



# Merleau-Ponty

INSTITUTION · ONTOLOGY · POLITICS

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

26–28 / SEPTEMBER / 2022

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES, UNIVERSITY OF LISBON

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## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

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*The Political Genealogy of Truth*

In this talk, I try to establish

- 1) That the question of the “genealogy of truth” has been a key driver in the evolution of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological ontology. I trace the question in three of its basic incarnations: the question of the “in-itself-for-us” and the response formulated in terms of the “unmotivated upsurge of the world” in the *Phenomenology of Perception*; the question of faith in Sense and Nonsense and the discussion of perceptual faith in the Visible and the Invisible, and finally, its last incarnation in Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of painting as a “seeing-according-to” (“voir-selon”) in *Eye and Mind* and some late notes.
- 2) That the genealogy of truth constitutes the systematic point of convergence of Merleau-Ponty’s metaphysical and political interests. Here, I argue that the question of an objective reference is presented as a fundamental illusion that structures both the field of perception polarized by objectivity and the field of politics polarized by the notion of legitimacy.
- 3) That Merleau-Ponty’s focus on the origins of truth has led him to an original theory of power. There, I argue that the phenomenology of the notion of legitimacy allows him both to argue that the appeal to objectivity is a genuine consequence of the structure of being and yet, that it can be circumvented, as is the case in the work of Machiavelli.
- 4) That this theory of power contains a subtle critique of democracy. For Merleau-Ponty, the democratic focus on cognition, nature and legitimacy, makes democracy unstable and unviable.
- 5) That Merleau-Ponty’s account contains some useful insights for dealing with the so-called current crisis of truth: the crisis of truth, I argue, is constituted by a discovery made most distinctly by Merleau-Ponty, according to which political behaviour does not primarily refer to truth but to meaning.

BIO

Frank Chouraqui is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Leiden University, Netherlands. He is the author of *Ambiguity and the Absolute: Nietzsche and Merleau-Ponty on the Question of Truth* (Fordham UP, 2014), *The Body and Embodiment: a Philosophical Guide* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2021), the editor and translator of Louis-Auguste Blanqui’s *Eternity by the Stars* (Contra Mundum Press, 2013 and 2021), the editor and co-translator of Egidius Berns’ *Porosity Between Politics and the Economy* (Lexington, 2022) and the co-editor (with Emmanuel Alloa and Rajiv Kaushik) of *Merleau-Ponty and Contemporary Thought* (SUNY Press, 2018). He works on themes at the intersection of phenomenology and political epistemology.

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*Politics, Institution and Time. On "An unprecedented theoretical revolution": The Threads of a Weft*

In this lecture, I will depart from a thesis proposed by the Brazilian philosopher Marilena Chauí according to which Merleau-Ponty's work offers us a completely new way for thinking the relationship between philosophy and politics. On the basis of this thesis, I would like propose a hypothesis of unexpected consequences: the existence of a conceptual weft that brings together politics, institution and time in Merleau-Ponty's thought. The examination of the terms of this weft will be less important for my purpose than reflecting upon the weft itself. In my view, what is at issue here is to highlight a certain way of understanding politics that, by means of a phenomenology of institution, may disclose another way to understand the metaphysics of our time. If this hypothesis proves correct, such a weft, as we will see, confronts us with some radical metaphysical implications.

BIO

Mariana Larison holds a BA in Philosophy from the University of Buenos Aires, a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Paris 1 - Sorbonne Panthéon, and a Post-Doctorate from the University of São Paulo. She works in the field of phenomenology, where she is currently developing a line of research on phenomenology of the institution. She is professor at the University of Buenos Aires and the National University of General Sarmiento in Argentina, and researcher at CONICET (National Council of Scientific and Technical Research of Argentina). In addition to numerous articles in national and international journals, she has published important translations into Spanish (including Merleau-Ponty's *La institución. La passivité*, Anthropos 2012-2016) and authored two books: *L'être en forme. Dialectique et phénoménologie dans la dernière philosophie de Merleau-Ponty* (Mimesis, 2016) and *Prolégomènes à une phénoménologie de l'institution* (2023, sous presse).

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*The Imaginary Institution of Being: Vortexes and Bachelardian Provocation in Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*

In the form of provocation and in a movement of extrapolation I developed a few years ago the idea of a Merleau-Pontian ontology of the imaginary. This was also a way of emphasizing that Merleau-Ponty's ontology requires a manifold approach, which is precisely what Merleau-Ponty defined as indirect ontology. A still pending question for the readers of Merleau-Ponty's later works is: what is exactly Being? More specifically what is the relation between nature and Being? Between flesh and Being? Between nature and flesh? Between the imaginary body and the «*Stiftung* of Being»? Why is Merleau-Ponty so committed to the project of a new ontological orientation for his philosophy, while admitting that the answer to the question of being will leave us disappointed and wondering «is that all there is to it?» (*Eye and Mind*). The key is not a taste for mystery or Gnosis, that Merleau-Ponty explicitly reprobates, but a dynamic and a dialectic of a new kind: those of institution. Instituting, reinstituting over and over again, being instituted by what one institutes form an endless vortex that can only be understood via its link with a deeply renewed concept of the imaginary as an inexhaustible anonymous origin. In this respect, Bachelard's attempts at an inchoative ontology, his concepts of provocation and phenomeno-technique provide invaluable keys to Merleau-Ponty's intricate strategy.

BIO

Annabelle Dufourcq is Associate Professor of Metaphysics and Philosophical Anthropology at Radboud University Nijmegen (Netherlands). She has published on the relation between the real and the imaginary in contemporary continental philosophy, with special interest in a phenomenological approach. Among her main publications, she has authored *Merleau-Ponty: une ontologie de l'imaginaire* (Springer 2012) and *La dimension imaginaire du réel dans la philosophie de Husserl* (Springer 2010), and as editor *Est-ce réel? Phénoménologies de l'imaginaire* (Brill 2016).



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*Merleau-Ponty Writing Today*

Among the many loose and unfinished projects of *The Visible and the Invisible* is an account of the interior relation between ontology and language. The ontology that Merleau-Ponty describes as a “hyper” or “good” dialectic is an initial starting point to think about this project. In this ontology, being is itself open, refusing to be self-enclosed, and always unfinished. This is an ontology that circumvents the ontological difference between a self-identical being and the beings that emerge from it. It is an ontology that Merleau-Ponty describes as “diacritical” – a being always already deviating, separating, differentiating, etc. The posthumously published course lectures, such as the ones on literary language and the problem of speech, help us think more about how this ontology is already a being of language. In it, nothing is foreclosed. Part of this paper explores the idea of a being so open that it intervenes both into the otherwise purely virtual linguistic system of signs as well as into the otherwise purely actual, perceptual world of things. If this is going to remain a hyper-dialectics, however, we will need to explore in greater detail, and in a more concrete way, the specific way a being which is always already differentiating implicates itself in language. Here, I explore further the kind of body and space where ontology and language are internally related to one another. Finally, the obvious implication of this mutual imbrication between being and language is that, methodologically speaking, the very language we use itself has ontological implications: if there is for Merleau-Ponty a deeper connection between words and things, phenomenology cannot only be a matter of describing phenomena to return to what appears; rather, in the language, there is a certain texture of being. In fact, on consideration, Merleau-Ponty’s own writing is not only archeological but also expressive and generative – an instituting of thinking itself, on the scene now, as if he is writing still today. These arguments can be partially found in my *Merleau-Ponty Between Philosophy and Symbolism: The Matrixed Ontology* and in more recent papers, but here I am trying to bring together a few un-sutured threads to give some consistent configuration for the new phenomenological method that I think is in Merleau-Ponty’s writing, what in reference to Proust he calls the “hermeneutical reverie.”

BIO

Rajiv Kaushiv works in the areas of phenomenology, hermeneutics, aesthetics, and psychoanalytic theory. He is the author of three books on Merleau-Ponty: *Merleau-Ponty: Art and Institution* (2011), *Art, Language, Figure in Merleau-Ponty* (2013), and *Merleau-Ponty Between Philosophy and Symbolism: The Matrixed Ontology* (2019), and is co-editor (with Emmanuel Alloa and Frank Chouraqui) of *Merleau-Ponty and Contemporary Philosophy* (2019). Rajiv is currently Managing Editor of *Chiasmi International*.



