

Corporeal Ontology: Merleau-Ponty, Flesh, and Posthumanism

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September 2013

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
PhD in Critical and Cultural Theory

Summary

As posthumanism has developed in the last twenty-five years there has been hesitation in elucidating a robust posthumanist engagement with the body. My thesis redresses this gap in the literature in three intertwined ways. First, it is a critical assessment of posthumanism broadly, focusing on how the body is read in its discourse and how there is a continuation of a humanist *telos* in terms which revolve around the body. Second, it is a philosophical interrogation, adaptation, and transformation of aspects of the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, focusing its reading on *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Visible and the Invisible*, with additional material drawn from his works on language, aesthetics, and ontology. Third, it is a critical analysis of four films drawn from that seemingly most posthumanist of genres, science fiction: Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*, Spielberg's *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*, Rusnak's *The Thirteenth Floor*, and Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*. Science fiction is the meeting place of popular and critical posthumanist imaginaries as the vast majority of texts on posthumanism (in whatever form) ground their analyses in a science fiction of some kind. By reading posthumanism through the work of Merleau-Ponty I outline a posthumanist ontology of corporeality which both demonstrates the limitations of how posthumanism has done its analyses of the body and elucidates an opening and levelling not adequately considered in posthumanist analyses of the body. Following Merleau-Ponty I argue that there is a 'belongingness of the body to being and the corporeal relevance of every being', yet, the body is not the singular purview of the human. There are alternative embodiments and bodies which have been previously overlooked and that all bodies (be they embodied organically, technologically, virtually or otherwise) are corporeal.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank my family for their unwavering emotional support throughout and for their financial support. I'd like to thank all those in CCCT, ENCAP, other Cardiff University departments and schools (particularly IO), and other Universities for moral support, innumerable discussions, evenings down the pub and the inevitable adventures had, and for putting up with me during certain periods in the process. I'd especially like to thank Adam Coward, Phillip Roberts, and David Vella. Moreover I'd like to thank those who embarked on reading a draft or portions of the thesis for their editorial comments: Phillip Roberts, Pat and Rorri McBlane, and Dr. James Miller. I'd also like to thank the administrative staff in CCCT and ENCAP, without whom nothing would ever get done. Finally I'd like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Neil Badmington, for his patience, particularly his patience, and guidance throughout.

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List of Abbreviations

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- ‘CD’ ‘Cézanne's Doubt’, in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 9-23
- ‘EM’ ‘Eye and Mind’, trans. by Carleton Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology and the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. by James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 159-190
- ‘ILVS’ ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’, in *Signs*, trans. by Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 39-83
- PHP* *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Donald A. Landes (London and New York: Routledge, 2012)
- PRI* *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology and the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, trans. by multiple, ed. by James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964)
- PW* *The Prose of the World*, trans. by John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973)
- SNS* *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964)
- S* *Signs*, trans. by Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964)
- VI* *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964)

Introduction
Posthuman Gestures

The posthumanist challenge that this thesis is situated around is the corporeal status of artificiality, technology, information and virtuality. The site of this challenge is the body itself. This is not to say that posthumanists should ignore questions concerning biology, other animals, and the organic. At the current moment questions concerning the status of animals in philosophy, theory, and cultural studies have become much more prominent,¹ including the rise of critical animal studies, and, within posthumanism, in particular, the work of Cary Wolfe has helped shaped this discourse.² Rather, the scope of this thesis is situated within a different register of posthumanism. In order to elucidate this posthumanist challenge the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty is crucial in disclosing, on the one hand, a form of posthumanist cultural practice which develops from Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of expression in order to interrogate particular styles of being in the world that have already been expressed and acquired 'institutional limitation within the conventions of a culture',³ and, on the other, a posthumanist corporeal ontology which interrogates the depths of corporeality through the reversibility and divergence of styles of being in the world, or what Merleau-Ponty develops as the ontology of flesh. While Merleau-Ponty is primarily known outside of scholars who examine his work as a phenomenologist, or more particularly an existential phenomenologist, Diana H. Coole notes that 'phenomenology became for Merleau-Ponty not a subjectivist, humanist and idealist philosophy, but a dialectical, posthumanist, yet existentialist critical theory'.⁴ This thesis, however, is not situated within phenomenology. It is situated within the discourse of posthumanism broadly, critical posthumanism specifically. I seek to transform the debates and discourse on the body by philosophically basing my work through the elucidation and

¹ By no means exhaustive, see the following for an indication: Cary Wolfe, *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species and Posthumanist Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. by Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I am*, trans. by David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); Matthew Calarco, *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); and readers such as *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, ed. by Cary Wolfe (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); *Phenomenology and the Non-Human Animal: At the limits of Experience*, ed. by Corrinne Painter and Christian Lotz (Berlin: Springer, 2007); *Animal Subjects: An Ethical Reader*, ed. by Jodey Castricano (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2008).

² See: Wolfe, *Animal Rites*; Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

³ M.C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, 2nd edn (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997), p. 188.

⁴ Diana H. Coole, *Merleau-Ponty and Modern Politics after Anti-Humanism* (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), p. 107.

transformation of aspects of the work of Merleau-Ponty. Following Neil Badmington this is a kind of posthumanism which allows 'us' to feel how 'meanings move without the human [and that] culture does not begin and end with "us"'.⁵

Methodologically this thesis contains three intertwined components. First, it is a critical assessment of posthumanism broadly focusing on how the body is read in its discourse and how there is a continuation of a humanist *telos* in terms which revolve around the body. Second, it is a philosophical interrogation, adaptation, and transformation of aspects of the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty which focuses its reading on the *Phenomenology of Perception*⁶ and *The Visible and the Invisible*, with additional material drawn from his works on language, aesthetics, and ontology. Third, it is a critical analysis of four films – David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*; Steven Spielberg's *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*; Josef Rusnak's *The Thirteenth Floor*; Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* – drawn from that seemingly most posthumanist of genres: science fiction. Science fiction film and literature is the meeting place of both popular and critical posthumanist imaginaries, with the vast majority of texts on posthumanism (in whatever form) grounding their analyses on a science fiction of some kind.⁷ By reading posthumanism through the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty I outline a posthumanist corporeal ontology which both demonstrates the limitations of how posthumanism has gone about its analyses of the body and discloses an opening and levelling of the body through Merleau-Ponty's elucidation of, on the one hand, experience and expression of an embodied being, and, on the other, style and his ontology of flesh. As M.C. Dillon comments: 'Body. Flesh. World.

⁵ Neil Badmington, 'Cultural Studies and the Posthumanities', in *New Cultural Studies: Adventures in Theory*, ed. by Gary Hall and Clare Birchall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 260-72 (p. 270).

⁶ It should be noted that I am using the Donald A. Landes translation of *Phenomenology of Perception* published in 2012 as opposed to the widely available but erroneous Colin Smith translation. Landes' translation of *Phenomenology of Perception* has vastly improved upon and removed many errors and omissions in Smith's translation making Landes translation much more readable and clear. It is now the standard English translation of *Phenomenology of Perception* having superseded Smith's.

⁷ I include not only science fiction film and literature here, but also things that had previously been the stuff of science fiction which are now becoming increasingly possible through technological and scientific endeavours such as genetic engineering, nanotechnologies, and virtual realities.

Body as flesh of the world. These are the terms of Merleau-Ponty's ontology.⁸ With Merleau-Ponty I argue that there is a 'belongingness of the body to being and the corporeal relevance of every being',⁹ where the body is not the singular purview of the human, but that all bodies (be they embodied organically, technologically, virtually or otherwise) are part of a shared corporeality. For the posthumanism that I am developing here one should not assume that by going hunting for cyborgs, hybrids, or 'posthumans' one is, in fact, practising posthumanism. Nor will I write of a logic of purification or contamination because, much like the seemingly disparate poles of technophilia and technophobia, the logic of contamination celebrated in certain variations of posthumanism is a parallel of the logic of purification celebrated in humanism.¹⁰ As Merleau-Ponty began his work by trying to develop a non-dualistic middle path between intellectualist and empiricist accounts of perception, this thesis is situated around an account of embodiments, bodies, and corporeality which similarly seeks to disclose a non-dualistic middle path.

