Language ‘as’ Element: The Sentient Registers of Communicative Practice

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Abstract

Facing the challenges to elementary and secondary education in the 21st century requires teachers as well as students, support staff, parents, administrators, academics, and the broader community to confront deeply held assumptions. To address these challenges, schools need to be places where meaningful and sustaining conversations unfold.

How we speak to one another becomes my entry point into this societal endeavour we call ‘education’. In this investigation I set out to form a language-based epistemic lens through which future research can study how communicative practices aid or impede educational processes.

This investigation draws on philosophy of language and phenomenology. In particular, I look at the ideas of J.L. Austin, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The main body of this work is divided into three parts. Part one problematizes the concept of language in order to flesh out its life, to see language qua language in the making. Part two is an extended discussion of Austin’s How To Do Things With Words, Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations and Merleau-Ponty’s The Visible and the Invisible that scaffolds an understanding of language as an animating force behind what we call ‘life’ and ‘reality’. Part three is a set of expressions of the ideas about the elementality of language developed in this dissertation: first as an exploration of subjective registers of language; second as a fictional dialogue representing my own cognitive shifts in this doctoral dissertation; and third as a reflection on the implications of language sensitivity on education. Together these parts demonstrate that living language is not so much a concept as an action, a human activity in the confirmation of what is real, what is meaningful, what is life itself. The findings of this dissertation do not bring closure to the subject of language but rather bring into the open the subject itself, that it is in the possibilities that the ground of our beliefs is formed.

Keywords: philosophy of language; phenomenology; dialogue; twenty first century; Austin; Wittgenstein; Merleau-Ponty
Dedication

I dedicate my doctoral dissertation to the three most beautiful persons I have ever known: Rosa Linda, my wife, and our two daughters, Angela Rose and Dina Marie. You are the fulfillment of my life, my greatest achievement.
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This work is the result of the continued support I received from the many wonderful people that became part of my life during my doctoral studies. The list is substantial, and even though they are not mention by name I am forever indebted to their kindness and generosity. I have also been enriched by those wonderful conversations that are unique to an academic setting, some lasting minutes, others lasting hours. In short, this work has emerged from community.

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My greatest debt of gratitude is to Dr. Stephen Smith, my thesis supervisor. Stephen, where to begin? You have been a critical interlocutor, a mentor, and a friend. Your unwavering support encouraged me to continue on, to not settle for half answers, to rethink, to rewrite, to continuously come at it again and again until that which is there began to be revealed. I am at a loss for words to most clearly articulate my gratitude, and hope that the simplicity of ‘thank you my friend’ will be enough for now.
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Key to Abbreviations

Below is a list of abbreviations that refer to the main works cited in this dissertation.


The Ancients may have had their gods,
The Old World its empires,
The New World its republics and individuals,
But to the Future World belong the communities.
Prologue

Thales of Miletus has said, ‘water is the nature of all things’. Such a claim is not difficult to understand given that human civilization has been built around rivers. Our source of life is river water. Yet, the immediacy of rivers distracts us from the greater direction of their flow. We see them grounded, framed by channels, and downward moving. To envision river water returning back to the mountains whence it came, following the circular motion of a planetary eco-system, which itself is propelled by circular cosmic forces, is a distanced understanding, an abstraction. Instead, we find ourselves in the concreteness of our engagement with river water: its fluidity, crossing it, seeking the cause of disruption where it is still.

Language engages us in similar ways. We find peace of mind in the fluidity of fluency. Language can allow us to travel to different lifeworlds by learning the flow of new language-games. One can fall victim to the nuances of a language, however, if one is not aware of currents of thought of a particular way of speaking (e.g., ‘Did I say something wrong?’). Moreover, like the familiar sounds of a body of water that mark one’s place of dwelling, the familiarity of one’s principal language creates a sense of tranquility in forgotten everydayness. Occasionally, something unexpected happens and we temporarily see language in more problematic terms. Homonyms are an example of this. Consider the word ‘spell’. When uncertain a hearer may ask ‘How is this word being used?’ What I wish to highlight here is the moment of displacement, when the assumed grounded meaning of words is brought into question. Our story could end there, in the duality of concreteness and abstraction. There is a third position, however, for both water and language. We use the word ‘water’ when having to think, that is, when having to use language, about the substance that forms rivers. But, when we are engaged with a river, drinking from it, moving in it, watching it, there is a connection that does not require language. In fact, we become aware of the moment we switch to a language mode. It is in this switch that the possibility to access a third awareness presents itself. Here we ask ‘How is it that I am engaged in activity without the conscious use of words?’ Asked differently, how is it that my actions remain meaningful without words?
Thales has also said, ‘the soul produces motion’. In our third way of seeing, soul is not only within us animating our ‘being-in’ but also as community spirit, ‘being-with’. When Thales spoke of soul he did so at a time when the gods lived among mortals. Thus, he tells us ‘all things are full of gods’. Today, to speak of gods is out of fashion, yet we struggle to verbalize a communal sense of life, because we are distracted by compartmentalization. Here, to see the forest for the trees, to recognize cohabitation as the gravity of meaning, we must seek ways to reconnect to a soul full of the gods, to a beingness intertwined with the fabric that allows distinction. For to know thyself is to recognize that the home that is myself is not ‘I-projected-to-the-world’ nor ‘Otherness-projected-towards-me’, which amounts to the same, compartmentalized action-reaction, but is the spatiotemporal event of the I-Other threshold.

To express the life of this dissertation, I have given it a place name. This place name differs from the official title inasmuch as that title is about recognized authority: in this case, recognition of PhD status and the institutional affiliations that go with it. Yet, I feel that this work deserves more than that. For it is a work full of the gods. Its life is not generated by me only but also by its readers. It is a life that resides at the threshold between I and the Other.

I am inspired by a lake in northern Manitoba known by its Cree name as Pekwachnamaykoskwaskwaypinwanik, which translates to ‘where the wild trout are caught by fishing with hooks’. I have never been there, and I do not pretend to locate my use of this word in the same place as those who speak it in familiar form. To say ‘the lake where the wild trout are caught by fishing with hooks’ is an act of collocation, of what sits well when one speaks it.

This compels me to honour this dissertation with a name that speaks of its purpose: ‘my-ideas-held-in-the-gravity-of-meanings-between-words-that-the-reader-endeavours-to-descry’. This name is not to be said in hyphenated form, because, as the expression ‘always already’ tells us, this would project-an-ontology-before-intentionality. Instead, this place name is to be spoken in a way that locates its familiarity within me: myideasheldinthegravityofmeaningsbetweenwordsthatthereaderendeavourstodescry.

The place of this work may be familiar to me but it is unknown to the reader. How then is the reader to journey through the pages that follow and arrive at this place called
One way to proceed is to begin with this peculiar name. A reader may find that it makes better sense to change the name to a statement made up of a number of words. But in what way would such a statement be different from the place name? If the meaning remains the same (i.e., ‘my ideas held in the gravity of meanings between words that the reader endeavours to descry’), then what changes between the two forms? What changes is its familiarity, its intimate connection. The familiar connections of the place name differ from the familiar connections of the statement. What is emerging here is a distinction between meaning and intimacy: as the common expression states, ‘what this means to me’. This distinction between understanding words and their affect on us points to the additional factor of the language artefact itself (e.g., the peculiar place name). Thus, in saying *myideasheldinthegravityofmeaningsbetweenwordsthatthereaderendevourstodescry* the visibility of this name becomes the pivot point between possibilities, what the name means to the writer and what it means to the reader. What is emerging here is the third position of the communicative process: recognition of difference where we can sense possible understandings before they are spoken, pre-linguistic awareness, having a presentiment of shift. It is in this place of silent reflexivity that this work resides and where I invite the reader to spend some time.
Introduction

What is language? I know what it is, but I cannot explain it.¹ We could say that language is like music: the result of an interaction between person and instrument. If the instrument is language, the use of words, then how does its music—its meaning—come about? To what extent are speakers in control of what they mean to say? Are we like drummers bringing out the sound with every strike? Or, are we, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty tells us in The Visible and the Invisible (1968), at the service of music: “the sonata sings through him or cries out so suddenly that he must ‘dash on his bow’ to follow it” (VI, p. 151). The distinction between seeing ourselves in control of language or at its service makes all the difference in the world for how we communicate with one another.

Consider the following fictional dialogue. Two people are having what one of them presumes to be a normal conversation but soon realizes the other is simply repeating everything that is said. Their exchange unfolds as follows:

Hello.
Hello.
Pleased to meet you.
Pleased to meet you.
It’s a nice day.
It’s a nice day.
Why are you repeating everything I’m saying?
Why are you repeating everything I’m saying?
Do you know you are doing this?
Do you know you are doing this?

¹ Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein warn of the philosophical pitfall of making obscure and complex what we know to be a straightforward matter in lived experience. Heeding this warning, my opening statement ‘What is language? I know what it is, but I cannot explain it’ is a tribute to Saint Augustine’s well known question “What then is time? If no one asks me, I know: if I wish to explain it to one that asks, I know not” (The Confessions, book 11, chapter 14, sect. 17). This passage from Augustine is quoted by both Merleau-Ponty in The Visible and the Invisible (p. 3) and Wittgenstein in The Philosophical Investigations (sect. 89) to express their warning. Austin (1962) also warns us of this philosophical pitfall in How To Do Things With Words (p. 3).
Amazing.

I wonder how I am going to communicate with you?
I wonder how I am going to communicate with you?

In the above dialogue, we can follow a change in awareness in the first speaker. It is reasonable to assume that at the time of the initial greeting the first speaker does not suspect anything odd. This can also be said about the second statement, and possibly the third. We can sense that, at least for the first speaker, the speaking tone is serious, matter of fact; this is to say, it is not playful or taunting. Moreover, by the third statement the first speaker might be sensing something is not right. The follow up question clearly indicates the first speaker is aware of the second speaker’s strange behaviour. But it is unclear if the first speaker is upset, thinking the other person is having a bit of fun, or if there is genuine concern for the person’s wellbeing. Nonetheless, the second question seems to be one of concern rather than annoyance; and the exclamation is a sign of this. The final question appears to be genuinely seeking a way to communicate. Assuming this is an innocent encounter between two people, void of hidden agendas, the above analysis seems reasonable.

What’s more, the mimicking behaviour of the second speaker has the effect of trivializing the words. They become mere sounds, which raises a fascinating question: if words can be so easily stripped of their meaning, then where does meaning reside? What is actually taking place when we communicate? We could say that what is taking place is neurological brain function. To this we could add that socialization is an interpretive mechanism of encephalic stimulation. But, if concepts like ‘socialization’ and ‘encephalic stimulation’ are merely words that help us visualize how the body makes sense of the world, then what is actually allowing us to communicate? I say this aware I am seeking an explanation. What allows me to be self-aware? If stimulated neurons are the spark that ignites words in us, then what is the oxygen that sustains this fire we call language? If this is starting to sound like some kind of Voynich Manuscript, it is because the closer we look at language the more difficult it is to make sense of what we see. What I am asking of readers is to witness language stripped down from its thick socio-cultural coatings, and experience it as if for the first time. The Japanese have a word, Boketto, that means to be
in the moment without thought. The Germans have a word, Urstiftung, that means a familiar thin g can be engaged without words. Whereas Boketto is about mental disengagement and Urstiftung is about silent mental engagement, there is an in between experience of first encounter or what I call ‘prima-vera’ (first seeing). To witness language prima-vero a disturbance of our taken-for-granted world of words. For the notion of ‘language’ is merely a story we tell ourselves. The amazing truth is that language does not exist. What is more amazing is that we can understand this.

What does it really mean to say ‘language does not exist’? Is this merely a rhetorical exaggeration? A reader can point out that language or, more broadly, ways to communicate do exist. Yet, what exactly is it that we are saying exists? Some kind of inner workings of a person? Perhaps. However, what I wish to draw attention to is that there is something mesmerizing about the statement, a mystery created through the magic of words: what Merleau-Ponty called “a spiritual power” (PP, p. 80).² ‘Language does not exist, nonetheless we understand’: whether one entertains the thought of an incomprehensible mystery or rejects the suggestion as trickery, the experience created by the statement remains. It is now a prima-vera something, an artefact for investigation, compelling us to ask ‘From what place does one investigate, form perspective, witness?’ In other words, where does understanding reside? Where can understanding be anchored? In one’s self? In the Other? Somewhere in-between? Or do such anchorings stem from

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² This notion is taken from Merleau-Ponty’s essay Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence. This essay is of interest to Merleau-Ponty scholars, because it marks a point of transition in his thoughts about language: what Johnson (1993) describes as “Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical experiment...during the middle of his career to form a new philosophy” (p. 14). In the essay, Merleau-Ponty discusses ‘the difficult idea’ of language being ‘autonomous’ and having an ‘inner life’ (p.82) where, for example, “a friend’s speech over the telephone brings us the friend himself, as if he were wholly present [in the exchange]...and carrying on the conversation through things left unsaid” (p. 80). The essay was first published in 1951, while he was still an editor of Les Temps Modernes, and later published in English in Signs (1964). (See footnotes 68 and 69 for further discussion of this essay). Moreover, Kearney (2011) notes that in developing a ‘diacritical hermeneutics’, Merleau-Ponty borrows from de Saussure’s notion that the meaning of a word is understood in relation to the meaning of other words (p. 6). For Merleau-Ponty, the diacritical “involves our sense of identity through differentiation” (p. 6), where “perception witnesses the birth of expression, against an unformed background” (p. 7). In Merleau-Ponty’s words, this is “the act of sensing (le sentir), as the intervening of a figure on a fond [ground]” (Kearney, 2011, p.7).
This dissertation is motivated by a nagging concern: Why do we have difficulty communicating in schools? From student instruction to discipline issues to staff disagreements to innocent misunderstandings, schools seem to exist in a daily struggle against communication breakdowns. Since, for the most part, there is common agreement in the words we use (e.g., a tomato is a tomato), the problem has been thought to lie elsewhere: be it psychology, culture, developmental maturity, political-economy, the list goes on to a multitude of *isms* and *ologies* that have found their way from every corner of our human world. Perhaps, it is as simple as the age-old adage that ‘humans will never rule over other humans’. While there is some truth to this, we, as a species, also prefer to build community. Hence a paradox: on one hand, there is some force at play that brings us together and, on the other hand, there is something about being together that drives us apart. Nonetheless, regardless of whether we are in agreement or disagreement, our resiliency to stay engaged as human beings suggests there is an element that brings to life our communicative practices and shapes our interactions. I use the word ‘element’ as a scaffolding notion to help us recognize a type of human inter-action from which arises the possibility to co-exist, cooperate, cohabitate and communicate. The aim of this doctoral work is to shed light on this language element.

Addressing language in this way locates it within a discourse that does not measure experience in like manner to the natural sciences or based on the criteria of grammar and logic, but allows for the *poiesis* of language to be appreciated. As Gaston Bachelard explains in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* (1964), we can speak of the elements of fire, water, air and earth as ‘poetic temperaments’ (*reverie*) in which “[w]e are not dealing here with matter, but with orientation” (p. 90). In this sense of elementality, “the person who listens to the sound of the stream can scarcely comprehend the person who hears the song of the flames: they do not speak the same language” (Bachelard, 1964, p. 89). “The position he suggests,” explains Picart (1997), “is that reveries of certain writers gravitate toward images of one of the four elements, and that such tendencies can be detected in language they adopt” (p. 62). It is to this orientation that I invite readers to lean in the reading of this work.
This investigation into the elementality of language has a ‘family resemblance’, as Wittgenstein would say, to other explorations that strive to shed light on the invisible grounds from which stem our taken-for-granted sense of human reality. One example of such explorations is Michel Serres’ theory of ‘noise’. In *The Parasite* (1982), Serres asks, “How do we live together? What really is this system which collapses at the slightest noise?” (p. 11). His response is that our systems, our focused activities such as conversation, eating, sitting by a fire, are structures of living born out of noise, out of the chaos of the world. For Serres (1982), noises tell us we are leaving one system and entering another (p. 67); noises are points of oscillation between systems (p. 52). The noise of a squeaky floor, a scurrying rodent, a door closing, a strong wind, these are normally seen as intrusions, interruptions, yet it is such noises that stimulate our focused activities: “We are surrounded by noise. And this noise is inextinguishable. It is outside—it is the world itself—and it is inside, produced by our living body. We are in the noises of the world” (Serres, 1982, p. 126).

A second example of a similar type of exploration is Jean-Luc Marion’s theory of ‘saturated phenomenon’. In his essay *Sketch of the Saturated Phenomenon* (1997, 2013), Marion asks whether ‘phenomena could exceed their horizon’ (p. 115): Is it possible to appreciate phenomena “without collapsing into limitation” (p. 111)? For Marion, the world is much more than is revealed through our intentionalities. A phenomenon is ‘saturated’ because it “passes beyond all summation of its parts” (Marion, 2013, p. 109). It precedes and surpasses “any analogy with already seen, objectified, comprehended experience” (Marion, 2013, p. 117). The ‘saturated phenomenon’ is not bound by any horizon: as such,

The objects that are supposedly the most simple—violin on a stool, with newspaper and vase—in fact always give more to see, and from afar, more than we can think. What we perceive by momentary intuitions and what we conceptually think of these moments remain incommensurably poorer than what we really have to see there (Marion, 2013, p. 110).

A third example is Michel Henry’s theory of ‘life’. In *The Essence of Manifestation* (1973), Henry brings into question what is arguably the most taken-for-granted ground of living, the phenomenon of life itself: how is it that we are to understand “the spontaneity of life” (Henry, 1973, p. 497)? In addressing the immanence
and essence of immediate experience, Henry (1973) distinguishes between sensibility and feeling, the second of which can allow for a much richer appreciation than the limitations of sensorial awareness (p. 463). In this sense, ‘that which is felt’ (i.e., life) is at its most basic level ‘affectivity’ (Henry, 1973, p. 462)—Being itself in its autonomous state (Henry, 1973, p. 490):

That which silently arrives in itself…in the all-powerfulness of this helplessness experiences what it is, and in the sweetness of its own arrival at self feels itself, trembles in itself in the interior trembling of its own revelation to…itself, this is life….Every life is essentially affective, affectivity is the essence of life (Henry, 1973, pp. 476-7).

There is an obverse/reverse aspect to this way of speaking about phenomena. To address noise, phenomenality or life in this manner places an entire investigation at risk of misreading. A parallel experience that might assist here is the humour of a joke. When a joke is told as matter-of-fact the humour is lost—the muse held in momentary amusement vanishes into thin air. In academia in particular, investigations into the elementality of phenomena walk a delicate balance between the held moment which audiences are invited to entertain, the obverse reading of a work, and its collapse into grounding structure, the reverse reading of critical analysis.

Mindful of such a balance, this dissertation endeavours to investigate the elementality of language itself. How is it that we stay engaged? What really is this phenomenality called language whose meanings shift at the slightest interruption? The elemental is sensed by movement explains Alphonso Lingis (1994, p. 125). In The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common (1994), Lingis tells us that this is “a movement of immersion in a plenum” (p. 125). We are immersed in our communicative practices in like manner to how we are immersed in the earth, light, and air that surround our lives: at the most primary level we orient one another by communicating “the light our eyes know, the ground that sustains our postures, and the air and the warmth with which we speak” (Lingis, 1994, p. 122). This becomes most apparent when language loses the power of common discourses, such as having to say something to a dying person:

You have never been more clear about anything. There are those who do not go, to the bedside of the dying one, demoralized by the terrible
impotence of language to say anything…. What is imperative is that you be there and speak; what you say, in the end, hardly matters (Lingis, 1994, p. 108).

“Language is a life,” writes Merleau-Ponty (VI, p. 125). The ‘life’ of language expresses who we are, who we were, and who we are becoming. Language can be not only living (e.g., regional dialects) but also extinct or dying (e.g., Indigenous languages), or emerging (e.g., twitter speak). We can be introduced to it, as in the acquisition of an additional language, or we can depart from it due to human migration. The life of language can be easily overlooked, however, in everyday communication that privileges naming and possession over action and relationship. For example, Aikenhead and Ogawa (2007) point out in their study of Indigenous languages, “noun knowledge does not translate easily into most verb-based Indigenous languages….the corresponding Indigenous expression often comes out something like ways of living (and sometimes ways of being)…. [in contrast, from a] Eurocentric worldview, knowledge (as a noun) is something that can be given, accumulated, banked, and assessed by paper and pencil examinations” (p.553). In this respect, Merleau-Ponty’s claim that “language has us…it is not we who have language” (VI, p. 194) stems from a tradition of Eurocentric enclosure. Yet, the sense of possession he wants us to see is the breath of life language brings into our lives. Here ‘breath of life’ pivots between a number of meanings; and it is this act of pivoting, this multistability of Gestalt shifts, that he wants us to recognize: “The Gestalt…. is a diacritical, oppositional, relative system whose pivot is the Etwas, the thing, the world” (VI, p. 206). In this ‘about to’ state of meaning we find the beating heart of language: Austin calls this the ‘force’ of meaning, and Wittgenstein calls it ‘form of life’. These three thinkers, Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein and Austin, are central to seeing language as animated, in living movement, as phenomenality, and their ideas are pivotal to this investigation.

How is it that we can see language? In Bergen’s book, Louder Than Words (2012), he describes an experiment using a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machine to identify neuron activity when the brain is stimulated by sound: “just as you use different but closely related brain regions to hear different types of sound, so you use different brain regions to imagine sound” (p. 35). This modern process of mapping brain
activity raises an important question about how to understand the phenomenon of language: is language a ‘sound’ to be studied or an activity to be ‘seen’? From J.L. Austin’s (1962) perspective, the challenge is “if we are to see the parallel between statements and performative utterances,” then “[w]e must consider the total situation in which the utterance is issued” (p. 52). For Wittgenstein (1958), when words are in their ‘original home’, in their everyday use (sect. 116), we grasp their meaning and know how to go on (sect. 155). He calls this everyday use of words ‘language-games’ where even “sound is an expression only as it occurs in a particular language-game” (sect. 261).

While Austin’s (1962) fresh perspective on communicative practices aims to establish “a new map of the field” (p. 25), Wittgenstein’s radical understanding of ‘grasped meaning’ demystifies the immanence of language, including auditory and ocular references.

We find a far more radical view in Merleau-Ponty (1968) who claims that mental blind spots require us to understand language not in analytical terms but as lived experience (pp. 31-33). Yet, these are not fixed experiences stemming from the essence of ideal form, because this would trap experience in language and “shut ourselves up in an immanent exploration of the significations of words” (VI, pp. 158-9). We need to recognize that ‘immanence’ like ‘consciousness’ and ‘transcendence’ are understood through a language process: “the combination of words…with their charge of sedimented significations” (VI, p. 171). “Everything comes down to this,” explains Merleau-Ponty (1968), “to comprehend is to apprehend by coexistence, laterally, by the style, and thereby to attain at once the far-off reaches of this style and of this cultural apparatus” (p. 188). Merleau-Ponty’s (1968) sense of lived language is of a field of possible meanings such as the notion of ‘red’ that is lived against a backdrop of redness in the world (p. 132). It is against this background that I aim to articulate a witnessing of the elementality language.

Language lives because we live. It is not difficult to imagine that long before written history people gathered to hear travelers tell of their journeys, whether physical, otherworldly or both. Over time, these gatherings became formalized such as the amphitheatre events of classical Greece. Hence, words like ‘theory’ and ‘theatre’ remind us through their etymology, thea (‘to witness’), of this long tradition of communal consciousness. From this tradition we also inherit the Athenian practice of learning
through conversation. Plato’s dialogues, for instance, demonstrate a process of coming to know thyself. What is less visible is that on the backside of such dialogical self-awareness there are underpinnings on which arrived-truths are based. The Platonic tradition that strongly influenced European thinking well into the Renaissance presupposed the existence of a realm outside human reasoning, a sort of *Music of the Spheres*, that was to remain a mystery but nonetheless determined reality. With the Enlightenment this mysticism was replaced by ideas like Kant’s categorical imperative, which saw the source of reality stemming not from an incomprehensible mystery but from human reasoning. The birth of humanism also brought with it the promise that human logic could lead us to the mind of God. But, by the twentieth century this great promise of reductionist scientism met a quiet end when the quantum world revealed that relational movement and the observer effect were the ‘true source’ of human reality. For the human condition, this meant reality had finally become unfastened. As we start to close the second decade of the new millennium, understanding the meaning of life has become a matter of perspective rather than a ‘holy grail’ to be imagined on the basis of fixed facts. Clearly, this general treatment of philosophical thinking glosses over tremendous developments in intellectual history. At minimum, some comments need to be made about the underpinnings of contemporary thought, in particular as it relates to language.

Contemporary views about language have their starting point, like so much of our modern world, in the Enlightenment. The predominant view of eighteenth century thinkers was that the mind developed concepts independent of words, making thought less susceptible to mistakes compared to language. For instance, in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1922), Immanuel Kant writes, “a thoughtful mind is often at a loss for an expression that should square exactly with its concept; and for want of which he cannot make himself altogether intelligible, either to others or to himself” (p. 254). This passive view of language came to be challenged, however, by two contemporaries of Kant. Johann Georg Hamann and Johann Gottfried von Herder argued that thought could not be possible without language (Forester, 2012). Hamann and Herder came to influence later thinkers like Gottlob Frege and Ludwig Wittgenstein (Forester, 2011).
By the early 20th century we see, especially with Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, the emergence of what has become known as philosophy’s *linguistic turn*. This turn essentially shifts a view of language from a means by which to grasp abstract notions (i.e., universal idealism) to an analysis of the logical structure of propositions (i.e., sense-data realism). Given that the philosophical landscape of idealism and realism is comprised of a broad range of positions and thinkers, the following examples are only meant to offer the gist of the two main views. Prior to the linguistic turn the claim ‘a dog can speak’ would be regarded as untrue due to the *a priori* universal understanding that dogs cannot speak like humans. After the linguistic turn the statement would still be considered false but for a different reason. In applying the test of a denotative link to sense-data which would fail to demonstrate evidence of a talking dog, an *a posteriori* conclusion would be that dogs do not speak a human language. This new shift in language to the senses, that is, experience, came to be known as philosophy of language (Rorty, 1967, ch. 3).

Since the 1960s philosophy of language has been undergoing additional changes. One of the most recognizable markers of this change is John Austin’s theory of *performatives*. Austin noted that the practice of his contemporaries was to analyze whether statements were true or false. A famous example of such constative analysis is the *Principia Mathematica* in which it takes almost eight hundred pages for Alfred Whitehead and Bertrand Russell to prove that $1 + 1 = 2$ (Blackwell, 2011, p.160). In contrast, Austin’s performativity brought to the foreground the action capacity of words. For instance, if a person warns ‘look out’, the utterance directs the hearer to perform an action: e.g., to get out of the way of danger. This recognition of the relationship of words to actions, or *force of meaning*, redirects our attention away from the cerebral process of logical analysis and towards the life actions that language can generate.

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3 The 1960s is perhaps the most notable period due to an increasingly radical view of humanism by such thinkers as Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault, to name a few. Arguably, 1968 stands as the galvanizing moment that marked a philosophical break from a sense of ontological root or origin, through such events as the Prague Spring, the Paris May uprising and the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. These events and others became expressions of a shift in consciousness towards what Derrida had proclaimed as the ‘rupture’ from structuralism in his 1966 lecture at Johns Hopkins University. Indeed, the author was dead, as Barthes observed in 1967, along with the meta-narratives that had until then comprised reality.
Another well-known marker of this shift to the lived aspects of words is the
notion of *language-games*, which characterized what has become known as
Wittgenstein’s later period. In his later ideas, Wittgenstein saw as *bewitchment* the
sense that language stemmed from the inner workings of the human intellect. Instead, we are to
see language as a *form of life* in the public sphere through which we interact. As such, we
are free to shape language in any direction we please; however, each direction or
language-game generates its own lived experience. There are no exceptions: even the
word ‘experience’ constitutes its own language-game.

As we can see from this brief historical survey, investigating a modern
understanding of language needs to shed light on the underpinnings of shared
worldviews. This is to say, we need to look at community, family, affiliation,
identification, or rather, intersubjectivity. Gillespie and Cornish (2010) explain that
intersubjectivity is what allows “a shared definition of an object...[and] the mutual
awareness of agreement or disagreement and even the realisation of such understanding
or misunderstanding” (p. 19). This said, how intersubjectivity is seen depends on the
epistemic lenses that colour the perspectives of researchers. For example, Course (2013)
explains that a western understanding of intersubjectivity is based on the notion of ‘multi-
culturalism’ (i.e., one nature, many cultures); but, among Indigenous societies of the
Americas, intersubjectivity is based on ‘multi-
naturalism’ (i.e., one culture, many
natures) where “all entities, both human and non-human [i.e., animals and spirits] are to
some extent already in an intersubjective relationship” (p. 310). The implication is that
the investigative waters become murky when a shared word like ‘intersubjectivity’ does
not necessarily have a shared meaning. To find clarity, we need to look at
intersubjectivity in a different light.

What must be corrected, posits Merleau-Ponty, is an intersubjectivity that blocks
the authentic moment, “the very presence of a culture” (*Geist*) (VI, p. 175), with
presuppositions of the Other and the *Lebenswelt* (VI, p. 182). The challenge is that we
must work through surface distinctions, which lead to contradictions (VI, p. 172) but not
to separate, rather to see the geometrical point where projection meets introjection as “the
invisible hinge upon which my life and the life of the others turn to rock into one
another” (VI, p. 234) filling gaps of understanding: “what the other says appears to me to
be full of meaning because his lacunae are never where mine are” (VI, p. 187). Central to Merleau-Ponty’s sense of intersubjectivity is the notion of Erfüllung: the fulfillment of inter-human union (VI, p. 234). Yet, authenticity of Erfüllung is impeded by “the world reduced to its intelligible schema” (VI, p. 46): the signification ‘world’ that pre-exists human witnessing and remains inaccessible other than as “the ideality of the world” (VI, p. 47). This is to say, “reflection suppresses the intersubjectivity” (VI, p. 48). But from this failure of articulated awareness there is a glimmer of hope: I am able to reflect because I am not trapped inside myself; I am “outside of myself, in the world, among the others, and constantly this experience feeds my reflection” (VI, 19). The implication is that meta-awareness is aesthesiologically in a state of “divergence, a certain constitutive dissonance” (VI, p. 234). Here, intercorporeity is illuminated by a “natural light” revealing that an experience like seeing rest in neither I nor the Other but is of “an anonymous visibility [that] inhabits both of us” (VI, p. 142). This opens us up, explains Merleau-Ponty, to an intercorporeity of reversibility where I and the Other are realized by mutual sensorial encroachment (VI, p. 143): “it is necessary that a body perceive bodies if I am to be able to be not ignorant of myself” (VI, p. 233).

To illustrate, consider the notion of ‘collaboration’. Interlocutors may disagree on how to collaborate, such as setting the boundaries of authority and what can and cannot be talked about, yet ‘collaboration’ as a form of life is not in dispute. What Merleau-Ponty is challenging is the ground that constitutes a form of life. In the case of this example, ‘collaboration’ remains ontologically stable regardless of intensional and extensional epistemic differences. However, in the performativity of ‘collaboration’, diverse language-games—which could potentially become divisive—form a life that does not precede the encounter of interlocutors (i.e., a universally natural form of collaboration) but unfolds with the intercorporeity of their engagement, or what I call the interverbal emergent. Here, the signification ‘collaboration’ is the surface, the “ontic mask” (VI, p. 229), hiding the uniqueness of participants whose lives are incommensurable (VI, p. 47); yet this gap of understanding is filled, Erfüllung, at “the intersection of my perceptual field with that of the others” (VI, p. 49) and “by encroachment” (VI, p. 233):
For the first time, the body...clasps another body, applying...itself to it...carefully with its whole extension, forming tirelessly with its hands the strange statue which in its turn gives everything it receives; the body is lost outside of the world and its goals, fascinated by the unique occupation of floating in Being with another life, of making itself the outside of its inside and the inside of its outside. And henceforth movement, touch, vision, applying themselves to the other and to themselves, return toward their source and, in the patient and silent labor of desire, begin the paradox of expression (VI, p. 144)\(^4\)

**A nagging concern about education**

For the past three decades, schools have been making claims to being inclusive in such practices as ‘student-centred learning’, ‘collaboration’, and any number of other forms of interaction that fall under the umbrella heading of democratic education.\(^5\) The very idea of a democratizing education is language-based. As Crafton and Kaiser (2011) note in their study on collaborative learning, “[i]t is language that scaffolds a group’s activities towards its achievements, it is language that supports (or denies) the development of particular identities and relationships within a social activity” (p. 107). This is to say, pedagogy and curriculum that support inclusiveness of diverse views imply a type of education that is strongly affected by communicative practices. In 1983, Jerome Bruner published *Child’s Talk: Learning to Use Language*, which synthesized the research he had undertaken throughout the 1970s. His book characterized the transition that language research had been undergoing, essentially shifting from syntax to pragmatics (Bruner, 1984). In addition to Bruner, the language turn in education has been enriched by thinkers like Lev Vygotsky, Mikhail Bakhtin, John Dewey, John L. Austin, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paulo Freire, Richard Rorty, Jürgen

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4 For Merleau-Ponty, we are caught in the paradox of trying to express a pure sense of the world but in so doing end up providing a construct of the world. What this reveals to Merleau-Ponty is the enigma that language has its own life: “an ontogenesis of which it is a part” (VI, p. 102), a pregnancy of possibilities (VI, p. 250) that is auto-regulating, “that is itself, that poses itself by its own means” (VI, p.208). As such, the richness of language as a means to bring us close to Being is not in the meaning of words but in the energy, the power of words (VI, p. 102).

5 The word ‘education’ itself rests on different epistemic structures. For instance, one can speak of education in terms of ‘self-actualization’, as captured in the German notion of ‘bildung’, or in terms of ‘skill training’, as in the notion of ‘ausbildung’. Moreover, there are numerous critiques of western education that point to the possibilities of other ways of learning. Such critical views include postcolonialism, feminism, queer discourse, critical theory, and so on.
Habermas, and Martin Buber to mention some of the most notable ones. Aided by such influences, among others, language-based practices have been growing, encompassed by the catchword ‘literacy’.

In Canada, the expanded understanding of ‘literacy’ entered mainstream consciousness as a crisis due, in part, to the 1987 Southam Literacy Survey, which claimed that a quarter of Canadians were functionally illiterate (Willinsky, 1990, p. 1). Since then literacy has come to encompass not only the ability to meet basic citizenship requirements (e.g., vote) and employability but also self-efficacy and social responsibility (Desrochers and Major, 2008, p. 79). Today’s students are engaging a multitude of literacies such as reading, writing and arithmetic as well as information technology, media, environmentalism, social-emotional conflict resolution, learning styles, sexuality, multiculturalism, indigeneity and so on. The implication is that the use of words themselves becomes, if not more important, the most important feature of this ‘new approach’ to learning.

The challenge is that the ramifications of this language-based education have not yet become fully apparent. As Englund (2011) notes, “If, as the linguistic turn has taught us…there is no representational knowledge…[then] we need to address and analyse the consequences of different vocabularies of educational phenomena and schooling” (p.194). For instance, research (Myhill, 2006; Hardman et al, 2003; Skidmore, 2000) has shown that while practitioners may use collaborative and student-centred language their practice remains by and large transmissive and teacher-centred. Nonetheless, this has not stopped educators from moving forward with what has become known as the democratization of schooling. A case in point is British Columbia’s (BC) new school curriculum:

The best outcomes are achieved through learner-centred approaches that are sensitive to individual and group differences, that promote inclusive and collaborative learning, that harness students’ passions and interests (BC’s Education Plan, 2015, p. 3).

This understanding of education has been growing in its influence over state policy. For example, in recent years, the BC provincial government has committed hundreds of millions of dollars to build new schools (Steffenhagen, 2011) with a “school
design sparked by new curriculum,” as one community newspaper put it (Reynolds, 2016). An example of this democratizing design is Vancouver’s Norma Rose Point School with capacity for 680 kindergarten to grade eight students, whose open-plan concept is “designed with spaces for students to work independently or collaboratively” (BC government news release, October 17, 2014). The school was completed in 2014 at a cost of $29 million (BC government news release, October 17, 2014). To put this cost into perspective, a typical community school of about 400 students can be built for about half that amount. These student-centred schools can be found across the country such as Regina’s Douglas Park Elementary, Winnipeg’s École Sage Creek, and Ottawa’s St. Cecilia Elementary. There are also open-plan high schools such as Hamilton’s North Secondary and Coquitlam’s Centennial Secondary. This is not to say that all new or remodelled schools will be based on an open-plan. But when hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent on such designs, it is telling that governments have bought into a particular view of education. Such large commitments by ministries of education are based on a belief that the better alternative to the factory model of the last century is pedagogy and curricula that are less teacher-centred.

Such a view, however, finds itself, like much of what happens in public education, having both advocates and detractors. Critics argue that this so-called ‘new approach’ is simply a refashioning of the problematic open classroom movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Gislason, 2009, p. 18). Proponents of a more teacher-centred approach hold the view that transmissive teaching still has much to offer students. Biesta (2011) takes the position that student-centred learning has “in a sense, given up on the very idea of education” (p. 360): that is, “in one and the same move, [constructivist thinking] discredited the ‘transmission model of teaching’ and thus has given lecturing and so-called ‘didactic teaching’ a really bad name” (p. 360). Lyle (2008), an advocate for collaborative learning, acknowledges that although there has been growing awareness about the benefits of democratizing pedagogies, most classroom practices have remained teacher-centred (pp. 230-1). McGhie-Richmond, Underwood and Jordan (2007) found in

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6 In 2012, the BC government announced it would build two Vancouver elementary schools with capacity for about 400 students each. The two schools are estimated to cost a total of almost $27 million and are to be completed by 2016 (BC government news release, July 11, 2012).
their study of 63 Canadian elementary school classrooms that transmitive teachers, while incorporating some constructivist methods, had the most engaged students and maximized instructional time.

