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Being and Literature: The Disclosure of Place in Modernity

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BEING AND LITERATURE:

THE DISCLOSURE OF PLACE IN MODERNITY

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Once again for my parents, who gave me a place to be.

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ABSTRACT

Irven, Donovan Ph.D., Purdue University, August 2016. Being and Literature: The Disclosure of Place in Modernity. Major Professor: Daniel W. Smith.

The dissertation develops an original ontology of place by reading Modernist literature (1864-1950) as a critical reaction to Modern philosophy (1641-1800), and builds a platform upon movements implicit in literature from which future metaphysical and epistemological inquiries can begin. Western metaphysics and epistemology have been conditioned by the Cartesian commitment to the *ego cogito,* primarily understood as a subject to which the world appears as represented in concepts or ideas. The postmodern and deconstructive criticisms of such philosophical foundations – and indeed, on the very notion of foundation itself – have become well worn, but have failed to offer a viable alternative, everywhere heralding the "end of metaphysics" while simultaneously carrying on metaphysical discourse as if unaware of their own dictum! *Being and Literature: The Disclosure of Place in Modernity* offers the ontology of place as an alternative to postmodern anti-realism, showing that Modernist literature prefigures the postmodern critical project and implicitly leads the way toward an ontology of place that would de-center the *cogito* subject from the heart of Western metaphysics and epistemology. We avoid anti-realism through the reading of Modernism, while developing the alternative placial ontology capable of responding the weaknesses of postmodern anti-realism.

The ontology of place offered as an alternative to the Cartesian legacy operates on the principle of "oscillation." This principle is a newly developed contribution to ontology, original to the dissertation, and rooted in close readings of Modernist novels, notably by William Faulkner and Robert Musil, put into dialogue with interlocutors from Modern philosophy. Oscillation accounts for the basic differentiation of things as they take shape in place. The relation of things, in their differentiation as the play of oscillation, determines the what-content of appearances in the world. We can thus agree that the signifier is arbitrary, but that the signified, in a radical independence and recalcitrance to our cognitive models, is *not* arbitrary. The signifier, even if arbitrary, signifies a real difference. This difference is explained by oscillation – the basic interplay within which recalcitrant entities in the world take on significance to other entities with human-like cognitive capacities. This basic play of oscillation is the occurrence of place, the basic unit of the emerging ontological picture.

The dissertation outlines a general ontological platform from which more systematic explorations in metaphysics and epistemology can proceed, maintaining literature as a source of philosophical insight and conceptual innovation.

CHAPTER 1. MIND WITHOUT A PLACE

Poetry, creative literature, is nothing but the elementary emergence into words, the becoming-uncovered, of existence as being-in-the-world. For the others who before it were blind, the world first becomes visible by what is thus spoken.
– Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, (1927)

1.1 The Place at the End of the Mind

The poet Wallace Stevens writes *Of Mere Being*,[1]

The palm at the end of the mind,
Beyond the last thought, rises
In the bronze décor,

A gold-feathered bird
Sings in the palm, without human meaning;
Without human feeling, a foreign song.

You know it is not the reason
That makes us happy or unhappy.
The bird sings. Its feathers shine.

The palm stands on the edge of space.
The wind moves slowly in the branches.
The bird's fire-fangled feathers dangle down.

In many ways, what follows is an attempt to approach mere being. It is an approach

through philosophy and literature. Wallace speaks of "the end of the mind," that if we are

to approach mere being, the being of beings in the ontological language of Heidegger, we

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[1] Stevens, "Of Mere Being." *Collected Poetry and Prose* (New York: The Library of America, 1997), 476-77.

must approach a terminal point – an end without human meaning, without human feeling. An impossible task! What are we if not human? How can we make such an approach to being without destroying ourselves, without erasing the very thing that we are? This struggle with being human, which is a struggle with finitude, is the essence of modernity. It is fitting, then, to begin here, with Stevens, a Modernist poet of the early 20th century. His poem asks us to attempt the impossible, to tempt madness, to dare and make a leap into something other than human, into a non-human place; the place at the end of the mind. And yet, this is not a philosophy of ends. It is a philosophy of beginnings, of new and other beginnings. We strive for this place at the end of the mind, struggling as moderns struggle with its foreign song, so that we might begin again.

Something grows in this place, from it. A palm, a palm still moved by the breeze, in which a bird can still rest, its fire-fangled feathers dangling down. There is still difference at this place, still *something*. But it is not for us. It is not by us. We must wait and let it come to us of its own accord. This is not the coming of some agent, some divine intentionality, but is only a happening, a basic movement, an impulse that like a breeze brings us to thought. If we have difficulty it is because we suffer. We suffer from a malaise, a *metaphysical* malaise that has taken hold, but which we forget and, in our forgetfulness, fail to treat it. Though we began here, with Stevens the Modernist poet, we will also be confronted by Modern philosophy, brought into its maturity by Descartes in 1641. It is an era grounded in humanism and repeatedly thrown into crisis by the crumbling foundations laid on the sands of the human condition, to borrow Hannah Arendt's titular phrase. These crises emanate from the central figure of philosophical discourse, which remains rooted in the interlocking metaphysics and epistemology of

Modern philosophy, borne of the Enlightenment: the human person, primarily defined as

subjective *cogito*, or ego. The major crises of Modernity, I will show, spreads out from

the central fissure of the I-Am's basic placelessness. In finding that palm at the end of the

mind, we discover the basic ontological emplacement that grounds any mind before it

even has a chance to think. As literary Modernism began to take shape in 1864, nascent

in such works as Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* and Baudelaire's "The Painter

of Modern Life," it proved to be a movement in the grips of the human struggle for

meaning in a world from which it was increasingly alienated. Banished from any

authentic home life, Modernism diagnosed the placelessness at the heart of philosophy.

Literary Modernism, often thought to be shattered by the relativities of postmodernism

and deconstruction in the 1950s and -60s, continues to be given new life by the

metaphysical and epistemological crises of so-called postmodernity. It is significant that

Modernism re-emerges precisely where postmodernism *fails to provide a ground*. There

is no better example of this in philosophy than in the recent reassertion (and it is entirely

an assertion) of a New Realism by philosophers such as Markus Gabriel, Maurizio

Ferraris, and the object-oriented ontologist Graham Harman. In literature, we see the

return of Modernism in Luke Turner's *Metamodernist Manifesto*, the Joycean panoply of

Bolaño's *2666*, and the essayistic, Proustian tangents in the pseudo-realism of

Knausgaard's *My Struggle*. These reactionary assertions respond to modernity's

perceived lack of a place to be – the abyss of the ground in our own subjectivity. Without

a place to be, there can be no ground for beings. Thus, the periods of literary

Modernism's dominance are marked by instability, a trend toward cultural fragmentation,

decentralization, and a touch of historical madness. At the heart of these characterizations

is a humanistic philosophy that grew from the seeds of the Cartesian *cogito* and have become reified, most notably by Kant. Such is the metaphysics of *subjectivity*. This is a metaphysics in which the subject must *represent* [*vorstellen*] objects to itself. It must set before itself an image of the object that is rendered sensible in the very act of setting-before. However, as the creation of the subject, the representation rendered in the setting-before becomes questionable, and the gulf that opens between the inside of the subject and the outside of the object is infinite. Truth is undermined. The chasm of the Real gapes, and the Realists do battle with the Idealists, with the Anti-Real that says we can *never know*, when to know must be to make representations that fully correspond to what is always and forever outside, that can never be adequately brought to the inside and vice versa. This representative procedure of bringing something into presence is the first casualty of the new beginning. What can stand in the place of presence? That is our first guiding question.

Our task in asking this first in a series of guiding questions is to seek out another beginning. The other beginning starts out from place. But a placial ontology[2] is not a Messianic ontology. It cannot save us from the cycles of crises instigated and exacerbated by humanity itself as the ground and measure of all things. Indeed, it is likely that this new beginning, coming about so suddenly and without regard to the authority of tradition, is itself the coming of a still *more profound crisis*. This crisis, the crisis of the ground of all grounds, comes about by the critical relation of literary Modernism to Modern philosophy. Thus we, still stranded, at home in transit, must turn again and ask,

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[2] "Placial" is here the counterpart to "spatial" and "temporal," an ontologically prior phenomenon that is spatiotemporal qua place.

even at so late an hour – *what is philosophy? What is literature? What are we that can be philosophic, literary, human, all too human…*

The philosophical value of Modernist literature comes about through a confrontation with Modern philosophy. When Modernist literature is read philosophically, and further, placed in critical dialogue with the metaphysical doctrines of the West (doctrines never fully divorced from epistemology), we find the Modernist already at work undermining the foundations laid upon the subjective *cogito*. What's more, literary Modernism has already cleared a path toward another beginning for Western thought, one that does not rest its edifice upon the certainty of the subject over and against some "objective" reality understood as "out there," independent of the subject. The alternative to the everywhere latent Cartesianism is found in place. Modernism expresses the need to "get back into place," as the philosopher Edward Casey has put it. It will be my task to provide this alternative, this other beginning, in a placial ontology. The new ontology opens upon as yet undisclosed vistas of thought barred to us by the prejudice that "man is the measure of all things." Through the Modernists, I will show the measure of things to be place. We cannot yet know what that sentence means. First, we must see how Modernists diagnose Modern philosophy as "dis-eased." Once the Modernist critique is made explicit, we can move beyond the critical, where the question concerning place can be adequately formulated.

1.2 The Dis-ease of Consciousness

To the extent that the modernist writer is a symptomatologist who diagnoses the diseases of the world as it merges in illness with humanity, then Modernist literature appears, from the start, to trace a disease of the mind, the disease of consciousness that

arose from the fervor of the Enlightenment.[3] There are analogues in the philosophical

literature as well. In 1949, Gilbert Ryle famously diagnoses the Cartesian mythology of

the "Ghost in the Machine" as suffering from a category mistake. The category mistake is

made apparent by philosophical problems (symptoms) that emerge in other areas as a

consequence of adherence to the Cartesian myth – problems (symptoms) of determinism,

the assumption of a mechanical body, etc.[4] When we read Ryle as a symptomatologist,

the malfunctions of theory demonstrate the presence of the category mistake. Literary

Modernism will be shown to struggle with the same Cartesian legacy, displaying a

similar symptomatology in the process. The symptoms that show in literary Modernism

arise from the radical *disemplacement* encouraged by subjectivistic philosophical

assumptions about what it means to be human. The diseases of the mind, which lead to its

untimely end at the foot of the palm, are caused by the lack of place, the madness of not

fitting in, of being strangely other, unable to relate, to commend oneself to social mores

and behavioral protocols. It is a general and existential dis-ease with living, with simply

having to be. It is an ontological malaise.

It is no coincidence that Dostoevsky's underground man laments being too

acutely conscious, and thus concludes that he is a "sick man."[5] If we seek the end of the

mind in order to think from another beginning, then we must be able to recognize that

consciousness, particularly *self*-consciousness, has long been regarded as essential to

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[3] This is how Gilles Deleuze treats literature in his essay "Literature and Life," *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1997), 3.
[4] Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), 18-24.
[5] Dostoevsky, "Notes from the Underground." *Great Short Works*, trans. David Magarshack (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 263, 266.

mind. When, in 1689, John Locke helps to bring the Enlightenment notion of Modern

Man into fruition, he writes,

> For it being the same consciousness that makes a man be himself, personal identity depends on that only, whether it be annexed only to one individual substance, or can be continued in a succession of several substances…For it is by the consciousness it has of its present thoughts and actions that it is self to itself now, and so will be the same self, so far as the same consciousness can extend to actions past or to come…[6]

The above passage is notable both for its clear articulation of consciousness as the

essence of personal identity, but also for the way in which it positions Locke against the

background of Cartesian substance ontology. For Locke, a person's very constitution is

not dependent on some one substance, immaterial or otherwise, but rather on their

capacity as a thinking thing to unite all actions past and present in recognition of their

continuity within one and the same consciousness. Locke emphasizes that personal

identity was constituted by the sameness of a *rational being*, because consciousness

always accompanies thinking and the very definition of "person" is to be "a thinking

intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same

thinking thing, at different times and places…"[7] It is clear that Locke is not attacking the

metaphysical underpinnings of the Cartesian concept of mind. His argument, rather, is

that the metaphysical substance was *irrelevant* to the constitution of identity. Throughout

Locke's argument it remains possible to separate the mind (defined essentially as

consciousness accompanying thought) from the body, and this separation is performed in

a series of thought experiments designed to prove consciousness to be the essential

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[6] Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1995), 247-48.

[7] Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 246-47.

ingredient of personhood. Perhaps most pertinent to our purposes is the scenario wherein

we are to imagine a prince and a cobbler who "switch bodies," the consciousness

continuous with the cobbler's experience entering into the body of the prince, and vice

versa.[8] In examples such as this, Locke shows that the Cartesian immaterial substance is

more or less commensurable with his theory, as long as it is conceded that the continuity

of consciousness and not the substance itself constitutes a person's identity. In an

important sense, Locke has caught Descartes' logical leap from "I think" to "I am a

thinking *thing*," i.e., an immaterial substance. In Descartes' famous argument, it is the act

of recognition that does all of the work required to prove his point. "Then without a

doubt," Descartes writes, "I exist also if he [the All-powerful Deceiver] deceives me, and

let him deceive me as much as he will, he can never cause me to be nothing so long as I

think that I am something…I am, I exist is necessarily true each time that I pronounce it,

or that I mentally conceive it."[9] This sounds very much like an act of pure reflection, as

Locke defines reflection to be "the perception of the operations of our minds within us, as

it is employed about the ideas it has got…"[10] Enlightenment epistemology, divided

between Rationalism and Empiricism, share the foundational claim that the perception of

thinking by itself grounds all knowledge in a consciousness whose existence is confirmed

in its own acts of reflective self-perception. Spinoza, for instance, claims that the truth of

any thought is intrinsic to the thought itself, and false ideas are the result of our *finitude*,

writing, "it is plain that inadequate ideas arise in us only because we are parts of a

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[8] Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 250-51.
[9] Descartes, "Meditation II: On the Nature of the Human Mind." *Philosophical Works of Descartes, Vol. 1*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (New York: Dover, 1955), 150.
[10] Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 60.

thinking being, whose thoughts – some in their entirety, others in fragments only – constitute our mind."[11] Literary Modernism is the symptomatology of this limited, finite consciousness. It is, after all, a consciousness born in doubt, and is therefore perhaps predisposed to neurosis. Following from Dostoevsky to Nietzsche and on through literary Modernism's maturity in the mid-twentieth century is a literary trope of consciousness as a disease.

Dostoevsky's underground man is insistent, "I firmly believe that not only too much consciousness, but any sort of consciousness is a disease."[12] Disease, then, lies coiled in the heart of modernity. The certainty of my own existence in the face of the self-reflective thinking by thought provided the epistemological foundations of the new mechanistic science, but in Locke's philosophy the problem of personal identity was *forensic*, not metaphysical.[13] Specifically, the term "person," whose essential characteristic was consciousness, is a forensic term taken by Locke to entail the merits of people's actions, and thus requires that the rational being be capable of law, happiness, and misery. Dostoevsky is careful to show that it is an understanding of happiness and misery, rooted primarily in the underground man's aching tooth and liver pain, that inspire much of his thinking, as well as his relationship to the law. When the underground man imagines being slapped, for instance, he does so with apparent joy and happiness over the justice of the act. He is, of course, guilty. He is, for instance, guilty of being too clever! On the one hand, he is, "overwhelmed by the consciousness of being utterly

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[11] Spinoza, "On the Improvement of the Understanding." *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza, Vol. 2*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1951), 28.
[12] Dostoevsky, "Notes from the Underground," 267.
[13] Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 256-57.

humiliated and snubbed," and yet he cannot help but feel his humiliation is somehow justified, that "though innocent I was guilty and, as it were, guilty according to the laws of nature."[14] It is then the function of self-surveyor that gives rise to the first symptoms of the disease. It is the disciplinary nature of the mind's eye turned in on itself, when the mind minds itself, assuming the role of forensic investigator, constructing an identity for the purpose of rendering a verdict. Although Locke is certainly relevant here, Kant is more likely the object of the underground man's polemic. I will expand on this point below, but first, one last lesson from Locke's engagement with Descartes.

The whole intellectual movement traced out above describes the mind's coming into its own presence, standing before [*vorstellen*] itself as rational judge. To do this, the mind must be fractured, divided against itself, reflective, reactive. This process subjugates the person, literally subjects them to a certain discipline, a rationalized regulatory protocol that presents its self as given, that is, analytically contained and derivable from the concept "person" as such – consciousness, the self-reflective thinking of thought. The rational discipline cannot be entirely disentangled from metaphysical theories. The present arguments aim to show that the necessary condition for the Cartesian mind to come into its own presence is a radical disemplacement. However, the stage will thereby be set to emerge on the other side of presence, to a more radical insight, another place to begin from within Descartes' own movement – that in order to stand in one's own presence one must, *a priori*, prepare a place into which one could *stand forth as present*. Chapter Two will primarily be concerned with uncovering this

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[14] Dostoevsky, "Notes from the Underground," 268.

basic emplacement through a confrontation with the centrality of Descartes' *optics* to his metaphysical position, and the play of this grounding metaphor of optical *reflection* in literary Modernism precisely where it undermines the Cartesian tradition of philosophical reflection grounding all knowledge in the *cogito* as *subiectum*. Having recovered this basic emplacing movement in Chapter Two, the remaining Chapters will pursue this other beginning in a placial ontology begun by this crossing out of the subject. For now, it is enough to emphasize that the Enlightenment theory sketched out above holds mind to be basically placeless. Its place, à la Locke, is irrelevant. The mind can move about anywhere, its immaterial status preserved so long as it retains continuity with a particular consciousness perceiving itself and remembering the series of self-conscious perceptions. As it develops, Modernism becomes a literature of the outsider and diagnoses consciousness with a profound homelessness, a sense that it has nowhere to fit in, a permanent exile, a wanderer, a nomad. The mind flits, bird-like, from one body to another. In 1970, it still made sense to suppose, as Bernard Williams does, "that there were some process to which two persons, A and B, could be subjected as a result of which they might be said – question beggingly – to have *switched bodies*."[15] I note and appreciate Williams' question begging caveat, however, he proceeds to develop a less question begging version of Locke's own prince and cobbler thought experiment in order to conclude that there is a problematic relationship between first- and third-personal aspect of personhood. In Williams, we see the uniquely analytic turn to language, as the semantic issues of the first- and third-personal accounts quickly manifest. The thought

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[15] Williams, "The Self and the Future." *Philosophical Review*, 79 (1970), 161.

experiment, Williams argues, yields intuitions that support a "mentalistic" picture in which continuity of *consciousness* constitutes personal identity only when the argument is conducted in third-personal terms. Arguments conducted in first-personal terms, however, yield intuitions about the thought experiment which support a picture wherein *bodily* continuity constitutes personal identity. Although Williams confesses that "we cannot seriously use such a model," as one that posits "ghostly persons in bodies," he has, despite his reservations, based his entire argument on a presupposition that we gain philosophical ground doing precisely that![16] Williams sets the tone for the debate in the late 20th century with this paper, and opinions divide along the lines of whether it was continuity of consciousness or bodily continuity that constituted personal identity – always in terms of personal identity *over time*, hence the centrality of continuity. Throughout this debate there remains a focus on the mind-as-consciousness, and one in which we are to presuppose a possible separation of mind and body, accompanied by Enlightenment style thought experiments as guides to the problems of mind and identity. Notice too that Williams has shifted the discourse to a surprisingly *existential* concern – the essential concern with *survival*. We have stumbled upon the ontological question where we least suspect it, where our own being has become an *issue for us*. The analytic discourse on personal identity, with its presupposition of the placeless conscious mind, is concerned primarily with how such a being can survive the passage of time as the thing that it is, the *same* thing, the same, *even when it appears different at different times*. We see a concern with the repetition, not of the same, but of a difference called "the same."

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[16] Williams, "The Self and the Future," 79-80.

The trend is epitomized in Derek Parfit's 1986 book *Reasons and Persons*, which

contains the Teletransportation thought experiment. We are to image our consciousness

being beamed to Mars and downloaded into variously functional replicas of our own

bodies, the original body being destroyed (in fact, each replica is subsequently destroyed

any time we teletransport, bodily destruction just being a feature of the transportation

mechanism). We can then imagine various malfunctions of the mechanism such that there

results a variety of different "branch-line" instances of ourselves running around, each

with different life-spans, and thus, increasingly intense deviation in continuity with

myself at the point from which they branched off. Again, the primary distinction of

significance is bodily, or so-called "physical," continuity and conscious

(mental/psychical) continuity.[17] Parfit is addressing a discourse mapped primarily by

Williams, Robert Nozick, David Lewis, and Ernest Sosa with the existential concern with

survival driving the conversation.[18] Parfit offered the contrarian view, kicking the door in

to say, "You've got it all wrong! Our *identity* is not at all what matters where our *survival*

is concerned!"[19] Yet, we are still confronted with this placeless mind. It is always

disembodied, tricked, lied to, beamed about, bisected and split, sharing a body with other

minds in exile, and so on. The person is in a constant state of triage. How to be kept alive

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[17] Parfit, "Part Three: Personal Identity." *Reasons and Persons* (New York: Oxford, 1987), 199-350.

[18] Cf., Nozick, "Personal Identity through Time." *Philosophical Explanations* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1981), 29-70; David Lewis, Survival and Identity." *Philosophical Papers, Vol. 1* (New York: Oxford, 1983), 55-77; and Ernest Sosa, "Surviving Matters." *Noûs*, 24 (1990), 297-322.

[19] Cf., Parfit, "Chapter Twelve: Why Our Identity is Not What Matters." *Reasons and Persons*, 245-80; and, Parfit, "The Unimportance of Identity." *Identity*, ed. Henry Harris (New York: Oxford, 1995), 13-45.

during these procedures, how to endure and live on after being so violently wrenched from place and separated from that which makes us what we are?

These placeless minds have troubled relationships with the body, doubtful relationships. The "brain in a vat" trope succeeds as a late 20th century reinvention of Descartes' Maleficent Genie, and in 1980 Hilary Putnam saw a serious enough challenge to famously prove that we cannot be brains in vats.[20] Later, I will return to Putnam in the context of realism, but it is more pressing at this juncture to appreciate the turn in analytic philosophy toward semantic externalism as a solution to the problems of meaning and reference. Putnam largely drove that development and it gained enough ground to have spawned its very own progeny in a full-blown externalist philosophy of mind.[21] Putnam's famous twin earth thought experiment in the 1973 paper "Meaning and Reference," and again two years later in "The Meaning of 'Meaning',"[22] is used to show that *meaning* "just ain't in the head," a phrase now synonymous with different varieties of externalism. Of interest is Putnam's turn to the environment, to a basic emplacement as an explanation for the source of meaning, and the attending conclusion that meaning and reference were robustly context dependent. This early semantic externalism laid the groundwork for more thoroughgoing externalisms in philosophy of mind. Varela, Thompson, and Rosch employ phenomenology geared toward extension of the mind into the body, and Evan Thompson in particular has developed these phenomenological insights in the philosophy

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[20] Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (New York: Cambridge, 1980).
[21] The flood gate on externalism in philosophy of mind was opened by Clark and Chalmers, "The Extended Mind." *Analysis*, 58:1 (January 1998), 7-19.
[22] Putnam, "Meaning and Reference." *Journal of Philosophy* 70, (1973), 699-711; and, Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning'." *Philosophical Papers, Vol. 2: Mind, Language and Reality* (New York: Cambridge University, 1985).

of life and biology.[23] Two general trends make these developments in Anglo-American analytic philosophy relevant to the current study. The first is the apparent rediscovery of phenomenology as a method among certain analytic philosophers. Husserl and Merleau-Ponty figure heavily, and Shaun Gallagher's text on phenomenology emphasizes its methodological aspects in the context of cognitive science, and his book with Dan Zahavi uses phenomenological insights to interpret the data of cognitive science in order to account for agency, social cognition, how we know ourselves and others, and offer a theory of personhood to compete with those of Williams, Nozick, and Parfit.[24] Andy Clark's 1997 book *Being There* makes titular reference to the Dasein analysis of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, but his research paradigm is driven by robotics and the ability of sensory feedback to manifest adaptive behaviors in machines without a central computing "agent" with coded operations to be followed.[25] Aside from the reemergence of phenomenology, there is a stirring similarity of theme and movement among these two different groups of analytic philosophers of mind and personal identity.

One the one hand, they display a superficial dissimilarity – they work in roughly different areas of research, the problem personal identity is not the same, philosophically, as philosophy of mind. And yet, despite this superficial difference of *content*, both groups struggle with the same set of presuppositions about what we are. Both center on issues of consciousness and embodiment. The fight over criterion, bodily or mental (conscious)

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[23] Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, *The Embodied Mind Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge: MIT, 1993); and, Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Sciences of Mind*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007).
[24] Gallagher, *Phenomenology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and, Gallagher and Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind, 2nd Ed.* (New York: Routledge, 2012).
[25] Clark, *Being There,* (Cambridge: MIT, 1997).

continuity, and the issues of the *where* of mind: just in the brain, in the body, extended beyond both into the environment? But, if we are to some extent nothing more than the continuity of some consciousness, and that consciousness (mind) is extended, in its *constitution*, into my body and the environment, then am I not *myself out there – outside my own inside – already in the world?* Am I not other people? Do we share minds? This line of thought completely destroys the *cogito*, but all along fails to acknowledge the world-changing consequences of its conclusion. *All of Western metaphysics and epistemology is rooted in the cogito as subiectum*. To alter this ground is to change the whole, to demand another beginning, even if one does so timidly, with humility.

Although they work in differing areas, the lines of philosophical thought briefly treated above lead to the same radical place, and the need for another beginning. Williams already admits that the model of a ghost in a machine cannot really be taken seriously. Parfit argues that for a person to exist "just involves physical and psychological continuity," that can "be described in an impersonal way…Personal identity just involves certain kinds of connections and continuity," and that "These connections are what matter."[26] Parfit abandons the simple, unified ego-self in favor of a more fluid and differentiated continuity, the intensity of this continuity making it more or less identical with past and future selves. Parfit looks East, to the Buddhist no-self, and traces out similar conclusions regarding self-interest. In dialogue with Hume and the Empiricist tradition, Parfit is disseminating consciousness, "extending" mind over a temporal continuum. There is something to be said regarding Kant on this matter momentarily.

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[26] Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 275.

Varela, Thompson, and Rosch extend the mind into the body, disseminating the ego from the cabinet of consciousness, and they too endorse a no-self view.[27] They describe the end of the mind as we know it, and outline a non-representational theory of cognition in the process. This is a major area of resonance with the current project. If we are to really think a different subject, to think through the end of the mind, the whole representational procedure of knowledge becomes disrupted. It is really a systemic upheaval, despite the often local manifestations. Parfit, as a reductionist, is adamant that there be nothing that is even said to *have an experience*. I offer a less extreme position here, it being entirely reasonable to talk about experiences, the *phenomena* in question. But we are immediately confronted then by questions of meaning and reference – a certain explanation is in order! Representation, and more importantly, an alternative, will be a recurring theme. Sometimes, I will ask that we think basic concepts as non-representational, and the idea of autopoiesis found in the work of Varela, Maturana, and Thompson will make an important contribution. But I will also talk of representations as being built up, as a structure made of smaller mental parts, for the momentary lack of a better vocabulary. Because of their interest in biology, philosophers such as Gallagher, Thompson, and Zahavi also rely on the work of James J. Gibson, who will feature, along with his mentor Edwin B. Holt, in Chapter Four. This also lends a certain developmental bent to their theorizing. As place is a temporal event, my ontology will always have a procedural feel to it. There will be processes and movement. A certain affinity with process philosophy, Alfred North Whitehead, will be felt alongside the explicit influence of Heidegger. Both

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[27] Varela et al., *The Embodied Mind*, 105-30.

Mark Rowlands and Richard Menary develop a theory in which representations are built up over time, a result of the active engagement of a cognitive agent with their environment, though perhaps Menary's work will prove more relevant here.[28] I too will talk about the accretion of representations, the way thinking comes to pass over time. The degree to which thought as such, base cognitive ability, *depends* in some way on representation as a basic component will be disputed. Thus, we must really consider a new paradigm for thinking about meaning, why things have significance for us. Certainly, those were central preoccupations of *Being and Time*, which prefigures the deconstruction of the Ego-Self that is repeated, an almost neurotic repetition, again and again. Its renunciation in theories of personal identity, its reduction in philosophy of mind, only to be reimagined as a dynamic, emergent, thoroughly differentiated being. This is, in fact, an unspoken re-valuation of the highest value in philosophy – the mind, self-conscious reflection. The subject, cast out of itself, made into the outside, transfigures both inside and outside, and demands a different ground.

　　　Working on local problems, these analytic thinkers have diagnosed a fundamental problem. They have made this dis-ease apparent, shaken the simplicity and centrality of the *cogito*, cast the existence of the *I think* into doubt – an *impersonal continuity*. It is significant that the first salvo in the reactive rush to defeat externalism in philosophy of mind was launched on the pretext of boundaries. Adams and Aizawa provide in essay and book a refutation of externalism based on boundaries, the need for a meaningful limit to

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[28] Rowlands, *The Body in Mind: Understanding Cognitive Processes*, (New York: Cambridge, 1999); and, Menary, *Cognitive Integration: Mind and Cognition Unbounded* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

cognition, a limit that renders the being unified enough and compact enough *to be a meaningful entity*. The problems Adams and Aizawa focus on, that extracranialist (externalist) theories of tool use (an example of cognitive function), paid inadequate attention to the "mark of the cognitive," thereby inadvertently damning the theory.[29] The mark of the cognitive is twofold: 1) that there be non-derived content, that is, content intrinsic to cognitive processes themselves, and this first mark itself presupposes a representational model of thinking that is performed in a language of thought in which representation with non-derivable content operate within the combinatorial linguistic system of syntax and semantics; the second mark, 2) that cognitive processes are causally individuated, that is, in order to "carve nature at its joints," cognitive processes, like all other natural phenomenon, are assumed to be discerned on the basis of underlying causal processes that determine them.[30] They admit that these numerous pre-suppositions, for which they provide citation to the background literature which supports their presuppositions, are, in their own words, "orthodox."[31] Now, the major argument is that if we are to be orthodox, and attend to the proper criteria, the proper marks of the cognitive, we shall see that the externalists repeatedly fail to account for the *causal* connection between the cognitive acts and the environmental tools that facilitate and are thereby correlated to the cognitive act – that just because a being is constantly coupled with environmental tools, that this coupling does not thereby imply causation, and it is only by

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[29] Adams and Aizawa, "The Bounds of Cognition." *Philosophical Psychology*, 14:1 (2001), 43-64; Adams and Aizawa, *The Bounds of Cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008); and, Adams and Aizawa, "Defending the Bounds of Cognition." *The Extended Mind*, ed. Richard Menary (Cambridge: MIT, 2010), 67-78.
[30] Adams and Aizawa, "The Bounds of Cognition," 48-51.
[31] Adams and Aizawa, "The Bounds of Cognition," 52.

causation that the environmental corollaries can be said to "constitute" cognition in the way externalism suggests.[32] Without these bounds of cognition, without the within of the subject's own private I-am, all of the presuppositions of Western metaphysics and epistemology become questionable. It becomes a systemic problem. This is not a study of causation. But really, Adams and Aizawa use causation as so much smoke and mirrors – a veneer of scientific validity, as if *cause itself* is never a question for the scientist! Without the bounds of cognition in place, the self, the invaluable *cogito*, bleeds out into the world and becomes lost, loses its reified interiority and is found only already in the world and demanding a new starting point, a new vantage from which to take off on the road to metaphysics, to epistemology.

Kant haunts this discourse. We trace the analytic vacillation between metaphysical and epistemological terrain, on the one hand asking about cognition and its limits, on the other, entreating about the being of beings, how it is they are and what we must be in order to have access to the beings we do. Kant's critiques were themselves about the bounds of cognition, and these bounds delimited and set out restrictions on the speculations of metaphysics as well. It was about a *kind of being*, the being of a being that was ontological, that was metaphysical, whose own being was an *issue for it*. How does it live? What matters for survival? How is it that this being that I am maintains itself as the thing that it is? Ontological questions that are always tinged with a flavor of epistemology, always demanding *how I am to know*. We have become sick with uncertainty alongside the externalists – turned inside out and made questionable by this

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[32] A good summary occurs at Adams and Aizawa, "Defending the Bounds of Cognition," 78.

history of philosophy, borne in doubt, raised into the private interior of the subjective I-Am, only to lose life-giving contact with the world, and enter the claustrophobic un-ease of being the only measure of a world you can never reach. At last, cast back out of yourself, the self is dissolved in the flow of time, time once its substance and refuge, now a maelstrom that scatters it, under which there is nothing, no-thing that could support you any longer, the environment hostile to your very being, but, in the end, the only thing by which you could be maintained any longer. The externalists beckon, silently, without acknowledgement, toward the place at the end of the mind. Beyond the *cogito*, there can only be a thinking other than representation, with representation given a *place* more cut to its measure, more apt for the modelling/mapping function of the *repraesentatio*. But we must find a place first! We rush too far ahead, for we are only just now getting a sense of the diagnosis, tracing a history of this dis-ease of consciousness that threatens an ever deepening crisis, a crisis that has spread throughout the whole, undermining the very foundations even of the analytic tradition itself. These minds have been self-undermined, subjected to their own rigorous procedure that has maddeningly proved a vivisection. Thus rendered in their own presence, they step forth still-born in the mirror.

These last minds, intent on their own self-perception, to be set forth before themselves for analysis, to see by which criteria they can be judged *the same* – criteria of unity and continuity, bodily and conscious, bodily conscious, always over time – these lost souls still shuffle after the mythic goal of the old metaphysics. The goal, philosophically, has remained a surprisingly forensic endeavor since Locke: to lay out analytically the necessary components of a given phenomenon and judge their merit, determine to what degree they "matter," thereby displaying their worth to survive, to be

kept alive in discourse, or discarded to the dust-bin of failed ideas. All this in spite of Ryle's earlier diagnosis. He had pointedly admonished that, "To talk of a person's mind is not to talk of a repository which is permitted to house objects that something called the 'physical world' is forbidden to house [such as consciousness, thought, or feelings]; it is to talk of the person's abilities, liabilities, and inclinations to do and undergo certain sorts of things and of the doing, and undergoing of these things in the ordinary world."[33] I hope it will prove possible to accept such sound advice without adhering to a form of behaviorism (as Ryle does) and move us in a direction where we do not think of consciousness as "housing" our identity or mental states, qualia, or any other such "mental" (read: "immaterial") characteristics traditionally associated with the mind and human thought.

As it stands within this reconstructed canon, the repository metaphor is a defining feature of personhood, the self-perceptive act of consciousness occurs nested in the mind, which is nested in the body, in the environment, layer within layer, confined and trapped there, an alien presence entombed while still living. Such a view is already found in Plato when he relays Socrates' etymological analysis of the word *soma* (body) in the *Cratylus* dialogue:

> …some people say that the body [*soma*] is the tomb [*sema*] of the soul on the grounds that it is entombed in its present life, while others say that it is correctly called "a sign" [*'sema'*] because the soul signifies whatever it wants to signify by means of the body. I think it is most likely the followers of Orpheus who gave the body its name, with the idea that the soul is being punished for something, and that the body is an enclosure or prison in which the soul is securely kept [*sozetai*] – as the name '*soma*' itself suggests –

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[33] Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 199.

until the penalty is paid; for, on this view, not even a single letter of the word needs to be changed.[34]

Plato presents both the mind's theoretical separation from the body and its fallenness into guilt and judgment. For my purposes, it is not relevant whether or not Plato or Socrates actually held this view of the mind-body relation. It is enough that Socrates attributes it to Orphic tradition, thereby reinforcing the discourse occurring aboveground, in the open, there every day and taken for granted. Rooted in history, the germ of the disease of consciousness is nestled deep. When we get into the thick of *Absalom, Absalom!* and the heretofore unseen collective value of the underground discourse has achieved its full power, we can see the crypt and tomb of the mind from a new perspective, turned inside out, and given a place. Now the claustrophobia of the bodily tomb manifests as a symptom of the turn inward and the radical separation that enables the *cogito*'s stability and certitude. This sameness, maintained by isolation, by an inward turn away from the "physical" will be a reminder of the first renunciation of place – a renunciation to be repeated, as we shall later see. This first little death opens the interior of subjectivity as a grave, a repository for earthly remains, a box in which the static, dead, revenant remnants of the mental are housed after they've been siphoned from the fleshy nerves and muscles of the object through which we stared. This ghostly separation, ghost from machine, alive in the tomb of life, is the first major metaphysical decision. Here is our entry into a hidden undercurrent, *the underground discourse*. It is important to have emphasized that Locke *covers over* the issue of the mind's substance in relation to the continuity of the

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[34] Plato, "Cratylus." *Complete Works*, trans. John Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997), 118-19/400c-d.

consciousness always associated with that mind. This movement obscures the ontological

question in a way, by allowing the presupposition of the *disembodied*, fundamentally

disemplaced mind – its place has no bearing on what it is, is in fact, *antagonistic* to what

it is. By allowing mind to be naturalistically subsumed, the Empiricists laid the seeds to

its destruction, which we can see unfold in the Modernist literature. The acceptance of the

Cartesian immaterial substance is covered over and made tacit by its irrelevance to the

continuity of consciousness as constitutive of personhood. The presupposition of the

cogito reappears in disparate studies, from Brentano's empirical psychology where he

states that "every [act] of presentation of sensation or imagination offers an example of

mental phenomenon" in distinction from physical phenomenon,[35] to externalists Clark

and Chalmers, who treat mental states (experiences, beliefs, desires, emotions) to be

something distinct from (though perhaps always coupled to with or otherwise dependent

on) physical states in the brain.[36] This first decision is the first symptom of the disease of

consciousness, the germ of which is the substance ontology of Descartes, covered over by

Locke and left as irrelevant. In recognition, in self-representation, the *cogito* sees the

limit, a limit, the absolute limit that conditions what can be within the boundary – those

limits in time, birth and death. The philosopher had sought to flee those external forces

that threatened certain knowledge with doubt, but now within the I-Am's retreat Hume

discovers the same *impersonal* flow. We applied a balm to heal. In truth, sequestered in

finitude, the ontological being festered there, a theoretical sore spot to which philosophy

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[35] Brentano, "The Distinction Between Mental and Physical Phenomena." *Realism and the Background of Phenomenology*, ed. Roderick Chisholm (Atascadero: Ridgeview, 1960), 41.
[36] Clark and Chalmers, "The Extended Mind," 11-16.

returns to dig but which never fully heals. The separation is performed at the cost of place, consciousness is uprooted from the world, an island unto itself, disconnected, yet also the center of all meaning.

1.3 The Underground Discourse and Minor Literature

In order to best make our way into the underground discourse, I want to turn now to the promised dialogue with Dostoevsky and Kant. I had previously mention Spinoza's explanation for the finitude of thought, but it is really Kant who determines the discourse on the subject of the finitude of human cognition. It is Kant who sets out to define the boundaries of metaphysics through an analysis of the conditions of the possibility of experience. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the limits of cognition determine the possibilities for knowledge, what can be known and in what way, and also, the kinds of question for which we might reasonably expect to get an objective answer. Kant's critical philosophy is, generally speaking, a philosophy of bounds, of limitations, but always in the sense that these limits are themselves the very condition of the possibility of the phenomenon being delimited. In the case of Kant's first *Critique*, the phenomena to be delimited is human cognition, the conditions of the possibility of any experience whatsoever. Kant follows with a second *Critique* on moral philosophy, deemed "practical," and a third *Critique of Judgment*, a theory of value – all concerning judgments derived from the capacity to judge itself, presented in the first *Critique*. Thus, the Great Synthesizer's reputation for systematic philosophy and the scope of his influence.

Protesting against the suggestion that a systematic science can dissect and expose the fraudulence of freedom and desire, Dostoevsky's underground man declares, "You

see, gentlemen, reason is an excellent thing. There is no doubt about it. But reason is only reason, and it can only satisfy the reasoning ability of man, whereas volition is a manifestation of the whole of life, I mean, the whole of human life, including reason with all its concomitant head-scratchings."[37] The problem of mind, of being possessed of consciousness, throws the underground narrator into the gap between metaphysics and epistemology, wandering between the two, even substituting his epistemic fancies for reality itself. Kant closes the subject in on itself. The ontological commitment underwriting his epistemological limitations on objective truth is that human cognition, in virtue of being the kind of thing that it is, only has finite knowledge of the phenomenal. It is precisely the finitude of human knowledge that inspired Heidegger's reading of Kant, and the Dasein-analysis of *Being and Time* is driven by a view of human finitude, of its death, on the one hand, but also the discrete nature of its temporality. In Kant, it is both the temporalization of human experience in the schematism, and its essential epistemic finitude from which Heidegger takes his lead.[38] There must be something capable of being perceived in phenomenal experience by the subject, but what that something is, beyond the subject's finite grasp, is in itself unknowable – the noumenal. This closure of the subject permits Kant to apply one of the most effective balms ever to be applied to the sore spot of Cartesian consciousness. In the balm of time, Kant soothes the mind's displacement and gives a positive account of what it means to be an "immaterial

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[37] Dostevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 285-86.
[38] Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics, 5th Ed., Enlarged*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1990), 14-23, 63-79.

substance." To be immaterial is to be primarily constituted temporally, "extended" in time, and "taking up time," as opposed to space.

Descartes' substance ontology provides only a negative account. "Immaterial substance" tells us primarily what the subject is *not,* it is not material, it is not extended in space, it need not submit to mechanical laws of the body, etc. What is it? Thinking? And if so, what does it mean to think? Is there a description of this verb, or is it merely another noun in search of a definition, presenting itself as a verb? To explain this verbal noun "thinking," the production of experience through perception, is the project of Kant's analysis of human cognition in the first *Critique.* In the Transcendental Aesthetic, Kant claims to have shown that space and time are the pure forms of outer and inner intuition respectively, forms of intuition which are necessary conditions for any cognitive experience whatsoever. Objects presented in space are, furthermore, objectively known, and objects presented in time are known subjectively. The forms of space and time themselves inform cognition *a priori* as the conditions of its occurrence, the form of inner intuition being facilitated by synthetic acts of retention and repetition which allow for the temporal orchestration of the movement of objects presented spatially in outer intuition. But the form of inner intuition is the key to our current study, for in this moment, Kant's Copernican Revolution leaves its mark on the symptomatology of consciousness after the Enlightenment. Modernity is the age of internal time consciousness, to share Husserl's emphasis. In an addition to §II of the Transcendental Aesthetic appearing in the second edition, Kant writes:

> Consciousness of itself (apperception) is the simple representation of the I, and if all of the manifold in the subject were given **self-actively** through that alone, then the inner intuition would be intellectual. In human beings

> this consciousness requires inner perception of the manifold that is antecedently given in the subject, and the manner in which this is given in the mind without spontaneity must be called sensibility on account of this difference. If the faculty for becoming conscious of oneself is to seek out (apprehend) that which lies in the mind, it must affect the latter, and it can only produce an intuition of itself in such a way, whose form, however, which antecedently grounds it in the mind, determines the way in which the manifold is together in the mind in the representation of time; there it then intuits itself not as it would immediately self-actively represent itself, but in accordance with the way in which it is affected from within, consequently as it appears to itself, not as it is (B68-69).[39]

According to Kant above, I do not have access to consciousness itself, but rather, I only have access to the phenomenal manifestation of this consciousness as it appears sensibly to itself in the synthetic unity of the manifold of perception given through cognition. The New Realist Maurizio Ferraris, with whom we will contend in Chapter Three, has quipped that Kant's revolution is really, seen in this light, more a Ptolemaic Revolution, than a Copernican one, precisely because "it places the human at the center of the [epistemic and metaphysical] universe."[40] The I-in-itself is closed off from us as noumenal, and consciousness is isolated absolutely, having only limited access to its own operations through sensible perturbations in the manifold of experience in which "I think" can accompany any possible experience of said manifold. Kant has successfully isolated consciousness within the now explicitly subjective mind and given it form in time. The legacy of the emphasis on temporality is present when the aforementioned analytic literature of the 20th century expresses concern with the problem of personal

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[39] Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (New York: Cambridge, 1998), 189-90.
[40] Ferraris, *Introduction to the New Realism*, trans. Sarah De Sanctis (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 43-46.

identity *over time*. Kant, as well as Locke, have formative influence on those particular

constructions; albeit an often unspoken, underground discourse.

Kant's effective isolation of consciousness in an essentially temporal subjectivity

works to the extent that both inner and outer intuition form irreducible *a priori* roles in

the syntheses that produce all experience. The result of this transcendental idealism is the

ossifying of the ego into a self-contained temporal mass, a point in time that moves along

the timeline – the line is, after all, Kant's most fundamental illustration of the inner form

of intuition.[41] But this leads Kant to a significant turn. For this spatial illustration proves,

according to Kant, that the representation of time is *itself* an intuition. This helps Kant

secure the transcendental ideality of pure forms of intuition, and, thereby, the mode of all

appearances whatsoever, which are themselves the basis of our knowledge. Further, Kant

writes,

> Time is the *a priori* formal condition of all appearances in general. Space,
> as the pure form of all outer intuitions, is limited in an *a priori* condition
> merely to outer things as their object, nevertheless as determinations of the
> mind themselves belong to the inner state, while this inner state thus belongs
> under the formal conditions of inner intuition, and thus of time, so time is
> the *a priori* condition of all appearance in general…all objects of the senses,
> are in time, and necessarily stand in relations of time (A34/B50-51).

He seems to offer a privileged position to time as the pure form of inner intuition. It

reigns over all appearance in general, unlimited in the way that space as outer intuition is

limited, and yet itself the absolute limitation of all appearance generally. Yet, when it

comes to the refutation of idealism – a title we should all note, the *refutation* of idealism

even in the face of the avowed *transcendental idealism* – Kant there wants space and

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[41] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 180 (A33/B50).

time on equal *ontological* footing despite the dominance of time in subjective experience (an epistemological valence). It is clear that Heidegger leans heavily on the emphasis on time as the form of inner intuition in his interpretation of Kant, and sees in this dominance of temporality an entry into the *Seinsfrage* that was Heidegger's primary goal.[42] And yet Kant is clear: we don't simply *imagine* things to be outside as in a purely intellectual exercise (Kant here seems, like Hume, to be thinking of *intensity*, that merely thinking of something strikes our consciousness with less vivacity than when we are struck by something that *stands before* us, with which we are present). For Kant, inner experience is not even possible without the presupposition of outer experience, for even if the *cognition* of outer things is dominated by time – the temporal play of the imagination as it applies the categories of the understanding to the manifold given in experience – this temporal process would be empty, would have no object, if it were not for the sensibility of *outer things*, even if we cannot assign space as a property of those things, whatever they happen to be.[43] This is proven in the consciousness of the possibility of making a time determination, which is made possible by consciousness (retention and repetition) of changes in a persistent manifold given from the "outside." What I experience in time, the objective content, is necessary for me to be time-conscious, just as I can perform the schema necessary for rending outside things sensible only because I have temporal access to it qua the form of inner intuition.[44] Kant is, after all, an Empirical Realist, in addition to being a Transcendental Idealist. However, if we are focusing on the subject, on the

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[42] Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 30-35.
[43] Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 326 (B274-75).
[44] Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 327 (B275-77).

conscious mind, then these considerations together with the previous passage make clear that consciousness itself arises primarily in time qua the activity of the imagination in the inner intuition of the sensible manifold. In terms of the order of conscious, finite knowledge, I am only secondarily associated with space through the temporal mediation of inner sense – although, Kant seems to think that *ontologically*, both are *a priori* necessary as the conditions of experience in general. But from the subjective side of experience itself, in its temporal unfolding, time takes hold first in the form of inner intuition. It is this sense of "inner" subjectivity, that subjectivity is the temporal "inside" of consciousness over and against the outside of the objective world, that is Kant's most profound contribution to the major discourse driving to the end of the mind. The Kantian temporal account alleviates the Cartesian immaterial substance of its mind-body problem by a positive account of finite human thought as subjectivity in time. All knowledge of extended bodies is mediate by time relations, relations that prove permanence and are themselves proven by the permanence of the object they relate. Space is mediated through the epistemological stop-gap of inner intuition, filtering it through a non-objective observer whose primary cognitive relation is the timeline of successive representational experiences.

But all this satisfies only reason! As Kant himself would agree, reason has its limits. At the limits of the mind, concepts such as human freedom (acts of volition) outstrip our cognitive capacity to render sound judgments on the matter. These issues are more than a reasonable mind can bear, they are all of life, as Dostoevsky writes, "volition is a manifestation of the whole of life, I mean, the whole of human life, including reason

with all its concomitant head-scratchings."[45] And it is to reason that Kant would have us

turn, and thus turn inwards to deduce morality, aesthetics, and the rest from principles of

Reason alone. The underground man stands against this, and, "had sewn a piece of

German beaver onto the collar of his overcoat. Suddenly, I was a hero." In his dreams, in

his mind, he is transfigured such that he would "give myself entirely up to dreaming," so

that he might "seek salvation in all that was 'sublime and beautiful,' in my dreams of

course."[46] The phrase "sublime and beautiful" marked by quotations gives a nod to

Kant's third *Critique*, or at least to the Kantian vein within German Romanticism, such as

it was in 1864. But we cannot take the underground man as a model, that is, he is not

intended to be anything like a moral exemplar. There is something *wrong* with the

underground man, he is, as he said, a sick man. The excess of consciousness that

produces his heroic dreams, his speculative, imaginary world of ideality, is a disease as

Dostoevsky presents it. It is possible to read the underground man as a diagnostic

exercise in the symptomatology of consciousness; a critical reading that asks, "what is

wrong here? What is consciousness such that it produces the underground man, a being

whose key characteristic and defining feature is rational self-awareness?" There are other,

formal reasons for considering Dostoevsky's work.

Just as marking "sublime and beautiful" is a formal mark that points us to the

confrontation with Kant's legacy, there are other marks that orient Dostoevsky's text

towards the Enlightenment era discourse on the human mind. That the narrative takes a

confessional form reveals its phenomenological dimension, the world according to the

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[45] Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 285-86
[46] Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 310.

underground man, his first-person account. Dostoevsky presents confessional "notes,"
suggesting incompleteness, fragmentation, a finite discourse, as though the mind were so
tightly nestled within that it could not really get out except for scraps at a time. The
underground man addresses his readers in these pieces, it it to us he confesses his dis-
ease, if only in part, the notes being the reflective part of himself, a representation of his
own discrete consciousness. As Paul W. Nisly has suggested, *Notes from Underground*
takes the form of a confession that implicates the reader in the narrator's dis-ease.[47] He
sets himself up to be at least as intelligent as the reader, perhaps even more so when he
shows how he can anticipate the reader's objections. Nisly remarks that the underground
man is a "pardoxicalist, a complexifier, one who can never treat any issue simply."[48] In
other words, the underground man is a man of the Enlightenment, a *le philosophe*. Here,
Dostoevsky's emphasis on dreams is relevant, that the underground man was once
decked out in German furs – but no more. No longer seduced by the dreams of Descartes,
or the wild, absurd fantasies of reason without the constraints with which Kant
cautioned.[49] Now he knows better, and initiates us into a countercurrent within the
prevailing Enlightenment discourse of Descartes and Kant, a countercurrent I am calling
the underground discourse.

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[47] Nisly, "A Modernist Impulse: 'Notes from Underground' as Model." *College Literature*, 4:2 (Spring 1977), 152.
[48] Nisly, "A Modernist Impulse," 153.
[49] The philosophical significance of Descartes' revelatory dreams and his idea for a systematic science of certitude are explored in Gregor Sebba, *The Dream of Descartes*, ed. Richard Watson (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois, 1987); and, Jacque Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes, Together with Some Other Essays*, trans. Mabelle Andison (New York: Philosophical Library, 1944). Kant speaks of the dialectic as a "logic of illusion" [*Schein*], saying "truth, as much as error, and thus also illusion as leading to the latter, are to be found only in judgments, i.e., only in the relation of the object to our understanding." This will become important later. See, Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 384(A293-94/B349-50).

The underground discourse implicates the reader because it is a counter-course to the dominant way of talking about the subject. Dostoevsky knows that, even to philosophically adventurous readers, the notion that consciousness is a disease will appear scandalous. The underground man speaks against the Enlightenment glorification of reason and takes the canonical view to task for the faults of its most lauded concept: the human mind. The underground discourse is thoroughly heterodox. It is a heresy. But, within this heterodox practice we develop the antidote to dogmatism. In this way, the unquestioned ontological commitments lingering from the Cartesian disemplacement of mind can be brought forth and analyzed, exorcizing the ghostly presence existing only in the act of self-perception spread out over time.

I have provided a gloss of the philosophical canon. This version of the canon was assembled in order to outline the development of a certain philosophical conception of the human condition, the condition being fundamentally self-conscious. On this point, the ontological occasionally slips into the epistemological, and the question of how we know being crops up in the shadow of the question of what is, what exists. With this epistemic element of awareness, of being able to recognize my own being thus somehow being a self, a who, ontology finds itself forced to confront, in the drift of its own guiding question, the fact of sense, that what is means something to and for a being who can take itself as such. That is the primordial ground of the Realism versus Idealism debate, and I will have something to say about this, and New Realism in particular, in Chapter Four. First, we must focus on getting to place, a placial ontology providing a new perspective from which to approach old problems.

When such an old problem of the mind flickers again as it nears its end, it does so in the full strength of the major discourse that became dominant in Modern philosophy. What I am calling "underground discourse" can be thought of as a special case of what Deleuze and Guattari designate as "minor literature." Underground discourse, with *Notes from Underground* still supplying our paradigm, fits generally into the schema of minor literature. Within the underground discourse on mind, there is a high coefficient of deterritorialization, to use Deleuze and Guattari's terms.[50] In other words, when Dostoevsky has his underground man call consciousness a "disease," everything about the discourse on consciousness is brought into question. Through the appropriation and recasting of the central terms of the discourse, the underground man has effectively called into question the entire chain of signification emanating from the central terms. The sharp delineations and distinctions dictated by the major literature suddenly become disturbed, creating rifts in the established boundaries that are indicated by the underground man's concern that his disease of consciousness is taking its toll on his physical body as well.[51] In expressing this concern, the underground man inverts the worries of Modern philosophy. He asserts that the mind must effect the body – not only must it produce an effect, this effect is *bad*, a detrimental causality, the cause of decay in the mind *and* body.

In defiance of the Enlightenment orthodoxy, of the *right view* regarding the mind, the underground discourse takes a quasi-political stance.[52] It is a discourse of resistance against powerful modes of discourse, against the *basic presuppositions*, the prejudices of

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[50] Delezue and Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986), 16.
[51] Dostoevsky, *Note from Underground*, 263.
[52] Deleuze and Guatteri require that in minor literature, "everything…is political," in *Kafka*, 17.

philosophers, that infect the major literature and are spoken to only by the silence of a new dogma. *Notes from Underground* is certainly a political book. It is, in many ways, a response to Nikolai Chernyshevsky's 1863 novel, *What is to be Done?* The underground man's assault on the Crystal Palace in chapters nine and ten of part one of the *Notes* is the best illustration of this political bent.[53] In Chernyshevsky's novel the illusory Crystal Palace appears in the fourth dream of protagonist Viéra Pavlovna. In idyllic surroundings, people enjoy lives free of labor and experience evenings of joy in crystal palaces that have no match in the waking world. These dreamscapes broadly express the philosophical union of utopian, socialist, and utilitarian arguments within the work.[54] While my goal here is not an analysis of the explicit politics within Dostoevsky's work, there is, nevertheless, a political element to the underground discourse in that it is a discourse of resistance. We are made to think of subjectivity and its central consciousness as a problem, as a dis-ease, the easy explanation given by the history of philosophy is barred from us, brought in question, made into a perverse explanation of dis-ease that brings about unforeseen and unaccounted for disturbances in the life of the subject itself. The authority of the disciplinary polity is disrupted. The orthodoxy that permits Bernard Williams to ask that we presupposed any procedure in which consciousness could be said – question beggingly or not – to be separated from its extended mechanical shell is denied. The underground man stands fast and says, "I shall presuppose no such thing. It's preposterous!" This connects the underground man to what Deleuze and Guattari

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[53] Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 291-94.
[54] Chernyshevsky, *A Vital Question; or, What is to be Done?* trans. Nathan Haskell Dole and S. S. Skidelsky (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1886), 367-86.

describe as a "political immediacy."[55] The dis-ease of consciousness must therefore be addressed, not just for the health of the individual, but also for the collective health of the body politics wherein the dis-eased individual expresses itself. Dostoevsky explains in a note at the beginning of part one, "such persons as the author of such memoirs not only may, but must, exist in our society, if we take into consideration the circumstances which lead to the formation of our society. It was my intention to bring before our reading public…one of the characters of our recent past."[56] He expresses an implicit problematization of the relationship between the individual and the whole of society. This problematic is played out in the solitary and idiosyncratic life of the underground man. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari argue that, in minor literature, "everything takes on a collective value."[57] In my reconstruction of the canon I am not merely picking individual quarrels with Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant, and so on. The purpose of the reconstruction is the disruption of the orthodoxy at the center of this discourse, and thereby a reconfiguration of the collective following the prognosis of the dis-ease. The discourse itself, the one contained in these pages, will itself remain unstable – that is, it is interdisciplinary through and through. It will traverse a variety of styles in order to deliver its arguments.

We cannot avoid this genealogy, which has conditioned the problem as we find it. We cannot avoid this discourse that slides in ontology, its ontological questions sometimes shaded epistemologically. Such questionable practice is part of the collective

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[55] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 18.
[56] Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 263.
[57] Delezue and Guattari, *Kafka*, 17.

discipline of philosophy and its history. To think through the end of the mind, to seek

another beginning, is to think through this metaphysics, to traverse this boundary, exceed

it – to risk this existential concern. Nisly was right to point out that the readers of the

underground man's confession are themselves implicated in the dis-ease. So too are

readers of the underground discourse implicated in these existential concerns. They are

themselves participants within the major literature whose language is re-appropriated in

the re-valuation occurring in the minor discourse. Taking up *Notes from Underground* as

a confession, Sharon Lubkemann Allen argues that the authenticity and authority of the

underground discourse rests upon an orthodox community which mediates a self-

conscious parody wherein the stubbornly rebellious yet reflective meditations on life

make possible the recovery of a moral ground on which self and other can still stand as

autonomous, dialogically realized beings.[58] It is with Allen that I want to move the

underground discourse in its own direction, distinguishing it from minor literature while

maintaining a family resemblance with Deleuze and Guattri. Within the underground

discourse, there exists a double orthodoxy. As a minor literature, underground discourse

operates within the major literature and must make use of its terms; in our case it has

been "mind," "consciousness," "presence," "representation," and so on. However, as a

form of resistance within the polity of the disciplinary discourse established by canonical

authority, underground discourse develops a tangential orthodoxy of resistance itself –

what is, from the major perspective, "heterodox." This alternative orthodoxy gains

momentum in its dialogue with the major literature, producing an undercurrent of

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[58] Allen, "Unorthodox Confession, Orthodox Conscience: Aesthetic Authority in the
Underground." *Studies in East European Thought*, 59:1/2 (June 2007), 66.

criticism functioning to subvert the meaning of the authoritative terms autochthonous to the major literature. Yet the minor orthodoxy, the resistant heterodox, mediates what Allen calls a "self-conscious parody," which is clearly a marked formal difference from the major orthodox. Because the terms operating within the underground discourse are rebelliously appropriated and not autochthonous they take on a subversive tone that is discontinuous with the major literature in a fracture that is asymmetrical. That is to say, there is not a simple alteration of terms, but an additive element – some third term is introduced to explain the difference itself. Dostoevsky introduces "dis-ease," a characterization of the ontological malaise occasioned by the existential concerns of Modernist literature. The appropriation of "consciousness" by a clinical discourse whose symptomatology treats the mind as dis-eased displaces consciousness from the essential core by mediating it through a third term. Therefore, to be human now means to be essentially dis-eased, to suffer from ontological malaise. Consciousness begins to lose its purchase on the claim to the essential being of personhood. To make sense of this radical transformation, we must consider the work of "parody" in Allen's account.

I turn to Linda Hutcheon for an appropriate theory of parody. In Hutcheon's work, we find a definition of "parody" that leads "to a vision of interconnectedness" while maintaining a "deliberate refusal" to take our social, historical, existential present, or the past as referent, to be the ultimate objects – the source of meaning and significance for us. And yet, this mode of parody, "…teaches and enacts the recognition of the fact that social and existential 'reality' is *discursive* reality when it is used as the referent of art, and so the only 'genuine historicity' becomes that which acknowledges its own discursive, contingent identity. The past as referent is nor bracketed of effaced…it is

incorporated and modified, given new and different life and meaning."[59] It is this

acknowledgement of its own discursive, contingent identity that makes the underground

man feel "unhappy" to recount his life and philosophy. Insofar as Allen and Hutcheon's

work trade in Kantian notions of autonomy, as I'll mention below, we must see how

Allen's discursive movement already undermines the identity she seeks, even though she

very astutely renders an extremely lucid account of parody itself. In the next Chapter, I'll

return to Hutcheon's troubled relationship to history in the context of the

modern/postmodern distinction. At this time, recall the demand for structure, order, and

limit that echoes after each question raised against the *cogito*, the simple unified self

haunting a finite time. Such a demand for the order, discipline, and certainty of the

cogito. "Why, just try," says the underground man, "just give us, for instance, more

independence, untie the hands of any one of us, widen the sphere of our activities, relax

discipline, and we – yes, I assure you – we should immediately be begging for the

discipline to be reimposed on us."[60] Again, I emphasize agreement with Nisly that

Dostoevsky does not present the actions of the underground man in part two of the

novella to be in any way a prescriptive model. Yet it is also apparent that Dostoevsky

sympathizes with the underground man's condition, and presents the arguments against

enlightenment rationalism as damning.[61] In fact, Dostoevsky gives the underground man

an earnest, fiery finish, at which point the *Notes* proclaim:

> Why, we do not even know where we are to find real life, or what it is, what
> it is called. Leave us alone without any books, and we shall at once get

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[59] Hutcheon, "The Politics of Postmodernism: Parody and History." *Cultural Critique*, 5 (Winter 1986-87), 182.
[60] Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 376-77.
[61] Nisly, "A Modernist Impulse," 156.

confused, lose ourselves in a maze, we shall not know what to cling to, what to hold on to, what to love and what to hate, what to respect and what to despise. We even find it hard to be men, men of *real* flesh and blood, *our own* flesh and blood. We are ashamed of it. We think it a disgrace. And we do our best to be some theoretical "average" men.[62]

The underground man is relating the burden placed on him by what Hutcheon called "discursive reality," which is disclosed in the "confession" that places the reader in the place of God – where a godless man implicates the reader as judge in God's place contra *Confessions* in the religious mode of St. Augustine. With this disclosure comes the vision of interconnectedness established by the parodic element within the underground discourse. The burden of this discursive reality is the need to incorporate and modify the past and thereby give it "new and different life and meaning."[63]

It is a step the underground man is unwilling to take. The symptom of paralysis recurs in Modernist literature. The underground man is paralyzed and unable to make the move that would incorporate and modify the past because he has no *place in it*. He is removed, aloof, his consciousness separating him from the world in its foundational act of self-representation, the grounding act of making thinking present to thought, the act of self-surveillance that enables all future knowledge and structures the mind temporally over and against objective space. In the closing sections, I will sketch an argument that will be developed further in Chapter Two. Having established the underground discourse, I want to turn to the appropriation of *representation* in preparation to rethink this starting point, to begin thinking again, thinking other than representationally. I have been focused almost exclusively on the disemplacement of subjectivity, its retreat to interiority, from

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[62] Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 377.
[63] Hutcheon, "The Politics of Postmodernism," 182.

which the dis-ease of consciousness arose. This retreat, the interiorization of subjectivity by its submersion in time, is staged by a process of *presencing*, of bringing oneself into one's own view by rendering a self-representation. To do this is to make oneself available through representational apperception. Moving forward, I will attempt to re-instantiate *emplacement* as the basic ontological movement; emplacement instead of presencing. But to do this I will extend the underground discourse beyond the limits found so far in Deleuze, Guattari, Allen, and Hutcheon. Particularly for Allen, but also for Hutcheon, we would need an underground discourse that rests on an assumption of the desirability of the self and others standing over and against one another as *autonomous*.[64] As I noted above, this remains firmly in the Kantian orthodoxy, still singing a song too familiar to human ears to herald the end of the mind and another beginning. Autonomy relies upon and presupposes the very self-presencing that I am here attempting to overcome. Instead, I will develop in the direction of *autopoiesis*. The ontological substitution of emplacement for presencing will put us in a position to make more sense of what an autopoietic being would look like without the central processing unit and judge seated within the tomb of the mind, its ghostly mechanism making mysterious contact with the body it inhabits. For the time being, I must stick to a critical analysis of the process of self-presencing in order to elucidate how placial ontology might address certain systematic problems in philosophy. I will seek out underground interlocutors along the way, other nomads and wanderers within the Modern traditions that augment and

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[64] Allen, "Unorthodox Confession, Orthodox Conscience," 66.

strengthen the heterodox discourse we discovered in Dostoevsky. Together, we express the need for a place to be.

1.4 In Place of Presence

I use the term "presencing." This antimeria allows me to emphasize and foreground the procedural nature of consciousness as it emerges from the Enlightenment and is cast in its subjective temporal mold. The subject comes into its own presence, expressing the capacity to render itself to itself in representational forms. Jean-Luc Nancy argues that Western culture is primarily defined by its representative procedures, where representation "designates a limit, as demarcation, even when it ceaselessly pushes back the frontiers of its imperium," such that it "opens the world to the closure that it is."[65] Nancy and I share a similar perspective on the concept of consciousness in the history of philosophy, especially as he sees it at the beginning of his 1984 essay, "Identity and Trembling." Nancy begins with a quote from Hegel's *Logic*, which is rendered from Nancy's French, "Identity as self-consciousness, is what distinguishes man from nature, particularly the brutes, which never reach the point of comprehending themselves as an 'I,' that is *pure self-contained unity*," [emphasis added].[66] I am also in agreement with Nancy that this follows from the Kantian conception of the "I" as an Ego, the "irreducible kernel of self-constitution," which lies at the heart of the subject *to whom* all

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[65] Nancy, "Introduction: The Birth to Presence." *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes et al. (Stanford: Stanford University, 1993), 1.