Situating Posthumanism

The current interest in posthumanism and its attendant concepts such as the posthuman¹¹ has developed from numerous sources: the theosophical work of Madame Blavatsky,¹² early works of science fiction literature by Mary Shelley and Villiers De L'Isle-Adam, the work of Olaf Stapledon and Philip K. Dick, the cyberpunk novels of William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Neal Stephenson, as well as contemporary novels by Charles Stross and Michel Houellebecq. It is coded into cybernetics from the pioneering work of Alan Turing and Norbert Wiener to the contemporary work of Kevin

⁸ Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, p. xix.

⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 118.

¹⁰ For detailed discussions of the logic of purification and contamination in humanism and posthumanism see, in particular, Elaine Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002) and Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

¹¹ There are a variety of spellings which have been used over the last century, among them: Posthuman, post-human, post-human, post-human, post/human, postHuman, posthuman. For clarity and consistency I will be using the spellings posthuman, posthumanist, and posthumanism throughout as they are the standard spelling in posthumanist discourse. If another spelling is used the reasons for doing so will be marked in a footnote.

¹² According to Neil Badmington Madame Blavatsky's 1888 theosophical treatise *The Secret Doctrine* contains perhaps the earliest direct reference to a concept called the post-human. See: Neil Badmington, 'Introduction: Posthuman Conditions', *Subject Matters*, 3.2/4.1 (2007), ix-xii.

Warwick and Marvin Minsky. More recently ideas about the possibilities of posthumanism broadly have found perhaps their widest disclosure and 'acceptance' in film, primarily within the genre of science fiction which is largely considered the 'posthumanist genre *par excellence*'.¹³

Posthumanism now seems to be everywhere, embedded in a circuit between science fiction and science fact, with science fiction furnishing the meeting place of posthumanist imaginaries and the vast majority of texts on posthumanism (in whatever form) grounding their analyses in a science fiction of some kind. Most discussions of the posthuman (temporally rendered as after or transcending the human) have tended towards placing the term in the context of technology and science on the one hand, or speculative, weird, and science fiction on the other. Human augmentation, prosthesis, information, bioinformatics and cybernetic theory, bioethics, bioengineering, artificial intelligence, and artificial life are generally presumed to be the speciality of the posthuman, with the cyborg becoming the standard-bearer of technological posthumanists worldwide.¹⁴ This form of posthumanism, while it may be the most apparent, nevertheless is not the only form posthumanism takes. If we approach the thematics and methods associated with posthumanism we can broadly situate five theorizations of posthumanism (although they can and do overlap)¹⁵ which have developed since the late 1970s¹⁶:

- 1) *Technological posthumanism* – Considers the posthuman as a potentially realizable being who comes after the human via a coupling with technology or through genetic engineering. It is largely characterised through organizations that flourish around transhumanism which stress an overcoming of the limitations of biology, and more subdued versions based in the analysis of risks to human life and flourishing.¹⁷

¹³ Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*, p. 113. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴ Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter, 'Critical Posthumanism, or, the *Inventio* of a Posthumanism without Technology', *Subject Matters*, 3.2/4.1 (2007), 15-30 (pp. 15-16).

¹⁵ This taxonomy is by no means exhaustive nor are the representative texts in the footnotes which follow.

¹⁶ The first academic reference to the 'posthuman' and posthumanism is generally considered to be Ihab Hassan's 'Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture? A University Masque in Five Scenes'. *Georgia Review*, 31 (1977), 830-850.

¹⁷ Representative texts: Nick Bostrom, 'A History of Transhumanist Thought', *Journal of Evolution & Technology*,

- 2) *Cybernetic posthumanism* – Adopts the metaphor of the cyborg as a way to overcome dualistic binaries by promoting a hybrid approach to questions concerning posthumanism and the posthuman. It differs from technological posthumanism in that the posthuman is understood as less a being which comes after the human than an inherent potential or working-through of the human by demonstrating how it is never whole, but always caught up and defined with and alongside others, particularly technology.¹⁸
- 3) *Postmodernist and Poststructuralist posthumanism* – As with postmodernism broadly, there is a distrust of calls to Truth, metanarratives, and universality. There is a focus on alterity in textual and discursive analysis of literature, film, and the everyday. Drawing inspiration partially from anti-humanism, the posthuman is not seen here as a temporally realizable being. This form calls for a rewriting or working-through of humanism as it argues that humanism cannot escape its post via an analysis of humanisms and the bifurcations, exclusions and metaphysics within them.¹⁹
- 4) *Ethical-Political posthumanism* – A more recent development in posthumanism which is interested in the ethical and political ramification of posthumanism in relation to technology, other animals, other humans, and the environment. It broadly argues for the necessity of humanity to have an increased responsibility and ethic of care towards ‘others’, particularly

14.1 (2005), 1-25; Nick Bostrom, ‘In Defense of Posthuman Dignity’, *Bioethics*, 19.3 (2005), 202-214; Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* (New York: Penguin, 1999); Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Penguin, 2005); Hans Moravec, *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Daniel Dinello, *Technophobia!: Science Fiction Visions of Posthuman Technology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); Humanity+ (formerly the World Transhumanist Association) <http://www.humanityplus.org>

¹⁸ Representative texts: Donna J. Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto’; Many of the essays collected in *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. by Gray, and *The Gendered Cyborg*, ed. by Kirkup, James, Woodward, and Hovendon.

¹⁹ Representative texts: *Posthumanism*, ed. by Badmington; Neil Badmington, *Alien Chic: Posthumanism and the Other Within* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Elaine Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human*; N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*; Colin Milburn, *Nanovision: Engineering the Future* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008); Thomas Foster, *The Souls of Cyberfolk: Posthumanism as Vernacular Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*; Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*; Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

non-human, of all kinds.²⁰

- 5) *Systems posthumanism* – Based on the adaptation of second-order cybernetics (autopoiesis) via Niklas Luhmann, this most recent form of posthumanism engages with cybernetic theories in order to develop an analysis of how the complexity of life is developed through an openness to the environment. It is concerned with how various systems – be they psychic, social, biological, or historical – operate not only through a self-referentiality, but incorporate and develop with other systems.²¹

Each form has already found expression within the current discourse on posthumanism. While these simplified characterisations do not do justice to each of these types of posthumanism and their often complex overlappings and intertwinings, they can all broadly be read as responses to or reworkings of major intellectual movements founded in the mid-twentieth century (as one would expect). Technological, cybernetic, and systems posthumanism largely emerge from developments in cybernetics and the possibilities opened up by it; postmodernist, poststructuralist, and ethico-political posthumanism emerge from responses to phenomenology and existentialism, structuralism, and modernism.²² The five forms of posthumanism listed above all have lengthy histories and contexts. Posthumanism broadly did not simply emerge from nowhere, but rather is a confluence of multiple threads which have developed over the last century. However, the earlier period of structuralism, existentialism, and phenomenology provides, in my view, a much more coherent and

²⁰ Representative texts: Chris Hables Gray, *Citizen Cyborg: Politics in a Posthuman Age* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002); Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter, 'What is a Posthumanist Reading?', *Angelaki*, 13.1 (2008), 95-111; Rosalyn Diprose, 'Toward an ethico-politics of the posthuman: Foucault and Merleau-Ponty', *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy*, 8 (2009), 7-19; *Posthuman Bodies*, ed. by Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995); Wolfe, *Animal Rites*; Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*; Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*; Braidotti, *The Posthuman*.

²¹ Representative texts: Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*; Bruce Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and System* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

²² For excellent accounts of some of these transitions, see: Hugh J. Silverman, *Inscriptions: Between Phenomenology and Structuralism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1987); Hugh J. Silverman, *Textualities: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); Jeffrey A. Bell, *The Problem of Difference: Phenomenology and Structuralism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Leonard Lawlor, *Thinking Through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003).

viable approach through which to develop a posthumanist corporeal ontology. In particular, this is found in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty who is deeply situated in this earlier period and published his major works from 1942 until his untimely death in 1961.

In order to clarify the reasons for this I begin by briefly discussing the emergence of posthumanism within academic debate from the 1980s onwards. Haraway's landmark 'A Cyborg Manifesto' is exemplary in this respect as it was through her essay that the metaphor of the cyborg entered more common academic parlance. While I would not call Haraway's essay explicitly posthumanist in orientation, nor does the essay ever mention the term, it was through this essay that the cyborg was broadly adopted as a being that signalled a blurring of boundaries. The cyborg was positioned between humanity and technology as a hybrid concept neither fully human nor fully technological but rather situated in the in-between.²³ The notion of the blurring of boundaries between the human and the technological enabled those who would follow to adopt the metaphor of the cyborg – posthumanist or not – as a way to demonstrate the leakiness of strict boundary delineation between concepts, ideas, and peoples.