Advocates for student-centred democratic education posit that past failures of open-plan schools were due to teachers’ lack of understanding about learning styles and collaborative education (Gislason, 2009, p. 18). Fernández-Balboa and Marshall (1994) note that impediments to democratic education include teacher attitudes, where student-centred learning is not strongly valued, which, in turn, reinforces a system of student competition for grades and the view that the teacher is the keeper of knowledge; another factor is neoliberalism, which has led to performance-based models of education, consequently restricting pedagogical innovation and undermining the development of the critical mass of administrators and teachers necessary for large-scale changes in attitude. As Skidmore (2006) puts it, the devil is in the details: “What matters most is…how far students are treated as active epistemic agents, i.e., participants in the production of their own knowledge” (p. 505). A study by Knowles and McCafferty-Wright (2015) reinforces this point in which analysis of data from grade eight students in 14 Western European countries found that “an open classroom climate encourages a democratic atmosphere that contributes to student learning and development, which in turn promotes active notions of citizenship” (p. 265). Gislason (2009) found in his study of an American open-plan high school that “open plan design functions effectively, in part because teachers are personally committed to teaching practices that are congruent with the design” (p. 31). This finding is supported by Deed, Lesko and Lovejoy (2014) whose study of two open-plan Australian high schools found that success was due to “teacher adaptation to new learning environments [which] was a process of trying different practices and thinking about the representative meaning of abstract concepts” (p. 381).

To address the capacity for change, some attention has turned to identifying the spaces necessary for genuine shifts in teaching practices. One of the challenges facing new teachers, for instance, is that there is a tendency for some to leave the theory behind and become socialized into local school practices, which may involve the type of transmissive teaching they intended to change (Donnell, 2007). Another challenge is that teacher preparation programs can marginalize the voice of pre-service teachers, where the
new teacher yields to the dominant views of both the faculty supervisor and classroom supervisor, inadvertently reinforcing the view that teaching is about authority and power dynamics (Fenimore-Smith, 2004). Even where there is district support for collaborative approaches to professional development, peer collaboration can become contrived when there are divergent views about school aims (Datnow, 2011).

Contrived collegiality is further complicated by the less visible biases that tend to fall under the radar, even for supporters of collaborative education. One study (Miller, 1992) that exemplifies this concern looked at an inclusive approach to multicultural awareness in American classrooms. The study highlights the case of a collaborative classroom where a shy Chinese-American student became increasingly engaged as students of European heritage changed the manner in which they addressed differences, shifting from debate to inclusive conversation. Critically important about the Miller study are her assumptions about “natural learning” (p. 12) within an American frame of the “social and cognitive values fundamental to a democratic classroom culture” (p. 11). The concern is that there are ontological presuppositions at play, which, if not noticed, cannot be critically addressed regardless of any claims to the introduction of a new epistemic perspective (e.g., democratic education).

The absence of such critical reflexivity reduces the potential of an alternate epistemology from an aim to ‘bring to question the practice itself’ to a type of awareness about ‘tools to improve existing practice’. For instance, in the Miller study, reference to “bright flags of commonality” (p. 12) between the Chinese-American student and her classmates implies there is some conflicted state of difference that needs to be resolved and made familiar. While a student may genuinely experience a shift from a competitive frame to a listen-for-understanding frame, what is being understood could very well be a form of colonization. Take the language-game ‘similar to’ for example, such as ‘chopsticks are similar to a fork’ or ‘your parents love and care for you similar to how our parents love and care for us.’ Here the ontological concreteness of western

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7 In the early 1990s, Hargreaves used the term ‘contrived collegiality’ to highlight deficits in what was then the emerging trend of ‘professional learning communities’ in schools. Essentially, Hargreaves’ concern was that teachers were feeling forced by administrators to collaborate on teaching practices; consequently, the products of these collaborations tended to be superficial and did little to improve student performance (Hargreaves, 1994).
intentionality, and in particular, American norms, appears impenetrable. Such presuppositions inhibit the formation of authentic places of encounter, because to experience ontological boundaries of different lifeworlds requires a surrendering to that other way of living. Awareness of the possibility of such surrendering can create opportunities for authentic encounters with difference, not framed by language-games like ‘similar to’, but framed by language-games like ‘that is strange to me yet I want to stay with it’.

What emerges from the above discussion are different perspectives that, at minimum, create a diverse educational landscape, which could lead to divisive positioning. The purpose of this dissertation is not to validate any particularly positioned approach but to assist in the formation of an epistemic lens to investigate what is taking place in schools as they face the challenges of the twenty-first century.8 A decade and a half into the new century, education finds itself driven by the forces of a post-Cold War, globalized, technologized, heterogenized world where stability is short lived and many of the things that will impact students in the future do not yet exist. For example, from the time my oldest child was born in the early 1990s to her high school graduation in the mid-2000s, almost three dozen new countries were formed, Pluto ceased to be a planet, the legalization of same-sex union redefined the family unit, and social media transformed human interaction. I offer these examples not to make any explicit value judgment but merely to highlight that what for previous generations had been taken for granted as timeless facts became contested grounds or, as in the case of social media, something completely new.

Our present time affords us numerous opportunities to struggle with language and to rethink how to speak about a changing world. As such, in order to ask ‘what is it?’ when we look at the world, we first need to be able to recognize that there is something there and, second, bring into focus different perspectives to help us address the question.

8 The introduction to the SFU Task Force on Teacher Education for the 21st Century (2013) states: “In this age of rapid technological advancement, social change and increasing economic and cultural globalization we can no longer be content to prepare teachers for the schools and classrooms of today. Rather, we need to look around the corner to forecast the repertoire of knowledge, skills and attitudes that teachers will require to best support meeting the learning needs of students five or ten years from now” (Phase 2 Report, p.1).
But here we must be aware of our epistemological frames: do my discerning eyes see the unfolding future of twenty-first century education, or do I merely hold such imagery as an objectified narrative whereby my pre-judgments remain anchored to the presuppositions of the past century? The implication is that when we speak of ‘education’ we are speaking various language-games, such as the language-game of ‘disciplines’ in terms of diverse ways of knowing or the language-game of ‘discipline’ in terms of correct behaviour and submission to authority. These language-games can fall into opposing tensions of irreconcilable differences, held by a western epistemic tradition that inhibits alternative intersubjectivities. For instance, one alternative can be to see education in non-anthropocentric terms where we could bracket claims of ownership and utility, allowing diversity to expose normative values. The challenge becomes, within an educational culture shaped by an epistemologically-objectifying ontology, how to create opportunities to foster a broad spectrum of intersubjectivities.

Creating such opportunities, however, must contend with the rule-bound institution of school. Education practitioners are guided by a number of documents including mission statements, professional and ethical standards, regulations, laws, and the nation’s constitution. These written rules can be found in dusty old books, in electronic format, and occasionally, as in the case of mission statements, as prominently displayed posters. These rules are also found in the language of practitioners, ranging from the authoritarian ‘In this school we believe in…’ to the subtle weaving of values in everyday utterances. Ideally, the dream of some administrators is for the language of their school communities to be consistent with the written rules. This can also be said of classroom teachers about their students. In general, teachers, students and administrators tend to align their speech with the rules. However, the daily struggle to ‘toe the line’, or the ‘buy-in’ factor as it is euphemistically called, points to a whole other level in school communities that is not visible yet actively at work. While not the focus of this

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9 Anthropocentrism gives us a sense of possession over non-human species. This human bias can be an impediment to a meta-awareness of a phenomenology of signification. Ted Toadvine (2007), in his essay on human exceptionalism, notes that while we may recognize that it is scientifically incorrect to believe that mankind is the superior form of life on earth, and that we would be wise to see our place in relational terms, the great challenge is in allowing for a phenomenology of animal lifeworlds that also allows for a reconceptualization of ‘human’ that is neither in opposition nor reducible to ‘animal’ (pp. 39-41). (Also see footnote 75)
investigation, the phenomenon commonly referred to as ‘the hidden curriculum’ is a good example of the invisible socializing forces in schools. Take for instance the Chamberlain legal case (2002)\(^{10}\) in which a British Columbia school board rejected a teacher’s attempt to introduce same-sex resources, or the Keegstra legal case (1990)\(^{11}\) in which an Alberta school board dismissed a teacher for teaching anti-Semitic views. What such cases reveal is that there is a set of assumptions to which teachers are expected to subscribe. Toeing the line, then, can lead to self-censorship or a type of clinical practice where teaching becomes increasingly content/skill-driven (e.g., assessment focused) and less relational (e.g., reflexively evaluative). Resistance can also become framed in reaction to dominant agendas, preventing or even blinding practitioners to alternative perspectives (e.g., the absence of critique about anthropocentrism). Against this normative backdrop a buy-in discourse begins to form around school programming that is governed by marked parameters, both visible and hidden.\(^{12}\) Yet, for all the efforts to maintain control, from the macro level of government-school relations to the micro level of student interactions during recess, members of school communities do not go quietly into the night. This is to say, ‘toeing the line’ is an uneasy truce keeping at bay differences on the verge of critique that could unravel into conflict.


\(^{11}\) R. v. Keegstra, [1990] 3 S.C.R. 697

\(^{12}\) This is made evident by the critical concern about ‘reproduction’ in the education system. Some of the leading education scholars of Critical Theory include Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux as well as Michael Apple and Peter McLaren, to name a few. While their work identifies how dominant paradigms privilege certain knowledge and ways of speaking, from a ‘living language’ perspective, a question that arises is to what extent can the epistemic frame of Critical Theory allow an interrogation of communicative practices to see language in ways that are more than tools of socio-political structures? Clearly, Critical Theory identifies the hegemony of dominant speech acts. However, to what extent can it address the implication of its own language-games and intentionalities? Take for instance a Critical Theory critique of the notion of ‘school choice’, where the concept of ‘choice’ is seen as reworked by neoliberalism so that it has become associated with free-market values (i.e., education as marketplace with consumers and service providers). The dialectical relationship created here aims to undermine one system (e.g., neoliberalism) for the benefit of another (e.g., non-market driven alternatives). But little is said about how the word ‘choice’ itself points to the phenomenon of possibilities. As Merleau-Ponty has pointed out, to dialectically replace one meaning structure (e.g., neoliberal pragmatics) with another (e.g., Marxist utopianism) does little to advance the fundamental aim of knowledge, which is to achieve a clearer understanding of human engagement. (Merleau-Ponty’s notions of hyper-dialectic/hyper-reflection will be discussed in part two).
Schools are not about social harmony but what the ancient Greeks called *krinein*, a concept from which we derive criteria, critique, crisis and crime (i.e., breaking the rules). This is to say, the learning process is one of conflict, both at the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels. For example, I once asked pre-service teachers, in a course I was teaching, to discuss the phrase ‘unceded Aboriginal lands’. I was not surprised by the range of views that emerged during discussion. What caught my attention was that the phrase itself was an emotional trigger: as soon as it was posted on the screen I could sense the energy levels rising in the room. Clearly, land claims is a sensitive topic, but what I wish to draw attention to is that both students and teachers experience schooling in very personal ways. I recall an early experience in my teaching career when I made the mistake of trying to impose my authority during a physical education class. I had arbitrarily decided that the grade seven boys would not play floor hockey that day but were to go outside and participate in a different activity. Given that they had not expected this, they strongly protested resulting in the authoritarian imposition of my will. Afterwards a senior teacher offered some advice on how to be inclusive of students’ views yet make clear to them that their choices had to stay within the requirements of my teaching plan. The point is that individuals have borders of autonomy which trigger reactions when threatened—personal lines that are continuously being encroached upon by the process of education. In this lifeworld of schools we find the forms of life of ‘bullying’, ‘standing your ground’, ‘being oppositional’, ‘being a disciplinarian’, as well as less confrontational measures such as ‘being persuasive’ and ‘being strategic’.

This is not to say that all school life is adversarial. Of course, there is much that takes place in schools that is about building caring relationships. But even here ‘caring relationships’ is a form of life energized by the desire to provide an alternative to conflict. Would you agree or disagree?

Perhaps this is an unfair question, because it is an adversarial framing of responses. Certainly there are alternative ways of living in schools. What I wish to draw attention to is that these different ways share the educational landscape, and such cohabitation of difference can be a stimulus for change as divergent views come in contact with one another.
Education is about change.\textsuperscript{13} Few would argue this. Where there is disagreement is in the type of realizations we expect will emerge when different perspectives encounter one another. The implication is that any intrusion into another’s personal space is met with uneasiness as a somatic reaction to an imposition of context (e.g., democratic education as teleology), of con-text, of the suspicion of being conned—a sleight of language hiding authorship behind the enchantment of text that taps into our susceptibility for universal norms (e.g., ‘collaboration is democratic’). Yet, tensions caused by encroachment into boundaries of autonomy reveal what we do not see; that personal doorways do not shut out the unknown to protect what is known first hand, but rather mark a threshold to different lifeworlds. This is to say, we must address personal spaces in a different way: not as ‘an act of resistance’ but as ‘resistance in action’.

To view engaged differences as ‘resistance in action’ is to discover what has always been there in schools: life in all its diversity, from teachers, students, support staff, parents, administrators, academics, to the broader community. Life resists because it lives! Yet, to engage this diversity “[w]hat one acquires here is not a technique,” explains Wittgenstein, “one learns correct judgments. There are also rules, but they do not form a system, and only experienced people can apply them right” (PI, p. 227). This is to say, we must be careful with processes that try to give us fixed meanings of ‘reality’ (PI, 200): “it is difficult to see that what is at issue is the fixing of concepts. A concept forces itself on one. (This is what you must not forget.)” (PI, p. 204). In other words, opening up to difference is not about \textit{techne} but \textit{phronesis}. The practical wisdom here is in recognizing that human engagement is about “seeing as” (PI, p. 197), where the central question is ‘in what context are words used?’ (PI, p. 188): “Mere explanation of a word does not refer to an occurrence at the moment of speaking” (PI, 217). For Wittgenstein,

\textsuperscript{13} According to Oelkers (1997) the fluidity of the language of education allows it to incorporate all kinds of notions, from past ideas such as those of Plato or Dewey to ambiguous concepts like ‘child centered education’. As such, Oelkers posits that the language of education is about continuous change and not about drawing final conclusions.
trying to interpret what a person might mean is a speculative game (PI, p. 212), rather “[l]et the use of words teach you their meaning” (PI, 220).  

Clearing cohabitable spaces for engagement is a way of living, a practical wisdom that is a fractal beginning with the most basic form of life constituting education—student-teacher interactions—and extending throughout all other school relationships. These spaces include supporters of both student-centred and teacher-centred practices. For when verbalizing bodies meet, comprehension is not about establishing what is held in common, or as the popular saying goes, ‘building bridges’, but, more basic, about seeking points of contact—no matter how abrasive—where, long after the desire to speak has dissipated into silent vulnerability, the Other becomes present, not as solipsistic-projected-reflection but as presentiment drawing on the element that both separates and binds, like an ocean between continents. In this inbetweenness of embodied communication, of interverbalization, there is possibility to engage one another in language-games like ‘that is strange to me yet I want to stay with it’.

The present trend in education, particularly in British Columbia, seems to embrace collaboration and empowerment of individual differences. This can be seen in the way the BC Ministry of Education speaks about the new 2016 curriculum: designed for “flexibility to allow students to explore their interests and passions” and “to remove barriers to personalizing instruction” (“Transforming BC’s Curriculum,” n.d.). These

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14 In Truth and Method (TM), Gadamer (1989) writes, “[w]hoever has language ‘has’ the world” (p. 449). What he means is that for human beings “in language the world itself presents its self” (p. 446). The implication is that “there is no point of view outside the experience of the world in language from which it could become an object” of analysis (p. 449). For Gadamer, this phenomenon of human reality directs us away from “abstract universality” and towards one another in our ethical actions: “The main thing for our purposes is that here sensus communis obviously does not mean only that general faculty in all men but the sense that founds community….Hence developing this communal sense is of decisive importance for living” (TM, p. 19). At the centre of this communal sense is phronesis (i.e., the Aristotelian notion of ‘practical wisdom’) that allows for “[t]he grasp and moral control of the concrete situation…so that the right thing may result” (TM, p.19). Mulryan (2009) notes, Gadamer’s phronesis recognizes that ethical decisions are contingent on the situatedness of the moral actor (p. 142). On this note, Halverson (2004) explains that the phronesis leading to good school practices is difficult to formulate into effective educational models because “practical knowledge lives in the particularity of local circumstance and is thus restricted to those with access to these particulars” (p. 92). To address this challenge, Halverson (2004) calls for a sharing of narratives (phrnetic narratives) that capture how practical knowledge works to resolve particular situations (p. 103).
views are supported by research and position papers that highlight the importance of collaborative learning and the open exchange of ideas (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009; Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2011; Doyle, 2012; Dumont, Istance & Benavides, 2010; Mathison & Freeman, 1998; Naylor, 2011; Planche, 2012; Premier’s Technology Council, 2010; Schonert-Reichl, 2012; Zirbel, 2006), as well as identify collaborative approaches to changing teaching practices (Halbert & Kaser, 2013; Harpaz & Lefstein, 2000; Langer, Confer & Sawyer, 1993). These claims are also supported by hundreds of millions of dollars for the construction of facilities to implement these ideas.

A research concern that arises is to determine the accuracy of such claims. Do practitioners have epistemic clarity? To what extent can they distinguish between their previous beliefs (e.g., being authoritarian) and their newly held beliefs (e.g., being authoritative)? Exactly how are they interpreting the terminology? In what ways are they bringing inclusive concepts to life? In other words, if we look past the surface meaning of words and search for evidence of Austin’s force of meaning, Wittgenstein’s form of life, or Merleau-Ponty’s flesh, what kind of communicative practices come to light?

My concern here is not to identify a right, an ideal, a good form of inclusive communicative practices. My concern in this dissertation is to flesh out a way to see what exactly is going on in schools that make inclusive claims. The new education is the education of performatives, language-games, and meta-awareness of one’s agency in the construction of meaning. This phenomenon requires a way of seeing, a way of investigating, that does not present itself as an epistemic intruder (e.g., sociological study, psychological study and so on) but as an epistemic cohabitant. This is to say, a language-based practice needs a language-based investigative perspective. In saying this, I need to make clear that this work does not outline a research method. It is a step back from this. Its purpose is to aid in the formation of an epistemic lens to better see language on its own terms.
The focus of this dissertation

To see language in terms of elementality aids us in recognizing a connection between speaker and what is spoken where the nucleus of meaning resides neither in the speaker nor the spoken but somewhere in-between, at some barycentre point. As Merleau-Ponty tells us, to rediscover the inter-human world, which on the surface separates me and the other, thought must be seen not as an internal process but “that it lives outside of this intimacy with oneself, in front of us” (VI, p. 234). To this we can add Wittgenstein’s position that even ‘I’ statements belong to a family of language-games (PI, 406-416). As such, this dissertation places the speaker, the spoken and meaning as distinct energies in relationship with one another. Through this investigative frame, this epistemic lens, language qua language reveals itself.

I recognize I am on shaky ground with such a claim. The challenge is that language itself is an obstacle. This is to say, the investigation itself is suspect. The principle of Occam's Razor might be wise to consider at this point. An investigation of language as ‘element’ can become an undertaking tantamount to calculating how many angels reside on the head of a pin. After all, observable evidence points to language as being the product of the brain and sensory organs stimulated by human interaction. Suggesting that language is an element, however, negotiates between the slippery slopes of ethereal mysticism, on one side, and the fallacy of an unprovable claim, on the other. The burden of proof here lies in demonstrating that in our immersion into language we can tease out this element in like manner to how we can recognize that a fish is in water given that it travels through a substance. For a brain to claim it moves through language,

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15 In astronomy, the centre of gravity between orbiting cosmic bodies does not lie at the centre of each but is found somewhere in between, closer to the larger, more dominant body. Hence, the term ‘barycentre’ refers to the balance of mass that allows cosmic bodies to hold their orbits around each other.

16 The shift away from the subject has also been expressed by others, such as Theodor Adorno’s (1973) thesis of ‘negative dialectic’ and ‘nonidentity’, in which he rejects the subject and argues for a radical understanding of the object. This object oriented focus has more recently been taken up by Graham Harman, Levi Bryant and Ian Bogost in such works as Tool Being (2002), The Democracy of Objects (2011), and Alien Phenomenology (2012), respectively.
such meta-awareness speaks to a process of reflexivity that can prove the claim to be either true or false. But independent of claim validation, the possibility that the reflexive question can arise at all points to something external, hopefully not as crude as wires connecting our brains in vats, yet something we are not able to readily see in our mind’s eye but nags us nonetheless. I refer to this nagging external—or more clearly, dimensionality of being—as ‘element’.

‘To see clearly’ is a hazy claim. What constitutes clarity? Do not all well articulated perspectives offer a clear view? What is at the heart of this desire ‘to see clearly’? Perhaps that’s all it is: a desire. But if clarity is simply a stated act of self-gratification, then what is actually there that we strive so desperately to see?

To speak of clarity is to speak of epistemic awareness. For instance, at the beginning of this introduction I stated, “The amazing truth is that language does not exist. What is more amazing is that we can understand this.” What I wish to draw attention to is that this statement directs the mind to a different place from the discussion that followed. The second discussion about the motivation of the dissertation can be said to be informing the reader rather than being conceptually problematizing, which seems to be the effect of the first discussion beginning with the question ‘What is language?’ followed by the fictional dialogue. To this we could add another shift: that of the third discussion about elementality to demonstrate a way of speaking about phenomena. A further shift is the survey of the history and theories influencing this dissertation, beginning with the discussion about language as an animating force. Possibly, a closer reading may reveal additional shifts. Yet, recognizing these different perspectives is only the beginning.

Readers may be cognizant of the four noted perspectives but may not be critical of their own worldviews. With the best of intentions, one may incorporate the practice of exploring different views but understood in relation to what one believes to be normal. Take for example a lesson on illegal drugs. A teacher could have students look at subsistence farmers in the developing world who earn a living growing the crops that are used to make these drugs. Students could also look at medicinal benefits of such crops. The hypocrisy of socially acceptable drugs such as alcohol, cigarettes and painkillers could be discussed, as well. But if all these alternative perspectives are judged in
reference to a healthy way of life without ‘illegal’ drugs, and the lesson does not challenge the ingrained belief that such drugs are not normal, even if they are seen as ‘good’ within certain contexts, then the negative view of these substances has not been addressed. To recognize this challenge is an important next step towards epistemic clarity, but still more is required.

Wittgenstein tells us ‘profoundness is understood as deeply as we understand jokes’. Here lies the punch line of epistemic clarity: I get it, but to explain it takes its life away. This effect of language on situated perspectives renders pointless any attempt to pinpoint the epistemic stance of an investigation of language as an element. It is easy to say ‘an investigator of the elementality of language must continuously verify personal location in reference to the shifting meanings of the communicative artefact under investigation’. But the joke would be on us if we tried to explain this. For the epistemic stance is found in the shift of meanings, what I call the ‘multistable logos’. As such, an ‘explanation’ would have to be recognized as an event in itself that takes the mind to places different from an event like ‘describing’. A good story requires both. Being conscious of their interplay is what animates the delivery.

This manuscript is self-aware of a reader’s participation to animate the words contained in these pages. To entertain the idea of a self-aware document requires a shift in a reader’s intentionality. Assuming a reader finds such an idea absurd, in order to hold the view of a conscious manuscript, a reader must keep at bay the overwhelming desire to revert to a normative stance. It might be helpful to recognize that words are mere marks until thought is directed towards such marks as words in an act confirmed by their utility as holders of meanings. This said, preventing the animated thought of a conscious manuscript from slipping into a caricature of symbolic representation contends with the challenge of holding back what feels normal: that these marks, these words, are the foreground figure against the inanimate whiteness that serves as the background of these pages. I recognize the burden I have imposed on the reader. Yet, in this uneasy state the greatest possibility for epistemic clarity presents itself.

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17 In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein asks, “why do we feel a grammatical joke to be deep? (And that is what the depth of philosophy is.)” (section 111).
Parts I, II and III

Part I of the dissertation problematizes the concept of language. It consists of four subsections, which together demonstrate how we move through language. Through these movements we can witness language speaking its own language. For the life of language is not what we wish it to be. It has its own momentum. Yet we see in it what we want to see. Understanding this distinction is a first step towards forming an epistemology of *language as element*.

The first subsection, ‘Language as a verbalized act’, draws the perimeters of the epistemic frame by describing the life of language. This is a witnessing of the act of language, what I call *verbalization*. Moreover, a distinction is made between being aware of frames of mind, what I call *cognitive-registers*, and being aware of shifts in these frames, what I call *sentient-registers*. While the distinction is subtle, this dissertation aims to bring the second to the foreground, marking with greater emphasis the corporeality of intersubjectivity. The central point is that communication as verbalization, that is, as *interverbalization* between interlocutors, requires that we see past cognitive-registers in order to witness sentient-registers of shifting frames, what I call *multistable logos*. This relationship between the possibility of meanings (see below for the notion of *prejection*) and interverbalization is a point the dissertation continuously returns to in Part I.

The second subsection, ‘Language as element’, continues the process of fleshing out the life of language. In this process we see that the so-called ‘language element’ is an action rather than some type of entity or substance. It is to be found in the movement of meanings, recognized through the affectivity of sentient-registers. This requires a particular way of speaking that uses words as temporary scaffolds in order to recognize that signification is situated perspective. As such, ‘ground’ is a bewitchment we must fight against. The implication is that what is being called ‘element’ is somewhere between the ontological ground, already always preceding our attention to the world, and the superposition of signs in an ‘about to’ state of potential meanings, what I call *prejection*.

The third subsection, ‘The spell of language’, takes up Wittgenstein’s challenge that at the end of reasoning there is nothing else to say except nonsense. There are two parts to this section. The first explores the grounding onticity of statements. As a
principal example of this exploration, I have chosen to play with some mathematical language-games, in particular as they pertain to the equation ‘2 + 2 = 4’. The second part endeavours to flesh out the prejected state of signification by describing different experiences of projection. What’s more, to recognize the elementality of language as lived through sentient-registers calls into the open the bewitchment of boundaries, of context, of the notion of ‘element’ itself in attempting to set parameters of interpretation.

The fourth subsection, ‘Bewitchment and Interverbalization’, unpacks the ‘I’ statement to open up a space for interverbalization (i.e., language as action between interlocutors). As an example the statement ‘unscented red certainty startles peacefully’ is used to demonstrate how the perspectives of those gathered in conversation form the event of meaning-making. What this reveals is that the thing we endeavour to understand emerges from interverbalization.

Part II of the dissertation takes a close look at the ideas of Austin, Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty, particularly their posthumously published works: How To Do Things With Words, Philosophical Investigations, and The Visible and the Invisible, respectively. Each thinker is discussed separately followed by commentaries about their contribution to an epistemology of language as element. A question that should be addressed at this point is ‘Why their posthumous works?’ In the case of Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations marks a correction of his previous ideas: “I have been forced to recognize grave mistakes in what I wrote in that first book [i.e., Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus]” (PI, preface, p. viii). Essentially, the mistake was in not recognizing that “the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not a result of investigation: it was a requirement” (PI, 107) and, as such, a ‘preconception’ (PI, 108) and an ‘illusion of profoundness’ (PI, 97). In the case of Merleau-Ponty, The Visible and the Invisible also seems to mark a correction of earlier thinking: “The problems posed in Ph.P. [Phenomenology of Perception] are insoluble because I start there from the ‘consciousness’-‘object’ distinction…. Starting from this distinction, one will never understand that…the whole ‘consciousness’ is a function of the objective body” (VI, p. 200). Both Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty found that in order to better articulate authentic experience they needed to guard against the trappings of presuppositions and look to the unfolding relationships of the everyday. In the case of Austin, he did not suffer from any such crisis of clarity. As
Searle (2014) explains, Austin saw language in concrete and practical terms, preferred the dynamics of the oral tradition and simply did not publish very much; consequently, most of what we know about his ideas comes from his notes and lectures published after his death (chapter one). This said, regardless of how these thinkers came to their ideas about human communication, together, they mark a trajectory of thought that shifts our view of language from a passive extension of the mind to an active force of meaning. For a speaker, this means finding one’s self implicated in the process of meaning-making. The challenge is in this ‘finding of one’s self’, which is not contextuality of authorship (e.g., ‘that is not what I meant/what I meant to say is’) but situatedness by complicity to directed attention, a type of corporeal collocation, of what sits well in us (e.g., ‘swimsuits are not undergarments’). This is a meta-meta-awareness akin to the experience of getting caught looking at another, whereby becoming self-aware of the act of looking has the effect of separating the actor from the act, as if ‘looking’ is an experience one stands next to and of which one decides to partake.

In terms of language, speakers can catch themselves partaking in words in like manner to how bringing a cup of water to one’s lips animates the act of ‘drinking’. Here, Austin becomes an important first step. For instance, in seeing the word ‘drink’ as a performative (e.g., ‘here, have a drink’), our relationship with words becomes closer to breathing and other body functions rather than to abstractions of the mind. Wittgenstein furthers this juxtaposition of body and mind by casting out the mind’s hold on language. For Wittgenstein, the world itself is an act of public communication where holding private views is bewitchment. As such, ‘to drink’, like a new day, is a form of life in its own right, separate from what a person may feel or think about such an occurrence. The implication is that speech needs to align itself to the occurrences of the world, and fight against the desire to add personal values to what is said (e.g., ‘what this means to me is…’). While Wittgenstein moves us one step closer to an epistemology of language as element, his desire to let us see language on its own terms, as language-games, overshoots the separation of speaker from the spoken. To address this challenge, Merleau-Ponty becomes a third step towards epistemic clarity. With Merleau-Ponty, the speaker is brought back into the fold of language. But in doing so Merleau-Ponty takes us to a place that neither Austin nor Wittgenstein conceived of going. For Merleau-Ponty,
the speaker and the spoken are intertwined to the point that it is not clear where one
begins and the other ends. In their interplay, meaning stands slightly off to one side much
like ‘looking’ and ‘drinking’ become acts in themselves. Yet, this division reveals the
unfolding world that forms with our every movement; an experience that is not only of
union between body and lifeworld, which he calls ‘flesh’, but also an openness, a release
of inhibitions to such a union. This sparks a meta-meta awareness of complicity in one’s
own self-referentiality: ‘If saying I am not here when, indeed, I am here suggests that
words cannot be trusted, and if thoughts are made up of words, then how can I truly
think, less say, I am here?’

Language creates an upheaval in pre-linguistic Being, observes Merleau-Ponty
(VI, p. 202).18 Yet, this turmoil of constructed thought also creates the possibility of
coming to an awareness of Being through the directedness of words that anticipate,
Vorhabe, the object of speech (VI, p. 201). This anticipation of words has a primordial
state, a point of “the speech before speech” (VI, p. 201) from which comes the wanting of

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18 In Poetry, Language, Thought, Heidegger asks ‘in what ways does language occur as
language? What does it mean for language to speak its own language’ (p. 190). While
Heidegger’s ideas have influenced the philosophy of language, his ideas are not explicitly
central to this thesis, other than what surfaces through discussion about Merleau-Ponty. My
reasons for this are twofold. First, Merleau-Ponty’s incorporation of Heidegger’s ideas,
particularly those of Being and Time referenced in The Visible and the Invisible, are developed
well enough that no further discussion seems required to understand the notions of ‘Being’ and
‘being’ (e.g., “the being-rose of the rose, the being-society of society, the being-history of
history” [VI, p.174]). Certainly, Heidegger’s work is deserving of substantial analysis.
However, in the context of this dissertation such analysis would not contribute significantly to
understanding Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh as an expression of Einfühlung, especially in the
development of my scaffolding concepts of sentient-register, prejection and interverbalization.
Second, there is a point of departure for Merleau-Ponty from Heidegger. Coole (2007) notes,
for Merleau-Ponty, “interrogation remains a worldly orientation…rather than a metaphysical
duty of ‘care’ for Being….This is why Merleau-Ponty does not follow Heidegger…but
emphasizes instead the species’ contingency and the necessity for ongoing critical practice”
(p.252). Similarly, Protevi (1998) posits that for Heidegger “the sensible body is left behind”
whereas for Merleau-Ponty there’s a “focus on embodied sense” (pp.222-223). Merleau-
Ponty’s own views are that “Being in Heidegger's sense…appears as containing everything that
will ever be said” (VI, p. 170), but to see “Lebenswelt as universal Being” is not about closure
and silence—it is about disclosure (VI, p. 170): “To have the idea of ‘thinking’…it is necessary
to have words. It is by the combination of words…that I form the transcendental attitude, that I
constitute the constitutive consciousness” (VI, p.171). This is to say, “There are only
differences between significations” (VI, p. 171). While exploring these points of departure from
Heidegger would make for rich scholarship, it would be a deviation that would not significantly
add to the aims of this dissertation.
signification, a lacking in need of fulfillment similar to a place that directs my body to it (VI, p.201): “a Vorhabe that is not cognition...[instead, it] is wanting with regard to cognition, to operation, but that envelops them as Being envelops the beings” (VI, p. 204). However, at the point of expression a paradox is formed. What I experience as a sentient being is separated from me when I think about the object of my experience, because what I can speak about is a selected engagement (VI, p. 135): “What we call a visible is...a cross section upon a massive being, a grain or corpuscle borne by a wave of Being” (VI, p. 136). In this paradox born out of the relationship between what Merleau-Ponty calls the ‘sensible sentient’, the positivism of language creates the possibility to grasp the non-visible alternative meanings, opening us up to the silence of pre-linguistic Being (VI, p. 214). This is possible because language has “a power of anticipation” (VI, p. 102) enabling us to speak of both what we know (e.g., ‘there is a tree over there’) and what we want to know (e.g., ‘what is that over there?’). In this diacritical condition of perception, divergence (Écart) forms a gap (lacuna) that is filled (Erfüllung) by awareness that my participation in the world is “possible and means something only because there is Being” (VI, p. 250). Hence, the paradox of expression that is due to the disconnected sensible sentient states of being is resolved by this fulfilment.

Part III is a demonstration of the ideas expressed in this dissertation. Forming a new epistemic understanding requires coming to terms with one’s own views and inhibitions, as well as working through new perspectives and addressing the feelings that arise when seeing the world through a different lens. This final part of the dissertation is divided into three sections. The first, titled ‘Spell it out’, looks at an interaction between the subjective ‘I’, a language artefact, and signification. The second section, titled ‘A dialogue between teacher and student’, is a fictional representation of my own cognitive shifts in this doctoral dissertation. The conversation between two characters is a metawork where the dialogue becomes self-referential, bringing to the foreground the interverbal engagement between speaker and hearer, writer and reader, I and the Other. The third section, titled ‘Implications for education’, returns to the nagging concern about education noted in the introduction. This section is not so much a closing analysis of the study, rather it is meant to open up discussion about the possibilities of an interverbal, interstitial view of education.
Objective of the dissertation

When seeking to understand language we are always at risk of falling under the spell of words, like being entranced by dancing flames when looking at a fire. It is easy to become lost in the pivot of meanings. For example, the expression ‘breath of life’ pivots between literal and symbolic meanings. Yet, in recognizing this, I see myself in control of the words I am using. The challenge, here, is to become self-aware of situated perspective. I can separate myself from the meaning of words (e.g., ‘I do not feel a personal connection to that meaning of the word’). I can be blind to some meanings (e.g., ‘I had never thought about that word in that way’). But control over what I am saying remains anchored in my sense of self. This is not to say I could not objectify words, such as a scientific dissection of the grammatical structure of language. Yet, the onticity of words is not dislodged: words remain attached to what they address, be it something concrete or abstract. To research language as an element in and of itself requires a break of this bond, to see words in their own light like a chair or a flower. Yet, this is not enough. We must let go of our sense of possession over words like recognizing the autonomy of a lion or a tree. But still, more is required. As an organic sensorial being I touch and I am touched by the world. This intersecting point of cognition and sensoriality reveals a pre-reflective state of being that is released at the moment of encounter.

The objective of this dissertation is to bring into the open this pre-reflective state with the aid of the animating force of language. This is a scaffolded process where Austin’s performativity serves as an introduction and Wittgenstein’s language-games are a middle step towards Merleau-Ponty’s flesh.
Part I

*The soul produces motion.*
—Thales of Miletus

**Language as verbalized act**

A good starting point is to establish how the notion of ‘language’ is situated in this investigation. Consider, for instance, the phrase ‘project proceeds’: depending on syllabic emphasis, this phrase can either mean ‘the undertaking can continue’ (i.e., *project proceeds*) or it can mean ‘estimate future earnings’ (i.e., *project proceeds*). Here, we could say that *such lexicon shifts exemplify how cognition navigates the bond between language and culture*. This bond can be expanded to the point where words hold non-literal meanings, as in the case of idioms, like the theatre expression ‘break a leg’ where the literal meaning ‘I wish you suffer damage to your limb’ is interpreted to mean ‘I wish you good luck’. What’s more, in some cases, words, in their standard form, may not be required at all. For instance, consider the phonetic phrase ‘watt eye rite seams knot reel’, in which case comprehension becomes a sensory experience combined with recognition. This embodied realm can be expanded to include gestures such as the raising of eyebrows or shrugging of shoulders, and at its most subtle level communication can be in the form of presentiment. To this we can add that even an analytical observation like ‘*lexicon shifts exemplify how cognition navigates the bond between language and culture*’ is a particular way of speaking in the same way ‘*break a leg*’ is a particular way of speaking.

19 A few years back, for a period of a week, I became preoccupied with the thought of visiting Sweden, the ancestral home on my paternal grandmother’s side of the family. What was odd about such a thought was that my distant Swedish roots had been, at best, a passing curiosity, never a serious genealogical concern. On the Friday of that week I felt compelled to leave work immediately at the end of the school day, unusual given that my routine was to stay longer to prepare lessons for the coming week. Upon arriving home, as soon as I opened the front door I saw my wife holding the telephone. She handed it to me, surprised by my good timing. The call was from a childhood friend who had moved to Sweden at about the same time I had moved to Canada, some thirty years earlier. We had never spoken since that time. He explained that by accident his brother recognized my father as they passed each other on the street during my father’s visit to Chile the year prior. They exchanged information and his brother later passed on my telephone number. He then explained that he had been contemplating calling me all that week and was happy to find me home when he finally decided to call.
Language recognized in this way is different from framing thoughts in terms of true/false statements. For instance, in *How To Do Things With Words* (HDW), Austin posits, to claim that ‘all swans are white’ prior to the discovery of black swans in Australia does not diminish the value of such a claim: “It is essential to realize that ‘true’ and ‘false’, like ‘free’ and ‘unfree’, do not stand for anything simple at all; but only for a general dimension of being a right or proper thing to say as opposed to a wrong thing, in these circumstances, to this audience, for these purposes and with these intentions” (pp. 143-4). What the above examples show is that language is not just cultural expression, cognitive awareness and about accuracy (historical, logical or otherwise)—language is an experience in itself.