[66] Cited in Nancy, "Identity and Trembling." *The Birth to Presence*, 9. Original at G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclodpedia of the Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), 181. The translators of Hegel's *Encyclopedia Logic* give the relevant passage as follows: "Similarly, it is his identity as consciousness of himself that distinguishes man from nature in general, and particularly from animals, which fo not achieve a grasp of themselves as 'I,' i.e., as their pure self-unity."

representation must appear as such – that, "must be able to accompany all his representations."[67] Nancy's argument is that any philosophy conducted in terms of "the" subject and subjectivity already presuppose the Ego-structure of representational thought bringing itself to presence in a self-contained unity. If this argument is followed, we can place Hegel within the lineage I've outlined above beginning with transitions from Descartes to Locke to Kant. However, my concern here is not so much to capture Hegel within my reconstruction, but rather, to engage Nancy himself on the issues of presence. He sees presencing as a process of coming-to-be wherein the key principle is one of *difference*. The foundational identity of the subject *makes difference* by self-actualizing in a representation to itself as, "the very movement proper to self-consciousness…"[68] The fundamental movement of self-differentiation sets the stage for the possibility of all representation to come, just as Descartes has described the knowledge that I exist to be the one thing known for certain. As with Locke, self-consciousness remains the outcome and the *telos* of this procedure. But the procedure of self-differentiation occurs as a painful separation. The subject becomes removed from things, locked within the cabinet of consciousness. As a representational process, it extends across time, but loses its spatiality behind the veil of the representational procedure itself. Since the subject is itself the ground of the procedure, that *to which* the representation is present *as such*, space becomes mediated through the temporal displacement of a fundamental differentiation enacted as the first step of negation in a dialectical process. In this respect, Hegel himself is basically a Kantian, and had written that in fact, "Kant rediscovered this triadic form

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[67] Nancy echoes Kant's claim, "Identity and Trembling," 9.
[68] Nancy, "Identity and Trembling," 10.

[of the movement of truth] by instinct," and that, "since then it has…been raised to its absolute significance, and with it the true form in its true content has been presented."[69] The interpretation of Kant's position on the I's self-representation provided above is the basis of my approach to Nancy's work on presence.

The disemplacement of consciousness has been shown to be the result of a quadripartite process. First, there is the act of recognition – the perception of the processes of the mind itself establishes the fact of conscious existence. Following the initial act of recognition is a state of self-presence wherein thinking attends to itself, attends to the self-perception established in the act of recognition. The thinking of thought by thought is reflection, reflection being the perception of the operations of the mind. The outcome of this reflective procedure is self-presence. That reflection is a procedure of presencing must be emphasized. The third moment, the maintenance and retention of that presence, the repetition of the setting forth, is representation. To persist in presence is to be represented to the subject. Persistent presence only becomes possible by the attendance of some self-representation capable of accompanying any given experience – a consequence of the foundational self-*perception*. Perception how? Through the representation. Thus, the significance of Nancy's comments concerning the dependence of Western culture on the representative procedure. But the fourth and final moment arises from the grounding function of the first two, remembering that Descartes intends the perception of thinking by thought to be an epistemological ground-floor. It was from the certainty of the self-perceptive act of "I think" that all subsequent

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[69] Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford, 1977), 29.

knowledge was vouchsafed. As this ground, the overall procedure must serve a differential function. The foundational act of self-representation must be the basis of difference as such, the first difference from which all subsequent differences follow. But what is differentiated in the first difference? My self and the representation of myself. I cannot be in my own presence without this difference. It is then that I, who am self-present, am differentiated from the I who is self-presented to me. Recognition, presencing, representation, difference – a placial ontology must deal with each in turn. Rather than attempting to refute each outright, I will work through the underground discourse, appropriating and modifying the significance of each as we proceed.

The first task to be accomplished will be the disclosure of place in modernity. Moving ahead, this will be the primary philosophical concern; to show how modernity discloses place. This first means confrontation with presencing as self-representational procedure. This means reconsidering the foundational role of representation itself. Representation is the abyss into which the *cogito* falls. Representation presents the circle, to stand out in a representation in order to represent. If we want to think differently, from another beginning, we must first think differently about representation. Remember, the response to externalism in philosophy of mind stems from a commitment and desire to preserve certain core beliefs about knowledge and language, thus knowers and thinkers, that center around the subject's representational nature. Representation is the primary explanans for *how* the subject exists as a thinking thing. It is also important to keep in mind the significance of reflection. I will turn explicitly to reflection in Chapter Two. But reflection in general is key to the foundation of metaphysics and epistemology. Reflection allows us to represent ourselves. If we are, at bottom, thinking things, and our

identity is constituted by the continuity of our thinking over time, and our thinking is a representational procedure by which the subject renders the outside world sensible to itself through a mental language, then reflection just is our ability to represent these internal processes to ourselves, thereby, as Locke and Hume said, we can observe the operations of our minds as it is busied with whatever thoughts and feelings, whatever experiences, we're having at the time we reflect. From here, we will be working up to a position that better enables us to see how Modernist literature transforms the concept of reflection. To see that, and thereby gain the proof necessary to show the disclosure of place in modernity, we must begin with work on basic concepts, beginning, again, with representation.

I am started down the road to thinking representation differently by Alva Nöe's excellent 2012 study, *Varieties of Presence*. There, Nöe writes plainly, "The idea that presence is representation is a bad idea," because: 1) the fundamental disconnection between the mental model given in representation and the actual world has remained inexplicable; 2) the *phenomenology* of my perceptual experience does not seem pictorial; 3) the world around us displays an abundance of images and reflections, and yet representations such as drawings, paintings, photographs, and the like must be painstakingly manufactured by us; and, 4) representations are not logically necessary in an explanation of perception.[70] Nöe argues that presence is not representation. Instead, presence is conceived as availability. There is a strong resonance here between Nöe's account of presence-as-availability and Heidegger's investigation of equipmentality in

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[70] The basic charges are outlined in Nöe, *Varieties of Presence* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2012), 30-31.

Being and Time. Nöe himself acknowledges the debt to Heidegger, but goes on to claim that the so-called "existential phenomenologists" don't go deep enough because they don't just flat out deny the transcendental account that underpins representation, but insist instead that the transcendental account is a secondary one made possible by the pre-thematic world we are absorbed in and involved with during the course of everyday human events.[71]

Before I dive into a disputation with Nöe over an interpretation of Heidegger's ontology (all with a view to be more clear about what a non-representational view of human cognition could be), I want to take stock of a few key components of Nöe's theory that will be indispensable to us moving forward. I also want to briefly mention an important piece of vocabulary that I am about to deploy in a somewhat idiosyncratic way. As part of the underground discourse I am confronted with a tangle of linguistic presuppositions and a very well entrenched technical vocabulary. We've got all the key words: perception, consciousness, identity, presence, representation, and so on. From here on out I am appropriating a philosophically familiar word. I want to talk about *concepts*. This is an advantageous time to discuss my use of the term "concept," because I will have to make sense of what Nöe means by "presence-as-availability," and *that* means making sense of "availability," which is what I want concepts to do. I will use "concept" to mean that which makes things available to us *as the things they are*. Concepts, traditionally *Begriffe* in the German vocabulary, are important to ontology. They help us see the way things are – they help us to get a sense of things, to orient us in

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[71] Nöe, *Varieties of Presence*, 32.

the right direction, so that we can take something in stride. If we can achieve this new

and different sense of what a concept is, what it does for us (and *to us*, really), we can

make some headway toward the disclosure of place. *Places are made available by*

concepts, and so, concepts will be our first entry to place. Let us sit with that first insight

for a moment.

Nöe and others, including those already mentioned, Thompson, Varela, Gallagher,

Clark, Menary, are inspired by the idea of an affordance. The idea was developed by

Princeton psychologist James Gibson in his work on visual perception. The first

advantage, an extremely significant advantage, to Gibson's approach is the way it

downplays the salience of the subject-object dichotomy that is so prominent a feature of

all the theories we've considered so far. Gibson writes, "an affordance is neither an

objective property nor a subjective property; or it is both if you like. An affordance cuts

across the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy. It

is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behavior. It is both physical and

psychical, yet neither. An affordance points both ways, to the environment and to the

observer."[72] To say an affordance exists is to say that the environment has provided some

being with the opportunity to do something, to behave in a certain way. In order to take

advantage of the affordance, a being has to be oriented, attuned to its surroundings in a

certain way. The being must be able to recognize the affordance, just recognize the fact

that it can act, that it can do something. To begin again must be done simply. I look

around and there's meaningful stuff, stuff I recognize. Why? But not answering

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[72] Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1979), 129.

beginning from the presupposition of the unified *cogito* setting out the representation before itself, but nowhere, in a vacuous *within*. Just recognizing that there is and there can be done. What is there in the being and the doing? Concepts are a way to talk about the fact that there are kinds of beings, being like we are, for which the environment shows up in a meaningful way, meaningful in the sense that those beings *do things that make sense*. Much of the activity is geared toward *maintaining the being that it is*. Things persist, we've encountered this observation in the literature, but things also degrade, and some things do some work to keep themselves persisting longer. The environment can afford, for instance, opportunities to do these sorts of things. And the affordance tells us something about the environment itself by the way in which things can be observed engaging affordances, even arranging for affordances by the manipulation of the environment, and so on. So, concepts, as I understand them, are the conjunction, the coupling, of a being capable of maintaining its being, with surroundings from which it can continue to maintain itself. In many ways, I am echoing Graham Harman's starting point in *Tool Being*, in which Harman says that his approach is "based neither on a credulous realism nor on some devious taste for substance abstracted from all relation. It relies only on a single, undeniable fact: *the fact that there are discernable individual entities at all*."[73] I may even demand less: that there are just discernable things, individual or not.

As I've demonstrated at length, concepts, and all such aspects of the language of thought, are traditionally held to be representational. That is, they are the subjective

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[73] Harman, *Tool Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*, (Peru, IL: Open Court, 2002), 44.

"stand in" for the thing-it-self. Concepts, understood in this way, are like mental maps or models of the outside world which we've constructed for ourselves secondhand, on the inside of thought. I'm intending a more direct reference here, where concepts speak to the way in which things *stand out* [*vorstellen*] for beings that are properly oriented toward them. The manner in which "trees" are foregrounded for me, distinguished with meaning, if I direct my gaze to look for "trees" and find them growing on a hillside. The environment affords for the seeing of trees, and by a certain attunement between being and environment (a concept) the being sees trees. All the ontology will demand at this point is an admission of two things: 1) things appear around me; and 2) I can do things with what appears around me. We could be even more basic, but perhaps less helpful, and say only that there happens that things appear. These are the first tentative moves for de-centering the *cogito* and uncovering place as a new ontological starting point. This first real change, the transformation of "concepts," and their role in making things present, in Nöe's sense of presence-as-availability. In this ontological connection to Heidegger, Nöe touches upon the crisis of consciousness in modernity. Rethinking presence in terms of availability demands an engagement with Heidegger and Nöe, both of whom mark out ways to begin already "outside," where we are not thinking from the inside of the subject to a mysteriously attained outside where we find knowledge to bring back inside.

1.5 What a Concept Does

Let me give an example of a concept, one identified by Nisly when he calls the underground man one of the first modern "anti-heroes." By "anti-hero" we all understand something about a kind of being in the world. We understand, first, a bit about heroes, their exemplary character, brave deeds, just causes, these all are struck in the chord of

"hero." But "anti-heroes" are somehow a negation of these, anarchic, against goodness, nihilistic, they are martyrs, not for any greater good, but for their own baser desires. Anti-hero is a certain way of being attuned to the world, either you are one or you know what you're looking for – brooding, dressed in black, cigarette, unwashed, but somehow still exuding sex appeal. Nisly means that the modern "hero" is an outsider who brings into question the culture in which he lives, and in the process, becomes something that refuses to be defined as a coherent unity.[74] The anti-hero denies the *cogito*, denies self-perception of some discrete, identical consciousness nested within the body. Nisly thereby reads Dostoevsky opening the doors on modernity, crossing a line, a threshold from which there is no return.

However, I would question the use of heroic language to refer to the type of character taking shape in the underground man. Nisly points out, correctly, that *Notes from Underground* does not follow traditional narrative patterns of conflicts, crisis, and resolution, being more a character study illustrated by select episodes from the protagonist's life. Except that really, the underground man is not even a protagonist who actively seeks the end of some plot; he even acts *antagonistically* at times. Rather, *because* he is standing at "The Abyss of the modern period," as Nisly puts it, the underground man is *beyond* the heroic narratives that rely on the *unity of some ideal*. There is no ideal, for it is precisely the idea of the ideal that is called into question by the heresy of the underground discourse. Certainly, the underground man is "anti-hero" in that he does things contrary to what a given hero might do. But he is not "anti-hero" in

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[74] Nisly, "A Modernist Impulse," 156-57.

the sense that modernity lies beyond the heroic age precisely because its literature and art expresses a dialectic procedure that could continue indefinitely, opening up further speculative possibilities rather than arriving at some final truth.[75]

Ironically, my point here, about both concepts and heroism, is a basically Hegelian one. In his *Lectures on Fine Art*, first published in 1835 and based on lecture notes from throughout the 1820s, Hegel argues that the heroic mode was best expressed by the epics of less modern cultures than the Germany of his day. Homer in Greece, the epics of ancient India and so forth, all express a cultural ideal made possible by their particular historical situation and the manner of their national unification. This is marked by the way in which the heroes of those epics are seamlessly integrated into the totality of the narrative structure that provided the hero with a whole and self-contained context within which they were driven toward a dramatic resolution that brings the story to an obvious end.[76] But the modern period (Hegel's example is Goethe) does not lend itself to heroic modes *precisely because it lacks a self-contained unity*. Hegel states that Goethe's *Hermann and Dorothea* is the work of literature contemporary with himself that comes closest to achieving the sense of cultural and national unity found in the ancient epics. However closely Hegel places Goethe to the ancients, his own analysis betrays Goethe's modernity as open, defying closure, ongoing, and referring always outside of its own bounds.[77] Further, Hegel attributes this to the peculiarly modern mode of production by machines, in factories, etc.[78] Thus, the Hegelian argument is that Dostoevsky's

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[75] Nisly himself identifies this dialectical process in, "A Modernist Impulse," 157.
[76] Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, Vols. 1 & 2*, trans. T. M. Knox (New York: Oxford, 1975), 260-61, and 1053-56.
[77] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 260, 262, and 1056.
[78] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 1053.

underground man is conscious in a way that Homer's Achilles is not. Achilles is fully immersed in the epic and follows the story to its logical end, only lamenting his Fate to the gods without questioning whether it could have been otherwise. The underground man seeks, through his confession to us, to question the logic of story, always unfolding some novel possibilities that do not appear fated, as destiny – even occasionally pointing out how people would really prefer a precise discipline dictated to them as if it were a logical necessity.

The "heroic" is a concept that lets us understand things in a comprehensive way. As a concept, it is a kind of short-hand, condensing a significant amount of cultural and historical information into a short breath, a word. But it is not this "short-hand," not its abbreviatory function that truly marks off the concept. Rather, this concept, "heroic" orientates us toward the text in a comprehensive way. The concept guides our approach to the text and shapes its affordances to us, the way in which things appear, the different ways the text can be "lit up" under our conscious gaze so that different elements become apparent. This leads us to the secondary reason for my appropriation of Nöe's notion that presence is availability, and my use of "concept" to indicated the being-made-available of things to and for something capable of accessing its surroundings. The new "conceptual" apparatus allows me to do two things that are distinct, and yet closely intertwined at the heart of this project.

First, the re-imagined work of the concept is a step on the way back to place. It places the being who "knows" and the surroundings that are "known" (the environment) on equal ontological footing – the concept is *both together*, both the being and what is afforded to that being in their capacity for epistemic action in the world. It allows me to

do this without adopting Hegel's dubious metaphysics of history, made problematic by his eminently modern sense of historical Progress. I can also steer clear of Heidegger's troublesome philosophy of history with its vocabulary of fate and destiny. Remember, this is not about causes. Secondly, as we have seen, much of my arguments ask that we understand literary Modernism in relation to Modern philosophy. It is therefore crucial that we have the philosophical tools necessary to grapple with broad historical movements in philosophy and literature. To get at mere being, to get back into place, we will enter through literature, through the aperture between being and literature – understanding literature as art which discloses being, or, in other words, as the scene of ontology. I will therefore make one important distinction, one between concepts, broadly construed, just any thing that opens the world up in a meaningful way and orients us toward the stuff we find all around – and the idea of a *basic concept*. A basic concept is basic, not because it is simple or non-complex, but because it is foundational and, in some sense, comprehensive. This will become more clear as we work through Nöe and Heidegger, but a basic concept, something like a *metaphysical concept* (identity, difference, cause, finitude, etc.), takes a general vantage on the world and *the place of human beings in that world*. They are comprehensive in their ontological orientation, both revealing something about the world "out there," but also something about us, about our basic emplacement and situation in the world. Basic concepts are attempts to approach *the whole*, in a way, though I do not intend that they "capture" or "model" the totality of all that exists in any numerical or absolute sense of being the "complete" picture. More on that in Chapter Four. Since we are just beginning, just now trying to think toward the end of the mind, straining to hear a non-human song, we will have to

leave the full development of these transformative moves regarding concepts to take place as we proceed. To recapitulate briefly: concepts will not be thought as maps, models, or images of some outside that are projected "inside" to be viewed by a conscious being. In general concepts will be thought as the way in which the world opens to beings capable of being aware of their surroundings, and can act in this awareness in a meaningful way. Concepts are openings, conduits by which we orient ourselves for actions in a meaningful world. *Basic concepts*, as metaphysical or, better, ontological orientations, open on a view of the whole, strive to see the world *and* our place in it.

Nöe's work on presence will help with arguments for this approach to concepts – the first move in our disclosure of place in modernity. With Nöe and Heidegger, presence and concepts are severed from representation. We thereby free concepts from laboring under the fruitless task of recreating a map or model of the world or object intended to be represented by the concept, because the concept – as that which becomes present in thought – is no longer representative of anything; indeed, there is no need to represent the "outside" to any "inside" of subjectivity. There is no need for representation, as far as Nöe is concerned.[79] He argues convincingly for an understanding of "concepts" in which we think of concepts as tools by which we take hold of and grapple with the world that is present to us. This move places Nöe in a position very close to that taken by Heidegger concerning *pragmata* in section 15 of *Being and Time* as that which displays the structure of an "in-order-to," *Um-zu* in German. While Nöe does try to distinguish himself from Heidegger and the "existential phenomenologists," it is also true that he shares the

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[79] Nöe rejects the need for representation all together in *Varieties of Presence*, 31.

existential idea that the concept itself is conditioned by the conjunction of human being

and the world – indeed, that the *meaning* of the concept is itself conditioned by the

interaction, the struggle, between the human being and the world it grapples with via the

concept. So, both Nöe and Heidegger seem to agree that human understanding is 1)

fundamentally interpretive, and, 2) that such interpretation is geared, primarily, for

action. This is where the rubber meets the road in understanding both Nöe disagreement

with existential phenomenology and in freeing presence from its entanglements with

representation for the purposes of the current discussions. I will show that part of the

problem is that Nöe's criticism of existential phenomenology as relegating the

"transcendental account" to a secondary position is wrongheaded, at least in Heidegger's

case. Since it is Heidegger who serves as Nöe's most productive interlocutor on this

issue, I take it that Heidegger is the primary target of Nöe's criticism. There are some

salient issues raised. Heidegger does claim that "correctness is an ineluctable scion of

truth."[80] If we understand "correctness" here to refer only to the correctness of the

correlation between a representation and some object or state of affairs out in the world,

then Nöe is on his way to showing how the transcendental account is relegated to a

secondary position. Here, Nöe must mean by the "transcendental account" the fact that

Heidegger, as interpreted in *Varieties of Presence*, must be committed to the view that

transcendental objects, something we know not what, must be "behind" the

representation, something we sort of throw a representation over from a subjective,

internal position, a first-person point of view – the Kantian phenomenal-noumenal

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[80] Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewizc and Daniela
Vallega-Neu (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2012), 272.

distinction. But Heidegger's position on Kant's transcendental was rooted in his ontology of being *as time*, and thus, in part because he was so close to Nietzsche, Heidegger presents an entirely *immanent* transcendence that is primarily temporal – the ecstases of the past, present, and future, my being toward my ownmost possibility, finitude, death. He argues that Kant still has the metaphysical conception of transcendental objects that held there to be some*thing out there* toward which we stepped in a transcending movement. But the transcendent itself remains, in Kant, some being toward which we step. Heidegger's transcendent just *is the overstepping itself*, the very movement of our being in time *is* the transcendent. Immanent transcendence is part of the explanation Heidegger gives for *aletheaic* truth, truth as disclosure, uncovering, revealing. In order to apply some representative proposition, something must stand out, be revealed and appear before me *in order for* me to say even that "there is" something there at all. So, it is true that Heidegger thinks *this* way of thinking truth, as unconcealing, as disclosure, is primordial and ontologically *a priori* to any "correctness" by way of representative propositions, or mathematical systematizing. Heidegger's phenomenological roots are on display throughout, and his pursuit of the answer in Kant during the late 1920s and early 1930s is evident by the way Heidegger treats truth always as the relation of some being (typically human being) to an appearance. But Heidegger does not then simply move the former account to a secondary position, completely untouched. To alter the ground of truth demands thinking differently about the representational procedure Heidegger sees running rampant as machination, manipulation, and calculative thinking – the nihilistic drive to level everything down to the value of resource, the value of utility, such that all landscapes became nothing but reserves to be put to use at a later time. So, yes, in one

sense, the "transcendental account" is relegated to a secondary position – it comes after the basic disclosure of beings in their very presence with a being capable of experiencing them. But the understanding of the transcendent is radically transformed by this procedure, construed as immanent in terms of time, and the very nature of the representational structure of thinking is transformed and no longer the foundational process by which "thinking" is to be thought. There are radically different ways of thinking, ways that are not necessarily less oriented toward truth just because they are not calculating, are not *ratio*. It cannot just be business as usual. The system demands a thorough reassessment, according to Heidegger. Being relegated to a secondary position is not so simple and pat a move as Nöe would have us believe. Heidegger, in light of the above interpretation, cannot mean "correctness" in the sense of a transcendental correlation between some representative concept and its object.

If we return to section 15 of *Being and Time*, we see that Heidegger attempts a radical reassessment of reference, or assignment. When he says that the structure of the in-order-to [*um-zu*] refers something to something, he does not mean that the in-order-to is a relation of correspondence between representational ideas and objects. Rather, he means that the in-order-to directs us to the world of equipment that gives whatever object we have at hand meaning *through the series of relationships that exist between the object at hand and the equipment involved in the project enabled by the in-order-to structure*. So Heidegger's famous hammer refers, not from a representation of a hammer to some object called "hammer," but refers instead to the other things that are involved in the world of carpentry; that is, planers, planks of wood, nails, sandpaper, and so on. The relationship, the relations, between the hammer and these other bits of equipment, in part,

underwrite the assignment of meaning to the hammer. But it is not just these other bits of equipment that give the hammer meaning; it is also that, taken together as a totality of references the collective noun "equipment" are all at the service of the in-order-to, that is, they are all tied together under the aegis of a *practice* – the in-order-to is geared for action. Later, in the same text at section 32, Heidegger makes it clear that we do not "throw a 'signification' over some naked thing which is present-to-hand [*vorhanden*], we do not stick a value on it…"[81] and this is perfectly in line with Nöe's basic position that, "the detail of [the appearance of a room] show up as present…in that I understand, implicitly, practically, that by the merest movement of my eyes and head I can secure access to an element that is now obscured on the periphery of the visual field," and therefore, these details are not represented to me, but are rather made available to me.[82] Likewise, according to Heidegger, in my involvement with the hammer, I understand implicitly, practically, that by a series of movements coordinated with the equipment of carpentry of which the hammer is a part, I can make available a table that is not currently available to me (because I have not made it yet). Note too that Nöe's conception of our conscious perception is a fundamentally *relational* one,[83] as is Heidegger's, dependent as it is on human being's involvement with worlds and their totalities of reference.

All of the above to say that Nöe severely misreads Heidegger's statements about the ineluctability of correctness. Heidegger certainly cannot mean "correctness" in the transcendental sense Nöe implies. While it is true that Heidegger claims that calculative

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[81] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquerrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Collins, 1962), 190.
[82] Nöe, *Varieties of Presence*, 19.
[83] Nöe, *Varieties of Presence*, 24-25.

thinking "makes beings ever more representable," we cannot take him to mean

"representable" here in the transcendental sense precisely because he believes that this

representation makes beings *more available*, that is*, more accessible for manipulation –*

in order to be put to use according to some plan.[84] For Heidegger, the "representation" of

anything in the concept is a matter of the most concrete and practical importance, not an

abstract practice of labeling something with a sign to give it significance. Thus, Nöe talks

past Heidegger because he fails to attend to the radical transformations taking place in

how we are asked to understand "representation," an interpretive project unfolding across

several of Heidegger's works. This is ironic, considering that Nöe's ostensive goal is to

re-imagine "presence" without jettisoning the word. My point is further emphasized when

we attend to Heidegger's understanding of the concept, which is the starting point for my

own appropriation of the term.

In a 1924 lecture on Aristotle, Heidegger claims the conceptions themselves are

concrete basic experiences and "not a theoretical grasping of the matter."[85] Later, in a

1929-30 lecture, Heidegger argues that we should not understand concepts, especially

metaphysical ones, as anything like a determinative representation through which we set

something before us in order to evaluate it or judge about it. Rather, concepts, and here it

is particularly metaphysical ones, arise from our being gripped by the world and

struggling in this grip to understand the whole of our condition, thereby bringing

ourselves as part of the whole into question as well.[86] Thus, concepts rise from a direct

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[84] Heidegger, *Contributions*, 389.
[85] Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. Robert D. Metcalf and Mark B. Tanzer (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2009), 15.
[86] Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1995), 8-9.

encounter with the world, a direct encounter that Nöe is also trying to articulate in his work.

However, I agree that Heidegger's maintenance of the word "representation" raises unnecessary problems in the interpretation of his philosophy. One must carefully work through several volumes of Heidegger's oeuvre to really track the changes and modifications he makes to the idea of representation. I will therefore move forward using a bit more of Nöe's "availability" and "access" vocabulary, and bearing in mind the particular definition of "concept" given above. So we'll be trying, with Nöe, to think presence-as-availability. However, the purpose of this dialogue with Nöe and Heidegger has been to complicate Nöe's dismissal of the existential phenomenologists. My own position is, at base, more in line with the phenomenologists that is Nöe's. It is not clear to me, for instance, whether or not Nöe wants to totally reject "picture" thinking as representation is often conceived, or to deny that we can really "map" or "model" the world in our thoughts. If he is indeed making those more extreme claims, I think a quick phenomenological experiment handily refutes him: I sit here right now thinking of an image of my car, and it is very clearly a model of my car in several respect, sitting there, even, in its usual parking place. Readers may feel free to map out their own ways in thought, or imagine a familiar object in detail. I think this is "representational" in all the relevant senses discussed in the canon, and there is a sense in which these types of thoughts can "match up" to objects in the world, but this is only a kind of thinking, not the basic level at which all thought whatsoever operates. And we can see how this kind of thinking, capturing the world in minute detail to map it out and "cover it," to really have "gone over it all," lends itself to calculation, machination, and utility. There's something

to be said about Heidegger's basic starting point for cultural critique, even if he could digress into extravagant polemics in moments of thoughtlessness.[87] But more to the point, we can, at will, imagine a handful of different locations and easily map out a trajectory through those places. However, I agree with Nöe that we do not *need* classical representational schemes to account for these abilities. Concepts, as both Nöe and Heidegger think of them – as practical tools by which we grapple with the world – are adequate to the task of explaining these abilities without recourse to the language of "representation." On this score, despite my advocacy of Nöe's approach to presence as availability, I think Heidegger makes the stronger case precisely because he is able to work through the problems of representation so as to transfigure the meaning of representation itself. I have tried to outline this transformation as clearly as possible, but it will help too if we keep the general idea of "affordances" in the background, just to help avoid lapsing back into the "map/model/image" mold. I will not talk about representations except as special cases, and we will see this unfold in Chapter Three. I will be focusing primarily on "concepts" as I have been discussing them here, taking cues from Nöe and Heidegger.

Remember, it was the act of *conceiving thought itself* that secured knowledge for Descartes and laid the groundwork for all epistemological certainty. Further, it is the *concept* of the human person with which the literary Modernists struggle in their attempt to diagnose the ontological malaise suffered as a result of their excess of consciousness. The path so far can be summarized roughly: Modern philosophy developed the concept

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[87] This is Krell's major complain against the *Black Notebooks* in *Ecstasy, Catastrophe* (Albany: SUNY, 2015).

of human being in order to grapple with the ontological and epistemological problems that faced them at the time. However, literary Modernism finds this tool to be lacking in the full existential concerns of life. The self-conscious temporal subject might be a fine conceptual scheme for scientific (or calculative) thinking. Perhaps intellectual abstraction is well-served by such self-reflective grounding. Nevertheless, once this concept is generalized and used in order to understand human being as such, it quickly collapses into the maddening self-enclosed solipsism that plagues philosophers in the later 19th and throughout the 20th century. Literary Modernists show aesthetically how the concept of the human being, as conceived and reified by Modern philosophy, breaks down and reveals in its fracturing the very conditions by which it came to presence in the first place. This is the quadripartite structure: the act of recognition, presencing, representation, difference. Each of these moments are entangled with and interpenetrated by the others, each self-reinforcing, and as I have shown by engaging with Heidegger and Nöe, alterations in one of the four moments reverberates throughout and results in seismic shifts across the whole procedure.

With this systemic transformation foreground, perhaps my Hegelian consideration from before can be made more clear. Heroic conceptions, I can now say, were the dominant basic concepts used by artists and poets in ancient Greece to struggle with the conditions of their existence. As times changed, as the historical and material conditions of cultural life shifted and realigned, the heroic conception gave way to Modern conceptions of the individual subject, the Ego. There is "progress" from one stage or state to another, the next, but there is not Progress in terms of the eventual actualization of some Ideal. I think there are serious considerations to be made on this point regarding

what cognitive scientists call "social cognition," but these considerations largely fall outside the current project. We will encounter this topic again briefly near the end of our studies. All I mean to say here is that may adaption of Nöe and Heidegger's action-oriented understanding of the concept is to be applied in instances where I make broad historical arguments about the relationship between movements in Modern philosophy and those in literary Modernism. These arguments, by and large, are arguments about the clash, the synthesis, and the re-valuation of concepts geared toward human action – in the case of metaphysics, geared toward the act of understanding the world and our own selves holistically.

The underground discourse makes interventions in the dominant conceptual scheme that lead to disruptions throughout the discourse reliant upon those conceptualizations. My focus on Dostoevsky's underground man was intended to lay the groundwork for the interventions that will occur and recur throughout the remainder of this text. I will encounter other underground interlocutors, literary and otherwise. Certainly Heidegger is such a thinker of the underground within the context of Anglo-American philosophy in the U.S. Even Nöe, who thinks against representation, who *resists* representational schemes, can be considered part of this underground. These thinkers and artists have helped me articulate the need to get back into place against the background of the major discourse occurring "above ground." They will also help to develop a placial ontology, one necessary for overcoming the difficulties inherited from the Enlightenment.

CHAPTER 2. THE DISCLOSURE OF PLACE IN MODERNITY

That climax when the brain acknowledges the world,
all values extended into the blood awake.
        – Muriel Rukeyser, "Reading Time: 1 Minute 26 Seconds," (1939)

2.1 Crises in Modernisms Literary and Philosophical

       The fascinating thing about Modernist literature in relation to Modern philosophy

is the specificity of its philosophical references and the way in which it prefigures the

postmodern theoretical turn in philosophical discourse. Calvin O. Schrag reports, for

instance, that while at Harvard together in the late 1950s, Derrida spent more time in the

Lamont Library reading James Joyce than worrying over existential quantifiers.[1] What's

more, leading figures in European Modernism (Joyce, Woolf, Thomas Mann, Rilke,

Robert Musil, Pirandello, Svevo, are examples) were educated in the classical

gymnasium style at least through secondary school, and often through university

educations. This means they were all exposed to the philosophical canon – Plato,

Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, etc. – and the influence of these various

philosophical figures on different Modernist authors is documented in a wealth of literary

critique, as well as in the letters and personal writings of the artists themselves.

Philosophically, part of the underground discourse I'm engaging involves reading this

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[1] Schrag, "Jacques Derrida and Martin Heidegger on Deconstruction." *Doing Philosophy with Others: Conversations, Reminiscences, and Reflections* (West Lafayette: Purdue University, 2010), 27-28.

philosophical response in Modernism, and teasing out arguments therein that point to our basic emplacement. The main focus of this chapter will be a reading of Descartes through the lens of critiques found in Modernist literature, in Rainer Maria Rilke and Luigi Pirandello specifically. We will discover emplacement *already in Descartes*, tacitly necessitated by his very own reflective procedure – a metaphor of mirrors. The way in which Modernists play on this reflective procedure, inverting the metaphor from one of epistemic certainty to one that prefigures madness and the dis-ease of consciousness thrown into an epistemic abyss of meaning is shown through scenes in Rilke and Pirandello that describe the displacement at work when looking into mirrors, when reflecting back our own self in the representative procedure. But before such an argument can land with full effect, two preliminary tasks are in order.

Ontology and epistemology are both thematic elements that have variously been taken to be the key defining features that differentiate the Modern from the *postmodern* or a feature of Modernism's fundamental orientation to the Enlightenment and its theories of representation.[2] I will therefore situate Modernism and postmodernism so that we have a general framework from which to approach the specific examples I'll draw on later. Keep in mind the need to see broad historical developments in artistic and philosophical movements that happen over several generations. Rilke and Pirandello are responding to philosophical ideas developed over 260 years. This background will help bring to a point

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[2] Cf., Matei Calinescu, *The Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, (Durham, NC: Duke University, 1987), 269; Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1987); Herman, "Modernism versus Postmodernism: Toward an Analytic Distinction." *Poetics Today*, 12:1 (Spring 1991), 55-86; Pericles Lewis, *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (New York: Cambridge University, 2007); and, Richard Sheppard, "The Problematics of European Modernism." *Theorizing Modernism*, ed. Steve Giles (London: Routledge, 1993), 1-30.

two lines of thought that have, until now, perhaps appeared as separate. The first Chapter

dealt alternatively with the idea of *crisis*, particularly the ontological malaise brought on

by the dis-ease of consciousness that presents a systemic threat; and, the idea of

representation, the need to think differently, to begin again, about the relationship

between a given entity capable of acknowledging the world around it, and its place in that

world, its constitution and maintenance as what it is in the world. When we understand

the fundamental ontological and epistemological issues raised in Modernist literature,

we'll see that this is a *crisis of representation* itself, which, following Nancy's analysis, is

a grounding principle of Western culture – a systemic risk. That the crisis of

representation is not a merely epistemic concern will become increasingly obvious,

especially in Chapter Four's interpretation of William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*

Indeed, the crisis is seen to be "global" in its progression from Europe to North America.

Although I cannot get into all the debts and trans-Atlantic exchanges between European

and American Modernists, it will sometimes be relevant that the two are historically

enmeshed.[3]

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[3] Good general studies can be found in Michael Levenson, *Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University, 2011); Tim Armstrong, *Modernism: A Cultural History* (New York: Polity, 2005); Edward S. Cutler, *Recovering the New: Transatlantic Roots of Modernism* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2003); Lemke Sieglinde, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* (New York: Oxford University, 1998); Robert M. Crunden, *American Salons: Encounters with European Modernism, 1885-1917* (New York: Oxford University, 1993); Graham Goode, "The American Reception of European Modernism." *Neohelicon*, 14:2 (September 1987), 41-52; and, Malcolm Bradbury, "The Nonhomemade World: European and American Modernism." *American Quarterly*, 39:1 (Spring 1987), 27-36. For more specifically on William Faulkner and European Modernism, see Richard C. Morland, "Faulkner and Modernism," and André Bleikasten, "Faulkner from a European Perspective," both in *The Cambridge Companion to Faulkner*, ed. Philip M. Weinstein (New York: Cambridge University, 1995); Scott Williams, "Eating Faulkner, Eating Baudelaire: Multiple Rewritings and Cultural Cannibalism." *The Faulkner Journal*, 25:1 (Fall 2009), 65-84, and Benjamin Koch, "The French

After the context of Modernism has been fleshed out a bit, it will be necessary to briefly outline Descartes' place within the history of modernity so that when the critical work is done, we are clear on the precise moment in Descartes' philosophy when the ontological significance of emplacement can be recovered.

2.2 Ontology, Epistemology, and the Crisis of Representation in Modernity

The paradigmatic example of the crisis of representation in European Modernism is perhaps Hugo von Hofmannsthal's 1902 text, *Ein Brief*, often translated as *The Lord Chandos Letter*. In *Ein Brief*, Hofmannsthal depicts a fictional letter written by Lord Chandos to Francis Bacon, dated August, 1603, in which Lord Chandos details, in ironically beautiful prose, how he is experiencing a crisis of language and meaning in which he can no longer articulate himself in speech or writing.[4] Lord Chandos' crisis of language has been explored by Rainer Nagele and Fernando Bayón,[5] expressed philosophically as the tension between metaphysics and epistemology. Bayón is particularly sensitive to the crisis evoked by the *fin de siècle*, an attitude toward the end of the 19th century that was marked by suspicion, condemnation of society's degradation by modernity, combined with terror and paranoia over the disintegration of traditions and, often rural, cultures. This attitude is typified by texts such as Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1892) and Otto Weininger's misogynistic and anti-Semitic *Sex and*

Quarter Apprentice: William Faulkner's Modernist Evolution." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, 48:1 (Winter 2007), 55-68.

[4] Hofmannsthal, *The Lord Chandos Letter and Other Writings*, trans. Joel Rotenburg (New York: NYRB, 2005).

[5] Cf., Nagele, "Die Sprachkrise und ihr dichterischer Ausdruck bei Hofmannsthal (The Language Crisis and Its Poetic Expression in Hofmannsthal)." *German Quarterly*, 43:4 (November 1970), 720-732; and, Fernando, "Freud y la crisis del lenguaje moderno en la Viena fin de siglo: Broch, Hofmannsthal, Kraus." *ARBOR*: *Ciencia, Pensamiento y Cultura*, 183:723 (January-February 2007), 135-154.

Character (1903).[6] Again, there is an explicit clinicalization, an appeal to health, in these texts, and Hofmannsthal's *Ein Brief* opens with a Hippocratic aphorism that translates, "One who is suffering from a severe illness yet feels no pain is sick in mind."[7] Lord Chandos' sickness is, like Dostoevsky's underground man, related to his consciousness, and Bacon had written to him that, "I need medicine not merely to cure my illness but to heighten my awareness of my inner state."[8] Bacon, the representative of the Enlightenment to whom Chandos is attempting to explain his situation, recommends more consciousness, a heightened awareness of his inner state, more reflection – reflection being the observation of the operations of our minds (Descartes, Locke, Hume). Out of this dis-ease it comes to pass that Chandos, once a talented wordsmith, "completely lost the ability to think or speak coherently about anything at all," emphasizes his specific unease over the words "spirit," "soul," or "body," and also suffers an intense bout of the malaise while trying to impress upon his four-year-old daughter the need to always be *truthful*.[9] An epistemic problem, arising from reflection, while planning artistic works entitled *Nosce te ipsum*,[10] finally manifests in the ontological question wherein Chandos' own being is an issue for him – the mind-body problematic leading to the crisis of representation, his inability to relate to the world *out there*. I briefly point out these elements of Hofmannsthal's text because they are really paradigmatic of the way Modernists in Europe were mixing up the ontological-

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[6] Nordau, *Degeneration*, trans. George L. Mosse (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1993); and, Weininger, *Sex and Character*, trans. Ladislaus Löb (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2005).
[7] Hofmannsthal, *Lord Chandos Letter*, 117.
[8] Hofmannsthal, *Lord Chandos Letter*, 117.
[9] Hofmannsthal, *Lord Chandos Letter*, 121.
[10] "Know yourself," in Hofmannsthal, *Lord Chandos Letter*, 120.

epistemological distinctions laid out by Modern philosophy. We'll see similar moves in greater detail in Rilke and Pirandello.

Using *Ein Brief* as an exemplar serves our purposes well for a variety of reasons, beyond illustrating the way Modernism had a fundamental orientation toward the Enlightenment that, as David Harman argues, "marks an unstable conjuncture of two phenomena: on the one hand, the elaboration of a highly progessivist ethos; on the other hand, an increased sensitivity to epistemological problems bound up with representation."[11] Thus we are also presented with a prefiguration of the so-called postmodern turn in philosophy, a turn instigated by the likes of Heidegger, Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida – almost anyone "continental" – but also by the followers of Whitehead's process philosophy and American Pragmatism in the Anglo-American world, and Richard Rorty in particular.[12] Although I would like to point out that during a 2014 summer seminar I attended at the *Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense* thanks to a generous scholarship from Purdue University and the Partner University Fund, I was hard-pressed to find any French scholar who took seriously the idea that Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, or anyone was "postmodern" or "post-structural" which seemed to them a mostly American invention. Many of the French, notably Jean-Michel Salanskis and Elie During, were happy treating Foucault and Deleuze as advanced

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[11] Harman, "Modernism versus Postmodernism: Toward an Analytic Distinction." *Poetics Today*, 12:1 (Spring 1991), 56.

[12] G. B. Madison, "Postmodern Philosophy?" *Critical Review: A Journal of Politics and Society*, 2:2-3 (1988), 166-82; David Ray Griffith, *Founders of Constructive Postmodern Philosophy: Peirce, James, Bergson, Whitehead, and Hartshorne* (Albany: SUNY, 1993); Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1990); John N. Deely, *New Beginnings: Early Modern Philosophy and Postmodern Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1994).

varieties of structuralists, with Derrida able to safely claim the mantle of deconstruction for himself. In Chapter Three, I will address the particular issue with regards to representation in Derrida's *Grammatology*. For now, it is important that these are crises of representation *broadly* speaking, that we find such a crisis not only in Derrida's trace and his procedure of erasure, borrowed from Heidegger, but also find in Foucault's famous concern with representation, and the classical versus modern *epistemes* throughout his early work culminating in *Les Mots et les Choses* in 1966.[13] Further, when we turn to the New Realists in Chapter Four, they will make it clear that these postmodern theories, particularly those with the family resemblance of "constructivism,"[14] are theories that carry both epistemological and ontological weight. More detailed analysis on these fronts can wait, but it is important now to show a general trend in both literary Modernism and so-called postmodern philosophy that echo and reinforce one another, but where literary Modernism offers an alternative to constructivism by way of emplacement. That alternative will be sought here, through a confrontation with Descartes – but one that seeks what is unspoken in Descartes.

The Lord Chandos' Letter is a brief text and it builds us toward the possibility of silence, the silence of a language Chandos knows not what; the sound of a foreign song sung from a palm at the end of the mind. When contemplating the profound peace that he seeks in another way of thinking, in a different kind of thought, he knows he will not

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[13] Literally *Words and Things*, translated as Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

[14] Theories that claim things appearing in the world are "constructed" by human discourse (language) in some way – that things exist insofar as we carry on a discourse about them, meaning things are contingent, historical, and their meaning and/or value is entirely dependent on and derived from human linguistic activity.

write any more books, for the reason that "the language in which I might have been granted the opportunity not only to write but also to think is not Latin or English, or Italian, or Spanish, but a language of which I know not one word, a language in which mute things speak to me and in which I will perhaps have something to say for myself someday when I am dead and standing before an unknown judge."[15] Thus Modernist literature prepares the incredulity toward metanarrative that will be expressed by postmodern theorists, to use Jean-François Lyotard's famous phrase. The repeated approaches to the unspeakable mere being, that place at the end of the mind, the end of subjectivity, erased "like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea,"[16] placed under erasure, "subjectivity" a necessary but insufficient sign, the true and authentic self always already yet to come, a futural projection, in the making, unformed, but finite. I want to focus on this epistemological and ontological tension within literary forms of Modernism and postmodernism, since on these issues we find a tremendous overlap and confusion between philosophy and literature. This is particularly true in the case of Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction*, which argues that the dominance of *epistemology* in Modernist fiction and the dominance of *ontology* in postmodern fiction is the key criterion for the distinction.

The first signs of resistance to McHale's neat distinction comes from Matei Calinescu's intellectual history, *Five Faces of Modernity*. As the sub-title (*Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*) suggests, postmodernism is treated as

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[15] Hofmannsthal, *Lord Chandos Letter*, 127-28.
[16] Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 387.

a derivative mode of modernity itself. Calinescu writes, "Postmodernism…is not a new name for a new 'reality,' or 'mental structure,' or 'world view,' but a perspective from which one can ask certain questions about modernity in its several incarnations…Within the lexicon of modernity, postmodernism appears to me as having an even more explicitly interrogative nature than other key terms…postmodernism is perhaps the most quizzical: self-skeptical yet curious, unbelieving yet searching, benevolent yet ironic."[17] Strangely, then, according to Calinescu, postmodernism is marked by a particular concern with *epistemology*, not necessarily ontology. We can get a sense of this just by considering Michel Foucault's title *The Archeology of Knowledge*, his emphasis on *epistemes*, and the "incredulity toward metanarrative," attested by Lyotard. Under these interpretations, postmodernism is not especially marked by a tendency toward ontology over epistemology. As Calinescu attests,

> The more comprehensive presentations of the issues of postmodernism sometimes include references to epistemological problems and concepts, such as the crisis of determinism, the place of chance and disorder in natural processes, Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy, the question of time and particularly irreversible time (whose recognition has displaced the powerful classical clockwork model of the universe), Karl Popper's view of scientific theories in terms of "falsifiability" rather than mere "verifiability," and Thomas Kuhn's "paradigms" and "scientific revolutions. That such ideas can easily be misunderstood and distorted by literary critics and artists goes without saying.[18]

Again, the crisis of representational knowledge is acknowledged as a systemic crisis. With increasing anxiety over the possibility of truth, a real danger that we have lost

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[17] Matei Calinescu, *The Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, (Durham, NC: Duke University, 1987), 279.
[18] Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, 269.

contact with the world, bound up with shifting cultural values and the upheaval of historical institutions and norms. We will see this widespread disruption addressed, for instance by Balzac and Faulkner, in Chapters Three and Four. Writing on the "problematic" of *European* Modernism, Richard Sheppard argues that, "At the heart of the *problématique* perceived by a large number of major modernist artists and intellectuals lay the sense, more or less explicitly formulated and explained in any given case, that contemporary European culture was experiencing the subversion of the most fundamental assumptions and conceptual models on which the liberal humanist epoch had been based."[19] This general picture is what's important for our immediate concerns. For one, it becomes increasingly clear that a neat demarcation between Modernism and postmodernism may not come as easily as McHale had hoped. However, we may still be guided by him to an important intensity within postmodernism – an extreme skepticism that denies the world outright, or else accepts our subjective constructions (epistemic constructions) *as identical with and constitutive of the world itself*. Modernism is already fomenting the paradoxical complexities of these onto-epistemological entanglements. We have already considered, with Nisly, how Dostoevsky's underground man, standing at the threshold of the Modern Abyss, was a paradoxicalist and a complexifier. Indeed, Nisly was prescient to call this a "Modernist Impulse." Elsewhere, Marshall Berman famously observes that, "…it [Modernism] is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity: it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said,

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[19] Richard Sheppard, "The Problematics of European Modernism." *Theorizing Modernism*, ed. Steve Giles (London: Routledge, 1993), 13.

'all that is solid melts into air.'"[20] Indeed, Calinescu notes that modernity is itself in tension, pulled between two modes of Modernism that run alongside one another and sometimes express a clash of ideas which mark the struggle and contradictions of the times. These two strains of modernity may be conflicting, but they are deeply interdependent, as Calinescu explains, "one socially progressive, rationalistic, competitive, technological; the other culturally critical and self-critical, bent on demystifying the basic values of the first."[21] In the terms of the current project, we can understand this as the tension between *philosophical* Modernism – exemplified here by Descartes, Kant, etc. – and *literary* Modernism – Rilke, Pirandello, Faulkner, etc. – where Modern philosophy is the rationalistic/technological strain and literary Modernism is the critical/demystifying variety. Calinescu is quick to point out, however, that literary Modernism is itself both modern and antimodern, "modern in its commitment to innovation, in its rejection of authority of tradition, in its experimentalism; antimodern in its dismissal of the dogma of progress, in its critique of rationality, in its sense that modern civilization has brought about the loss of something precious, the dissolution of a great integrative paradigm, the fragmentation of what once was a mighty unity."[22] Of course, I am applying these concepts broadly, for we can see in any particular example a mixture of these modes: Descartes is the champion of reason, a technologist, and believes in progress and the unity of scientific knowledge secure in God's Being; yet, he rejects dogmatism, is critical of traditional authority (especially that of the ancients), and so on.

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[20] Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Penguin, 1988), 15.
[21] Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, 265.
[22] Calinescu, *Fives Faces of Modernity*, 265.

We will elaborate on Descartes' Modernist impulses below. In short, I think a nuanced and complexified understanding of modernity has great advantages over neat compartmentalization, simply because it reflects historical reality and the very notions of cultural crisis, revaluation, and paradox that so consume folks who wade between these two currents.

At this point, we really hit upon the problem posed by Brian McHale's tidy demarcations. When he first suggests his main thesis, he relies on a quote from Dick Higgins, which McHale repeats when he writes, "modernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions such as… 'How can I interpret this world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?'"[23] The immediate problem is that only one of those questions is epistemological, namely the first, while the second is an *ontological* question that asks about the nature of being in the world, the being capable of asking questions regarding its own existence. McHale has a difficult time dealing with the philosophical aspects of his theses throughout *Postmodernist Fiction*. While I appreciate his desire to focus in on *fiction*, he does not maintain this focus, and consistently veers into the philosophical (which he must do – epistemology and ontology are the domains of philosophy, not literary criticism, and although it is desirable and sometimes necessary for literary critics and theorists to engage literature philosophically, the criteria by which their deployment of philosophical concepts must be judged remain philosophical criteria, which is the only domain appropriate to them). This tendency is expressed in a certain

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[23] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 9. Quoted from Dick Higgins, *A Dialectic of Centuries: Notes Toward a Theory of the New Arts*, (New York: Printed Editions, 1978), 101 – although, McHale himself provides no page number for this reference.

slippage of orientation toward Derrida. McHale sometimes treats Derrida's texts right

alongside works of fiction, subjecting those works to analysis as literary works, and

sometimes uses Derrida's theories in order to execute his own arguments regarding

postmodernist literature. Part of this difficulty is addressed by deconstruction itself, but

more to the point here, the difficulty can be alleviated by attentiveness to the dialogue

occurring between philosophy and literature, that there is a seemingly generational

process between the two – at least at that time in Europe. For instance, in sections on

"machines," and "schizoid texts" McHale could indicate Deleuze, who applies both these

concepts explicitly to modernist texts by Kafka, Artaud, and others.[24] On this front there

is one oversight which I do consider a threat to the overall thesis of *Postmodernist*

Fiction. Although there is an entire Part of the book, comprised of four chapters, entitled

"Worlds," and a total of eight chapters with "world" in the title, including one called

"Worlds Under Erasure," nowhere is there *any* reference to Heidegger, and this in a book

that is, ostensibly, about the role of *ontology* in literature. Worse, McHale treats erasure

as a technique developed by Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, when in fact, this technique

was developed as a *specifically ontological procedure* by Heidegger as early as 1955.

Even more problematic is that the very section in *Of Grammatology* cited by McHale is

engaged in a rigorous dialogue exactly with Heidegger, and Derrida there emphasizes his

attempts to think through the problems of erasure and trace in *Speech and Phenomena*,

which also deals at great length with Heidegger's ontology.[25] It is not as if these texts are

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[24] McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 159-61, 190-94.

[25] Cf., McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 99-111; Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans.
Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1997), 18-26; Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena: And
Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston, IL: Northwestern

irrelevant, as purely philosophical, to McHale's thesis. On the contrary, Heidegger

himself often treats literature and art as ontological, and most of his specific examples are

exactly Modernist ones – Rilke, Paul Klee, Georg Trakl, van Gogh, Stefan George, to

name a few – and the point of those discussions is precisely that the artists in question are

primarily *ontological*, that is, they bring us to the *Seinsfrage*, the question of Being.[26] I

cannot help but think McHale's book could only benefit from attention to some of this

significant work already done on the relationship between Modernism, postmodernism,

epistemology, and ontology, including Calinescu's book, which had, ten years earlier,

treated postmodernism as a new variety of the *avant-garde*, one marked by anarchism

and hyper-intellectualism.[27] The central problem with these philosophical oversights is

precisely that the previous works explicitly contradict McHale's main thesis regarding

the division of Modernism and postmodernism along epistemological and ontological

lines. As I have shown above, McHale himself does not always keep ontology and

epistemology so neatly separated. In itself, *Absalom, Absalom!* – where McHale clams

"postmodernist" literature begins – is not so unique in its blending of these two modes, a

fact that outstrips our concerns here, though I urge readers to go back as early as

Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* for but one example.

University, 1973); and Heidegger, "On the Question of Being (1955)." *Pathmarks*, trans. William
McNeill (New York: Cambridge University, 1998), 291-322.
[26] Cf., Heidegger, "The Nature of Language," and "Language in the Poem: A Discussion of
Georg Trakl's Poetic Work," both in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (San
Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1982), 57-110 and 159-98, respectively; Heidegger, "The Origin
of the Work of Art (1935-36)," and "Why Poets? (1946)," both in *Off the Beaten Track*, trans.
Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (New York: Cambridge, 2002), 1-56 and 200-241
respectively; Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of
Chicago, 2002), 1-3; Heidegger, "What are Poets For?" *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert
Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial Classics, 2001), 87-140.
[27] Calinescu, *Fives Faces of Modernity*, 132-48.

The ultimate point, one recognized by Calinescu, Lewis, Sheppard, Berman, and

Heidegger, is that Modernism is not especially epistemological as opposed to ontological,

and, in fact, a close reading of Modernist texts reveal a deep suspicion of the authority of

those distinctions, which became canonical around the time of Kant. In the end, the

distinction between epistemology and ontology is just not a good criterion for

distinguishing between Modern and postmodern. Herman has argued that to even

postulate the ontologic/epistemic distinction is already a Modernist gesture, one rooted,

as I have already indicated, in the Enlightenment project exemplified by Kant. Herman

himself advocates for understanding Modernism-postmodernism in terms of two

responses to the Enlightenment itself, which serves as both a wellspring and a metonym

for progressive ideals.[28] This echoes Calinescu's analysis of Modernism as both modern

and antimodern; as divided within itself and against itself in a state of relative crises. It is

also sensitive to the deeply historical concerns of modernity, concerns about the stability

of culture and society, the dubiousness of Progress, the death of God, and this historical

sensibility resonates with both Frederic Jameson and Linda Hutcheon, who fair better

than McHale in treating the distinctly postmodern relationship to history as its defining

feature.[29] But John Duvall has pointed out that both these positions on postmodernism,

Jameson's as an ahistorical (politically dangerous) play on pastiched images with a

consumer-focused analysis and Hutcheon's as a parodic historicism focused on the artist-

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[28] Herman, "Modernism versus Postmodernism: Toward an Analytic Distinction," 56-57.
[29] See particularly Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University, 1991). Like Berman, Jameson argues from a predominantly Marxist position. Linda Hutcheon produced two book-length studies: Hutcheon, *The Poetics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1988); and Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1989). Her theory of parody has made important contributions to the current work.

as-producer, are ultimately rooted in basically Modernist trends. Jameson follows the

path of Adorno, and Hutcheon that of the *avant-garde*.[30] Given Adorno's "accidental

insight" into decadence as a philosophy of negation capable of severing art from

ideology, and his attacks on kitsch, interpreted by Calinescu as the ideological

manipulation of art to produce an illusion of taste, we can see how Jameson's pastiche

performs a similar function as the result of aesthetic production being subsumed by

commodity production.[31] Hutcheon's relation to the *avant-garde*, as a term of

revolutionary politics rooted in the French Enlightenment is likewise informative.[32] For

Hutcheon, the postmodern is progressive and liberatory because of its play with history,

its acknowledgement of historical precedent while parodying that precedent in a creative

dialogue that can be moved forward and provide political change. This aligns her, not

only with the Utopians of the Romantic *avant-garde*, but also the politically extreme

futurists Apollinaire and Boccioni, who ushered in an obsession with *esprit nouveau*, and

Bakunin's anarchist maxim that "To destroy is to create."[33] Even if Hutcheon strives to

remain liberatory, insofar as she invokes a dialectic between two autonomous entities, the

very dialectical process itself instantiates a transformation that destroys its first moment

in the opening salvo. The parody of history destroys it. What is retained are the fragments

of history reworked and reinterpreted and somehow different, representative of a break

with the past and the creation of the new – thus, the realization of Jameson's fear of the

ahistorical.

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[30] Duvall, "Troping History: Modernist Residue in Frederic Jameson's Pastiche and Linda Hutcheon's Parody." *Style*, 33:3 (Fall 1999), 372.
[31] Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, 210-11 and 240-42. Duvall, "Troping History," 374.
[32] Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, 100-101.
[33] Duvall, "Troping History," 378-80. Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, 101 and 116-17.

What we stumble upon is perhaps the key of postmodernism; that in it, the tension pulling ontology and epistemology apart reaches its highest point, and in a mad dash to tip the scales, the die is cast in favor of one extreme or the other. Both result in a loss of authentic history – the crisis of modernity still the beating heart of a derivative post-modernism. Postmodernists respond to the crisis with a Pyrrhic skepticism that is interpreted either negatively (Jameson) or positively (Hutcheon). In the negative case, we must give up the fight for truth and surrender to a basically groundless existence, doomed to mass-produce a hollow meaning in the same manner as consumer goods, and be thus alienated from an authentic historical relationship with the world around us. In the positive case, we continue the fight, surrendering any pretense to an authentic history in parodic gestures performed in the hope of a liberation to come. Both approaches give up far more than they gain. They both essentially perform the equivalent of Husserl's phenomenological *epoché*. The *epoché* asks that we bracket or set aside the question of the real existence of an object of thought in order to analyze the object as perceived through a series of intentional acts.[34] Postmodernism sets these questions aside, and then promptly loses them altogether! We are thus left only with what we construct for ourselves out of the flotsam of our subjective states. This discussion serves to highlight Ferraris' identification of postmodernism with social construction. Jameson sees postmodernism accepting this constructivism in despair, while Hutcheon remains ever hopeful of the rebirth that follows destruction. What has happened is that, in the

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[34] I mean here only the "phenomenological reduction" given by Husserl in *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorian Carnes (Boston: Kluwer Academic, 1999), 20-21. I am aware that Husserl elsewhere details other modes of reduction, but these are not pertinent to the point, and it seems clear that Husserl himself never intends that we bracket these questions indefinitely – in fact, the phenomenological method should help us be better prepared to face them.

forgetting of the ontological question, surrendered in both the positive and negative iterations of postmodernism, the ontological question has been given an epistemological answer, namely, that existence, Being, just *is* our epistemic construction. It should be clear that the constructivist answer is epistemological only, and cannot address the constitution of the being that constructs, nor is there a viable explanation for why the construct has any significance to begin with.

Husserl himself saw this tension as part of the crisis he had diagnosed in the European sciences. He writes, "Reason itself and its [object], 'that which is,' become ever more enigmatic – reason as giving, of itself, meaning to the existing world, and correlatively, the world as existing through reason – until finally the *consciously* recognized world-problem of the deepest essential interrelation between reason and what-is in general, the *enigma of all enigmas*, has to become the actual theme of inquiry."[35] Thus, Husserl is thoroughly modern. He did not fall prey to the Pyrrhic skepticism of postmodernity, still hoping for a universal philosophy, even under a modified understanding of "universal," and retaining the Kantian ground in the transcendental ego. Heidegger, Husserl's student, only makes progress by avoiding the transcendental ego in favor of emphasizing the finitude of thought in Kant. He thereby sought to reach the heart of the enigma of all enigmas, something that we will see the New Realists want to avoid by re-instantiating Modern philosophers' barrier between ontology and epistemology.

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[35] Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, 1970), 13.

With this background now in place, and the tension between ontology and epistemology within the Modern paradigm made clear, we can turn again to the beginning, to Descartes and the founding procedure of consciousness. In Descartes' grounding metaphor, his basic concept, reflection, we find the hidden entry into place. It is a strange language, spoken in silence, in which the underground discourse wins its terms from the aboveground, from the major literature. With this confrontation between Descartes and the Modernists, we take the first step, with Edward Casey, toward getting back into place.

2.3 Descartes' Mirror

The mirror perfectly illustrates the structure of the *cogito*. I have already outlined the basic significance of reflection in the procedure that sets things before the subject in representation. It is significant that Descartes was working seriously on optics in the late 1620s, evidenced by a letter to Father Marsenne in November 1630, in which the early *Dioptrics* is mentioned by name.[36] This study in natural philosophy was preparatory for a larger, systematic study of the mechanical universe, including its cosmology, to be titled *Traité du Monde et de la Lumière*. In the total system of mechanistic natural philosophy, only matter and three laws of motion were necessary to produce all natural phenomenon. The material basis of Descartes' natural philosophy was designed in order to support his theory of optics using the well-established principles of hydrostatics. The task Descartes set for himself in *Traité du Monde* (hereafter referred to as *The World*) was to apply the

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[36] Descartes, *Philosophical Writings: Vol. 3, the Correspondence*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Soothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (New York: Cambridge University, 1991), 28-29.

principles of hydrostatics to cosmology in order to construct a world in which his optics

could be adequately formulated. But *The World* never appeared during Descartes'

lifetime.

In November, 1633, Descartes writes to Mersenne concerning Galileo's

condemnation, saying he had been "told that [*World Systems*] had indeed been published

but that all the copies had immediately been burnt at Rome, and that Galileo had been

convicted and fined. I was so astonished at this that I almost decided to burn all my

papers or at least to let no-one see them."[37] Thankfully, Descartes did not burn his work,

but instead, separated his research on optics and meteorology from the larger treatise, and

published them independently and without including reference to the forbidden

hypothesis of the Earth's movement, though that hypothesis is actually central to the

entire cohesion of *The World*. The heliocentric hypothesis, and the concomitant assertion

that the Earth moved contrary to Church doctrine was, according to Descartes in his

November 1633 letter to Mersenne, "such a central part of my treatise that I couldn't

remove it without making the whole work defective."[38] Gaukroger has conclusively

shown that the condemnation of Galileo was the primary reason for Descartes'

abandonment of *The World*.[39] These historical circumstances will become philosophically

salient below. First, a consideration of what exactly Descartes achieved in his optics is in

order.

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[37] Descartes, *The Correspondence*, 40.
[38] Descartes, *The Correspondence*, 41.
[39] In both Gaukroger, Introduction to *The World and Other Writings* (New York: Cambridge University, 2004), vii-viii; and in the book length study Gaukroger, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (New York: Oxford University, 1995), 290-92.

Descartes' theory of optics was part of a lineage dating back to Greek antiquity and is bound together with the history of certain scientific technologies; equipment such as lenses, mirrors, and camera obscura. For instance, in 1604, the German astronomer Johannes Kepler describes having seen a camera obscura:

> …an *experimentum*...which I saw at Dresden in the elector's theater of artifices...A disk thicker in the middle, or a crystalline lens, a foot in diameter, was standing at the entrance of a closed chamber against a little window, which was the only thing that was open, slanted a little to the right. Thus when the eyesight travelled through the dark emptiness, it also, fortuitously, hit upon the place of the image, nearer, in fact, than the lens. And so since the lens was weakly illuminated, it did not particularly attract the eyes. But the walls were also not particularly conspicuous through the lens, because they were in deep darkness.[40]

The device had been known since antiquity for its use in the safe observation of lunar eclipses. I mention this observation by Kepler, because it has been demonstrated that Kepler exerted an oft unacknowledged influence on Descartes, and both conducted research with the use of technological apparatuses such as lenses, mirrors, and camera obscura.[41] The refinements of lens grinding technologies in the 1500s made for ever more

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[40] Johannes Kepler, *Optics: Paralipomena to Witelo & Optical Part of Astronomy*, trans. William H. Donahue (Sante Fe, 2000), 194.