Technological and cybernetic visions of the posthuman began to arise after previously being largely confined to the realm of science fiction and the scientific disciplines which explored the possibilities of a 'posthuman' future coming to be, embedded in what Stefan Herbrechter calls 'science fiction' which 'consciously mixes the fictionality and facticity of scientific culture'.²⁴ In 1988 Hans Moravec outlined a dream of eventually being able to download one's consciousness into a machine and described the process as follows:

Layer after layer the brain is simulated, then excavated. Eventually your skull is empty, and the surgeon's hand rests deep in your brainstem. Though you have not lost consciousness, or even your train of thought, your mind has been removed from the brain

²³ The term cyborg was first coined in the early 1960s by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline, 'Cyborgs and Space', in *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. by Chris Hables Gray (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 29-33. It did not gain widespread prominence in parts of the humanities until Haraway's essay.

²⁴ Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*, p. 114.

and transferred to a machine.²⁵

As is readily apparent in this passage the biological body was not a concern for Moravec. With the aid of technology one could remove oneself from the so-called 'human condition' and enter into the completely new realm of the 'posthuman condition'²⁶; one needed only to simulate and excavate the mind and the whole person would be transferred. Moravec's dream is in continuity with the lengthy history of the mind-body question and reiterates a hierarchical dualism of mind over body in which a complete radical break between them would signal the dawn of the posthuman age. For N. Katherine Hayles this is an age defined by the body no longer taken as a ground of being which, for her, is '[a] nightmare [where] a culture [is] inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being',²⁷ having discarded a biological or organic embodiment in favour of a 'disembodied' mind.

At the same moment cyberpunk fiction gained popularity with William Gibson's sprawl trilogy²⁸ setting the tone for much of cyberpunk's playing around with the idea of artificial intelligence and human augmentation in the 1980s. Augmentation was discussed in numerous forms from neural implants that connect one to cyberspace directly, to bodily augmentation through implants and prosthetics.²⁹ Gibson's oft-cited *Neuromancer* details a world which could be considered posthuman as it abounds with augmented humans, direct neural links to cyberspace, and an intelligent AI battling for its independence; this is a world where technologies of enhancement have become the norm and used by most inhabitants of its world. Others, like Bruce Sterling, further develop these notions. In his novel *Schismatrix*³⁰ he specifies two forms of posthuman being: the Mechanists, who use prosthetic and machinic enhancement, and the Shapers, who rely on genetic engineering. Not

²⁵ Moravec, *Mind Children*, p. 110.

²⁶ Robert Pepperrell, *The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness beyond the brain*, 2nd edn (Portland and Bristol: Intellect, 2003).

²⁷ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*. p. 5.

²⁸ William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace Books, 1984); *Count Zero* (New York: Ace Books, 1986); *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989).

²⁹ Cyberpunk also owed much to its immediate predecessors in the 1960s, particular to the work of authors like Philip K. Dick and J.G Ballard who dealt with similar thematics but without the technological style that defined cyberpunk.

³⁰ Bruce Sterling, *Schismatrix Plus* (New York: Ace Trade, 1996).

only has science fiction literature had a widespread cultural influence with respect to the ways that one thinks about the 'posthuman' and posthumanism, technology, science, robotics, cybernetics, and genetics, but science fiction cinema, in particular, has explored these in detail and aesthetically influenced the way that 'posthuman' futures are envisaged. Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, for instance, has deeply affected the way that 'posthuman' futures are aesthetically presented on film. Older examples include Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* or, while not strictly science fiction, Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* and Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. More contemporary examples include James Cameron's *Terminator* films, Shinya Tsukamoto's *Tetsuo* films, Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*, and the Wachowski's *The Matrix* and its sequels to Neill Blomkamp's *District 9* and *Elysium*. As Stefan Herbrechter notes, 'science fiction [should be taken seriously], not in the sense of its factual 'realizability' but rather on the basis of its cultural influence'.³¹

The technological and cybernetic forms of posthumanism continued to develop into the early 1990s as the focus shifted to the possibilities of virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and their attendant concepts (artificial life, biotechnology, genetic engineering, and robotics). In the development of proto-posthumanist³² theory based around technologies and cybernetics and within the wider spectrum of popular culture the idea of the posthuman began to gain cultural currency. At the end of the 1990s a coherent splitting occurred between the various schools of posthumanist thought in which technological posthumanism and cybernetic posthumanism can be grouped together into what I will term popular posthumanism. On the one hand, popular posthumanism is organized through the promotion of more developed posthumanist theories embodied in the metaphor of the cyborg and fervently engages with new technologies – such as the potential of VR during this period or

³¹ Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Cultural Analysis*, p. 117.

³² I call them proto-posthumanist because although the 1970s and 1980s signalled the beginning of what was to become posthumanist theory, it was not until the 1990s that posthumanism took a more cohesive direction.

more recently in discussions of the internet and cyberspace.³³ The cyborg served to legitimate claims towards hybridity and the blurring of boundaries between the human, the technological, and their mutual transformation. On the other hand, the posthuman as a potential being encapsulated in the science fiction and science fact of the twentieth century, notwithstanding its mythic predecessors,³⁴ provided an outlet for proponents of disembodiment or for a radical break from what they consider human,³⁵ to explore alternatives. Yet it was also for those who were keenly aware of the risks associated with human finitude and flourishing and wanted to alleviate these anxieties through the use of enhancement or therapies.³⁶

Other forms of posthumanism³⁷ would not fully emerge until N. Katherine Hayles' *How we Became Posthuman* (1999) was published, followed in relatively quick succession by Neil Badmington's edited collection *Posthumanism* (2000), Elaine Graham's *Representations of the Post/Human* (2002) and Cary Wolfe's *Animal Rites* (2003). In the late 1990s and early 2000s the three other forms of posthumanism – postmodernist and poststructuralist posthumanism, ethical-political posthumanism, and systems posthumanism – emerged largely under the banner of what Jill Didur calls 'critical posthumanism' which, she argues 'questions the view that there was ever an originary divide between [nature and culture, man and machine] in the first place'.³⁸ Critical posthumanist elements

³³ The influx of texts on the possibilities of virtual reality with dreams of a Star Trekian holodeck, mind extension, and assorted other dreams that began in the 1980s celebrating or challenging this possibility waned as the reality of the limitations of virtual reality technologies became apparent. The focus then shifted to cyberspace and the internet as the world wide web exploded in popularity in the mid-1990s.

³⁴ The history of science fiction and mythology is replete with beings that may be considered 'posthuman'. See: Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human*.

³⁵ Most notably Moravec, *Mind Children*, and transhumanists who believe that the Singularity (when humans and machines fully merge) is forthcoming. For more on the Singularity see: Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*.

³⁶ Nick Bostrom, 'A History of Transhumanist Thought'; Nick Bostrom, 'In Defense of Posthuman Dignity'.

³⁷ This is not to say that technological and cybernetic proto-posthumanisms went unchallenged during this period or earlier even. Hayles' book was not the first to critique the claims made in both of these discourses. For instance see: Anna Balsamo, 'Forms of Technological Embodiment: Reading the Body in Contemporary Culture', *Body and Society*, 1.3-4 (1995), 215-237; Sadie Plant, 'The Future Looms: Weaving Women and Cybernetics', *Body & Society* 1.3-4 (1995), 45-64; Margrit Shildrick, 'Posthumanism and the Monstrous Body', *Body & Society* 2.1 (1996), 1-15; *Virtual Realities and Their Discontents*, ed. by Robert Markley (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996); Vicki Kirby, *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

³⁸ Jill Didur, 'Re-Embodying Technoscientific Fantasies: Posthumanism, Genetically Modified Foods, and the Colonization of Life', *Cultural Critique*, 53 (2003), 98-115 (pp. 101-102).

can be found in earlier works, yet it was at this point that the primary orientation of critical posthumanism was explicated via a concern for a technology-human-animal triumvirate. The historical predecessors to critical posthumanism are largely located through the anti-humanism of the latter half of the twentieth century, influenced by theorists and philosophers of the post-68 generation such as Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jacques Derrida.³⁹

Hayles explores the human-machine aspect by arguing against the disembodied practices found in cybernetics, explaining how information lost its body, and the problematic of the liberal humanist subject. She concludes that the exclusionary anthropocentric logic which underwrites both information and the liberal humanist subject expels the body from what is 'proper' to humanity. Hayles explains: 'the liberal humanist subject lies in the mind, not the body [...] to the extent that the posthuman constructs embodiment as the instantiation of thought/information, it continues the liberal tradition rather than disrupts it'.⁴⁰ For Hayles, information is in continuity with traditions that place mind over body.