## PARTICIPANTS

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*Commodity Fetishism and the Work of Art: Toward a Phenomenology of Enchantment*

Material objects hold a powerful fascination for the viewer, for better or worse. This paper will examine the perceiver's double-sided relationship to objects through two categories in particular: commodities and works of art. In *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, the political philosopher Jane Bennett thematizes the doubled sidedness of this fascination as a mystification, on the one hand, and an enchantment, on the other. Following Marx, Bennett understands commodity fetishism as a mystification of the material object but reads Marx's critique of commodity fetishism as tinged with prejudice against the vitalist tendencies of so-called primitive cultures. Thus, also following Marx, Bennett sees the material as still bearing the vitality of matter, even when it is instantiated as a commodity within the capitalist exchange network. Commodities can therefore still be a site of enchantment. According to Bennett, this enchantment is necessary as a guarantor of affective buy in to ethical systems, which are ineffective if they are only a system of rules. Bennett proposes a phenomenology of enchantment but where commodity fetishism is concerned, methodologically, she reads Marx against himself by returning the reader to his dissertation, *The Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature*. Bennett is herself well known for drawing out the political implications of vital materialism. However, to articulate a phenomenology of enchantment more robustly, I turn to Merleau-Ponty's late essay on art, *Eye and Mind*. There, we find Merleau-Ponty's articulation of artistic vision in terms of his mature ontology of the flesh. There is no explicitly political concern in this essay but reading Bennett's phenomenology of enchantment through Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of artistic vision will, I hope, prove productive by allowing us to bracket the vitalist presuppositions in Bennett's brand of materialism in order to turn to the experience itself. In particular, I am interested in Merleau-Ponty's statements that the painter practices a magical theory of vision, lives in fascination and inspiration, indiscernibly between action and passion, with vision as a continued birth. Questions I will also examine include whether the fascination of artistic vision can be extended to the commodity. This question touches on aesthetics and beauty but is more importantly about the conditions under which one creates and views artworks as opposed to commodities. A question I have for Merleau-Ponty, and one with which I will conclude this paper, is whether there is room in his phenomenology of perception and artistic vision for mystification—for a degenerate theory of vision. Examining whether this tension between mystification and enchantment exists in his phenomenology of perception more broadly speaking will allow us to explore the connection to Bennett's vital materialism further.

BIO

Yue Jennifer Wang is a doctoral candidate in the Philosophy department at Villanova University (Pennsylvania, USA). She works at the intersection of phenomenology and theology. Her dissertation project is an articulation of a phenomenology of mystical perception, and she draws on medieval Christian mysticism and the late works of Merleau-Ponty. She is also interested in the application of her findings to emancipatory projects especially as they relate to the transformation of sense perception.

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*A Dialogue between Abstract Cinema and Merleau-Pontian Thought*

Although Merleau-Pontian reflection has mainly focused on literature and figurative art, we can find numerous decisive passages in his work that can help us understand the potential of the cinematic work. As early as the 1945 lecture “The Film and the New Psychology”, the author argued that movies “present to us that special way of being in the world”, thus enabling us to see human being’s true connection to the world, his bond with it. However, it is only in Merleau-Ponty’s later writings and in his Course Notes from the Collège de France, that we can notice a more important reference to the question of *movement* and its ontological implications. In these works, we can find our way back to an authentic dimension, a possibility to reveal the relationship between human beings and the world, the unity of their Origin. The importance of this topic can also be decisive in defining the relationship between the abstract cinema of the Avant-garde of the 1920s and the Merleau-Pontian reflection. Even if Merleau-Ponty prefers to refer to other authors, we can still detect in his thought a potential place to support the value of this kind of art. In the relevance that the filmmakers of these years gave to film editing and in the poverty of their cinematographic means, we can therefore see an attempt to make visible the original movement of our existence. The works of Richter, Eggeling, Léger, and others can be a new venue for Merleau-Pontian thought. Abstraction here does not emphasize a radical detachment from the world but wants to offer a possibility towards a more original dimension. The dialogue between Merleau-Ponty’s works and this ‘guiding phenomenon’ hence proves to be useful in making possible a participation in the truth of things, an experience of openness. In this way, the manipulative, defining approach of science is abandoned to make this movement toward things themselves. Avant-garde cinema proves to be an appropriate medium to give us an experience of totality, of an original movement, as theorized in the notes on the “Sensible World and the World of Expression”. The purity of movement, and the rhythm of the images that we see in these works, detached from narrative paradigms or representation, thus allow us to experience certain dimensions of existence, such as, for example, the original movement and rhythmicity of our experience.

BIO

Maria Calabretto is a Ph.D. student at the Catholic Institute of Toulouse, where she is working on a project entitled “The Suspension of Abstract Cinema” and teaching courses on Merleau-Ponty’s thought. In 2021 she received his master’s degree in “Philosophical Sciences” at the University of Padua with a thesis entitled “The Work of Art as an Exercise of Truth: Merleau-Ponty and Painting”. Her works focus on contemporary philosophy, mainly from the French field, and subjects related to art, the status of the work of art, and its relationship with human existence and thought. She has participated in several international conferences, presenting papers on topics related to aesthetics.

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*Putting Things Back into Nature: Merleau-Ponty and Institution at the Edge of Phenomenology*

In this presentation I propose to clarify how Merleau-Ponty responds to the 'limit of phenomenology' that is faced in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. As I show, there are two aspects in which phenomenological constitution is insufficient for an account on our experience: the appearing of the other and the constitution of the world as common, shared, or the milieu of our coexistence. These two aspects, in turn, reach their limits through Merleau-Ponty's extensive account on two main notions of his project in the *Phenomenology of Perception*: the body and intersubjectivity. In the first section I analyze the genesis of the limit of constitution through its exemplar case (i.e., the appearing of the alter ego) and how it is related to the 'trace of a generalized existence' that is experienced by us in the connection between the ambiguity of 'my body' and the paradox of time, and how this connection points to the outer world that I cannot constitute and is always already there, before me. In the second section I show how Merleau-Ponty substitutes the notion of constitution for the Husserlian notion of institution (*Stiftung*) and how this shift can be seen as a radicalization of aspects that were already present in the *Phenomenology of Perception*: the critique of philosophies of consciousness, and the importance of the body and intersubjectivity. Finally, I show how it is through the notion of *Stiftung* that Merleau-Ponty intensifies the connection between the paradox of the body and the paradox of time, and radicalizes his notions of body and intersubjectivity, combining them into a notion of 'intercorporeality'. Insofar as *Stiftung* gives me both the others and the world sedimented into nature, it puts them within being, in the "spatializing-temporalizing vortex" that is the flesh of the world, or connective tissue pass through us all. Thus, it is through the notion of *Stiftung* that Merleau-Ponty tries to solve the problems of philosophies of consciousness, setting the alter ego and the world free from constitution. This movement can be seen as a radicalization of the 'trace of generalized existence', in which the 'pivot of the world' is not 'my own body' anymore, but rather the connective tissue of the flesh of the world.

BIO

I am a 4<sup>th</sup> year PhD student at the University of Alberta, Canada. My area of specialization is continental philosophy (esp. phenomenology and deconstruction), and social and political philosophy. I am originally from Brazil, where I did my BA in Philosophy (Federal University of Minas Gerais, Brazil, 2015, which was partially completed as an exchange student at the Universidad Nacional de Tucumán, Argentina, 2012), and my BA in Fine Arts (University of the State of Minas Gerais, Brazil, 2016). I came to Canada in 2018 to complete part of my MA research thesis at the University of Alberta under the Emerging Leaders in the Americas Program (ELAP). My ongoing PhD dissertation focuses on the phenomenological notions of body and spatiality, and how those could inform and transform the world we live in.

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*Institution and geology in the late Merleau-Ponty's philosophy*

Merleau-Ponty introduces the concept of “transcendental geology” in a working note of *Le visible et l'invisible* dated 1st June 1960, discussing the idea of a philosophy of history based exclusively on human praxis, such as Sartre's one. As Merleau-Ponty writes, the concept of transcendental geology is developed to thematize the simultaneous “*Ur-Stiftung* of space and time”, that is the fact that human history is possible because it finds its historical-geographical root on the Earth's soil. In the parallel course dedicated to *Husserl aux limites de la phenomenologie*, the problems of geology and of Earth intended as the ante-predictive elements that institutes human history find a broader thematisation. Dealing with the Husserlian fragment on the *Umsturz der kopernikanischen Lehre*, Merleau-Ponty speaks of a “mutation ontologique” of philosophy itself once the consideration of the geological element is reintroduced into reflection. This series of theoretical points are strictly tied to the outcomes of the previous courses on Nature – where Nature is thematized precisely as the “non-instituted” – that inaugurate the project of a phenomenology of the pre-phenomenological developed by Merleau-Ponty in the late 1950s. The aim of this presentation is to analyse the emergence of the problem of geology in the philosophy of the late Merleau-Ponty in relation to the concept of institution. The main thesis I would like to support is that Merleau-Ponty assimilates the Earth to the non-instituted that opens and makes possible – this is the meaning of “transcendental” – human history. The presentation will be divided into three parts. The first one will discuss the problem of geology in relation with Merleau-Ponty's rethinking of Nature developed along his courses at the Collège de France, showing how the Earth represents, in the French philosopher's intentions, the non-instituted that phenomenology should be able to include in its analysis. The second one will focus on the examination of the relationship between geology and institution in the course dedicated to Husserl, in order to show how Merleau-Ponty's proposal detaches from Husserl's one in its capacity to untie the geological dimension from the (exclusive) reference to the subjective pole and, at the same time, reading it as the condition of possibility of history itself. The third part will draw on the working note on transcendental geology in order to demonstrate, on the one hand, how it represents an adequate and effective model to think of an idea of *instituting praxis* both open to contingency and bound to Nature and, on the other hand, how it provides a useful conceptual tool in order to address contemporary philosophical issues, such as the problem of Anthropocene.

