

**RETURNING TO THE LEVEL OF THE SKIN AND BEYOND:
A TECHNO-ZOONTOLOGY**

by

Jami Weinstein

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Philosophy in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New
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ABSTRACT**RETURNING TO THE LEVEL OF THE SKIN AND BEYOND:
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Adviser: Professor Sibyl Schwarzenbach

Finding myself on the New York City subway, I noticed the omnipresent, post-September 11th mantra: “If you see something, say something.” It failed to signal the now commonplace terror of backpacks concealing explosives or bio-chemical weapons. Instead, I was pondering ontology and biology—and terrorism; the way in which certain antiquated or unsubstantiated biological claims have been effectively terrorizing us since the dawn of western intellectual history with their *something*, that ever-elusive substance of which we are alleged to be constituted, and their paucity of evidence to justify it. I wanted to expose the fact that the *something* I see is *nothing*. And, saying something about the *nothing* we are is exactly what I do here.

There are four parts. Part 1, the methodological framework, reclaims an ontological theory that was actual virtually in the past. It synthesizes Buddhist and Heraclitean intuitions to harvest a non-substantive, fluid motif of being later transplanted into post-Nietzschean theory. This is cast in contrast to and in repudiation of the hegemonic Aristotelian/Cartesian ontology of substance.

Parts 2 and 3 justify the preference for non-substantive ontology by deploying evidence from recent biology and teletechnology to establish the human as an inextricably interdependent being. Zoontology, the theme of Part 2, bespeaks our interspeciesed nature, the aspect of being that is animalic, a chimerically hybrid force essentially cobbled together with a variety of species—flora, fauna, fungus, and microorganisms. Technoontology, the rubric of Part 3, codes human being and experience as artifactually/technologically textured and reflectively figured. Jointly, Parts 2 and 3 are descriptive and justificative, theorizing transhuman being while providing fuel to raze Enlightenment humanism and its handmaiden substance ontology.

Finally, the conclusions herald the normative effects: how this ontology renarrates the range of responses to the question of how one *might* live. I assess critiques of situating ontology and ethico-politics in a dynamic relationship and underscore non-substance ontology's capacity both to regulate and limit the sorts of ethico-political platforms we can advocate and to produce novel human possibilities. I suggest that these possibilities square well with progressive ethico-political agendas and gesture toward the realization of that future.

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INTRODUCTION:

IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING

Deeply embroiled in this project, I found myself on the New York City subway. Looking up, I noticed New York City's omnipresent, post-September 11th security mantra: "If you see something, say something." I had a hard time resisting the leap to the ontological. What could be a better motto under which to organize this project? After all, there have been many sightings by suspicious theorists spilling untold ink about some *thing* they claim to have seen but, thus far, all have turned out to be mere false alarms. Of course, I was not thinking of packages or bags full of explosives or biological or chemical weapons being left under the seats. I was thinking about ontology and biology. And terrorism. And the way in which certain antiquated or unsubstantiated biological claims have been in effect, terrorizing us since the dawn of western intellectual history with their *something*, that ever-elusive substance of which we are all alleged to be constituted, and their paucity of evidence to justify it. To date, there has been no definitive proof that there is some such *thing* that we are ontologically. In other words, the claim that we are *something*, a substance, behind or transcending the set of properties, processes, interdependencies, multiplicities, fluidities, et cetera has yet to be compellingly formulated despite the mammoth effort waged by theorists throughout the history of western philosophy. But the idea that there is this *thing*, this substance, is deeply embedded in our hegemonic philosophical tradition and it has been poisoning us quite like the biological and chemical weapons we New Yorkers are supposed to find hidden on the subway or in trashcans. Obeying the subway dictate, I wanted to root out the terrorists in our midst, those who have been inflicting their dangerous weapons upon us. The conclusion I have reached is that those very theorists who insist that there is

something that underlies all the properties, processes, multiplicity, flux, and species-interdependent becoming we are are the real terrorists. They are the ones who have imposed their *thing*, their idea of substance, upon us. To restore security, we must first say something as dictated by the subway mantra—that the *something* these theorists claim to see is actually *nothing*. But, to ultimately disarm this weapon, we must provide the ontological antidote—*the nothing*. Thus, saying something about the *nothing* I see is exactly what I am about to do in what follows.

One of the most basic and foundational philosophical enterprises is that which studies, delineates, defines, and comprehends the nature of existing things, otherwise known as metaphysics or first philosophy. Perhaps the most complex and interesting subdivision of these studies is that which concerns the nature of human being, ontology. Briefly, understanding what it is to be human is thought to give us insight into who and what we are. It is unlikely that any other philosophical pursuit could be more integral to shaping our worldview than this one. This dissertation takes up that project from our current historical context; it endeavors to locate an ontology, what it means to be human, in the technological age. It concentrates on describing the inherent features of that ontology and providing justification for it. Unfortunately, the repudiation of metaphysics found throughout postmodern, feminist, and queer theory has led to the misguided belief that our sights should be turned away from ontology. While the critique of metaphysics advanced by these theorists certainly has merit, its scope is far more restricted than they acknowledge. Namely, it only concerns one version of the many possible perspectives on human ontology, what will be called here substance ontology. What emerges from this realization is the impetus to reclaim alternative ontological paradigms, those that survived

on the margins of the hegemonic models, those that existed and were well-theorized for centuries alongside those traditionally accepted as true.

In reclaiming what was virtual in the past, but always actual, we will come to see that telling a story about human ontology is essential to any progressive political and ethical venture. Though the focus here is almost entirely on ontological considerations, it should be made clear that doing ontology is always a political and ethical enterprise. A wholesale recasting of human ontology inevitably has political and ethical consequences.¹ For, altering our understanding of what it is to be human will, in turn, impact the manner in which we exist in the world and the relations we have with other beings in it. Furthermore, we can make the negative claim that certain ethico-political schemas can be deemed invalid or unsound depending on which ontological models are dubbed accurate, compelling, viable, or interesting. In other words, while ontology does not dictate a specific ethico-political agenda, it does place limitations and restrictions on possible theories. To forestall an obvious critique issuing from this claim, Part I surveys and assesses the implications of the so-called “naturalistic fallacy,” providing both a revised analysis of the relationship between ontology and ethico-politics² and an alternative positive ontological theory. Although the ethico-political consequences of the ontological picture painted in this project are not fully developed, as the gaze remains squarely ontological, the conclusions will sketch the springboard for applications this ontology might have to future work in ethics and social/political philosophy.

¹ It would seem that this claim flies in the face of the traditional western ethical argument (the naturalistic fallacy) that one cannot make a connection between what is (ontology) and what we ought to do (ethics). This will be discussed at length in Part 1, Section III.

² Here I am weaving together ethics and politics in the manner of the ancient philosophers. I will continue to use these two together throughout the rest of this work.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, posing the question “What is philosophy?” hit the nail squarely on the head when they offer that, “[p]hilosophy does not consist in knowing and is not inspired by truth. Rather, it is categories like Interesting, Remarkable, or Important that determine success or failure.”³ As they mention, they are extrapolating out from Friedrich Nietzsche’s exclamation that, “[t]his is where man begins to be interesting!”⁴ The question is more about what kinds of possibilities are open for human being, not what is true about it. Alternately, we can configure this to read philosophy as a tool for aesthetic self-construction, as that which provides openings toward possibilities of being. Interestingly, openings can be understood as gaps or holes, especially one through which you can see or through which people or animals can pass. This dissertation is precisely that type of aperture, a line of flight, through which humans and animals, and even machines, can pass and be permanently transformed. But to what end?

Todd May recently suggested that Deleuze and Guattari opt to delve into the ontological in order to more deftly approach the question of how one might live.⁵ I concur wholeheartedly with both his interpretation and their method. Rather than repudiate metaphysics and ontology as many have done, I offer, following Deleuze and Guattari, that we embrace it; not in the stalwart and reductive form of investigating what is in the sense of being stable, fixed and enduring, or even the later versions that examine the specifics of exclusively human being, but rather attending to the truths we can garner

³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (New York: Columbia, 1994), 82.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁵ Todd May, *Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 15.

and, “*discovering, inventing, new possibilities of life.*”⁶ The focus is on experimentation, novel refigurations, and actualized possibilities, not teleological stasis. The aim is to construct new assemblages of immanent difference, not locate identity. It is indeed about facts, but not in the ordinary sense—facts as it is etymologically derived from the latin *facere*, a making and doing, not an is.

Despite popular belief, many postmodern philosophers have rebuked ontology. For instance, Michel Foucault, interpreting ontology in a more traditional fashion and siding with the constructionist end of the essentialist-constructionist spectrum, diagnosed what he held was a philosophical category mistake—what we have taken to be ontological issues were, to him, merely historical sheep in ontological clothing. He advises that instead of examining the ontological, we shift to a genealogical analysis in order to understand the way in which human nature has been historically constructed. Jacques Derrida, too, challenged the view that ontological investigation could bear fruit of the variety to which it aspires. To him, once we get behind the linguistic matters, we realize that there is actually no resolute story we can tell about what there is. For, immanent to everything there is is that which the category or term itself is thought to exclude. At core, everything is in a dynamic relationship with its contrary term—contrary terms are contained within the original term and are in a dynamically immanent relationship with it. This resonates with the assertion that *something* actually is nothing. There are many others who, by way of different logic, also turn their sights away from ontology. But this is a grave error not to mention a misread of their own projects. Foucault, like Derrida, was doing ontology just not one that could be measured against

⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Hugh Tomlinson, trans. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 101.

the standard variations that preceded it. They were theorizing ontologies of difference, telling us what is interesting, remarkable, and important, not what is true. Further, these projects are fueled by the desire to attend to the question of how one might live, not only ethico-politically but also existentially. In other words, ontological study is founded on the quest to understand new possibilities for living.

I am very interested in transfiguring conceptions of the human in order to generate new lines of flight for how one might live, especially the normative responses to that question. But, against Deleuze and Guattari, Foucault, and Derrida, I also think it is important to describe what really is. These are in an inextricable relationship, as we cannot merely construct possibilities out of thin air without first establishing what is and contrariwise, we cannot establish what is without grasping that to which human being is already open—this is a dynamic and historical process. Thus, I adopt Deleuze and Guattari's normative ontological motivation but marry it to the project of descriptive ontology. To wit, the basic argument of what follows will first describe a tripartite connection between science, ontology, and ethico-politics and then seek to justify these claims by turning individually to biological and teletechnological facts about being. Ultimately, the conclusions drawn from the justification of this anti-substantive ontological picture will point toward the ontologically normative, toward how one might live.

The linkage between science and technology and ontology is not original; these disciplines have often been connected throughout western intellectual history. This will be apparent notably in Aristotle, Descartes, and Nietzsche. The task however is not to disentangle these efforts but instead to continue telling new stories, more interesting ones,

as science and technology continue to renarrate their tales about the human and especially about the human body. In this vein, Henri Bergson, to whom Deleuze owes an enormous intellectual debt, dubs his method a “positive metaphysics.” Weaving together the strands of positivist science and ontology, he proposes a methodology that intends to evoke the idea that metaphysics is a science of the empirical variety. Empiricism, like that supported by positivist scientific theory, strives to delineate facts by experimenting with real objects and measurable phenomena. Again, however, these facts are not stable fixed objects that we discover. Rather, they are a making and a doing, or here, moreover, an experiencing. Bergson writes that he views, “future metaphysics as a science that is in its own way empirical, progressive, obliged like other positive sciences to present the results of its attentive study of reality as merely provisional,”⁷ which, he maintains, “requires a continuous contact with reality. It follows reality in all its sinuosity... It is composed of corrections, of refinements, of gradual complications.”⁸ Thus, we must continue to negotiate that connection between what really is and what possibilities are open to us, realizing all the while the extent to which these claims are contingent, provisional, and situated. Metaphysical study, further still in its ontological light, is about precisely that charged place where those two endeavors—understanding what is and how one might live—encounter each other.

Thus, some of the focus, especially in Part 2, will be on what is, particularly on biology and the new stories scientists are telling. In Part 3, the gaze will be directed at technology, specifically teletechnology and its scientific underpinnings, and the ways in

⁷ Henri Bergson, cited by Jean Gaydon, “Bergson’s Spiritualist Metaphysics,” in *Continental Philosophy of Science*, Gary Gutting, ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005) 48.

⁸ *Ibid.*

which possibilities for human being and how one might live are established through very new instances of this technology. Returning to the theme of terrorism and the “if you see something say something” motto and blending it with this issue of science, we can ascertain that it is no accident that some of the most potent of today’s weapons are believed to be those of the biological variety. Indeed, biological weapons are precisely the type our intellectual (ontological) terrorists have been deploying for millennia. Biology, in its earlier forms is precisely that which gave purchase to these theories of the *something*. The antidote to these biological weapons, as is the case of the more literal variety, is more nuanced biology, biology that can overcome the forces of its own historical baggage. Canvassing contemporary biology and recent interpretations of evolutionary theory, evidence begins to amass in favor of a certain degree of indeterminacy, multiplicity, interdependency, flux, and contingency. And it is from this basis that the justification of a non-substantive ontology will be forged. Bergson, himself, identified this process when he suggested that we, “accept science with its current complexity, and...recommence, with this new science as our raw material, an analogous effort to that which the old metaphysicians carried out on a much simpler science.”⁹ In this fashion, this project will be a positive descriptive ontology based on the new stories being told by contemporary science and technology.

Looking back, we witness that the history of science about human existence or being has been marked by an underlying reductionist project, by a fundamental mechanization of life. This was supported by well-entrenched ontological theories characterizing human being as the sort of entity one could isolate out from its

⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

environment in order to make it a unique object of study, as a thing or a substance. In other words, science appeared to have the goal of successively peeling back the layers with the hope of one day arriving at the “core of life” and the answer to our deepest questions about human nature. Witness the flow of modern science as it focused first on the organ, then the tissue, later the cell, the nucleus, the chromosomes, the genes, and finally the individual proteins which constitute them. The game of science can be likened in this way to treating human being as if it were a Russian *matryoshka* (nesting) doll which you continually open only to find another smaller version hiding inside¹⁰. Scientists appear to be searching for that atomistic core they can dub “the meaning of life.” But where does this violently reductionist project ever end? Rather than continuing to dig deeper and deeper below the skin to find that evasive (if not non-existent) core, why not switch gears and start from the level of the skin, a whole person, and turn our sights outward? Therein lies the title this dissertation: “Returning to the Level of the Skin and Beyond.”

I believe there are great costs to this reductionist project. It is my claim that an ontological theory and scientific facts are never neutral, especially when theorizing about human being. It has been evident throughout the history of philosophy that one’s ethico-political claims often echo one’s ontological claims. If this relationship between ontology and politics is not merely coincidental, and in fact political views can and are often shaped by one’s ontology, there is good reason to be cautious about those ontological theories one defends. I submit that what is being defended here ontologically is consistent with a politics that reveals a more interesting, and perhaps accurate,

¹⁰ Michel Tibon-Cornillot, *Les corps transfigurés: Mécanisation du vivant et imaginaire de la biologie*, (Paris, France: Édition du Seuil, 1992).

description of being rather than conceals it, that encourages human flourishing and responsibility instead of making those impossible, that takes the needs, desires, and interests of all manner of living things above instrumental interests, particularly economic gain. Although the details of the ethico-political argument that can ensue from this ontological thesis are not the primary focus of this dissertation, it should be made clear that doing ontology is always a political and ethical enterprise. A wholesale recasting of human ontology inevitably has political and ethical consequences.¹¹ For, altering our understanding of what it is to be human will, in turn, impact the manner in which we exist in the world and the relations we have with other beings in it. Furthermore, we can make the negative claim that certain ethico-political schemas can be deemed invalid or unsound depending on which ontological models are dubbed accurate, compelling, viable, or interesting. I mention this merely to provide a sense of what is at stake in defending this thesis and to give a hint of why it ought to be defended. In other words, the larger scope of this project is, thus, an effort to link up the historical triad of science, ontology, and ethico-politics with its contemporary counterpart and, in doing so, eviscerate the current hegemonic ontological models of their vacuous claims by wielding the latest evidence from biology and teletechnology.

The case could be made that over the last half of this millennium several deeply entrenched distinctions have been overturned which set the stage for the collapse of many important binaries necessary to maintaining this myth of the human subject and behind that the subject/object distinction itself. The collapse and transcendence of these

¹¹ It is clear that this claim flies in the face of the traditional western ethical argument that one cannot make a connection between what is (ontology) and what we ought to do (ethics). This is discussed at length in Part 1.

boundaries permitted us to decenter our own worldviews and begin to see ourselves as other than the dominant center of the universe. First, Copernicus and Galileo did their part to undermine the sharp demarcation between the celestial and terrestrial spheres. Then, Darwin did his share by revealing the leak in the boundary between humans and animals. Finally, Freud helped us to unhinge the door between reason and unreason and present a formidable challenge to the Enlightenment dogma concerning the supreme governance of reason. In large part, the work of this dissertation will be to engage that momentum in novel blendings—the blurring of the boundaries between nature and artifice and between animal and human. Indeed, many of the theorists figuring in this project have initiated the blurring of that split in unique ways. My work here is to develop it further and apply the resulting ontology to questions about human being, with a special focus on dynamic and co-constitutive relations with teletechnology and animality that lead toward a theory of the transhuman.

This blurring starts from our current historical context; it endeavors to locate an ontology, what it means to be human, in the technological age—our artifactually textured world replete with our mutually emergent companion relations with non-human species. It concentrates on describing the inherent features of human ontology, what we *are*. In reclaiming what was virtual in the past, we will come to see that drawing a clearer and more compelling picture of human ontology is a key aspect of any progressive political and ethical venture. In depicting this alternative human ontology, I weave together two main threads: the essential interdependency both internally and externally that human bodies have with non-human species, and the fundamental interrelationship humans have with technology, particularly teletechnology—the way in which each of these

interrelationships tells an ontological story of what we *are*. Thus, separate parts of this work are dedicated to fleshing out each of these relationships in contrast to the more mainstream theories that emphasize independence, autonomy, and bodily integrity. It becomes clear throughout, as Nietzsche already knew, that, “we are a *multiplicity that has constructed an imaginary unity for itself*.”¹² Or, otherwise stated, the “process of materialization that stabilizes over time...produce[s] the effect of boundary, fixity and surface we call matter.”¹³ This has duped us into clinging to the fictitious unity of this organism we call the human rather than helping us recognize our fundamental ontology of interdependence, flux, multiplicity, impermanence, and disunity. The body is not a static entity that can be unproblematically reduced, decoded, and mapped. Nor is it properly construed as autonomous and independent. It is a lived interrelational and interdependent entity embedded in a world that is animalic and technoscientific.

Now that we have dispensed with the general overview, let us move on to a schema of what is to follow. The project is divided into three parts—ontology, zoontology, techno-ontology. Each part is subdivided into sections and, in Part 1, additional subsections. The overall thesis is that human being is techno-zoontological—a multiple phenomenon made up of an ever-changing variety of forces and inextricable interdependencies. Certainly, there are many such forces. The focus here, however, is on the biological, technological, and social. The foundation of this ontological narrative lies in the ancient world, particularly Buddhist thought and Heraclitean theory and the emphasis on fragmentation and flux. Many theorists have transported this ontological

¹² Eric Blondel, *Nietzsche: The Body and Culture—Philosophy as a Philological Genealogy*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991) citing Nietzsche, 234.

¹³ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex,”* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 9.

foundation, in various ways, into the contemporary world. Herein, Nietzsche and Heidegger are highlighted as a springboard to more contemporary theorists indebted to the seeds they planted. In order to justify favoring this ontological picture over the myriad others that could be defended, I employ the insights and evidence of contemporary biology and recent teletechnology.

Part 1, *Fundamental Concepts of Ontology*, starts by framing the history, both of substantive and non-substantive ontological theories. Aristotle and Rene Descartes are analyzed in order to constitute the basis of the hegemonic substantive ontological paradigm. Turning toward the non-substantive view, Buddhist thought and Heraclitus serve as the soil in which the Nietzschean and Heideggerian seeds are planted. This should be understood merely as a foundation for the very recent non-substantive ontological theories examined throughout the rest of the project. Subsequent to laying down this historical groundwork and situating the thesis of this project against the background of history, ethico-politics enters the scene. The end of Part 1 thus draws the connections between ontology and ethico-politics that, after amassing the biological and technological evidence from Part 2 and Part 3 respectively, will be explored in the conclusion.

To forestall an obvious philosophical critique issuing from this claim, the ethico-political Section III of Part 1 surveys and assesses the implications of the so-called “naturalistic fallacy,” or fact-value problem, providing both a revised analysis of the relationship between ontology and ethico-politics and an alternative positive ontological theory. I argue that supporters of the naturalistic fallacy claim are justified in their repudiation of a positive, causal, logical, linear connection between ontology and ethico-

politics; merely having a specific ontological platform is not sufficient to deduce or even engender a specific ethico-political theory. Yet, the caution I raise is that this fully exhausts the scope of the observation. What does not follow from the fact-value problem is the claim that ethico-politics and ontology have no relation at all. In fact, I push this further and assert that their relation is deeply intertwined and inextricable. Though, it is not causal or logical. On the other hand, taking the negative approach, I show that certain ethico-political theories *cannot* be justified or regarded as sound in light of serious revisions to our traditional ontological account of human being. What is entailed here is a relatively strong claim that ethico-politics and ontology do have a sort of negative causality, or at least a dependency relation. That is to say, some ethico-political theories would cease to be supportable in light of convincing proof of certain ontological realities.

In Part 2, *Zoontology—Traces Of The Beast: Transspecies Corporeality And Transhumanity*, I develop the notion of the body as interdependent with non-human species, the zoontology component. I interrogate the way in which other species and our own animality are integral to knowing what we are ontologically. I explain what is at stake in investigating questions of animality. Through a rehearsal of contemporary biological perspectives on the bodies of humans and non-humans, and the resulting realization about the extent to which humans are, at core, interdependent and chimeric, lines of flight will be created toward a transhuman ontological theory. This vision of the transhuman, derived in tandem from Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal and Donna Haraway's companion Species motif, forms a better depiction of human being given its

In Part 3, *Technoontology—Reality Television: Technonature And The Human Petri Dish*, teletechnology is used as a point of departure to investigate the intersection of

the scientific, technological, and social elements of human ontology. The evidence presented in this part demonstrates the extent to which we are techno-ontological, the ways in which the scientific character of the reality television genre configures who and what we are. Since in today's society both television and science are central forces in how we come to understand what and who we are and, from that, how we might live, the reality television genre in particular seemed an apt object to interrogate. The employment of the word "reality" itself almost begs for ontologists to take notice. After digging slightly under the surface, I argue, one cannot help but notice a scientific thinking, replete with its substantively reductive metaphysical vestiges, bubbling beneath it. Understanding the intersection of science and the televisual in this way also points to the kinds of risks present when the subjects and identities presented as real and true by these broadcasts are widely disseminated. Returning to the ethico-political, these supposed "real" identities both create and limit possibilities for how one might live. Moreover, I argue, they create and structure human being in line with a fairly conservative, oppressive, and currently hegemonic ethico-political agenda while cloaking it under the guise of "the real" and "the true."

The aim of the project up to this point is to demonstrate that these interdependencies are essential to what it means to be human insofar as the human is necessarily embodied and in an artifactually textured and animalic world. In other words, the resulting picture is of human being as techno-zoontological, the subtitle of this work. Hence, having argued for that, in the conclusion, I return to the ethico-political questions raised in Part 1 with the revised ontological theory in hand. It is here that we strip off the veneer and briefly expose some possible ethico-political implications and further suggest

how one might live given this ontological theory. In this final part, I also tackle the lingering allergy that some feminist, queer, and postmodern theorists have with ontological or metaphysical study. Unfortunately, the repudiation of metaphysics found throughout postmodern, feminist, and queer theory has led to the misguided belief that our sights should be turned toward ethico-politics or epistemology and not ontology, eliding any ontological considerations. While the critique of metaphysics advanced by these theorists certainly has merit, its scope is far more restricted than they acknowledge. Namely, it only concerns one version of the many possible perspectives on human ontology—the substantive view. Moreover, it overlooks the dynamic and inextricable relationship between ontology and ethico-politics (argued for in Part 1).

What emerges from this realization is the impetus to reclaim alternative ontological paradigms, those that survived on the margins of the hegemonic models, those that existed and were well-theorized for centuries alongside those traditionally, but incorrectly, accepted as true. It is here I argue that the wholesale repudiation and subsequent avoidance of ontology by these theorists in favor of “pure” ethico-political investigation (allegedly free of any underlying ontological presuppositions) both weakens their arguments and the libratory potential of their critiques. They need to take stock of the alternative non-substantive, fluid, multiple paradigms. And, only then will they see that there have been important and profound ontological assumptions always already operating under the surface of their arguments and that highlighting and championing these will provide more force and potential for their claims.

PART 1—ONTOLOGY

RETURNING TO THE LEVEL OF THE SKIN AND BEYOND

I think an almost unbelievable amount of false philosophy has arisen through not realizing what 'existence' means.¹⁴

Become the one you are.¹⁵

In order to distill the ontological argument of this project into a digestible form, we need to take stock of the ingredients of which it is composed. Well prior to this, however, we must frame the project in its historical roots, both classical and contemporary. This two-pronged approach will furnish the two key elements constituting the framework in which the argument is to be constructed. First, briefly turning our revisionist eye to the classical legacy, we can witness the taxonomization of early ontological projects into broad categories of metaphysics of substance on the one hand, and bundle, process, or event theories on the other. This classification is very important in situating the whole of this work as we will see. Second, surveying the contemporary field, and the so-called analytic and continental methodologies, we acquire another insight. Many analytic philosophers seem to be motivated primarily with articulating a straight forward ontology, hoping to describe how the world or objects *really are*, caring very little, if at all, about how these relate to ethico-political programs. Conversely, while describing what *is* is also a background concern of the continentals, their impetus seems to be primarily the ethical, social, and political, examining ontological questions in order to overturn those that fly in the face of their political agendas or help to provide support for oppressive political projects. Of course, these are overgeneralizations and

¹⁴ Bertrand Russell, *Logic and Knowledge* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1956), 234.

¹⁵ Babette E. Babich, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science: Reflecting Science on the Ground of Life and Art* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1994), 12.

many theorists from each camp would resist this classification and assessment. Despite its shortcomings, however, this diagnostic will be helpful in understanding the allergy feminist and queer theorists have had to metaphysics, as well as highlight the way in which we should think about ontology and ethico-politics in concert with one other. My aim here is to take up both of these concerns, aiming to describe both how things *really are* as well as understand that formulating and advocating ontological descriptions is inextricably linked to ethics and socio-politics.

To wit, the first section of Part 1 attends to the historical questions; I sketch the two opposing ontological paradigms we have derived from intellectual history and explain which one will be promoted in this project. The critique of the paradigm I wish to dethrone will be formulated by the arguments and evidence presented in the rest of this project, notably in Parts 2 and 3. In other words, by arguing for a more nuanced, interesting, and compelling ontological description in my discussion of animality and technoscience, it will be clear why the ontological model proposed by the metaphysics of substance faction cannot hold. In this section, I also delineate the foundational principles, the building blocks, of the ontology I describe and champion in the rest of this project. In Section II of this Part, I move to a brief discussion of the methodology of both the so-called analytics and continentals. It is here that I catalog the merits and deficiencies, commonalities and differences, of each approach. In doing so, I situate this work's motivations. In Section III, I will argue against the contemporary grain by relating ontology and ethico-politics and demonstrating the limitations of the naturalistic fallacy.

I. Framing the History: The Classical Ontological Paradigms

Ontological inquiries of most stripes share core methodologies regardless of whether they intervene on human being or the being of any other object. Though these theories can be wrangled into very nuanced categories, I bifurcate them more crudely as the metaphysics of substance (or substance ontology) and non-substance ontology. This dichotomy corresponds to other similar models, which pit, for instance, metaphysics of immanence, becoming, interdependency, and flux against metaphysics of presence, being, stasis, autonomy, and essence. For the purposes here, let us consider the substance/non-substance categories to include the other versions among its inventory, let them stand as umbrella terms. By avoiding this minefield, though fully acknowledging the various skirmishes taking place within each class, this admittedly rough taxonomy will facilitate our approach to the question of what the being of an object *is*, or human beings *are*. The most unrefined analysis of this ontological issue claims that it turns entirely on the issue of “properties,” broadly construed. In other words, is there an object in excess of properties (or events, or processes), namely, is there a substance, or are objects nothing more than a collection or bundle of these properties? It is this very dichotomy I now wish to examine. Substance ontology is positioned first in what follows both because it is hegemonic and thus the standpoint against which the rest of this project is positioned.

A. Know Thy Enemy: The Substance Ontology of Aristotle and Descartes

Though there are a legion of theorists, classical and contemporary alike, that have contributed to the dominant substantive ontological paradigm still largely holding sway, Aristotle has often been singled out by opponents as the chief perpetrator and advocate, if

only for his meticulousness. It is well known that Plato laid some of the foundations with his Theory of the Forms, many of his dialogues are a quest to discover one or more of these, but it is Aristotle who carefully and thoroughly crystallizes the foundational concepts of this brand of metaphysics. It should be well noted, however, that substance ontology was born even before Plato. Pre-Socratic philosophers devised a plethora of theories to describe reality and being. Thales was famous for his belief that reality at core was essentially water, while Anaximenes held that reality was a form of air. Atomists like Democritus held that specific individual entities called ‘atoms’ were the fundamental substances of the universe. Furthermore, Anaximander suggested that everything existing is composed of varied proportions of the four elements—earth, air, fire, and water.

Plato’s Theory of Forms (*eidōs*) is one attempt to resolve the myriad questions that arise from these materialist ontological perspectives. He revised these materialist substance ontologies by proposing his legendary theory of Forms. According to it, what is ontologically basic are called *eidōi* or Forms and particular physical objects or instances are merely copies of them. Not exactly substances in the intuitive sense, these abstract, transcendent entities are universal and eternal and they constitute, structure, make intelligible, and form the blueprint for particular instances. It is this universal and abstract quality that forms the backbone against which Aristotle waged his critique and which drove him toward his theory that maintains substance (*ousia*) as particular and individual.

Though mentor and student are distinct in significant ways, particularly whether reality or being is universal or particular, both Aristotle and Plato draw upon the insights

of Parmenides and Zeno. At least in their metaphysical views, they both embraced the notion of ontological stasis, relegating flux, impermanence, and change to the realm of appearances rather than the real. In fact, Parmenides even denied the existence of time, a necessary component of change and flux. Without time, the change the senses observe must be considered illusory falsehoods. While it is certainly true that Aristotle did not fully subscribe to Parmenidean metaphysics at its extreme, he was unmistakably influenced by the aspects of it that argue against being, in its essential form, having as its nature change, movement, or flux. This is precisely what generated an overall theory of “ontological essentialism” oft vilified by postmodern theorists. We will turn to this critique in Section II below.

One small qualification must be articulated here: this historical survey does not strive to be exhaustive or thorough. Rather, it is deliberately oversimplified and sweeping, for getting our hands dirty with the nitty gritty of these theories would carry us far afield and provide scarce, if any, space to advance, elaborate, and argue for an alternative ontological account—the main objective of this entire work. Thus, in an effort to sketch these foundations for the intention of providing a framework within which to understand this alternative ontology, I deliberately shy away from engaging in the compelling debates over the microscopic differences between theorists I place in this category. Furthermore, while I also acknowledge the value of the considerable scholarly debate waged over the frequently controversial interpretations of even one of these theorists, all such matters lie outside the scope of this project. It serves my purposes here to simply broad stroke the main structures and criteria of substance ontology, as this will be a sufficiently formidable barometer against which the non-substance versions can be

measured. As such, I join ranks with those who take Aristotle as an archetypical representative and use his paradigm as the fulcrum. In addition, since substance ontology was translated into the modern world by way of an important revision of the Aristotelian perspective, I pepper this analysis with the later insights of Rene Descartes. First, let us consider Aristotle.

1. Aristotle

Because of Aristotle, “(m)etaphysics became synonymous with that which transcends the physical, and with the study of ‘being’, ‘substance’, ‘time’, ‘space’, ‘cause’, ‘essence’, and ‘identity’. Furthermore, ontology is regarded as necessarily bound up with the study of a ‘primary’ and separable substance or ‘being’ that is fundamental, non-relational and that remains constant through change.”¹⁶ Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* entitled such because it was the book that came after his *Physics*, contains two chief issues that fit our objectives here: ontology and universal science. Ontology, or the study of existence, is customarily conceived by Aristotle as the science of being *qua* being. Universal science, also known as first philosophy, refers to the widely accepted “first principles” that undergird all other inquiries. It is in investigating these first principles under the rubric of universal science that he treats such issues as: substance, causality, species, identity, motion, space, time, quality, quantity, and relation, among others.

Championed throughout both the *Categories* and the *Metaphysics* is a concept axiomatic to our purposes here: substance. There are various ways to signify what is

¹⁶ Christine Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 5 (punctuation as in original).

meant by substance, commonly translated by the Greek ‘*ousia*’ (being) or the Latin ‘*substantia*’ (that which grounds entities).¹⁷ Substance can, for example, be configured as the irreducible or foundational elements in a given ontological economy or it can be defined as a specific and precisely articulated fundamental entity. In the former case, substance is tantamount to some sort of ontological substratum; this interpretation is most frequently associated with a certain read of Aristotle. In the latter case, we find the common sense intuition of substance as a unified *thing* or *object*. It is this latter sense that is frequently contrasted with the alternative ontological faction that regards substance as specious, rendering what *is* as nothing more than a bundle of properties, a collection of processes, an aggregate of forces, a string of events, or a set of occurrences. Admittedly, there are assorted ways to characterize what this *thing* or *object is*; therein lies the crux of the debate among theorists in this category.

Both of these techniques of construing substance rely on a prior presumption of the separability of an object and its properties. Taking this distinction as valid momentarily, particular substances are figured as the enduring, permanent, stable, durable, even sometimes eternal, and universal subjects of these properties. Aristotle fine tunes this distinction in the *Categories*, cordoning off ‘primary substance’ from ‘secondary substance’—whereby the former refers to the most basic of ontological entities and the latter to properties (neither of which is universal or eternal save very rare exceptions). Aristotle further hones this distinction, arguing that primary substance is that which is ‘said of’ objects while secondary substance is that which is ‘in’ primary

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

substance.”¹⁸ Likewise, he remarks in the *Categories*, that, every non-substance is, “what is in something, not as a part, and cannot exist separately from what it is in.”¹⁹ This relation is often called ‘inherence,’ resulting from his claims that secondary substances are *in* substances and cannot exist independently from them.²⁰ Thus, that leaves substance as the most eligible candidate to understand being *qua* being, being is just a primary substance, that which is “neither in a subject nor said of a subject.”²¹ The definition of ‘subject,’ is spun later in the *Metaphysics* as both, “that which is primarily and is simply (not is something)”²² and substratum, “that of which everything else is predicated, while it is itself not predicated of anything else.”²³

All this relies on the belief that primary substance is the possessor of properties, or secondary substances, and that secondary substances could not exist without them; primary substance is then that upon which secondary ones are predicated and cannot be predicated upon anything else—it is the irreducible element. Whereas primary substance endures and maintains identity over time, secondary substance is acknowledged to be impermanent; while properties of the object might change, including its material composition, the primary substance, remains fixed throughout time. Thus primary substance earns a privileged rank insofar as it is the category of beings to which all other categories owe their existence; it is what makes the object what it is, “the form...the

¹⁸ J.L. Ackrill, ed., *A New Aristotle Reader (Categories 1a21)*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, (*Categories 1a25*), 5.

²⁰ This is where Aristotle parts company with Plato and his theory of abstract, eternal, and universal forms in which particular instances participate. For Aristotle, red does not exist other than in some substance, say a tomato. Whereas for Plato, red exists “out there” even if there are no instances of it to be found.

²¹ Ackrill, *Op. Cit.*, (*Categories 1b4, 2a11*), 7.

²² *Ibid.*, (*Metaphysics 1028a30*), 285.

²³ *Ibid.*, (*Metaphysics 1028b36*), 286.

account of what the being would be.”²⁴ Despite the Platonic conclusions some of us might hastily want to draw from this dichotomy, Aristotle maps the notion of species onto the category of secondary substance. He argues that, “[t]he species in which the primarily called substances are, are called *secondary substances*.”²⁵ This grounds his theory of immanent substance, or substance as particulars, rather than transcendent substance, or substance as universal. It also tips his hat in favor of the sanguine conviction that the *things* that constitute the world have principles of intelligibility within them. However, it also leads to a very tricky quandary. Within this rubric, lurks an important Aristotelian claim, one that later will be foregrounded as an Achilles heel by alternative ontological theorists who see it as a site of intervention. While most properties are depicted as contingent and accidental, he maintains that a substance can possess some of properties in an essential way, i.e. by necessity throughout their existence. Species might be considered to be one of those essential properties. This generates the challenge of parsing out the distinction between entities *having* essential properties (and thereby remaining ‘something more’ than just the property) and entities being *nothing but* these essential properties. Wielding Ockham’s razor, we must pause to ask ourselves what, if any, additional explanatory power exists in supposing that substance is ‘something more’ than these essential properties. Is there in fact anything we gain by this move? Are we not just proliferating unnecessary and thorny philosophical conundrums by positing this additional ‘something?’

It seems worthwhile here to skim Aristotle’s four “because” or explanations (*aitia*), also frequently translated in the literature as “causes,” although this seems not to

²⁴ *Ibid.*, (*Physics* 194b27), 98.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, (*Categories* 2a15), 7.

fully capture Aristotle's intent. Taking this detour is important as it is under this guise that we reveal another way of conceptualizing substance, as form or essence. His famed example, the oak tree, orients his theory. All entities have a fourfold explanation of their being. The first, referred to as *material* (though not by Aristotle himself), is held to be the, "that out of which as a constituent a thing comes to be,"²⁶ and persists. Basically speaking, it is the matter. Aristotle might have indicated the wood and the leaves in the case of the oak while nowadays we might offer the genetic component as a replacement. The subsequent explanation is that all entities have a *formal* component, which refers to the account of the essence of the thing, the oakness, let us say. He offers that, "form or model is the account of what the being would be."²⁷ This is one place where substance is situated in this schema, it is the formal explanation of an entity.²⁸ The *efficient cause* is, he claims (contrary to Parmenides), "the primary source of change or the staying unchanged."²⁹ This is most akin to a cause as we currently conceive it, where something causes something else either to be generated or affected. With respect to the oak, this might be thought to be the sun, water, environmental conditions, etc. The last is the *final* cause, the *telos*, the reason for which a thing is done, the "what something is for." (*Physics* 194b33) This is the end toward which all natural processes are said to be directed. Substance can also be encoded as *telos*, namely in the sense that what something *is* is inextricably bound with its natural purpose, end, or function. Paired with the formal explanation, these Siamese twins become a central source of contention with

²⁶ *Ibid.*, (*Physics* 194b24), 98.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, (*Physics* 194b30).

²⁸ It is true that in the *Categories*, he seems to imply that the substance, or at least the individual, is the unity of form and matter. But in the *Metaphysics*, it is clear that he opts for form more purely.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

non-substance ontologists who repudiate the possibility that within being rests an organizing blueprint, certainly not one that is pre-programmed or in any logical sense necessary. More on that in the Section IB and IC of Part 1.

Dovetailing Aristotle's theory of substance, and a vital component anchoring the critique levied against him, is the slippery notion of essence, which can be interpreted as the substance of substance. Aristotle has two means for evoking the English term essence: *to ti en einai*, 'the what it is to be' and, as substance, *ousia*.³⁰ According to his theory, essence can be interpreted as, "the timeless and necessary element in the species or genus which persists across change. Essence is bound up with the minimal necessary and sufficient conditions that enable us to identify and reidentify entities as belonging to the 'same' kind."³¹ The notion of essence is situated within a matrix of the other concepts at the heart of this theory, in particular, substance, being, form, and *telos*. Merging the variety of conceptual angles together, we can surmise that essence is the primary substance, or formal cause, of a particular, which is neither reducible to its matter nor thought to be some eternal independently existing entity. Germane to interject here is also the issue of actuality and potentiality. Since his theory was teleological, Aristotle gave priority to the actual over the potential, a position that held sway up until Darwin entered the scene.³² As substances cannot admit of any change, which, simply stated, is the movement from potentiality to the actual, substance fits in with the realm of the actual. While at first blush it appears to be a compelling stab at overcoming the

³⁰ Christine Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 10.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

³² Herein lie many of the problems feminists highlight in his theory. For, if there is only one substance human, and its telos is male, females are deemed incompletely developed humans by his account.

Parmenidean logic against change in general, it only leaves us with a more macro-level problem regarding change. Simply put, if it is true that everything possesses a *telos* that befits its essence, there is no room for change of essence in the grand scheme of things—either it fulfills its potentiality by actualizing it or it does not. It allows no possibility that a wholesale transformation could occur or that events or processes could recombine in novel ways and still be considered actual and not merely potential something else.

As we gleaned from the admittedly condensed discussion above, Aristotle's theory placed in stark relief most of the primary ontological principles that have endured hegemonically since the Hellenistic period, particularly the notions of *telos*, substance, form, actuality, substratum, and essence. Extrapolating out and combining these pillars of his theory, we can characterize it on the whole as typified by motifs of ontological stasis, unity, permanence, immutability, self-identity, essentialism, and we will later see, autonomy. These are the very doctrines that constitute the cornerstone of the metaphysics of substance that continues to hold sway to this day. Part of the reason for the durability of this theory, however, is the invaluable contributions and modifications made by later philosophers, particularly Rene Descartes. Though there were certainly a multitude of theorists who revised or retold the story of the metaphysics of substance in important ways, Descartes' input is inestimable for our objectives here. For, not only did he successfully nestle substance ontology into the zeitgeist of the modern world, he bestowed upon us a host of additional philosophical quandaries with which we continue to wrestle. Before recapitulating the basic structures of substance ontology and turning to the alternative history, it would be wise to briefly sound out these basic additional motifs, clearly pollinated by the Aristotelian model.

2. Rene Descartes

Intent on legitimizing emerging theories in science and bringing them to bear on the entirety of our epistemic inventory, Descartes gives currency to substance ontology, though with a twist. Under the guise of justifying and modifying human knowledge for the enlightenment audience, and having the fabric of this scientific worldview in the background, Descartes begins his quest for clear and distinct, scientific, knowledge about himself and the world by employing the device of radical doubt. Descartes asks us to suspend judgments of truth about the entirety of our beliefs until we can determine whether they are clearly and distinctly true. He argues for his method as not only logically possible but in fact, reasonable. The evidence for this is amassed from the tripartite insight that all our knowledge has been acquired from the senses and that we could be either dreaming or under the spell of an evil genius—a shaky foundation, indeed, for someone with a faith in substance. Making use of this technique, he hopes to arrive at a robust and unshakable foundation for knowledge in the face of a looming skepticism engendered by the enlightenment turn toward human rather than absolute divine knowledge.

Descartes generates our existential knowledge by means of his celebrated statement: *cogito ergo sum*—I think, therefore I am—founded on the supposedly self-evident principle that we are thinking. Stumbling upon the *cogito* he comes to the *a priori* realization that we are incapable of doubting the fact that we exist, at least as *res cogitans*, thinking things. Descartes' conclusion from the cogito is frequently interpreted as the following: since I cannot *conceive of* myself without thinking (“conceiving” in

itself would be another way of saying “thinking”), I cannot *exist* without thinking. Ergo, I am, at the very minimum, *res cogitans*—or, better put, recapitulating insights from the Sixth Meditation, I am the sort of thing that has as its essence thinking, since it is the one property I could not shed and still exist. Employing this radical epistemic apparatus and, by means of it, exposing a central epistemic distinction, he cleverly draws out his ontological conclusions: that we are *essentially res cogitans* and, after much more argument, that substance must be bifurcated into two distinct kinds: *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, extended substance and thinking or mental substance. For him, only these two types of finite substance exist, hence his theory is dubbed substance dualism.³³ The key epistemic distinction he draws is that since we can doubt that we have a body and we cannot doubt that we exist, we must be *essentially* something other than material substance. Insofar as there exists an epistemic distinction this, he maintains, entails that there must be a corresponding ontological one. On the surface, his argument for *res cogitans* and its concomitant substance dualism certainly appears to be valid. In the case of the former, if I cannot doubt that I am thinking, there must be some *I* that is doing the thinking. On the latter, how could *res cogitans* and *res extensa* be the same substance if you could doubt one and not the other?

The plethora of arguments against his ontological conclusions have been well rehearsed and need not be rehashed in detail here. Suffice it to mention a couple of arguments on the issue of the certainty of *res cogitans* as it generates its twin dualistic claim. The first exposes Descartes’ logical misstep—that his conclusion does not follow from his premise, i.e. the argument is simply not valid. Briefly put, this translates as: his

³³ I am eliding the issue of infinite substance here as is it irrelevant to our purposes.

conclusion that it is impossible to conceive of myself as a being who does not think, does not follow from the premise that in order to conceive of myself I have to think.

Secondly, many, following Bertrand Russell³⁴, contend that Descartes has begged the question by inserting the ‘I’ in that he is only entitled to advance the weaker claim that “there is thought.” This is to say that he is only existentially committed to the *thinking* not to the *I* and, in adding it, he overdraws his existential bank account. His argument is simply too strong. Nietzsche, too, had already recognized this with his comment that, “[t]here is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything.”³⁵ With this claim, Nietzsche also sought to divorce the ontological conception of human being from the Cartesian picture, which saw the person as essentially a disembodied rational entity trapped in a mechanistic body.

Indeed, fashioned in that manner, his ontological conclusions do not stand quite as tall as they did at first blush. We must, however, set those arguments aside. For the truth or validity of his conclusion is less significant to our purposes than the implications derived from substance dualism’s status as hegemonic ontological dogma since his time. The concern here is unpacking and providing a framework in order to enable us to present an alternative, non-substance model and then demonstrate its plausibility in contradistinction to substance ontology writ large. Adding Descartes as the twist in the substance ontology cocktail is only meant to help us better digest the broader ramifications of this dogma for contemporary philosophy. As we will see in the next section, moving to a non-substance based ontological paradigm will have the bonus side-

³⁴ Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1962).

³⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Walter Kaufmann, trans. (New York: Vintage, 1969), 45.

effect of undercutting substance dualism, since all variations of substance ontology will be renounced in the shift in perspective. It is undeniably a gross understatement to assert that Descartes' twist itself has had lasting influence on both philosophy and science. Much ink has been spilled, especially in recent years, attempting to overturn and repudiate this dualism. In effect, it would not be incorrect to add the ink of this project to that overflowing lake.

Allow me a few further remarks, then, on the other problems generated by Descartes' distinct version of substance ontology. Especially vital to highlight are the issues that surround the material side of Descartes' dualism. While Descartes concludes that what we are *essentially* is *res cogitans*, he ultimately concedes that what we *are* more generally is two distinct substances in an intimate causal relation. Under the rubric of his 'unity of science' thesis that strives to reduce all the sciences to physics, he recognizes that the essence of matter is spatial extension. This conclusion follows a logic similar to that employed in determining that human essence is *res cogitans*, i.e. without knowledge of any other property save thinking we know we exist. On the matter of matter, he declares that it could exist without any other property save extension, ergo the *essence* of matter is spatial extension. Thus, matter, as extended, submits first and only to the authority of mechanical laws of physics and nature, three of which were authored by Descartes himself. Since the corporeal facet of our being is mere matter, it, too, is depicted as wholly mechanistic in character. The processes by which all bodies interact can be mathematically formulated and, in principle, quantified, measured, predicted, and calculated. What is absent from this story is the Aristotelian teleology and final causes. They have no value in a story of the world that is inextricably bound to the laws of nature

and physics. His mechanistic metaphysics gave purchase to the emerging worldview previously spawned by scientists like Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo and forecasted the groundwork of Newtonian theories of classical mechanics in physics, though we will see that later scientific developments in quantum mechanics displaced the emphasis on the classical mechanics of the enlightenment period.

A serious fallout from these mechanistic claims about bodies are his extraordinarily unenlightened views about animals. Given that, according to his platform, animals do not possess the privilege of the dual nature that he affords humans, they are relegated to the status of complex machines, differing only in degree from the clockwork-like nature they inhabit. Descartes cautions that, “[o]ne must not confuse words with natural signs that express the passions, and can be imitated by machines and animals, nor think...that beasts speak, even though we don’t understand their language.”³⁶ Mere soulless, mechanistic matter, automatons, incapable of language and reason, animals are sharply distinguished from humans, who, since their essence is thinking substance, could evidently exist without their material being. Apparently, words and language are testament to thought, which it is clear, he does not believe animals possess. In contrast to our ghost in the machine status, they are mere machines. It is thus he reserves a unique place in the natural order for human being. Though Descartes, on some interpretations, stops short of declaring animals entirely without feeling³⁷ and openly admits that human bodies, like animal bodies, are mere machines, “he never refers

³⁶ Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, Donald A. Cress, trans. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993).

³⁷ See Cottingham, J. “‘A Brute to the Brutes?’ Descartes’ Treatment of Animals,” in *Philosophy* 53: 551-59.

to human *being* as machines or automata.”³⁸ This naïve, arrogant, anthropocentric perspective opens the door to centuries of ongoing, dangerous and destructive misconceptions both about humans and about animals, that are of primary concern in Part 2.

What also merits a passing mention is the vehicle through which substance ontology was carried beyond the modern period, namely, epistemology. Since Descartes, and until fairly recently, philosophers turned their sights toward epistemic questions and either completely ignored the ontological ones underlying them or only deemed them relevant insofar as they bore upon epistemic concerns. What is ironic and even perhaps paradoxical about this turn with respect to Descartes, is that a great deal of skepticism about the possibility of knowledge of material substance rose from the ashes of the very foundational epistemology that Descartes thought he guaranteed. While it is certainly not the place here to engage in the details of the circularity of the Cartesian argument, it is enough to comment that, in order to justify our knowledge about the external world, Descartes must adequately (clearly and distinctly) prove, the existence of a monotheistic, benevolent, omnipotent, omniscient god who created the world and the totality of beings populating it. By many accounts, he either failed to adequately do so due to the sheer weakness of his arguments or his meta-argument was circular insofar as in order to prove this god clearly and distinctly he needed to already hold the existence of that god as described or trust (without god) in the existence of the external world. If all epistemic truth about the material world rests on an uncertain premise and, in this case, his premise is by no means self-evident or unequivocal, then there is no stable, incontrovertible

³⁸ Daisie and Michael Radner, *Animal Consciousness* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1996), 61.

foundation. This quagmire locating a solid, incontrovertible, *a priori* foundation for our beliefs has had the effect of generating widespread skepticism in his successors about the strength and reach of our epistemic abilities. Rather than getting lodged in the epistemic quagmires generated by these puzzles, this project turns away from viewing ontology through the lens of epistemology and directs our gaze once again squarely at ontology.