The posthuman invoked by Hayles is not an entity that is 'post-' in a temporal sense as after the human; rather, she writes '[that] 'human' and 'posthuman' coexist in shifting configurations that vary with historically specific contexts'.⁴¹ To ground something within a particular concept of the human and attempt to transform it into its 'post-' denies that the human has a myriad of ways of being in the world that coexist with posthumanist ways of being in the world. The posthuman for Hayles is deeply connected with subjectivity and she loosely characterises it by stating that '[for the posthuman] there is no a priori way to identify a self-will that can be clearly distinguished from an

³⁹ For detailed accounts of the anti-humanist influence on critical posthumanism see: Badmington, 'Introduction: Approaching Posthumanism', in *Posthumanism*, pp. 1-10; Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*, pp. 1-29 and pp. 31-73; and Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, pp. 13-54.

⁴⁰ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 5.

⁴¹ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 6.

other-will'.⁴² For Hayles, in contrast to the popular concept of the posthuman (that she rightly criticizes), self and other, and body and mind are deeply connected: the exclusionary logic of humanism cannot function when there is no 'proper' to humanity. This type of posthumanism can be characterised through Bruce Braun's isolation of 'deconstructive responsibility', which is 'a vigilant attention to the bounding of the human, to the supplemental logic that is at work in each and every effort to set off the human as its very own kind'.⁴³

This deconstructive responsibility carries into Elaine Graham's teratological analysis of the post/human.⁴⁴ In her work she analyses beings that are considered inhuman (including animals and machines), be they monsters, aliens or other humans who are excluded from the category of human. She develops the concept of 'ontological hygiene'⁴⁵ to explain how the borderlands between humans and others are set up, patrolled, and maintained through a rigorous process of exclusion. She maintains that:

Monsters serve to both mark the fault-lines but also, subversively, to signal the fragility of such boundaries. They are truly 'monstrous' – as in things shown and displayed – in their simultaneous demonstration and destabilization of the demarcations by which cultures have separated nature from artifice, human from non-human, normal from pathological.⁴⁶

Alterity is clearly developed as a key mode of her critical posthumanist engagement. This demonstrates critical posthumanism's importation and expansion of poststructuralist and postmodernist ideas. Because monsters function simultaneously as the keepers and usurpers of the ontological faultlines of human/inhuman, for Graham they provide a history of the post/human before the more current trend of technologically focused conceptions. She connects ontological hygiene, which the monstrous doubly functions with and as, to Bruno Latour's problematizing of

⁴² Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 4.

⁴³ Bruce Braun, 'Querying Posthumanism', *Geoforum*, 35 (2004), 269-273 (p. 270).

⁴⁴ Graham uses the spelling post/human throughout her work; therefore I will not change it when discussing her work. Rather than using a dash, as in post-human, the oblique stroke used by Graham serves a uniting function and attempt to place the two terms under question. Cf. Neil Badmington, 'Post, Oblique, Human', *Theology and Sexuality*, 10.2 (2004), 56-64.

⁴⁵ Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human*, p. 11.

⁴⁶ Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human*, p. 12.

modernity by pinpointing that ‘the naturalism of modernity's privileged categories must be underwritten by the effacement of its others’.⁴⁷ Modernity, in this instance, must possess an ‘ontological purity’.⁴⁸ She traces this through a genealogical analysis of the monstrous, demonstrates the fragility of rigorously patrolled boundaries, and shows how the process of ontological hygiene deconstructs itself through its own guardians. Graham concludes that

Monsters, aliens and others still function as important monitors and mediators of understandings of what it means to be post/human, not least in their indeterminacy, their eschewal of ontological purity, and their attention to human nature as defined by boundaries rather than essences. They embody the disturbing reminders of difference at the heart of unitary identity, and they suggest that any post/human ethic can be neither an escape into technocratic invulnerability nor a retreat into the imaged purity of organic essentialism.⁴⁹

Graham's work connects Braun's isolation of deconstructive responsibility to his second characterisation of posthumanism: posthumanism as ontology.⁵⁰ For Braun, posthumanism as ontology becomes a question of ‘the *making* of the human, and in particular, the making of (human) bodies’⁵¹ and Graham's notion of ontological hygiene explicitly makes clear how this process occurs through her emphasis on ontology, responsibility, and alterity.

Posthumanism as ontology is also found in Cary Wolfe's work. However, the focus here is not on human-machine as in Hayles or human-monstrous (inhuman) as in Graham, but rather on animal-human. Wolfe is the pioneer of adapting critical posthumanist theory to the ‘question of the animal’ and he is interested in developing a non-anthropocentric ethical framework which does not merely expand the ‘rights of man’ into the ‘rights of animals’ as this would continue a process which cleaves humanity from animals. For Wolfe

the subject of humanism is constituted by a temporal and evolutionary stratification or asynchronicity in which supposedly ‘animalistic’ or ‘primitive’ determinations inherited from our evolutionary past [...] coexist uneasily in a second-order relation of relations, which the phantasmic 'human' surfs or manages with varying degrees of success or

⁴⁷ Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human*, p. 33.

⁴⁸ Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human*, p. 234.

⁴⁹ Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human*, pp. 233-34.

⁵⁰ Braun, ‘Querying Posthumanism’, p. 271.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.

difficulty.⁵²

Wolfe is wary of a definition of the human that relies on an ‘animalistic’ or ‘primitive’ stage in the progression of human evolution as there is a fundamental discontinuity that arises. This discontinuity serves to separate human from animal as distinct forms, one which humans outgrew. Humanity is in a continual process of defining itself against what it is not, which in this case involves other species. Wolfe is less concerned about the posthuman of posthumanism as he outlines in the introduction that he will explore the ‘unexamined framework of *speciesism* [...] [which] involves systematic discrimination against an other based solely on a generic characteristic’.⁵³ He adapts posthumanist theory to demonstrate the ‘embeddedness and entanglement of the ‘human’ in all that it is not, in all that used to be thought of as its opposites or its other’,⁵⁴ with which he critiques the contemporary animal rights movement.⁵⁵ For Wolfe there is no ‘proper’ to humanity; rather, there is a multiplicity of relations, entanglements, and cominglings that construct the ‘human’. Wolfe’s work is an exemplary example of Braun’s third and final characterisation of posthumanism; ‘posthumanism as non-anthropocentrism’,⁵⁶ which is perhaps the most insistent characteristic of critical posthumanism.

All three characterisations of posthumanism that Braun pinpoints are intertwined within the majority of texts on critical posthumanism. How these characterisations of posthumanism are united under the banner of critical posthumanism is made most apparent by Neil Badmington.⁵⁷ In his work he sets out the particular goals of critical posthumanist modes of thought by theorizing how one is to theorize about posthumanism. He argues that ‘posthumanism [...] needs theorizing, needs above all to reconsider the untimely celebration of the absolute end of “Man”’⁵⁸ arguing against the more

⁵² Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, p. 3.

⁵³ Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, p. 1.

⁵⁴ Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, p. 193.

⁵⁵ Wolfe, *Animal Rites*, Chapters 1, 2 and, particularly, pp. 169-171.

⁵⁶ Braun, ‘Querying Posthumanism’, p. 272.

⁵⁷ In particular: Badmington, ‘Introduction’, in *Posthumanism; ‘Theorizing Posthumanism’*, *Cultural Critique*, 53 (2003), 10-27; ‘Post, Oblique, Human’. See also Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*.