BIO

I am Giovanni Fava, PhD Student in Philosophy at Ca'Foscari University of Venice where I am currently working on a project titled *Towards a transcendental geology: researches on the ontology of the Anthropocene*. The project represents a philosophical inquiry into the main theoretical problems raised up by the concept of “Anthropocene”, which I try to read through the lens of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. I graduated in Philosophy (MA) at University of Bologna with a thesis on the relation between ecology and history, with a special reference to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy (winner of the “Di Biase-Lavecchia” award for best national master thesis in Philosophy). I have published in many Italian scientific journals, such as *InCircolo*, *Areté*, *Logoi.ph*, *Aisthesis*. Chiasmi International has accepted a paper I wrote concerning the relation between Merleau-Ponty and Dipesh Chakrabarty. I am translating in Italian with R.Valenti (for Mimesis Editions) Merleau-Ponty's course on *L'institution et la passivité*.

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*Transubstantiation and 'the pedagogy of sight'. Two themes from the late writings of Merleau-Ponty*

Merleau-Ponty's last published essay *L'Oeil et l'Esprit* (1961) [LE] on the painter's work was probably intended to form a part of the book on a new ontology he was working on before his death. An unfinished work, from which we have what in the hands of Claude Lefort became four posthumously published chapters and working notes: *Le Visible et l'Invisible* (1964). [VI] Although we have qualified assumptions about the precise, intended placement of *L'Oeil et l'Esprit* in the sketched book, we do not know for sure (cf. Lefort, 1968: xxxiv-xxxvii). What remains clear, however, is a partial overlap of themes (and style) of LE and VI. My presentation is an exposure and discussion of two thematic layers in LE and VI. The first is what I call 'the pedagogy of sight': The painter is able to, paradoxically expressed, open our eyes, 'make us see again'. But why? How? And who are the blinded ones? Against e.g. (Guentchev, 2018), I do not think LE is particularly aimed at or useful for art students. Merleau-Ponty's critique of Descartes' explanation in *Dioptrique* of vision as thinking, his (partly) critical stance towards science (e.g. against cybernetics and atomistic psychology, and, more generally, against any science treating our world as 'objets-in-general' ('survoler')), reflects familiar culturally critical themes of an orthodox, phenomenological sort. But how does this stance transform into a 'pedagogy of sight'? For this purpose, useful comments on learning ('apprender') can be found here and there in LE. My second theme is the central ontological notion of 'reversibility' in LE and VI (and elsewhere). The painter does not paint by sight alone, but through an intertwining ('un entrelacs') of vision and movement (LE, II). Another instance of this 'intertwining' is expressed by Merleau-Ponty's much quoted remark, that from the painter's perspective the things are looking at them, permeating them. A reversal of the privilege to see and to be seen is taking place, a theme closely connected to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of 'the flesh'. The vision of the painter transcends the given visible things and opens up towards the structure of Being. Merleau-Ponty applies the Eucharistic notion 'transubstantiation' about this instantiation of reversibility (also to be found much earlier in *Phenomenology of Perception*). How is the concept of transubstantiation to be understood and interpreted? Is a merely a 'phenomenologically apt' metaphor? Against e.g. (Dillon, 1998: chapter 9), I read Merleau-Ponty's description of the reversal as a literal description of a symmetrical relation, and, although the presence of pre-Socratic 'Elements' certainly are ubiquitous in LE and VI, I attempt with a reading of his ontology of mind and body (particularly in LE) along Aristotelian lines.

BIO

Associate Professor at Aarhus University, Department of Philosophy of Education since 2014 (from 2017-2021 serving as HoD). Ph.D. in philosophy of mind from Univ. of Copenhagen (2009). Research interests: interrelations between embodiment, tacit knowledge and conscious awareness. In 2021 I initiated EMBED ('EMBodied EDucation'), a group of philosophers and educational researchers focusing on the transformation of thoughts from 4E research into pedagogy and education: <https://dpu.au.dk/forskning/forskningsenheder/embodied-education-embed>

Has published widely on phenomenal consciousness, including in *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, *Frontiers in Consciousness Research and Behavioral and Brain Sciences*. Has organized international PhD courses in collaboration with Dan Zahavi (Univ. of Copenhagen), Ned Block (NYU) and Dan Dennett (Tufts). Organized several conferences/public talks. Former visiting scholar at NYU. Invited speaker at Institute of Philosophy, School of Advanced Study at University of London, University of Oxford (The Ockham Society), Nancy Université, City University of New York, Xiamen University, and The American University in Cairo.



PAOLA PAZIENTI

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*Wisdom of the flesh and phronesis. Internal finalism in Merleau-Ponty's ontology of praxis*

“My body *obeys* the pregnancy, it ‘responds’ to it, it is what is suspended on it, flesh responding to flesh” (VI: 209, italics in the original): in this work note of September 1959 Maurice Merleau-Ponty points to the responsiveness of the body and, more generally, of the flesh. The aim of this paper is to investigate how he envisages this pre-reflexive knowledge and what relevance the topic acquires in his mature writing. In his endo-ontology, the understanding of nature from within corresponds to the exercising of an ability to focus correctly on nuclei of sense or to synchronize with them through a kind of practical wisdom, which takes the form of enactive and embodied awareness. It is described as reversibility, i.e. an effort of half-reflection in the movement of the flesh, which folds upon itself. The main functions of this spontaneous wisdom seem to be, on the one hand, to explain and guarantee a meaningful convergence between man and nature, based on the internal logic of Being or “cohesion without concept”; and, on the other, to recognize, already at the level of the *Lebenswelt*, the simultaneity of sensation and interpretation or, in Husserlian terms, of experience and judgement. This effort to identify a guiding, generalizable principle in an ontology of *praxis* shows points of contacts – which in my opinion deserve further investigation – with Aristotelian *phronesis* as described in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: “a true disposition accompanied by rational prescription, relating to action in the sphere of what is good and bad for human beings” (NE, VI, 5, 1140b 5–7: 180). The first part of my contribution will be devoted to clarifying the characteristics of the practical wisdom of the flesh, by emphasizing its performative dimension. The second part will discuss the re-definition of truth in an ontology of *praxis*, by referring to Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of Descartes’ “institution of nature” as the main paradigm he resorts to, throughout his work, in order to explain the internal finalism of nature. The third part will consider the possibility to interpret the wisdom of the flesh as a sort of *phronesis*, in order to develop a carnal hermeneutics which is either irrational nor arbitrary in its experience and understanding of reality.

NE = Aristotle. 1990. *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. C. Rowe, phil. introd. and comm. S. Broadie. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

VI = Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1968. *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, transl. A. Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

BIO

Paola Pazienti has been teaching History and Philosophy in Italian secondary schools since 2017. She studied at the University of Pavia, attending the Collegio Ghislieri. She completed her PhD at the Scuola di Alti Studi Fondazione Collegio San Carlo Modena in 2015 with a thesis on Merleau-Ponty’s interpretation of Descartes starting from the mind-body problem, under the supervision of Prof. Luca Vanzago. Her main areas of interests are French and German Phenomenology, contemporary hermeneutics, and modern interpretations of the mind-body problem. Authored publications: *Invisibilità delle passioni e uso della vita. Questioni cartesiane nella fenomenologia dell’affettività di Henry, «Aisthema»* (accepted – forthcoming); *Oltre il dualismo. Merleau-Ponty interprete di Descartes*. Milano: Mimesis, 2022; “Virtuality and Truth. On Literature in Merleau-Ponty’s Indirect Ontology”, in: *Phainomenon*, 32 (1) (2021): 69-84.

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*Adversity and Institution: Reading Merleau-Ponty in the Global Condition*

My presentation proposes to read Merleau-Ponty's thought in the context of our global condition, from both an ontological and political perspective. First of all, by referring to the notion of adversity (*adversité*), I will outline how Merleau-Ponty's ontology can allow us to understand a condition of shared fragility. I will therefore insist mainly on the lecture of *L'homme et l'adversité*, as well as on *Signes*, texts in which Merleau-Ponty takes up and expands an argument that had already been present in his philosophical journey: the relationship between the absence of sense (*insensé*) and the possibility of an act of shared signification. I will also try to put this notion in resonance with contemporary interpretations as Mauro Carbone's one about September 11, 2001; in his book, Carbone describes a condition of «being dead together». For my part, I argue that merleau-pontian ontology allows us to think of our being together, fragiles, in the world, and that the ontological element of adversity could be considered as paradigmatic in understanding our global condition. Then, I propose to understand the Institution as a process of production of symbolic matrices that could constitute, in our global condition, a major tool in the emergence of political strategies and common meaning. In order to achieve this, I will refer mainly to Merleau-Ponty's lessons concerning the Institution, but also to *Sens et non-sens* in which he poses the question of the search for meaning in political life. To find a common signification in adversity, in spite of adversity, seems to be a primary issue in contemporary times, and I'll try to draw links with the most contemporary reflections on this subject. Finally, I will refer to the practice of «weaving» (*tissage*) which allows us to understand the emergence of plural histories and their encounter. It is through the stories we tell ourselves that symbolic matrices can appear and be constituted and deployed. Thus, Merleau-Ponty's ontology teaches us at the same time a practice of weaving, which is an instituting practice in and despite adversity.

BIO

Gael Caignard is a PhD student in philosophy at the Université «Jean Moulin» Lyon 3, under the supervision of Mauro Carbone. He studied also in Bologna, Paris and Dijon. His research currently focuses on the notions of «global» and «local» in an attempt to bring postcolonial studies and anthropocene studies into dialogue with the phenomenological tradition. In particular, he has studied the political implications of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's thought, seeking its possible contemporary interpretations. He published several articles, and he is a translator of philosophical essays. He is coordinator of the editorial staff of the journal *Chiasmi International* and part of the editorial board of the journal *Kaiak – A Philosophical Journey*.