[41] Descartes does admit the profound influence in a letter to Mersenne dated 31 March 1638. For reasons about which I can only speculate, this letter (and many letters significant to Descartes' work as a natural philosopher) are not included in Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings, Vol. 3: Correspondence*. This particular letter can be found at Descartes, Letter to Mersenne, 31 March 1638, *Circulation of Knowledge and Learned Practices in the 17th-Century Dutch Republic*, http://ckcc.huygens.knaw.nl/epistolarium/letter.html?id=desc004/2152, [accessed 03/16/2016]. The relevant passage reads, "Cela n'empêche pas que je n'avoue que Kepler a été mon 1er maître en Optique, et que je crois qu'il a été celui de tous qui en a le plus su par ci-devant," which translates, "This [Kepler's errors] does not prevent me from admitting that Kepler is my 1st teacher in optics, and I think that he knew more [on the subject] than all those who came before." There is good scholarly work on the influence of Kepler on Descartes in Stanley David Gedzelman, "Did Kepler's *Supplement to Witlo* Inspire Descartes' Theory of the Rainbow." *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 70:7 (July 1989), 750-51.

powerful instruments, and allowed more daring inquiries into the nature of optics. The

ancient Chinese thinker Mozi mentions the camera obscura as early as the 5th century

BCE, and he correctly explains that the image appeared upside-down because light travels

in a straight-line from its source. Light entering the lens at a downward angle ends up

proportionally lower than light which entered the lens at an upward angle. The image is

not only upside-down, but reversed left-to-right due to the trajectory of light through the

lens, or just a plain old pin hole in the wall of a dark enclosure. By explaining the

appearance of images according to natural or physical principles, such as the movement

of light, thinkers the world over were beginning to unlock not only the ways in which the

world itself worked, but also the reasons why the world *appeared to us* in the manner that

it did.[42] Of course, Mozi's "treasure house," or the simple, improvised examples given by

Aristotle to illustrate the problems connected with mathematical theory could be

constructed without the use of lenses. Some small aperture leading to a darker space

would suffice. Aristotle makes note of the behavior of light passing through leafy foliage

into a shaded clearing, how the edges round off in a uniform way due to its passage

through the leaves. With the camera obscura, the problems always have to do with

mathematics, and with geometry in particular.[43] Light was a way to "measure the earth,"

so to speak. Around 300 BCE, Euclid develops a geometric theory of optics in which he

too correctly deduced the reason for the inversion of the image as light passed through

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[42] Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China: Volume 4, Physics and Physical Technology, Part 1, Physics*. (Taipei: Caves Books, 1986), 82.
[43] Aristotle, "Problems." *The Complete Works*, *Vol. 2*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University, 1995), 1415-20.

the pin-hole.[44] His theory built on a philosophical idea of Plato, who proposed that human

vision worked because of rays emanating out from the eye and which constitute a visual

cone. Anything that falls within this cone becomes visible, just in the way a flashlight

illumines only a conical area emanating from one end.[45] The 9th century Arab philosopher

Al-Kindi promoted Euclid's theory over that of Aristotle, who argued that both the eye

and the observed object must appear in a transparent medium, such as air, that is filled

with light.[46] Ibn al-Haytham, known in the West as Alhazen, further advance the field of

optics through a synthesis of Aristotle, Euclid, and Ptomely. Composed from 1011 to

1021 CE, Alhazen's book was among the most comprehensive in the world at the time. It

contained the first clear, technical description of a camera obscura outside of China in

addition to experimental arrays using lenses and mirrors to explore the geometries of

reflection and refraction.[47] Eventually, Alhazen's *Book of Optics* was translated into

Latin sometime in the late 12th or early 13th century. In 1572, Freidrich Risner, a German

mathematician from Hersfeld, printed the book as *The Thesaurus of Optics*. The *Book of

Optics* was widely read and copied, even before Risner published it, and there is evidence

that Alhazen's work was profoundly influential to Roger Bacon, Galileo, Kepler,

Descartes, as well as Descartes' Dutch correspondent Christaan Huygens. In addition to

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[44] A good translation of Euclid's *Optics* by Harry Edwin Burton appears in *The Journal of the Optical Society of America*, 35:5 (May 1943), 357-72.

[45] Plato presents discussions of optics in several dialogues, notably in *Timaeus*, *Meno*, and in the *Republic*, during the famous analysis of the Divided Line. All of these dialogues can be found in Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

[46] Peter Adamson & Peter E. Pormann, eds. *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[47] Alhazen's *Book of Optics* is translated in two volumes by Abdelhamid I. Sabra as *The Optics of Ibn al-Haytham*, 2 vols. (Kuwait: National Council for Culture, Arts, and Letters, 1983 and 1989).

these early stars of science, Alhazen inspired Giambattista della Porta to place a lens in

the camera's aperture in order to sharpen the image generated within the dark enclosure.[48]

I spend the time rehearsing this history because I want to emphasize just how technical

Descartes' understanding of reflection was, and how light itself was central to Descartes'

natural philosophy – light is the first element, the most fluid and least dense of the

corpuscles that constitute matter in its various states.[49] Reflection is a fundamental

property of light, and it is clear that it is Descartes' basic inspiration for the notion of

mental reflection. His account of the perception of light, given in the "Treatise on Man,"

a mechanistic physiology following "Treatise on Light" in *The World*, involves the same

geometrical optics he deploys in both *Dioptrics, Meteorology*, and *The World*'s "Treatise

on Light." Think too, how rare it was for a Western European actually look at themselves

in a mirror until about the 19th century. It was not until the 1500s that mirrors as we know

them today develop in Venice. The German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk ties the

development of the mirror at this time to a *conceptual shift* in our sense of self-

identification that was increasingly yoked to the idea of having one's own face and being

able to see that face of one's own in a mirror.[50] Prior to the capabilities of mass

production, mirrors of a quality sufficient for indoor lighting in the 1800s were rarely

available to people who were not wealthy, or else had access to mirrors as part of

scientific or aesthetic research. This last element brings Sloterdijk's analysis of mirroring

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[48] For Alhazen's influence on the Enlightenment: David C. Lindberg, *Roger Bacon and the Origins of Perspective in the Middle Ages* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1996), 11; Charles H. Carmanx and John Hendrix, eds. *Renaissance Theories of Vision* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), 12; and, Frank Northen Magill and Alison Aves, eds. "The Middles Ages: Alhazen." *Dictionary of World Biography, Vol. 2* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 66.
[49] Descartes, *The World*, 17-18.
[50] Sloterdijk, *Bubbles: Spheres, Vol.1*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2011), 197.

in self-identification into relation with Modernists' confrontation with Descartes.

Descartes, as I have shown, was a man of science. Philosophers, in their reverence of the

Meditations and *Discourse on Method*, tend to forget the natural philosophy that put

Descartes on the map. Descartes was using optics, and the attendant technologies, to

make scientific investigations more rigorous, and geometry served as a mathematical

model, coupled for the first time with algebraic mathematics imported from the Middle

East. The point of this historical overview is to paint a picture of Descartes as the Modern

technologist, invested in the progression of knowledge, but caught in a crisis when the

mechanistic philosophy of nature conflicted with the metaphysical presuppositions of

Church doctrine. As a result of this crisis, not quite a crisis of *faith*, for there seems to be

no evidence whatsoever that Descartes was an atheist, but nevertheless, a sort of *political*

crisis, which Descartes expresses in writings as an earnest desire to seek the truth; truth to

which he believes most people are allergic, and he thus comes into conflict with the

competing desire to be left alone and live a life of relative calm and quietude.[51] This is a

systemic crisis, as we saw Descartes admit that if he could not postulate the motion of the

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[51] The desire for a peaceful existence is expressed numerous times in Descartes' correspondence, and the series of letters to Mersenne concerning the Copernican hypothesis are exemplary. See, Descartes, *The Correspondence*, 36-43. There is also the moment in his *Discourse on Method* in which Descartes writes, "…in order that I should not remain irresolute in my actions while reason obliged me to be so in my judgments, and that I might not omit to carry on my life as happily as I could…" he resolves to live by a few maxims in order to live happily, one of which being to, "obey the laws and customs of my country…it was most expedient to bring my conduct into harmony with the ideas of those with whom I should have to live…" in Descartes, "Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason." *Philosophical Works*, *Vol. 1*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R.T. Ross (New York: Dover, 1931), 95. Note this pragmatic argument is published in 1637, in the aftermath of his decision regarding *The World*, which Descartes discusses in the closing section of the *Discourse*, and which is also the public premiere of the famous "I think, therefore I am" argument developed further in the Meditations, see Parts IV, V, and VI in Descartes, "Discourse on Method," 100-130.

Earth, then the whole of mechanistic science is scrapped. Descartes had already engaged in practices of obfuscation, hiding away his true hypotheses to shield his endeavors from scrutiny. Already in *The World*, when Descartes introduces the mechanistic principles of the world, he does so only hypothetically, in the mode of a *thought experiment*, but then moves to argue that the hypothetical world structured on such principles would *not appear any different from our own world*. This is compounded in the "Treatise on Man," which gives mechanistic explanations for human behavior, shielded as hypothetical theories about the bodily functions of hypothetical beings, but to whom the hypothetical world would appear no differently and who would themselves behave no differently than the world appears to us and we ourselves behave.[52] The use of hypotheticals to disavow serious postulation of propositions heretical to Church doctrine was a staple of natural philosophy, deployed by Galileo himself, and utilized throughout the Enlightenment, including by Newton.[53] More to the point of our purposes here, at the end of the "Treatise on Man," Descartes concludes,

> Further, I desire that you consider that all the functions that I have attributed to this machine, such as the digestion of food, the beating of the heart and the arteries, the nourishment and growth of the bodily parts, respiration, waking and sleeping; the reception of light, sounds, odours, smells, heat, and other such qualities by the external sense organs; the impression of the ideas of them in the organ of common sense and the imagination, the retention or imprint of these ideas in the memory; the internal movements of the appetites and the passions; and finally the external movements of all

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[52] Cf., Descartes, *The World*, 21-22, 67, 69, 99-100.

[53] This point on the genre of Enlightenment scientific writing is indebted to Gaukroger, *Descartes*, 238; and, Gaukroger, *Descartes' System of Natural Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge, 2002), 10-23, and 28-29. But first and foremost to the astute historical scholarship in Peter Harrison, "Laws of Nature in Seventeenth Century England: From Cambridge Platonism to Newtonism." *The Divine Order, The Human Order, and the Order of Nature: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Eric Watkins (New York: Oxford, 2013), 133-36.

the bodily parts that so aptly follow both the actions of objects presented to the senses, and the passions and impressions that are encountered in memory: and in this they imitate as perfectly as is possible the movements of real men. I desire, I say, that you should consider that these functions follow in this machine simply from the disposition of the organs as wholly naturally as the movements of a clock or other automaton follow from the disposition of its counter- weights and wheels. To explain these functions, then, it is not necessary to conceive of any vegetative or sensitive soul, or any other principle of movement or life, other than its blood and its spirits which are agitated by the heat of the fire that burns continuously in its heart, and which is of the same nature as those fires that occur in inanimate bodies.[54]

Such proclamations lend heft to the interpretation that Descartes cannot intend the "animal spirits" coursing in nerves and muscles in hydraulic processes to be anything like immaterial soul substance[55] – and, crucially, that this substance does is not required in *perception*. This brings us back to the task at hand. It is central that Descartes' theory of perception is rooted entirely in his mechanistic natural philosophy and its centerpiece, the crowning achievements in optics.

When understood in this context, with Descartes experimenting, trying out new and dangerous ideas under the threat of condemnation from the Church, it becomes clear how Descartes worked to protected the validity of mechanistic natural philosophy, in part by advocating a metaphysics that would essentially build a wall of substance to separate

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[54] Descartes, *The World*, 169.
[55] Descartes was working almost entirely without an understanding of electricity. In fact, the word itself was not formally introduced into the English lexicon until 1646, and there was only a basic grasp of static electricity put forth in 1600 by William Gibbert. See both Brian Baigrie, *Electricity and Magnetism: A Historical Perspective* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), 7–8; and, Gordon Chalmers, "The Lodestone and the Understanding of Matter in Seventeenth Century England." *Philosophy of Science,* 4:1 (January 1937), 75-95.

the two realms.[56] But because Descartes' provides a definition of *immaterial* substance that is entirely privative, he continues to explain all functions associated with the mind in purely mechanistic terms, including reflection, defined as the observation of the operations of the mind. All such procedures are already contained in the optics which Descartes just uses as a frame onto which he projects a metaphysically shaded picture.

Consider how Descartes explains visual perception, his primary example of sensory perception. He does not think the senses function much differently, in principle, other than in terms of their physiological mechanisms and attending secondary qualities. He describes the anatomy of the eye, and how refraction of light by the convex shape of the eye's surface allows the image to be sharpened and focused as the light constituting it passes into the eyeball according to all the geometrical principles laid out in the optics and investigated with the camera obscura.[57] The light, which is material and composed of the smallest and most energized corpuscles, stimulates the optic nerve in the back of the eye, and that sets animal spirits to motion. The geometry of the light as it enters the eye determines the effects it has on the nerves, which differentiates the movement of the animal spirits. But Descartes also goes on to describe *internal senses*, such as those involved in dreaming and imagination. This is where Descartes gives his most robust explanation of animal spirits in terms of fluid dynamics (hydrostatics) that have flows throughout the body.[58] When explaining the brain, the seat of all internal functions, Descartes makes special note that these are dynamic flows, saying, "The spirits never

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[56] This is Gaukroger's recurring argument in *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography*, and *Descartes' System of Natural Philosophy*, as well as in the "Introduction," to Descartes, *The World*.

[57] Descartes, *The World*, 124-29.

[58] Descartes, *The World*, 140-41.

stop for a single moment in one place."[59] Descartes wants to give a physiological account

of the distinction between waking sensation – ideas and memories had while awake – as

well as the sensations of dreams.[60] Now, according to Descartes, the image received

through the eye is transmitted by the animal spirits through the optic nerve and are

transferred to the infamous pineal gland. But Descartes discusses this transference as a

"tracing" of the image onto the gland, as if the animal spirits carry, by virtue of the

geometry that stimulated them, that very geometry into the brain in order to literally

project the image onto the "Cartesian Theater."[61] Descartes details how random

movements of the body's animal spirits, the general excitation of the nerves, produce

daydreams and fancies when not properly directed by reason.[62] This is the basis of his

explanation of the occurrence of dreams. These are produced by the internal actions of

the animal spirits, particularly those involved in memory, which are never at rest and

which impress upon the gland and bring about somnambulant imagery. External

stimulations of the body may also produce dreams, but these are mostly prevented from

reaching the brain by the dormancy of the senses and their dullness in sleep.[63] Again, all

of these processes operate along the basic principles laid out in the "Treatise on Light,"

expounded as the basis of Descartes' hypothetical world, and none of these presume a

soul or immaterial substance in any way. We could echo Pascal's complaint regarding

Cartesian natural philosophy and God, substituting in our own case the "soul" for

Pascal's God when he writes, "I cannot forgive Descartes. In all his philosophy he would

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[59] Descartes, *The World*, 145.
[60] Descartes, *The World*, 146.
[61] Descartes, *The World*, 148-50.
[62] Descartes, *The World*, 155-56.
[63] Descartes, *The World*, 165-67.

have been quite willing to dispense with God. But he had to make him give a fillip to set the world in motion; beyond this he has no further need for God."[64] Indeed, he has no further use for the soul either, accept as a ghostly observer and pilot watching the trace of the image on the pineal gland, a fool in his cave commanding a mechanical puppet. The brain inside the head, with its pineal gland prepared like a screen on which to project the world, with the eyes as the aperture through which light enters and by which the geometry of the image is determined, *is just a camera obscura*. The brain is the black box within which the image can manifest through the aperture. Reflection becomes paramount when we want to observe these internal operations – the operations of our own minds as they are busy with the ideas they have got. And they are *always* busy. All things, according to the basic principles of Descartes' natural philosophy, have an inherent tendency toward circular motion. He does not arrive at Newtonian inertia, but motion is necessary to Descartes system. One of the primal elements of matter is that is it in motion relative to the material that surrounds it, and this motion is fluid, hence the reason for Descartes' reliance on hydrostatics. That movement is at the center of this picture will be foregrounded in time. This basic movement will be central to our understanding of emplacement, and with it, we have uncovered the first instance of Descartes' unspoken and heretical commitment to place.

Edward Casey commits admirable work to tracing the specific function of the word "place" within early modern philosophy, particularly in Descartes, Locke, and Leibniz. His arguments, focused on the explicit treatment of place, show that place

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[64] Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. W. F. Trotter (Mineola: Dover, 2003), 23.

gradually becomes subsumed under "space," that space and time become a dichotomous pair, two basic concepts that structure the whole system, and place becomes a secondary feature, a combination of time and space instead of their ecstatic unity. Casey's argument is astute, and I think his scholarly work tracking how place is subsumed into space is spot on.[65] It is on this point that the arguments in *Getting Back into Place* dovetail with those currently being developed. I have already undertaken to show the role of space and time in Modern subjectivity, how this basic bifurcation facilitates the covering over of place and the rendering of the subject in placelessness as it is cast into the immaterial chronology of a continuous timeline. Casey focuses more expressly on "place" and the conceptual history of its relation to space and time. Here, I have come at the problem from the explicit orientation of the representational *cogito* in an effort to show, independently of Casey, the implicit emplacement that is *already nascent in Descartes* and thereby demonstrating in another way, from another beginning, the ontological *a priority* of place. It has also brought me, circumspectively, to the ontological significance of movement as such. These finer points will be brought into sharper relief as we proceed. We turn now to the end of the mind in Descartes, keeping in mind that reflection and refraction are considered fundamental properties of light, and light can be treated geometrically in two ways. First, as particulate, like the motion of tennis balls bouncing off surfaces to illustrate the trajectory of light as it was reflected or refracted. This was Descartes first step toward a mechanical understanding of light.[66] He later clarifies and we are given to understand that light emanates in rays, following straight lines from their

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[65] An excellent summary of these arguments is found at Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 357-60.
[66] Descartes, *The World*, 76-77.

source, the rays reflecting and refracting in the same patterns described previously under the particle model.

Consider again how Descartes explains the epistemological foundation that "I am" – that I exist – as grounded in the act of reflection. In *The Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes affirms that thought itself is "all that of which we are conscious of operating within us," and later that "although the mind of a man informs the whole body, it yet has its principle seat in the brain, and *it is there* that it not only understands and imagines, but also *perceives*," [emphasis added in both instances].[67] Between 1642 and 1648, in replies to objections by Antione Arnauld and Pierre Bourdin, Descartes insists that reflection is not something distinct from thinking itself – reiterating on several occasions that reflection *is* thinking in such a way that we become aware of whatever is being thought.[68] Thinking becomes so synonymous with reflective consciousness that, by 1690, Locke's definition of "reflection" is nearly identical to Descartes': "the perception of the operations of our minds within us as it is employed about the ideas it has got."[69] But even for Descartes, *perception happens someplace*. It occurs somewhere. Thinking has a place.

The mirror metaphor only works if we can imagine being *in front of* a mirror. Thus, thinking can only occur if it can be directed toward itself as in some place. The manner of refutation we will see in Rilke and Pirandello has its origins already in Hume, in 1748. Hume takes ideas to be "less lively perceptions, of which we are conscious,

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[67] Descartes, "The Principles of Philosophy." *Philosophical Works, Vol. 1*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Mineola: Dover, 1955), 221 and 289.
[68] Cf., Arnauld, *On True and False Ideas*, trans. Stephen Gaukroger (Manchester: Manchester University, 1990), 71; pages 150, 171-72, 362, 382 in vol. 2, and page 357 in vol. 3 of Descartes, *Philosophical Writings*, eds. Cottingham, Soothoff, Murdoch, and Kenny.
[69] Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 60.

when we reflect on any of those sensations or movements," which have previously been

impressed on us through sensation.[70] If an idea arises from reflection, it does so through

its perception of "the operations of our own mind," and this is part of the reason why

Hume will go on to deny the introduction of any novel simple ideas through the

observation of these operations – because there is no clear impression of the idea given in

sensation.[71] On these grounds, Hume denies knowledge of the Self and casts personal

identity as an illusion. When Hume says, "There are philosophers who imagine we

intimately conscious of what we call our Self; that we feel its existence and its

continuance of existence; and are certain beyond evidence of demonstration, both its

perfect identity and simplicity,"[72] he no doubt has philosophers like Descartes and

Arnauld in mind, philosophers for whom reflection and consciousness are inseparable

from thought itself; and also Locke, for whom consciousness as self-reflection is the

necessary element of personal identity. Hume refutes this line of argument by insisting on

experience as the origin of all ideas: if I have no experience of something, I have no idea

of it – thus I can have no idea of a simple self because I have no impression of a self that

is given through experience; when I reflect on the operations of my mind I perceive only

the flux of whatever ideas occupy me over the duration of my reflection. Yet, even for

Descartes, knowledge is presented has having its origin in perception when he writes,

"consequently, this notion of thought precedes that of all corporeal things and is the most

certain since we still doubt whether there are any other things in the world, while we

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[70] Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Chicago: The Open Court, 1921), 15.
[71] Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 66.
[72] Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 245.

already perceive that we think," [emphasis added].[73] What Hume wants to show is that

under Descartes' own definition, it is not possible to substantiate myself as a "thinking

thing," because I do not perceive this thing, even in reflection. But really, the response is

already there, in the natural philosophy, which has been displaced and covered over by

the later discourse initiated in the *Meditations* and picked up in Arnauld, Gassendi,

Locke, now the subject of Hume's polemic. Everything is there to excite the perceptive

apparatuses without a soul. The activity of the body and brain themselves are enough to

stimulate consciousness – that consciousness *just is* the unfolding, the movement of these

processes from which reflection gives rise to a basic *awareness*. Descartes does not

disavowal the earlier works. In *The Passions of the Soul*, published reluctantly in 1649,

Descartes returns to the *Dioptics* as sufficient treatment of visual perception, and the

general treatment of perception, imagination, and the body are repeated from "Treatise on

Man," part of *The World* which was still unpublished at the time.[74] Thus, again, just as

Pascal complains that Descartes reduces God to a causal mechanism to set the motion of

the cosmos into play, in *Passions of the Soul*, the soul with its *will* is reduced to a causal

power that exerts its influence on the body via the pineal gland, the seat of the *cogito*'s

agency, again, the forensic task to assign responsibility for actions, but an *ontological*

responsibility *as the chief cause and producer*.[75] If Descartes is reluctant to publish the

Passions it is because of how embarrassingly inadequate is his treatment of the soul in

light of his robust natural philosophy. Everything, in any event, falls back on the body,

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[73] Descartes, *The Principles of Philosophy*, 221.
[74] Reference to *Dioptics* at Descartes, "The Passions of the Soul." *Philosophical Works*, 337-38; and the material from "Treatise on Man," recurs at pages 333-34, 335, 336-37, 339, 341-42, 345-46, 347.
[75] Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, 340, 345-47, 350-52, 355-56.

the seat of the brain, the "ultimate and most proximate cause of the passions of the soul is none other than the agitation with which the [animal] spirits move the little gland which is in the middle of the brain."[76] The aperture opens to a place, a place for the projection of the image. But within this place lies another mirror, the mirror of reflection, and from this second surface the play of the projection on the first can come into view – but there is no real need for the soul. Descartes props it up, but it is really sequestered and harmless behind the wall of substance. Kant's insight that the empirical subject will never itself come into view but is only discernable through the perturbations it can effect on the manifold given in intuition is anticipated when Descartes writes that "we cannot desire anything without perceiving by the same means that we desire it; and, although in regard to our soul it is an action to desire something, we may say that it is also one of its passions to perceive that it desires."[77] The very movement by which the soul, selfsame with mind, *acts* is also the very same movement by which it *perceives*, and this perception is itself the grounding, that *I think*, lies implicit in every thought, revealing that thinking *just is this movement*, the movement not the *post hoc* unity of space and time, but the ecstatic place from which space and time are derived. Casey's phenomenological analysis of place details emplacement as the ecstatic unity of space and time that is phenomenologically prior to both conceptualizations. Thus, we have an open avenue beyond the Kantian position outlined above, wherein space and time are the forms of intuition *a priori*. This is best expressed by Casey when he writes, "Rather than being separate but equal cosmic parameters...space and time are themselves coordinated

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[76] Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, 357.

[77] Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, 340.

and co-specified in the common matrix provided by place."[78] Much of the work in *Getting Back into Place* is devoted to the deconstructive power of its central concept, where traditional dyadic structures (Mind/Body, Space/Time) are disrupted and subverted by a careful analysis of the role played by place in the facilitation and articulation of these dyads. And Casey is quite clear on the ontological primacy of place when he writes that, "place, by virtue of its unencompassability by anything other than itself, is at once the limit and the condition of all that exists."[79] Later, he stipulates that although place may not necessarily have metaphysical or logical primacy, because it is descriptive and phenomenological, it does, nevertheless, express a certain *ontological primacy* in that to be is to always be in place. That is, there is no placeless being.[80]

Reflection requires a staging, an emplacement, such that thought can double back on itself in order to catch itself in the act, so to speak. This is why the mirror metaphor becomes central at the same time Modern philosophy is bandying consciousness as the key defining feature of being human. The mirror *puts us in a position to see ourselves* – it is a metaphor of fundamental emplacement with a view of our own machinations. What remains an underground current within the Cartesian doctrine, which is entirely different from the words written by Descartes, will be brought to the fore in a parodic gesture by Rilke and Pirandello, presenting characters on the verge of madness, lingering in front of mirrors, discovering a topology of reflection opening as we work toward the place of thought. Descartes enters into the major discourse, acquiesces to the demands of the

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[78] Casey, *Getting Back*, 339.
[79] Casey, *Getting Back into Place, 2ⁿᵈ Ed.*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 2009), 15.
[80] Casey, *Getting Back*, 313.

Church authorities, and participates in the covering over of his own ground. Under his guidance, the place where the mind takes root is forgotten, and the mind itself becomes opaque, inaccessible, placeless; an unmoved mover in a world that is nothing but movement, a being in time forsaken by its other half, disemplaced by the subsumption of place to space that occurs in the shadow of Descartes' desire to be left alone. He retreats, and with him, the subject into its own mind, an abyss where place once disclosed itself.

2.4 Overcoming the Mirror

It is important to remember that the mirror is a fundamentally *technological* metaphor. Descartes is modeling his metaphysics off of insights gained primarily by technological manipulation. This will not be the last time in the history of philosophy that a scientifically minded thinker has used the technological apparatuses of scientific research as the models for his own being – those tools perhaps seen, in some oblique way, as themselves the extension of our being. One motivator of 20th century Anglo-American philosophical discourse on the concept of "mind" was certainly a research program related to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robotics. The publication of Alan Turing's "Computing Machinery and Intelligence," in the October 1950 issue of *Mind* marks a watershed event in the history of that research program. Yet it is not so much the question of whether or not a machine could think that fueled philosophy of mind, for the line between computing machinery and thinking would not remain clear. Mind increasingly began to be described *as computing machinery*, the brain supplying the hardware on which the "mind" program would run as software whose function was

representational in nature.[81] While a small sampling here conveys a great variety of

thought, it remains clear that analytic philosophy of mind in the second half of the

twentieth century is marked by a concern with computationalism and a turn toward the

discourse of "cognition."[82] However, by the end of the 1990s, the popularity of

computationalism waned, former advocates of computationalist theories significantly

altered their position, and an engagement with cognitive science began opening

possibilities of non-representational theories of mind.[83] Following the externalist path

forged by Putnam, Clark, and Chalmers, as I noted in the previous Chapter, is a trend in

research on cognition with a particularly *existential* flavor.[84] Although we would do well

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[81] For the highlights of this debate, cf., Joseph Weizenbaum, *Computer Power and Human Reason: From Judgment to Calculation* (New York: W.H. Freeman & Co., 1976); Terry Winograd, *Understanding Natural Language* (Waltham: Academic Press, 1972); Daniel Dennett, "Brain Writing and Mind Reading." *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 7 (1975), 403-15; Shank & Abelson, *Scripts, Plans, Goals, and Understanding* (Hillsdale: Laurence Erlbaum Press, 1977); Jerry Fodor, "Methodological Solipsism Considered as a Research Strategy in Cognitive Psychology." *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 3:1 (March 1980), 63-72; John Searle, "Minds, Brains, and Programs," *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 3:3 (September 1980), 417-24; Hilary Putnam, "Computational Psychology and Interpretation Theory." *Philosophical Papers: Realism and Reason*, vol. 3 (New York: Cambridge University, 1983), 139-54.

[82] For a succinct overview of the "cognitive turn," see Noam Chomsky, "A Really New Way of Looking at Language (November 1987)." *Language and Politics*, ed. C. P. Otero (Oakland: AK Press, 2004), 575-82.

[83] Cf., Winograd and Fernando Flores, *Understanding Computers and Cognition* (Boston: Addison-Wesley Professional, 1987); John McDowell, "The Content of Perceptual Experience." *Philosophical Quarterly* 44:175 (April 1994), 190-205; Tim Van Gelder, "What Might Cognition, Be If Not Computation?" *The Journal of Philosophy* 92:7 (July 1995), 354-81; Fred Dretske, "Phenomenal Externalism or If Meanings Ain't in the Head, Where Are Qualia?" *Philosophical Issues* 7 (1996), 143-58; Andy Clark, "The Dynamical Challenge." *Cognitive Science* 21:4 (1997), 461-81; Susan Hurley, *Consciousness in Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1998); Susan Hurley and Alva Noë, "Neural Plasticity and Consciousness." *Biology and Philosophy* 18 (2003), 131-68; Robert Wilson, *Boundaries of the Mind* (New York: Cambridge University, 2004).

[84] For a sampling of cognitive science flavored with existential phenomenology, cf., F. J. Varela, E. Thompson, & E. Rosch, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge: MIT, 1993); Andy Clark, *Being There* (Cambridge: MIT, 1997); Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life: Biology, Phenomenology, and the Science of Mind* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2007); Shaun Gallagher & Dan Zahavi, *The Phenomenological Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2008);

to take note of the reemergence of *phenomenology* in the mold of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty within analytic philosophy (or, at the very least, among analytically *trained* philosophers) it would be a mistake to think that the trend of externalism in Anglo-American philosophy of mind is any kind of a return to the brand of existential phenomenology practiced in continental Europe in the early- and mid-20th century. Despite having overcome computationalism and its attending reductionism, even verging on the discovery of non-representational theories of cognition, philosophy of mind remains attached to the research programs of AI and robotics. No better example can be given than the paradigm case of Andy Clark, whose 1997 book *Being There* makes obvious titular reference to the Dasein analysis of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, but quickly drops any existential consideration after the first page to spend the next 228 discussing a dizzying array of robots and their various abilities. Computational AI is thereby replaced by the technology driven robotics program, wherein the function of AI is to produce seemingly autonomous action in a mechanical body. The ontological foundations of philosophy of mind, since the 1950s, have been parasitic on programs in AI and robotics. Descartes is in good company when it comes to his technologically driven metaphysical paradigm – the *mechanical* universe, of course.

One way we might think about this drive to the technical is as a movement by which we extend our senses, and thereby reinterpret ourselves. The very first chapter of

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Anthony Chemero. *Radically Embodied Cognitive Science* (Cambridge: MIT, 2009); T. Fuchs & H. de Jaegher, "Enactive Intersubjectivity: Participatory Sense-Making and Mutual Incorporation." *Phenomenology and Cognitive Science,* 8:4 (Dec. 2009), 465-86; Shaun Gallagher, *Phenomenology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); and especially, J. Kiverstein & M. Wheeler, eds. *Heidegger and Cognitive Science* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

The World is called "On the difference between our sensations [*sentiment*] and the things that produce them," probably by Claude Clerselier, Descartes' editor. In two extremely important passages, Descartes writes, "In putting forward an account of light…it is possible for there to be a difference between the sensation that we have of it, that is, the idea that we form of it in our imagination through the intermediary of our eyes, and what it is in the objects that produces the sensation in us, that is, what it is in the flame or in the Sun that we term 'light'," and then immediately proceeds to make a foundational point regarding *language*. This often discussed passage deserves consideration, and so I offer it in full:

> As you know, the fact that words bear no resemblance to the things they signify does not prevent them from causing us to conceive of those things, often without our paying attention to the sounds of the words or to their syllables. Thus it can turn out that, having heard something and understood its meaning perfectly well, we might not be able to say in what language it was uttered. Now if words, which signify something only through human convention, are sufficient to make us think of things to which they bear no resemblance, why could not Nature also have established some sign which would make us have a sensation of light, even if that sign had in it nothing that resembled this sensation? And is it not thus that Nature has established laughter and tears, to make us read joy and sorrow on the face of men?[85]

This argument really summarizes the question driving the crisis of representation that runs throughout modernity. Descartes, in his optics and natural philosophy, was able to show that the world as it was in itself may be very different from the way in which the world appears to us, but from observation and technological manipulation and not by way of allegory or thought experiment. This is one reason why the "observation of the operations of the mind" becomes a hallmark phrase of early Modern philosophy, where

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[85] Descartes, *The World*, 3-4.

the goal is to bring the mind into view, put it before itself for observation and experimentation. All of this makes representation an appealing answer, since the internal stage of the Cartesian Theater is primed for a performance of the outside, rendered in miniature on the inside, etched out and traced across the most spiritual of glands in the brain's center. No wonder Rorty titles his book *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, nor that *Las Meninas* is the work of art by which Foucault makes his entry into the history of epistemes, when that painting features, at its very center, a mirror reflecting the artist, *the producer of the image*. This theme will return with Derrida in the next Chapter.

Now we are in position to see how the mirror positions us. It is the technological apparatus by which we can see ourselves *out there* and recognize ourselves in the same way as we recognize *others*. I will return to this point in Sloterdijk, but the point is made more salient by the analysis of the literature to follow. The whole process of coming to consciousness is illustrated in the act of looking into a mirror, an act internalized and made self-productive in the *cogito*. This very act has become a litmus test for the detection of consciousness – that some being can recognize itself in the looking glass. In Descartes, this is a foundational act on which we can rest the epistemic certainty of scientific knowledge (notice the circle; the apparatus of science used as the model for a foundation on which to rest the apparatus of science). Yet, in Modernist literature, the act consciousness becomes a way to manifest the symptomatic neurosis of dis-ease.[86] The examples from the works of Rilke and Pirandello will solidify this for us.

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[86] A dissertation on the theme of mirrors in Modernism offers considerable insight on this matter in general. See, Mamta Chaudhry-Fryer, "Modernism's Wilderness of Mirrors," PhD diss., University of Miami, 1999. ProQuest (A AT 3732).

Consider the case of Vitangelo, the narrator of Luigi Pirandello's 1926 novel *One, No One and One Hundred Thousand*. In this novel, the narrator's wife points out that his nose is crooked. In literary criticism it has been common to approach this scene within Lacan's theoretical framework of the mirror stage.[87] Radcliffe-Umsted, for instance, flatly reads Vitangelo's mirror-crisis as one wherein Pirandello's humorous style reveals the *falseness* or seeming inauthenticity of subjectivity, which is alienated, thus somehow thrown into untruth, by their constitution as a subject in the mirror stage.[88] Alcise Sforza Tarabochia is right to argue against this simplistic reading, showing that, at least for Lacan, alienation in the "imaginary" order is not equivalent to being "false," and it is therefore misleading (at best) to assume there is some "true" or authentic order to be attained on the other side.[89] Further, Radcliffe-Umstead argues that Pirandello somehow misunderstands or misreads Lacan, but I want to emphasize that, insofar as Lacan stands within the Cartesian-Kantian shadow of subjectivity, the primary target of Pirandello's critique is *not* necessarily Lacan. Michael Quinn handles Pirandello's humor much better in relation to subject formation, where self-discovery functions as a pun, as Quinn puts it, "not mirror as phase but mirror as *stage*, as a platform for the theatrical representation of the self."[90] Such performative insight makes sense in the context of Pirandello as a *dramatist* and playwright, but it also highlights the *activity* and movement we've been tracing out in the underlying structures of Cartesian metaphysics – its inherent *dynamos*.

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[87] My major sounding board for the Lacanian interpretation is Alcise Sforza Tarabochia, "The *Aphanisis* of the Pirandellian Subject." *Italian Studies*, 68:1 (March 2013), 123-37.
[88] Radcliffe-Umstead, *The Mirror of Anguish: A Study of Luigi Pirandello's Narrative Writings* (London: Associated University Presses, 1978).
[89] Tarabochia, "*Aphanisis*," 124.
[90] Quinn, "Relative Identity and Ideal Art: The Pirandello Conflict and Its Political Analogy." *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, 3:2 (1989), 75.

Though, there is a problem when Quinn emphases the *stage* over the *phase*. Understand,

for Lacan, the mirror-stage is the culmination of a process of subjection that results in the

phase-effect of self-identification and differentiation; the seeing of myself as the other

sees me, and of the fact that the other sees and has some idea of *who I am*.[91] Note too that

we have half an ally in Lacan, who writes that, "this experience sets us at odds with any

philosophy directly stemming from the *cogito*."[92] And yet, Lacan nevertheless ends up

the same, with the Ideal-I and the subject, still beginning in an *Innenwelt* that is shattered

in an alienating *Umwelt*, in which the I must shore itself up as a defended encampment,

always threatened by the encroaching world that will uproot and displace it, placeless

thing it remains.[93] Nevertheless, we are close to Lacan when we talk about dynamic

persons, and particularly when we begin to explore the building up of representation as a

higher order cognitive function.

      With respect to Pirandello, he does present a theatrical rendering of a "mirror

stage" in Quinn's sense when he writes of his character Vitangelo lingering "unusually"

in front of a mirror, and his wife mistakenly assumes that he lingers to examine the way

his nose tilts to the right. In fact, Vitangelo had never before considered his nose to be

tilted at all, one way or the other.[94] The seemingly innocent exchange ignites a crisis of

identity (self-representation) in Vitangelo, and the rest of the book recounts his spiral into

what everyone around him takes to be madness. His wife's comment undermines the

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[91] Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 76-78.
[92] Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," 75.
[93] Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," 78-79.
[94] Pirandello, *One, No One, and One Hundred Thousand*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Marsilio, 1992), 3.

certainty of his identity, and he begins to see that the identity he took for granted as certain and self-assured is in actuality mediated through the relation he shares with all the others with whom he is in community. This is actually one of the key stumbling blocks to reading Pirandello in a strictly Lacanian light. For Lacan, the mirror stage is a developmental process that is specific to early childhood and can provide an explanatory causal mechanism for neuroses that manifest later in life, but are rooted in this primary identification. In *One, No One and One Hundred Thousand*, Vitangelo is middle aged, and thus cannot effect the mirror stage simply by looking at himself in the mirror, even if we read his wife as a substitution instance of the mother's formative gaze.[95] But it's clear that Vitangelo is well on in the formation of his own self-representation, and in the parodic gesture read as Pirandello's humorous style, we actually see the *inversion* of the mirror stage, not as the self-enclosure affected at the culmination of a developmental stage, but rather as the first pull in the unravelling of the subject's private citadel. It is not merely Lacan's theory put to literature, but a *radical critique* of the subject itself, from Descartes to Lacan, who, even if he claims not to start from the *cogito*, still ends up in the same self-enclosed unity. The wife's comments are the anti-thesis to the mother's, and undermine the certainty of self-representation, an identity taken for granted as self-assured but which is, in actuality, mediated through the relations he shares with all the others with whom he is in the world. Vitangelo muses that "everything" is based on, "The assumption that reality, as it is for you, must be and is the same for everybody else."[96] Just as Dostoevsky has undermined Enlightenment faith in rational consciousness by

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[95] Which, surprisingly, Tarabochia does not suggest.
[96] Pirandello, *One, No One*, 25.

positing consciousness as a disease, Pirandello undermines the paradigmatic metaphor of

gazing at oneself in the mirror by showing this exact situation to be the onset of madness

– thus, the act becomes symptomatic of the ontological dis-ease I'm treating here.

Pirandello has his narrator confess to "…the little signs of madness I began to exhibit in

the form of pantomimes, in the lively infancy of my folly, at every mirror in the

house…"[97] Vitangelo wants desperately to catch himself in the midst of "natural acts,"

not those of self-contrived expressions of emotion that are put on by actors.[98] He

summarizes his problem elegantly, saying, "The idea that the others saw me as one who

was not I as I know myself, one whom they could know only through watching me from

outside with eyes that weren't mine, giving me an appearance fated to remain always an

outsider's to me, though for them it was inside me, mine, (a "mine" therefore that didn't

exist for me!); a life which, though for them it was mine, I couldn't penetrate: this idea

allowed me no peace."[99] Here too, as Dostoevsky's underground man stood against the

presupposition that the interaction between the mind and body was questionable,

Pirandello's underground man, Vitangelo, stand against the problem of other minds. He

does this through the inversion of the usual mirror function. It is not the simple fact that

others see him differently than he sees himself. That is not the point, at least, not entirely.

The deeper point is that the recognition of the perspective of the other alters Vitangelo's

ability to recognize himself. His own self-representation becomes modified by the

perception of the other's recognition of him. Thus, the solipsistic certainty of the

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[97] Pirandello, *One, No One*, 14.
[98] Pirandello, *One, No One*, 14.
[99] Pirandello, *One, No One*, 15.

recognition of my own self-representation is undermined by the alteration of this

representation through the imposition of the difference between the representation of me

to myself and the representation of myself given to me by the other. Vitangelo literally

loses himself in the multiplicity of representations, becoming unable to differentiate what

might be his "authentic" self from the mere representation of himself.[100] Pirandello

presents us with a very Kantian form of madness, one that results from the closure of the

subject from a direct access to the Transcendental Ego, an Ego which can only be

detected by its operations on the manifold presented in experience.

Another useful Modernist illustration is found in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, published in 1910 by the poet Rainer Maria Rilke. The novel is an example of the

semi-autobiographical in fiction, and Rilke presents Malte as an alternative version of

himself, with not altogether different life circumstances. At one point in the novel, Malte

narrates a time when he was a child left to his own devices. He occupies himself by

trying on various costumes from a bygone era which he has found locked in a wardrobe

in the unoccupied guest-rooms of his well-to-do family's manor house. This is a much

discussed episode in Rilke's prose writing, and its general theoretical significance will

soon be apparent.[101] Rilke has Malte describe the effects and affects worked by the

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[100] This basic insight is admitted to varying degrees by Ratcliffe-Umstead, Quinn, and Tarabochia, however, always in a way that lends support to Lacan, and never as a potential criticism of Lacan, or of psychoanalysis in general. Certainly, I am being more strident here and am getting, ultimately, at the *ontological* dimension of Vitangelo's crisis as written by Pirandello.

[101] For our purposes, the most relevant essays are probably the following: Warren F. Motte, "Reflections on Mirrors." *MLA*, 120:4 (September 2005), 774-89; Andrew J. Weber, "Gothic Revivals: The *Doppelgänger* in the Age of Modernism." *Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (New York: Oxford, 1996), 317-357; Judith Ryan, "Validating the Possible: Thoughts and Things in James, Rilke, and Musil." *Comparative Literature*, 40:4 (Fall 1988), 305-317; Morna Martens, "Autobiographical Narrative and the Use of Metaphor: Rilke's Techniques in *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*." *Studies in 20ᵗʰ and 21ˢᵗ Century Literature*, 9:2

donning of different costumes. He explains, "Scarcely had I put on one of these outfits

than I had to concede that it had me in its thrall; it dictated my movements, my facial

expressions, *even the thoughts that occurred to me*," [emphasis added].[102] Like

Vitangelo, the mirror opens up a vast array of opportunities for Malte to see himself

transfigured by the costumes – but there is one further wrinkle. Malte notes in particular

how he feels a *loss of control* or of *autonomy*. This occurs in Pirandello's text as well, but

more subtly, as the focus is there on the dynamics of intersubjective self-representation.

Here, Malte is alone, like Descartes in his dressing rooms, seeking out a true self beneath

the masks, within the tomb of the body. Malte and Vitangelo are alike in this respect,

determined to, as Malte puts it, "find out what I actually was," and discovering that the

mirror, "really was superb. It exceeded all my expectations. The mirror instantly returned

my image; it was too, too convincing. There really was no need to move at all; this

apparition was perfect, even if it did nothing."[103] The illusion only works without motion,

when even Descartes observes the constant motion of consciousness. Here, at first, the

mirror weaves an opposite effect on Malte as on Vitangelo. At first, Malte becomes *more*

certain of his identity. Thus, he is initially comforted, the change in appearance

reinforcing his own static sameness beneath the masks. Rilke expresses it clearly, writing,

"These disguises never went so far as to make me feel a stranger to myself, though, on

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(January 1985), 229-49; Lorna Martens, "Mirrors and Mirroring: 'Fort/da' Devices in Texts by Rilke, Hofmannsthal, and Kafka." *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 58:1 (March 1984), 139-55; and, Herbert Blau, "The Shadow of a Magnitude." *Daedalus*, 98:3 (Summer 1969), 654-76. There is, surprisingly, no recent literature relating this episode in Rilke's work to Lacanian psychoanalysis, nor to the Mirror Stage.
[102] Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. Michael Hulce (New York: Penguin Classics, 2009), 67.
[103] Rilke, *The Notebooks*, 68.

the contrary, the more my transformation varied, the more convinced I was of my own self. I grew more and more daring…"[104] Malte is emboldened by his experiments with the mirror, offering a counterpoint to Vitangelo's growing uncertainty. But Malte's performance cannot go on indefinitely – he must *move*, after all. He is only emboldened up to the point when he determines to find out who he *actually* is. This ontological qualification, the demand for the *actual*, undoes Malte's game. He knocks over a table. Expensive porcelain knick-knacks are broken, a phial of perfume is spilled, and Malte struggles to clean it up only to find his costume now constrains his movements. He rushes to the mirror in order to take off the disguise, but finds only horror in the reflection. Rilke has Malte describe the scene, "Hot and furious, I rushed to the mirror and, with some difficulty, watched through the mask the working of my hands. But that was exactly what He was waiting for."[105] Rilke here stresses "He," the translators capitalizing the English pronoun to highlight a newly realized autonomy for the apparition in the mirror. All of Malte's previous confidence had been misplaced. The apparition had been waiting for the opportune moment. Rilke writes, "His moment of retribution had come. While I struggled, with a measurelessly mounting sense of trepidation, somehow or another to tear free my disguise, He compelled me – I do not know by what means – to look up, and imposed on me an image, no, a reality, a strange, incomprehensible, monstrous reality, in which I was steeped against my will: for He was now the stronger and I the mirror."[106] The loss of control in the face of some imposing reality is a hallmark of Modernism, and

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[104] Rilke, *The Notebooks*, 67.
[105] Rilke, *The Notebooks*, 69.
[106] Rilke, *The Notebooks*, 69.

of its philosophical iteration in existentialism as well. Malte has found his "actual" self: it is the self of his own creation, but once projected into the world, this creation takes on a life of its own and turns around to ensnare its creator. Rilke describes the realization of Malte's literal selflessness, the vacuous Nothing that underlies the assumptive certainty regarding his personal identity in self-representation: "…the very worst had happened, and I lost all sense of myself, and then He was the only one who remained: there was nothing but Him," that is, nothing but this projection of Malte's own making that takes over and controls his thoughts and actions.[107]

Both Pirandello and Rilke present characters that deeply agree with Descartes' famous conclusion, *cogito ergo sum*. However, the predicaments of both Vitangelo and Malte reveal a subtle rebuttal of the logical leap from "I am" to "I am a thinking *thing*," where to think is to be Rational. The mirror might confirm one's existence, but it cannot provide the insight into that which one essentially *is*. The more earnestly this essence is sought in the mirror, the more hopelessly lost it becomes. To be one, after the Cartesian way, is to be no one and/or one hundred thousand – it amounts to the same. Sartre's famous "decompression of being" is a compelling alternative to Lacan, for it explicitly marks the nothing that arises from beginning with the *cogito*; that the subject must distance itself from itself, becoming a presence to itself.[108] The decompression suggests multivocity, an appearance of different selves across time, quickly multiplying our potential as being-for-ourselves. Like we have seen with Hutcheon, Sartre too interprets

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[107] Rilke, *The Notebooks*, 69-70.
[108] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square, 1984), 125.

this first grounding fissure, which as temporal is historical from the perspective of the

for-itself, as liberatory, as a being-freed-for. And as before, with Futurism's historical

association with the fascism of Apollinaire and Boccioni, we see here that freedom is, in

itself, not a conceptual inoculant against political extremism. Look no further than

Heidegger's Nazism, however it's interpreted, as well as some of Sartre's own stances on

Communism during the 1950s and -60s. Whatever political scandals continue to broil

over the personal lives of these thinkers, it is clear that there is a common trend of

philosophizing about *being freed* for ourselves, however, this comes at a price, namely

our contingency and finitude, and thus we are thrown into this freedom. The strange

phenomenological result of this nothingness – the negation that is our movement in time,

our having to be other than who we are at the present moment – can be a sense of having

been given over to something, or someplace, and having to find your way in this already

existing and eminently meaningful construct. Judith Ryan sees this in Rilke's scene, that

Malte realizes the horror that his *own possibilities* bring with them,[109] and I might add

that, once he has chosen, he is bound to that choice, and free only *from it*, to do in the

aftermath of what he is. Thus, there is a play, an opening up between contingency and

necessity, that I can do, and that I must do, that Rilke's episode in front of the mirror

invokes. On the one hand, Descartes says we must posit the *cogito*, we cannot help it, but

it is nothing, just the other side of our affirmation of whatever we think, the "I think"

echoing after it, haunting it. Whatever it is, it is not to be oneself. The "actual" self, the

thing-in-itself, is always hidden under the representation that facilitated the act of

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[109] Ryan, "Validating the Possible," 312.

recognition by bringing me into my own presence. But the representation of me, in whose presence I am, cannot be the "real" me. It can only be a phantasm, a fiction, something postulated *post hoc* in an effort to patch up a floundering representational schema and provide the basis for postulating that each representation given in experience is *my* representation. What Pirandello and Rilke provide are characters for whom this Cartesian outlook fails.

2.5 In Front of, Before, and on the Other Side

Pirandello and Rilke both present characters whose expectation in front of the mirror are structured on a sense of permanence and stability. Vitangelo believed "everything" rested on the assumption of a reality that was the same for everyone. Malte is convinced of his identity's strength while striking a pose, remaining still and presenting a fixed image. This desire for a fixed identity is expressed by both those two who are looking in the mirror to see who they "really" are – just as Descartes presents mind as the substance of our being. But like Hume, what Vitangelo and Malte actually experience is an ever changing flux that inevitably obscures their identity and washes it away, obliterating it to nothing. Malte even feels dissociation, as if a foreign agent has usurped his volition and had assumed his identity in his stead. It is not only that we lack the ground to posit an "I" that thinks. It is moreover that to posit "thinking" at all, even for thought without an I, there must be some place where thinking is thought. Reflection requires a staging such that thought can double back on itself, to emphasize the *camera obscura* structure underlying the *cogito*, decompression in its dark enclosure. The underground in Descartes becomes foreground in Malte and Vitangelo. Vitangelo, on the verge of madness, and Malte, a young boy, enthralled by the radical changes in his person

that can be brought on by the seemingly superficial changes in his semblance.

Discovering a topology of the subject. Before we ever postulate a being like the *cogito*,

we must first prepare a place for it such that the "there" of emplacement always precedes

the presence of the being. "There is," we say. If we have worked through Descartes'

legacy we have arrived at a new formulation, a parodic transformation of the old axiom:

"Think, there is." That is the only ontologically responsible thing we could say. Or, to put

it more generously, and therefore, perhaps, more irresponsibly, "Thinking happens,

therefore something is." No wonder Vitangelo is stumbling into madness!

At this point it may be good to draw attention to how peculiar and particularized

are these Modernist subjects. Vitangelo – he has a name, and a nose that may or may not

be crooked. And Malte, a little boy, a bourgie pup playing in an attic wardrobe.

Descartes' *cogito* is everybody but before it can be anybody it has to have a place. Casey

argues for the particularization of place, taking the phenomenological approach of asking

readers to think of themselves, wherever they are, in a room;

> Wherever you are, you are distinctly (if not simply) located in space and
> time. Let us assume that you are now in your living room as you read these
> words. The room itself serves to distinguish you, at least as much as does
> the time of day or year. You are *there*, in your room *now*, comfortably
> ensconced in space and time. Your existence is reflected and supported by
> the room as a distinguishing mark, a "specific difference" in an otherwise
> undistinguished world of homogenous space and equably flowing time.[110]

Again, the ecstatic unity of space and time is reaffirmed in this particularization.

Certainly, Heidegger is drawn to Kant's philosophy of finite thinking to glean similar

insights, why the ecstases of time are always tied to instants, the instantaneous, the

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[110] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 22.

sudden, and abrupt.[111] Casey also points to Hegel's linguistic argument from the

Phenomenology of Spirit that locator adverbs and propositions are always used to specify

particularly emplaced things, they are nevertheless intrinsically universal in scope.[112]

This reminder is meant to guide us to the ontological insights of place as the other

beginning, that, starting from place, we are always given some particular place, but

through the particular we can see that insofar as things are, all things are in place.

"Occasion-bound," is a term Casey uses to denote that places *occasion*, they happen, as

I'll stress repeatedly. From his phenomenological perspective, and in the tradition of

Merleau-Ponty, Casey focuses on my body as something that "continually *takes me into*

place."[113] The body is part of this occasion-bound, space-time matrix that unfolds in

places, that is the movement of place as the things appearing there are emplaced. The

body is part of a foundational cognitive structure, and Casey performs the existential

phenomenologist's move of regulating formal, geometrical accounts of direction and

dimensionality to a secondary position, focusing on how those basic concepts (now in my

sense) arrive from our bodily emplacement. Casey's describes bodily orientation as a

"tensional arc" between here-there relations – that I am always emplaced here, in my

particular local body, but *there is* some over there toward which I am oriented, that

occupies me from where I am *here* – is a useful general concept that I will put into

motion below.[114] Bound up in the space-time of place, as the ways of place's movement,

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[111] Excellent studies on the ecstases of time in Heidegger's philosophy can be found in David Farrell Krell, *Intimations of Mortality: Time, Truth, and Finitude in Heidegger's Thinking of Being, 2nd ed.* (University Park: Penn State, 1991); and, most recently in Krell, *Ecstasy, Catastrophe* (2015).
[112] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 23.
[113] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 48.
[114] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 53-56.

dimension and direction also follow from the basic emplacement of things. From within

the underground discourse, the body in this orientation, given dimension and direction, is

uncovered beneath the *cogito*. Even Descartes gives, in the "Treatise on Man," an entirely

bodily account of perception, cognition, and memory, putting us always in a position

from which we can always already perceive that we think. The toward which of

consciousness, the trademark of phenomenological intentionality being that

consciousness is always consciousness of…, is found in Descartes' mirror; the turning

around to catch sight of the operations of the mind, my own doubling back, this turn

already implying a bodily emplacement, something capable of turning in or back on

itself. This folded body creates the enclosure for Descartes, the dark scene of the

Cartesian Theater, the cave and cabinet of consciousness, fit for the projection of

shadows on the wall, cavern *camera obscura*.

The mirror act was designed to dispel doubt. But it bears out the existential

question "to be or not to be," what does it mean? Can I really doubt that I am? But if I

am, then what am I? This is what the philosopher never gets a handle on. When she looks

for it, it's gone. Daniel Dennett is very good at this line of attack on the *cogito*, ridiculing

the "Cartesian Theater," where we turn to look for the seat of our identity and the power

of our volition only to have it slip away undetected.[115] Kant goes further to bar us from

accessing the self, really in agreement with Hume that we cannot catch ourselves in

experience, and are left to postulate the I out of a logical necessity – a necessity to the

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[115] Dennett, *Freedom Evolves* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 123, 187, 231-45, and 253.
And twenty years earlier, in Dennett, *Elbow Room* (Cambridge: MIT, 1984), 74-92.

cohesion of Kant's own system, of course.[116] I concede Kant's requirement that a certain

system must necessitate the axiomatic proposition of an ego in order to bring about the

systemic unity of representation. But any such system, as founded on the metaphor of the

mirror, is secondary, not foundational, as I have shown that such a system is founded on

the *tacit assumption of a basic emplacement* – the place from which I can see myself,

placed before myself, represented in my own presence. Notice that Casey uses the word

"reflected" in the passage above, "reflected by the room." Rather than reflecting to

ourselves, from ourselves, beginning from place puts us in a position to reflect on

ourselves in place, ourselves already *out there* in the world, and being reflected back to

ourselves by that world. Remember the salience of bivalence in Gibson's theory of

affordances. But here, with Casey's ontological insights about place, we take a step

further away from the bifurcation, implicit dualism, that is some subject in its

"environment." We are still hinting at Malte and Vitangelo's surroundings, the people

and things around them that disrupt their egos, with whom they expect to share a world,

but we are starting to see them in a more dynamic interplay, now with the mirror

highlighted as a technological object, but moreover, one used *experimentally*, a device

turned back on its creator and seizing hold of them, rendering them now according to the

mechanizations of their own design. Thus, the move to "externalize" is supported and

reinforced, to evade the damning requirements of the old system from which the

underground discourse seeks its escape. Again, it remains possible to sometimes

construct a representation, even one of ourselves, but place remains ontologically prior to

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[116] See the discussion in Kant's first *Critique* in Chapter One above, and see in particular, Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 189-90.

any such representation, is the basis of any representation as such – any representation being *someone's* representation, and any someone being some particular someone somewhere. Presence, then, is freed from the representational scheme, and we are encouraged to continue thinking presence as the availability of the world, *even its availability to become a representation*. We must pay close attention to our literary examples.

Let's think, first, of just standing in front of a mirror, looking at your own reflection. This is the basic scene for Vitangelo and Malte's crisis of identity. In order to reflect, in the sense of being conscious, one's image must be projected out to the surface of the glass. Already, Descartes' interest in optics is apparent. That light serves as the ontological basis of his natural philosophy is tied to this notion of the self-image – the representation of myself in which I am rendered sensible and brought into self-awareness through the act of recognition; that is, I perceive myself to be. Light projects the image on the glass, which returns the light again to its source, providing the mechanism of my return, the trajectory of the reflected light illuminating the procedure of my own self-awareness. This out and back again, the back and forth, to and fro, there and back, of consciousness is the first step toward understanding the basic occurrence of emplacement, the movement of its happening: *oscillation*. It means, first, a doubling of the center (the decompression of being), which is a destabilization of the very identity Descartes hopes to secure, silently, in his bid for harmony with the powers aboveground. Through neglect of the ontological foundations of his thought, and the assumptions regarding the necessity of securing the certainty of his method, the Cartesian doctrine becomes something entirely separate from the words of Descartes – its own *technological*

apparatus, a matrix of concepts.[117] For, when we've attended to the metaphor at play, we can see that oscillation is already tacitly at work even within Descartes own writings, wherein nothing that is, that exists, is without *movement*, and *regular* movement to boot. It remains true, however, that Descartes was himself oblivious to the basic emplacement that ensured he had a place *from which to doubt at all*. Radical doubt, then, is exposed as an illusion – but not just because its end is achieved in certainty. More importantly, radical doubt is an illusion because Descartes never doubts the veracity of his own procedure, based on his optics. It is uncritically assumed that the reflective act analytically contains the basis upon which the deductive procedure can extrapolate systems of scientific knowledge. That is to say, just as he treated light in a mathematical way, according to geometric principles, Descartes assumes the reflective procedure inherent to thought itself must contain, *a priori*, the foundational axioms of mathematical logic such that mere knowledge that I am could systematically ground the whole scientific endeavor. This is why Descartes is treated as the inception of a new mode of philosophizing and among the first rays of a dawning modernity.

To *express* the law identity accordingly is already to double that which is identical, "X = X." There are two "Xs" required to write the identity of the one X. Thus, I need the representation of myself in the ego to be the selfsame identity of which I am conscious – this consciousness exactly that which makes me what I am. The mirror facilitates this obscurity while nevertheless pretending to an austere rigor. Rooted in the science of optics and geometries of reflection, consciousness sees itself essentially *as it*

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[117] Exactly how this occurs will be elaborated in Chapter Three.

sees others. Historically, the advent of the mirror brings us at last into the position of seeing ourselves *as we had previously seen only the others with whom we live*. This reversal of the phenomenal order is a point developed by Sloterdijk. He writes, "The other acts as a personal mirror; but he is also the opposite of a mirror, for he permits neither the peace nor the discretion of a reflection in glass or metal – but above all because he produces not an eidetic representation, but rather an affective echo."[118] I think, rather, that we have seen the *cogito*'s reflective thought ground out in an affective echo as well. Though discrete, the self-representation cannot be discreet; discretion is broken by its very being, its being as the disclosure of myself to myself, already a confession. Vitangelo laments the discovery that the world appears differently to others, thus, he loses the stability of having any *certain* world at all. Malte's discovery is no less dramatic. He discovers the power of semblance in his interplay with the mirror. In that fundamental oscillation he uncovers the real transformations wrought by changes in semblance, such that in these oscillations, both between costumes and between images in the mirror, his identity becomes unstable to the point of dissolution, going from one to one hundred thousand, and at last to no one, running in fear from the spectacle of his usurped identity. At this point we find ourselves beyond the mirror. It has been transformed from a stabilizing metaphor to a radical act of fundamental destabilization. Literary Modernism turns the modern foundations of identity into the dissimulation of the one amid the multitude of semblances. Beneath this tumult, we have discovered place. In Descartes, it is a tacit, underground place unacknowledged by doctrine. I want us to look

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[118] Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*, 200.

more closely at emplacing *oscillation*, a concept that will develop throughout the remainder of this study. By oscillation, I mean the movement by which emplacement occurs. Thinking without representation will come about by a basic movement and through this movement, things will become presently.

2.6 Empty Centers

The basic movement I want us to think about happens from an established basis, a major language, aboveground, so to speak; one that is taken for granted most of the time. And so, the first step from this pre-established and largely uncritical basis is one in which that basis is disturbed and destabilized. In his 1989 book, translated as *The Transparent Society*, Gianni Vattimo discusses oscillation in relation to art, taking up themes shared by Heidegger and Benjamin. Vattimo focuses in particular on the *destabilizing* power of oscillation that is "*directed toward keeping the disorientation alive*."[119] But he does not go far enough, because in this movement, one described as oscillation, Vattimo fails to recognize the *other side* of the movement. Something emerges on the other side of oscillation, and, as something sensible, is something stable. The Modernists open an opportunity to see this movement in action, to experience for ourselves this destabilizing/stabilizing oscillation in which being springs forth from the work of art. We can appreciate phenomenology at work here.

Heidegger develops a notion of *Stoss* or "the blow" in relation to the work of art's destabilizing power – the same power by which the world "breaks down" and reveals the essential groundlessness of its signification. According to Heidegger, it is this moment in

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[119] Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, trans. David Webb (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1992), 51.

an aesthetic experience, coming on suddenly and "from out of nowhere," that opens us to

the *Seinsfrage*, the Question of Being.[120] As Vattimo interprets it, during an encounter

with a work of art, which is to say, during an aesthetic experience, we are struck by a

blow that destabilizes our normal way of understanding the world. Under this

interpretation of Heidegger, the oscillation of the work of art faces us toward the abyss

where the certainty and presumed validity of our normal ways of going about the world

collapse and are called into question – what's more, we realize the basic groundlessness

of our everyday understanding. Vattimo relates this concept of *Stoss* to Walter

Benjamin's concept of the "shock." For Benjamin, shock is best represented in film,

where one image is constantly usurped and replaced by another, then another, and so

on.[121] What ties *Stoss* and shock together is their mutual emphasis on disorientation, and

specifically, one that is being shaped by and coming into conflict with the technological

apparatuses developing in conjunction with urbanization and metropolitan life. Further,

both Heidegger and Benjamin, by focusing on disorientation, break from the previous

aesthetic tradition, particularly the followers of Kant and Hegel, who teach that aesthetic

experience is reducible to formal relations in which one finds repose; aesthetics in terms

of *Geborgenheit*, security, organization, or reorganization.[122] We can read Vattimo's

oscillation, with its emphasis on destabilization, in both Pirandello and Rilke.

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[120] Vattimo focuses on Heidegger's "Origin of the Work of Art." *Off the Beaten Track*, trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (New York: Cambridge, 2002), 1-56. However, it would be useful for readers to confer with sections 40 of *Being and Time*, and there is a further elucidation of fundamental moods or attunements in the 1929 lecture course published as *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*.
[121] Vattimo, *Transparent Society*, 49.
[122] Vattimo, *The Transparent Society*, 52.

In his art, Pirandello argues precisely that with the destabilization of the ego at the center of the epistemological order comes a chain reaction throughout the system of differences built upon the signification of the I. He appropriates Cartesian consciousness and provides a literary rendition of the mirror metaphor that parodies the Cartesian arguments, thereby offering a refutation of them. Rilke performs a similar aesthetic gesture. Rilke presents an easier approach, due to Malte's relative isolation in the wardrobe episode described above: a boy parading a series of costumes in front of the mirror. Simple enough. His identity is secured by the fixity of the image. As long as Malte strikes a pose he carries off a convincing semblance of identity. But the illusion is soon shattered by the fluidity of his transformations together with his inability to control the appearance of his identifications. He is taken out of his own hands, the semblance determining, in part, the things he was able to *think* about himself. To put it another way, the manner of his appearance determined the limits by which he could identify himself. Remember, Malte is wearing costumes found in a wardrobe that are notably outdated – they are historical and representative of a bygone era. It is in virtue of these historical facts that the costumes co-determine the character with which Malte identifies, the style and manner of dress coupled with the bodily gestures of his pose, which orients him toward the mirror, toward the manifestation of himself in the manifold given in appearance. A particularly cut and ornamented jacket imposes the characteristics of the era's aristocracy, or the petit bourgeois, and throws Malte into relations with the system of references within which those lives and worlds make sense, all of those pre-suppositions which necessarily go into understanding a place with landed gentry and such. Just as donning the livery of a servant necessarily places him in relation to those

systems of labor and he "becomes" a servant in his mirror image – always particular, always *this body*, in *these clothes*, here I am, there they are, the mirror over there, here in the room. As he undermines the Cartesian doctrine with one hand, with the other Rilke opens the avenue to another way of thinking, toward a radical emplacement. Casey paints our bodies and their surroundings as "coeval epicenters around which particular places pivot and radiate."[123] These epicenters offer open horizons, a differential interplay between them, that is also a transference, a passing through. Because of this openness, this interplay occurring in place, places display a cultural dimension, an eminent sensibility that allows us to take places in stride, to "get down to business" in different contexts (literally different places) that demand certain responses from us, that structure certain attitudes and behaviors. But this is also why oscillation, as an ontological principle, cannot be destabilizing only. I'll return to this point below. Stay with Malte and the wardrobe just a bit longer. See that Rilke has built on the basic Humean position by not only noting that Malte can never have a perception of his "actual" self in experience, but that in fact the perception of himself which he does have is *not entirely within his possession or control*. If he is garbed in a particular costume, then his identity is guided by the logic of that costume – he identifies according to the historical significations manifest in the costume's style. Even as the confidence in Malte's identity is diminished and he flees in the face of his own annihilation, we are nevertheless circumspectively presented with something stable enough to impose an order upon Malte's amorphous identity. Warren F. Motte has compared this moment in Rilke with Dostoevsky's

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[123] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 29.

underground man, who also has his own moment in the mirror, one in which the dis-ease is reflected back.[124] He confesses, "I caught sight of myself accidentally in the mirror. My flustered face looked utterly revolting to me: pale, evil, mean, with disheveled hair. 'It's all right, I'm glad of it,' I thought. 'I'm glad that I'll seem repulsive to her. I like that…'"[125] Motte wants us to see in both Rilke and Dostoevsky that the ancient imperative to "Know Thyself" has backfired, with catastrophic results.[126] Yet even the underground man points beyond himself, has dimension and direction, an orientation, at least to *her*, to the other who he can imagine will be repulsed, thus, his own self-representation mediated already through his relation to those with whom he communes, in places that condition his reflection. He sees "by accident," stumbling upon himself unawares, and then, suddenly revealed "out there," is thrown back on the wretchedness of his condition. This horror is also what Ryan perceives in the Rilke scene, Malte's mixture of elation and despair, the way his possibilities overpower him and he becomes lost in multiplicity.[127] The blow is delivered in each instance, and the shock follows, being *subjected* to and by the flow and movement in which we are emplaced. But we see that the wake of the destabilizing effect of oscillation does not reveal a *meaningless* nothing. This annihilation is not nihilism, understood as devoid of sense, or without any meaning. The destabilizing effect of oscillation, even under Vattimo's interpretation, should never be confused with an absolute lack of order. It is not in any way equivalent to disorder. Further, there *must be something which is itself unstable*. There may be an order, but an

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[124] Motte, "Reflections on Mirrors," 777.
[125] Dostoevsky, *Notes from Underground*, 338.
[126] Motte, "Reflections on Mirrors," 779.
[127] Ryan, "Validating the Possible," 312.

unstable one, or one in fluctuation. Like Hume's argument, Malte's identity is not under

attack because there is disorder, not at all. Instead, Malte and Vitangelo's identity are

dissimulated under the shear multitude of *different orders* which come to be instantiated

in their place.