To further illustrate, imagine two people in dispute over the words ‘use real ideas’. Their disagreement stems from the pronunciation of these cognates: if the words are pronounced with long vowel sounds, then ‘use real ideas’ is in English; if the words are pronounced with short vowel sounds, then ‘use real ideas’ is in Spanish. In either case, the meaning of ‘use real ideas’ is the same. While the shared etymological roots of ‘use real ideas’ (*uti, res, idein*) explain the linguistic family connection, the lived experience of the phrase simultaneously being an English and a Spanish expression is a different type of concern. In the case of our two imaginary disputants, the duality of ‘use real ideas’ is troubling because living language runs deep in the sinews of cultures. Witnessing ‘use real ideas’ pivoting between English and Spanish lifeworlds raises to awareness the limits of lived language and, with this, the limits of one’s mortality: that life is lived within horizons of *the normal*. For instance, an English speaker pronouncing ‘use real ideas’ in Spanish (e.g., phonetically: ú-sé + ré-ál + ee-dé-ás) can find awkward the relationship between the foreign pronunciation and the meaning of the phrase held in one’s mother tongue. The same can be said about a Spanish speaker pronouncing the

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20 As indicated by the Latin root, language is connected to the body via the tongue (as well as hands and other corporeal parts), which can lead to ingrained physical connections to communication patterns. A somatic example of the body’s relationship to language is how different cultures finger count. For instance, Europeans start with the thumb whereas North Americans start with the index finger.
phrase in English (e.g., phonetically: juice + reel + eye-dee-as). In both, there is physical discomfort. Here, language is more than etymology, more than meaning—it is our ground from which we project sounds. If this ground loosens, our sounds become out of step with what we intend to mean; and as language becomes intertwined with body awareness, reasoning can become a type of sentient intelligence. For instance, when a non-Spanish speaking tourist says ‘dos cervezas por favor’ it is said differently from having to make the same statement in a Spanish language class or being aware of one’s accent when desiring to be accepted as a local. Language, as somatic experience, becomes a witnessing of the possessive nature of words: a nature, as Merleau-Ponty would say, that is natura naturans reconquering the world and which “clarifies everything except its own role” (VI, p. 33). Thus to speak, language is present not as speaker-created but more rudimentarily, as potential, as an element whose energy is about to be directed—a syncopated moment of a shifting rhythmic accent.

What I am drawing attention to is that there is something there in language, an elementality, through which we engage in communication but which is not limited to the visible spectrum called ‘language’ or ‘word choice’. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, “there is no thing fully observable...[therefore] we do not wait until we have observed it to say that the thing is there” (VI, p.77). In saying this, Merleau-Ponty is not so much distinguishing the thing from the thing-spoken-about as he is drawing our attention to recognize this relationship in a different way. To break this down a bit, we can say that at the most basic level we speak from an egocentric perspective, such as naming (e.g., ‘that apple over there’) where my personal experience is the focus of my articulation. When we are more socially aware, the focus of our articulations shifts to the Other in

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21 This is an Anglicized adaptation. For a Spanish speaker, the phonetic aid would be closer to ‘yus + ril + hay-di-as’. It is worth noting that ‘yus + ril + hay-di-as’ and ‘juice + reel + eye-dee-as’ speak to different experiences. The first is a Spanish speaker’s attempt to communicate in English; whereas, the second is an English speaker’s attempt to gain access to the experience of a Spanish speaker. Of course, it goes without saying that such phonetics can have a humorous application, both in friendly and unfriendly ways.

22 In the Working Notes of The Visible and Invisible, Merleau-Ponty writes, “Perception is not first a perception of things, but a perception of elements (water, air . . .) of rays of the world, of things which are dimensions, which are worlds, I slip on these ‘elements’ and here I am in the world, I slip from the ‘subjective’ to Being” (p. 218). Merleau-Ponty’s ideas will be expanded on in part two of the thesis.
conversation. For instance, I may begin a statement (e.g., ‘Mary had a’) and another may complete it (e.g., ‘little lamb’). Here, there is a presumption that the words leaving my lips are being projected into a world shared by those in conversation. We push the limits of this shared world when attempting to persuade, in which case we are no longer speaking from a taken-for-granted place of presumption. When persuading we are well attuned to a sense of anticipation (e.g., ‘do we have a deal?’). In this sense, an utterance becomes momentarily disengaged like a ball in the air without guarantee of being caught at the other end. The experience of language shifts from a sense of security to vulnerability. It is in this spectrum of the corporeality of language that Merleau-Ponty wants us to locate our understanding of communication. For instance, the literal meaning of the idiom ‘toe the line’ is often mistakenly thought to mean ‘tow the line’ (e.g., a worker pulling a rope with some item fastened to it). Yet, regardless of the confusion over the literal meaning, phonetically the expression is recognized to mean ‘abide by the rules’. Here, the sensory experience of the sound of the expression is enough to grasp the meaning. As Merleau-Ponty tells us, “to understand a phrase is nothing else than to fully welcome it in its sonorous being, or, as we put it so well, to hear what it says (l’entendre)” (VI, p. 155). The implication is that what we call ‘language’ is acting on us in ways that are different from grammar. For the corporeality of language is more than articulation locating in cognition the experience of communication. Language is also located in the body, from the throat of laughter to the queasiness of stage fright, and all the other compositions in-between. To bring forward this second awareness of language as action, of spoken tongue embodied from head to toe, I will use the notion of verbalization. In this sense, the verbalizing body speaks louder than words, where somatic awareness between interlocutors suggests there is an elementality allowing the buoyancy of meaning to flow between bodies, or what Merleau-Ponty calls Einfühlung, a "knowing by sentiment" (VI, p. 249): “it is the geometrical locus of the projections and introjections, it is the invisible hinge upon which my life and the life of the others…[form] intersubjectivity” (VI, p. 234). A common example of verbalization is found in cases when we seem unable to say what we mean. In such situations, one may
ask ‘do you know what I mean?’ to which another may respond ‘I see where you are going’.

Gaining access to this elementality of language, however, can be as difficult as separating light from air on a bright sunny day. The difficulty is that language is like the glass ceiling that has been removed from a flea jar, where we still stay within the confines of what is familiar and what we incorporate into familiar form, preventing us from seeing past the mental constructs of our words as they reflect back the images of what we are saying. For instance, consider the matter of a tomato. If it is I who calls the tangible before me ‘tomato’, then I am implicated in meaning-making since I am actively reproducing normative knowledge: ‘it’ sits well with me to say that what a plum is to a bowl of fruit, a tomato is to a bowl of salad. But when we try to get up close to language in order to pin down the reason why we make such connections we are quickly frustrated by a foundation that eludes capture. As Merleau-Ponty notes, “‘reality’ does not belong definitively to any particular perception, that in this sense it lies always further on…. whose accomplishment is only deferred” (VI, p. 41). Consequently, we find ourselves always deferring the root definition of words and never truly pinning down a logical atomism for any meaning. In time, we come to realize that the elephant in the room is the desire itself of wanting to get to the root of the matter. As Wittgenstein put it, once we've reached the bedrock of our thoughts, and we can dig no further, then all we are left

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23 It is worth noting that in reference to Einfühlung, Merleau-Ponty draws on a substantial body of work dating back to Husserl’s phenomenological view of ‘empathy’ including ideas from other great philosophical minds of the twentieth century. We see a glimpse of this scholarly community in the following passage from Hutt (2009): “two of his [Husserl’s] most famous students, Edith Stein and Emmanuel Levinas ….offered critiques of their teacher's portrayal of empathy…in addition to proposing their own unique positions…. Stein….compiled what became the basis for On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)—more famously ‘edited’ by Martin Heidegger” (p.1).

24 Interestingly, Derrida’s concept of différence has a close resemblance to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of deferring. In The Visible and the Invisible, Merleau-Ponty writes, “What I can conclude…is that perhaps ‘reality’ does not belong definitively to any particular perception, that in this sense it lies always further on…. the ‘probable’ evokes a definitive experience of the ‘real’ whose accomplishment is only deferred. When faced with a perceptual appearance we not only know that it can subsequently ‘break up,’ we also know that it will do so only for having been so well replaced by another that there remains no trace of it, and that we seek in vain in this chalky rock what a moment ago was a piece of wood polished by the sea” (p. 41).

25 It has taken me a number of years of graduate studies to apprehend with less haziness that our discernments of the realities we experience are seen through epistemic lenses.
to say is “This is simply what I do” (PI, 217). For the problem is not the elephant; it is the room. This is a room held up by ontological walls that, on one hand, reassure us through tautological redundancy (e.g., a tomato is a tomato), and, on the other hand, conflict us through solipsistic doubt (e.g., why is a tomato a vegetable?). Ergo, when we call out ‘tomato’, ‘dog’, ‘tree’ and so on we are never absolutely certain, because facticity is always on shaky ground. One can be unshackled, however, from the confines of this tautological-solipsistic dichotomy in which ‘the world is my world’ (TLP, 5.641), where objectification leads to a ‘bad dialectics’ that replaces one positivism for another (VI, pp. 94–95), and reduces reason to true/false ‘constated’ statements (HDW, pp. 141-145).

What is needed is inquiry that situates the self as the ventriloquial author of the interlocutor who announces in the author’s own inner voice the world thought-about and experienced: in short, meta-awareness of a phenomenality of signification. An everyday situation that exposes this inner voice and that brings into the open this little man, as Merleau-Ponty might say, is the act of lying. “If you are aware you may be mistaken,” notes Austin, “you oughtn’t to say you know, just as, if you are aware you may break your word, you have no business to promise” (Other Minds, p. 66). Awareness of a lie allows us to recognize, perhaps with greater clarity than other language-games, a speech act separate from the content of a locution, and in so doing pinpoint the little interlocutor in the speaker and/or hearer (e.g., ‘I know you are lying’). As Wittgenstein posits, the point is not so much that there is a lie but that we can recognize the language-game of lying (PI, 355). From this place of self-awareness we become witnesses as participant-observers of the lived experience of verbalization.

Returning to our philosophical tomato, to break from the onticity of a taxonomized understanding requires an awareness that allows us to say a tomato is a culinary vegetable yet a botanical fruit (i.e., signified reversibility). This is not an awareness of the logical distinctions between given criteria (i.e., what I call ‘cognitive-

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26 In criticizing the notion of an interpretive self, Merleau-Ponty writes “This thought, this disclosure of being which finally is for someone, is still the little man inside man, but this time contracted into a metaphysical point” (VI, Working Notes, p. 210).

27 Insincerity is an ancient concern as we see from Plato’s Republic: “The tragic poet, too, is an artist who represents things...he and all other artists are, as it were, third in succession from the throne of truth” (327).
register’) but of the affective experience of epistemic movement (i.e., what I call ‘sentient-register’). While ‘cognitive-registers’ enable us to articulate that we are in one frame of mind or another (e.g., ‘you are being irrational, rational, etc.’), ‘sentient-registers’ enable us to verbalize that we are moving between frames of mind. This distinction can be subtle but makes all the difference in the world. For instance, consider the following free-verse:

Time on read is line each when
Rhyme to seem verses these yet.
Found be to nowhere are rules.
Down is up and right is left.
Madness is language reversed.

Being attuned to my ‘cognitive-register’ I would be aware that this passage is a free-verse poem. I could also say that this piece is self-referential, bringing to the foreground normative assumptions of grammatical structure (e.g., when read from bottom up, right to left). In comparison, being attuned to my ‘sentient-register’ I would be not only aware that I am holding these different understandings, but also I can witness, as participant-observer, that the sense of structure in the poem is in a state of chiasmatic reversibility always already about to shift between correct/incorrect normative form. Through this interplay of cognitive and sentient registers we can, as Merleau-Ponty would say, create the space where “the visible is…to be the surface of an inexhaustible depth” in order to expose the limits of a tautological-solipsistic dichotomy (VI, p. 143).

To recognize that I am implicated in the act of language (i.e., ventriloquial authorship) is a first step toward descrying, or of catching sight of, the horizon of the elementality of language. Imagine a Ferris Wheel at a carnival. A person watching the Ferris wheel can experience different sentient-registers such as the architecture of the wheel, its social impact, etcetera. And when this observer starts to count each time the wheel makes a full circle we can say this is the sentient-register of mathematics. What’s more, a sentient-register can be further distinguished. For example, consider the sum and product of two and two. If we were to say that four is four regardless of how we come to it, then what does this say about the relationship between answer and process when solving a mathematical problem? In what ways do we experience addition differently
from multiplication? Do these differences influence how we experience sums and products? Clearly, the ‘sentient-register’ of mathematics feels different from that of other disciplines such as literature, physics, athletics. For example, discussing the notion of ‘pulling’ in a literary sense would be experienced differently from discussing ‘pulling’ at a gathering of physicists, and different again from an athletics perspective. In mathematics, this is also true: answers carry with them the experience of solving the problem (e.g., ‘luckily, I guessed the right answer’). Here, the number four is more than the palindrome ‘4’. It would be a misstep, however, to suggest it is like an antigram with different meanings creating a contradiction (e.g., ‘when four is read one way it is a mathematical number, and when read a different way it is an exception to mathematical rules while maintaining the integrity of a number’). Instead, four is best appraised as a cognate comprised of different awarenesses recognized through a type of sentient intelligence. As such, the answer of two and two oscillates between the ‘sentient-register’ of universal four, the ‘sentient-register’ of sum of four, the ‘sentient-register’ of product of four, as well as the ‘sentient-registers’ of being mathematical and of being a mathematical anomaly.

Meta-awareness of a phenomenality of signification is a reflexive undertaking, where we are to see past our reflections but not with an eye that envisions an outside our ontological walls; nor are we to look inward to find the source of solipsistic doubt. Both inward and outward meta-ways of seeing can lure our love of wisdom to an endless search for inner depth or an outwardly beyond. What, then, is it that we are to ‘see past’? As Wittgenstein points out, drawing a threshold “is like a pair of glasses on our nose through which we see whatever we look at. It never occurs to us to take them off” (PI, 103). This is to say, we can think about this problem we have created for ourselves in a different way. Consider the self-referential paradox ‘this statement is false’. Logically, this statement is in limbo since it can be neither true nor false. The paradox situates us in that fine line that lies between meanings. What we are to recognize is that the mind-body disturbance caused by this logical impossibility is an opportunity to be aware of the potential for different ways of speaking (and different epistemologies from which to draw conclusions). In other words, in ‘seeing past’ we recognize the ironic-ness of language: that the things words point to are always at the threshold of becoming something else,
like Mona Lisa’s lips in a perpetual state of almost revealing her mood.

This is the curse of the phenomenality of language: we are sentenced to a lifetime of misunderstandings in *that which we call* ‘normal speech’, where the request for clarification (e.g., ‘what exactly are we talking about?’) is a stabilizing brace on an otherwise slippery surface of a ground that is never anything more than a shared understanding. Like a gift from toying Greek gods, language, in all its manifestations, is the best we have but it’s not enough. One does not have to go far for confirmation of this all-encompassing claim about language. For it cannot be refuted without language in some way, shape or form! Yet, the sensation of an impenetrable container of language exposes the construct of impenetrability. This phenomenality compels us to investigate, but we must do so with a kind of dogged determination like that of Diogenes the Cynic. When Alexander the Great offered to grant Diogenes a wish, Diogenes replied ‘I wish for you to stand aside and stop blocking the sunlight’.28 In other words, we must fight against the seduction of signification. One such seduction is the bewitchment of perception; I see what I see: an orange sunset, a purple plum, lime foliage. These colours may be mental constructs, yet they are as real as the sun, a plum and spring leaves. They ground us like the mythical Sirens calling to Jason. At what point, however, does the concreteness of orange, purple, lime or four become situated experience? This is to say, it is through the concept of language that we must get to the act of language.

This calls for a type of reflexivity that allows us, as participant-observers, to witnesses the bifurcation of signification, like the sentient-registers of Mona Lisa’s moods recognized somewhere between my cyclopean perception and the physicality of my two eyes. To say that this bifurcated situation requires meta-awareness of a phenomenality of signification stems from a presentiment that there is *something there* from which relationships form—not inside or outside, but—between word, referent and speaker. This ‘something’ is more than can be accounted for by cognitive-registers. As Merleau-Ponty asserts, “If being is to disclose itself, it will do so before a transcendence, and not before an intentionality” (VI, p. 210). This to say, the starting point of inquiry, for Merleau-Ponty, is not an intentionality based on presuppositions (VI, p. 131), but a

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transcendence, no matter how delusional, that nonetheless is evidence of a distancing, a going beyond myself in my encroachment to that which is there (VI, p. 202). In this way, transcendence is a scaffold to rediscover one’s bond to the world (i.e., flesh).\(^{29}\) What is hidden from us does not lie in the thought of dichotomies, of obverse and reverse, foreground and background. The phenomena to be verbalized, the phenomen-ology, are the sentient-registers of movement, the lived experience of shift, of oscillating pivot, reversibility of chiastic interplay—that is, presentiment of \textit{that which is about to be}.

\textbf{Language as element}

To speak of language as an element is an attempt to flesh out an epistemology informed by the ideas of John Langshaw Austin, the later Ludwig Wittgenstein and the later Maurice Merleau-Ponty. An extended discussion of their ideas will be presented in part two of this investigation. For now, suffice it to say their views on human communication have been central to wresting language away from the confines of grammar.\(^{30}\) Through their ideas, language ceases to be merely an instrument of human

\(^{29}\) Merleau-Ponty is critical of a directedness to the world (intentionality) that “imposes my vision upon me as a continuation of its own sovereign existence” (VI, p. 131). Instead, by sensing that “[t]ranscendence is identity within difference” (VI, p. 225), this difference exposes a divergence (écart) (VI, p. 224) of the “invisible of the visible...[that] enables me to rediscover in productive thought all the structures of vision, and to radically distinguish thought from operation, from logic” (VI, p. 220).

\(^{30}\) While the ideas of these thinkers allow us to disconnect language from the mechanics of writing, I should acknowledge Derrida’s project of deconstruction, which, in contrast, sees grammar as central to our liberation from logocentrism. In \textit{Of Grammatology}, Derrida radicalizes text as “arche-writing” which becomes foundational to both spoken and written language; but unlike the privileging of logos through dominant binaries, “arche-writing” forms signification whose root meaning is always deferred (i.e., \textit{differance}) yet stabilized (and destabilized) by the ‘traces of chains of meanings’ we call truth or fact. Granted that there is much richness to Derridean deconstruction, I have chosen to not travel along these anti-ontological/anti-epistemic lines, precisely because of a richness that robs language of phenomenological reflexivity (i.e., situated self-awareness with possibilities for intersubjective actualization). To illustrate, consider the metaphor of a piece of a picture puzzle. The piece generates the anticipation that it is part of something larger than itself, connected to a bigger picture. For Derrida, this is the spell of the transcendental signified. From a \textit{language as element} perspective, the range of inquiry, from a search for greater meaning to existential nihilism, creates opportunities for communicative engagement. This is to say, Derridean deconstruction—along with its technologies of resistance—is but one more perspective with \textit{interverbalizing} potential.
engagement; instead, language can be witnessed as a *form of life*. As Wittgenstein observes, the answer to the question ‘what is the colour red?’ is simply that I select a ‘red’ item when I hear the word ‘red’; this is because there is agreement on a shared language: “That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life” (PI, 239-241). Similarly, Austin posits that words do more than name, describe, or put forward premises. Words can be actions in themselves like the act of hammering or running. For instance, “When I say, before the registrar or altar…‘I do’, I am not reporting on a marriage: I am indulging in it” (HDW, p. 6). Both Wittgenstein and Austin remain committed to the study of the rules of language. In this sense, their analysis of language is more about its ‘form’ rather than its ‘life’. This said, they come upon a lived aspect of language that is not fully addressed. Austin calls it ‘force’ of meaning, and in Wittgenstein’s parlance it is the ‘bewitchment of private thoughts’. For Austin, ‘force’ plays a positive role in the formation of meaning; for Wittgenstein, private thoughts are a negative side effect of language that his language-game therapy is unable to eradicate from the human intellect. Arguably, these are epistemological blind spots in Austin and Wittgenstein, and this is where Merleau-Ponty becomes an important piece of the puzzle. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty writes, “What it [a mind’s blind spot] does not see is what makes it see” (p. 248). His work is thus an exploration of this mysterious element that brings language to life.

In this way, *language as element* is an invitation to ‘leave everything open to view’ and meet language ‘as is’. Here, the prepositional ‘as’ acts to animate a conceptual relationship between ‘language’ and ‘element’, drawing attention to epistemological framings of language (e.g., language-games of ‘teachers’, ‘doctors’, ‘police officers’ and so on) and, at the same time, giving pause to consider the ontological implications of such frames (e.g., a teacher’s instructions, a doctor’s advice, a police officer’s order). What’s more, to refer to language ‘as’ something else, like an element, is meant to highlight the instability of signification—the *multistable logos*. One may claim to apprehend the meaning of *language as element* (e.g., ‘I think I get it’) only to have that momentary grasp slip away. Yet, this uncertainty is only a struggle within a desire for

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31 From Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, section 126.
certainty. Hence, to say that language ‘is’ an element can only be said with a sense of irony about being fixed or anchored in meaning, given that language is always at the threshold of becoming (e.g., ‘tomato’ as culinary vegetable or botanical fruit). In this way, to say that a person in his or her early years ‘is’ a child would be incomplete, because such a person would take on many roles, such ‘as’ student, friend, minor, athlete and so on, of which one appreciation can be ‘as’ child. Here the normalizing and naturalizing ‘as is’ begins to give way to a contingent ‘as if’ or, more accurately, ‘if, then’.

If language is contextual, then its resiliency to survive contextual changes, separating word from referent from speaker, points to an autonomous characteristic of language. For example, a small hard piece of the planet can be a stone, a cutting tool, a weapon, a building material, a form of art—even to say ‘a small hard piece of the planet’ serves a purpose. What I am addressing here is language qua language. To utter a word means more than the link between sign and referent; such utterances are as rich in vitality as the life from which they stem. To demonstrate, consider the following playful example: to a non-German speaker, the phrase ‘Ich möchte kein Salz in meinen Kaffee’ (‘I do not want salt in my coffee’) might require a phonetic aid to help with pronunciation, such as ‘íg moosh-té kyne sálz in my-nen café’. Now, imagine making a speech in German to a German audience where the words are pronounced with the aid of such a phonetic trick. While the audience members may comprehend what is being said, they might become uneasy about this ‘trick’ of language. They would recognize the words and their meanings, but what is missing, other than what is sympathetically accorded, is the life of the language. To further illustrate, many English speakers feel somewhat at ease pronouncing Spanish words with an accent such as ‘sombrero’ or ‘amigo’ where the last letter ‘o’ has a long vowel sound. In contrast, an English speaker could feel discomfort if asked to pronounce such words closer to their Spanish short vowel sound. It is as though Spanish pronounced with an Anglophone accent is a language unto itself, lived differently from its short vowel cousin. These experiences of interverbalization are self-evident and the explanations seem unnecessary precisely because these examples speak to our intimacy with this lived aspect of language.

Language seems to take on a life of its own. My aim, here, is not to reduce the
human urge for discriminatory observation (e.g., ‘what is language?’) to a psychological trap (e.g., ‘living’ as personification of language) but rather to direct attention to what can be revealed by our corporeal connection to words. A first step is to begin to see language in terms of what Austin calls ‘performatives’. Austin shifts our attention away from the noun capacity of words to the actions that stem from our communicative practices. For instance, to some people the following statement can be disturbing:

- ‘Finger nails across a chalkboard’

To this we can add debate-triggering concepts such as:

- 9/11

Another example can be personal identifiers such as:

- Claims to ethnicity and nationality (e.g., ‘we are the true Atlanteans!’)

At a more rudimentary level, we can include interjection and onomatopoeia such as:

- ‘Oops! I made a mistake’
- ‘Achoo! Excuse my sneeze’

And, we often become self-conscious when pronouncing foreign words such as:

- ‘Habla usted inglés?’

In the earlier example about the German phrase, some readers might have recalled the humorous folktale about John Kennedy’s jelly-donut speech in Berlin: Ich bin ein Berliner. Given that I thought of this possibility, and the fact that this might be the case for some readers, points to the cognitive processes of language: what we might call ‘suggestion’ in lay terms, that, in actuality, is the firing of neurons due to sensory stimulus, which in this case stems from reading eyes. In the Foreword to Bergen’s (2012) Louder Than Words, George Lakoff explains, “Thought is carried out in the brain by the same neural structures that govern vision, action, and emotion….None of it is abstract in any way. Not moral systems. Not political ideologies. Not mathematics or scientific theories. And not language” (p. x). But, is this scientific fact or the facticity of a way of speaking? There is some emerging work in neuroscience, however, such as that of Antonio Damasio, which looks at the link between emotions and cognition. Nonetheless, the communicative link between living creatures remains a scientific missing link, and to reduce intersubjectivity to the body’s hardwiring is still a leap of faith. What I am taking up here is Merleau-Ponty’s critique of positivism’s physiological link to an objectified world (i.e., stimuli): “why is there a perception of the world and not no perception. It is causal, positivist, negativist thought….obliged to hollow out lacunae in it [i.e., ‘it’ as in the thing that is there]…and paradoxically wants these lacunae to be apparatus, dispositions of nervous functionings” (VI, pp. 231-232).

In How To Do Things With Words, Austin states, “The term 'performatives'… is derived, of course, from 'perform', the usual verb with the noun 'action': it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action” (p. 6). Austin’s ideas will be discussed in part two.
While these examples are not strictly performatives in the Austinean sense (e.g., ‘I am afraid’), they, nonetheless, highlight the potential for action contained in words. A normative observation might point out that these examples are ‘alive’ to the extent that they can evoke emotional reactions. I agree that words can generate physiological-cognitive reactions, but in a similar way to how we can harness solar energy, whereby we do not also claim to have made the rays of the sun.

Language may seem to come from us, because we have such a close relationship to it, culturally, biologically, and psychologically. But language is no closer to us than the elements of air or light. Yet, through our intimacy with language we have become possessed by it. We seem entangled in our own perceptions, unable to separate ourselves, as we have with the aid of empirical science, from other elements like air and light. For instance, we now recognize that colours are not fixed but are affected by how the brain reacts to different light conditions. We are also aware that breathable air is restricted to the troposphere. As such, we engage these elements recognizing that the reality affected by them is conditional. Language, however, has stubbornly remained affixed to the human intellect radiating out into the world like a Ptolemaic universe. As Merleau-Ponty points out, a physicist who has liberated his own science from the classical canons of mechanism and objectivism will not hesitate to revert to Cartesianism to explain the

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34 Breathable air is restricted to about 18,000 feet above sea level and 200 feet below sea level; beyond these points the composition of air changes and becomes poisonous to humans.

35 To these boundaries we can add the full spectrum of human sensory limitations that restricts the world we experience and speak about.

36 In A Brief History of Time, Hawking notes that scientific advancements have reduced philosophy to Wittgenstein’s language analysis: “What a comedown from the great tradition of philosophy from Aristotle to Kant!” (p. 175). Ironically, such dismissive comments seem to confirm Merleau-Ponty’s concern. What is missed by Hawking’s oversimplification of philosophical concerns is a growing gap between positivistically driven development and a lack of awareness about the ramifications of such advancements. In this, Dewey brings us closer to a more meaningful relationship between these two aspects of being human: “when we ask what sort of permanent disposition of action toward the world the scientific disclosures exact of us we are raising a philosophic question” (Democracy and Education, 1944, p.325).
impact of his scientific findings on the world (VI, p. 25).\textsuperscript{37} Although the above noted characteristics of air and light, as separate elements from humans, make sense to the non-specialist, to refer to language in like manner seems illogical: How can language be separate from the speaker? In western everyday thought, the greatest distance placed between speaker and language is within the clinical terms of development (e.g., ‘the child is having difficulty pronouncing Rs’) or in terms of skill training (e.g., ‘in hockey, icing means…’). This is to say, we remain within a Cartesian frame in which words, as an extension of the mind, bridge body experiences with external stimuli (e.g., ‘what is the person doing in the picture?’ or ‘how do you put on ice skates?’). Even attempting to create theoretical distance in terms of ‘context’ can become entangled in a Cartesian web. For instance, the difference between a tourist and a conservation officer encountering a lion can, in dualistic terms, confirm that the world outside ourselves is a mental construct, because the entity called ‘lion’ does not change what it is, but the contextual difference in what the tourist and conservation officer think they see is a different matter. In other words, western everyday practices remain anthropocentric:\textsuperscript{38} that is, presupposing that since words and their context are human constructs, then the element that animates a sign is also a construct of the human intellect (or of ‘the brain’ in neurological terms). Within our solipsistic anthropocentrism, to see language like a living thing is at most a simile; beyond this it is seen to enter a world of fantasy and superstition. For instance, to the Mapuche Indigenous people of Chile, the Mapudungun language is thought as having

\textsuperscript{37} In The Philosophy of Science, an introduction (1960), Toulmin is critical of inadequacies in how scientific knowledge is disseminated to non-specialists: “For then he [the scientist] may unwittingly use in his exposition terms and turns of phrase which can be understood properly only by someone already familiar with the theory” (p. 13). Influenced by Wittgenstein, Toulmin identifies what he calls ‘language-shifts’ in the way scientists develop theories. For example, in scientific terms, the so called “laws of nature will not easily fit into the traditional array of logical classifications” (p. 10). Yet, when such laws are expressed in lay terms they create the impression of presuppositions, which can lead a non-specialist to “regard as serious philosophical problems questions having no application to the practice of physicists at all” (p. 10). To counter this problem, Toulmin calls for scientist to be conscious of ‘language-shifts’ and return to the everyday sense of words when explaining research to outsiders. “Anything less than this will leave room for cross-purposes and misunderstandings of the old, deplorable kind” (p. 169).

\textsuperscript{38} In addition to cognitive blind spots due to anthropocentric biases, more explicit egocentric notions like pride, selfishness and prejudice can also affect how we communicate with one another. For instance, one can say ‘I see the different point of view, but I do not accept it.’
newen or ‘force’. Course (2013) explains, the Mapuche believe that to speak about the possible death of a person can actually cause the person to die (p. 309). To Western modern sensibilities, newen and other similar beliefs like Judaic Kabbalah or Japanese Kotodama are seen as anthropological curiosities. What’s more, despite an emerging discourse (Salehie & Tahvildari 2009) about artificial intelligence, such as self-adaptive software and genetic algorithms (e.g., self-mutating computer viruses)—which have the potential to problematize anthropocentric linguistics—the very idea of computer language becoming a form of life remains science-fiction. As biologist Agapow (1993) notes, “viral evolution….is similar to the question of life on other planets…where for any conclusions to be drawn at all one must make assumptions bordering on the outrageous” (p.53). This sentiment can be extended to claims about living language that suggest anything more than symbolism.

I confess: what I am suggesting is a radical reformulation of the relationship of language to speaker to referent. It breaks from the ancient paradigm that words are bonded to the world, and pushes the envelope of neurolinguistics and our modern sensibilities that words are an extension of who we are. Language as element endeavours to see in what way we are in language by first recognizing that we are through language, like a human electrical circuit, a force that travels across bodies. We encounter words like we encounter a tree or a dog when we turn a corner. We say ‘tree’ or ‘dog’ with slight hesitation—a pause revealing that our desire to make connections causes us to sense a disconnection between referent, sign and speaker. Yet, this is not disconnection but recognition that these constituents of signification inhabit the world on their own terms. And among them there is an elementality whose energy we sense as force of meaning. For instance, I say ‘orange purple lime’: what do these non-primary colours say about the world outside my body? What does neurological brain function say about the energy waves we have come to culturally label ‘orange purple lime’? We could

39 In the introduction to the Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein makes reference to a passage from Augustine’s Confessions that speaks to this bond of words to objects.
40 In terms of our modern sensibilities, perhaps no one said it better than that great oracle Nietzsche who foretold of the coming of the ‘individual’ as maker of his own realities: “I will make company with creators, with harvesters, with rejoicers: I will show them the rainbow and the stairway to the Superman” (Thus Spoke Zarathustra, p. 52).
say ‘the world is an interpretation’. But how far does this explanation take us? Eventually, as Merleau-Ponty tells us, the explanation that colour is “a pellicle of being without thickness” must concede that with colours “one knows all there is to know, and of which in the end there is nothing to say”—except, in that brief moment before my gaze is fixed, “[b]etween the alleged colors and visibles, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility” (VI, pp. 131-133). In this sense, living language is more than figurative speech. It is a framing to help us address language qua language whose effects we see as oscillating meanings but whose animating force, its element, escapes our grasp—except in the osculation of words taking on different meanings:

Living language.

But in what way ‘living’?

Symbolically? Organically? Characteristically life-like?

I say ‘language has a life of its own’ in the sense of a double entendre indirectly drawing our attention to the meaning of life that illusively eludes us. To appreciate language qua language we need to recognize it as an ironic-metaphor that folds back into itself and loops through its contradiction to come out at a not-yet defined place: in like manner to how the rule of exception must have its own exception. To hold the ironic thought that ‘language is not as the metaphor suggests’ does not mean ‘language is a human construct’ but also does not mean ‘language takes on the characteristics of the analogous suggestion’ (i.e., a breathing organism). The ironic metaphor is an osculating thought, contemplation of the intersection between the pre-metaphorical (e.g., language in normative terms) and the metaphorical (e.g., language as alive).41 Yet, to think of this osculation as a ‘point’ of intersection can be misleading, because it is a misconception to see ‘point’ in terms of an origin from which meanings pivot. While the act of understanding in its ancient sense is achieved, as Plato tells us, from a poetic chain linked to the Muse, understanding in its modern sense is, in our post-Planckian world, relational

41 “There is no metaphor between the visible and the invisible,” observes Merleau-Ponty, “metaphor is too much…if the invisible is really invisible, too little if it lends itself to transposition” (VI, pp.221-222). With this observation in mind I present the ‘ironic-metaphor’ as a way to access movement of language in a manner that is not grounding, arrested by a grammar of fixed placement, but a poetic appraisal.
potentiality, contingent, a scaffold, a temporary ladder. In this second sense, ‘point’ is the action that stems from the one directing attention (i.e., the pointer) and in the act of ‘pointing out’ revealing where the pointer stands (i.e., ‘I am here in reference to…’). Thus, living language is meta-awareness of location in the process of grasping the lifeworlds we inhabit. Location, however, can become entangled with an interlocutor’s sense of authorship (e.g., ‘I have a right to my opinion’). The challenge here is in teasing out ‘the right to voice a view’ from ‘the view being voiced’ (see footnote 38). For once ‘the right to voice’ is granted, ‘the voiced view’ can be pivoted away from a means to justify authorship and towards exploring a perspective in its own right. This said, situated pointing (i.e., perspective) says little about the pointer, who can hold varying levels of commitment to what is said, and says less about what is being pointed out, given that this depends on the held opinion(s) of the pointer. For instance, if I say ‘the lion scares me’, whatever this statement reveals about me it does so in reference to ‘the lion’; and, given that I can only guess at a lion’s intentionality, whatever this statement reveals about the lion it does so in reference to my stated fear. This is to say, other than the geo-positioning of interlocutors, what is revealed by the statement is the value of the statement itself. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, “each one speaks with all that he is….Life becomes ideas and the ideas return to life…each is led on by what he said and the response he received, led on by his own thought of which he is no longer the sole thinker” (VI, p. 119).

From a given standpoint, what is being pointed out (e.g., fear of the lion) directs a line of thinking, which at its rudimentary level precedes articulation (e.g., ‘I was about to say…’, ‘you know what I mean?’; ‘you read my mind’, ‘I see where you’re going’). In Wittgenstein’s words, “One does not feel that one has always got to wait upon the nod (the whisper) of the rule” (PI, 223). This phenomenon of ‘about to’ I will call ‘pre-jet’ or ‘preject’, which seems to more easily roll-off the English-speaking tongue. Prejection is here defined as ‘the state of being about to be thrown into the world’; another way to say this is ‘a presentiment of intentionality’. Consequently, through prejection I recognize a self-witnessing of my own situatedness in that the act of pointing out reveals where I stand on a topic of conversation. One experience of this presentiment is the unfolding of anchored language-games (e.g., ‘a child in the classroom is not a teacher but a student’).
Here, words are fixed and what is about to be said is pre-fixed. Another experience of the ‘prejected’ moment is when fixed meanings are problematized such as in the case of double entendre, paradox, irony and so on. In this second prejected sense, trying to move past the stage of being baffled, of drawing a blank, words can be thrown into the engaged moment without immediate commitment to definition (e.g., the many understandings of ‘living language’). I will call these the language-games of unfixed words (e.g., ‘I’m just throwing it out there’). In this unfixed state, words take on meanings when caught in a gravitational field of a situated perspective (e.g., ‘I never thought about it that way’).

The challenge, then, is to be aware that words have been affixed to a particular orbit. A barycentre is a visual that might be helpful, here. Metaphorically, language-games that find themselves directed to the same topic of conversation can be said to be in orbit with one another (e.g., the pro-choice and the pro-life of the abortion debate). What’s more, the centre of gravity (i.e., the sense of ‘normality’) is closer to the more dominant standpoint (e.g., a tomato is treated as a vegetable in its everydayness). To this relationship, we can add the illusion stemming from the centripetal force of conflicting views in tethered orbit, where each standpoint perceives its own centrifugal ground. As Wittgenstein notes, “to say that this ground makes the occurrence probable is to say nothing except that this ground comes up to a particular standard of good grounds—but the standard has no grounds” (PI, 482). The locution ‘on what grounds’ expresses the sensation of ground stemming from a reaction to difference (e.g., ‘To say the child is the teacher does not sit well with me’). This said, the ground is bewitching; and those who fall under the glamour of words can be blinded to the presuppositions of a stated ‘normality’ and ‘naturalness’: “Thought is surrounded by a halo,” Wittgenstein warns,

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42 Consider the following three examples: 1) ‘he was the elephant in the room’; 2) ‘he was the lion in the room’; 3) ‘he was the snake in the room’. To the North American ear there is no confusion about the distinct meaning of each of these metaphors: 1) he was the topic no one wanted to talk about; 2) he took charge; 3) he was untrustworthy. Their meanings, as Nietzsche would say, run deep as a ‘river roars in subterranean caves’. Consequently, an attempt to change the meaning of these metaphors (e.g., the snake espousing the dispositions of the lion) would be met with confusion.