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*Reflections on Social Critique in Merleau-Ponty and Adorno*

In this paper I explore the hypothesis that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and Theodor Adorno's social theory can be considered two aspects of the same critical project. Beginning from the customary opposition of phenomenology and the Marxist critique of political economy, I will show conceptual affinities between Merleau-Ponty and Adorno that require us to consider their relation anew: a concept of nature suffused with nonidentity, a novel consideration of the interchangeability or reversibility of subject and object, and a complex account of institutions and their sedimentation over time. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's reflections on labor at the end of his *Phenomenology of Perception*, his notes from the Collège de France course on "Nature," and *The Visible and the Invisible*, I will argue that genetic phenomenology gives us an important way to view the institutions of political economy – value, labor, and real abstraction – by grasping them within an open-ended ontology of the visible and invisible. Next, reading Adorno's Marxist social theory – including in *Negative Dialectics*, his sociological essays from the late 1950s and 1960s, and his lecture course on "Ontology and Dialectics" – allows us to understand the modes of experience studied by phenomenology as the forms of appearance of a society that is not identical to itself, but whose dynamic can be discerned as the development of class antagonism. After having developed the conceptual translatability of Adorno and Merleau-Ponty's terminologies, I will suggest this as grounds for a new thinking of "critical phenomenology" and "critical theory" alike – one in which the usual opposition between these fields is downplayed. A critique of society without an account of social experience is empty; and a phenomenological account of institutions without a critique of political economy is blind. In order to open new areas of research beyond this paper, I will close with some reflections on these authors' very different responses to communism and the duty of intellectuals vis-à-vis this phenomenon, suggesting that these differences can be traced to the different orientations towards social hope implied by their projects. I close by suggesting that thinking Adorno and Merleau-Ponty together – combining pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will – requires developing each of these two aspects of social critique into a theory of transformative praxis.

BIO

Iaan Reynolds is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Utah Valley University, where he teaches courses in history of political philosophy, critical theory, and Marxist philosophy. He completed his Ph.D. at Villanova University in 2021, with a dissertation discussing the relationship between social critique and the education of critics in the works of Karl Popper, Theodor Adorno, and Karl Mannheim. His current research further develops his understanding of education by engaging with phenomenological and Marxist treatments of political experience.

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*Stiftung with Constitution. A Possible Husserlian Reply to Merleau-Ponty's institution*

The concept of 'instauration' (in German, *Stiftung*) is one of the key ideas of Husserl's genetic phenomenology and is the main source for Merleau-Ponty's reflections on the institution. In this paper, I want to compare the alternative approaches provided by the two phenomenologists, by focusing on the aspects of the Husserlian theory that has been overlooked by Merleau-Ponty in his re-use of this notion. According to Merleau-Ponty's reading, Husserl's interest was confined to the sense-instauration in the theoretical sphere (and in the history of knowledge). Thus, Merleau-Ponty aims at expanding upon this concept in order to broaden its reach into symbolic and socio-political phenomena. In doing this, though, Merleau-Ponty detaches the notion of institution from the operations of a constitutive ego; thus regarding this notion even as a "remedy to the difficulties in a philosophy of consciousness" (IP 1968: 59). What I want to argue for in this paper is that most of the problems raised by Merleau-Ponty with his concept of institution can be addressed also from a strictly Husserlian perspective. As I will show, indeed, far from being concerned only with the problem of knowledge, Husserl employed his theory of genetic constitution (hence, of *Stiftung*) also to account for problems similar to those explored by Merleau-Ponty. But from a different standpoint, since Husserl, unlike Merleau-Ponty, maintains the centrality of consciousness even to analyse socio-historical phenomena. To substantiate my argument and show the main differences with Merleau-Ponty, I will proceed in two steps. (1) First, I will propose to broaden our view of intentional constitution, by taking into consideration not only the constitution of an individual consciousness but also the constitution of a historical and generative intersubjectivity. In particular, I will draw attention to the role of *Stiftung* in what Husserl calls 'tradition' (Hua 14, Beil. 28). (2) Second, I will suggest turning the focus from the constitution of intentional objectualities (or objectual senses) to the problem of the self-constitution of a (inter)subjectivity. Thus, the notion of *Stiftung* will turn out to be crucial also to the self-constitution of groups and communities, i.e., as sedimentation of habits and practices in social contexts. In particular, I will draw upon some relevant manuscripts in which Husserl speaks of the 'instauration of communities' and employs this concept to describe 'social norms' and 'collective habits' (Hua 14, Beil. 29).

BIO

Rosario Croce (Palermo, 1995) is a PhD student at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa. He is carrying on a project on the problem of social structures from a transcendental-phenomenological perspective. His main research interests are in social phenomenology and the history of phenomenology (especially, Husserl). He has spent research stays at the Center for Subjectivity Research in Copenhagen (Denmark) and the Husserl-Archiv in Cologne (Germany).

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*Sense-Institution, Dialectics, and Imagination in Merleau-Ponty's Late Phenomenology*

How can we understand the relationship between the process of sense-formation (*Sinnbildung*) and the emergence of particular moments of sense-institution (*Sinnstiftung*)? How does a new sense arise against the background of a certain historical context where various senses are already sedimented together and continuously reactivated through social rituals? In his fifth Cartesian meditation, Edmund Husserl discusses the problem of the institution of a new sense in connection to bodily habits that are sedimented on the basis of a passive synthesis of association that grounds the active synthesis of identification and provides its “matter” (Husserl, 1960, § 38). Moreover, the identification of objects in the course of our experience is effectively supported by the already existing background of passive associations from which sense is instituted and through which it is formed (Husserl 2001). This materiality provided by passive association is nevertheless covered in the process of the active synthesis of identification, that generates not only distinct unities of sense, but also idealities and abstractions that veil the real emergence of sense-institutions on the background of a process of sense-formation (Husserl 1973, §10). It is the task of a late methodological instruments, such as the backward inquiry (*Rückfrage*) and the reactivation (*Reaktivierung*) of sense-sedimentations, to reveal its grounding function (Husserl 1970). In my presentation, I will argue that every grasp of a determined meaning is made possible through a dialectical contrast between the emergence of something new and an already instituted material background. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's reading of Husserl's *Origin of Geometry* (Merleau-Ponty 2002) and on Marc Richir's reading of Merleau-Ponty in the 1990ies (Richir 1992, 1993, 2009), my goal is to question the function of dialectic in Merleau-Ponty's late phenomenology and its relationship to imagination. Imagination is indeed the modality that allows not only for unexpected sensible connections, but also for dialectical contrasts that transform the sense that is “given” into something totally different. This function of imagination is explored by Merleau-Ponty in his courses at Collège de France (Merleau-Ponty 2010), where artistic creation is presented as the result of a dialectic between spontaneity and sedimentation, between immediate intuition and patient exercise. The emergence of a style in writing or painting thus requires sustained efforts and daily practice, building a process in which the already existing collective institution of meaning is reshaped and transformed until it allows for a new institution of sense, that is to be discovered again in unforeseeable historical contexts and acknowledged in the light of future horizons of interpretation.

BIO

Delia Popa is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Villanova University. Her first book was on Emmanuel Levinas: *Les aventures de l'économie subjective et son ouverture à l'altérité* (Lumen, 2007). She is the author of *Apparence et réalité. Phénoménologie et psychologie de l'imagination* (Olms, 2012) and co-editor of *Person, Community and Identity* (2003), *La portée pratique de la phénoménologie. Normativité, critique sociale et psychopathologie* (2014), *Approches phénoménologiques de l'inconscient* (2015) and *Describing the Unconscious. Phenomenological Perspectives on the Subject of Psychoanalysis* (2020). In 2016 she published her translation into Romanian, with Livia Catalina Tobosaru, of Merleau-Ponty's *Visible and the Invisible*. Her current research focuses on the problem of becoming a stranger and structures of social exclusion, on the relationship between critical imagination and political responsibility, and on the phenomenology of gesture. She lives in Philadelphia.