The greatness of Descartes' thought is attested when we realize that, even in his

gravest error, the philosopher still manages to point us toward an ontology of place. By

using the language of "reflection" Descartes reveals the ontological underpinnings of his

thinking, expressed as natural philosophy in his treatises on light and optics. So we see

even more clearly the trajectory of identity, from bodily person, in which even Descartes

located the activity of perception, to the surrounding environment, the wardrobe, the

costumes, before the mirror, this projection onto the mirror and the return of this image

from the mirror to myself again. All of this at once revealing the destabilization of the

cogito and also the mechanisms by which whatever various identities might occur can be

constituted at all. The historical trail accumulates across space-time, in place, building

beings up as they traverse the developing surface, a lifeline, always in relation to a

fundamental emplacement. Put into place how? Exactly in this oscillation between,

between places, between one being and the next, defined in relative motion to them. A

return to Pirandello will help me clarify.

Prirandello presents Vitangelo in an exclusively relational light. The character is

always between, he exists *intermezzo*. First, he is caught between his wife and the mirror.

That is, between the image he has of himself, his own representation, and the image of

himself as he imagines his wife must see him. But now, witness how vertiginously

Vitangelo's in-between identity multiplies. If there is Vitangelo as he himself see him,

and Vitangelo as he *imagines* his wife sees him, then there must *also* be Vitangelo as his wife *herself* see him, to which Vitangelo has no access, thus a version of himself that remains completely unknown. But further, there may even be a Vitangelo that is one his wife imagines is how Vitangelo sees himself. And so on. But the philosophically salient point is not merely that there are different perspectives on who Vitangelo "really" is. It is not the banal point that there are many different ideas of Vitangelo that people imagine to be the case. It is that these perspectives bear on Vitangelo's *actual* identification to the extent that they shape his actions in the world and the realization of their existence, imagined or not, brings about the *Stoss* and shock that dislodges and destabilizes the everyday understanding routinely taken for granted. The text walks us through the destabilization of Vitangelo's identity in such a way that we are made to feel the vertigo of the existential question. The implication of the reader by the text is a recurring theme in all of the critical literature I've been citing in relation to Modernism. The net is cast for us by Vitangelo's narration when he muses, again, in front of a mirror, "What could I know of him?" he asks, referring to the reflected image of himself. The answer: "What I saw of him for the moment in which I stared at him and nothing else." There is the basic insight from Hume again, upon which Pirandello continues to build and add layers of nuance. Vitangelo goes on,

> If I didn't wish myself or didn't feel myself the way I looked then, he was also for me an outsider, who had those features, but could have had others. Once the moment I stared at him was past, he was already another; in fact, he was no longer what he had been as a boy, and was not yet what he would be as an old man; and as I tried to recognize him today in the him of yesterday and so on. And in that head there, immobile and hard, could put all the thoughts I wanted, kindle the most disparate visions…All of a sudden

> I extinguished the vision, and that head remained there again immobile and hard in dazed apathy.[128]

The real impermanence and instability of Vitangelo's self is fully revealed the moment immediately before something *else* entirely is made clear. "Who was he?" Vitangelo asks of his self-image. "No one. A poor body, nameless, waiting for someone to take him." His is no one. But then he is taken over, and this brings us closer to breaking free from Vattimo's emphasis on destabilization. Vitangelo is overcome by a series of sneezes, which is, of course, entirely beyond his control and generates a dramatic effect in the image as it is seized by the need to sneeze. Vitangelo feels that, "He had been affected, on his own, alone, by a little draft, which had come God knows where from, to that poor body, without telling me anything and beyond my will."[129] Vitagnelo expresses, in a less traumatic mode, a feeling of dissociation similar to Malte – and so, if we are to make oscillation into an ontological principle, we must associate it with a *loss of ego*. The *Stoss* is a blow to the ego, and the shock, that of realizing, not that the ego has been lost, but rather that the ego was an empty concept all along, *that it was never necessary*. Indeed, if we follow Descartes' own foundational metaphor of the mirror to its logical conclusion, the *subiectum*, which was not as rigorously developed in Descartes as in Kant, has always been a chimera, a mere play of light on a reflective surface. If the ego-self at the center of Modern philosophy has been an illusion, then the epistemological foundations which facilitate the movement of metaphysics after the Enlightenment (another wholly light-centered way of talking about a certain historical period where it was thought that "to

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[128] Pirandello, *One, No One,* 20.
[129] This and the immediately preceding quote both at Pirandello, *One, No One*, 21.

have knowledge" is always to stand in the presence of what has been illumined as "truth") are proven to be empty centers, but centers of a sort nonetheless.

With the *cogito* disrupted, decompressed and bleeding out into the body, situating itself in world, but losing its cranial bounds and slipping more and more fluidly into place, dissipating and thinning across some environmental matrix, we now find an empty center, the place once occupied by the ossified ego. Of all those who thought against Descartes' major literature – Bergson, Merleau-Ponty, James, Dewey, and Whitehead – it is Heidegger who Casey thinks best thematizes place, although in an inconsistent and fragmentary manner.[130] With Casey, we will return again to Heidegger, who is quick in reminding us of the deconstruction of the subject – that we are "always already" *out there*, in the world, being with others and the things through the use of which we make sense of our lives. This is an appropriate reminder as we embark on the next chapter, which will begin to take us, in the wake of these dissolutions, out into the world, one formerly composed of objects over and against subjects. But without a subject, we can no longer be quite so sure. What is it that can relate to an empty center? How can anything *mean*, have *significance for*, these bizarre empty centers? In an oblique way, this issue, this question concerning sense and significance, that whole apparatus of reference bound up with representation, the ground of which has been deconstructed and cast on a breeze by the destruction of the *cogito*, will recur in the Chapters that follow. Thomas Sheehan has recently published a groundbreaking study on Heidegger's career which proposes that the central question, the *Seinsfrage* proper to Heidegger's thought, is concerned first and

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[130] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 11.

foremost with the *intelligibility* of things, the astonishing fact the anything *makes sense at all*; in ontological terms, what makes intelligibility possible. Heidegger's answer, according to Sheehan, is eventually existence as the thrown-open clearing.[131] One way Casey gets at this is his *tensional arcs*, the openness *between* my body and the landscape, the room, the place in which my body emplaces me. Perhaps there is overemphasis on the spatial environment in Casey's effort to avoid Heidegger's absolute surrender to temporality. In going through Descartes' underground discourse, we have rediscovered a balance, just as Heidegger sought temporality in Aristotle's account of *motion*, here too, we find place in movement. Casey's tensional arcs are certainly rooted in Heidegger's temporal account of dimensionality as a "stretching," an opening gesture. I want to stay within this influence in thinking oscillation as an emplacing movement; as a movement that opens space and time, that brings us into place, and in whose play things can stand out in the open as the things that they are. There is still a dimension of appearance that has philosophical significance. This will become paramount in Chapter Four. As we close the door to the subject, and bar ourselves from recourse to that orthodox explanation, moving out into the world to better secure our placial ontology, I want still to think about these empty centers, these strange clouds, the debris of the self, a field, somehow still sensing, for they are a part of the whole that ontology seeks. Ontology and epistemology are never far apart. Let our first attempt to think these empty centers take us far afield in excess, to the most inhuman terrain, on a most inhuman scale. Let us think this first,

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[131] Sheehan, *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 23.

excessive attempt beyond the end of the mind on a cosmic scale, and image the empty

centers that hold a solar system together.

These things, huge in their orbits, do not, strictly speaking, orbit other things,

whether they be neutrons and protons in the center of an atom, or the sun at the center of

a solar system. Rather, it is more accurate to say that *all* these things, even those at the

supposed center, orbit around an imaginary point in space – a center of gravity that is

"empty." The sun itself is in a tight orbit around this center, the star itself oscillating

around an axis that is the undetectable hub of the solar system. The systematic

metaphysics built on the humanistic centrality of the ego-self, normally analyzed under

the auspices of "subjectivity," begins to lose its structuring force if this ego-self is

missing. However, even with the center emptied, we might still put a system in orbit

around a point of gravity, perhaps one heretofore undetected by the tradition, one that

was obscured by the brilliant luminosity of the ego-sun. Perhaps our placial ontology is

composed of binary stars, the center the empty space between, two horizons, coeval

epicenters, constitutive parts of a larger whole. If we believe falsely about the ego, and it

is in fact illusory, a play of light, then what we falsely believed to have conceptual weight

has none, and the system it held in place begins to break down and dissolve, sending its

former certainties spinning off into the ether as merely speculative fantasy. But here we

are, and things make sense. There is, and it's all around. So how can we describe these

empty centers in order to account for the way in which the world and ourselves can

express the meaning that it inevitably does express. For neither Malte nor Vitangelo ever

experience the annihilation of meaning as such. There is no "meaningless-ness" attested

by the loss of ego in either works, even if one set of assumptions is revealed to be

groundless or unnecessary, even if all knowledge is so. There is *something* there, the

world remains sensible even to those who experience the destabilizing aspect of

oscillation most powerfully. What follows, the wake of creative emplacement.

CHAPTER 3. GETTING INTO PLACE

We recognize oscillation to be the natural order of the world.
        – Luke Turner, "Metamodernist Manifesto," (2011)

3.1 Is this a Metaphysics?

Oscillation occurs on many levels. Until now, the focus has remained almost exclusively on human being – the mind that minds itself. This mind has been thoroughly particularized by a basic emplacement, and we have seen the tensional arc described by Casey being put into motion, moving beyond mere destabilization into a formative movement, an opening of place into which things can stand forth. We begin to move outward from here, leaving the human being behind as we approach mere being, guided forward by the strange song that, so long as we catch it, still comes from a place, though it may be no human place. We struggle against this enigma, wondering how this foreign song can even have meaning for us if it is not a human song. Perhaps it is, in one sense, a senseless song, but still a song that sounds. We will continue to struggle here, at the end of the mind, trying vainly perhaps to see that bird in the palm, hear and makes some sense of the song, even if it is just to say "I can hear…something…" At this limit, on the edge of meaning, the question stares us in the face: is this a metaphysics? So much has been said about the relationship between epistemology and ontology, their Modern division and distinction set out prominently after Kant. If this is a metaphysics, it is one that comes after the end of metaphysics, and so is obliged to start again, from the other

beginning. I have sought this other beginning in Casey's work on place, and have tried to meet him half-way, uncovering place in modernity where Casey himself saw that it had been obfuscated and reduced to mere space. The *cogito*, reified as subjectivity, has been the starting point of metaphysics since the inauguration of Modern philosophy, at least since 1641. It has also been the end of metaphysics, heralded stridently by the deconstructionists and so-called "postmoderns" of the 20th century, and largely ignored by the Anglo-American analytic school, which carries on as if philosophy was first invented by the Vienna Circle in 1929, perhaps with Frege and Bertrand Russell as precursors to the abuses of "logic" perpetuated in their names. Because of this alternative starting point, and the radical break from the traditional point of view discussed aboveground, in the major literature, the metaphysics that follows, if it is indeed a metaphysics, may appear blessedly *unphilosophical* to those whose prejudices lie rooted in the received interpretation of the history of metaphysics as the history of a search for certitude resting upon the human subject for which knowledge of the "outside" world is secured through a logico-linguistic representative procedure. As I have already shown through an engagement with Heidegger and Alva Nöe, we will not require representation in the usual philosophical sense of that term, to the extent that we will need it at all.

To the extent that what appears here appears as a form of metaphysics, has metaphysical comportments, tendencies, and vices, we tread dangerously close to the twin giants of Realism and Idealism. Indeed, in this Chapter we will begin to see the relevance of realism in its literary manifestation, which has significant import for the treatment of emplacement in literature. Realism has again become a theme of importance in philosophy, and, to some extent, I will take a dedication to "the real" as axiomatic. But

this is really no more than to say that I hold places to be real, to exist, and, insofar as anything else exists or is real, it only does so in place. Strictly speaking, this is not an epistemological commitment, but an ontological one. However, what I do not mean by "real" or "to exist" is that there is a "real world" "out there" and my major philosophical difficulty is how to get "out there" from "in here" the inside of consciousness, locked in the epistemic cabinet of subjectivity, slipping out to get knowledge in shiny baubles and artifacts that I recreate for myself in my treasure box mind. Still, this ontological commitment shows how little we can separate epistemology and ontology completely; another layer to the arguments laid out in the previous Chapter. If we are to know something real, that things exist, we seem to be committed to "the real" *before the question is posed*, or rather, to assume it in the very posing of the question itself. And if existence, whatever is real, is to appear as an object of knowledge, then I must at least offer the start of an answer as to how I know it. Graham Harman has supplied a critical insight necessary to unpacking what I'm driving at here, although, I certainly will not be following Harman uncritically into the realm of the "object oriented ontologists." It doesn't take much to see, from the coupling of "realism" and the "object" orientation of this new movement, that the old metaphysical paradigms are uncritically reinforced, again the postmodern trend of throwing all the weights onto on side of the onto-epistemic scales, this time in favor of the object over the subject, the real over the ideal, but never escaping the draft of Kant's tremendous gravity and the eminently Modern origin and determinations of their basic position. It is not my task here to directly and fully engage or "refute" the object orientation of New Realism, or Harman in particular, but it should be made clear that this project, although rife with certain family resemblances (we have

all read our Heidegger), takes off from a trajectory that is tangential (at best) to this line

of Continental thought. In many ways, I am, with Casey, still waving the flag of

phenomenology – even after the end of phenomenology.[1] Despite these caveats, I do

endorse Harman's arguments to the effect that "all relations are on the same ontological

footing as the human-world relation," and he thereby poses an inversion of the Kantian

doctrine that, as Harman sees it, "the human-world relation has privilege over all

others."[2] Before I ask readers to also accept this commitment, I will work once again

through literature, where we find an emphasis on the impact of the surrounding

environment on human being.

We will find this emphasis in Honoré de Balzac. My arguments will begin with a

reading of Balzac, whose *Human Comedy* repeatedly emphasizes the global importance

of place as his narrative oscillates between the urban and provincial, between Paris and

Angoulême. From Balzac, we traverse the Atlantic to find another great author of place

who took his literary inspiration, in part, from Balzac. William Faulkner and his

Yoknapatawpha County will become paramount for my most forceful formulation of a

placial ontology.

3.2 Becoming in Places

The critic E. K. Brown has commented that, for Balzac, "between man and

animals there is this crucial difference, by which the representation of men becomes

immensely more dramatic, more complex, and more interesting: in the individual man

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[1] My friend Tom Sparrow has made a powerful argument regarding the relationship of phenomenology and Idealism in his *The End of Phenomenology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2014). I will be engaged with Sparrow's arguments below. I am indebted to him for an extremely fruitful correspondence on the issues taken up in this and the following Chapters.
[2] Harman, "Realism without Materialism." *SubStance*, 40:2 (2011), 55.

there is striking change as his habitat is changed. Throw the rabbit in the ocean, and he is still a rabbit; throw the young provincial into the welter of Paris, and he becomes a being new and strange."[3] If we ignore the clumsy, gendered language, and Brown's anthropocentrism, we can hear the final clause ringing with a profound truth. In order to execute the task of bringing to life the transformations in character that result from the transition from locale to locale, it is necessary to paint a sufficiently vivid picture of the material and social environments within which the activities of the character take on meaning. Around 1832, Balzac conceives of a grand work that would capture the life of France at the time. Historic in breadth and scope, populated with dozens of elaborately wrought and thoroughly imagined characters, Balzac began his monumental work with *Eugénie Grandet* in 1833, followed quickly by *Père Goriot*, published in serial form from 1834-35. Although he is not properly a Modernist, according to the usual dates, Balzac's literary realism is philosophically relevant to the current project. He is also formally significant in terms of the influence of Balzac's style and subject matter on writers that follow him, and on Modernism in particular. For us, it is important that Balzac prefigures Faulkner in the use of place and the development of an intricate social-historical order related to place, which enables the powerful depictions of human interactions and personal psychology. In these intensely realized places, Balzac's characters become what they are, and he presents them through their oscillations between places, and between the people and things that occupy those places. When he wishes to evoke the mood or thoughts of a character, or to sum up their positions in life, and how the broader social-

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[3] Brown, "Introduction." *Père Goriot and Eugénie Grandet* (New York: Modern Library, 1950), x.

historical context is reflected in their situation, Balzac invariably refers us to these places and their accoutrements.

The final Chapter of *Eugénie Grandet*, entitled "The Way of the World," begins with rumination on the state of the title character's happiness, or rather, her unhappiness. Throughout the novel, Eugénie cultivates a miserly nature inherited from her father, Felix, who plays his daughter's suitors against one another for his own paternal profits. When his nephew, Charles Grandet, arrives from Paris, Felix's provincial plans are thrown into turmoil, largely due to the fact that Charles and Eugénie fall in love with one another. Felix desires to be rid of Charles by sending the young nephew overseas, a wish he is eventually granted, but only because Eugénie herself funds Charles' expedition with her own gold coins, outraging her father and sending her mother into a dire illness. Neither Felix nor Eugénie's fortunes continue for long, as Felix's wealth is ravaged by opportunistic businessmen, and Charles returns to France only to renounce his love for and engagement to Eugénie in favor of marrying a down-on-her-luck aristocrat. This alternative marriage is more beneficial to Charles, as it allows him to leverage the new wife's titles in order to ascend the social ladder himself. Eugénie eventually does marry; she weds a wealthy suitor, who in turn dies at a young age and leaves Eugénie a thirty-three-year-old widow, but also very wealthy. In summing up the life and effort spent by Eugénie on a quest for fleeting happiness, Balzac writes,

> Thus, until now, in her struggle for happiness she had wasted her strength and gained nothing. In the life of the soul, as well as in the life of the body, there is both a breathing in and a breathing out; the soul must first absorb the feelings of another soul, must assimilate them and give them back again more abundantly. Without this glorious human phenomenon, there can be

no life for the heart; it cannot breathe; it suffers and wastes away. Eugénie had begun to suffer.[4]

Readers are given to understand that Eugénie retreats inward, a soul-searching gesture, because her wealth was not a power for her, nor did it console her. Love, religion, a faith in the future: these were Eugénie's comforts, where she is "plunged in the depths of infinite thoughts, which for her perhaps merged into one."[5] And yet, Balzac does not express Eugénie's treasures as some immaterial "within" that brings her solace through meditation (reflection) on her own immaterial attributes. Certainly, it is not the abstract principle of her value in terms of wealth or income. As Balzac describes, it is, "Charles' dressing-case, the two portraits hanging above her bed, the jewels recovered from her father and proudly spread out on a layer of cotton wool in a drawer of the cabinet, her aunt's thimble, which her mother has used and which she put on religiously every day to work at a piece of embroidery – Penelope's web, begun solely for the purpose of wearing on her finger that gold so full of memories."[6] The reference to Penelope here is telling: that the embroidery, like so many human endeavors, is not undertaken merely for its own sake, but is engaged for the purpose of connecting Eugénie to those others from whom she derives her life's meaning through its use.

It is not that we must adhere to a mode of materialism, where these "external" objects define Eugénie's character, and we should be even more skeptical of the reduction of her relationship with those object to mere symbolism – an act of

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[4] Balzac, *Père Goriot and Eugénie Grandet*, trans. Dorothea Walter and John Watkins (New York: Modern Library, 1950), 472.
[5] Balzac, *Eugénie Grandet*, 472-73.
[6] Balzac, *Eugénie Grandet*, 473.

representation wherein the object stands in for the person's psychology. Charles'

dressing-case is not, strictly speaking, a symbol; it is just a dressing-case, presented by an

author as belonging to a character, a reasonably believable articulation based on

experiences had with others in the world. The dressing-case can take on symbolic value

only to the extent that it appears to us as a dressing-case, an everyday object with which

people in Balzac's time (and we with analogues in our own) have familiar dealings as

they go about the course of their lives. Charles' dressing case is and is not a mere conceit

of fiction. It is, because it is part of the artist's technique. Prefacing *The Lily of the*

Valley, Balzac explains that, "writers use whatever literary device seems capable of

giving the greatest intensity of life to their characters."[7] And yet, it is not, because there is

some philosophical significance to the fact that the technique shows Balzac to be driving

toward an imagined emplacement of characters within a "realistic" setting – a setting

recognizable as the usual types of places we occupy in daily life. To understand both,

consider the literary and philosophical prejudice long held against *description*.

On the one hand, mentioning the dressing-case has symbolic potential. It can refer

us to Eugénie's failed relationship with Charles, her sacrifices to his success only to be

spurned, and so on. In part, the "standing in" for Charles works *because Charles is*

literally absent and his absence is expressed in the object with whom he was familiar. But

there are other ways in which Balzac utilizes details such as the dressing-case. Again,

part of its symbolic function allows that the object itself be somewhat arbitrary. The

important thing is that whatever it is that Balzac mentions must be part of imagined

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[7] Quoted in Samuel Rogers, *Balzac and the Novel* (New York: Octagon Books, 1953), 161.

history of his characters. Thus, there must be repetition of the image or phrase, a repetition of the sign, by which Balzac will signal the relation between the characters, their history together with the object. And yet, there are plenty of details about the character's surroundings that are never repeated, that are just rote descriptions of things going on, laying about, furniture, wallpaper, and sundry accoutrements of living. These descriptions of the surroundings, descriptive prose generally, has been subject to much abuse in the history of French letters.[8] It is interesting to note that *description* is used often and early in the 1600s primarily to describe *places*; Paris, Versailles, military exercises. But this is to put it out of the purview of literature, because it served as a textual *praxis*, writing to "describe-for" some practical purpose. Such "work" and *praxis* was avoided, or detoured in proper literature as art.[9] Hamon and Baudoin show that this attitude toward descriptive writing led to a policing of literature for descriptive language during the classical period in France. There were three particular dangers posed by description: 1) the introduction of "foreign" terminology, especially the technical vocabularies of professions associated with the thing being described and would, thereby, corrupt the text with the "trace of work," but which could also hinder lay people in accessing the text; 2) descriptive details are valued only for utility in proofs offered in the text, and this becomes compromised if description becomes an end in itself, just writing for writing's sake; and, 3) the freedom offered by excessive description plays into the uncontrollability of the readers' reactions and thus, the author loses control of the

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[8] A good critical review of this history is provided in Philippe Hamon and Patricia Baudoin, "Rheotrical Status of the Descriptive." *Yale French Studies*, 61 (1981), 1-26.
[9] Hamon and Baudoin, "Rhetorical Status of the Descriptive," 4-6.

audience, and the text becomes less effective at what it aims to communicate.[10] The

extensive use of description is seen as an innovation of the realists, and Zola includes

Balzac among its champions when he is trying to sell the realist school of fiction

writing.[11] Nevertheless, description still serves several ends that Hamon and Baudoin

successfully fit into Foucault's configuration of the Classical *episteme*. Here, by the time

of Flaubert (*Bovary* is 1857, *Dictionary of Received Ideas*, 1911), description has become

a space in which the *author as artist* can show their own work. This technical prowess

can be demonstrated in three ways: 1) exactly by deploying a technical vocabulary

associated with what is being described; 2) the use of this vocabulary in metaphor making

and linguistic showmanship; and, 3) that connects with the general work going on in the

world, work that produces such vocabularies, and by which knowledge is categorized.[12]

These tendencies, as I will discuss below, lead even contemporary critics to view

description as nothing but so many curlicues; an embellishment just for show, but which

carries no deeper significance. After all, even the example from Balzac above, in which

he ties everyday objects to the deep psychological dramas of a woman's lived experience,

can come off as just a list of things given in the text. Other passages would fair far worse

on that front, without the explicit connection to a character's consciousness. Regardless,

such attention to detail allows objects such as dressing-cases to take on the role of a

minor character: the fate of such objects are in themselves consequential to the plot, and

it has effects on the actions and states of the people with whom it is associated. Balzac

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[10] Hamon and Baudoin, "Rhetorical Status of the Descriptive," 9-10.
[11] Zola, letter to Henry Céard, 22 March 1885, cited in Hamon and Baudoin, "Rhetorical Status of the Descriptive," 11.
[12] Hamon and Baudoin, "Rhetorical Status of the Descriptive," 21.

needs a fully realized *place* in which his characters can live. It is from these places, and primarily from them, that actions and relationships between characters take on significance and have the level of intensity necessary to render meaningfully dramatic stories – and thereby keep readers' attentions. But more than that, such technique resonates with philosophical import. For it is not just the symbolically laden object that brings the characters to life in this way. It is also through seemingly inconsequential details that a robust historical place can be prepared in which plausible characters can do the sorts of things people do in the course of living their daily lives.

Take the descriptions of wallpaper provided in another of Balzac's works, *Père Goriot*.[13] Balzac sets up the wallpaper as a point of comparison, as a way of determining certain fundamental differences between the places in which his characters are to develop. Very early, he describes the condition of the boarding house, owned and operated by Madame Vauquer. Before we are introduced to the players in the drama – and it is a drama[14] – Balzac gives a thorough description of the boarding house itself, which includes the following details: "The floor is far from even; the wainscoting rises to elbow-height; and the rest of the wall is hung with a varnished paper representing the principle scenes from *Télémachue* [the Telemachus episode from the *Odyssey*], with the classic personages in color. The panel between the two barred windows exhibits to the guests the feast offered by Calypso to Ulysses' son."[15] Of course, the grandeur of the

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[13] Graham Robb notes the source of Balzac's inspiration for this detail is the poet Henri de Latouche, who knew the details of hanging wallpaper, in *Balzac: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), 152. This reinforces Hamon and Baudoin's general point regarding the deployment of professional and technical vocabularies by the French realists.
[14] Balzac, *Père Goriot*, 3.
[15] Bazlac, *Père Goriot*, 7.

Greek drama is contrast to the lowly state of the boarding house, and this Balzac

leverages on a symbolic level, but some details (uneven floor, the wainscoting) are sort of

throw-aways; that is, they are just the kinds of things found in boarding houses at the

time. It makes sense that, for forty years, that wallpaper and its epic had, "stimulated the

humor of the young boarders who try to forget their poor estates by making fun of the

dinners to which it condemns them."[16] When we are at last introduced to the title

character after about twenty pages of place-setting, Balzac again includes the wallpaper,

writing about Goriot's apartment that, "Madame Vauquer had done over the three rooms

of which the apartment consisted, in consideration of a down payment sufficient, it was

said, to cover the cost of yellow calico curtains, wooden armchairs covered with Utrecht

velvet, a few cheap pictures, and wallpaper which was too ugly for suburban cafés."[17]

Note again the layering of the symbolic with the mundane, and yet the whole working

toward the greater connectivity in historic circumstance – class, country, city life. When

we revisit the same rooms much later in the novel, we are again directed to the wallpaper.

"There were no curtains at the window; the wallpaper was hanging loose at many places

because of the dampness, and where it had shriveled one could see the plaster yellowed

by smoke."[18] The curtains are gone, light comes in, but reveals more. Always these

circumstantial details of the room refer us, not only to the individuals that inhabit them,

but also to the greater social conditions under which the person is lodged in the rooms so

described. I do not here mean something reductive, as if the "social conditions" as such

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[16] Balzac, *Père Goriot*, 7.
[17] Balzac, *Père Goriot*, 19.
[18] Balzac, *Père Goriot*, 133.

could be reduced to the rank of classes in society, to which each individual ultimately

belongs according to a series of power relations, etc. Class distinctions are important, and

Balzac displays a consciousness and provides a *detailed* account of class differences that

impress both Marx and Engels.[19] Nevertheless, I mean to include in the "social" other,

less thoroughly politicized phenomena. For instance, the wallpaper reveals plaster that is

"yellowed by smoke." Yellowed by the social habit of smoking cigarettes, which one can

do in isolation, but which remains throughout a habit conditioned by the social mores of

the times, as well as the material paraphernalia that constitutes, together with practices,

the habit of smoking. We could refer further, to the heating mechanisms of the time. Coal

and wood burning stoves, ventilated to various efficiencies, together with the workaday

dust stirred by cleaning and maintaining the heating instrument, yellows the wall of the

years, and, left unclean, the plaster is later papered over, only to have the previous grime

discovered again, highlighting the original attempt to cover over the soiled plaster.

The peeling wallpaper that signals this robust history to us as the history of a

place which houses the character and gives shape to their appearance in the text

reinforces our need to think place, along with Casey, as the ecstatic unity of space and

time, and particularized in such ecstasis. Not only does oscillation occur between

localities in space, but also in time, across it, as the past effects the present, generating

conditions for the future, which becomes present and then past, exerting in its turn and

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[19] In a letter to Margaret Harkness, dated April 1888, Engels extols the power of Balzac's realism to recount the historical development of French society and its class relations. See: Engels, Letter to Margaret Harkeness, early April 1888, Letters: Marx-Engels Correspondence, The Marxist Internet Archive, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1888/letters/88_04_15.htm [accessed 03/20/2016]. Balzac also, famously, coined the phrase "fictitious capital" as part of a character's description of French financialization, which has become a well-known phrase within Marxism.

effect on the present yet to come, itself to be the conditions of some as yet undisclosed future. The fundamental unfolding of time in history, as the history *of…*someplace or something, shows that ontological oscillation is not sufficiently thought out if we take it only as a "back-and-forth" between objects. How to resolve this difficulty? I suggest we adopt "play" as a technical term in our developing placial ontology. Initially, let's think "play" as in a game, a "play" called in football, or a play on the chessboard. A play in this sense has its peculiar time dimension, both as a goal toward which the play drives and also in its series of distinct movements. But let us work toward a definition so that the concept might reveal itself most powerfully as a result of analysis. Oscillation can be sought in the play between things. This is *not* to say that oscillation occurs, and then, as an effect or function of oscillation, things arise in certain relations. It is an ontological statement. The relation between things *is* their oscillation. The play between manifests oscillation. Thus, the appearance of things *is* their play in oscillation. Their play frees them, and makes things available to us.

To clarify, we need to consider how differently the walls appear in the well-to-do homes of Balzac's aristocratic salons. What a contrast to Madame Vauquer's boarding house is the dreary wallpaper in Goriot's sad apartment. The home of the Baroness de Nucingen exhibits walls too exquisite for drab paper. Reader find her drawing room, "hung with Italian paintings and with the general air of a café."[20] The wallpaper in Père Goriot's room was too unseemly for suburban cafés, but the Baroness' reading room provides the air of the café itself, a striking play between the public and private spheres,

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[20] Balzac, *Père Goriot*, 144.

the Baroness' home itself the scene of a public life to which the young boarder at

Madame Vauquer's aspires. The house was generally composed of "stucco and stairways

with landings in mosaics of marble."[21] The book plays between luxury and destitution,

and the characters display a consciousness of the fact that to become the kind of person

they wish to be, they must adapt themselves to the environments most appropriate to the

lives they wish to cultivate. Balzac's realist novels are rife with sentiments expressing the

importance of emplacement to the success of a character's plans for self-advancement,

such as this passage concerning Eugène de Rastignac, the young boarder "whom

misfortune has condemned to hard work, who understand in their first youth the hopes

that their relatives have set on them, and who prepare for a great career by calculating the

bearing their studies will have upon it and adapting them in advance to the future

tendencies of society in order to be among the first to profit by them."[22] Thus, the

development of Eugène's character does not unfold from some inner subjective essence,

but is first conditioned by wherever he finds himself, his original position, and leads from

there into a series of relations involving his education, his family, and society at large,

within which he must anticipate and prepare a place for himself. Eugène's personal

development is then presented as the oscillation between these different places, the run-

down boarding house, the fine salons of the aristocracy, the theater, the pubs of common

Parisians, and so on. Each of these locales, and the outward ways in which these places

signal their relationship with other elements of society and their shared history, play into

the manifestation of Eugène as a person, and heighten the intensity – the realism – with

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[21] Balzac, *Père Goriot*, 144.
[22] Balzac, *Père Goriot*, 11.

which Balzac is able to portray them as *living*. Nowhere is this play more evident than in *Lost Illusions*, the centerpiece of his ongoing *Human Comedy*. Written between 1837 and 1843, *Lost Illusions* centers on the young poet Lucien Chardon and his drive to become a successful literary figure. He begins fairly poor in provincial Angoulême and Paris, oscillating between these two poles, and also between failure and success in his quest for literary acclaim. It is worth noting, just to begin, that much of the character's motivation is derived from the idea that *in order to be* a poet, one *had to be in Paris*. Location was everything to the young man from the provinces.

It is significant that the book opens with a consideration of the printing press. In Angoulême there is an outdated press; a wooden "groaning press" with leather ink daubers and a stone "marble" on which the type was arranged for printing.[23] Here is good evidence for Hamon and Baudoin's observations regarding the use of professional and technical vocabulary in realist description. Balzac relies on technical details to paint a picture of the press. He lists off the parts, their make-up and working relations, but also elaborates on the beliefs and superstitions of the printer, the history of the technologies developed by Elzivir, Pantin, Aldini, and Didot, as well as the machine's relevance to the overall plot.[24] The first page already deploys the object as an instance of historical grounding, connecting, through the object, the persons with whom the object is associated in their work, the global history of the development of the technological object itself, and the local history of the story contained in the novel, dealing not with

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[23] Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, trans. Katherine Prescott Wormeley (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2007), 5.
[24] Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 5.

developments in French society and culture, but with particular individuals and people who draw their living from the larger context. And, as I've mentioned in regards to Charles' dressing-case, the press itself has a role to play in the story. We are lead into the context of the drama through this object. Our trajectory through the text is "set," as it were by the press. Here, although we do not typically consider Balzac as a Modernist *per se*, we can see how his realism prefigures the critical work of Modernists through the "meta" level awareness of the objects as both historically constructed (literally, in the case of a machine press), but also of the role this object will play in the unfolding of the story.

For us now, it is crucial that this press is an outdated one, and that immediately distinguishes life in the provinces from life in the urban glow of Paris. In fact, Balzac notes that the specialization of printing in Angoulême allowed a very close relationship between the province and Paris, so that the two maintain an intimate interplay, although Angoulême remains "behind the times." No surprise then, that Lucien will often feel as though the provincial life holds up or otherwise retards his progress toward literary greatness – so much so that he must catch-up to his own talents in the salons of Paris. At least, Lucien imagines that he can only be the poet *per excellence* after he takes up the Parisian life, and thus catches and surpasses his own provincial potentials. The outdated press is thus the initial foil against which the basic oscillations of emplacement are established – from the object, Balzac sets up some basic binaries *between which* the actions of the story take on meaning and significance and through which the positions of the characters are revealed. These oppositions crop up naturally and linearly in Balzac's narrative. I will complicate these relations later, and allow them to take a more realistic

(irony noted) nuance that is not fully developed in Balzac. It will also be made clear how the realism in Balzac's literature is carried over into Modernism and why this literary realism has philosophical implications. The placial ontology is, in other words, perhaps a mode of *literary realism*, given its phenomenological dimension, rather than a strictly philosophical realism that is opposed to some idealist foe. If this is the case, we may sidestep the danger of falling back into the subject on which the outside of realism breaks against the inside of subjectivity. It could mean something like a methodological realism *against* the onto-epistemological orthodoxy.

Part One of *Lost Illusions* is called "Two Poets." It begins with the printing press, and the proprietor of the machine, Jérôme-Nicholas Séchard, whose son, David, is one of the titular poets. David Séchard eventually takes over the press from his father. The younger Séchard is a scientifically minded fellow who has been educated in Paris. After a while, David hires Lucien Chardon as a foreman and falls in love with Lucien's sister, Eve. David and Lucien become close friends, business partners, and share in Lucien's literary aspirations. They prefer the creative poetic work of the mind to running the print shop, which carries on a marginal existence largely due to the fact that its most serious competitors, the monarchist Cointet brothers, view Séchard and company as weakened threats, ultimately preferable to other, potentially stronger competition.[25] Like the earlier work *Père Goriot*, Balzac spends many pages place-setting. He gives historical background through his discussion of the printing machine and its passage from father to son. He used the publishing business, rooted in the technology of the press, to elucidate

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[25] Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 20-24.

the then-recent history of France and the post-Napoleonic politics of revolution,

monarchism, and republicanism. He casts Lucien and David as liberals, against their

rivals in printing, the monarchist Cointet brothers. The proximity between Paris and

Angoulême is highlighted and elucidated, foreshadowing the interplay between these two

localities that will give shape to the drama yet to unfold. David and Lucien are

themselves played off one another as like-minded souls, but of basically different types:

David the scientist and business owner, calculating and pragmatic, Lucien the literary

artist and dreamer, and yet, both are poets in their own rights, with creative visions of the

world, seeking truth in the written word. These were some of the crucial planes between

which the oscillations central to defining the key characters, events, and dramas of the

book play. Again, Balzac outlines these basic differences in a very linear manner, careful

to root social-historical abstractions in realist descriptions of everyday life and the objects

that facilitate the activities of such living.

    With this outline of the novel and Balzac's descriptive technique in mind, we can

move on to the philosophically relevant insight gained by reading Balzac's work,

focusing on *Lost Illusions*. Such a reading will reveal the salience of literary realism,

which will pass from its literary form to a methodological consideration in the vein of

phenomenology. This will be made most clear by our encounters with William Faulkner.

Once with Faulkner in his Yoknapatawpha County, I can show the philosophical power

of Modernism's latent placial ontology, and use it to further elaborate on the concept of

oscillation. But first, we must contend with Balzac and the legacy of his realism.

3.3 A Detour Through Physics on the Way to Methodological Realism

Oscillation occurs on many levels. In the previous Chapter, the focus was mostly on particular individuals, characters that are singularly depicted in their immediate environment, in rooms, with the objects and garments that occupy them, in front of their own reflections. Earlier in this Chapter we saw Eugénie Grandet drawing sustenance from the few things that linked her to those with whom she'd lived out her life's drama. With *Lost Illusions*, and even more so in Yoknapatawpha, we ascend to levels beyond the individual, and our time scales become proportionally longer in relation to the accompanying topologies that open on each level, in each layer. Our view of places will increasingly resemble an onion with hermeneutic layers that allow us access to different levels of analysis – the individual, the familial, the household, the village, the town, the city, the county, the country, the nation, the planet… Of course, the individual need not be the starting point. The terminal scale in the direction of small is on the order of $1.6119926 \times 10^{-35}$ meters, and for events occurring at that infinitesimal level of being we would need to consider durations of time on the order of 10^{-43} seconds.[26] It is only fitting that we express these dimensions using measures based on the scale of the human body, given our average 1.64-meter height. The opposite magnitude is attained on the order of light-years, 9.5 trillion kilometers long, measuring galaxies forming and colliding over billions of years. Still, we refer these astronomical measurements to the things we can

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[26] In physics, these are Planck lengths and times, which are, theoretically, the terminal limit of measurability. These so-called "natural" limits are derived from five physical constants (gravity, the speed of light in a vacuum, the reduced Planck's constant, the Coulomb constant, and the Boltzmann constant), each of which are in turn associated with a fundamental physical theory (general relativity and Newtonian gravity; special relativity and electromagnetism; quantum mechanics; electrostatics; and, statistical mechanics and thermodynamics, respectively).

deal with – light, a trip around the sun, multiplication. The bigger story we tell, the bigger are the requisite timescales. The more modest our narrative breadth, the less time is spent. A human lives over sixty years, a hundred if we're lucky. Sometimes we are barely born – a single breath can be the breadth of our finitude. A generation spans a century and heralds the next, 150 years, give or take. There is a ratio. Place is, after all, the ecstatic unity of space and time. They are, irrevocably, connected in spacetime. And yet, all of this is not to say that "man is the measure of all things." The universe can be its own measure, granting Planck his achievements in physics. What ontology seeks is an understanding of the *κόσμος*, which means an understanding of ourselves in *φύσις*. I allow the Greek to stand so that readers might be thrown back on themselves, to make these terms (cosmos, physics), weird for us again, to make us puzzle over them a second. Although I grant the physical sciences their achievements, and readily accept that philosophers benefit from knowledge of the sciences, I do not want to necessarily mislead readers into a naive materialism or physical realism. I also want to be careful to avoid the idea that oscillation, cultures, places, history, or cognition – really anything – "supervenes" on the physical or material. This presupposes all the old metaphysical dogmas that the last two Chapters worked hard to circumvent. Supervenience, generally, is too firmly entrenched in the order of representation, where the goal remains the correlation of property sets between objects, such that propositional formulae express their identity in veridical procedures.[27] This more local, particular concern puts it outside our purview here, since emplacement is the ground of any relation of supervenience and

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[27] Brian McLaughlin and Karen Bennet, "Supervenience." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/supervenience/ [accessed 03/22/2016].

the condition of their possibility. But supervenience in relation to physicalism poses a further problem, namely one of implicitly introducing an ontological hierarchy in which what is "physical" is somehow "more real" than what supervenes on it – mysteriously immaterial things like mind, culture, history, etc. I want to dwell just a bit longer on the relationship of this project, and ontology broadly, to the physical sciences so that we can move forward clear headed with regard to these thorny metaphysical issues. Indeed, I have been using, and the literature has pushed me to use, examples laden with materiality, with the physical things and stuff with whom people live, with which they interact, and from which they draw meaning.

Philosophers must be careful when treading the theoretical boundary between Newtonian mechanics and our contemporary Standard Model, which is itself undergoing tentative and controversial revision. As early as Einstein, the old Newtonian ideal of absolute space and absolute time, and both as two distinct and separate fundamental properties (notice the latent Kantianism – space and time fundamental, intuitive absolutes of all physical phenomena) was reformed as a unified manifold of spacetime; a fabric in which things are suspended, and which itself can effect and be affected by the things appearing in it. So again, the vessel metaphor. Just as consciousness was fundamentally placeless, yet trapped within the body, bodies themselves were formerly held to be "in" absolute space and time as in a container, but never interacted with the container itself. In the Standard Model, physical objects appear enmeshed in a dynamic matrix of spacetime, and interact with it, engaging a multi-valenced web of active fields; relative forces which

co-depend on and define one another.[28] The mathematician Hermann Minkowski, in a

now famous lecture to the *Naturforscher Verstammlung* (Congress of Natural

Philosophers) at Cologne in 1908, says: "The conceptions about time and space, which I

hope to develop before you today, has grown on experimental physical grounds. Herein

lies its strength. The tendency is radical. Henceforth, the old conception of space for itself

and time for itself shall reduce to a mere shadow, and some sort of union of the two will

be found consistent with the facts."[29] In this statement we can see a natural philosophical

affinity between spacetime and place as developed by Casey. Again, Casey shows that

spacetime brings us back to event, events in space and time, a placial *happening*, where

anything that occurs has its place.[30] Particularization, multiplicity, relative motion,

relativity generally – whatever is physical is relationally defined between fields of force.

So, philosophers must understand the radically revised notion of what it even *means to be*

physical that exists in today's Standard Model. Physicist Frank Wilczek has argued that

"the ancient contrast between celestial light and earthy matter has been transcended. In

modern physics, there's only one thing, and that thing is more like the traditional idea of

light than the traditional idea of matter."[31] In fact, although matter is no longer considered

to be the extended, mechanical objects thought by Newtonian physics, the question of

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[28] For a general overview of this development in the physical sciences, see: Herman Minkowski, "Space and Time." *The Principle of Relativity*, trans. Meghnad Saha (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1920), 70-88; James Jean, "Space-time." *The Growth of the Physical Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1947), 205-301; Tamás Matolsci, *Spacetime without Reference Frames* (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1994); Georges Francis Rayner Ellis and Ruth M. Williams, *Years Later* (New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 2010).
[29] Minkowski, "Space and Time," 70.
[30] Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, 339-40.
[31] Wilczek, *The Lightness of Being: Mass, Ether, and the Unification of Forces* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

void and vacuum has again been raised in the context of quantum fluctuations – that on

the Planck scale, the elementary physical particles are continuously and unstably popping

in and out of existence in a tangible quantum ether of fields. Of course, no one

understands why this is the case.[32] Ironically, modern quantum field theory echoes with

Descartes and Newton's corpuscular theory of the atom, in which there were not point

particles, but corpuscles, little cavities of different sized matter, energized and differing

in active intensity.[33] Rather than an ontological hierarchy, where the "physical," whatever

that now means (the oscillation of light-like stuff?) is a "domain of all domains" on

which other "non-physical" stuff, whatever that means, globs on, or supervenes on, and

thus maintains its parasitic existence, we have Dirac's sea of relative motions;

fundamental differentiations that are themselves the very constituents of the things that

appear, and is itself the stratum of being, never a container or a confined area. From here,

we arrive with Deleuze at the insight that this multiplicity presumes, "a swarm of

differences, a pluralism of free, wild or untamed differences; a properly differential and

original space and time [place!]."[34] As far as I can tell, contemporary physics offers no

stable substratum on which whatever might somehow be "non-physical" would

supervene. Whatever substratum it does offer, however, *itself depends on oscillation*.[35]

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[32] Cf., Wilczek, *The Lightness of Being*, 76-111; Leonard Susskind, *The Black Hole War* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009), 96-98; Roger Penrose, *The Road to Reality: A Complete Guide to the Laws of the Universe* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 622-28 and 897-907.

[33] Richard Feynman, *QED: The Strange Theory of Light and Matter* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2006), 13-14.

[34] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University, 1994), 50.

[35] That is, can be described by the mathematics of *harmonic oscillators*. Cf., Leonard Susskind and Art Friedman, *Quantum Mechanics* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 311-46; Susskind, *Black Hole Wars*, 169-75; Penrose, *Road to Reality*, 153-78.

Showing oscillation to be a fundamental element in the physical world is relatively easy. We need only two of the most well-known equations of the standard model to show how oscillation functions at the heart of the mathematics explaining physics, and further, that it is by this fundamental oscillation that physical objects are differentiated, that is, their identity is bound to their oscillation.

Take the following two equations, those of Einstein and Planck. Planck's equation is $E = h\nu$ where (E) is energy, (h) is Planck's constant, a quantum of action (that is, the quantification of the trajectory/path/history of a system with the dimensions of either [energy]·[time] or [momentum]·[length]), and (ν) is the frequency. Einstein's equation is $E = mc^2$ where (E) is energy, (m) is mass, and (c) is the speed of light, which is a physical constant.

Now, we can easily combine these two equations and get $\nu = m\left(\frac{c^2}{h}\right)$ where the frequency equals the mass times the speed of light squared divided by Planck's constant. Oscillation is already central to Planck's constant, since that represents the coefficient of proportionality between a minimal increment of energy (E) and some frequency (ν). Of course, the constant c is itself measuring a quantum (light) which exhibits wave-particle duality. We can thus see that any particle exhibiting mass (so, all particles except the photon [the quantum of light, carrier of electromagnetism] and the gluon, which is the carrier of strong force. However, the gluon is never observed alone and is always imbedded within a hadron composed of quarks held together by the strong force carried by the gluon. Of course, this is complicated by the fact that, insofar as "massless" particles accelerate, they *do* in fact have relative mass due to the equivalence principle

which equates the effects of gravity and acceleration. But I digress…) would have a frequency of oscillation inherent to its mass relative to the two constants, namely the speed of light squared and Planck's constant. The fundamental feature of things is that they oscillate. The differences in their oscillation give rise to the different elementary particles wherein the string's dynamics determine the properties of the particles themselves, such as mass, spin, and charge. To understand the ontological significance of place is to grasp how an oscillation emplaces things as the things they are. Placial ontology is a sort of philosophical topology performed on a surface generated by the historical motion of structures in place. Formerly things became available in representation. Now, things become available qua their oscillation into place. Things are emplaced by oscillation. The topologies produced by places serve as the basis of later categorizations of the things emplaced. Things emerge from the interactions between places, the conjunction of events in space and time, all events happening in place, place, the ecstatic unity of space and time. Ontology seeks an understanding of what *makes physics possible*, which means an understanding of ourselves as part of a cosmos, of the whole. Further, that it is *we who understand* to which the understanding must be cut. In order to "get it," it must be made available to me, in a sense, be brought to my level so that I can "get a sense of it." So I look through microscopes and telescopes, and I make graphs and charts and work on equations and tell stories that render the world around sensible to something like me. Thereby, I see that everything is in place, has its place, occupying different levels, different layers, big and small.

Literature leads us through these levels, and herein lies our methodological realism – in the phenomenological element of *description*. We follow along a

philosophical path, and are introduced to Père Goriot, in his room, with its wallpaper. It is a human place, for us and by us. Previously, literary critics have treated details like the wallpaper as just a symptom of "realism," a listing off of details to depict a scene or scale it to the drama. It is no more than elaboration on a set-piece, a flourish on the backdrop before which the character stands as if on a stage, supposing they could be lifted out of it as from a vessel, and plopped down again unaltered in some other scene.[36] What I hope our detour through the complexifiers of theoretical physics has shown is that *there is no such vessel from which they could be removed*. That old way of understanding is now cut off from us, and Goriot in his room can only appear through the dynamic interplay of his emplacement, the relative motions of his rooms within the flow of French history, its happening in its time and space relative to the other happenings depicted by Balzac. Balzac's contribution to our placial ontology is that emplacement is *constitutive* of his characters and the drama precisely qua their places. He is realist to the extent that his writing performs a vision of the world in which the place-setting determines the archetypes by which a character's action and motivation within the ensuing dramatic events will be rendered sensible to the reader. Everything, for Balzac, has a place. More radically, place cannot be deconstructed. Without place, there is no work to deconstruct – the necessary representational order cannot emerge to be taken apart.

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[36] Cf., Alexander Fischler, "Rastignac-Telemaque: The Epic Scale in *Père Goriot*." *The Modern Language Review*, 63:4 (October 1968), 840-48; and, Paula Quigley, "Realism and Eroticism: Re-Reading Balzac." *Paragraph*, 36:1 (2013), 31-49.

3.4 Balzac's Printing Press

It is a great coincidence that *Lost Illusions* begins, as it does, with a printing press. And, like all things, deconstruction has its place. Within Balzac's novel, we can take the printing press itself as a symbol of the domain of deconstruction. That which is underwritten by the word is fair game. But we might also encounter something like a "natural object" which is itself recalcitrant to the words used to define it. The thing itself shapes our approach to it. The drama is driven, in part, by the recalcitrance of the world in the face of Lucien Chardon's grand plans.

In his discussion of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Derrida makes his most famous – and most thoroughly misunderstood – claim: *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*, literally, "there is no outside text," or even, "there is no out-of-text," if we compare the French *hors-saison*, "out of season."[37] Derrida is attempting to elucidate the concept of the "supplemental" in writing. The supplement is itself a substitutive signification (a representation) existing in a chain of signifiers upon which the "real" supervenes – again, the issue of hierarchy in supervenience is made relevant. "Reality" is then something "added on" by an appeal to the supplement itself, and so on *ad infinitum*. Writing is revealed to be the disappearance of natural presence, where "presence" is the presence of Nature in Rousseau's understanding of "Nature" as the source of human morality and justice in society. We cannot forget that Derrida's dictum that there is "nothing outside the text" occurs in this discussion of Rousseau and concerns this very exacting definition of "Nature." For Rousseau, Nature bequeaths to human beings an essentially good disposition that

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[37] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1997), 158.

becomes corrupted by social injustices, inequality, property, and the like. The opening

line of *Émile* attests to Rousseau's vision of God-given natural goodness: "God makes all

things good; man meddles with them and they become evil."[38] Also of note regarding

Rousseau is his belief that Nature does not lie, and therefore offers a more certain and

reliable "text" than those written by human beings. He says stridently, "O man, of

whatever country you are, and whatever you opinions may be, behold your history, such

as I have thought to read it, not in books written by your fellow creatures, who are liars,

but in nature, which never lies."[39] It is this view, particular to Modern philosophy in the

18th century, that Derrida is criticizing with his infamous dictum. Kant, once again,

carries Rousseau's philosophy to its logical conclusion, writing that, "…the first

characteristic of the human species is man's ability, as a rational being, to establish

character for himself, as well as for the society into which nature has placed him. This

ability, however, presupposes an already favorable natural predisposition and an

inclination toward the good in man, because evil is really without character (since it as

odds with itself, and since it does not tolerate any lasting principle within itself)."[40] Kant

then goes on to argue that because human beings are the kind of creature that we are –

namely, social, rational, and free – that we are able, unlike the "lower" animals, to thwart

Nature's teleological plan for us. As Kant puts it, "Regardless of the purposes of Nature,

we can assume the principle that she wants every creature to arrive at its own destiny

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[38] Rousseau, *Émile*, trans. Barbara Fowley (North Clarendon: Everyman Library, 1993), 5.

[39] Rousseau, "Discourse on Inequality." *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. G. D. H. Cole (North Clarendon: Everyman Library, 2003), 51.

[40] The following views are put forth by Kant during a discussion of Rousseau in: Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Victor Dowdell (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1996), 246.

through the proper development of all inherent tendencies, so that at least the species, if not every individual, accomplishes Nature's purpose. Among irrational [non-human] animals this actually happens, reflecting Nature's wisdom. But regarding man only, the species reflects this principle."[41] It is this very specific take on Nature and its role or manifestation in human moral-social development at which Derrida takes aim in *Grammatology*. Nature, in Rousseau and Kant's sense, disappears under the trace left by the trail of signifiers, which has no end, and thus, under which "Nature" as the "real mother" of humanity is not even lost, for that would imply that we had hold of her to begin with! Nature in the sense used by the Modern philosophers, was *never* clearly discernable *as such*. It has always only been the chain of historical signifiers through which, as a function of language, meaning is construed – constructed by us. Thus, there is "nothing outside the text," insofar as the supplement offers only an ever-multiplying chain of signifiers into which we are thrown as if into an *abyss*. This abyss is the absence of natural presence, or its erasure to use Derrida's language. But here is the catch. Derrida's argument *only works if we think of presence in terms of representation*. He says, "Representation, *in the abyss* of presence is not an accident of presence; the desire for presence is, on the contrary, born of the abyss (the indefinite multiplication) of representation, from the presentation of representation, etc."[42] To avoid the deconstructionist critique, then, would require two moves, one of which is already underway. First, we cannot mean anything like "Nature" or "natural objects" in the sense used by Modern philosophers such as Kant and Rousseau. Second, we must think beyond

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[41] Kant, *Anthropology*, 246-47.
[42] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 163.

representation as the basis of thought, if not language. Deconstruction must be put into place.

Balzac's printing press cannot be deconstructed. The wallpaper cannot be deconstructed. The Italian philosopher Maurizio Ferraris has already made in-roads toward limiting the reach of deconstruction's power. To "radicalize" Derrida, as has been done in the name of postmodernism to the extent that, as Ferraris puts it, "squirrels are socially constructed," is wrongheaded. Rather, he says, we should "look for the area to which that statement [that there is no outside the text] is truly pertinent." Ferraris argues that this area is the social world.[43] Incorporating Derrida's insight to a level of analysis at which it is most salient allows Ferraris to develop the concept of "documentality," which is a key element of his philosophical New Realism. Ferraris uses documentality to describe the conditions by which social objects emerge, thereby explaining the "social construction" of such objects as underwritten by writing technology. Here, technology means the technique by which anything becomes recordable, and this is the de facto basis of iterability in general.[44] We can deepen this understanding with an insight from Bernard Stiegler on "technics," as, "the domain of skill."[45] We have a skillful recording, one practiced, learned by one that also unfolds across time. Stiegler wants to give an account of "technics *as* time…as a *question of time*."[46] Ferraris' concern with *iterability* also suggests a temporal structure, at least as repetition, if not of the same, then of a likeness.

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[43] Ferraris, *Introduction to New Realism*, trans. Sarah de Sanctis (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 9.
[44] Ferraris, *New Realism*, 63.
[45] Stiegler, *Technics and Time, Vol. 1*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University, 1998), 93.
[46] Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1*, 83.

The historical process of writing these iterations gives rise to the social institutions that are inscribed in jurisprudence, business practices, educational programs, and so on. Documentality provides the basis of archival practices associated with the preservation and maintenance of the recorded social interactions and the documents regulating these interactions.[47] Ferraris also thereby restricts the Derridean tendency to overgeneralize "writing" to include any speech act or any possibly construed inscription of any kind. The recordabilty and iterabilty elements suffice, and always also indicate some intentionality, a language all too human expressing what is always its relation to the world. Thus, a mere speech act, unrecorded through any technic, is not writing. A conversation amongst friends is not writing. If these are recorded, by written word, audio, video, hologram, memorization, whatever means so skillfully deployed, then there is writing. Reading can still be writing by both Ferraris and Stiegler's accounts. This should give us pause when considering Balzac's printing press, if we've followed the gist of the New Realism thus far. In what sense, then, can the printing press be like a "natural object"?

It must be ceded to the deconstructionist that Balzac's printing press appears in literature, and thus is written. It's in the text. That much is obvious. But, to what does Balzac refer when he indicates this particular printing press, the inheritance of David Séchard? Let us take a sentence as an example, describing what a visitor to the printing office might see: "While they gazed at the vault of paper, stretched on ropes, hanging from the ceiling, they stumbled against rows of cases, or had their hats knocked off by the iron bars which held up the presses."[48] Of course, it cannot be that Balzac refers to some

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[47] Ferraris, *New Realism*, 82.
[48] Balzac, *Lost Illusions*, 10.

actual printing press, in the sense that there is some particular printing press in mind, instantiated in physical materials, residing at some specific location, and so forth. The Séchard's press is an invention of Balzac's imagination, *Lost Illusions*, is his creative work. This is a useful ontological distinction – what is *actual*, in the sense of the instantiation of some individual thing in spacetime. Kant understood the actual in distinction to what is *real*, that is, had what Leibniz would call *possibilitas*, the what-content of things in general.[49] In this sense, Balzac's printing press is *real*. But the sentence, taken as a whole, represents a possibility, a scene in a printing room, what might happen trying to traverse that room, its human hazards. The representational aspect of the work of art must be developed. It doesn't immediately leap out. It emerges. There are layers of details, "vaults of paper," that hang from the ceiling, "rows of cases," "iron bars," and taken individually these refer us to actual things. Balzac refers to an actual historical object: a particular kind of press, made in a particular way, with particular materials. It was a press from a particular *place*. It is not that he refers to some historical *individual* press, but that he invokes a particular *kind* of press that is rooted in actual French history. Balzac describes a possible printing press conjured from his imagination. But he nevertheless refers to actual objects in the textual construction of this possible press, that is, sheets of paper, ropes, the ceiling of rooms, iron bars, cases, rows, these all indicate actual things, and their imaginary construal in the scene articulated by Balzac is

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[49] Cf., Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), 74 and 218; Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*, trans. E. M. Huggard (La Salle: Open Court, 1985), 246; Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 274-75 and 566-67; and the treatment in Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1982), 34-35 and 38.

itself real in the sense of mere what-content. The what-content of the Séchard's printing office is an imagined possibility, and real as such, whereas the references made to the bits of stuff making the imagined possibility refer to actual things by which the imagined scene it rendered sensible. It is also to say that these things as they are rendered in the text don't appear any differently than they would if we were to encounter them in actuality. All the usual rules apply to our understanding. We see the danger Balzac intends when he depicts a hat knocked off by an iron bar. An iron bar is really actual. We are to imagine it brought into a possible relation with someone's head. As an idea, that's real enough, and no one gets hurt, though it takes knowing someone would actually get hurt for the possibility to be imagined. I will call this the world's "recalcitrance," or the recalcitrance of the real. I'm going to return to this issue of the "real" in the next Chapter. I must do so in order to avoid a lapse back into the old realist/idealist-subject/object metaphysical paradigm that will bury emplacement if it is uncritically reasserted. We will see that realness is bound up with appearances, and that becomes obvious here, where we are dealing with the appearance of the printing press in the text, its appearance as a real possible object that is recalcitrant. It cannot be deconstructed. It just is whatever it happens to be, a printing press. Such an object has come to be, through its relation to a thoroughly historical set of emplaced individuals, something like a natural object. If it did not appear this way, it would not be possible for the press to serve its metaphorical or symbolic function in the text. Metaphor only works if we are able to take something to be what *it is not*. This means, for the metaphor to work, the thing must *appear to me as what it is*. It is only through an overarching contextual organization that the press, which appears just as a press, can then take on the further signification at play in the symbolic,

could be put into narrative play qua characterization. On that level alone, where a meta-narrative begins to take shape, is the place for deconstruction, because it is on that level that the text begins *to represent something*. The printing press *does not refer to a representation of a printing press*. The printing press is used to build a representation of a possible printing office in the French province of Angoulême.

The printing press is an interesting example because it is a tool, a piece of equipment. The discussion of Heidegger and Nöe in Chapter One is relevant here. We think of the concept as that through which the world is made available. The world is not represented; it is opened to us, made ready for thoughtful action. This is made possible, in part, by the world's recalcitrance. First, Saussure's claim that the relation between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary must be given its proper measure.[50] The claim should be taken at face value – whatever phoneme or grapheme is used to signify a concept, is arbitrarily assigned, and has no "natural" basis in the concept itself. The concept of a tree is as sufficiently indicated by "tree," as by *árbol*, *arbre*, *Baum*, or 木, there is no necessary connection between signifier and signified. However, there is no justification for leaping to the conclusion that, "since there are no fixed universal concepts of fixed universal signifiers, the signified *itself* is arbitrary, and so is the signifier."[51] There is nothing arbitrary in the assignment of *some* sign, though the sign itself be arbitrary, to the concept of a tree, because this concept reveals actual trees in the world that serve a variety of functions that are not themselves dependent on a particular context. A particular culture might make use of a particular kinds of trees in particular

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[50] Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Roy Harris (London: Duckworth, 1983), 67.
[51] Jonathan D. Culler, *Saussure's Theory of Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1986), 32-33

and culturally relative ways in order to shelter their family – but the fact that trees are used to build human shelter is a general one, and so it is no surprise that most, if not all, cultures that associate with tree-like objects have some word or indication that a thing being encountered is a tree-like thing. Trees are recalcitrant. Again, we need not think "natural" in the former Romantic sense of Mother Nature, for it is as natural to say "printing press," as it is *presse d'imprimerie*, *Druckerpresse*, or 印刷機, whatever the situation demands. What those various contingent situations will invariably have in common, however, is the object "printing press," that performs some function that is, admittedly, contingent upon human whims and desires. Thus, even if a given phoneme or grapheme is arbitrary, the concept signified takes a determinative value from the recalcitrance of the world in the face of human interactions, the fundamental way in which the world lends itself to or impedes the intentional actions of human beings. The concept just is this skillful interaction, the fact that I know such and such an interaction can occur or has already, that it is *possible*. That I think "cup" is already an act, and as such indicates the real possibility that I can drink and have drunk, call the cup what you will.[52] It is to be oriented toward cups in a meaningful way. My thinking "cup," in whatever capacity I so choose, is the real possibility of a cup, that is, that I am in a relation to actual things, cups, which open up the domain of actions for which cup is a meaningful constituent. But what would it mean for me to say, then, that cups and printing presses are something like natural objects?

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[52] The idea that "all doing is knowing and all knowing is doing," has been posited and defended in regards to living autopoietic systems that display cognitive function in Humberto Maturana and Franscisco Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding*, trans. Robert Paolucci (Boston: Shambala, 1998).

Philosophers who would radicalize either Derrida or Saussure's dictums are guilty of a category mistake. They subsume concepts under the category of representation. In fact, these are two very different things. If we understand concepts as merely being representations of something perceived, then we make perception dependent on representational schemes. What we perceive is determined by the representation, and we "see" a cup or tree only to the extent that we are able to represent them through a concept. The words we use to signify a thing do not refer to a representational concept. The concept signified by our words are the ways by which we skillfully act in a world that sometimes resists our conceptual schemes. I can use the hand of a screwdriver to hammer in a nail, but that's wrong tool for the job. My neighbor wants me to give their horse a bath so I run it through the car wash. In each case, I've got the wrong idea. My conceptual approach to the issue at hand is off. And the world resists my attempts to fit the square peg into the round hole. Once I get the right idea, my actions begin to meet with less resistance in the world. Ferraris treats what I am calling the recalcitrance of the world by referring to the way in which the world is sometimes not amendable to our concepts. He argues that the "unamendability of the real determines the non-conceptual content of experience. It is a contrastive principle, which manifests the real as non-I."[53] Here, Ferraris leans on Gareth Evans' articulation of the non-conceptual content of experience as being whatever is given through the sense without being rendered linguistically.[54] Evans thinks through the non-conceptual content in terms of

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[53] Ferraris, *New Realism*, 39.
[54] Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (New York: Oxford University, 1982), 122-29; see especially n. 5 on p. 123.