Overall, we can see that by championing this dualistic and mechanistic platform, and by opting to approach the questions of ontology epistemologically, rather than providing a solution to a timeless ontological question about human being, Descartes bequeathed to the philosophical world a legacy of still largely unresolved dilemmas. This supplemented the already rich heritage of philosophical puzzles spawned by the Aristotelian paradigm.

Before concluding the general analysis of substance ontology, let us pause to recapitulate its basic principles. Ultimately, there are a vast multiplicity of potential ways to read the metaphysics of substance. I have only reviewed two of them here, Aristotle's and Descartes'. Despite the differences among them, however, all substance ontologists possess at least some of the criteria cataloged below. Regardless of the fact that different substance theorists adopt these criteria to varying degrees, delineating these general structures and interpretations remains important for painting the backdrop against which we figure the alternative ontological views. In summary, substance can be depicted as some subset of the following list³⁹:

³⁹ Howard Robinson, "Substance," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2004 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2004/entries/substance/>. [The ellipsis indicates an omission because the content was irrelevant.]

- i. being ontologically basic — substances are the things from which everything else is made or by which it is metaphysically sustained;
- ii. being, at least compared to other things, relatively independent and durable, and, perhaps, absolutely so;
- iii. being the paradigm subjects of predication and bearers of properties;
- iv. being, at least for the more ordinary kinds of substance, the subjects of change;
- v. being typified by those things we normally classify as objects, or kinds of objects;
- ...
- viii. The substances in a given system are those entities crucial from the teleological or design perspective of that system. ‘Crucial’ means that other things exist either to constitute them or to provide a context of operations for them.

Mapping this list back onto our theorists, it is clear that Aristotle’s formulation contains all of these criteria, while Descartes added the dualistic twist (modifying criterion (i)) and omitted criterion viii. Together, they call for us to re-explain what *is* in a way that better suits not only contemporary intuitions but the insights gained from recent developments in the sciences. For, like the archaic biology fortifying Aristotle’s theory, and the classical mechanics buttressing Descartes’, their theories have serious limitations and fail to accurately account for the way the world *really is*. While I admit to not having comprehensively or meticulously, or even adequately, articulated those limitations in the brief review above, in effect, that is the mission that lies ahead; the task is to argue and provide evidence for re-embodiment of being through a wholesale revision of the ontological account of what we *really are*.

Thus, the articulation of the limitations of substance metaphysics will be achieved in this project almost inadvertently, through telling a different—and what I believe to be more interesting and compelling—story and thereby turning away from a substance dogma altogether. For, if there is no such thing as substance and we are merely a collection of properties, events, processes, occurrences, forces, et cetera, not only the

essentialist conclusions drawn from it, but dualism as well, will lose their footing.

Together, Aristotle and Descartes have presented a formidable challenge to those of us who both believe that what *is* has not been compellingly described through any variation of the metaphysics of substance and maintain what *is* could be better described through alternative ontological paradigms. Many of these alternative theories turn back to history, even more ancient than theirs, to recover other paradigms that were always already lurking on the contours and that have only recently begun to gain prominence.

To those we now turn.

B. Reclaiming the Virtual from the Past: The Non-Substance Ontologies of Buddhist Thought and Heraclitus

Ontological history also tells another story, one that remained fairly marginal until relatively recently when its hidden subordinated side has become increasingly recognized and admired. Reaching back to this history, it will become evident that we can extract a great deal of support for those contemporary ontological theories that renounce substance. In light of contemporary scientific perspectives in biology and physics, we can infer that this ontological resurrection is of positions that were already “drawn toward their future.”⁴⁰ They were waiting there in the past for the evidence to emerge that would justify them, to be reborn and to finally arrive at their moments in the mainstream limelight. Their time has arrived and, shortly, we will get to the evidence for that claim. Before then, let us to return to them, exhume their skeletal remains, and examine what principles lay in wait underneath the hegemonic model. Here again, I have sifted out two

⁴⁰ Term adopted from: Patricia Ticinto Clough, *Auto Affection: Unconscious Thought in the Age of Teletechnology* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

focal ontologies typifying the non-substance stance. The attention here will be directed at both Buddhist and Heraclitean ontologies. The former platform has been selected in order to highlight the issues of multiplicity, impermanence, disunity, and non-identity, while the latter platform, for its renowned comments on flux, motion, difference, and non-identity of objects. Both, however, are committed to the absolute processual, eventual, and fluid nature of being and the real. To be clear and for the sake of argument, let us operate under a very general definition of process as something like, “*a sequentially structured sequence of successive stages or phases.*”⁴¹ First let us examine Buddhist ontology.

1. Buddhist Thought

Methodology is one of the first areas over which we stumble in our initial foray into Buddhist theory, or the Buddhist way. Unlike Aristotle and most Western philosophers who examine the world with the goal of acquiring knowledge (often a dominant thread is theoretical knowledge), “the method of Buddhism is to be understood quite literally as a path to *reach*, to attain *something*.”⁴² As Joan Stambaugh observes, “[t]he Buddhist question about the nature of reality does not aim at finding out *what* it is, but rather *how it comes about*.”⁴³ Ergo, unlike Descartes, the aim is not to arrive at some sort of secure epistemic basis for our knowledge about our self and the material world or, following Aristotle, some truth or fact of the matter. Rather, the aim is to achieve a

⁴¹ Nicholas Rescher, "Process Philosophy," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2002 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL =

<<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2002/entries/process-philosophy/>> (ital. in original)

⁴² Joan Stambaugh, *Real is Not the Rational* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1986), 96.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 95-6.

certain state or experience. When one achieves this state, one does not, “‘have’ enlightenment, but *is* it.”⁴⁴ This kind of experience can be described in today’s terms as kin to the conception of the trans-human in the sense that it strives to, “abandon any human viewpoint whatsoever” and is, “an absolutely nonanthropocentric way of experiencing.”⁴⁵ As we will later witness, this transhuman experience resonates squarely with Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *becoming-animal*, and Donna Haraway’s *companion species*,⁴⁶ which repudiate egocentric substantive metaphysics. As Stambaugh cites Dogen:

Now human beings well know as water what is in the ocean..., but they do not know what...fish see as water and use as water. Do not foolishly suppose that what we see as water is used as water by all other beings. You...should not be limited to human views when you are studying water.⁴⁷

This notion blatantly flies in the face of the Cartesian model, which sharply distinguished between human and animal. Traces of this are present in Heraclitus, Nietzsche, Haraway, Deleuze and Guattari, and many others.

The Buddhist quest begins with the seemingly simple, yet admittedly controversial, claim, “that all things are without self.”⁴⁸ This declaration is linked to two other vital tenets: “that all things are suffering and all things are impermanent.”⁴⁹ These principles serve as the springboard for the rest of the Buddhist thinking, which diagnoses the central cause of human suffering as the incessant craving to attach to a unified,

⁴⁴ Joan Stambaugh, *The Formless Self* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 38.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁶ This is an issue that will be raised later with Nietzsche, Haraway, and Deleuze, among others. See Section IC and Part 2.

⁴⁷ Stambaugh, *The Formless Self*, 48.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

unchanging, permanent self resulting from the awareness of and a difficulty in stomaching the reality of human impermanence. According to Buddhist principles, not only is this self with which we would like to identify not a real, continuous, static, enduring entity, but in fact, in a certain sense, there really is no self at all, much less a ‘my’ self. Moreover, contrary to traditional renderings of Western logic, since the self is a no-self, it is not self-identical either; being is thusly characterized as nothingness, though not in any binary dualistic fashion. Hence, continuing to cling to this fiction is futile and will remain a source of suffering until one’s grip on this phantom notion of the permanent, unchanging self is released and abandoned. The moment we are able to detach from this notion and confront the reality of existing as ever-changing beings, our suffering will cease, we will *reach* *that something* toward which we strive—and this will not be in the form of either of, “the two extremes of permanence (*sasvatā*) and nihilism (*uccheda*),”⁵⁰ nor will it resemble a self in the traditional substantive, egocentric, sense. This can be restated as, “to study the Buddha-way is to study the self; to study the self is to forget the self...is to drop of the mind-body of the self as well as the mind-body of the other.”⁵¹

Buddhism importantly does not intend us to annihilate this craving we have for a unified self, rather it recommends we release ourselves to the existence of it by acknowledging it, letting go of it, and letting it be. Abandonment is thus not the same as annihilation in that the craving will not actually vanish rather it will enter the underlying fabric of existence and thereby our relationship to it will be recreated. This is not unlike Nietzsche’s notion of *amor fati*, or love of fate. By it, he suggests that we actively

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1

embrace existence in its pain as much as in its pleasure. Both are constitutive features of life; denying either would be to deny life. In addition, the more we reject our momentary experiences of suffering the more power they acquire and the more impossible diffusing and transcending them will be. Thus the possibility of extinguishing suffering only exists in facing and willfully welcoming it and letting it be.

Non-substance ontology is also markedly evoked in the Buddhist doctrine of *anatman* or no-self. To backtrack a bit, the concept of the person, to Buddha, is coextensive with five simultaneous intermingling processes or phenomena called “aggregates,” which are in constant flux and are not held to be connected, certainly not in any necessary or logical sense. These five processes exhaustively constitute and embody what we *are*, which is disunified, impermanent, fluid, perpetually changing, and indeterminate. Accordingly, the notion of a stable, fixed, permanent self is a mere fiction to which we cling in our pre-enlightened incarnations (or post-Enlightenment ones). Four of these processes correspond to what we would dub ‘mental properties’ while only a single process could be said to refer properly to the ‘physical.’ Though it should be cautioned that this is no dualistic theory. These categories are merely descriptive. Furthermore, the ordinary binaries of subject-object and mind-body with which Western metaphysics typically wrestles are not validated within Buddhist thought. Having noted that, the physical process, *rupa*, confers on bodies their solidity, liquidity, their ability to transform various kinds of energy, and their ability to move and act. Surveying the other four, we find that there are: sensation, or *vedana*, which is said to produce pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings; perception, or *sanna*, held to produce perceptions of material and mental objects through the senses and the mind; volitional, or *sankhara*,

thought to produce impulses to action that enable a person to act in the world; and consciousness, *vinnana*, which enables one to be aware of the presence of various objects.

A person is thus theorized to be simply the interrelated functioning of these five groups of constantly changing processes. Nowhere do we find a separate and unchanging substance or substratum to whom or which the whole process belongs. But, in their ignorance, people construct a separate and permanent self to which they attempt to attach the material and mental processes constituting these five groups. This is the most basic form of suffering (*dukkha*) because the attempt to maintain a separate and permanent self through attachment to the five groups of processes is doomed to failure. Thus, attachment, or clinging to some idea of a unified self or substance, can only produce suffering. Further, since the implication here is that there is, strictly speaking, no-self, the belief that we are continuous throughout time is even to some degree erroneous. If the true nature of existence is that of an interrelated set of constantly changing processes, then the usual human attempt to achieve a permanent and separate existence for oneself is totally at odds with reality. Rather than a being or a substance, we should see ourselves as a moment of intersection of these independent processes, an event. In concert with these views we can take a u-turn with respect to Aristotle's theory about actuality and potentiality. We witnessed his theoretical bias toward the former. In Buddhist thought, however, the dynamic process-oriented underpinnings of reality generate a reversal of this view. We can come to think of potentiality *as* actual, movement and becoming as fundamental, and disunity as primordial, given the rejection of a static, teleological substance being.

2. Heraclitus

This Buddhist ontological schema of the no-self recalls another ancient theorist—Heraclitus, the great defender of multiplicity and change and opponent of unity, self-identity, and permanence. He is regarded as the great great grandfather of flux among theorists of the Western intellectual tradition. Heraclitus is a pre-Socratic philosopher who held that the fundamental nature of the world was fire. We must be careful not to misinterpret what he means by this. This claim does not entail that all entities are *composed* of fire, rather he claims that the world *is* fire. If he were misread as arguing the former, this would imply that there is some *substance*, fire, of which the world is composed. That would be wildly disharmonious with the worldview he is supposed almost universally to espouse.

In order to better grasp his point, let us inquire into the essence or ontology of fire. Exactly what does it mean for a fire to exist, to endure, to be identified continually as the *same* fire over time? What, if any, are the principle properties of fire? To answer these questions, we can immediately remark that its essential feature is certainly not any of the substances constituting it; it is plain to see that what we call the same fire across any given duration is but a series of transformations. Part of being a fire, in fact, involves the continual destruction of the material used to fuel it. As the materials burn and eventually all convert to ash, we say that the fire dies. It is in this sense that we can talk about the life of a fire, which, it should be noted, is entirely dependent for its life on the fuel it will eventually destroy along with itself in the process. What seems essential of a fire then is not the materials that make it up but rather a process that endures over a fixed

period of time—the transformation of, say, a fixed amount of coal into ash. That is the fundamental nature or the Being of fire; insofar as it endures as a process, it is stable, “by changing it is at rest.” (22B84a) If we go in search of some substratum or substance to the fire, we will have to take Heraclitus’ admonition to heart: “[u]nless he hopes for the unhoped for, he will not find it since it is not to be hunted out and is impassable.”

(22B18) Thus, if the world *is* fire in this manner, Heraclitus was opposing a metaphysics of substance and championing an ontology in which process is the most fundamental and basic. This perpetual change is not argued to be chaos, however. Heraclitus speaks of the world fire-nature as governed by structures, deliberate, measured, and reliant on the “stasis” of laws of change as its essence. Its “substance,” then, if such a thing could be said of Heraclitus, is the stability and measured nature of *flux*, “being kindled in measures and extinguished in measures.” (22B90) This harkens us immediately back to Buddhist theory, which has as one of its three grounding precepts that whatsoever is an arising thing is a ceasing thing, the noble truth of impermanence discussed earlier. Therein lies recognition of the same waxing and waning, flux, transformation, movement inherent to Heraclitean theory.

Perhaps the most famous statements of the way in which this Heraclitean cosmology becomes relevant to his ontology is located in his fragment 22B12. Plato quoted it in *Cratylus* 402a in a slightly stilted manner and, as a result, his version of it results in a paradox and a misunderstanding, which has often been used to disprove non-substance ontology and advocate a metaphysics of substance of the type Descartes later reified. According to Plato’s interpretation, Heraclitus claims that nothing retains its identity for any time at all. He says, “Heraclitus...says that everything gives way and

that nothing is stable; and, comparing existing things to the flow of a river, he says that one could not step twice into the same river.”⁵² (*Cratylus* 402a) Under Plato’s schema, it is not the same river (but it *is*—hence the paradox), since the waters are actually different. Aristotle echoes these sentiments in the *Physics*, where referencing Heraclitus he states that, “[s]ome assert, not that some things are in motion and others are not, but that everything is always moving, though this escapes our perception.” (*Phys.* 253b9) It eludes our view because, he judges, “[t]here is no change apart from actual things; for whatever alters always does so in respect either of substance, or of quantity, or of qualification, or of place...nothing is apart from the things mentioned.” (*Phys.* 200b33) Accordingly, change must be change of some *thing* and cannot be perceived unless something remains non-changing. Aristotle, who admittedly can perceive change, maintains the necessity of ascribing that change to an object that, for all intents and purposes, is mere intellectual extrapolation. To wit, he argues that, “change too is known by that which changes, and motion by the moving thing, because the moving thing is a ‘this,’ but the change is not.” (*Phys.* 219b30) One could easily reply to these criticisms by explaining the perception of the change in one entity as relative to another entity that changes at a different rate. So, for example, evoking Heraclitus’ river, we could proffer that the perception of the changing waters is visible against the background of the banks of the river, which merely change at a slower rate. That is, of course, not to say that the banks do not change and are, thus, stable. It amounts to a measuring of speeds and

⁵² Also translated as: “Heraclitus is supposed to say that all things are in motion and nothing at rest; he compares them to the stream of a river, and says that you cannot go into the same river twice.” (Princeton--collected dialogues of plato) *The Collected Dialogues*, Benjamin Jowett, trans. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989.)

slownesses, rates of change, though never against the background of something fixed, unchanging, or stable.

Hence, contrary to Plato and Aristotle, and more in line with the ontological theory being proposed in this project, we can see that in fact what Heraclitus intended was to relate to us the ways in which existence is becoming, flux, change, a set of processes and not static being. Following this and for the sake of grounding and establishing an alternative to the metaphysics of substance, we can call forth the translations of his actual fragments, not the interpretations of them by secondary sources, albeit quite distinguished ones. These manifestly draw out the connections we are trying to make between Heraclitus and Buddhism. Heraclitus postulates: “We step and do not step into the same rivers, we are and are not,” (22B49a) and “Upon those who step into the same rivers, different and again different waters flow.” (22B12) On one possible analysis, the moment we put a foot into the waters of the river, the river has already transformed dramatically. Further, if it were to cease its constant flux, it would not longer be called a river; instead, it would be a lake. Likewise, there is no increment of time brief enough that, within its duration, even an infinitely speedy agent could step twice and the river would remain exactly the same; the material of the river would always be at least microscopically altered from the first step to the second. On a more profound reading, however, it is clear that this flowing is precisely what bestows existence and essence upon any river. Under this less paradoxical lens, it *is* the same river, in spite of the fact that the waters are different. The river would cease to exist *qua* river if it stopped flowing. It is such that flux, change, movement, process, and a non-identical notion of identity can be considered as ontologically essential and basic to the world and the

entities within it. As in the case of fire, and as would be the case with the river, once these *processes* come to a halt, so does the *life* or *being* of the entity. A third pass across his fragments might offer up a prototypical nominalism. As, perhaps, what Heraclitus was suggesting is that naming a so-called object like a river imposes a sort of artificial stasis to it. It generates the notion that there is *something* to which we are referring. Extrapolating out, especially from his fire worldview, Heraclitus might simply be locating himself on one side of the fence with respect to the puzzle that Plato thought he solved with his Theory of the Forms—to what exactly do these names refer? His solution, not unfamiliar to contemporary philosophers, is to deny a substance to which these processes belong and diagnose the problem as semantic rather than ontological. This might be a bit of an unorthodox read of Heraclitus, however it is nonetheless compelling.

Thus far we have focused our reflections on Heraclitus' formulations of universal flux but have scarcely spilled ink to frame his evaluation of a related high voltage issue: The Identity of Opposites. So as not to be remiss in this brief gloss, let us nourish our analysis with a few remarks about these. Along with universal flux, they are the supporting beams of the Heraclitean ontological architecture. Germane to our discussion of Buddhist thought, Heraclitus observes, “[t]he sea is the most polluted water: to fishes drinkable and bringing safety, to humans undrinkable and destructive.” (22B61) Pondering this in light of the Buddhist perspective that we must come to see the ocean the way fish do, we can viscerally comprehend why becoming-animal is quite handy; in doing so, we can actually come to understand how reality really operates, the way in which it can be ontologically contradictory, the way in which it reveals

interdependencies, and the way in which flux and contradiction can be granted the status of being ontologically basic. The water is both safe and destructive, after all. Further, Heraclitus offers a view that underlying harmony only exists in the union of opposites when he ventures that, “[w]hat is opposed brings together; the finest harmony is composed of things at variance, and everything comes to be in accordance with strife.” (22B8) Here, we come to the crux of the matter: since flux and transformation are maintained as ontologically basic, internal strife, or opposition, are thought to be coherent and essential on a deeper level. The aim is not to reach a stasis of a unified substance but to see harmony in discord, multiplicity, disidentification, and flux—a deeper level of harmony, not unlike the Daoist notion of the perfection of opposites in the yin and the yang. A last connection between the Buddhist thinkers and Heraclitus rests on this issue of the identity of opposites. He states that, “[t]he same thing is both living and dead, and the waking and the sleeping, and young and old; for these things transformed are those and those transformed back again.” (22B88) Again here he underscores the nature of reality as connected essentially to oscillation, transformation, and flux—essentially, to processes. Moreover, he evokes the Buddhist principle of impermanence, stressing reality as ontologically contingent.

Obviously, Heraclitean ontology raises some of the very same questions about reality, identity, and permanence as Buddhist theory, not to mention a few eyebrows. Both of these theories struggle to tease out under what conditions an object persists through time as one and the same object. If the world contains things that endure and retain their identity in spite of undergoing alteration, then somehow those things must persist through changes. The implication of Heraclitean theory is that this persistence is

nothing more than an extrapolation, an artificially constructed stability. Both theories ultimately point us to process as the core element essential of being. This connection should be patently evident from what has been just spelled out. Like Buddhist theory, Heraclitus situates his vision of reality in a paradigm that is not fixed, stable, unchanging, and self-identical and his fundamental picture of identity is understood as a process not a substance. A brief recapitulation of the main principle is now warranted. Following and expanding on the format of the outline in the previous section, we could summarize the main points in the following way:

- i. process is ontologically basic and the unique focus of any ontological description of being and reality;
- ii. duration, flux, transformation, becoming, force, affect, contingency, and emergence are also essential components of ontological descriptions of being and reality;
- iii. being or reality is not theorized as autonomous or enduring but interdependent; it is subject to and altered by the influences of forces and affects, it is in no way absolute or eternal;
- iv. there is no paradigm subject of predication or bearer of properties; understanding properties or processes exhausts our description of reality and being;
- v. change is the subject of being, there is no subject *of* change;
- vi. objects or substances are to be understood as nothing more than collections of processes, there are no other ways to construe the notion of object;
- vii. identity of objects (see v.) contains inexorable contradiction or difference
- viii. given that stasis is uniquely derived from the consistency of flux, there cannot be an end or *telos* without bringing an end to reality itself; novelty and creativity rule over predictability
- ix. potentiality *is* actuality it does not *result in* actuality

Hence, the marked bias favoring substance as static, enduring, self-identical, or even autonomous, objects or things represented by Aristotle and Descartes, is displaced by and supplanted with an equally if not more viable alternative emphasizing duration, flux, difference, contradiction, novelty, potentiality, impermanence, multiplicity, force, affect, interdependence, and becoming or evolving (in the non-teleological sense). It refuses to

slight processes, events, and occurrences in favor of the “something more,” it instead features these. It is diametrically opposed to the Parmenidean logic that, at best, subordinates change to stasis or, at worst, on a thicker interpretation, relegates flux to the realm of fiction and falsity. On a certain read, one can say this view opts to describe being and reality as a verb, rather than a noun.⁵³ As Nicolas Rescher puts it: “the classical principle *operari sequitor esse* (functioning follows upon being) is reversed: [the] motto is *esse sequitor operari*, since being follows from operation because what there is is in the final analysis of the product of processes. Process thus has priority over product—both ontologically and epistemically.”⁵⁴

C. The Contemporary Twist: The Non-Substance Ontologies of Nietzsche and Heidegger

Needless to say, as it has been hegemonically positioned for millennia, the substance model has become the punching bag for many recent theorists—especially those drawing off the work of Nietzsche and Heidegger, both heavily influenced by the work of Heraclitus and perhaps even by Buddhist theory (according to some interpretations of their work). Coupled together, Nietzsche and Heidegger provide the basis for projects aimed at overcoming substantive metaphysics, and especially those seeking to both re-envision conceptions of human ontology by disarticulating beings from being and move away from a model based on being to one focused on becoming.

⁵³ This point is relevant to the shift from LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) identity politics to queer politics, which I claim is based on this very transformation of ontological perspective from being to becoming, from noun to verb. More on this in Section II of Part 1.

⁵⁴ Nicholas Rescher, “Process Philosophy,” *A Companion to Metaphysics*. Blackwell Companions to Philosophy Series. Jaegwon Kim and Ernest Sosa, eds. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995) 417.

Fortunately, these theorists have accomplished much of the necessary groundwork of exposing the shortcomings of the substance model and most, at least many feminist, queer and postmodern theorists, have convincingly dispelled it as impoverished and oppressive, if not utterly bankrupt and false as a result of their insights. Since they have more than paved the way, and these arguments have been rehearsed across a broad spectrum of works, we are not charged with reinventing the ontological wheel here. It is superfluous to reiterate their arguments in their entirety; for, it would only be a lengthy detour from the mission of asserting the alternative ontological paradigm and, furthermore, the critical analyses that have repudiated teleological, static, essentialist metaphysics and ontology are legion and also quite familiar to those of us working within the so-called “continental” framework.⁵⁵ However, a brief overview is warranted in order to ascertain the foundation of this project.

While the critiques of substance ontology vary somewhat both in their underlying intent and larger claims, the basic anti-substance position can be summarized as follows: the study of metaphysics, moreover that of ontology, has been the quest to locate eternal, universal, static, immutable truths about the world and, more specifically, about human being. The quest itself reveals an intellectual arrogance insofar as these metaphysicians believe they possess a privileged, ahistorical insight about these truths. Furthermore, by proposing this notion of substance, they not only fail to describe the world compellingly or interestingly (or perhaps even accurately) but also they create a plethora of unsolvable philosophical problems that could be easily avoided by shifting to a more process-oriented, non-substance theory. Reminiscent of Okham, we need to reduce our theory of

⁵⁵ That is, if we take continental to mean a post-Nietzschean theoretical lineage.

reality and being to its essential explanatory components and, since, as I will claim, we can do all our necessary ontological work without it, substance is not one of them.

Theorists like David Hume noted that the substantive view is far from evidently true, nor is it clear, that metaphysicians have any special diagnostic tools at their disposal:

I wou'd fain ask those philosophers, who found so much of their reasonings on the distinction of substance and accident, and imagine we have clear ideas of each, whether the idea of substance be deriv'd from the impressions of sensation or reflection? If it be convey'd to us by our senses, I ask, which of them; and after what manner? If it be perceiv'd by the eyes, it must be a colour; if by the ears, a sound; if by the palate, a taste; and so of the other senses. But I believe none will assert, that substance is either a colour, or a sound, or a taste. The idea of substance must therefore be deriv'd from an impression of reflection, if it really exist. But the impressions of reflection resolve themselves into our passions and emotions; none of which can possibly represent a substance. We have therefore no idea of substance, distinct from that of a collection of particular qualities, nor have we any meaning when we either talk or reason concerning it. The idea of a substance...is nothing but a collection of simple ideas, that are united by the imagination, and have a particular name assigned them, by which we are able to recal, either to ourselves or others, that collection. But the difference betwixt these ideas consists in this, than the particular qualities, which form a *substance*, are commonly refer'd to an unknown something, in which they are supposed to inhere; or granting this fiction should not take place, are at least supposed to be closely and inseparably connected by the relations of contiguity and causation.⁵⁶

He reiterates most of the points we have already made above and concludes, as we have, that there is no evidence for “some *thing* more,” just a bundle of properties, a collection of processes, an aggregate of forces, or string of events, a set of occurrences from which we extrapolate the fiction of substance. As discussed in the overview of Heraclitus above, substance amounts to what Alfred North Whitehead describes as, “*the activity synthesizing the relationships* into its emergent character. The event is what it is, by

⁵⁶ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I: Of the Understanding; Part I: Of Ideas, their Origin, Composition, Connexion, Abstraction, &c.; Section VI: Of Modes and Substances, (London: Penguin Classics, 1969), 63.

reason of the unification in itself of a multiplicity of relationships.”⁵⁷ Similarly, Christine Battersby suggests that, “stability can emerge in a world of ‘events’ and ‘becoming’, and how we can think ‘essence’ without positing underlying ‘substances’ that remain unaltered through change,” and that, “it is not necessary to think in terms of fixed ‘essences’, permanent ‘substances’ or unchanging ‘being’ to secure stable patternings. Persistence of a ‘subject’ or ‘object’ over time can also emerge from within intersecting force-fields, dependence and flow.”⁵⁸ Undoubtedly, these thinkers were raiding Heraclitus’ ontological toolbox. Millennia prior, he asserted that stasis is indeed derived from the reality of consistent flux, to which Whitehead now adds an emergent character of the event.

I will now shift gears and provide a sketch of the two contemporary thinkers with whom I share more than a basic agreement and who have star status when it comes to this matter. Their influence is also detectible in the work of all the other theorists who also play more than cameo roles in this project. These two Heraclitean tomb raiders have resurrected non-substance ontology for the present day audience. From them, I will borrow some crucial elements for the construction of the ontological paradigm the will be supported by the evidence in Part 2 and Part 3. The theorists I have selected for this bricolage are: Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger. Others, among them, Donna Haraway, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Luce Irigaray, Elizabeth Grosz, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler could also be discussed in this section but I am going to reserve their insights for later sections. The two chosen will provide a sufficient basis for the moment. It should be said, however, that each of these theorists have extensive and

⁵⁷ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Free Press, 1967), 123.

⁵⁸ Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman*, 12.

elaborate theoretical reach. What will be highlighted presently is just the tip of the iceberg. The aim is to draw out their connections to the ancient paradigms and their critiques of substance-based theories in addition to highlighting some of the new or unique features of their particular alternatives. It is, indeed, nothing more than a continuation of my cherry-picking expedition.

1. Friedrich Nietzsche

Nietzsche's Heraclitean roots and repudiation of Hellenistic metaphysics of substance and Cartesian dualism are well-documented, as is his full-scale attack on most of the foundational precepts of Western metaphysics, ethics, and religious thinking. The specters are omnipresent throughout his works and at times his critiques border on the vitriolic. Despite that, his constellation provides a roadmap to present day work in non-substance ontology as his was a great upheaval of the steadfast principles holding sway from the ancient world. Several of these remarks have already been cited above. To call attention to a few other locations in his texts, permit a bit of close read. For, not unlike Hume, Nietzsche has a string ent skepticism about the effort to locate a substance apart from forces, processes, and events. More importantly, his intervention sets the stage for much of what will unfold through the other, more contemporary ontologists grounding this project.

Not known for mincing words or cloaking his commitments, Nietzsche plainly establishes his opposition to substance. To wit, he succinctly offers that, "[t]he thing in itself" ...is quite incomprehensible to the creators of language and not at all worth aiming

for.”⁵⁹ In its stead, he proposes to supplant an ontological story about reality that almost exactly reiterates Heraclitus’ words; he observes that,

Everything goes, everything comes back; eternally rolls the wheel of being.
Everything dies, everything blossoms again; eternally runs the year of being.
Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; eternally the same house of being
is built. Everything parts, everything greets every other thing again; eternally the
ring of being remains faithful to itself. In every Now, being begins.”⁶⁰

Of course, he echoes Heraclitus with a unique thematic variation, transposing it slightly to advance his theory. Nietzsche’s own fluid and perpetually transforming ontological foundation, a version of the Heraclitean concept of stasis in flux thesis, is eternal recurrence. While the eternal return has a much wider scope than we can examine here, it reaches into the realm of ethics for example, we should mark the presence of a kin underlying process-oriented ontology holding substance or thinghood to be a collection of perpetually moving forces.

Undeniably, the exhortation to recast living being as *becoming* was an extensively prevalent theme throughout Nietzsche’s work. His unreserved admiration for Heraclitus is hardly a secret, nor should it be taken lightly, as he was not noted for bestowing such unqualified praise. Moreover, it is to Heraclitus that perhaps Nietzsche owes the largest debt for the fundamental doctrines of his ontology. He does not hesitate to praise his intellectual mentor while advancing his critique of the Cartesian *a priori* assertion of substance, here depicted as that “empty fiction of being.” He also seizes the opportunity to advance his own deeply held opposition to dualism in the name of an ontology of becoming, multiplicity, and flux. The assertion of a “true” world, he tells us, is a

⁵⁹Walter Kaufmann, ed. and trans., *The Portable Nietzsche (On Truth and Lie)*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 45.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), 330.

construct that is illegitimately contrasted to the knowledge gained through the senses, which should stand on its own as the unique measure of the validity of our epistemic web. The extrapolation to substance or unity from that knowledge is a mendacious story we have been told by the champions of the metaphysics of substance.

Whatever has being does not become; whatever becomes does not have being. Now they all believe, desperately even, in what has being. But since they never grasp it, they seek for reasons why it is kept from them. “There must be some mere appearance, there must be some deception which prevents us from perceiving that which has being: where is the deceiver?”

“We have found him,” they cry ecstatically; “it is the senses! These senses...deceive us concerning the *true* world...And above all, away with the body, the wretched *idée fixe* of the senses, disfigured by all the fallacies of logic, refuted, even impudent enough to behave as if it were real!”

With the highest respect, I except the name of *Heraclitus*. When the rest of the philosophic folk rejected the testimony of the senses because they showed multiplicity and change, he rejected their testimony because they showed things as if they had permanence and unity...the lie of unity, the lie of thinghood, of substance, of permanence...Insofar as the senses show becoming, passing away, and change, they do not lie. But Heraclitus will remain eternally right with his assertion that being is an empty fiction. The apparent world is the only one; the “true” world is merely added by a lie.⁶¹

And again, his nominalist flavored anti-substance sentiment resonates loudly in the following excoriation of Descartes:

There is thinking; consequently there is that which thinks”—that is what Descartes’ argument comes to. Yet this means positing our faith in the concept of *substance* as “*a priori* true.” When there is thinking, something must be there which thinks—that is merely a formulation of our grammatical habit, which posits a doer for what is done.⁶²

His contribution below to the collapsing of mind-body dualism is quite witty.

Effectively, he commands its exponents to “put up or shut up,” since, without a body through which to speak, they would be forced to cease their senseless prattle. Here, too we witness his enormous debt to Heraclitus and his contradiction of opposites thesis:

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, (*Twilight of the Idols*), 480.

⁶² *Ibid.*, (*Letter to Overbeck*), 455.

I want to speak to the despisers of the body. I would not have them learn and teach differently, but merely say farewell to their own bodies—and thus become silent...

But the awakened and knowing say: body am I entirely, and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body.

The body is a great reason, a plurality with one sense, a war and a peace, a herd and a shepherd. An instrument of your body is also your little reason, my brother, which you call “spirit”—a little instrument and toy of your great reason...

Behind your thoughts and feelings...there stands a mighty ruler, an unknown sage—whose name is self. In your body he dwells; he is your body.⁶³

Deliberately conflated, body and man seem to be in some sense co-extensive to Nietzsche and, following him, we will soon witness, Deleuze and Guattari. Nietzsche indicates the coalescence of self/mind and body in his straightforward pronouncement above. His critique of reason, says Stambaugh, “sometimes lands in a swampy glorification of the instincts, enticing us to believe that the animal is better off without the rational. This is not the most interesting or provocative...The alternative is to focus on man’s *use* of reason...The issue is what man has done and what he will do with his reason not that he has it.”⁶⁴ Construed in such a way that we acknowledge the defragmentation of mind/reason/body/self, Stambaugh’s interpretation of Nietzsche gives currency to the emphasis on doing over being. Thus, despite the Cartesian claims to the contrary, “[w]e have not found out yet what or who *we* are, what man is. ‘Man is the still undetermined animal.’⁶⁵ That is because it is not what human/body *is* which is in question but rather what it *does*, or could do.

This marches quite firmly onto Buddhist turf, as it is kin to the views that the ontological quest repudiates fact in favor of a *reaching* or a *striving*; reality is a verb, not a noun. Unlike Christianity, which, pun intended, Nietzsche essentially damns to hell, he

⁶³ *Ibid.*, (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), 146.

⁶⁴ Joan Stambaugh, *The Other Nietzsche* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 6.

⁶⁵ Nietzsche cited by Stambaugh, *The Other Nietzsche*, 5.

exalts Buddhist thought as, “the only genuinely positivistic religion in history. This applies to its theory of knowledge (a strict phenomenalism).”⁶⁶ As is now more than evident, both Buddhist tenets and Nietzschean dogma align themselves strictly with metaphysical programs that uniquely take phenomena or processes into account and banish any reference to unifying substance or enduring *things*. On this point, he cleverly quipped that, “Christianity is a metaphysics of the hangman,”⁶⁷ implying, among other things, that the ontology of substance, mind-body dualism, stasis, unity, determinism, and essentialism rampantly encoded into Christian doctrines fixes the human in such a way that it ceases to be fully human, i.e. a becoming, flux, multiplicity. Rather, it is, as Christian metaphysics would have it, but a mere *thing*.

Another relevant connection between Nietzsche and Buddhism is their respective dogmas about the leveling of status between human and so-called animal. Nietzsche appreciated Darwin’s work of both establishing the fluid interrelationship between humans and animals and making porous the boundary artificially constructed between them by means of the humanistic logic of civilization. Rejecting teleological interpretations of Darwin, he remarks sharply that it was not, “...as if man had been the hidden purpose of the evolution of animals. Man is by no means the crown of creation: every living being stands beside him on the same level of perfection.”⁶⁸ This disruption of and intervention into the human-animal dichotomy codifies Buddhist intuitions about

⁶⁶ Kaufman, *Op. Cit.*, (*The Antichrist*), 587.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, (*Twilight of the Idols*), 500.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, (*The Antichrist*), 580. For more on Nietzsche and animals, see Part 2 of this work in addition to my “Traces of the Beast: Becoming Nietzsche, Becoming Animal, and the Figure of the Transhuman,” in *A Nietzschean Bestiary: Becoming Animal Beyond Docile and Brutal*. Christa Davis Acampora and Ralph R. Acampora, eds. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004.).

animals noted earlier, moreover when Nietzsche comments that, “[h]e who has knowledge walks among men as among animals.”⁶⁹ There seems to be an emerging trend among non-substance theorists, including Heraclitus, that a revision of our metaphysical schema may engender a different relationship to, or at least view of, animals. This is also certainly the case with other thinkers as we will see, particularly the Deleuzo-Guattarian and Harawayan constellations featured in Part 2, which focuses on the subject of animality.

Nietzsche’s fidelity to process and myriad arguments exposing the unintelligibility of substance and static or dualistic being ushered in a new wave of support for the freshly dusted off relics of ancient ontology. His work marks a distinct rupture in the centuries old substance metaphysics, vestiges of which still haunt us today. His contribution was considerable and can be traced to nearly all of the postmodern continental thinkers we can name; in a sense, his rejection of Hellenistic substance metaphysics and Cartesian dualism provided the necessary blueprint for them. What he added to the discussion was a crystallization of the notion of becoming and force and, along with his interpretation of Darwin, he constructed a new narrative of human being in contradistinction to his foes. Admittedly, this sketch has been quite patchwork but it will be fleshed out in greater detail in the rest of this work as Nietzsche’s prescient insights will be unabashedly peppered throughout.

2. Martin Heidegger

[I]t always remains a metaphysical faith upon which our faith in science rests—
that even we devotees of knowledge today, we godless ones and anti-

⁶⁹ Kaufman, *Op. Cit.*, (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), 200.

metaphysicians, still take our fire too from the flame which a faith thousands of years old has kindled: that Christian faith, which was Plato's faith, that God is truth, that truth is divine⁷⁰

Since Heidegger was extremely prolific, and his work is far-reaching, meticulously thorough, and notoriously difficult to interpret, oversimplification is par for the course in advancing any analysis of his corpus. Thus, the objective here is to locate the points at which his theory crystallizes some of the main precepts we have been thus far advancing. I present his analysis in a tad more detail than I have done with the previous platforms since his presentation of these issues is important to our aims. Ultimately, I bring to light the way in which his theory edged non-substance ontology a bit ahead of his ancestors. Given Heidegger's extensive analysis of ancient philosophy and his multi-volume writings on Nietzsche, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that their influence on his work was immeasurable. Along with these predecessors, Heidegger strives to overcome a lingering Aristotelian, Cartesian, and Kantian ontological residue brought up through phenomenology through his teacher and mentor Edmund Husserl. Nietzsche, as quoted above, summarizes precisely what Heidegger wanted to avoid. He wanted to make sure that he, too, would not be engaged in the metaphysical/philosophical description of Being as a thing. As Nietzsche intimated, even the anti-metaphysicians are engaged in this project insofar as they utilize the same language. Although they employ this language in order to oppose metaphysics, by attempting to invalidate it, they too are immersed in "metaphysical thinking." For, "the reversal of a metaphysical statement remains a metaphysical statement." Thus if this is one's goal, it would be subject to the same criticism he levies against metaphysics in its

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, (*Toward a Genealogy of Morals*), 450.

“oblivion of the truth of Being.”⁷¹ Heidegger has the intention of sidestepping this paradox when he endeavors to “cease all overcoming and leave metaphysics to itself.”⁷² As he sees it, “a regard for metaphysics still prevails in the intending to overcome metaphysics.”⁷³ To wit, Joan Stambaugh summarizes, “[w]hat Heidegger rejects is quite clear: metaphysics. Metaphysics is not the sheltering, preserving, and harboring of being, but rather its perversion.”⁷⁴ Therefore, Heidegger’s project should not be seen as the overturning of metaphysics but rather as the blatant disregard for it through a reportrayal of its main focus: Being.

The tradition of metaphysics belies characterizing the understanding of Being in such a way that Being becomes a fixed and determined entity. This aim is first and foremost what Heidegger would like to alter; he believes we are not going to get an absolute definition of Being since Being is not the sort of concept one can know in a final or authoritative manner. Those who think they can are conflating the notion of Being with beings; they are seeing Being as a fixed entity rather than a becoming, they are seeing Being as “presence,” to employ the Heideggerian term.

The quest for certainty of substance initiated in ancient times and fostered, as noted, by thinkers like Descartes, corrupted our ability to think in an open way about concepts like Being. To these traditional philosophers, scientific justification and evidence is necessary in order to reach the goal of knowledge. To Heidegger this is

⁷¹ David F. Krell, ed, *Basic Writings* (San Fransico: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1977), 208.

⁷² Martin Heidegger, *Of Time and Being*, Joan Stambaugh trans. (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1972), 24.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷⁴ Joan Stambaugh, *The Finitude of Being* (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), 59.

merely a perversion of thinking since, “where science waxed, thinking waned.”⁷⁵ In this sense, if we follow science and thus turn away from thinking, we will be led to metaphysics and, thus, far from Being. If we are to capture a sense of the truth of Being, we are going to have to redirect thinking toward the Being that we have within ourselves as a preontological understanding (since we are beings who question our Being) rather than toward these external artificial standards that merely direct us away from it. Being, to Heidegger, will not resemble the Platonic form Being which we can understand as an abstract entity existing independent of its embodiment in beings. It is not something that we can distinguish from ourselves; it is integrally related to us and ever-changing, not immutable and pre-existing (if in fact we grant that this characterization could even be made coherent—Being as pre-existent to beings). Since Plato’s time we have “forgotten” Being, we have separated the subject and the object by calling ourselves “thinking beings.” Instead, we should conceive of ourselves as thinking Being in the verb form, as an activity and not trap ourselves in the substance or object mode. What Heidegger claims is that humans are the thinking that thinks Being as its mode of Being. This is the only kind of Being and it is ontologically prior to the being begun by Plato which he deems “ontic” (or a factual account of beings). To Heidegger, the category that explains entities, the ontic, is usually that which conceals Being. That is why his primary focus becomes a fundamental ontology. He thinks that we should first uncover that which is most close, most near, and most familiar (he calls this the “everyday”). Once that task is achieved, we can look to the conditions of experience (which would be foundational ontologies and the ontic).

⁷⁵ Krell, *Basic Writings*, 232.

Interestingly, the question Heidegger is posing is both similar to and entirely distinct from that of Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*: What is Being? The twist is that Heidegger does not care about some substantive being or the being of things, rather he is interested in primary Being. That which he claims is, “precisely not ‘a being.’”⁷⁶ He further holds that “metaphysical inquiry must be posed as a whole and from the essential position of the existence [*Dasein*] that questions.”⁷⁷ Being must not be thought of as reduced to a concept, rather, to be clearer about what Heidegger is saying, we might want to think of Being as “the process in and through which entities appear.”⁷⁸ It is not a conscious Cartesian-like subject since “Heidegger has always polemicized vigorously against the concept of man...as the rational animal.”⁷⁹ Thus, the efforts made by the tradition of metaphysics to clarify the notion of being have only brought us further away from the truth of Being. They have been deficient in that they have treated Being as an entity and they have tried to understand *Dasein* in terms of presence or nonhuman being. On the contrary, what we are to focus on is *Dasein*'s way of being so as not to conflate it with some entity Being that it possesses. “Philosophy should stop trying to give reasons why for everything, in the sense of explaining everything in terms of the objective presence of a connection of cause and effect.”⁸⁰ This destruction of the tradition has a positive consequence: with its demise, one can uncover Being from beneath the concealments thrown over it by those alleging to discover the truth of Being through the interpretation of it as some sort of thing-like entity. He is offering “a fresh analysis of

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁷⁸ William Schroeder, *Sartre and his Predecessors* (New York: Routledge, 1984), 123.

⁷⁹ Stambaugh, *Finitude of Being*, 115.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

what it mean to be human.”⁸¹ In doing this, Heidegger will undoubtedly “modify our self-understanding and transform our very way of Being.”⁸² For in the past we were “on the lookout for something like a person or an object. But the personal no less than the objective misses and misconstrues” what it means to be.⁸³

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger proposes three very central goals: “to re-pose the question of the meaning of Being, to undertake the ‘destruction’ of the history of ontology, and to construct an analytic of [*Dasein*] human being.”⁸⁴ To Heidegger, these questions have not only been neglected but have also been covered up, or concealed, by the metaphysical/philosophical tradition. As such, Heidegger’s story, one that he calls a fundamental ontology, requires a new vocabulary; utilizing the vocabulary of that tradition would embed his project with the inherent presuppositions of that tradition and would likewise ultimately serve to undermine his position. Thus, Heidegger is forced to coin new terms to denote the relationships and entities he describes. His purpose is not to make the understanding of Being more muddy but rather to regain its clarity and force. He does not want us to simply take for granted the terms we casually employ. He wants these terms, especially ‘Being,’ to be utilized in a manner loyal to the concept they suggest. Since, “one cannot clarify Being except through clarifying some entity, the entity Heidegger chooses to examine in *Being and Time* is *Dasein*.”⁸⁵ He focuses his discussion on this area because he thinks that simply because humans are the sort of beings that are concerned about their Being, they are open to and have access to Being

⁸¹ Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), 2.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸³ Krell, *Basic Writings*, 207.

⁸⁴ E. F. Kaelin, *Being & Time: A Reading for Readers* (Tallahassee: The Florida State University Press, 1989), 38.

⁸⁵ Schroeder, *Sartre and his Predecessors*, 126.

more generally. This is because Being is, according to Heidegger, the Being of beings. However, we must be clear to note his limitation on this which is that, “what a thing is in its Being is not exhausted by its being an object.”⁸⁶

In the introduction to *Being and Time*, he states three traditional prejudices that illustrate why we should concern ourselves with the question of Being: “(1) ‘Being’ is the most ‘universal’ concept, (2) The concept of Being is indefinable, and (3) Being is the self-evident concept. ‘Being’ is used in all knowing and predicating, in every relation to beings and every relations to oneself, and the expression is understandable ‘without further ado.’”⁸⁷ Heidegger’s main stated interest is to investigate Being and explain why we need to rethink our conception of it. To this end, he explores *Dasein* and attempts to elucidate the structures of it. This, he thinks will create the conditions of the possibility for inquiring into Being, which may then be clarified in turn.

So what is Being? In Heidegger, Being is typically characterized as *Dasein*; this being is what will elucidate Being. *Dasein* is not “a substance, a process, an event, or anything we normally come across; rather, it is a fundamental aspect of entities, viz. their intelligibility.”⁸⁸ Heidegger cites Aquinas when he says that, “an understanding of Being is always already contained in everything we apprehend in beings.”⁸⁹ Though we all have an average everyday understanding of Being, this is not satisfactory, Heidegger wants us to become clear about exactly what it is we understand (what is intelligible). Further, Being is not so easy to understand because, according to Heidegger, it resists understanding. Since Being “has long stood for ‘beings’ and, inversely, the latter for the

⁸⁶ Krell, *Basic Writings*, 228.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 42-44.

⁸⁸ Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, xi.

⁸⁹ Krell, *Basic Writings*, 43.

former, the two of them caught in a curious and still unraveled confusion,”⁹⁰ we must make an effort to unpack the meaning of these two terms.

The foundation to all questioning about Being is *Dasein*'s given awareness of Being. However, the structure of *Dasein*'s specific type of Being is what makes that implicit understanding possible. Being itself is not “an entity but governs every entity and is manifest wherever anyone experiences an entity.”⁹¹ In a nutshell, Being is “what understandings of Being are understandings of.”⁹² This means that there is nothing behind the understanding, there is no more to Being but the understanding and, moreover, that the understanding of Being is itself Being. This “understanding” will, in Heidegger's later work, transform into his concept of “thinking.”

Being is not reducible to some set of qualities and does not remain constant in such a way that we could offer a fixed story of it. The difference here is that the traditional metaphysician assumes that once you get what is commonly believed to be an accurate grasp of Being, you have succeeded. Heidegger, however does not hold that such an understanding is possible or even desired. This would be to conflate the notions of Being and *beings*. Only the latter can be described and adequately attained but the former is more elusive, even absent. As Stambaugh maintains:

Metaphysics...claim[s] to think being, but they translate it into a being, the highest being, the cause itself, or some sort of *a priori*. Being itself remains absent...there is nowhere else for being to be. And being is not *a* being that could be somewhere else. Being is unlocalizable; it cannot be pin-pointed in space and time as they are ordinarily conceived. This is the enormous difficulty. Up to now, all that our thinking has been able to do is to think of beings. We are told that this is not due to some oversight or deficiency in our thinking. Being has

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁹¹ Schroeder, *Sartre and his Predecessors*, 123.

⁹² Richard Rorty, *Essays of Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 37-8.

simply remained absent. Being is not anywhere else; *it presences as this remaining absent.*⁹³

Despite the fact that there is this impossibility of situating Being due to its absence, Heidegger believes that *Dasein* comprehends Being even before there is the attempt to analyze it. As he puts it, *Dasein*'s "ownmost Being is such that it has an understanding of that Being, and already maintains itself in each case as if Being had been interpreted in some manner."⁹⁴ And again, "*Dasein* is in such a way that, by being, it understands something like Being."⁹⁵ It is *Dasein*'s understanding of its Being that will ultimately shed light on the subject of the meaning (or truth) of Being more generally. This understanding is not something we possess and apply but rather is one element of *Dasein*'s being-in-the-world—to be in the world is to have an understanding of the world and this understanding is ontologically fundamental.

Heidegger prefers to use *truth* of Being rather than *meaning* of Being. As Joan Stambaugh indicates, Heidegger does not mean to imply any sort of accordance between the agent and external world when he employs the word "truth." Rather it is a consequence of his notion of the concealed everyday state of Being. When uncovered, Being is in its truth. "Truth consists in the fact that things are disclosed to us at all in the first place. Thus truth is something more akin to revelation, or...unconcealment."⁹⁶ The concept of truth as unconcealment will be further elaborated in the section about the *Letter on Humanism* however, it is important to note his terminology choice here because

⁹³ Stambaugh, *Finitude of Being*, 66.