43 In the case of positivism, this ground is the existence of an objective world confirmed by logic and empiricism. Yet, this is a shifting ground. As Kuhn explains in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, “when paradigms change, there are usually significant shifts in the criteria determining the legitimacy both of problems and of proposed solutions” (p.109).
“Its essence, logic, presents...the a priori order of the world” (PI, 97). With this precaution in mind, we can appreciate Wittgenstein’s criticism of Heraclitus’ claim that ‘one cannot step twice into the same river’, to which Wittgenstein asserts ‘nonsense, of course one can!’ Thus, our quest for the language element that animates the meaning of life is, above all else, as Wittgenstein tells us, “a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language” (PI, 109).

The spell of language

Consider the following self-aware statements:

• Standing on the ground I look and see the sky, the mountains, the sea.

• The visual of our solar system distracts from the reality that earth is free falling through space.

Each statement captures a profoundly different sense of the world we inhabit. The first gives us a sense of security whereas the second is unsettling, like being in an airplane and suddenly realizing we forgot we are thirty thousand feet in the air. If we seriously consider the expressions ‘standing on the ground’ and ‘earth is free falling’, these observations can generate sensations so fundamental to our sense of being that the words become part of us, embodied. As Wittgenstein observed, why is it normal to think the sun moves about the earth, setting at night and rising in the morning (e.g., ‘the sun is leaving’)? How would it affect us to hold the thought that we inhabit a spinning planet and it is we who are in perpetual motion (e.g., ‘we are starting to move away from the sun...we are coming around again’)?

When Wittgenstein states, “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (TLP, 5.6) he is telling us words are our ground

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44 Wittgenstein’s actual quote is “The man who said that one cannot step into the same river twice said something wrong; one can step into the same river twice” (Philosophical Occasions, p. 167).

45 In An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus, G. E. M. Anscombe quotes a conversation with Wittgenstein in which he asks, “Why do people say that it was natural to think that the sun went round the earth rather than that the earth turned on its axis?...What would it have looked like if it had looked as if the earth turned on its axis?” (p. 151).
like the floor of an airplane or the planet beneath my feet. There is a point when words fail us and all we can do is simply recognize in silence.  

Consider the mathematical statement ‘2 + 2 = 4’. If asked to explain why this statement holds true, we may spread out four pebbles and count them. We may also look to see if there is a case where ‘two plus two does not equal four’, only to find that ‘two plus two always equals four’. While these experiences may demonstrate how things add up to four, they do not explain why. Here we could turn to those who have given considerable thought to the matter. For instance, Bertrand Russell once stated, “the proposition ‘2 and 2 are 4’ is useless unless it can be applied. Two dogs and two dogs are certainly four dogs” (Rose, 1988). But what if meticulously laid out logic is not enough? What begins to emerge is not a problem of satisfying a logical curiosity but uneasiness about the certitude that the sum of four is an impenetrable mathematical truth, finite, where doubt could lead to wrong-headed formulations. What is troubling, if one is troubled by such certainty, is the helplessness of not being able to find an exception to the rule. But, if we do not want to go down the route of logical positivism, what alternative course of thinking is open to us?

A breakthrough, here, is achieved not through directional analysis (e.g., ‘could 2 + 2 = a number other than four?’) but rather an analysis that is relational. Acceptance of the rule is a case in point. Submitting or not submitting to the mathematical rule ‘2 + 2 = 4’ presupposes that it is possible to state these two opposing options because there must be something there on which rests ‘the rule’ and ‘not the rule’. Stated differently, what allows ‘two plus two equal four’ to hold true experientially and logically? What is this invisible field that prevents us from shaking off the concreteness of this mathematical

46 In the conclusion to the Tractatus Wittgenstein declares, “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent” (sec. 7).
47 The three volume Principia Mathematica by Russell and Whitehead is often held up as one of the most exhaustive investigations to demonstrate the supremacy of mathematical logic. For instance, a considerable portion of the work is dedicated to logically demonstrate that ‘1+1=2’ is a sensible statement.
reality? We could say that this invisible field is the physical force that keeps the planet in orbit. It is, as it were, the cosmos’ gift to the human intellect.\textsuperscript{48}

There is danger in this line of thinking, however. In like manner to how we can ask if there is a foundation behind dichotomies of the visible (e.g., four pebbles), we could also ask if such a foundation has its own foundation behind it, and a foundation behind that, and so on, trapping us in a kind of Zenonean ad infinitum paradox? If, on the other hand, we say that there is only one foundation, that of the physical force, how do we know this with certainty? We don’t. Sure, we can point to a track record of consistency, but all this tells us is that our foundational knowledge is consistent, not certain. A reductionist search for a root source eventually leads to a logical dead end. Yet, a logical cul-de-sac has a way out. For instance, the existence of the contradiction ‘this statement is false’ suggests there is something at play outside logic.\textsuperscript{49} One way out of the paradox is to shift perspectives, such as framing the self-referential statement as a joke, as wordplay, which would allow us to live it in a different way, as humour. This move identifies two phenomena: the first concerns the onticity of statements, the second concerns the projection of perceptual shifts. Let us address the easy one first.

If I can walk away from a paradoxical trap, then I can see the onticity of any statement in a different frame. For instance, we could say that a number like ‘4’ is caught-up in its own self-referentiality, such as the fourness in both 4 horses and 4 unicorns; clearly, one ‘4’ is grounded in fact and the other ‘4’ is fictional, yet in both cases there is the concept of ‘4’. Is it possible, then, for ‘4’ to be paradoxical? Can ‘4’ have a signified reversibility like the tomato (i.e., both a culinary vegetable and a botanical fruit)? Can we experience the quantity of ‘4’ in different ways? For instance, if

\textsuperscript{48}The Buffon’s Needle phenomenon is a good mathematical example of the rotating nature of our planet and the universe in which we find ourselves. The phenomenon occurs when needles or needle-sized sticks are randomly thrown on a lined surface. A comparison is then made of the needles that touched the lines and those that did not. The result is the number Pi, which is central to the measurement of circular shapes. Using the Buffon’s Needle method, Pi can be calculated to greater accuracy as the quantity of needles thrown increases.

\textsuperscript{49}In the history of mathematics, Gödel's incompleteness theorems can be said to have opened the theoretical door for the possibility of multiple worlds. In short, the theorems formulate that for any system to hold true, such truth relies on an unprovable fundamental; therefore, any system can hold true, including what logic identifies as contradictions (Gödel's Incompleteness Theorems, 2013, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/goedel-incompleteness/).
we restate ‘2 + 2 = 4’ as ‘number – number = 4’, then there is a range of possibilities that can make this statement true. Equally, there are a number of options that would not make this statement true, such as ‘4 – 4’. But, what if this was not the case? For example, under what circumstance might ‘4 – 4’ equal four? One possibility is to see this statement from the perspective of material transformation such as from solid to liquid to gas. Imagine I have four dollars in my pocket and I ‘take away’ those four by paying a four-dollar debt. The conventional result is that since I no longer have the four dollars, the answer to four subtract four is zero. This is one way to look at it. Another way is to recognize that the four dollars have not disappeared, because the money is now in the pocket of my lender. To this we can add that in the fiat world of lenders and debtors, in the eyes of my creditor, I am valued as a four-dollar risk. This is to say, I would retain my four-dollarness in like manner to how treeness is retained in paper or, from a social perspective, how an astronaut retains his or her astronautness after retirement. And, in the same way one’s astronautness can be converted to gains such as VIP treatment, for my lender, my four-dollarness can be converted into four-dollars. I concede that this is an unorthodox mathematical perspective. However, it is accurate in terms of the physicality of our world where nothing disappears; things simply take on different forms such as the transformation of solid to liquid to gas. Hence, to hold that ‘4 – 4 is equal to zero’ is possible within a spectrum of mathematical abstraction compounded by cultural values of ownership. Alternatively, if we see values from the perspective of material transformation and in non-enclosure terms, then ‘the having’ of possession gives way to ‘the holding’ of communal care.

But is this not cheating? In making my point, I have changed the rules from mathematics to social theorizing. To suggest that within the rules of mathematics the difference between four and four can be an amount other than zero is sleight of hand, a switch of foreground concreteness with background abstraction. This four is not a palindrome (i.e., ‘4’) such as the result derived from the sum/product of two and two; rather, the four of the mathematics/social theory dichotomy is an antigram (e.g., the number four/the essence of fourness). It is not one and the same four but different fours that are worlds apart. In saying “This is one way to look at it,” I have moved the mathematical four to the dimension of an abstracted concept of four (e.g., the fourness in
both 4 horses and 4 unicorns), and then moved it again from concept to an interpretive realm like Mona Lisa’s moods. Through this sleight of language I have bifurcated *four*, caused it to pivot in interpretive oscillation, and in doing so, *four* became self-referential (i.e., in what way *four*?). I confess my heresy.

A normative mathematical view is that there is no obverse/reverse relationship to a number—four is four, regardless of what it quantifies! Yet, there are mathematical anomalies as in the case of the sum/product of two and two, which are exceptions to the rule that addition and multiplication of the same number give different results (e.g., \(3 + 3\) or \(3 \times 3\)). This is to say, the result (e.g., 6 or 9) is important to the extent that it is the outcome of correctly following the rules. How, then, do we reconcile an exception to the rule with a normative assumption of impenetrable onticity? On second thought, isn’t mathematics teeming with exceptions to the rule (e.g., only when multiplying by ten add a zero, with eleven double the number but only until nine, with one the number is always the same). In other words, within the family of mathematics there are many forms of life where particular number relationships cannot be applied universally. Stated differently, within the lifeworld of mathematics divergence is not a destabilizing factor.

We run into trouble when applying mathematical relationships to a non-mathematical world. For example, consider the rule of zero. In the world of people, zero is as concrete as a unicorn; its function is to mark a transition: like a unicorn tells us we are speaking about fiction, zero tells us we are speaking about mathematical abstraction entangled with normative values of personal possession. To believe that outside the mathematical world zero means more than such a state of transition is to fall under the spell of mathematical language-games.\(^{50}\) For the numerical sun does not rise in the morning and set in the evening, rather we stand witness to a continuous approaching and moving away from the lifeworld of mathematics. Hence, under the spell of mathematics

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\(^{50}\) Today, equating zero with nothing is taken for granted, but when this Indian-Arabic notion was first introduced to medieval Europe it was considered evil. The quantifiable world of medieval Europe was tangible such as the measurement of ‘virgate’, an Old English term for the amount of land two oxen could plough in a year. Thus, unlike units of measurement such as a finger, hand or foot, the abstract notion of quantifiable nothingness was viewed with suspicion. In 1299, for instance, this prejudice, compounded by concerns about the ease with which Arabic numbers could be falsified, unlike Roman numerals, led the city of Florence to ban the use of zero (Kaplan, 1999).
what we see is not actually there (e.g., the fact of zero in the world) and what we do not see is actually there (e.g., the transition marked by zero). As Merleau-Ponty notes, we are not the ones who determine what is there, but what is there constitutes what we determine: “In the grain of the sensible we find the assurance for a series of cross-checkings, which do not constitute the ecceity of the thing but are derived from it” (VI, p. 77). For instance, what is there in the event of paying my four-dollar debt is the transfer of possession, not the abstract nothingness of zero characterized by a sensation of disappearance. In other words, under the spell of normative mathematics, what we see through cognitive-registers is four as antigram (i.e., a mathematics/social theory dichotomy); what we do not see, but can access through sentient-registers, is four as cognate: where the appearance and value of the number are the same in both ways of speaking, albeit the sounds of normative mathematics resonate differently in our bodies (e.g., ‘4 in the process of being subtracted’) from the sounds of non-possessive communal relationships (e.g., ‘4 in the process of change’).

One more clarification is required. Have I not contradicted myself by suggesting ‘4 – 4 = a number other than zero’ given that earlier I posited that directional analysis (e.g., ‘could 2 + 2 = a number other than four?’) would be wrongheaded? Perhaps this is true, but much depends on how I am framing my rejection of ‘directional analysis’. To allude to the futility of an answer other than ‘four’ to ‘2 + 2’ recognizes the parameters of normative mathematics. To then go on to entertain the idea that ‘4 – 4’ can result in a number other than zero brings to the foreground the imposition of mathematical abstractness in the social lives of humans, bewitching us into believing that what is concrete in a social setting is mathematical reasoning and what is abstract or fantasy are quantifiable relationships calculated in non-mathematical terms. In other words, what is brought into the open is the cohabitation of multiple language-games where the only normality about the normal is that some ways of speaking dominate our views, sometimes to the point of blinding us to alternative perspectives. Once this mix-up is disentangled, what is revealed—open to the world, to use Merleau-Pontyan parlance—is that speaking is situated pointing; in turn, awareness of our standpoints can allow us to access different ways of speaking.
To continue, then, from a communal perspective we can see ‘2 + 2 = 4’ in a different light. In relational terms, given that no two things are exactly alike, we compensate with language-games that reduce differences (e.g., ‘for our purpose, they are close enough’). Ergo, the notion of ‘equal’ or ‘is’ (e.g., ‘2 and 2 is 4’) can be more accurately stated as ‘approximately similar to’. Hence, addition can be stated as ‘1 item and 1 item are approximately similar to 2 of the same category given that, for our purpose, they are close enough’. This is to say, not all ‘2 + 2 = 4’ are the same. The distinction is that the qualifier ‘for our purpose’ would be experienced differently in the lifeworld of a farmer, for example, measuring the space needed to store sacks of potatoes compared to the lifeworld of an engineer measuring the parts to hold up a bridge. Other computation experiences (and language performatives) can be those of a prison guard carefully determining which four prisoners to group together or a parent cutting four slices of birthday cake, and so on. In like manner, for a mathematician, computation has a particular experience: numbers do not merge like mixing cream in a cup of coffee but have boundaries; as such, it would not sit well to mathematically state ‘1 blends into 2’, rather we would say ‘where 1 ends 2 begins’. What I hope is beginning to emerge, here, is a pattern of relationships (e.g., ‘I see where you are going’). The above discussion leads us to recognize that a mathematician’s experience of numbers can be considered one more view thrown into the mix for consideration. Prejectively, we can sense the switch—the reversibility of the chiasmic ‘4’, in Merleau-Pontyan terminology—between one ‘2 + 2 = 4’ language-game and another ‘2 + 2 = 4’ language-game. As such, in a

51 Speaking about numbers outside their mathematical frame is an ancient practice. My aim here is not to dwell on alternative meanings of numbers (e.g., numerology) but to accentuate the use of numbers as expressions in themselves, such as 9/11 (the 2001 attack on the United States), 747 (the Boeing airplane) or 10-4 (message understood). A more recent phenomenon is the ‘illegal number’ whereby a series of numbers (e.g., 90210) can be regarded as a code that can only be used with permission.

52 Fleener and Reeder (2006) point out in their study on mathematical language-games, “The world and all of nature, perceived as ‘a mathematical manifold,’ became quantifiable, predictable, and controllable and mathematics lost its sense of being patterned relationship and a system of meanings” (p. 143). In terms of students learning math, they further posit, “the abstraction of pure mathematics is of little relevance to their lives and has little meaning beyond the classroom mathematics lessons being taught” (p. 153).
universe of many potentialities, when we state ‘2 + 2 = 4’ we can pause to consider in what ways does this add up for us?

If we are able to change how we experience the onticity of a statement, then what is this projection that permits perceptual shifts? Is it simply that language is a slippery slope and, as such, can lead us to all kinds of outcomes? Certainly, the flexibility of everyday language leads us to the impression that mathematical language-games are rigid. This is because we are looking at mathematics from the perspective of a non-mathematical world. But, what allows language to go so far as to express the phenomenality of mathematics, to tease out the ‘mathematics’ from numerical relations? Are we caught in the magic of language, replacing one illusion (e.g., mathematical numbers) with another (e.g., non-mathematical numbers)? Or is all this talk of ‘illusion’ its own illusion? What allows me to say ‘all this talk of illusion is its own illusion’? What is needed here is clarity: to separate light from air, to separate the speaker from the spoken. For a person may know how to speak a language-game without comprehending why the rules work, yet there is awareness that one is living a form of life. Consider the slang expression ‘that joke was sick’. Here we ask, what allows shifts in time (e.g., ‘sick used to mean illness’), shifts in space (e.g., ‘from this perspective sick means great’), and the multistable logos (i.e., the pivot of sick between illness and greatness)?

To better address this question, we need to rethink the notion of ‘element’. We ‘come to’ (i.e., awaken to proxemics) the spatio-temporal landscape of our verbalized world through recognition of the horizons of our constructs, separated not by a lacuna (unfilled space) but by the additional construct of Ecart (divergences), as Merleau-Ponty would say; and to address ‘what is there’ (i.e., the significance) about what is there (i.e., the thing being pointed out), we must bring into the light “the birth of speech as bubbling up at the bottom of…mute experience…[because] born at this depth, language is not a mask over Being, but…the most valuable witness to Being” (VI, p. 126). Prejectively, however, we can almost reach but not grasp a full sense of language as element. This is because, on one hand, language is slippery, with its inability to arrest compensated by a delusion of possession (i.e., concrete, fixed words); and, on the other hand, poetic appraisal, even as pre-linguistic reaction, is intuitively linked to language (e.g., I see ripples in the water, a sensory experience separate from the words ‘I see ripples in the
water’ but nonetheless a distinction held through language, such as the bracketing expression ‘separate from’). As Merleau-Ponty tells us in *The Visible and the Invisible*, expression of the sensorially accessible visible world stems from a place of knowing that is invisible yet “comprehensible only as the accomplishment by other means of the will of the *there is*” (p. 145).

This comprehension is not received like the warmth of a universal sun under which we stand (i.e., under-standing) nor is *that which is there* an emanating pure source of itself (e.g., ‘it speaks to me’). What *is* revealed is accomplished through the sensorial limitations of being human in touch with what has caught our attention: a grasped sense which, at its most authentic level, is reflexive of situated pointing, perspective (i.e., stand-point). To further clarify the distinction between under-standing and stand-point, I can say ‘it is universally under-stood that the sun will rise every morning’; I can also say ‘from the stand-point of centrifugal ground we are not so much standing on earth as hanging from our feet’. This is to say, one of the “means of the will of the *there is*” is akin to a ‘quantum observer effect’ where the superposition of a sign (i.e., its many possibilities) collapses the moment we attend to it. For instance, imagine sitting by the still waters of a lake and the calm is suddenly interrupted by what sounds like a pebble striking the water. When you look in the direction of the sound all that can be seen are radiating ripples. The sensory experience of the sound and subsequent visual leads to speculation about what caused the event: a pebble? If so, from where did it come? If not a pebble, then what? A fish poking its head above water? If not, then maybe…. Each possible cause becomes an explanation momentarily held until another explanation moves to the foreground. Eventually, we settle for what common sense determines to be the most likely reason. This does not mean we stop thinking of other causes, but we find ourselves returning to the more dominant view. As such, we oscillate between dominant under-standing and alternative stand-points. Similarly, the imagining that stemmed from the invitation ‘to imagine’ held the possibility of ‘4 – 4 = 4’; but, since ‘imagining’ is an intervention into the habitual flow of signs, when the held stand-point is interrupted (e.g., ‘I lost my train of thought’) signs ‘collapse’ to their habitual under-standing (e.g., ‘4 – 4 = 0’). This is because, as Merleau-Ponty observes, our “initiation into the world… is always already accomplished when the reflective return intervenes” (VI, p. 35).
Nonetheless, projectively, before a collapse of superposition, in the oscillation, in the pivot of ‘the sound of the water being struck’ or the pivot of ‘sick’ or the pivot of ‘subtraction’, we find humour and the desire for ‘depth’ in attempting to come to terms with the shifting play of foreground/background, of obverse/reverse, and that we see what we see.

What do I mean, however, by ‘we see what we see’? Let’s entertain the idea of the mixed metaphor of Schrödinger's cat in Wittgenstein’s beetle-box.  

Schrödinger's part of this metaphorical hybrid refers to the impact an observer has on the collapse of a superposition. Wittgenstein’s part refers to the primacy of public communication and the misconception that a private language cannot be shared. Now, if a group of people opened their individual beetle/cat-boxes and witnessed their own collapsed state of superposition, could they all appreciate each other’s experiences? What did each of them experience? The difficulty with this question is that Schrödinger's cat raises different concerns from Wittgenstein’s beetle. With Schrödinger's cat there is a possibility that each person may have a different experience; with Wittgenstein’s beetle each person cannot claim to have a uniquely private experience. If the experience stems from what Wittgenstein is suggesting, then no matter what is revealed by a collapsed superposition everyone would appreciate each other’s experiences. However, if the experience stems

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53 The ‘beetle in the box’ is Wittgenstein’s thought experiment to demonstrate that the belief in a private language is self-deluding. At the centre of this concern is the confusion that arises when trying to connect sensations with expressions: “How do words refer to sensations?” (PI, 244), “In what sense are my sensations private?” (PI, 246). For Wittgenstein, the paradox of inarticulable experience shows that grammar has limits: “The paradox disappears only if we make a radical break with the idea that language always functions...to convey thoughts—which may be about houses, pains, good and evil, or anything else you please” (PI, 304). What this means is that understanding is an activity where even the desire “to emit an inarticulate sound...is an expression only as it occurs in a particular language-game” (PI, 261). What is being understood as private is the connection one makes with a sensation: “he has said the word to himself and at the same time has directed his attention to a sensation” (PI, 268). In the end, when a sign, no matter how obscure, is used consistently to refer to a particular sensation then it becomes a rule and as such enters the public realm of human communication (PI, 202). For example, the statement “there is something unknown” needs to be broken up into the language-games of “there is,” “something” and “unknown”. To help us see the positioning of the articulated experience, the statement needs to be placed in context of how in everyday language we use the words “there is,” “something” and “unknown”. For Wittgenstein, awareness (i.e., sensation) is not a matter of pure inarticulable experience but of “grammatical difference” (PI, p. 185), much like directing a doctor by saying the pain is not here but there (PI, 626).
from what Schrödinger is suggesting, then, in a universe of multiple possibilities, it is possible for an observer to experience something impossible to express. This second possibility can be seen as a contradiction if one holds true the two values of the mixed metaphor. We are at an impasse with an experience that cannot be expressed in a case where all experiences are expressible. This is the challenge imposed by the mixed metaphor. There is a sense of helplessness, perhaps even desperation, with not being able to break an impenetrable silence (e.g., ‘I don’t know what I saw in the box’). This paradox places the Schrödingerean experience ‘in limbo’ awaiting a method of expression. And here is the magic of the elementality of language: the locution ‘the experience is in limbo’ stands separate from the mixed metaphor. This is to say, while the mixed metaphor remains in language, ‘the experience in limbo’ is in a state of prejection—in an ‘about to but not yet’ form of life, flesh, force of meaning. Of course, one way to fix the state of limbo is to situate the experience back within a Wittgensteinian gravitational field where there is no such thing as an inexpressible experience. But this will only serve to kill the punch-line and the magical moment would pass us by. Nonetheless, even with this killjoy we can recognize the multistable logos (e.g., oscillating between Schrödingerean and Wittgensteinian perspectives)—the chiasmic reversibility—separate from prejection itself (e.g., ‘I don’t know what I saw in the box’), much like the distinction between the prima-vera witnessing of ripples in the water and determining what to say about it.

Prejectively, the locution ‘we see what we see’ is an unfixed expression drifting until caught in a gravitational field of a situated perspective. But, caught in what way? Drifting in what way? Consider Berkeley’s famous falling tree. In the thought experiment, the event takes place out of sight, out of mind, but it still takes place independent of what it might mean to our senses and sensibilities. The traditional understanding of Berkeley’s tree is that it directs our thinking toward logical universality (i.e., ‘in principle, it would stand to reason that…’). A shift in the multistable logos is that, prejectively, to verbalize ‘the independent existence of the event’ suggests the potential to be situated—a presentiment that permits such ‘independent existence’ to be sensed even in the farthest reaches of consciousness: where thoughts struggle to take hold yet we recognize as pre-linguistic energy, aesthesiologically, the ‘independent existence’.
As Merleau-Ponty tells us, “Before the essence as before the fact, all we must do is situate ourselves within the being we are dealing with” (VI, p. 117). However, this is not a self-confirming presentiment of intentionality: “The lived experience can no longer recognize itself in the idealizations we draw from it” (VI, p. 87), because we are no longer speaking of the classical distinction between essence and existence (VI, p. 117). This pre-linguistic energy or element of flesh, to use Merleau-Ponty’s term, is “not consciousness facing a noema” (VI, p. 244). Elementality, as prejective experience, is an “absence [that] counts in the world” (VI, p. 228), which allows movement between inexpressible sensorial experience and language-bound logos: “It is as though the visibility that animates the sensible world were to emigrate…into another less heavy, more transparent body, as though it were to change flesh, abandoning the flesh of the body for that of language” (VI, p. 153).

Like stepping into a hot bath, the body enters the verbalized world, dissolving the constructs of ‘subject’ and ‘object’ upon recognizing the moment of transition, flips of language-games, shifts in the multistable logos. This moment is not derived from an existential awaiting witnessing (e.g., the hot water before me) nor from traces of past actions whose expressions speak to us of their presence (e.g., reflecting on what it was like to step into the water). As Merleau-Ponty tell us:

What there is then are not things first identical with themselves, which would then offer themselves to the seer, nor is there a seer who is first empty and who, afterward, would open himself to them—but something to which we could not be closer than by palpating it with our look, things we could not dream of seeing ‘all naked’ because the gaze itself envelops them, clothes them with its own flesh (VI, p. 131).

This moment is a witnessing of unfolding sentient-registers born from human engagement with the many lifeworlds of daily habitation. “One therefore witnesses the advent of the positive,” yet any expectation of that which is there “is [in] a conflict between several possibles with regard to existence” (VI, p. 206). This is to say, “it is the advent of difference” (VI, p. 217). The operative here is witnessing, because we are not creators who ‘breathe life into’ the world but witnesses awakening to the spatio-temporal proxemics of the world. When Merleau-Ponty tells us “to think in the sense of being in the world” (VI, p. 224) he is speaking of witnessing the threshold between “that
language-thing which counts as an arm, as action” and “the pre-language and…the mute
world” (VI, p. 126), in which awareness is not of cognitive difference but of the
movement of sentient divergence, or to use Merleau-Ponty’s term, Urstiftung. For
instance, the sentient-register of a form of life I will call ‘computation’ is experienced
differently depending on the situation in which a computation language-game (e.g.,
addition/subtraction) is being expressed, such as a potato farmer, an engineer, a prison
guard, a parent, a mathematician, philosophically in a doctoral dissertation, and so on. As
such, in the above discussion we encounter the sentient-register of ‘being imaginative’ in
holding the thought of ‘4 – 4 = 4’, and the sentient-register of ‘being meta-aware’ in
recognizing ‘epistemic asymmetry of the mixed metaphor’, and the sentient-register of
‘being intuitive’ in sensing ‘the pre-linguistic energy of a claimed independent existence’.
Element itself is lived through the sentient-register of ‘prejection’ (i.e., recognition of the
spatio-temporality of signification). As Wittgenstein recognizes, the notion of ‘element’
when named becomes a language-game (PI, 50); for this reason, he opts for the
expression “family resemblances” as a better way to address similar ways of speaking
(PI, 67). Thus, being projectively attuned to the flow of language-games enriches
sentient-register recognition of family resemblances, and in so doing calls out the spell of
language through an awareness not of the logical distinctions between ascribed criteria
but of the experience of epistemic movement: it’s not what constitutes imagination, meta-
awareness, intuition, and so on (i.e., ‘cognitive-registers’) that I wish to bring into the
light, but the aesthesiology that in the flow of conversation there can be shifts in being
imaginative, meta-aware, intuitive, and so on. For Merleau-Ponty, “[t]he problem is to
grasp what, across the successive and simultaneous community of speaking subjects,
*wishes, speaks*, and finally *thinks*” (VI, p. 176). This is a particular kind of grasping, not
one that attempts to catch the time that slips through space (i.e., a horizontal

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54 Vallier (2005) explains that Urstiftung refers to acts that are done without having to think about
them, such as holding a knife and fork, which Merleau-Ponty contrasts with Husserl’s term
Erlebnisse or ‘an understanding of lived experience’. Merleau-Ponty moves away from
Erlebnisse, because it traps awareness in preconceptions about lived experience. In contrast,
Urstiftung is much closer to Merleau-Ponty’s project of accessing experience void of
preconceptions (pp. 287-290).
understanding of past, present, future), rather a vertical standing-point of immediacy “as one sole grasp of the hand contains a whole chunk of space” (VI, p. 236):

The space, the time of the things are shreds of himself [who experiences the world], of his own spatialization, of his own temporalization, are no longer a multiplicity of individuals synchronically and diachronically distributed, but a relief of the simultaneous and of the successive, a spatial and temporal pulp where the individuals are formed by differentiation…. [and] exist only at the end of those rays of spatiality and of temporality emitted in the secrecy of my flesh (VI, p. 114).

This is a coming to—an awakening to the cohabitation of difference—where spatial awareness of stand-point allows for a witnessing of the temporality of holding rather than the possessiveness of having perspective. I say this mindful of the subtle distinction between cognitive-register and sentient-register; nonetheless, being attuned to the second in the syncopated moments of conversation makes all the difference in the world to witness with greater clarity the shifting rhythmic accents of situated pointing (e.g., ‘what exactly is that?’).

**Bewitchment and Interverbalization**

Being attuned to sentient-registers of that which is there brings into the open the subjectivity of ‘I’. If I cannot place complete trust in my senses, then how can I fully know what lies outside my body? I am blind to the world, and what I don’t see is hidden in plain view. For instance, my mind’s eye sees ‘orange, purple, lime’ yet struggles to recognize that clouds are as heavy as herds of elephants or that my body is teeming with microscopic life. These are facticities in the face of floating fluffy clouds and insect-free bodies. Wittgenstein writes, “It is in language that an expectation and its fulfilment make contact” (PI, 445). This raises the question ‘what is expected and what is fulfilled?’ In this division of the sense and the intellect, of body and mind, the communicative landscape becomes ripe for bewitchment:

Thought does not strike us as mysterious while we are thinking, but only when we say, as it were retrospectively: "How was that possible?" How was it possible for thought to deal with the very object itself? We feel as if by means of it we had caught reality in our net (PI, 428).
Wittgenstein’s answer to Cartesian duality of body and mind is that our realities are limited to public language, where to utter ‘I see, I hear, I feel’ are language-games in themselves (PI, 415).

Merleau-Ponty’s response to solipsism is that I become aware of the security of my private space when my gaze is caught by the gaze of another:

Vision ceases to be solipsist only up close, when the other turns back upon me the luminous rays in which I had caught him, renders precise that corporeal adhesion of which I had a presentiment in the agile movements of his eyes, enlarges beyond measure that blind spot I divined at the center of my sovereign vision, and, invading my field through all its frontiers, attracts me into the prison I had prepared for him and, as long as he is there, makes me incapable of solitude (VI, p.78).

Yet for this relationship to remain authentic, it must not strive for agreement, instead it needs to cherish its divergences (VI, pp. 78-79). As Merleau-Ponty notes, it is quite an achievement that human beings agree on anything given the developmental variation of our sensory organs in addition to the multitude of social behaviours (VI, p. 14). When a person speaks “immediately the others are now but certain divergencies by relation to his words, and he himself specifies his divergence in relation to them” (VI, p. 119). In other words, “nothing is more improbable than the extrapolation that treats the universe of the truth as one world…without fissures and without incompossibles” (VI, p. 14). In the “finality of all my organs” (VI, p. 42) “there is dehiscence” (VI, p. 265), which opens up into the world the body inside, seeing and speaking to the world, and the body outside, being seen and spoken to (VI, p. 118). What’s more, this threshold between flesh of the body and flesh of the world is also “the nexus of space and time” (VI, p. 259), in which the sentientness of perceptual movement (VI, p. 224) escapes spatio-temporal conceptualization (VI, p. 205), allowing for the simultaneity of Urstiftung (VI, p. 259).

In the immediacy of Urstiftung things appear before they take on appearances and form presence. To illustrate, if I see a blacked-out screen, I might not give it much thought: “It is nothing more than a black screen,” I might think to myself. But if I am then told that behind the blackness there is an image of the city of Florence, the blackness now becomes a veil covering up what is behind it. With a sleight of hand, or more accurately, sleight of language, the blackness now appears as a cover. A curtain has
manifested itself before my very eyes. Accepting that Florence lies behind, the immediacy of the look gives way to the appearance of a cover: “I am looking at Florence covered up by a black curtain.” Wittgenstein notes that in such moments of awareness, where there is a sensation of disconnect between what I assumed or thought and what my brain experienced, there is giddiness (PI, 412) and we ask ourselves “How was that possible?” (PI, 428). For Wittgenstein, this exposes our tendency to be dissatisfied with ordinary language; we desire for such events to be deeper, more profound: “where one believes that the difficulty of the task consists in our having to describe phenomena that are hard to get hold of…. [which is] [w]here we find ordinary language too crude” (PI, 436). In this attempt to make sense, we lose sight of distinction: whereas to “coexist as the two convictions [i.e., that (a) there is a world and (b) I participate in it] do without difficulty in the exercise of life, once reduced to theses and to propositions they destroy one another and leave us in confusion” (VI, p.8).

To address what is there, we must first establish ‘what is there’ (i.e., the significance) about what is there (i.e., the thing being pointed out). As Merleau-Ponty explains, “we are asking precisely what is that central vision that joins the scattered visions….we are seeking to comprehend how there is a center, what the unity consists of” (VI, p. 145). This central element is revealed when we peel back the layers of human interaction (i.e., the layers of comprehension): from fixed palindrome under-standings to shifting antigram stand-points to disentangled mixed-rules to sensorial limitations to centrifugal grounds of difference in tethered barycentre orbits to cognitive/sentient-registers—to prejection of silent witnessing. What we find at the nucleus of that which is there is not an Authority with ‘The Answer’ nor atoms in relational orbit but others who also seek to establish a strong sense of self. “Every question,” recognizes Merleau-Ponty, “even that of simple cognition, is part of the central question that is ourselves” (VI, p. 104). In this place of encounter where we come to see one another in the nakedness of our humanity—the good, the bad, the indifferent—the spell of language is not so much broken as it is recognized. For in interverbalization what we witness is that words address the place where we find ourselves. In Merleau-Ponty’s words:

my movements no longer proceed unto the things to be seen, to be touched, or unto my own body occupied in seeing and touching them, but
they address themselves to the body in general and for itself (whether it be my own or that of another), because for the first time, through the other body, I see that, in its coupling with the flesh of the world, the body contributes more than it receives, adding to the world that I see the treasure necessary for what the other body sees (VI, p.143-4).

The element of flesh, as Merleau-Ponty would say—this ‘absence that counts in the world’—is where we come to sense life in the farthest reaches of consciousness, where intentionality is not yet thought, but a pre-linguistic energy. Yet, this ‘life’ is not an entity unto itself nor is it conjured by the vision of observers: neither existence nor essence but a restoration of being “back into the fabric” (VI, p. 117) of who I am as sensible (e.g., the objective body that touches) and sentient (e.g., the phenomenological body awareness that I am touching). What we are to recognize as silent witnesses is the presentiment that acknowledges encounters with forms of life. As Meleau-Ponty describes:

if I am close enough to the other who speaks to hear his breath and feel his effervescence and his fatigue, I almost witness, in him as in myself, the awesome birth of vociferation….there is a reflexivity of the movements of phonation and of hearing; they have their sonorous inscription, the vociferations have in me their motor echo. This new reversibility and the emergence of the flesh as expression are the point of insertion of speaking and thinking in the world of silence (VI, p. 144-145).

This silent threshold, where thought-utterance is the second movement of the human body, the first act of life is experienced as the sentient-register of touching and being touched by an element that comes to life through interaction, and whose invisibility from cognitive-registers only challenges us to see it in a different way: revealed as the threshold of recognition not only of my complicity in intertwined reversibility, in the Ineinander, in the Ecart of interverbalization, but also of empathic interaction, where

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55 In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty writes, “unconscious is to be sought not at the bottom of ourselves, behind the back of our ‘consciousness,’ but in front of us, as articulations of our field. It is ‘unconscious’ by the fact that it is not an object, but it is that through which objects are possible, it is the constellation wherein our future is read—It is between them as the interval of the trees between the trees, or as their common level. It is the Urgemeinschaftung [i.e., basic community] of our intentional life, the Ineinander [i.e., intertwining] of the others in us and of us in them” (p. 180).
authentic selfhood (selbstheit) is aesthesiologically intertwined with lifewords, in which intercorporeity (flesh) is life to the extent that we are of a world in a “sphere of Einfühlung” (VI, p. 172).

To illustrate, imagine a group activity where each person holds an envelope. They are told that each has a separate statement, but in actuality they all have the following phrase:

‘unscented red certainty startles peacefully’

The group is instructed to quietly contemplate the meaning of their ‘individual’ phrases. Later, the group is asked to discuss their views without revealing their ‘phrases’. One participant interprets the phrase to be an expression of our desire to make sense of any communicative gesture, no matter how nonsensical it may seem. Another offers a slight variation of this interpretation in that the phrase is symbolic of the tendency to connect unrelated elements occurring at the same time. A third participant confesses to having difficulty making sense of the statement. Another confesses to playing along with the activity, but remains suspicious of the purpose of the exercise.

Participants can experience this event differently. One sentient-register may be expressive of the event as a whole such as ‘different points of view’, another may be more specific to the topic of discussion such as ‘the relationship between grammar and semantics’, and so on. Each perspective acts as a signpost marking the place within which dwells the thing that is being experienced: a need to make sense, a desire to make connections, uncertainty, suspicion. Each stand-point offers a glimpse of that which is there being addressed by the group. What they are talking about is animated by their own verbalizations of what they are witnessing.