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*'A Negative Philosophy As Negative Theology' or 'The God Beneath Us':  
Merleau-Ponty And The Refoundation Of Metaphysics*

Merleau-Ponty's critical confrontation with Christian theology, particularly the question of God, is clearly one of the *unthought thoughts* yet to be thought about, in the French philosopher. Michael Berman argues that "the role of God in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, frankly speaking, has not received a sustained or adequate treatment in secondary literature. This is beginning to change, with a second wave of scholars following those from the 1960s who are looking at the relevance of Merleau-Ponty's corpus for religion and theology." If most philosophical investigations aim towards the phenomenology of perception, ontology, Merleau-Ponty's aesthetics or political thinking, by contrast, it can be said that there is a scarce amount of current investigations working on the question of God or the influence of Christianity in his own philosophy. And lesser still, the ones which identify in Merleau-Ponty's work a possible contribution aims a *phenomenology of religious experience*. Yet, paradoxically, for the French philosopher, "the comparison with Christianity is one of the ways in which philosophy better reveals its essence" (Merleau-Ponty). This assertion, like others, is not circumstantial in its intellectual philosophical path. Along with love and politics, we know that he had in mind the writing of something more systematic about religion, specifically, about Catholicism, as we see in the second part of his book *The Prose of the World*. Would there not be, however, in Merleau-Ponty, a different approach to the religious phenomenon, less direct, more subliminal, which would allow us to affirm that his own philosophical proposition was founded in Christianity, namely: the incarnate conception of the subject, corporeality, finitude or negativity of the Being, freedom, perceptive faith, ontology of the flesh, the relationship between the visible and the invisible, and the 'wild being'? By conceiving philosophy essentially as a radical interrogation, the French philosopher, even in his texts more open to the religious phenomenon, in particular Catholic Christianity, does not accept its pretention to absolute truth. Would religious affairs or theological questions be incompatible with his philosophy of ambiguity or finitude, to the point of causing disinterest its interpreters in the question of religious philosophy or even of God and of the human means for accessing transcendence of thought? In this sense, we will approach the concept of «existential eternity» and «ultra-things», in order to understand how they could be the anonymous expression of a new way of saying or thinking about God based on the thought of Merleau-Ponty (perceptive faith, visible and invisible, presence and absence, symbolic institution, « Dieu comme invisible à la 2e puissance »). Thus, our hypothesis will seek to show that there is a theological background to Merleau-Pontian philosophy and that, in this way, there is a metaphysics in act or incarnate, which is, at the same time, a possibility of renewal and overcoming of classical metaphysical questions ('a transcendence which no longer hangs over man').

BIO

João Paulo Costa is PhD student in Philosophy, in joint orientation between the University of Coimbra (Portugal) and the Catholic University of Paris (ICP - Research Unit "Religion, Culture and Society"), with the theme: *Le corps sensible. Affectivité et corporéité chez Merleau-Ponty*. I am particularly interested in contemporary French phenomenology, aesthetics, literature, philosophy of religion (philosophical theology) and art. Author of the essays *Indícios* (UCP editora, 2016) and *À Sombra do Invisível* (Documenta, 2020).

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*The Guilty Body and the Opacity of Its Gestures*

Against the view of guilt as a private emotion, I argue that guilt is intersubjective, constituted by its opacity. In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty says that a person's way of Being is their style. We see that someone is angry by their tone and gesticulations. Hence, the angry person would be said to have an angry style. Often, these emotive styles show themselves clearly in the emotional crescendo, but other emotions do not betray themselves so easily. A resentful style takes time to show itself in one's subtle, spiteful acts. So too a guilty style is opaque but to a seemingly greater degree. Discussions of guilt commonly speak of it as a matter of one's conscience, as if a private affair. However, we also have various idioms like the "wicked flee though no one pursues" that articulate the intersubjectivity of guilt. Guilt's opacity is explored by Dostoyevsky in *Crime and Punishment*. Following his act of murder, Raskolnikov succumbs to delirium, clamoring for his blood-speckled sock in order to hide the evidence of his crime from others to the bewilderment of his friends. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty discusses the "flesh of the world" as the unity of the seen, wherein there is constant encroachment upon the perceived by the perceiving-perceived and viscera with an oriented sense. The guilty person interacts with another being with their guilt at issue, treating the being in an inappropriately for what the being is, as Raskolnikov does. This inappropriate behavior is perceived by others in its distorted sense. Thus, a person with a guilty style obscures the object by encroaching upon it in their inappropriate behavior which often befuddles others, such that the behavior in its inappropriateness is what constitutes the disclosure of the person as having a guilty style.

BIO

Timothy Schatz is a second year MA student in the Boston College Philosophy Department, working on the phenomenology of emotions. His focus is on questions of ontological opacity and ambiguity, as given in both subjective and intersubjective emotional experiences.

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*Common Contingencies: Merleau-Ponty between Marx and Saussure*

In this paper we would like to propose an interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's approach to Saussure and Marx between *Humanism and Terror* and *Adventures of the Dialectic*. In the first part of this work, we will present some brief notes about the interpretation of Saussure's linguistic theory that Merleau-Ponty develops in the late 1940s and in the early years of the following decade. The main objective is not so much to establish whether this reading – which is, as we know, quite “subversive” – should be considered well founded or not, but, above all, to analyze the role it plays in the philosopher's intellectual path. We believe that Merleau-Ponty's political experience and his approach to Marxism is crucial to understand both his reading of Saussure and, more importantly, the direction of his later thinking. In this sense, in the second part of the text we show the relationships, which seem to us to be very significant, between Merleau-Ponty's peculiar approach to Saussurean linguistics and the “philosophy of history” that he sought to articulate between *Humanism and Terror* and *Adventures of Dialectic*. Through this reading, the philosopher's later “ontological turn” is seen as a reaction to a philosophical dead-end, the result of a dissatisfaction with the attempt at a philosophy of history, in the subjective sense, based on the notion of historical contingency. And it's this “failure” that motivates his later reorientation beyond history and the human world.

BIO

Davide Scarso is Assistant Professor at the Applied Social Sciences Department of NOVA School of Science and Technology, in Portugal, and a researcher fellow at the Interuniversity Center for the History of Science and Technology (CIUHCT). He has a background in philosophy, with a focus on Phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty), Structuralism and Anthropological Theory (Lévi-Strauss) and, more broadly, the History and Philosophy of the Social Sciences. His more recent research deals with the conceptual and political implications of the Anthropocene debate and he is currently working on climate denial and the so-called “infodemic”. He was a member of the organizing team of the “Anthropocene Campus Lisboa: Parallax” (Jan. 2020), in which he also co-conducted a seminar on “Repoliticizing the Anthropocene. He is currently part of the coordinating team for the Anthropocene Observatory in Portugal, an initiative jointly led by CIUHCT and the Foz Côa Foundation.



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*Becoming proletarian: Merleau-Ponty on the 'institution of the proletariat'*

Merleau-Ponty's Marxism is a complicate trajectory from full endorsement of Marxism in earlier works, including *Phenomenology of Perception*, through a 'wait-and-see' approach in *Humanism and Terror* to an alleged abandonment in favour of a 'new liberalism' in *Adventures of the Dialectic*. The change has been determined by the concrete events in the USSR, like revelation about Gulag or Moscow trials, aspects that forced Merleau-Ponty to revise his positioning on Marxism and revolutionary politics. An inevitable question in this interference of philosophy and real politics is if the change of positions alters the relevance of concepts and perspective through which Merleau-Ponty theorised Marxism in earlier works. The premise of this paper is that in spite of the later withdrawn, Merleau-Ponty's early Marxism retains its validity and the originality of insights. To prove this, the paper will examine Merleau-Ponty's thinking of proletariat based on his phenomenology of perception. Famously, the part three of *Phenomenology of Perception* describes the proletarian experiences as being shaped by the institutions and, concomitantly, the very fact of being a proletarian reveals itself as an institution: "Neither the economy nor society, taken as a system of impersonal forces, determine me as a proletarian, but rather society or the economy such as I bear them within myself and such as I live them; nor is it, for that matter, an intellectual operation without any motive, but rather my way of being in the world within this institutional framework" (*Phenomenology of Perception*, 469). As the proletariat, the idea of the revolution itself is an institution, more exactly a "revolutionary institution" (*Adventure of the Dialectic*, 220). However, in the traditional understanding, the proletariat and the revolution are by definition anti-institutional and critical of every existing institution, so how can there be a 'revolutionary institution' and an 'institution of the proletariat'? This question persists even within Merleau-Ponty's innovative thinking of institution. Merleau-Ponty speaks of institution in relation to constituted language, expression, and the sedimented structures of available significations, and his approach emerges from Husserl's use of the term *Stiftung* (foundation/institution). He identifies four levels of institution: vital/affective institution, institution of works, institution of language, and historical institution. In his view, institution avoids the problems of a philosophy of consciousness (*Institution and Passivity*, 76), given the paradoxical nature of institution as functioning between activity and passivity. Institutions, as meaning structure, are a compulsion that the speaking subject submits to passively. Thus, if the institution apart from the opening of the future, as described in different contexts, also contains sedimentations and passivity, then how can the proletariat - and the revolution which is a "practical-critical activity", as Marx describes it - be reconciled with sedimentation and passivity? By a close reading and interpretation of the fragment on becoming proletarian from the part three of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, this paper will argue that the 'institution of the proletariat' is the very 'institution of critique'. Thus, recaptured by Merleau-Ponty as being shaped by an institution, the process of becoming proletarian presupposes concomitantly 1) a perception of the material condition of existence; 2) an experience of the intersubjectivity with other workers, 3) an embodying of a critical attitude which does not emerge ex nihilo but from the compulsion contained in the existing situation and from the sedimented meanings and practices which function as well as a 'compulsion' to critique. Thus, in the fragment on becoming a proletarian, the proletariat emerges not only as an agency, but also as a critical attitude and as a critical concept, while the 'institution of the proletariat' reveals itself as a phenomenology of a critical attitude. The concluding remarks will summarize how Merleau-Ponty's approach reaffirms Marxism as a yet unsurpassed mode of critique, embodying the very 'institution of critique'.