⁹⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, trans. (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 36. Herein cited as "Heidegger, BT1"

⁹⁵ Krell, *Basic Writings*, 6.

⁹⁶ Stambaugh, *Finitude of Being*, 2.

it directly relates to his project of re-posing the question of Being. By framing his objective as truth conceived in this fashion, Heidegger is planting a seed about exactly how he wants us to see Being. Using the term “meaning” would imply a more correspondence-theory-like search for an external object. Heidegger wants us to forget about that sort of metaphysical methodology and concentrate on Being as a non-entity or an absence. In a sense, he is guiding our questioning simply by redefining the terms we employ. As mentioned above, several analytic ontologists suggested modifying our language to better fit reality and, like them and like Heidegger, I wholeheartedly subscribe to this strategy.

“The task of ontology is to explain Being itself and to make the Being of entities stand out in full relief.”⁹⁷ As stated, this Being that he discusses is not an entity, and, rendering Being as a thing or as fixed is the main fault of the history of metaphysics according to Heidegger. Recall Nietzsche’s remark about Christian metaphysicians being kin to hangmen. These erroneous interpretations of Being have covered up the fact that *Dasein* is being-in-the-world and not Being-in-itself. Being-in-itself would be something more like the being of an object, stable and determined. Being-in-the-world is what we are because *Dasein* is always already immersed in the world before it is ever made object for *Dasein*. Heidegger does not conceive the world as something apart from *Dasein* since the task of *Being and Time* is to overcome precisely that traditional metaphysical distinction by first, ontologizing understanding (by defining it as what we are rather than what we possess), and second, humanizing the world (by defining it as the surroundings we inhabit rather than the sterile, mechanistic domains of science).

⁹⁷ Heidegger, *BT1*, 49.

An important Heideggerian strategy for pushing ontology beyond metaphysics was the characterization of Being-in-the-world as care. This can be described as the experience we have, “[w]hen we question our existence [and] merely find ourselves already in a world.”⁹⁸ Thus, it follows that since *Dasein* is always already in the world, and because *Dasein* has a preontological understanding of its own Being, *Dasein* knows itself as connected to that world. There is no separation between *Dasein* and world when the two concepts are properly grasped. However, unlike the traditional concept of it, the world is more than the entities within it, and it is, in principle, impossible to express it exhaustively. The world in its entirety can never be thematized; only aspects of it or certain parts at certain times can. For the most part, the world is as invisible to us as the ocean is to a fish. Recall the many times we have seen this concept theorized—the Buddhists, Heraclitus, and Nietzsche all had this intuition. As Nietzsche stated, “‘that world’ is well concealed from humans—the dehumanized inhuman world which is a heavenly nothing.”⁹⁹ *Dasein* is *in* the world just as a car is *in* motion, a child is *in* trouble, or a couple is *in* love. It is only when something disrupts our usually transparent and unobtrusive encounters in the world that it stands out before us as an object. The world gives objects their meaning by their relations to other objects within the world, for example, houses suggest their inhabitants, street signs suggest the cars that travel there, and fashion suggests the class structure and social relations that make the style fashionable. The world is the horizon of experience in which we belong, and the act of interpretation simultaneously makes explicit both *Dasein*’s being-in-the-world and the

⁹⁸ Kaelin, *Being & Time: A Reading for Readers*, 45.

⁹⁹ Kaufman, *Op. Cit.*, (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), 144.

world, which is only a world for *Dasein*. Thus, “being-in-the-world” and “understanding” are two inseparable parts of its ontological constitution.

“*Dasein*, when understood ontologically, is care.”¹⁰⁰ What this means is that what *Dasein* really *is* is care and concern for its Being, for things and people, and for the world. What Heidegger is saying is that we are essentially connected to our being-in-the-world, “it is not the case that man ‘is’ and then has, by way of an extra, a relationship-of-Being toward the ‘world’-a world with which he provides himself occasionally.”¹⁰¹ We are only insofar as we are in the world. *Dasein*’s, “being is more accurately revealed in [its] involvements, purposes and possibilities; around these the instruments of the world are organized.”¹⁰² The reason why this becomes interesting is that *Dasein*, “gets its ontological understanding of itself in the first instance from those entities which it itself is *not* but which it encounters ‘within’ its world, and from the being which they possess.”¹⁰³ Thus, it is important to be in touch with the fact that *Dasein* is being-in-the-world because it is from its relation to the world that it becomes ontologically known to itself. *Dasein* is thrown into the world because of care and, the world, because it is organized instrumentally, is already open to that insertion. Thus, the relation between *Dasein* and the world is in effect symbiotic—*Dasein* needs the world to derive an intelligibility of Being, and the world needs *Dasein* to attribute meaning and purpose to it.

Heidegger discusses several of what he considers to be the structures of human Being, or existentials. Two of which, understanding and being-in-the-world, have already been mentioned. A third one that seems important to the project of his later work

¹⁰⁰ Heidegger, *BT1*, 84.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 84,

¹⁰² Schroeder, *Sartre and his Predecessors*, 128.

¹⁰³ Heidegger, *BT1*, 85.

is the kind of being *Dasein* has which is ek-sistence. This is important to his “metaphysical” project in that it describes the very sort of creatures we are: we are the kind of beings who ek-sist. This is not existence in the traditional formulation of that concept as derived from a sense of actuality in opposition to possibility. What he means more clearly is that we are the kind of beings that project ourselves toward the future possibilities of Being. In other words, “human beings have no essence and no existence that is limited to the observable properties of a body or the effects of one’s behavior.”¹⁰⁴ When conceptualized in this way, it seems clear that humans are the only beings that ek-sist since they are the only beings that determine their own essence and whose essence is not fixed or established. A human being is nothing but a totality of its actions and choices. “What man is—or, as it is called in the traditional language of metaphysics, the ‘essence’ of man—lies in his ek-sistence.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, *Dasein*’s very existence (actuality) is ek-sistence (possibility). This odd way of conceptualizing leaves us with the notion that *Dasein*’s essence is not to have an essence or, more succinctly, that *Dasein*’s essence is nothing, which is formulated in contrast to things that have fixed pre-determined essences. We witnessed this precise description of the relation of actuality and potentiality, the denial of the Aristotelian narrative, in Heraclitus and in both Nietzsche and Buddhist thought.

Dasein is that which, once understood properly, will uncover the truth of Being. The truth of Being is Being as it stands when it is unconcealed. *Dasein* itself consists of a variety of existential structures including, but not limited to, the following: being-in-the-world, understanding, and ek-sistence. These three existentials form the foundation

¹⁰⁴ Kaelin, *Being & Time: A Reading for Readers*, 58.

¹⁰⁵ Krell, *Basic Writings*, 205.

of the understanding of *Dasein*'s being, which, in turn, should lead to the understanding of Being. Being, conceived of through *Dasein* can be viewed as an absence. One final note about Heidegger's reformulation is that, in it, he depicts the shift to Being as absence as analogous to the move from thinking about beings to thinking Being. This is certainly no Cartesian *cogito*. He maintains that, "language is the house of being. In its home man dwells."¹⁰⁶ The interest in understanding in his earlier work is transformed here into a focus on thinking and language. What we discover through this work is that Being, language and thinking are all centrally related. Heidegger is attempting to caution those who would like to see these as exclusive concepts, for, "if you try to make the user more than his or her words, and the object more than its description in words, you risk winding up with some version of the Subject-Object...dualism, and thus [are] condemned to think in terms of power relations between the terms of [this] dualism."¹⁰⁷ Clearly, the avoidance of this dualism is one of the foundations of his project. We certainly do not want to separate the subject and the object as we witnessed in the discussion of world. That is why he talks of thinking of Being as a verb rather than thinking of beings as a noun. The latter loses the true sense of Being. Since ancient times, we have forgotten Being. We have to regain our sense of Being by realizing that we are the very thinking that thinks Being as its mode of being—not, however, thinking *things* or *res cogitans*.

What this thinking entails is "a recollection of Being and nothing else...it thinks Being. Such thinking has no result. It has no effect...[it] builds upon the house of Being

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁰⁷ Richard Rorty, *Essays of Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 35.

[language].”¹⁰⁸ Thinking is responsible for elucidating the connection between Being and the essence (here not substance, of course) of man. As was already established, only those beings whose being is at issue for them may properly understand Being. What Heidegger is claiming now is that thinking, which is accomplished through language and speech, buttresses and fosters the essential relationship of Being to those very beings. In other words, thinking assists and augments language in that it strives to disclose, or clear, Being in its truth for *Dasein*. It is only through the fact that we are human and make use of language to speak that we think according to Heidegger. Thus, language is what actually unconceals true Being to us since language speaks through us and only when we speak are we thinking. By using language, what we are doing is allowing Being to be free, we are disclosing or uncovering Being. He says “[l]anguage is the clearing-concealing aspect of Being itself.”¹⁰⁹ That is all language is: a framework in which thinking can clear, reveal, or unconceal Being. As such, thinking cannot be described in systematic and pragmatic terms. Since it thinks Being, in essence, it is unpragmatic; it does not attend to any chosen intent other than “bringing the unspoken word of Being to language.”¹¹⁰ That is to say, thinking the truth of Being is to think the nothing. But, if we do not engage in thinking as just pictured, we cannot arrive at a ground for ontology. Thinking provides us with the capacity to overcome metaphysics by returning us to ourselves, to Being.

He contrasts this thinking to its antithesis, science. One thing we must do in order to ensure that Being is properly revealed is to extricate philosophy from the standards of

¹⁰⁸ Heidegger *BT1*, 236.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 239.

science. Heidegger holds that the very endeavor of likening philosophy to a science in order to validate its claims is “to abandon the essence of thinking.”¹¹¹ As shown earlier, he feels that in metaphysical thinking, “science waxed and thinking waned.”¹¹² Moreover, science inhibits real thinking, which would be defined as thinking Being, because “science does not think. [T]he gulf...that lies between thinking and the sciences, lies there unbridgeably.”¹¹³ This is what is meant by the claim that “he turns ‘thinking’ polemically against ‘reason.’”¹¹⁴ The thinking of which he speaks is certainly not thinking as we have previously conceived it. The prior form of thinking is thinking beings which was the sort commonly practiced by traditional metaphysicians. If correctly conceived, thinking should indeed be considered more valid than the sciences because it will permit Being to be free; it will not be restricted to the incorrect thing-like definition commonly proffered by traditional philosophers. If confined to the usual sense, we could never reach our goal of uncovering the truth of Being but with the revised notion of what our search entails, Being may in fact be rightly unveiled.

Heidegger’s main project, as stated above is to elucidate to truth of Being through the understanding of *Dasein*, or human being. *Dasein* has a primary relationship to Being in virtue of the fact that it is a being who has Being as its concern. As a result, *Dasein* is in a position to uncover that which conditions all existing entities. Consistent with his earlier conception of Being, Heidegger stresses Being as the enabling of possibility, as a

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 232.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 349.

¹¹⁴ Reiner Schurmann, *Heidegger On Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 9.

“may be.”¹¹⁵ This, of course, is in contrast to Being as beings, actuality, or presence. The truth of Being is what is most near to us, he even says, “[m]an is the neighbor of Being.”¹¹⁶ But, simultaneously, Being is most hidden from us in our everyday mode of being. We ordinarily live in denial of our mode of being to such a degree that the truth of Being is the farthest thing from us. This quotidian existence is called “inauthentic” to Heidegger. When we live inauthentically, we have fallen from the truth of Being. He wants us to regain a sense of ek-sistence that would call for a more authentic mode of living—living in a close relationship with Being. As stated earlier, “[e]k-sistence can be said only of man, that is, only of the human way ‘to be.’”¹¹⁷ Ek-sistence is conceptualized as a clearing of Being. *Dasein*, which ek-sists, does so in that “[it] stands outside [its] Being as such and within the truth of Being, preserving in such standing the essential nature of [its] Being.”¹¹⁸ What he means here is that our form of being is such that it is concerned about its own being which is the openness to and care of Being more generally. And, tying this to the earlier discussion, it is only through language that we have this ability to clear Being. Thinking makes this clearing achievable. Since Heidegger claims that, “ek-sistence thoughtfully dwells in the house of Being”¹¹⁹ we must assume then that our way of being is essentially tied to our language through thinking. And, since we established that thinking makes the clearing possible, Heidegger’s claim that our very being reveals Being to us can finally become intelligible. It must be noted that rather than “owning” Being once we have discovered its nature, we

¹¹⁵ Heidegger *BT1*, 196.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 222.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 204.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 239.

merely guard and preserve its truth in our language. As Heidegger put it, “Man is not the lord of beings. Man is the shepherd of Being.”¹²⁰ This realization bears upon the litany of problems attributed to metaphysics because we can reconceptualize the tradition as neglecting to characterize the truth of Being as a clearing or unconcealing.

The final picture we get of *Dasein* in the *Letter on Humanism* is one of an estrangement from Being. Time and time again he employs the term “homeless” to describe this phenomenon. The idea is that *Dasein* is not at home unless actively, authentically attending to the truth of Being. He spells this out in the following way: “Homelessness so understood consists in the abandonment of Being by beings. Homelessness is a symptom of the oblivion of Being. Because of it, the truth of Being remains unthought.”¹²¹ Thus, although Heidegger would probably turn over in his grave to think of his project as metaphysical, it seems no story could be as metaphysical as his in the sense that he demands an incredibly high level of engagement with Being. In no other traditional metaphysical theory is there such an immersion in Being. Moreover, although he views the everyday plight of *Dasein* as an alienation from Being, he prescribes a cure: reveal and encounter Being in its truth. Hence the possibility will arise that *Dasein* can find its way back home.

What is gained from Heidegger’s specific analysis of *Dasein* is vast and rich. Despite all that we have said about language revealing the truth of Being, we must realize that “language comes under the dictatorship of the public realm which decides in advance what is intelligible and what must be rejected as unintelligible.”¹²² For this reason,

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 218.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 197.

Heidegger maintains that even authentic living, or living in regard to Being, is a form of social living. *Dasein* always exists in relation to others. This sets him apart from many of the theorists that preceded him in that life was no longer life of the individual; we are not separable from our world. We are historically and contextually situated in our social structure in a way that the traditional philosophers have neglected. “Each *Dasein* must understand itself within some culture that has already decided on specific possible ways to be human—on what human beings essentially are.”¹²³ We are not simply solitary consciousnesses. What Heidegger’s theory tells us is that without acknowledging that fact, we have missed the truth of Being. To fully be acquainted with what Being itself is, we must become aware of the fact that we are inextricably linked to our situation (our particular time and place in history). We must be clear though that very often this connection to the social world also serves to obfuscate our capacity to understand Being because in everyday life, people often live in denial of or opposition to authenticity. As such, our involvement with the world can have the undesirable effect of impeding our grasp of our own being and likewise of Being more generally.¹²⁴ What is relevant here is that in the area of the traditionally valued individuality; Heidegger reveals that this highly touted characteristic may not be all it is cracked up to be. It certainly is not a necessary trait of being human according to his theory and it may not even be a sufficient one.

Additionally, we must see ourselves as a becoming, a verb, not as a fixed pre-determined entity, a noun. *Dasein* has no essence although it often thinks of itself as having one. Knowing this allows us to understand our structure of being as self-initiated and thus, is optimistic in terms of our ability to alter our state of homelessness from

¹²³ Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World*, 24.

¹²⁴ Schroeder, *Sartre and his Predecessors*, 131.

Being. This sentiment seems echoed in the sanguine Buddhist encouragement to overcome suffering resulting from our inability to stomach the lack of unity of being. We can no longer feel as if we are trapped in some static, immutable self, as defined by those who put forth the tenets of Enlightenment humanism. Yet despite his nod to the idea that we must come to see differently, as I described with the ocean and fish metaphor, a criticism may certainly be raised that his whole project is circular. He only raises the question of Being in terms of a particular kind of being, human Being, *Dasein*. Without raising this issue in its entirety, for it will resurface in Part 2, let it suffice to say that this hermeneutic circle has a serious impact of his views about animal being. Not unlike Descartes, but for different reasons, he winds up mired in an unfortunate anthropocentrism because of his unique focus on *Dasein*, or human Being. In the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, he has an extensive discussion of this problem in which he admits remains unsolved in his corpus. We will take this up this problem soon.

D. Returning to the Level of the Skin and Beyond: Situating this Project Against the Historical Background

While as underscored in the introduction, this project is exclusively unhinging, recasting, refiguring, and remapping the ontological, we revisited the “origins” in order to avoid getting lodged in the morass that metaphysics, and ontology in particular, is currently claustrophobically engulfed. By that, I simply mean we need to look beyond substantive ontology, to what was always already existing on the contours of hegemonic ancient metaphysics, to those alternative views about the architecture of human being, to those theories regrettably elided in favor of the concepts that have colonized our thinking about human ontology since that time. We now understand and must acknowledge that

substance ontology was far from being the only viable choice or, for that matter, the most on target. I am in no sense claiming to be inaugurating a novel theory of human ontology in what follows. It is instead atavistic in its impulses, cherry-picking and culling the most salient features from those theories just sketched, those that have maintained a marginal presence throughout philosophical history, in the service of fleshing out a comprehensive and more interesting conception of human being. The ancients endowed us with the solid groundwork upon which Nietzsche and Heidegger built their theories and propelled us into new territory. Their work provides the springboard for the ontological work undertaken by postmodern theorists of many stripes, as Part 2 and 3 will elucidate. As such, the processual ontological stance need not remain a devalued philosophical stepchild—it deserves to be seriously considered for its moment in the spotlight. It is time to dust off these relics of the ancient world and make them shine anew, as they constitute both the lodestone attracting recent ontologies of process and the cornerstone of the non-substantive, process-based ontology being espoused in this project. And, now that the dusting is through, we must tend to the remainder of our ontological spring cleaning. That is the task here and there is much at stake in this process, as will be argued in Section III.

Additionally, the poverty of the substance model has been exposed in light of the recent scientific evidence that what we *are* cannot be described properly, or at least accurately and exhaustively, by way of a substantive explanation (both quantum mechanics and biological dynamism offer evidence and justification for processual ontologies as we will see in Parts 2 and 3). This is not to claim that the substance model does not provide us with important organizing principles that have the potential to aid in

our survival. Just that they are empty fictions, they not True. This is also not to claim that the process model is *True* either. The claim is slightly weaker. It is that, given recent scientific and cultural evidence, non-substance based process theories provide much better explanatory structures according to which we can flesh out the nature of human being, now, in this age, and perhaps also have a basis for making more interesting normative claims. What we consider true in the sciences, for example, is that which best explains and helps us make predictions about the world—at that time. Of course, we all know that in the sciences these truths evolves with the acquisition of new techniques of knowledge production; for this reason and others, Nietzsche and Heidegger were wary of potential to provide useful information about being and, to a certain degree, about reality—Nietzsche even went so far as to call science the new god, plagued and driven by a bankrupt and false metaphysics. It is in this vein that W. V.O. Quine observed¹²⁵ that our epistemic commitments are vulnerable to recalcitrant experience (experiment). On one read, this seems to suggest that we need to revise and discipline our epistemological commitments to be more in line with the nature of our experience and experiments with nature, reality, and being. Certainly Nietzsche would deny that there was any True nature, outside of human interpretation of it, with which to discipline our beliefs. And, it seems at certain times Heidegger agrees with this, especially when the object of scientific observation is being.

However, while both Heidegger and Nietzsche reject, or are at least very suspicious about, the possibility that science can tell us about being or what *is*, I remain slightly more optimistic, as do many of the theorists whose work I admire and who

¹²⁵ Willard Van Orman Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

mobilize Heidegger and Nietzsche in the service of ontological pursuits. While, I do not fully share their worries about science and technology, I remain cognizant of the many rich and persuasive critiques of technoscience. Further, I am very aware of the feminist and queer interventions into and disruptions of both epistemic and ontological technoscientific products and I both hold them in high esteem and find them compelling. However, I am not sure that ignoring technoscience is the answer. I contend that the lens of science and technology has a lot to offer with respect to this project, both in its microscopic and telescopic views. It can provide us with some very good evidence for the very sorts of claims those who renounce it writ large it want to make. We must proceed with caution, of course, and take care not to consider those results of science uncritically. Indeed, we want to ensure that we do not fall prey to Nietzsche's admonishment that, "(a)gainst positivism, which sticks to the phenomenon: 'There are only *facts*'—I would say: No, facts are precisely what there is not, only interpretations,"¹²⁶ and "physics too is only an interpretation and arrangement of the world (according to our own requirements...) and *not* an explanation of the world."¹²⁷ Nietzsche recognized that all knowledge was interpretation; while cloaked as Truth, even in the sciences, knowledge was "rooted in the nihilistic sociopolitical tendency of the modern soul to reduce everything to a common or average level."¹²⁸ We have come full circle back to those empty fictions.

¹²⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*. Walter Kaufmann, ed. and trans. with R.J. Hollingdale, (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 481.

¹²⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. R.J. Hollingdale, trans. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 26.

¹²⁸ Babich, *Nietzsche's Philosophy of Science*, 41.

Perhaps, however, Nietzsche was overly pessimistic. After all, as hinted above, to Nietzsche, science was the new god—not a positive assessment in the eyes of Nietzsche. He quipped that, “science has most successfully resisted theology, whose ‘handmaid’ it was for too long, it is now, with great high spirits and a plentiful lack of understanding, taking it upon itself to lay down laws for philosophy and for once to play the ‘master’—what am I saying? To play the *philosopher* itself.”¹²⁹ Instead, by unpacking the socio-political factors and doing away with the scientific methodological claims to universality, objectivity, and necessity, in other words, taking the products of science as interpretation, we might actually be able to arrive at something interesting or important to say about a situated reality *as we see it*. This could look something like Ian Hacking’s suggestion that, “If you can spray them, they are real,”¹³⁰ not in any enduring universal abstract sense, rather very well situated in the here and now. The mistrust of science found in Nietzsche and Heidegger is more a question of devaluing the sort of science that aims to dominate nature or view it as standing reserve than it is a declaration of the wholesale bankruptcy of the scientific. To wit, Nietzsche noted, “The whole knowledge apparatus for abstraction and simplification—aimed not at knowledge but at power over things.” This intuition is echoed by Vandana Shiva (among others), who apart from observing a correlation and dynamic relationship between the way in which science and its violently reductionist, mechanical projects dominated over the earth and the way in which patriarchy and its sexist logic reduced woman to an object to be subjugated by male power, proffered that, “nature as the object of knowledge is violated when modern

¹²⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. *Op. Cit.*, 110.

¹³⁰ Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 23.

science destroys its integrity of nature, both in process of perception as well as manipulation,”¹³¹ and, “the ontology of dichotomization generates an ontology of domination, over nature, and people.”¹³² While I appreciate and even often levy these compelling and strident critiques, I am not sure they warrant an utter disregard of the products of science and their potential to offer us some insight into the nature of being and reality. We need only take seriously and be cautious about the ways in which science is both often practiced in the service of dominating, patriarchal, racist, homophobic, hierarchical, industrio-military capitalist projects and under the omnipresent influence of social forces that are internal and external to it; we need only insist upon maintaining a critical stance toward its output in light of this. But, being critical and suspicious do not equate to invalidating the accuracy of *all* scientific results.

Heidegger’s views on science manifested in several different stages over the span of his career. In at least one phase, the earliest, philosophy was to be thought of as a science. This evolved into a turn from philosophy to science, and then, finally, to locating the essence of science in technology.¹³³ Technology, he says, is *enframing*, “that way of revealing which holds sway in the essence of modern technology and which itself is nothing technological.”¹³⁴ It is, “a way of revealing,” not, “a making and manipulating nor in the using of means, but rather...revealing.”¹³⁵ It is an opening up, not a reductive process. And, if science can be a technological praxis, to be sure, we could be more

¹³¹ Vandana Shiva, “Science, Nature, and Gender,” in *Ecofeminism*, ed. Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, (New York: Zed Books, 1993), 276.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 283.

¹³³ Trish Glazebrook, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Science* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 5.

¹³⁴ Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), 20.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 20-1.

sanguine about its prospects with regard to informing our understanding of reality, maybe even being; though, what remained true throughout his work was his belief that science, although very capable of grasping truths at an ontological level, did not have access to fundamental Being, or *Dasein*. His main insight about the nature of science is that it must shed its teleological dogma in favor of looking toward efficient causes acting on spatiotemporal bodies. It is the grip of *telos* that restricts science's ability to make nature ideologically present to human intention. It is as technology, or standing reserve, available for human use, that the essence of science is located. Like Nietzsche, he connects epistemological and ontological concerns in science, though he does seem to think there is a possibility that we can have an *a priori* stance toward what there is, just not being. In this, his phenomenological and hermeneutic background rings a tad Kantian and slightly more optimistic and realist than Nietzsche's perspectivalism, which is patently anti-realist. Hermeneutic circularity and the Kantian claim that we only have access to phenomena and not noumena are actually quite similar. Under these epistemological economies, there may be something to know about the world, reality, and being, we just cannot know it since we are *in* it, we *are* it. This is not to say that Heidegger is a hardcore realist, just that he allows more possibility than Nietzsche does that we can derive some truths in science. As Trish Glazebrook stated it, "He holds that science does not *make up* but rather *setup* its object."¹³⁶ This resonates well with Ian Hacking's point and that of many postmodern thinkers that experiments, "create, produce, refine and stabilize phenomena"¹³⁷ under specific restricted conditions rather than discover Truths about nature. It is this optimism and I would like to retain—that

¹³⁶ Glazebrook, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Science*, 71.

¹³⁷ Hacking, *Representing and Intervening*, 230.

there is something we might be able to know, though it is not *something*. Likewise, I hold onto the Shiva/Heideggerian shared belief that the mechanical/mathematical reduction of what *is* to *something*, a quantifiable object, is a violent rendering that in effect destroys being as it is—in all its flux, multiplicity, hybridity, et cetera. Being, it should be said, cannot be understood as an object or it is not being; it is in this way that science can be complicit in the forgetting of being.

As such, with a critical eye, we can and will mobilize the important work done in technoscience in line with our intentions here. To avoid confusion at this stage, I must qualify this claim just a bit more. My assertion is that science does have the potential to tell us about what *is* in the sense of an enduring Truth, but it can tell us about what *is* in a special sense. Unlike many, I do not believe that science is as universal, objective, true, and value neutral as it purports to be. Without opening up the can of worms that contain the science wars, it should be said that I regard science, at least in large part, to be a located, situated, historical, political, and social praxis. So, too, conceptions of being revealed through science will fail to meet the unattainable constructs of objectivity, neutrality, and truth and will instead be historically, culturally, socially, and politically infused. This last issue will be addressed further in Part 3. A final caution: we must also be sure to deploy the findings of technoscience under the purview of the naturalistic fallacy so as to avoid automatically invalidating any value claims we make in relation to the ontological ones. The issue of making value claims from fact, including scientific fact, will be elaborated further in Section III.

Let us return to the aforementioned comment about empty fictions being useful for survival anticipates a possible objection to the full gamut of non-substance

ontology—that there is a common sense belief that when I go about my daily life I deal with *things*, I count them, identify and reidentify them, et cetera. If these *things* were not real, I would not be functional. My beliefs, if false, would eventually manufacture potentially fatal error. This common sense experience of reality excoriates non-substance ontology as seriously contradicting our bedrock intuitions about the world. Hermetic as this objection may appear, it is actually only cosmetic or, at best, semantic. As we know, quotidian existence is riddled with common sense and folk beliefs, some of them may be true though they may still be detrimental, while others may be false but fall across the spectrum of advantageous, benign, or even hazardous. Evolutionary psychology, for example, admits that these fictions enhance our survival potential even if they fail to tell a complete or accurate story about what the world or the person *is*. One classic example of this kind of belief is overconfidence. Possessing it can maximize survival on many different levels despite the fact that it is the belief that you are something you are not or have false beliefs about the extent of your abilities. For example, overconfidence staves off negative psychological states that inhibit performance, it aids the person in reassessing failure as due to external forces (positive attribution), in landing jobs, and in finding mates. Nietzsche also diagnoses this about the more concrete level of daily life when he observes that:

We have fixed up a world for ourselves in which we can live—assuming bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content: without these articles of faith, nobody now would endure life. But that does not mean that they have been proved. Life is no argument; the conditions of life could include error.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*. Walter Kaufmann, ed., trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 191.

And, pointedly, he states elsewhere that, “(l)ife is grounded on the presumption of a belief in enduring and regularly recurrent events. The more powerful life is, the broader is the calculable simultaneously constituted world. Logicizing, rationalizing, systematizing as aids to life.”¹³⁹

In the disciplines of gender studies, post-colonial theory, and critical race theory, for example, some theorists even advocate deliberately deploying these empty fictions. They call this move operational or strategic essentialism.¹⁴⁰ According to operational essentialism, we employ identity categories in the service of specific political aims despite simultaneously understanding them to be always already contested regulatory and oppressive ontological fictions. It should be noted that others among these theorists wager that this tactic is prone to backfire and may obstruct rather than advance the progressive agendas of those advocating it.¹⁴¹ We will speak to this problem in greater detail in the conclusion under the guise of attending to the stakes and impacts of shifting ontological paradigms.

Especially because of the potential danger of operating in the world under false pretenses, it might be better to hold that the common sense beliefs we have that generate the necessity of substance can serve merely as heuristic devices. They may often provide helpful survival tools but certainly not proofs of the existence of things *qua* substance.

¹³⁹ Nietzsche, as cited in Babich, 149.

¹⁴⁰ See Judith Butler critiquing Gayatri Spivak in "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," in Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina and Sarah Stanbury, eds., *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*. A Gender and Culture Reader (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) 401-417.

¹⁴¹ For example, Judith Butler thinks that since identity categories *only* exist insofar as we insert them into discourse or perform, enact, repeat, and deploy them, making use of them, even for “good” reasons, only serves to reify and codify them further. She does not ascribe to the belief that they are ontologically enduring substances. This view critiques others, like Gayatri Spivak, who advocates operational essentialism.

They supply a useful macroscopic vision of the world, a convenient shorthand, that can at times prove to be quite handy. But this does not entail that they speak the *truth* about what *is*. Further, I hold along with Judith Butler that because they are often *not* truths about the world, deploying them often causes more harm than good. In line with this, some recent analytic non-substance ontology advocates,¹⁴² suggest that rather than insist these *things* exist, we need to adapt our language to better suit reality. In doing so, we will not be mired in the many quagmires that, as nominalists already established, are rooted in the false extrapolation to a *thing* or substance spawned by our grammatical structures, which camouflage the truth of the matter—there is no substance, it is just a manner of speaking. Prescient as usual, Nietzsche called our attention to this problem (quoted above). Another classic example of this, “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” nominalists argue, does not indicate that there is some *thing* “beauty” that *is actually* in anyone’s eye. While that particular example may seem benign in the scheme of things, there are many others that are indeed hazardous. Thus, I side decidedly with those who fear that continuing to use at least some of these fictions could be dangerous business. The reason for this will be more transparent in Section III of this part when we connect up ontology and ethico-politics. Moreover, I would like to raise the stakes a bit higher and jump on board with those theorists in the analytic camp who wish to transform our language in order to reflect a more compelling picture of the world. Heidegger obviously shares those inclinations, though not for the same reasons I find important. I maintain that this linguistic shift is especially relevant in the ethico-political arena where the use of

¹⁴² See Achille C. Varzi, “From Language to Ontology: Beware of the Traps,” to appear in Michel Aurnague, Maya Hickmann, and Laure Vieu (eds.), *The Categorization of Spatial Entities in Language and Cognition*. (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2005).

certain language, particularly those terms that evoke “the natural,” allows for assumptions that obstruct progressive change. For, how could it be disadvantageous to uses language that reflects and operates under the assumption of viable, interesting, and compelling (perhaps even more accurate) ontological models? How could we go astray if we argue from the microscopic perspective of reality? While if we forgo deploying these useful fictions we may have to develop new political strategies to achieve our goals, I remain sanguine that the goals will still be attainable.¹⁴³ Indeed, they may be even easier to attain if armed with arguments that rest on better ontological suppositions.

There is an attendant worry, moreover, that in denying substance in all its forms we would, concomitantly, have to relinquish any hold we have on realism. However, this tandem fear is unsubstantiated. I suggest a perspective I call process realism, whereby a particular set of processes at a particular moment could be something to which we could make reference. Thus, some of the insidious ethico-political anxiety that might result from there not being a real “person” (read: substance behind the processes) could be abated. In other words, one might wonder how we can construct ethical theories of the “person” if the person is merely a set of processes. To whom we attribute these all-so-important rights?¹⁴⁴ What I am suggesting is that that specific set of processes *is* the person for whom ethical rules or practices would be articulated and binding. We need not dissipate into ethical nihilism in abandoning the substantive model of human being.

¹⁴³ More on this in the conclusion.

¹⁴⁴ Not to open a huge can of worms or be inflammatory, because I will not discuss the issue of rights in detail anywhere in this project, but I believe rights discourse to be part of the insidiousness of certain moral/ethical theories and I discern an overlap of those who people advocate rights-based ethics and those who advocate substance ontology. More on the problems with rights discourse and how the turn to non-substance ontology might provide some valuable intuitions about why they are problematic (and maybe even provide an important intervention to help circumvent some of them) in the conclusion.

We simply need to alter our language to better fit with reality as we will now describe it. As we will witness in Section III below, this does have a serious impact on what types of ethico-political schemas can be deemed legitimate but it does not entail that all ethico-political programs are vacuous. Now, let us return to the spring cleaning.

Having delved into the contemporary field just a bit with Heidegger and Nietzsche, I have arrived at the main claim of this work. What I argue for in the next two parts is an ontology rooted in the historical tradition of flux and change, where processes are taken to be basic. By processes, I mean forces, affects, interminglings, social and cultural intersections and interactions, events, multiplicity, interdependency, movement, difference, becoming, change, biological mappings, and environments. These are to be considered ontologically basic without reference to some substantial being or entity lurking underneath—regardless of how epistemic access is construed in relation to this substance. I am brandishing Ockham’s razor and severing the unnecessary “something more” advocated by the metaphysics of substance. I do this in concert with many contemporary thinkers (some of them glossed above)—be they philosophically analytic or continental, scientific or socio-cultural, ancient or current, or Western or non-Western. And, I do this for a reason that transcends theoretical parsimony. To this we must adjoin Heidegger’s profound insight about being-as-care, ek-stasis, and projection. The derivation from Buddhist and Heraclitean theory does not go unnoticed here either. With these notions, Heidegger provides us some of the fundamental weapons in the arsenal necessary to battling against the sway of substance and, further, raises the stakes for how our self-knowledge can impact the way in which we operate in and with the world. His portrayal is crucial for what is to come subsequently in Parts 2 and 3, both in the way we

will interpret human-animal relation and human-technology relation. Being-in-the-world as projected, or standing outside Being, is an essential component of reality that is almost entirely omitted from substance ontology. But, given that what we are is unequivocally in-the-world, among other beings and artifacts, this facet must be reappropriated into any comprehensive ontological theory that aspires to present the truth, or especially, *the* Truth, of Being. Exposing elided but vital features such as this, brings to light the purpose of the ongoing reclamation project initiated here in Part 1; it is the very effort to uncover these sorts of truths that gives cause to this lengthy historical survey. As Heidegger argued, truth is an unconcealing: any revealing will by definition have the effect of concealing some other “truth.” Thus, in the effort to put forth substance, many features of Being were subsequently concealed or “forgotten.” Making those virtual notions actual in the present, or drawing them toward their future, is the attentive praxis of remembering Being Heidegger encourages us adopt.

Revisiting the Ockham issue for a moment, so as not to be misunderstood, it should be said that I am deploying parsimony in the more general sense than is customary nowadays.¹⁴⁵ When we look at the world through the filter of contemporary developments in biology and physics, what we find is that those theories supporting substance have little basis in what we can now see beneath the surface or how we now construe the world. They fail to compellingly describe what *is*. The promise of substance has not been fulfilled, our Aristotelian hopes have been dashed. Yet, the myth

¹⁴⁵ I am aware that Ockham’s name is more often invoked to discuss *logical* and *theoretical* parsimony. Basically, what I am saying is that in the comparison between two theories—one that while it acknowledges process also alleges substance (especially one that is still by no means either empirically or *a priori* proven) and the other that appeals only to process without that “something” more, both being empirically equivalent—explanatory and predictive powers being comparable—the notion of substance seems an unnecessary extra severable by Ockham’s razor.

of a unified substratum underlying these processes still lingers quite like the diagnosis Nietzsche gives to the modern world with respect to god—we have all the metaphysical baggage of the divine and substance, in our language and beliefs, even though we have turned away from it as the source of knowledge. Further, with the linguistic shift suggested earlier, it is not at all clear that there is anything we could not describe simply through an appeal to forces and processes. Thus, we ought to cease our steadfast search for this substance and the metaphysical puzzles it engenders, for a perfectly viable option exists to replace it—one that was always already just on the surface, alongside the other, and right in front of our faces. Recent cultural, gender, and postmodern theory, often without the scientific background, has also arrived at the same conclusion. All the becoming, flux, and multiplicity that was banished to the world of appearances was done so misguidedly. All the peeling back of the layers of the skin in an effort to locate some ontological core substance has left us no closer to some substantive truth. Rather, in its most favorable read, substance metaphysics can be relegated to the realm of the epistemically inaccessible, as Kant would have it, or be bracketed out, as phenomenology suggests. In either case, we are left with no more than a bankrupt metaphysical ideology one without evidence or a strong footing on which to stand. It is time to relinquish this futile quest for the, at best, unknowable substance and turn our gaze both back and forward at the same time. Michel Tibon-Cornillot described this process as a Russian *matroyshka*, or nesting doll¹⁴⁶; the attempt to offer evidence for this mysterious and hidden substance successively stripped each layer off only to find, each time, a smaller version of the same problem nested within it—an infinite regress with little hope for

¹⁴⁶ Michel Tibon-Cornillot, *Les Corps Transigurés: Mécanisation du vivant et imaginaire de la biologie*. (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992).

victory. Simultaneously, the evidence was always, quite literally, right in front of their eyes, evidence they chose to simply expel and relegate to a subordinate realm of reality while they continued to dig deeper and deeper for that holy grail of being hidden somewhere beneath the surface. Our effort here is to cease this futile excavation for substance and adopt a new methodology in which we take a much wider scope of the forces, processes, properties, occurrences, and events into account as uniquely essential. As beings that are projected out, in-the-world, continually in flux, affected by an ever-changing multiplicity of forces, we need to redirect our gaze to where it will bring us greater insight about being—simultaneously outward and inward—to those forces comingling under, on, and outside the skin. In this effort, we should pay careful attention to the permeable boundaries that we are, or that the skin is.

Now that we have revisited those thinkers who paved the way for process-oriented ontology by comprehensively recasting our metaphysical worldview, bringing forward what was virtual in the past, and resurrecting it into its future (our present), we ought to turn to spelling out what we have reclaimed. Some of this will become clearer as we progress into the next parts of this project, but an initial pass here would be helpful before coming to realize what is at stake. This will be achieved by way of a short discussion about the relationship between ontology and ethico-politics in which this project is embedded. Once established, we can deploy the storehouse of doctrines reappropriated from history in the service of exposing the ways in which this new worldview impacts our ethico-political choices and schemas.

It is necessary now to establish the ground upon which we are going to walk in this quest to revamp our understanding of human ontology. What is of tantamount

import here is to realize that the ontology detailed subsequently in Parts 2 and 3 is not meant alleged to be or radical in the sense that signifies originality, novelty, or invention. As has become abundantly evident, it is drawing on what was already present as an unactualized virtuality, in the sense Bergson employs this, and radical in the sense of being *rooted*, as Heidegger reads it. Indeed, threads of this sort of thinking were always already present throughout the various stages of the historical development of the ontology under which human being is currently characterized. Certain ideas and marginalized views of being are hence being drawn toward their future from a past that neglected to recognize them as interesting, compelling, or central to our self-understanding. Foucault recognized this through his method of historical ontology, and Deleuze, echoing Bergson, pushes us to reclaim and unleash what was virtual in the past, that which resided on the contours of mainstream ontological analysis, in order to push ahead new lines of flight in the present and project us toward our future. I have been deploying the term Patricia Clough coined, as being “drawn toward a future,” because it precisely captures this methodology—certain concepts were, in a sense, untimely. They were already there, in place, waiting, at a time in which the possibility of being adopted was low given the context in which they were birthed. As such, the overall aim would be to unearth the virtual, that which was always already drawn toward its future, and implement it in the progress toward an unpredictable future, one for which we do not and could not have a map or blueprint, given we are still deeply embedded in the world constructed by the hegemonic substantive paradigm. The only tools we have our disposal for our quest are the compass of these virtual paradigms and recent developments in science. So, onward we go.

What tools does the alternative tradition supply? As enumerated at the end of Section II of this part, we have the compass of the ancients to guide us. They told a plausible story of reality and being that debunked the notion of substance and advanced in its place a theory that speaks to the so-called appearances or phenomena, the elements evicted from the house of being by the exponents of substance. They relied on the evidence of experience and the senses to divine a conception of nature that grants an at least equally predictive and explanatory force to that of the substance paradigm. They stressed becoming and flux over stasis but could explain the fallacy of our belief in stasis through the law-like rhythms of flux, change, and transformation. Stasis or essence need not be sacrificed in the name of flux. They are simply refigured as aggregate unities, assemblages of forces, sets of occurrences, bundles of properties, and collections of processes. We need not forego the notion of identity either, however, we must now understand identity in a way that is much more temporally located and does not by necessity have to involve sameness but can include difference or even contradiction. This paves the way for theorists like Donna Haraway who emphasize hybridity and multiplicity, and Deleuze and Guattari who offer the rhizomatic, the nomadic, the schizophrenic, and becoming-other, as essential to reality and being. Likewise, we are forced to rethink both the subject and its concomitant subject-object distinction and, under its umbrella, many other binaries like human/animal, organic/inorganic, natural/artificial, and even dichotomies like woman/man, heterosexual/homosexual, white/black, et cetera. The influence of debunking the subject/object binary radiates so widely it is almost inestimable. For example, issues surrounding agency, independence,

vulnerability, and autonomy will have to submit to wholesale revision. Elizabeth Grosz plainly describes the crossroads we have reached with this shift. First citing Nietzsche,

If we give up the effective subject, we also give up the object upon which the effects are produced. Duration, identity with itself, being are inherent neither in that which is called subject nor in that which is called object: they are complexes of events, apparently durable in comparison with other complexes - e.g., through the differences in tempo of the event...

If we give up the concept 'subject' and 'object', then also the concept 'substance' – and as a consequence also the various modifications of it, e.g., 'matter', 'spirit', and other hypothetical entities. 'the eternity and immutability of matter' etc. (Nietzsche, 552, p. 298)

Then she continues with her assessment of the dilemma we now face:

We have a theoretical choice: either we ascribe to a theory of the subject which strives to have its identity affirmed through relations...of identification, with other subjects, a subject who seeks the recognition of others and a place as a subject within culture...; or we ascribe to a theory of the impersonal (and ultimately a 'politics of imperceptibility', the opposite of identity politics, a politics of acts, not identities), in which inhuman forces, forces that are both living and non-living, macroscopic and microscopic, above and below the human, are acknowledged and allowed to displace the centrality of will and consciousness. At the very least, this means that there are wills, forces, powers that can be ascribed no humanity, no life, but which have 'their' perspectives and interests, their own trajectories. Forces have their own intentionalities – to win, to expand, to become:

The victorious concept 'force', by means of which our physicists have created God and the world, still needs to be completed; an inner will must be ascribed to it, which I designate as 'will to power'. (Nietzsche, 619 (p. 333))

...(f)orce, whether bodily (as in Foucault) or impersonal (Deleuze), can be mobilized in particular contexts (contexts that can't be determined in advance). For both, it is forces, and not subjects, which act and produce, which proliferate and transform, which are subjected to becoming and self-overcoming.

This speaks precisely to what sort of monumental potential this move to process has. By ridding ourselves of this surfeit baggage of substance, much of what has burdened our social and political life will have to be revised—in particular, exclusionary and ultimately impoverished identity politics. Of course, since the results of overhauling our ontological

worldview are unpredictable, and also since (as we will see in Section III below) we cannot logically entail an ought from an is, there is no guarantee that what will emerge will be a vast improvement over the currently hegemonic schema. Though, my suspicion is that there cannot *but* be social and political improvement in shifting to this ontological paradigm; the reasons for this will become more transparent in the conclusion. A few words of preview are warranted, however.

In destabilizing and decentralizing the subject by moving to a non-substantive ontology, we effectively collapse the subject/object distinction, as discussed above. For, what would be a subject other than a compendium of forces, processes, events, properties, et cetera. And, even those, are in constant flux. So where do we locate that subject? Given that, we can start to narrate a new story, one that questions the intuitions inherited from being as substantively characterized and one that begins from the following observation: this ontology indicates that we have a different kind of kinship or filiation with the world that we are *essentially in* than we previously thought, both because we are intrinsically enmeshed in it (and with everything included in it) at an irreducible and essential level and because we are always already engaged in a simultaneous multiplicity of processes. This has the effect of unhinging the stalwart trope of the internal/external distinction as well. Indeed, if we cannot locate a subject, what then could we possibly say about the inside or outside of it? What would that even signify? Thus, theories that profoundly rely upon, for example, autonomy, strict boundaries drawn at the skin (a blurry, permeable, and leaky boundary to be sure), or the property model of the body (based on a dualistic notion of the self) to justify them, will be met with a serious challenge. Indeed, this bespeaks a fertile ground on which to make

progress. Though, admittedly, we still have a decent amount of heavy lifting to do. This is but an embryonic foreshadowing of the ways in which our traditional suppositions about being will be realigned and recast and is only meant to provide a directional signpost for what will be both argued in the Parts 2 and 3 and evaluated at length in the conclusion.

II. Bridging the Analytic-Continental Divide

Since there is a dual motif in what I am undertaking in this project and part of it is a bit unorthodox, we must back track to explore the more controversial path not yet taken. Above, I established that one axis of this project's framework is its situation with respect to the historical ontological debate about substance. As is fully transparent by this point, this project is located on the contours of traditional metaphysics and ontology with its fellow non-substantive ontology kin. But that is just one part of establishing the framework. The other, is its orientation on another debate—that between those who hold that an ontologist's concern is uniquely understanding how the world *is*, and those who maintain that doing ontology is a sidebar to the main attraction: unpacking ethical, social, and political consequences implied by the hegemonic ontological paradigm. This debate seems to correlate with the so-called analytic and continental divide. While I am not terribly interested in maintaining or continuing to perpetuate this bifurcation of philosophical pursuits into these categories, as I truly believe there is much more crossover than is generally acknowledged, it does on the surface ring true to say that the so-called analytic folks, with their perhaps slightly more scientific and logic-based approach do tend to want to depict their research as *purely* ontological. While on the

other hand, the so-called continental crew, with their important concern for the ethical, social, and political, seem much less interested in *purely* describing what *is*, and perhaps frequently do so only to further flesh out their ethical, social, and political claims or to critique those of their opponents. In fact, as many of the more recent, postmodern continental theorists believe that what *is* is nothing more than a construction—be it linguistic, discursive, social, et cetera—and, given that, the idea of doing *pure* research of this type is impossible (since it will always be situated in the context of the hegemonic worldview with its false claims to objectivity, neutrality, and Truth and concomitant myriad hierarchies). These theorists, thus, seek to rewrite what *is* in terms that better fit their ethical, social, and political agendas. No doubt, this is a gross generalization. Especially in light of the fact that the basis for most of these postmodern theorists' claims lies in the work of Nietzsche and Heidegger about whom it certainly could not be said that their primary concerns were ethical, social, and political.

The rationale for raising this point was twofold. On the one hand, in terms of this debate, I would like to situate this project on the fence. In other words, I agree with both sides. I both want to theorize and come to understand ontology in itself *and* I want to understand ontological claims in relation to ethical, social, and political claims. I want to examine what *is* and “get reality right,” so to speak (or at least describe it more accurately than does the substance model). But, I also want that study to have a purpose outside of its own sake. Both pursuits standing alone are deficient and as a result there are risks associated with each strategy. In regard to the former matter, the Parts 2 and 3 will provide the argument. We look at what *is*, through the lens of biology, physics, and socio-cultural and technoscientific forces to derive justification for the non-substantive

paradigm. For the latter issue, the next section will paint a fuller picture of the relation of ontology to ethico-politics and the conclusion will demonstrate one application of the ontology advocated in this project to that domain.

The other motivation for calling attention to this debate is to underscore a snag that has ensnared many a postmodern theorist and another that has entangled more than a few analytics. According to many of the contemporary (postmodern, queer, and feminist) continental theorists, the opposition to metaphysics and ontology in particular is quite strident. It may be, however, that their opposition can be linked to the fact that they have located all metaphysics and ontology under the umbrella of a substantive paradigm with its ostensibly nefarious essentialism. And, insofar as essentialism has been vilified as the foe of progressive political pursuits, ontology (taken as uniquely substantive) has been tossed out as contributing to the problem. There is a risk of doing so: by throwing out metaphysics wholesale, these theorists neglect to see that (1) they are already doing metaphysics, though a different sort, and (2) that theorizing what is in the way it actually is can be quite beneficial to their endeavors. Part of the inspiration here for examining what *really is* lies in uncovering or unconcealing the truth of that claim. For, if it turns out that what *is* is entirely different from the *substance* or *thing* central to hegemonic claims, we may in fact be in a better position than ever to argue for the sorts of ethical, social, and political causes we prefer. As Elizabeth Grosz put it:

(f)eminists, and all theorists interested in the relations between subjectivity, politics, and culture, need to have a more nuanced, intricate account of the body's immersion and participation in the world if they are to develop political strategies to transform the existing social regulation of bodies, that is, to change existing forms of biopower, of domination and exploitation. We need to understand not only how culture inscribes bodies—a preoccupation of much social and cultural theory in the past decade or more—but, more urgently, what these bodies are

such that inscription is possible, what is the *nature* of bodies, in biological evolution, that opens them up to political, cultural, and conceptual evolution.”¹⁴⁷

This is not to say that the analytic arguments for purity are free of criticism. They simply commit the opposite crime. The risk in their quest is that they (1) neglect to recognize all the forces that contribute to drawing their conclusions and (2) as such, their conclusions are disingenuously and arrogantly characterized as enduring Truths. Moreover, purity discourse itself has a long and unsavory history. Not the least of which is that “objective, neutral” claims to Truth, the purity of which is explained by way of methodology uniquely formulated in order to produce such Truths, have participated in more than their share of oppressive aims. These theorists fail to understand the ways in which their projects influence and are utterly influenced by the ethical, social, and political world—and can not be carried out in isolation. Following Donna Haraway, we can acknowledge that, “in order for the modesty [of the practitioner]...to be visible, the man—the witness whose accounts mirror reality—must be invisible, that is, an inhabitant of the potent ‘unmarked category,’ which is constructed by the extraordinary conventions of self-invisibility...such a man must inhabit the space perceived by its inhabitants to be the ‘culture of no culture.’”¹⁴⁸ This observer, metaphysician, scientist,

bears witness: he is objective; he guarantees the clarity and purity of objects. His subjectivity is his objectivity. His narratives have magical power—they lose all trace of their history as stories, as products of partisan projects, as contestable representations, or as constructed documents in their potent capacity to define the facts.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, *The Nick of Time* (Crows Nest, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2004), 2.