⁵⁸ Badmington, ‘Theorizing Posthumanism’, p. 10.

popular posthumanisms which do not interrogate the figure of 'Man', despite their assertions to the contrary, as they continue to view it as central to their projects. 'Man' is something to be overcome, transcended in the name of progress, rather than 'human' and 'posthuman' [coexisting] in shifting configurations that vary with historically specific contexts'.⁵⁹ As I hope has been made clear, critical posthumanism is united by a critique of this centrality of the human.

For Badmington there is an ironic twist in that as 'the intellectuals were celebrating the demise [of humanism], popular culture was committed to a defence of humanism'.⁶⁰ This subject is investigated in more depth in Badmington's *Alien Chic: Posthumanism and the Other Within*, which engages with discussions and representations of aliens in popular culture and how regardless of whether there is 'alien hatred' or 'alien love' there is a humanistic-anthropocentric logic which distinguishes the boundaries between human and inhuman. Critical posthumanism cannot celebrate 'the absolute end of 'Man'' as the anti-humanists did, nor declare a complete radical break from notions of the human with the incorporation of technologies as forms of popular posthumanism do precisely because there is still an underlying *telos* of humanism in declarations of the ends of 'man'.

Posthumanism, Merleau-Ponty, and Corporeality

So far I have shown that the posthumanisms that developed from the 1980s onwards broadly developed out of the work from the latter half of the twentieth century situated, on the one hand, around cybernetics and, on the other, the 'great French Philosophy of the 60's'.⁶¹ These developed into the two major lines of popular and critical posthumanism and have five overlapping subsets consisting of technological, cybernetic, postmodernist and poststructuralist, ethical-political, and systems posthumanisms. Further to this Bruce Braun elucidates three strands that unite the projects of critical posthumanism whatever their methods: deconstructive responsibility, ontology, and non-

⁵⁹ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 6.

⁶⁰ Badmington, 'Introduction', *Posthumanism*, p. 8.

⁶¹ Lawlor, *The Being of the Question*, p. 1.

anthropocentrism. What differentiates popular and critical posthumanisms is that popular posthumanism bases itself on the possibility of a radical break signalled, for some, by a reiteration of the disembodiment thesis and a potential posthuman being that will come after the human, while critical posthumanism makes no such claim. With the rise of posthumanism (both popular and critical) we are finding the gradual decline of an exclusive definition of the body as a human body. Even in rhetoric that appeals to an obsolescence of a corporeal body, and disembodiment more broadly, it is not necessarily the body which is being dispelled, but rather a particular conception of a 'body'. Merleau-Ponty's work is particularly prescient for elucidating a posthumanist corporeal ontology as the inheritor of anti-humanism is less the critical posthumanism that has been on-going for at least the last 15 years, but cyborgology, the rhetoric of hybridity, and finally the 'posthuman' futures envisioned in technological and cybernetic posthumanisms. In these the 'ends of Man' found their widest disclosure. Cyborgology developed from the unsatisfying metaphor of the cyborg heralded by Haraway's 'A Cyborg Manifesto'. Hybridity attempted to address the merging of beings without rigorously taking into account difference, and ultimately risked developing a homogeneity of beings even as they demonstrated the relation of the inside/outside.⁶² Technological posthumanism largely begins at the moment that the human becomes the posthuman which renders a final end to 'Man' and stresses the overcoming of biology through technological progress and the various impulses which guide it. Within posthumanism broadly we have yet to see a robust approach to the body which does not take as its final ground a human body: the legacy of humanism runs deep even within posthumanism.

Kate Soper⁶³ provides an outline of three major modes of humanism which remain common, whether through critique or tacit renewal, in posthumanism. The first is an instrumental form where

⁶² See, for instance, the edited collection *Posthuman Bodies* which celebrates a logic of contamination that a particular form of posthumanism aspires to bring forth. Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston write in their introduction that a 'recognition of a posthuman agenda requires new protocols for reading the positivity of horror and abjection, not as representational (as pedagogical object-lessons: don't try this at home) but as functional dysfunctions that make other things happen'. 'Introduction: Posthuman Bodies', in *Posthuman Bodies*, pp. 1-19 (p. 14).

⁶³ Kate Soper, *Humanism and Anti-Humanism* (Chicago: Open Court, 1986).

there is an external relation to an ‘objectively existing world’ in which “Man” is conceived as standing “outside” the reality that is given to him in consciousness’.⁶⁴ ‘Man’ and world here are distinctly separated, and this is most readily identifiable through a logic of dominion where ‘nature exists *for* Man, who by means of an objective knowledge of its workings, harness it in the service of human ends’.⁶⁵ Consumption of natural resources and industrial farming both function in this way. Humanism presumes that the world exists for ‘Man’.⁶⁶ The second form is an “idealist” humanism’ which ‘argues that the world exists only in so far as it is reflected upon and understood in thought, and since thought is an exclusively human property, the world exists only by virtue of its conceptualization *by* “Man”’.⁶⁷ The world only comes to exist through ‘man’, and only ‘man’ can think and speak. The third form she outlines is ‘dialectical’, in which ‘the relationship of “humanity” and “nature” is to be understood as a *totality*: the world is what it is as a result of its being lived in and transformed by humanity, while humanity in turn acquires its character through its existence and situation in the world’.⁶⁸ While these types are by no means exhaustive of how humanism functions, they provide an insight of critical importance in that all claim that the designator of authenticity and legitimacy is the human which situates it as a *telos*. *Telos*, as Heidegger discloses, is ‘that which gives bounds, that which completes’.⁶⁹ With this in mind humanism is situated as follows: it is a reductive appeal to the category ‘human’, where the human is made an ultimate ground which renders the human (no matter the definition) as a *telos*, a being which completes and bounds.

Given this schema it may seem somewhat unconventional to turn to phenomenology, more specifically to Merleau-Ponty, to develop a posthumanist corporeal ontology. Phenomenology, very

⁶⁴ Soper, *Humanism and Anti-Humanism*, p. 24.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* My emphasis.

⁶⁶ Cf: Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I am*; Wolfe, *Animal Rites and What is Posthumanism?*.

⁶⁷ Soper, *Humanism and Anti-Humanism*, pp. 23-24. My emphasis.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* My emphasis.

⁶⁹ Martin Heidegger, ‘The Question Concerning Technology’, trans. by William Lovitt with alterations by David Farrell Krell, in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. by David Farrell Krell, revised and expanded edn (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993), pp. 307-341 (p. 315).

broadly conceived, is an attempt to describe experiences of the world. In its Husserlian form this was formalized via the phenomenological reduction (eidetic and transcendental). The reduction, *epoché* in phenomenological language, is an effort to bracket off the concerns of a subject in order to prevent it from disrupting an adequate encounter with the things-themselves.⁷⁰ By virtue of this bracketing the subject was made transcendental and constituted an intersubjective world – a self-world relation. In the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty sees himself as continuing the Husserlian project by examining the phenomenon of perception which ‘is the background against which all acts stand out and is thus presupposed by them’.⁷¹ Hence *Phenomenology of Perception* is not strictly about embodiment or the body. Rather it is about adapting Husserlian phenomenology through Gestalt theory⁷² in an attempt to carve a middle path and develop what is known as the primacy of perception. In essence it is an analysis of first-person subjectivity (consciousness) in the world:

The phenomenological world is not pure being, but rather the sense that shines forth at the intersection of my experiences and at the intersection of my experiences with those of others through a sort of gearing into each other. The phenomenological world is thus inseparable from subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which establishes their unity through the taking up of my past experiences into my present experiences, or of the other person’s experience into my own.⁷³

Of critical importance for Merleau-Ponty is that perception is not sustained through a ‘pure’ consciousness removed from a body or world, but it is in a space and time, in relation to other beings, and in a world. As he develops his analysis Merleau-Ponty grounds the perceptual act through what he terms the body-subject.⁷⁴ Merleau-Ponty is quite humanist in his treatment of the body-subject. While he locates perception in the body and the body in the world, which is particularly useful to begin a discussion of the body, his approach towards the body in

⁷⁰ See: Edmund Husserl. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. by Dorion Cairns (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1950); Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Phenomenology*, trans. by Brian Beakley (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘Preface’, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Donald A. Landes (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. lxx-lxxxv.

⁷¹ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. lxxiv.

⁷² Of particular interest to Merleau-Ponty is the figure/ground, or background/foreground, relation put forward in Gestalt theory.

⁷³ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. lxxxiv.