But, how can we prevent this group from arriving at an incorrect conclusion? What ensures that we have not remained under the spell of language; in Wittgenstein’s words, ‘have we shown the fly the way out of the fly-bottle’? And can we be certain that prejection is not merely a sensation of presence reflecting a presupposed nature? Prima facie, this line of questioning anticipates a correct answer. But the backside of any

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56 In the Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein rhetorically states, “What is your aim in philosophy?—To shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle” (PI, 309).
certainty is much more hazy, because on closer inspection resolution tends to lose its cohesiveness like a pointillistic painting. The only elucidation to be had is that reality is what we influence and are influenced by. What we descry in the horizon of our thoughts are the boundaries of our beliefs, our Pythagorean triple that sets the parameters of our dominant views (e.g., ‘I don’t know how to explain it, but when I look at a river I see water, not H₂O’). We see what we see. Yet, the habitual state of signs can be disrupted, and these held moments of prima-vera interruption reveal a distortion in the space of meaning, a presentiment of the superposition of signification: e.g., from what stand-point do we address ‘four’, ‘use real ideas’, ‘unscented red certainty’?

When Wittgenstein suggests that we can cross the same river as often as we can he is telling us that we can jump off the boat of a given way of thinking. We can shift to alternative barycentre orbits that hold different ways of speaking (with different epistemologies from which to draw conclusions and different ontological realities). Granted, a willingness is required here, and before there can be a willingness to change there must be a willingness to see. Luckily, our present times afford us many opportunities to see the ironic-ness of language. On one hand, language can fail us when striving for agreement about hazy notions (e.g., What exactly is a ‘dwarf planet’ like Pluto? What is the meaning of ‘father/mother’ in today’s family unit?), in which case words seem to get away from us. On the other hand, language can seem inadequate when confronted with implacable opposition (e.g., ‘I see the different point of view, but I do not accept it’), in which case we quickly find ourselves at reasoning’s end. Whether striving for agreement or confronted with disagreement, an interchange can become a sea of unfixed words, where clarity (e.g., ‘am I reading the situation right?’) increasingly comes to dependent on communal recognition—the interverbalized accent of an implied ‘do you know what I mean?’ Hence, what is of most importance is Einfühlung, how the verbalized energies of interlocutors interact with one another: at what points do they intertwine, pass each other with minimal acknowledgment, rub in conflict, or lead to new formulations and sentient-registers? From these interactions emerge the intersubjectivities we come to grasp, through phronesis, as ‘the life of…’ (being teacher, being doctor, being police officer, and so on). Attuned to sentient-registers, expressed in language-
games (and performatives), we can recognize opportunities to projectively engage one another. This is to say, *that which is there* is the possibilities of the interverbal emergent.

To grasp a fuller sense of interverbalization, the next section is a scaffolding of the language theories of Austin, Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty. For Austin, “[s]aying something will…produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience” (HDW, p. 101). For Wittgenstein, the concern is more basic: how is it that another can understand what I am saying (PI, 433)? For Merleau-Ponty, it is the Other who realizes the ‘I’ that makes “ourselves fully visible” (VI, p. 143).
Part II

Water is the nature of all things.
—Thales of Miletus

If language were a lion, Austin would witness it not as a mental construct but as a living thing; Wittgenstein would claim that Austin’s witnessing remains egocentric, whereas to properly witness one should hold an allocentric perspective, given that the lion has its own life; Merleau-Ponty would agree that the lion has a life of its own but that this life is animated by the act of witnessing.

In Part II, we take a closer look at the ideas of these thinkers, particularly their posthumously published works, namely Austin’s How To Do Things With Words, Wittgenstein’s Philosophical Investigations, and Merleau-Ponty’s The Visible and the Invisible. These three thinkers challenge us to not only reconceptualize how language works, but more fundamentally they challenge us to reorient our way of living as a speaking species. Austin’s speech acts, like Wittgenstein’s language-games, direct us to something dynamic in language that generates what Austin calls the ‘force’ of locutions and what Wittgenstein calls ‘form of life’. Although neither Austin nor Wittgenstein formally linked their philosophies of language to phenomenology, in Wittgenstein’s case, as Stern (1963) and Gier (1980) point out, ‘form of life’ can easily lend itself to phenomenological analysis. Perhaps Wittgenstein’s untimely death cut short what arguably can be seen as a progression toward a phenomenality of language. Luckily, the story does not end there. “Merleau-Ponty's writings on language,” suggests Coyne (1980), “are contemporaneous with the ascendancy of Wittgenstein's post-Tractarian views on the nature of language as a rule-governed activity embedded in and expressive of ‘forms of life,’ and with the Austinian theory of speech acts” (p. 324). If one buys into

57 Wittgenstein did refer to his work as an endeavour to achieve a phenomenological language; however there is much controversy among Wittgenstein scholars as to what he meant by this. While his later ideas, captured in the Philosophical Investigations, are, as I see them, an exploration of what it means to see language as a lived phenomenon, his work does not take the leap of faith of a true phenomenological stance. As Monk (2014) posits, Wittgenstein’s principal interest remained throughout his life an analysis of “the syntactical rules of our ordinary language, the rules that determine what it does and does not make sense to say” (p. 331).
In the trajectory of this theoretical progression, Austin is an important first step. His theory of *performatives* shifts the analytical focus from the abstraction of constative or declarative analysis to the experientiality of *speech acts*. Through Austin we see that language has its own force with which we interact, much like an obstructing tree causing us to turn right or left. We can then speak of Wittgenstein as a second step. He is able to give a name to what Austin recognizes as the force that animates ‘speech acts’. Wittgenstein calls this animating force ‘language-games’: as such, we could speak of the language-game of speech acts. What’s more, in Wittgenstein’s battle against the bewitchment of language to create the illusion of unshareable private thoughts, he stumbles on pre-linguistic being. While Wittgenstein is correct in pointing out the self-delusion of speaking about pre-linguistic being, he is, nonetheless, unable to do away with such a state of being, and instead leaves it in silence. It is here that we need to turn to Merleau-Ponty’s element of *flesh* since it is through this element that Merleau-Ponty attempts to clarify the bond between the act of being in the world and language (i.e., thought). What Wittgenstein sees as a contradiction of private language Merleau-Ponty sees as evidence of Being: that is, as the *multistable logos* pointing to the very being of our humanness, where the disillusion of bedrock reveals a centrifugal ground that itself is nothing more than situated perspective. This is to say, Wittgenstein’s silence is revealed in Merleau-Ponty’s *flesh* of being.

What’s more, the trajectory of thought traversing Austin, Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty requires an open attitude towards language and our relationship to it. Austin warns that *performatives* “must remain in principle open for anyone to reject any...”

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58 In the folklore of philosophy of language, rumour has it that the precisionist Austin did not care much for the esoteric Wittgenstein. While there is no common knowledge of how Merleau-Ponty felt about the other two, one could reasonably speculate that Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty could have established amicable terms due to their ideas about language being closer to each other than to Austin’s. However, given Wittgenstein’s temperament, evident in the infamous poker incident, it is equally reasonable to doubt that such a friendship would have lasted. In the spirit of Monty Python’s Philosophers’ Football Match, I venture to guess that if these three ever found themselves on the same team, there would be little need for an opposing team.
procedure…. [so as not to compress speech acts] into flat factual circumstances; for this is subject to the old objection to deriving an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’” (HDW, p. 29). For Wittgenstein, openness “simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything” (VI, 126), but since “we are…entangled in our own rules…. [t]his entanglement in our rules is what we want to understand” (VI, 125). The openness of speech acts that paves the way to recognize the openness of language-games brings us to the doorstep of Merleau-Ponty’s openness upon the world, where Cartesian duality, continued in Einstein’s simultaneity, is contested, rejoining being with Being through perceptual faith, which is less an antecedent of articulation as it is a chiasmic relationship prefiguring dualistic thought: “neither ‘historical’ nor ‘geographic’…this very time that is space, this very space that is time…[reconnected in] the simultaneous Urstiftung of time and space which makes there be a historical landscape” (VI, p. 259) (see footnote 54). When Merleau-Ponty proclaims “Language is a life” (VI, p. 125) he is recognizing that the sine qua non of language is in the dehiscence stemming from the spatio-temporal continuum—when the human being recognizes I am not the end of my body, but I can be the unfolding horizon (VI, p. 265). Language can finally be seen for what it is—a naked walk in the park: the Ineinander between flesh of the body and flesh of the world, and in the Urstiftung of this engagement, meanings vibrate forth from primordial anticipation (Vorhabe).

**John Langshaw Austin**

Austin’s theory of speech acts, which can also be referred to as his theory of performatives, looks at the everyday uses of language in an effort to gain insight into the process of signification. In *How To Do Things With Words* (HDW), the theory

59 Merleau-Ponty writes in his essay *Einstein and the Crisis of Reason*, “If we call ‘classical’ a way of thinking which assumes that the world is rational, the classical spirit reaches its extreme limit in Einstein” (Signs, p. 193). “It is striking to see Einstein disqualify as ‘psychology’ the experience that we have of the simultaneous through the perception of another and the intersection of our perceptual horizons and those of the others” (VI, p. 18). He adds, “we do and always will believe that what takes place here and now is one with the simultaneous…Its hour is no longer destined in advance for the event, but, whatever it be, the event appropriates it to itself; the event would not be entirely itself if we did not situate it in the immense simultaneity of the world and within its undivided thrust” (VI, p. 104).
distinguishes between ‘action statements’ or performatives, as Austin calls them, and other uses of language. In everyday speech, we can use words to describe, such as ‘what a beautiful day’, and utter many other locutions that do not impose on bystanders to respond in any particular way, such as an interjection like ‘oh no’ in reaction to being splashed by a passing vehicle. Language can also be purposely directed at an audience, such as a comedy act, drama performance or poetry reading. However, in these types of speaker/hearer interactions the object of communication is fanciful: “Walt Whitman does not seriously incite the eagle of liberty to soar” (p.104). Of course, there is always the possibility of unintended interpretations. Austin gives the example of a monkey making a noise that sounds like ‘go’: although the monkey is merely performing a phonetic act (i.e., a noise), not a phatic act (i.e., following grammatical rules), a listener may ‘go’ having misinterpreted the monkey’s noise for a command (i.e., a rhetic act or meaningful statement). But even when there is a proper interpretation of a speaker’s utterance, Austin factors out, in order to clarify what he means by performative, a listener’s tendency to qualify statements as true or false (i.e., constatives). Framing the quest for ‘truth about reality’ in constative terms has shaped thinking from the great philosophical debates to the more mundane, such as wondering whether it’s going to rain. Austin posits that constatives reduce language to grammatical concerns. This is to say, the existence of words themselves is taken for granted. In contrast, to think about language in performative terms recognizes that words are an active component of how we interact in the world: utterances form part of a speaker’s unfolding action. An example of a performative would be to state, “‘I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth’—as uttered when smashing the bottle against the stem” (p.6). Because performatives are action-based locutions, Austin more accurately refers to such utterances as illocutionary acts. Other examples of illocutionary acts can be a police officer ordering ‘freeze’ to a suspect or a bride saying ‘I do’. At most, illocutionary acts can be appraised for their effectiveness (felicity) or ineffectiveness (infelicity). Through the concept of illocutionary acts, Austin redirects us away from philosophy’s tendency to abstract communication in constative
While language can be as real as the weather, it can be just as fluid and dynamic. Take for example the locution ‘it looks like rain’. In *performative* terms, utterances are referred to as *locutionary acts*. In saying ‘it looks like rain’ the speaker may have no other intention than to merely make an observation. But there may be other reasons for making this statement. For instance, the speaker may be deciding ‘I don’t trust the weather, so I will not go out today’, or soliciting input such as ‘do you think it might rain?’. Austin suggests that to determine the type of *locutionary act* (e.g., observation, decision, inquiry) the listener is guided by a rich interpretive process called *illocutionary force*: “precision in language makes it clearer what is being said—its *meaning*: explicitness…makes clearer the force of the utterances, or ‘how…it is to be taken’” (p.73). Interpreting the ‘force’ of a speaker’s locution is a contextual process: “There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, the procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances” (p.26). Yet, there is a host of possibilities that can impede understanding and completion of a speech act. Austin calls these impediments *infelicities*. When the locution (i.e., what is said), the illocution (i.e., the speaker’s intention) and illocutionary force (i.e., clarity of intention) are mismatched with how the hearer interprets the...
message, then the *speech act* is in a condition of *infelicity* or an ‘unhappy’ union between the locution and its understanding. To illustrate, let’s look at the following six examples:

**Example 1:**

- **Locutionary Act:** ‘You can count on me.’
- **Illocutionary Act:** I’m sincerely saying that I will support you.
- **Illocutionary Force:** In context with the situation, the speaker is clear in making this commitment.
- **Reception of message:** The listener understands the locution as such.

This speech act is in a condition of felicity, because there is a match between the speaker’s intended meaning and the listener’s understanding.

**Example 2:**

- **Locutionary Act:** ‘You can count on me.’
- **Illocutionary Act:** I’m sincerely saying that I will support you.
- **Illocutionary Force:** In context with the situation, the speaker is clear in making this commitment.
- **Reception of message:** The listener mistakenly believes the speaker to be disingenuous.

This speech act is in a condition of infelicity, because there is a mismatch between the speaker’s intended meaning (e.g., ‘I will support you’) and the listener’s misunderstanding (e.g., ‘You are lying’).

**Example 3:**

- **Locutionary Act:** ‘You can count on me.’
- **Illocutionary Act:** It’s a symbolic gesture, and I want you to understand that I cannot support you.
- **Illocutionary Force:** In context with the situation, the speaker is clear that this is only a symbolic gesture, without real support.
- **Reception of message:** The listener understands the locution as such.
This speech act is in a condition of felicity, because there is a match between the speaker’s intended meaning and the listener’s understanding.

Example 4:

Locutionary Act: ‘You can count on me.’

Illocutionary Act: It’s a symbolic gesture, and I want you to understand that I cannot support you.

Illocutionary Force: In context with the situation, the speaker is clear that this is only a symbolic gesture, without real support.

Reception of message: The listener fails to ‘read between the lines’.

This speech act is in a condition of infelicity, because there is a mismatch between the speaker’s intended meaning (e.g., ‘I cannot support you’) and the listener’s misunderstanding (e.g., ‘I can count on you’). Austin also refers to this type of infelicity as a misfire, because what is being promised at face value cannot be delivered.

Example 5:

Locutionary Act: ‘You can count on me.’

Illocutionary Act: I am being disingenuous, because I want to manipulate you.

Illocutionary Force: In context with the situation, the speaker is artfully deceitful.

Reception of message: The listener is successfully deceived.

Austin posits that this ‘speech act is achieved’; however, it is an ‘abuse’ and as such infelicitous.

Example 6:

Locutionary Act: ‘You can count on me.’

Illocutionary Act: I am being disingenuous, because I want to manipulate you.

Illocutionary Force: In context with the situation, the speaker is artfully deceitful.

Reception of message: The listener is suspicious and does not believe the speaker.

This speech act is in a condition of infelicity, because there is a mismatch between the speaker’s intended meaning (e.g., ‘trust me’) and the listener’s understanding
(e.g., ‘I don’t trust you’). Austin also refers to this type of infelicity as an ‘abuse’ due to its insincerity.

The above examples illustrate the dynamics of language where conventions can allow for indirect understanding. Yet these conventions are not fixed like grammatical rules but rather seem to accompany utterances in order to make intelligible the force of statements: “What we do import by the use of the nomenclature of illocution is a reference, not to the consequences…of the locution, but to the conventions of illocutionary force as bearing on the special circumstances of the occasion of the issuing of the utterance” (p. 114). This is to say, the adaptability of words (where the same word or expression can be understood in different ways) is due to the animate rules that accompany speech acts. As demonstrated in the above examples of infelicity, the force/convention dynamic is evident in the different understandings of ‘you can count on me,’ where the meaning of ‘count’ (i.e., support) can shift with relative ease. Austin also identifies what he calls the asymmetry of the performative verb where a verb oscillates from illocution (e.g., the unfolding action of the speaker in saying ‘I support you’) to a locution of observation void of action (e.g., speaking of ‘support’ as an abstract term), similar to the oscillation between verb and gerund. As a result of this fluidity, analysis of performatives is subject to ‘slips between cup and lip’, given that locution, illocution, force and the number of other factors form a loose taxonomy of abstractions for the purpose of investigating the phenomenon of speech acts. Consequently, “[i]t is inherent,” cautions Austin, “in the nature of any procedure that the limits of its applicability, and therewith, of course, the ‘precise’ definition of the procedure, will remain vague” (p.31).

Consider the following scenario. On a winter day, a person stands in a crowd waiting for the bus. He looks at his watch and states ‘Five more minutes.’ He then rubs his arms in an effort to wear off the cold. It starts to rain, prompting him to say ‘oh, no, this is all I need,’ given that he doesn’t have an umbrella.

In performative terms, various aspects of speech act can be identified. First, the locutionary act about time could be a mere observation or an illocution about being impatient or in a hurry (requesting for the bus to arrive soon). Second, Austin recognizes that while most speech acts are verbal it is also true that “non-verbal means…are illocutionary acts” (p. 118); subsequently, the arm rubbing can be understood as the
illocution ‘I’m cold’. Third, the utterance about the rain can be an illocution pleading for someone to share an umbrella.

Austin uses the term perlocutionary act to describe when a speaker imposes on a listener some sort of action. Perlocutions can be acted out in many different ways. For instance, “[a] judge should be able to decide, by hearing what was said, what locutionary and illocutionary acts were performed, but not what perlocutionary acts were achieved” (p. 121). In like manner to illocutionary acts, conditions of felicity or infelicity also apply to perlocutionary acts. Moreover, perlocutions can be direct or explicit such as requesting ‘please pass the salt’. They can also be indirect or implied such as commenting ‘it’s cold’ prompting a listener to close a window or turn up the heat. Additionally, there can be unexpected perlocutionary acts. For instance, I may say ‘a tiger is on the loose’ with the illocutionary force of ‘warning’, but a listener may decide to hunt it down rather than run for safety. Austin refers to these unexpected reactions as sequels. While (infelicitous) sequels may act out unwanted perlocutions, they can also bring about beneficial results. For example, if a rampaging tiger is caught, the speaker of the initial warning can enjoy the benefit of safety, even though a request to hunt was not the force of the initial locution.

Austin’s theory outlines a loose taxonomy, or nomenclature, which categorizes three distinct speech acts: locution, illocution and perlocution. Yet, he is cautious of these divisions: “It could well be said that all aspects are present in all my classes” (p.151). As such, what is at play in speech acts is a continuous shifting of perspectives, similar to determining whether a cup is half-full or half-empty: at what point does a locution become an illocution and shift again to become a perlocution? For instance, when does the hearer, and the speaker herself, know if a statement such as ‘looks like a good restaurant’ requires a response (i.e., perlocution), does not require a response, or is an expression of the speaker’s unfolding action (i.e., illocution)? Clearly, there are external factors such as circumstances and the authority of the speaker (i.e., the force/convention dynamic), but these cannot guarantee felicitous outcomes.

In his essay Other Minds, Austin explains, “we cannot misunderstand the storm in the way we misunderstand the man” (OM, p. 80). How does a person truly know anything at all, he asks? To hold the view that sense-data merely reads off nature’s labels is “only a
manner of speaking… [since] sensa are dumb, and only previous experience enables us to identify them” (OM, p. 65). As such, “[i]f we have no great familiarity, then we hesitate to say we know: indeed, we can't be expected to say (tell). On the other hand, if we have had the necessary experience, then we can, in favourable current circumstances, say we know” (OM, p. 72). This is to say, “the conditions which must be satisfied if I am to show that a thing is within my cognisance or within my power are conditions…about the present and the past: it is not demanded that I do more than believe about the future” (OM, p. 69). Also, “accepted ‘signs’…have to be more or less normally accepted” (OM, p. 75). For example, if I say ‘this is red’, I am either consistent with the consensus of others or I’m ‘wrong’; however, if I say ‘this looks red to me’ I might be wrong in the general sense but correct about expressing my own perception (OM, p. 58-9). Similarly, a person “feels (not knows) what he recognizes as…anger (not his anger), and he knows that he is feeling angry” (OM, p. 65). Moreover, people can recognize things in the world, such as different wines and fashions “without being able to say ‘how they recognise them’, i.e., without being able to ‘be more specific about it’” (p. 53). A central point for Austin is accurately matching experience with language: “If you are aware you may be mistaken, you oughtn't to say you know, just as, if you are aware you may break your word, you have no business to promise” (OM, p. 66). In addition, locutions raise the question of legitimacy such as ‘are you in a position to know?’ or ‘are you in a position to promise?’ (OM, p. 68).

Returning to How To Do Things With Words, Austin confesses that his theory is the beginning of a line of inquiry, not its end: “Many of you will be getting impatient at this approach,” he acknowledges rhetorically, “….You will say ‘Why not cut the cackle? Why go on about lists available in ordinary talk….Why not get down to discussing the thing bang off”; to which he replies, “Well, of course, I agree that this will have to be done—only I say after, not before….Otherwise we shall overlook things” (p. 122). What cannot be overlooked are the rules that lie at the heart of performatives: “a good many other things have as a general rule to be right and to go right if we are to be said to have happily brought off our action” (p. 14). These rules allow both verbal and non-verbal actions; but unlike written laws, performative rules “are naturally not so definite in ordinary life” (p. 36). For instance, “I may nod or shake my head, or assert or deny…by
implication in saying something else” (p. 87). When viewing utterances from the perspective of speech acts, inaccuracies to facts cannot deny the existence and intent of statements. As such, to claim that ‘the present King of France is bald’ (when there is no present French monarchy) is as real a speech act in everyday life as ‘two plus two equals four’.

Essentially, Austin’s project is to wrest away from philosophy, and more broadly speaking, from critical thinking, the trappings of constative analysis. “In real life,” notes Austin, “as opposed to the simple situations envisaged in logical theory, one cannot always answer in a simple manner whether it is true or false” (p.142). Offering an example, he asks, rhetorically, whether it is true or false that ‘France is hexagonal’, and posits that while this is geographically inaccurate, it may suffice where a general description is all that is needed. He gives a further example of a historical perspective in a textbook, which may be factually inaccurate yet remain effective in a school setting: “As ‘France is hexagonal’ is rough, so ‘Lord Raglan won the battle of Alma’ is exaggerated and suitable to some contexts and not to others; it would be pointless to insist on its truth or falsity” (p. 143). What’s more, “truth and falsity are (except by an artificial abstraction which is always possible and legitimate for certain purposes) not names for relations, qualities, or what not, but for a dimension of assessment—how the words stand in respect of satisfactoriness to the facts, events, situations, &c., to which they refer” (p. 148). Therefore, “[i]t is essential to realize that ‘true’ and ‘false’, like ‘free’ and ‘unfree’, do not stand for anything simple at all; but only for a general dimension of being a right or proper thing to say as opposed to a wrong thing, in these circumstances, to this audience, for these purposes and with these intentions” (p. 144). “Once we realize,” asserts Austin, “that what we have to study is not the sentence but the issuing of an utterance in a speech situation, there can hardly be any longer a possibility of not seeing that stating is performing an act” (p. 138). Yet due to the intertwining nature of performatives, any analysis must abandon rigid categories and subsequent dichotomies (p. 149), rather we need to look at “what are their relationships and inter-connexion” (p. 162).
Some holding thoughts about Austin

Austin’s epistemic shift to performatives sets the frame of inquiry that begins the guiding process towards language as element. We can see glimpses of sentient-register being teased out of cognitive-register. In determining felicity/infelicity, cognition (e.g., ‘what exactly is being stated?’) shares the force of meaning with the affectivity of performatives (e.g., ‘I feel that what you mean is…’). For instance, to determine (in)felicity of the statement ‘France is hexagonal’, the pivot between generalization and exactness is brought to the foreground. We also begin to see glimpses of chiasmic reversibility in his recognition that ‘slips between cup and lip’ can result from separating speech acts into components. This is to say, in the slips between locution, illocution, perlocution there is presentiment of vacillated movement, where something like the geography of France can be in a state of multistability. Here we have hints of the elementality that maintains the integrity of language in all its manifestations. Through infelicities like misfires (i.e., undelivered promises) and sequels (i.e., unexpected reactions) we get a sense of the diversity comprising the animating force of speech acts. Austin recognizes this divergent tendency of the enigma he calls ‘force’: “There are… numerous expressions…which suffer from or profit by a sort of deliberate ambivalence” (HDW, p. 79). Hence, in the unfolding pivot of speech acts, the force of language can be better expressed as “general families of related and overlapping speech acts” (HDW, p. 149).

Ludwig Wittgenstein

In section 67 of the Philosophical Investigations (PI) Wittgenstein writes, “I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than ‘family resemblances’” (PI, 67). The similarities Wittgenstein refers to are the relationships between expressed ideas. Take for example the statement ‘five red apples’ (PI, 1). This statement brings together three different ways of thinking: the world of numbers and mathematics, the world of colours and aesthetics, and the world of fruits and organic matter. While a mathematician, an artist and a biologist may think about the world in distinct ways, the magic of language can weave these three forms of awareness into an
intelligible statement. Wittgenstein’s investigation into how this occurs led him to
develop his theory of language-games.

In an earlier work, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (TLP), Wittgenstein
begins to lay the foundation for the development of his philosophy of language. “The
limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (TLP, 5.6), he writes. The tautology
that “[i]f a question can be put at all, then it can also be answered” (TLP, 6.5) reveals that
beyond the boundary where “every proposition is its own proof” (TLP, 6.1265) “[t]here is
indeed the inexpressible” (TLP, 6.522). Where we run into trouble is that “in the modern
system it should appear as though everything were explained” (TLP, 6.372); modern
society fails to recognize the boundary between the end of “elementary propositions” and
the “obvious nonsense” that follows when trying to provide further explanation (TLP,
5.5571). The target of Wittgenstein’s criticism is the modern superstition of the scientific
explanation: “Superstition is the belief in the causal nexus” (TLP, 5.1361), which is based
on “the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural
phenomena” (TLP, 6.371). To see past this illusion, we need to understand that “[t]he
sense of the world must lie outside the world” (TLP, 6.41) and that “[a]ll inference takes
place a priori” (TLP, 5.133). For instance, the hypothesis that the sun will rise tomorrow
is not a fact about the world but a logical inference that only exists in language (TLP,
6.3631 - 6.37). As such, logic reflects the world (TLP, 6.13) but at most it is a reflection
that is tautological, stemming from the solipsism that “[t]he I occurs in philosophy
through the fact that the ‘world is my world’” (TLP, 5.641). For this reason “[w]e feel
that even if all possible scientific questions be answered, the problems of life have still
not been touched at all” (TLP, 6.52). The fact that there is a world outside language
mystifies us (TLP, 6.44 & 6.522), which explains the reason why those who develop a
clear sense about life “could not then say wherein this sense consisted” (TLP, 6.521).
Thus, at the threshold where the subject ends and the living body begins, the human being
can do nothing more than stand in silent witness of that which lies outside language:
“Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent” (TLP, 7). However, these final
words of the *Tractatus* present a paradox in Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language. On
one hand, language is all we have to explain the world; on the other hand, language is
incapable of truly explaining the world:
My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) (TLP, 6.54).

At best, language, or more accurately, the use of words, should be seen similar to tools serving specific functions in the process of signification (PI, 11-15). Yet, the challenge is to maintain in balance the tendency of words to oscillate between the meanings they possess, as if words pivot on an “axis of reference” (PI, 108). For instance, the word ‘march’ generates a different experience whether one thinks about ‘march’ as a month or ‘march’ as an action (PI, p. 215). Sometimes words can be more clearly fixed such as when we speak of a chess piece, where we normally refer to its function in the game of chess, not its physical appearance (PI, 108). But other times we struggle to keep words from shifting like a child trying to determine if he has been asked to use ‘sleeping’ as a verb or a gerund (PI, 47). Once we enter the rabbit hole of language, we travel down a slippery slope where words can spin us in circles, like Lewis Carroll’s poem Jabberwocky, and the sensation of movement prevents us from realizing we are stuck in a vortex. Of course, Wittgenstein recognizes that there is nothing wrong with nonsense for the sake of nonsense (PI, 13 & 282). But to take language seriously and for serious analysis to get a foothold on the slippery ice of signification, “we need friction. Back to the rough ground!” (PI, 107). We need to turn language from tools of intellectual paralysis to tools of intelligent movement: “Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language” (PI, 109).

We are bewitched by a desire for depth and purity, dazzled by the notion that there must exist some ‘super-order’ allowing words to have meaning. Yet no matter how extreme the subtleties of our descriptions, we are unable to find perfection and crystal clear rules. Language appears to have indefinite boundaries, and the pursuit of ideal forms becomes intolerable: “We feel as if we had to repair a torn spider's web with our fingers” (PI, 106). Bewitched, we fall under a spell whereby we feel that agreement on words is possible due to some invisible force guiding the process of signification. But to imagine a yet-unnamed force requires imagining the existence of such a deity to begin with. For Wittgenstein, what we understand a priori is that we exist in a language world, and any attempt to describe or explain a world outside language is to speak nonsense.
“For philosophical problems arise when language goes on holiday” (PI, 38). Yet, here lies the crux of the problem: deep thought leads to the sensation that everyday language is inadequate, like the urge to describe the aroma of coffee leads to dissatisfaction with the words ‘coffee’ and ‘aroma’; consequently, we become disillusioned with our ability to bridge the language gap between our senses and an unshakable belief in the object of our experiences. The idea that a person is unique and can somehow conjure a privately held pure thought, never before touched by mankind, is a superstition supported by the illusion that the desire for perfection presupposes the existence of ideal forms. For the punch line of a joke is about as deep as ideas can become (PI, 94-112, 610).

While a made up word like ‘abracadabra’ and the babbling of a child may appear to express private experiences, both require public understanding; otherwise, such sounds remain expressions of meaningless nonsense. For instance, if a number of people, each with a box, use the same word to describe what is in their boxes, then what they see—their private experiences—become secondary to the public consensus of the word they use. To state this in a more concrete way, if instead of a box we were speaking of a pain like a headache, the word ‘headache’ can be understood independent of each person’s pain experience.° Wittgenstein uses the box example and subsequent discussion on pain to demonstrate the impossibility of having a ‘private language’. Even if a genius could make up a word to best help him understand a particular experience, such a word can only come about due to the preexistence of a whole language system, or ‘grammar’, to use Wittgenstein’s term. But what if this genius created a language with unrecognizable symbols, sounds and gestures, or, even more to the extreme, there were no outward expressions and the whole process was internal? In order to best answer this question, we must first acknowledge Wittgenstein’s point about being in language. The above question is incomplete and is completed in our minds: ‘But what if this genius created a language…?’ (‘then what would Wittgenstein say about such a unique language?’). If the signs of such a language consistently matched their points of reference, then rules exist

° Merleau-Ponty is troubled by a similar concern: “It is in the world that we rejoin one another. Every attempt to reinstate the illusion of the ‘thing itself’ is in fact an attempt to return to my imperialism and to the value of my thing. Therefore it does not bring us out of solipsism: it is a new proof of solipsism” (VI, p. 10).
which anyone can follow, effectively countering any claim to a private language. In the case where there are no outward signs, while our understanding of this genius person may suffer similar inaccuracies as a visiting Martian, the mere presence of this genius person invites our engagement in the same way we know that a clock is about time, or that a lion or dog are to be engaged in particular ways, even a stone reveals something of itself.\(^6\)

In Wittgenstein’s view, we are misdirected in how we look at the problem of perspicuity in our use of language. When we say ‘I can't imagine the opposite of the pain I am feeling’ it does not mean that we cannot imagine not-pain. It means ‘this experience is inescapable in like manner to how looking at the sun I cannot negate the existence of the light in my eyes.’ At a primitive level, when something catches our attention and we turn to it or ‘light on it’, to use Wittgenstein’s expression, this points to the self as the source of understanding. But “[a]n ‘inner process’ stands in need of outward criteria” (PI, 580). For instance, “you can only learn what 'calculating in the head' is by learning what 'calculating' is; you can only learn to calculate in your head by learning to calculate” (p. 220). In reference to Socrates, Wittgenstein asks, “if someone thinks mustn’t he think something?” (PI, 518). Yet, if a red rose is still red in the dark, what does this tell us about the ‘things’ we think about? For instance, to understand the colour ‘sepia’ presupposes an understanding of colours; and because we are well versed in the language of colours, when we look at the blue sky “the idea never crosses your mind that this impression of colour belongs only to you” (PI, 275). When Wittgenstein claims that an investigation into the use of language must ‘leave everything open to view’, he means that perspicuity is in how words or (primitive) signs are used: “Once you know what the word stands for, you understand it, you know its whole use” (PI, 264). We do not need to

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\(^6\) Stern (1963) is critical of Wittgenstein’s rejection of ‘private language’. Stern posits that there are many instances of non-linguistic moments, such as being about to sneeze, wishing, hoping, or simply interacting with a known person, like a sibling, without having to pause for any type of consideration. Yet, I do not think Wittgenstein would see this as a contradiction of his ‘private language’ argument. After all, Wittgenstein recognizes there is a world outside language such as a stroke across the chin. What Wittgenstein takes issue with is that we try to make these corporeal experiences something unique, not yet stained by the hands of the human world. Nonetheless, Wittgenstein, like Stern, recognizes that there is something pre-linguistic about communication, as forms of life.
think of the parts to understand the meaning of the whole: we understand ‘tree’, ‘chair’ and ‘broom’ without having to think about their component parts.

We are astonished when we grasp a meaning in a flash and proclaim ‘I understand, now; I know how to go on.’ The sensation is as if we are being influenced by some guiding force that cannot be explained. Reasons seem to ‘hang in the air’ requiring the support of further explanations ad infinitum. To thwart the bewitchment of the ethereal, we seek solid ground, rules that can explain how we think and act. Yet, to think that language follows fixed rules “you are standing on the very brink of a misunderstanding” (PI, 81). Rules can have many interpretations, such as being able to move a chess piece in any number of directions, making it seem as if “[w]hatever I do is, on some interpretation, in accord with the rule” (PI, 198); I can also behave in a way that simply does not follow the rules, such as yelling and stamping of feet and calling that a chess game. Against this paradox of unruly rules, rule-based explanations appear superficial: To say, “‘The line intimates to me which way I am to go’ is only a paraphrase of: it is my last arbiter for the way I am to go” (PI, 230). At some point, explanations come to an end (PI, 1), so does justification from experience (PI, 485), and even doubt has an end (PI, p. 180); ultimately, the chain of reason ends (PI, 326). “And then I shall act, without reasons” (PI, 217): “I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: ‘This is simply what I do’ ” (PI, 217). What’s more, the ‘bedrock’ itself is illusory. It disappears on close inspection like peeling the layers of an artichoke only to discover that it has vanished before our very eyes. If we stare at a presupposed bedrock for too long, the tendency to generate a multitude of understandings leads to a losing battle to hold in balance all our thoughts just long enough to get it. In its final analysis the ‘bedrock’ is simply a statement that marks the end of reason, revealing the inadequacy of explanations and theories of mental processes. Our foundations are in continuous motion like the shifting background of an ambiguous image like the duck-rabbit or the black/white double cross. As circumstances change so do the meanings of our words: “It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life” (PI, 241).

Language directs us to the actions of signification like “the gesture of pointing with the hand by looking in the direction of the line from finger-tip to wrist, not from
wrist to finger-tip” (PI, 185). What determines the right way to do things (e.g., pointing) are language-games that stem from our forms of life:

How do I find the 'right' word? How do I choose among words? Without doubt it is sometimes as if I were comparing them by fine differences of smell: That is too ...... that is too ...... —this is the right one.—But I do not always have to make judgments, give explanations; often I might only say: "It simply isn't right yet". I am dissatisfied, I go on looking. At last a word comes: "That's it!" (PI, p. 218)

It is at this point when sensation gives way to expression that language-games come to life. For example, to state that a rose is toothless is far more accurate than to claim that a newborn child is toothless. Yet, whereas the statement ‘a toothless newborn’ sits well with us, we would not be clear as to the meaning of ‘a toothless rose’ (PI, p. 221). In this sense words have something like a face value: “The familiar physiognomy of a word, the feeling that it has taken up its meaning into itself, that it is an actual likeness of its meaning” (PI, p. 218). As such, in the same way I can draw two dots for eyes and see those eyes looking back at me, I can hold the conviction that I could not understand a talking lion, or that an infant cannot pretend, or that a dog cannot be hypocritical. What’s more, we understand the distinction between these animated thoughts and a caricature like the ridiculous image of Goethe writing the ninth symphony (PI, p. 183).

Wittgenstein’s ‘language-game’ approach to being human is a form of therapy for the illness of mentalism that has plagued awareness since ancient times. Wittgenstein wishes to disentangle the tangled web we’ve created for ourselves in trying to explain the world. His ‘grammar’ analysis “simply puts everything before us” (PI, 126) without exceptions, including the very words of analysis: ‘think’, ‘understand’, ‘meaning’, ‘context’, ‘sign’, ‘circumstance’, ‘process’, ‘experience’ and so on. While language does not have limits or boundaries, there are paradigmatic characteristics that help us understand the nature of words. One of the fundamental characteristics of words/signs is

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63 Gier (1980) notes that, for Wittgenstein scholars, the form of life concept is “Wittgenstein’s... most significant concept in the later philosophy” (p. 241). Gier distinguishes between forms of life and language-games in that the second is an expression of the first. To use my terminology, language-games are recognized through ‘cognitive-registers’ whereas forms of life are felt through ‘sentient-registers’.

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that they can be used with certainty in the absence of tangible objects. For instance, we can speak of King Arthur’s Excalibur sword regardless of its existence. The ‘bedrock’ of such certainty then allows us to make comparisons based on criteria that function only in language (e.g., ‘an excellent replica of Excalibur is one that looks like…’). As such, we are capable of pointing to examples that stem from words to objects, but without the danger of destabilizing words when the referent changes. It is as if words have a ‘life force’ of their own: “it is the field of force of a word that is decisive” (PI, p.219). Yet, we must be aware of “the grammar which tries to force itself on us” (PI, 304) to get us to draw particular conclusions. This force that moves words is irreducible; consequently, an elementary language-game like ‘destroy’ is itself indestructible. And from this irreducibility we can begin to see the emergence of the life form of language.