¹⁴⁸ Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second Millenium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 23.

¹⁴⁹ Haraway, *Modest_Witness*, 24.

By failing to take into account the dynamic relationship between ethico-politics and ontology these theorists' conclusions, the fear is that they will continue to supply justification for ethico-political projects that constitute oppressive regimes. By not situating and locating their reality framing projects, observations, and investigations, and by denying their subjectivity, they rely on the false pretense to an arrogant and false objectivity that is actually subjective.

As such, this project yokes together the two motifs—the vision of ethico-politics and ontology as related and the insistence that ontology can be (and in some ways should be) undertaken in its own right. Though the focus here is much more on depicting and arguing for what *is*, this should always be read under the guise that undertaking ontological description has vital significance outside of that effort. It should be said, however, that this does not mean that there is a preconceived ethico-political agenda cloaked in this ontological work. That would put it decidedly in the postmodern camp, as just diagnosed. Rather, after spelling out the ontological rubric within which this work is conceived, framed in the sections above, the fortification process will begin. As stated, Parts 2 and 3 foreground the justification for ordaining this particular ontological paradigm. Only in the conclusion will the ethical, social, and political matters be raised: investigating how this brand of ontology can help us recast at least one debate in ethics that has persisted for way too long, understanding some of the risks of this ontological paradigm, and allowing some of the feminist and queer theorists to speak their concerns and have them resolved. Before achieving that, we must explore and establish the dynamic relationship between ethico-politics and ontology.

III. Mutual Emergences of Ontology and Ethico-politics

A. Statement of the Problem

In order to forestall some of the common critical reactions to studies focusing on the ontological, especially one that aims in some sense to be more than descriptive, even perhaps to be normative, it is important to take stock of a deep-rooted philosophical position still holding sway in ethics—the so-called naturalistic fallacy. This section reassesses the validity of that claim by placing the problem in a new register. In the course of this reassessment, I will advance a richer positive theory of exactly what ontology has to do with ethics and politics. Without taking this initial detour, I fear there will be misguided attempts to shoehorn the ontological schema being asserted here into a longstanding meta-ethical dilemma into which it does not fit, thus leaving it open to attacks about its logical soundness. For, I contend, the claims I am making about the relationship between ontology and ethico-politics do not provide sufficient evidence to succeed at convicting this work of the naturalistic fallacy. In other words, I am not at all sure that the naturalistic fallacy applies to the relationship between ethico-politics and ontology except in a very narrow sense. I maintain that the tendency of theorists and critics has been to, perhaps inadvertently, widen the scope of the naturalistic fallacy beyond the limits of its original intent and apply it too liberally. They have taken too “thick” a view of it such that the mere mention of ontology and ethico-politics in the same breath causes feathers to start ruffling. It is almost as if we are to believe that the two have no relation at all. This slippage from the thinner understanding of the fallacy to the thicker version is a serious misstep as I shall show. If it is true that many theorists have been misattributing this fallacy, and too-narrowly restricting our understanding of

the relationship between ethico-politics and ontology, we can better grasp the way in which the force of ontological investigation itself has been unduly underestimated and impoverished. This is a key element of what is to come.

It is also my view that the matter of ontological study is further complicated by the perspective of queer, feminist, and, more generally, postmodern thinkers who have adopted what they deem to be a post-metaphysical stance. They maintain that the philosophical quest to understanding being, which is oft premised on a search for a universal Truth about being, conceals deeply oppressive discursive, logical, ethico-political, semiotic, and ideological structures. The search for such an ahistorical, universal Truth in itself has been called into serious question by these same theorists. As such, those ontological studies that appear to be based on them have in turn been regarded with suspicion. Many queer theorists and feminists have charged the entire field of ontology with upholding deeply entrenched discursive structures that could be more effectively battled in the domains of epistemology and ethico-politics, eviscerating them of any ontological claims. Ontology has thus, like the baby, been thrown out along with the bathwater of oppression. This move is a grave mistake for those seeking fundamental change in hierarchical and oppressive structures. For, merely refusing to take up the study of ontology neither avoids nor undercuts the problems these thinkers associate with it. Nor does ignoring its place in epistemological and ethico-political discussion properly banish it from those arenas. Further, even epistemological theory seems to be buttressed on ontological assumptions. A more productive route might be to rethink the ontological assumptions under which we are operating and elucidate the ways in which perhaps they might be flawed, correcting them to reflect a more compelling and viable description of

actual human being. In doing so, what we might discover is that it is the erroneous ontological claims, to wit the aspiration of finding some *a priori* Truth of being, and not the study of ontology itself that is to blame. The further point here is that ethico-politics, epistemology, and most other philosophical pursuits for that matter, operate under very specific, even if rarely stated, ontological premises. The task is to uncover those and assess them, not to avoid them altogether. All this is to say that there are ontological assumptions and concerns present whether we choose to talk about them or not, and that choosing not to serves to both weaken ethico-political arguments and obstruct the possibility of obtaining the real transformations, even revolutions, these theorists seek.

B. The Limits of the Naturalistic Fallacy

The purpose here is not to engage in a detailed debate over the long-standing meta-ethical claim about the naturalistic fallacy. That would send us too far afield. Rather, the critical task is simply to rend asunder some of the immediate concerns of those theorists who, armed with the spurious predisposition to construct a sharp divide between the ontological and ethico-political, might want to diminish the force of the ontological work undertaken in subsequent parts. This combines with the productive task, which is to spell out the relationship between the ontological arguments being advanced here and ethico-politics by navigating the minefield that contains the unfashionable claim that ontology always has both an ethical and a political dimension. To be precise, it is not as if we have ontology and ethics, ontology and politics; ontology is about what there is, an understanding of which must always intervene in any ethical and political claims one would like to advance.

As has been widely rehearsed throughout ethical literature, the relationship between ontology and ethico-politics has been a bit thorny since David Hume made the following meta-ethical observation in his *Treatise of Human Nature*:

In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary ways of reasoning...makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given; for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.¹⁵⁰

This little blip on the ethical radar screen has caused quite a broad-reaching effect.

Culled from this paragraph, the notion that “one cannot derive an ought from an is,” or that one cannot derive a prescriptive statement from a descriptive one or any normative conclusions from purely factual premises, has often clipped the wings of those ontological theorists wishing to draw from their descriptions of human affairs or human being, ethico-political obligations or ramifications. Hume was correct to observe that it is in effect a category mistake to derive or deduce an ethical obligation from a description of specific state of affairs, however accurate that description might be. We would not, for example, want to assert that just because women are subordinate in most societies that they ought to be. However, his claim is that there is no *causal* connection or relation of *logical entailment* between any particular ontological description and any particular ethical principle. Since all knowledge, to Hume is based either on logic and definitions or experience and neither of these two methods locate a connection between ought and is statements, simply knowing how things, people, nature, et cetera are does not necessarily

¹⁵⁰ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book III: Of Morals, Part I: Of Virtue and Vice in General, Section I: Moral Distinctions Not Derived From Reason, 521.

entail an obligation to perform any specific action. In this narrow interpretation of the is-ought problem, I am in perfect agreement with Hume. But, as far as I am concerned, this exhausts the efficacy of his claim. While it may not be causal or logical, in the sense that once we have an adequately justified ontological picture that we can automatically deduce some deontological ought, it would be remiss to pretend as if one could do ethics without thinking about ontology at all. Thus taking a more macroscopic perspective, what I argue is that, though a particular ontological fact cannot in itself entail a particular ought, an entire ontological theory can impact the sorts of normative claims we can make.

What I am claiming here is that ethics and ontology are in an inextricable and dynamic and mutually emergent relation. In other words, ethical theorizing necessarily involves a set of ontological premises about, for example, persons, living beings, the world, the good, personal and bodily integrity, and so forth. How then can we hope to come up with a set of principles about what we ought or ought not do without first understanding those fundamental concepts? The claim I want to make is slightly more complex than this, however. Looking at the picture from the flip side, it seems equally correct to understand that one cannot do ontology without there being ethical ramifications. To set out foundational views about what there is cannot help but shape and redirect our ethico-political beliefs. This is not to say that, in re-envisioning ontology, any one ethics is prescribed; in fact, seeing ontology anew might point us in many directions, all equally viable. That, however, is the beauty of focusing on ontology—the ethical results of understanding what there is are unpredictable. Like Luce Irigaray, I believe we cannot have, in advance, a blueprint for what the future holds in this regard. The key is that, refiguring ontological schemas, while not prescribing, can

foreclose ethical possibilities. In other words, for example, if what this project holds as true ontologically obtains, that human being cannot be characterized in the classic register of an autonomous, independent, static, individual person, I claim that some versions of the ethico-political theory of liberalism would lose its grip. Without that ontological underpinning, forms of liberalism that depend on individuality and autonomy have little or no force. Such is the, perhaps backward, causal relation between ontology and ethico-politics. Doing ontology can delimit what sorts of ethico-political pictures are *not* tenable, but they cannot prescribe which theories we must hold.

Thus, as stated, the relation between ethico-politics and ontology is a dynamic one. Each is entangled in the web of the other, inextricably, but neither, in a true sense, is causally or logically prior. All each can exert over the other is the power to limit certain possibilities, not to produce them. And, as Elizabeth Grosz suggests in an interview,

Ontology is primary. Ontology always has both an ethical and a political dimension. It's not as if we have ontology and ethics, ontology and politics. Ontology is about what there is and what debts we owe to it. It always entails an ethics, a debt, obligation, responsibility. However, ontology does not have a moral dimension, it's not the order of imperative, ought, or law, only an ethical dimension of debt and obligation.¹⁵¹

We must not however be so cautious as to conclude that the facts are entirely irrelevant. For, it does not follow that facts have *no* bearing on values, only that they do not logically entail them. A final admonition: there is a tendency among scientific thinkers to hold that we can derive ethical and political explanations from the truths of science. This certainly resonates with the entailment side of the debate just canvassed. And, it should be said, that this is not what we are doing here. I center the rest of this project

¹⁵¹ "Interview with Elizabeth Grosz," Robert Ausch, Randal Doane, and Laura Perez in *Found Object*, Number Nine, Fall 2000.

around issues in science and technology, not to derive ethical claims from these ontological descriptions, but to provide a context in which we can see some limitations in the ethical and political arena. Again, this is more about showing the limits of certain ethical and political projects than constructing new ones based on ontological “evidence” be it scientific or otherwise.

C. Relation of *These Ontological Principles to Ethics*

The ontology of this project unravels into this dynamic relation between ethico-politics and ontology. Given what was just established, we can acknowledge that there is little need to be allergic to mobilizing ontological claims in ethico-political debate, despite the vestiges of the naturalistic fallacy looming when we do. While here is not the place to meticulously flesh this out, establishing this dynamism gives currency to some of the claims about the way in which motifs like autonomy, independence, bodily integrity, rights, responsibility, duty, dignity, personhood, the self, ought to be reconfigured in the face of this shift away from a moribund substantive ontology. What I suspect is that if we can establish a firm basis upon which a non-substance model seems to be at least an interesting, or more compelling and viable, way of depicting being and reality, many of the ethico-political themes prevalent today will have to be revised. Moreover, some stalwart ethical debates might be importantly refigured such that we can circumscribe longstanding impasses. Destabilizing the unsubstantiated and nefarious ontological essentialism and replacing it with an ontology that recognizes becoming, care (in the Heideggerian sense), being-in-the-world, ek-stasis, flux, multiplicity, non-identity, difference, unity of dissimilar or even sometimes contradictory forces, processes, events,

occurrences, interrelationships, hybridity, mutual emergences, and inextricable interdependencies has an undeniable impact on the way we construct our worldview and the conduct and duties we envision it to entail.

Now it is time to say something, because we have finally seen something—the *nothing*. Being is not a thing that can be quantified, measured, objectified, stabilized, or universalized. It is no longer possible in light of our reclamation project, our actualizing what was virtual, our locating and resurrecting those concepts that were always already drawn toward their future, to consider processes, events, occurrences, properties, flux, and becoming as a subordinate level of reality to that elusive holy grail of substance—they are not mere appearances, they *are* being. Suspicions have been high, and we have just witnessed the reason for this; there is a long and compelling counter-history always already present and waiting for its moment in the limelight. And, the consequences of this are intertwined with the decentering that centuries of science have initiated. Along with the collapse of the dichotomies of substance/object and internal/external we will presently turn to animal/human (the basis for civilization) and human/artifact. Together, the non-substance theorists and the scientists have provided the metaphysical and scientific antidote to the weapons of substance. And, having spotted the suspicious baggage, to unpacking the evidence, we now go.

PART 2—ZOONTOLOGY

**TRACES OF THE BEAST:
TRANSSPECIES CORPOREALITY AND TRANSHUMANITY**

Neo: I just haven't been able to sleep much.

Councilor Hamann: It's a good sign.

Neo: Of what?

Councilor Hamann: That you are, in fact, still human. Have you ever been to the engineering level? I love to walk there at night, it's quite amazing. Would you like to see it?

Neo: Sure.

Councilor Hamann: Almost no one comes down here, unless, of course, there's a problem. That's how it is with people—nobody cares how it works as long as it works. I like it down here. I like to be reminded this city survives because of these machines. These machines are keeping us alive, while other machines are coming to kill us. Interesting, isn't it? Power to give life, and the power to end it.

Neo: We have the same power.

Councilor Hamann: I suppose we do, but down here sometimes I think about all those people still plugged into the Matrix and when I look at these machines, I... I can't help thinking that in a way, we are plugged into them.

Neo: But we control these machines, they don't control us.

Councilor Hamann: Of course not, how could they? The idea's pure nonsense, but... it does make one wonder just... what is control?

Neo: If we wanted, we could shut these machines down.

Councilor Hamann: Of course... that's it. You hit it! That's control, isn't it? If we wanted, we could smash them to bits. Although if we did, we'd have to consider what would happen to our lights, our heat, our air.

Neo: So we need machines and they need us.¹⁵²

This scene, taken from the *Matrix: Reloaded*, the second in the *Matrix* trilogy, captures the underlying methodology of and provides the direction for what follows here in Part 2 and subsequently in Part 3. Though each of these two parts will be addressing a different subject matter, the methodology is the same. What will be demonstrated are the ways in which what we *are* is inextricably bound up with non-human animals and technology. In both cases, there is a myth of control and domination by humans over that which constitutes the Other, which is what, paradoxically, defines human *qua* human. Although I acknowledge that there are a plethora of other Others that could similarly be evoked for this ontological justification process, non-human animals and technology are

¹⁵² *Matrix: Reloaded*. Script viewed at: <<http://www.code-matrix.net/2-23.htm>> on April 20, 2004.

the others I opt to investigate in this project.¹⁵³ That myth of control and domination over others is, as stated, a large component of what is thought to define us—we are not beasts and we are not machines. It erects the boundaries of the very binaries that construct and define us *qua* human by distinguishing between subject/object, self/other, human/non-human, inside/outside. This matter as it pertains to technology will be examined and addressed in Part 3. But now, we will take on the interrelation between the human and non-human animal. Ultimately, this investigation will not only call into serious question our reliance on a substantive ontological picture of the human but also will achieve this by problematizing the distinction between the so-called human and non-human animal.

Let us return to the issue raised in *The Matrix* in order to unfold our map for the next two parts. As cited above, after reaffirming that Neo is in fact human, the Councilor and Neo venture down to the engineering level, or the technological control center of Zion (the city of the Real as opposed to the matrix world, which is effectively the Cartesian-like dream world or the world of illusions created by an evil genius—here intelligent machines). It is upon viewing the rather antiquated cogs and wheels puffing smoke on the engineering level that the Councilor pinpoints the essence of human-machine relations. The machines, and (presumably all) humans possess both the power to bestow and destroy life. It is slightly odd that they agree to what they both take to be a self-evident fact: that all humans have the power to give life. Need it be mentioned that this is commonly thought to be the domain of “women?” In any case, Neo would like to believe that there are good machines and bad ones; that appraisal is based on the extent to

¹⁵³ More nuanced arguments have been launched about human ontology as forged on the back of other Others constituted as such by virtue of gender, race, class, and sexual orientation norms, among others.

which humans (initially sharply distinguished from machines and technology in this scene) have control over, and can end the life of, machines. The Councilor interjects to remind Neo of the inextricably interdependent relation between humans and machines. While it is undoubtedly true that Neo could shut the machines down, the Councilor is correct to assert that doing so would be at the grave inevitability of self and species destruction. For, without the machines to produce and filter the air, provide heat, water, light, et cetera, there would be no (organic) life in Zion. As Neo had already been established as human, evidently he would be among the casualties should the machines stop their processes. What is not clear, however, is whether the machines could survive without their human counterparts. It would not be difficult to imagine that they could function long after human extinction until they finally broke down. This calls to mind the possibility that they possess a greater degree of autonomy than we do, or maybe even a higher degree of agency. After all, as the Councilor noted, humans tend not to venture down to the engineering level unless something goes wrong; they need not, as the machines do their work without human intervention.

This points to the intrinsic vulnerability at the core of our essence. On both a literal and metaphorical level, our necessary dependency relation with machines presents us with counterarguments to ontological autonomy. Herein, I will make a parallel argument about non-human animals. This, too, has the attendant effect of calling into question the validity of substance ontology. If we are not autonomous beings, with what then would the substance be identified? So, too, this bespeaks the fragmented and disunified network of processes and events, the environment that we are—following Buddhist thought and Heraclitus most notably.

A few background points should be delineated before embarking on this animalic justification. First, I am deliberately avoiding the use of the term ‘species.’ The reasons for this will become evident in Section III below when I discuss the ways in which the biological interminglings impact our notions of species and organism. Second, if one is attempting to collapse the human hegemony and its attendant human-animal distinction, it is indeed a challenge to locate language (specific terms) that, while precise, is not already embedded in the binary. For example, the terms “human,” “non-human animal,” and especially the simple, “animal,” are loaded and already contained within them is the presupposition of the distinction in question. In other words, using those terms in an unqualified manner will have the frustrating result of making any analysis that wishes to unhinge the binary internally contradictory. The same problem exists when terms like “organism” and “species” are employed. Aside from deploying neologisms, or providing extensive explanatory prologues before employing the terms we do have, there are no other options. Third, as Jacques Derrida and many others have remarked, using the term “animal” in the singular is extremely problematic and fraught with a human species chauvinism. In other words, the human-animal distinction, from which we generate the very concept of the human, is asymmetrical. “Animal” is a heterogeneous plurality, referring to a plethora of immeasurably diverse beings, whereas “human” is meant to refer to one specific species that somehow stands above and beyond all those incalculable others. Making use of the term “animal” thus serves to recodify an evolutionarily teleological human supremacy; it slyly defines a mythical norm against which all other beings are measured and deemed other. Derrida calls the term “animal,” “the single

feature of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity.”¹⁵⁴ He offers the neologism *animot* in an effort to circumvent this problem. In French, the plural of animal is *animaux*, and *animot* is its homophone. The latter is intended to marry the plural notion of animal with *mot*, or “word” in French. He argues that primarily, “it is a matter of taking into account a multiplicity of heterogeneous structures and limits,” since, “[a]mong non-humans...there is an immense multiplicity of other living things that cannot in any way be homogenized, except by means of violence and willful ignorance, within the category of what is called the animal or animality in general.”¹⁵⁵ This also evokes the sense in which reductions of this kind have a violent quality. This will be addressed in relation to scientific reductionism in Part 3. Secondly, foregrounding *mot* by adding it as a suffix, helps us to seize upon,

the thing *as such*, as what it is in its being, and therefore to the reference point by means of which one has always sought to draw the limit, the unique and indivisible limit held to separate man from animal, namely the word, the nominal language of the word...The animal would in the last instance be deprived of the word.

Derrida is not proposing that we “‘give speech back’ to animals,” just that we find a way to transcend that facile and limiting criterion of language when we think about being, both our own and that of animals. Although I do not opt to deploy Derrida’s neologism in what follows, I do incorporate his insights into the analysis. It should be noted that while, for the sake of ease and clarity, I will utilize terms like “human,” “animal,” “non-human animal,” “being(s),” “species,” and “organism,” it would benefit the reader to realize that I do so under the pretext that these terms are never totalizable and are always

¹⁵⁴ Jacques Derrida, “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow),” in *Animal Philosophy: Ethics and Identity*. Peter Atterton and Matthew Calarco, eds. (London: Continuum, 2004), 125.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 125-6.

already sites of contestation. In Section VII of this part, I tackle the issue of language proper in more detail.

I. Mapping the Territory: What is at/on the Stake?

The four errors.—Man has been educated by his errors. First he always saw himself only incompletely; second, he endowed himself with fictitious attributes; third, he placed himself in false order of rank in relation to animals...If we removed the effects of these four errors, we should also remove humanity, humaneness, and ‘human dignity.’¹⁵⁶

The idea of man in European history is expressed in the way in which he is distinguished from the animal. Animal irrationality is adduced as proof of human dignity.¹⁵⁷

Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?¹⁵⁸

There is a near consensus among these theorists that what we have taken as given for so long, our status as human, has been a relatively modern construction that relies on a clear distinction from what is deemed to be animal. Although Darwin made strides in undermining Promethean and Enlightenment humanistic values by unhinging the door hastily erected between man and beast/nature, the view of the autonomous human subject, sharply contrasted to animality, has continued to hold sway up to the present. Moreover, Elizabeth Grosz argues that Darwin, “introduced the concept of the *event* to the sciences.”¹⁵⁹ He did this by infusing scientific prediction with the element of

¹⁵⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Walter Kaufmann, trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 115.

¹⁵⁷ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. John Cumming, trans. (New York: Continuum, 1972), 245.

¹⁵⁸ Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 179.

¹⁵⁹ Grosz, *The Nick of Time*, 8.

unpredictability, randomness, mutation, novel blendings, and chance occurrence. The concept of the event is central to the ontological understanding being fleshed out here and an often-overlooked feature of his theory. As Haraway's question above infers, we need to query why we continue to cling to these fictions of purity, organism, species, autonomy, corporeal integrity, and unity all implied by the notion of being bounded by the skin. To avoid the humanistic misstep generated by the Enlightenment and the science of the modern period, we need to interrogate more carefully what makes something a human being or, even more fundamentally, a species or an organism. Further, we need to determine what is at stake in establishing and policing these taxonomic boundaries between humans and other organisms. As we have just seen in Part 1, many have pointed to some sort of invariant essence to justify various classification systems. Today, for example, it is not uncommon to think of that essence as originating from genetic sources. This amounts to another form of substance metaphysics. To circumvent some of these matters, we need to start this investigation on another foot, one that takes seriously the notion of event, force, process, interdependency, and hybridity in relation to our understanding of "organisms," "species," "human," and "animal."

The aim here is to reformulate Haraway's question, to describe, "the cobbled-together, mixed-up history of living beings," including their, "long history of genetic exchange."¹⁶⁰ Rather than regarding nature and non-human organisms as barometers against which we measure and demarcate the human, this refiguration will recognize the skin as a site of encounter with "nature" and what we presently call "other species." The

¹⁶⁰ Haraway 1997:61, cited in Myra J. Hird, *Something in the Water? New Materialism and the Australian Challenge to Feminist Sociology*. (unpublished manuscript)

skin serves as a permeable portal through which various beings form the temporary coagulations, alliances, and assemblages that crystallize the historical idea of the human into an organismic *event* out of emergent properties. Thus, following Nietzsche's call to action, we must forgo, "[t]his worthy verbal pomp...[that] belongs among the ancient false finery, lumber and gold-dust of unconscious human vanity...under such flattering colors and varnish too the terrible basic text *homo natura* must again be discerned...[in order to] translate man back into nature."¹⁶¹

It is precisely the moment that "animal" came to be seen as other to man that Foucault indicates when he asserts that man as an epistemological entity, as a species, came into being. Humanity then became the subject in contrast to the animal object. In fact, humanity was only a subject insofar as it had the constructions "animal" or "nature" against which to contrast itself. But, as Nietzsche forewarned, this was the great error of the arrogant modern man. In consigning animality to the margins of ontology, those marking the boundaries of humanity, the Enlightenment project in effect gave birth to the human as "not-animal." Although traces of this view can be found as far back as the ancient Greek philosophers, in earlier periods, animals took part in the constitution of human ontology and, as we know, Darwinian evolution later confirmed that intuition. Thus, by sharply distinguishing between humans and animals and relying on that very distinction for human ontological subjectivity to be constituted, humanity loses a great deal of its original understanding of its being. The main claim that will be argued here is that the reality of human ontology, especially as understood through contemporary biology, flies in the face of that move to elide (our) animality. Human being is

¹⁶¹ Nietzsche cited in Eric Blondel, *Nietzsche: The Body as Culture*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), 45.

inextricably enmeshed and vitally interdependent with animality such that taking account of it has the paradoxical consequence of decentering or even *dehumanizing* the human. This deterritorialized, *dehumanized*, picture of human being has often been rendered as the transhuman or post-human¹⁶²; depending on the theorist, these transhuman subjectivities take widely variant shapes. I opt for the former terminology, transhuman, for the reason that it has less of an implication of being the next evolutionary stage or hierarchically up the ladder. It has a sense of being across, between, or outside rather than beyond; it is on the same horizontal plane, rather than vertically aligned. It also gels with much of the gender theory around transgender identities, which I also see as ultimately related to this project.

Ontologically, what will emerge out of this analysis is a new kind of totality, not one cast in the well-trodden “whole is more than the sum of its parts” paradigm of transcendent unity. For, “if we discover...a totality alongside [these] various parts, it is a whole *of* these particular parts but does not totalize them; it is a unity but does not unify them; rather it is added to them as a new part fabricated separately.”¹⁶³ The investigation here, thus, will not be undertaken with the goal of naming and describing a being, organism, entity, totality, or unity; the focus of analysis will shift to those various parts and their interrelations, to transspecies, transhuman machinic assemblages built on co-constituted, mutually emergent, and essentially interdependent beings.

¹⁶² There are many linguistic techniques to describe what is meant by going beyond the human. Some examples include: post-human, anti-human, meta-human, trans-human, overman, superman, and Übermensch. For sake of clarity and consistency of argument, I will opt to use transhuman throughout except perhaps in specific references to Nietzsche’s texts.

¹⁶³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, trans. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 42. Quoted in Manuel DeLanda, *1000 Years of Non-Linear History*, (Boston: Zone Books, 2000), 271.

What is at stake here is not simply a neutral scientific commitment to or repudiation of a certain taxonomical system or evolutionary origin story. Drawing these boundaries and policing these distinctions has important political, social, and ethical ramifications. These classifications often justify systems of domination and oppression, they support blatant injustice, mistreatment, and violence, they allow for the perpetuation of nefarious and dangerous stereotypes, and, fundamentally, uphold hegemonic social, economic, and political structures. Thus, the collapse of these categories can easily be read as threatening and risky to those desiring to maintain hegemonic agendas.

Decentering the human, and thereby its privileged claims to reason (which, along with language, is said to distinguish the human from animals), moreover through those very rational scientific and technological projects and findings of the West, has the consequence of answering some of the charges levied against the West since the Enlightenment. In the post-Enlightenment West, the scientific and technological rationality has achieved an almost total primacy. With this, others, especially post-colonial subjects, have been moved to question the degree to which this supremacy of the culture, science, socio-political organization, and hypertrophic rationality of the West is valid and not merely a smokescreen for hegemonic world domination by the first world Western Empire. These sorts of concerns emerge when we begin to dethrone the stable, rational, autonomous, substantive human being. And, that is precisely my intention in these next two parts of this project.

While this will be spelled out in detail later, a brief preview will help to contextualize the present discussion. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno asserted that the entirety of Western humanist culture, “depends on the exclusion of animals, and that

its historical progression culminates logically in the justification of mass murder,”¹⁶⁴ their more specific claim that, “The National Socialist state...excused the elimination of Jews from the ‘German’ populace by transforming them first into nonhuman or animal others, ‘to the condition of a species.’”¹⁶⁵ Based on being placed into the broad categories of “wild” and “tamed” and then hierarchically ranked by the nazis according to those categories, animals and humans were regarded as possessing or not possessing moral weight. Thus, the “blonde beast,”¹⁶⁶ deemed a member of the wild class, took up the apex of organismic superiority, “along with wild animals and beasts of prey,” while “Jews, stereotyped as overly domesticated and sophisticated, were classed as inferior, tamed...along with pigs, cattle, and dogs.”¹⁶⁷ This particular system ordering the earth’s creatures allowed for seemingly paradoxical behavior on the part of Hitler and his cohorts who, “gladly murdered millions of human beings while condemning the hunting of hares and deer and adhering to a strictly vegetarian diet.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Akira Mizuta Lippit, *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press, 2000), 10.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁶⁶ On some reads of Nietzsche’s the “Blonde Beast” is thought to be the epitome of the *übermensch* (often translated overman or superman). I tend to think of Nietzsche’s *übermensch* as another instance of the transhuman rather than the nazi misinterpretation, which manifestly spoke to a evolutionarily teleological, Aryan, white supremacy (that I hold is both a misrepresentation and a misread of Nietzsche’s intention). For more on interpretations of the “Blonde Beast” see: Gerd Shank. “Nietzsche’s ‘Blonde Beast’: On the Recuperation of a Nietzschean Metaphor,” in *A Nietzschean Bestiary: Becoming Animal Beyond Docile and Brutal*, Christa Davis Acampora and Ralph R. Acampora, eds. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), 140-55.

¹⁶⁷ Lynda Birke and Ruth Hubbard, *Reinventing Biology: Respect for Life and the Creation of Knowledge* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 190.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Another telling example, hails from Michel Foucault's analysis of the construction of the concept of both madness and animality up to the modern period.¹⁶⁹ What he exposes describes human/animal relations in an equally nefarious register. Foucault located an historical genesis, as he is wont to do in the case of various subjectivities, of man. He claimed that, "(b)efore the end of the 18th century, man did not exist...He is a quite recent creature, which the demiurge of knowledge fabricated with his own hands less than two hundred years ago...there was no epistemological consciousness of man as such."¹⁷⁰ He is not denying that there were humans, or more specifically, men, before the 18th century. Rather, he is advancing his theory that the species man *qua* man, as an epistemological and scientific category, perhaps in contrast to other animals, was bred at that time. Nietzsche too, endeavored to resist a metaphysical characterization of the subject and instead draw the subject out from its genealogical roots. Like Nietzsche, Foucault, "focused on critical analyses of the conditions of emergence and decent" rather than valorizing "origins."¹⁷¹ This historically rooted becoming of the self allowed for the sort of flux, change, and impermanence Nietzsche underscored in contrast to the modern unsituated Cartesian paradigm.

Both Nietzsche and Foucault aimed their genealogies of the subject at the body. In Foucault's case, he took flight from Nietzsche by pointing his lens at the relationships of power. Power as it is figured in Nietzsche, as the life force in his formation will to power, was rhizomatically implanted in Foucault, deterritorialized, and rematerialized, so

¹⁶⁹ see Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Richard Howard, trans. (New York, Vintage Books, 1965).

¹⁷⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, A translation of *Les Mots et les choses*. R.D. Laing, ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 308.

¹⁷¹ Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche's French Legacy: A Genealogy of Poststructuralism*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 47.

as to spur an entirely new line of flight. Foucault's power was immanent to all relations but, "(c)ontrary to the 'repressive hypothesis' which functions as one of the privileged myths of modernity, Foucault claims that power relations are not pre-eminently repressive."¹⁷² Power has its freeing functions as well. The subject, he argued, is the self as it is constructed by power imposed on the body through the affects of social discursive practices. Like Nietzsche before him, the self is drawn as a materialized, located, historicized, practice, not a subject in the traditional Cartesian sense. Foucault distinguished four kinds of affects or, "four kinds of technologies: production, signification, domination, self," each essential for the "'genealogy of subject' to 'take into account.'"¹⁷³ These formed the backbone of his analytic of power and his rubric of the constructed self. This regime of power, dubbed biopower, is entirely directed at classifying, coding, and disciplining bodies. He employs the concept, "to refer to the practices of administration, therapeutics, and surveillance of bodies that discursively constitute, increase, and manage the forces of living organisms."¹⁷⁴ Biopower, according to Foucault, has become the primary disciplinary and regulatory instrument of our institutions; it intends to homogenize and control people and bodies through institutionalized discourses developed to classify identities as either normal or pathological and deviant. In the service of biopower, "(t)he individual is constituted as a describable, analyzable object through a set of procedures for identification, codification, narration, and induction."¹⁷⁵ Institutions are then erected to attend to this business of describing and analyzing these newly "discovered" pathologies. As a result of the efforts

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁷⁴ Haraway, *Modest_Witness*, 11.

¹⁷⁵ Alphonso Lingis, *Foreign Bodies*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 59.

of these technologies of signification, which steadfastly monitor and discipline bodies through and by these regulatory regimes and institutions, the normal subject is produced. But it does not emerge alone; determinations of the abnormal emerge simultaneously with the establishment, naming, and classification of the normal. In other words, while this practice is intended to root out the pathological deviants at the moment they are classified, this discursive power has the inadvertent consequence of creating and multiplying them. Biopower thus has the effect of creating identities, truths, possibilities, and constructing tropes of the normal while it identifies, formulates, organizes, and then seeks to suppress the multiple abnormalities or deviances that are concomitantly spawned.

The modeling of animality and the practice of mapping the animal onto select human bodies follows the same logic of biopower just described. The concept animal, like that of man, was produced through the same discourses of power, regulatory regimes, and institutions that sought to insure that rationality would continue to be upheld as the *sine qua non* of human being. The moment this rationality is called into question the human body becomes dispossessed of its humanity as such. This descriptive overlay of human-animal relations with reason has important normative consequences, as we will now observe. Foucault begins the origin story of animal-human relations in the Middle Ages, and with reference to the Christian bible that describes Adam (the Christian origin story's first man) naming the legions of animals.¹⁷⁶ As witnessed above, naming and classifying practices are never neutral. Rather, taxonomizing and classifying tends to reveal the force of control and domination, a "capturing" in human language. Almost

¹⁷⁶ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 21.

ironically, language is that which commonly represents the sharp dividing line between human and animal. Language, it can be said, has this crucial and vital status at least in part because of the presupposition of reason it denotes. Thus, this act of naming and classifying can be, “interpreted as the establishment of a human power relation over animals,”¹⁷⁷ grounded on the premise that reason and language should be elevated to a nearly sacred status.

Foucault continues his tale by contrasting the dogma of the Middle Ages to that of the early Renaissance during which, “the beast was set free.”¹⁷⁸ Though, this freedom should be immediately qualified. While animals are now thought to be free of human control, it is only because they have become threatening, undomesticatable, wild beasts who have the potential to stalk humans as prey. Madness in the Renaissance, he offered, “now leads the joyous throng of human weaknesses.”¹⁷⁹ Freeing the beast in turn captured the wild madman, who, in the Modern Period was then blamed for his madness—adding an ethical dimension of blame and responsibility into the mix. Madness in the seventeenth century, the period of “Great Confinement” to Foucault, implies a choice by the mad to willingly forego reason. For, how can one be blamed if they had no choice? This is, of course, internally paradoxical, since blame for such a choice could only be assigned to a being evaluated to be *rationally* opting to relinquish reason. Still, assessing it as an immoral choice for the irrational animal mode of being in favor of the ideal rational human mode both pits madness alongside the other Others in

¹⁷⁷ Clare Palmer, “Madness and Animality in Michel Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization*,” in *Animal Philosophy: Ethics and Identity*. Peter Atterton and Matthew Calarco, eds. (London: Continuum, 2004), 76.

¹⁷⁸ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 21.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

need of correction and control and justifies the resulting confinement and social exile. Thus, it is the Modern Period, and the move to classifying madness as mental illness, that ushers in the most strikingly bankrupt and egregiously dichotomized picture of human - animal relations. This should come as little surprise given the primacy of the mechanistic characterization of animality championed by Descartes and others during this epoch. “The madness that rages in man dispossesses man of what is specifically human in him,”¹⁸⁰ his essence as *res cogitans*, a rational thinking thing. What remains, *res extensa*, brings, “man in immediate relation to his animality.”¹⁸¹ Foucault additionally echoes Cartesian logic in observing that, “[m]adness had become a thing to look at: no longer a monster inside oneself, but an animal with strange mechanisms, a bestiality from which man had long since been suppressed.”¹⁸² It is man devoid of reason, and thus the ability to use the language dependant on it, that the madman has become. In other words, the madman is a mechanistically construed, corporeal animality. And this permits, according to the Cartesian account presented in Part 1, mistreatment at the corporeal level. After all, animals in his view, are invulnerable to suffering and must be disciplined, controlled, and dominated.

To unlock the full scope and impact of this move to mental illness, we are beckoned to the passages in *Madness and Civilization* that vividly evoke the historically-entrenched relationship between madness and animality. He notes that, “[t]he model of animality prevailed in the asylums and gave them their cagelike aspect, their look of the menagerie. At the hospital of Nantes, the menagerie appears to consist of individual

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 70.

cages for wild beasts.”¹⁸³ It was indeed the deeply entrenched belief that people deemed “mentally ill” were more like animals than humans that justified centuries of inexcusably violent mistreatment and appalling injustices. Moreover, the animal becomes a stand-in for wildness, beasts needing to be tamed through violent and unconscionable discipline, force, and punishment; in the case of those deemed “insane” Foucault describes torturous practices of confinement, beatings, being chained and caged, starved, left naked and exposed to severe temperatures, even placed on view to the public as specimens. It was indeed the perceived wild untamable animality of madness, the mechanistic Cartesian underpinnings of that construction of animality, and the normative assessment of immorality (the intentional renunciation of reason) that seem to stand as sufficient criteria to legitimate these atrocious practices. Clearly, if understood as domesticated or domesticatable, these “animals” would warrant very different treatment. Momentarily accepting the charge of animality, there is thus at least one viable alternative sense in which the West could have narrated the conception of animality differently: as a *domestic* animality, which would be only a short flight away from rationality such that the person could be seen as remaining in dialogue with reason. Likewise, it would not be considered a complete divestiture of humanity, rather it would resemble Nietzschean herd animals—just following orders blindly. It is interesting that the depiction of animality in the case of the mad is so biased toward the wild and away from the docile. It is almost as if the notion of animality deployed is some chimerical beast constituted of all the ferocious and threatening elements of a heterogeneous mix of animal species without any of the benefits of the “higher faculties” or calming and gentle aspects of these animals.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 72-3.

This seems to beg the question, implying a predisposition toward a disapproving normative evaluation of the mad (*qua* animal) founded on a definition of animality constructed deliberately to support it.

This logic rings true in the case of many dehumanizing practices of othering. Without eviscerating traces of the human from the individual, none of these practices could be justified. Recall the ways women, “the native,” “the Jew,” “the negro,” “the poor,” and “the pervert” have been configured in the history of Western thought. All have, to some degree or another, been likened to animals or thought to have a predominant animality and reduced humanity. The deterritorialization of humanity here serves an oppressive function as it is performed through metaphor and analogy, not through metamorphosis. Configured in this way, the figuration of “becoming-animal” as the dispossession of reason inextricably associated with madness (at least in western intellectual history) does not provide openings to novel subjectivities the way we will see the Deleuzo-Guattarian theory transfigure it through the model of the schizophrenic subject. It merely permitted absolution for the crimes against humanity committed by those who control the institutions and disciplinary regimes of power. To this end, Foucault claims, we can never escape the discursive-productive power immanent to all relations, all we can hope to do is reconfigure the dynamic of it in such that we maintain the lowest quotient of hegemonic domination. By metamorphosizing and reterritorializing the human through the analysis of so many dehumanized, animalized, others throughout his work (the prisoner, the medical patient, the homosexual, the mad) Foucault points us toward the line of flight that could result in a novel transhuman ontology. Wisely he remarked that, “madness did not disclose a mechanism, but revealed

a liberty raging in the monstrous forms of animality.”¹⁸⁴ This line of flight is well Nietzschean, aimed toward transcending the epistemological man, the rational animal, through a transfiguration of human-animal relations and those subject positions the relation underscores. It, indeed, endeavors to undermine the anthropocentric, ahistorical, privileged positionality held by the human. Foucault echoes, or rather changes the scale of, the project started by his intellectual mentor Nietzsche who, in a parallel move, dethroned the absolute position of God and transcendent God-human relations. In doing so, Nietzsche provided us with a menagerie of animal references to help us transfigure humanity. Foucault, thus, put his finger on the pulse of embodied human-animal relations in this transformative sense. He understands that we need to become aware of and strive to remove the element of domination that figures in this schema of animality in the face of the questions posed by madness. And, in reflecting on Nietzsche, Foucault concludes that, “by the madness which interrupts it, a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself.”¹⁸⁵ Nietzsche, so fond of unpacking human-animal relations, deemed mad, but leaving a legacy of brilliant philosophical stem cells, represents the very sort of corporeal and theoretical engagement with animality and madness we need to recapture in order to transcend the reductive humanism and reach for the *übermensch*/transhuman.

What this demonstrates is the way in which classing, ordering, demarcating, and ranking is far from a neutral enterprise. The agenda in the nazi case may not have been well masked, and there may not even be a preconceived agenda in other cases, but the

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 288.

critical task is to unpack how, once in place, these taxonomic economies bear upon the ways we construct our worldviews and what the consequences of maintaining them is. The Foucault example demonstrates that what gets counted as animal and human, and how these identities are figured and refigured, bears grave consequences—to bodies, to humans, to animals. So, too, we come to realize, as David Harvey summarized, “the extent to which the body itself is a site of contestation for the forces that create it...open and porous to the world.”¹⁸⁶ From this, we can come to transfigure human ontology such that it is, as Harvey championed, “grounded in an understanding of real spatio-temporal relations between material practices, representations, imaginaries [even scientific and technological], institutions, social relations, and the prevailing structures of political economic power...and viewed as a nexus through which the possibilities for emancipatory politics can be approached.”¹⁸⁷ This grounding is exactly the project in which we are engaged here. Unpacking, in particular the scientific imaginary and its representations, provides deeper insight into the level to which human embodied being is relational and porous, the site of exchange with the environment (broadly construed), a collection of disparate and disunified processes, rather than a unified, bounded, airtight, enduring, and stable substance. It is this aim of ontological theorizing and transfiguration that the present discussion of human-animal blendings and relations continues.

I will henceforth describe this historical transspecies corporeality from the biological perspective. This description will be performed in the register of materiality. At first blush, this project might appear to be planting itself on the material side of the

¹⁸⁶ David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 130.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

idealist-materialist split. And, in a certain sense, insofar as it leans toward a materialist picture, it is. However, this materiality is not of the sort of static, mechanistic, physicalist materialism endorsed by unreformed evolutionary biologists, biochemists, and biopsychologists. That type of materialism rests heavily on maintaining the sharp binary split between mind and body and likewise depicts body (and self) as untheorized matter of some mechanistic or quantitative type. It also views the organism as a single entity rooted in an autonomous notion of identity, rather than a contingent multiplicity or temporary agglomeration. The issue is that the traditional materialist-idealist split relies both on the presupposition that there is a distinction to be made between the mind and the body and that we subscribe to such dualistic thinking. If one does not accept that premise or dualism in general, the very notion of materialism can be reconceptualized. It is from that reconceptualization that we will now proceed.

In what follows, I develop the notion of the body, of human ontology, as interdependent with non-human animals. I do so from two different angles. First, I lay out the biological understanding of human bodies as always already integrated in an inextricable way with non-human species, without which we could not survive. The biological analysis here digs a step deeper to reveal that, in fact, the very notion that the human as an organism (or species), in the traditional sense of being autonomous, unfragmented, pure, and independent, is a misrepresentation. Second, following, Donna Haraway, I show the ways in which we are always already co-constituted as subjects by other beings. To this I add Deleuze and Guattari's insights that transport Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Haraway one step further. I explain the reasons for why we must also explicitly engage in continuing to project ourselves out toward otherness and the world in

order to be fully human, including undergoing a radical restructuring of our understanding of our nature through their concepts of *becoming-animal* and the *Body without Organs (BwO)*. This radical restructuring includes the shift from the body as a static, whole being to the body as a multiple becoming in flux. In order to ascertain the full breadth of this interdependence, it must be shown that this integration occurs “bi-directionally,”¹⁸⁸ taking the metaphoric (but porous/leaky) boundary of the skin as the point of origin. In other words, tracing one vector inward, looking beneath the skin by peeling back the layers, reveals the extent to which humans are always already integrated with non-human beings in inextricable and essential ways. Projecting outward from that same origin will demonstrate the interdependency inherent in living in the world. This bi-directional approach is intended to expose human ontology as lacking claims to autonomy, independence, and bodily integrity often associated with substance ontology and touted by many political and ethical theories. It also points toward the characterization of human ontology as a transhumanity as perhaps more compelling and viable than a human being cloaked in the trappings of Enlightenment and Promethean Humanism.

According to the above sketch, it is clear that there is much at stake in this analysis. And, further, that it is our very humanity as such that is *on* the stake, waiting for the fire to be ignited. Thus, after having attended to the biological underpinning in the above analysis, the conclusory remarks of this part will investigate the aftermath of the dethroning of the human. In its stead, the concept of the transhuman will be installed.

¹⁸⁸ While I employ the term “bi-directional” here, this is meant to be understood as a contested term. For, if what is shown in this project is compelling, the inside-outside/internal-external dichotomy collapses.

The thought here is that having this new paradigm in hand, one that gels with the recent scientific and technological insights, we can create new lines of flight and both construct more productive ontological analyses and ethico-political theories. It is within the conclusion of this section that I return to the issue of language.

II. Biological Traces of the Beast “Inside”

Turning to the issue of the human as it is now known to be biologically configured, we should start with an explicit recognition of the ways in which humans actually exist materially. As Alphonso Lingis reminds us:

human animals live in symbiosis with thousands of anaerobic bacteria—six hundred species in our mouths, which neutralize the toxins all plants produce to ward off their enemies, four hundred species in our intestines, without which we could not digest and absorb the food we ingest. Some synthesize vitamins; others produce polysaccharides or sugars our bodies need. The number of microbes that colonize our bodies exceeds the number of cells in our bodies by up to a hundredfold. Macrophages in our bloodstreams hunt and devour trillions of bacteria and viruses entering our porous bodies continually. They replicate with their own DNA and RNA and not ours; they are the agents that maintain our borders.¹⁸⁹

The human body is not only dependent on animal life, as mentioned, but similarly incorporates flora and fauna in the form of fungi, viruses, and the like. Given the networks and communities of bacterial, microbial, molecular, and inorganic life that exist beneath the surface of our skin, and the biological reality that without the constant dynamic interaction between human bodies and the multiple autonomous bodies of these other living organisms human bodies would not survive, the economy of the independent, unitary, fixed, stable, whole body becomes mere rhetorical scientific fancy. Even the

¹⁸⁹ Alphonso Lingis cited in Alan Schrift, ed, *Why Nietzsche Still?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 167.

classification animal becomes suspect. In fact, to push this chimerically hybrid view one step further, being completely autonomous and self-sufficient of these interspecies relations would be to the detriment of human existence; this parallels the argument made by the Councilor in *The Matrix*. Genetic researcher Pierre Sonigo supplies additional ammunition for this argument. He holds that the question of individuality amounts to a question of perspective. Moreover, repositioning our point of view actually generates a vision of the body that speaks more to some form of process ontology than a substantive one. So, too, there is a collapse of the internal/external boundary and a revised picture of human ontology as an ecology, economy, or a society in which individual members pursue their own interests and fail to act systematically toward the betterment of the whole. In sum, this biological analysis offers the backbone to any ontological theory arguing for human being as an assemblage of processes, events, occurrences, forces, et cetera.

pour une fonction aussi biologique que la reproduction, nous sommes qu'un demi animal. Et encore moins pour une fonction aussi vitale que la nutrition, qui requiert la photosynthèse végétale, source première des glucides que nous consommons, et la biochimie des innombrables bactéries qui occupent notre tube digestif. Notre autonomie individuelle est donc bien subjective. Les notions de groupe, d'intérieur et d'extérieur, ou même d'altruisme, sont relatives au point de vue de l'observateur. Un observateur humain considère avant tout son individu et son "milieu intérieur." Quant aux cellules, elles verraient ce milieu intérieur comme extérieur, et le reste du corps comme leur environnement ou leur société. Pourquoi notre point de vue serait-il plus valide que celui de nos cellules?

Si nous considérons nos cellules comme des animaux à part entière et non comme des pièces détachées au service d'un tout, le corps...devient une société dont chaque élément cherche à assurer...sa propre survie. En écologie ou en économie, l'objectif des acteurs individuels n'est pas de construire l'équilibre générale d'un système dont ils ne possèdent ni vision ni compréhension globale.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Pierre Sonigo, "Le Robot et la Forêt," in *La Recherche Hors Série*, no. 12, Juillet-Septembre 2003, 8.

My translation: Regarding a function as biological as reproduction, we are only half-animal. And we are even less human with regard to a function as vital as nutrition, which requires

In other words, individual cells and, further, the other organisms that constitute the human body, fail to organize their activities around a common genetic program in which collective interests would trump individual ones. Of course, frequently, the collective interests may actually ensure individual survival. In which case, the interests may accidentally coincide. But if those interests were contradictory, it is not at all clear that the individuals would act “altruistically” in the service of the whole, especially if that would eventuate the demise of that individual. From this, we can gather that the idea of a global structure, a self, a unified, stable, ontological subject, only emerges from the theoretical extrapolation of simultaneous, local, individual interactions. There is abundant similar biological evidence for these claims throughout the literature of contemporary biology. Important discussions of immunology, and especially of autoimmune deficiencies, for instance, problematize the very notions of subject and object, normal and pathological, internal and external, and self and other. For, if a “body” attacks “itself” as a “foreign body” and we interrogate that process under this revised perspective of the organism as an event or environment, the dichotomous self/other relation buttressing the concept of a whole, stable, fixed self becomes unintelligible.

vegetable photosynthesis, a primary source of the glucides we consume, and the biochemistry of innumerable bacteria that occupy our digestive tube. Our individual autonomy is thus very subjective. Notions of group, interior and exterior, or even altruism, are relative to the point of view of the observer. A human observer holds above all his individuality and his “internal milieu.” According to the cells, they see their interior milieu as exterior and the rest of the body as their environment or society. Why should our point of view be more valid than that of our cells?