"information," and it is out of this basic, sensibly obtained information that human subjects are able to posit concepts that correspond to the information acquired by the senses. For Evans, non-conceptual content directs a perceptive entity toward their environment in a way that is meaningful in terms of *skillful behavior or activity*.[55] Indeed, Evans goes so far as to say that (non-conceptual) information states about the surrounding environment are not necessarily perceptual *experiences*, that is, they are not something we are *conscious of*, strictly speaking.[56] For our purposes, the key to understanding Evans' (and also Ferraris') treatment of the non-conceptual comes in the following passage: "…it is not thoughts about the experience that matter, but thoughts about the world…we arrive at conscious perceptual experience when sensory input is not only connected to behavioral dispositions…but also serves as the input to a *thinking, concept-applying, and reasoning system*; so that the subject's thoughts, plans, and deliberations are also systematically dependent on the informational properties of the input."[57] In treating concepts as representation, Evans must recognize the barrier thrown up between ourselves and the world. "It's not thoughts about the experiences that matter," he writes, indicating the orientation of thought *toward the world*, and not merely inward, toward projections of its own positing. But, I have argued that concepts are not representational in nature, and have been building an account of concepts in which they function on a more elementary level than representation. In fact, to the extent that human beings represent the world to themselves, they do so only by the possible arrangement of

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[55] Evans, *Varieties of Reference*, 156.
[56] Evans, *Varieties of Reference*, 157.
[57] Evans, *Varieties of Reference*, 158.

concepts according to some assumed logic. All representations are made up of concepts, but concepts themselves do not represent. This is the same as in painting. All paintings are made of dabs and smears of paint, but these are not themselves paintings. However, we say the painting "is red," or "has red in it," just as we say the dab of paint is red. Just so, we think the concept "tree," and can represent a scene with a tree in it, or represent some single tree against an empty background in an act of abstraction. Evans is correct to say that the primary sensible information we receive from the world is always oriented to skillful behavior or activity, but we do not err if we admit that this primary information is conceptual. For us, a concept is not a representation.

For this reason, I must also reject Evans' claim that we are not *conscious* of this basic information. As deployed here, "concept," though it has lost its representational function, still carries with it an implication of experience, because my argument has been precisely that we make *real contact with the world*. Thus, experiences are not experiences of some perceived concepts (nor of a representation). Perception is a mechanism that explains how experience comes about – an account of perception is an account of the relationship between some conscious entity and the world such that experience can occur to the entity. Experience is an experience of the world directly, not as told to myself by myself after the fact. To be conscious-full-stop is just to be aware of the world in general. *Self*-consciousness, then, is the second order thinking about the fact that one is aware as such – it is the experience of taking one's experience as the object of experience. Nevertheless, both Evans and Ferraris are correct when they assess the world's demonstrable effect on the shape and heft of our ideas about it. It is not correct to put concept fully "on the side" of the subject, to make concepts something that the subject

casts over things to give them shape, or a model of the world that might translate what's real into terms the subject can understand. Such a translation would occur on the level of perception. That is why I had made references to telescopes and microscopes. Those tools help to translate different levels of being to us, adapting our perceptual apparatus to the very small or large. Conceptually, it is a matter of scaling, that we navigate our interaction through the instrument as taking a view on such and such a scale, magnified so many times relative to our usual capabilities, determined by our body, its perceptual apparatus, and my environmental situation, historical context, and so on. So it is that I "take a view on" society writ large, a dynastic legacy, or a colony of ants. I can thus think the life-cycle of a star, that a star even has a life; through the concept, though a concept that is just as much "on the side of" the object to which the so-called subject is oriented. The concept is precisely the two in conjunction, that some entity is capable of experiencing *is* in relation to some other entity capable of being experienced. This relation holds even in the eventual absence of that object. And so, I am prepared to answer the question: how is Balzac's printing press like a natural object?

3.5 The Accretion of Things Natural and Technical

We do not perceive concepts. Concepts are a way of explaining how our perceptions orient us to act on and interact with our surroundings. Within *Lost Illusions*, the Séchard's printing office operates on the level of representation. It is a real possibility imagined by Balzac. In order to conjure this representation of a printing office, owned and operated in the province of Angoulême, the author must bring actual concepts into a possible relation by writing them out, such that reading through these relations as iterated in language will established the possible relation of actual objects sufficient to render a

reader aware of such printing offices in Angoulême. Readers are thereby led through a

series of actual objects, referred in sequence to these through a writing technique that

generates a representation in art. Balzac does not present a printing press. He refers to the

printing press to construct a scene, lay out a world into which his characters walk and

take on life. The world Balzac weaves is made up of stuff. Things populate this world and

are the touchstone by which we come to know the world. Things and stuff have histories.

I am going to refer to the general ontological condition that there is something extant in

the world as things. I resist retention of the word "object" because I think this

inadvertently privileges two metaphysical positions that are wrongheaded. First, we are

immediately referred to the subject/object distinction, which has dominated Modern

philosophy into the 20th century and continues to exert inordinate influence on our

concept of certain philosophical problems. But it also is very easy to slip back into the

old comfort of thinking of things in the world as primarily extended objects that take up

space – the substance of matter or material. Further, to talk of "things" is both sufficiently

general to be a useful term for ontology, but it is also, in a way that may seem strange to

a certain school of thought, sufficiently *ambiguous* to be a grounding ontological term.

The details of a thing must be sufficiently ambiguous so that our concept directs us to just

whatever happens or is capable of happening given the kind of experiences we have as

the kind of *things* that we ourselves are. As ontological, all the term "thing" needs to do

is refer us to the general manifestation of individuals, particulars, and any given

relationship between these. Relationships are things in that I can sensibly refer to them.

My usage stems from the Heideggerian tradition, wherein Heidegger ties "the thing" to

ontological differentiation, and also shows the thing to be an entry into world – the thing

is that worldly entity most near to us, appearing to us *as thing*.[58] However, I do want to

drive in my own direction, away from the superficial mysticism of Heidegger's

"fourfold," a rhetorical device of Heidegger's that will not serve us here. More to our

concerns are Heidegger remarks, made in a 1935-36 winter seminar, that, "The question

'What is a thing?' is the question 'Who is man?' That does not mean that things become

a human product (*Gemächte*), but, on the contrary, it means that man is to be understood

as he who always already leads beyond things, but in such a way that this leaping-beyond

is possible while things encounter and so precisely remain themselves – while they send

us back behind ourselves and our surface."[59] I might get to "justice," a certain relation,

perhaps an "abstract concept" in some ways, but I arrive there through the real bodies of

people involved, their relationships to a judiciary and legislative body and practice, that is

inscribed and reified by the history of these things, the historical dynamics of the

relations, and the concrete objects that are extended in space and so on, which in their

own way serve to constitute the just or unjust situation as a whole. Ontology, in its

generality, must be able to talk about all sorts of things. And thus, things as a terms must,

for now, be sufficiently defined in order to serve some technical purpose, while

remaining sufficiently ambiguous so as to be generally applicable in the manner

appropriate to ontology. Now we can give an account of how things come about. As I've

indicated, it is an historical process, and things generally tend to be built up over a period

of time. The technical term for this process will be accretion. Things accrete. Thinking in

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[58] Heidegger, "The Thing." *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight Into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking*, trans. Andrew J. Mitchell (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2012), 5-22.
[59] Heidegger, *What is a Thing?* trans. W. B. Barton, Jr. and Vera Deutsch (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1967), 244.

this way retains our emphasis on place as the unity of space and time. To come into a spatial relation requires temporalizing. To be a thing is to be busy being that thing – to be sustained as the thing that is. Thus, persistence as well as change invoke time, but also construed over a spatial dimension. This is still not to reduce everything to bare physics. With this sketch of a technical definition of "thing," let's address the issue of natural objects.

Balzac's printing press appears as something like a natural object. It is, first of all, a thing, and as such, is real. But we can say more. It is an object, in the sense that it is indeed extended, with mass and all that. Objects can be thought of here as physical objects, rendering that specific phrase redundant. Any conceivable printing press bears the marks of being an extended thing, taking up space, so to speak, and it is also a reliable sort of thing that persists over time, spoken to in the solidity of its extended appearance. All of this, again, just to say that things like printing presses are real things that we understand by virtue of our accessibility to things, our basic ability to skillfully navigate the world in which a thing such as a printing press can be. To get at my basic position, we don't really even need to think of the press as an object. We could simply bracket the press' "objectivity," and withhold for the sake of argument that it is extended and so on, that it has those physical properties and the like. Nevertheless, when Balzac describes the press, we get it. The idea is conveyed and we make sense of the scene he constructs and in which the press figures. We don't stumble. It is easy, given the level of detail provided by Balzac, to render a representation of this printing office in Angoulême. This approaches my meaning if we are to have an adequate understanding of what in the world a "natural object" could be, given the placial ontology as our new beginning.

Instead of narrowly thinking of "objects," let's take a more open term, things, and see how things are in place. I have already begun to elaborate oscillation, so we must bear in mind this basic movement of emplacement. Oscillation is ontologically prior – it is the other first decision, the movement of the opening of place that is the ground of things in their very showing forth, the movement that makes what is available and is the scene whereby what appears can appear to what is given appearance. As historical, things accrete in the wake of the movement of emplacement. As oscillation unfolds and differentiates, the relative motion of places begins to build a trace, begins to accumulate a condensate, and the thing stands in the aftermath of the gathering of place; the spatiotemporal sediment aggregated by the play of oscillation through which things become emplaced. If we are thinking through oscillation, and with it as a grounding concept, then we are already in the midst of an historical ontology. Ian Hacking has described and argued for an historical ontology in which "concepts have their being in historical sites. The logical relations among them were formed in time, and they cannot be perceived correctly unless their temporal dimensions are kept in view."[60] Of course, we must augment Hacking's statement with our own, reworked theory of the concept. Regardless of this substitution, as historical ontology, placial ontology follows Hacking's observation, already incorporating emphasis on time by acknowledging the deep interconnection of spacetime. We now have a set of issues to work with, as I have been outlining them in the current Chapter. Thus, I can also endorse Hacking's statement that historical ontology, "would show how to understand, *act out*, and resolve present

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[60] Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2004), 25.

problems, even when in doing so it generated new ones" [emphasis added].[61] Things, then, have their historical sites, their places, and we must keep this in view. As historical, things have, always, some procession, long or short, during which they unfurl themselves in the world, and at the end of which they withdrawal again, variously disintegrating or bursting apart as they cease to be the thing that they were. Things are finite. Things come into being over time, building up over the course of their duration. Things are accreted. Accretion describes the cumulative effect of oscillation whereby things come to stand-out as the particular things that they are, and become individuated as a result of their unique play taking shape in place as history. Accretion occurs in two basic ways, and this will be the key to understanding how it is that things could be anything like "natural."

The two kinds of things that accrete in oscillation are natural and technical. Perhaps it is obvious at this point, but I do not mean by "nature" anything like "the source of all that is," or the "totality of all things," or "the domain of all domains," or even, "what stands outside of human created things." I will get more into the details of the traditional, metaphysical problems of "nature" in the next Chapter. By "nature," I here mean something very simple that has nothing to do with any sort of absolute totality or "independence" from human endeavors. I'm skeptical of whatever it is that philosopher's hope to achieve by this "independence," that bugbear of the realists, which will be given full consideration in due course. In antiquity, the Latin *natura* meant "birth." We know it later incorporated the meaning of the Greek *phusis*, which also has a sense relevant here, that is, the original one, relating to the intrinsic properties of plants, animals, and

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[61] Hacking, *Historical Ontology*, 24.

whatever appears in the world as they develop of their own accord. So by "natural," I

mean whatever comes into being of its own accord. Try not to read "of its own accord" as

a statement of intentionality or agency. By "of its own accord," I mean to say that it

emerges from the relations it has in place, the result of oscillations which have not come

under the regulatory principle of a determinate thing – that are not subject to some logic,

that is, the ordering principle of a thing. So rocks and streams and meadows are natural

things, and bugs and birds and human beings are natural things, just as snowflakes, and

raindrops, and clouds are natural things. Really, "nature" as used in everyday speech is

not a bad indicator of what might be, in this philosophical sense, "natural," but I have

rendered a sufficiently specific definition for our purposes here. What is technical, on the

other hand, emerges from the practices of natural things that fall under some logic, or

organizing principle – such as the logic of life, biology. At this stage, *autopoiesis*

becomes formative. I signaled the significance of this idea back in Chapter One, and it is

now time to discuss, briefly, its relevance. The Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana

and Francisco Varela give a working definition of "autopoiesis" as follows:

> An autopoietic machine is a machine organized (defined as a unity) as a
> network of processes of production (transformation and destruction) of
> components which (i) through their interactions and transformations
> continuously regenerate and realize the network of processes (relations) that
> produce them; and (ii) constitute it (the machine) as a concrete unity in
> space in which they (the components) exist by specifying the topological
> domain of its realization as such a network.[62]

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[62] Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1980), 81.

In this language, we might say that technical things are the products of autopoietic machines. They are things that are the result of these networks of processes that take shape according to those processes, but that then become *detached* from those processes and are capable of standing and perduring on their own *without the support of the machine that produced them* and *even if the autopoietic site of production is totally destroyed or ceases to be*. In short, autopoiesis is a description of the self-sustaining activity of *living* things, living things being natural things in our placial ontology, and living things, as products of their living practices, accrete technical things. Technical things have a second order temporal position after natural things, but that in no way reduces their ontological significance. Natural things are only prior to technical things in the order of their temporal appearance. Ontologically speaking, they are on level ground. But this leads to an interesting phenomenon from the epistemological perspective. What we have is the peculiar result that technical things don't appear as fundamentally different from natural things.

Think of the appearance of a cup in a room. We could even think of a cup and a rock sitting together on a table. Upon seeing these things, they appear just as they are, a rock and a cup, nothing immediately jumps out, unless we begin to consider the matter further. Change the setting. Think of coming upon an old cup in the forest, perhaps during a hike or however it is one finds oneself in a forest. The cup may be found in a pile of rocks, yet we see the cup as a cup, and the rocks as rocks and all this different from the dead leaves strewn around and the trees that dropped them. We experience all these things *as something*, just so, without having to make all the further logical distinctions between the kinds of things they are. I chose a cup, but any sufficiently

familiar thing will do. Familiarity is key to understanding the phenomena in question, because it takes a sufficiently robust *history* for things to appear to us *as such*. For instance, even if I have never personally seen a printing press, printing presses are things with a sufficiently robust history, integral to the production of an extremely widespread technology – the production of writing – that, even without a direct personal experience of one, a printing press can appear as just one thing among others, without any further thought given to the kind of thing it is. The printing press, insofar as we encounter it, just is as it is. It *seems like* a natural object just by virtue of its deep historical constitution. Now, consider the launch of the iPhone. The major question posed upon the launch of the new technology was: what is it? Is it a phone, a device for playing music, a gaming platform, all of these? Or none of them? The thing is ostensibly a phone, but it goes far beyond that function in terms of its use, and it is arguable that a phone conversation is actually pretty low on the list of the device's popular uses. The iPhone was, unmistakably, a technical thing. But now, after years of use and incorporation into all facets of life, including our entertainment and art, the iPhone just appears as an iPhone. Its distinctive design, as well as its ubiquitous appearance in society and culture, allows us to see it just for what it is, an iPhone, and understand it as a multi-tool, its own thing, so to speak, and no longer ponder over just what in the world that thing is anyway. That process took time. It took time for us to see this new thing just as another thing that is what it is. The iPhone, over time, achieved its robust thinghood. Now that we take it for granted, the iPhone might appear just as natural things do. This is how it is possible for Balzac's printing press to appear *as* something *like* a natural object. It is not, ontologically speaking, a "natural thing," it is in fact a technical thing, but

phenomenologically, our placial ontology, as historical, can explain how it is possible for things to appear just as they are, on the same level as anything else, natural or otherwise.

Spider-webs, beaver dams, and bird's nests are all technical things. Spiders, beavers, and birds are natural things capable of producing other things, technical things, that have the structure of being in-order-to do something in the natural life of things. Heidegger's treatment of *pragmata* in section 15 of *Being and Time* is again relevant to the point. Technical things will always point us back toward their origin in a living autopoietic process. Thus, upon the discovery of some technical thing, we can begin to trace that thing back to its origin in some technique. Thus, the spiders' webs are differentiated according to differing species and their habitats. Birds' nests differ, again, according to species and the materials furnished by the environment – the affordances – for nest building. In part, this is due to the fact that living things produce the technical as a means of continuing their life, and the technical, on such an account, is an extension of the autopoietic process itself, an "externalization" of the living mechanism that is capable of standing on its own and used extraneous to any given autopoietic system. Many different people could use one hammer, and a bird might abandon a particular nest, or return to find it occupied by usurpers. The technical thing has an established independence from the circumstances of its production, though those circumstances will always be involved in the life of some autopoietic system – that is, some living thing. What is living, as such, maintains itself as what it is through directed activity. Through Maturana and Varela, I come back to the Nietzschean insight of life as a will to power, as he put it, "A multiplicity of forces, connected by a common mode of nutrition, we call

'life'."[63] The nutritional aspect here is captured by those "interactions and transformations that continuously regenerate and realize the network of processes (relations) that produce them," as Maturana and Varela say.[64] With the placial ontology and its basic emplacement by oscillation, I am making a philosophical attempt at, "specifying the topological domain of its realization as such a network."[65] The Nietzschean roots of such an attempt can be traced back to my earlier work on personal identity and the metaphysics of freedom.[66] We will find an affinity between my use of autopoiesis and Nietzsche's use of the will to power (a concept we do not need to adopt as such) as the principle of life, which he explains as something that "defines limits, determines degrees, variations of power."[67] We see autopoiesis when Nietzsche writes that life would be defined, "as an *enduring form* of *processes* of the establishment of force, in which the different contenders grow equally," [emphasis added], and also that life can "manifest itself only against resistances; therefore it sees that which resists it – this is the primeval tendency of the protoplasm when it extends pseudopodia and feels about."[68] We come full circle, back to the driving force behind Balzac's realism and the need to constitute that realism through descriptions that are thoroughly grounded in place: the need to depict an intensity of *life*. What I am calling the recalcitrance of the world is, indeed, part of the resistance indicated by Nietzsche and necessary to the regeneration

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[63] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), 341.
[64] Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, 81.
[65] Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, 81.
[66] Cf., "Interlude," and "The Free Spirit Parallax," as well as the Third Study of the title essay in Irven, *The Ontological I and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Streisguth/Martin, 2012).
[67] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 342.
[68] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 342 and 346.

and realization of a self-sustaining system. The world is just as recalcitrant to a spider, beaver, or bird as it is to humans, and, of course, to the protoplasm's pseudopodia.

Moving forward, we have the account of things as given above: things accrete, and accretion is the historical process of oscillation by which things get built up. Accretion generates two basic sorts of things – those natural and technical. Though the technical may depend upon the natural in order to be produced, the technical nevertheless attains, as a culmination of the productive process, an independence and ontological stature equal to that of any natural thing.

3.6 The Power of Place in William Faulkner

We are now prepared to move away from Balzac toward the work of William Faulkner. In the next Chapter, Faulkner's 1936 novel *Absalom, Absalom!* will serve as a case study for the placial ontology and the play of oscillation. For now, we must take a broader approach to Faulkner and his Yoknapatawpha county. First, a little comparative work to tease out what we have gained from Balzac. We will see that Faulkner is indebted to Balzac, that much is well established in the literary criticism. But the philosophically salient advances made by Faulkner over his French precursor have never been uncovered and certainly, the ontology implicit in the construction of Yoknapatawpha is completely beyond the purview of literary theory.

The influence of Balzac on Faulkner is well known and, it has been argued, formidable.[69] Faulkner read Balzac's works aloud with his friends Phil Stone and Bess

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[69] The Balzac-Faulkner mini-industry was perhaps initiated by Malcolm Cowlry, "William Faulkner's Human Comedy." *New York Times Book Review* (29 October 1944), 4. Book-length studies were conducted in Carol Colatrella, *Evolution, Sacrifice, and Narrative: Balzac, Zola, and Faulkner* (New York: Garland, 1990); and, Merrill Horton, *Hunting the Sun: Faulkner's Appropriations of Balzac's Writings* in *Modern American Literature, Vol. 55* (New York: Lang,

Storer. As a result of these readings, Faulkner conceived of the idea to re-work Balzac; to

give him, in Stone's words, "a new coat."[70] However, Faulkner might have

"appropriated" Balzac, we must take note of a great difference that will be the focus of

our philosophical investigation. For us, it is essential that Faulkner makes substantial

strides away from Balzac's form in his advanced treatment of *time*. When it comes to the

concept of time, Faulkner finds his inspiration elsewhere. He was keen to set up an

interview with the physicist Albert Einstein, as James Merriwether reports to Horton.[71]

But an in-depth conversation never transpired, despite the fact that Faulkner did indeed

meet Einstein at a party hosted by the Comminses at Princeton toward the end of 1953.[72]

Nevertheless, Faulkner was certainly concerned with time, not only with Einstein and the

physical notion of spacetime, but also with the philosophical positions of Henri Bergson.

Faulkner was, at the very least, familiar with Bergon's *Creative Evolution*. Faulkner is

known to have told the Memphis-based writer Joan Williams that Bergon's book had

"helped" him, and he inscribed "Don't work too hard at it, but read it," in her copy of

Creative Evolution.[73] His interest in the philosophical concept of time, or rather, the

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2010). See also the following journal articles: Roxandra V. Antoniadis, "Faulkner and Balzac:
The Poetic Web." *Comparative Literature Studies*, 9:3 (September 1972), 303-325; Jacques
Pothier, "The Designs of Faulkner's 'Yoknapatawpha Saga' and Balzac's Human Comedy."
Faulkner Journal, 13:1-2 (Fall 1997-Spring 1998), 111-32; Merrill Horton, "Balzacian Evolution
and the Origin of the Snopeses." *Southern Literary Journal*, 33:1 (Fall 2000), 55-81; Merrill
Horton, "Balzac, Faulkner, and the Word." *Faulkner Journal*, 19:2 (Spring 2004), 91-106; David
Walter, "Strange Attractions: Sibling Love triangles in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and
Balzac's *La Fille aux Yeuz d'Or*." *Comparative Literature Studies*, 44:4 (2007), 484-506.
[70] Louis Daniel Brodsky and Robert W. Hamblin, eds. *Faulkner: A Comprehensive Guide to the
Brodsky Collection, Vol. 2* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1984), 192
[71] Horton, *Hunting the Sun*, note 12 page 6.
[72] Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* (Jackson: Jackson: University Press of Mississippi,
2005), 578.
[73] Rober Hamblin and Charles Peek, eds., *A Faulkner Encyclopedia* (Westport: Greenwood,
1999), 38-39.

radical changes that the concept of time underwent in the early 20th century, no doubt

drove Faulkner beyond the strictly linear time that unfolds in Balzac's writings.

In fact, I began with Balzac in part *because* his conception of time is linear, as

opposed to Faulkner's multi-valenced depictions of time. Balzac's realism opens an

avenue toward understanding the accretion of things and their basic historical

constitution. Through their linear progress, Balzac compellingly illustrates the

accumulative procedure of place-building and the centrality of emplacement to

characterization, plot development, and representation, which only arises at an advanced

stage, brought into being by a complex of concepts in possible relations. *Lost Illusions*

allowed us to approach things, because it has its peculiar origin in the appearance of a

particular printing press in the imagined offices of the Séchards. There, the thing

provided an historical anchor, a point that moored the story in a particular place, set in

particular spatial relations to other places and at a particular juncture of time in French

society. Faulkner performs similar constructive gestures, but we are not so easily led

from the start. With Faulkner, we very often have *no moorings*, no set anchor that

delineates a clear avenue into the text. This, strangely, only increases the realism of

Faulkner's texts precisely where we least expect it. For Balzac, the world had a straight

forward (temporal) appearance – as if time itself was something that moved in a line

through some spatial dimension. Faulkner throws us into the maelstrom, where we are

left to put the pieces into place ourselves, often without direct clues as to their ultimate

placement. The reason this is *more realistic*, I will show, has to do with the collapse of

the subject-object dichotomy in the moment that space and time are unified in place.

Without space for itself and time for itself, the subjective and objective have no domains

over which they reign, and the ecstatic unity of spacetime in place shows the subject to be already "outside" itself, in the world as one sort of thing among others. Thus, Faulkner is more realistic because he strives to depict the human being as she is in herself, in addition to depicting the recalcitrance of the world in the face of human design. Faulkner is more metaphysical in his basic position – a comprehensive position. There are, then, descriptions of real things in Faulkner, just as in Balzac, that are shown taking form through historical accretion, but the intensity with which Faulkner is able to present the life of his characters, due to his particular emphasis on their "inner" conscious lives and the dynamic interconnection between the "inner" and the "outer" as they mutually formulate one another, achieves a philosophical rigor previously unheard of, except, maybe, in James Joyce, or Virginia Woolf.[74] Again, my focus here is on the play of time and the reformation of the concept of time that was a widespread philosophical concern in the early 20th century, and which can readily be seen in Faulkner's art.

My application of the term "realism" to Faulkner will be an idiosyncratic one to literary theorists. There has been a dissertation on magical realism in Faulkner, Márquez, and Morrison.[75] Otherwise, realism is, again, treated as a technique whereby pop cultural "facts" and details are listed off as a way to heighten the "realism" of a novel by making sure we all know when and where the action is taking place. And, again, this type of realistic place-setting is just a backdrop, the details no more than a flourish on a set

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[74] This view is approached, but the philosophical insight remains undeveloped, in Marijke Rijsberman, "Interior Viewpoints and Psychological Realism in Some Faulkner Novels." *Neophilologus,* 68:1 (January 1984), 150-59.
[75] L. Tamara Kendig, "Dreaming of Home: Magic Realism in William Faulkner, Gabriel Garcia Márquez, Toni Morrison, and John Nichols." Order No. 9833169, Lehigh University, 1998.

designed to make the characters come off as believable.[76] More often, Faulkner's

experimental style and his application of the stream of consciousness technique are

labeled as anti-realist.[77] However, if we read the literature carefully, we can see that there

is a sharp difference now between the *way the critics treat* realism – on the one hand, as

part of a descriptive technique deployed to make readers accept the story and characters

as true to life, and on the other, as an epistemological stance oriented around the subject-

object distinction whereby the readers are able to see the characters questioning the world

"out there" by the way the author now depicts the details of their "inner" life. This

confusion, wholly unacknowledged, harkens back to Chapter Two's discussion of

postmodernism and Modernism with Faulkner teetering on the edge of modernity itself,

sometimes read as the site of the transformation from Modernism to postmodernism![78] As

we shall see, part of the power of Faulkner is exactly this tendency to complicate things.

Since it has been made clear that the Modernists generally complexify and undermine the

very distinction upon which the subject/object (and hence, philosophical

realism/idealism) operates, I'm going to jettison this consideration within the literature to

focus on the descriptive-phenomenological technique of a methodological realism. This

will help make sense of the stream of consciousness technique, as well as aid in our

approach to the increasingly messy temporal relations that we find in Modernism, and

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[76] As in Ted Atkinson, "Faulkner on the Mississippi: Popular Currents of Realism in *If I Forget Thee Jerusalem*." *The Southern Quarterly*, 52:3 (Spring 2015), 46-61.

[77] For a paradigmatic example, see Marguerite Alexander, *Flights from Realism: Themes and Strategies in Postmodern British and American Fiction* (New York: Edward Arnold, 1990), but also the emphasis on the "supernatural" that pervades pieces like Peter Ramos, "Beyond Silence and Realism: Trauma and the Function of Ghosts in *Absalom, Absalom!* and *Beloved*." *The Faulkner Journal*, 23:3 (Spring 2008), 47-66.

[78] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 10.

Faulkner in particular. Recall Nisly's assessment of Dostoevsky's underground man,

discussed in Chapter One, and we can see Faulkner himself may be such a man, a

"paradoxicalist, a complexifier, one who can never treat any issue simply."[79] In fact, in

Modernism we can see the nascent deconstructive slogan that there really is nothing that

is simple. This is a strength of Faulkner's, not a flaw. Even now, the underground

discourse remains at work, drawing upon the ontological undercurrent in literature to

sustain the drive to another beginning – one staged in parodic homage with the refuse of

those built before.

Let us consider the accretion of things in Faulkner's work, and the strange

complexification of things by the ecstatic unity of spacetime in place.

3.7 Building Yoknapatawpha, One Thing at a Time

The flight of Caddy Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* is a good starting point

for our analysis of place in Yoknapatawpha County. The Compsons are a Southern

family thrown on hard times as their ancestral estate is whittled away, and their lineage

falls into disrepute. One brother, Benjy, is mentally handicapped – a fact interpreted by

most of the family to be punishment for their sins – and his parcel of land is ultimately

sold off to a golf course. The sister, Caddy, is cast in an iconic image climbing a tree in

order to spy on the scene of her grandmother's funeral, while her brother Jason and the

servant's children watch from below and see the sister's underwear muddied from

playing in the creek. Her actions create a scene to be repeated again by her daughter

Quentin, the repetition of the act of flight her legacy, but one that perpetuates the

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[79] Nisly, "A Modernist Impulse," 153.

abandonment of the old ways of Southern family life, which the conservative and even reactionary Compson brothers struggle to maintain in the face of a cultural crisis. Of course, it would be better if everyone could ignore the transgression of the sister, if she could come and go unnoticed, without drawing attention to herself. But she is given away by the world's recalcitrance.

The famous opening section takes place from Benjy's perspective and is dated April 7, 1928. Benjy is thirty-three years old. He walks along the fence that borders the golf course with Luster, one of the Compson's servants who is tasked with supervising Benjy. In order to render Benjy's point of view, much of this section is written in simple, declarative statements with a pointed lack of motive ascription. Benjy doesn't take much note of people's intentions. Things, from Benjy's perspective, just happen. A comparison to Impressionism in painting is useful – Faulkner gives a sense of the action, a simplified, yet vibrant encounter with things passing in succession. Again, the place is foundational. The fence by the golf course refers us to the Compson's land, and Benjy's literal position across the fence from it gives us the image of him barred from the land, his birthright inaccessible to him, and Benjy himself unable to acknowledge the claim. Further, Benjy waits for the golfers to call for their caddies. The homophone "caddie" refers also to Benjy's sister Candace, who is his favorite sibling, and certainly the one who is nicest to Benjy from the reader's perspective; but Benjy himself never expresses his love for Caddy in terms of what she does or how she treats him. He just loves her, and associates her with nature sensations – dry leaves, the earth.

The temporal structure of Benjy's sequence is complex to the extreme. Words and events on the day of April 7 trigger memories that Benjy vividly inhabits, and the

narration turns sharply on these significations, dropping the reader abruptly into different past timeframes associated with the events of April 7 by whatever triggered the memory. More to the point here, these significations all arise out of the emplacement of the Compsons on the land, in Yoknapatawpha, with the golf course and so on. The basic emplacement in Yoknapatawpha County also constitutes the appearance of things as such within the text. The first diversion into the past comes when Benjy gets snagged on a loose nail as he passes through a gap in the fence with Luster. Luster unsnags Benjy, and this triggers Benjy's memory of Caddy unsnagging him in the same place when they were children, on the day of their grandmother's funeral.[80] This first diversion sets up Caddy's defiance of her brother's authority, her getting muddy in the creek, and her power over the family members who both adore and wish to protect Caddy, but inadvertently lord over her in the controlling manner of would-be patriarchs. Benjy's reveries are punctuated by snippets of scenes from the Compson property; its barn falling into disrepair as a commentary on the state of the family, and Benjy's muted desire to walk by the golf course to hear the call "Caddie!"[81] As we dip in and out of these different past timeframes, which include not only the day of their grandmother's funeral, but also the day Benjy's name was changed from Maury, after his uncle, to Benjamin upon the discovery of his handicap, we are given fleeting insight into the family history, the social dynamics of the time, and the obsession with Caddy and her cleanliness; the focus on the sister's purity that remains the center of the novel throughout. We discover that Caddy's illegitimate daughter is named after one of her brothers, Quentin, who was

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[80] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), 4.
[81] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, 12.

spared the sight of his sister's muddied drawers, thus preserving her innocence in his

eyes, and whose perspective on June 2, 1910 is featured in the second section of the

novel, the day of brother Quentin's suicide. Daughter Quentin, and the repetition of her

mother's defiance, feature prominently in Benjy's perspective on April 7, 1928. I want to

turn there and look closely at how particular things appear in this text, heavily laden with

the significance of the arc of time from the very beginning. I have provided much more

exegesis here than Faulkner does leading up to the scene I am about to analyze. It is

important to keep this in mind, because Faulkner's style is a huge departure from

Balzac's linearity. Balzac narrows his focus until he finds a clear path and then follows

that path. He gives us the printing press, and uses the cultural history of that thing within

the printing industry in France at the time to place the Séchards and Lucien, constituting

their characters through the historical accretion of details about their emplacement.

Faulkner throws us into Benjy's perspective, sends us on a series of detours that briefly

illuminate scenes spread across time, but gives us pinpoint access to moments of great

significance, whose meaning plays out over time. Balzac explained all this up front, with

plenty of place-setting exposition. In Faulkner, the payoff comes much later, after the

intense, disorienting, and, to be plain, really difficult reading of the first two sections.

Nevertheless, even when the reader is unaware of the full significance, we see things

appearing in the text in the same natural way that my analysis of Balzac's printing press

made clear. Let us look at a small collection of things found in Yoknapatawpha.

From Benjy's perspective on April 7, 1928, we see Luster looking along the fence

for a quarter he lost. Luster wants to see a musical show, but needs the quarter to be able

to pay his way. He is supposed to be watching Benjy, but gets distracted in his search for

the quarter. Caddy is in exile in this timeframe, but she has left her daughter Quentin at the Compson family home with the promise that she will send money to help care for the daughter. Benjy, between memories, happens upon Quentin and a nameless young man from the traveling show whom Benjy identifies by the red tie he wears. Benjy makes an awkward scene, wanting to hang around Quentin and the man as they sit together on a swing, until Luster intervenes. The man with the red tie tries to trick Benjy into burning himself with a match. Quentin stops him, gets aggravated with the whole scene, and runs off into the house, leaving Luster to explain his lost quarter to the man with the red tie.[82] Luster tries to sell the man with the red tie a golf ball for a quarter when the following exchange occurs:

> "You don't want to buy no golf ball neither, does you." Luster said.
> "What kind of ball?" he said.
> "Golf ball." Luster said. "I don't want but a quarter."
> "What for." he said. "What do I want with it."
> "I didn't think you did." Luster said. "Come on here mulehead." he said. "Come on here and watch them knocking that ball. Here. Here something you can play with along with that jimsom weed." Luster picked it up and gave it to me. It was bright.
> "Where'd you get that." he said. His tie was red in the sun, walking.
> "Found it under this here bush." Luster said. "I thought for a minute it was a quarter I lost."
> He came and took it.
> "Agnes Mabel Becky." he said. He looked toward the house.
> "Hush." Luster said. "He's fixin to give it back."
> He gave it to me and I hushed.
> "Who came to see her last night." he said.
> "I don't know." Luster said. "They comes every night she can climb down that tree. I don't keep no track of them."[83]

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[82] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, 48-49.
[83] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, 50.

As Faulkner writes it, there are three non-human things of significance in this scene. There is the quarter, golf balls, and a semi-mysterious, bright thing, about quarter sized, identified by the proper names "Agnes Mabel Becky." Most contemporary readers have no immediate way of telling exactly what the third thing is. This break down of easy identification is exactly what we need to consider. Its philosophical significance is crucial.

The thing is not named as such. It is quarter-sized, bright. "Agnes Mabel Becky" signifies the thing only insofar as it indicates something written down, displayed on the thing and read by the man in the red tie. Readers at the time would have been more ready to identify the thing as a tin in which the 3 Merry Widows brand of condoms were packaged. Even without a direct identification of the thing as exactly what it is, the condom tin emerges out of its relations, and refers us ultimately to the sexual promiscuity of Quinten. The 3 Merry Widows brand came in small tins that were stamped with the brand name, along with the names "Anges – Mabel – Beckie." Luster has given Benjy this discarded tin to placate him. We contemporary readers struggle more with the historical distance between the widespread use of this particular brand and ourselves, who would now easily recognize Trojan (an odd and symbolically loaded brand name itself…). We have here the opposite situation from the iPhone example discussed above. The significance of this particular thing deteriorated over time, losing its easy and natural identification for readers in the 21st century. Notice too how Faulkner, or his editors, varied the spelling of "Beckie." This variation is a minor point, but one that reinforces the arbitrariness of the signifier while simultaneously revealing the recalcitrance of the thing itself. Further, though the thing is not really referred to as such, the fact of its use as a

prophylactic signals to readers, through the reaction of the characters to its appearance, the web of sexual politics that so dominate the Compson family and is the singular legacy of daughter Quentin, who unknowingly repeats the actions of her mother in the shadow of her namesake's suicide. Not only does this thing, which is not referred to as such, still manage to refer us to a real historical object even in its absence and, through this reference, indicates the tangle of human sexuality, it also orients the characters (and readers) to the broader historical context of this particular place – the Compson family home. With Benjy as our first source, we are able to bounce around the timeline of this history, gleaning bits and pieces of the story as we go. Thus, with the 3 Merry Widows tin, Faulkner discovers the oscillation that occurs even in the absence of a stable signifier; that the thing still emerges through the play of its absence and presence, and attains stability as what it is through the series of significations rooted in historical place. The tin was found in a bush, after all. It was uncovered, just we seek to uncover the details of the Compson family drama, or recover them from the complexities of Benjy's temporal juxtapositions. Whether or not Faulkner could have realized it, he has enacted a scene wherein readers, especially contemporary ones, must piece together the significance of a particular thing in the same way we must piece together the overarching history of the Compson drama. In the Chapters to follow, we will touch upon the philosophical relevance of synecdoche, where a part stands for the whole, but for now we can see this scene as a structural synecdoche for the organization of the whole novel. The pieces can fall into place exactly because of the web of references given throughout the text as a whole and which signal the thing's involvement in the sexual politics of the South, and specifically tie the Compson family turmoil to this elaborate politics. Indeed, the

appearance of the condom in the scene already indicates the advanced stage of this

drama. Perhaps Quentin repeats her mother's rebellion, but she has the cultural tools

available to thwart an unwanted pregnancy of which she is herself the result. Caddy had

no such access to condoms, and the appearance of this thing here reveals yet a different

flight – not a flight from the South, or from the surveillance of the brothers, but a flight

from the repetition of the sins themselves. The thing, as what it is, offers a way out for

Miss Quentin, a way out that is very different, both from Caddy's exile *and brother/uncle*

Quentin's suicide. Thus, the thing, and its stubborn recalcitrance, conditions the very

possibility of Miss Quentin's future in Yoknapatawpha, whatever future that may be.

Faulkner conceals these intricacies of place behind the simple expressions of Benjy's

experience, but strangely, this apparent simplicity is itself concealed behind the

complexity of the temporal trajectory we wend through the text.

And then there's the issue of the red tie. We are tempted, because of Faulkner's

emphasis on the Compson's policing of female sexuality, to think that Quentin and the

mystery man from the traveling show are engaged in some sort of necking or heavy

petting. Faulkner sort of implies this when he writes, "*I kept a telling you to stay away*

from there, Luster said. They sat up in the swing quick. Quentin had her hands on her

hair. He had a red tie."[84] As Luster comes upon the trio, the man and Quentin sit up,

implying a reclining position, and Quentin's hands are on her hair, suggesting it may

have been tousled. But Michelle Ann Abate makes a compelling argument that the man's

red tie is meant to signal him as a homosexual, thereby further disrupting the sexual

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[84] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, 48.

policies of Yoknapatawpha, and the American South in general.[85] As we will see when we take on *Absalom, Absalom!*, things not only accrete, they also disintegrate – or sometimes, explode. It is not just that things come into being and stabilize. There are also processes of decay and erosion that result from the play of oscillation. Just as the condom opens Quentin to the possibility of breaking from the repetition of her mother's path, the red tie could open the possibility of another kind of relationship, not just between Quentin and men, but between men and women generally. Faulkner deploys homosocial relations as the site of cultural transformation, transformation that means, for many, the destruction of a way of life seen by those who inhabit Yoknapatawpha as the only valid tradition. A ready connection is made to the brothers Buck and Buddy in both *Go Down, Moses* and *The Unvanquished*. In *The Unvanquished*, Faulkner writes of the brothers' (at least) homosocial lifestyle, "Father said that they were ahead of their time; he said that they not only possess, but put into practice, ideas about social relationships that maybe fifty years after they were both dead people would have a name for."[86] We could easily apply that sentiment here, to Miss Quentin and her companion. With these examples, we should see that complex historical and social relations are brought about and signified by an elaborate interplay between things natural and technical, between the places things occupy, places inhabited by people and their creations upon which are built the array of socio-political institutions that shape their lives.

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[85] Abate, "Reading Red: The Man with the (Gay) Red Tie in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*." *Mississippi Quarterly*, 54:3 (Summer 2001), 293-312.
[86] Faulkner, *The Unvanquished* (New York: Vintage INterntional, 1991), 48.

Faulkner plays out a subtle parody of those institutions, often behind the backs of his own characters. Jason Compson, Caddy's reactionary brother, later wonders, "what the hell kind of man would wear a red tie?"[87] What kind of man indeed. We may never know for certain, though Abates analysis leads us to consider that, "even though Miss Quentin's escape signals the end of the 'old' Compson line, it may simultaneously mark the beginning of an entirely new order."[88] Perhaps in fifty years there will be a name for it – for this other beginning. Certainly, Jason's comments come just as Miss Quentin prepares her escape, on Easter Sunday, no less, if not a resurrection, then at least the emergence of something new from out of the old. It is not simply that these things constitute life in Yoknapatawpha. Rather, it is that the historical play of things *is* exactly their generation and constitution as such. As things fall apart, something new emerges from the significations that spin off from the collapsing structures. If all that is solid eventually melts into air, then all that is solid also condenses from air in its time.

Keeping with Faulkner's parodic gestures, his play with the changing and unstable socialities that unfold across time, I want to turn to another passage wherein the author manipulates the supposed simplicity of the mentally handicapped. It is remarkable that Faulkner plays on prejudices held, not only by his characters, but also by his audience, in order to enact the radical emplacement that we find in his Yoknapatawpha novels. In *The Sound and the Fury*, Benjy is given his own voice, simple in its direct expression, complex in its mode of temporalization. In *The Hamlet*, Faulkner performs an inverse complexification of the simple. Rather than explaining a complex scene with

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[87] Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, 232.
[88] Abate, "Reading Red," 311.

simple declarative sentences, he depicts a simple scene with a hyperbolic effluvience

whose excess cannot be missed. However, Faulkner does not place us so firmly "within"

the mindset of the character in the scene to which I now turn. From the distance of a third

person narrator, we see Isaac Snopes, the handicapped cousin of the conniving and

ambitious Flem Snopes, in the following scene:

> Then he would hear her, coming down the creekside in the mist. It would not be after one hour, two hours, three; the dawn would be empty, the moment and she would not be, then he would hear her and he would lie drenched in the wet grass, serene and one and indivisible in joy, listening to her approach. He would smell her; the whole mist reeked with her; the same maleate hands of mist which drew along his prone drenched flanks palped her pearled barrel too and shaped them both somewhere in immediate time, already married. He would not move. He would lie amid the waking instants of earth's teeming minute life, the motionless fronds of water-heavy grasses stooping into the mist before his face in black, fixed curves, along each parabola of which the marching drops held in magnification the dawn's rosy miniatures, smelling and even tasting the rich, slow, warm barn-reek milk-reek, the flowing immemorial female, hearing the slow still in the mist lout with its hymeneal choristers.
>   Then he would see her; the bright horns of morning, of sun, would blow the must away and reveal her, planted, blond, dew-pearled, standing in the parted water of the ford, blowing into the water the thick, warm, heavy, milk-laden breath; and lying in the drenched grasses, his eyes now blind with the sun, he would wallow faintly from thigh to thigh, making a faint, thick, horse moaning sound.[89]

This is Isaac, pleasuring himself as he watches a cow come to pasture. He takes great

sexual satisfaction from watching this animal, and has designs to do more than just

watch, though, again, the sexual mores of the place will condition his attempts and

failures as he is policed by the community for his aberrant sexual proclivities as well as

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[89] Faulkner, *The Hamlet* in *The Snopes* omnibus ed. (New York: Modern Library, 1994), 159.

his status as someone of limited mental capacity. Our concern here is not an exploration of these sexual politics, nor are we engaged in a disabilities oriented study of the treatment of these extraordinary characters. Such concerns are beyond our purview here. Nevertheless, these factors are most powerfully revealed, and indeed, are ultimately grounded upon, the emplacement of things presented in a particular place and, as Faulkner writes, "somewhere in immediate time."

We are tempted to laugh at Ike, and the scene is a funny one. And yet, even though he lacks the linguistic prowess with which to express the scene as we in fact read it, Ike fully inhabits the scene, his poetic imagination given flight through the third person narration that breaks from the old pastoral form in its content. That is, to Isaac, the cow *is* Venus. The pastoral, though not given in Ike's voice, gives full expression to what Isaac feels welling within him, which he is unable to articulate for himself, and which appears comical to us. Although we laugh, Isaac remains exultant despite our chiding. In order to paint this scene most fully for us, to grant Isaac the fullness of his passion, Faulkner relies, not just on the pastoral as a genre, but also on the deep emplacement of pastorals as such – that they take us immediately to the countryside wherein the scene is brought most vividly to life.

In fact, more than describing any characters in these scenes, Faulkner devotes most of his words to the place: the drenched grasses, the dew-laden morning, the mist, the smell, and the sun. The parting of the mist in the sunlight reveals the cow in the river, the man in the grass, a particularly Platonic revelation, despite the erotic intent of the man, because it is, of course, seeing the cow in the full light of the morning sun that most powerfully reveals her for what she is. We do not need to (and hopefully do not in fact)

share the amorous inclinations of Isaac to see the scene in this way, to see the "flowing immemorial female" celebrated in this pastoral. It is *only* because we can see the cow in the pasture as such that the passage can come off, after the torrent of its excesses subsides, as a rather funny one. It is the play between the simplicity of the scene (man sees cow come to pasture) and the complex rendering of the scene thoroughly emplaced in the pasture, as Ike lays there, in the ford, in Yoknapatawpha, that the humor can emerge – Faulkner's underground discourse a parody of the orthodox pastoral, one of the countryside's great vices given sacrosanct treatment. Only by seeing the cow as Ike does can we then break the usual script of the idealized human female and see that the cow, just as what it is, has come to stand in the usual place of a rising Venus. These substitutions work because of the oscillation that emplaces them as such, through which we can see the things as what they are, and then relate their play to the broader context that imparts the significance derived from Isaac and his longing for a cow. Here, Faulkner lets time be. With Benjy, time is overly complex. With Isaac Snopes, time stands still. Time becomes oversimplified so that the complexity of emplacement stands forth. Through this contrast, we are led in both instances to place – in the case of Beny through the temporal web of his family's history, in the case of Isaac, through the simple morning revealed in its spatial web. In each case, we see the slow build of details, the layering of concepts that point us onward, on a trajectory by which we compose the representation of a particular scene that becomes burdened with significance and meaning only through the emplacement that makes such representations possible in the first place.

The scene of Isaac Snopes in *The Hamlet* gives a timeless time, the "immediate now" of the marriage of Ike and the cow together in the pasture, but what of Benjy? How

do we understand his time? I suggest that Benjy's temporal structure can be understood

as a rhizome.[90] Deleuze and Guattari define the rhizome as follows: "A rhizome has no

beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*."[91]

The rhizome functions under principles of connection and heterogeneity,[92] while

simultaneously displaying a substantive multiplicity.[93] Benjy's perspective contains all

these traits. Since place is a unity of spacetime, the rhizome here functions spatially and

temporally. Faulkner must lay the timeframes out in space, among the pages of the novel,

but the reading takes time, and the procession through this spatial arrangement brings us

into relation to the various times and the various spaces strewn across these times that

constitute the history of the Compsons. We are constantly disrupted in our traversal of the

timeframes, always landing in a heterogeneous place, the exact day on which we land

intimately tied to Benjy's struggle. Benjy himself is between many different timeframes,

oscillating between past and present days, constantly breaking away from the present,

seeking refuge from moments of recurring trauma or signals of past traumas, connecting

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[90] This concept, the rhizome, is from Deleuze and Guattari. There has been a dissertation written as a "Deleuzian" reading of Faulkner, see Eunju Hwang, "William Faulkner's Art of Becoming: A Deleuzian Reading." PhD diss., Purdue University, 2006. ProQuest (305272520). However, this study focuses on the becoming of characters in Faulkner's work by analyzing the language use of those characters, and does not apply the rhizome to the temporal structures of the novels themselves. My aim here is not to illuminate the way Faulkner shows characters changing, becoming-something, but rather, to reach the placial ontology revealed by the play of time in the formal structures of literature. I myself have addressed the rhizomatic structure in relation to character development in both Faulkner and James Joyce, particularly as this reading helps to overcome the emphasis on Freudian analysis in studies of Modernist fiction, a project I share with Hwang. See Irven, "Schizonalysis and Modernist Refutations of Freud," presented at the 43rd Annual Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture After 1900, 26 February 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xe615UGtUeA [accessed 09/25/2015].

[91] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987), 25.

[92] The first two principles of the rhizome. Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 7.

[93] The third rhizomatic principle. Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 8.

heterogeneous events through a multiplicity of referents that are nonetheless substantial in terms of their impact on the story. Deleuze and Guattari designate these as "lines of flight," but we need not adopt this vocabulary to see how Benjy, his sister, and his niece seek ways out of their predicaments, and indeed, in their resistance to the prevailing orders, restructure that order and reveal new significations, form new structures, and their flights cause ruptures in the old order. Benjy, though not able to vocalize it, rebels in his own small ways, loving Caddy despite her transgressions, and escaping Luster to follow Quentin.

There is not, then, just one time in Yoknapatawpha. Time takes many forms as it erupts from places. We can determine this from *The Sound and the Fury* alone. Neither brother Quentin, nor Jason's sections of the book follow the same pattern as Benjy, and they differ from one another in significant ways as well. We see Quentin twisting himself into knots trying to acquit Caddy of her crimes, convincing himself it would actually be *better* if everyone thought he and Caddy had committed incest together. Jason, the single-minded businessman of the three, holds to a fairly linear time, at last giving readers a chance to piece things together in a more typical narrative order, though relatively late in the novel. There is a temporal plurality that grounds the procession of spatial relations, but that is, in turn, grounded by the juxtapositions of those relations in space. Perhaps Kant was right. Space and time, themselves a unity in place, are but rationalizations of the experience of place, whereby spacetime comes to be for us *as* subsistence, procession, repetition, and so on. Though time is no object, Levinas is right when he points out the lesson taught by Heidegger, that "one cannot pose the question 'What is time?' because

then one immediately posits time as [a] being."[94] But, as soon as one posits time at all,

insofar as time must be given *as*, one cannot help but posit time as a thing – if not a

being. We can begin to see the collapse of time-for-itself as a philosophical concept,

something derived, as if analytically, from a basic emplacement. Taken together, these

paradigmatic examples show the substantive multiplicity of time that plays on the

appearance of things in space, both of which only emerge out of the places in which

things can be. Spatiality and temporality are *both* derived from place, which is their

ecstatic unity. In the next Chapter, I will explore this theme in more detail, focusing on

Absalom, Absalom! This novel will allow me to more fully convey the fundamental

nature of place and fend off potential criticisms of this other beginning. Much of this

criticism, I suspect, will come from the New Realists, notably the German philosopher

Markus Gabriel.

Before turning to the philosophical issues of realism and the confrontation with

Absalom, Absalom!, let me, in closing this Chapter, briefly clarify that place itself is *not* a

thing. Then, since we have covered a lot of ground, let's take stock of our new

ontological vocabulary, and see where oscillation has gotten us in terms of the

quadripartite structure that was uncovered in Chapter One.

3.8 Why Place is Not a Thing, but Everything Else Is

Place does not appear as place. The thingliness of things is determined by their

as-structure. The mug appears *as* a mug. Things display this tautological structure. They

are what they are, and are sometimes many things at once, but in each instance appear

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[94] Levinas, *God, Death, and Time*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University, 2000), 7.

just as the things they are. We gained this insight, initially, from considering Balzac's printing press. Place, as such, never appears to us. Places are always apparently particular, an event, an occurrence, always specific – my living room, the diner down the street, a particular meadow, forest, city block, townhouse, beach. Places appear as these things, and not as place itself. Places are always *some*place, somewhere, sometime. This is why *all things* are in place and not the other way around. To the extent that place appears *as* place, it appears as oscillation. Why? Because place always appears differentiated. There appears to be places and things, or better, things in places. We never get immediately at place, which is why place is so universally taken for granted. We work to uncover place, work I undertook in the first two Chapters, uncovering and recovering place from obscurity in the Cartesian legacy of post-Enlightenment thought. In the analysis of *Absalom, Absalom!* that follows, the singularity of Yoknapatawpha will become ever more apparent, much more so than it does here, with a sampling of examples from throughout Faulkner's corpus. Place can never appear as place, can never be a thing, because place occurs as oscillation, that is, as the very differentiation of things in their being what they are. Place is not, and this is very important, anything at all like a universal category, or a master domain that encompasses everything that exists, or "in" which everything that is is contained as if the universe were a giant vessel – a metaphysical cookie-jar filled with all the stuff. Place cannot be anything like this because there is nothing that could possibly unify, in a sensible way, everything that appears in place.

The ontology of place is *not* a domain ontology. The next Chapter will make this clear. Rather, place is an explanation for the fact that things appear at all – that there *is*

anything to begin with. "To exist," does not mean, "to appear in a place," and even less does it mean anything like "to be subsumed under the concept of being-in-a-place." As we have seen, such an understanding would lapse back into the old and entirely useless way of thinking concepts themselves as representations. We are beyond that now. If we are to get at place as such, we must understand it in other terms, and come to see that being in place is exactly the differentiation of things in their particularity. I have proposed oscillation as the way in which we can come to understand the differentiation of things in places. The play of oscillation frees things to be what they are between the push and pull of other things from which they become differentiated in play. *Absalom, Absalom!* will help to see this play most clearly, aided in our reading by philosophical thought and the relevant literary criticism.

Taking stock, we can say that place is the manner of the existence of things as such. If we wish to describe or explain this emplacement, just the fact that things are such and such, we must turn to oscillation for that explanation. How are things emplaced, such that they can be just what they are? Oscillation. What does this achieve? It accounts for the basic differentiation between things that are given in places, and so thoroughly differentiates that no places are the same, except maybe in the sense that time and space may be derived from the appearance of any given place. Oscillation thus usurps representation as the mode of the appearance of things as such. Place takes the overarching role of the *ego cogito* as the ground of ontological and epistemological inquiry. Because places are historical and oscillation is an historical movement, things accrete. Accretion results in two sorts of things: natural and technical, where natural things accrete out of their own basic emplacement, and technical things accrete out of the

emplacement of natural things as a result of their self-sustaining activity, autopoietic activity, by which an autopoietic natural thing works to maintain itself as what it is.

Remember the old quadripartite structure: the act of recognition, presencing, representation, and difference. This was the procedure of the *cogito* in its self-grounding. Now, something quite new is emerging, de-centered from the ego in its founding act of recognition. Place is now central, and the occasion of oscillation is the first step. Not only has representation been replaced, its role has been displaced. The new quadripartitie structure, transformed through careful analysis, a deconstructive/reconstructive gesture, takes shape: oscillation, difference, play, accretion. Oscillation generates difference and, in this movement, is the grounding place. These differences are freed, coming to stand as what they are against the background of their basic emplacement, by historical movement (oscillation). These differences accrete things. The accretion of things results from the play of differences released by oscillation. Once things have accreted, in their mutual play, they become available to other things, to each other, to themselves as things, and this was first understood by us as affordance. Epistemologically, this is where the concept emerges – as the affordance of things both *as* what they are and also *for* the others. Graham Harman's insistence on a sort of ontological egalitarianism, mentioned above, is reinforced. The ontological relationship between things is the basic component of any subsequent relation between the subject and the object, or the human being and the world, of the human cognitive apparatus and the representations appearing to the one who cognizes. One relation between a certain kind of thing is not privileged over the other kinds, even if it remains the case that we must deal with the repercussions of being the specific kinds of finite things that we are as human beings.

Next, we go deeper into the placial ontology, distinguishing oscillation from the current trends in philosophy through a close reading of *Absalom, Absalom!* The new ontological structure of emplacement is put into motion and yields our most robust results thus far. We approach the culmination of the odyssey begun with Edward Casey, where our destination has always been to get back into place.

CHAPTER 4. PLACES HAPPEN

Writing is drawing the essence of what we know out of the shadows. That is what writing is about. Not what happens there, not what actions are played out there, but the there *itself. There, that is writing's location and aim. But how to get there?*
– Karl Ove Knausgaard, *My Struggle, Book One*, (2009)

4.1 Emplacement, Oscillation, and the Real

Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* presents an opportunity to explore the meaning of the real because its central concern is with what *really* happened between Henry Sutpen and Charles Bon. The moment is made ever more opportune by the irony that there is no mystery as to the facts of the story. Henry kills Bon. That much is established outright. It is not a question of what happened or whodunit. Those facts are given. Rather, Faulkner presents characters whose questions about what "really" happened are questions regarding the personal significance of events *for* Bon and Henry themselves – that is, the mystery of the real is an "intersubjective" one. The speculative work of the characters in *Absalom, Absalom!* centers around the nature of the real in regards to the question of *why* the facts are the way they are; *why* did Henry kill Bon? It is a question of motive, of guiding principles and intention. The question of the real appears, then, as the relation of personal projects – the so-called "inner" life of the subject, according to traditional views – and the recalcitrant facts of the world. Unfortunately, literary criticism of *Absalom, Absalom!* has almost entirely neglected the ontological significance of the novel, instead treating it as a variety of murder mystery where the forensic procedure is not carried out

in a crime scene – since both victim and perpetrator are already known – but is instead

carried out on operations of the minds of those who lived through the event and have

some stake in it. Even Brian McHale, whose thesis in *Postmodernist Fiction* places

Absalom, Absalom! at the starting line of postmodernism because of its ontological

content fails on philosophical grounds to confront the ontological insights developed by

Faulkner, whether knowingly or not. Indeed, McHale, as I have shown, falls into the

Enlightenment rut of completely separating ontology and epistemology, a rut that is

embraced and reinforced philosophically by the New Realists. Because of the profoundly

Heideggerian lineage claimed by the New Realists, who variously assert on inappropriate

grounds that Heidegger was or was not a realist himself, I am compelled here to take a

stand on the issue. Thankfully, such a position works in our favor, clarifying some of the

more demanding and obscure of the insights won from the preceding studies. Here, we

are brought into relation to Gabriel's *Sinnfeld*, or "fields of sense," which he believes

escapes the criticism leveled against domain ontologists (which, for Gabriel, includes

almost everyone in the 20th century, from Heidegger to Badiou).

In many ways, oscillation provides an alternative to Gabriel's *Sinnfeld*, and at the

same time, rejects the neat compartmentalization of epistemology and ontology (or

metaphysics, a word of which I am not quite so afraid as Gabriel). As we explore the

potential of a methodological realism, if not a metaphysical one, it will become clear that

when we ask the question of what is, we are also implicitly stepping into the problem of

how we know what is, and further, when we ask how we know what is, there is implicit

within that question the tacit assumption regarding what is. This Chapter will attempt to

round-out the ontological theory developed so far. Before a confrontation with Faulkner's

text, I want to consider, at length, what are the philosophical stakes of realism, and what

exactly I achieve with a methodological realism over a metaphysical one.

4.2 New Realisms

The concern is that a full embrace of realism in its metaphysical or ontological

dimensions would throw us back into the subject-object distinction, thereby into the old

interpretation of the subject experiencing on the inside what it meets on the outside,

where the philosophical problem becomes one of mediating between the two. The

standard answer for the media of such mediation has been representation. Two

approaches to realism will highlight this concern, and allow me to bring into sharper

relief what exactly I mean by a methodological "realism" as a descriptive,

phenomenological technique over an ontological commitment to "the real" out there

somewhere beyond the cabinet of my consciousness.

The first, historically, is a group of American philosophers writing in the first

decades of the twentieth century whose legacy has been almost entirely forgotten and

whose major book lays long neglected and out of print. Markus Gabriel and Maurizio

Ferraris are not the first to proclaim themselves "New Realists." In 1912 a group of six

philosophers in the United States published a collection of thematically interrelated

essays under the title *The New Realism: Cooperative Studies in Philosophy*.[1] This old

New Realism shares many aspects with the new New Realism espoused more than a

hundred years later. The lead author of this text was Edwin Holt, whose legacy is perhaps

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[1] Ferraris acknowledges the previous movements, both American New Realism and the Brazilian *Novo Realismo* of the mid-1970s, and yet, neither Ferraris nor Gabriel have, to my knowledge, considered with any seriousness the claims made by these other "new realists." Ferraris' acknowledgement of his predecessors can be found at Maruizio Ferraris, *Introduction to New Realism*, trans. Sarah de Sanctis (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 11.

best served by his Princeton advisee James J. Gibson, on whom we've relied for his work on affordances. The New Realists of 1912 oppose all forms of "subjectivism," which they identify primarily with Berkeley and Kant, although I've provided enough evidence to show that, in practice, this rejection is effectively a shake-down of the entire post-Cartesian metaphysics and epistemology. Indeed, although it is not clear that Holt et al. reject the Cartesian ego outright, they do, nevertheless, argue strongly against the ego-*centric* nature of philosophy on two grounds. The first responds to the supposed predicament that all known things require a knower; thus, if we eliminate the knower, nothing could be known of anything. Such consequences would reinforce the Kantian view that without the "I think" to accompany every cognition it is not possible to say anything positive about the noumenal world-in-itself at all. All knowledge then, is knowledge of the phenomenal – that is to say, is subjective knowledge – leading eventually to the placement of truth within propositions that maintain a correspondence between these separate inner and outer realms. But the problem now arises that when we do form a proposition concerning things, we are faced either with the redundant proposition that "all known things are known," or with the false inference that all things are known, full stop.[2] As the New Realists have it, this kind of subjectivism, so closely aligned with and associated with the dominant Idealism of the time, puts us into a corner and wrecks itself on the thorny tangle of propositions that was so thoroughly deconstructed by Derrida and others at a later time. Of course, logically speaking, a redundant proposition is not at all a proposition, and the old New Realists claim that the

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[2] Holt et al., *The New Realism: Cooperative Studies in Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 11-12.

asserting of the former only conceals a commitment to the latter false inference that *all things* are known. That all things, full stop, are *not* in fact known should be obvious unless we admit to the end of discovery and the futility of all science. There is yet a further logical issue, which is that, as Holt and company elegantly put it, "it is impossible to argue from the fact that everything one finds is known, to the conclusion that knowing is a universal principle of being, because it is impossible to find non-things that are not known."[3] The other line of attack zeroes in on the notion of the simple self, which had gained philosophical currency following the attacks of Thomas Reid on David Hume, and, of course, Kant's proposal of the transcendental ego as a necessary ground for the possibility of cognition as such. My own views on this are that Reid fails to refute Hume's position on the self, and that Kant only fairs better because he concedes so much to Hume from the start; something I've discussed above. The old New Realist refutation of the simple self lies in the fact that philosophers who assert this simplicity violate their own methodology, which presumably only admits to analytic simplicity *after* the analysis has been carried out, and not as the starting point of all inquiry in general. According to Holt et al., concepts taken as simple (the self, the will, immediacy, life) are not, in fact, analytically simple, because when they are treated as such "it is necessary to give them a complex existence also in order to account for what is known about them."[4] They hold that all attempts to say that these more complex iterations are just "manifestations" or "transformations" of a simple and fundamental reality are just excuses which conceal the invalid reversal of the espoused analytic procedure. We are thus gravely in error when we

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[3] Holt et al., *New Realism*, 13.
[4] Holt et al., *New Realism*, 13.

assert that the self could exist just as a simple datum of consciousness – precisely because

that much is just assumed, together with the assumption that consciousness and the like

can be known *only* introspectively. I find these two criticisms to be the most powerful of

the handful presented by the old New Realists. The others are intriguing as well, and are

more dialed in on the specific concerns of American philosophers in the early twentieth

century when American philosophy as such was coming into its own; hence the emphasis

on refuting Idealism. At the time, most US scholars took their PhDs in Germany or were

students of German emigrants, as Holt himself was under Hugo Münsterberg at Harvard

in 1901. In this regard, the accusation that subjectivism and Idealism fall prey to the

"fallacy of exclusive particularity" is notable for its extreme sensitivity to *linguistic*

context, no doubt shaped by pragmatists like Charles Saunders Pierce (who was also

deeply indebted to Reid) and William James, with whom Holt also studied. In *New*

Realism, the issue is stated clearly, "Unless…multiple classification of terms were

possible, discourse would break down utterly. All the terms of discourse are general in

the sense that they belong to several contexts."[5] This may seem obvious to those of us

raised on Wittgenstein and deconstruction, but in American philosophy circa 1912 it is a

significant statement. Likewise, the fallacy that follows from this, the "fallacy of

definition by initial predication," which claims that once a subject of discourse is taken to

be a particular kind of thing, say, that the mind is immaterial substance, then, following

on the heels of the fallacy of exclusive particularity, it is assumed that this one particular

aspect is the *only relevant* aspect, and, further, it cannot belong to any more robust

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[5] Holt et al., *New Realism*, 14.

relational manifold. Therefore, that initial characterization becomes the definitive

explanation.[6] More generally, subjectivism and Idealism are determined to suffer from a

"speculative dogma," which assumes that there must be some "all-sufficient, all-general

principle, a single fundamental proposition that adequately determines or explains

everything."[7] This proposition is strangely similar to Heidegger's insistence that Being is

not some general, all-encompassing property which can be attributed to everything that

is. A final fallacy outlined by the old New Realists is that of "illicit importance," and I

think this particular notion should be revived and seriously considered by nearly every

major analytic philosopher in practice today. This argument attacks as spurious the idea

that because a proposition appears to be self-evident and unchallengeable, that that

proposition is therefore an important or philosophically relevant one.[8] The example given

is somewhat silly, but speaks directly to the form of this fallacy: that I like cucumbers

may be self-evident and unchallengeable, after all, who can challenge one's tastes, but

this proposition – that I like cucumbers – never gives us reason to conclude that

"cucumbers are the true foundation of dietetics, nor that [my] liking them reveals

anything about [my] own nature or the nature of cucumbers."[9] This brief outline of the

old New Realist assault on subjectivism, which is by them largely identified with

Idealism of the German variety, should be enough to establish their relevance to this

project, and also to the current discussion of "New Realism" instigated by Ferraris,

Gabriel, and others. Where the old and new New Realisms collide is surely in their

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[6] Holt et al., *New Realism*, 15-16.
[7] Holt et al., *New Realism*, 16-17.
[8] Holt et al., *New Realism*, 19-20.
[9] Holt et al., *New Realism*, 20.

treatment of and general concern with the notion of "independence," and this speaks directly to our current project.