Clarity of signification is in the actions—not the objects—of words and primitive signs, such as a mason looking at a stone and his apprentice understanding ‘bring me that stone block’. By approaching human action from the point of view of language-games Wittgenstein looks at the landscape of signification and sees the forest for the trees, where the question “If a person speaks when no one else is present, does that mean he is speaking to himself?” (PI, 260) is based on the language-game of ‘speaking’. Likewise, we can distinguish between the language-games of ‘thinking’, ‘meaning’ and ‘understanding’, and even ‘experiencing’ as when we become aware of ‘going astray’ and shifting paradigms. For instance, to say ‘red exists’ tells us something about how we use the words ‘red’ and ‘exist’. This is to say, there is no existence other than the language-game ‘existence’. But if we had no concept of red, and we could not hold ‘red’ in our minds, then “we have lost a paradigm which was an instrument of our language” (PI, 57).

Wittgenstein’s paradigmatic descriptions are at their core descriptions of the illusive background, which is itself the ‘bedrock’ language-game. If this is beginning to sound tautological, that is, ontologically circular, it is because language-games are meta-games of holding in thought our uses of language. A good example of treading a paradigmatic horizon is the momentary disappearance of a foreground sign, such as when we say, ‘The word is on the tip of my tongue’ (PI, 219). This expression is evidence of the range of possible moves in a given language-game, as opposed to a bewitching search for the essence of the topic of conversation. In this sense, the phenomenality of language-
games is as natural as when we predict with certainty that the sun will rise tomorrow. This is to say, “we pronounced the word with this meaning and take this expression over from that other language-game” (PI, p. 216). There is no outside to language-games, not even sense-data, hypothesis or intuition. When Wittgenstein claims in The Big Typescript (TBT) to be “constructing a phenomenological language” (TBT, p. 321) he is pointing to how language shapes perception: “like suddenly seeing spatially the drawing of a cube that I had previously been able to see only as a flat decoration” (TBT, p.322).

Some holding thoughts about Wittgenstein

Whereas Austin directs our attention to the threshold dividing the world of language and the forces that generate meaning, Wittgenstein stands on the threshold and looks in: “there is always a gulf between an order and its execution” (PI, 433). What he helps us to see is that the force of meaning has some particular characteristics: “it is the field of force of a word that is decisive” (PI, p. 219) At the most basic level, the slipperiness of language reveals that language is a moving phenomenon. Yet, this is not movement without purpose, suggesting there is some type of intelligent guidance taking place. What's more, this guiding force is not reducible and, as such, cannot be explained through the logical process called ‘rules’. Access to the force of meaning is to be found in everyday practices, because language is phronesis, the practical wisdom that helps to distinguish between fact and nonsense, and recognize when it is best to speak nonsense and when it is wise not to be factual: “Let the use of words teach you their meaning” (PI, p. 220). Here we follow a far more radical move from Austin. Whereas Austin does not wish to go further than to separate the performativity of language from other forms of speech, Wittgenstein separates language in its entirety from the speaker. Like Jastrow’s duck-rabbit, an investigator of language-games needs to distinguish between a language artefact and its possible meaning: “I must distinguish between the 'continuous seeing' of an aspect and the 'dawning' of an aspect” (PI, p. 194). Language has its own life, which is why we are capable of speaking about King Arthur’s Excalibur sword in the same way we are capable of understanding that the act of pointing with the hand directs our eyes from wrist to finger-tip, not from finger-tip to wrist. The implication is that all articulated experiences become language-games, such as ‘to see’: “The concept of a representation
of what is seen…and…the concept of what is seen. The two are intimately connected. (Which is not to say that they are alike.)” (PI, 198). Wittgenstein’s forms of life direct our attention to the forces from which emerge family resemblances of ways of speaking; and in so doing, he takes these families by the hand and walks them into the light of human consciousness. Through a Wittgensteinean lens we come to recognize that to be human is to live with the forms of life that manifest themselves as language-games.

**Maurice Merleau-Ponty**

In his 1946 address to the Société Française de Philosophie, Merleau-Ponty explained that to perceive, in the phenomenological sense, meant to grasp a thing as a collective whole. Borrowing from Husserl, Merleau-Ponty further explained that this ‘synthesis of transition’ allows us to have such experiences as perceiving a cube or a house in its wholeness even though aspects may not be visible (e.g., the backside of a cube or house). This ‘primacy of perception’ is the experience of the lived moment void of the intellectual process of conceptualization or construction (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, ch. 2). His presentation came as a result of the publication of the *Phenomenology of Perception* (PP), in which Merleau-Ponty works through Husserl’s challenge of ‘zu den Sachen selbst’ (to the things themselves). In the preface to his work, Merleau-Ponty notes that ‘phenomenological reduction’ (i.e., the process of epoché) was a central concern for Husserl (PP, p. xii). “The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us,” writes Merleau-Ponty, “is the impossibility of a complete reduction…since… there is no thought which embraces all our thought” (PP, p. xv). In a paper titled *The Philosopher and His Shadow*, Merleau-Ponty posits that for Husserl “the transcendental field has ceased to be simply the field of our thought and has become the field of the whole of experience” (Signs, p. 177). The phenomenality we experience, therefore, “is the very appearance of the world and not the condition of its possibility; it is the birth of a norm and is not realized according to a norm; it is…not the projection of the internal in the external” (PP, p. 70). Nonetheless, the impenetrability of existence “cannot be taken for granted as facts, but [to] contribute to determining the significance of the cogito and of ultimate subjectivity” (PP, footnote, p. 437). For instance, when looking at a three-dimensional image of a cube with its sides outlined, one will see that it periodically
changes direction. This phenomenon has three components: (a) the image exists, (b) we can think about the visual effect of the image and draw conclusions from that, and (c) we can experience the cube’s directional shifts. As such, “to perceive in the full sense of the word (as the antithesis of imagining) is not to judge, it is to apprehend an immanent sense in the sensible before judgement begins. The phenomenon of true perception offers, therefore, a meaning inherent in the signs, and of which judgement is merely the optional expression” (PP, p. 40). A second example is death, where to say ‘someone is dead’, which tries “to extend the brief hold on my experience,” may seem disconnected from the actual death, and when I think of the words “there is nothing clear in my mind” (PP, p. 455). A third example is a young child who witnesses a sex act, in which case the child will understand it as disturbing behaviour but void of the sexuality, given that the child has not reached that stage of development (PP, p. 214). The implication is that a genuine return to phenomena is not about ‘essence’ (i.e., phenomenological reduction as idealism) but about ‘flow’ and ‘Lebenswelt’, which, according to Merleau-Ponty, Husserl came to recognize in his final period⁶⁴ (PP, footnotes, pp. 57 & 425): “for a thing…guides the flow of phenomena without being explicitly laid down in any one of them, a sort of operative reason” (PP, p. 57).

In The Visible and the Invisible, Merleau-Ponty writes, “It is by considering language that we would best see how we are to and how we are not to return to the things themselves” (p. 125). This is recognition that “what is lived is lived-spoken” (p. 126), yet “language is not a mask over Being, but—if one knows how to grasp it with all its roots and all its foliation—the most valuable witness to Being” (p.126). As such, language “brings to the surface all the deep-rooted relations of the lived experience wherein it takes

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⁶⁴ Husserl’s thoughts can be generally grouped into three periods: the first focused on logic and psychology, the second on a phenomenological understanding of subject and object, and the third on lived experience (Lebenswelt), with works like Logical Investigations, Ideas, and Experience and Judgment respectively representing each period.
form, and which is the language of life and of action” (p. 126). For instance, when we see something in the distance, the initial image gives way to other images the closer we get, yet we have faith that these “disillusions” are “perspectives upon the same familiar Being” (p. 40-41): “it is the appearance it has of being a thing that convinces us immediately that it would be possible to observe it” (p. 77); and we would “say that the thing is there” (p. 77) “as though the visibility that animates the sensible world were to [be]…abandoning the flesh of the body for that of language” (p. 153). We need to be cautious, however: “What is to be elucidated…is the upheaval that speech introduces in pre-linguistic Being” (p. 202). We must guard against the tendency of language to reflect back presuppositions, “which would impose upon the world in advance the conditions for our control over it” (p. 39): the illusion that makes “a world numerically one, common to all” (p. 62), where the familial “contains everything necessary” to construct an analytical “ladder one pulls up after oneself after having climbed it” (p. 35). Here there is circular reasoning—“reflection which turns back over the density of the world…[and] reflects

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65 In addressing the Cartesian cogito doctrine, Merleau-Ponty puts forward Husserl’s view that “Consciousness is in the first place not a matter of ‘I think that’ but of ‘I can’” (Phenomenology of Perception [PP], p.159). We need to ‘plunge into the actions of life’, he tells us: “it is not because I think I am that I am certain of my existence….for example] My love, hatred and will are not certain as mere thoughts about loving, hating and willing: on the contrary the whole certainty of these thoughts is owed to that of the acts of love, hatred or will of which I am quite sure because I perform them” (PP, p. 445). In a sense, action-based awareness reverses the a fortiori doctrine of the cogito in that my existence—confirmed by my actions of living—leads to what I think about: “As soon as there is consciousness, and in order that there may be consciousness, there must be something to be conscious of, an intentional object” (PP, p.139-40).

66 Abram (1988), explains that The Visible and the Invisible is an expansion of Merleau-Ponty’s earlier project to “de-intellectualize transcendence” (p. 109). In The Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty endeavours to reclaim the body-subject from the Cartesian cogito; hence, human expression must begin with the understanding that “the mere presence of a living being transforms the physical world” (PP, p. 220). Consequently, “man transcends himself towards a new form of behaviour, or towards other people, or towards his own thought, through his body and his speech” (PP, p. 226). In this way, human expression comes to “establish between speaking subjects a common world” (PP, p. 216). In comparison to these ideas, Abram explains that the later Merleau-Ponty of The Visible and the Invisible was “dislodging transcendence as a particular attribute of the human body and returning it to the entire world of which this body is but a single expression” (Abram, p. 109). Merleau-Ponty named this later understanding the ‘flesh’: “The ‘flesh’ is the animate element which Merleau-Ponty has discovered, through his exploration of pre-objective perception, to be the common tissue between oneself and the world” (Abram, p. 110).
back to it only its own light” (p. 35). Hence, there is a paradox: “Philosophy itself is language” (p. 126), “since it is in words that the question will be answered” (p. 96), that “asks of our experience of the world what the world is before it is a thing one speaks of and which is taken for granted, before it has been reduced to a set of manageable, disposable significations; it directs this question to our mute life, it addresses itself to that compound of the world and of ourselves that precedes reflection” (p. 102); however, paradoxically, “what it finds in thus returning to the sources” language reconstructs as “artefacts”—“the world reduced to our idealizations and our syntax” (p. 102).

The contradiction that we can construct a “grammar of Being” (p.107) in order to speak about “this great mute land which we never leave” (p.126) is elucidatory of the “force” of “facticity” (p.110) that reconstructs “lexical signification …toward which we were already thrown” (p.101). We are thrown into a time and space (p. 140) “which operate according to an identifiable style” (p. 100), “under the domination of certain structural laws” (p. 100), “the ready-made notions of thought, subject, and object” (p. 100) that crystalize “what makes the fact be a fact” (p. 140). But “this crystallization …is in other respects never terminated” (p. 100), since “the rules for the legitimate use of the word...[are] but one part of the signification of the word” (p. 96). What allows the coexistence of “not only differences but also contradiction” (p. 90) is that our articulations are “caught up in the fabric of one sole Being” (p. 110). As such, “the dialectic is the thought of the Being-seen, of a Being that is...Self-manifestation, disclosure, in the process of forming itself” (p. 91). “Thus it would be naive to seek solidity in a heaven of ideas or in a ground...of meaning” (p. 116), which are but shadows of the perceived world (p. 98) in “ventriloquial" play in our own internal Platonic cave (p. 73). “Far from opening upon the blinding light of pure Being” (p. 84), we are “constantly enshrouded by those mists...[of] extreme divergencies of one same something” (p. 84), where “the force of being” is supported by the superficiality of

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67 Merleau-Ponty tells us that the challenge facing phenomenological awareness is what Husserl identified as a constant state of forgetfulness (selbstvergessenheit): “Logical objectivity derives from carnal intersubjectivity, and it is carnal intersubjectivity itself which produces this forgetfulness by wending its way toward logical objectivity.... Intercorporeality goes beyond itself and ends up unconscious of itself as intercorporeality; it displaces and changes the situation it sets out from, and the spring of constitution can no more be found in its beginning than in its terminus” (Signs, p. 173).
abstract dichotomies (p. 64). This is “a spell cast over the world” (p. 93) whose “sorcery” (p. 87) is “the assurance that the things have another sense than that which we are in a position to recognize in them” (p. 94).

What this reveals to Merleau-Ponty is that “language is itself a world, itself a being” (p. 96).68 This is not to say that “language takes possession of life…[as] if there existed nothing but things said” (p. 125), because “the field of language” (p. 97) “does not speak in a vacuum, since it speaks of being and of the world” (p. 96). In referencing the French poet Paul Valéry, Merleau-Ponty writes, “language is everything, since it is the voice of no one, since it is the very voice of the things, the waves, and the forests” (p.155). “Language is a life” (p. 125) “because language in forming itself expresses…an ontogenesis of which it is a part” (p. 102), and is “endowed with a natural magic that attracts the other significations into its web, as the body feels the world in feeling itself” (p. 118). Language intertwines the visible with the invisible (p. 118), that silent place where we find “the birth of speech as bubbling up at the bottom of…mute experience” (p. 126). While “speech is a relation to Being through a being” (p. 118), the “climax” (p. 64) of articulating “a Self in ec-stasy in Being” (p. 51) remains perpetually within reach, never realized, prevented by an unstable dialectic—while pregnant with signification (p. 124)—that “has never been able to formulate itself into theses without denaturing itself” (p. 92). To understand how language is “the life of the things,” we need to experience it

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68 In an essay titled *Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence*, Merleau-Ponty writes, “language is not meaning’s servant, and yet it does not govern meaning” (p. 120). This is to say, meaning is not fixed to signs because “the sign has meaning only in so far as it is profiled against other signs” (p. 79). To understand this relationship of meaning to language, “we do not have to consult some inner lexicon…we have only to lend ourselves to its life” (p. 79). In this way, “Language is much more like a sort of being….something like a universe, in which it is capable of lodging things themselves—after it has transformed them into their meaning” (p. 80). As such, language “passes beyond the ‘signs’ toward their meaning. And nothing separates us from that meaning” (p. 80). If this was not the case, “[w]e would not have the feeling of living in the language and we would remain silent, because the sign would be immediately obliterated by its own meaning and because thought would never encounter anything but…the thought it wanted to express and the thought which it would form from a wholly explicit language” (p. 81). As such, “language which only sought to reproduce reality itself would exhaust its instructive power in factual statements” (p. 114). On the contrary, there is a spontaneity to language “which will not take orders, not even those which I would like to give myself….yet which unites us…[by living it]…[by] the fruits of our toil” (p. 112). This “language…opens up a discussion that goes beyond the language and itself invites further investigation” (p. 114).
in its “nascent state, with all its references… which connect it to the mute things it interpellates” (p. 125), and “if one wishes to maintain its spirit it is perhaps necessary to not even name it” (p. 92). For “it is being that speaks within us and not we who speak of being” (p. 194). A philosophical interrogation, therefore, must not only “aim at the signification ‘being,’ [but also] aim at the being of signification and the place of signification within Being” (p. 119). Consequently, “the words most charged with philosophy are not necessarily those that contain what they say, but rather those that most energetically open upon Being,” (p. 102); “what counts is…the kinships [of words] that are implicated in their transfers and their exchanges” (p. 125).

To speak is a “weakness,” confesses Merleau-Ponty, for one “should keep silent, coincide in silence, and rejoin in Being” (p. 125). Being is thus articulated through “the voice of silence” (p. 127). Merleau-Ponty tells us, “the whole of man is already there in his infancy” (p. 13). By this he means that already in childhood a person “understands well beyond what he knows how to say, responds well beyond what he could define” (p. 13). Our communicative confidence stems from our “faith” that where “there is being, there is a world, there is something” (p. 88). For “there is no thing fully observable, no inspection of the thing that would be without gaps….in the grain of the sensible we find the assurance for a series of cross-checkings, which do not constitute the ecceity of the thing but are derived from it” (p. 77). Moreover, “there is a world of silence…where there are non-language significations” (p. 171) such as observing an object “of which I

69 In *Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence*, Merleau-Ponty tells us that in the silent voice of art “[w]hat is irreplaceable in the work of art…[is that it] ultimately gives us something to think about as no analytical work can” (p. 114). The aim is not like “trying to establish the moment at which Latin becomes French” (p. 78), but that “[w]hat we mean is not before us, outside all speech, as sheer signification. It is only the excess of what we live over what has already been said” (p. 120). What’s more, a work should be admired “only after having understood that there are not any supermen, that there is no one who does not have a human’s life to live, and that the secret of the woman loved, of the writer, or of the painter, does not lie in some realm beyond his empirical life, but is so mixed in with his mediocre experiences, so modestly confused with his perception of the world” (p.95). For this reason, something is lost with art in museums, because they become detached “from the chance circumstances they arose from” and from which arose “so many joys and sorrows, so much anger, and so many labors” (p. 99). For the artist makes choices, as “Matisse’s hand did hesitate;” and likewise with words, a sign can have many meanings: “In short, we must consider the word before it is spoken, the background of silence which does not cease to surround it and without which it would say nothing” (p. 83).
could not say what it is...which nonetheless is there” (p. 268). Words, “themselves caught up in something like a second life and perception” (p. 153), are like Leibniz’s donkey who in walking straight to its fodder illuminates the concept of a straight line, albeit as a latent idea (p. 153). Words also have a “halo of signification” (p. 96) powered by living language intertwined with the things of the world (p. 125), where signification “manifests itself in new and unexpected modes of use” (p. 96). With this understanding in mind of words as both artefact, experienced through silent perception, and signification within an unstable dialectic, articulation “must plunge into the world...descend toward it...instead of working its way back up toward a prior...thinking” (p. 39). Yet “no disclosure will make us comprehend” (p.122) Being whose “characteristic” is to be “hidden” (p.122). “One cannot make a direct ontology” (p. 179). For “Being...is not posited because it has no need to be” (p. 129). The closest understanding that we can have of Being is in “predicative” terms of being, this is to say, through experiences: “everything one gives to Being is taken from experience, everything one gives to experience is taken from Being” (p. 122). Influenced by the Heideggerian Wesen of the unfolding action of potentialities, for Merleau-Ponty, Being is not caught in spatio-temporal dimensionality but traverses me and lives in the very actions of being at the intersection of the sentient and the sensible (p. 114-5). In this intersecting place, the ontogenesis of language makes palpable the dehiscence of Being through being someone or other in relation to this or that so that “one speaks not only of what one knows, so as to set out a display of it—but also of what one does not know, in order to know it” (p. 102).

This interrogation, which “must use words not according to their pre-established signification” but in a manner that states the “prelogical bond” of perception to the world (p. 38), and whose radical beings of inquiry are umbilically bound to Being, would have to see the world and Being as living articulations in their own right “to let them speak, to listen in” (p. 107). Merleau-Ponty confesses, however, that “[w]e know neither what exactly is this order and this concordance of the world to which we thus entrust ourselves, nor therefore what the enterprise will result in, nor even if it is really possible” (p. 39). Nonetheless, his motivation is to counter a reflective dogmatism that has cast us into a confused existence (p. 39). “‘[M]y’ philosophy,” he explains, “would not be idolatry” (p. 198), nor “the equivalent of the transcendental consciousness” (p. 194), “a god who is
beyond thought” (p. 242)—but “starting from ourselves [recognizing that]… problems are within the problem of Being” (p. 198). To this end, Merleau-Ponty posits that the signified Being is not, in the sense of “spiritual positivity” (p. 98), a “massive individual” that affirms “an absolute exterior” (p. 107); “kosmotheoros” whose “sovereign gaze” is, “God knows how” (p. 139), “a pure look which fixes the things in their temporal and local place and the essences in an invisible heaven” (p. 113), of which I am aware through my own shame of being visible (p. 61). It is also not a “Hyper-being” that emerges from the “repulsion” of a false dichotomy between “being and nothingness” (p. 74), since the constructed ‘nothingness’ collapses under the weight of its own contradiction: “It is…saying too much of nothingness…to treat it as a sort of essence, to introduce the positivity of words into it” (p. 88)—in essence becoming a sort of being-nothingness (p. 64); consequently, there is no counter point of reversibility that would allow a sort of Hyper-being but only a “redoubling” of being (p. 74).

If Being is to be understood in signified terms, then it is as an unfolding self-manifestation whose “ontological vibration” (p. 115) of potentialities we experience through the thickness of intentionality, facticity and historicity. This condition of Being is due to the paradox that we can, on one hand, place ourselves outside the world by thinking about it and, on the other hand, find ourselves inside the world as living beings: “the two ‘sides’ of our body, the body as sensible and the body as sentient” (p. 136). As such, our perceptions “remain a horizon” within the limits of signification “because

70 In the Translator’s Preface to The Visible and the Invisible, we read, “[t]he extended critique of the philosophy of negativity, that is, of Sartre, may seem to occupy inordinately Merleau-Ponty’s attention in the manuscript” (p. xlv). However, the considerable amount of attention Merleau-Ponty places on critiquing Sartre’s notion of ‘nothingness’ serves to explain Merleau-Ponty’s own theory of being-in-the-world. For Sartre, nothingness is a bottomless abyss (VI, pp. 236-7) from which I, who come from this nothingness, find myself in the world, in Being that is “absolute plenitude” (VI, p. 52). In Merleau-Ponty’s view Sartre’s idea of “nothingness is to be rejected” (VI, p. 196). Instead, Merleau-Ponty takes his “starting point where Sartre ends, in the Being taken up by the for Itself” (VI, p. 237). To do this, he undertakes a hyper-analysis of the dichotomy of being and nothingness. By asking “[w]here are we to put the limit between the body and the world…?” (VI, p.138) he is generating a feeling of impassibility (VI, p. 137) through a sensation of ‘de facto invisibility’ (VI, p. 151). Yet, this very sensation leads us to recognize that our cognitions cause divergences, which are not divisions but act as hinges between possible understandings (VI, p. 248). In this way, the ‘limit’ of meaning is transformed from Sartre’s darkness of nothingness to Merleau-Ponty’s bright openness of what was once not seen but is now recognized through an embodied language that he calls ‘flesh’.
somehow he who sees [the world] is of it and is in it” (p. 100). The implication is that while we can be explicit about our relationship with Being, we ought not to reconstruct Being to reflect preconceptions (p. 100): “We do not have the right to say that the essences we find give the primitive meaning of Being” (p. 109). For the immanence of the reflective self is an illusion (p. 42): that “in order to constitute the world, it is necessary to have a notion of the world as preconstituted” (p. 34). “It is necessary to take as primary, not the consciousness…with its distinct intentional threads, but…the spatializing-temporalizing vortex (which is…not consciousness facing a noema)” (p. 244). If we are to construct an essence of Being, it is an essence of a non-teleological (p. 265) “predicative Being” (p. 110) in continuous movement. Through sentient palpation we come in contact with Being in prepossessive relationship where the beings we experience “offer themselves… only to someone who wishes not to have them but to see them, not to hold them as with forceps, or to immobilize them as under the objective of a microscope, but to let them be and to witness their continued being…. which lets the perceived world be rather than posits it” (p. 101-2). As such, “within an actual experience surrounded by actual experiences” we are touched by Being (p.110) in the sentient moment of “the natal bond between me who perceives and what I perceive” (p. 32). This ontogenesis of signification (p. 102) “we shall here call the openness upon the world” (p. 35) in which “Being is this strange encroachment… [where I and the other] both open upon the same sensible world—And it is the same encroachment, the same junction at a distance, that makes the messages from my organs…reassemble themselves into one sole vertical existence and into one sole world” (p. 216). This means “we are already in…being…that we are of it, that between it and us there is Einfühlung” (p. 248). 71

71 According to Husserl, explains Merleau-Ponty, “Being in itself,” which is accessed pre-theoretically (i.e., through epoché leading to a derealized awareness of the object), reformulates the subject-object relationship so that “there is neither absolute mind nor the immanence of intentional objects in that mind, but only incarnate minds which through their bodies ‘belong…to the same world’” (Signs, p. 172). As such, “[t]he body is nothing less but nothing more than the things’ condition of possibility” (Signs, p. 173). At this stripped down level of corporeality, I am able to understand the Other because “the body proper is a premonition of the other person, the Einfühlung [empathy] an echo of my incarnation” (Signs, p. 174). Einfühlung is to be understood ‘aesthesiologically’ (Signs, p. 170): “In learning that my body is a ‘perceiving thing,’ that it is able to be stimulated…I prepared myself for understanding that there are other animalia and possibly other men” (Signs, p. 168).
This relationship counters the Cartesian separation of body and mind, which forms “the canonical structures of the sensible world” (p. 12) where “the thought of seeing is more certain than the thing seen” (p. 98). The Cartesian universe of pre-existence created “a science of the human body that decomposes that body…into a network of objective processes” (p. 26) where “the more the thought adheres to experience, the more it keeps it at a distance” (p. 87). Thus, Cartesian dualism forms “a gap in the continuous fabric of the acts of thought” (p. 44) rendering its own constructed coexistence of subject and object an “incomprehensible mystery” (p.42). This fissure or lacuna that forms from “the procedure of objectifying or reflective approximation” only deepens the more we try to transform the unknown into the known (p. 101). By placing doubt on perception, Cartesianism has reduced perception to a phantasm of rigor, an “infinite distance” (p. 106): the “illusion of illusions… that from the beginning perception has been an inspection of the mind” (p. 37)—where “a thing perceived…the reflection has neutralized and transformed into thing-perceived-within-a-perception-reflected-on” (p. 38). Ironically, while today the science of the microphysical fields is forced to recognize a situated relationship between the observer and the observed (p. 15), “a physicist who has liberated his own science from the classical canons of mechanism and objectivism [can] take up again without hesitation the Cartesian distinction between primary and secondary qualities as soon as he turns to the philosophical problem of the ultimate reality of the physical world” (p. 25).

The duality of a subjective body and objectifying cogito reflects realities that are only “coherent illusions” (p.106) supported by “the naive certitude of… the anticipation of an intelligible world” (p. 13). This naiveté is occulted by the opacity of weak theses (p. 13) that translate sentient experience into “disposable significations” within a contrived sphere where experiences “would become comprehensible according to their sense and their essence” (p. 36). This Cartesian reflection is a mirror that centers us to the “brute or wild being” (p. 102) through a fabricated “natal bond” that sets out to “reconquer explicitly all that we are and do implicitly” (p. 33). However, this enterprise of recovery “recuperates everything except itself as an effort of recuperation, it clarifies everything except its own role” (p. 33): that “we as minds are the cradle of the world” giving birth to our own nature, which in turn unfolds itself to the things of the world as a priori, all the
while the blind spot of the mind’s eye fails to see the presuppositions (p. 33). When Merleau-Ponty asks that we situate our relation between a thought and its object “within a more muted relationship with the world” (p. 35), he does so cognizant of our Cartesian tradition, where the silence of a tacit cogito “rests entirely on the virtues of language” (p. 179). Hence, the commerce of reflective enclosure aims to rectify what it sees as a decentered relationship to the world (p. 33) reassured that beyond “language as a system of explicit relations between signs and signified” (p. 153) the brute or wild being is "always already" there (p. 35). This is the error of a priori conditions on the transcendental (p. 85): “With transcendence I show,” notes Merleau-Ponty, “…that vision is in principle what convinces me by an appearance already-there” (p. 220).

Consequently, the search for the “hard core” of “what there is” ends up in confusion because “signification never is except in tendency” (p.94).

Working through the paradox of language—that it is all we have, yet we must work through its “crystallizations”, its “artefacts,” in order to gain access to “the openness upon the world” (p.100)—requires a “hyper-reflection” (p. 38). In order to not objectify, to “not cut the organic bonds between the perception and the thing perceived” (p. 38), language is co-opted “with a perhaps difficult effort that uses the significations of words to express, beyond themselves, our mute contact with the things, when they are not yet things said” (p. 38), which is to say, it is an interrogation of the forest for the trees of references (p. 39). Take, for instance, the colour red, a talisman that “imposes my vision upon me” (p. 132). Its naked quale, itself an illusion giving way to disillusion in “momentary crystallization of colored being,” is not “held at the end of the gaze” as a fixed thing but as possibility (p. 131-3). These variations of redness pivot as beings of the Being that “is silently behind all our affirmations, negations, and even behind all formulated questions” (p. 129). Such a pre-empirical line of inquiry, which places “[p]erception…at the foreground of our research” (p. 158), “must put to itself the problem of the genesis of its own meaning” (p. 12). What is brought to question is “a thought that itself traces its own course, that finds itself by advancing, that makes its own way, and thus proves that the way is practicable” (p. 90). But in the shadow of our own thoughts (p. 98) practice “mixes in presuppositions which we have to examine and which in the end reveal themselves to be contrary to what inspires the reflection” (p. 32).
clearing of our fields of perception, a situated reflexivity is centered, implicated in its own inquiry, where tangibility is at most a *bric-a-brac* in the *pell-mell* of the world. By shifting our mind’s eye to ontogenesis, Merleau-Ponty aims to disentangle us from the perplexities that objectivist ontology has brought on perceptual faith (p. 35). The restoration of meaning, where “[t]he perception of the world is formed in the world, [and] the test for truth takes place in Being” (p. 253), “is neither above nor beneath the appearances, but at their joints” (p. 116); hence, the impediments of classical ontology, from objective fact to vulgar relativism, give way to the openness of ontological difference.  

To believe is to have faith that beyond cloudy thoughts there is a world, a Being, we experience through beings, and “as of every faith…it is the possibility of doubt” (p. 103). Our sensory experiences and power of language are but approximations, points of reference, of Being (p. 103): “If we are ourselves in question in the very unfolding of our life…it is because we ourselves are…a perpetual enterprise of taking our bearings on the constellations of the world” (p. 103). Yet, we do not have a clear and direct view of the things we are trying to accurately determine: “Positive information, a statement whatever it be, only defer that question and beguile our hunger. They refer us to some sort of law

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It is worth noting a feminist critique of Merleau-Ponty’s ‘situated reflexivity’. Elizabeth Grosz (1993) asks, in reference to his project to situate perception outside empiricism and rationalism, is Merleau-Ponty’s “notion of the flesh… simply another masculine appropriation of the metaphors of femininity?” (p.37). Grosz references Luce Irigaray’s critique of Merleau-Ponty’s grasping hands that speak to a reversibility of dominance. Alternatively, Irigaray offers the visual of two hands touching at the palms with fingers stretched, which speaks to mutual connection (Grosz, p. 49). The concern, given Merleau-Ponty’s silence about women’s ways of knowing, is that his borrowing from attributes of maternity arouses suspicion of phallocentric complicity. For instance, Merleau-Ponty’s view that the tangible is visible can be challenged as an ‘oedipus perception’, given that the absence of protrusion of female genitalia suggests that the tangible does not have to be visible (Grosz, p. 50). The implication is that “women not only have different bodies from men…they must also have different minds” (Grosz, p. 53). For instance, Merleau-Ponty’s reversibility separates toucher and touched, where the crossing over is an acknowledgement of this division. In contrast, for female sexuality, such points of intersection are opportunities for reciprocal intimacy (Grosz, p. 49). Consequently, Merleau-Ponty’s visual of flesh as invagination, rather than spoken in terms of *écart* could be spoken in terms of flow, a lubricated corporeality slipping between toucher and touched void of control (Grosz, pp. 50-51). As such, an interpretive question can be to consider when Merleau-Ponty speaks of a woman’s ‘telepathic awareness’ of “her body desired and looked at” (VI, p. 245), is the reader to see this reversibility in directional terms (e.g., I see myself being seen) or in radiating terms (e.g., I partake in my own visibility)?
of our being that lays down that after a space there is a space, that after a time there is a
time, but it is this law itself that our questions of fact are reaching for” (p. 121). This is
compounded by the paradox that “access to the things themselves” is obtained “through
the intermediary of the body, which therefore opened us to the world only by sealing us
up in the succession of our private events,” where sensible observation “leaves nothing
but ideates, cogitata, or noemata” (p. 30)—a signified reality that is “res cogitans” (p.
52). Consequently, the reflected world becomes a "being-thought" (p. 43) where “I qua
thought am what makes there be a distance and…any relation…from one point of the
object to another” (p. 44); thus, the world is possessed by an “Absolute Mind” whose
“immanence” is made “inexpugnable” through a “simultaneity” that holds past-present-
future within an objectifying tacit cogito whose centripetal/centrifugal dynamics form the
“horizon” of “thing thought” (p. 32). While this “sovereign gaze” (p. 113) appears
“ineluctable” (p. 94), “the fragility of the ‘real’…[becomes evident] when an appearance
suddenly breaks up” (p. 40). What this tells Merleau-Ponty “is that perhaps ‘reality’ does
not belong definitively to any particular perception, that in this sense it lies always further
on… deferred” (p. 41). We experience this enigma whenever we try to explain the
certainty of our perceptions and, as a result, “we enter into a labyrinth of difficulties and
contradictions” (p. 3). It is as if trying to capture the source of an image found in “two
mirrors facing one another where two indefinite series of images set in one another arise
which belong really to neither of the two surfaces, since each is only the rejoinder of the
other” (p. 139).

Merleau-Ponty’s point of departure is to expose through radical interrogation the
tyranny of reflection whose “incomparable monster” (p. 62) of solipsism reduces
perception to representational thought (p.43). This disorder of “methodic doubt” that
evokes “an evil agent,” “a Great Deceiver,” fails to recognize “the borrowings it makes
from Being” (p. 106) in the construction of “negintuition.” To counter this false Being of
scepticism, we must reconsider distinctions “by referring to the experience of the world
that precedes… distinction” (p. 27). The tension of tethering antinomies gives way to the
“dimensionality of every fact and facticity of every dimension” exposing the sorcery of
“hierarchy of orders or layers or planes” (p. 270). For Being is “surrounding me and in a
sense traversing me, and my vision of Being not forming itself from elsewhere, but from
the midst of Being” (p. 114). While the reflective sphere is revealed, Merleau-Ponty recognizes that it is impossible to do away with reflection (p. 43), and that access to openness upon the world may remain an occulted understanding (p. 28); however, a philosophical investigation “must tell us how there is openness without the occultation of the world being excluded, how the occultation remains at each instant possible even though we be naturally endowed with light” (p. 28). This is “to use language in a way that takes from it its power of immediate or direct signification” (p. 103), which will help us understand the process of ontogenesis that language undergoes, because “Being…is implicated in the movement…[formulating itself]…. [b]etween the manifest content and the latent content” (p. 90). Yet, “[w]e do not even know in advance what our interrogation itself and our method will be” (p. 158). What interrogating our experiences should do, however, is help us to see “margins of presence, to discern these references, to put them to the test” (p. 159). This is undertaken with the appraisal that one is always implicated in one’s statements and questions (p. 90), and “[t]he manner of questioning prescribes a certain kind of response” (p. 158): “We are not asking ourselves if the world exists; we are asking what it is for it to exist” (p. 96). We who are here not looking from outside nor from a high-altitude but are examining like “a physics that has learned to situate the physicist physically, a psychology that has learned to situate the psychologist in the socio-historical world, have lost the illusion of the absolute view from above: they do not only tolerate, they enjoin a radical examination of our belongingness to the world” (p. 27).

When Merleau-Ponty speaks of a “mute language” (p. 126) and states that “silence will not be the contrary of language” (p. 179) he is not contradicting himself but directing our attention to “the dialectic, as a situational thought” (92). This is a good dialectic, cautious of the trappings of thetic thought, of fixed signification; a good dialectic seeking to “rediscover the being that lies…not outside of us and not in us, but there where the two movements cross” (p. 94-95)—where there is inertia. “What I want

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73 In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty calls for a phenomenology of phenomenology: “We must return to the *cogito*, in search of a more fundamental *Logos* than that of objective thought, one which endows the latter with its relative validity, and at the same time assigns to it its place” (p. 425).
to do,” explains Merleau-Ponty, “is restore the world as a meaning of Being” (p. 253): “restoring a power to signify, a birth of meaning, or a wild meaning, an expression of experience by experience, which in particular clarifies the special domain of language” (p. 155). Such clarity requires a hyperdialectic that “envisages without restriction the plurality of the relationships and what has been called ambiguity” (p. 94). What Merleau-Ponty rejects is a bad dialectic that “results in a new positive” (p. 95). The hyperdialectic is a resistance against the grip of fixed meaning: “the fixing of the eidetic invariants would be no longer to confine us within the consideration of the what…but to make evident the divergence between the eidetic invariants and the effective functioning and to invite us to bring the experience itself forth from its obstinate silence” (p. 46). This is the experience of affirmation and negation, of the ‘yes’ that invokes the ‘no’ and vice-versa, which are movements that do not merge into synthesis but cross in diverging paths: “the fabric of possibilities…maintains between them a certain divergence (écart)” (p. 272); “[i]t is therefore necessary that the…écart…be also an openness upon the thing itself” (p. 124). One example of how a hyperdialectic shifts the fixed meaning in obstinate silence to a disclosure of the flux of unfolding meaning is Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of how a pure nothingness and a pure being obscure the field of investigation, since pure nothingness is to be located “not in the margin like the zone of non-vision around our field of vision, but over the whole expanse of what we see” (p. 66); and “pure being is nowhere to be found, for every alleged thing soon reveals itself to be an appearance” (p. 68). Consequently, the signification of purity finds itself in a struggle against the disillusion of fixed meaning: “The very progress of the investigation cannot change the idea we form of Being and Nothingness; it can only disclose its unnoticed implications” (p. 69). A second example of hyperdialectic is the “catching sight of the necessity of another operation besides the conversion to reflection” (p. 38): through obscure powers reflection prolongs “the ‘I can’ of my sensorial and corporeal exploration…[so as to] found the latter on the former” (p. 38), an operation that “forget[s] the reflection itself as a distinct act of recovery” (p. 38). Here, reflection “lose[s] sight of the brute thing and the brute perception….and condemn[s] itself to putting into the things what it will then pretend to find in them” (p. 38). A third example is Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of a lost immediate whose restoration “will…bear within itself the sediment of the critical procedures through
which we will have found it anew…. If it is to be the [pure] immediate…it is to retain no trace of the operations through which we approach it” (p. 122).