If we consider our cells as individual animals and not as detached pieces in the service of a whole, the body...becomes a society in which each element seeks to assure...its own survival. It is an ecology or an economy, in which the objective of the individual actors is not to construct the general equilibrium of a system about which they do not possess a global vision or understanding.

Physician and philosopher, George Canguilhem, recognizes this perspective-dependent view in his analysis of the normal and the pathological. Uninterested in debunking the concept of the normal physiological state for human bodies, rather focusing on the philosophical, he purports that, “the pathological state can be called normal to the extent that it expresses a relationship to life’s normativity.”¹⁹¹ These pathological states, he asserts, are simply different norms. As Dorian Sagan puts it, “disturbances of the body’s normal microbial ecology do not, properly speaking, signal sickness so much as the emergence of difference and novelty.”¹⁹² This is exactly what I was referring to in Part 1 when I critiqued Aristotle’s teleological program for forestalling the possibility of new actualized beings. The pathological can also be construed as a norm relative to, for instance, the bacteria thought to be “infecting” a human body. In fact, one might even say that it is a state of flourishing for these creatures. Canguilhem concludes from this observation of the perspective, or what he earlier called dynamic, theory, that rather than erecting a biological science attendant to the “normal,” biologists ought to conceptually refigure their thought around the notion of “biological situations *called* normal.”¹⁹³ According to Canguilhem, this dynamic biological theory of the organism references Hellenistic medical practices, which held that, “[n]ature (*physis*), within man as well as without, is harmony and equilibrium. The disturbance of this harmony, of this equilibrium, is called disease. In this case, disease is

¹⁹¹ Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological*, Carolyn R. Fawcett, trans. (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 227.

¹⁹² Dorian Sagan. “Metametazoa: Biology and Multiplicity,” in *Incorporations*, Jonathan Crary and Stanford Kwinter, eds. (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 369.

¹⁹³ Canguilhem. *The Normal and the Pathological*, 228.

not somewhere in man, it is everywhere in him; it is the whole man.”¹⁹⁴ Interestingly, he ratchets this up a notch. He does not hold that disease is, “simply disequilibrium or discordance; it is, and perhaps most important, an effort on the part of nature to effect a new equilibrium.”¹⁹⁵ This gels with the more process-oriented ontology being advocated here in that if we are bundles of processes, events, and forces, normal and pathological states would be better construed as relative to a particular point of view. Recall, too, that one of the main contentions with teleological ontology was that it lacked the explanatory potential to account for novel mutations insofar as fully formed beings were only deemed such if they actualized what was thought to be potential within them. Under this dynamic theory, not only can we now consider that novel interactions of forces and processes are fully actualized other beings but also theories like Darwinian evolution, which rely on these very mutations to motor speciation, gain new credence.

What emerges from this analysis is what Myra Hird makes crystal clear¹⁹⁶:

that only by taking our skin as a definitive impenetrable boundary are we able to see our bodies as discrete selves because, our human bodies, like those of other animals and plants, ‘is not one self but a fiction of self built from a mass of interacting selves. A body’s capacities are literally the result of what it incorporates; the self is not only corporeal but corporate.’ The cells in our bodies engage in constant, energetic reproduction...Indeed, the millions of microbes which exist on, and in, our bodies makes our traditional definition of ourselves as single organisms highly problematic.¹⁹⁷

From this we become aware of the way in which the skin is more like a border/frontier,

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ See also, Jami Weinstein, “Traces of the Beast: Becoming Nietzsche, Becoming Animal, and the Figure of the Transhuman,” in *A Nietzschean Bestiary: Becoming Animal Beyond Docile and Brutal*, Christa Davis Acampora and Ralph R. Acampora, eds. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), 308.

¹⁹⁷ Myra Hird, “Re(pro)ducing Sexual Difference,” (in press, *Parallax*), 8, citing Dorian Sagan. “Metametazoa: Biology and Multiplicity,” in *Incorporations*, Jonathan Crary and Stanford Kwinter, eds. (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 370.

with all the politics that that entails, and the extent to which it is ill-demarcated as a fixed, heavily-guarded boundary. In the acknowledgement of the skin as porous and leaky, symbiosis and transspecies interdependence emerge as the reality of human being so much so that an innumerable range of non-human animals can not be deemed properly other. In other words, the notion of individuality becomes complicated and the issue of physical and ontological autonomy, predicated on bodily integrity, must be revised to account for the actual lived reality of human beings—what it means to be a material self is clearly permeable and in flux.

This theory extends to the realm of non-human animals in a way that can offer us additional insight into questions of autonomy, identity, unity, and bodily integrity, especially when we begin to acknowledge the extent to which we are always already multiple and chimerical. Donna Haraway, who furnishes an archetypical non-human example, calls this the problem of, ‘the one and many.’¹⁹⁸ Her case of the *Mixotricha paradoxa* both justifies and poses some intriguing questions for how to approach this ontological paradigm shift. This almost insignificantly miniscule single-celled organism, which inhabits the hindgut of the South American termite, actually has a great deal of significance with respect to ontological issues around being. The population of microbes in the hindgut of the termite aid in the digestion of wood, the termites’ primary source of nutrition. Evidently, it takes a village. As in the case of the *Matrix* machines, without this village of hardworking creatures the termite would cease to exist. Thus, this “individual” *M. paradoxa* microbe, while only possessing a single nucleated cell, is better

¹⁹⁸ Donna Haraway, “More Than a Metaphor,” in *Feminist Science Studies*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 82. (Thanks to Myra Hird for calling this to my attention. She discusses this in her unpublished manuscript “Something in the Water? New Materialism and the Australian Challenge to Feminist Sociology.”)

described as a consortium of five distinguishable types of microbes, each with its own genome. The possession of a nucleated cell is the standard criteria for defining organismic identity. Yet, if we wish to consider *M. paradoxa* and individual being, which most scientists seem to agree it is, identity begins to look more like a process and a multiplicity than a singular object or substance. Like Haraway, we must wonder whether it, “is one or six? We can see why calling it one might be an oversimplification but six does not seem quite right either because there are about a million of the five non-nucleated entities for every one nucleated cell. There are multiple copies. So when does one decide to become two? And what counts as *Mixotricha*? Is it just the nucleated cell or is it the whole assemblage?”¹⁹⁹

The idea of such an organism also generates questions for human ontology. As Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan inform us:

The hullabaloo over mapping the human genome—the sum of all the genes in an individual—might lead one to think that each species has only a single genome and that the genetic makeup of individual organisms is discrete and unitary. Such is far from the case. Paraphrasing Walt Whitman, we multicellular beings contain multitudes. All animals’ cells have at least two interacting genomes. One is the DNA in the cell nucleus; this is the genome that has recently been “mapped.” The other is that of the DNA in the mitochondria—the cell’s multiple oxygen-breathing organelles that are inherited only through the maternal line. For more than a century, some scientists have known that every organism is in fact a multiple being, but until recently these unorthodox researchers were ignored.²⁰⁰

Even at the cellular level, as this shows, human are inextricably mixed and inherently multiple. Combined with Canguilhem, we can understand these communities of “individual” and “autonomous” living organisms not as some pathological invasion, but

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ Lynn Margulis and Dorian Sagan, “The Beast with Five Genomes.” Copyright The American Museum of Natural History. http://www.naturalhistorymag.com/0601/0601_feature.html, consulted April 22, 2005.

extrapolating, as an organismic *event*. When the symbiotic relationships between varied species actually amount to a new species, this can be called “symbiogenesis.”²⁰¹ Though previously controversial, this theory is now taking hold and shedding light on how we might re-envision the mechanisms behind evolution. The symbiotic relationship develops into a bricolage of genetic exchange that eventually leads to the spawning of a new “species.” But, apparently, the evidence that we have been living under the empty fiction of a unified, autonomous, static, self-identified organismic ontology has been omnipresent for far too long. Perhaps, then, it is high time to begin the crucial task of disrupting, and perhaps even abrogating, this stalwart hegemonic motif. Important to our purposes is the way in which Haraway, Hird, Canguilhem, Lingis and Sonigo’s observations herald using *M. paradoxa* as an analogue to human ontology, rupturing longstanding dogmas of individual, static, self-identified substance and rendering the human subject transhuman. Humans, too, exist in this necessary relationship to a myriad of other creatures—without many of which, we, too, would not survive. Like the Councilor in Zion remarked about the machines, Margolis and Sagan affirm that the, “mitochondria in our nucleated cells,” are “entirely integral to our bodies” and “generate the chemical energy needed to sustain life.”²⁰²

It should be said that without the increasingly subtle surveillance capabilities of the electron microscope, none of these biological realities would be known. It is indeed the collision of science and technology, as technoscience, that provides a compass for our recent ontological theorizing. Thus, it should come as no surprise then that earlier ontologists, anchored in scientific practices with much more limited capabilities, might

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² *Ibid.*

not have arrived at the belief in ontological multiplicity. It is curious and striking, given the way in which these technological mediations start to unravel the patchwork of entities we are, that the specters of unity, autonomy, wholeness, self-identity, bodily integrity, and the like, still haunt contemporary ontology. I would like to suggest that perhaps those clinging tight to these fictions do so in the service of justifying the ethico-political platforms that rely upon them. Here ontology can be taken as the handmaiden to ethico-politics. The arguments behind this claim will be advanced in the conclusion to this project. In the meantime, an interesting new approach is sparked by this digging beneath the skin. As Sonigo made manifest, the idea of a unified organism is a mere extrapolation from the varied and multiple, simultaneous processes, forces, and events. Rather than continue our attempt to excavate that “meaning of life,” that *substance*, by continually peeling back successive corporeal layers, might it not be more productive, especially in light of the evidence just presented, to start from the bottom-up (so to speak)?

This is not a novel idea, many have proposed approaching the study from this direction. Manuel DeLanda cites C. G. Langton’s concept of “Artificial Life” as an exemplar of this method. While,

[b]iology has traditionally started at the top, viewing a living organism as (an autonomous and independent but) complex bio-chemical machine, and worked *analytically* downwards from there—through organs, tissues, cells, organelles, membranes, and finally molecules—in the pursuit of the mechanisms of life. Artificial Life starts at the bottom, viewing an organism as a large population of *simple* machines, and works upwards *synthetically* from there, constructing large aggregates of simple rule-governed objects which interact with one another nonlinearly in the support of life-like, global dynamics.²⁰³

²⁰³ Manuel DeLanda, *1000 Years of Non-Linear History*, (Boston: Zone Books, 2000), 2, fn 7 (quoting C.G. Langton “Artificial Life”).

It should be made clear here that by machine, we are not referring to anything like a Cartesian mechanistic theory. Instead, it is meant to evoke the interconnectedness of a multiplicity of forces and processes that temporarily coagulate forming the idea of *an organized global being*. This is an important perspective shift. Key here are the notions of non-linearity and dynamism. For, through the lens of the stable, autonomous, independent organism, we can only achieve a very myopic view of the world. In fact, assuming that the nature of an organism is unequivocal, starting research from that platform, and then drawing conclusions from that research begs the question. The issue of organismic ontology remains unexamined. Thus this top down view only serves to establish a conditional worldview depending entirely on subscribing to a specific theory about the ontology of living entities, which will presently be problematized. Of course, a less sympathetic theorist might want to take issue with the foundations or assumptions inherent in the bottom up approach. However, part of what makes this approach immune to such critiques is that it does not allege that there is any static foundation from which to begin. This approach also does not seek unity or fixed answers. Rather, the central tenant involves what is called *emergent behavior*. As such, it could be said that artificial life and like theories endeavor to describe organismic events, temporary agglomerations, interactions, and what will later be deemed Bodies without Organs (BwO). They recognize flux, change, instability, becoming, essential interdependence, disorganization, and ontological incertitude as the “natural” state of living entities. As DeLanda explains:

Natural life emerges out of the organized interactions of a great number of (living and) nonliving molecules, with no global controller responsible for the behavior of every part. . . . It is this bottom-up, distributed, local determination of behavior that Artificial Life employs in its primary methodological approach to the

generation of life-like behaviors.²⁰⁴

Note that the locution “life-like behaviors” is employed here to quiet the resonances echoing in terms like organism. Utilizing the term organism might obscure the issue in that it seems to commit a theorist to the very ontology of organic life that she is challenging.

What is interesting about the method of starting from the bottom up and deriving the global concept of a being from a disunified assemblage of forces is that it allows us to revise our ontological interpretation of human being such that we can account for the flux and change that constitutes it. For instance, the fact that we, “constantly reproduce our own bodies as an essential feature of autopoiesis.²⁰⁵ [In particular, we] reproduce our own livers every two months, our stomach linings every five days, new skin every six weeks, and ninety-eight percent of our atoms every year,”²⁰⁶ can be easily understood and explained within the context of a theory that begins from the idea that there are always already a heterogeneous set of forces and interactions at play underneath our theoretical extrapolation to a unified being, organism, or even species. In other words, that this picture of a stable unity and bodily integrity, indeed a fiction, must always already be a site of contestation—a chimera, a hybrid.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Autopoiesis is the concept that living systems are self-organized. This is juxtaposed to allopoiesis in which self-organizing machines produce something other than themselves—social and technological systems, for instance. See Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela. *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living*. (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1980).

²⁰⁶ Myra Hird. “Re(pro)ducing Sexual Difference,” (in press, *Parallax*).

The term chimerism in biology initially took hold around the new technology of xenotransplantation—“the transplantation of animal organs into human bodies.”²⁰⁷

The mixing of flesh and production of chimeras is no longer purely theoretical. Human organ transplantation began in the 1950’s...In recent animal experiments, mixture of flesh of different individuals and biological types has progressed even further, yielding chimeric ‘geeps’ (animals formed by the jumbling together of cells from goat and sheep embryos) and such curiosities as mice with four biological parents. Most significant from the point of view of human biology is the capacity to produce transgenic cells and animals, which originate in one individual or species but contain genes derived from another.²⁰⁸

But it is not all that recent. Francis Bacon envisioned this sort of reality in his scientifically utopian Salomon’s House where he presaged the application of many of today’s biotechnological advances to human biology:

We have also parks and inclosures [sic] of all sorts of beasts and birds, which we use not only for view or rareness but likewise for dissection and trials, that thereby we may take light what may be wrought upon the body of man...By art likewise, we make them greater or taller than their kind is; and contrariwise dwarf them, and stay their growth: we make them more fruitful and bearing than their kind is; and contrariwise barren and not generative. Also we make them differ in color, shape, activity, many ways...We find means to make commixtures and copulations of different kinds; which have produced many new kinds, and them not barren.²⁰⁹

These days, the chimeric notion is typically employed to describe, “the presence of two [or more] genetically distinct cell lines in an organism.”²¹⁰ Though, while in biological literature chimerism can refer to inherited, transplanted, or transfused blendings, I would argue that this broader view of chimerism can be thought to include all manner of mixings, especially today’s transgenic organisms in which genes of one organism or species are implanted into the bodies of another. There are many revealing examples of

²⁰⁷ Myra Hird. “Chimerism, Mosaicism and the Cultural Construction of Kinship,” in *Sexualities*, Vol.7(2): 219, 2004.

²⁰⁸ Stuart A. Newman, in Birke and Hubbard, *Reinventing Biology*, 193.

²⁰⁹ Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis* (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1901), written in 1626, 241.

²¹⁰ Myra Hird. “Chimerism, Mosaicism and the Cultural Construction of Kinship,” in *Sexualities*, Vol.7(2): 219, 2004.

chimerism achieved through inheritance. One such case, highlighted by Myra Hird, describes, “a boy...recently born in Britain who is, genetically speaking, two people because he was formed by the fertilization of two eggs and two sperm which then fused into one embryo.”²¹¹ Is he one or two? Without a doubt, beings such as Donna Haraway’s cyborg protagonist, OncoMouse, or the Flavr Svr tomato could also be understood to be chimeras—OncoMouse is a mouse implanted with the human gene that is linked to the development of breast cancer and Flavr Svr is a tomato plant infused with flounder genes allowing it to withstand colder temperatures and decay slower.²¹² While chimerism can be taken in these literal biological senses, it also seems to hold for the ontological perspective being advanced here. It should be clear from the biological descriptions of the inextricable inter-species interdependence above that humans are unequivocally chimeras at a biological and metabolic level. This sort of evidence presents serious challenges to supporters of substance metaphysics who still hold out a candle for the possibility of locating that holy grail of unified, enduring substance hidden somewhere beneath the skin. For, all we seem to find, the deeper we dig, is hybrid or heterogeneous communities of increasingly enmeshed interdependent creatures. Recent biological science thus offers us the opportunity to revise our ontological theory of human being and offers us new methodological strategies for constructing this refigured account. Understanding this in the face of some of the risks outlined in Section I above, the threat to the hegemonic social order posed becomes manifest—questions of autonomy, bodily integrity, responsibility, self, and even kinship (as Hird suggests) must come to the fore. Clearly, there is a lot at stake.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 223.

²¹² See Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness*, especially p. 56, 88 for Flavr Svr.

Let us now take a detour into the ontology of the organism and species. A few brief points should be raised. What all these points will ultimately amount to is the fact that the common sense view of the organism and species bears little resemblance to what is commonly believed to be true about it.

III. Sidebar on Organism and Species

We must also place the notion of species under the microscope. For, like the notion of organism, which, in the face of the abundant evidence presented above, has been seriously compromised if not completely disrupted, the notion of species that is dependent upon it must also be called into question. What I have done above is to sketch the material side of the material-semiotic figure possessing a fundamental ontology of disunification, multiplicity, and flux by acknowledging an essential co-constitutive biological ontology with non-human species—it is a symbiotic *zoontology*, in which selves, semiotically construed, are reinscribed into an embodied transspecies materiality. I want to suggest that issuing from the biological analysis above is the notion of the organism as an event, a temporary coagulation, or assemblage of forces and processes. Thus, the notion of species, which relies on the concept of organism for its definition, would also have to be reconfigured to account for the interdependence and flux associated with organisms so described. The history of organism and species and the scientific taxonomies constructed to order (and rank) them are reliant upon a stable, independent, identity-based substance ontology. For, without the notion of an independent “subject” sharply distinguished from other like subjects, the notions of organism and species would cease to be intelligible. As such, and given the multiple

examples that undermine that picture, it is time we rethink these categorizations and the violent reductionism and categorization prevalent in the sciences. It is said that:

In the West,...much of the history of science is concerned with separating and reducing this unity [of nature] into even smaller and smaller fragments out of which nature has somehow to be glued together again. It is a history not only of fragmentation but of our own alienation from nature.²¹³

This methodology has engendered a very important split between organisms and their environment²¹⁴, each thought to be independent and both thought to be unified, extricable from each other, and whole. Setting aside for a moment the question of whether or not this ontology accurately describes the way things are, this distinction can be read as the source of what some may view as an untenable taxonomic organization. This scientific worldview carves the totality of organic life into niches that pre-exist the organisms themselves. As organisms and species evolve, they are theorized to take their already established place in the taxonomy. Hence, “where no [organism] has evolved to follow a particular lifestyle, the niche is described as being ‘vacant’ or ‘empty,’ and this hypothetical space is held to be a potent force for evolutionary change.”²¹⁵

The various debates over the specific details of evolutionary theory are well-rehearsed throughout the literature of the history of science and are largely unimportant here. However, one main point should be noted in order to fully comprehend the direction in which I am moving. Whereas some post-Darwinian theory did advocate the sort of static scientific structure sketched above, there were a fair number of dissenters. Among them, namely, is Darwin himself and Richard Lewontin. As Grosz (cited above)

²¹³ Mae-Wan Ho, cited in Judith Maters, “rEvolutionary Theory,” in Birke and Hubbard, *Reinventing Biology*, 176.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

claimed, Darwin is the man “who introduced the *event* to the sciences.” He understands organisms and species to be open to future reconfigurations rather than fixed and stable. This is the essence of unpredictable evolutionary process. “Events,” Grosz describes, are, “ruptures, nicks, which flow from causal connections in the past but which, in their unique combinations and consequences, generate unpredictability and effect sometimes subtle but wide-ranging, unforeseeable transformations in the present and the future.”²¹⁶ Evolution, itself, is an event in this sense. It is, contrary to armchair evolutionary theory, *not* teleological. Elsewhere, Grosz also observes that, “[e]volution is a fundamentally open-ended system which pushes toward a future with no real direction, no promise of any particular result, no guarantee of progress or improvement, but with every indication of inherent proliferation and transformation.”²¹⁷ Lewontin, for his part, endeavors to envision evolution as a more dynamic process. He challenges the notion that the niches pre-existed organisms by proposing the alternative that they actually establish their own niches in a dynamic process whereby they modify and are modified by their environments. Further, the environments themselves are not static. They, too, evolve in this relationship. It is a question of speeds and slownesses, relative rates of change, not flux measured against some stable substantive background. While his theory remains in many respects as controversial as the post-Darwinian strands, it invokes the kind of dynamism relevant to the project here. It allows us to turn our sights toward, “organismal activities and interactions for their own sakes, rather than as support for an idealized model of how the world should be ordered,” and opens up the possibility that we can,

²¹⁶ Grosz, *Nick of Time*, 8.

²¹⁷ Grosz, “Darwin and Feminism: Preliminary Investigations for a Possible Alliance.” *Australian Feminist Studies* 14(29):31-45. Cited in Hird, *Something in the Water*, 17.

“understand nature from the inside as opposed to attempting to impose order from the outside.”²¹⁸ This has the advantage of turning the tables on Western science, which has “transformed the objective world... into the type of structure that would ‘correspond’ to its theories, so that the latter became, in a sense, self-fulfilling prophecies.”²¹⁹ Rather than policing the pre-prescribed boundaries and forcing organisms into a rigidly static, and perhaps even inaccurate, taxonomic economy, we can rework the picture from its disparate parts and circumvent the issue of organismic and species unity and autonomy.

A few other points warrant mention here. It is widely understood that species require other species for speciation or at least are not restricted to the genes of the gene pool of their species. As Manuel DeLanda notes, “a totally homogenous species would be incapable of evolving, since natural selection requires variation in the gene pool as its raw material.”²²⁰ So, in a certain sense, we could argue that species are more like historical constructs than natural kinds, contingent assemblages rather than autonomous beings. As DeLanda argues, “[i]n a very real sense, [as] much as our bodies are temporary coagulations...they are also passing constructions in the flow of genetic materials.”²²¹ We indeed live under the fiction of fixed species and organisms. To wit, it is often thought that the mere fact that we can reliably recognize and class organisms into species justifies the belief that there is an invariant, substantive essence cloaked beneath the surface. This argument parallels those outlined earlier about substance ontology in general—i.e. merely thinking something is a unified substance, does not in fact make it so. Likewise, just because we can reliably recognize what we think is a specific species

²¹⁸ Maters, “rEvolutionary Theory,” in Birke and Hubbard, *Reinventing Biology* 176-7

²¹⁹ DeLanda, *1000 Years of Nonlinear History*, 273.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

or organism by no means entails that there *is* some invariant, substantive essence. The unity extrapolated from the disparate fragments and multiple forces and processes may be, at best a functional one, or at worst, no more than fictional or imaginary. While we may choose to cling to this fiction, might we not be better off changing our language and worldview to reflect the amassing contrary evidence? We could thus start conceptualizing the establishment of an organism as a community project—a community of forces, processes, and actors, as an event.

We might be inclined to view our organic bodies, and even species, given this picture of biological reality, as temporary coagulations in the flows of energy (like biomass or food) and genetic materials—as a contingent event. At least it is reasonably clear that, “we capture in our bodies a certain portion of the flow at birth, then release it again when we die [after which] microorganisms transform us into a new batch of raw materials.”²²² Organisms and species are not such simply in virtue of gene replication, inheritance, and flow, but are also constituted by forces and processes, mixing and recombining with other organisms, participating in certain reproductive economies, inhabiting certain ecosystems, and using, producing, and exchanging energy. And, due to, “the flow of biomass (energy) and of genetic material” we can come to understand that, “species are historical constructions, their defining traits [are] a purely contingent collection assembled by means of selection pressures. . . In a very real sense, [as] much as our bodies are temporary coagulations of the flow of biomass, they are also passing constructions in the flow of (a variety of) genetic materials.”²²³ As the example of *Mixotricha* and our own bodies demonstrate, bodies are:

²²² *Ibid.*, 104.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 111.

transient agglomerations of materials derived from both of these flows, and not only for the obvious reason that living creatures must eat (and avoid being eaten) to successfully reproduce. A more fundamental reason is that the very structural and functional properties of these bodies cannot be explained in terms of [a singular set of] genetic materials alone.”²²⁴

We can thus see that rather than a stable fixed individual, “an organism is a plenum, a material system that produces more energy than is transmitted into it and releases that energy in movements.”²²⁵ In this way, we might want to begin the shift by noting, as Manuel DeLanda does, that, “[o]rganic constraints, like cultural constraints, are contingent historical products, though they operate over longer timescales.”²²⁶ Because the timescales are much longer for the organic, the changes appear to be so imperceptible that the organism or species seems stable or even to have reached a teleological stasis. But this is just a fiction. It is a mere appearance of stability, where the change is simply not immediately perceptible though it does exist. After all, few novel genetic variations have developed in recent times. But, again, this is a question of relative rates of change. Organismic or species flux here is simply parsed out on a different scale than, for instance, cultural evolution. That, however, does not entail that flux is not occurring. Viewing the body in this manner, allows us to start to revise our view of human corporeality to reflect a more anti-essentialist perspective. Since, construed in this fashion, it would hardly be correct to assert any variety of substance ontology.

The emphasis here on multiplicity and its application to the body promotes a more compelling ontological perspective of the body than that of either the traditional substance view or the dualistic, autonomous Enlightenment view. Although we might be

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

²²⁵ Lingis, *Why Nietzsche Still*.

²²⁶ DeLanda, *1000 Years of Nonlinear History*, 142.

inclined to assert species or organismic unity, identity, permanence, substance, and being, this view amounts to an expedient falsification in light of the evidence we now have at hand. In what follows in the rest of Part 2, I will sketch some of the ways in which Donna Haraway, combined with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, have suggested we incorporate and embody these insights about our ontological multiplicity. These views will serve as the basis for understanding how the biological picture painted above justifies the ontological claims made in Part 1—the ways in which we can refigure human being as becoming, in the face of our essential chimeric nature. Further, these sketches will provide important groundwork for “how we might live.”²²⁷ In other words, they will furnish the ontological foundations and background for a transhuman²²⁸ ethico-politics.

IV. The Nietzschean and Heideggerian Lines of Flight

Though, characteristically, Nietzsche’s claims about human-animal relations are widely contradictory throughout his work, it seems one underlying motif throughout his work is that humans have greatly misjudged their status with regard to animals and nature. The third of the four great errors according to Nietzsche was that man “placed himself in a false order of rank in relation to animals and nature.” He asserted that, “[I]f

²²⁷ This concept is taken from Todd May, *Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²²⁸ Alan Schrift describes Nietzsche’s figure of the Übermensch as becoming, a process, not a super subject, not a higher kind of man in Darwinistic evolutionary fashion. This is consistent with my selection of transhuman. See my note 11 above and Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche’s French Legacy: A Genealogy of Poststructuralism*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 72-4. Another suggestion, also consistent with the use of trans-human, is made by Michael Haar, citing Nietzsche: “The Overman is ‘an attempt at something which is no longer man.’” Michel Harr, *Nietzsche and Metaphysics*, trans. and ed. Michael Gendre, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 25. Also see: Keith Ansell Pearson, *Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition*, (London: Routledge, 1997).

we removed the effects of [this] error, we should also remove humanity, humanness, and ‘human dignity.’”²²⁹ To develop this latter transhumanist point to the fullest extent, contemporary theorists have launched a critique of the binary and hierarchical split between humans and animals and have extended their resulting more fluid ontological understanding of the human to incorporate animals. Above, I have surveyed some of the biological underpinnings justifying that ontological move. Now we will turn to the task of gaining a deeper conception of what that ontology looks like and how it operates.

In sketching his account of the subject, Nietzsche extended two post-enlightenment challenges to his readers. One could claim that they each constituted a tine of the divining rod which ushered in the flows of trans-humanism and the work on animality we are about to uncover in Deleuze and Guattari. Nietzsche was trying to disentangle himself from the paradigm of the modern subject still holding sway; this is the vision of the subject as a unified, static, rational, self-identical, interior, mental substance free from instinct, animality, flux, exteriority, and bodily nature. This classic paradigm defined the human in negation to other animals and distanced human being from its animal being. It was this very model²³⁰ that justified the rejection of the evolutionary schema which located human being as continuous with animal being. It should be noted that while Nietzsche seemed to endorse the central tenets of Darwinian evolution, his relationship to it was often ambiguous. He was not at all bothered by the idea that there are animal traces in human beings, in fact, this idea greatly appealed to him. However, the teleological component of natural selection entails the belief that a

²²⁹ Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 115.

²³⁰ Not to mention that the religious transcendental model that preceded it also had its issues with evolution.

continual betterment of the species was possible; this implied, at least on some accounts, that humans were at the top of the hierarchy, and perhaps even something like the perfection of nature.²³¹ This concept was incompatible with Nietzsche's belief that humans are not necessarily superior in rank to other creatures. Further, the principle that there is an external inter- and intra-species battle waged for existence contradicted Nietzsche's own belief in the will to power which designates internal drives as the mechanism of advancement, existence, and survival. Thus, despite Nietzsche's interest in repudiating the enlightenment paradigm of human nature, he was not entirely committed to using evolutionary theory as the vehicle to rescue human ontology from its grasp.

To embark on his flight away from the enlightenment vision, Nietzsche calls upon us to embrace "(1) the absolute loss of transcendence (God is dead); and (2) the dethroning of reason as man's most characteristic and cherished faculty."²³² He recasts transcendence as, "what man does; or, rather, has never yet done but could do. 'Man is something that has to be surpassed.'"²³³ This new sense of transcendence is not the traditional "something beyond man" but rather speaks to "man's activity in transcending

²³¹ Schrift here notes the similarity between Nietzsche and Deleuze on the point of teleology: "whereas evolutionary language focuses our attention on the beginning and endpoint of a process in a way that obscures the passage between them, the language of compound becoming draws our attention to what happens *between* these ever-receding endpoints. Becomings take place *between* poles; they are the in-betweens that pass only and always along a middle without origin or destination." Alan D. Schrift, *Nietzsche's French Legacy: A Genealogy of Poststructuralism*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 70. See also: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Brian Massumi, trans. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 293.

²³² Stambaugh, *The Other Nietzsche*, 3.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 4.

his human, all too human condition.”²³⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, offer a faithful Nietzschean reading (with a touch of Spinoza thrown in for good measure) of this notion when they pronounce, “Spinoza asks: What can a body do?...we will seek to count its affects...von Uexküll, in defining animal worlds, looks for active and passive affects of which the animal is capable.” They continue, “we know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body.”²³⁵ We once again observe the emphasis on doing when Nietzsche claims, “‘I,’ you say, and are proud of the word. But greater is that in which you do not wish to have faith—your body and its great reason: that does not say ‘I,’ but does ‘I.’”²³⁶ All these references point to a general theory of material subject founded on praxis and becoming which is a radical deterritorialization of the modern subject.

If it could be said that Deleuze had one underlying theme in his work, perhaps it was to “‘invent an experimentalism, which, instead of asking for conditions of possible experience, would look for the conditions under which something new, as yet unthought, arises.’ What William James called ‘not of things made but of things in the making.’”²³⁷ The preference here is on practice, a verb. Undoubtedly, this spirit of experimentalism is linked to Hume, the subject of Deleuze’s first book in which this revised empiricism was conceived, but it also most vividly beckons the influence of Nietzsche’s bestiary and the method under which Deleuze and Guattari elected to engage with it. The enchanting

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

²³⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Brian Massumi, trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 256-7.

²³⁶ Kaufmann, *Op. Cit.*, (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), 146.

²³⁷ John Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000), 17.

interplay of creatures appearing and often multiply re-entering Nietzsche's work call upon us to re-envision what we habitually call human nature and human experience. Their presence is an appeal for us to attend to issues of our ontology by paying attention to becoming over being, uncovering the flux and impermanence of the self, elevating the status of our bodily nature, rethinking the status of man with respect to animals, meting out new relationships between and conceptions of man and nature, and obtaining a more profound insight into our psychology and emotions. It is also a call to reconfigure the many problems that have plagued philosophy in domains such as metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. In short, the aim is to unleash the previously unforeseen, to give birth to the novel through experiment/experience.

Becoming-animal, though not a Nietzschean concept in itself, resonates with many of the essential elements of Nietzsche's opus. Certainly, as addressed in Part 1, we saw that becoming itself is a prevalent theme throughout his work. Further, Nietzsche's works are peppered with a multiplicity of animals. By employing animal imagery, Nietzsche is certainly building a case for a materialist view of the self. The chimeric materialist perspective of human ontology sets the stage for a wholesale refiguring of the hierarchy erected between humans and animals—precisely the task Nietzsche calls upon us to perform. No longer is it valid to construct the human as not-animal. Humans are better understood as an intricate community of heterogeneous organisms and forces, acknowledging the Darwinistic continuity of humans with animals, including an acceptance of the animalic nature of the human rather than positing the human as a teleological perfection of the evolutionary process. Nietzsche speaks to this permeable boundary between humans and animals and is not sparing in his excoriation of

humanistic values and the teleological reads of evolutionary theory buttressing them. He calls on us to consider where the beast ends and where man begins. So, too, he pushes us to recognize the essential relationship of humans to multiplicity and change. If humans are chimeric and interdependent with animals (rather than defined in opposition to them) as might be inferred from Nietzsche's continual intersection of humans with non-humans, a revolutionary recasting of our theories of human ontology needs to be executed. Moreover, in his cryptic, "man is a rope, tied between beast and *übermensch*"²³⁸ Nietzsche plants the seed that the human is the essential bridge between the animal and the transhuman or, at the very least, an integral link in the chain. It is almost as if he foreshadowed Deleuze and Guattari; the implication is that in order to get beyond humanism, we would have to uphold our elemental association to animals, we would have to *become-animal*. In other words, if, for example, one were standing with one's legs on either side of the bank of a deep, powerful river and one side collapsed, the footing on the other would be lost as well and one would fall in and be swept away. It is thus that Deleuze and Guattari's notion of *becoming-animal* summons Nietzsche to the next level; for us not to be carried off and drown in this powerful river called the Enlightenment which has been holding sway over our conception of humanity and animality, we must extrapolate from Nietzsche's ontological foundations.

It is in that manner that we may be able to arrive at a robustly *human* transhumanism alluded to in Nietzsche's figure of the *übermensch*. Caution should be exercised in this endeavor for Nietzsche himself would have fervently opposed an utter blurring of the boundaries of humans and animals. Despite countless intersections

²³⁸ Kaufmann, *Op. Cit.*, (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*), 126.

between them in his many works, Nietzsche would no more advocate putting animals on an equal plane with humans than he would a blanket preference for animals over humans. However, the former ontological configuration is favored by Deleuze and Guattari in their conceptualization of becoming-animal and it could be said that Buddhist thought would have advocated this perspective. Revisiting Nietzsche and Buddhist thought from this renewed vantage point, Deleuze and Guattari find novel lines of flight, extensions, dynamics, relations, ontologies, traces, possibilities, and openings—a real response to the question of how we might live. Now, before we proceed to the mission of unpacking the concept of becoming-animal, let us detour slightly to grasp some insight from an unlikely source: Heidegger.

It is perhaps strange to include Heidegger among the theorists said to be participating in becoming-animal in a literal sense in that he had, more than the others, quite a narrow scope of animality. Indeed, he considered animals poor in world, a premise we will momentarily flesh out. However, his four volume study of Nietzsche's work certainly attests to his dogged experimentation with Nietzsche and in this manner did help to issue a line of flight opening him up to the possibilities of the human experiment and a large-scale refiguration of human ontology. Very early in the first volume of his study, Heidegger makes his method known; Shrift summarizes:

it is only by conceiving Nietzsche as the culmination of th(e) metaphysical tradition, and then proceeding to the question of the Truth of Being, that we can succeed in arriving at Nietzsche's philosophy proper, a philosophy that, while leaving unthought the question of the Truth of Being, *nevertheless opens up the path by which subsequent thinking will be able to think this hitherto unthought thought.*²³⁹

²³⁹ Alan D. Schrift. *Nietzsche and the Question of Interpretation: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*. (New York: Routledge, 1990). Emphasis added.

Of course here he is referring to the way in which the history of metaphysics is marked by the forgetfulness of Being, but he also seems to echo a Deleuze and Guattarian becoming in that lines of flight that emerge from becoming are meant to rhizomatically take hold and nomadically lead us to the previously unthought. Though from his well-known critique of Nietzsche's concept of becoming as the mode of being of humans, we know that Heidegger did not champion the idea of positioning human Being in this arena of becoming. However, viewed in terms of his project to bring forth the unthought, Heidegger's project of thinking Being is actually well within an economy of becoming; initially, it is through his experimentation with Nietzsche, subsequently, a becoming-animal. Heidegger's richest inquiry into animality as such, into the essence of animality, takes place in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* though there are stray comments throughout his other works. His basic thesis in that work is that "the stone is worldless, the animal is poor in world, man is world-forming."²⁴⁰ He dedicates nearly a quarter of that work, ultimately with little success, striving to parse out the essence of animality or to see the animal *qua* animal with respect to whether it possesses world. He undertakes this examination in relation to the two poles of the being between which it is situated: that of non-living material entities and that of *Dasein*.

So what is the character of animal essence? Well, Heidegger depicts it as poor in world, "it somehow possesses less...in respect of what is accessible to it, of whatever as an animal it can deal with, of whatever it can be affected by as an animal, of whatever it

²⁴⁰ Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker, trans. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) II:3, 185.

can relate to as living beings. Less as against more, namely as against the richness of all those relationships that human *Dasein* has at its disposal.”²⁴¹ Hence, animals are in deprivation or lack of world. After surveying the significatory prospects for deprivation, Heidegger reaches the conclusion that animals do possess world but in the mode of not-having. By that he intends that they have the possibility of world, unlike a stone, but cannot access beings in the world as being. They are not worldless, but world impoverished. His schema also hints at a quasi-enlightenment, anthropocentric hierarchy constructed with *Dasein* at the top. However, Heidegger cautions that, “this comparison between man and animal, characterized in terms of world-formation and poverty in world respectively, allows no evaluative ranking or assessment with respect to completeness or incompleteness...However ready we are to rank man as a higher being with respect to the animal, such an assessment is deeply questionable...May we talk of a ‘higher’ and a ‘lower’ at all in the realm of the essential?”²⁴² Nietzsche had already warned us against these sorts of normative hierarchical arrangements. And Deleuze and Guattari make it abundantly evident, as we will soon see, that all ontological planes, all becomings, were equal to all others insofar as they were all temporary assemblages, multiplicities without originariness. Permit one brief tangent; it is too tempting not to remark about Heidegger’s mention above of the ability to be affected. This harkens us to the Spinozist/Deleuzian view of the body as a multiplicity of affects.

The key to unlocking the Heideggerian storehouse of human Being, to forming world, is language, which many hold that animals conspicuously lack. If the many are correct, this entails, that animals do not possess Being, at least not in its full spectrum.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, II:3 §46, 193.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 194.

Heidegger states that, “Where there is no language, as in the being of stone, plant, and animal, there is also no openness either of that which is not and of the empty.”²⁴³

Another essential difference between human and animal rests on *Dasein*'s capacity to stand outside itself, to be ecstatic, and to open up the space of the world to itself. This can be mapped as a brand of transhumanism in that the human is, in virtue of its humanity, beyond or outside humanity. Lingis points to the paradoxical nature of this mode of Being; it is, “an ex-sistence that is simultaneously a transcendence toward the being of the world and toward the nothingness of death, a world that is simultaneously the array of possibility and the immanence of impossibility.”²⁴⁴ Heidegger in fact demarcates three discrete types of death depending on the nature of the being experiencing it. His tripartite schema saw *Dasein* either authentically being toward death or inauthentically undergoing demise while animals simply perish, they physiologically cease.²⁴⁵ Once again, the human emerges as essentially different from animals and as apart from animal nature. For even in its physiological end, *Dasein* never perishes.

In summary, Heidegger realizes by the conclusion of his inquiry in *Fundamental Concepts* that,

this characterization of animality...is not a genuine one, not drawn from animality itself and maintained within the limit of animality, since the character of poverty of world is being conceived by comparison with man. It is only from the human perspective that the animal is poor with respect to world, yet animal being in itself is not in deprivation of world.”²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*. Albert Hofstadter, trans. (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971), 73.

²⁴⁴ Alphonso Lingis, *Foreign Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 217.

²⁴⁵ Heidegger, *BTI*, II.1 §49, 229.

²⁴⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, II:3 §63, 270-1.

By his own admission then, animal essence remained problematic within his anthropocentric corpus. His question of whether it is coherent to even ascribe the thesis of world poverty to animals from the perspective of animals *qua* animals should give us all pause. Further, though his theory allows that we not only can but that it is constitutive of *Dasein* to be able to “transpose” ourselves into other *Dasein*, we cannot fully do this with animals. The inter-subjective character inherent in *Dasein* thus does not reach the level of our animality. Nonetheless, the inquiry did produce a more profound account of the fundamental Being of *Dasein* as an ecstatic being-toward-death, in possession of language, and world-forming. This shift in the conception of the subject to an inherently inter-subjective Being which is always already projected beyond itself certainly demonstrates the landing of Heidegger's line of flight. He has been freed through his experimentation with Nietzsche to arrive at a transhuman picture of subjectivity; he has thought the unthought, Being, however imperfect his account remains.

We should reiterate, for the purposes of releasing a line of flight from Heidegger, that he did not escape the anthropocentrism, which plagued the metaphysics from which his project evoked its future; the nature of human Being still flows through a certain negation to animality, a thinking animal as world impoverished. Perhaps there is a way to elude this trap by reading Heidegger through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari; mapping becoming-animal onto Heidegger we can interpret world poverty as alterity rather than lack and revise his theory to decenter the inherent humanism. He hints at this possibility in the last section saying that perhaps animals just have *other* worlds. We could then elevate the status of his warning against erecting a normative hierarchy of essences and place animal *qua* animal on par with human *qua* human. Heidegger's

becoming-animal could thus engender an even richer deterritorialization of human Being.²⁴⁷ So, too, we might be more in line with the ontological perspectives being argued in the project if we read Heidegger's being-as-care, projection, and Being-in-the-world more broadly; we can sidestep some of the humanistic vestiges present in Heidegger's theory by focusing our sights in this manner rather than on Being as *Dasein*, or human being-there.

V. Transhumanizing Forces: Becoming-animal and the Body without Organs (BwO)

By way of introduction, allow me to cull the essential features of becoming as rendered by Deleuze and Guattari themselves in *A Thousand Plateaus*:

A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification...[becomings] are perfectly real...it is clear that the human being does not 'really' become an animal any more than the animal 'really' becomes something else. Becoming produces nothing other than itself...a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself...becoming is not an evolution...becoming is involutory, involution is creative...Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, 'appearing,' 'being,' 'equaling,' or 'producing.'²⁴⁸

Importantly, Deleuze and Guattari are not simply erecting the usual binary clash between being and becoming. They are directing us to slip altogether beyond teleological interpretations, not dissolving but strategically multiplying dualism by incorporating the binary difference within the temporarily extrapolated unity. This gels with Jacques Derrida's notion of *différance*. Under that motif, he recognizes that the terms that form the foundation of our knowledge are fundamentally binary, but in a certain pluralistically

²⁴⁷ For an exegesis of Heidegger's discussion in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, see William McNeill, "Life Beyond the Organism: Animal Being in Heidegger's Freiburg Lectures, 1929-30," in Peter H. Steeves. *Animal Others: On Ethics, Ontology and Animal Life*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

²⁴⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 237-9.

monadic sense, they are falsely so. According to his theory, certain concepts get privileged over their complement. This is, in effect, an illusion since what actually happens is that the complementary term operates by negation to constitute the privileged one and is thus immanent to it. This dynamic and fluid process operating between binary terms and generating their meaning can be mapped onto this human-animal issue in that the human is such only insofar as it contains animal, as negation, within it. It is immanent and dynamic difference. Likewise, becoming always includes being in that it is enters a variety of states of being on its nomadic path of continual experimentation. This is a becoming, an essential, pure difference that cannot be reduced to identity, substance, and the usual subject-object dichotomy. There is nothing other than becoming according to their blueprint, and becoming only gives rise to itself, to more becoming. The focus is on the interstice between the two categorical extremes and on the process of becoming. To wit, Deleuze and Guattari claim that, “a line of becoming is not defined by points that it connects, or by points that compose it; on the contrary, it passes between points, it comes up through the middle...a line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination...a line of becoming has only a middle.”²⁴⁹ The point of this process of becoming is not to transform into another pure entity or being nor to reach another point, but rather to become-other and ultimately become-imperceptible. Becoming-imperceptible occurs at the point that the categories are so deterritorialized that there is an imperceptibility in the sense of being marked in a categorical fashion. For example, in becoming-animal, we are not trying to achieve a state of pure animality but rather we are asymptotically navigating toward some sort of an

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 293.

immanent actualized crossbreed which mingles animal with human, which of course, affects both what it means to be human and what it means to be animal. Deleuze and Guattari's own model of becoming-dog is the following:

how [should we do this]? This will not involve imitating a dog, nor an analogy of relations. I must succeed in endowing the parts of my body with relations of speeds and slownesses that will make it become dog, in an original assemblage proceeding neither by resemblance nor by analogy. For I cannot become dog without the dog itself becoming something else...elements will enter into a new relation, resulting in the affect or becoming I seek...[one should not] compare two organs but place elements or materials in a relation that uproots the organ from its specificity, making it "become" with the other organ.²⁵⁰

Thus, *becoming-dog* is not a question of mimicking dog behavior in some robotic, detached fashion; it, "will not involve imitating a dog, nor an analogy of relations." That would be working according to a model of identity and substance, acknowledging the fixity of the poles, rather than the interstice between them. This process of becoming is itself an actuality but not in the way the substantive ontologists would have us envision it. Deleuze and Guattari posit that, "there is a reality to becoming-animal, even though one does not in reality become animal."²⁵¹ The reality is that there is a certain animality, "*an inhumanity experienced in the body as such.*"²⁵² Therein lies the key—there must be a shared experience/experiment such that the difference between the terms reads as imperceptible, the categories become mute. What remains are differences of differences, differences in speeds and slownesses, rates of change, modes of expression rather than the construction of a norm or stable barometer against which differences can be calculated and measured. Difference is immanent, actual, and present.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 258-9.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 273.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 273, italics theirs.

It is only in this way that humans can become transhuman and in doing so paradoxically maximize human potential. In any becoming, including becoming-human, the self is deterritorialized and, in the case of humans, *dehumanized*. The dehumanization in its best light amounts to a transhuman subjectivity from which what was previously thought to constitute the “human” (as we have understood through the Enlightenment’s dualistic substance ontology and the animal forces which constitute its border and limit) must be rethought and transformed. This rethinking creates an openness and projection out toward the future of possibilities in the sense Heidegger suggested for *Dasein*. So, too, it is a connection back to the world (and other *Dasein*, animals, nature, and technology) as care, engagement, experimentation, *aletheia*, revealing, uncovering, and an incorporation of the flux and multiplicity belonging to it.²⁵³ The plateau reached from the deterritorialization of becoming-human can be depicted as, “a new notion of freedom: not the freedom of a human self who can be disengaged from the force of life, but a freedom gained by no longer seeing ourselves as a point of view detached from life. We become *free from the human*, open to the event of becoming,”²⁵⁴ in addition to the difference inherent within it. In our inextricably interdependent relationships with other bodies, technology, socio-cultural processes, and biological and material forces, Deleuze and Guattari recombine and transform what it means to be

²⁵³ It should be noted that Heidegger gets lodged in his own problem of humanism with his focus on *Dasein*. Though he makes a stab at transcending humanism, he remains anthropomorphic in his claims about being. Even while acknowledging and admitting the limitations of his own theory in the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, he seems incapable of escaping them. For an analysis of this problem and potential ways to circumvent or reinterpret Heidegger more in line with arguments being presented here, see Jami Weinstein, “Traces of the Beast: Becoming Nietzsche, Becoming Animal, and the Figure of the Transhuman,” in *A Nietzschean Bestiary: Becoming Animal Beyond Docile and Brutal*, Christa Davis Acampora and Ralph R. Acampora, eds. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004).

²⁵⁴ Claire Colebrook, *Gilles Deleuze*, (London: Routledge, 2002), 129.

human, or transhuman, into the Nietzschean and Spinozian question of what a body can do, or the Heideggerian verb rather than noun. Accordingly, becoming-animal is not mimetic. It is not becoming *like* an animal—not an analogy or imitation. It is becoming some novel hybrid, always a heterogeneous multiplicity without an origin or genesis. Constitutive to animal being, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is multiplicity. Thus, in becoming-animal, the human is embedded in a dynamic connection with multiplicity and immanent difference. This relation becoming-animal, is an assemblage since, “becomings, and especially becoming-animal, involve a mediating third term, a relation to something else, neither animal nor human, through which the subject enters into connections with the animal.”²⁵⁵ Deleuze and Guattari accordingly proclaim that, “becoming and multiplicity are the same thing. [I]ts variations and dimensions are immanent to it.”²⁵⁶

Deleuze and Guattari open up the possibility of many types of becoming, which according to their schema all flow toward a becoming-imperceptible of the human. The becoming through which all becomings must pass in order to arrive there, they claim, is becoming-woman. It is worth mentioning that all transhuman subjects began the process of becoming-other by first performing a molecular becoming-woman—both male *and* female bodies must perform this. All becomings are already molecular. By this, they intend becoming as a process that takes place at the level of shared particles within a dynamic zone of nearness to the object of becoming. In this zone, relationships of movement and rest, speeds and slownesses are parsed out and transmuted. This

²⁵⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994), 174.