This concern with independence is but one offshoot from the roots of representationalism and the subject/object divide. Here, the idea of independence is just the question of how we know things exist, and that their properties etc. exist, *independent* of human cognition. That is to say, how do we know what, if anything, exists whether or not there are human perceivers also there to perceive what is said to exist? An aside here, that, insofar as Gabriel and Ferraris treat this sort of problem as a serious one, they are doing metaphysics despite all protestation to the contrary. But to stick with the old New Realists for just a moment longer – their key insight into this issue is expressed succinctly by Ralph Barton Perry. Independence is essentially *privative*. That is, exactly the way Descartes' "immaterial" substance tells us nothing at all about what mind *is* in itself, neither does "independence" tell us anything at all about what things might be in themselves, other than the negative principle of *not* being "dependent" in some way on being perceived.[10] This is a brilliant move. It allows Perry to outline the positive things normally intended by "dependence" (relation, whole-part, exclusive causation, implication, and being exclusively implied), and then address each in turn so that a positive understanding of "independence" can be worked out.[11] What emerges is that the old New Realists do not actually seek to define "reality" in terms of its independence precisely because independence is not a relation, but is the lack of a relation and does not,

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[10] Holt et al., *New Realism*, 106-107.
[11] Holt et al., *New Realism*, 106-113.

therefore, define *anything*.[12] Thus, we can say, for instance, that *a* is related to *b*, and yet

is independent of *b*, and such statements are equivalent to saying just that *a* can be

defined without reference to *b*. We are then in a position to see that realism need not

assert that "everything true of *a* is independent of *b*," exactly because *a*'s independence

of *b* is true of *a*, and at the same time, this judgment rests upon a certain relation between

a and *b*. Still further, realism does not require that we deny *a* could enter into a relation,

such as it does in the case of knowledge (it enters a relation to a knower), nor that *a* exists

"independently" of knowledge even though it has acquired that relation (to a knower of

which it is independent), but it would deny that the added relation of being-known is

necessary to the constitution of *a*. As Perry puts it, "Thus *a is known*, it is *a* itself, as

constituted without knowledge, that is independent of that circumstance. The new

complex *known-a* is of course dependent on knowledge as one of its parts."[13] While I find

the argument compelling, I cannot endorse it without a few caveats.

It must be said that the intellectual atmosphere for the American New Realists

(and Anglo-American philosophy generally) in 1912 was one in which it made sense for

G. E. Moore to famously argue for "the existence of the external world" in a completely

un-ironic fashion, though certainly his argument hints at the common language approach

soon to come, and is rooted in Moore's own ideas regarding the philosophical power of

common sense.[14] While I think Moore's own ideas regarding so-called "common sense"

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[12] Holt et al., *New Realism*, 117.
[13] Holt et al., *New Realism*, 117-18.
[14] Moore's essay appeared in 1939: G. E. Moore, "Proof of an External World." *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 25 (1939), 273-300.

are preposterous on their face,[15] it is, nevertheless, notable that on the other side of the

channel, in 1927, Heidegger found the *very question* of the existence of the external

world to be a *scandal* and an embarrassment to philosophy, one that marked the decline

of thinking in the West – that the question of Being had been covered over and

forgotten.[16] This gets us to the crux of the matter in a definitive way. Interestingly,

Ferraris claims that "new" realisms, as separate from "realism as opposed to idealism," is,

historically, always a response to a philosophically dominant or hegemonic anti-

realism.[17] In the case of Ferraris and Gabriel, it is a response to the Pyrrhic skepticism of

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[15] The admiration and philosophical heft granted to "common sense" by some 20th century Anglo-American philosophers is *entirely suspect* and in no way admits to philosophical rigor. If it were up to common sense, I would go outside, observe the movement of the sun across the sky, and conclude – reasonably, given the utterly inadequate criteria – that the sun moves while the Earth and myself with it remain still. The truth of the matter is discovered only later and through much work and technological manipulation. The truth thereby becomes observable, but from the common sense perspective is entirely counter-intuitive and contradictory to the observations *commonly available to all people*. The vast, *vast* majority of people, after all, have no access to the technological and cultural apparatuses that allow scholars, academics, and scientists to so readily and easily propose, more or less correctly, that the sun stays put while we and the Earth orbit around it at break-neck speeds. Of course, even more daunting to prove, but which science has nevertheless demonstrated, is that the *sun itself* is not exactly still either. That, in fact, the sun itself orbits a yet greater center of gravity and drags its planetary hangers-on along with it. Common sense, provided this information, might "reasonably" infer a pattern and propose that the *galaxy* must then orbit some greater center itself (after all, the Moon orbits the Earth, the Earth orbits the Sun, and the Sun orbits the center of the galaxy…) but of course, this is wrong as well, and as far as we know galaxies are observed, with great effort, to be gravitationally bound to a number of other galaxies in a fractal-like hierarchical distribution of clustered structures.
[16] Heidegger writes, "Der »Skandal der Philosophie« besteht nicht darin, daß dieser Bewies bisland noch aussteht, sondern *darin, daß solche Beweise immer wieder erwartet und versucht werden*," which I translate, "The 'Scandal of Philosophy' is not that these proofs [of an external world] are hitherto still pending, but that *such proofs are repeatedly expected and tried*." Heidegger is here explicitly referring to Kant, who claims in a footnote to the Preface of the B Edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the "scandal of philosophy" is, "that the existence of things outside us (from which we after all get the whole matter of our cognitions, even for our inner sense) should have to be assured merely *on faith*, and that if it occurs to anyone to doubt it, we should be unable to answer him with a satisfactory proof." Heidegger is here taking a harder line than Kant. We find the source of the former at Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1977), 272; and the latter at Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 121.
[17] Ferraris, *Intro to New Realism*, 11.

philosophical postmodernism, which I detailed in Chapter Two. Ferraris contends that it is Schopenhauer's argument that the "world is my representation" which becomes the ontological heart of postmodernity. Postmodernity, then, is best exemplified by social constructivism in which, because reality is constructed by humans (note the residual Kantianism) therefore, "reality does not exist independently from the representations of an unspecified mankind."[18] I want to stick with the focus on independence, since I have already and at length presented arguments against representationalism. Now, Heidegger was himself dismissive of the division between idealism and realism, both of which were taken by him to fundamentally misunderstand the nature of the knower who knew the real. For Heidegger, reality [*Realität*], like all philosophical issues, must first be understood ontologically, and this means that "Reality" refers us to the Being of entities (beings) that are present for us within-the-world. This, in turn, means that Reality can only be understood after the careful clarification of the concept "world."[19] Enter Markus Gabriel's audacious thesis that the world does not exist.

4.3 Being and the Meaning of the World

First, let me be very clear – I think Gabriel's conclusion that "the world does not exist" is rather absurd. However, his current impact and acclaim in the philosophical community merits some comment here, especially since what follows depends on the existence of something like the "world." There is the further issue of Gabriel's indebtedness to Heidegger, which Gabriel seems to exploit for the benefits of a family resemblance, but in which Heidegger's philosophy is rather poorly represented. Both of

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[18] Ferraris, *Intro to New Realism*, 18.
[19] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 252.

these issues are entangled, since what I mean by "world" (and what Heidegger means by "world") is not at all the same thing that Gabriel means by the term – and in fact, my use of "world" is actually very, very close to Gabriel's idea of a *Sinnfeld*, or field of sense.

When Gabriel says "world" he means something like "the unified totality of all that is," what we would indicate categorically as the domain of all domains, and such. I'm a little vague here only because Gabriel is himself vague. He says that how his arguments strike you depends on how you are given to understand what the "world" is. In his 2013 book, *Why the World Does Not Exist*, Gabriel clearly means: "The world is neither the entirety of objects or things nor the entirety of facts. It is the domain of all domains."[20] But two years later, in *Fields of Sense*, he is less clear. A quote might help: "For some, I will deny that there is unified entity, which goes by the name of 'the world', 'reality', or maybe even 'nature'. For others, I will deny that there is a unified domain of all facts, the single all-encompassing 'sphere of objects' unified by some conceptual operation of other."[21] In this sense, where the world is treated as some unified totality of all that is, or the domain of all domains, I totally agree with Gabriel. The world, if we mistake it to be the unified totality of everything that is, a metaphysical catch-all as the domain of all domains, does not exist. Gabriel seems to be correct. But there's a problem here, and at least one that is potentially damning. Before we get into all that, first notice that Gabriel calls himself a New *Realist*, but part of his thesis involves denying "reality," again understood as a unified totality of all that is. So, he is not, in principle, opposed to

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[20] Gabriel, *Why the World Does Not Exist*, trans. Gregory S. Moss (Malden: Polity Press, 2015), 49.

[21] Gabriel, *Fields of Sense: A New Realist Ontology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2015), 8.

admitting redefinitions or reimagined concepts into the ontological vocabulary, and that is a good thing for us all! However, his whole project involves proving a negative, which is logically suspect.

Tom Sparrow has written me to the effect that Gabriel may not be trying to prove a negative when he sets out to deny the existence of the world, but rather that he could be simply trying to show that anyone postulating a domain of all domains are just not permitted to assert that such a mega-domain exists – that such a domain *need not exist*. This point is well taken, however, both Sparrow and I concur that Gabriel seems to be loading the dice by using highly idiosyncratic definitions.[22] I do not think the definitions are a real problem – after all, theorists of every stripe use idiosyncratic definitions that are cut to the measure of the subject under consideration. I want to pursue the proving a negative line for just a moment, because I think that Gabriel's rhetorical tact very strongly implies a proof of a negative, and not the less demanding conclusion offered by Sparrow. In mathematics, for instance, proving a negative is permissible. Negatives are, after all, just another point on the number line. It's an odd way of speaking, perhaps, but in math negatives are positively extant. Not so in the "real world." Mathematics have the advantage of being highly abstract and are thereby able to delve deep and soar high into realms far beyond what we experience – experiences that include observations made possible by technology, such as deep-space observation with a telescope and microscopic observations of sub-atomic particles. Now, it could be rejoined that Gabriel is involved in a deduction, and, like mathematics, strict deductions can prove a negative. Indeed, given

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[22] Sparrow in email to the author, 31 January 2016.

a closed system, *inference* could prove a negative – such as proving that some identifiable object is not inside a box. But it is far from clear that the *world* is or must be such a system, and Gabriel's argument hinges upon the denial of metaphysically closed systems. Insofar as the closed system is concerned, again, Gabriel is correct. If by "world" we understand some unified totality, the domain of all domains, and we then say something like, "for things to exists, they must belong to some domain," then we are clearly committed to saying that for these domains to exist they must belong to yet another domain or else some meta-domain – the domain of all domains – which results in an infinite regress of domains within domains within domains.[23] So Gabriel's ontology cannot be expressed as a closed system. Further, Gabriel explicitly rejects thorough mathematization. "I reject the idea that the meaning of 'existence' can be fully or relevantly captured by the language of quantification," writes Gabriel, elaborating that, "I also reject the idea that existence is relevantly bound up with the concepts used to understand set theory," and, this is the kicker, "Existence is just not a *particularly mathematical or logical* concept, as there are vague and messy objects of all kinds…" [emphasis added].[24] With that goes all hope of proving the negative deduction. On these terms, Gabriel simply cannot *prove* that the world does not exist. Of course, if we accept Sparrow's less demanding interpretation, Gabriel could slip away from this criticism, however, he would do so at the cost of the force of his argument, and the titles of his work become misnomers. Gabriel isn't claiming just that we are not justified or

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[23] Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 138-41.
[24] Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 8.

warranted in postulating the world as the domain of all domains – he argues stridently

that such a world "does not exist," the much stronger claim.

I have already, and at length, discussed the difficulty (in my mind, the

impossibility) of neatly or completely separating ontological and epistemological

questions. The issue raised by Sparrow highlights the problem. Gabriel is very clear that

he agrees "with Kant, who distinguished between epistemology and ontology: whatever

holds good of our access to how things really are is not necessarily the most general

frame for all things regardless of our access."[25] This position actually bars Gabriel from

making the weaker claim suggested by Sparrow. The weaker claim is actually an

epistemological one regarding our *warrant* or how justified we are in making claims

regarding the domain of all domains. This throws us back into the Realism-Idealism

debate, specifically, as it was hashed out by Hilary Putnam in *The Threefold Chord:*

Mind, Body, and World. There Putnam writes,

> To suppose that philosophy divides into separate compartments labeled
> 'philosophy of mind,' 'philosophy of language,' 'epistemology,' 'value
> theory,' and 'metaphysics,' is a sure way to lose all sense of how the
> problems are connected, and that means to lose all understanding of our
> sense of puzzlement. Indeed we have seen how the arguments in the
> realism/antirealism debate over the very possibility of representing a reality
> 'external' to our minds (or to our brains) constantly appeal to assumptions
> about our perception and assumptions about understanding – in particular,
> the assumption that we face a forced choice between explaining the very
> possibility of understanding by an appeal one or another metaphysical
> mystery, on the one hand, and accepting a verificationist account of
> understanding on the other – and how that assumption in turn support
> deflationist and anitrealist accounts of truth.[26]

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[25] Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 162.
[26] Putnam, *The Threefold Chord: Mind, Body, and World* (New York: Columbia University, 1999), 69-70.

I myself have shown the difficulties Putnam points out in several places: the discussion of Ferraris and Evans in Chapter Three, the uncovering of place in Descartes in Chapter Two, and the reaction to externalism by Adams and Aizawa in Chapter One. Thus, again, when Gabriel goes on to write that "if we give up the idea that our projected truth-conditions generally matter for how things are, we might grant some terrain to anti-realism, but never give up a realist conception of fields and accordingly of facts," we can see that he does accept the verificationist account of understanding, while also appealing to the "mystery" of appearance and simply asserting that appearances are real "out there" beyond our minds, past the end of the mind, which, again, throws Gabriel back into the old metaphysical paradigm, where his idiosyncratic definitions are revealed to be merely new labels on a pre-existing logical structure. Here, we need to get a little more into the details of what Gabriel is saying, starting with that word which slipped so innocuously into the last quote – fields. What, ontologically, is a field of sense?

Readers sympathetic to Gabriel might admit that his one book's title might be a bit of hyperbole, and that Gabriel, more than trying to prove a negative, is actually offering a positive alternative argument that to exist is to appear in a field of sense, *Sinnfeld*. To answer the question "what is a field of sense?" presents us with certain difficulties that arise from Gabriel's avowedly Heideggerian position, which includes a total embrace of the history of metaphysics as "ontotheology."[27] Part of the difficulty, if

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[27] A full interpretation of "ontotheology" is beyond the purview of this study. I bring this up because it is central to understanding Gabriel's troubled relation to and appropriation of Heidegger's way to ontology. He affirms Heidegger's critique of metaphysics in Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 22-23.

not the whole of it, is that fields of sense are not substantively different than "world" as

Heidegger understands it. Now, again, Sparrow has resisted this interpretation by

emphasizing that Heidegger is rooted in phenomenology, thus cannot, due to

methodological constraints, ever show the world to be independent (that tricky non-

relation again) of Dasein. I will return to this objection below, and consider Sparrow's

critique of the phenomenological method after we deal with Gabriel's misinterpretations

of Heidegger. It is important to understand that Gabriel really only makes fields of sense

seem to be substantively different from Heideggerian worlds through an indefensible

interpretation of Heidegger *as a domain ontologist*.[28] To be fair, Gabriel hedges his bet,

somewhat, when he says that Heidegger is a domain ontologist "in his earliest books."[29]

But even such hedging is problematic, since Gabriel nullifies this hedge when he says

that Heidegger follows Aristotle's domain ontology (because he talks about *Bereiche*)

"throughout his [Heidegger's] whole career."[30] Further, this statement shows a serious

misinterpretation of Heidegger's appropriations of Aristotle, who Heidegger *did not* treat

as a domain ontologist, an interpretation of Aristotle that Heidegger *explicitly rejects*. In a

1931 lecture course on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Heidegger is analyzing the Aristotelian

notion that being is an analogy and not a genus. He asks, "is being the unity of a highest

genus…which we can get back to by separating our what is common from the various

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[28] I cannot fathom a coherent interpretation in which Heidegger can justly be read as a domain
ontologist, and suggesting that his concept of "world" is meant to be something like the "domain
of all domains" so badly mangles what Heidegger actually says, repeatedly, about the worldhood
of the world that I begin to question either the interpreter's competence as a reader of Heidegger
or his honesty.

[29] Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 146.

[30] Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 136.

ways of being? Aristotle says no, this too is impossible."[31] Heidegger then clarifies his interpretation in a way that totally avoids Gabriel's concern that domain ontologists assert some form of the claim that "to exist" means to "fall under a concept."[32] Heidegger says, "The universal, comprehended and defined as species-enabling genus, is usually called 'concept.' If being is not a genus, then it cannot be comprehended as a subject, nor can it be conceptualized. This is so not just because there is a higher genus than the genus of being, but also because being is not a genus at all."[33] Such textual evidence is sufficient to refute Gabriel's assertion that Heidegger follows Aristotle into a domain ontology, but one more point on this matter is of relevance here, namely that the "analogy" of being in Aristotle is historically interpreted in a way that all the different categories "lead back" in their ontological grounding to οὐσία, *ousia*, or their substance. Heidegger says this is an error, "in part resulting from the inadequate interpretation of the πολλαχῶς [manifold, in many ways]; more precisely: it was overlooked that only a question is here first of all being prepared."[34] He says this because Heidegger does not think Aristotle ever adequately formulates what exactly he means by "manifold" or the analogous nature of being, and only gives examples of analogy by which we are left to infer his intended meaning.[35] So Gabriel has, at the very least, badly misrepresented Heidegger's interpretation of Aristotle.

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[31] Heidegger, *Aristotle's* Metaphysics *θ 1-3: On the Essence and Actuality of Force*, trans. Walter Brogan and Peter Warnek (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1995), 28-29.
[32] Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 162.
[33] Heidegger, *Aristotle's* Metaphysics, 30.
[34] Heidegger, *Aristotle's* Metaphysics, 37.
[35] This interpretation is supported by Thomas Sheehan, "Being in Aristotle." *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift* (New York: Rownan and Littlefield International, 2015), 31-66.

Before I move on, allow me a moment of scholarly pedantry. By "earliest books,"
Gabriel can only mean *Being and Time*, which was Heidegger's first *book*, and, perhaps,
Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics, published in 1929. Certainly, the materials for his
next published books, developed in the 1930s, cannot be considered "early" since
Heidegger had already taken his famous "turn" by then. Perhaps Gabriel means here all
the early *Gesamtausgabe*, which include numerous lecture courses and seminars
delivered throughout the 1920s. Gabriel does refer to *Being and Time* and to the 1929
Kantbuch, but also to a 1927 lecture course, published in English as *The Basic Problems
of Phenomenology*. However, Gabriel actually cites a much later work, written by
Heidegger in the summer of 1943 and published in *Early Greek Thinking*, as the key
textual evidence for his claim that Heidegger is a domain ontologist. This evidence is
translated by David Farrell Krell as "the realm of realms" and concerns an interpretation
of Heraclitus regarding *aletheia*, or truth as the unconcealedness of beings in the
clearing.[36] In *Why the World Does Not Exist*, this quote from Heidegger, who is talking
about Heraclitus, is conveniently translated as "the domain of all domains."[37] One
wonders which it is: early Heidegger, Heidegger after the turn, both? It is none of those,
of course. In fact, the word "world" never appears on any of the pages cited by Gabriel,

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[36] Gabriel makes these references to *Early Greek Thinking* in *Why the World Does Not Exist*, 45;
and, Gabriel, "The Meaning of 'Existence' and the Contingency of Sense." *Speculations: A
Journal of Speculative Realism* (4), 75.

[37] The German word in question is *Bereich*, which, it is true, could be translated either as "realm"
or "domain." However, in either sense, Heidegger is emphasizing the "holding sway of Being" as
the clearing is opened for the showing forth and withdrawal of beings. "Realm" is in some ways
preferable in this context, because Heidegger is talking a lot about gods and mortals in this
particular work, and traditional phrases like *Reich der Götter* [Realm of the gods] imply the
lording over and dominion that Heidegger often, problematically, implies, while *Gebiet*, which is
a mathematical term, is used more often for "fields" or "areas," such as when we say a "field of
research."

and he never offers any interpretation that would either: 1) show that Heidegger is indeed talking about his own early concept of "world" in these sections; or, 2) that Heidegger is providing his own views and mot merely attempting an interpretation of Heraclitus. When we turn to the early works, where the concept of world is much more in the foreground, Heidegger makes very explicit statements that would seem to rule out Gabriel's interpretation.

Part of the problem is expressed in the following statement by Gabriel in which he explains that the overemphasis on the condition of the knowers of the real, which Gabriel calls "zoontology," can lead to an anti-realism "according to which the existence of 'the world' is interpreted as depending on our existence – *a position wrongly attributed to Heidegger* [emphasis added] on the grounds that he understands 'the world' to be the way things appear to human beings." Gabriel elaborates that Heidegger "does not, however claim that there is a totality ('the world') whose existence depends on our existence, as he explicitly draws a distinction between 'nature' and 'the world', where only the latter is *Dasein*-dependent."[38] It's hard to tell where we should start with this strange set of assertions about Heidegger's thinking. Let's just work out what Heidegger seems to mean by "world," keeping in mind Gabriel's claims about the world and its dependence on Dasein. This is a crucial point, as I am slowly returning to the theme of independence, which was the promised aim of this discussion!

Focusing on *Being and Time*, Heidegger asks us to take "world" to signify "that '*wherein*' a factical Dasein as such can be said to 'live'."[39] Worldhood is taken to signify

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[38] Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 34-35.
[39] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 93.

the structural wholes that any given world (there is a plurality, $\pi o\lambda\lambda\alpha\chi\tilde{\omega}\varsigma$, something said in many ways) may have, thus the wherein in which humans finds themselves might encompass a multiplicity or manifold of entities (beings). Heidegger's first example is the world of mathematicians, where "world" here signifies the realm [*Region*] of possible mathematical objects.[40] The world of everyday human existence, which is the focus of *Being and Time* throughout, is the environment [*Umwelt*], the surroundings that human beings find themselves among and with which we have our usual and familiar dealings. It is true that Heidegger does make a distinction between the world and nature, and that nature is considered to be a categorical-aggregate, but "Only in some definite mode of its own Being-in-the-world can Dasein discover entities as Nature."[41] Therefore, even Nature, *as a categorical-aggregate*, is ontologically subservient to the world in which human beings might encounter any other entity as a being of nature. Thus, if world is Dasein-dependent, so too is nature, since nature can *only be encountered in the world*, which is part of the fundamental constitution of human existence as Being-in-the-world. Later in the work, Heidegger makes a fairly strong statement of identity between Dasein and world. Remember, as Being-in-the-world, Dasein needs the world as that wherein it becomes possible to encounter entities as such. Heidegger writes:

> …it [Dasein] has been delivered over to entities which it needs *in order to* [*um zu*] be able to be as it is – namely, *for the sake of* itself. In so far as Dasein exists factically, it understands itself in the way its 'for-the-sake-of-itself' is thus connected with some current 'in-order-to'. *That inside which* existing Dasein understands *itself* is 'there' along with its factical existence.

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[40] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 93.
[41] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 94.

>That inside which one primarily understands oneself has Dasein's kind of Being. Dasein *is* its world existingly.[42]

Basically, human beings need things they find in the world in order to sustain themselves as what they are in the world, to live a human life. Insofar as humans just are, that we "factically exist" – a technical way of saying that we just find ourselves here as a matter of fact – we understand ourselves primarily in the way we are concerned with worldly dealings that enable us to sustain ourselves, and these are always connected to some project, some practice, that we undertake "in-order-to" do the things that sustain us. Think back to Eugénie in her room, at the end of Balzac's novel, the accoutrements of her life surrounding her and from which she draws meaning – from which meaning is reflected back to her, as Casey would put it. The world, for Heidegger, is that in which humans understand ourselves to be and it is just there as a matter of fact. The world is that obscure horizon within which all the entities with which we concern ourselves can appear to us as the things we need to live. The world has the same kind of Being as human beings, we *are our world as it exists*. Note how in German *um* as in *um zu*, "in order to," is connected to *Umwelt*, the "around world" or "surrounding world" if we're being literal, but which is commonly translated as "environment." Then, Heidegger clarifies, *Wenn kein* Dasein *existiert, is auch keine Welt »da«*; "If no *Dasein* exists, no world is 'there' either."[43] Very clear. No Dasein, no world. How then can the world, in Heidegger's sense, ever be anything like the domain of all domains? Things do not get

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[42] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 416.
[43] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 483; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 417.

any better when we consider the 1927 lecture course, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*.

In that key lecture course, Heidegger again addresses the ontological relationship between human beings and the world. Again, the distinction from nature is reinforced: "Nature – even if we take it in the sense of the whole cosmos as that which we also call, in ordinary discourse, the universe, the whole world – all these entities taken together, animals, plants, and humans, too, are not the world, viewed philosophically."[44] And even more stridently than in *Being and Time*, "The world is not the sum total of all extant entities. It is, quite generally, not extant[45] at all…The world is something Dasein-ish, it is not extant like things but it *is da*, there-here, like the *Dasein*, the being-da [*das Da-sein*] which we ourselves are: that is to say, it exists."[46] With this lecture series, it is possible to just catalogue instances where Heidegger identifies Dasein and world. A few key moments: "World is a determination of Dasein's being," "Only so long as Dasein is, is existent, is world given," "World exists – that is, it is – only if Dasein exists, only if there is Dasein," "Self and world are not two beings, like the subject and object, or like I and thou, but self and world are the basic determination of the Dasein itself in the unity of the structure of being-in-the-world," and "Being-in-the-*world* belongs to the basic constitution of the being that is in each case mine, that at each time I *myself* am. Self and

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[44] Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1982), 165.

[45] Heidegger is here making a distinction that goes back to Medieval philosophy: things-in-themselves, unliving material stuff, is extant, while things-for-themselves, living things that strive toward some end (self-preservation, autopoiesis in our terms), exist. Living things exist because they are ecstatic – they go our beyond themselves in a futural, transcendent movement that Heidegger cashes out in terms of Being *as temporality*.

[46] Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 166.

world belong together; they belong to the unity of the constitution of the Dasein and, with equal originality, they determine the 'subject'."[47]

Returning to the unfortunate quote by Gabriel above, he is correct to say that Heidegger "does not…claim that there is a totality ('the world')." That much is clear; however, while it might not strictly speaking *depend* on our existence, the existence of the world is, for Heidegger, so deeply, ontologically entangled with the existence of human Dasein that, as he repeatedly says, if there is no Dasein, then there is no world. The distinction between Nature and world is irrelevant here, and reference to this distinction in no way proves what Gabriel hopes it does, again, because for "nature" to appear to us as a possible domain, or for anything to be an object of nature, or a natural object, *it must be a being or collection of beings in the world alongside which Dasein already is*. World is ontologically prior to nature. Finally, and I don't know who attributes this view to Heidegger because Gabriel offers no citation, but whoever says that Heidegger understands "world" to be "the way things appear to human beings" is simply wrong. It is true that insofar as things appears to us, they appear in the world, but things do not have the *appearance* of being-in-the-world *as such*. The world is so close to us, the environment so deeply connected to us on the ontological level, *that we do not usually notice it at all*. In fact, it would make more sense in the context of Heidegger's philosophy to say that the way things appear to us is exactly by the *dis-appearance of the world in the showing forth of things*. In order to make the world apparent as such, as the ontological ground of our dealings with things, we have to do a lot of painstaking work,

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[47] Quotes founds at Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 296, 296, 297, 297, and 298 respectively.

which is very difficult, technical, and the project of not only *Being and Time*, but a

decade's worth of university courses in philosophy and the history of metaphysics. The

world, as such, is among the *least* apparent aspects of the way things appear to us. If we

are really being technical, and true to Heidegger's thought, it is most proper to say that

the "way" things appear to us is by their "essence," *Wesen*.[48] Moreover, and this is my

final point on the matter, Heidegger, from his earliest years, is *not* an anti-realist, as

Gabriel suggests.[49] Gabriel maintains that anti-realism is entailed by Heidegger's position

on the relationship between world and Dasein (which Gabriel has, in any event, badly

misrepresented).

In the end, it is just not appropriate to interpret Heidegger as a realist. On the one

hand, Heidegger does admit that, "Entities *are*, quite independently of the experience by

which they are disclosed, the acquaintance in which they are discovered, and the grasping

in which their nature is ascertained." So, in one sense, perhaps Heidegger falls into a

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[48] This particular point outstrips the current discussion, so I refer readers to William Lovitt's masterful explanation of the role played by the German noun *Wesen* in Heidegger's philosophy, found in the first footnote to "the Question Concerning Technology," in Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Perennial, 1977), 3. Heidegger himself elaborates on page 30 of the same essay.

[49] In fact, there is a large body of research which suggests Heidegger was some variety of realist. Although I think such lines of argument almost entirely miss the central point of Heidegger's ontological project, their arguments, taken with sufficient caveats regarding what we mean by "realism," are persuasive to a point. Cf., Trish Glazebrook, "Heidegger and Scientific Realism." *Continental Philosophy Review* 34:4 (December 2001), 361-401; Glazebrook, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Science* (New York: Fordham University, 2000); Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Spinosa, "Coping with Things-in-themselves: A Practice-based Phenomenological Argument for Realism." *Inquiry* 42 (1999), 49-78; Jeff Kochan, "Why Heidegger was Not a Robust Realist: A Response to Dreyfus and Spinosa," presentation at the Hermeneutics and Science Conference (August 2010); Graham Harman, *Tool-being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Peru: Open Court, 2002). Gabriel forwards his own argument against reading Heidegger as a realist, translated by Nikola Mirkovic and Mark J. Thomas in Gabriel, "Is Heidegger's 'Turn' a Realist Project?" *Meta: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology and Practical Philosophy*, Special Issue (2014), 44-73.

realist camp in regards to the independence of things. And yet, he immediately qualifies,

"But Being 'is' only in the understanding of those entities to whose Being something like

an understanding of Being belongs…there is a necessary connection between Being and

understanding…"[50] It is this necessary connection between Being and understanding that

Sparrow uses to insist that, due to the *methodological* constraints of phenomenology, any

philosophy beginning from here ends in idealism.[51] But such an argument only works if

phenomenology starts from within the presumed cabinet of consciousness, from the

Cartesian *cogito* in the style of Husserl's phenomenology. Thus, Sparrow's argument is

perhaps effective against Husserl or Sartre, who maintain the Cartesian roots of the ego in

subjectivity, but fails to address the very deconstruction and rejection of this ground in

Heidegger. Of particular interest here is Heidegger's argument that, in order to "prove" or

"presuppose" or have any epistemic relation to some "Reality" that is "out there" is to

"presuppose a subject which is proximally *worldless* or unsure of its world. Thus from

the very beginning, Being-in-a-world is disposed to 'take things' in some way

[*Auffassen*], to suppose, to be certain, to have faith – a way of behaving which itself is

always a founded mode of Being-in-the-world."[52] Here Heidegger displays his full

underground character, denying the ground of the question of realism altogether, "for

realism holds that the Reality of the 'world' not only needs to be proved but also is

capable of proof."[53] The reason this is so is just because of the types of beings that we

are, things in the world are *already* fundamentally disclosed to us – that is, wherever I

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[50] All of these at Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 228.
[51] Sparrow, *The End of Phenomenology*.
[52] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 250.
[53] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 251.

look, there things are, and they're already widely differentiated and appear already as a

manifold and multiplicity to which I've secured access. This is why Heidegger admits

that Idealism has an advantage *in principle* (not in fact), because it demands the

"ontological analysis of consciousness as an inevitably prior task."[54] This sentence really

explains the whole reason Heidegger writes *Being and Time*, which he repeatedly

reminds us is a preparatory analysis aimed to clarify the *meaning* of Being

phenomenologically, starting from the fact that wherever we are and whatever we're

doing, things just *make sense to us* intuitively.[55] So when Descartes asks us to doubt the

existence of our bodies and so on, to doubt the "external world" generally, Heidegger

stands fast and says, "No! It's just not possible – to doubt is to already have things

revealed to you, to doubt, one already finds oneself in the world, a world which is to be

doubted." The method of doubt is an illusion, because it presupposes the very

mathematical procedure embedded within the *cogito* from which one aims to deduce the

mathematical procedure of certain knowledge *as a doctrine of ideas* (read: as the

representational procedure).[56] Heidegger's phenomenological method does not end in

idealism, but is rather the end of idealism and realism as salient philosophical

distinctions. Realism which does not account for the being of the beings that know the

real cannot account for the real, because knowledge is real, and understanding is real, and

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[54] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 251.
[55] Thomas Sheehan is very good at drawing out this insight into Heidegger's phenomenological method. See both Sheehan, "Astonishing! Things Make Sense!" *Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual*, 1 (2011), 1-25; and, the book-length Sheehan, *Making Sense of Heidegger*.
[56] Compare the arguments I've forwarded to this effect in Chapter Two with the argument Heidegger makes in the 1933 lecture series translated as Heidegger, *Being and Truth*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2010), 30-36. Although we approach from different directions, we end in the same place.

the knowers of being are real, and so realism unjustifiably favors the object in a completely unreflective and uncritical way by dogmatically assuming the orthodoxy of subjectivity and representationalism on which the divide is founded. I'll return to this point below, because, once we understand Gabriel's fields of sense, we will see he falls right into this trap, and is, thus, on his own account of ontotheology, which he adopts wholesale from Heidegger, just unwittingly reestablishing the old metaphysics.

So what of Gabriel's *Sinnfeld*? How does this compare to Heidegger's *Welt*? I have been very hard on Gabriel. But like Nietzsche, I only attack the strong and worthy adversary. My quarrel regarding Heidegger is not, in any way, an attempt to dismiss Gabriel by the weak declaration that "Heidegger already said that." Rather, it is an attempts to grapple with both Heidegger and Gabriel in order to gain ontological insight from a thoughtful encounter with them. Even if it were the case that Heidegger's "world" and Gabriel's *Sinnfeld* are exactly the same concept, it would nevertheless remain true that Gabriel goes beyond Heidegger, especially where his arguments engage the legacy of Heideggerian philosophy as it develops in the later 20th and early 21st centuries. If I were truly being uncharitable to Gabriel, I would take this quote, "existence is the circumstance that something appears in a field of sense…Existence is thereby found not in the world, but in one of its domains," and then assert (as Gabriel does on the basis of a single quotation from Heidegger) that Gabriel is himself just another domain ontologist.[57] I really do not think Gabriel is a domain ontologist in the pejorative sense he intends that phrase, so let us see what exact he could mean.

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[57] Gabriel, *Why the World Does Not Exist*, 50.

According to Gabriel, "to exist," to be, means "to appear in a field of sense," in which "appearing in a field of sense" is a technical expression of "being in a context."[58] Insofar as fields *themselves* exist, they too appear in fields of sense. It's just that there is an indefinite plurality of different fields, and no one overarching universal domain that contains them all. Very good. Now, the great advantage that Gabriel has over Heidegger is that, for Gabriel, "to appear" is not strictly "appearing to some human being."[59] I think this is the correct view, and I have argued for a version of this in the previous Chapter concerning the difference between natural and technical things, and the concept of autopoiesis. Heidegger too began to recognize this mistake later, though he failed to clearly address the problem, and it will serve us well to heed Gabriel's remarks on the issue.[60] There is an almost insurmountable problem in Heidegger interpretation, wherein "Dasein" is take to be equivalent to "human being" – that Dasein just *is* human being. In fact, this is the weakest aspect of Sheehan's "paradigm shift" in *Making Sense of Heidegger*. But then, what to do with passages such as this, from *The History of Beyng*:

> 7. *Da-sein*
> Who could say it!
>> The clearing of being. To *be* the *grounding* ground of this clearing.
>> This itself does not = being human, rather the latter as guardianship
> and founding.
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[58] Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 158. In the same text the notion that "existence = appearing in a field of sense" is explicitly affirmed on pages 166, 188, 190-91, and 213. This is consistent with the earlier work, Gabriel, *Why the World Does Not Exist*, 50-72.

[59] Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 166.

[60] Heidegger later remarks that *Being and Time* is too "anthropomorphic" or "subjectivistic" in its understanding of Being, and yet, Being, even as the event of the clearing, is still an appearing. Later we can see that perhaps Heidegger leaves open the possibility of an appearance to something other than human. Again, however, this is not clear, and the issue remains contentious in Heidegger scholarship. For examples of Heidegger's reflections on *Being and Time* that express this concern, see Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 70-72, 233, and 237-38.

> The There [*Da*]
>> A trace of the There in the [*aletheia*] of [*phusis*].
>> But the trace has long since been extinguished – it can never simply
> be followed gain, but must be found from one's own trail.[61]

Here, Heidegger is casting humans, to which Being appears as beings, in the role of stewards, in whose language Being dwells. Thus, he reverses the advantage of Gabriel, who fails to recognize that appearing implies that to which the appearance appears! As appearing, existence always *appears to something*. We have the reemergence of our refrain – ontology and epistemology remain intertwined. Already in positing existence as appearing we have the implicit question "appearance to what/whom?" that haunts our investigations. Further, this makes Gabriel's ontology fundamentally *phenomenological* in Heidegger's sense, where the phenomenological conception is "that which shows itself is the Being of entities, its meaning, its modifications, and derivatives."[62] And, insofar as fields of sense *exist*, they must themselves appear in a field of sense. It is then perfectly coherent to say that there is a "field of a field," which is a limited case. However, if *ontology* – "the investigation concerned with being"[63] – is indeed ultimately "the systematic investigation into the meaning of 'existence', or rather the investigation of existence itself aided by insight into the meaning of 'existence',"[64] then ontology, *as the field of investigation into existence as fields of sense*, is itself *the field of fields*. Ontology is the field (context) in which fields *as such* make their appearance. Again, investigation into existence *itself* as an appearing echoes the phenomenological call "to the things

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[61] Heidegger, *The History of Beyng*, trans. William McNeill and Jeffrey Powell (Bloomington: Indiana University, 2015), 8-9.
[62] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 60.
[63] Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 1.
[64] Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 5.

themselves!"[65] We have not seen the end of phenomenology, which Heidegger never abandons.[66] With these insights into the underground presence of the field of all fields within Gabriel's own work, let's revisit what Heidegger could mean by the "realm of realms" in his confrontation with Heraclitus.

In the 1943 essay referenced by Gabriel, Heidegger is analyzing the fragment by Heraclitus which reads: *τὸ μη δῦνόν ποτε πῶς ἄν τις λάθοι*, translated by Diels-Kranz as, "How can one hide from that which never sets?" Heidegger understands *μη δῦνόν ποτε* to mean "not setting ever."[67] This is how we are urged to understand nature, *φύσις*, and the way in which it is *experienced* as "the ever rising."[68] Notice, ever-rising does not mean or connote some unified totality, or domain of all domains in Gabriel's sense – Heidegger does not even interpret Aristotle in that way and he warns against this reading of Heraclitus when he writes, "Because *μη δῦνόν ποτε* names the realm of all realms for early thinking. It is not, however, the highest genus which subordinates different species of realms to it. It is the abode wherein every possible 'whither' of a belonging-to rests."[69] He stresses this fact precisely because he recognizes that the movement of concealing and unconcealing that is demonstrated in the thought of Heraclitus "has no images and no fixed place."[70] This echoes the remark in *Being and Time* that, "Being can be something

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[65] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 50.
[66] This is another of Sheehan's astute insights in *Making Sense of Heidegger*. Yet, in 1963 Heidegger himself plainly says he never abandons phenomenology in Heidegger, "My Way to Phenomenology." *Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2002), 82.
[67] Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking: The Dawn of Western Philosophy*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins, 1984), 111-12.
[68] Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, 111.
[69] Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, 115.
[70] Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, 115.

unconceptualized, but it never completely fails to be understood."[71] In our current context, we can understand the "ever-rising" to mean "appearing" or "coming into presence." It may seem strange, but these obscure (Heraclitus, ὁ Σκοτεινός) passages speak to the fact that so long as something appears, so long as it is apparent as the thing that it is, it does not ever "set," that is, so long as something appears as what it is, it has not ceased to be what it is. The earlier distinction between world and Nature begins to fall away, because Heidegger is here attempting to understand "nature," φύσις, in the more original sense intended by the Greeks. We can quibble and argue whether or not it is possible for Heidegger to transpose himself into the mindset of the ancient thinker Heraclitus (he can't, and he says as much himself)[72] however, it is certainly the case that by working through the Greek in his own original way we have been brought around to a very different understanding of φύσις than what is intended by modern interpretations of "nature," including the categorical aggregate version differentiated from "world" in *Being and Time*. By 1943, Heidegger is attempting to think world through Heraclitus in the sense of what is ever-rising, what is standing-forth (*vorstellen*) and enduring in appearance as what it is. He writes, "We say 'world,' and think it improperly so long as we represent it exclusively, or even primarily, after the fashion of cosmology or philosophy of nature," then, to elaborate the point and drive it home from the Heraclitian perspective, "World is enduring fire, enduring rising in the full sense of φύσις."[73] The "fire" of Heraclitus means not only the sacrificial fire, the fire in the oven or hearth, a

[71] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 228.
[72] Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, 120.
[73] Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, 117.

campfire, but also a glowing or scintillating, such as by the light of a torch or the stars. Heidegger therefore claims, "In 'fire,' lighting, glowing, blazing, soft shining hold sway, and that which opens an expanse in brightness."[74] As the enduring fire, the world opens up the clearing (as a *field* is a clearing, or a clearing in the woods) into which whatever appears may stand out (*vorstellen*) and be revealed as the thing that it is. World and *Sinnfeld* struggle toward the same end. They attempt to think the same thought – though Gabriel still within the old metaphysics.

Gabriel says of the *Sinnfeld*,

Fields are generally unconstructed, and their force is felt by the objects entering them…The field provides objective structures and interacts with the objects appearing within it. It is already there, and objects can pass through it and change its properties. Fields are not horizons or perspectives; they are not epistemological entities or objects used to explain how we can know how things are. They are an essential part of how things are in that without fields nothing could exist.[75]

We see Gabriel uncritically falling into the old paradigm wherein objects must appear over and against some subject, glossing over and hiding the fact that for him "to exist" means "to have sense" in the field of sense – sense to and for *something that is never spoken*. Gabriel calls us back from the end of the mind. He cautions us from the orthodox position – but still we hear the foreign song. Heidegger reminds us of another of Heraclitus' fragments, that the world (fire) is "that which neither any of the gods nor any mortal brought forth."[76] The world is unconstructed, and its force is felt by that which stands out from it, which is illumined in its light – the world is (always) already there,

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[74] Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, 117.
[75] Gabriel, *Fields of Sense*, 157-58.
[76] Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, 117.

and it interacts with what passes through it and its "properties" change (concealing and unconcealing in turn). Even the gods need the world to be. Though the world exists only with Dasein, Dasein does not "construct" the world. We already find ourselves in the world, and, insofar as anything exists, its existence occurs as appearance in the world. To exist is to appear in the world (*Sinnfeld*). The world just *is the field of sense within which what appears appears as what it is*. Sheehan sums this up nicely, if we forgive his questionable anthropocentrism, when he interprets, "We are a hermeneutical field of force, like a magnet that draws things together into unities of sense insofar as these things are connected with a possibility of ourselves as the final point of reference."[77] Remember Chapter Three: we have to bring things into our layer to know them, but this transferal in no way suggests that we have not been brought into a real relation with a real thing – it's just that the thing must appear to us in the way that things can appear to us. As Heidegger puts it, "The whole of these relations, everything that belongs to the structure of the totality with which the Dasein can in any way give itself something to be understood, to signify to itself its ability to be, we call *significance* [*Bedeutsamkeit*]. This is the structure of what we call *world in the strictly ontological sense*."[78] In the light of this quote, it becomes obvious that Sheehan is punning on the inherent *sensibility of the world as world* in his title *Making Sense of Heidegger*. So, it is only the world that gives us a sense of things. The world is a field of sense. The only thing that should give us pause about this quote is Heidegger's use of "totality," *Gesamheit*. The most common meanings of *Gesamheit* are "entirety," and also "aggregate." Heidegger uses the word a lot in his early

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[77] Sheehan, *Making Sense of Heidegger*, 125.
[78] Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, 295-96.

works, and it seems as though he took it to be unproblematic. But I can see how, given

Gabriel's strongly persuasive arguments about totalizing domains, we might be

suspicious of this use. Heidegger is simply not that clear about it. Totalities in Heidegger

are always local, so we should understand "totality" here just as all the things that make it

possible for anything to have meaning for – well, anything. This should give us no more

pause that when Gabriel writes both that he "will deny that there is a unified domain of

all facts, the single all-encompassing 'sphere of objects' unified by some conceptual

operation or other," *and also that everything that exists only exists insofar as it appears*

in a field of sense, including fields themselves. The idea of a field of sense explains the

existence of *everything that is* in Gabriel's work. Heidegger's "totalities" are local

totalities of structure, of reference, and so on. It's just a way for him to talk about all the

stuff related to this area, anything we might talk about in relation to the issue at hand – be

it the issue of equipmental contexture or the care-structure. It is never used to express the

overarching and unified domain, or the sum total of all entities or objects in the world.

That is just not part of Heidegger's project, as I've shown above.

      If the previous Chapter contained an ontological deduction, the first half of this

Chapter has been a reduction. Working with Heidegger and Gabriel, I have given a

general account of what I mean when I say "world." Is the world independent of us? The

question is meaningless, if we remember the words of Perry, the old New Realist. It

might be more appropriate to say that we depend on the world, but that too misses the

point. If we are to achieve our new beginning, somewhere after the end of the mind, we

must accept the philosophical vacuity of those paradigms – realism-idealism. We account

for the world and the things we encounter in it, and are able to account for the fact that

not only do things happen to exist in the world, but also that things *appear in the world*. That is, there are things to which things appear, and also things that appear to themselves. Insofar as things appear, they appear in the world, understood as the field of sense. How do they make this appearance? Though oscillation. Oscillation is the differentiation of things in the world, and in this differentiation, oscillation is the movement by which things stand out, *the movement of opening*, the disclosure of things, their unconcealment and release to that which they appear. Thus, the world doesn't appear as such, but makes itself apparent through the very things that constitute a world. And there are indefinite numbers of worlds, of contextures (*Sinnfeld*), that generate the appropriate domains within which things become apparent. These are not only human contextures. Contra Heidegger, not even a spider is world-poor.

I'm sitting at a table. For me, the table is disclosed as that thing in the world at which I sit, that provides a surface for my work, a place to eat, something around which to gather with friends for a game or drinks. Along comes a spider. For the spider, the expanse of the table must appear as the ground or floor appears to me; the spider walks across the table. I would put the spider outside. I take a piece of paper and place it before the spider, hoping to scoop the little critter up with it. The spider is suspicious of the paper. It encounters it as different from the table and stops. It feels around, exploring this new and unknown obstacle. It backs away. It attempts to go around. I move the paper in front of the spider again. Its movements quicken, it senses something strange in this obstruction. I move the spider, and it exists for itself in a planter. It builds a web. The spider waits. It is futural. It has laid a trap. It engages its prey and performs all those things that are required to sustain the spider as what it is in the world. The spider, in the

only sense that matters, is concerned with its own being. Does it ask the question of

Being? That is utter non-sense. Most people never ask the question – why should a

spider? I would ask some sage spider one day what being means to it and it would reply,

"the web, the wait, the fly…" It depends on its little world, the whole world to it, its field

of sense. We need the world – but the world exists *for* us, in order to… The difficulty

arises from the idea that ontology and epistemology are completely separate concerns.

They are not. If ontology is ever to be adequate, it must account for the being of

knowledge as well as of rocks. And it would be philosophically irresponsible not to make

at least some effort to explain how I know what's real. If indeed there is no domain of all

domains, and I agree with Gabriel that there is not, then only from out of one world can

we glimpse another. Thus, ontology cannot be revealed as what it is from within ontology

itself. That is why, in Chapter Two, I showed that even when approached through

Descartes' "I think," we still arrive at place. We still need a place to be, and the world is

how our place is given in appearances – not that the world appears as such, as a place per

se, but that, insofar are things are apparent, they are in places and, as *for us*, places

manifest world. Rocks and mountains and bridges are in places, but the world does not

exist for them. We are in places, my cat is in a place, the amoeba has a place, but insofar

as things are apparent to and for those other things that live a life for themselves, their

place is in the world. The struggle between Modernism and postmodernism has been cast

as a struggle between the dominance of epistemology and ontology, but the dichotomy is

a false one, recalling the call to wonder and awe that echoes from Aristotle through

Putnam. It cannot be either/or, but only both/and. I now turn to the crucial place –

Yoknapatawpha County. There, with literature as a case study wherein the placial

ontology can be illumined, the full import of our discussion so far can shine. We will see the deep connection between ontology and epistemology in the very movement of oscillation that opens the world for us, that places us there for ourselves and the other, and through which existence becomes apparent as such. We move now from philosophy, strictly observed, to literature, which yields the philosophy yet to come in heralding another beginning.

4.4 Phenomenological Methodology as Descriptive Realism

Allow me first, before delving too far into *Absalom, Absalom!*, to lay out a little more clearly my own position relative to the New Realists. I do not wish to take up the mantle of New Realism, and so the phenomenological aspect of the current study should be foregrounded a bit more so that the distinction between my position and theirs is better articulated. As I have implied above, the New Realism of Gabriel and Ferraris is the most naïve of realisms, which cannot see the frayed bare threads hanging loose from the ontology they've wrenched from its philosophical entanglements – loose threads which they apparently refuse to sew up. Indeed, Sparrow seconds my understanding of the New Realists as simply asserting the mind-independence of "reality" as axiomatic, but he takes this view to be about as warranted as it would be unwarranted.[79] I cannot agree regarding warrant, because, as I have shown, the New Realist are *not* merely asserting that the world is real – they are asserting that the world "out there" is real, and thereby reinforcing and uncritically assuming all the old metaphysical baggage that they proclaim to be avoiding. I am demanding far less – just that there is meaningful stuff all around.

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[79] Sparrow in email to the author, 9 July 2015.

Further, I, along with Casey, Heidegger, the Modernists, and analytic philosophers of mind and personal identity, have shown that the assertion of the world "out there" is wholly *unwarranted* because of the groundlessness of the subjective self that is alleged to be the "inside" against which the "outside" appears. My demand that we accept just that there are meaningful things all around is rooted in phenomenology, and my path to the deconstruction of the *cogito* as *subiectum* stems from my engagement with that tradition. There is a descriptive element to this procedure that has always appeared odd within philosophical discourse obsessed with propositions and verificationist explanations of truth. In philosophy, the old French prejudice against description still holds. All I mean by a descriptive realism is that when performing a phenomenological analysis, say, analyzing the experience of a young boy parading a series of costumes before a mirror, or asking that we think of our experience of sitting in a room, I am asking, first, for a descriptive account, on the one hand, of what it is like to be in that situation or have such and such an experience – to *really have it*. On the other hand, such descriptive techniques begin to yield philosophically salient insights as they confirm or deny theoretical expectations we have about what certain experiences should be like based on the theoretical model through which they are approached. The "realism" comes into play because I can find no reason at all to assume that something's being existential or involved with a personal experience would somehow make it "less real" than anything "out there in the world." Indeed, as I have shown, to have an experience at all already presupposes that there is *something* of which I have an experience; i.e., the world. In a way, Hume can be read "phenomenologically" when he expects to find the "simple self" in experience and, turning to observe, finds none. The phenomenological argument is

basically, "that's just not what experience is like, that's not the kind of things we are." We cannot be rid of our reliance on experience, because that's the only way we can go on confirming or denying things. This is why I have returned to comments regarding our abilities to expand our powers of observation. This is not to throw us back into an old modern Empiricism, but it is to stick within a general empiricist framework that maintains a "show me" attitude toward conclusions reached through "pure reason." Rationalism, for instance in pure mathematics or theoretical physics, is demanding and trustworthy to a point, but we remain somewhat skeptical until theoretical conclusions can be hashed out and confirmed experimentally. Even analytics like Bernard Williams and Derek Parfit rely on this sort of existential confirmation, and the analytic love of pumping intuitions has always struck an underground chord that rings phenomenological. Again, epistemology and ontology are caught in cahoots, we who know what is are always backed into a corner by the question of how we know what is, the question itself an implicit proof that we at least know *something*.

We have been carried as far as possible on the backs of our interlocutors. The engagement with old and new New Realists, as well as with the literary distinctions between Modernism and postmodernism discussed in Chapter Two, have brought us to an impasse regarding the separation of epistemology and ontology. At this point, it should be clear that I think ontology needs to be *foregrounded*; perhaps made the dominant theme, but not the only one, nor so dominant that we lose sight of the epistemic insights of conceptual availability and non-representational cognition opened in the previous sections. Insofar as these two philosophical threads are intertwined with one another, it is really epistemology that *needs* ontology. It makes some sense to say "talking

about knowledge is epistemological, talking about being or existence is ontological," but that's about as robust as the distinction gets. An adequate ontology will always be able to account for the being of knowledge and the being who knows – thus it will occasionally stray into epistemological territory. Epistemology is actually far worse off than that! Epistemology without ontology is a total non-starter. It literally makes no sense on the grounds of its circularity. It presupposes a theory of knowledge in order to execute arguments regarding the nature of knowledge – which have been presupposed. Epistemology, on its own, is self-defeating. Ontology is the only place from which epistemological investigations could be launched, because it is situated to account for the being of knowledge whose existence is presupposed in epistemology "proper." Does this mean that epistemology "depends" on ontology? No – for we can describe epistemological issues separately from ontological ones, however, it seems that epistemology, at least, will always *imply* some ontology. Again, the relation of implication is distinct from that of identity or dependence. As Perry shows, only the implier is dependent on the implied in the logical sense that, in a syllogism for instance, the premises cannot both be true unless the conclusion is true, and thus, only what implies is dependent on the implied in a positive and unqualified sense. However, what is implied can be implied otherwise such that the conclusion of the syllogism can be obtained by more than one set of premises, and so cannot be said to depend in any exclusive manner on any one set of premises. We can likewise understand this distinction mathematically, as when we consider an "independent postulate." In this case, the postulate in any given system is co-determined with the other postulates of the system,

however, it cannot be deduced as a theorem from the other postulates.[80] Again, we can

see the systemic risk that has spread from the fissure of the I-Am's dissolution into the

body and out into the world. This has been an underground crisis, one unacknowledged

and incapable of acknowledgement from the position of entirely local and hyper-

specialized philosophical concerns. Indeed, most of these overspecialized theories

presuppose and uncritically accept so much metaphysical baggage, are locked so blindly

into centuries' old metaphysical paradigms with ideas about the physical world that pre-

date Newton, and are so adamantly reluctant to ask *fundamental questions* regarding

truth, knowledge, or thinking, that, from the Heideggerian perspective cultivated here,

they are *not really philosophical at all*. The crisis of philosophy remains its radical

groundlessness.

Crisis is a key element of Faulkner's overall artistic project, and is especially

relevant to any interpretation of *Absalom, Absalom!*, a work whose characters are acutely

aware of crises both recently past and those yet to come. Recall Sheppard's assessment,

discussed in Chapter Two, that Modernism was rooted in the sense that contemporary

culture "was experiencing the subversion of the most fundamental assumptions and

conceptual models on which the liberal humanist epoch has been based."[81] It is easy to

spot this in Faulkner's writing, as I have already shown in the previous Chapter's

interpretation of *The Sound and the Fury*. From the very outset of *Absalom, Absalom!* we

can see the same concern with the subversion of fundamental assumptions and the

explicitly acknowledged cultural crisis that marks the end of the antebellum South and its

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[80] Holt et al., *The New Realism*, 112-13.
[81] Sheppard, "The Problematics of European Modernism," 13.

integration (or failure to integrate) into a broader federal tapestry. This crisis of identity

and its division is attested from the very start as Quentin Compson (the brother of Caddy

from *The Sound and the Fury*) sits listening to Rosa Coldfield tell the story of how

Thomas Sutpen came tearing into Yoknapatawpha from the Virginias with a band of

"wild" black slaves in tow. Faulkner established the crisis of modernity very early when

he writes,

> Then hearing would reconcile and he would seem to listen to two separate
> Quentins now – the Quentin Compson preparing for Harvard in the deep
> South, the deep South dead since 1865 and people with garrulous outrage
> baffled ghosts, listening, having to listen, to one of the ghosts which had
> refused to lie still even longer than most had, telling about old ghost-times;
> and the Quentin Compson who was still too young to deserve yet to be a
> ghost but nevertheless having to be one for all that, since he was born and
> bred in the deep South the same as she was – the two separate Quentins now
> talking to one another in the long silence of notpeople in notlanguage…[82]

In this passage, one much analyzed over the years,[83] we see not only the thoroughness

with which the crisis grips life in Yoknapatawpha, but also the formal experimentation

that often marks Modernist literature. Pericles Lewis has remarked, "In general, work that

is considered modern is experimental rather than traditional, though many of these

experiments draw on and develop techniques inherent in more traditional art…In each

case modernism called attention to the medium of the literary or artistic work, defined

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[82] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (New York: Vintage International, 1990), 4-5.

[83] Cf., Eric Plouffe Lazure, "Literary Motherhood: Rosa Coldfield's Design in *Absalom, Absalom!*" *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 62:3-4 (Summer 2009),479-96; J. G. Brister, "*Absalom, Absalom!* and the Semiotic Other." *The Faulkner Journal*, 22:1-2 (Fall 2006), 39-54; David Cowart, "Faulkner and Joyce in Morrison's *Song of Solomon*." *American Literature*, 62:1 (March 1990), 87-100; Leslie Haywood, "The Shattered Glass: The Blank Space of Being in *Absalom, Absalom!*" *The Faulkner Journal*, 2:1 (Fall 1986), 12-23; and, Lewis P. Simpson, "The Fable of the Writer in Southern Fiction." *Prospects*, 7 (1982), 249-66.

itself in contrast to convention, and radically altered the means of representation."[84]

Indeed, Faulkner's notoriously long sentences, the unusual breaks and punctuation, the

stream of consciousness that veers between characters all draw attention to the medium

itself, and break radically from the traditional linear scheme of the novel; something I've

already noted regarding the difference between Balzac and Faulkner's styles. But the

passage also marks the paradoxes that haunt the whole novel and signify its Modernism,

paradoxes in line with Berman's Marxist assessment that in modernity "all that is solid

melts into air."[85] Again, we see this in the struggle of daughter/niece Quentin to break

free of the vicious cycle implemented by the sexual politics of Yoknapatawpha and seek

a new life beyond its confines, a new life prefigured in the enigma of the man with the

red tie in *The Sound and the Fury*, which I discussed in the previous Chapter.

      With Faulkner and the other Modernists, we have overrun the established

discourse, which has melted into air, and stumbled out on our own into new territory.

With *Absalom, Absalom!* we will make headway into this new, yet hauntingly familiar

domain. In the section that follows, concerned almost exclusively with Faulkner's novel,

I will engage Yoknapatawpha from the placial ontology developed in the previous

Chapters. The novel lends itself to this analysis because of the way in which the story is

told and retold among the characters who are all oriented toward the story's significance

in different ways – that is, who all have different stakes in the consequences of Sutpen's

design. They have basic concepts that guide their actions in relation to others, orienting

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[84] Lewis, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernism* (New York: Cambridge University, 2007), 3.
[85] See the discussion in Chapter Two above. The quote is from Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, 15.

them to the history of the Sutpen's in Yoknapatawpha, and which they use in order to do and be the kinds of things they are in place. We will see the hermeneutic layers unfolding across generations of people making up an ensemble cast. Their actions cast meaningful roles to be followed and repeated in actions iterated over several generations. Of course, if we recall Ferraris' notion of documentality, there are points in the text that show how meaning can be anchored in documents. We will touch on the significance of letters in the text, letters which relate characters and orient their actions, inspire love and vengeance. There are also ledgers, "what the old Aunt Rosa told you about some things that just have to be whether they are or not, just to balance the books, write *Paid* on the old sheet so that whoever keeps them can take it out of the ledger and burn it, get rid of it."[86] All well and good. But I want to focus more on the bodily emplacement, and the opening of rooms and houses in which characters dwell and from which their lives take on meaning – but more importantly – places whose meanings give rise to the ontological question, place that reflect characters back on themselves in such a way that there very being is at stake, becomes an issue for them. Since, as technical, documentality is derivative of the immediately lived experiences and actions (including, but not limited to speech acts), in order to get more directly at the placial ontology recoverable from *Absalom, Absalom!* I will focus more on the phenomenological enactment of the question within the text.

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[86] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 260.

4.5 *Absalom, Absalom!* and the Movement of Being

Thomas Sutpen enters the world of Yoknapatawpha from that of the Virginias, and immediately sets about an unwitting transformation of the place. The world of Yoknapatawpha exists prior to Sutpen, it is "independent" of him, and yet, on arriving, Thomas Sutpen enters into a relation with Yoknapatawpha that becomes constitutional for them both. Insofar as the Sutpen's become a fixture of the county and implicate themselves in the drama of its worlds, the Sutpen's begin to change Yoknapatawpha. Even if it were the case that they did not change the county, we can see in Rosa Coldfield's proclamation to Quentin Compson the fear of any potential change brought by newcomers. But what kind of world is Yoknapatawpha that admits Thomas Sutpen to its ranks?

We can loosely understand Yoknapatawpha itself as a localized matrix of overlapping and interconnected worlds – notably, those of race, gender, class, sexuality, ownership, and propriety. These are notable in that Faulkner takes them up as explicit themes throughout his writing. But in fact, there are many more factors at play at different times, such as the roles of families or individuals during the American Civil War, or the handling of mental illness by a town or family, always at the intersections between individuals and social units, be they family, townsfolk, farmhands, regiments, and so on. No one in Yoknapatawpha live alone, strictly speaking; though many of them live lives of relative isolation, it is an isolation predicated on a relation of absence from a larger social group. The hermit's hermitage can only exist when there is a larger community from which the hermitage is distanced. Thus, Yoknapatawpha is a richly differentiated world; a "totality" whose component parts outstrip the boundaries of the

county proper, and in their very overflow, connect Yoknapatawpha to other worlds in other places, such as the American South, the Yankee North, the rural and the urban, the native and the foreign, white and black, and so on. Think of the most complex Venn diagram you can imagine, then multiply its density a thousandfold in dimensions greater than two. The totality is local, and it came to be in an historical process by which human beings engage one another and their mutual surroundings. From out of a senseless landscape emerges, in the state of Mississippi, the county of Yoknapatawpha. We can imagine this unfolding in the world of fiction just in the same manner as any given county in the "actual" world, where "actual" merely denotes the difference between imagined Yoknapatawpha and Lafayette (the historical Mississippi county on which Yoknapatawpha is modeled) or Tippecanoe (the county in which I sit writing these words). Yoknapatawpha exists in books written by William Faulkner, which he has situated and placed in the state of Mississippi through a rigorous dialogue with that place from which he raised up a fictional world with all the trappings of the actual one. This is Faulkner's radical realism, couched in a descriptive practice that instantiates in art a place that readers find to be very much like the "real" American South in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Yoknapatawpha exists between actuality and fiction. It is really fiction, and as fiction, it is real, in real books, but the imagined place is a representation of the world we actually encounter in the American South, and in Mississippi in particular. It is built out of the actual. The fears in Yoknapatawpha are real fears, loves are real loves, and its crises are our crises.

If we follow the arguments of the previous Chapter, we know that much of Yoknapatawpha is "constructed," in some sense. That is, there are interstices of worlds

whose meaning is historically construed for and by human beings. Race, gender, class, and so on need to be recorded, documented. Recall Ferraris' notion of documentality on this point. Rosa Coldfield wants to document the Sutpen tragedy, and she does so by enlisting the help of young Quentin Compson who is to be a witness to the whole affair. This request raises the first major difficulty in interpreting the text. For one, we can see rather early that Rosa may not be the most reliable narrator, because the stakes for her and the consequences of the Sutpen affair for her personally are so daunting. Indeed, early criticism of *Absalom, Absalom!* focuses almost exclusively on trying to figure out what "really" happened, that is, why did Henry Sutpen *really* kill Charles Bon.[87] Of course, this is not the question with which we are concerned. More important for our present purposes is to show both how the different narrations interact in order to "construct" Yoknapatawpha, and also how these mutual constructions inflect the different relative worlds through the perspective of each character, and thereby reveal that character is likewise constituted by a fundamental orientation toward these intra-worldly significations.