Through the hyper-dialectic/hyper-reflection our perception of the landscape of signification shifts from a geometry of the flat, where empirical being is , “without depth, without dimension” (124), “the sole plane of ideality” (p. 127), to the vertical, where the upright existence “leaves the plane of objective being, but not without dragging with it all the adversity and favors it brought there” (p. 272): “For it is the horizon of the world that secretly guides us in our constructions and harbors the truth of the procedures of reflection by which we pretend to reconstitute it” (p. 51). Against the weight of this atmosphere, our investigative approach should echo the ethnologist who “cannot exclude a priori” lived experiences on the ground that they are inconsistent with Western objective cognition, but rather describe their “magical effects and the mythical and ritual life” (p. 24). Resisting the canon of classical ontology, Euclidean dimensionality and Pyrrhonian doubt, the sensible sentient becomes aware of both the visible, pregnant with possibilities, like the ready to be seen face of a cube, and its hidden face, “the invisible structure…understood only through its relation to logos, to speech” (p. 224). Consequently, the sensible sentient awakens to the phantom centrifugal illusion of ground where things are recognizable, because we project into their nuclei a range of possible identities, which then become their radiating internal energies: the centripetal forces of perceiver and perceived encroaching on one another, forming a naïve horizon of self-evidence (p. 162). For instance, “I see my table…it holds and stops my gaze with its insurmountable density” (p. 5) yet “the table in itself has nothing to do with the bed a yard away” (p. 75). The self-evidence of a naïve horizon “is a sort of madness in vision” (p. 75) “as is so well indicated by the double meaning of the word” (p. 134). As such, “[t]hat the world could pre-exist my consciousness of the world is out of the question” (p. 47). There is a sensation of pre-existence, because when I find the world “under my hands, under my eyes, up against my body… a sort of dehiscence opens my body in two…between my body looked at and my body looking, my body touched and my body touching” but “there is no anteriority of the percipere to the perci” (p. 123). This is not to say that what is perceived, such as a table or bed, does not exist but what does it signify, how do I reflect on its existence? Take for instance the phenomenon of pure
memory, as in “the former present preserved” which hyper-analysis elucidates to be impossible, in that I do not have access to the dimension of the past. Even if there is a past, “I am separated from it by the whole thickness of my present;” and, if somehow, I could make the past present anew, we could “never have at the same time the past and the consciousness of the past,” in the same way as we could “never have at the same time the thing and the consciousness of the thing” (p. 122). For “never does the perception grasp the body in the act of perceiving” (p. 9).

Here we turn to Merleau-Ponty’s most famous illustration. “[T]he moment I feel my left hand with my right hand,” explains Merleau-Ponty, “I correspondingly cease touching my right hand with my left hand” (p. 9), because “this reflection of the body upon itself always miscarries at the last moment” (p. 9). Similarly, when I realize that another sees me and experience “the other's medusan power” (p. 63) that “leaves me petrified (médusé)” (p. 72), either I become the observer who looks and the obverse, or reverse and I become the visible who is seen, but I cannot simultaneously be aware of both; nor can I simultaneously focus on the sound of utterances and remain attentive to voiced thoughts: “these experiences never exactly overlap…they slip away at the very moment they are about to rejoin…there is always a ‘shift,’ a ‘spread,’ between them” (p. 148). This hiatus is caused by language, itself “a world and a being to the second power” (p. 96), which like a camera obscura creates a double of the brute world (p. 122): “language is a power for error, since it cuts the continuous tissue that joins us vitally to the things and to the past and is installed between ourselves and that tissue like a screen” (p. 125). On this hinge of words pivots the natural light of the sentient and the instituted light of the sensible in perpetual reversibility of ocular, tactile and auditory experiences, “and as at the point where the two metamorphoses cross what we call perception is born” (p. 154). Here Merleau-Ponty asks, “Que sais-je?” (p. 128). This is not a request for an investigation similar to ‘where am I?’ The question is to be understood in its secondary meaning, as the ironic idiom ‘what do I know?’ (p. 129). Essentially, it is a point in the conversation where nothing more meaningful can be said, but out of this mute moment the sense that there is more to explore presents itself (VI, p. 129). In addressing this uneasiness, Merleau-Ponty opts to “leave the philosophy of Erlebnisse and pass to the philosophy of our Urstiftung” (VI, p. 221) (see footnote 54). This is the domain of
“intuitus mentis” in which “[t]hought is a relationship with oneself…the world as well as…with the other,” but the seed that produces ideas is in my own body (p. 145). Thus, intuitus mentis is “a sublimation of the flesh” (p. 145). Only by intuitive interrogation can the divided mind and body/world be reacquainted with Being, where “by principle no statement or answer can go beyond and which perhaps therefore is the proper mode of our relationship with Being, as though it were the mute or reticent interlocutor of our questions” (p. 129).

“[W]e are asking,” clarifies Merleau-Ponty, “precisely what is that central vision that joins the scattered visions, that unique touch that governs the whole tactile life of my body…that I think that must be able to accompany all our experiences” (p. 145). Between the sensible and the sentient, the consciousness and the perception, the thought and the thing, “we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them” (p. 132-3). Merleau-Ponty acknowledges that “there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate” this tissue, which is neither material, spiritual, nor a mental representation (p. 139).74 “To designate it, we should need the old term ‘element,’ in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is…midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being” (p. 139). Merleau-Ponty calls this element ‘flesh’: “I call it flesh…in order to say that it is a pregnancy of possibles…. It is by the flesh of the world that in the last analysis one can understand the lived body…. [where perception is]

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74 Merleau-Ponty explains that our awareness of Being, which remains hidden from sight, is made visible through our acts-of-being-in-the-world. This ‘visibility’ of the invisible is to be understood as ‘element’ “in Bachelard's sense” (VI, 267). In The Psychoanalysis of Fire, the French philosopher, Gaston Bachelard, writes, “Fire is the ultra-living element. It is intimate and it is universal. It lives in our heart. It lives in the sky. It rises from the depths of the substance and offers itself with the warmth of love. Or it can go back down into the substance and hide there, latent and pent-up, like hate and vengeance” (p. 7). In his concluding thoughts, Bachelard states, “To seize fire or to give oneself to fire…such is the psychological alternation which converts all values and which also reveals the clash of values…. a special psychoanalysis must destroy its painful ambiguities the better to set free the lively dialectics which bestow on reverie [i.e., muse] its true liberty and its true function as a creative mental process” (The Psychoanalysis of Fire, p. 112).
possible and means something only because there is Being” (p. 250). Through reversibility the bifurcation that results from the dichotomy of traditional dialectics gives way to the chiasm—the intertwining of divergence; “But this divergence is not a void, it is filled precisely by the flesh as the place of emergence of a vision” (p.272). As such, the flesh of ocular, tactile and auditory experiences forms its own style: the condition of thought, “inimitable, inalienable, an interior horizon and an exterior horizon” (p. 152) from which the natal bond of experience is like the flesh of a sonata, where the performer is “at the service of the sonata; the sonata sings through him or cries out so suddenly that he must ‘dash on his bow’ to follow it” (p. 151). The style of the flesh is to “remain beyond the words as it remains beyond the notes” (p. 153). The flesh is the miracle that creates a culture, a knowledge to “recapture and rectify the natural generality of my body and of the world” (p. 152), consequently resulting in a created generality, an objectifying universalism. However, the medusan experience of ontic visibility intimates the presence of preconceived nuclear properties; this is to say, we name things such as pebble or shell (p. 161). Once intuition has “[b]rought to appear” (p. 145) the lack of power of self-

Merleau-Ponty’s element of ‘flesh’ opens many possibilities for human expression, The following are two examples of such possibilities. First, Abram (1988) expands Merleau-Ponty’s element of ‘flesh’ beyond its initial anthropocentrism (p. 114). To further this link, Abram suggest that the Gaia hypothesis of a self-regulating (living) planet can be useful to reconceptualize a corporeal world (p. 111). As such, our relationship to the planet is not of being “on the Earth” but that “we live within the Earth” (p. 106): “human beings with all of their language and thoughts are enveloped within the atmosphere of this planet” (p. 107)—“like a fish in the sea” (p. 108). This “intertwined organic reality” (p. 114) requires an aesthesiological language (p. 116) that belongs to “a world that already speaks to us at the most immediate level of sensory experience” (p.117): “born as a call for and response to a gesturing, sounding, speaking landscape—a world of thunderous rumblings, of chattering brooks, of flapping, flying, screeching things, of roars and sighing winds” (p. 118). Second, McLane (1996) pushes the limits of Merleau-Ponty's element of ‘flesh’ in a different direction. In her work on ‘self-inflicted violence’ (SIV) of abuse survivors, McLane posits that Merleau-Ponty’s notion of ‘reversibility’, “that human beings…exist in reciprocal relation to other people and the world” (p. 115), is hindered by the victim-abuser relationship where the reversibility of touching is corrupted by the experience of violation (p. 116). It is against this corruption of the body that abuse survivors must reconnect with the ‘flesh’ of the world. According to McLane, self-mutilation becomes an act of resistance against the reiteration of the pain of abuse. As such, the point of intersection between the touching and the touched is between the victim, who carries the embodied history of her abuse, and the survivor seeking “her own agency” (p. 117). Consequently, the gestural expression of SIV becomes “as a mouth on the flesh containedly expressing violence…provides the possibility of a new openness—of expressing what it is to be hurt and what it is to be aggressive—without either lying or becoming an abuser” (p. 117).
determination of a thing (p. 161), what is revealed is the “generativity and generality, brute essence and brute existence, which are the nodes and antinodes of the same ontological vibration” (p. 115). Through the style, the flesh is visible as a milieu, “the thin pellicle of the quale” formed “by a sort of… invagination” where “the actual visible is a provisional partitioning” of distinctions (p. 152): “it is not enough that my look be visible for X, it is necessary that it be visible for itself, through a sort of torsion, reversal, or specular phenomenon, which is given from the sole fact that I am born” (p. 154).

The flesh is a corporeal engagement with the world, which from the palpating movements of the eyes to those of the tongue and subsequent hyper-analysis of reversibility, attains “a maximum of true proximity to a Being in dehiscence” (p.128). This “proximity through distance” is an “intuition as auscultation” (p. 128): “as if [my body]…were built around the perception that dawns through it; through its whole internal arrangement, its sensory-motor circuits, the return ways that control and release movements, it is, as it were, prepared for a self-perception” (p. 9). Flesh—in “perpetual pregnancy, [and] perpetual parturition” (p. 115)—is our chiasmic organic bond intertwining the sense-data of two eyes, two hands, two ears, like a cyclopean vision, yet with the presentiment of the reversibility of both the obverse and reverse of carnal situatedness and the multiple meaning of words. The “route of ontogenesis” of the “fragile mass of living jelly” (p. 14) from which we started life leads not to the corporeal awareness of the soaring ipseity of thetic thought but to the sensorial aesthesiological body whose narcissism and solipsism give way to "intercorporeity" (p. 141):76 while I and the other inhabit different private landscapes with divergent perspectives (p. 78), “these private worlds are ‘worlds’ only for their titulators; they are not the world” (p. 10). The body engages the world as “a halo of visibility”—“a presence of the imminent, the latent, or the hidden” (p. 245). “This visibility of my body…is what is responsible for what is called telepathy. For a minute indication of the other's behavior suffices to

76 We do not live alone, explains Merleau-Ponty (Signs, p. 175): “The solitude from which we emerge into intersubjective life is not that of the nomad. It is only the haze of an anonymous life that separates us from being; and the barrier between us and others is impalpable….What ‘precedes’ intersubjective life cannot be numerically distinguished from it, precisely because at this level there is neither individuation nor numerical distinction. The constitution of others does not come after that of the body; others and my body are born together from the original ecstasy” (Signs, p. 174).
activate this danger of visibility” (p. 245). The implication is that “[j]ust as we rediscover the field of the sensible world as interior-exterior… so also it is necessary to rediscover as the reality… between me and the other…the unique Einfühlung of his life and my life….as the inner framework of intersubjectivity” (p. 234). This raises the question of an intertwined sensoriality: “to feel my eyes is to feel that they are threatened with being seen” (p. 245). While this anticipation may not always be the case, nonetheless “for the first time, through the other body, I see that, in its coupling with the flesh of the world, the body contributes more than it receives, adding to the world that I see the treasure necessary for what the other body sees” (p. 144). For instance, “through other eyes we are for ourselves fully visible; that lacuna where our eyes, our back, lie is filled, filled still by the visible, of which we are not the titulars” (p. 143); similarly, as a sonorous being “if I am close enough to the other…I almost witness, in him as in myself, the awesome birth of vociferation…. there is a reflexivity of the movements of phonation and of hearing; they have their sonorous inscription, the vociferations have in me their motor echo” (P. 144); and visually, “through the concordant operation of his body and my own, what I see passes into him, this individual green of the meadow under my eyes invades his vision without quitting my own, I recognize in my green his green, as the customs officer recognizes suddenly in a traveler the man whose description he had been given” (P. 142).

In an encounter with another, through slight variations “suddenly there breaks forth the evidence that yonder also, minute by minute, life is being lived” (p. 11). While I become “the respondent for the interpellation that is made to me” (p.11) I become aware that what is being invaded is “my own substance”—my Lebenswelt—and “my private world has ceased to be mine only” (p. 11). What’s more, “the little private world of each is not juxtaposed to the world of all the others, but surrounded by it, levied off from it, and all together are a Sentient in general before a Sensible in general” (p. 142). This generality forms the horizon that is the being of our humanity (p. 237). The visibility of this generality, style, culture, caused by the chiasm of divergent experiences such as the seer and the seen, is then what we come to understand as the dimensionality of flesh (p. 139). “What is needed is to make explicit this horizontal totality which is not a synthesis” (p. 211). For Merleau-Ponty, thesis has failed dialectics because intersubjectivity has been able to bypass Reason (Grund) and reconnect with esprit sauvage (brute or wild
being) (p. 175). Nonetheless, given that “language has us and that it is not we who have language” (p. 194), for the physico-historical Lifeworld to remain dialectical, “speech can no longer be statement…it must be thinking speech…it is indeed the speaking, not the language…that aims at the other as a behavior…that responds to the other before he would have been understood as psychism, in a confrontation that repels or accepts his utterances as utterances, as events” (p. 175). “It is already the flesh of things that speaks to us of our own flesh, and that speaks to us of the flesh of the other” (p. 193). As such, eidetic variation of generality stems from the imaginary that is supported by speech (p. 236). The problem is to restore “an intersubjective diacritical system which is the spoken tongue” in the Lifeworld (p. 175); this is to say, we are to “rediscover the Lebenswelt logos” (p. 167). “We will therefore have to recognize an ideality that is not alien to the flesh, that gives it its axes, its depth, its dimensions” (p. 152), whence “intersubjectivity…has its solidity and its completeness…in the mode of the Lebenswelt” (p. 167). For at the chiasmic zero moment of the sensible-sentient, where I and the other rejoin at exterior poles (p. 11), or as Merleau-Ponty calls it, the “modulation of the being in the world” (p. 194), the idea as Etwas—that there is something—becomes the pivot qua speaking grasped by the Gestalt body that is in “a domain…where it reigns, where it is everywhere present without one ever being able to say: it is here” (p. 205-6).

In the working notes of The Visible and the Invisible, Merleau-Ponty reveals what had been hidden from view all along: “what stands in the way of my seeing myself is first a de facto invisible” (p. 254). This is the miscarriage of grasping hold of being, where Etwas is already always Ecart, forming lacunae of perception somewhere in the cogito that lie between my cyclopean vision and the physicality of my two eyes: “my eyes invisible for me” (p. 254). The realization is that the reverse of this de facto blindness (i.e., punctum caecum) is the de jure, the rule, of invisibility. This meta-awareness “signifies in reality that Wahrnehmen [i.e., perception] and Sich bewegen [i.e., self-

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77 Alphonso Lingis, translator of The Visible and the Invisible (1967), writes, “Merleau-Ponty believed that the study of this wild Logos, not constituted by a mind and not consisting of positive idealities, was destined to renew our understanding of the imaginary, which is not simply the production of mental images, but the…axes….[of] the invisible substructure of the visible [which] is the key to the unconscious structure of consciousness” (VI, p. liii).
movement] are synonymous: it is for this reason that the Wahrnehmen never rejoins the Sich bewegen it wishes to apprehend…[because they] emerge from one another” (p. 255). Yet, the Ec-stasy (transcendence) that is experienced during the failure to rejoin, which leads to cognition of divergences, is evidence of the presence of Being whose indivisibility is the potentiality of I can (p.255). This je peux, operative of the corporeal schema, is realized in animation, in movement—that is, in flesh.

Some holding thoughts about Merleau-Ponty

Indeed, Merleau-Ponty has earned the peculiar recognition as “the philosopher of ambiguity.” While Austin opened the door of language and Wittgenstein stood at the threshold, it was Merleau-Ponty who crossed to the other side. What he finds in the primordial silence of Being is inexpressible in words. The challenge, then, is to speak about the unsayable to a human species that is in words like a fish is in water. What is particular about our world of words is that we speak in a way that separates the mind from the body akin to a fish being meta-aware that it is in water, where this meta-awareness impedes the body of the fish from truly sensing its water world. Like seeing the world through a television, this meta-obstruction directs thought to a constructed image of the world. But the only way to see that we are trapped in a constructed world is to work through it. For there is no outside, there is no above water; our realization can only be a submerged realization. Like a fish reconnecting its body to water, we must reconnect our bodies to words. Here Merleau-Ponty plunges into a world far beyond where neither Austin nor Wittgenstein desire to venture. Whereas Austin teases out the animating force of speech, and Wittgenstein separates language from speaker, for Merleau-Ponty, to truly reconnect with Being, the speaker itself must undergo a

78 During a presentation at the Société Française de Philosophie about the Phenomenology of Perception, Merleau-Ponty was criticized for seeming to relegate science to an inferior form of knowledge. His response was that, on the contrary, his project was to actually compliment scientific understanding, prompting the critic to reply, “I have, therefore, misunderstood the sense of the ‘primacy of perception’” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 35). Coyne (1980) posits that Merleau-Ponty’s work may seem unfinished because, for him, what drives language is to be found between thoughts, in the silence of a body on the verge of expression, of “the yet-unmeant, yet-untought…the yet-unsaid” (p. 321).
separation (écart) between the ‘physical body’ and the ‘language of body’. Merleau-Ponty sees his investigation as “the study of the Vorhabe of Being” (VI, p. 204). As such, to grasp a clear understanding of Vorhabe (i.e., anticipation, intention), Merleau-Ponty brackets cognition, even in its most subtle form of Erlebnisse (i.e., experience, awareness), in order to “describe the vertical or wild Being as that pre-spiritual milieu without which nothing is thinkable, not even the spirit, and by which we pass into one another, and ourselves into ourselves in order to have our own time” (VI, p. 204). An impediment, however, is the body’s meta-obstruction that has become intertwined with the sensoriality of physically being in the world. To distinguish this ‘false Being of scepticism’ from corporeality, Merleau-Ponty assumes a way of speaking that separates. Yet, this is a particular type of division, not one that undermines one binary with another to establish a new synthesis; Merleau-Ponty’s hyper-dialectic/hyper-reflection aims to confirm the presence of Being by the mere fact that there can be distinctions (écart). For divergence is in continuous topological flow: “a total voluminosity which surrounds me, in which I am, which is behind me as well as before me” (VI, pp. 213-14). In this ‘primordial topology’, the diacritical of the visible makes accessible “Being whose home is language [though it] cannot be fixed, looked at” (VI, 214).

At the heart of écart we do not find some mysterious force of creation; rather, we find ourselves, as sensible-sentient participant-observers, integrated in the Urstiftung of lived experience. Body, language and lifeworld come together when the sensible-sentient is witness to the obverse and reverse of that which is there, allowing recognition of the intertwining of the objective body and the phenomenal body (VI, p. 117). A case in point is that “there is no essence, no idea, that does not adhere to a domain of history and of geography” (VI, p. 115); as such, “[t]he Gestalt is…not free in regard to space and time, it is not aspatial, atemporal, it only escapes the time and space conceived as a series of events in themselves” (p. 205). To Merleau-Ponty this is a re-envisioning of bifurcation as reversibility of difference forming the totality of perceptual experience—the chiasm: “That is, that the things have us, and that it is not we who have the things….That language has us and that it is not we who have language. That it is being that speaks within us and not we who speak of being” (VI, p. 194). Through this language of differentiation (VI, p. 191)—this operative language—we find the Urstiftung of
meaningfulness like we find music and mathematics; that is, we know how to go on without the mechanical restriction of notation (VI, p. 153).

Well, and what of it?

Through the reversibility of the visible and the invisible Merleau-Ponty unpacks, or endeavours to unpack, the immediacy of grasping the world and knowing how to go on, which is Wittgenstein’s project, as well as how is it that we go about our daily activities as a speaking species, which is Austin’s project. There is something further that Merleau-Ponty adds to these projects. Merleau-Ponty helps us to understand a mystery in language that Austin only goes so far as to name, and Wittgenstein sees no reason to say more about it other than distinguish which part relates to speech and which part is to remain silent. For Austin, it is enough to recognize the magic of signification as the force of meaning. For Wittgenstein, such a force requires a subtle but crucial distinction in that this force that is at the heart of forms of life is composed of sensation and expression. The second generates the world of language-games, but the first, as incommunicable private experience, “does not help us in the least to grasp” meaning (PI, 274). Wittgenstein, however, is not saying that sensation is not an aspect of signification. When he writes “[m]eaning is a physiognomy” (PI, 568) he means that genuine expression is like a human face (PI, 606) that does not hide feelings such as the pain of a toothache (PI, 311). As such, we would recognize the role of sensation in the process of signification when playing the card game of solitaire (PI, 248). Similarly, sensation would be at play if a visiting Martian, unfamiliar with the thought processes of earthling, looks at a picture of a person on a steep hill and sees a person sliding downhill just as easily as moving uphill (PI, 139). Moreover, we would recognize the sensation of understanding when looking at a familiar image like an arrow and simply knowing that the arrow points (PI, 454). We would recognize the sensation of understanding when surmising that a picture of a steaming pot also means there is boiling water in the pot (PI, 297). For Wittgenstein, the problem arises when we try to say that our sensations are private (e.g., ‘only I know what the experience means to me’). This would be like my right hand giving money to my left hand: “we shall ask: ‘Well, and what of it?’” (PI, 268). In Wittgenstein’s view, sensations need to be put aside, because to entertain them can only lead us to a world of “hocus-
It is here, where Wittgenstein leaves off, that Merleau-Ponty can help us a little further. For Merleau-Ponty, the silent awareness generated by the exchanging hands (i.e., ‘my right hand touched by my left hand’) is not only an invitation to ask “what is there?” but to go further and ask "what is the there is?" (VI, p. 129). Merleau-Ponty is not putting aside bewitching sensations but confronting their sorcery. Sensing the world brings with it the trappings of positivism yet this illusion is necessary to have a better understanding of the shifting movements between the visible and the invisible, the dominant and the alternative: “the silent persuasion of the sensible is Being’s unique way of manifesting itself without becoming positivity” (VI, p. 214). Here Wittgenstein’s silence about the sensations behind the physiognomy of words finds a voice but not as an objectifying element or phenomenon, rather in the affectivity of elementality and phenomenality. And here also is the punch line of this trajectory from Austin to Wittgenstein to Merleau-Ponty. For it is from the sensation of force and form of life that performativity and language-games generate human movement, that distinguish disengagement, like the Japanese Boketto, from engagement, like the German Urstiftung. Merleau-Ponty’s project, although obscure, offers a witnessing voice to this sensation we call ‘language’:

speech (la parole)—which is sustained by the thousands of ideal relations of the particular language (la langue), and which, therefore, in the eyes of science, is, as a constituted language (langage), a certain region in the universe of significations—is also the organ and the resonator of all the other regions of signification and consequently coextensive with the thinkable” (VI, p. 118).

Part III is a demonstration of this language that we are, this flesh of language. If we are to find the rough ground on the slippery slope of language, then what we need to see through the epistemic lens this dissertation has endeavoured to fashion is that the undeniable visibility of the words we engage—whose dominant meanings are in a constant state of about to shift to invisible alternative understandings—is evidence that the multistable logos lives, is animated, held in an orbit of signification not by any grounding concreteness but by the engagement of interlocutors. This is to say, ‘engagement’ is a moving activity not a fixed point. As Wittgenstein has observed, the
expression "The word is on the tip of my tongue" articulates a sensation akin to "Now I know how to go on" (PI, p. 219). It is here that language lives where we do not clearly grasp how yet recognize that it is there. This is the ‘there is’ of that which is there. It comes and goes in a flash. Yet, as Merleau-Ponty notes, in this failure to grasp my unfolding movements there is the success of recognizing that what prevents my flesh and the flesh of the world from becoming unhinged is that my engaged body is what completes meaning (VI, p. 148): “The wahrnehmen-sich bewegen implication is a thought-language implication—The flesh is this whole cycle” (VI, p. 260).

The next two sections, titled “Spell it out” and “A dialogue between teacher and student,” place language before us, illuminated by a ‘natural light’ that, while anonymous, holds speaker and hearer, writer and reader in an orbit of signification. The visibility of the text pivots in a continuum of holding and shifting meanings. What I wish to impress on the reader is that, while we are participant-observers as investigators of communicative processes, we must recognize our own sense-awareness, our cognitive-registers and our sentient-registers when engaging language as language-beings. The understood word may complete the communicative cycle, but what I wish to bring into the open is a prima-vera witnessing of prejection, of the superposition of language before it collapses into multistable logos. The next two sections serve to demonstrate that an investigator of the elementality of language must continuously verify personal location in reference to the shifting meanings of the communicative artefact under investigation.
Part III

_The greatest difficulty in life is to know thyself._
—Thales of Miletus

**Spell it out**

Consider the following passage:

- Hallway
- Door
- Whiteboard
- Windows
- Florescent lights
- Desks

This passage could be understood in any number of ways. It could be points of discussion, such as areas of school design (e.g., ‘how can the hallway be improved?’). It could be a mental record of what a student sees walking to the classroom. It could be the first impressions of a new teacher’s first day. It could be the last impressions of a retiring teacher’s last day. It could be any number of possibilities. So which one is it? “Why not cut the cackle?” as Austin would say (HDW, p. 122). Fair enough, but how am I to get to the point? What does it mean to _spell it out_?

The word ‘spell’ carries a double meaning, orthography and enchantment. Consider an absurd spelling test dictated by an ape whose vocal noises periodically sound like words, while a second ape randomly keyboarding occasionally types words. Regardless of the randomness of the words ‘spoken’ and the words ‘typed’, this orthographic illusion would be mesmerizing to witness. We might even be awe-struck, witnessing _prima-vera_ human language. Austin suggests that the physicality of phonetic noises, which were the first linguistic steps of our primitive ancestors, has remained part of human language (HWD, p. 72). Merleau-Ponty notes, “the movements of phonation and of hearing…have in me their motor echo” (VI, p. 144). As such, despite our ability to discern forces of meaning we have remained vulnerable to “the movement of vocal organs” (HDW, p. 114). Austin gives the example of a person performing a phonetic act...
that sounds like ‘I stink’ but who actually meant to say ‘Iced ink’ (HDW, p. 123). We seem to have a much more personal connection to orthography than something like numeracy. For instance, we may shrug off a computation error as a mental slip but seem to take to heart spelling mistakes or confusion over word usage (PI, 167).

It is as if words themselves carried some kind of power. As Wittgenstein observed, when we look at familiar marks on a page the sound of letters or words come instantly (PI, 165-166): “I feel that the letters are the reason why I read…. I feel a kind of influence of the letters working on me” (PI, 169). Yet this guiding force does not reside in words or letters themselves but, as Merleau-Ponty points out, is a “halo” that “makes of the word-meaning itself an enigma” (VI, p. 96) and “make[s] ideas be the other side of language” (VI, p. 153). Consider the open-ended statement “There is a bull in the field” where it is not clear if the utterance is an observation, a warning or something else (HDW, pp. 32-33). Austin explains, this ambiguity causes a special kind of misunderstanding about “the force of the utterance as opposed to its meaning” (HDW, p. 33). This category of language-acts includes theatrical speech and poetry (HDW, p. 104) as well as insinuations, jokes, swearwords and expressive language (HDW, p. 33). Here signification is carried not by (literal) meaning but by an “awe-inspiring” force where utterances seem to be “the outward and visible sign…of an inward and spiritual act” (HDW, p. 9). It is as if “being guided by…a spell, feeling astonishment at the fact that we agreed” (PI, 234).

A challenge here is that the force of meaning—as an enigma expressed in language—is in a state of reversibility, where the other side of its elementality leads to “the error of the semantic philosophies to close up language as if it spoke only of itself” VI, p. 126); what Austin calls the “sui generis” of relativistic semantic analysis (HDW, p. 10). To be caught up on this flipside of the animating power of language can lead to the mistake of taking as fact statements “which are either…nonsensical or else intended as something quite different” (HDW p. 3). The word ‘spell’ then pivots between primordial corporeality (i.e., affectivity) and intellectual containment (i.e., cognition) or what Wittgenstein called the “atmosphere” of language. In this reversibility lies the frontline in the battle against bewitchment by the same intelligence that can also help us see language as force, form of life, and flesh.
Hallway
Door
Whiteboard
Windows
Florescent lights
Desks

How might we experience a passage like the one above if written in rhyme? For instance,

Hallway.
Door.
Whiteboard.
Floor.

The rhyme evokes a kind of sonorous collocation: the rhythm sits well with our embodied sense of western musical patterns (e.g., iambic metre). But the piece I chose to compose creates slight dissonance, lacks *popular beat*. The bottom three lines burden the desire to find a footing in this offbeat passage:

Hallway
Door
Whiteboard
Windows
Florescent lights
Desks

Given that this passage does not hold a spellbinding rhyming rhythm, our attention is directed to the literal meaning of the words: what is the relationship between hallway, door, whiteboard, windows, florescent lights, desks? Earlier I mentioned that these words described a school setting, but how might we understand this piece void of context?

Could the placement of the words be a guiding force? What happens if we arranged them in reverse?

Desks
Florescent lights
Windows
Lacking context, we can still confidently say that these words, regardless of their arrangement, form a list. But what constitutes this confidence? How is it that in a linguistic universe of possible intentionalities the presentation of these words, one on top of the other, forms what we understand as ‘list’? One explanation is that ‘list’ has a visual structure that stimulates a neurological response, as if radiating from the heart we address the visible as ‘list’. We could also say that socialization enables us to experience the fundamental *Urstitfung* of ‘list’ and the directing *Vorhabe* of ‘list’. Yet, this does not show us how cognition of these words (and their literal meanings) has some kind of connectivity to force: how does the placement of the words allow us to *prima-vera* experience the force of ‘list’? What is our complicity as participant-observers with such force? At what point, between the words on the page and our engagement with those words, does language spark to life, or in Wittgenstein’s words, what is the point when the “atmosphere forced itself upon me” (PI, 607)?

I say the piece is a poem. A moment ago the passage was a list, now it is a poem. Which intention dominates, which has greater gravity, greater pull: the list or the poem? Let’s put them side-by-side to compare:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hallway</th>
<th>Hallway</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Door</td>
<td>Door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiteboard</td>
<td>Whiteboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windows</td>
<td>Windows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florescent lights</td>
<td>Florescent lights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desks</td>
<td>Desks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How can we tell them apart? What if we gave each a title? Imagine walking into a room and seeing the list:

\[ \text{LIST} \]
\[ Hallway \]
\[ Door \]
\[ Whiteboard \]
Now, imagine walking into another room and seeing the poem:

**POEM**

- Hallway
- Door
- Whiteboard
- Windows
- Florescent lights
- Desks

The ‘atmosphere’ of the list would be denotative, whereas the ‘atmosphere’ of the poem would be connotative. With the list we think of objects; with the poem we sense an invitation to be introspective. The language-game ‘what does this mean to me?’ would seem fitting in reference to the poem, and the language-game ‘how is this place managed?’ would feel right in reference to the list. What is emerging within each atmosphere is a family resemblance of language-games (e.g., list, denotation, objects, management *compared to* poem, connotation, introspection, personal view). We could even say that the forms of life of ‘list’ and ‘poem’, expressed in corresponding families of language-games, can be experienced in reference to the titles themselves. We do not need the passages as exemplars of ‘list’ or ‘poem’. But how does the gravity of these atmospheres emerge? In what way do force of meaning and form of life come to be?

Force and form of life are not sources of meaning but descriptions of the affectivity of language. For Austin, ‘force’ is about “‘how…it [i.e., the utterance] is to be taken’” (HDW, p. 73). For Wittgenstein, ‘form of life’ is “an activity” of “the speaking of language” (PI, 23). Yet, to speak of affectivity does not anchor signification in the body. As Merleau-Ponty notes, “The flesh of the world is not explained by the flesh of the body…The flesh of the world is not *self-sensing* (*se sentir*) as is my flesh” (VI, 250). But if force and form of life are not, as the Merleau-Pontyan flesh suggests, ‘inside ourselves’, then how are they to be grasped?
This raises the question of who is to be doing the grasping? Austin writes, “when we insinuate…we cannot say ‘I insinuate…’” (HDW, pp. 104-5). Yet, the ‘I’ is implied. But what is this ‘I’ to which a speaker makes reference? Rhetorically Wittgenstein asks, “Whom do I really inform, if I say ‘I have consciousness’?” (PI, 416). The implication is that ‘I’ acts as a placeholder for a desire for personal depth. When we grasp how to go on with a ‘poem’ or ‘list’ we want to know “by what token do we understand?” (PI, 433). It is here that a common error is made in thinking about this animating power of language as ‘elusive phenomena’ (PI, 436). There is no mystery here, simply a ‘giddiness’ about something that seems hidden in plain view. There is only form of life expressed in language-games whose atmosphere we experience as “[a]n indescribable character” (PI, 609). And this indescribable character of language generates the frustration that “[o]ur vocabulary is inadequate” (PI, 610). This “illness” (PI, 255), this sensation that “I cannot get my fill” (PI, 277), this bewitchment of ‘I’ that language has the “character of depth” must be done away with (PI, 109). What needs to be grasped is that “every sentence in our language ‘is in order as it is’” (PI, 98): “the language is itself the vehicle of thought” (PI, 329).

Imagine a game in which a person is given six word cards with the words florescent lights, windows, door, whiteboard, desks, hallway. The person is instructed to arrange the cards in any way the person pleases. After some thought the person decides to arrange the words according to their relationship to floor, wall and ceiling: as such, they respectively read ‘hallway, desks, whiteboard, windows, door, florescent lights’. The person is then instructed to arrange the words in any other way. After some thought the person arranges the cards to read ‘windows, door, hallway, florescent lights, whiteboard, desks’. This time the point of reference is about being outdoors, and the words are arranged from strongest to weakest relevance to being outdoors. In both cases, the person does not reveal the reasoning behind each arrangement. Nonetheless, the instructor congratulates the person on a job well done! The person, however, is baffled, not knowing exactly what has been well done.

Indeed, what has been well done? Wittgenstein explains that language can seem like a Chinese sentence to a non-Chinese speaker, appearing as ornamentation rather than writing (PI, 108). In other words, at what point do marks and sounds become language:
“what does the characteristic thing about the experience of reading consist in” (PI, 165)? If people were like reading machines, at what point would they transition from pretending to read to actually reading (PI, 157-158)? In the above scenario, the instructor recognizes this transition, and more so recognizes (i.e., ‘what has been well done’) that language is its own vehicle with form and force. The recognition emerges, as Merleau-Ponty would say, from “the obscure region whence comes the instituted light, as the muted reflection of the body upon itself [which] is what we call natural light” (VI, p.154). In other words, the nomenclatures of ‘form’ and ‘force’ hold in language the act of recognition whereby even the ‘I’ that reaches to grasp is itself not above being a language-game: “nothing has so far been done, when a thing has been named” (PI, 49). But, if ‘form’ and ‘force’ are placeholders like ‘I’, then how do we come to the elementality of language, to the “rays of the world” (VI, p. 218)?

Merleau-Ponty tells us, “the world is no longer founded on the ‘I think’” (VI, p. 57); “There is no intelligible world, there is the sensible world” (VI, p. 214). This is because “the structure of its mute world [i.e., the human body’s ontological framework] is such that all the possibilities of language are already given in it” (VI, p. 155). From “this great mute land” (VI, p. 126) comes “the force of incarnation of language” (VI, p. 240), which is “the most valuable witness to Being…[where the sensed and the sentient] are articulation before the letter” (VI, p. 126). As such, the protagonizing ‘I’ does not come to terms with the world through a distinction between actions and their ideal forms (i.e., noema-noesis analysis) (VI, p. 242), but as “the segregation of the ‘within’ and the ‘without’” in terms of “the dehiscence of the speaking and the thinking” (VI, p. 118). The revealed body “feels the world” (VI, p. 118) as “a carnal adherence of the sentient to the sensed and of the sensed to the sentient” (VI, p. 142). Thus, in seeking to grasp that which is there, opinions that give way to other opinions do not amount to skeptical proof of an illusion of reality but “verifies…the belongingness of each experience to the same world…as possibilities of the same world” (VI, p. 41). Access to the world, then, through Wesen is “belongingness” that sidesteps the trappings of the Cogito and opens up the human body to the “rays of the world” (VI, p. 247). This is to say, through ‘natural light’ “it suffices that I look at a landscape, that I speak of it with someone” which reveals to us
that before experience returns to ourselves (i.e., incorporeal) (VI, pp. 117-118) at minimum it is “intercorporeal being” (VI, p. 143).

The mere locution of ‘list’ or ‘poem’ implies a speaker and hearer, a writer and reader; positions that are themselves significations. But before we can bring into the open these positions in the game of words, we must first recognize that “speech…inscribes itself…manifests itself by an almost carnal existence of the idea…a sublimation of the flesh” (VI, p. 154-155). What’s more, “no locutor speaks without making himself in advance allocutary, be it only for himself…and, with the same stroke, also sets himself up as delocutary; speech of which one speaks: he offers himself and offers every word to a universal Word” (VI, p. 154). As such, the object, the visible, the measurable, is perceived by an ontology of ‘lo’, the acting subject of lo-cus, lo-gos, lo-cution that incorpo-rates the observable into the sensorial flesh of the witnessing subject, a prerequisite to the invisible, to the other side of that which is there: “Hence it is necessary to account for this relative positivity of the perceived…especially since it is upon it that the positivity of the invisible rests” (VI, p. 214).