²⁵⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 249.

experience is pitted against the molar, which signifies something more like traditional notions of self and identity. In other words, the molar woman must still become-woman, the blacks must become-black, Jews must become-Jewish. Controversially, this entails the claim that “Becoming-woman necessarily affects men as much as women.”²⁵⁷

This schema of becoming and difference transports Nietzsche to the next level; the self emerging from this Deleuzo-Guattarian picture, “is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities...A fiber stretched from a human to an animal, from a human or an animal to molecules, from molecules to particles, and so on to the imperceptible. Every fiber is a Universe fiber. A fiber strung across borderlines constitutes a line of flight or of deterritorialization.”²⁵⁸ The fiber recalls Nietzsche’s rope, and the human it represents, now extrapolated and unsedimented, liberated and rhizomatic, nomadic, imperceptible, or transhuman, a Body without Organs (BwO). But, to achieve this result, we do not simply become animal but we must, “engage in an animal relation with animals.”²⁵⁹ It is thus that the subject and object, internal and external are rendered unintelligible. In becoming-other, neither party remains as it was prior to the becoming other—both sides of the binary are permanently transfigured, which does not, however, imply that future transmutations and metamorphoses are then

²⁵⁷ It should be noted that many feminists in particular take issue with this claim citing that Deleuze and Guattari do not make it clear that, insofar as there is a molar gender difference prior to becoming, the individual becomings-woman are cast in different lights. It should also be noted that there is no becoming-man on their map because it is what they call majoritarian or molar in the most profound sense. And, since all becomings are molecular, minoritarian, and becoming-other, becoming-man is a logical impossibility (see *A Thousand Plateaus*, 291-2). See, for example, Rosi Braidotti. *Metamorphoses: Toward a Materialist Theory of Becoming*. (Cambridge: Polity, 2002)

²⁵⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 249.

²⁵⁹ Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), 121.

impossible. Quite like we came to understand in our encounter with the biological microbial communities and events we are, there do not exist sharply demarcated boundaries between “us” and “the world,” “animals,” “nature,” “technology,” “culture,” et cetera. Rather, the transhuman is a plenum, and assemblage of intensities, forces, processes, and multiple becomings containing an immanent finitude and lacking a unifying, centralized organizing principle. As Grosz put it, “[t]heir ‘law’ is rather the imperative of endless experimentation, metamorphosis, or transmutation, alignment and realignment.”²⁶⁰

It is important that becoming-animal should not be taken as metaphor because that tack simply reduces becoming to imitation or analogy which we already ruled out above. Like all becomings-other, the other should be, “taken in its radical immanence as a field of forces, a quantity of speed and intensity,”²⁶¹ as real and actual. Instead, human experience/experiment co-mingles with that of animal-becoming in order to generate a new organization of perspective. In other words, human being opens up to animal being. It should be noted, however, that this novel relation, embodying the dualism within, cannot be adopted or shed deliberately; this is not a voluntary, willful, or intentional act. It is a mutual emergence, which at the moment it comes into existence, is irreversible and forever changes the actors and relationships involved; they become-imperceptible. Grosz rehearses Deleuze and Guattari’s position in the following:

these becomings are not simply a matter of choice, not simply a decision, but always involve a substantial remaking of the subject, a major risk to the subject’s integration and social functioning. One cannot become-animal at will and then

²⁶⁰ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 167.

²⁶¹ Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, 126.

cease and function normally. It is not something that can be put on or taken off at will like a cloak or an activity.²⁶²

This deterritorialization of the humanistic subject into the transhuman leads to what Deleuze and Guattari dub the Body without Organs (BwO). According to them, the body is but a series of affects, and, in the ideal state, a BwO. The BwO is not meant to imply that we are some hollow shell. Rather, they claim in *A Thousand Plateaus* that:

the BwO is not at all the opposite of organs. The organs are not its enemy. The enemy is the organism. The BwO is opposed not to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism.²⁶³

The schizophrenic, nomadic body proposed by Deleuze and Guattari is, “open-ended, interrelational, and transspecies. It explodes the boundaries of humanism at skin level,” and opposes the conceptualization of a subject as a, “corporeal cohesion or unity.”²⁶⁴ It is anti-oedipal, anti-substance, non-totalizable, disunified and heterogeneous, and always multiple. It is not a body eviscerated of its material and psychical forces. Instead, it is a restructuration and incorporation of processes and forces, always in temporary coagulations incorporating flow. Braidotti calls this an, “enfleshed materialism,” a materialism which envisions, “the process of unfolding affects [as] central to the composition of radically immanent bodies.”²⁶⁵ It is never *my* body but always *a* body. The issue of property is elided. The Body without Organs is the “previously unforeseen,” the experiment, the novel perspective on human ontology resulting from the multiple becomings and lines of flight Deleuze and Guattari discuss in *A Thousand Plateaus*. “The concept of the BwO was created in an effort to conceive the genesis of form (in

²⁶² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 174.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁶⁴ Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, 124.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 135.

geological, biological, and cultural structures) as related exclusively to *immanent* capabilities of the flows of matter-energy information and not to any *transcendent* factor, whether platonic or divine.”²⁶⁶

Given the biological realities of multiple interdependencies of microbes and gene flows and exchange, a body is untotalizable metaphorically and, “literally ‘without organs’, and Nature, as the sum total of particles and affects, may be described as the great Body without Organs.”²⁶⁷ The BwO is not properly a person, substance, thing, or subject in the traditional sense. As with Heidegger’s *Dasein*, a being-there, Deleuze and Guattari’s BwO is a “thisness,” or what they call, following Duns Scotus, a “haecceity.”²⁶⁸ The body, then, is a complex relation between differential speeds and slownesses of infinite forces and particles, which speaks to a Spinozist power to affect and *be affected*.²⁶⁹ This affectivity is power, ontologically what we are. Deleuze spins this around another Spinozian notion, *conatus* (striving), which is the physical instantiation of the power (affectivity) we ontologically are. This is Heideggerian projection, thrownness, and being-there dressed up insofar as it incorporates the undissolved binary of affecting and being affected within it.

In a separate essay by Deleuze, he situates the BwO within the Nietzschean corpus when he remarks that in respect to the body,

[t]here is no quantity of reality, for all reality is already a quantity of force. There are nothing but quantities of force ‘in a relation of tension’ between one another.’ (WP 635) What defines a body is this relation between dominating and dominated forces. Whether chemical, biological, social, or political, every

²⁶⁶ DeLanda, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*, 263.

²⁶⁷ Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze and Guattari* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 134.

²⁶⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 262.

²⁶⁹ For additional detail on this topic, see Gilles Deleuze. *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988) p.165.

relation of forces constitutes a body. Composed of a plurality of irreducible forces, the body is a multiple phenomenon; its unity is that of a multiple phenomenon, ‘the unity of domination.’²⁷⁰

As such, the BwO evokes and exalts immanent and dynamic features like those described above rather than transcendent or substantive ones. It levels out the playing field of all manner of beings insofar as they are considered ahierarchical, on the same plane. Nothing is excluded from this—inanimate, animate, psychical, material, bodies, culture, human, animal, et cetera. This ontological bent is precisely what Donna Haraway evokes in her cyborg and later, manipulating the concept another step further, with her companion species. So, let us shift now to Donna Haraway who, from another angle unpacks these heterogeneous, mutually emergent, non-hierarchical, immanently multiple, interdependent forces and processes.

VI. From Cyborg to The Entire Transhuman Queer Companion Species Family

“At precisely the moment when the bond between humanity and animal came to be seen as broken, humanity became a subject and the animal its reflection.”²⁷¹

Thus marks the point of departure for Donna Haraway’s *The Companion Species*

Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness It is an introduction to the *companion animal*, the newest addition spawned into her ever-expanding queer family of fluid and permeable subject figurations she terms *companion species*. Though she acknowledges many such figures that share membership in that queer family, the famed cyborg of her 1985 manifesto included, her focus in this work is the significance of dogs

²⁷⁰ Gilles Deleuze, “Active and Reactive,” in *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, David B. Allison, ed. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992), 80-1.

²⁷¹ Lippit, *Electric Animal*, 19.

as companion animals. In this work, she is trying to expand upon the ontological and ethico-political claims made through her earlier cyborg figuration.

The introduction of the term “companion species” is meant to capture a specific type of heterogeneous relation in which, “(t)here are no pre-constituted subjects and objects, and no single sources, unitary actors, or final ends...there are only ‘contingent foundations.’” (Haraway, p. 6) As is the case with the pollinating bee and the orchid, the very existence of humans and the various companion species with which they are inextricably intertwined is interdependent and non-hierarchical; Haraway often likens this relation to the children’s string game of cat’s cradle where every move simply refigures the way in which the string is interconnected but never entirely disentangles it. More robustly stated, the effect of the game’s history is an ever-deepening entanglement. One caution she issues is that, “(i)nter-subjectivity does not mean ‘equality,’ a literally deadly game in dogland; but it does mean paying attention to the conjoined dance of face-to-face significant otherness.” (Haraway, p. 41) In true Nietzschean fashion, the partners in this companionship, though they may not be arranged in a hierarchy of value, may be nonetheless non-identical counterparts. Building on the dance motif, she also portrays this interconnectivity as an “ontological choreography,” aiming to highlight a co-constitutive species emergence, “in which none of the partners pre-exist the relating, and the relating is never done once and for all,” (Haraway, p. 12) emphasizing that, “the relation is the smallest unit of analysis.” (Haraway, p. 24)

A detour should be made to carefully consider the cyborg, as her *Companion Species Manifesto* might have largely overhauled her original figuration. The term cyborg is a shorthand for cybernetic organism, usually conceived as an inextricable

blending of organic and inorganic, particularly, human and machine. On most interpretations of her earlier *Manifesto for Cyborgs*, Haraway holds that we are all cyborgs and, as such, the classic essentialized notions of identity that rely on fixed binary categories of nature/culture, natural/artificial, organism/machine, human/animal, physical/non-physical, woman/man, heterosexual/homosexual, and white/colored are necessarily blurred and subverted. Rather than simply leveling these intrinsically hierarchical binaries, however, Haraway advances her cyborg as the political myth meant to incorporate these multiple contradictions into a living embodied practice. Quite like Deleuze and Derrida, she posits a plenum or a pluralistic monism in which terms are inherently and dynamically heterogeneous or even contradictory. And, similar to Heraclitus and Buddhist thought, the cyborg endorses a notion of identity principally established on themes essential to an ontology of flux, hybridity, fragmentation, disunity, and becoming; the cyborg was not unitary or essentialized, but a necessary multiplicity. She posits the cyborg as inherently about, “transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work.”²⁷² The cyborg rebukes both a pure Christian salvation history and oedipal origin stories. In its stead, Haraway positions it as unfaithful to its origins and realigns kinship as inextricably cobbled together with animals and machines. She dubs the cyborg as the “illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism.”²⁷³

This myth of the cyborg spawns her politics. It is a politics that can, “embrace partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective

²⁷² Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, 154.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 151.

selves and still be faithful [and] effective.”²⁷⁴ The types of control strategies deployed to police the categorical and taxonomic boundaries that the cyborg brazenly crosses would have to be dismantled in the face of refiguring human ontology in the register of the cyborg. As, “hybrids, mosaics, chimeras,”²⁷⁵ the old binary logic of norms and deviances, human and animal, nature and culture, natural and artificial, et cetera, no longer holds. It opens us up to thinking about the Nietzschean and Deleuzian question of how we might live rather than how we ought to live; it posits possibility as actuality. In light of the fact that ontologically and genealogically, the, “cyborg body is not innocent; it was not born in a garden [presumably Eden],” ethico-political theory also has to transfigure its origin story and point of departure to reflect chimeric collectivity and symbiotic hybridity. It can no longer rely on the stalwart, sharply demarcated, and autonomous substance ontology previously believed to be intelligible rather than merely a totalizing fiction. In other words, this politics has to take seriously the notion of inherent interdependence and difference.

The characterization of the cyborg in *The Companion Species Manifesto*, however, has a slightly different flavor: “I have come to see cyborgs as junior siblings in the much bigger, queer family of companion species.” (Haraway, p. 11) It is unclear here, and elsewhere in this text, whether she still holds that all humans are cyborgs or whether cyborgs, as she now depicts them, have an independent ontology apart from humans. Is the cyborg just one figure among the many included under the guise of companion species and the human another? Furthermore, has the cyborg been effectively revoked as a useful critical myth with the birth of her new technoscientific creature? To

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 157.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 177.

wit, she does offer that cyborgs, “raise all the questions of histories, politics, and ethics that dogs require.” (Haraway, p. 21) Yet, she reckons that, “(b)y the end of the millennium, cyborgs could no longer do the work of a proper herding dog to gather up the threads needed for critical inquiry.” (Haraway, p. 4) Thus, in effect, Haraway is yielding to a fresh, and perhaps more fertile, paradigm of analysis with her notion of the companion species, while not entirely repudiating the import of the cyborg model; some of the central features of cyborg ontology are retained in the new paradigm. In making this shift, however, she gently modifies the nature of the cyborg to allow it to be accommodated under the new economy of companion species.

As is well known from her rich body of work, Haraway endeavors to construct a politics of affiliation between humans, non-human animals, other organisms, machines, and non-physical entities by demonstrating that the boundaries between and among them are leakier than previously held. She ordinarily achieves this by de-essentializing the terms through a re-historicization of their interrelations. In *The Companion Species Manifesto*, she deepens that motif of affiliation by re-characterizing it using the concept “significant other,” allowing the relation to be intensified by adjoining to it the element of love. This fleshes out and materializes the relation in important biosocial ways. She understands this relation of significant otherness between dogs and humans to be a trope, a relation of “swerving or tripping.” (Haraway p. 20) The particular kind of trope she assigns dog-human companionship is *metaplasma*, a term taken from linguistics that evokes a praxis of remodeling and remolding. Haraway favors the term *metaplasma* to designate this process because of its similarity to other terms possessing a decidedly biological character, such as: “‘protoplasm,’ ‘neoplasm,’ ‘cytoplasm,’ and ‘germplasm.’”

(Haraway, p. 20) In doing so, she morphs the term from its original linguistic meaning while retaining its fleshy linguistic core. Another benefit of this term is that it squarely resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's *becoming-animal*. Becoming-animal, as explained above, is one instantiation of Deleuze and Guattari's relational structure of human deterritorialization in which becoming-other in a non-mimetic fashion re-crafts each member of the relation in considerable and permanent ways. It is a non-hierarchical relation, as each of the actors in the relation is on the same plane. Though the paradox is that, in dehumanizing through becoming-other, the agent becomes more fully human. Haraway confirms this intuition when she instructs dog handlers in obedience sport training to, "play with their companions in a way the dogs enjoy, instead of shutting dogs down by mechanical human ball tosses or intimidatig over -exuberance. Besides...the human must actually enjoy playing in doggishly appropriate ways, or they will be found out." (Haraway, p. 45) This is in perfect theoretical harmony with Deleuze and Guattari's views on *becoming-dog* rehearsed above. It is this very simultaneity of emergence between dog and human that epitomizes Haraway's figuration of the companion species.

For Haraway, there is much at stake in invoking the dog as a companion animal, most importantly, "1) the relation between what counts as nature and what counts as culture in Western discourse and its cousins, and 2) the correlated issue of who and what counts as an actor." (Haraway, p. 27) These are key facets of any political and ethical story told by technoscientists and, as such, essential to unpacking exactly what consequences and relationships exist for both humans and animals in the postmodern technoscientific world. Myths of domestication abound, especially with respect to dogs,

which shape the nature of the debate about ethical treatment of and political status of animals. In particular, the very definition of civilization follows from a previously drawn, sharp division between man and beast and the concomitant implication of the superiority of the former over the latter. It is this implied supremacy that engenders the hegemonic pretext for the domination of animals by humans. Like Nietzsche before her, Haraway understands this portrayal of the relation between humans and companion species to be grossly misguided. Like Nietzsche, she would agree that man has, “placed himself in a false order of rank in relation to animals and nature.” (Nietzsche, GS 115) Failing to acknowledge the irreducibility and inextricability of the relation between members of companion species bolsters the neo-liberal fantasy of (sometimes, *absolute*) autonomy, which has disastrous effects on each of the members of the relation and the economy of the relations themselves. Allowing this mistaken belief to hold sway importantly prevents an accurate read of many central debates on technoscience studies, notably, for Haraway, those between nature and culture on the one hand, and nature and technology on the other. Blurring the boundaries between those terms has long been a focus of her work. In the notion of companion species in general, and the dog as a companion animal more specifically, Haraway has located the perfect tool with which to unhinge that door and open up onto new and perhaps more palatable ethical and political potentialities.

In closing her manifesto, Haraway shows her hand by self-consciously acknowledging the extent to which she uncharacteristically anthropomorphizes her dog’s behavior. Upon observation of her male dog and a friend’s female dog interacting, she remarks that, “*things heated up, put mildly...She is...one turned on little bitch with*

Willem, and he is INTERESTED...here we have pure polymorphous perversity that is so dear to all of us who came of age in the 1960s...Sure looks like eros to me. Definitely not agape." (Haraway, p. 99) She even refers to her male, neutered dog as, "*what feminists of [her] generation would call a considerate lover.*" (Haraway, p. 100, emphasis in the original) Perhaps, ironically, she is invoking the Heideggerian caution that there is in fact no way, even for her, to look upon animal being from the perspective of the animal. Heidegger claims that there is an inescapable personification involved, "this characterization of animality...is not a genuine one, not drawn from animality itself and maintained within the limit of animality, since the character ...is being conceived by comparison with man." (Heidegger, FC II:3 §63, 270-1) Wittgenstein echoes these views, underscoring that the distinction between animal and human forms of life presents serious obstacles to communication; likewise, he asserts that, "if a lion could talk we could not understand him." (Wittgenstein, p. 223e) Though far more likely stated with tongue-in-cheek, one could charitably read Haraway's admission, with Heidegger and Wittgenstein, as an acknowledgement of her situated epistemological location.

Deleuze and Guattari alternatively theorize a communication between animals and humans that transcends hierarchy, dislocated observation, and the god-trick frequently denounced by Haraway. This communication is central to Haraway, who depicts the training process as the development of mutual respect between dog and human via the creation of a common language: "'method' is not what matters among companion species; 'communication' across irreducible difference is what matters; the resultant dogs and humans emerge together in that game of cat's cradle." (Haraway, p. 49) Haraway believes we must achieve this interspecies communication in order to strike

the appropriate balance of power and love, and situate an acceptable ethico-politics in the companion relation. She derives her relational ethics and politics from the premises of interconnectivity and mutual, simultaneous emergences. She insists that the fundamental underlying principle of such an ethico-political stance must be, “knit from the silk-strong thread of ongoing alertness to otherness-in-relation,” (Haraway, p. 50) and, “that the origin of rights is in (the) committed relationship, not in separate and pre-existing category identities.” (Haraway, p. 53)

But, clearly, Haraway intentionally vacillates between these Deleuzo-Guattarian and Heidegger-Wittgensteinian positions, offering both that there is an inherent obstacle of anthropomorphization in the sense that, as she claims elsewhere, all knowledge is situated, and that there is a way in which we can develop a language and form of communication that allow the co-constitutive relation of significant otherness to be fostered. She does not advocate, for example, the infantilization prevalent among dog people, one which casts the dog as a furry child; this would tip the balance in favor of the anthropomorphic view, misrepresent the true nature of the co-constitutive relation, and demean both children and dogs. (Haraway, p. 37) Rather, she prefers that, in relating to dogs, humans acknowledge the extent to which their companion is an adult of another species. This characterization of the interspecies companion relation would undeniably generate a vastly different ethic and politics toward the animal in that a far greater degree of agency would be imparted to the animal than previously thought warranted. It is here that, though she does briefly, and perhaps ironically, entertain the possibility that a certain degree of anthropomorphism is unavoidable, Haraway gestures toward the less anthropomorphic, which, given the body of her work, seems the most consistent position

for her to hold. She reveals this by confessing that, “(she), *of all people, who ha(s) written infamous books about how we Western humans project our social orders and desires onto animals without scruple, should know better than to see the confirmation of Norman O. Brown’s Love’s Body in (her) spayed Aussie dynamo and Susan’s talented Landscape Guardian Dog with that big, sloppy, velvety tongue.*” But she wonders, still vacillating, “*what else could be going on?*” (Haraway, p. 100, emphasis in the original)

The “what else,” as she had presaged, is significant otherness predicated on love; this is not love of the pernicious unconditional sort, but the sort premised on realizing that, “*who is at home must be permanently in question. The recognition that one cannot know the other or the self, but must ask in respect for all of time who and what are emerging in relationship, is the key. That is so for true lovers, of whatever species.*” (Haraway, p. 50) This love involves a rejection of historical amnesia and an appreciation, in all its difficulty, for the variety of time-space scales from which the co-constitutive companionship emerged. This latter point evokes Nietzsche’s *amor fati*, or love of fate, under which the actor must embrace life and its history (in the guise of his eternal return) in all its multifarious forms in order to be truly authentic. Haraway tailors her notion of authentic love in this manner in order to give materiality and flesh to the rubric of significant otherness structuring the companion species relation. This version of love thus serves as the linchpin that, when properly exercised, forms the appropriate stance to the other, allows us to become-other and, in turn, more fully human. Thus, taken to fruition, Haraway’s companion species ethico-politics creates a line of flight that produces the unexpected in the way Deleuze and Guattari’s becoming-other (becoming-animal) recommends and it offers us a contested and interrelational foundation for

constructing a less exclusive, non-hierarchical, and progressive ethico-politics. As Rosi Braidotti observed, Haraway, “prefers...multiplicities, and multiply displaced identities. Non-linearity, non-fixity and non-unitary subjectivity are the priority, and they are situated in close proximity to women, the native, the dispossessed, the abused, the excluded, the ‘other’ of the high-tech clean and efficient bodies that contemporary culture sponsors.”²⁷⁶

VII. The Flight Beyond a Taxidermic Ontology

So, while the mosaic above rejects dualism, it does not do so in the name of a classical reduction either in the register of the physical/material or the ideal. The evidence amassed manifestly flies in the face of substance ontology and goes a long way toward providing a solid justification for an ontology of possibility, flux, multiplicity, impermanence, processes, events, forces, hybridity, chimerism, disunity, contingency, and interdependence. Thus, we need not base ethics on either a human or animal taxidermic (substance) ontology. We must step outside that binary human-animal schema entirely in order to naturalize the ideal somatic subject and project it out beyond the level of the skin—meshing with other species, mutually emerging companion species.

We can envision the self as a materiality, which is also a plural unity. As cited in the Introduction, Nietzsche claims, “we are a *multiplicity that has constructed an imaginary unity for itself*.”²⁷⁷ Following Haraway, we can insist that “bodies are not born; they are made. One is not born an organism. Organisms are made; they are

²⁷⁶ Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, 139.

²⁷⁷ Nietzsche cited in Blondel, *Nietzsche: The Body as Culture*, 234.

constructs of a world-changing kind.”²⁷⁸ Unfortunately, over time and from a host of processes, events, fragments, and properties, we have extrapolated out a fictitious stable, bounded, substance and this has duped us into clinging to the unity of this organism rather than helping us recognize our transspeciesed technoontology, our techno-zoontology characterized by flux, multiplicity, impermanence, and disunity. Rather than stuffing and freezing humans as trophies to mount above our fireplaces, (i.e. viewing the human as a dead stable, frozen, substance) we can continue to stoke our living ontological fire through the more interesting, compelling, and perhaps even more accurate, understanding of being argued in this project. John Rajchman, recapitulating Deleuze, depicts the traditional model of human being as, “formed through habit from an indeterminate world, and is itself a strange kind of ‘fiction’ difficult to dissipate, since it is precisely the fiction of ourselves and our world.”²⁷⁹ And, it is, indeed, this very fiction we are exposing and replacing here—not with some other truth, rather with a theory that gels with truths emerging in biological, social, and technological domains. As stated in the Introduction to this project, philosophy is in pursuit of what is interesting, remarkable, and important, not what is true in any fixed, stable, and enduring sense.

It should be noted that the ontological move from humanism to the transhuman has often been characterized as the death of man. This is, in many senses, an accurate portrayal. Man, or the human, as it has been conceptually generated by the Enlightenment’s dualistic substantive ontological view, has indeed been laid to rest. But this is not in anyway a damaging critique. As Deleuze mused, “while these views invoke

²⁷⁸ Donna Haraway, “The Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies: Determinations of Self in Immune System Discourse,” in *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 207.

²⁷⁹ Rajcman, *The Deleuze Connections*, 17.

the ‘death of man,’ it is only the death of the ‘man’ of the old ‘manifest destinies,’ not the death of humanity and its potential for destratification.”²⁸⁰ What still remains after the destratification, the becoming-other, is the transhuman ontological picture, open to lines of flight, possibility/actuality, in all its fluid and multiply actual splendor. This, however, points not to the death of man but rather to the vitality and intensity of the transhuman—one founded on the multiplicity of forces that resist the taxidermic death of man. Deleuze suggests we seek out, “the set of forces and functions which resist the death of man. Spinoza said there was no telling what the human body might achieve, once freed from human discipline. To which Foucault replies that there is no telling what man might achieve ‘as a living being’ as the set of forces that resist.”²⁸¹ This is obviously not the same as a wholesale disavowal or repudiation of the human. It is a transfiguration of it, a mutation and evolution of it, into the transhuman. It captures the ontological force of our biological reality and sets us on new lines of flight toward an open future, jettisoning only the substantive picture.

As indicated above, the essential feature of becomings-other, and in particular of becomings-animal, is the emergence of new lines of flight and new perspectives produced by novel assemblages. In the case of the co-mingling of animal and human intensities, these lines of flight encourage us to generally refigure human and animal ontologies and to obtain a novel perspective on the human subject. This is no easy task, and much is at stake as we witnessed in Section I.

Of the traditional ‘others’ that mark the outer boundaries of the classical vision of the subject, the animal, natural or organic other is in some ways the hardest to

²⁸⁰ DeLanda, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*, fn. 274. Citing Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, 93.

²⁸¹ Deleuze, *Foucault*, 93.

analyse. Maybe because it is too close for comfort, especially ever since Darwin. Deleuze's theory of 'becoming-animal' addresses this uncomfortable familiarity [which] unveils and disavows the 'beast within.'²⁸²

Despite the trepidation and discomfort brought about by an investigation centered on the organic other that we are, the theorists above have met the challenge. What each of them dare to do is reveal the beast within their versions of the human subject; each has released the line of flight known as becoming-animal. All of them have as a point of departure for their flight an experimentation, a co-mingling of intensities, a transhuman direction.

Deleuze and Guattari are intent on embodying and discovering the creative possibilities of becoming, especially becoming-animal. For Heidegger, it is a summoning forth of the post-metaphysical future of the historically forgotten Being. For Haraway, we are called upon to acknowledge and attend to our mutual emergences, our co-constitution, and our immanent hybridity. And, for Foucault, it manifests in his shift in thinking about the nature of power and its influence on human bodies. It could be argued that these lines of flight were also pollinated by the Nietzschean meditations on animality and human nature. Like him, the other theorists were fighting to repudiate the metaphysics of substance; each attempted to replace traditional versions of the hegemonic subject, the rational animal, with a decentered, material, transhuman subject which included in some sense both human and non-human animal inter-subjectivity. Haraway, with her cyborg, even transports these Nietzschean seeds to the next level by stirring the blended boundaries of natural/artificial and organic/inorganic into the animal-human cocktail.

Before accepting this animal-human picture lock, stock, and barrel, we should briefly pause to reiterate the Derridean qualification discussed in Section I above. This

²⁸² Braidotti, *Metamorphoses*, 120.

point was also raised by David Wood, who claimed, “there are no animals ‘as such,’ rather [a list of] extraordinary variety.”²⁸³ Given this, how then can we coherently talk about becoming-animal in a non-specific way? Perhaps we can take “animal” to represent something like “other,” insofar as the construction of an other is a form of dehumanization, which can manifest as an “animaling.” If interpreted in this manner, as we have seen, this extraordinarily varied list could include such minoritarian subjectivities as: women, “the native,” “the negro,” “the poor,” “the pervert,” “the Jew,” “the mad,” et cetera. each of which has been historically perceived as animal. Consequently, a recognition of the animal as multiple, and an acknowledgment that we are always in a dynamic relation to animal under the guise of our becoming-animal, bestows life to the transhuman with its concomitant multiplicity and flux. Deleuze concurs: “what is involved is no longer the affirmation of a single substance, but rather the laying out of a *common plane of immanence* on which all bodies, all minds, and all individuals are situated.”²⁸⁴ This plane includes animals and humans, the organic and the inorganic, the animate and the inanimate, and the natural and the artifactual.

Because these becomings deterritorialize both human and animal subjectivities in the process, we have to develop a new language with which and a new people with whom we can pronounce this interspecies intersubjective world. In addition, language itself will be dethroned as the *sine qua non*, as the sufficient criteria for being in its teleological form. As we have seen, in wondering about the consequences for *Dasein* in

²⁸³ David Wood, “*Comment ne pas Manger—Deconstruction and Humanism*” in H. Peter Steeves, *Animal Others: On Ethics, Ontology and Animal Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 29.

²⁸⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, Robert Hurley, trans. (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 122.

“transposing” itself into animal (become-animal), Heidegger recognized this problem too and remarked, “*we find ourselves forced to adopt another language because of a fundamental transformation of existence.*”²⁸⁵ Deleuze, unconcerned about the risk of enacting becomings, counsels that we actively undertake, “to create a foreign language within our language to be spoken by a people that does not yet exist.”²⁸⁶ Language, along with reason and the claim to species supremacy founded upon it, are thus transfigured in the course of the deterritorialization to account for the inextricably and multiply interdependent ontological view of the transhuman that emerges from it. Perhaps, if nothing else, the argument presented here simply confirms that we have already begun the process of populating the transhuman world with these bilingual figures, the whole queer family of them (as Haraway would say).

This linkage between language and evolution is not at all accidental. The development of the anatomical and cognitive apparatuses necessary to be capable of linguistic communication is alleged to be what makes complex organisms like humans evolutionarily superior to other species. But this is not the only relationship worthy highlighting. According to Grosz’s read of Darwin, “the development of language is not just *like* evolution, it *is* evolution,”²⁸⁷ and “[t]he same problems regarding the origin of species face any account of the origin of languages, and the same inherent indeterminacy regarding the unit of analysis—the word, the sentence, the text, a dialect, a language—haunts linguistics as it does biology.”²⁸⁸ As discussed in Section III, species and organisms, like languages, are indeterminate and multiple when we get beneath the

²⁸⁵ Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, II:3 §49, 203.

²⁸⁶ Proust via Deleuze, as quoted in Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections*, 10.

²⁸⁷ Grosz, *Nick of Time*, 29.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

surface. Both are also vulnerable to mutation as a result of pressures from outside forces in such a way that speciation and linguistic evolution often result in a product containing the vestiges of the combined history of forces and pressures. In light of the fluid multiple view of ontology and biology, and the revised understanding of human-animal interrelations presented above, language should perhaps, in turn, lose its privileged and hegemonic status as the defining fact of human nature. Only when language is thus desituated can we come to realize our full ontological scope, as focusing on language construed as stable and fixed helps bolster the substantive ontological perspective.

Lastly, since bodies and human being can now be understood to be a cobbled together history of molecules, particles, forces, events, processes, et cetera, at least biologically, it is important to qualify and soften this claim. I want to avoid falling on either side of the fence with respect to the issue of social construction and biological essentialism. On the one hand, a completely constructionist model fails in its analysis of the body because it omits the multiple biological forces and processes and, “metastable relations between microcellular and multicellular bodies, the bodies of animals and human, the bodies of society and technological bodies merging and unleashing new mutating compositions.”²⁸⁹ On the other hand, biological essentialism fails on its own terms. If everything that has been presented above is true biologically, there is nothing stable and essential about humans *qua* corporeal/biological entity; the communities of interdependent creatures living on and beneath the skin and the external species and organisms surrounding us are irreducibly what we are. There is nothing over or under that set of properties. That leaves us with an ontological theory that is teetering on the

²⁸⁹ Luciana Parisi, *Abstract Sex Philosophy, Bio-technology, and the Mutations of Desire* (New York: Continuum Press, 2004), 27.

line somewhere between the poles of construction and essentialism. Part 2 has been dedicated to the task of investigating the material/biological end of this issue. But, in order to unpack the socio-technological aspect of this split, we now turn to Part 3, which focuses on teletechnological constructions of human being.

PART 3—TECHNOONTOLOGY

**REALITY TELEVISION:
TECHNONATURE AND THE HUMAN PETRI DISH**

Technology is...no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing...What is decisive in *techné* does not lie at all in a making and manipulating nor in the using of means, but rather in the...revealing...bringing-forth.²⁹⁰

The analysis of reality TV may seem an odd choice to make in order to justify the ontological paradigm being advanced here. Certainly, it is not among the most obvious choices. Having just sifted through the ways in which biological features of the human demonstrate the multiplicity of bodies, of the organismic event that is human being, the *becoming-animal*, the Body without Organs, it seemed a logical move to turn to the ways in which human-technology relations uncover human ontology. It is my argument that our inextricable relationship to technology, herein viewed through the televisual screen, is, “a discontinuous, nontotalizable series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances, and incorporeal events, speeds, and durations...[that] reconceive[s] bodies outside the binary oppositions imposed on the body by the mind/body, nature/culture, subject/object and interior/exterior oppositions.”²⁹¹ As demonstrated in the Part 2, this body/self that we are, our ontology, is not properly depicted as a static, homogenous, unified identity having a clearly bifurcated internal/external boundary. Rather, the body/self, what we are ontologically, is an ongoing border project taking place on and through the porous and leaky terrain of the skin.

The term “teletechnology,” as it is deployed by Patricia Clough, captures the eventual element of our technonature and the way in which technology is part of the fabric of being rather than that in which being is swathed; the latter entails the possibility

²⁹⁰ Martin Heidegger. “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), 12.

²⁹¹ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 164.

of there being a separation of technology and being, which I deny. There is no escaping technology. It is part of what we are, it is part of our essence. Clough describes teletechnology as:

the realization of technoscience, technoculture, and technonature—that is, to the full interface of computer technology and television, promising globalized networks of information and communication whereby the layers of electronic images, texts, and sounds flow in real time, so that the...adjustment to the vulnerabilities of exposure to media event-ness, are beyond any user's mere decision to turn "it" on or off.²⁹²

Her depiction of the teletechnological hones in on the way in which we must refigure our understanding of technology to fit the postmodern experience²⁹³ of it. Following Heidegger, cited above, we come to envision technology not as mere instrumentation or manufactured object. Rather, we begin to see that our "artificially textured existence,"²⁹⁴ our being-in-the-(technological)-world, comes to shape us ontologically in ways that belie substance and expose fluidity, multiplicity, process, occurrence, and the event. Technology at its essence is *aletheic*, revealing, of Being. This, technology, is the "truth" of being, not in the sense of correctness or by means of some reference to a particular state of affairs, rather truth is a technological unconcealing. As beings-in-the-(technological)-world, human ontology can be depicted as cyborgian—collapsing the boundaries between machine and organism, nature and culture, human and animal, and championing an identity of hybridity, a chimera, a mosaic.²⁹⁵ Following Donna Haraway, we can transport this ontology a step further and claim, "we are all chimeras,

²⁹² Clough, *Auto Affection*, .3.

²⁹³ Experience, borrowing from Kaufman-Osborn, can be understood relationally as, "an articulation of the way nature's dynamic events come to be incorporated within the equally mobile realm of human being," rather than, "gestur[ing] at some ineffable substance located who knows where." Timothy V. Kaufman-Osborn. *Creatures of Prometheus: Gender and the Politics of Technology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), 145.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁹⁵ Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," 149-152; 177.

theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology, it gives us our politics.”²⁹⁶ This returns us to what I have been arguing are the inextricable, mutually emergent connections between science, technology, ontology, and ethico-politics. We cannot disentangle these issues. Ontological theories of the human arise hand in hand with technoscientific theories and this has ethico-political effects.

It can be of little controversy nowadays to maintain that, “television [is] the machine central to the technology defining postmodernity.”²⁹⁷ As such, and given that we are beholden to the teletechnological, at least in part, to flesh out our technonature, reality TV stands out as an obvious vehicle through which human ontology is revealed. The argument here rests on the assumption that, “‘(m)achines and other technologies should be understood as agents in the construction of subjectivities...’ In other words, how we think of ourselves as persons is partly a function of our interactions with machines.”²⁹⁸ But, there is more. At its core, I believe that reality TV is a kind of scientific thinking about subjects. One that, with its substantive metaphysical vestiges, strives to create subjects that neatly fit into pre-scripted, determined, static identity roles and derive truths about their nature. Far from portraying being as an event or, “an object that comes into being only with a theoretical apparatus or device...[where] temporality matters, when the ontology of the object is volatile, unfolding,”²⁹⁹ the scientific underbelly of reality TV rears its ugly and violently reductive head in reifying a fictional

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.150.

²⁹⁷ Clough, *Auto Affection*, 10.

²⁹⁸ Emily Martin, “Working Across the Human-Other Divide,” in Birke and Hubbard, *Reinventing Biology*, 269.

²⁹⁹ Clough, *Auto Affection*, 190.

ontological picture of human being; one that is contradicted by the very ontology of reality TV itself.

As we will uncover, reality TV is a mode of what Ian Hacking describes as “making up people.” In a perhaps inadvertently performative and mimetic bringing-forth, as True, visions of human being that are misguided from the point of view of an internal analysis of the logic of reality TV itself, reality TV paradoxically reveals the extent to which the notion of being as a static, unified substance is a misunderstanding or a concealing of being. Moreover, in the process of broadcasting its versions of (scientific) human Truths, reality TV has the effect of constituting, codifying, and widely disseminating a specific ethico-political platform that contains not only serious global geopolitical risks but also contributes to the forgetting of being a danger against which Heidegger vehemently cautioned us. Now to the analysis:

I. Coming Attractions, Previews

Sometimes certain cultural phenomena bothers one for reasons that one cannot quite explain. Though seemingly benign, they gnaw at you until you finally seize upon the conceptual understanding that accounts for that nagging feeling. Of course any good critical thinker would be bothered by a host of commonly accepted and popular cultural phenomena; there are many offensive practices that find themselves vast and fanatical audiences and practitioners. But certain ones just perplex you in ways that are not apparent at the onset. In these cases, it is not enough to just rehearse the standard line: that these practices reify and legitimate offensive social, political, and economic structures. There seems to be something deeper at stake, something much more

troubling. This intuition warrants an analysis that transcends or at least deepens that standard line. Such is the case I found with so-called “reality TV.” A relatively recent genre, reality TV has undergone many changes in format over the years. From its humble birth practically coinciding with the inception of the television medium, to its more recent genesis in *The Real World* and *Cops*, to its current incarnation in the now ubiquitous *Survivor* and its spawn *Temptation Island*, *Combat Missions*, *Big Brother*, *The Mole*, *Fear Factor*, *The Apprentice*, et cetera, reality TV has evolved into something slightly different than its voyeuristic and documentary-like origins would have envisioned.

The aim of this part, Part 3, is to show the way in which the scientization of knowledge has taken hold and influences our ontological understanding of our selves, the social world, and the relations among people within it. It is an important step in the justification of the ontological paradigm proposed in the sections constituting Part 1. It broadens the scope of the biological arguments made in Part 2 to the realm of the socio-cultural and deepens the claims about the breakdown of static subjectivity and the binary of internal/external constructed on the back of the substantive paradigm and ontological dualism. It also expands the reach of these ontological motifs to the domain of the influence of contemporary media technologies.

My aim here is to demonstrate that reality TV has expropriated the model of the laboratory with its concomitant experimental method and, in doing so, has altered and shaped the nature of our understanding of social relations. I argue that reality TV functions like a corporate laboratory, the sort that would produce the modalities of human

possibility described by Hacking's "dynamic nominalism."³⁰⁰ By dynamic nominalism Hacking means to bridge the simple division between realism and nominalism; he allows that social kinds can be socially constructed but that, once constructed, they create *real* human possibilities toward which real humans project themselves, and that they can actually become. This brand of nominalism thus holds that, "a kind of person came into being at the same time as the kind itself was being invented."³⁰¹ This, he claims, follows Foucault, who, Hacking admits, locates labeling or naming as only one of a number of factors that contribute to the "constitution of subjects." He cites Foucault: "We should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts etc."³⁰² As such, these human realities acquire a quasi-natural ontological status. Karen Barad, with her agential realism means to connote something similar, as:

[a]gential realism is an epistemological and ontological framework that provides an understanding of science as 'material-discursive' practices. These practices are recognized as being productive rather than merely descriptive. However, what is produced is constrained by particular material-discursive factors and not arbitrarily construed. Agential realism theorizes agency in a way that acknowledges that there is a sense in which 'the world kicks back.'³⁰³

This "looping effect" described by Hacking gels with Barad's assessment that "the world kicks back," or has agency. There is an ontologically and epistemologically productive component to naming, labeling, and similar discursive praxes. And what it produces is real, material, human possibilities. Such is the claim herein about the scientific quality of

³⁰⁰ Ian Hacking, "Making Up People," in *The Science Studies Reader*, Mario Biagioli, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 161.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

³⁰² Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, C. Gordon, ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 97. Cited in Ian Hacking, *Ibid.*, 164.

³⁰³ Karen Barad, "Agential Realism: Feminist Interventions in Understanding Scientific Practices," in *The Science Studies Reader*, Mario Biagioli, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 2.

reality television. This investigation seeks to pinpoint the very sorts of material human realities, ways of being that are generated by this technological medium.

My argument is that these television programs generate, (re)produce, and proliferate the sorts of social human kinds that exist and toward which we can direct ourselves, those selves we can and do become. Additionally, understanding this parallel between the corporate experimental laboratory and reality TV will help us understand the ways in which the “truths” that get generated from these shows serve to infiltrate, and perhaps even contaminate, social relations. They produce the sorts of natural human kinds that are consistent with a greedy, capitalistic, profit-driven societal model. And whether we ultimately valorize those sorts of relations or ways of acting, because they are repeatedly rewarded in the reality TV context, or whether we continue to find them repugnant but suppose that others are or will be inclined to behave in that manner, reality TV has an overall undesirable effect on constituting and shaping social relations.

Prophetic as usual, Friedrich Nietzsche long ago declared that, “the ‘true world’ finally became a fable.”³⁰⁴ He proclaimed that the true world was, “an idea which is no longer good for anything, not even obligating—an idea which has become useless and superfluous—*consequently*, a refuted idea: let us abolish it!”³⁰⁵ Reality TV goes a long way toward fulfilling the vision Nietzsche forecasted even though his claim was made long before television itself would be invented, and about a century before the so-called “reality TV” genre would be born, become popularized, proliferate, and spread to audiences across the globe. Not only does reality TV in a certain sense permit the true

³⁰⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable,” *Twilight of the Idols Or, How One Philosophizes with a Hammer*, in Kaufmann, *Op.Cit.*, 485.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 485.

world to become fictional, it also has the inverse effect of making what is essentially a highly constructed quasi-fictional world become real. It is the blurring of these very boundaries that seems to be an essential feature of this medium and it is the interstice between them, which Hacking was denoting with his dynamic nominalism.

What follows will take this configuration: Section II will, in a schematic manner, draw the map of the scientific method and one of the chief science and technology studies (STS) critiques of it; Section III puts forth the ontology, definition, and early genealogy of reality TV; Section IV canvasses the variety of contemporary reality TV motifs and puts forth some cursory analyses of each type; Section V pauses to flesh out one general concern about reality TV; Section VI traces the blueprint of the scientific method and the attendant critique of it onto the methodology of reality TV; Section VII pinpoints some of the consequences of the seepage of scientific thinking into our understanding of humanity and human relations; Section VIII highlights a subset of those consequences, those that draw connections among the teletechnology medium, the social products engendered and disseminated by reality TV, and issues of globalization and capitalism; and, finally, Section IX returns us to the ontological issues of human being as they relate to reality TV.

II. Experimental Histories, Modest Witnesses, and the Construction of Reality and Truth³⁰⁶

The purpose of the following section is to serve as a cursory exposition of some of the relevant features of scientific method and the laboratory sciences. What distinguishes science from other disciplines is commonly called the “demarcation

³⁰⁶This section relies heavily on indispensable conversations with my colleague Toby DeMarco.

problem.” One traditional way in which philosophers of science have tried to demarcate science from other areas of inquiry and discourse is to appeal to an alleged methodology of science. There is a long history of debate over whether there are scientific methods, or *the* method, or no methods at all. There is also a debate about what the purposes of such methods are and whether they are valuable enterprises or not. Moreover, there is the issue of whether such methods should be prescriptive/normative or descriptive. I make no conclusions about these issues here; nonetheless, there is the traditional story and that is the one I present now. The story told is coupled with the science and technology studies (STS) critique about it.

Scientists involved in the laboratory sciences are faced with problems, seek explanations, formulate and test hypotheses and theories, use models, use technology, make observations, manipulate materials, construct technologies, design experiments, conduct experiments, et cetera. Each of these elements also contains myriad problems and questions. For example, there are the questions of whether human observations are theory-laden or not, whether the knowledge gained from scientific research is true or socially constructed, whether the objects studied by or products resulting from science are independently real or constructed by the procedures of science.³⁰⁷ One could maintain that, “(s)cience is not nearly self-reliant enough...it first requires in every

³⁰⁷ See, among others: Helen Longino. *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Donna Haraway. “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” in *The Science Studies Reader*. Mario Biagioli, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999); Bruno Latour. *Pandora’s Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); André Kukla. *Social Constructivism and the Philosophy of Science* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Ian Hacking. *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); Karin Knorr-Cetina. *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); and Andrew Pickering. *Science as Practice and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

respect an ideal of value, a value-creating power, in the *service* of which it could believe in itself—it never creates values.”³⁰⁸ All of this is done usually and practically toward some end: explaining some phenomenon, making and testing new medicines, making predictions about the world, and building new technologies. The interactions among the above elements along with the complexities of capital, profit motives, government intervention through regulations and laws, and individual biases, prejudices, and motives, qualifies science as a complex social phenomenon. Indeed, I would concur with Nietzsche that, “there is no such thing as science ‘without any presuppositions’; this thought does not bear thinking through it is paralogical: a philosophy, a “faith,” must always be there first of all, so that science can acquire from it a direction, a meaning, a limit, a method, a *right* to exist.”³⁰⁹ Thus, there are social factors of science and scientific practice, and STS has focused on these social factors. Science is purported to be objective, aim at the truth, discover the truth, generate theories, explanations, and be able to make predictions. Though none of these features is necessarily a day-to-day concern of working scientists and scientific institutions, these assumptions form the basis of the entrenched practices and beliefs of science.

First, science uses observation and experiment, or the experimental method. The concept of experiment is one in which particular objects and events are placed together in highly regulated and specific laboratory conditions in order to make observations about what occurs. Early practitioners and developers of the experimental method like Francis Bacon called the results that emerged from this sort of scientific setting an “experimental history” rather than a truth. However, in a move to capture the results of the scientific

³⁰⁸ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III:25:153, 1989.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 151-2.

method as true, the modest witness was born. Donna Haraway describes the figure of the Modest Witness, the new practitioner of this experimental method:³¹⁰ “S/he is about telling the truth, giving reliable testimony, guaranteeing important things, providing good enough grounding—while eschewing the transcendental foundations—to enable a compelling belief and collective actions.”³¹¹ It is this modest witness, who steps back and observes as the “truth” emerges from the confines of the experiment and then universalizes it through the process of induction. From particular instances, a general conclusion is drawn. Haraway adds that, “in order for the modesty...to be visible, the man—the witness whose accounts mirror reality—must be invisible, that is an inhabitant of the potent “unmarked category,” which is constructed by the extraordinary conventions of self-invisibility...such a man must inhabit the space perceived by its inhabitants to be the ‘culture of no culture.’”³¹²

Very often, the observations may be made with the help of technology, e.g., the microscope. The conditions of the experiment are supposed to be in line with experimental protocol, which has now in contemporary capitalistic society been ordained by government agencies, e.g. The United States Food and Drug Administration. The experiment should contain a control group that does not participate in the experimental conditions, and/or a placebo group in order to rule out various kinds of placebo effects. It should have an appropriate level of blindness: for example, double-blind means that

³¹⁰ Haraway credits the following for the term Modest Witness: Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

³¹¹ Haraway, *Modest_Witness*, 22.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 23ff. “The culture of no culture” is a phrase Haraway attributes to Sharon Traweek, *Beamtimes and Lifetimes: The World of High Energy Physics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).

neither the participants/subjects nor experimenters know fully the conditions of the experiment. Psychological factors that might influence the results should also be minimized if not eliminated. For example, it is often better that a laboratory is unaware of what it is meant to find, in order that it is not predisposed to finding it. Another simple example is that often it is better that radiologists do not know what they are meant to find on a film in order that they not “think” they are seeing it. All of these regulatory practices on the processes of scientific experimentation are meant to guarantee the truth and objectivity of the results observed.

There are many levels at which things may go wrong or in which error may occur. Are the observers paying attention to relevant properties? Are the observers’ dispositions biased or selective? Are the causal agents just those we can discern or are there others? Did the scientist design the experiment necessarily to achieve a certain result? Are other aspects of the conditions of the experiment being ignored yet relevant to the results? The observer of experiments is supposed to be neutral and objective; yet, there is always the possibility of observational error due to the cognitive and perceptual biases humans possess. The observer is responsible for collecting data. Data is then analyzed with the use of models, statistics, and other forms of mathematics. Here there may be errors in the models, a problem with the misapplication of them, or the chance of computational errors.

In addition, the results of experiments must be replicable and public, that is, other researchers using similar materials and means must be able to arrive at the same results. Testability is a hallmark of this method. One needs to be able to test a hypothesis, be able to devise a method to test it, verify it, and this test should be repeatable and/or

witnessed by others. Not only is this corroboration said to increase the probability that the conclusions drawn are true epistemically, but the results are thought to be real ontologically. It is interesting to note that under the reign of early formations of the experimental method, access to the laboratory as well as the observation of experiments was highly restricted; “experiments were not, in practice, available to be witnessed by everyone, but only by a self-selected few...the witnessing of experiments, upon which the making of matters of fact depended, was a private and, possibly, a partial affair.”³¹³

Especially in modern, industrial, capitalistic societies, science needs to be financed. The source and nature of the financing may have highly influential effects on how science is conducted. Money acts as a filter. It may determine what knowledge is sought, which hypotheses are pursued, which results get attention and which do not, and what technologies are available and to whom. In this manner, the profit motive itself distorts the disinterested knowledge-seeker picture of science. In short, science today is almost always in the service of capital. This is highly relevant in light of the fact that there are two major sources of funding for scientific projects in the United States: the government (especially its military) and corporations. One cannot help but project conjecture about the ways in which these sources influence science toward their motives—militaristic and profit-driven. Michel Tibon-Cornillot examines and evaluates some of the risks associated with the channeling of science through these sources.³¹⁴ The movement of scientific research and its products from the domain of science proper to the

³¹³ Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer. *Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 113.