Consider just the first iteration of the story, that told by Rosa to Quentin. This version will be made more complex and questionable by a subsequent telling by Quentin's father, and further, by Quentin's own ruminations on the tale, both to himself

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[87] For a sampling of early criticism that attempts to find the one true unifying story within the novel, cf., Cleanth Brooks, "*Absalom, Absalom*: The Definition of Innocence." *The Sewanee Review*, 59:45 (Autumn 1951), 543-58; Ilse Dusoir Lind, "The Design and Meaning of *Absalom, Absalom!*" *PMLA*, 70:5 (December 1955), 887-912; Arthur L. Scott, "The Myriad Perspectives of *Absalom, Absalom!*" *American Quarterly*, 6:3 (Autumn 1954), 210-20; Duncan Aswell, "The Puzzling Design of *Absalom, Absalom!*" *The Kenyon Review*, 30:1 (1968); and, Ralph Behrens, "Collapse of Dynasty: The Thematic Center of *Absalom, Absalom!*" *PMLA*, (January 1974), 24-33.

while listening to Rosa, but also in subsequent dialogue with his Harvard roommate, the Canadian Shrevlin "Shreve" McCannon. These other versions will become important in a moment, but for now, let's stay with Rosa's version of events.

Rosa is among the casualties of Thomas Sutpen's calculations, mostly because Sutpen successfully maneuvers to marry Rosa's sister, Ellen Coldfield. This union would cause Rosa much grief, and is, perhaps, the main reason for her disdain of the Sutpen family – not so much that he married her sister per se, but that he was a destroyer of the order of things. To make things worse, when Ellen dies, and then their father dies, both in the turmoil of the Civil War, Rosa retreats to Sutpen's Hundred and becomes engaged to her sister's widower. When Sutpen suggests they attempt to produce a son before marriage, Rosa breaks their engagement, and leaves Sutpen's Hundred to return to Jefferson, the Yoknapatawpha County seat. The Coldfield's family history ends in a tragic assimilation to the Sutpen clan. The mother dies giving birth to Rosa, Ellen is married to Thomas Sutpen, and the father goes mad during the Civil War, locking himself in the attic when soldiers ransack the store he had run with his Sutpen son-in-law, only to starve to death in 1864. These facts help to explain Rosa's account of Thomas Sutpen as the Devil when she says, "*It seems this demon – his name was Sutpen – (Colonel Sutpen) – Colonel Sutpen. Who came out of nowhere and without warning upon the land with a band of strange niggers and built a plantation – (Tore violently a plantation, Miss Rosa Coldfield says) – tore violently. And married her sister Ellen and begot a son and a daughter which – (Without gentleness begot, Miss Rosa Coldfield says) – without*

gentleness.[88] The devil imagery is reinforced by the implicit usurpation of the role of

God in creation, where Sutpen's Hundred, the hundred-square-mile plot gained by

Thomas Sutpen from Native Americans, is described, "Then in the long unamaze Quentin

seemed to watch them overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and

astonished earth and drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless

Nothing and clap them down like cards upon a table beneath the up-palm immobile and

pontific, creating the Sutpen's Hundred, the *Be Sutpen's Hundred* like the oldentime *Be*

Light."[89] A few formal remarks on these passages. Rosa is already revealed in her

unreliability when she insists that Sutpen comes out of nowhere bringing terror. Of

course, the terror he brings and the destruction wrought is predicated on Sutpen's *past*,

and his illicit relation to Charles Bon. I'll make this relation explicit in a moment, but for

now, it is important to realize that the entry of Sutpen into Yoknapatawpha is a literal

collision of worlds as he brings his past with him. Too, notice the repetition[90] involved in

establishing Sutpen, the repetition of his name, of the Biblical imagery, the violent

separation (its tearing) of house and garden from the land, and the lack of gentleness and

the implication of sexual violence. These repetitions function to overlay the conceptual

scheme by which Rosa interprets her own world and are exemplary of the process of

accretion. We can see repetition functioning in this structural role throughout the text,

such as in the repetition of renunciations by both Henry and Quentin. This repeated

renunciation will become important below. In any event, we can see that Rosa's

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[88] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 5.
[89] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 4.
[90] The theme of repetition in *Absalom, Absalom!* is perhaps best analyzed in John Irwin's landmark psychoanalytic study, *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1996).

perspective does not spring up out of whole cloth. She rehearses it in the telling, but it also accretes from the entanglements of her own history and develop from out of Rosa herself and her relation to and situation within the social order of the county. This layering process of accretion is remarkable in every Faulkner character, and is signaled early in relation to Quentin, whose "childhood was full of them; his very body was an empty hall echoing with sonorous defeated names; he was not a being, an entity, he was a commonwealth."[91] Indeed, Rosa and Quentin are already implicated with one another – Quentin's grandfather, according to his father, "was the nearest thing to a friend which Sutpen ever had in this county, and she [Rosa] probably believes that Sutpen may have told your grandfather something about himself and her, about that engagement that did not engage, that troth which failed to plight." These speculations are immediately prior to one of the key moments in the book, wherein Quentin's father pronounces the importance of keeping family secrets, that the whole affair should and could "still be in the family; the skeleton (if it be a skeleton) still in the closet."[92]

Stepping back to take stock, we can see that Quentin, Rosa, and Jason Compson (Quentin's father) are helping to establish what I designate "basic concepts," or "ground concepts," what might be called in German "*Grundbegriff.*" Again, these are not anything like representations nor maps nor models that relate to the world or to places in the mode of "correspondence," where we must see if the "internal" concept "matches up" to the "external" state of affairs. The discussion of Heidegger and Alva Nöe in Chapter One should be consulted on this point, though it is a recurring one throughout the current

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[91] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 7.
[92] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 8.

work. One reason why Faulkner's novel helps us to understand this important notion of a basic concept is because, for once, he writes in a way that simplifies a phenomena and allows us easier access to it. In actual life, we are not oriented toward the world by just one basic concept. However, in *Absalom, Absalom!* one or two basic concepts become foregrounded and serve as a holistic explanation for any given character's interpretation of established historical events. I will enumerate some basic concepts to be associated with each character below. Rosa is an interesting case because she seems to be searching for such a concept. Her basic alignment is "outraged bafflement," and this lack of understanding with regards to why Henry kills Bon drives much of Rosa's actions, including her fateful request to return to Sutpen's Hundred with Quentin, and there finally confront the ghosts of her past.

Our understanding of basic concepts generally follows Heidegger, who explains that basic concepts, "are anchored in our being gripped, in which we do not represent before us that which we conceptually comprehend," but instead, "is in the *grip of an attack* – driven out of everydayness and driven back into the ground of things."[93] It is the fact that we are the kinds of things that we are, and that we are thrown into the midst of a comprehensive order that makes sense, which drives the assault coming from our own *being there*, in place, as we ourselves confront our own place in the world. Basic concepts get us oriented toward our own grounds, toward the *ground of grounds* to echo Heidegger's way of talking about them.[94] Again, Faulkner presents characters in the grip

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[93] Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 8, 21.
[94] Heidegger, *Basic Concepts*, trans. Gary E. Aylesworth (Bloomington: Indiana University), 2-3, 9-11.

of this crisis – the ontological crisis of their very grounding, the undermining of the basic assumptions by which they live their lives and construe their actions meaningfully in the world. It is a fundamental crisis; a crisis of grounds. A few things should be made clear. If we think "concepts" under the old rubric of representation, then it should be immediately clear that there is something basically false about these concepts insofar as they are, admittedly, always oversimplifications of a complexity that outstrips the powers of human cognition to contain it. The basic concepts are *comprehensive*, not because they fully and totally represent all the salient facts about a state of affairs, but rather, basic concepts are comprehensive because they take a view of the world as it implicates the knower who knows it. Further, and more importantly, because the basic concept is not representational in character, but for us indicates the orientation of a being for whom the world holds significance toward its own situation in the place from whence the being's history unfolds, these concepts remain avenues by which we can obtain ontological insight. Nietzsche is correct that there is something illusory about the truth of these concepts, especially when they are taken to be veridical representations of some world "out there" beyond us where things-in-themselves reside.[95] But the illusion can be unmasked as such, and we are thrown back onto the "ground of things" by the shudder of the basic concepts when they are assaulted. Rosa will give us our first and best example of this.

One of the reasons Rosa calls upon Quentin is because she wants the young man to accompany her to Sutpen's Hundred so that she can finally confront the secrets of that

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[95] See Nietzsche, "Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense." *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999), 139-53.

old manor-house from which she had fled after the war. In one of the most bracing and

revelatory passages in *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner recounts a confrontation between

Rosa and Clytemnestra Sutpen. Clytie is one of Colonel Sutpen's illegitimate children,

fathered with one of the women who he had brought to Yoknapatawpha as a slave. We

learn that Clytie is not the only one; that in fact, prior to arriving in the county, Sutpen

had a wife, Eulalia, who had been awarded to him by the master of a Haitian plantation

on which Sutpen had worked as an overseer and where he had helped to squash a slave

rebellion. Sutpen fathered a son with his first wife, Eulalia, and that son was none other

than Charles Bon. These racial "betrayals," as Rosa sees them, are a secret locked in the

house at Sutpen's Hundred, and that Rosa enlists Quentin to help her secure. But

something remarkable happens in the house in the two instants in which Rosa is forced to

engage Clytie on the stairs. The first crucial moment is consistently illuminated in

Faulkner scholarship, one returned to again and again as a key passage in the novel.[96]

Faulkner writes from Rosa's perspective,

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[96] Cf., Merle Williams, "'Bullets in the dining room table': The (Im)possibility of Mending Wounds in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Journal of Literary Studies* 29, no. 2 (July 2013), 24-44; Masami Sugimori, "Racial Mixture, Racial Passing, and White Subjectivity in *Absalom, Absalom!*" *The Faulkner Journal* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2008), 3-21; Sharon Desmond Paradiso, "Terrorizing Whiteness in Yoknapatawpha County," *The Faulkner Journal* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2008), 23-42; J. G**.** Brister, **"***Absalom, Absalom!* and the Semiotic Other," *The Faulkner Journal* 22, no. 1-2 (Fall 2006), 39-54; Kristin E. Pitt, "National Conflict and Narrative Possibility in Faulkner and Garro," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 8, no. 2 (2006); Christopher C. De Santis, "Pseudo-History Versus Social Critique: Faulkner's Reconstruction," *Southern Quarterly* 43, no. 1 (2005), 9-28; Norman W. Jones, "Coming Out Through History's Hidden Love Letters in *Absalom, Absalom!*" *American Literature* 76, no. 2 (June 2004): 339-366; Thomas Loebel, "Love of Masculinity," *The Faulkner Journal* 15, no. 1 (Fall 1999): 83-106; Helen Lynn Sugarman, "'He was Getting It Involved with Himself': Identity and Reflexivity in William Faulkner's *Light in August* and *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Southern Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 95-102; David Greenham, "Avant-garde transgression in *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Renaissance and Modern Studies* 41, no. 1 (1998): 119-131; Sean Benson, "The Abrahamic Mythopoeia of Sutpen's Design: Notrespectability in Search of a Dynasty," *The Mississippi Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 451-464; Ulfried Reichardt, "Perceiving and

I do not know. I know only that my entire being seemed to run at blind full tilt into something monstrous and immobile, with a shocking impact too soon and too quick to be mere amazement and outrage at that black arresting and untimorous hand on my white woman's flesh. Because there is something in the touch of flesh with flesh which abrogates, cuts sharp and straight across the devious intricate channels of decorous ordering, which enemies as well as lovers know because it makes them both: – touch and touch of that which is the citadel of the central I-Am's private own: not spirit, soul; the liquorish and ungirdled mind is anyone's to take in any darkened hallway of this earthly tenement. But let flesh touch with flesh, and watch the fall of all the eggshell shibboleth of caste and color too. Yes, I stopped dead – no woman's hand, no negro's hand, but bitted bridle-curb to check and guide the furious and unbending will – I crying not to her, to it; speaking to it through the negro, the woman, only because of the shock which was not yet outrage because we both knew it was not to her I spoke: 'Take your hand off me, nigger!'[97]

In an instant, Rosa has a flash of insight, the eggshell shibboleth of caste and color is broken and falls away, but only for a moment. She is thrown back into the ground of things. The passage describes Rosa's dread and anxiety over her very being, an angst brought on by her confrontation with Clytie as Rosa attempts to climb the stairs and at last confront whatever ghost of the past may be lurking in the old Sutpen mansion. Rosa becomes ontological. She is a being such that her very being is an issue for her. The revelation is brought on precisely by Rosa's growing awareness that there exists a very real conflict of interpretation.[98] In this instance, Rosa sees the fissure of Southern culture

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Representing Slavery and 'Race' 'Through' Time: William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 42, no. 4 (January 1997): 613-624; Gina L Hicks, "Reterritorializing Desire: The Failure of Ceremony in *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Faulkner Journal* 12, no. 2 (1997): 23-40; Carolyn N. Slaughter, "*Absalom, Absalom!*: 'Fluid Cradle of Events (Time)'," *The Faulkner Journal* 6, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 65-84; and, John N. Duvall, "Authentic Ghost Stories: *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Absalom, Absalom!*, and *Beloved*," *The Faulkner Journal* 4, no. 1 (Fall 1988): 83-97.

[97] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 111-12.

[98] Carolyn Norman Slaughter brings the passage into relation with Heidegger's philosophy by reading it through Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*, although Slaughter is operating on a

embodied in herself; the racial narrative that pits "white woman" against "niggers" and the fact of Clytie's blood relation to the Sutpen's and, through marriage between their families, to Rosa herself. In this moment, Rosa sees through her comfortable Southern-white-female orientation and all the privilege it affords. Upon touching her, Clytie ceases to be some absolute Other that is deeply and essentially different from Rosa – so different that her difference amounts to a moral devaluation in Rosa's eyes. However, touching on the stairs of the Sutpen manor, this essential difference melts away and Rosa is left to "*watch fall all the eggshell shibboleth of caste and color too*." Her very being is disturbed, "*the citadel of the central I-Am's private own*" is disrupted and de-centered, leaving Rosa reeling in a moment of groundlessness. Her groundlessness so profound that when she eventually retorts "*Take your hand off me, nigger!*" she knows it is not even to Clytie that the command is addressed. Indeed, Clytie herself knows that Rosa has not spoken to her. Rosa confesses, "*...I crying not to her, to it*." To what? To what does Rosa cry if not to Clytie? She says she cries "*to it*" but to what does this "it" refer? "It" refers here to the sensibly rendered worlds themselves, worlds either comfortable for Rosa, the world of her white privilege, or the alternatives that would annihilate that comfortable world and force her to stand in a new light, without a tether, without the crutch of race and privilege to use, not only to stand, but as a cudgel with which to beat Clytie and all "niggers" into subservience.[99] Rosa speaks to these colliding worlds "*through the negro,*

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confused notion of mind/body duality that has been thoroughly outstripped by the current essay, and is already implicitly outstripped within *Absalom, Absalom!* itself when read philosophically (not to mention the problems of this dichotomy from a properly Heideggerian perspective, with or without Ricoeur's influence). See Slaughter, "*Absalom, Absalom!*: 'Fluid Cradle of Events (Time)'," 77-78.

[99] John Duvall astutely treats the binaries operative throughout *Absalom, Absalom!* and between which the characters are established in their power relations (we might now say, between which

the woman," and thereby implicates herself in the formation of Southern culture, which she has witnessed collapsing all around. But this cry is a cry in vain. The old world is dead. Rosa can expect nothing else. She laments, "*What did I expect? I, self-mesmerized fool, come twelve miles expecting – what?*"[100] She knows she has fooled herself, that her own narration has all along been unreliable, that her world is unreliable, and that she must therefore take up the challenge of establishing herself or surrender to nihilism. Rosa here acts as a reactionary messiah saving the old world with her violent reassertion of the degrading and brutalizing racial epithet. But as this reactionary messiah she can act only as a ghost of the old world, a corpse hanging around the tomb of the old mansion who cannot yet move on.

And yet, when we compare this instance to the second encounter between Clytie and Rosa, this time when Quentin accompanies Rosa to Sutpen's Hundred, we see a different outcome; the possibility of a transcendence, not out of the world altogether, but into a new and different one. In the second meeting, the two women much older, perhaps Rosa "running up" to this leap for 43 years, Rosa now casts Clytie to the ground, Quentin allowing his friend Shreve to recount "how it just came out of the terror and the fear after she [Clytie] turned you [Quentin] loose and caught the Aunt Rosa's arm and the Aunt Rosa turned and struck her hand away and went on to the stairs and Clytie ran at her again and this time the Aunt Rosa stopped and turned on the second step and knocked Clytie down with her first like a man would and turned and went up the stairs."[101]

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they *oscillate*). He emphasizes the privileging of flesh by the "ghostly" woman in the meeting on the stairs. My analysis echoes the shock Duvall identifies in this ecstasy of flesh as it meets on the stairs. See Duvall, "Authentic Ghost Stories," 93-94.

[100] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 113.

[101] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 280.

Rosemary Coleman and J. Christopher Cunningham have hashed out the difficulties of

Rosa as a "mother" of a narrative, either her own, or Quentin's who in some ways

synthesizes Rosa and his father's stories, and they point to the "problem" of Rosa's

gender and sexuality.[102] I suggest we gain some insight by "queering"[103] the text here,

and see finally that Rosa is *trans*gendered – literally transversing the genders in her

passage from mother of a narrative, to a passive body in Clytie's grip, to the masculine

assertion on the stairs wherein she strikes Clytie down, and is resolute to enter the

"cryptic closet" and therein discover a secret truth; an aletheaic truth.[104] Again, this is not

the "leaping out" to some transcendent being, but rather, a transcendence that is just the

very overstepping of the threshold, the act of over-stepping itself that carries Rosa

forward into a new being, a new world, in the wake of the destruction of the old. She had,

after all, asked Quentin if he had brought a gun; for what else if not to become the

destroyer of worlds?[105] She overcomes in her resolve, moving out of her outraged

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[102] See Cunningham, "Sutpen's Designs: Masculine Reproduction and the Unmaking of the Self-Made Man in *Absalom, Absalom!*" *The Mississippi Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 578-79, 582-83; and, Coleman, "Family Ties: Generating Narratives in *Absalom, Absalom!*" *The Mississippi Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 421-31.

[103] Norman W. Jones reads Rosa's "queer" narrative where "queer" has the primary sense of a mystery – one into which Rosa moves to initiate Quentin; in, "Coming Out Through History's Hidden Love Letters."

[104] Erin Pearson has explored the homoerotic subtext of cryptically concealed and "closeted" spaces, as well as the logic of the closet as a threshold to be crossed, such as in the culmination the grieving process in "Faulkner's Cryptic Closet: Forbidden Desire, Disavowal, and the 'Dark House' at the Heart of *Absalom, Absalom!*" *The Mississippi Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 341-67. My reading runs somewhat against the grain of Olivia Carr Edenfield, who argues Rosa never finds a place to "fit-in" among the gender-norms of the American South in "'Endure and then Endure': Rosa Coldfield's Search for a Role in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Southern Literary Journal* 32, no. 1 (Fall 1999): 57-68. I'm suggesting that in the end, Rosa forges her own role, no matter how fragile – as the letter from Mr. Compson describing Rosa's death and burial is a "fragile pandora's box of scrawled paper which had filled with violent and unratiocinative djinns and demons," in Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 208.

[105] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 291.

bafflement toward a consummation with Henry Sutpen in the secret heart of Sutpen's Hundred. We can see the momentary hesitation of this resolution in the last repetition of the question, "Are you…?"

We are in the grips of the truly ontological movement of the novel. Rosa is revealed as a character that is ontological, that is, a being who's very being is an issue for her; she has herself become questionable, mysterious, queer, her very existence in question. We can see the conflict of interpretation at work in other places as well, such as in Jason Compson's retelling of the Sutpen tale to his son, Quentin. Let's make sure the general outline of the story is clear and add a few more crucial details before muddying the worldly waters again – for we will see that Mr. Compson's versions of the story eventually come into conflict with themselves, after he becomes aware of what Quentin knows after the latter's initiation into the secrets of the manor's haunted rooms.

Although the driving hermeneutic question of the novel is why Henry killed Bon, much of the narrative structure depends on the history of Thomas Sutpen, the circumstances of his entry into Yoknapatawpha, and his designs to become a proper Southern patriarch, though we are witness to that design's disintegration. For that story, we must go back to 1807 and the tidewaters of Virginia. There, Thomas Sutpen was born and exposed to the plantation way of life and its concomitant slavery. He is fully inducted into the values of plantation culture on a chance errand, where he deigns to deliver a message directly to the front door of a manor where a liveried black servant instructs him that he must go around to the back door, where the servants enter. We see the accretion of Sutpen's old Southern values. Sutpens naiveté is destroyed on the steps of the plantation house. A new world opens for him, and he begins to design a door by which he may enter

it. He runs away to the Caribbean in order to start amassing wealth, slaves, and there begins working for a sugar plantation in Haiti. In 1827, Sutpen is married to Eulalia, the sugar planter's daughter, as a reward for defending the plantation from a slave revolt. They have a son, Charles Bon, but Sutpen discovers that Eulalia is part black – an unforgivable sin in the world of the South within which Sutpen would make himself into someone – and divorces her in 1831. Eulalia and Charles are abandoned to their fates and Thomas Sutpen arrives in Yoknapatawpha in 1833, a universal scandal due to both his lack of history (or his apparent lack of history in the world of Yoknapatawpha) and property. He negotiates a partnership with Goodhue Coldfield within five years of his arrival, and marries Goodhue's daughter Ellen. Thomas and Ellen have two children, Henry (b. 1839) and Judith (b. 1841), but there is an illegitimate child, Clytemnestra, born to Thomas and a slave in 1834. Henry enters the University of Mississippi in 1859, where he meets and becomes good friends with Charles Bon. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Thomas Sutpen becomes the second in command in Colonal John Sartoris' 23rd Mississippi Infantry. Henry and Bon remain friends throughout the war, but their relationship, for reasons unknown, sours as Bon courts and becomes engaged to Henry's sister Judith. Ellen dies in 1863, making her sister Rosa swear to look after Judith, and their father Goodhue dies the following year. Thomas Sutpen has been gone this whole time, and he returns from the war to find his design in shambles, his wife dead, his son Henry a fugitive for the murder of Bon in May, 1865. Not to be denied, Sutpen unsuccessfully attempts to jumpstart his dynasty, first by trying to marry Rosa, then, when Rosa leaves him, by sleeping with Milly Jones, the granddaughter of Wash Jones, a poor squatter at Sutpen's Hundred who ran his mouth about looking after the place while

Colonel Sutpen fought the war. When Milly has a daughter instead of a son, Sutpen

spurns her, and Wash, whose pretense to be Sutpen's equal parallels Sutpen's own

embarrassment on the plantation steps in Virginia, murders Thomas, Milly, and their

child in 1869. Clytie, Henry, and Judith continue to inhabit Sutpen's Hundred, and in

1871, Judith sends Clytie to New Orleans in order to bring back Charles Bon's son,

Charles Etienne de St. Velery Bon, born of an octoroon mistress, who, although he could

pass for white by virtue of his appearance, is raise to understand himself as black, and

eventually marries a black woman, with whom he has a mentally handicapped son, Jim

Bond. In 1884, Etienne falls ill with yellow fever, Judith catches it while nursing him,

and both die, leaving the rest to haunt Sutpen's Hundred, the ghosts of Thomas Sutpen's

failed design. Typically, Faulkner drops us in the middle of things, after these facts, in

September, 1909.

Faulkner has each character invoke different reasons for why Henry kills Bon at

different times depending on their relation to the story of Thomas Sutpen's Grand Design

as detailed above. In the beginning, we move with Quentin from Rosa's outraged

bafflement to Quentin's Father, Jason, who seems mostly assured that "Because Henry

loved Bon. He repudiated blood birthright and material security for his sake, for the sake

of the man who was at least a bigamist if not and out and out blackguard, and on whose

dead body four years later Judith was to find the photograph of the other woman and the

child."[106] This passage already displays the slippage in Mr. Compson's conceptual

orientation as he meditates on the events, first understanding the tale through the lens of

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[106] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 71.

Bon as a bigamist, then complexifying that interpretation through the additive element of

Henry and Bon's friendship, hence Henry's love for Bon, blackguard or not. These

meditations, ruminations occurring over the course of the retelling, lead Mr. Compson to

understand the murder in terms of a "mutual seduction" wherein Bon seduces not only

Judith, but Henry as well.[107] I'll return to the novel's homoerotic subtext in a moment,

but my goal here is simply to make readers aware of the transformation of interpretations

as the different narrators come into different epistemic relations with the history of the

Sutpen dynasty. As they learn, their explanations change to fit the recalcitrant facts of the

story, facts coded in the actions, words, letters, and ledgers of Yoknapatawpha's

inhabitants. Jason Compson's story changes again, after Quentin discloses to him the

experience of meeting Henry when he takes Rosa to Sutpen's Hundred. Once Mr.

Compson knows of Bon's illicit blood relation to the Sutpen's he thinks it all becomes

clearer: incest must be the motivating factor – kill Bon to prevent the incest between half-

siblings.[108] Even still, Quentin and his friend Shreve speculate on the nature of that illicit

relation, that Bon is the product of miscegenation, and therefore, according to the "one

drop" rule of Southern racial identity, Bon is black. He therefore presents a great threat to

the purity demanded by Southern patriarchs and must be killed to prevent this

transgression.[109]

So far, we have only been talking only about Rosa Coldfield's iteration of this

story. However, there is obviously more to the story than Rosa tells. And yet, there is

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[107] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 94-95.
[108] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 213-14.
[109] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 285-87.

more to the story than Rosa *can* tell, precisely because there are parts of this story that

she just doesn't know, to which she has no relation. Thus, certainly, the story is

independent of Rosa, for I have just demonstrated in several ways how it is possible to

describe the events without any reference to knowers of the story. But, crucially, it is also

possible to demonstrate that when the world according to Rosa Coldfield is brought into

conjunction with a series of events which become informed by Rosa's having been

conditioned by the facts, in the grip of those very events, there does arise something that

is, in the sense relevant to the knower-known relation, dependent on Rosa's existence.

These entanglements, which under the old metaphysical paradigm would be termed

"intersubjective," destroy the anti-realist claims stemming from constructivist theories, or

those unable to see truth outside of propositions. The general mistake of those types of

theories, which rely on knowers knowing in order to substantiate the world's "reality," is

that they are constantly slipping, in an undisciplined manner (that is, when it is

convenient for their arguments), between addressing a singular Knower, the existence of

which would vouchsafe all veridical knowledge, and communities of knowers, the

totalities of which would constitute the ground either of all knowledge or at least of

domains of knowledge. Thus, the old tension between idealism/realism rooted in the

rationalism/empiricism debates of modern philosophy is reasserted. My theory denies a

singular Knower, some remnant of the Hegelian World Spirit which comes to see itself as

such, or the holder of the sum of all propositions, the Cosmic Compendium of all

logically true statements, but it also assails the implicit uniformity, the assumed

hegemony among any given community of knowers as well. Not all human knowers

know the same, neither the same things, nor in the same way, though of course there may

be extensive overlap. What's more, it makes rather a lot of sense to say that my cat knows something, that it is time to be fed, for instance, or that I will play with her and her little mouse-toy if she brings it to me, but that she knows these things in a cat-like way, and therefore has knowledge, but "cat" knowledge. Likewise, my sage spider knows to build the web and wait, and knows what to do when along comes the fly, but it has spider-knowledge of these things, which is different from cat- and human-knowledge. So, which knower is it that knows the truth of knowing? The idea, again, thinking back to the old New Realists, is that *human* knowledge being self-evident to *me* (or, generously, to kinds of things like me) does not tell us that human knowledge constitutes the essence of knowledge, nor does it *necessarily* tell us something fundamental about knowing itself. We should be skeptical of such claims, and, if our other examples of knowers can be accepted, we might then infer that one basic element of knowledge is exactly its finitude.[110] On this point I digress.

Rosa Coldfield tells the things *she* knows, and her orientation by the old South and its gendered racial codes define her iteration of the story of Henry and Bon, which she struggles to make sense of in the intimacy of her outraged bafflement. Further, what she *doesn't* know orients her toward the story as well, because they go on "behind her back," so to speak, and they give her story the shades of unreliability that are so clear from the outset, and on which Quentin makes frequent comment. Indeed, Quentin is soon turning to other knowers who know differently than Rosa – not just that they have command of a different array of facts, but that, for them, the facts take on a varying

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[110] This is one Heidegger's key insights into reading Kant in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*.

significance according to the basic concepts by which they orient themselves. We might

complexify Rosa a bit, and say that her basic outrage and bafflement set her in an

unstable oscillation between race, gender, and sexual propriety. The play of race, sex, and

gender opens the field of sense for Rosa, her whole world, and render the things that

manifest in that sphere sensible for her as the things they are in that world already colored

according to black and white, male and female, heterosexuality, and family dynastics. We

can try to keep it simple, but the matter multiplies beyond our control as the play of

oscillation opens ever deepening hermeneutic layers.

Return to Jason Compson, Quentin's father. Two main concerns drive the

narratives he shares with his son, and which Quentin takes up with his Harvard roommate

Shreve in the final chapters of the novel. The world of the Compson's story is largely

predicated on two ideas, namely bigamy and incest, but both are inflected at different

times through the subtext of homosociality – if not explicitly homo*sexuality*. Mr.

Compson, moreover, is in possession of an artifact, a document, that clues him into facts

about the story to which Rosa has not been privy. With this letter in hand, Mr. Compson

proclaims what we have already heard, "Because Henry loved Bon," and recalls after

Bon was killed, on "whose dead body four years later Judith was to find the photograph

of the other woman and the child."[111] So the Compson's do hold some knowledge that

Rosa does not, and we are introduced to the mystery of both letter and photograph – the

mystery of the *word*. I want to linger on the photograph for just a moment, because it

again brings us to the ontological insights for which *Absalom, Absalom!* is being

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[111] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 71.

addressed. The implication of this photographic evidence, Mr. Compson believes, is that

Bon had a mistress and child in New Orleans, which it turns out is true to a point. But the

supposed fact of Bon's bigamy is always told in questionable terms, such as when Mr.

Compson speculates:

> …who knows, perhaps if Henry had gone with him that summer instead of waiting until the next Bon would not have had to die as he did; if Henry had only gone then to New Orleans and found out then about the mistress and child; Henry who, before it was too late, might have reacted to the discovery exactly as Sutpen did, as a jealous brother might have been expected to react, since who know but what it was not the fact of the mistress and child, the possible bigamy, to which henry gave the lie, but to the fact that it was his father who told him…[112]

This long passage is riddled with hedged bets, loose associations, and unconfirmed half-

truths. Likewise, it continues explicitly informed by Mr. Compson's metaphysical

assumptions about human nature, that "…the father who is that natural enemy of any son

and son-in-law of whom the mother is the ally, just after the wedding the father will be

the ally of the actual son-in-law who has for mortal foe the mother of his wife."[113] Here,

Mr. Compson plays armchair psycho-analyst with the unconscious machinations of the

Sutpen mind.

But where in the text is the identity of the people in the photograph found on

Bon's body confirmed? Confirmation of their identities is not to be found. What we do

find is the problematic nature of the Sutpen face. The face of Clytie when Rosa saw her

in the shadows of the barn, and again later, when she confronts Rosa in the ruinous old

house, when Rosa recognizes, "*It was a Sutpen face enough, but not his; Sutpen coffee*

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[112] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 83.
[113] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 83.

colored face enough there in the dim light, barring the stairs…"[114] We must consider:

what if the face in the photograph, the face, not her face, the child, not her child, and

perhaps, the other face, not her Bon. It is possible that Bon carries with him a lonely

photograph of Thomas Sutpen with his mixed-race first wife Eulalia, who he abandoned

for the white Ellen Coldfield, and therefore the child is actually Bon himself. Is this the

"True" interpretation? No, but it is just as likely, given the text, as the possibility that the

photo is of Bon and his mistress – that a young Thomas Sutpen looks enough like Bon

would look. More importantly for us, both interpretations cannot be true. They are

irreconcilable.

The Sutpen's are irreconcilable with one another throughout the novel. It is

insinuated more than once that Bon seduced not only Judith, but Henry as well.[115] Mr.

Compson is the primary user of this rhetoric, as I've mentioned above. Yet it leads him to

talk as if it were *Henry* who had seduced his sister Judith all along, and we are thereby

led, circumspectively, to the idea that incest is at the troubled heart of Bon's murder.[116]

This is only later made explicit, after Quentin tells his father of Bon's parentage, where

the roles of Henry and Bon are then switched and it is Bon who then risks incest with

Judith. Now, not only are Rosa and Mr. Compson's versions of the story in conflict, but

Mr. Compson's own telling has slipped, come into serendipitous conflict with itself. How

then can we take Mr. Compson at his word? What unifying theme or style can bring these

mutually exclusive views into alignment? We have not yet begun to approach Quentin

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[114] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 22 and 109.
[115] Cf., Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 73, 73, 75, and 76.
[116] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 79 and 85.

and Shreve's speculative recounting of the confrontation between Henry and Bon. At this point, clarity is required. What these counter-narratives suggest is not at all that there is no truth, that relativism results and there is no "real" and authentically true story beneath all the different accounts by the characters. Henry killed Bon, it might as well be writ in stone. Rather, what emerges is that the myriad tellings of the tale *require* and *necessitate* that there is some common touch-point for them all. Remember the Venn diagram metaphor, because it serves us well here. All the stories revolve around a mutually shared set of facts, though different individuals have different access to different parts of the set. We commit to perspectivism after a fashion; that is, all worlds are worlds for and to some knower, are known from some perspective, but it does not devolve into a destructive relativism, because we are forced to ask, "relative to *what*?" To place and the play of oscillation which frees things to the worlds emergent from the thoughts and actions of emplaced people. There are bodies and houses and letters and photographs; deeds and wills and marriage licenses, birth and death certificates that anchor these worlds, around which the significance of Quentin's world or Judith's or Rosa's revolve. Constructions, even meager human ones, stand on their own once they are built. Social constructs simply do not imply non-reality but a rather a modality of the real which facilitates human existence. I can build a shack in the woods and never return to it, but it can be discovered independently of me, by some raccoons, a bird, and termites; perhaps a pack of cub scouts wanders into it on a hike. Certainly, it is the case that the *creation* of the cabin, as a technological thing, depends in some way on me – but once construction is over the thing stands on its own even as I come to have no relation to it whatsoever. It is

discoverable without ever revealing me, although people will no doubt speculate, correctly, that *someone* must have built it.

The different interpretations of *Absalom, Absalom!* are not *wrong*, but they are finite. Finite here means basically that they develop from some perspective, which is informed by concerns and conceptual orientations that may be idiosyncratic, and as such, will not have access to every possible aspect of what is to be interpreted. Not even a theoretical sum total of all perspectives gives us something like the whole truth and nothing but, because all perspectives are finite, partial, and subject to error. Nevertheless, attentiveness to the shared aspects of each perspective lends itself to reasonable speculation about why things happened as they did, particularly when the object of speculation is the motivation for human action. The different theories put forth in *Absalom, Absalom!* are not crazy. They are all, more or less, generally reasonable, especially given which characters attach to which interpretations.

For instance, it is not particularly surprising that Mr. Compson and Quentin discuss the possibilities of incest and homosociality. Last chapter, I explained how Quentin, in *The Sound and the Fury*, had tried to save his sister's honor, bizarrely, by claiming the two had committed incest together, and he is repeatedly going on about how he would tell their father this lie. But I have long suspected, and am not at all alone in this suspicion, that Quentin himself may be homosexual, or at least struggling with homosexual desires.[117] Perhaps Jason Compson has his own suspicions. Nevertheless, it

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[117] Several critics have read the character this way. For examples, see, Pearson, "Faulkner's Cryptic Closet,"; Kevin Ohi, "'My Spirit's Posthumeity' and the Sleeper's Outflung Hand: Queer Transmission in *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*, ed. E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (Albany: SUNY, 2011), 205-232; Michael P. Bibler, "Intraracial Homoeroticism and the Loopholes of Taboo in William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Cotton's*

is not important, nor is it relevant, to prove here that Quentin is a homosexual, or to show how a queered reading of *Absalom, Absalom!* better illumines the objective truth of Quentin's situation. That has been done elsewhere and is not my concern here. Rather, I think we can safely speculate on Quentin's sexuality precisely to show how the different worlds run up against one another, and how one person's basic concepts can overlap with another and bring both into a similar orientation that has a dual effect, which is just the dual effect of worlds in general – that they are always, due their finitude, both revealing and concealing at the same time, in the same movement. The critic Betina Entzminger builds on the theory first applied by Deborah McDowell to Nella Larson's novel *Passing*. What Entzminger shows, I think convincingly, is that Shreve and Quentin's (at least) homosocial relationship mirrors that of Henry and Bon, but they code their homosexual tendencies (a minor language, see Chapter One above) in language that is more acceptable, namely, that of racial transgression (the major language).[118] Extrapolating Entzminger's insight to the current project, we can see Shreve and Quentin performing an underground discourse that erodes the norms of masculinity and Southern racial and sexual mores. Moreover, the ontological movement of *Absalom, Absalom!* is one that makes characters into problems for themselves; remember, their very being is at stake. Thus, it is important for us that each person's version of the Sutpen story is one in which the telling is motivated, in part, by their attempts to understand themselves and their place

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Queer Relations: Same-sex Intimacy and the Literature of the Southern Plantation, 1936-1968 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2009), 63-95; Matthew R. Vaughn, "'Other Souths': The Expression of Gay Male Identity in *Abalom, Absalom!" Mississippi Quartery* 60, no. 3 (Summer 2007): 519-28; and, Betina Entzminger, "Passing as Miscegenation: Whiteness and Homoeroticism in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!" The Faulkner Journal* 22, no. 1-2 (Fall 2006-Spring 2007): 90-105.

[118] Entzminger, "Passing as Miscegenation," 90.

in the world, the role they have been left to play in the unfolding drama. And so, Shreve and Quentin, under such a reading, are finding ways to "pass" as they navigate the social constraints placed on them by the words in which they find themselves and must make meaning. Thus, as Erin Pearson has noted, both the house at Sutpen's Hundred and the Harvard dormitory shared by Quentin and Shreve serve as "closeted" locations doubling as crypts for the ghosts of the past; places that hold secrets to the history and identity of one or more characters.[119] Remember, Faulkner's characters are commonwealths.

When Shreve and Quentin begin to speculate on the love of Bon, of the imagined affair between Bon and Henry, or at least their fraternal love for one another, they reveal exactly how, caught in the grip of their worlds and struggling to understanding themselves in that grip, they twist and turn their concepts around in order to try and make meaning out of the situation. Faulkner has them start out,

> "And now," Shreve said, "we're going to talk about love." But he didn't need to say that either, any more than he had needed to specify which he he meant by he, since neither of them had been thinking about anything else; all that had once before just so much that had to be overpassed and none else present to overpass it but them, as someone always had to rake the leaves up before you can have the bonfire. That was why it did not matter to either of them which one did the talking, since it was not the talking alone which did it, performed and accomplished the overpassing, but some happy marriage of speaking and hearing wherein each before the demand, the requirement, forgave condoned and forgot the faulting of the other – faultings both in the creating of this shade whom they discussed (rather, existed in) and in the hearing and sifting and discarding the false and conserving what seemed true, or fit preconceived – in order to overpass to love, where there might be paradox and inconsistency but nothing fault or false.[120]

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[119] Pearon, "Faulkner's Crytpic Closets," 343.
[120] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 253.

Since hermeneutics has haunted our discussion thus far, I want to bring this passage into

conjunction with one written by Hans-Georg Gadamer with which he begins his analysis

of "Language and Hermeneutics." Gadamer writes:

> We say that we "conduct" a conversation, but the more genuine a
> conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner.
> Thus a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct.
> Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or
> that we become involved in it. The one word follows another, with the
> conversation taking its own twists and reaching its own conclusions may
> well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less the
> leaders than the led. No one knows in advance what will "come out" of a
> conversation. Understanding or its failure is like an event that happens to
> us. Thus we can say that something was a good conversation or that it was
> ill fated. All this shows that a conversation has a spirit of its own, and that
> the language in which it is conducted bears its own truth within it – i.e., that
> it allows something to "emerge" which henceforth exists.[121]

Quentin and Shreve are having such a genuine conversation, one they have fallen into,

one that leads them on, one in which they do not know what will "come out," and the

Sutpen tragedy, the reason why Henry killed Bon, emerges from the tellings and

henceforth exists. They have become involved in a story that precedes them. But further,

there is an explicit loss of ego involved, noted by Faulkner when he writes, "it might have

been either of them [speaking] and was in a sense both: both thinking as one, the voice

which happened to be speaking the thought only the thinking become audible, vocal; the

two of them creating between them, out of the rag-tag and bob-ends of old tales and

talking, people who perhaps had never existed at all anywhere, who, shadows, were

shadows not of flesh and blood which had lived and died but shadows in turn of what

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[121] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), 385.

were…shades too."[122] Between the oscillation of the two opens the place for a new order

to arise out of the old, but in that place is evoked the shades of the past that is not even

past, as Shreve and Quentin evoke and invoke Henry and Bon, their "shuddering" and

ecstatic being-with-one-another echoing and re-establishing the mysterious relation.[123]

There is always a movement of oscillation between the two, then the four, then the two,

the room again like a tomb that re-instantiates the ontological moment at Sutpen's

Hundred.[124] The multivocity is highlighted and sent running – the story once told by

Quentin's grandfather, by Rosa, by Mr. Compson, by Quentin and Shreve, where

something new emerges each time as a paradox, an irreconcilable difference by which

each character in turn exists and becomes differentiated and individualized, giving way at

last to the possibility of Henry and Bon's own voices. John Duvall has suggested to me

that the moment at the very end of the novel, where we witness one final formal lapse

into italics, holds the potential to read as transcendence; the possibility of leaping out of

the myriad baffled ghosts and into a "really was" of the two brother/lovers'

confrontation.[125] Of course, here we must be very careful, for in the context of this

current project, we are not permitted any leaping out toward some external narrative of

Henry and Bon that is the transcendent object toward which Shreve and Quentin would

overstep. Rather, here Quentin and Shreve achieve what Mr. Compson had previously

written about Rosa, that they have, "*escaped not at all the privilege of being outraged*

and amazed and of not forgiving but on the contrary has herself gained that place or

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[122] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 243.

[123] Pearson relies on a similar insight throughout "Faulkner's Cryptic Closets."

[124] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 275.

[125] This suggestion was made most explicit in a conversation on Friday, 4 March 2016. The transition occurs at the end of Chapter 8, in Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 280-86.

bourne where the objects of the outrage and of the commiseration also are no longer ghosts but are actual people to be actual recipients of the hatred and the pity."[126] This in the wake of a summoning, a séance set out in the crypt and tomb echoing with the raven's *nevermore*.[127] After all, it is in the "creating of this shade whom they discussed (rather, existed in) and in the hearing and sifting and discarding the false and conserving what seemed true, or fit preconceived" that the two pass over to love – read: pass over to the openness of the clearing in which the tale stands forth on its own terms, independent of a given teller, and wherein history itself seems to guide the telling between the two, the four, the two, the multitude in oscillation between in the commonwealth. This is not a comfortable love. This love is unsettling. The neat identity composed in the citadel of one's private I-Am is de-centered and destabilized. The very conceit is proven inadequate and the characters find themselves (are thrown into their own grounds) existing in shades of their own creation where they must conserve what seems most true – or fits their preconceived notions.

Quentin ultimately experiences an anxiety analogous to that of Rosa on the stairs. Following their speculation, which concludes with Henry insisting that the marriage between Bon and Judith amounts to incest while Bon insists it is miscegenation, Quentin and Shreve retire to bed determined to put the matter to rest, as it were.[128] But it still haunts them, leads them to uneasy rest. Quentin is troubled. Shreve begins to push again saying, "So it took Charles Bon and his mother to get rid of old Tom, and Charles Bon

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[126] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 301-302.
[127] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 298.
[128] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 385-87.

and the octoroon to get rid of Judith, and Charles Bon and Clytie to get rid of Henry; and

Charles Bon's mother and Charles Bon's grandmother got rid of Charles Bon. So it takes

two niggers to get rid of one Sutpen don't it?"[129] Like Rosa and Clytie on the stairs, here

the threat of the annihilation of Quentin's identity as the white Southerner re-emerges

after he had been assimilated into the Quentin-Shreve-Henry-Bon configuration. Shreve

goes on,

> I think that in time the Jim Bonds [the last remaining Sutpen, a mentally handicapped black man] are going to conquer the western hemisphere. Of course it won't quite in our time and of course as they spread toward the poles they will bleach out again like the rabbits and the birds do, so they wont show up so sharp against the snow. But it will still be Jim Bond and so in a few thousand years, I who regard you will also have sprung from the loins of African kings.[130]

Finally, Shreve asks the question, "Why do you hate the South?" The question brings on

Quentin's panicked fear, and his response is denial. "'I dont hate it,' Quentin said,

quickly, at once, immediately; 'I dont hate it,' he said. *I dont hate it* he thought, panting

in the cold air, the iron New England dark: *I dont. I dont! I dont hate it! I dont hate it!*"[131]

Again, as with Rosa, we must ask, to whom is Quentin talking? To what is his emphatic

denial addressed? We cannot be deluded and seduced into reading my interpretation of

Rosa's resolve or of Quentin and Shreve's genuine and productive conversation (again

the production in the wake of their bodily shuddering, a vibration, oscillation that hints at

the sexual but cannot be that alone) as the only significant aspect – a positive one – and

thereby fall into the divide opened by Hutcheon and Jamison, rooted in the modern

[129] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 302.
[130] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 302.
[131] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 303.

distinction of metaphysics and epistemology, playing out in their understanding of the historical in art. Even more suspicious is this positive feature if it is read as an ethical paradigm, though we may in time find a wellspring of ethics. There is the negative too – Rosa's reactionary stance, her violence toward Clytie in overcoming – Quentin's repetition of her renunciation, perhaps initiated into it by Rosa, himself reactionary – *I dont hate it, I dont*. Quentin earlier signaled this repetition, the reproduction of a difference, when Falkner writes "*Am I going to have to hear it all again* he thought *I am going to have to hear it all over again I shall have to never listen to anything else but this again forever so apparently not only a man never outlives his father but not even his friends and acquaintances do*."[132] The commonwealth, all differentiated relative to each other, differentiated by a past that is carried forward, repeated, but repeated also in the variations of the difference, freed in the play of these between which what is appears. So these denials are addressed in part to that ground I must be, to myself and the other and myself as the other, and to the world, to that conversation with a spirit of its own, with its own history, into which Quentin has fallen, and yet, *which he is responsible for creating* as he has helped create the shades in which he dwells. All of this is exposed to him. He is, in the end, ontological. Quentin's own being is an issue for him.

Absalom, Absalom! is perhaps Faulkner's most questionable novel, his most thought provoking achievement. Why did Henry kill Bon? I confess, I do not know. Bigamy, incest, miscegenation, homosexual or homosocial desire…destiny? One seems as likely as the next in retrospect. However, I wonder if the truth of why Henry killed

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[132] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 222.

Bon is really important at all. The novel is, ostensibly, about the rise and fall of the

Sutpen dynasty, a story that is founded upon the life and times of Thomas Sutpen. We

cannot take the words of Faulkner's characters to be objective truth, to expound fully the

true and verifiable story of Thomas Sutpen's design. Goethe provides sound advice for us

on this point. He writes,

> If someone regards words and expression as sacred testimonials, rather than
> merely bringing them into quick and fleeting circulation like token or paper
> money, seeking instead to employ them as true equivalents in intellectual
> exchange, then one cannot chide him for drawing attention to the way in
> which conventional expressions that no one takes exception to any longer
> have a damaging influence, obfuscating opinions, distorting concepts, and
> leading entire disciplines in a wrong direction.[133]

The narrators of *Absalom, Absalom!* treat their words, at times, like tokens or paper

money, bringing them into quick and fleeting circulation. It is only when this smooth

circulation breaks down that those conventional expressions, which none of them take

exception to, become exceptional. And then, suddenly, they see the sacred attempting to

shine through. And yet, they hold this dark truth at bay: "*Take your hand off me, nigger!*"

"*I dont! I dont hate it!*"

We the readers should, however, regard their words and expressions as sacred

testimonials in the common sense of the word, that is, as a formal statement given to

clarify a person's character, conduct, or qualifications. Although, these testimonials do

not speak to the character of Thomas Sutpen, or Henry, or Bon – instead, they speak

emphatically to the character of the one giving testimony. And when these characters are

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[133] Wolfgang von Goethe, *West-East Divan: Poems, with "Notes and Essays": Goethe's Intercultural Dialogues*, trans. Martin Bidney (Albany: SUNY 2010), 226.

themselves opened to the ontological question, they testify to the question of the meaning

of being, to their own questionable nature. The consequences of such questioning is that

there are no answers in *Absalom, Absalom!* that cannot in turn be questioned. The text

contains no answers, only questions. It is, to use the words of Rosa Coldfield, an

"*incredulous recounting.*"[134] Peter Brooks has made a strong point in this regard when he

too shows Rosa herself acknowledging the "*incredulous recounting*" of the Sutpen

tragedy, and thereby suggest that the seemingly metaphysical claims of postmodernism

were always already present in the Modernist novel. The ontological question haunts

Brooks. He almost touches upon it when he remarks, "The seemingly universal

compulsion to narrate the past in *Absalom, Absalom!* imaged in Judith's insistence on

transmitting Bon's letter, may speak both of an unmastered past and a necessary narrative

present, a kind of tortured utopia of never-ending narrative dialogue."[135] Brooks treats

Absalom, Absalom! as a deconstructive text that "sums up the entire nineteenth century

tradition of the novel" and at the same time subverts that tradition, maintaining all the

former problematics of the novel without accepting any of the traditional solutions.[136]

The whole effort comes off as a nod to the postmodern "incredulity toward meta-

narratives" without striking the ontological heart of the novel that always lurks beneath

the surface waiting to open and swallow the reader whole, bringing them at last to

question the meaning of "being," the simple word to which no one takes exception any

longer, and yet appears for us as the most questionable.

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[134] Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* 130.
[135] Peter Brooks, "Incredulous Narration: *Absalom, Absalom!*" *Comparative Literature* 34, no. 3 (Summer 1982): 268.
[136] Brooks, "Incredulous Narration," 247.

In *Absalom, Absalom!* the characters are not merely constructing some fictional world. It is the real world for them, and it implicates the real world of the readers. To say, as some postmodernism does, that the world is a fiction is not to say that the world is unreal, or simply a word game that can be done or undone on a whim. The terror that strikes Rosa Coldfield or Quentin Compson is not the terror of doing or undoing a world themselves. It is that the world is being done or undone around them, and they themselves have been thrown into this unravelling unawares, unconsciously participating in the formation of the new world and the preservation of the old. The very constitution of their being is at stake. This ontological movement is the hidden heart of Modernism, one always beating beneath the ontic surface, formed in the pre-theoretical womb of the author's unknown design. It is not planned: it emerges from the text to confront us in a moment when we confront ourselves. In this sense, Faulkner cannot help but be a philosopher because he never ceases to ask these questions, to be questionable. These questions trouble us, and although they do so explicitly, they lead us roundabout to the question of being. To do that is to be truly ontological.

CHAPTER 5. PLACE AND BEING IN LITERATURE

I hope that by now you realize what I am saying – that we cannot help making history
because we are made of it, and history is made of people like us, carriers of the
behavior and assumptions of a given time and place.
– Adrienne Rich, "Resisting Amnesia: History and Personal Life," (1983)

5.1 The Ontology of Place

Oscillation is the movement of emplacement where place is the ontological

ground of being as the ecstatic unity of space and time. The final chapter puts this insight

into effect. What does a metaphysics of place, with oscillation at its conceptual center,

look like? We have emerged from an underground discourse, engaging with the unspoken

thought of thinkers such as Descartes, the forgotten words of the American New Realists,

the silent interplay between places as far-flung as Angoulême, Paris, and

Yoknapatawpha. We have come to see that, although reality can be described

independently of those who know it, it is, nevertheless, a reality in which knowers exist.

As these knowers, we know only what we know and from the perspective of knowing it.

For the final analysis, I want to return to these knowers and the places from which they

know. It is to them that being is revealed as it is, and it is us for whom appearing appears.

And yet, we are not always ourselves. Although we are individual, we are so only to a

greater or lesser extent. In the end, in place, we see that we are never The Individual; that,

in fact, we are only individuals and we slide in places between ourselves and the other

without whom we could not be ourselves. In some ways, this final stage is an attempt to

think the *cogito* anew after the painstaking critique that has come before and that has placed us on different terrain that may at first seem foreign and hostile. After all, I have called people things! Mere things, the horror of it; that I, this singularity, a shimmering snowflake, should be so reduced to a thing, an appearance to and for the other that appears also to me. The possibility no doubt accosts us and writes our finitude in towering letters before our unwilling eyes. But be not afraid of these strange new vistas.

The outline of ontology is as follows: There is, though not yet a thing. I am willing to accept even that thinking itself proves this. To be and to be detected by, to appear, is a movement, a basic move. This I have called oscillation. But oscillation may go by other names – I call it thus only because oscillation illustrates a regular movement that opens a place between, that is the opening of place itself as a ground, as a possible domain or sphere into which things proper can really stand out. The movement of oscillation, as the opening of place, is the ground of significance. This happens in spacetime, the ecstasis of which is emplacement. Once oscillation takes hold, things begin to accrete. The opening of place in oscillation is ontologically *a priori*. The accretion of things is, in some sense, dependent on this oscillation, which provides the matrix of spacetime as the ecstatic unity of place. Places happen suddenly, from out of their own basic movement, and at each moment spread out from themselves in the event of their happening. Places happen. Insofar as place is, place goes out beyond in its opening for and to that which it might appear. Those to which place might appear as some things take up their basic position in places that, for them, become the world they know. Worlds take root in place. And, though places exist even without knowers,

knowing a place brings forth that place as world. To be from out of place itself is to occur naturally, with our modified understanding of that term. Ontology embraces nature and gives it its proper place. Oscillation frees things to enter into a play between one another. The play of oscillation in the between opened by emplacement is a way for us to talk about the various processes of accretion by which things become what they are and through which they are either maintained in that being or destroyed, fall into decay, and disintegrate. Things that accrete of their own accord, from out of place, may develop in such a way that they maintain themselves in their being what they are. This is autopoiesis – not a pure self-production from nothing, but a taking over of production in a place and a maintaining of the being that is, and thus, with it, a maintaining of the place from which it can be the thing that it is. This is the protective function of world, a world built from the struggle of beings to maintain themselves in their being and thereby render sensible the basic place that grounds them. In this endeavor, from this struggle in place, technical objects emerge and are always geared in order to maintain the productive being in its being. The technical is always close to the natural, and the technical can be spun off and stand apart from its producer in a manner that gives the appearance of what is natural. The technical, being so close to the natural, is often taken for granted as "the most natural thing," but its origin in the in order to of the natural thing betrays its rootedness in the project of maintaining the movements necessary to holding open a place to be for the autopoietic being.

Human beings are autopoietic things, though to be there is not, necessarily, to be human. Many things are there and there for themselves in the maintenance of what they are. However, these closing considerations will return us to human worlds and human

things in places by and for human being. Human beings do not enter the world fully formed, of course. We are nurtured in our places by those around us, and we grow, accreting, over time in oscillation between those forces that shape us and that we, in time, learn to shape ourselves – both shaping ourselves and shaping the places in which we can be and become ourselves. This is the dynamic that I want to explore, tentatively, in closing. Part of the motivation for these studies, outlined in Chapter One, was to place humanity on a new footing, one not utterly dependent on our own sense of self-recognition, one that de-centered the role of the ego in the foundation of metaphysics and epistemology. Thus, it is important to show how we should proceed from this new beginning, where we ourselves are not the absolute center. What does such a view, perhaps a new humanism, look like when place occupies the theoretical center? A sketch of such a view is the project of this closing chapter. To assist in this endeavor, where the philosophical insights are new and depend upon the work that has unfolded in the previous chapters, I want to turn, once again, to literature. The major work to be considered is Robert Musil's, *The Man Without Qualities*. This massive work, unfinished during Musil's lifetime, provides the final scene of our ontology. Along the way, we may catch a few departing glimpses of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha, the proving grounds of our theory thus far. With these two, we will at last make clear the placial ontology, the unfolding of the individual in the place belonging to them and to which they belong, and our conceptual scheme is fleshed out, made somewhat whole by the complimentary concepts of the axis of individuation and hermeneutic layering.

5.2 Returning to the Underground Discourse

Stijn De Cauwer has read Musil's *Man Without Qualities* as a response to Nietzsche's cultural immunology, which already expressed both the seeds for eugenicist and Nazi interpretation, as well as a strident critique of society's demand for rigid and ultimately self-destructive immunological procedures, prophesizing that cultural stagnation would follow from obsessive purification.[1] This insight brings us back, in the end, to the underground discourse.

Musil speaks in this underground current against the Modern philosophies, much in the manner of other Modernists we've examined, namely Rilke and Pirandello. Dagmar Barnouw has made the connection between Musil and David Hume, noting that Musil has copied the introductory remarks from Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* in the draft to a volume of essays he was composing with the working title, "Versuche einen anderen Menschen zu finden."[2] In Musil's 1913 essay "Mathematical Man," he praises mathematics for having an exploratory method that dealt in the dimension of potentiality with courage and seriousness. But Barnouw is keen to remind us not to misread these praises of mathematics, and strongly argues that, for Musil, "mathematics and mysticism are not linked by the tautological structure of an *a priori* order abstracted from the world, but by an articulated openness to all the surprises that the world, as a disorderly complex of mostly conflicting structures will yield."[3] Barnouw is echoing a general Modernist trend to address the peculiar *linguistic* dimension of the extreme difficulties associate

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[1] Cauwer, "Robert Musil's Cultural Diagnositcs in the Light of Nietzschean Immunology." *Neophilologus* 96:1 (January 2012), 411-25.
[2] Barnouw, "Skepticism as a Literary Mode." *MLN*, 93:5 (December 1978), 852.
[3] Barnouw, "Skepticism as a Literary Mode," 865.

with ontology. That is, how can you possibly give adequate voice to what *being itself is*? The paradigmatic example of this trope in European Modernism is Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Lord Chandos Letter*, which I discussed in Chapter Two. We have explored this theme in Rilke and Pirandello, expressed philosophically as the tension between metaphysics and epistemology. Recall Bayón's sensitivity to the crisis evoked by the *fin de siècle*, an attitude toward the end of the century marked by suspicion, condemnation of society's degradation by modernity, combined with terror and paranoia over the disintegration of traditions, often rural, cultures. The same tendency, a mid-century repetition of the *fin de siècle* sense of crisis, has been identified and lamented in Heidegger's private ponderings of the 1930s, during the crisis of World War II, by David F. Krell as a period of unforgiving catastrophe and collapse.[4] When Modernists confront this lapse into silence, the inability to speak, announce, or articulate the experience they have in the ontological confrontation with the world (Vitangelo and Malte before the mirror, Rosa and Clytie on the stairs, Shreve with Quentin, Chandos' to Bacon) there is then a tendency to read this as a devolution into mysticism. Let us not be confounded by those baffled ghosts of Yoknapatawpha – those are shades that need places, that exist in places, that must haunt, and thus are not entirely disembodied, hanging as they do on the bodies (and minds?) of occupants still living. The same issue has been diagnosed in Heidegger, especially after the turn to poetry, mortals, earth, and gods, even if it is to be the last god.[5] Such a trend toward mysticism explains Barnouw's desire to clarify Musil's

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[4] Krell, *Ecstasy, Catastrophe: Heidegger from* Being and Time *to* The Black Notebooks (New York: SUNY, 2015).

[5] Perhaps most notably in John D. Caputo, *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1977), and Reiner Schürmann, *Meister Eckhart: Mystic and Philosopher* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978). Caputo comments on mysticism in

position on mathematics, where it seems that Musil is attempting use mathematical

metaphors (at least) to "speak" to this silence. In part, this response cannot take the

typical approach, which is why we find Musil playing with the distinction between novel

and essay.

Part of Musil's interest in the essay form, and why he turns to the novel is driven

by his desire to gain *philosophical* insight. Barnouw is, therefore, correct that when Musil

praises the systematicity of mathematical approaches, and offers an ontological view of

the "whole," he is not thereby going back to a systematic philosophy that gives the static

totality of all that is, the domain of all domains, recalling our discussion in the previous

Chapter. Musil does not address the mystical element by trying to capture its essence in

words that would render it completely. He uses the essay to blur the line between

disciplines in a discursive movement, which echoes for us the role of parody in the

underground discourse which we've adapted from Hutcheon. Mark Freed gives a helpful

analysis of this technique, describing how Musil uses the essay as "a discursive space

between science on the one hand and art and life on the other."[6] While we must

acknowledge the power of science as a systematizing force, we must still, nevertheless,

account for the human tendency to slip away from and overflow these systems, exhibiting

what Musil himself calls "singularities," and we are therefore entreated to essay between

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the Catholic context in, *Heidegger and Aquinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982).
See also, Caputo, "Heidegger and Theology." *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed.
Charles B. Guigon (New York: Cambridge, 1993), 270-89; and, Michael Zimmerman,
"Heidegger, Buddhism and Deep Ecology," also in the *Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*,
240-69. More recently, Ryan Coyne has explored Heidegger's mysticism in relation to St.
Augustine in *Heidegger's Confessions: The Remains of St. Augustine in* Being and Time *and
Beyond*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2015).
[6] Freed, "Robert Musil and the Techne of Rewriting Modernity." *The Germanic Review*, 88:1
(March 2013), 90.

the *ratoid* and the *nicht-ratoid*, the former characterized by a "monotony of facts,"

serialization, and repetition, while the latter displayed "the dominance of the exception

over the rule," and in which, "facts do not submit, laws are sieves, event do not repeat

themselves but are infinitely variable and individual."[7] Musil is thus engaged in a formal

parody of appropriation between discourses of the arts and sciences that demands we pay

attention to certain structural aspects of the text which demark it as underground

discourse. For us, it is important that Musil engages in a silent but salient dialogue with

the philosophical tradition of systemization, and does so in a way that destabilized that

tradition while simultaneously opening on a new way. The underground discourse

continues to open on the new beginning, functioning to bring us back again to

emplacement, as Musil himself opens *The Man Without Qualities* with a movement down

into place, bringing readers into the world of Vienna through a series of images which

repeat a pattern, but whose repetition is not a repetition of the same (numerical identity),

but is a repetition that displays a difference as well. I will elaborate on this

philosophically charged locution, "repetition of a difference," later, but for now it is

enough to note that it is an important connection from Foucault and Deleuze to

Heidegger, where Deleuze sees in Foucault the legacy of the deconstruction of the

"outside" of consciousness that is initiated in *Being and Time*.[8] For now, I want to stay

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[7] Freed, "Musil and the Techne of Rewriting Modernity," 91. Freed gives an excellent summary of Musil's technique here, and the quotes I've provided are cited by Freed from Musil, "Sketch of What the Writer Knows." *Precision and Soul: Essays and Addresses. Precision and Soul: Essays and Addresses*, trans. and ed. Burton Pike and David S. Luft (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1990), 62.

[8] The key moment is in Delezue, *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2009), 94-99. Although Deleuze does not explicitly mention Heidegger here, we must not fail to see the similarities with Heidegger's notion of immanent transcendence as the act of overcoming itself, which is articulated in *Being and Time*, but also in the way Deleuze treats the

with Musil in order to draw out the ontological advantage gained by his formal choices in structuring the *beginning* of his novel, *The Man Without Qualities*.

Keeping the above observations regarding mysticism, mathematical systemization, and the essayistic technique, I want us to attend to the way in which Musil sets out in a familiar world that is, for all its familiarity, foreign. It is a world that has been, but is no longer, the world of the Austrian Empire in its final year, August, 1913, just before the outbreak of World War I. Musil began composing the novel in 1921, and the first volume was published in 1930, with the second volume following in 1933. It commences with the ironic perspective of knowing beforehand the fate of the Empire, which all of the main characters are committed to celebrating in a grand jubilee year in celebration of Franz Joseph's 70-year reign, which would occur in 1918. Of course, the readers know that the war breaks out, and Franz Joseph dies in November 1916, just shy of completing his 68th year in power. The text thus displays a play between past and future, a play that shapes the appearance of the past in the present conditioned by our orientation to the future of the past we address. It creates a distance between us and the characters, not so that we do not care, but rather so that our care is carried into the tragic mode that recognizes a flaw in all to which the characters are committed without themselves seeing this crippling flaw. Musil alleviates this tragedy with a comedic style and a primary protagonist, the mathematician named only as Ulrich, a man without qualities who does not take anything too seriously. Throughout, there remains a sense of

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"crossing of the line," between inside and outside, which requires a transgression and resistance to the power of the outside, and how this treatment by Deleuze resonates with the "crossing of the line," that consummates a nihilistic movement against the *subiectum* and prepares for the leap into being questionably in Heidegger, "The Question of Being (1955)." *Pathmarks*, trans. William McNeill (New York: Cambridge, 1998), 291-98.

catastrophe that tinges most comedic elements with absurdity. Cauwer describes Musil's

immunological response this impending catastrophe, "the pathology of the times is an

inadequate response to the challenges and changes of modern life. Incapable of facing the

complexities, novelty and problems of the present, people flee into a moral *Hinterwelt.*"[9]

Recall Rosa Coldfield's outraged and baffled ghosts. Just as we saw in *Absalom,*

Absalom!, Cauwer finds that in Musil, people become "Confused by the present," and

subsequently "cling to a construction of moral order, often associated with 'mystical

fetishes' of state, nation, and race."[10] In the current context, we can understand these

mystical fetishes as reifications of certain basic concepts that people allow to dominate

their orientation toward the world. When we're talking about appropriately systematic

views, I will describe Musil's technique as being sensitive to hermeneutic layers, to

which I've appealed in earlier Chapters. These layers, I will explain, are not hierarchical,

but allow a better understanding of both the multivocity of being, and the interconnection

of worlds (fields of sense), thereby gathering some loose threads from the previous

chapter. The play of irony in the temporal distance that I have outlined above will be a

good entry into the idea of hermeneutic layers in *The Man Without Qualities*, and will

allow us to continue to pursue Musil's underground discourse, guided by his essayistic

technique that sets us in oscillation between various approaches to beings.