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*Chair and Style. An Inquiry into Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*

Every philosopher chooses their own style to adequately express the content of their thought. Far from being an ancillary element, style is profoundly interconnected with the concepts that it conveys, so much so that it is a fundamental key for understanding the specific character of philosophical innovations that philosophers intend to communicate. This fact is even more evident if we consider Merleau-Ponty's philosophy whose style is extremely distinctive, dense with technical notions, metaphoric language, and suggestive passages. The aim of the paper is to investigate the meaning of the notion of *chair* (flesh), by looking at Merleau-Ponty's stylistic choices. To do so, it shall focus on late Merleau-Ponty's works, especially on *The Visible and Invisible* and its related *Working Notes*. Despite its pivotal role within Merleau-Ponty's onto-phenomenology, the notion of chair remains hard to clarify and obscure. To capture its nature in detail, I highlight Merleau-Ponty's peculiar style in three interrelated steps. Firstly, I will analyse Merleau-Ponty's use of synaesthesia, crucial in describing his understanding of the perceptual dimension –the constant horizon of all his contributions – and the articulation of chiasm. Secondly, I will identify a selection of textual passages in which Merleau-Ponty mentions and defines the *chair*, both clarifying what it is and what it is not. I will closely consider the specific vocabulary employed by the author to characterize the chair; I shall pinpoint the philosophical relevance of Merleau-Ponty's terminology when he defines *chair*, i.e. as “porosity”, “thickness”, but also as “structure”, and “*membrure*” (framework) to indicate not only the nature of chair but also its constitutive relationship with the world. Following the stylistic path to comprehend the notion of *chair*, I will offer an analysis of the features that Merleau-Ponty ascribed to his ontology, by discussing why those specific terms have been chosen, what kind of philosophical need they respond to, and moreover, what kind of ontology do they communicate to the reader. Thus, in conclusion, we will appreciate how Merleau-Ponty's style is inextricable with the ontology of the chair and how it supports Merleau-Ponty's effort in depicting a carnal and yet structured ontology of the world and our experience within it.

BIO

I have achieved my PhD in 2018, with a thesis on the analysis of the nature and structure of Heidegger's categories. I have focused my research interests on phenomenology (Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty) and pragmatism (Peirce, James, Dewey), with special attention to neo-pragmatism (Sellars, Brandom, McDowell). I have studied at the University of Florence, where I graduated, Turin, Genoa, and Pavia (Italy), and I have been a visiting student at the University of Southampton (UK). Recently, I have been awarded a Post-doc Stipend from the Thyssen Foundation with the support of the Husserl-Archives of Cologne (Germany) with a Project on Husserl and McDowell's conceptualism. Currently, I am a post-doc researcher at the University of Padua at the Department of philosophy. My work mainly concerns the question of the relationship between concepts and perceptions and focuses on Classic Phenomenology and the Dreyfus-McDowell Debate.

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*The act of painting as dancing in Merleau-Ponty's "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" and Eye and Mind*

Arts and art creation have in Merleau-Ponty's work different uses. On the one hand, art allows him to test and try some of his hypotheses. On the other hand, as some of the works of Rajiv Kaushik and Charles Bobant point out, art is compared to phenomenology and constitutes in itself an act of revelation or a way to unfold the world. Either in one way or the other, what is clear is that not all kinds of arts have the same relevance in his work. Painting in the first position, and cinema in the second one, occupy a very important place in it, especially in his latest works. The point of departure of this work is a quotation from Merleau-Ponty's text « Le langage indirecte et le voix du silence»: *«Le même pinceau qui vu à l'œil nu sautait d'une action à l'autre, on le voyait méditer, dans un temps dilaté et solennel, dans une imminence de commencement du monde, commencer dix actions possibles, exécuter devant la toile comme une danse propitiatoire, la frôler plusieurs fois jusqu'à la toucher presque, et s'abattre enfin comme l'éclair sur le seul tracé nécessaire.»* Here, the act of painting is described. The painter's openness to the world in the act of creating a canvas appears as a vacillation of the body, as a time that dilates. And, this situation is compared to dancing. Even if we interpret that as a metaphor, as Ricoeur points out, every metaphor includes a kind of knowledge. What is Merleau-Ponty trying to express with this comparison? Why does he use the adjective "propitiatory" to describe this painting dance? On the other hand, the dance reference is curious if we think about the place dance has in Merleau-Ponty's work. As I worked in previous papers, dance appears at such only twice and in both cases in *The Phenomenology of Perception*. In one case, he uses it as an example to develop the concept of habit. That is, it is used here in the kind of uses we mentioned at the beginning of this article. In the second case, he brings in a slightly more independent reflection, even if it is a footnote. By reading Merleau-Ponty's late works, especially «Le langage indirecte et le voix du silence» and *L'œil et l'esprit*, I will try to understand what understanding of dance this author takes into account in the previous quotations and how this influences the way he thinks about painting as a creative practice.

BIO

Verónica Cohen holds a PhD in History and Theory of Arts at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, University of Buenos Aires and the Centre of Contemporary Arts, University of Lille. She is a specialist in Artistic Combined Languages at the National University of Arts, Argentina. Prior to her PhD, she obtained a bachelor's and teaching degree in Communications from the University of Buenos Aires. As visiting professor at the Master in Dramaturgy at the National University of Arts, she teaches a course called "Performance and Arts of Movement". Her research is interdisciplinary insofar as it combines elements of phenomenology, dance studies, and body studies. As an artist, her works are influenced by buto dance training. She has presented performances and exhibitions in Buenos Aires, Quito, Chicago, Edinburgh and Paris.

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*Merleau-Ponty on institutions and the first-person plural perspective*

In the summary of the course “‘Institution’ in Personal and Public History”, delivered in 1954-1955 at the Collège de France, Merleau-Ponty announces that “[i]n the concept of institution we are seeking a solution to the difficulties found in the philosophy of consciousness” (2010, p. 76). One of those difficulties is the idea that “[t]here is nothing in [...] constituted objects — that is able to throw consciousness back into other perspectives” (2010, p. 76). By analysing the concept of institution in different domains of personal and public history, Merleau-Ponty proposes a shift from the constituting subject to the instituting subject. He suggests that the constituting subject remains tied to the immediacy of what is first-personally given to consciousness at a certain point in time, whereas an instituting subject would be radically open to alterity. As he writes, “[a]n instituting subject is able to coexist with another because the instituted is not the immediate reflection of the activity of the former and can be taken up by himself or by others without a total recreation being at issue” (2010, p. 76). The point is that the relationship of institution would differ from that of constitution in that what is instituted can be inherited and potentially taken up by other subjects, whereas constitution is an inherently first-person singular accomplishment. In this sense, the instituted (differently from the constituted) configures a sort of common ground between subjects: “the instituted exists between others and myself, between me and myself, like a hinge, the consequence and the guarantee of our belonging to one self-same world” (2010, p. 76). Merleau-Ponty’s notion of institution hasn’t been taken into consideration in current debates on collective intentionality and the first-person plural perspective, not even in those that have explicitly drawn from the classical phenomenological tradition (Salice & Schmid, 2016; Szanto & Moran, 2016). One of the still unresolved issues in those debates is what kind of relation between subjects may ensure the emergence of a first-person plural perspective (Zahavi, 2019), or whether the first-person plural might be as basic as the first-person singular perspective (Schmid, 2014). The aim of my presentation is to propose and argue for one interpretation of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of institution that can contribute to these discussions, by pointing to the embeddedness of the subject in social practices that already have a collective or shared significance (thereby including reference to a first-person plural), while at the same time requiring a subject who (re-)institutes those practices (from a first-person singular perspective).

BIO

Felipe León is an Assistant Professor at the Center for Subjectivity Research, University of Copenhagen. He holds MA degrees in Philosophy from the National University of Colombia and the University of Copenhagen, and a PhD degree in Philosophy from the University of Copenhagen. León’s primary research areas are classical phenomenology, social cognition, and collective intentionality. Recent publications include “Joint Attention Without Recursive Mindreading: On the Role of Second-Person Engagement” (*Philosophical Psychology*, vol. 34, no. 4, 2021, pp. 550-580), and “For-me-ness, For-us-ness, and the We-relationship” (*Topoi*, 39, 2020, 547-558). In co-authorship with Dan Zahavi, León has written “Phenomenology of experiential sharing: The contribution of Schutz and Walther” (in: A. Salice and H.-B. Schmid (Eds.), *The Phenomenological Approach to Social Reality History, Concepts, Problems*. Dordrecht: Springer, 2016, 219-234), and “How We feel: Collective Emotions Without Joint Commitments” (*ProtoSociology* 35, 2018, 117-134), amongst other publications.