³¹⁴ Michel Tibon-Cornillot, “New Approaches to Risk: Remarks on a Possible Shipwreck in the Life Sciences,” Jami Weinstein, trans., in *Found Object*, number eleven, Fall 2001-Spring 2002, p.97-118.

service of the military and capital, causes what Tibon-Cornillot describes as a shift in scale; no longer can we calculate risk in quantitative terms, now we must think in endlessly more complex qualitative terms.³¹⁵ The mass deployment of scientific products created under this guise surely has grave, and likely incalculable, effects.

As some have suggested, these may not be very deep truths about science—at least not about its objects of study—science, they say, still locates “Truths” about the world, regardless of the funding source. However, it would be irresponsible to underestimate the role of these sources in constructing certain truths, even if one clings tightly to ontological realism.³¹⁶ After all, a special superior type of knowledge, a “universal truth,” is said to be learned but only by a special sort of person, a “scientist,” using a superior way of developing and evaluating knowledge, “the scientific method.”³¹⁷ The deck is stacked. The epistemic status of the results and conclusions of the laboratory sciences is always suspect because of the potential of the above outlined problems, risks, and social influences to surface. But so too, because results are obtained and confined to the artificial constraints of the laboratory, it is unclear whether these results hold true for more “natural” conditions and contexts. The conclusions are put forward as universal, as True for reality. But in many cases this inference has no further evidence than the laboratory results themselves. Obviously, the researchers are making an inductive inference. One need not raise the skepticism issue in order to find potential flaws in this

³¹⁵ Jami Weinstein, “Introduction to New Approaches to Risk: Remarks on a Possible Shipwreck in the Life Sciences,” in *Found Object*, number eleven, Fall 2001-Spring 2002, 100.

³¹⁶ Hacking states in reference to electrons that “if you can spray them, then they are real” thus declaring himself to be a scientific realist, or a realist about natural kinds. Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening*. However, when the issue regards social human kinds, Hacking himself admits that realism may not be so appropriate. (see Ian Hacking, “Making Up People” in *The Science Studies Reader*, Mario Biagioli, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999.))

³¹⁷ <http://dharma-haven.org/dispelling-myth-magical-science.htm> (slightly modified)

inference. Furthermore, though many would disagree that these are profound, compelling, or definitive critiques of science, they may very well be when exported into the world of reality TV.

III. Reality TV: Ontology and Genealogy

What is reality television? What makes it a unique entity and a distinct genre? In reflecting on the various programs labeled under the genre “Reality TV,” it is not immediately obvious what, if anything, they all share. As we will see below, there are various sub-categories of reality TV programming; aside from the thematic differences, there are also teleological differences. Some might be inclined to declare that there is no essence to reality TV in the Platonic sense but rather that all the shows forming the class of things labeled reality TV merely share a sort of Wittgensteinian family resemblance. Though it may be less controversial to claim the latter and more difficult to claim the former, I am going to analyze the genre and make an attempt to nail down some sort of essence in the more Platonic sense. I do think that there are some common threads among the various reality TV forms. Most notably, the intersection of three elements: the documentary format, the *agon* or contest, and the goals of money and fame. The primary affinity among the varied shows, I am arguing, is the way in which they make use of a mode of scientific thinking arising from the experimental method that allows them to naturalize their output such that the ontological and epistemological status of this output gets elevated to Truth or Reality. Once this takes place, real human possibilities are created. In this version of the Foucauldian and Hackingesque looping effect, these social relations get mapped onto and projected out into our real world (outside the reality TV

context) and social relations and ordinary people are transformed according to them. These human kinds are produced and then embodied by real people in a dynamically nominal or agentially real manner. This will be the main focus of the analysis undertaken in Section VII below. In the present section, I first take stock of the other three salient similarities I mentioned with two important, interconnected pauses: one to unpack the notion of 'real' in reality TV and the other to consider the relationship between fictional presentations and those of reality TV.

An analysis of the central elements of reality TV reveals that there are three major strands comprising it: the documentary facet; the game show, *agon*, or competitive component; and the drive to attain fame or win money for fame or money's sake alone. Let us take a quick glance at the precursors to our contemporary genre of reality TV just to see its roots in these twin origins. Arguably, it can be said that the program, *The American Family*, broadcast in 1973 in the United States might have been the first of the reality TV genre, even though it would be about sixteen years before another show of its kind would surface, spawn spin-offs and finally take hold as a genre. For *The American Family*, a documentary-style show, three hundred hours of footage was shot over seven months and merely twelve hours of it finally aired. The subjects were an actual family, the Louds, and during the period of filming, the parents broke up, the husband was kicked out and the sons came out of the closet as gay.³¹⁸ Even today, such a broadcast would have a broad appeal and likely garner top ratings and substantial advertising revenue.

Unequivocally, reality TV is parasitic on documentaries of this type, both broadcast and film. Yet they are not identical. One of the differences between them may

³¹⁸ <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/realitytv1.html>

reside in the fact that the goal of documentation is to have the recording process make as minimal interventions with the filmic events as possible. However, even in documentaries there are constructed events. For example, when a person or the filmmaker interviews subjects, obviously the event's existence is contingent upon the documentary and the recording process. In other words, the event would not have taken place if it were not for the documentary. But the difference between this type of documentary-style event and the occurrences on reality TV is that the good documentary gives no pretense that it is non-constructed when it is constructed, whereas the reality TV constructions are presented as if they are real, there is a pretense, an ideology, of documentation.

Another contrast between them might rest in their teleologies. The goals of each medium are different: one is to record or to inform, the other is to entertain and/or profit. The goal of reality TV producers is to construct an entertainment object on video or film whereas the goal of documentary filmmakers is to record or document. Though it is true that a byproduct of documentary could be entertainment, it is not meant to be the primary or even secondary objective; documentary seeks neutrality but reality TV endeavors to create a spectacle. This distinction in their aims undoubtedly affects the ontological status of the product. It is a bit early to return to the issue of science but a cursory remark is appropriate here. On the one hand, documentary filmmaking resembles the historical and standard modest witness view of the scientific method in that the filmmaker, like the scientist, tries to disappear into the background in order that the "truth" will emerge and be uncompromised. On the other hand, and as we will see below, reality TV plays with the relation between the observer and the "objects of study" in a bid to increase interest

on the part of the audience and, via the entertainment spectacle, ultimately to increase profits. Drawn in that manner, reality TV resembles modern, industrial, capital-infused technoscience, which strives to invent and develop merely to maximize financial gain. We will revisit this relationship between science and reality TV in much more detail in Section VI.

The other genealogical precursor of reality TV is obviously the *agon*, or the contest. The history of television is peppered with game shows of many varieties but an overall sweep reveals them as generally reliant upon a specific skill, such as knowledge of trivia, and confined to the game show context. The advent of shows such as *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* allowed a real-life element to enter into the studio-constructed mix. In that show, contestants were permitted a limited number of phone calls to friends or family members not present in the game show studio for help in trying to answer the questions. Further, shows like *The Weakest Link* padded the well-worn game show formula with a *Survivor*-like voting process, strategy, scheming, and teamwork among the players, and an increased element of humiliation for the losers. At the end of each round, the contestant who is perceived to be the weakest link is eliminated by the votes of the other contestants (who may confer with each other to some degree) until the resulting one-to-one showdown for the entire cash prize. The prize is amassed and banked by all the players working together throughout the game up until the final round when the ultimate victor leaves with its totality. After each player is voted off (and at various points throughout the game), the host of the show sees fit to hurl a pointed and witty insult at him/her before capping it off with her signature line, “you are the weakest link, goodbye.” Allowing oneself to be humiliated in this fashion speaks to the problem of

fame for fame's sake or the willingness to do almost anything to win money that will be addressed below. Thus, it is no longer reasoning skills or superior knowledge that advances a game show participant to victory nor is the play of the game confined to the studio setting. These are a couple of the early seeds that have sprouted reality TV in its present form.

It would be useful to pause a moment to unpack the notion of the 'real' in reality TV before attending to the particular instances of it and attempting to classify and analyze them. The salient features of the genre referred to as reality TV includes at least the following: it is unrehearsed, unscripted, (sometimes) real-time action by non-actors. The lives of the participants/contestants seem to be or are observed unceasingly by what one might assume is an omnipresent camera or set of cameras; the audience and participants presume the camera to be a version of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon.³¹⁹ Foucault describes the panopticon as the disciplinary technology in which, "Inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere."³²⁰ and, "Visibility is a trap."³²¹ The purpose of this technology with respect to prison life is to maintain order and submission through the illusion of constant surveillance, thereby automating the disciplinary effects of a constraining and restricting power through non-(physically) violent means. Though, in the case of these broadcasts, nobody confesses openly to the disciplinary effect the ubiquitous camera has on people and their behaviors. It is meant to broadcast "real events" as they "actually happen." In the case of a number of these shows like *Big Brother*, the transmissions are fed twenty-four hours a day through internet simulcasts

³¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). See particularly Part Three, Chapter Three: "Panopticism."

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 195.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

and are accompanied by television broadcasts of edited digests of the week's highlights. The practice of "digesting highlights," or editing in general in the case of all of the other varieties which do not have twenty four hour real-time simultaneous broadcasting, definitely calls into immediate question the "reality" of the reality TV. For many who have watched both the live streaming simulcasts and the edited digest versions of *Big Brother*, for instance, it is clear that editing can create (or efface) situations and characters and often the two versions share little, if anything, in common. Additionally, since the camera operates like a panopticon, and all the contestants are aware of its (presumed) presence at all times, it cannot help but regulate, distort, and influence their behavior.

It is also not exactly clear how unscripted reality TV is. Setting aside public claims by former participants that producers actually have told participants what to say or how to act, and even without digging too deeply, we can witness a sort of scripting both through events and contests constructed by the producers and the casting of specific types of participants. As for the unrehearsed nature of the shows, it is interesting to consider the effect that having numerous seasons of a show has on constructing the behavior of the participants in an almost rehearsal-like fashion. After all, when you want to win, you take tips and clues from the ways in which previous contestants have acted. This "stylized repetition of the same"³²² set of behaviors is exactly what constitutes them, naturalizes them, and propagates them as *real*. The construction of selves, as characters, that gets disseminated and transmitted, is a performative act in every sense.

³²² Judith Butler gives this argument to describe the way gender operates but it also seems to work in this context. For her argument, see *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1990).

So, how real is this form of reality then? Is it scientific thinking or aesthetic attitudes that lead people to interpret reality TV as real? We ask ourselves “is it real?” as if this question makes sense. The question is elliptical: real compared to what? People often make mistakes in interpreting films, TV drama and situation comedies. For example, people frequently confuse characters with actors, fictional entities with real entities, and representational types with actual social types. Should we be more charitable to people or are they simply that fatuous? Producers of reality TV obviously take advantage of what they already know about people’s reactions to the fictional. However, reality TV invites these kinds of confusion more patently than fictional shows.

To better frame the problem of this blurring between reality and fiction, we should pause again, this time to consider the way in which the production process itself perforates and pervades the action of reality TV. Taking note of this helps us see how reality TV is ontologically distinct from “pure” known fiction shows. Film theorist Laura Mulvey maintains that:

There are three different looks associated with the cinema: that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion. The conventions of narrative film deny the first two and subordinate them to the third, the conscious aim being always to eliminate intrusive camera presence and prevent a distancing awareness in the audience. Without these two absences (the material existence of the recording process, the critical reading of the spectator), fictional drama cannot achieve reality, obviousness and truth.³²³

The fictional domain thrives on the bracketing of the elements of the experience that make it fictional, as Mulvey suggested: the recording process and the awareness of the audience. Without the (sub)conscious elision of these elements, there would be no way to suspend disbelief and enter the fictional realm as real. In the case of reality TV, there

³²³ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16.3, Autumn 1975, 6-18.

has been a great deal of blurring of the boundaries between the filmic construction of the reality TV world and the realness of the activities performed within it. Though while these boundaries were consciously and filmically blurred, this move was simultaneously cast as accidental and taboo. This recalls Foucault's familiar pronouncement that in repressing "deviant" sex we were also producing its reality and multiplying the categories of human possibilities in the process. It was never a pure repression since to repress we had to invent and bring to the foreground all the categories we allegedly were trying to pathologize and eliminate. Furthermore, far from repressing sex, this taxonomization and pathologization created a growth industry around and set of institutions sanctioned to talk about sex; sex was incited into discourse.³²⁴ In consciously airing segments in which the participants crossed those boundaries while simultaneously claiming that this was an accident, unacceptable, "a sin," the producers were utilizing the same logic Foucault spelled out in his assessment of the function of biopower—they were imposing a rule which steeped the breaking of the rule within the very imposing of it.

On "The Real World," breaking down the fourth wall—the barrier between crew and cast, television show and "reality"—has always been a huge deal, even though it has basically happened almost every season...crossovers, from love affairs to producer interventions, have dotted the show's nine years. Yet...exposing the false illusion between the cast's soap operas and the actual production process has been treated as a terrible sin. Most of the other shows have, thankfully, dropped the pretense. We know the casts are on TV, and they know they're on TV, so we might as well just dispense with the fourth wall. Plus, it's interesting to watch cast members screw with the process or hear them talk about why they're on the shows in the first place.³²⁵

Perhaps the hiding of the production process, though ostensibly taboo, is part of the game of making it *real*. As such, ontologically, one of the differences we find between reality

³²⁴ See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), See Parts One and Two.

³²⁵ <http://www.salon.com/ent/log/2000/07/12/reality/index.html>

TV and the fictional realm is this interplay around the borderlands of the first of Mulvey's three elements, "the camera as it records the pro-filmic event." Since the cameras are actually part of the real context of the events taking place in reality TV, allowing the seepage is a way of creating the filmic event as real. Mulvey, "rejected the reductive model of realism as a transparent reflection of a pre-given world and showed how filmic realism participated in the construction of reality and subjects."³²⁶ Further, in the case of reality TV, we can see this being taken to a new level; the subjects and reality that are created are ontologically *real* people and *real* human possibilities, not those bracketed out as merely part of the fictional realm in a suspension of disbelief.

We will later see that this vacillation around the issue of what is being revealed and what is being concealed connects with the methods of science as it purports to be the modest witness. Science elides the ways in which it constructs the reality and the products it produces. For instance, in evading the questions of the effect of global capital, in the artificiality of the experimental context, the manipulations taking place in the laboratory, or in the actual lack of objectivity of the observer as well as a whole host of other considerations, science mirrors Mulvey's paradigm of the fictional world; science calls on us to subordinate the "subjective" influences and productive practices to the "objective" experimental process and denies its own role in creating the reality it asserts as ontologically real and epistemologically true. I fear I might be echoing Nietzsche, who mused, "Oh, what does science not conceal today! how much, at any rate, is it *meant* to conceal! The proficiency of our finest scholars, their heedless industry, their heads smoking day and night, their very craftsmanship—how often the real meaning

³²⁶ Mandy Merck, Naomi Segal, Elizabeth Wright, eds., *Coming out of Feminism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 160.

of all this lies in the desire to keep something hidden from oneself! Science as a means of self-narcosis: *do you have experience of that?*³²⁷ The interesting play on the word experience might be a reference to the fact that the French word for experiment is *la expérience*, interestingly feminine gendered. So the experience/experiment, with its strict methods and regulatory practices, allows us to shroud all the features that reveal it to be crafted or produced.

There is one disturbing trend worth an additional pause to investigate. It is related to the ontology of the reality TV genre—these shows are vehicles for the proliferation of the desire to acquire fame for its own sake. This is one vertebrae in the backbone of the ontological difference between reality TV and other genres. These television shows pervert the concept of fame; they warp it into an objective in itself, a reward worth anything one must do to procure it. It is especially desirable if one need not do anything at all to secure it. For example, “with *Survivor*, you’re offered two things: The possibility of becoming really famous and getting your own TV show without any acting lessons or tap dancing, or anything else that one normally has to go through; and secondly, a million dollars. Fame and fortune are two pretty big plums in American society.”³²⁸ Under the Western rubric, fame has long been paired with fortune as the most unmistakable barometers of success. But are they actually criteria for measuring success or are they in fact constitutive of it? What has actually been achieved in the contexts we are analyzing here? When we look at fame as it is molded in reality TV, the achievement of fame turns out to be circular. The participants become famous for being

³²⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Third Essay, Section 23 in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*. Walter Kaufmann, ed., trans. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 147.

³²⁸ Robert Thompson, <http://pbs.org/newshour/forum/july00/reality.html>

famous, essentially for doing nothing at all save participating in a widely disseminated broadcast. Fame is no longer a barometer, but the mission itself. The prior causal chain of fame had as its antecedent some talent or deed, which merited the consequent fame, which was then a measure of success in that field. In the new schema, one strives, by any means necessary, to acquire fame, which, once achieved, is the measure of success again. But what is missing here is the role of the virtuous deed or estimable talent. The process by which fame was achieved is eliminated and the acts for which the person becomes famous only play a role, if at all, inversely; the acts performed which lead to the fame and accompanying success in this case are irrelevant since the fame is all that matters. However, they may become relevant retrospectively in that if someone wants to achieve fame, she might consult the (outrageous) behaviors and actions of those who have already achieved it. Again, this mimes the scripts that performatively constitute success. After doing so, she may feel the need to contrive more scandalous antics than those who have already achieved it and thus the original behaviors are reified, and the ante is upped. Of course this is not an entirely new phenomenon, the lowest brow talk shows have for years used this carrot of fame to seduce guests to appear on their shows. However, when the desire to be famous, even if you are not famous for any good reason, or even if you become famous for a bad reason gets emphasized above all, the conceptual perversion is complete. In the words of Salmon Rushdie,

In order to be famous and rich, it's OK - it's actually "good" - to be devious. It's "good" to be exhibitionistic. It's "good" to be bad. And what dulls the moral edge is boredom. It's impossible to maintain a sense of outrage about people being so trivially self-serving for so long. Oh, the dullness! Here are people becoming famous for being asleep, for keeping a fire alight, for letting a fire go out, for videotaping their clichéd thoughts, for flashing their breasts, for lounging around, for quarrelling, for bitching, for being unpopular, and (this is too interesting to happen often) for kissing! Here, in short, are people becoming

famous for doing nothing much at all, but doing it where everyone can see them.³²⁹

This phenomenon of reality TV highlights the quotidian to such a microscopic degree that it serves to raise the stakes at what should constitute it. Decent human values such as cooperation, care, altruism, moderation, propriety, intelligence exist in the “real world” outside of reality TV but since they do not garner high ratings with the viewing public and thus are not marketable as they do not maximize profit, they are downplayed or even completely eliminated in favor of the seedy and unethical side of human existence. Boredom does not equal profit. What is presented or constructed by the producers of these shows is an utter Hobbesian state of nature, the war of all against all, for the prize of fame and perhaps direct or indirect fortune. The more ignoble the act, the more the viewers seem to tune in, which suggests that not only do these traits get rewarded in the actual contexts of reality TV but, moreover, in actual life itself, these unsavory “virtues” are being extolled. What is even more worrisome is that this “engineered realism,”

like all fads, it’s likely to have a short shelf-life, unless it finds ways of renewing itself. The probability is that our voyeurism will become more demanding. It won’t be enough to watch somebody being catty, or weeping when evicted from the house of hell, or “revealing everything” on subsequent talk shows, as if they had anything left to reveal. What is gradually being reinvented is the gladiatorial combat. The TV set is the Colosseum (sic) and the contestants are both gladiators and lions; their job is to eat one another until only one remains alive. But how long, in our jaded culture, before “real” lions, actual dangers, are introduced to these various forms of fantasy island, to feed our hunger for more action, more pain, more vicarious thrills?³³⁰

In other words, the stakes will be continually raised until a threshold has been reached, or until audiences tire of the monotony of the excess. Let us hope, for the sake of humanity,

³²⁹ http://guardian.co.uk/saturday_review/story/0,3605,503921,00.htm

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

that the (quest for the) buck stops where we now are before we are propelled back into the lion-riddled gladiatorial ring.

IV. Reality TV: Contemporary Embodiments, Producing Human Possibilities

The modern, post-*The Real World*, format of reality TV has extremely broad popularity among American audiences. However, although the early origins of the genre can be traced back to the American sources mentioned above, the genesis of the modern version cannot be. *Expedition Robinson*, the precursor to our *Survivor*, which in any case was conceived and developed by a British producer, aired in Sweden in 1997. *Popstars* upon which the American version, *American Idol*, was based originally began New Zealand in 1998. *The Mole*, which had a short-lived run in the US, was watched by the Belgians that same year. *Big Brother*, which now is running with local versions in at least 15 countries, entered the scene in Holland in 1999.

In canvassing the television programs currently considered part of the reality TV genre, one can isolate approximately eight prevalent motifs: survival, containment, law enforcement, military, fear, sexual/romantic relations, corporate life, and fame. All of these themes, especially the penultimate, are buttressed by a capitalistic infusion of greed in that the primary goal on the part of the contestants in most cases is to win a large monetary prize. Although money is the primary goal, it often seems that the more fundamental point is to demonstrate “how far can we get people to go for money(.) And that’s not very ennobling.” As the varieties of these shows multiply and their scenarios become increasingly extreme, it seems we cannot help but return to the same “underlying

theme, sort of seeing what people are willing to do basically for money.”³³¹ This underlying theme seems to be at the heart of the message that is diffused globally through the explosion of the genre into more and more viewing markets. This economic underbelly is the substructure of the televisually modified social relation, the scientization of the social world. And, as this Western phenomenon becomes transmitted across the globe and becomes popularized, the sort of cut-throat capitalistic mentality of human relations will be free to spread like a virus. Before even touching further on the issue of how reality TV has the power to shape human possibilities, it would be wise to foreground the eight aforementioned motifs and give a brief synopsis of each. This will allow me to draw the analogy between reality TV and experimental science.

The survival motif is most clearly represented by the show called *Survivor* but it is also echoed in adventure-oriented shows like *No Boundaries*, *The Amazing Race*, *Lost in the USA*, *Lost* and in a way, *The Mole*. *Survivor*, for example, had ten camera crews observing sixteen people (divided into two teams) twenty-four hours a day for about forty days. Participants engaged in an almost Darwinesque survival of the fittest contest which not only involves challenges between the two teams contrived by the show’s producers but also forces them to develop and utilize basic survival techniques including procuring food, water, and shelter. The “highlights” for each week are edited together to form narratives that aired to the eager public on television. Every three days, the group voted to eliminate one member until only two final contestants remained. The seven who were eliminated immediately prior to the final pair are then invited back to select the winner of the one million dollar prize, allowing a sort of revenge for those who were previously

³³¹ Frank Farley, <http://pbs.org/newshour/forum/july00/reality.html>

voted off the show. *Survivor* producer Mark Burnett in an online forum for PBS's *Newshour* insisted that he does not want to bill his show as reality, instead he coined the term "dramality" linking the concepts of drama and reality. He claimed that he,

never said *Survivor* is reality, because what's real about dropping people on an island they never would have found without us? It's certainly not reality, is it? I mean, reality would be a show like *Cops*, where a policeman is arresting a suspect, there happens to be a camera crew along with them, so the cop would do the same job with or without the camera. I think the example of sports is pretty true. Those football players wouldn't be in that stadium were it not for the television. Clearly, these 16 people would not have found the island without us. So it's really - we joke around saying "dramality," a mixture of drama and reality. It's real people in an unscripted drama in a contrived situation.³³²

Yet, it seems the sports analogy is a bit off. For, on the one hand, it is not obviously true that the players would not play without the presence of television cameras and on the other, it is far from clear that somehow the presence of the cameras alters or, at least, controls the reality and truth of the events of the match. Whereas, on the contrary, the presence of the cameras in the reality TV instance does seem to have an effect on the behaviors and actions of the individual participants, and though it is unlikely that the participants would be there without the television cameras, that seems to be at best only a necessary condition, while the monetary prize seems to be the sufficient one. So in a certain sense, football is real where reality TV is not. Furthermore, the *Cops* reference can also be called into question. While it is (hopefully) true that the police officers being filmed would "do the same job with or without the camera" again, it is not at all clear that when we add the camera that their behavior is not affected, that they are not in some way performing for the camera. And, given that *Cops* is an edited show, we can easily question the narrative constructed around each case, which is usually punctuated by some

³³² Mark Burnett Executive Producer, *Survivor*, <http://pbs.org/newshour/forum/july00/reality.html>

sort of summary analysis by the police officers at the close of the show. So in a sense, football is more “real” than Mr. Burnett would admit, *Cops* is less “real” and that still leaves open the question about the status of the reality of *Survivor*. In this sense, *Survivor* might be more like *Cops* than like football in the effect the camera has on the actions of the participants. Or, if we take the optimistic tack on *Cops*, *Cops* and football could be more related and *Survivor* its own breed in that the former two would do what they do regardless of the camera and it is unlikely the latter would. All three are unscripted, and thus in some sense real, so perhaps the best way to characterize the situation is to place the three types on a continuum or spectrum. In that case, football is the most real because the behavior of the players is much less likely to be influenced by the camera and, aside from the basic rules of play, the action is not controlled. *Cops* would be next in the hierarchy of real, since the camera could certainly be affecting the behavior of the police officers being filmed. And, *Survivor* would be viewed as less real than both because the situation is controlled and constructed and there is little doubt as to the intrusiveness of the cameras.

Robert Thompson, a cultural historian at Syracuse University agrees with Burnett that, “There’s no sense of blurring reality with fiction, because it’s so completely contrived.”³³³ But that too looks a bit naïve and simplistic. After all, does the unscripted nature of it not imply that there is a way in which what the participants are doing and performing is real? Granted, nobody would argue that in light of the degree of editing, the presence of the cameras, the fact that the challenges are constructed, and even the possibility that voting is influenced by the producers (as some recent court cases allege),

³³³ Thompson, *Op. Cit.*

that this is reality as it would be in “nature.” However, to say that there is no blurring whatsoever denies the way in which these shows differ from situation comedies and fictional dramas. I hold that there is an ontological difference between reality TV and the fictional programs that does seem to turn on the issue of reality and truth. They *are* real whereas situation comedies and fictional drams are obviously not. We know that despite being contrived, edited, influenced, or disciplined by the ubiquitous cameras, the participants in reality TV programs really did perform what the cameras captured. Whereas, while the *actors* did *act* what the cameras in their broadcasts express, the actual people portraying those characters were *acting* and were not, *as themselves*, really performing those acts. A good example of this is the difference, say, between the cinematic sexual acts we observe in films and the sexual acts depicted in *Loft Story* (see below).

Next, we move to the containment theme, in which a group of strangers are selected and gathered together to cohabit and be ceaselessly observed under varying degrees of accessibility with the outside world. It is most prominent in shows like *Big Brother*, *The Real World*, *Loft Story*, *Residents*, and *Under One Roof*. In *Big Brother*, the most restrictive of these shows, twelve people are locked into a house for seventy five to eighty days. They are recorded twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, by thirty-eight cameras and sixty-two microphones. Four live feeds are constantly airing on the web and some thirty, five hour-long, edited digests are broadcast on television weekly. In the first season of the American version, the participants compete for the top prize of five hundred thousand dollars, second prize of one hundred thousand dollars, and third prize of fifty thousand dollars. It is not clear whether second and third prizes will be

awarded in subsequent seasons. When nine guests have been evicted by being voted off by the other contestants and the final three remain, the nine return to do the final selections. Once again, like on *Survivor*, revenge is encouraged by this tactic. As mentioned earlier, the editing process is clearly relevant here in that one could conceivably watch the live feeds and discern the degree to which the characters of the show's participants are constructed. This became clear when on the first season of the American version, a mutiny of sorts was orchestrated by certain members of the house. They wanted to stage a walk-out of the entire cast because of the ways in which they were being depicted by the producers in the edited digests. The mutiny, of course, was minimized in the televised versions.

It is interesting to compare the American reaction to *Big Brother* which was basically disinterested boredom, to the French reaction to their version of it called *Loft Story*. Apparently,

in an emergency sitting called after fierce criticism of the programme led by French intelligentsia and clergy, the Paris-based CSA [Conseil Superior de l'Audiovisuel] ruled that the constant TV scrutiny of the contestants harmed their human rights. '(The authority) requires daily breaks of significant and reasonable duration in which no audio or visual recording or broadcasting shall take place,' it said in a statement. 'Regardless of the aim of the programme or the fact that the contestants have given their consent, it is imperative from the point of human dignity that there are places and times in which they are not submitted to public observation,' it added.³³⁴

Protesters seem to be responding to the perception that the show is *too* real. The implication is that there should be some events, conversations, and activities outside the scope of the camera in order to preserve human dignity. And that, somehow, this ostensibly essential human dignity turns on the issue of privacy which should be,

³³⁴ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/entertainment/tv_and_radio/newsid_1331000/1331348.stm

according to this ruling, insisted upon despite the fact that the participants consented to or perhaps even desire the constant surveillance. What this critique fails to recognize is the degree to which the whole scenario is contrived and artificial and, in fact, much less real than it seems. However, this blurring of fiction and reality is common. As one journalist pointed out:

Love it, hate it or be uncomfortably compelled by it, the one thing most people have been taking for granted about *Big Brother* is that, contrived as the situation may be, what we see on the screen is what is really happening. ...never assume that things happen in the order you see them on the show. You've had hints if you've been observant: Sometimes someone will have an earlier hairstyle in a later scene.³³⁵

One of the catalysts of this call to arms against reality TV in the *Loft Story* instance is that two of the participants decided to engage in sexual intercourse in a hot tub under the gaze of the camera and the producers aired the scene as part of one of the digested segments. But would it not be fair to say that the contestants knew perfectly well what they were doing and the likelihood that the act would be aired? Is that not the very sort of behavior that is being encouraged of them? After all, that is pretty exciting material in the context of what might otherwise be quite a mundane existence in the loft. Further, in airing the segment, would it be right to claim that the producers were acting unethically or somehow against the dignity of the participants as humans? It seems that would be an unfair assessment given the free choice of the participants and their full knowledge that they were under constant surveillance. Moreover, this ruling situates human dignity above and apart from free human choice. Is free choice not part of or even the essence of human dignity? Were the French existentialists not the ones who elucidated the extent to

³³⁵ http://www.salon.com/ent/tv/feature/2000/08/22/bb_web/index.html

which choice is inextricable from what it means to be human? Perhaps a little lesson on Sartre would serve the CSA in rethinking this case.

One last note on this genre, relevant to the final section of this essay, is that the Spring-Summer 2002 season of The United Kingdom's *Big Brother* added an interesting twist to its constructed setting. Clear, prison-like bars were installed in the house dividing the two sides effectively into two classes. One side ate better and had more food, and enjoyed a swimming pool and various other luxuries, while the other was often deprived of even the most basic sustenance. When the participants from the "rich" side decided to help their friends on the "poor" side by offering them some leftover food, the producers sanctioned them and threatened to evict them from the house. It seems almost unnecessary to bother to interpret what sorts of behavior the producers are trying to advocate, as their disciplining of participants' altruism seems to capture it all. Clearly emphasizing the essentialism and inevitability of class conflict, this new element adds fuel to the fire for our ontological arguments of flux and becoming. The former resonates with the sort of static ontology underlying Plato's notion that people are born either gold, silver, or bronze and cannot hope to escape these caste-like natures. They are forever fixed in their social position, which, in turn dictates their ethical standing in the polis.

As for the law enforcement type of program, it is typified by *Cops* and by a new show in development called *Danger Island*. Now, *Danger Island*, though it is still only in development and is not yet a real show, typifies the escalation and exaggeration taking place in the constructing of these shows. The producers of this show intend to take twelve felons who have already completed their prison sentences and provide them with the opportunity for redemption (their words). These felons cannot be rapists, murderers,

or child molesters, but all other crimes are fair game. The point is a survivor-esque challenge among the participants with a hitch: manhunters will be employed to hunt the felons while they are on the island. So, they not only have to avoid being eliminated by the other participants by losing the challenges constructed for them by the producers, but they also must avoid the manhunters whose sole aim is to eliminate them from the contest. These manhunters are law enforcement officials, military personnel, sport hunters, bounty hunters, et cetera. The prize for the winner is a million dollars to be awarded to his or her last victim or the family of that victim and a fifty thousand dollar educational scholarship for the winner's child to "break the cycle of crime and violence." Perhaps the reason the participants do not earn money for winning this game is due to the American "Son of Sam" law, which disallows convicted felons from profiting off of their crimes. From the promotional discourse around the show, we can infer that the producers believe that people will participate in order, in an almost religious fashion, to redeem themselves in the eyes of the viewing public and they also think that their fifty thousand dollar educational scholarship will somehow break the crime cycle—no doubt mighty presumptuous assertions. If you were a convicted felon who had completed serving your sentence and were transitioning back to your life with your child, do you think that being publicly hunted on television in front of millions of viewers would benefit you? What about the ways this spectacle might affect your children? And, do you really think that a fifty thousand dollar educational scholarship would be adequate compensation for the child who now has to live with this additional stigma?

A related theme—the military—surfaces in *Combat Mission* and *Boot Camp* as well as in a certain sense, *The Mole*, which also belongs to the survivor/adventure

category. Ironically or not, *Combat Missions* (developed by the team who brought *Survivor* to the world) premiered January 16, 2002, a mere four months after the events of September 11th occurred and its concomitant “War on Terror” began. This program gathers former military and law enforcement personnel from the elite Special Operations branches (Navy SEALs, Delta Force, SWAT, and Army Rangers) to demonstrate their physical endurance, discipline, and strategy. Interestingly, these were the same “Special Ops” forces that infiltrated Afghanistan in the initial stages of America’s current war. In the game scenario, four four-person teams are competing against each other. “The four squads will follow a specialized and rigorous regimen of base contests, training exercises and combat missions. This competition will initially be squad against squad for a \$150,000 team winner. Then it will culminate in a final showdown mano a mano for \$250,000 of prize money.”³³⁶ As the name of the show indicates, the contestants are involved in a simulated war. They use actual modern war simulation technology developed by the United States Armed Forces for its own real-life purposes and the same, “sophisticated laser based weapons system that the military uses in its training.” And, eerily, “all combat missions will be based on recent political and civil events like ‘rescue the downed pilot,’ a mission based on recent N.A.T.O. military action in Bosnia.”³³⁷

The blurring between the engineered televisual reality and the real reality of contemporary geopolitical events cannot be overlooked here and seems nearly too obvious to state. Could it be a not-so-subtle form of preparing the public for the events unfolding? It almost begs us to wonder whether, for the sake of entertainment and maximizing profits, these unscrupulous producers would dare to recreate the U.S.’s entry

³³⁶ <http://www.combatmissions.com/default.htm>

³³⁷ *Ibid.*

into Afghanistan as one of their missions. Would they dare to recreate the barbaric Baghdad “Shock and Awe?” The question remains here to what extent these televisual recreations as *reality* affect the sensitivity of viewing audiences to these sorts of events. Many people recounted their experience of watching the television broadcasts of the collapse of the World Trade Center Towers on September 11th as akin to watching a film. It did not seem real. Reality starts to appear a lot more like fiction as fiction becomes reality, it seems. Likewise, these war games represented as reality may have the parallel affect of desensitizing the population to real events, real wars, real invasions viewed on the same technological apparatus—the television.

Moving to the fear motif, we find shows like *Fear*, *The Scariest Places on Earth*, and *Fear Factor*. *Fear* groups two teams of twenty-somethings together and transports them to a location in which paranormal activity is reported to take place. Sites such as abandoned prison electric chair chambers and ghostly burial grounds provide the backdrop of the contest in which each team, represented by one of its members, must submit to a dare constructed by the show’s producers. The member participating in the dare wears several well-positioned infrared cameras as they perform their challenge in order to film the action from various (read: “the participant’s”) perspectives, there is even one pointed directly at the participant’s face. In this manner, there need not be a camera crew trailing the team member and the possibility of being scared is more likely. However, the broadcast is edited. Thus, though it appears that the challenges often elicit actual fear, it is questionable what causes the fear as sound effects could be added and the editing process could construct the situation in such a way as to exaggerate the responses. Additionally, it would not be surprising if we discovered that the producers of the show

planted certain elements to augment the fear or increase the likelihood of a fear response. On a similar broadcast, the *Scariest Places on Earth*, there is continual narration which serves to dilute the fear the audience might experience watching the event and this disclaimer: “‘Some of the scenes depicted in this program were re-creations or dramatizations of actual or alleged events.’ So did the woman searching for the sasquatch-esque Jersey Devil on Tuesday’s episode really hear a roar and run away, or was that a dramatization?”³³⁸ What might be the goal of challenging people to submit to these dares? What might be the interest in watching it? While the person is performing his/her dare, the rest of the team watches and communicates with him/her on an unsophisticated two-way radio and monitors the event on a television screen with images fed in from the infrared cameras. Their role is to urge the person to complete the challenge despite whatever misgivings and fear s/he might be experiencing. The message seems to be: selfishly push people past their limits so that your team can win the prize. On the other hand, though these programs were developed before September 11th it seems that reading the purpose of them through that lens might be interesting. The country is wracked by fear following the attacks on the World Trade Center. Learning to cope with it is in fact an appropriate aim. One common treatment for anxiety is exposure to the trigger or source of the anxiety. In other words, this program advocates confronting and overcoming one’s fears.

The sexual/romantic relations broadcast genre is exemplified by *Temptation Island*. Other shows like *Love Cruise*, and *Chains of Love* could also be placed into his category. *Temptation Island* is first of all interesting because there is no monetary prize,

³³⁸ <http://www.salon.com/ent/tv/feature/2000/10/27/fear/index.html>

perhaps because adding money to the schema of the show would further the critique that, “*Temptation Island*...is anything but family friendly. Indeed, the show that could be dubbed “Prostitution Island” is so morally corrupt that several advertisers, including Best Buy, Quaker Oats, and Sears, have pulled their commercials from the controversial and utterly entertaining show.”³³⁹ The gist of the show is that four unmarried, heterosexual, gender normative couples volunteer to vacation on a beautiful tropical island for two weeks. The catch is that they cannot stay together. Rather the men are put on one side of the island and the women on the other. On each side, there are twenty-six attractive single members of the “opposite sex” ready to tempt them to be unfaithful to and/or leave their partner. These tempters are not paid for their visit to the island (for, again, it would too closely resemble prostitution) other than that they might meet the partner of their dreams and in any case have an American dream-like vacation. One controversy surfaced around the show when it was discovered that one of the couples, the only black couple (all the rest were white), had a child. The producers decided that this was unacceptable and eliminated them from the show offering them a private vacation for two in its stead. The process by which they were removed involved sitting them both down with the producers, on camera, and essentially chastising them for wanting to be participants on a show that has the potential to further entrench the relationship problems they were already experiencing. The message is that couples with children have a greater moral obligation to remain together and that putting their relationship under “real” examination by “dating” the eligible single tempters would endanger that in some *real*

³³⁹ <http://www.infoplease.com/spot/realitytv1.html>

way. I cannot help but worry about the racial implications embedded in this whole controversy. Especially given that a subsequent lawsuit alleges that although,

[the] Fox [network] is...claiming it was unaware that *Temptation Island's* tempestuous couple Taheed Watson and Ytossie Patterson were the parents of two year-old Tylor...The couple has sued Fox Television and Rocket Science Laboratories, which produced the show, for defamation, arguing at least some of the production crew met Watson and Patterson's child when they were visited at home and that producers allowed the pair on the island, only to toss them off in the middle of taping, in a self-righteous bid for ratings.³⁴⁰

Perhaps the couple's claim has merit and this was part of what was being constructed by the producers: knowingly put them on the show and then deliberately throw them off in order to redeem the show's potential "moral depravity." If their story is true, the producers' motives are extremely suspect. What kind of on-air experiment is this? What is the real moral message we are sending? And, is not this message patently infected by racist stereotypes?³⁴¹

On the motif of corporate life there is one clear standout: *The Apprentice*. This genre has not yet exploded on the scene as much as the others. However, it is rumored that a spin-off is in the works that would feature home decorating diva Martha Stewart, fresh out of prison and still under house arrest for white-collar stock trading crimes, in the Donald Trump role. She would be the one determining who was most suited to be a corporate leader, the goal of this contest. *The Apprentice* is just what its title suggests—a contest to determine who will become the apprentice to Donald Trump and run one of his subsidiary companies. It amounts to a sixteen week job interview. The winner is selected after the entire cast is divided into two corporations and set to a series of

³⁴⁰ <http://www.eonline.com/Features/Features/RealityTV/>

³⁴¹ I could not help but notice the name of the production company—Rocket Science Laboratories. This is coincidental given my argument about reality TV being a thinly veiled form of scientific thinking. See Section VI.

challenges to determine whose leadership and business acumen is superior (according to the watchful and unrelenting eye of “The Donald” himself). For each of these two to three day challenges, or business projects, the object is to earn the most money. The composition of the corporations is constantly reworked over the course of the season to insure fairness. At times they pit the women against the men, at other times, the genders of the members of each corporation are mixed. In each case, a leader is selected and she or he must not only organize the challenge, but also nominate the weakest members of the team for Donald’s weeding process from among the participants of the losing corporation in the “boardroom meeting,” which takes place at the end of each episode. Donald is rarely sensitive, kind, or constructive in his criticism, demonstrating the extent to which the corporate world is thought to be a pool of hungry sharks—one has to want success desperately, so much so that you would be willing to do almost anything, often even forming alliances only for instrumental purposes and for the sake of self advancement.

In the first two seasons, the overarching theme pit women against men. They were marketed as corporate versions of the “age-old” battle of the sexes. Often when the corporations were bi-gendered, the emphasis (achieved through the editing and digesting process) would be placed on the way in which women would compete against each other by selling each other out to the men in their corporations and chose to take sides with men rather than favoring or allying with other women. Clearly this highlights the heterosexist presupposition that women are in competition with each other over men and will do anything in their power to eliminate the competition for men’s approval. In both of these seasons, men were the ultimate victors and the top four or five women cashed in

on their fame by posing nude or almost nude for men's magazines. Of course, the moral this story aims to proliferate is that women's competition over men makes them inferior in the corporate world and that the only avenue for success is to sell their bodies or make themselves available for men's pleasure.

In the most recent, third, season, the producers added a new twist: they pit the so-called "street smarts" against the so-called "book smarts." In other words, the idea was to measure the extent to which a college education provided advantages in the world of business. The surprise of this season was that victory was awarded to the show's first female apprentice. What should come as little surprise, however, was that she was among the book smart group (college graduate) group and her final opponent, also a woman, was among the street smart clan (entrepreneurial high school graduates).

The grand prize for the winner of each season's sixteen-week job interview is touted to be the "dream job of a lifetime" with a six-figure salary according to the show's marketing campaign. At the end of each season, Trump presents the final two candidates with a choice between two projects that they could take on upon victory. The prizes awarded to the first two seasons' winners, both male, were in fact classic corporate executive positions in which they were responsible for product marketing, building skyscrapers, managing real estate development ventures, and the like. Here, Trump tipped his sexist hand by offering the final two women of the third season the options of either organizing The Miss Universe Pageant or renovating his Florida Mansion. Season three's victor, the first woman, chose the responsibility of directing the renovation of Trump's mansion. In other words, she became a glorified home decorator. Apparently, that is what Donald Trump and the American public, believes would be the dream job of

a lifetime for a woman. Perhaps this season was as much a battle of the sexes as the previous two?

Thus, in the case of the corporate theme, the evidence is almost too heavy handed to warrant analysis. As could be imagined, the participants who are favored most match the criteria of the stereotypical, American, (male) competitive, greedy, cut-throat, capitalist, corporate persona. They must portray qualities that would make them worthy in the mind of Donald Trump to take the helm of one of his own companies. Further, if that victor happens to be a woman, her role in the corporate world must still align with what is stereotypically thought to be a woman's role outside of it. Thus, it goes without saying that most of these traits are not among the list of Aristotelian virtues.

The last motif, fame, is actually an element of all of the shows. Aside from potential financial gain, most of the participants of the other shows wish to attain status and fame either to further their career goals (which is assuredly the case with this sub-genre) or perhaps get an advertising endorsement contract from some large (multinational) corporation, a book contract, or to be paid for selling their story or joining the talk show/lecture circuit. However, these shows have a certain degree more integrity in that they are intended for those desiring careers in entertainment, and the victor(s) wins a contract in their specific area of the entertainment industry. These shows seem to reward talent with the prize of potential fame, whereas the others simply bestow fame on those who are willing to relinquish their privacy, expose themselves to perpetual scrutiny, often humiliate themselves, and simply to participate in a reality TV show. Shows such as *Bands on the Run*, *Making the Band*, *Popstars*, *Pop Idol*, *American Idol*, *The It Factor*, *Top Model*, and *WWF Tough Enough* typify this sub genre of earning fame for talent.

The issue of fame will be discussed in the next section, however, suffice it to say that with this sub-genre of reality TV programs, the participants of the contests are attempting to build a career around some talent that they believe they possess rather than acquire fame for its own sake.

V. Real Dehumanization, Humans as Standing-Reserve

There is one disturbing trend upon which we have not touched: the tokenism undertaken in the guise of “diversity.” For those who have suffered through more than one of the now eleven seasons of *The Real World*, the formula is evident: amass as many varied (stereo)types as possible among the participants and, the logic is, it will make for more interesting viewing. This logic has been carried to such an extreme that producers now deliberately seem to select participants who will not, even under the most ideal of circumstances, be able to get along (and being confined in a house together under constant surveillance and being strongly influenced to submit to inane and contrived challenges or tasks certainly does not qualify as optimal). “While the often-criticized formula stereotypes of *The Real World*—the angry black male, the ignorant white female, the gay guy, the player, et cetera—have shown up nearly every season, the series has become progressively less and less interesting.”³⁴² Add to this the cardboard-cutout lesbian, or bisexual, the macho white male, the promiscuous female and/or male, and a neo-nazi style sexist/racist/homophobe, and you have yourself a surefire formula for a Jerry Springer-like fight, anxious to be sparked by some well-conceived manipulation by the producers waiting in the wings to capture it all on film. This practice goes beyond

³⁴² <http://www.salon.com/ent/log/2000/07/12/reality/index.html>

The Real World, “the cast of *Survivor* is diverse in age, experience and background—and, yes, in race, religion and sexuality—which yields plenty of interesting conflict.”³⁴³ Thus, we are forced to ask ourselves whether such racial, homophobic or related conflicts would arise if not so clearly set up and manipulated by the producers.

Seeking a multicultural or otherwise “diverse” cast, however questionable and suspect this practice might initially seem, does not on the surface necessarily appear to be an offensive endeavor. After all, having a diverse array of participants might spark engaging discussions and might furnish an environment that can offer an opportunity for growth and increased tolerance or understanding on the part of both the participants and viewing audience. However, when undertaken in order to create conflict, augment ratings, and increase profits, this practice is nothing other than the commodification of human types; it is blatant racism, sexism, and homophobia performed simply from the motive of maximizing profit. Especially when so highly influenced by the actions of the producers, it is analogous to “bad science” in which the scientist tries to prove the truth of a hypothesis by cosmetically massaging the data, essentially forcing the experiment to conform to it.

One other problem that highlights the racism inherent in this move by the producers to select people as types is that it treats people as “standing-reserve.”³⁴⁴ Just as the airliner that Heidegger describes, “sits on the taxi strip only as standing-reserve, inasmuch as it is ordered to ensure the possibility of transportation,”³⁴⁵ so, too, the racialized and othered bodies of the participants make up the standing-reserve the shows

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁴ Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essay*, 17.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

producers employ as money-making vehicles driving them toward their goals of capital accumulation. In other words, the meaning of these people is determined thoroughly by their capacity to serve some instrumental purpose. They are stripped of their authentic human being in that they are now mere objects. Again like the airliner, these othered bodies are, “completely unautonomous, for [they have their] standing only from the ordering of the orderable.”³⁴⁶ They only have a purpose insofar as they fit neatly and unambiguously in the identity category they are thought to represent. So, too, Immanuel Kant’s exhortation that a person must be treated in accord with dignity—always, categorically, as an ends and never as a means—resonates with the spurious and unethical selection practices manifested here. This subtle yet potent dehumanization is nothing more than racism/sexism/homophobia and is undertaken simply to maximize profit, which is of course not a sufficient justificatory condition for reifying, and performatively codifying, stereotypes of identity categories.

The additional fallout of this dehumanization practice is that it tends to compromise the integrity of the ‘reality’ of the show. Let us suppose for example that a team of producers decides that racial strife on the show would increase ratings and thus advertising revenues and profits in turn. There are several ways that they might construct the show such that narratives of racial conflict are foregrounded and inevitable. First, as I just demonstrated, careful cast selection is key. Selecting participants who are the most likely to be independently in conflict about race issues is essential. Then, rather than allowing participants to interact in “natural” ways, or at least given the nature of the context ways that are not coerced, they might choose to make those contestants

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

roommates. And, when this fails to reap the desired goal of an all-out battle, tasks are invented by the producers to render the likelihood of the conflict inevitable. Further, if that strategy again fails to spawn the race war, creative editing is always a last resort.

The Real World lost any semblance of reality a long time ago when the producers realized they could get a lot more mileage by deliberately choosing cast members who were the least likely to ever have anything to do with each other in any other situation. This has been pushed further with each season as well, with borderline homophobes and racists now being cast so as to spark tensions with the rest of the cast members.³⁴⁷

It would not be strange to wonder about the ethics of this practice. Is it really fair to subject a twenty-something year old person of color to the wrath of a raging racist? Is the world not difficult enough? What do the actions of the producers permanently inscribe in the psyches of these young participants or in the psyches of the (young) viewers? What about the guidelines for using human subjects in scientific experiments? Where do these sort of ethical constraints enter the picture? Does the participant's desire for fame and money, and her or his consent to be cast on the show in a (potentially futile) bid to satisfy this desire, relinquish the producers of their ethical responsibilities? I think not. These sorts of preconceived, harmful, and psychologically damaging racist/sexist/homophobic conflicts seem to be the epitome of capitalistic exploitation.

VI. The Scientific Method as a Blueprint for Reality TV

At last I have sifted through all the groundwork and have arrived at the main crux of my argument: that reality TV is a kind of scientific thinking as a result of bearing many of the properties of and being modeled on the experimental method. This section will provide the comparisons between the scientific method and reality TV in order to

³⁴⁷ <http://www.realitynewsonline.com/article1240.html>

draw out the manner in which reality TV has expropriated a kind of scientific thinking. There are two basic ways of parsing out the results of observing objects, testing hypotheses, amassing data, and drawing conclusions using the scientific method: epistemologically and ontologically. With regard to the former, the methodology of experimental science tells us that if objects are observed in a controlled (laboratory) environment with the appropriate measures taken to try to ensure the fair and accurate reporting of results, and the experiment is repeatable or publicly verifiable, then the epistemological status of the conclusions drawn from these experiments is elevated to the level of “truth.” On the ontological side, if all the same conditions pertain, the objects and the products of the experiment get designated as “real.” If the similarities between the scientific method and reality TV are as compelling as I think they are, the claim would then be that an analogous epistemological and ontological stature is granted to the products of reality TV. Further, once we have witnessed the parallels at the level of methodology, we will be able to take the critique levied by the STS theorists against science to task on the products of reality TV. And though some might argue that the STS critique is not nearly as potent as it need be to eradicate the possibility of realism in science, we will see that in the realm of the social, it is of considerable weight.