⁷⁴ The body-subject is explored in much more detail in the next chapter.

Phenomenology of Perception nevertheless begins and ends in the human body. As Leonard Lawlor and Fred Evans write

Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* can be seen as the culmination of the humanistic tradition within modernism...[as] it identifies the self or 'subject' with reason and pronounces reason to be the basis for knowledge and for our emancipation from forces that would otherwise prevent us from developing and fulfilling our human capacities.⁷⁵

Much like Hayles' critique of the 'liberal humanist subject' in *How We Became Posthuman*, Evans and Lawlor pinpoint a possible problem with an attempt to utilize Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* for posthumanist theory: it is laced with an enlightenment humanism. Yet, they continue that Merleau-Ponty

does not guarantee our freedom by bifurcating reality into the mental and the physical or the noumenal and the phenomenal...Rather, we and the world are engaged in a dialogue with each other. This dialogue simultaneously provides and calls for a direction and meaning (*sens*) for the development of both of its poles.⁷⁶

Therefore, while Merleau-Ponty does practice a form of humanism in *Phenomenology of Perception* it is a seemingly moderate version that stresses a dialectical relation rather than a bifurcation.

Merleau-Ponty's form of humanism in the *Phenomenology of Perception* can be read as being part of the third dialectical form of humanism that Soper outlines. Merleau-Ponty writes that 'the phenomenological world is not the making explicit of a prior being, but rather the founding of being...no explanatory hypothesis is more clear than the very act by which we take up this incomplete world in order to attempt to totalize it and to think it.'⁷⁷ Merleau-Ponty is leading the reader back to a human body in the world – a body-subject – which dialectically engages with the world through an act of completion, a humanist *telos*, where 'we witness, at each moment, this marvel that is the connection of experiences, and no one knows how it is accomplished better than

⁷⁵ Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor, 'Introduction - The Value of Flesh: Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy and the Modernism/Postmodernism Debate', in *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, ed. by Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), pp. 1-20 (pp. 2-3).

⁷⁶ Evans and Lawlor, 'The Value of Flesh', p. 3.

⁷⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, pp. lxxxiv-lxxxv.

we do, since we are this very knot of relations'.⁷⁸ It would be far too simplistic to simply dismiss *Phenomenology of Perception*, at least in these passages from the 'Preface', as it conforms to how I have situated humanism as *telos*. Merleau-Ponty develops in this work two key aspects which help to sketch a preliminary posthumanist approach to corporeality: experience and expression. The experience that a body has and the expression that a body is are crucial in Merleau-Ponty's early works as they develop his analysis of perception, the body-subject, and the dialectical relationship of the body-subject and world. Notwithstanding the *telos* of humanism that runs throughout *Phenomenology of Perception* it provides a starting point from which to develop an analysis and elucidation of the experience of other forms of embodiment in their manifold expressions. That is, while Merleau-Ponty's early works, particularly *The Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception*, do take the human body as their starting point for analysis, this does not equate his entire philosophy to a humanism.⁷⁹ Rather, there is an underlying strand of what we now call posthumanism that runs through Merleau-Ponty's work. In Chapter 1 I disclose that for Merleau-Ponty the ground of experience and expression of a body-subject is not a human body in-itself but the world, and one only has experience of a body and the world by living it. As Merleau-Ponty declares:

I am my body, at least to the extent that I have an acquisition [of others and the world], and reciprocally my body is something like a natural subject, or a provisional sketch of my total being. The experience of one's own body, then, is opposed to the reflective movement that disentangles the object from the subject and the subject from the object, and that only gives us thought about the body or the body as an idea, and not the experience of the body or the body in reality.⁸⁰

The *Phenomenology of Perception* provides a starting point to develop a posthumanist corporeal ontology as it signals, on the one hand, Merleau-Ponty's analysis of embodiment, in particular of an embodied perceiver, and, on the other, it begins to develop a philosophy of expression. Within posthumanist discourse I principally engage with N. Katherine Hayles *How we Became Posthuman* and outline a provisional way of situating embodiment, bodies, experience and expression. I

⁷⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. lxxxv.

⁷⁹ The charge of humanism made against Merleau-Ponty is largely for his early works, not his later.

⁸⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 205.

explore these in Chapter 2 in relation to David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*⁸¹ and Steven Spielberg's *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*⁸² and analyse technological embodiment as an overlooked or ignored alternative form of embodiment.

The elucidation of experience and expression in *Phenomenology of Perception* is not only crucial in order to begin to develop a corporeal ontology but as a way to understand what Merleau-Ponty develops in his later works as style and flesh. The movement from the primacy of perception found in *Phenomenology of Perception* to an ontology of flesh⁸³ developed in *The Visible and The Invisible* refines the way in which alternative forms of embodiment can be analysed in addition to demonstrating a shift to corporeality in Merleau-Ponty's thinking.⁸⁴ In *The Visible and The Invisible* Merleau-Ponty addresses the 'necessity of bringing [the results of *Phenomenology of Perception*] to ontological explication'⁸⁵ which hinges on his notion of flesh.

In the most famous chapter of this unfinished work, 'The Intertwining – The Chiasm',⁸⁶ Merleau-Ponty analyses the basic structure of a touching-touched, seeing-being seen, visible-invisible, sentient-sensible model and demonstrates their reversibility (*chiasm*) and divergence (*écart*) without recourse to a false unity which would simply put the terms together. In order to maintain and account for this model Merleau-Ponty puts forward the notion of flesh (*chair*), in which

The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term 'element,' in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an 'element' of Being.⁸⁷

What maintains the experiences that a body has and the expression that it is in *Phenomenology of*

⁸¹ *eXistenZ*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Dimension, 1999) [on DVD].

⁸² *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*, dir. by Steven Spielberg (Dreamworks, 2002) [on DVD].

⁸³ This is not, however, to say that the primacy of perception is discarded in *The Visible and The Invisible*.

⁸⁴ Merleau-Ponty himself does not use the term corporeality, rather he uses corporeity. I take these terms to be interchangeable as they refer to existence.

⁸⁵ Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated Feb 1959, *VI*, p. 183.

⁸⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, pp. 130-155.

⁸⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 139. Emphasis in original.

Perception is hereby given a name, and the body-subject's relation to the world, and vice-versa, is secured. Breaking away from the consciousness-object distinction⁸⁸ and the dualistic legacy that is present throughout *Phenomenology of Perception* flesh marks the middle path that Merleau-Ponty sought and he is clear that it is not matter, mind, or substance. Therefore, even though touching-touched, visible-invisible, or seeing-being seen may be read as textual markers of dualism, flesh, and the reversibility and divergence inherent to it, illustrates '[a] circle which I do not form, which forms me, this coiling over of the visible upon the visible, can traverse, animate other bodies as well as my own'.⁸⁹ Flesh is an element which relates to the mutual encroachment and divergence of a body and a world⁹⁰: what Merleau-Ponty calls the flesh of the body and the flesh of the world. Flesh is crucial to a posthumanist corporeal ontology as it provides an alternative to the deployment of cyborgology, hybridity, and singularity of the 'Other' in engagements with the body by providing a way to discuss bodies that are not completely reducible to a human body and opens possibilities for previously unconsidered or largely invisible forms of embodiment.

In Chapter 3 I connect experience and expression to the notion of flesh through Merleau-Ponty's elaboration of style. Style is generally connected to Merleau-Ponty's writings on aesthetics, which largely focus on painting, in 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence',⁹¹ 'Cézanne's Doubt',⁹² and 'Eye and Mind'.⁹³ Style remains underdeveloped in *The Visible and The Invisible* and it is for this reason that I look to the other essays in order to clarify and connect it not only to flesh, but as a refined expansion of his philosophy of expression. Linda Singer characterises Merleau-Ponty's

⁸⁸ 'We will get out of the [consciousness-object] difficulty only by renouncing the bifurcation of the 'consciousness of' and the object, by admitting that my synergic body is not an object, that it assembles into a cluster of 'consciousnesses' adherent to its hands, to its eyes, by an operation that is in relation to them lateral, transversal...that is it sustained, subtended, by the prereflective and preobjective unity of my body'. Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 141.

⁸⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 140.

⁹⁰ Merleau-Ponty argues that flesh, however, can be thought on its own.

⁹¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence', in *Signs*, trans. by Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 39-83.