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*The institution of embodiment*

This paper aims to clarify how Merleau-Ponty's general interpretation of the "logic of institution" (*Stiftung*) affords an elaboration of the philosophy of embodiment. Although the late Merleau-Ponty clearly did not want place the individual bodily subject and its experience in the center of his philosophy, his works from the 1950s have important implications for our understanding of the topics crucial for his first two books and for the philosophy of the body generally. In particular, they shed light on the relationships between "one's own" body and the body viewed as one of the objects in the world, that is, on the interrelation of the transcendental function of the body and the material, spatio-temporally concrete conditions of its existence. In this paper, I offer a reading of these problems from a dynamic, developmental perspective. Building primarily on Merleau-Ponty's preparatory notes for the lectures on *The Sensible World and the World of Expression* (1953) and *Nature* (1956-60), I explain how his discussion of the logic of *Stiftung* from the course on *Institution and Passivity* (1954-55) has to be extended far beyond what he explicitly addresses in the published text. I focus particularly on showing how the innovative Merleau-Pontyan ontology of embodied existence helps resolve problems which are still prominent in contemporary philosophy and cognitive science, such as the persistent adherence to the dichotomies between innate and developmental/learned, environmental and neural/physiological, individual and social, natural/causal and cultural/constructed aspects of existence. I provide concrete examples showing how, by building on the idea of the embodied subject as an instituted and instituting existence, Merleau-Pontyan philosophy can productively intervene in the contemporary discussions on the body schema, in particular regarding ontogenetic development and corporeal pathologies. More generally, my extension of Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of institution aims to contribute to a renewal of the idea of nature and shed light on the limits of its understanding in natural sciences and embodied cognition theories that build on them.

BIO

Jan Halák, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic. His main interests are in enactivism and phenomenology (esp. Merleau-Ponty), with a focus on philosophy of embodiment, ontology of nature, and the relations between embodiment and higher-order cognition. He has published articles and chapters on phenomenology of the body, embodied cognition, philosophical anthropology, learning, language innovation, and mathematical reasoning. He has collaborated on research aiming to implement phenomenological insights on embodiment into medical humanities and practical disciplines such as physiotherapy. He has translated several Merleau-Ponty's texts into Czech language (e.g., *Résumés de cours*).

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*Late Merleau-Ponty and Hannah Arendt: The ontological relation between chiasm and “in-between”*

The aim of this paper is to assess the ground for a potential synthesis, which could emerge from a combinatorial reading of late Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of flesh and Hannah Arendt's political phenomenology of appearance, with a clear view to incorporate our conclusions in the sphere of politics. By focusing, mainly, on Hannah Arendt's *The Life of the Mind* and Merleau-Ponty's *Le Visible et l' Invisible*, we detect two main themes that run through their texts: the notion of intentionality and the interaction between visible and invisible. In light of the intentional structure of both Arendtian appearance and Merleau-Pontyan perception we disclose affinities between the concepts of perceptual faith and *sensus communis*. At the background of this discussion, though, lies the interaction between visible and invisible, a mechanism which is at work in both thinkers and is able to unveil their strong ontological differences. Concerning Merleau-Ponty, we realize that behind the interdependence of visible and invisible there is the notion of flesh, that is “the concrete emblem of a general manner of being”, with its chiasmatic structure. Thus, the paradoxical nature of perceptual experience is embraced under the schema of ambiguity. For Arendt, through the lens of the movement among visible and invisible, we discover the core ontological notion of the spatio-temporal “in-between”. Hence, on the one hand, the invisible “in-between” appears as the intersubjective field of human relationships, which is the essential requirement for radically new visible actions, while, on the other, the “in-between” emerges as the “place in time” where the thinking activity occurs, namely between past and future. At the *nunc stans*, the mind deals with absent objects, which through metaphor become quasi-visible, eventually producing new meanings. Despite strong similarities, a look into their respective ontologies is able to uncover the source of their subtle distinction. The movement from visible to invisible and vice versa, unlike Merleau-Ponty's philosophy where it designates the chiasmatic structure of Being, in Arendt, even though it is not nothing, it is not Being. And that is why Arendt argues for the primacy of appearances, which results in the ontological coincidence of Being and Appearing. Therefore, despite their similar function and their intrinsic ambiguity, chiasm and “in-between” form an antithetical dipole where elements of potential synthesis are hidden. Those ontological considerations prompt us to form political questions concerning the Merleau-Pontyan “flesh of history”, which incorporates the thesis of reversibility into politics, and Arendt's circularity of thought and action and investigate their relation.

BIO

Michalis Dagtzis is a PhD Candidate in Philosophy at the University of Athens, working on a dissertation project entitled “Ontology and Politics in Hannah Arendt and Merleau-Ponty: An attempted synthesis”.

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*Tracing and Making Explicit Husserl's Notion of Stiftung [Institution] in Merleau-Ponty's Early, Middle, and Later Works*

In this talk, I discuss Husserl's notion of *Stiftung*—but also, *Urstiftung*, *Nachstiftung*, and *Endstiftung*—in Merleau-Ponty's works. In my talk, before I turn to Merleau-Ponty, I will discuss what Husserl means by *Stiftung*. In 1942 *The Structure of Behavior*, Merleau-Ponty has a handful references to the word “institution,” but it is not entirely clear if they refer to Husserl's notion of *Stiftung* (SC 111/168, 176/267, 208/315; Descartes' notion of “institution”: SC 191/290, 247 n. 29/299 n. 1). In the 1945 *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty writes, “even in its intellectual sublimation, content remains radically contingent as the initial institution or founding [la fondation] of knowledge and action” (PhP 128-129/160). In a footnote penned to the word “*la fondation*,” Merleau-Ponty tells us that “[w]e are translating Husserl's favorite term, *Stiftung*” (PhP 521 n. 66/160 n. 1). In the 1950-1951 abandoned *The Prose of the World*, Merleau-Ponty makes a few references to *Stiftung* (PW 37-38 n. †/155 n. \*, 68/76), but the following one is noteworthy: “Husserl has used the fine word *Stiftung*—foundation, institution—to designate, first, the unlimited fecundity of each present which, precisely because it is singular and passes, can never stop having been and thus being universally. ... [and] to designate that fecundity of the products of culture which continue to have a value after their historical appearance and open a field of work beyond and the same as their own” (PW 68/76). Then there is the substantial discussion of *Stiftung* in Merleau-Ponty's 1954-1955 Collège de France courses on “Institution and Passivity,” which I will discuss in my talk. In his 1956-1957 Collège de France course on “the Concept of Nature,” Merleau-Ponty defines Husserl's notion of *Stiftung* as “an inaugural act that embraces a becoming without being exterior to this becoming” (N 59/88). The notion of *Stiftung* is also important for Merleau-Ponty's later ontology of the flesh (*The Visible and the Invisible*). Overall, what I find valuable in Merleau-Ponty's reinstitution of Husserl's notion of *Stiftung* are at least two things (and the list is far from exhaustive): (a) a rethinking of the relation between universalizing-particularizing [cf. “the double aspect of institution. 1) universalizing 2) particularizing” (IP 13/23)]; and (b) a reviving of the notion of a past that is not, and cannot be, present (cf. “a past that has never been present” [*un passé qui n'a jamais été présent*] [PhP 252/289]).

BIO

Arsalan Memon received his Ph.D. from University of Memphis. His area of specialization is 20<sup>th</sup> Century Continental/European Philosophy (especially, Merleau-Ponty). Currently, Arsalan is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy and the Chair of the Department of Philosophy at Lewis University (Romeoville, Illinois, U.S.A.). Since September 2008 to present day, Arsalan has been working on three manuscripts, the first manuscript has been under contract since 2020 and with Lexington Books (Rowman & Littlefield). The manuscript is tentatively titled *Phenomenological Structural Anti-Realism* (PSAR): *A Critical Commentary on The Structure of Behavior*.

MATTEO PAGAN

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*“A logic within contingency”: History and Institution in Merleau-Ponty’s Lectures at the Collège de France (1953-1955)*

Although the problem of history permeates the entirety of Merleau-Ponty’s work, it has not received as much attention as other issues, such as perception and (later) nature. However, Merleau-Ponty himself states, in a note in *The Visible and the Invisible*, that “one will not clear up the philosophy of history except by working out the problem of perception”. Just as perception is neither the gaze of a sovereign subject in a position of overview nor the mere sum of impressions of the external world on the senses, so history is neither the visible realization of a rational plan nor an absurd sum of unrelated events. Thus, from the very beginning, Merleau-Ponty’s theoretical aim was to find a balance between logic and contingency in history, an articulation between past and present that does not imply teleology. As is well known, the French philosopher initially believed that Marxism provided the answer to this problem; however, Merleau-Ponty abandoned his original and heterodox interpretation of Marxism in the first half of the 1950s, simultaneously with the beginning of his teaching activity at the Collège de France. The aim of this presentation is precisely to show how the courses “Materials for a Theory of History” (1953-1954) and especially “Institution in Personal and Public History” (1954-1955) on the one hand sanction Merleau-Ponty’s break with Marxism and, on the other, offer an alternative solution to the problem of history. It will be shown how the concept of institution enables him to avoid the sterile alternative between the idea of providential history and the conception of history as a simple sum of chances and thus to think of history as “a logic *within* contingency, a reason *within* unreason”. The institution configures a dynamic relationship between an instituting activity, the historical event, and an instituted state, the tradition. The historical event always modifies the already instituted field into which it inscribes itself and in so doing opens up another meaningful one. It will be highlighted how this consideration of history in a sense that is neither messianic nor eschatological distinguishes Merleau-Ponty’s thought from much of 20th century French philosophy. In conclusion, the political implications of the concept of institution will be emphasized by examining the idea of “real but relative revolution” that Merleau-Ponty proposes at the end of the section dedicated to the relationship between institution and life.