Aside from the issues raised in the final section regarding capitalism and globalization, there are three main intersections between scientific method and reality TV. The first is that both environments are highly constructed, contrived, artificial, and confined to a laboratory (or a house, island, “the set,” et cetera). In neither the scientific context nor the reality TV one, is it necessarily true that the performances of the objects/subjects being observed translate back to “nature” or the “real world” (if such a

thing is agreed to exist). As a result of this, the truth that emerges from the scientific method is the truth of a laboratory, an experimental history; it is not nature but still read as if it were natural because of the inductive inference made from the laboratory observations. The reality of the social laboratory of reality TV is not necessarily the reality of the “real” social world either, it is just as much a modified and constructed reality.

The second overlap is that both methods presuppose or at least feign a kind of strict objectivity and an idealization of the observer. In the case of science, this is rendered by the figure of the modest witness who, “is objective; he guarantees the clarity and purity of objects. His subjectivity is his objectivity. His narratives have magical power—they lose all trace of their history as stories, as products of partisan projects, as contestable representations, or as constructed documents in their potent capacity to define facts.”³⁴⁸ This is akin to reality TV examples like the self-held camera in *Fear* or the twenty-four hour streaming internet feeds in *Big Brother* Reality TV insinuates that it is unedited and unscripted, objective, but as we have seen in these and other examples above, there is plenty of evidence to the contrary. Both of these cases purport to be recording the plain facts from which we could induce general theories about human nature and behavior. But, of course, there is no ideal objective observer who does not affect, construct, or splice together a narrative about the behavior, not in science and not in reality TV.

Related to that is the third point of connection. Both science through its experimental method and reality TV construct narratives of their objects/subjects that

³⁴⁸ Haraway, *Modest_Witness*, 12.

elide singular events and “irrelevant” data. In the case of science, statistical measuring tools allow for a great deal of diversity in findings gathered in the experimental setting yet profess to be able to make general claims about the real world outside of it. What becomes of those counter-narratives, those singular events, those strange mutations that remain unaccounted for in the reporting of conclusions? They are simply forgotten, discarded, or, at best, deemed to be counter to what really *is*. The same structure is found in the reality TV setting especially in light of editing techniques, which even permit the ordinary flow of time to be upended and deemed irrelevant. The people we see on the digested broadcasts, are not those people. They are representations, constructed through edited narratives that are naturalized, and that elide antithetical evidence.

Quite like the critique levied against science by the STS theorists, we can see that reality TV is little more than an artificial construction or an experimental history. Both laboratory experimental science and reality TV allow the viewer/scientist/public to draw general conclusions from what is observed and act as if these are laws and truths. However, the limitations of these conclusions are often not fully appreciated. In order to make these conclusions broader, one must make inductive inferences from the particular cases that were observed. And, indeed, often what is observed is changed, and has been manipulated, constructed, and controlled by the observer under specific conditions. For example, it is not clear at all that young people are actually like those portrayed in *The Real World*. We must be cognizant that we avoid considering the conclusions we draw, especially from the context of reality TV (and more controversially from science), to be actual epistemological Truths since, given the above analysis, they are at best particular localized truths.

VII. The Culture of the Human Petri Dish

Reality TV, because of its scientific framework, has the consequence of asserting modes of human relations and being, and ways of acting, that get read back as true, real, and naturalized, though they are performed and restricted to the particular highly-constructed setting. Just like science, reality TV asserts an ontological truth, a naturalness, about its outputs though they emerge from in the artificial conditions of a social laboratory. The repetition and augmentation of those sorts of relations and behaviors reifies them as real human possibilities *only* because reality TV naturalizes the behavior (i.e. allows us to interpret them and read them back as natural and real, expressions of some underlying truth of being) in portraying the production of them as less contrived and more unscripted than is actually the case. This claim is different from the standard conservative line that holds that all media and forms of entertainment influence us to act in certain (read: unsavory) ways. Because of the scientific nature of the process of knowledge production embedded in the framework of reality TV, there is a bracketing of the constructedness of the reality that does not happen while viewing known fictional programs (see Section III). It is my contention that it is only the scientific thinking underlying the premise and ideology of reality TV that allows this naturalizing effect, and thus the epistemic status of the output. Though I am aware that making claims about the way people interpret reality TV is speculative and would require further empirical study to confirm, as a phenomenon, reality TV presents itself in such a way that begs to be interpreted in that manner.

On the issue of the straightforward conservative line, it is no surprise that certain sorts of religious leaders have chimed in with their views of the ills of reality TV; they have never faltered in their quests to point blame at popular culture for perpetuating what they perceive to be sinful thoughts and behavior and the overall decadence of humankind. Take for example the President of a Lutheran Church in Missouri who claims that,

The problem with ‘Reality TV’ is that it is not nearly real enough. Because it operates with a distorted philosophy of what reality is, TV keeps missing out on the possibilities of realism... human history shows us that real survival depends on people cooperating, helping and supporting one another...couples...recognize that genuine relationships have to be based on more than good looks and TV-style glamour...When we entertain ourselves with fantasies about adultery, or greed, or hate or murder—fantasies manufactured and sold by a billion-dollar industry—we are harming ourselves morally and spiritually. Even if we never act on those fantasies, the damage is done...Such fantasies can harden our hearts, dull our sensitivities to other people, make us shallow, and deaden our souls...Given human nature, temptation is indeed very entertaining.³⁴⁹

It is true that we become hardened and desensitized, but not for the reasons this religious leader has assumed. Rather, my argument indicates that it is not merely a matter of some fixed pre-determined human nature moved by temptation to enter into the dark underbelly of social and moral evil. This ontology of human being is misguided at best, or what Nietzsche would call the “metaphysics of the hangman.”³⁵⁰ In its static, universal, substantive incarnation, it leaves no room for human choice or mobility and, as such, what it means to be human is essentially slipped into the noose. This murderous brand of deterministic thinking about being is what Nietzsche attributed to Christian metaphysics; it does not reflect human ontology as becoming, flux, and multiplicity. Further, it fails to acknowledge the extent to which human being is mutually emergent with

³⁴⁹ <http://www.lcms.org/president/statements/reality.asp>

³⁵⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Four Great Errors,” Section 7, *Twilight of the Idols Or, How One Philosophizes with a Hammer*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, Walter Kaufmann, ed., trans. (New York: Viking Penguin Books, 1982), 500.

teletechnology—our being and teletechnology, as the fabric of our existence, are simultaneously constituted. It is a dynamically nominal relationship. Although insightful critical thinkers are clearly able to see through the deterministic sham, it nonetheless affects all of us; other more gullible among us practice what these shows preach as natural human possibilities and this has a global and wide-ranging effect.

Additionally, the argument asserted above could lead to the more general, widely-rehearsed conservative argument (not being supported here) that all sorts of entertainment have the capacity to transform human behavior in ways which would be deemed undesirable. However, the suspension of reality that occurs when one watches a situation comedy or a fictional drama allows one to reenter “reality” in a way that separates the content of the narrative of the fictional work from the real lived reality outside of it. Given that we are always aware that this is an edited piece comprised of actors, and that we are always aware that what we are witnessing is not real (we are reminded of this through cinematic devices such as the mutation of temporal normality, music or laugh tracks, special effects, et cetera), we never fall into the trap of elevating the actions and behaviors of the characters to the status of real human possibility. Most people are aware that validity claims (are limited) to the context of the fictional world created within the work and do not permit them to escape that narrow domain...Since the compelling power of linguistic activity in a fictional work is limited to the realm of the created characters, the activity loses the bindingness that it would have in normative interactions.³⁵¹

However, without resorting to an impoverished view of human being, it is still possible to recognize a way in which this particular type of programming, reality TV, has

³⁵¹ See: Jami Weinstein, “On the Leveling of the Genre Distinction Between Theory and Fiction,” *Conference: A Journal of Philosophy and Theory*, Volume 5, Number 1, 1994.

the effect of shaping social relations in a way that other genres do not. This would of course point to the previous analysis of reality TV as a kind of scientific thinking that leads us to take it as *real* or *True*. Insofar as we see reality TV as true and an accurate portrayal of human behavior, we can see the possibilities created by the participants as real human possibilities toward which we, too, can and are encouraged to project ourselves. Not only are they potentialities in this way, we also see these sorts of unsavory behaviors as desirable in that the contestants who perform in these ways are rewarded for their efforts in both money and fame, the most valued currencies of today's capitalistic, western, social world. On the other hand, even if we do see their behaviors as undesirable, understanding their actions as real and unscripted truth might lead to false expectations of human being and false worldviews—it might even create a pervasive cynicism based on the belief that people actually operate according to this model of selfishness and greed, which could give us false expectations about how people are going to act.

To carry the analogy between science and reality TV one step further, and to admit the potential reality TV has for influencing and shaping human behavior, I want to weave another argument into the web; this one concerns the potential for modern scientific practices, mixed with corporate greed, to have grave repercussions involving large-scale risks of contamination. To discern the link, we must acknowledge that the products of reality TV are diffused to wide and various audiences, like the products of science, without much forethought other than maximizing profit. In the case of science, it is unarguable that if poorly understood products are unleashed on large diverse populations both nationally and globally without much knowledge of the potential

interactions, contamination and unforeseen damages (to people, animals, ecosystems, et cetera) will inevitably occur.³⁵² The risks transform from predictable, calculable,

quantitative ones to a new scale of incalculable, unpredictable, qualitative risks.

Extrapolated out into the current world context, we can see that the sorts of human values and ideals that are created, codified, reified, and supported by reality TV are consistent with the social climate being produced by the U.S. Empire under the current “War on Terror”—fear, surveillance, voyeurism, containment, suspicion, greed, individualism, infidelity, cheating, competition, scheming, allying with enemies to further your own ends, rudeness, humiliation, hypocrisy, militarism, fascistic law enforcement practices, classism, racism, homophobia, sexism, tokenism, commodification of stereotypical representations of people, religious notions of redemption (usually meted out monetarily) and temptation (usually unavoidable and sexual), revenge, racial, religious, sexual, and gendered strife, just to establish the foundation. This position is corroborated by many.

One such view holds that the biting,

rudeness of the host of *The Weakest Link*, the scheming and treachery of *Survivor*, the humiliation of the weekly public eviction vote of *Big Brother* - these are in danger of being seen as normal, desirable parts of human discourse... it will be incumbent on the networks and the media generally to ensure that...viewers understand that the use of the word ‘reality’ to describe shows where ostracism and humiliation are the norm is a bit of unintended irony.³⁵³

There might be even a greater risk at stake. Apart from desensitization of viewers to undesirable actions in ordinary social interactions and interpersonal relationships, there might be more serious geopolitical consequences. Albeit speculative, the multiplication

³⁵² For a more detailed explanation of this argument as it related to science, see Michel Tibon-Cornillot, “New Approaches to Biological Risk: Remarks on a Possible Shipwreck in the Life Sciences,” *Found Object*, Number Eleven, Fall 2001-Spring 2002, 97-118.

³⁵³ <http://theage.com.au/opinion/2001/07/18/FFX9CT6K8PC.html>

of, for example, reality TV offerings with military and law enforcement themes, and the large-scale proliferation of the values consonant with them, might serve to anesthetize people to the notion of war. The political impacts of this could be significant especially given the current state of international relations. For example, if people cease to have responses to war because watching “war games” as reality TV makes war feel *de rigueur*, a certain critical edge will be lost. People may no longer be able to judge, from their anesthetized reality TV state, right from wrong. Along with Michel Tibon-Cornillot, we can speculate that, for instance, the rhetoric of the “ethical war” (a war alleged to have an ethical purpose, but in actuality a violent aggression that lacks a clear ethical motive) serves only to whitewash “war crimes” and permit their repetition. This whitewashing, however, is effectively enabled by our televisual stupor and allows those in power to continue, unimpeded, to commit their crimes.³⁵⁴

VIII. Reality Television as the Cultural Capital of the Empire

Bringing the scientific method and STS critique to bear on reality TV has unveiled the seepage of scientific thinking into our social and political ways of being such that it shapes and widely disseminates our contemporary form of life. Agreeing, as I do, that, “(t)he globalization of the world, of ‘planet Earth,’ is a semiotic-material production of some forms of life rather than others,” and that, “(t)echnoscience is the story of that globalization,”³⁵⁵ it is now time to reflect on the ways in which capitalism is buttressed and globalization is fostered through the phenomenon of reality TV. Martin

³⁵⁴ Michel Tibon-Cornillot, *Blanchiment des Crimes*. (unpublished manuscript)

³⁵⁵ Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©™:Feminism and Technoscience*. (New York: Routledge, 1997), 12.

Heidegger argued that, “(t)he reality within which man of today moves and attempts to maintain himself is, with regard to its fundamental characteristics, determined on an increasing scale by and in conjunction with that which we call Western European science.”³⁵⁶ He does not view science as a mere socio-cultural praxis that could be abolished at will. Rather, he declares that, “(s)cience is the theory of the real” which he believes is a, “statement...that always refers exclusively to the new science of modern times.”³⁵⁷ In short, Haraway and Heidegger are both calling upon us to reflect on (techno)science and scientific thinking in order to fully grasp the nature of our reality, of our form(s) of life, and about how they have come to hold sway as global entities. I propose once again that we use the example of reality TV to elucidate this claim.

There are several features embedded in reality TV which make us mindful of, and which undoubtedly contribute to, the prevailing industrialized, capitalistic, geopolitical and economic world order. First, there are the issues of the financial *telos* and attendant marketing, merchandising, product placement, and advertising. Then, too, as we have seen, there is the nature of exploitation, both geographical and human. And, finally, there is diffusion of a specific form of life, a nefarious version of substantive human ontology, replete with a valuation of a certain set of social relations. All three of these features recall Vandana Shiva’s theory of the “monoculture of the mind.”³⁵⁸ Evoking the environmental polemic of the disintegration of agricultural diversity, Shiva extends this term to illustrate a global cultural homogenization she thinks is governed by U.S. and

³⁵⁶ Martin Heidegger, “Science and Reflection.” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 156.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 157

³⁵⁸ Vandana Shiva. *Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity and Biotechnology*. (London: Zed Books, 1995)

Western values and lifestyles, driven by a consumer-based, free-market ideology, and propelled by the massive U.S. entertainment-military-industrial complex.

With regard to the issue of capital and the underlying profit motive inherent in the phenomena of reality TV, there are many examples of how these uphold prevailing capitalistic value systems. There can be no doubt that the participants, producers, television networks, and corporate sponsors have little else to gain from these shows than a large cash reward. Overestimating this *telos* would be nearly impossible. The profit motive is what drives them purely and simply. True, in the case of the participants, fame might be an additional and even equally potent attraction. But, as discussed earlier, this too is sustained only by a superficial, highly industrialized, western capitalistic value system that sees fame for its own sake as worthy of pursuit. Marketing, merchandising, product placement, and advertising are also deeply implicated in the business of reality TV both in sustaining it and in what it (re)produces. One must not ignore that the houses are furnished and decorated, the participants must eat and drink, are (usually) clothed, and that rarely, if ever, does television have a broadcast without paid advertisers. Product placement as a subtle (subliminal) form of paid advertising is hardly a new practice; big-budget Hollywood films have paid crew positions just for that purpose. A key instance of this is that on *Big Brother*, “(s)ponsor Ikea’s furniture keeps falling apart on the residents. You can rely on it: CBS will never show the housemates’ Ikea jokes on television. Nor has the network allowed viewers to see that some product brand names are scratched out, some are not. If you didn’t pay for product placement, your product doesn’t see airtime.”³⁵⁹ Also, television networks now have retail chain stores where fans of the

³⁵⁹ http://www.salon.com/ent/TV/feature/2000/08/22/bb_web/index.html

programs can acquire the requisite t-shirt and cap to represent their favorite conceptions of reality. In sum, there is big business in reality TV and, given its widespread dissemination around the globe, it serves as a rapid vehicle for transporting and exporting to new markets the desire for the commodities of western industrial societies.

Central to capitalism and globalization is the motif of exploitation, both human and geographic. We find this value clearly inscribed in reality TV. We have already canvassed the multifarious ways in which participants are exploited to serve the needs of the producers and sponsors: they are shamelessly humiliated, often falsely constructed, have their characters defamed, and often put in potentially psychologically damaging situations. Additionally, participants are encouraged to exploit each other to amplify their possibility of winning. On the geographic front, there is another form of exploitation inherent—a marketing tie-in, which we can call adventure tourism.³⁶⁰

Shows like *Survivor* construct simulacra of locations like “The Outback” or “Africa” and then promote tourism to those regions or continents. These are marketed in the form of pre-packaged tours designed to “permit” the tourist to “experience” the reality they witnessed on television, which, of course, is merely construction. This, in effect (re)colonializes and commodifies those regions, destroys their natural environments, exploits the indigenous people and natural resources, and might ultimately even transform their cultures and economies. Furthermore, it changes the way we understand the Real and Nature:

a couple of weeks out in Nature doesn't make it anymore. Even if you eschew the resonant clutter of *The Tour* and *The Gear*, you will virtualize everything you encounter anyway, all by yourself. You won't see wolves, you'll see “wolves.”

³⁶⁰ This parallels many of the arguments made about ecotourism.

You'll be murmuring to yourself, at some level, "Wow, look, a real wolf, not in a cage, not on TV, I can't believe it."

That's right, you can't. Natural things have become their own icons.

And you will get restless really fast if that "wolf" doesn't do anything... You will begin to appreciate how much technology and editing goes into making those nature shows.³⁶¹

This is clearly a globalizing effect and one that gets nature and reality very wrong.

With the more rapid flow of and broader access to teletechnological media and the global diffusion and popularization of reality TV, Vandana Shiva's monocultural nightmare is quickly becoming a reality. As we saw in Section VI, there are a core set of human behaviors, social relations, and values that get (re)produced, reified, and codified, in the global dissemination of these programs. And these are the values extolled by the western empire as the ones to emulate. In the same way that fast food has leveled the artisanal production of food on a global scale, McReality will likely have a ripple effect on cultural, intellectual, moral, and social diversity. Because these behaviors and relationships are scientifically touted as real and true, and are thus naturalized, the contamination is liable to be enormous.

Thus Haraway and Heidegger were correct to diagnose (techno)scientific thinking as at least partly responsible for the creation of reality that is now being (de)naturalized around the globe. Here, this phenomenon has been witnessed through the medium of reality TV argued to be an instance of that sort of thinking. As testament to the seepage of scientific thinking into the genre of reality TV, we were able to bear witness to the widespread effect of its products on both the creation and foreclosing of human possibilities. These products, it should be said, are still engaged in the ongoing process

³⁶¹ Thomas de Zengotita, "The Numbing of the American Mind: Culture as Anesthetic," *Harper's Magazine*, vol. 304, no.1823, April 2002, 37.

of infecting the world (quite like the corporate scientific products that contaminate it) by promoting the very values that justify and sustain capitalism and nefarious forms of globalization.

IX. The Technoscientization of Being

Making up people, as it is practiced scientifically through the technological medium of reality TV, bespeaks the sense in which human ontology is not substantive. Reality TV does allege to present facts about human nature, and it is right in alleging this. But fact here, must be unpacked to expose the way in which it evokes a *making* rather than an objective, independent, fixed, stable, universal, enduring quality or entity. Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar renounce the extent to which fact has been conflated with substance. They offer in its stead an etymological read of the word ‘fact,’ “derived from *facere, factum* (to make or do).”³⁶² It is a process of construction of what we take to be real and objective. However, “facts and artifacts do not correspond respectively to true and false statements...facts are not real, nor...merely artificial.”³⁶³ The problem, they maintain, is that while all facts and artifacts are constructed, the process by which facts get codified as real are, “extremely difficult to detect.”³⁶⁴ Quite like Judith Butler’s assessment of gender performativity, there is an erasure of the history of construction such that we naturalize and underlying (stable, substantive) truth from which we presume the “fact” is derived. This leap to the assumption of naturalness and objectivity is a misstep. There is not truth or falsity of the matter, there is no realness or naturalness—

³⁶² Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar. *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 174.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 176.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

not of facts and artifacts, and not of gender. In the case of scientific and technological “facts,” it is the human praxis that is elided. While in the case of gender performance, it is the disciplining and policing of societal scripts, which crystallizes the arbitrary acts into a coherent and intelligible gender identity according to those scripts, that gives the illusion or fiction of naturalness, reality, objectivity, and Truth. But, in both cases, there is no truth or falsity, reality or appearance. All gender and all scientific facts about human ontology (like those advanced in the reality TV genre) are a making and a doing, a verb not a noun, a praxis not a final truth, an *aletheic* truth not a truth as correspondence or representative. This is not to say that facts and reality do not exist, only that we must reshape our language and conceptual schemes to understand them in the manner just described—as relational, interdependent, fluid, multiple, located, situated, temporal, historical, and infused with the essence of technology as a unconcealing.

It should be evident, by now, that using the teletechnological to underscore and justify the ontological claims of Part 1 was not an odd choice. Technoscience, the material-semiotic fusion of “science and politics, science and society, science and culture” that, “engages promiscuously in materialized reconfiguration...[and] traffics heavily in the passages that link stories, desires, reasons, and material worlds,”³⁶⁵ is a large part of what makes us what we are, that which provides facts about human ontology. Combined with the biological and animalic issues of Part 2, we have a solid justification for the human ontological story put forth in Part 1. Moreover, reality TV, with its additional scientization of the teletechnological medium, provides a font of important analytic avenues for more compellingly understanding what we *are* in contrast

³⁶⁵ Haraway, *Modest_Witness*, 62, 64.

to the story it actually aims to tell. The logic of reality TV deliberately conceals, even revels in the concealing of, the element of it that involves human practice and construction—that panopticon-like regulation of bodies and subjects that constructs the fact of human ontology as stable and fixed. We have seen the ways in which this eliding often peeks above the surface and becomes, at times, detectible to audiences. Its alleged modest witnessing belies the constructedness of its human ontological products, which speaks to its internally contradictory logic—simultaneous to its declaration of objective and fixed, substantive, human ontological truths, it reveals the mechanisms of its own unreality. There is no truth (or falsity), fixed nature, and stability. The subject-object, mind-body, split is a mere regulatory fiction. From this transparently constructed, contradictory and misconstrued, reality TV vision of human nature, we have come to recognize that there are qualitative geopolitical and ethical risks. In the conclusion, I assess in greater detail, these very risks and attempt to revision our approach to ethico-politics in accord with a non-substantive ontological picture of human being. To that we now turn.

CONCLUSIONS:

GESTURES TOWARD A FUTURE IN THE ABSENCE OF *SOMETHING*

Returning to the September 11th security slogan, “If you see something, say something” discussed in the introduction, it should now be clear that there is *nothing* about which we can say something. At the very least, it is evident that the substantive ontological picture is on shaky ground in the face of the biological, technological, and social evidence surveyed. Given the multiplicity of organisms we are and the co-constitutive relation we have with other species, this transhuman picture points us in a more interesting direction than the stalwart substantive motif. The transhuman portrait escapes many of the problems associated with classifying human being as a *thing*. Peeling back all those layers of skin and digging deeper in search of that something has resulted in centuries, millennia, of philosophical missteps. Had we simply listened to Heraclitus and Buddhist thought from their prescient beginnings, we would have had all the tools we would require to develop a more sophisticated ontological theory that could cohere better with the recent technoscientific evidence presented herein. We could return to the level of the skin and beyond without construing the skin as an impenetrable boundary containing who and what we are within it. The “beyond” here indicates the porousness and the leakiness in both so-called directions: inside and outside of the skin. Rather than continue to follow in the path of those continuing to search for that elusive something, I have, in Part 1 resurrected the concepts already actual virtually in the past. This was in order to theorize human being as transhuman—the cobbled together, fluid, interdependent, multiple, non self-identical, non-autonomous, interspeciesed assemblage of forces and processes, the body without organs, the cyborg, a member of the entire queer family of companion species, the disunified unity mistakenly extrapolated out as a coherent, static being. And, I have provided evidence from recent biology and

contemporary teletechnology for why this theory of human being is more interesting, and perhaps even more accurate. But I have not yet traced the ethical ramifications I have herein claimed exist.

So, how does this ontological theory limit or support ethico-political agendas? It has been suggested by some that this ontology could be used to support conclusions that would be considered unsavory. For example, if we are not autonomous, what would prevent someone from infringing on what we deem to be our rights to our bodies? The non-substantive paradigm might, it could also be said, be open to fascism. To respond to these concerns, it is important to emphasize a few background points. First, there are many ontologies that are possible at any given time. Mine is not necessarily more true than any of the others, just more interesting; it better describes how one might live in the sense that it leaves open many possibilities in a way that others simply do not. This will become clear below in the discussion of queer ontology. Second, it also coheres better with contemporary science than, say, the substantive motif. As argued earlier, the ontological stories we tell depend in large part on our scientific knowledge, what there really is. I do not wish to overturn scientific realism here. Thus, if fascism can be supported ontologically by this theory, we will have to tell a more complex story about why fascism is so dastardly. There in fact might not be compelling ontological reasons for why fascism is the wrong theory to champion. Instead, the repudiation of it might rest on other kinds of reasons, for instance, epistemological or logical ones.

Thus, my more nuanced response to these sorts of critiques can be understood if we properly construe the goals of this project. As stated in the Introduction, not only do I wish to extend these ontological claims into the realm of the normative, providing clues

about how one might live, but also I aim to describe what really is, using the evidence that contemporary science and technology offer. Thus, if it is the case that ethico-political theorists deploy this ontological paradigm in order to justify principles that many of us would reject, we might have to turn to other sorts of reasons, non-ontological ones, to refute their arguments. In other words, I am willing to bite the bullet about the fact that these ontological principles may be employed in the service of oppressive political projects since I do not wish to deny what is just because I am disinclined toward the conclusions they are alleged to buttress. Although one likely possesses a particularly fixed set of ethico-political convictions, it would simply be bad philosophy to create an ontological theory for the sole purpose of bolstering those principles. Remember, too, it would hardly be a challenge to dispel the argument that a particular ontological theory leads to specific ethico-political claims—we could simply convict the argument of the naturalistic fallacy. Further, in this causal sense, where an ought is thought to entail an is, I concur with those who evoke that fallacy. In addition, it would be begging the question to start out with ethico-political conclusions we hold dear and support an ontological theory only because it coheres with them. In other words, I want to tell a viable story about human being and only after try to work out how unpalatable ethico-political perspectives like fascism might be limited or ruled out by the details of that story.

I have good hope that that the ontological paradigm I have advocated here can indeed achieve the task of making fascist claims untenable. Fascism as it has manifested in practice, is hierarchical, dictatorial, totalitarian, and limits how we might live in ways that do not allow for human flourishing or becoming. While in its theoretical underpinnings, fascism opposed individualism derived from 18th Century materialism, it

does not do so in a way that would be supported by the transhuman ontological paradigm advocated in this project. Fascism in its theoretical instantiation³⁶⁶ considers the subject as subordinate to the group, specifically, the state. As the state grows more complicated, individual liberty is lost, ergo possibilities for how one might live are increasingly restricted. It also endeavors to group individuals according to types or categories, quite like the reductive substantive model, and is thus inherently opposed to the sort of flux the transhuman inherently possesses. In its most nefarious and oppressive formation, National Socialism, fascism uses racial, rather than national ideals or types to taxonomize and rank human beings. Some subjects under this theory, do not count as much as others and there is little if any recognition of the ontological lack of autonomy at the core of human existence.

By ontological lack of autonomy here, I simply mean that we are inextricably interdependent with other beings, and thus must take our relationship to others and animals as the most basic level of analysis. Fascism, with its dictatorial, top-down approach takes the lack autonomy in an ethical sense, holding that since we are not autonomous (ontologically) we do not possess any privileged rights to our bodies or have the capacity for free choice. This, however, is a misread of the ontological claim as an ethico-political one, which both equivocates on the term “autonomy” and, on the least sympathetic read, commits the naturalistic fallacy.

The first mistake is a basic equivocation. There are two meanings of autonomy at play here. Etymologically, autonomy evokes the ethical, signifying self-rule. Ontologically, however, autonomy is refigured metaphorically implying that being is

³⁶⁶ See Benito Mussolini and Giovanni Gentile, *The Doctrine of Fascism* (1932) at <http://www.worldfuturefund.org/wffmaster/Reading/Germany/mussolini.htm>.

independent, or at least not significantly interdependent (as has been argued throughout this project). By taking the ontological sense and reading it ethico-politically, the fascist project has a crucial logical and justificatory problem that serves to undermine its claims at their foundation. It also commits the naturalistic fallacy by making a causal connection between a fact about being and an ethico-political claim.

The ontological arguments surveyed in this project have indeed been aimed at undermining the sense in which we are independent beings. They have not, however, meant to deny that individual human beings, or for that matter, animals, lack the capacity for self-rule. While I have argued that ontology can limit or impact the sorts of ethico-political claims one can maintain, I am not prepared to commit to a wholesale repudiation of a certain type of ethical autonomy. For example, a positive lack of autonomy, or a lack of autonomy in the ontological register might be compatible with something like Kant's kingdom of ends variation of the categorical imperative. While this is not meant to imply that it is entirely compatible with a deontologically-centered ethics, focused on principles of ought (duty) rather than might (opening to novel ways of being), it perhaps could gel with the sense of ethical autonomy underlying Kant's theory. Moreover, perhaps seeing Kant's theory from the perspective of an always already interdependent being ethical might actually provide a new twist, enhancing and strengthening Kant's argument. For instance, this ontological lack of autonomy might make us more sensitive to species difference. We might be more inclined to allow entrance of other species into the ethical community whereas Kant, in his restriction of the ethical realm to rational human being, was disinclined to do. In other words, while the ontological sense of lacking autonomy may have ethico-political implications such as widening the circle of

beings considered in the ethical realm, it does not necessarily impact questions about ethical autonomy and the capacity of beings for self-rule.

I am not taking a stance on the issue of ethical autonomy here. What I am arguing is that certain ethico-political theories have mistakenly conflated one sort of autonomy with another—a category mistake or equivocation. I have exposed that trend in the fascist case. This can also be witnessed in some of the more grotesque forms of liberal-capitalist democratic individualism. That is not to say that more sophisticated forms of liberalism or capitalism do not exist that evade that crude error. But, those theorists who take radical individualism and the ascription of rights to these individuals to be founded and justified on the evidence of some brand of ontological autonomy (of which substance ontology is a subset) are not only guilty of this but also fundamentally mistaken given the arguments against ontological autonomy throughout this project.

On a more general level, the argument I am constructing regarding the relationship between ontology and ethics can best be described through an example. Let us say that there are some one hundred plausible ethico-political theories. And these are the only possible ethico-political positions one could reasonably hold. Given any specific ontological paradigm, what we can do is whittle down that number substantially. Say, in this case, we can reduce that number to five in light of the constraints placed on our logic by the principles and facts of human being derived from our contemporary techno-scientific conceptions. In other words, after understanding human being as I have theorized it in everything that has preceded this, and witnessing the extent to which that paradigm gels with our techno-scientific knowledge, imagine that certain theories would no longer be able to be substantiated and that we would be left with something like five

viable options.³⁶⁷ In order then to advance one of those options as the most interesting of the five, we would then have to turn toward other sorts of justificatory principles outside of the realm of ontology. Likewise, even if both democratic and fascist theories were equally valid within the constraints of this ontological theory (though I have just raised several compelling reasons for why fascism in both its actual and theoretical formations could not be supported in light of this ontology), we could still manage to excoriate fascism, by making use of other kinds of reasons. I would not wish to deny a specific ontological theory merely because it was open to a range of possibilities, even ones that are as nefarious as fascism. For, what is is, even if we do not appreciate the agendas of those who concur with it.

A suggestion made earlier is that perhaps there are other ways around this problem. One way, as just stated, is to use other, non-ontological, sorts of justificatory principles to undermine their theories. A second method is to attempt to demonstrate that those who support fascism, for example, are mistaken to think that this set of ontological principles supports their theories. Namely, it must be shown that we ought to engage in conceptual and linguistic revision of what is in order to expose something like a category mistake or an equivocation of terms—like that of autonomy mentioned above. In this case, we could offer that holding that human being is not autonomous does not imply that an individual has no right to make decisions about the body they are and that those decisions should be left to some organizing body like the state. One can claim the right not to be subject to violence for instance by deepening or refining the understanding of non-autonomy as inextricably interconnected to other species, other people, technology,

³⁶⁷ This is a randomly selected number employed only to make this point about the overall move to the ethico-political realm.

et cetera. From this perspective, the repudiation of autonomy does not entail a free-for-all, anything goes, fascistic denial of human rights, rather, it points us in the opposite direction—opening up toward connectedness and respect in the sense that Haraway maintains: a mutual co-constitutive relation founded on mutual respect, a Heideggerian being-as-care. Beginning from this assumption helps us better respond to the question of how one *might* live rather than how one *ought* to live. Rather than imposing abstract rules binding only in the case of static substance, ontologically fluid beings retain an openness to novel possibility, a point of departure for formulating ethico-political principles.

A third method for averting problems occurring from the move from the ontological to the ethico-political realm would be to respond to the following claim: that if ontology and ethics are in an inextricably dynamic relationship and I am, at least in part, attempting to describe what is actually the case (contrary to much of contemporary continental philosophy), then I might be committed to a specific truth about ethico-politics. I strongly disagree with this claim about that to which my argument theoretically commits me. For, I would not want to claim that there is only one right or true ethico-political theory. Returning to the example above, let us say that we are left with five, even competing, ethico-political theories. I could commit to holding that any one of the theories within that range is the “true” one³⁶⁸, though we would not be able to determine which one is the true one merely through ontological reasoning. We would have to appeal to other realms to come up with important reasons for why some of the

³⁶⁸ True is placed in scare quotes in order to leave open the possibility that there may not be a Truth as such and that a more sophisticated truth theory will have to be worked out in subsequent versions of this work. One possibility here is to adopt a pragmatic truth theory that understands truth in a non-abstract and transcendent way. This will be considered in future work.

theories could not hold. But, I would prefer to think that among the five, there is some truth in each of them, even the worst of the remaining possibilities. Moreover, we could accept the fact that the set of competing ethical theories is collectively valid just as we have herein accepted the possibility of internal “self-contradiction” and non-identity identities. What is accomplished in this whittling process is that those theories that fail to cohere with the way the world really is are eliminated. The subsequent task is to either, using other logic, whittle away further until we find one and only one viable theory, or take the various interesting nuggets from what remains and to start to erect a new theory that makes use of all that is interesting among them, even if we have to allow for some “internal contradictions” to remain. If the internal contradiction is more than we can bear, perhaps all we can say about the remaining theories is not that this ontology alone excoriates the theories to which we are still opposed, but instead, the weaker claim that given the list of five, four out of the five seem to point in one direction and that, thus, the ontology is strongly disinclined toward the fifth option (fascism, for example). That would provide fodder for further investigation into why fascism can still be thought to be untenable regardless of the ontological arguments that appear to allow it to stand.

In summary, what I am not arguing here is that we make a normative claim from an ontological one. Again, that would be a grave error under the rubric of the naturalistic fallacy. Rather, the weaker claim being supported here is that possessing a clearer understanding of human being makes headway toward the question of how one might live without answering it completely. It is just one element of a set of factors that direct us toward the goal of possessing a just ethico-politics. It helps us question our intuitions

in important ways, most fundamentally by providing a diagnostic or heuristic tool to eliminate those theories that are largely incongruous with what human being is.

While it could be asserted that neither Heidegger nor Deleuze is making a direct ethico-political claim in their respective ontological works, but rather each is focusing squarely on the ontological, and that Nietzsche, insofar as he is making any ethico-political claims at all, is making ones that are quite difficult for some to swallow, each of these theorists does in deed plant the seeds that have the potential to grow into interesting theories of how we might live. It cannot be said that their theories point us toward specific oughts. Instead they offer us different possibilities for how one might live and a type of openness toward the future that previous theorists, namely those of Aristotelian or Cartesian stripes, do not.

I agree, however, that the omission by Heidegger and Deleuze of a theorized relationship of their ontological insights to the ethico-political is indeed a shortcoming. As I claimed throughout, I think we need to do both simultaneously and in a dynamic process. Had Heidegger attempted to gel his ontological theories with his ethico-political convictions, what he may have realized was that he could not hold the two simultaneously and would have likewise had to relinquish one or both of his positions. For, as I outlined in Part 1, I think there are important elements of his theory that lend themselves to a theory of interdependent existence that on the surface seems to limit the possibility of supporting fascist political platforms. So, rather than stand on ceremony and dispel his observations and theories on the basis of the fact that he was a member of the National Socialist party, I choose to add his insights to those of the other theorists, cobbling together elements of each in order to amass a more comprehensive and

interesting ontological picture. If one were to take the line that because of his political convictions we could not support his ontology or, even stronger, that we should not even read him, one would be forced to admit that somehow ontology has a causal relationship to ethico-politics or that at least they are in a dependency relationship whereby one's ethico-political beliefs are dependent upon one's ontological beliefs—again falling into the snares of the naturalistic fallacy. All that is being asserted here is that while Heidegger might have held a set of naïve but oppressive ethico-political beliefs, it may not in fact be his ontological beliefs that supported them. Otherwise stated, while his ontological beliefs did not completely rule out his ethico-political convictions, it may not have been those beliefs alone that generated his unsavory ethico-politics—ontology is not a sufficient condition from which to derive ethico-political principles. That is to say that ontology is to some degree overdetermined with respect to ethico-politics—several, even competing platforms could understand themselves as founded on one ontological paradigm. That is not, however problematic for the ontologist. For if that paradigm more closely resembles what is than competing ones that do not provide support for the more oppressive political schemas, it would be wrong to excoriate it solely on that basis.

The questions of right action and rights surface when we arrive at this point and we need to take a quick detour to attend to these matters. To what extent does this, or any, ontological theory direct us toward ethico-political action? And from where can we derive rights in this inextricably interconnected being? These issues were not the primary aim of this project. The discussion of right action and rights fall squarely within the rubric of how one *ought* to live whereas the aim here was to direct us toward how one *might* live. The latter calls upon us to answer very different sets of questions than those

we are ordinarily accustomed. It is about the fluidity of being standing open to a future of possibility and experiment/experience rather than human being (figured in a static way) as bound to sets of rules and criteria for how this being *ought* to live. The difference is important when we think about action and the kinds of prescriptions we can make in regard to it. Cast in the light of a static being bound by rules and fixed criteria, action is guided and constrained by a set or sets of principles. What is right is prescribed and the consequences for acting against those prescriptions are also often delineated. On the contrary, the motif of understanding how one might live takes a different tack. While we can make claims to *being* bodies or being *embodied*, for instance, we can no longer make claims to *having* bodies. Since bodies under this ontology are not autonomous individuals, there is nothing we *have* but rather something like an environment we *are*. Thus, demands for the right to have an abortion based on the presupposition that this body is *my* body (the famous “my body my choice” argument) have to be refigured. It may not be a right derived from property, in the more antiquated liberal sense of the term. If we want to generate a strong argument for why women should have the right to have an abortion, we will have to come up with a more complex story. This story can be best understood through a thought example.

Suppose there exists a sophisticated technological process that could allow a practitioner to extract the conjoined egg and sperm from the uterus as early as the moment of conception. Further, this procedure would have no serious health risks to the woman and, at most, cause her minimal discomfort. Moreover, this new technology would allow the extracted entity to develop into a normal and fully formed human being. Given this, at least one important question remains to be answered from the perspective

of the political left: why should one still have the right to destroy the entity (prevent it from developing into a fully formed human being) given that it could be removed and remain viable at no significant cost to the woman? I could imagine that many would want to say that one should have the right to destroy it because in some sense the entity is considered “part of the woman” or “the woman’s.” But is this really true? Are we to claim, after reviewing and accepting this new fluid, multiple ontological perspective, that these cells are actually our property in some way? Even our so-called “own body” is not independent and autonomous, let alone “ours.” So how could this self-generating group of cells be considered “the woman’s property?” Simultaneously, the political right must rethink issues of choice and obligation: under what set of reasons, if any, could they argue that the woman should be prevented from opting for this procedure and what obligates her to raise the child as her own? It seems that if the entity would be viable from the moment of conception the worry of the Christian right about preservation of life would be no longer relevant. Further, if the pregnancy were unwanted (especially obvious in the case of failed birth control methods or rape), there is no compelling reason why the woman should be prevented from undergoing this procedure. But should she be obligated to raise the child? It seems not. For, again, if it is not “her” or “her property” than what obligates her (especially if she took action prior to conception to prevent the pregnancy or was raped)?

I do not wish to carry this thought experiment further at this point as it would bring us far afield. My intention was simply to raise some intuitions about obligation and rights claims derived from notions of the body as property. For, under this revised ontological schema, these clearly must be reconceived. It is not that we are unable to

derive rights or obligations within this new schema, or even that we would be incapable of maintaining our progressive political agendas, just that they would have to be generated from a far more complex story about bodies, bodily integrity, property, rights, and duty/obligation. This story, along with the story of the many other applications of this ontological perspective to specific ethical cases, will not be told here. It will however, be the subject of some of one of my future projects.

Despite the complications presented regarding formulating an ethical agenda in light of the revised ontological view, it is actually not difficult to understand how we can establish one from the foundation of fluid notions of being and orient it around might rather than ought. In fact, the groundwork for this project has already been well paved. Since being in its generality is fluid and multiple, as has been argued here, it becomes the condition for intelligibility rather than intelligible in itself. In other words, it provides the ground from which we can make sense of a particular being and formulate ethical claims. In order then to impose ethico-political logic or sense upon a particular being, we must, as suggested by Heidegger, and to some degree Nietzsche with his concept of the eternal return, bound being in its temporaeity and finitude. Only then can we derive an understanding of individual action and perhaps even rights. Finitude gives us the boundaries of our being—that multiple, interdependent fluidity we are. It should be said that this understanding is always horizional and limited to a certain fixed set of finite circumstances. As Nietzsche made abundantly clear, all intelligibility and understanding is perspectival. The suggestion here is that, at minimum, intelligibility is bound by temporal constraints. Moreover, however, meaning is always revealed to us in a particular way and from a particular vantage point. Within these constraints, we can try

to make sense of concepts such as right action and rights. However, without something like the notion of the Eternal Return to provide a metaphor to demonstrate that actions have consequences, even within an understanding of being as finite, actions could potentially default to a selfish, hedonistic individualism because, despite their binding nature within the confines of a particular temporal context, none of these rights or prescriptions for right action have a transcendent or absolute status. So too, we must foreground the interdependent nature of our being within that horizon or on that plane and highlight the extent to which interdependencies discipline the sorts of actions and rights we may be able to prescribe. Like Haraway, we must begin our analysis from the always already mutual co-constitutive relation. This relationship need not be one of equality, as discussed in Part 2. Rather it can emerge from a notion of pure difference; this is not an absolute difference from a norm or fixed substantive standard but a relative difference in which all of the beings exist on the same plane and all the differences are measured according to ratios and degrees of force, motion, and intensity immanent in the beings in question. Thus, we can escape the inevitable anthropocentric humanism of the Heideggerian rubric which safeguards and privileges the notion of human in its coding of being as *Dasein* or human being.

As this project was intended to focus largely on ontology and not detail the ethico-political theory or theories that I maintain is or are most compatible with it, I will now only briefly draw out a few points that uncover the kinds of intuitions we must question if we agree that this ontological theory is somehow more interesting than the substantive model. Again, this is just a sketch and will not be comprehensive. Its aim is to help rule out certain stalwart ethico-political options by demonstrating the limits and

boundaries I maintain ontological theories draw and the possibilities toward which this ontology opens human being in regard to how one might live. It might help ethico-political theorists ask new questions and tell new stories. And there is little more we can ask for in the name of erecting a progressive ethico-politics.

Before closing, I would like to give an example of one area in which this ontological paradigm lends itself to a progressive political agenda. It is my contention that queer identity resonates with many of the same concepts and diverges little from this overall ontological schema. It should be immediately noted that, “the term ‘queer’ signifies not only those who mark themselves as gay or lesbian (or, perhaps, not even those), but anyone whose proclivities, practices, or sympathies defy the strictures of the dominant sex/gender/sexual identity system.”³⁶⁹ It appeals to a Freudian polymorphous perversity, to a sexual multiplicity, and the capacity to elide differences and categories that constitute a binary world.³⁷⁰ It is the challenge to all the concrete forces that make sexual identity stabilized, fixed, binary, disciplined, and regulated.³⁷¹ It is meant to be an identity critical of the very notion of identity itself. “Queers must question any identity, even a queer identity, since the very fact that it is fixed enough to be recognizable implies an idealized norm and an imperative to identify with it.”³⁷² It is an identity without an essence, one always in tension with the notion of stasis and permanence. It is fluid and always changing. “Against those who think ‘I am this, I am that,’ we must think in

³⁶⁹ Amber Ault, “The Dilemma of Identity: Bi Women’s Negotiations,” in *Queer Theory/Sociology*. Steven Seidman, ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 322. [my addition in brackets]

³⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 323.

³⁷¹ Joshua Gamson, “Must Identity Movements Self-Destruct?: A Queer Dilemma,” in *Ibid*, 408.

³⁷² Carole-Anne Tyler, “Desiring Machines? Queer Re-visions of Feminist Film Theory,” in *Coming Out of Feminism?*, Mandy Merck, Naomi Segal, Elizabeth Wright, eds. (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 155.

vague, improbable terms...No queer will ever be able to say with certainty, 'I am queer.'"³⁷³ As an anti-normative stance, queer identity is in constant dialogue with the changing definition of normal; thus it is never possible to exactly pinpoint its essence outside of the context of a given definition of normal at a particular spatio-temporal, historical location. One must realize then that queer functions more like a verb than a noun or adjective; it is a process not an object, an active engagement not a rigid and stable identity, a performative praxis not a fixed category.

Queer identity also speaks to the issue of cessation of suffering. As illustrated in Buddhism, suffering is amplified by the futile struggle to attach to a permanent, unified self. As we witnessed, a new ontological relationship to suffering can be attained by first refusing to envision ourselves as trapped in a fixed identity category replete with rigid criteria and then abandoning to our impermanent natures. Queer identity overcomes suffering in quite the same manner by applying an ontological picture of multiplicity and flux to the domain of sexuality. Identity politics, which advocated attaching to a fixed notion of identity, entitled the myth of a permanent, fixed sexual identity to hold sway. Though perhaps strategically important for practical political purposes, this characterization of identity poses the same fundamental ontological predicament that the Buddhist schema detected and transcended. Hence, a similar paradigm shift in the domain of sexual identity might well serve the greater interest of cessation of suffering at the more essential level of existence and being.

³⁷³ Gilles Deleuze, "Lettre à un critique severe," cited in *The Pink and the Black: Homosexuals in France Since 1968*, Frédéric Martel, Jane Marie Todd, trans. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

The importance of the observation that queer identity can be seen as continuous with a long tradition of theories about personal identity is found by comparing the many attempts made to uncover the origin of queer. Most of these theories have positioned the origin of this notion at relatively recent historical moments or in traditions and practices with fairly recent histories. Having surveyed the ontological history, we can now situate the notion of queer identity within the broader tradition of an oft-marginalized conception of personal identity beginning with the ancients and continuing on the periphery of western intellectual history up to the present. This undermines the assertion that queer identity is radical in the sense of being novel but reconceptualizes it as radical in the sense of being rooted, in this case to a tradition of theories about personal identity.³⁷⁴ In doing so, we can characterize queer identity as an identity without falling into the trap of equating the notion of identity with a permanent, unified, stable self. This move demonstrate the normative resonances of this ontology by illustrating one way in which we might live in tandem with it.

Since this example shows a practical a progressive application of non-substance ontology to a radical political agenda, it further exposes the problem with feminist and queer theorists who repudiate ontological study in favor of “pure” ethico-political aims. One of the issues here is to pinpoint exactly which ontology of the subject these theorists are repudiating. “Metaphysics itself has got a bad name, with many theorists maintaining that there has only been one metaphysics in the history of the west and that all

³⁷⁴ I do not pretend to have justly or adequately presented the concepts of Buddhist personal identity, the philosophical history of personal identity, or even queer itself. Time constraints have only allowed me to give a brief gloss of these issues.

metaphysics is necessarily complicit with patriarchy.”³⁷⁵ However, as we have seen, there are and have been many ontological theories throughout the course of history. It is true that the dominant, even hegemonic, story in the West since the Hellenistic period has been the Aristotelian or Cartesian substantive version. As explained in Part 1, Aristotle held that human being, like the being of all things in the world, contained a fixed and teleological essence underscored by the notion of a permanent, immutable, autonomous, static substance. This story continued to be retold throughout the enlightenment from Descartes with his notorious substance dualism through Kant who, while making new epistemic claims, which precluded knowledge about ontological facts, stopped short of overturning the theory in its entirety.

But that is, of course, not the only story one could tell. Throughout this work, I have presented a highly plausible and compelling alternative to the hegemonic ontology using the influence of Heraclitus and Buddhist theory. Through them, and the contemporary theorists indebted to their fertile beginnings, we have been able to reclaim what was already existing virtually in the past and bring it forward to spawn the transhuman future, our present. This theory was shown all the more viable by matching it against the evidence of recent biology and studies of the teleotechnological. From this we can gather that it would be more interesting, and perhaps even more accurate to understand human nature as transhuman, or beyond the level of the skin as techno-zoontological. This nothing is the something about which I have said something. I have disarmed the vestigial biological weapons lurking under the surface of the hegemonic ontological paradigm and rooted out the ontological terrorists of substance who brandish

³⁷⁵ Battersby, *Phenomenal Woman*, 15.

them. In their stead, I have elected to advocate a transhuman theory, one constituted essentially of: interspecies and technological interdependence, flux, impermanence, and multiplicity; collections of events, sets of forces, bundles of properties or processes; and one that is non-identical, internally contradictory, and non-autonomous. It is from this ontological basis, this line of flight, that I claim we must begin anew in the construction of our normative and existential agendas for how one might live. We must now direct our energies toward discovering and inventing the new possibilities of life that are engendered by this foundation. To this task, I ask that you, the reader, now turn.

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