⁹² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Cézanne's Doubt', in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 9-25 (p. 15).

⁹³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind', trans. by Carleton Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology and the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. by James E. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 159-190.

approach to style as ‘[...] not simply a veneer over things which can be extracted and investigated on its own. In its most comprehensive sense, style refers to a generalized structure of being-in-the-world, a fundamental component of all phases of existence’.⁹⁴ The fulcrum of this move is that when Merleau-Ponty introduces flesh in *The Visible and The Invisible* he does so by maintaining that flesh ‘brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being’,⁹⁵ even though he says very little about styles of being in the remaining finished sections and the working notes. The reason for elaborating style and its consequence for flesh is captured by Véronique M. Fóti, who writes that ‘[for Merleau-Ponty] one’s body (*le corps propre*) must itself be understood in terms of the Flesh of the world, if one is to avoid the pitfalls of construing it as an in-itself’.⁹⁶ For the posthumanist corporeal ontology that I am elucidating a style of being in the world moves to re-embody the corporeal grounds of expression and experience of other beings (non- or in-human, other animals, things), and serves to develop a corporeal ontology through the reversibility and divergence of the flesh of the body and the flesh of a world without succumbing to a self-enclosed exclusionary logic that is the *telos* of humanism. This is elaborated in Chapter 4 by an analysis of Josef Rusnak’s *The Thirteenth Floor*⁹⁷ and Mamoru Oshii’s *Ghost in the Shell*⁹⁸ through the complexities of another form of embodiment: virtual embodiment.

With Merleau-Ponty I find that a body, any body, and the world are the grounds for a being: that is, a body, through flesh, is a style of being in the world, not only a human being-in-the-world. To read bodies in their multiplicity of expressions and styles, and the different embodiments whose depths are unconcealed by these expressions and styles, is to describe

⁹⁴ Linda Singer, ‘Merleau-Ponty and the Concept of Style’, in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, ed. by Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), pp. 233-244 (p. 234).

⁹⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 139.

⁹⁶ Véronique M. Fóti, ‘Chiasm, Flesh, Figuration: Toward a Non-Positive Ontology’, in *Merleau-Ponty and the Possibilities of Philosophy: Transforming the Tradition*, ed. by Bernard Flynn, Wayne J. Froman, and Robert Vallier (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), pp. 183-196 (p. 190).

⁹⁷ *The Thirteenth Floor*, dir. by Josef Rusnak (Columbia Pictures, 1999) [on DVD].

⁹⁸ *Ghost in the Shell*, dir. by Mamoru Oshii (Manga Video, 1995) [on DVD].

‘the corporeal relevance of every being’⁹⁹ which locates the bodies of these beings with-in the flesh of the world. Dillon remarks that the gestures that these other bodies make, even if they are not the originator of them, they

always mean something, but, depending upon the context, can mean several things. The plurality of possible meanings allows for the possibility of the same gesture being institutionalized with different meanings within difference cultural contexts and thereby acquiring conventional limitation and rigidity.¹⁰⁰

Drawing from Merleau-Ponty for posthumanism I situate gestures in a more generalized sense as the corporeal capacity to intertwine¹⁰¹ with another expressive body, which nevertheless is caught up in a plurality of meanings that may have ‘[acquired] conventional limitation and rigidity.’ The humanism of Merleau-Ponty’s earlier approach to the body is redressed in these later works as he writes in a working note from *The Visible and the Invisible*, ‘Man is not the *end* of the body, nor the organized body the *end* of the components.’¹⁰² While Merleau-Ponty may have started from a human body in his analysis of perception and thus partially limiting other forms of meaning, he does not end there.

Merleau-Ponty’s ultimately final project, cut short by his death, was to

be presented without any compromise with *humanism*, nor moreover with *naturalism*, nor finally with *theology* -- Precisely what has to be done is to show that philosophy can no longer think according to this cleavage: God, man, creatures.¹⁰³

I seek to introduce Merleau-Ponty’s work into the discourse of posthumanism and transform the way that the body is read. Through the interrogation and transformation of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of expression and ontology of flesh I disclose a posthumanist corporeal ontology. The object of this corporeal ontology is to enable one to *see* and *be seen* with renewed eyes, to *touch* and *be touched* with renewed hands, and, more importantly, to *feel* and *be felt* with

⁹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 118.

¹⁰⁰ Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology*, p. 188. Dillon is commenting on Merleau-Ponty’s gestural theory of language as developed in his early works *The Structure of Behavior* and *Phenomenology of Perception*.

¹⁰¹ Whether intentional or non-intentional.

¹⁰² Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated Nov 1960, *VI*, p. 265.

¹⁰³ Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated Mar 1961, *VI*, p. 274. Emphasis in original.

renewed bodies: the corporeal relevance of every being.

Chapter 1

The Texture of Bodies:

Embodiment and Expression

The experience of one's own body [...] is opposed to the reflective movement that disentangles the object from the subject and the subject from the object, and that only gives us thought about the body or the body as an idea, and not the experience of the body or the body in reality.

- Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 205

An expression and what it expresses strangely alternate and, through a sort of false recognition, makes us feel that the word inhabited the thing for all eternity.

- Merleau-Ponty, 'The Specter of a Pure Language', *The Prose of the World*. p. 6

While embodiment is one of the central concerns of critical posthumanism, there has been some reticence in developing a robust account of embodiment. The most well-known and sustained engagement with embodiment in critical posthumanism thus far is N. Katherine Hayles' discussion of virtual bodies and information in *How we Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Here she addresses the status of virtual bodies and the problematics associated with tropes of disembodiment in popular posthumanism, specifically technological posthumanism, ultimately asserting the importance of the body in the development of emergent subjectivities. She explains that

If my nightmare is a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being, my dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival.¹

Hayles is clearly concerned with how technologies have led some astray by thinking that these technologies will free them from material finitude. Here, the body largely becomes a 'fashion accessory' which can be changed, augmented, or discarded at will. Encapsulated by her overarching theme of disclosing how 'information lost its body',² her goal is to re-embodiment discourse associated in information and cybernetic theory and technologies, and disrupt the narrative of the liberal humanist subject which, for her, informs current debates surrounding the development of various theories and practicalities of informatics, cybernetics, and artificial

¹ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 5.

² Ibid.

intelligence. However, given her concern for the disembodiment thesis and emergent subjectivities it is curious that Merleau-Ponty's work is only briefly mentioned and largely engaged only through secondary material.³

In reading Hayles' discussion of virtual bodies I was struck by how much of her account appeared to implicitly develop from Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty's attempt in *Phenomenology of Perception*, and to a certain degree in *The Structure of Behavior*, to develop an analysis of perception which locates it in the body, against the dualistic claims of empiricism and intellectualism to which he was reacting, seems quite amenable to the task that Hayles has put forward, especially given her affinity for embodied cognition. Merleau-Ponty's elucidation of the body-subject in *Phenomenology of Perception* aligns with Hayles' declaration that 'human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity'.⁴ Both argue that bodies are not to be overcome, but are embedded in the world. The body cannot be cast aside because it is in the world. As Merleau-Ponty declares: 'the body is our general means for having a world'.⁵

For Merleau-Ponty perception has to be situated in the body for a subject to be possible and the subject does not simply inhabit a body but lives it; this is what he develops as the lived body (*corps propre*) of the body-subject. While *Phenomenology of Perception* is focused on developing the primacy of perception which discloses that 'perception is not a science of the world, nor even a deliberate taking of a stand; it is the background against which all acts stand out and is presupposed by them',⁶ the way Merleau-Ponty argues for this primacy is through a rigorous description of the body.

³ Hayles' direct in-text references to Merleau-Ponty are chiefly found in Chapter 8 'The Materiality of Informatics' especially the section on 'Incorporating Practices and Embodied Knowledges' pp. 199-207; however, she draws primarily from secondary literature based on Merleau-Ponty.

⁴ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 5.

⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Donald A. Landes (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 147.

⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. lxxiv.