Hallway
Door
Whiteboard
Windows
Florescent lights
Desks

An ocular experience. But of what? Linear structure, list, poem, random words: shifts between the visible dominant and the invisible alternative. At the most basic, that which is there is the act of witnessing. And, even here ‘witnessing’ is thesis. What allows for awareness of ‘witnessing’? These questions drift towards analysis. But who is speaking? The author? Is the author holding an interpretation for the reader? Is the reader holding an interpretation for the author? Or, is it that different moments of engagement are being held? What is this experience of ‘holding meaning’? One holds against the shift (e.g., ‘it is not poem; it is list’). Yet, another holds differently (e.g., ‘it is neither poem nor list, but random words’). Periodically the grip is lost and there is an unexpected shift.
(e.g., ‘I see letters organized horizontally and vertically’). Holding and shift, shift and holding constitute the event of language.

What evidence is there of this holding-shifting event? The evidence is in the participation of writer and reader, speaker and hearer: in the communication between their private worlds (e.g., ‘I know what this means to me’). As Merleau-Ponty explains, “The communication makes us the witnesses of one sole world,” but this world “remains absolutely obscure” (VI, p. 11), because what we are dealing with is “the signification ‘world’” (VI, p. 47). To speak of witnessing, the positivity of witnessing, its very visibility, its lo-cution, lo-cus and lo-gos, reveals that there is something not-yet-signified. This affirmation, this positive recognition of the invisible (e.g., ‘lo and behold the hidden alternative’) serves as evidence that the entity referred to as ‘I’ can be outside its construction “in the world, among the others, and constantly this experience feeds…reflection” (VI, p. 49). From this outside comes the “natural light that illuminates all flesh” (VI, p. 142), “because it is not I who sees, not he who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us” (VI, p. 142).

Hallway
Door
Whiteboard
Windows
Florescent lights
Desks

To spell it out, the flesh of language is in the pivot between the visible and the invisible, obverse and reverse, dominant and alternatives—divergence: words as poem or list; quantity as mathematical concept or social phenomenon; tomato as culinary vegetable or botanical fruit. The flesh of language is not only lived in the cognitive-registers of a shifting multistable logos but also in the sentient-registers of indirect referencing or suggestion: e.g., ‘this passage reminds me of Searle’s Chinese room’; ‘that passage reminds me of Kennedy’s Ich bin ein Berliner’; ‘another passage reminds me of Chomsky’s colorless green ideas sleep furiously’. That which is there of the flesh of language is prejection: i.e., that which could be before ‘I’ and the ‘Other’ collapse the superposition of possibilities.
At the beginning of this dissertation I made the absurd statement ‘language does not exist, nonetheless we understand’. The implication is that ‘language’ is itself a language-game; or more accurately, there are various language-games whose family resemblance forms the life that we recognize with the word ‘language’. Language can be literal, symbolic, and can create tension between different understandings. As an artefact of investigation, its elementality left undisturbed can be appreciated like the ‘the experience in limbo’ of the Schrödinger-Wittgenstein mixed metaphor—the prima-vera of possibilities “between consciousness and brain-process” (PI, 412).

I have invited readers to entertain the idea of a self-aware manuscript. As a language artefact, ‘self-aware manuscript’ can be taken at face value to be an absurd statement. Its other visibility stems from my invitation to entertain a poetic appreciation of this document. In either case, the language artefact is engaged in accordance to how it has been presented: “This manuscript is self-aware of a reader’s participation to animate the words contained in these pages.” Yet, there is an invisibility here as well, a parallel discourse of alternative interpretations, extended thoughts, agreements and disagreements. The reader has engaged the text of this dissertation in accordance to what the author presumably has meant to say and parallel to this reading is its invisible discourse: e.g., ‘I see what he means here…. This reminds me of….It could also be that….’ Much like the person arranging and rearranging word cards, the form of life at play here is that language is its own vehicle generating experiences, emotions and memories: e.g., ‘I see what he means here…. This reminds me of….It could also be that….’ At the threshold—generated by language itself—between the visible and the invisible is the elementality of language, its flesh, animating the possibilities of that which is interverbally emergent.

**A dialogue between teacher and student**

Meaningfulness emerges from interverbalization and the flesh of language where there are manifold possibilities of meaning. On this point my work draws to an end as it began—with a story about language. In this story, a dialogue develops between teacher and student. To animate their conversation, I invite the reader to believe, at least for its duration, in the existence of Amitoid who lives on a mountain and Setarcos who seeks
wisdom. The dialogue is itself a form of life generating its own sense of event. Its ‘atmosphere’, as Wittgenstein would say, is that of a traditional dialogue with the teacher in the role of the wise guiding hand. Yet, this visible reading suggests an alternative, hidden from view, in which the process of education can also be about mutual learning. This is the richness of the interverbal emergent: that in the flesh of language arise moments of prejection. For the reader, there can be a number of possible shifts and holds, such as entertaining the invitation to read the story, appreciating character development, recognizing the self-referentiality of the dialogue itself, scrutinizing the reasoning expressed by the characters, and being drawn in by the story itself. A reader may experience some, all or completely different shifts and holds, nonetheless in such moments of prejective sentient-registers the affectivity of language opens us up to its flesh. At a more symbolic level, Setarcos also experiences moments of shifts and holds. For instance, early on Setarcos recognizes that thoughts are language-games: “At some point a pattern clicks and you know how to go on.” Later in the dialogue Setarcos begins the process of showing the fly the way out of the fly-bottle: “You are in control, even if you deny it,” Setarcos says to Amitoid; and goes on to say, “This amounts to saying that ‘I’, as an articulation of myself, makes me an illusion.” This dialogue not only exemplifies the performativity of story telling (e.g., ‘I invite you to believe in Amitoid and Setarcos’) but also brings into the light text itself as a form of life in parallel co-existence with the flesh of language. Here, the flesh of language is the prejection that emerges from the interverbalization between the writer of this dissertation and it readers, and symbolically between the two interlocutors of this story. Their conversation begins when Setarcos reaches the summit.

\[\text{Amitoid:} \quad \text{Who are you?}\]
\[\text{Setarcos:} \quad \text{I am Setarcos, and I seek the wisdom of Amitoid.}\]
\[\text{Amitoid:} \quad \text{I did not ask for your name or mine. I asked ‘who are you?’}\]
\[\text{Setarcos:} \quad \text{I do not understand the question.}\]
\[\text{Amitoid:} \quad \text{Yes you do, but you do not have a clear answer. Setarcos, Amitoid, these are just names we hide behind, yet we do not know who we truly are.}\]
\[\text{Setarcos:} \quad \text{I now understand the answer you seek.}\]
Amitoid: And what is that?
Setarco: You want to know if I am self-aware, and that’s the problem. I know I am alive, but I do not know what is the purpose to my life. This is why I seek your guidance.
Amitoid: You have failed the first test.
Setarco: What test?
Amitoid: And now you have failed your second test.
Setarco: [silence]
Amitoid: To know yourself is to always be prepared for the test of life. This test comes in different forms and at different times, but it amounts to the same question: ‘How do I know I am here?’ Do you know you are here? Only you can answer that question. You say you seek my guidance. Why? I just tried to guide you and where did that lead you? Nowhere.
Setarco: I don’t know what to say.
Amitoid: Now you are on the right track. Forget about the words. Simply the sound of speech is evidence that you are here. Any physical movement, for that matter, beginning with your breathing, is evidence of your presence.
Setarco: Yes, I agree. I know I exist. I just don’t know the purpose of my existence.
Amitoid: We are going around in circles. To find the answer you must first understand the question. And you understand the question. You don’t need me. You know how to proceed.
Setarco: That’s just it, I don’t know.
Amitoid: Are you feeble-minded! You know the question, ‘Why do I exist?’ and so the answer is ‘I exist because….’ All you need to do is simply complete the statement.
Setarco: [silence]
Amitoid: You are silent. Tell me what you are thinking.
Setarco: Who am I to question the great and wise Amitoid.
Amitoid: Who is this great Amitoid? I am as much a fool as you, and yet you give me such power over you. Am I really that powerful? When you leave this mountain you will do as you please. I have no power over you. Are you that
cowardly that you would hide behind politeness instead of telling me what you are really thinking?

*Setarcos:* I might not be too bright but I’m not a coward. I am just frustrated. I cannot move my thoughts forward. You stop me at every turn.

*Amitoid:* You are upset.

*Setarcos:* Yes, I am upset!

*Amitoid:* Finally you present yourself. It’s not a matter of existing; it’s a matter of being present in the moment.

*Setarcos:* You have tricked me.

*Amitoid:* Yes. Sometimes we must fly south if we wish to head north.

*Setarcos:* But how does awareness of my physical presence, of my emotions, of my breathing, help me see the purpose in life?

*Amitoid:* Before we can address your question about purpose, we need to complete the answer to my question about who *you* are. So far we have only provided half an answer. The other half concerns the here and now of self-awareness. What is ‘here’ for you at this moment: is it the mountain, this rocky terrain, the trees, the sky, the valley below, you, me?

*Setarcos:* I suppose it’s all those things. But the true here and now is this conversation I am having with you.

*Amitoid:* And what is it that we are talking about?

*Setarcos:* I guess we are talking about the act of talking, about being self-aware in the conversation.

*Amitoid:* I would not disagree, but this means we have not really been talking about anything yet. Let’s talk about something.

*Setarcos:* Let’s talk about real things.

*Amitoid:* All right, let’s talk about this stone I hold in my hand. This is real. Take the stone, place it on the ground, take a step back and look at it.

*Setarcos:* [follows instructions]

*Amitoid:* Clear your mind of all notions of ‘stone’: its texture, colour name and any other identifiers. In the absence of these notions, what do you see? Take a moment and describe your initial impression.
Setarcos: [observes quietly] I see an object, a basic oval shape, about the size of…

Amitoid: [waves a hand to interrupt] Stop. Perhaps, I wasn’t clear. I want you to describe your initial impression without resorting to familiar concepts. Tell me what you see as if you had no familiar words to describe it.

Setarcos: [ponders] I feel unsure of what to say.

Amitoid: If you are at a loss for words, then what are you experiencing?

Setarcos: I feel anxious, stuck, wanting to say something but unable to do so.

Amitoid: That’s right! In the absence of the familiar, that very personal ‘I’ that resides deep in our bodies becomes most apparent.

Setarcos: So, what you are saying is that self-awareness, my personal ‘I’ statement, is at the root of what is real, what is here and now for me.

Amitoid: I didn’t say that. You said it.

Setarcos: But you implied it. You guided me to this understanding.

Amitoid: Do you believe in your new understanding?

Setarcos: If I accept your line of reasoning, then yes I do.

Amitoid: To believe, now there’s one of the great mysteries of the world. I will come back to that, but first, what do you mean by ‘my line of reasoning’?

Setarcos: I can see a pattern of thought in your statements. If I choose to follow it, I sense it will lead me to where you want me to go.

Amitoid: And is this how you came to this new understanding?

Setarcos: Not really. When I spoke of ‘my personal I statement’, that came in a flash. This part about following your line of thought, I said in retrospect trying to make sense of how this flash of awareness came to me.

Amitoid: So you are telling me a story to explain what is unclear to you. Why are you confident about where you are right now?

Setarcos: It makes sense. I see it now: from your first question about ‘who am I’, and realizing that I need to be physically self-aware, not just in my head but I need to be in the here and now, to listen to myself speak, to feel myself breathing, getting upset. So, when it came to the matter of the stone, something clicked in me, and I now recognize my participation in the creation of my reality.
Amitoid: All right, for now, I’ll grant you all this. Let’s try another ‘self-awareness’ exercise. If you could not be explicit or implicit about identifying yourself or others, and you wanted to invite a friend, how could this be expressed?

Setarcos: This is the same as the stone example. If I am at a loss for words, I become self-aware.

Amitoid: But is this self-awareness the same as the previous self-awareness?

Setarcos: [ponders] No, there is a subtle difference. My first experience, regarding the stone, was like a spark, a flash of awareness. With the second exercise, about inviting a friend, I felt I had control. It was a more calculating experience like playing a game of chess: I followed your moves, tried to figure out the next intersect point. There is also one more experience of self-awareness. It was when you tricked me at the beginning and got me upset, which was like accepting an inevitable truth I did not initially see. I was defensive.

Amitoid: Could we then say that, here, we have three distinct experiences of self-awareness?

Setarcos: Yes, not all self-awareness is the same.

Amitoid: You are not giving me a complete answer. You need to move your own thoughts forward and not stop halfway. What you just said is the same type of passive response as when you stated you were unsure of what to say. You are letting me lead you. Not all self-awareness is the same, you are right in this, but do you recognize that you are stating this in a particular way?

Setarcos: I think I am beginning to see what you mean. I need to be meta-aware. For instance, I make this observation aware I am not having the same self-awareness experiences as before. I say ‘I am beginning to see’ empathetically, like a parent seeing past the anger of a child. I have a sense of connection with you that is more than the exchange of words.

Amitoid: Very good. Now let’s come back to a few things you said earlier. You said ‘something clicked’, what did you mean?

Setarcos: I don’t know how else to say it. To see my complicity in reality just ‘clicked’ in the same way learning to add just clicks: one plus one is two, two and two is four, and so on. There is no way to clearly explain this. At some point a
pattern clicks and you know how to go on.

*Amitoid:* Could it ‘click’ in a wrong way? For example, could it click such that the next addition pair consists of the same number as the previous answer: one plus one is two, two and two is four, four and four is eight, where the number three is overlooked.

*Setarcos:* I suppose it could. And this is where guidance comes in. But this does not diminish the experience we call ‘clicking’.

*Amitoid:* You also stated ‘If you accept my line of reasoning’. With this ‘if’ qualifier you seem to leave a door open for yourself.

*Setarcos:* Yes, what you are saying works within your frame of reasoning, but there are other ways of thinking that may work just as well or better. I’ve given myself the option to pursue another line of reasoning should I find one.

*Amitoid:* Fair enough. If I grant you this insurance against my thoughts, then what are you accepting within my frame of reasoning?

*Setarcos:* Before we spoke I was not aware that I needed to have this deeper connection to words. I thought, well, I didn't even think about it, I just spoke. I mean I was aware of how I was speaking and how to respond to others, to not put my foot in my mouth, so to speak. But you have opened my eyes to a different type of awareness. There is something in how words come together that expresses the thoughts of the speaker and impresses those thoughts on the listener. Like magic, something moves from one person to another. I’m not clear on what this ‘something’ is, but I see now that it is there. Even this explanation is not enough. But I know now how you wish me to proceed; it’s just that I cannot explain it in words.

*Amitoid:* Yet, you sense you are on the right track?

*Setarcos:* Yes, there is something going on with language that is separate from us, but nonetheless affects us. I just don’t know if it is something being projected from me towards language or from language towards me. There is a kind of separation there, which I did not see before, because I have always felt that the words I speak are my words, they come from me, they are a part of me.

*Amitoid:* [after a prolonged silence] Tell me, how is it that you believe this new
understanding to be true?

Setarcos: I believe it in the sense that it fits; it sits well with me. If I did not believe in what I was saying, then I would be pretending, or at most holding a truth within a given context. Let me explain. I pretend New Year’s Eve is a special event, but I know it’s a day like any other day. Contextually, an actor on stage is a star but on the street that actor is an ordinary person. Whereas this belief in language as an extension of who we are is like the moon; it is there no matter what, even when I don’t see it.

Amitoid: It’s about how you feel.

Setarcos: Yes, before I felt one way and now I feel another way.

Amitoid: But the moon is there regardless of how you feel.

Setarcos: I see where you are going with this: language is there regardless of how I feel about it, like a tree that exists regardless of whether I exist or not.

Amitoid: [silence]

Setarcos: But you corrected me when I spoke of existence before, yet you are leading me to think about it again. [ponders] I see it now! The answer has been in front of me all along. ‘Existence’ is merely a word we use to express our perception of the world: we say the moon exists, the tree exists, I exist. But, if ‘I exist’ is a perception, and if language is separate from us, which means ‘I exist’ is a notion like ‘stone’ is a notion, then what am I? Am I self-awareness, but even with ‘self-awareness’ there are many forms. I got it! At the most basic level I am experience.

Amitoid: But is not ‘experience’ a word?

Setarcos: Then, there it is: life at its most basic is silent, without words. There are wordless moments when we are self-aware such as fear, hesitation, bodily functions, and even the moment we find ourselves unsure of what to say.

Amitoid: And what does this say about words, about language?

Setarcos: Language must have its own momentum, its own energy, which allows movement in thought. For instance, I keep being guided by you, but in truth there is a force in how the words come together to move me in one direction or another. This is that ‘something’, that magic, that is allowing the
movement of ideas between us.

*Amitoid:* Tell me, how did you feel when I said that you didn’t need me, that you knew the question you wanted to ask and should know how to complete the statement “I exist because…”?

*Setarcos:* It felt like they were just words; that you were using the words to mock me. The meaning and the words were disconnected, and at that moment we were communicating through meanings, not through words.

*Amitoid:* And what of the words ‘feeble-minded’ and ‘coward’?

*Setarcos:* This is my point, the meaning of the words are affecting me at a very basic level in my body, my muscles, my breathing, my heart rate, all these things that have no need for words. It’s like being moved by a force such as the wind or ocean currents.

*Amitoid:* But if language has its own momentum with which we interact, what does this say about who or what we are as an entity separate from language?

*Setarcos:* We have no access to our true self other than through interpretation, through the storytelling of art, poetry, prose, music.

*Amitoid:* Yet, we are here.

*Setarcos:* Yes, we are here in our silent physical moments. And like language, our bodies must also have their own momentum, their own force of movement. But how do these two forces, body and language, come together?

*Amitoid:* Where there’s movement there’s friction.

*Setarcos:* [silent bewilderment]

*Amitoid:* Perhaps here is the flaw. Why the separation? As you have pointed out, we are participants in the creation of our own reality. Why can’t I say my personal ‘I’ statement is a spark of meaning caused by the friction of the silent movement of my organic existence? My presence is derived from the spark of ‘I’. In other words, this articulated presence is evidence of the silent being that is here behind the words.

*Setarcos:* Is this spark the bond between body and language?

*Amitoid:* If so, what causes the spark? When you rub two sticks together it is oxygen that brings the fire. Oxygen is the invisible element that bonds the sticks in
motion and fire. Is there an invisible element between body and language?

Setarcos: An ether.

Amitoid: And where does this ‘ether’ come from?

Setarcos: [silence]

Amitoid: Earlier you said we create our own reality. What did you mean?

Setarcos: I think the conversation is at another level now. In retrospect, I used those words as filler. I said ‘create’ to account for something I truly didn’t understand. Given my new understanding, however, I can try to use the word ‘creation’ to keep the conversation moving, which is probably why you have reintroduced it. I am beginning to see your game master Amitoid.

Amitoid: [silence]

Setarcos: I ‘create’ like drawing two dots on a piece of paper and then seeing two eyes looking back at me. What does create, here, mean? Is creation my act of drawing? What if I intend to draw eyes, but all I see are two dots? What if I see two marks on the ground and perceived them to be two eyes looking at me? I could have passed that spot many times, but on this occasion it caught my attention. What I’m saying is that what we are calling ‘creation’ occurs somewhere between becoming attentive and interpretive experience. [ponders] I am a participant in the process of creation, but no more than a farmer growing crops. I see that now. What I am is a participant and an observer, except that in my everydayness I forget I have participated in the creation of what I am witnessing.

Amitoid: Can you give me an example?

Setarcos: I am normally not aware of how I move and coordinate my body parts when building a chair.

Amitoid: Yet, there are times when you become self-conscious.

Setarcos: Yes, for example if I am concerned about getting caught looking at someone, I become aware of my eye movements.

Amitoid: And what does this self-awareness tell you?

Setarcos: It makes me realize I am separate from my actions.

Amitoid: Yet, you are not separate: it is you who speaks, who looks, who touches.
Setarcos: [silence]

Amitoid: What did you mean when you said ‘we participate in the process called creation like planting crops in a farm field’?

Setarcos: What I mean is that it is human arrogance to believe we are creators. We work with what has already been created, even though it may not seem that way at first glance. A chair, for example, is the outcome of managing our resources. This is to say that what we encounter, the trees, the sun, the world itself, has an origin dating back to a time before our engagement with it. The original source does not necessarily have to be an omnipotent creator; it can be the synergy of atoms. Either way this origin precedes us, awaits our discovery, our management.

Amitoid: If I told you the stars you see at night are the lights reaching your eyes from worlds that no longer exist, what does this say about an original source?

Setarcos: It tells me that those worlds existed at some point, which still does not address the question of an original creation. Your example is about reality. And as we have already established, reality is an interpretation of our experiences. It sounds to me like you are equating origin with reality. And if I accept your view that it’s all interpretation, I do not see any way forward in my thinking.

Amitoid: You seem to have hit a dead end, because the connection you are making to language is what?

Setarcos: I can accept that we manage language like a resource, but to believe that there is no origin to language, that language itself is a story we tell ourselves, a type of interpretive illusion, I cannot connect to such an idea in my mind. How can we, on one hand, be separate from language, where ‘existence’, ‘self-awareness’ and ‘experience’ are not real but words, that even these words I am speaking right now are not real; and, on the other hand, I participate in the creation of the meaningfulness in my life, which is expressed in words? This amounts to saying that ‘I’, as an articulation of myself, makes me an illusion.

Amitoid: Yet, you are not an illusion. Perhaps we made a wrong turn in our reasoning at some point. If this is the case, we could say that the idea of language having a force independent of a speaker is a weak thesis. But where is the
solid ground allowing us to say this?

*Setarcos:* At the very least I would say that the ground stems from the fact that I am here in the conversation. I can hear myself speaking, feel myself breathing.

*Amitoid:* And what is your body telling you about this conversation?

*Setarcos:* I am frustrated by where you have taken my mind.

*Amitoid:* If indeed I have been guiding you, then I have done a poor job since I have been unable to keep you under my spell. After all, you have brought yourself here. You have stretched out your arm to let the creatures of my thoughts feed from your open palm. They are now your pets to do as you please.

*Setarcos:* I am weak. I see that now. These words I’ve been using, they amount to nothing more than filler, like my initial use of the word ‘creation’.

*Amitoid:* The weakness you are recognizing is the powerful gravity of your habits. You, me, we are all in a world of words. To separate ourselves from language is like jumping to the moon, we will always be pulled back to the ground.

*Setarcos:* You have a way with words. The gravity of language, yes I see this now. This is why I keep hitting dead ends.

*Amitoid:* There is something in saying we are self-aware and ‘self-awareness’ being words separate from us. The question is what is it that we are recognizing here? If thinking is a word-based action, then how can I be ‘me’ outside language? This is the problem at hand. We are faced with a situation of being at the end of reasoning and the end of words, which amounts to the same thing. Or is it that we are at the beginning of words. In either case, given the focus of our conversation about knowing yourself in a world of language, this is a particularly special situation.

*Setarcos:* Now it is you who is not providing a complete response. We have already established there are moments of self-awareness that do not need words. The structure of this dialogue, for example, has framed our exchanges. You are in control, even if you deny it; and I feel dependent on your approval. Yet, we have not stated this relationship, neither in utterance nor in thought. Is this not an example of how I can be ‘me’ outside language?

*Amitoid:* [silence]
Setarcos: What we are to recognize here is that, while a separation of body and language is not accurate, there is some force of meaning at play. But there is a part of me that is not getting it, that is grounded in my language habits, blinded to what you want me to see: a part of me that is not seeing the sun’s light that makes the day visible. There is another part of me, however, that recognizes my blindness.

Amitoid: What does your meta-awareness tell you about being guided by me?

Setarcos: How ironic that this is itself a guiding question. I have followed your line of reasoning with a mixture of curiosity, of wanting to take advantage of having access to your wisdom, and of feeling intimidated by your authority. And, like a child doing something that may not be permitted, I have explored new thoughts that have aroused in me unfamiliar feelings. Yet, these feelings have remained separate from those that are familiar to me.

Amitoid: Tell me more about this sense of separation.

Setarcos: This whole experience has made me doubt my familiar world. [pause] Wait, that is not what I mean to say. This experience has made me appreciate different ways of thinking. The fact that I have taken an insurance against your influence, while accepting to believe in the force of your words, has made me realize that this act of self-preservation has no limits: even the ground of my physical being can be questioned. This has led me to think that if your knowledge feels alien to me, then what is familiar to me could feel alien to another, which leads me to an interesting question: what would I experience if my familiar world became strange to me? If I could not connect to the meaning of my words, how could I find my ground?

Amitoid: It would be easy for me to say ‘ground’ is only a word. But I confess, your suspicions were right. I have misguided you. We have gone south whereas we needed to head north. I have pushed you to believe in a separation between body and language. But this is only to show that there is an element that binds them together. Yet, this binding element is not an ether that has been there from the beginning of time awaiting our discovery, our management. The element is to be found in the loss of words you have been experiencing
throughout our conversation, in your suspicions, and more basic, in your sense of separation, in your presentiment that there is something there for which you have no words.

Setarcos: If there is no ether and there is no original source of creation, then how do all things come to be?

Amitoid: There’s the golden question: how do all these things come be?

Setarcos: [silence]

Amitoid: What do you believe?

Setarcos: When we first met you asked ‘Who am I?’ Now I see that to find purpose in my life I must recognize how all things come to be. Life is movement and from this movement comes the friction that ignites the fire of language. So, my answer to you is that ‘believe’ is a word. But for ‘believe’ to be more than a meaningless stone, I must believe in ‘believe’. And if I believe in ‘believe’ like I believe ‘I am here’, then I can also believe in the word ‘click’ that expresses the most basic level of awareness. At last I understand the ‘spark’ of life.

Amitoid: Your words make all the difference in the world. They disturb the silence that precedes our voices like radiating ripples caused by stepping into water. In this way, we disturb the worlds into which we step.

Setarcos: [placing a hand in front and slowly moving it as if to study it] I can see the sun’s light in the day. You and me, we are in these words; they are drawings of our existence.
Implications for education

“Seeing a living human being as an automaton,” writes Wittgenstein, “is analogous to seeing...the cross-pieces of a window as a swastika” (PI, 421). This is to say, language-games are the placeholders of our beliefs. An implication is that particular ways of seeing can blind us to alternatives. One can only speculate if Wittgenstein had in mind his schoolmate Adolf Hitler when he wrote those words. They both attended the K.u.k. Realschule, a small public high school in Linz, Austria. They were not in the same grade and neither was very studious (McGuinness, 1988). It is reasonable to assume that their teachers saw them as typical teenagers and interacted with them as they would with any other student. The young Ludwig and Adolf had assignments to complete, tests to study for, and were expected to pay attention in class. On occasion, teachers might have spoken with their parents about their progress in school.

The point of this somewhat curious piece of history is that educators never really know how life will turn out for their students, and what the ramifications of students’ actions might be for their families, friends and society at large. What educators do know, or feel they have some control over, is the reality in their classrooms. The key concept here is ‘reality’ and what constitutes reality in schools. There are many ways to address the factors affecting education. School realities can be seen through the lenses of psychology, culture, developmental maturity, political-economy, and so on. This dissertation has taken language as its point of entry, primarily because education has become increasingly language-based. From the prenatal stage onwards we are not only talking about education (e.g., ‘lifelong learner’) but education itself has become the practice of talking, of literacies (e.g., ‘information technology literacy’, ‘media literacy’, ‘social emotional literacy’). What’s more, navigating through this multitude of literacies has brought about an education language that is increasingly becoming coded (e.g., ‘differentiated instruction’, ‘collaborative learning’, ‘core competencies’). A critical question that arises is ‘What does all the talking that takes place in schools tell us about what is unfolding in the classroom?’

Language does not create reality, that would be saying too much, but language does complete what is real to a person. For instance, to say I am special needs, an immigrant, a teenager, poor articulates ways of being in the world. Clearly a person has
multiple ways of living (e.g., ‘as’ student, friend, minor, athlete and so on), yet life can become deeply ingrained when particular identities are continuously reinforced by families of language-games and performatives. In hindsight, one could ask ‘Might the language-games and performatives of the adolescent Hitler and Wittgenstein have hinted as to the persons they were becoming?’ Or at least, might careful attention to their ways of speaking have generated opportunities for intervention to either support or redirect the life they were confirming for themselves through their words? To bring this question forward to present-day realities in education, how might careful attention to language enrich learning moments for both students and teachers?

We find ourselves living in a period of constant change where in the concreteness of questions and answers there is no certainty but confirmation of the placeholders of our beliefs (i.e., language-games). In other words, teacher and student, as interlocutors of the same descrying conversation, become self-fulfilled through language. As Merleau-Ponty tells us, I and the Other become witnesses to *that which is there* by recognizing that meaningfulness is not to be found in some unconscious personal depth but “in front of us, as articulations” (VI, p. 180). The aim of such an education is to have a sense of fulfillment. While personal fulfillment may need to contend with the selfishness of immaturity, it is nonetheless an integral aspect of the communication cycle. To put it in a different way, this is the education of ‘let them speak!’ For the realization of ‘I’ is completed in language. Yet, this is not a pedagogy of student-centredness nor teacher-centredness, for that matter, but of recognition that such practices are bound by families of language-games and contained through performatives. And, too, when we bring curricula into the open landscape of language we can ask ‘What forces of meaning and forms of life are being encouraged and are being discouraged?’ As Wittgenstein notes, even the most obscure language-games require “a great deal of stage-setting” (PI, 257). This is to say, language is completed in the public sphere. Where this has profound implications for education is in asking ‘What kind of public is being formed and given voice?’

For example, one way to speak about education is to say that it is composed of activities that sustain a delicate balance between what can be called foundational literacies (e.g., the basics of reading, writing, mathematics, and so on) and
imaginative/creative literacies (i.e., new discoveries and fresh perspectives). Between these two families of literacy we could add interpretive/intuitive literacies (i.e., values) that scaffold transitions between what we know and what we do not know. As such, education is an interweaving of literacies and their respective ways of speaking, thinking and acting. In terms of practice, foundational literacies lead the learner from the speculative wider end of the teaching funnel towards a narrowing of correct responses, whereas imaginative/creative literacies move in the opposite direction, from the narrow safety of the known to the vulnerability of a wider unknown. A challenge arises when these practices become entangled such as narrowing correct responses when aiming to be imaginative/creative (e.g., ‘your horse drawing must look like the picture of the horse on the board’), or opening up to wider interpretations when aiming to be foundational (e.g., ‘your interpretation of the story is just as valid as the author’s intentions’). Of course, a teacher may be purposely open-ended with a foundational lesson or have specific aims for an imaginative/creative activity. The problem arises when a teacher is not aware that at some point these literacies have become entangled. It is here that language-game analysis can help to unpack the force of meaning of learning activities: What is meant by “must look like” or “just as valid”? In what ways are the language-games of imaginative/creative learning different from those of foundational learning? What are the shifts of meanings in the interpretive/intuitive process when directing learning towards foundational understanding or imaginative/creative understanding (e.g., when saying ‘you must struggle with the answer’, what is meant by ‘struggle’, and by ‘the answer’)? The objective of this type of analysis is not to identity who controls meaning (e.g., teacher-centred or student-centred), but how meaning, language itself, brings personal fulfillment to one’s life as teacher, student, adult, child, immigrant, with special needs, and so on.

If there can be a statement about education that captures the essence of this dissertation, then let it be that language enables us to articulate the meaning of life. But what am I saying with this statement? Or, more clearly, what’s taking place with this statement? Well, much will depend on the reader. This dissertation has a core message about education, yet it is one that does little to satisfy a desire for a pinned down understanding. I recognize that those seeking such fulfillment are left wanting. Instead, the heart of this work is to be found in the interpretive/intuitive process, which serves as
the middle step between the known and the unknown. The core message of this dissertation lies in the animating power of language itself, which, as Wittgenstein tells us, has the depth of a good joke. This work teases that tendency of wanting to get to the point of the matter. For instance, in what way am I saying “the meaning of life”? How am I using these words? Am I offering an esoteric expression similar to “speaks louder than words”? Or, am I literally referring to the process of defining (i.e., the meaning of the word ‘life’ is…)? Why the ambiguity, the pivoting possibilities?

Part of the answer lies in addressing another of our tendencies, which is what motivated much of Wittgenstein’s thinking—the bewitchment of depth, that there needs to be something deep and profound being said here. Another way to say this is that there is an emotive challenge to awareness: Can we strive for awareness where our emotional response is neither the removed stance of scientific-objectivism nor the deep connectivity of mystical-subjectivism? In other words, how can we address awareness in that middle ground where we spend much of our time, in our everydayness? Merleau-Ponty offers one solution. His hyper-dialectic/hyper-reflection is a way to gain access to that which is there when words seem inadequate. Yet this explanation is still not clear enough. What Austin’s performativity, Wittgenstein’s language-games, and Merleau-Ponty’s flesh attempt to bypass is the Greek dialectical tradition of logos that has colonized much of western thinking over the centuries. The challenge that these three thinkers take up is how to speak, think and address human experience in a way that is different from that tradition yet does not leave us victim to rhetoric or ethereal mysticism.

So, how can education be addressed through the type of awareness that is called for by thinkers like Austin, Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty about the animating force of everyday language? In this dissertation I have characterized education, or more specifically, learning, as language-based, generating both intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts, communal, mutual and phronetic. What’s more, learning, especially as a language-based practice, needs to be continuously brought to pivoting stand-points of self-referentiality. This requires a disposition, that is to say, an inclination, a leaning towards staying with the unfamiliar (e.g., “this is strange to me yet I want to stay with it”). Here, the finitude of logos becomes a critical tease: there must be more. As Setarco states in the final dialogue, “for ‘believe’ to be more than a meaningless stone, I must
believe in ‘believe’.’’ This is to say, we must create the right type of problems for ourselves. By holding back the gravity of the familiar, we create the possibility for a more authentic recognition of our humanity, in both its possibilities and limitations.

I offer the above characterization of education with caution. Words have a tendency to be pulled into the gravity of logos. They can quickly fall into the trappings of thesis and dialectical analysis. As such, I ask the reader to be patient, to fight the addiction for reduction long enough to witness the animating force of language yet mindful of the shift to a caricature of symbolic representation: in short, meta-awareness of a phenomenality of signification. This is the other part of the answer to the question of the multistable-logos: language meta-awareness is another way to say ‘be open to the fulfillment of the interverbal emergent.’

Wittgenstein has said, “An ‘inner process’ stands in need of outward criteria” (PI, 580). And here is the work that must continued to be done: the fleshing out of ways to better witness that which is there between cognitive-registers and sentient-registers—to have a much stronger sense of what we believe, of what makes all the difference in the world as we come to the places where we find ourselves.

The elementality of language is not an object that can be pinned, poked and dissected; rather, it manifest itself as prejection, as sentient-register, affectivity. Here lives language in the struggle with stand-points (e.g., ‘I think I understand what you mean’). Here lives language slightly off-centre from interlocutors, in the divergences of what is about to be said or the meanings of what has been said. Here lives the language of education in superposition, before the intervention of logos, and of correct and incorrect responses. Here lives the language of students, in the limbo between searching for words with which to respond and the aesthesiological silence of pre-linguistic being, where even ‘I’ appears not in thought but out in front awaiting language like a catcher awaiting a ball to be thrown. Here lives the language of teaching and learning in the confirmation of ‘I’ as the Other’s sentient-register, in awe of the unfolding interverbal emergent—in being drawn into articulation.
Epilogue

For much of my life I have believed in an ‘outside’, an incomprehensible realm out of reach of the human intellect. But I had a change of heart when I understood the contradiction: that to speak of an outside makes ‘the outside’ a human construct. This moment of awareness came to me one afternoon, following a conversation earlier in the day with my doctoral supervisor when, among other things, we discussed Sartre’s chestnut tree. Sitting in my backyard that afternoon, I fixed my stare on a stone, asking myself ‘If I say it is not a stone, what is it? What is there that is neither stone nor not-stone?’ To my surprise, the realization that came over me was not directed at myself, as self-awareness, but directed at that which was before me: it was something and not nothing. For sometime afterwards, I interpreted that something as a presence. In retrospect, what I believe I experienced was akin to Merleau-Ponty’s flesh, except at that time I could not articulate it as such. At most, I was catching glimpses of the phenomenon of reversibility between the construction ‘stone’ and the abstraction ‘not-stone’, a hyper-dialectic that was situating me—but situating me in relation to what? This silent energy was to remain a mystery. I could easily conjure this energy by performing the same dichotomizing exercise: apple/non-apple, chair/non-chair, and so on. However, I could not comprehend it; I could only recognize its presence. Years have passed since that first realization.

Only recently have I come to better understand this energy or force. Not long ago, as part of a conference presentation, I performed a card trick to problematize the notion of a priori. Reflecting on the audience reaction I realized that what had been preventing me from understanding the energy or force was my own bewitchment about its presence. I was mesmerized by what was incomprehensible. This is not to say that I could not articulate these thoughts before: I had been saying similar things for years. The difference is, for reasons that have remained a mystery to me, at those pivotal moments in my life the universe seemed to be aligned with my consciousness. Yet, to use words like ‘serendipity’ or ‘eureka’ seems trivializing.

In writing this dissertation, what has become clear is that to seek deeper meaning, as a way to counter the Cartesian tradition I have inherited, is itself a language-game: the
language-game of profundity. Applying Austin’s theory of performatives, I now realize that the language-game of profundity, like the language-game of empiricism, carries perlocutionary implications. This is to say, I become implicated in a discourse defined by expectations of particular cognitive actions, where the firing of neurons and other corporeal networks form conduits of desire, what feels right and what feels discomforting. Within this epistemic frame of language-games with perlocutionary implications, the energy that emerges out of hyper-reflection can only come about as an extension of the one who is engaged. For me, this means that once the onticity of what lies outside my encephalon dissolves through hyper-dialectics, the form of life before me, its energy, its force, its flesh is the realization of Being.

In saying all this, I still have not let go of words. I am like a novice skater holding on to the edge of an ice rink. In the Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers, we are told Diogenes of Sinope went about ancient Athens with lantern in hand, in midday, searching for ‘a real human being’. In this dissertation, I have traversed through pages of text, with words in hand, searching for ‘a real language’. Little did we both know that what we so desperately wanted to find was in our hands all along. The light of words, like the light of a lantern, illuminates what the holder of the light is able to see.

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79 From The Lives and opinions of Eminent Philosophers by the ancient Greek historian Diogenes Laërtius, book 4, p. 231.
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