## BIO

Former student at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris, Matteo Pagan is currently a PhD candidate in Philosophy at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa and at the EHESS in Paris, under the supervision of Simona Forti and Barbara Carnevali. His doctoral research aims to demonstrate that the philosophies of Helmuth Plessner and Maurice Merleau-Ponty share a common theoretical direction that can be described as a “third way” in the 20th century philosophical debate on human subjectivity and freedom. He is interested in contemporary French and German philosophy, especially in phenomenology and philosophical anthropology.



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*Institution and politics: the emergence of the meaning*

The concept of institution is a central concept in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology so that he can think about how meaning emerges. In our study we will try to connect the concept of institution with the concept of political action, showing that political action also gives birth to a new meaning. The important phrase of Merleau-Ponty for the politics in the preface of *Les aventures de la dialectique*: "*Elle n'est pas morale pure. Elle n'est pas un chapitre d'une histoire universelle déjà écrite. Elle est une action qui s'invente*" can be better understood through the concept of institution. The action of the subject, the function of the institution, the dimension of self-invention are issues that can be connected in order to be able to capture the phenomenon of political action. This is a conclusion we can draw from the thought of Merleau-Ponty. His courses at the Collège de France on the concept of institution will be the main text of our study. But we will try to show how these courses and his phenomenology in general are in dialogue with his political treatises and political texts from the 50's onwards. Our hypothesis is that along with the phenomenology of expression, the phenomenology of institution is an integral part of a phenomenology that can think and give meaning to politics and how the political act of the subjects gives birth to a new meaning in the field of history and in the collective life of a society.

BIO

I have a PhD in political philosophy from Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences of Athens with the title: "Theory of Political Practice in Maurice Merleau-Ponty. A phenomenology of the politics". (September 2021). My academic interests are phenomenology and in particular the connection of ethics and politics with phenomenology. I work as a social science teacher in secondary education and as a translator of philosophy from English and French into Greek.

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*The 'Adventures of Experience': Genesis and Institution*

At the end of the summary of the lecture course on Institution (“Institution in Personal and Public History”), Merleau-Ponty enigmatically states that phenomenology is at a crossroads, facing a dilemma that implies a redefinition of its scope and purpose: “Either phenomenology is only an introduction to true knowledge, which remains estranged from the adventures of experience, or phenomenology dwells entirely within philosophy”. What exactly does he mean by the term “adventures of experience” and why does it stand as a fundamental and guiding feature of a phenomenology that claims to be an authentically philosophical project? In my presentation, I will explore the scope of this claim by outlining the contours of Merleau-Ponty’s late and unfinished philosophical project, as well as its tense relationship with his Husserlian heritage. I argue that the historical horizon that introduces the notion of institution in its different domains (individual, collective and trans-individual) allows us to rethink the process of genesis of sense from a fundamentally practical angle (and no longer merely theoretical, as Husserl still seemed to foster in his late published works), closely linked to political action. More concretely, I consider that the revolutionary becoming that opens up the notion institution is a process towards a future (an advent) that neighbors the field of Utopia, i.e, the field of the imaginary and unreal *par excellence*, and the concrete and material reality of the embodied subjects living in an historical community.

BIO

Ricardo Mendoza-Canales is FCT Junior Researcher at the School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Lisbon and member of its Centre of Philosophy (CFUL), where coordinates the Practical Philosophy Research Group (Praxis-CFUL). His area of specialization is contemporary continental philosophy (19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> Century), in particular, philosophy of culture, phenomenology & hermeneutics, aesthetics & philosophy of arts, critical theory and French post-structuralism. His primary research interest is the critical study of imagination and the imaginary as an embodied experience, specially concerning its historicity, its genesis and activity, and its role in the aesthetical, political and cultural domains.

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*From body schema to body as symbolism: the dream as a prefiguration of the flesh*

This proposal aims to investigate the evolution, within Merleau-Ponty's thought, of the deconstruction process of the cartesian as well as the husserlian residue consisting in the assumption of conscience, which will lead to a philosophy of the flesh. More specifically, it will be argued that the abandonment of such preconception is closely interconnected with the consideration of the dream experience, as a borderline-case inviting to both overcome the passivity-activity alternative and, more radically, to reject the model of consciousness itself. This will be done by briefly reconstructing the evolution of Merleau-Ponty's account of dream. Although making its appearance as early as *Phénoménologie de la perception*, the oneiric phenomenon is only properly thematized in 1954-1955 course on *L'Institution, la passivité*, to remerge in some notes at the end of *Le Visible et l'invisible*. Similarly, the refusal of the consciousness' precondition announced in his 1945 oeuvre, though still flawed by this same assumption, is carried out more radically since the early 1950s, culminating in the project of a phenomenological ontology of the flesh. Intrinsically bound to one another, these paths seem to suggest a continuity, rather than a rupture, in the merleau-pontian reflection, which can be traced back to a single gesture, hinging on an investigation of corporeality and leading to the notion of flesh. To this end, the notion of body-schema, introduced in 1945 and revised in the 1953 course

*Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression*, will be initially discussed to both highlight its eminently unconscious character and to illustrate to what extent its functioning might be challenged by the dream experience. Secondly, an overview of the pages of *L'Institution La Passivité* dedicated to the dream will offer a glimpse into a broader understanding of the lateral passivity implicated in our incarnated being-in-the-world, prompting a rejection of the consciousness model, and revealing symbolism as the true subject of dreaming. Lastly, a note at the end of *Le Visible et l'invisible*, where the body is equally identified as the subject of dream, will be considered, as it suggests a kind of corporeality essentially intertwined with symbolism, underneath the functional body. Such acorporeality, already announced in the course on Nature, clearly unfolds in the dream scene and constitutes the imaginary dimension of the articulated body of perception. An analysis of the dream experience could thus disclose meaningful insights to a further understanding of the fundamental passivity, which however does not prevent activity, rooted in our carnal existence and ultimately leading to flesh as indivision of the body and the world.

## BIO

Giulia Andreini is a PhD student in Visual and Media Studies at IULM University (Milan) working under the supervision of Renato Boccali and Mauro Carbone. She holds a MA in Contemporary Philosophy from Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University, where she graduated with a thesis on the merleau-pontian theory of dreaming under the supervision of Renaud Barbaras. Since 2021 she is a member of the editorial board of the international journal *Bachelard Studies*. Her research interests are mainly in the fields of contemporary esthetics (with a focus on virtual reality), phenomenology and theories of dreaming. She has published articles concerning Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of the oneiric experience on several reviews. Her doctoral research focuses on the analysis of user's experience in immersive virtual environments by comparing it with the oneiric one, adopting a phenomenological perspective.

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*A Thought of Desire. Art, Narcissism and Institution in Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*

My presentation aims to address Merleau-Ponty's ontology from the author's last reflections on painting in *L'Œil et l'Esprit* (1961) and *Le visible et l'invisible* (1964). The idea of a «narcissism of the flesh», an expression of the irreducible complexity of the link between man and the world, synthesised by the author through the metaphor of the chiasm, triggers in Merleau-Ponty's ontology a profound link with the dimension of desire, as can also be seen in the course at the College de France in '54-'55 (2003), in which the philosopher explicitly correlates institution and passivity. In this text, and in the pages dedicated by Merleau-Ponty to *L'institution d'un sentiment* and *L'institution d'une œuvre*, it becomes possible, through the artistic and literary dimension, to read Merleau-Ponty's thought of the flesh as a thought of desire, of which Cézanne's reflection on painting is one of the most emblematic examples. This reading of Merleau-Ponty's thought would therefore like to argue, also on the basis of the studies conducted by Emmanuel de Saint Aubert (2013), that it is precisely in the field of art and aesthetics that Merleau-Ponty opens up to the desiring dimension, in order to conceive of a new, reciprocal co-implication between subjectivity and the external world.

BIO

Anna De Martino studied Philosophy at the University 'Federico II' of Naples, where she graduated in Philosophical Hermeneutics with a thesis on the relationship between painting and philosophy within the aesthetic reflection of Merleau-Ponty, Lyotard and Deleuze. During her studies she carried out research stays at the University of Lille and the University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, as well as at the State University of Milan and the University of Lisbon.

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*The Touch of Absence. Understanding Absence*

*Through the Sensible Idea of Chair in Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy*

Traditionally, philosophy has conceived absence merely as the negative of presence, relegating it as a deformity or a falsity of the world. Merleau-Ponty, in particular in his unfinished project *Le visible et invisible*, was able to sketch an ontological view where both presence and absence are constitutive elements of our relationship with the world. In particular, I will focus on the sensible idea of *Chair* [Flesh], the chiasmatic relation that encroach us with the world. Within this philosophical framework, absence it is not merely a negative attribute, but it acquires its own space in the double relation that links it with the notion of presence. Presence and absence are not simply two opposite that exclude each other's, but their own ontological status can be understood only in chiasmatic relation with each other.

BIO

Maura Ceci is FCT PhD student at the Centre of Philosophy of the University of Lisbon (CFUL) working on a dissertation project that focuses on the intersection between power and time in the philosophy of Michel Foucault. She obtained her BA at University of Bologna with a final dissertation on Biopolitics (2015). Then, she obtained a double MA degree in Philosophy at Leiden University (Netherlands), in Philosophy, Politics and Economics and in Philosophical Anthropology, on which she wrote a master thesis on the body in terms of power and resistance as expressed by Foucault.





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This work is funded by Portuguese national funds through FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., within the project UIDB/FIL/00310/2020