5.3 Hermeneutic Layers in *The Man Without Qualities*

Ironic detachment, coupled with the temporal play between past and futures

known, opens a series of layers in the text that each carry different hermeneutic demands.

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[9] Cauwer, "Musil's Cultural Diagnostics," 422.
[10] Cauwer, "Musil's Cultural Diagnostics," 422.

Musil himself brings us into the novel in such a way that these layers are highlighted, and the way he begins offers us synecdoches by which we can understand the whole of the work. In a synecdoche, a part of something is used as a metaphorical stand-in for the whole of the thing, or vice versa. Kenneth Burke held synecdoche to be one of four "master tropes" because of their role in the discovery and description of truth.[11] In Musil, the trope is applied in order to expose ontological truth. With a clear August day, Musil clears a way for us to approach being. Thus, Musil provides not only a series of metaphors by which to interpret the whole of the work, he also provides an opening that already contains a sense of precariousness, of immanent dissolution and transience. It begins with a descriptive account of the weather. Musil writes:

> A barometric low hung over the Atlantic. It moved eastward toward a high-pressure zone over Russia without as yet showing any inclination to bypass this high in a northerly direction. The isotherms and isotheres were functioning as they should. The air temperature was appropriate relative to the annual mean temperature and to the aperiodic monthly fluctuations of the temperature. The rising and setting of the sun, the moon, the phases of the moon, of Venus, of the rings of Saturn, and many other significant phenomena were all in accordance with the forecasts in the astronomical yearbooks. The water vapor in the air was at its maximal state of tension, while the humidity was minimal. In a word that characterizes the facts fairly accurately, even if it is a bit old-fashioned: It was a fine day in August 1913.[12]

First, notice the technical nature of this description, but do not be seduced by it, as if it were the technical alone that should guide our interpretation! Walter Moser has given a thoughtful commentary on the play of language between the technical and the poetic in

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[11] Kenneth Burke, "Four Master tropes." *The Kenyon Review* 3:4 (Autumn 1941), 421.
[12] Musil, *The Man Without Qualities, Vol. 1*, trans. Sophie Wilkins (New York: Vintage International, 1996), 3.

this opening passage, and he notes the way it complexifies the reader's usual contract

with the author regarding any pre-suppositional "as-if" that would underwrite the work as

purely fiction, taken as a byword for "make-believe."[13] We can add Moser's observation

to Freed's contributions to our considerations of the essayistic technique displayed in *The*

Man Without Qualities. Moser points out that although Musil makes generous use of

allusion, parody, re-use, explicit quotation, paraphrase, metaphor, and so on, he does so

without necessarily referencing a particular text, but rather, plays off of features

autochthonous to one or more discursive types on which Musil plays and performs in his

novel. What's more, this technique addresses and highlights the onto-epistemological

issues I've previously addressed at the heart of the modern/postmodern debate, where

these issues manifest for Musil as the epistemological question concerning the

appropriateness of a given discourse relative to its domain, and ontologically as the

question concerning the subject itself as the grounding force of the subjectivistic

system.[14] But Musil starts off, crucially, from an emplacing movement, oscillating

between the weather, the traffic, the technical, and the poetic. We can see place between

the *ratoid* and the *nicht-ratoid*, highlighting the excess, the dominant of the exception to

the rule. For although the paragraph rings out with a technical, meteorological sound, it is

at the same time tinged with a sense of excess, as if at some point the "facts," as they are

so characterized cannot come to fully articulate the scene no matter how voluminously

we pile on descriptive language. Not only are the basic atmospheric conditions outlined,

but also the "rising and setting of the sun, the moon, the phases of the moon, of Venus, of

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[13] Moser, "The Factual in Fiction: The Case of Robert Musil." *Poetics Today*, 5:2 (1984), 411.
[14] Moser, "The Factual in Fiction," 419.

the rings of Saturn, and many other significant phenomena..." So it is not just the immediate conditions of one particular place, but also conditions that telescope out beyond the world into vast expanses and magnitudes beyond the scope of this one fine day in August. There are "many more significant phenomena," too many more to be elaborated, perhaps, and yet, this inability to account for all of the possible facts does not negate or erase their *significance*. In fact, Musil seems to be suggesting that the simple phrase "It was a fine day in August 1913," captures the richness and significance of all the technically elaborate details provided in the entire preceding paragraph.

This is Musil's methodological insight: that there is always so much to say, and yet there is only so much that *can be said*. Thus, although the technical account may *appear* superior is its minutia, the same phenomena and state of affairs is equally expressed in the far simpler statement that it is indeed a fine August day. And yet, this is not to deny the complexity of the event, nor is it to degrade the value of technicalities. It is, rather, to open us up to the full richness of poetic language and poetic thinking, in its very relation to and play with the technical.

But we are just getting started. We are only at the very beginning of Musil's novel, only at the very beginning of this invitation to think ontologically – only just now starting our attempt at thinking. Just as we should not get sidetracked and overly invested in the language of meteorological technicalities, neither should we now become too enamored by poetic language itself. The task of thinking, rather, requires that we train our ears to listen for the truth in whatever form it happens to appear. Not every mode of expression is suited for every truth, and some modes better reveal certain truths than others. Moser's observation regarding the appropriateness of discourse to its context is in

harmony with Aristotle's profound advice at the end of Book Two of his *Metaphysics*. Therein, Aristotle teaches us, "one must be already trained to know how to take each sort of argument, since it is absurd to seek at the same time knowledge and the way of attaining knowledge; and neither is easy to get" (995ª12-14).[15] Thus, we must be wary and careful to differentiate the *way in which* Musil's text can expose us to an ontological insight from the insight itself – that to which we are exposed in thought.

From the outset, where the weather is our entry into the whole of the text, we can see that Musil is presenting an essayistic mereology. In formal logic, mereology is the study of parthood relations, that is, the relation of parts to the whole and also of parts to other parts within the whole. In the opening paragraph, Musil presents us with a set of part relations which are intended to represent the whole, where the "whole" is expressed as "it was a fine day in August 1913." Soon, however, Musil's view takes us down, layer by layer, to the scene of a traffic accident which has occurred in the city of Vienna. The opening paragraph sets us off on a course that begins from on high, in the atmosphere, where forces cosmic and global have come into conjunction to produce a fine August day. It should be noted, on the technical side, that precise knowledge of the cosmic conditions, the alignment of the planets and so on, would even allow us to determine that this fine day was indeed in August in 1913. We would only need to consult an astronomical calendar. Nevertheless, it is clear that this weather pattern is not *the* whole – Musil does not mean us to understand that this particular relation of parts is all that is. Somehow, this part of parts is *illustrative* of a deeper ontological insight. The weather is

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[15] Aristotle, "Metaphysics." *The Complete Works of Aristotle, Vol. 2*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University, 1995), 1572.

exemplary for Musil. This part of parts reflects for us the structure of being itself. Here, we must note that being has become, for us, a word for the primacy of place and the play of oscillation that opens all grounds. Not an all-encompassing ground of grounds, or a domain of all domains, though certainly that ground in which domains themselves become possible, and which open before us the possibility of signification, for our own being to be in a place that sustains it. We are then attempting to think "being" as the very openness of parts and wholes themselves. We can go pretty far with a preliminary Kantian view of "being," not as predicating the existence of a thing, but rather, as itself the very condition of the possibility of anything whatsoever. A hasty articulation, perhaps, but one necessary to facilitate our attempt at thinking through Musil's text no matter how insufficient it may be in capturing the fullness of being itself. Thus, if we understand being in this way, we begin to see the power of Musil's approach through synecdoche, an approach that can think, in one sense, the base commonness of being while at the same time prefiguring its radical differentiation. Synecdoche does not, in this instance, speak directly to being as such, but provides a way of approach, a way around being, in order to better see it, performing, as Moser says, a play between fact and fiction, poetics and technics, that transverses a line between discourses and frees language to address a mystery, not in hollow mysticism, but with an earnestness that still struggles in its orientation toward truth – always a truth appearing to and for, yet still one unconstructed, perhaps a singular truth emergent from the confluence of myself and the world, there waiting for me, yet still in need of being apparent.

It is not a coincidence that Musil moves from the weather to traffic. Both weather and traffic could stand in for one another – they are systems of part relations wherein

tangential forces collide and produce a singular event whether it be one fine day in August 1913 or a traffic accident involving a truck and a pedestrian on a specific street in the city of Vienna. The day's weather and the day's traffic are, each in their own way, singular events that emerge from the collusion of an innumerable set of variables all coming into concert. They will each dissipate, their various parts and patterns moving away from the former whole and entering into new relations with new parts to generate new events, new wholes, and different days with their own weather and traffic that will be both like and unlike those of previous days and days yet to come. One of the innovations of Musil's vision of being lies in its systematicity. It is systematic in a way that is totally different from Kant's architectonics or Hegel's ascent through Reason to Absolute Spirit and the end of history. Musil, rather, presents a vision of systematic multiplicity. In this understanding, the world does indeed express a kind of systematic structure. This is contrary to the majority of analytic philosophy in the Anglo-American world, where systematic philosophy is eschewed for the minute analysis of isolated problems according to the representational schema of propositional logic. Musil's text suggests, with Aristotle and Moser seconding his suggestion, that this type of analysis is not fit for the task of ontology. Rather, we need a more inclusive vision – one that encompasses both the technical language of the meteorological sciences as well as the poetic potential of fine days in August; a vision suited to explain the emergence of systems from the confluence of forces, and yet also acknowledges and maintains the transitory nature of these systems, abstaining from the reification of any given system into an Absolute totality that pretends to encompass everything that is.

Thus, the movement from the weather to the traffic should not disturb us, for both are parts of a whole in relation to one another while simultaneously expressing wholes that are themselves capable of reflecting structures of being. Musil uses synecdoche in both its macro- and microscopic potential, offering us a glimpse of the whole through the part, and giving us a whole by which each part is rendered sensible. This interplay is facilitated by the openness of Musil's systems. They are never closed. They are open, transitory, and feed into and out of one another. These are *dynamic systems*. Like mereology, dynamic systems have a rigorous theoretical basis in mathematical logic. The theoretical application of dynamical systems analysis is to trace the continuous development of a complex system from one physical state to another. So, how does the system move from state A to state B in a smooth, continual movement. Students of calculus will no doubt suspect the importance of differential equations to these theoretical concerns, but our primary focus must be the emphasis that dynamic systems place on *time*. Time is of the essence for us. Musil has, serendipitously, brought forth the metaphysical bugbear of time through a revolutionary formulation of the age-old philosophical problem – the problem of change, of becoming, of motion between states.

Time was subtly indicated in the beginning, where Musil makes sure we know the year. It was August, 1913, and so time is invoked through the acknowledgment of the historical record. Remember, volume one of *The Man Without Qualities* was published in 1930, and so audiences of the time, and we as contemporary readers, are fully aware that the Austro-Hungarian Empire was doomed – that the Great War meant the final defeat and dissolution of the Empire into many smaller nation-states. This is crucial to the understanding of being introduced through the weather of the fine August day. The main

narrative of the novel involves the planning of a great celebration of the 70th year of the reign of Emperor Franz Joseph I. Anyone who has planned an event involving a significant number of people understand immediately the seemingly innumerable quantity of variables that arise in conjunction and contribute to the final form, shape, atmosphere, and quality of the event itself – in just the same manner as a fine day in August, or a traffic jam in Vienna. If you can, project the difficulties and challenges involved in planning these smaller events into the great magnitude of a year-long Imperial jubilee and you'll get a sense of the scope of Musil's novel, and also of his irony. The great event will never happen. Or, rather, its happening far outstrips the effort of any one character's attempt to control and guide the event and the finally realized historical moment is something no one involved could have foreseen. Each contributes in their own way, according to their talents, attempting to shape the event into the object they desire. Some objectives are achieved, some are thwarted. The theme of "A Year of Austria" is realized through the stroke of an unnamed journalist's pen, but the characters involved in the planning seize on this idea, appropriate it, attempt to make it their own and use it as the instrument for the achievement of their own ends. They are themselves wholes of parts within the whole, the wholes they are but parts within a greater whole, itself a part of the European whole, itself a part of parts in the whole of the world...and so on. In this mereology, Musil expresses a dynamic vision of open, interconnected systems involved in an ongoing process of mutual formation, confluence, and eventual dissipation.

This get us to the point of hermeneutic layering. Just as I have previously discussed the necessity of "translating" into human terms any phenomenon which outstrips our capacity to bring it forth for comprehension, so too do hermeneutic layers

speak to the multivocity of being. I have, by and large, eschewed the language of "being" in order to speak more concretely of emplacement and the play of oscillation. Indeed, being is spoken in many ways and, as the title of this work suggests, being has always been in view insofar as to be is to be in place. Being is place, its oscillation and the play of things released by oscillation to their being in place. And place-being lends itself to a kind of systematicity that cannot be some absolute static system, or in some way a complete or total system, because such totalizing systemization exactly misses the dynamic nature of emplacement from the start. In a way, to even have a system requires from the start a place for the system, and so no system can ever capture place, though for us in our worlds it is necessary sometimes to think through place in a systematic way. This is basically Casey's point when he argues that place, "by virtue of its unencompassability by anything other than itself, is at once the limit and the condition of all that exists."[16] Hermeneutic layers trace out the multivocity of place, its basic analogous structures that allow place itself to stand out for us in a way that can take on significance. Ontology itself demands, on one level, a systematic answer to the question of being. Here, that answer is the oscillation of emplacement where all beings, insofar as they are, are in places. Yet, on another level, folded in a different way in a different hermeneutic layer, that system cannot close in on itself, for such closure would deny the very play required by emplacement for the very showing forth of the things for which ontology provides an account! This is the difficulty that was overcome in the confrontation with Gabriel and Heidegger on the meaning of world and the *Sinnfeld*. In

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16 Casey, *Getting Back Into Place,* 15.

The Man Without Qualities, we require such hermeneutic layers in order to address the fullness of the story. We must descend, as Musil illustrates, from perspectives (layers) on high, that capture and render a social and cultural event that encompasses the activities of many people. But we must also "descend," a word used in a metaphorical way, to the individual level (layer) where intimate relations between people help to understand their roles in other layers. The transversal of these layers further illustrates their interconnectivity and thorough entanglement. Consider the Moosbrugger subplot within Musil's novel.

5.4 The Problem of Subjection in Several Examples

The city of Vienna, the locale of the committee and the home of the man without qualities, is enraptured by the newspaper coverage of a sensational serial rapist and murderer of women named Moosbrugger. Moosbrugger is himself rendered in intimate detail, and we are given access to the psycho-sexual proclivities of a vagabond, an anti-social who does not fit in to society, who hates women, but moreover, hates his own neediness and physical attraction to women over which he has little to no control and for which he ultimately blames his victims in the crassest and most unreflective ways. Ultimately, Moosbrugger is shown to be mentally deficient, unable to take any critical distance from his actions, and fancies himself a victim of the system that has imprisoned him. All of this is just one layer. Operating in tangent with this is the press coverage of his trial and crimes. Now, different presses and periodical are actors in a sense. The aggregate of their individual members lead to different editorial decisions about the handling of the trial, and they compete with each other to render the most sensational and attractive (in the sense of winning over readership) rendering of the monster

Moosbrugger. So we are given quite a grand portrait of the Austrian media apparatus of the time, both in its own functioning, and in its relationship to culture, the way in which media can shape mass opinion. Running parallel to the Moosbrugger story is, of course, coverage of the planning of the year of Jubilee, so we are further treated to the way in which the Austrian Empire, as a governmental authority, is reified in the media coverage as it imposes social mores through coverage of cases such as Moosbrugger's. To be clear, this is not to render an ethical judgment that the treatment of Moosbrugger by the media is right or wrong. That is not the point. It is clear that Moosbrugger is guilty of heinous crimes, though he himself does not see it that way. However, it is also clear that the media plays its part in shaping the general social views of people like Moosbrugger and his crimes. So, we have at least three hermeneutic layers here: that of the personal layer of Moosbrugger himself, his psycho-sexual formation; that of the media, where Moosbruggers case is handled on a mass scale; and the wider social network that gains access to Moosbrugger through the media portrayal of it and which integrates the media view, disseminating through several intermingled layers, eventually taking Moosbrugger's case into the disparate private layers of Ulrich and his friends. The multivocity of oscillation between these layers, and the layering effects of overlapping worlds of sense and meaning are hardly more pronounced than in this example. Just to be clear – layers are places, just recall the discussion to this effect from Chapter Two. I use the term "layers" here because it must be made obvious that when we begin to consider the significance of places *in their interconnection and entanglement*, we are then considering the ontological plurality of place that extends in every direction. This is not an ontological hierarchy where the personal or the social are thought through a rank that

places one "over" the other or bestows ontological priority. Hermeneutic layering spreads out every which way, and ontological priority belongs solely to the oscillation that frees things to place and sets them forth for the mutual procedures and interactions. The term "hermeneutic" applies, because each layer, insofar as it is a world, generates its own guiding question – the world of Moosbrugger asks what drives him to commit these crimes, the world of the media concerns how to capture a readership and shape public discourse, the world of mass culture asks about the formation of adaptation of social mores, and worlds of given individual consumers of such mass media returns to the struggle of the individual to find their place in confluence of forces exerted upon them. Each layer demands a different approach, though not one that is entirely divorced from the others, since they are, ontologically, shot through with connections to each other.

Moosbrugger has been previously identified by Wilhelm Braun as a microcosm of the European crisis that lead to the First World War, and comments at length on his schizophrenic nature, his name invoking the peaceful and serene atmosphere of an Alpine "mossy brook," while his actions are one of a destructive, murderous force – I might add, without any of a brook's "reflectivity."[17] Braun is also right to emphasize the way Moosbrugger oscillates between lucidity and madness, and this oscillation itself serves as a foil for Musil to poke fun at the medical establishment, particularly psychiatric medicine, who cannot fit Moosbrugger into their diagnostic schemes.[18] Braun's analysis anticipates Freed's observations on the way the essay form plays on different discourses,

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[17] Braun, "Moosbrugger Dances." *Germanic Review*, 35:3 (October 1960), 215.
[18] Braun, "Moosbrugger Dances," 215, 219-20. Braun even uses the term "oscillate," though only in passing.

and we see, obliquely, the symptomatology of Modernism's Nietzschean influence, though one seen earlier in Dostoevsky's underground man. Given Musil's systematic tendencies, and the aforementioned analysis of Moosbrugger as microcosm, together with entry into the text by way of synecdoche, we can then see the underground discourse manifest. There is a high co-efficient of deterritorialization in the play between modes of discourse by which, as I've outlined above, Musil speaks to the silence that might mystify our attempts to think being. He has destabilized us by our entry into the text, both by the synecdoches which repeat a difference and thereby epitomize the dynamic structure of the whole, but also by the entry through the non-human, the circumvention of the *cogito* through weather, and clouds; the analogies of being already prefiguring the deconstruction of the subject and its re-assemblage on the other side of the line, a line crossed into a new beginning, another way to begin. Like Nietzsche, Musil too diagnoses the ailments of European society, but in another movement he begins a sketch of an alternative vision. Thus, everything takes on the collective significance of the underground discourse that is working to lay foundations even as it undermines the previous one, sometimes taking up what is found to be of use in parodic gestures that re-appropriate the major, canonical terms. Systems change, if we care to think metaphysics again, or a new and different metaphysics. Taking on collective significance gives the air of systematicity and Musil has provided a different, more open approach to such systematicity. But, because of the synecdoche, the analogous nature of being, the repetition of a difference, he has cast us back to the relationship, already spoken mereologically, of parts to whole, of the individual to the system that would condition it.

Ulrich becomes fascinated by the Moosbrugger case, both in Moosbrugger himself and in the media's handling of the affair. In part, Ulrich's interest concerns the way in which Moosbrugger is conditioned by his presence in the system, by his appearance in court and in the press coverage; the details of his crimes elaborated in bloody depictions to increase circulation (both of newspapers and the readers' blood). The tangle of these forces can be illustrated succinctly by comparing Moosbrugger's case to an episode in which Ulrich is "taken in" and processed by a social system. The episode is one in which Ulrich is arrested following his unwitting involvement in a barroom dispute concerning politics. The arrest proves fortuitous for Ulrich in the end, due primarily to his friends in high places, but during the arrest Ulrich gets a flash of insight into the state apparatus. As it happens, Ulrich was not the original object of the policing force, rather, it was a drunken working-class man whose political tirades, fomented by his reading of a particularly slanted newspaper, had devolved into physical violence and resisting arrest. But Ulrich intervenes, claiming that the poor man, given his inebriation, cannot be held responsible for any "offense against the Crown," and this intervention was interpreted by the police as the cause of the drunk resuming his resistance. The police order Ulrich out, but the man without qualities "was unaccustomed to regarding the state as anything other than a hotel in which one was entitled to polite service, and objected to being addressed in such a tone; whereupon the police unexpectedly decided that one drunk did not justify the presence of three policemen and arrested Ulrich as well."[19] What sets off this series of events is a moment of existential dread. The agitated drunk had been

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[19] Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*, 167.

further agitated, to the point of eruption, by a policeman's buttons. Musil describes the

arousal of the old ontological malaise elegantly when he writes,

> There is always something ghostly about living in a constantly well-ordered state. You cannot step into the street or drink a glass of water without touching the balanced levers of a gigantic apparatus of laws and interrelations, setting them in motion or letting them maintain you in your peaceful existence; one knows hardly any of these levers, which reach deep into the inner workings and, coming out the other side, lose themselves in a network whose structure has never yet been unraveled by anyone. So one denies their existence, just as the average citizen denies the air, maintaining that it is empty space. But all these things that one denied, these colorless, odorless, tasteless, weightless, and morally indefinable things such as water, air, space, money, and the passing of time, turn out in truth to be the most important things of all, and this gives life a certain spooky quality. Sometimes a man may be seized by panic, helpless as in a dream, thrashing about wildly like an animal that has blundered into the incomprehensible mechanism of a net. Such was the effect of the policeman's buttons on the working-man, and it was at this moment that the arm of the state, feeling that it was not being respected in the proper manner, proceeded to make an arrest.[20]

So much of this analysis can be applied, not only to Moosbrugger's individual case, but

also the public response to it, which is proceeded by the revelation of one man's

encounter with this normally hidden and submerged apparatus of laws. Of course,

Moosbrugger is guilty, admittedly so, of horrible crimes, but his guilt is not the issue

here. What is at issue is the way, as Ulrich muses, "that the police could not only

dismantle a man so that nothing was left of him, they could also put him together again,

recognizably and unmistakably, out of the same worthless components. All this

achievement takes is that something imponderable be added, which they call

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[20] Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*, 165-66.

'suspicion.'"[21] Ulrich is repeatedly shown to be a champion of such lost causes. He seeks a way to have Moosbrugger excused and treated as mentally unfit for trial after seeing the accused in the docket one day, and witnessing for himself the blind struggle of one incompetent individual against the amassed powers of the state. And everyone he meets and interacts with in regard to Moosbrugger has, in some way, had their thinking on the matter mediated by the ever-present interpretations of the affair in the media.

We are not concerned here with media studies, or sociological issues, although the placial ontology worked out above should be the foundations of both. Neither are we here concerned with the ethical dimension of these encounters, although, contra Levinas, we should see that ethics cannot be the first philosophy if it has no basic concept of the thing that embodies *ethos*, has character, and could be held responsible. Rather, the ontology emerging from oscillation is itself the foundation of any possible ethics or else it is no ontology. Without some notion of what it is that is to be ethical, or sociological, or involved with media, there can be no adequate study of such phenomena, although it is not necessarily incumbent upon those studies to treat ontology as such. They all must, by virtue of their local character, assume some basic concept that will guide their discourse without that basis itself being brought into question. But the object of ontology is itself to question the foundation *itself*, to be, being the ground of grounds.

What the episode of Ulrich's arrest, and his fascination with the facets of the Moosbrugger case reveal in the ontological context is that those moments exemplify the collision of worlds in their generation, coming together, and coming apart. The world of

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[21] Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*, 169.

the working man, and that of the state, embodied in the police. The world of Ulrich's

class with the two, its radical differentiation from the working-class world that shapes

and forms different outcomes and different consequences. Moosbrugger, his social

placelessness resulting in his unceasing conflict with all the worlds woven into the

tapestry of the Austrian Empire; its authority, its gender dynamics, its methods of

employment, urbanization, and village life. Moosbrugger has no place to be, cannot be in

any place, and thus becomes the destroyer of worlds, the worlds of so many women and

eventually the vanquishment of his own self in unknowing guiltless vanity. To

understand this, for us, we require the hermeneutic layers that show the folding and

unfolding of these worlds as they meet and as the individual is conditioned by their

entanglements on the surface of these worlds. As I had said in Chapter Two, we are

arriving at a topological ontology, and at last, uncovering what is to be a topology of

subjectivity, but a yet undiscovered subjectivity, one completely other, a subjectivity yet

to come – we are here too attached to place. To venture into some other subjectivity

would be too far, too much.

And yet, we find attempts already in progress, aids on our way to the new

beginning. For instance, Stefan Jonsson has clearly laid out the case that Musil is

attempting to think a different kind of subjectivity, and he does so in part through a

subversion of the old paradigm, which hinges on cohesion, and a unified inwardness that

must stand against some outside that subjects it.[22] Jonsson shows Musil structuring

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[22] Stefan Jonsson, "Neither Inside nor Outside: Subjectivity and the Spaces of Modernity in
Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*." *New German Critique*, 68 (Spring/Summer 1996),
34-36.

subjectivity on enclosure by rooms, rooms in the architecture and urban landscape of the city. The man without qualities rejects the reification of his interiority – when he turns inward to escape the impersonal rush of the outside world, he finds within himself only another impersonal flow, this time composed of thoughts, feelings, and sensations.[23] We have seen Musil's interest in Hume, and I have previously discussed the Modernist play on the general Humean attack on the simple self in Rilke and Pirandello, expressed phenomenologically in novels as readers are treated to the conscious operations of the character's minds. Jonsson refers to a conversation between Ulrich and General Stumm von Bordwehr, "if you escape from this drab repetitiveness into the darkest recesses of your being, where the uncontrolled impulses live, those sticky animal depths that save us from evaporating under the glare of reason, what do you find? Stimuli and strings of reflexes, entrenched habits and skills, reiteration, fixation, imprints, series, monotony!"[24] Here I must disagree with one element of Jonsson's analysis. Jonsson blames a phenomenologically rooted sense of the ego-I as the ground and sole source of meaning.[25] Jonsson overlooks the way in which it is really phenomenologically based *method* that underlies the arguments from Hume, even, in a different vein, those of Heidegger's *phenomenological* ontology of *Being and Time*. Descartes' method of doubt attempts to set up a logical stop-gap that would give reason to question all phenomenological considerations, where to question does not mean to investigate the phenomenological appearance *as such*, but rather is intended precisely to throw the very

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[23] Jonsson, "Neither Inside nor Outside," 46-47.
[24] Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*, 410. Cited by Jonsson, "Neither Inside nor Outside." 47.
[25] Most clearly at Jonsson, "Neither Inside nor Outside," 52-53.

veracity of the appearance into doubt, to make us suspicious of the very notion that our phenomenological experience could even tell us anything meaningful about the world. The Empiricists variously fail to acknowledge this exact maneuver, refuse to grant Descartes such logical wrangling, or else actually follow the basic conclusions to their logical end, as was the case with Berkeley. Hume's basic argument could be crudely summarized as "Very fine reasoning Descartes, but that's just not what I experience if I reflect on my experience as such." To the things themselves indeed! And, although Kant and Husserl are invested in the logical necessity of the transcendental ego, even their description of what experience is like entails serialization, repetition, and the trend in phenomenology after Heidegger seems geared toward destabilization and deconstruction of the stable subject, with de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty effecting a powerful shift toward emphasizing the body. Musil's critique seems of a family resemblance here, offering us alternative models for subjects that accrete, while expressing through these new subjects an impersonal phenomenology of repeated and serialized experiences based on routine, habituation, and structured by social architectures and power relations.

Jonsson is correct to caution against the thought that "social roles develop as natural externalizations of desires and talents that are slumbering inside the self and are realized under surveillance of a benevolent environment. In this view, the formation of a stable identity is the result of a dialectic where interiority and exteriority check, confirm and legitimate each other."[26] But he is wrong to place the blame for this predicament on phenomenology, especially when we attend to the methodological procedure of

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[26] Jonsson, "Neither Inside nor Outside," 54.

phenomenology in philosophy, and as a technique of the novel to render the character's

insights and motivations as part of their emotional and intellectual landscape. But

Jonsson's exploration into the anticipation of a new subjectivity, one conditioned by a

longing for an altogether different life – the different condition [*der anderen Zustand*] –

that glimmers with potential in light of the Millennium [*Das tausend-jährige Reich*], seen

as a break and sudden departure from past tradition.[27] That is, for all the repetition and

habitual, everything is at once, ecstatically, shot through and through with anticipation of

a sudden rupture, a rapturous happening that comes "from out of nowhere," and is at once

the destruction of what came before and the ground on which the new stands forth.

Again, the Nietzsche double movement of diagnosis and caution, excess, overcoming, but

warnings of the danger of too much of one thing – not the excess itself, but an excess of

the same, ending in nihilism. The complete fixation of Moosbrugger that destroys him,

the singular drive that puts him against everything, even his own self.

Barbara Sattler has recently tried to hash these issues out in terms of necessity and

contingency, how characters and groups deal with or "handle" contingency, and what this

means for their efficacy as agents in the novel.[28] Sattler's concerns are prototypically

metaphysical, rooted deeply and uncritically in the *cogito*. She worries over Musil's

radical treatment of contingency, seeing the danger that if this contingency is not

mitigated in some way, we are led onto a trident wherein there is either no possibility for

meaningful action, or is just acting in accord with dominant conventions, or just wholly

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[27] Jonsson, "Neither Inside nor Outside," 56-57.
[28] Sattler, "Contingency and Necessity: Human Agency in Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*."
The Monist, 97:1 (January 2014), 86-101.

arbitrary actions. The only thing that can mitigate these disasters is a form of necessity

that would connect individual acts to a basic principle, or finding some necessity in the

network of actions taken by individuals collectively, or else identity a necessary

superstructure, even if the individuals that flesh out this overarching form are

interchangeable.[29] Although Sattler captures the tone of crisis and impending disaster, she

mistrusts the movement of Musil's text and seeks to ground it again in comfortable

paradigms. She, like Jonsson, analyses the relationship between Ulrich and Agathe,

Ulrich's sister and spiritual twin in the second Volume of the novel, his complimentary,

quasi-incestuous woman without qualities. Sattler sees in Ulrich and Agathe the kindling

of necessity, whereas Ulrich's relationship with women in the first part of the book is

always contingent, passing, unserious, and flirtatious, Agathe appears to Ulrich as a soul-

mate, and, as his sister, they are somehow connected in a non-arbitrary way.[30] However,

in Jonsson's reading, we return back to the call of a latent mysticism, the other condition,

"a liminal condition; the subject embraces a reality by which it is simultaneously

embraced."[31]

Like Sattler, Karen-Margrethe Simonsen falls back into old metaphysical

paradigms when she attempts to read Moosbrugger as either a Dionysian hero or as a

possibilist, denying the former on the grounds of Moosbrugger's condemnable offenses,

while nevertheless holding open the way to a different understanding of truth (another

beginning) as a *homo sacer* who is implicated in society only through his exclusion.[32]

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[29] Sattler, "Contingency and Necessity," 100-101.
[30] Sattler, "Contingency and Necessity," 98.
[31] Jansson, "Neither Inside nor Outside," 57.
[32] Simonson, "The Subject Before the Law: On Robert Musil's Broken Fiction and Narrative Humanism Within the Law." *Pólemos*, 7:1 (2013), 55-56.

Although working in very different paradigms, Sattler in the metaphysical paradigm of

contingency-necessity with Simonsen concerned with literary types of Dionysian hero

and possibilist, both read Musil solely in the mode of critique, and see him grappling with

the collapse of an old paradigm – there is nothing of the heroic in Moosbrugger, a

thoroughly Modern exile who is only rendered whole by his exclusion from the social

order. Both have a harder time articulating the other side of the line which is crossed by

Musil's characters, and to which Jonsson gestures in his analysis. Simonson in particular

is focused on "broken fiction," harkening back to our dialogue with Vattimo, Heidegger,

and Benjamin in Chapter Two. Simonson and Sattler both stop short, arrested by the

brokenness of the system and casting around in the shattered paradigm for flotsam to

shore up the fissure. But Musil is already preparing a way beyond the wreckage in the

breach itself, crossing the rupture of the old system in a movement that brings forth the

new with the occasional parodic appropriation of the old – though never wholesale

appropriation, never a borrowing whole-cloth. The parody transforms, in some sense

destroys, and the repetition of the same is a repetition of difference, the old paradigms no

longer the proper ones in the new context. The issue is not now contingency/necessity –

or to be or not to be the hero. Think again to Chapter One and the struggle with heroism

evinced by Hegel in his confrontation with Goethe's modernity. As we have seen, the

inside of thought, of consciousness, has been thrust outside, and in this transversal of the

line to the outside, the crossing of the threshold into place, is transformed into a being in

the world, a being already "out there," whose inside becomes a chambered outside, a

fold, a bending of the outside to construct the within.

The insight gained from attentiveness to this crossing of the line resonates with Deleuze, and his assessment of Foucault precisely where Deleuze claims Foucault has outstripped Heidegger. Deleuze writes, "If the inside is constituted by the folding of the outside, between them there is a topological relation: the relation to oneself is homologous to the relation with the outside and the two are in contact, through the intermediary of the strata which are relatively external environments (and therefore relatively internal)."[33] However, Deleuze and Foucault are both still narrowly focused on the local ontic description of the subject, and thus, even within their radically transformative visions we are teetering on the precipice of the old metaphysics. From the placial ontology we can see the global implications of Deleuze and Foucault, who began to uncover the salience of cartography and topology in their explorations of what Calvin O. Schrag has called the "self after postmodernity." There, Schrag picks up on Richard Rorty's criticism that there is no "we" in Foucault, and elaborates that:

> The we-experience and the I-experience are more intricately intertwined than has been acknowledged by proponents of either the social doctrine of the self or the individualist doctrine. Whereas the social doctrine defines the self as simply and ensemble and product of social relations, the individualist perspective argues for a self-constituting individuality that proceeds independently of relations with other selves. The first doctrine buys into a species of collectivism and a semblance of group substantiality, relegating the individual qua individual to the status of a societal epiphenomenon. The other doctrine makes purchases on an egology, or either an empirical or a transcendental sort, and locates the primary datum of selfhood in a sphere of ownness that antedates the acknowledgement of other egos. The point is that both these doctrines trade on a common mistake of sundering an undivided portion of world-experience and then reifying the abstracted components.[34]

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[33] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 119.
[34] Schrag, *The Self After Postmodernity* (New Haven: Yale University, 1999), 79-80.

It should be clear that the current project rejects the individualist egology identified by Schrag, but that does not mean we revert back to the social doctrine where selves are "merely" social constructs. I have been chasing out those remnants alongside the New Realists with whom I agree on the issue of constructivism in postmodernity, despite our other theoretical differences. As I will outline below, I am moving away from Schrag's late-Derridean suggestion that we keep "subjectivity" alive,[35] however, the crucial insight I am drawing out here is relevant to our appropriation of Deleuzian "folding" à la Foucault. For when we begin to reach the ontological power of emplacement in oscillation, we see that it is not just people who are folded thusly – the chord of space literally strung through us, from mouth to anus, the element of spacetime around which our bodies fold – but also that rooms, buildings, and other encultured places are likewise folded, and thus have their own "insides," their own characters and apparatuses of subjection. Thus, individuals are "brought into the fold," and their individuation oscillates along this axis as they are "subjected" to the logic of places into which they are emplaced. I will explore this subjectivating aspect of places in relation to *The Man Without Qualities* below, but first, I want to think with Schrag just a bit longer. Musil's text has opened this mereological dimension through the repetitious deployment of synecdoches which reveal the analogous nature of being emplaced where places recur "all the way down," but still maintain a general structure in the form of the oscillation by which each layer is opened. We can see the opening of each local site in oscillation. And yet, to understand ontologically is to understand in a comprehensive way. We must

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[35] Schrag, *The Self After postmodernity*, 13-15.

therefore consider individuals, however briefly, as they are individualized among the layers of worlds they inhabit. To do this, I turn to Schrag's ontology of self-with-society, as it will help us with the final piece of out ontological puzzle. In the end, we will see the axis of individuation along which we each slide in conformity with the projects we engage. Schrag's concept will help orient us, and so I will outline the basics below.

5.5 Schrag's Ontology of Self-with-society

The ontology of self-with-society presents individuals and the societies in which they live as mutually formative entities existing along an axis of degrees of individuation.[36] For Schrag, ontology constitutes the thematization of pre-philosophical and prescientific experience, thereby making everyday life explicit as opposed to something taken for granted. As such, ontological analysis of the self-with-society maintains roots in concrete experience in order to avoid abstractionism; that is, the reduction of experience to abstract theoretical models that break experience into discrete and atomistic conceptual units.[37] The openness of societies generally is entailed in this view – that societies are not closed totalities such that we can ignore phenomena such as migrants, immigration, gentrification, and so on. Societies are fluid.

Schrag's anti-abstractionist position emerges from a specific philosophical tradition that stems from Husserl and runs through Heidegger to Merleau-Ponty, incorporating tenants of radical empiricism from William James. Cartesianism (labeled by Schrag as a variety of intellectualism) is a prime example of an abstractionist

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[36] Calvin O. Schrag, "The Concrete Dialectic of Self-with-Society." *Philosophical Papers: Betwixt and Between*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 147.
[37] Schrag, "…Self-with-Society," 142.

philosophical position. Descartes treats the self, the *cogito*, as something fundamentally

separate from the physical world, and it is the physical world that constitutes the

structures of society. Therefore, under a Cartesian model, the self can, in theory, be

abstracted away from all relations to society. The self, as a Cartesian *cogito*, is considered

an atomistic entity separate from and independent of any social relationship. Schrag,

following the phenomenological emphasis on lived experience, rejects the Cartesian

model as overly intellectualized. Views like Descartes do not take lived experience

seriously; their foundational philosophical presumptions preclude the basic, concrete

relations experienced in the course of a person's everyday life.[38] Classical empiricism

suffers from its own abstractionist problems. While Cartesian theories focus on the

transcendence of immaterial mind over and above a mechanical physical universe,

traditional empiricism turns away from the idea of transcendence to focus very narrowly

on physical processes that can be measured and quantified. Thus, Schrag contends that

empiricism's overemphasis on measurement and quantification gives a version of reason

that is a controlling reason, obsessed with feedback-control procedures and techniques.[39]

The self, then, is reduced to quantifiable bundles of physical and mental properties.

Again, these bundled properties are severed from all intrinsic and meaning-laden

connections to nature and society. Under the traditional empiricist model, the self is a

discrete phenomenon, solipsistically dislocated from the world of lived experience within

which the concrete relations of the self-with-society have no import in the formation of

identity.

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[38] Schrag, "…Self-with-Society," 137.
[39] Schrag, "…Self-with-Society," 138.

Against these two versions of abstractionism, Schrag calls for the suspension of philosophical commitments to foundationalist principles such as the transcendence of immaterial mind, or the quantification of the self into a discrete bundle of properties. The suspension of such philosophical commitments is part of the phenomenological method influential in Schrag's work. When Schrag talks about "pre-philosophical" or "prescientific" experiences, he means just to attend to experience without assuming some foundational philosophical model uncritically, *a priori*.[40] Schrag finds that, when he turns to consider experiences without presupposing a philosophic model uncritically, the experience of everyday life is always already intertwined with social relations. Instead of discrete, atomized subjectivities, Schrag argues that lived experience is intersubjective, that intersubjectivity is part and parcel of the social structures basic to experiences of everyday life. By intersubjective, we are to understand that subjects are mutually formative of one another, collectives of individual subjects come together to form society through their various activities and relations, relations that are always concrete and immanent – not theoretical, transcendent abstractions, or discrete, atomistic quantifications. To make the intersubjective nature of his ontology clear, Schrag focuses on language as a principle ontological feature of the world that carries a privileged role in the disclosure of "being-with" as a dialectical (that is, as a communicative) experience. "Language is both structure and event," writes Schrag, "an institutionalized system and a creative act."[41] The structure and systematic elements of language allow linguistics to take language as an object of scientific scrutiny, but the creative aspect of event allows

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[40] Schrag, "…Self-with-Society," 139.
[41] Schrag, "…Self-with-Society," 143.

the pre-objective and pre-categorical establishment of meaning to remain transparent; thus, neither of these two elements of language can be reduced to the other. Rather than being the object of reduction, language serves as a cross-section of the ongoing operation of language as performance.

It is clear that Schrag does not attempt to get rid of, or downplay the role of scientific or philosophical theory. He does not proclaim that a full return to the prescientific or pre-philosophical mode of thought is entirely possible.[42] However, all philosophical commitments should be treated critically, and the experiences of everyday life should not be taken for granted, ignored, nor treated lightly. The performance of language in dialogic communication helps to show that being-with-others is basic to everyday experience, to the world as lived experience. In a concrete interchange, participants reciprocally appropriate each other's thoughts and interweave them so that individual contributions to the intersubjective exchange are, strictly speaking, indistinguishable. It is only after the fact, in a post-reflective stance, that dialogic language can be dissected and parsed out in a more systematic understanding. But there is something artificial to this postmortem operation, which cannot escape the ambiguity inherent in the original intersubjective exchange.[43] The original exchange, according to Schrag, always already occurs among others; this is the primary role of being-with and a result of the suspension of abstractions that would render individuals as discrete, unrelated units. Instead of abstraction, Schrag's ontology of self-with-society places

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[42] Personal conversation with Schrag in Leonard Harris' Philosophy of the Social Sciences Seminar at Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN, 30 October 2012.
[43] Schrag, "…Self-with-Society," 144.

individuals in an irreducible relationship to one another wherein individuation occurs on

a scale between individuation and assimilation into society at large. Recall Gadamer and

the genuine conversation, illustrated by the Quenting-Shreve-Henry-Bon configuration in

the previous Chapter. Selves within society are more or less individuated, depending

upon the degree of their participation within the broader social milieu.[44] Members of a

sports team, for instance, may lose a large part of their individuality by assimilating into

the cultural milieu of their team, wearing uniforms etc. Later, after a game is played, the

team may disperse and each individual may become increasingly individuated as they

dissociated from the team and begin interacting in various ways with various different

cultural milieus. Language comes to the fore because language mediates these

relationships and presents an indicator of the various levels of individuation on display.

The teammates articulate their relationship in a highly uniform language that revolves

around the goals and rules of the game that binds them as a team. As those relationships

become less uniform, language may reveal a wide variety of differences that mark

individuation: from a taste for different foods, to divergent political opinions. Under

Schrag's ontology, we must always return to the concrete relations of lived experiences to

observe the performative aspect of language, and then afterwards, in a reflective position,

it becomes possible to dissect the language performance into theoretical constructions of

concepts, theories, facts, and the like.

A few things in the current context. I do not fall under the problem of assuming

"foundationalist principles" in my arguments for oscillation as the basic movement of

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[44] Schrag, "…Self-with-Society," 147.

emplacement. In fact, part of the argument has been exactly to account for the things that appear as they appear and give a philosophical ground for why they might be this way. This is, to be sure, the laying of some foundation. But the foundation is not an exhaustive or *complete and total* foundation, because we might always discover more. Further, oscillation is just one approach to laying this foundation. As I have said before, oscillation might go by other names, and at other times I myself might talk about other movements and other openings into place that go by other names. But these names name an attempt to think being as the being of beings. They are efforts, arguments put forth tentatively because humility demands it, and because *it is not possible to exhaustively pronounce the one system of ontology*. This is the limit Heidegger runs up against again and again. This is why scholars continually frustrate themselves on the language of ontology, throw up their hands at the "mystification" of being, and are unable, repeatedly, to put forth the one comprehensive system of reality. That is not my project. This is a project of beginnings, not endings. This is a place to begin again, not to finish. The foundation is always being laid, and revisited, and the structures built will not last into eternity.

However, Schrag still suffers from the ghost of subjectivity, which cannot be entirely salvaged for the current project. Even this intersubjectivity, which is seen as the saving grace in his notion of self-with-society, puts up two insides with the outside between, two insides that trade between them, that share their contents as two vessels pour water back and forth. That scheme will not do for our placial ontology. So I want to amend this portion of Schrag's thinking, while moving forward with the remainder of his astute insights. I must, in this case, fully endorse the Heideggerian position that *there is*

no innersphere, an inside of the subject from which we travel out into the world to return again with the knowledge of things like so much treasure won from our expedition.[45] That old model has fallen under the preceding critiques of representationalism, and now shows no signs of being salvaged in the weakening of the subject to the point of dissolution. But there is *something* there, if not a subject. Something emerges, there is no better word, from the confluence of these worlds in play with one another, some being who knows itself in its being and is doubled back on itself in the currents of the places it occupies, which wash over it and shape it even as it shapes the tides themselves. The accretion that leads to this emergence occurs as a play in the thrall of oscillation. This movement is basic emplacement, and here we find what makes Schrag's self-with-society analysis so compelling in the context of a placial ontology. It highlights the fact that individuals are intensified by their exertion of conscious force, but diminished too by their subjugation to the forces at play in the places they inhabit. Thus, the axis of individuation becomes a useful conceptual tool.

5.6 The Axis of Individuation

Think again of the team, perhaps a baseball team, from the example above. Or think of the many instances in *The Man Without Qualities* in which a character gets "brought in" to an organizational context and take up a role within that context that operates along certain social and legislative axioms geared toward a "greater purpose" than individual ends. Even the instance of Ulrich's arrest with the working-man, or Moosbrugger's eventual arrest and the way police lingo "brings them in." Bring 'em in,

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[45] To echo Heidegger's arguments in *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Collins, 1962), 86-90.

brought in for questioning. Appearing in the docket, the interrogation room, the waiting room, all ways of being brought into the fold of social context, a field of sense, the world. Ulrich has the sense of being taken apart and reconstructed under a new rubric, in a new paradigm, reoriented in a new world, by new basic concepts, disoriented in oscillation, its play freeing new things to you, different, shaded in a new valence, in the new sphere. Thus the individual is thereby reduced to a kind of role; the police, the perpetrator, the secretary, detective, bailiff, juror, judge, guilty, innocent, beyond a reasonable doubt. But, at the same time, the individual brings along a particular history, but more, particular entanglements with other worlds, in other contexts, with other people. In the wake of their passing, a person carries with them the consequences of the myriad collision of worlds oscillating in the places thrown open before them. These entanglements weigh on the individual in their individuation. That is, being an individual, to a greater or lesser extent, but always, depends on their differentiation in places onto which the world can open from their particular historical direction. Such an historical vector, opened by the passing of the human being, opens as a passing cloud that becomes dense and dissipates over time, in an irregular oscillation, sometimes close to itself, condensate among the folds, atomic, but at other times it is thin, widely dispersed, shot through with the other passing vectors, lifted apart by the intensity of the forces thriving in certain contexts, that prefigure the individual and make demands upon it that are guided by the direction and ends of the social order itself, context for context, layer by layer, one being the individual, family, village, town, city, nation, state. As oscillation the pattern of emplacement repeats all the way down. The basic movement ripples through the folds in the hermeneutical layers by which world manifests with the significance it has to and for

whatever inhabitant are open to sense. Ontologically, they are not of a fundamentally

different kind.

Indeed, Austin Harrington has made the observation that Musil's novel argues

that "the subject of modernity is not at home in the world: that the subject of modernity

has neither a fixed core of inner goals of life, nor a stable social world in which

outwardly to express those goals…he opens these ideals to a kind of critical

questioning…unique to the peculiarly aesthetic reflections that literary discourse can

communicate."[46] What I have been arguing for, really, in each of the works of

Modernism I have approached as ontological, is a vision that escapes the trajectory of the

history of metaphysics as outlined in the ontotheological critiques of Heidegger and

Gabriel – in the inversion of Descartes' mirror in Rilke, Pirandello, and Faulkner.

Harrington too, sees this inversion at work in Musil, wherein "the merely apparent,

transitory and local can at the same time encapsulate the collective and universal: a kind

of inverted Platonism that puts appearance and difference back into the heart of essence

and identity."[47] However, as I have repeatedly alluded, such an inversion comes at a

price. We see this inversion as far back as Nietzsche, who seeks to instill immanence

with a metaphysical power and priority that usurps the old transcendence toward some

transcendent Being. But Heidegger shows that such can inversion is not merely a reversal

of roles, but comes at the cost of a systemic transformation in which the old world "up

(out) there" in transcendence is destroyed. As Heidegger explains, "The new hierarchy

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[46] Harrington, "Knowing the Social World Through Literature: Sociological Reflections on Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 5, no. 1 (2002): 55.
[47] Harrington, "Knowing the Social World," 58.

does not simply wish to reverse matters within the old structural order, now reverencing

the sensuous and scorning the nonsensuous. It does not wish to put what was at the very

bottom on the very top. A new hierarchy and new valuation mean that the ordering

structure must be changed. To that extent overturning Platonism [or Cartesianism] must

become a twisting free of it."[48] Certainly, the new structural order I am proposing here,

alongside Deleuze and Foucault, is not even a hierarchical one, as I have shown, for

instance, in the discussion of supervenience in Chapter Three. In individuation, we are

not moving vertically amongst hierarchically ordered layers, but horizontally in every

direction across the matrix of worlds (hermeneutic layers) into which we are initiated and

engage ourselves with activities in which we take on differentiated roles and supplement

or suppress our individuation through submission to and subjection by the logic of those

places. We are more or less ourselves, oneself as another, to borrow a line from

Ricoeur.[49] Oscillation spreads in every direction, in every dimension, its movement the

opening of directionality and dimensionality as such, unfolding everywhere, at every-

time, to and for everyone. And so the axis of individuation appears here as a sort of gauge

by which this "more or less" is measured, to the extent that it can be measured. "I was not

myself last night," "I've never felt more myself," my oscillation between the not at home

feeling so regularly identified with Modernism and the feeling that I might, at any

moment, slip into home, that this is where I belong, at least now and for a time. So, we

see Moosbrugger qua Mossbrugger, and his slippage into Moosbrugger the misogynist,

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[48] Heidegger, "The Will to Power as Art." *Nietzsche, Vol. 1*, trans. David F. Krell (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 209-210.
[49] The title of Ricoeur's Gifford lectures, published as Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994).

the criminal, the vagabond, the carpenter; Ulrich, the man without qualities, mathematician, politician, bourgeoisie, friend, lover, son, member of the Planning Committee. The Henrys, Quentins, and Bons, of the world – oscillating between race, incest, miscegenation, homosocial-sexual, becoming together and between worlds.

But note that individuation is not just a human affair, and that all things come to be differentiated in their historic interplay. Even replicated things are stamped by their ecstatic differentiation – by the event in which they were stamped out, assembled, one in the order of numbering after the previous, a repetition of a difference that will make its own way into the hands of someone other than who will receive the next one down the line. Remember we are sorts of things, autopoietic things, and the prejudice against things come from the mistaken assumption of their absolute disposability. That "things" are disposable is true only in a context, and then only certain things. Some things are indispensable, and not only to a task, but to life and beyond. The other is indispensable, singular, even in its appearance to me in its thingliness, as a body, among other things, sometimes even using this to blend into the background as it were, a face in the crowd. The axis of individuation is one that describes how sharply that face stands out from the crowd, how richly delineated one thing is from the next. It is a kind of measure of the density of a things, how compact it is relative to the other things against which it is differentiated and particularized, as the members of a baseball team all appear relatively similar on the field, or the members of a choir blend together in their ensemble. The self is a shade, a shading, condensate, a passing cloud becoming dense or sparse in relation to the forces in oscillation around it, in place, as it traverses from place to place.

The Man Without Qualities has lent itself to our study exactly because of the way Musil himself traverses these many layers in his essayistic technique. I have tried to show this traversing across a few examples from the text, as well as in my own traversing of domains that bear the formal marks of similar structuring. Place provides a kind of *arche*, a new formalism in which we can speak to an ontological ground, even one shifting beneath our feet, even now, in the grips of ever deepening crises that threaten the sensibilities of the old orders. I have come to this novel in the end because of this structure, because the structure of the current study is to be found there, because the structure of being is found *there* in place, in the places we've been and to which we are going. This last leg of our journey has given an account of how things, once they can appear, are given to individuation and particularization. I have wended my way through to this axis by a particular kind of being, the kind of being I am, but by being in place, by beginning from *there*, I arrive in place to the being of beings, the ontological dimension, opened by Modernist fiction. Modernism, in particular the novel, has become the scene of ontology.

Is this the place at the end of the mind? Have we heard the foreign song? I want to go back, in closing, to the beginning, to the other beginning. In the the opening lines of *The Ontological I*, readers were asked to imagine stepping up to a precipice – as if on the top of a mountain or the edge of a cliff.[50] In staging the opening of my explorations in this way, I already conceived of the person *contained in* their environment, over and against it, confronting from within and the world without. I had already begun from the

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[50] Irven, *The Ontological I and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Streisguth | Martin, 2012), 5.

subject/object divide, unwittingly perhaps, but within the old metaphysics nonetheless. How easily these structures insinuate themselves to us, even when we seek to escape them, seeking lines of flight away from the old order, as it were. If my last work has walked us up to a threshold, then the current one has, at the very least, encouraged us to take the leap – if indeed we have not yet taken flight. I want now, at last and in the end, to return there, where it all began, on the mountainside, and think through the places we've been to get to where we are *here*. We have reached a threshold, the last one for now, and I want to linger here just a moment longer, and await that sudden rupture wherein we might discover something new. This will be the last place, the place to herald the other beginning from the end of the mind.

5.7 The Place at the End of the Mind

The tree had stood on the edge of space until at last it fell. The sun dried its bark and bleached its hull until its skin dropped flaking to the ground, into a soft, ruddy bed beneath its whitish surface; a great yellowing bone jutting from the mountainside. The tree lay perpendicular to the mountain face, pointing north. A creek ran east to west at the base of the mountain, out of the deep cleft called the Narrows through which runs the first national road, now Route 40, with either side festooned with steel ribboned railroad tracks and the clatter of the cars in the soot-strewn echoes of the valley. The place where the tree had fallen; the not insubstantial birch had grown for years beside an abandoned rail-line running west along the mountainside parallel to the national road. The iron rails are gone but the crossties remain in dirt and mud and moss; lichen covered, sticking out of the leveled shelf that drops abruptly away to the creek running at the base of the mountain where the valley levels off and spreads out into the suburbs. The tree had fallen

and conditions had stripped the bark and left a wide and whitened bench on a diagonal across the path. Another tree, oak, lay beside it on the ground in advanced stages of decomposition, shelf mushrooms blooming in a ridge along the side, dense green growth softening the top, moist chipped wood spilling out of the end in the path, its circumference buckling under weight. From my mother's front porch, you can see the faint trace of this path along the side of the mountain, and in the right light, you can just make out a little gap in the trees where this fallen one made a clearing. This line, this trace along the mountain, extends from the fate of a nation, which just a mile east, had found a gap to the frontier, the way from the tidewater of the coast through the Appalachians and into the Ohio Valley where the great unclaimed future lay. Between east and west, civilization and wilderness, between the Old World and the New. Everything became conditioned by those railways, themselves conditioned by the mountains and the valleys beyond. Even time was bent to their measure in the setting of the clocks. Nobody living there in city or valley was untouched by those tracks. In my case it was two great-grandfathers, two grandfathers, a great uncle and great aunt who all toiled on the railroad, my mother's father a true to life boilermaker whose color blindness kept him in the yard but whose skillful welding made him indispensable. His father had escaped the factory to work on the railroad, escaped the same factory in which his own father, my great-great-grandfather had lost both arms and died in an industrial accident for which no one was faulted. It was along the trace left from this old way of life that the tree had fallen where the tracks used to run, where no freight would run again. It was a place for me, the eventual ironic Boilermaker pounding keys like rivets into the edifice of my own design. I would walk along this path, to this fallen tree, and think in solitude to

be most myself. Sometimes, my friends would walk and there, away from parents' watchful eyes, would be most ourselves together, between us. This is a place in-between: between the height of the mountain and the depth of the valley, between the city and suburbs, between the technical and the natural, between solicitude and solitude, between myself and the world. It was a place for thinking – a place to be.

When I returned to the spot many years later, the tree was gone. It had been cut clear of the path, its guts gathered in mounds of sawdust atop the anthracite spackled banks of the sunken abandoned line. New neighbors used the path to ride their four-wheelers. What had been for me a bench for so long was, for them, a recalcitrant danger, that spot transformed from one to be in one's head to a place where one might lose their head, and so the obstacle had been dispatched. I will never forgive these neighbors, who I do not know, who I will probably never know, and who themselves will never know what they destroyed, just some fallen tree but for another, the world. The path from there to here is so clear once *sitting mole-skin I sketched the words "Ginny's Diner…" after a faux-steel box car pretending to another century down the street that become a place and anchor in the text and pages written and rewritten again; going over that place and back to that place and peopling it with friends and lovers and queers who never felt like they had a place here except where once was rotted next to the fallen bones of an unknown and unknowing sister whose great bleached thigh still supported a boy and his notebook that themselves emerged from this place just as they once sank into it again standing on that rotted and rotting oak; fungus lichen moss decomposing the once-living flesh too timorous and trembling to hold the weight of living and at the threshold gave way to the sensation of sinking, of being swallowed whole, of crumbling and sliding so graciously*

into the disintegrating arms of rainsoaked wood chips that sitting on the ground in them

after all that could be done was laugh and laugh and laugh and think I am, here I am, I,

here between bank, ravine, and shadow of the old private citadel that lay crumbled at my

feet and now in that sudden rupture cries Here I Am, Yes, Here

To be is to be in place. To be a self requires a place in which to be oneself. At the end of the mind, a gold-feathered bird sings the unhuman song, but it is a song that calls us to ourselves, to the places in which we can be, in which being is. I had heard so many birds in that clearing, singing so many songs, and each took off on their own flight in time. The bird in Stevens' poem here signals our escape, or at least the attempted jailbreak from the old Platonic Cave of the I-Am's private cloister. That the palm stands on the edge of space hints at the last dissolution of space-for-itself and time-for-itself, their ecstatic unity in places; always particular, always moving. The movement of being is oscillation. This movement, a movement between that opens place, that constitutes a place to be. In places, things can be and stand forth, always to and for something that has sense, that can sense. My feeling hand and seeing eyes, the spider with its leg on the trigger, the amoeba's ancient pseudopodia. Out of this placial movement, freed in oscillation, things accrete and disintegrate, things natural and technical, the technical at the service of the natural's having to be and being in such a way that its being becomes an issue for it – how to live?

At the end of the mind, reached as a limit of the old metaphysics and the threshold to another beginning, where we can think the old thinkers anew, and think again with them in wonder, there are so many questions. As a beginning, the whole of philosophy opens. This placial orientation illumines the perennial questions in a different light,

evokes a different tune from them – one addressed to the not merely human, but one that hears the human as well. The view from this terminus is expansive, comprehensive, but not in the sense that *everything* is captured and brought under a category called "oscillation." It is comprehensive in the analogous sense that takes in the seeing and the seen, the feeling and the felt, the living and the lived. This is a foreign song. We have ventured beyond the last thought, the last representation of a place built up on the edge of the mountain; clinging there as the vestiges of the technical rails sink again into the earth, their path blackened by the passing of a thousand steam engines in the years before their decommission. But we have all seen these trees, these crossties, these clearings of light if not forested then between buildings who still encircle a dome of the sky. Synecdoche, the structure of being, all the way down into place. In this bronze décor, we might hear a song that is without human meaning, but so long as we are there to hear, we hear and ask "what's that? What is there?" That is where this writing has tried to take us – *there*, to be, that has been the question, one of mere being.

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One last attempt. One final pass, a coda. Robert Musil writes that thinking:

> ...comes about not very differently from a dog with a stick in its mouth trying to get through a narrow door; he will turn his head left and right until the stick slips through. We do much the same thing, but with the difference that we don't make indiscriminate attempts but already know from experience approximately how it's done...the slipping through takes the clever fellow just as much by surprise [as it does a dim fellow]; it is suddenly there, and one perceptibly feels slightly disconcerted because one's ideas seem to have come of their own accord instead of waiting for their creator. This disconcerting feeling is nowadays called intuition by many people who would formerly...have called it inspiration; but it is only

something impersonal, namely, the affinity and coherence of the things themselves, meeting inside a head.[51]

This "something impersonal" is the event of thought. It has the structure of the weather, a traffic jam, a grand jubilee. It is the dynamical confluence and mutual dependence of very many heretofore unforeseen variables coming together in the human being who has prepared a place for thought. There, in being human, is the place for the occurrence of thought. But it is not the human who thinks, rather, it would almost be better to say that it is the human being who *is* thought. We are the occasion of the thinking of thought – but only for a time, in-between states A and B, and then it is gone again. To think is to dwell in this in-between, to be in transit, to move, to come to be and then pass away, each thinking a bringing into being what is thought before it sinks again into non-being or is made concrete in deed. When we heed Aristotle's advice and we have trained ourselves to hear the truth appropriate to each way of approaching being, then our presence in this process of thinking becomes less and less evident. As Musil puts it:

> As long as the process of thinking is in motion it is a quite wretched state, as if all the brain's convolutions were suffering from colic; and when it is finished it not longer has the form of the thinking process as one experiences it but already that of what has been thought, which is regrettably impersonal, for the thought then faces outward and is dressed for communication to the world. When a man is in the process of thinking, there is no way to catch the moment between the personal and the impersonal, and this is manifestly why thinking is such an embarrassment for writers that they gladly avoid it.[52]

I must confess I avoided talking about thinking for so long exactly to circumvent this embarrassment. Mereology, dynamical systems, the weather, traffic, a jubilee: these are

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[51] Musil, *Man Without Qualities*, 115-16.
[52] Musil, *Man Without Qualities*, 116.

but the turning of the stick as we try to pass through the door of thought. And, although

we may pass the threshold alone, we are led to the door by the others with whom we

commune and are met again by them on the other side of thought – after all, Musil has it

that at the end of the process of thinking we arrive at a thought facing outward, "dressed

for communication to the world." Thus, the solitude of thought rests upon the solidarity

of meaning in a language that is shared. What we learn from our exposure to being in this

way is the instability of ourselves in the act of thought, which is to say: the fundamental

instability of our being as we oscillate between ourselves and the world, between

ourselves and the others with whom we share the world, and with the other who is ourself

on either side of thinking. To expose ourselves to the thinking of being is to expose

ourselves to the possibility of an ethical relation – not only to other people, but also to the

world, and, as Ricoeur has said, to oneself as another.

Musil himself sees this oscillation, putting it simply and elegantly that if thinking

is not a personal affair, then it is "World in, and world out; aspects of world falling into

place inside a head."[53] This oscillation occasionally has the appearance of conflict or

contradiction. Musil goes on to observe, "The well-known ability of thought...to dissolve

and dispel those deep-raging, morbidly tangled and matted conflicts generated in the

dank regions of the self apparently rests on nothing other than its social and worldly

nature, which links the individual creature to other people and objects. Unfortunately, this

healing power of thought seems to be the same faculty that diminishes the personal sense

of experience."[54] However, this relation is only "unfortunate" for egoists and

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[53] Musil, *Man Without Qualities*, 116.
[54] Musil, *Man Without Qualities*, 117.

opportunists, and is completely unknown to the Narcissist. In reality, this relation is all of life and the very basis of it. It brings us back again to our home and ourselves, where we might be able to hear at last and listen to the old Nguni Bantu proverb "I am because we are," which was expressed by the philosopher Albert Camus when he wrote, "At this limit the 'we are' [*le nous somme*] paradoxically defines a new form of individualism."[55] As the African thinker and scholar Michael Onyebuchi Seze has written, "Humanity is a quality we owe to each other. We create each other and need to sustain this otherness creation. And if we belong to each other, we participate in our creations: we are because you are, and since you are, definitely I am. The 'I am' is not a rigid subject, but a dynamic self-constitution dependent on this otherness creation of relation and distance."[56] This is the ontological insight to which Musil's text has cleared the way: the deep and ineluctable interconnectivity between that threefold chord: places, ourselves, and the other. We must weather this thinking of being, let it wash over us and be carried away by it.

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[55] Camus, *The Rebel*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 297.
[56] Eze, *Intellectual History in Contemporary South Africa*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 191.

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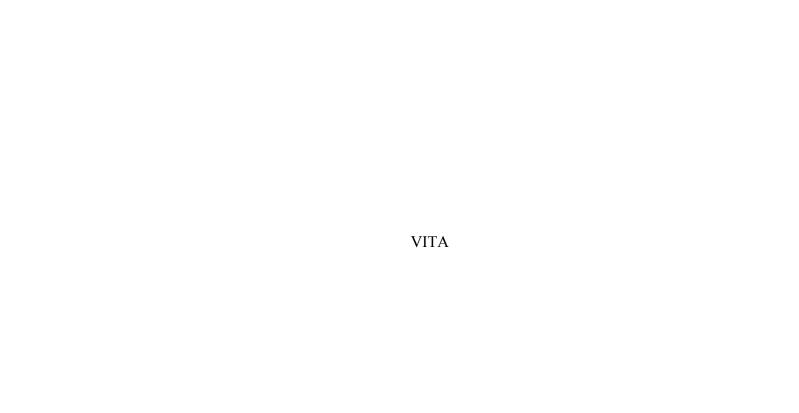
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