Merleau-Ponty attempts in *Phenomenology of Perception* to develop a more meticulous account of perception than intellectualist and empiricist accounts provide. M.C. Dillon provisionally summarizes the intellectualist and empiricist accounts that Merleau-Ponty argues against as follows:

[Empiricism is] the philosophical standpoint based on the contention that all knowledge originates in experience.⁷

[Intellectualism] seeks to ground knowledge in the immanent structures of subjectivity rather than upon the transcendent origin of experience.⁸

The key preliminary move for posthumanism is that in arguing against these accounts *Phenomenology of Perception* develops an approach to the body as both experiencing *and* expressing the world. For Merleau-Ponty the body is not 'just' an object among other objects, but, adapting the notion from Husserl, intersubjective – a body that is a subject among other subjects. This chapter explores the texture of bodies in their experience and expression. Through *Phenomenology of Perception* I provisionally clarify embodiment and bodies in posthumanism, adapt and reconfigure Merleau-Ponty's elucidation of embodiment, experience, and expression, and align experience and expression of the world with other bodies to disclose that the *telos* of humanism is not a condition of other bodies, but an epistemic effect. This lays the groundwork for the discussion and expansion of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of expression through style and his indirect⁹ ontology of flesh to follow, and begins to disclose 'the corporeal relevance of every being'¹⁰ in order to slowly develop a posthumanist corporeal ontology.

⁷ M.C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, 2nd edn (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997), p. 20.

⁸ M.C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, p. 26.

⁹ Merleau-Ponty develops an indirect ontology in *The Visible and the Invisible*; for the moment the term will be set aside as it is outlined in Chapter 3. However, the notion of indirectness is crucial in Merleau-Ponty's later texts. Cf: Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*; Renaud Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon: Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, trans. by Leonard Lawlor and Ted Toadvine (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004); Christopher Watkins, *Phenomenology or Deconstruction?: The Question of Ontology in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur, and Jean-Luc Nancy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 118.

Embodiment

N. Katherine Hayles discusses at length the differences between the usage of embodiment and body, basing her deployment of the terms in the work of Elizabeth Grosz. ‘There is no body as such; there are only *bodies*’¹¹ writes Grosz, and Hayles marks a functional differentiation between embodiment and the body. Hayles argues that ‘the body is always normative relative to some set of criteria’, whereas ‘embodiment is contextual, enmeshed within the specifics of place, time, physiology and culture’ and ‘never coincides exactly with “the body”’.¹² Further, she details that ‘the body is an idealized form that gestures toward a Platonic reality, [while] embodiment is the specific instantiation from the noise of difference’.¹³ The body is an ideal, whereas embodiment is the lived reality of that ideal which nevertheless does not perfectly align to it. Hayles then contrasts the process of inscription, the writing of the body, with incorporation, the living of that body. She draws on feminist and poststructuralist theories¹⁴ which reveal that bodies are written on, marked, and sites of discursive and ideological conflict. She argues that while bodies are always embedded in a certain world which constructs these frames and these meanings – a body that is a text – she writes against the ‘postmodern orthodoxy that the body is primarily, if not entirely, a linguistic and discursive construction’.¹⁵ Bodies have been situated in certain ways, largely in terms of problematic categories and binaries such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, socio-economic class, in addition to a multiplicity of other frames of meaning which impact the manner in which these bodies engage the world. In the latter part of the twentieth century phenomenological descriptions of the body were cast aside as lacking because, at least in phenomenology's Husserlian form via the famous phenomenological reduction (*epoché*), they appear to attempt to bracket off subjective concerns and categories in order to return to the things-themselves, and thus they omit the context within which one is working that will inevitably have an

¹¹ Quoted in Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 196.

¹² Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 196.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ For instance the work of Margrit Shildrick, Vicki Kirby, Gail Weiss, Elizabeth Grosz, Sadie Plant, Donna Haraway, Judith Butler, Ira Livingston, Judith Halberstam, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida.

¹⁵ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 192.

impact on the description.¹⁶ Yet what Merleau-Ponty does in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, whilst overtly viewing his project as a continuation of Husserl's,¹⁷ is to integrate emphatically the role that the body has in an intersubjective world so that 'embodiment... has a philosophical significance for Merleau-Ponty that it could not have for Husserl'.¹⁸

This move is made possible by shifting from Husserl's constituting consciousness to a body-subject which establishes the role of bodies in orienting a subject within a world, rather than via a transcendental ego/alter-ego intersubjectivity. This step is initially made by Merleau-Ponty to analyse the conditions of Husserl's turn to the *epoché*.¹⁹ The analysis of perception that *Phenomenology of Perception* is devoted to thus comes to bear on posthumanism because it does not take the body only as a text which goes against the 'postmodern orthodoxy that the body is primarily, if not entirely, a linguistic and discursive construction',²⁰ but through the analysis of a body's experience and a body's expression the body is described as *real* – a body in the world. Merleau-Ponty's intentions regarding this are rather clear as he states that 'the real is to be described, and neither constructed nor formed'.²¹

Embodiments and Bodies

Taking Hayles' functional differentiation of embodiment and bodies as a starting point, embodiment is situated through a body, and a body is situated through its embodiment, or what Hayles calls the processes of incorporation and inscription. She writes that '[...] as the body is to embodiment, so

¹⁶ For various accounts (both positive and negative) of this transition see the following: Hugh J. Silverman, *Inscriptions: Between Phenomenology and Structuralism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1987); Hugh J. Silverman, *Textualities: Between Hermeneutics and Deconstruction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); Jeffrey A. Bell, *The Problem of Difference: Phenomenology and Structuralism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006); Leonard Lawlor, *Thinking Through French Philosophy: The Being of the Question* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003); Christopher Watkins, *Phenomenology of Deconstruction?*.

¹⁷ Merleau-Ponty, 'Preface', *PHP*, particularly pp. lxx-lxxi.

¹⁸ Taylor Carman, 'The Body in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty', *Philosophical Topics*, 27.2 (1999), 205-226 (p. 206).

¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, 'Preface', *PHP*, particularly pp. lxxiv-lxxviii.

²⁰ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 192.

²¹ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. lxxiii.

inscription is to incorporation'.²² She marks the relation between embodiment and bodies as an 'interplay' where:

When the focus is on the body, the particularities of embodiment tend to fade from view...Conversely, when the focus shifts to embodiment, a specific material experience emerges out of the abstraction of the body...Embodiment cannot exist without a material structure that always deviates in some measure from its abstract representation.²³

When either a body or embodiment is the singular focus of analysis, the other element of the interplay has a tendency to shift into the background. However, that background nevertheless remains and has an impact, similar to Merleau-Ponty's claims regarding perception, albeit one that does not necessarily completely conform to an idealization or its context. For Hayles, recourse to an idealized notion of the body implies a separation from its materiality and abstracts it from its embodiment. She utilizes the notion of inscription to describe the process where bodies are 'usually considered as a system of signs operating independently of any particular manifestation'.²⁴ In her initial assessment and critique of this situation this process aligns a body with abstract representation which tears it away from its material context, and thus solidifies the grounds for her critique of how 'information lost its body'.²⁵

There is nothing particularly new in this, given that the writing of the body has been one of the central concerns of continental philosophy and theory in the latter half of the twentieth century.²⁶

What is new, however, is the deployment of it with regard to virtual bodies and information, and this is what has made *How We Became Posthuman* a canonical text in posthumanism. Poststructuralism, especially deconstruction, has illuminated the processes where ontological purity and dualistic thinking inherently rely on the terms which they define themselves against – Derrida's illuminations of *différance* and *trace*, for instance, are powerful examples of this. This is precisely why Hayles'

²² Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 199.

²³ Ibid. In the passage that this quotation is from Hayles is criticizing theorizations of corporeality which take an either/or focus on embodiment and bodies as opposed to looking at the two simultaneously.

²⁴ Hayles, *How we Became Posthuman*, p. 198.

²⁵ Hayles, *How we Became Posthuman*, p. 5.

²⁶ The sheer volume of material written on the subject of the body in the last 50 years is truly immense. For this reason we will be at a loss in order to cover even a small fraction of it. It is for this reason that the focus is on embodiments and bodies within posthumanism and related endeavours.

treatment of information and virtual bodies is an attempt not only to analyse technological posthumanism but to reassert the materiality of a body as its ground of being: neither purely idealization nor material context, but an interplay of both. She pinpoints her reasons for doing this by arguing that

it is primarily the body that is naturalized within a culture: embodiment becomes naturalized only secondarily through its interactions with concepts of the body. Consequently, when theorists uncover the ideological underpinnings of naturalization, they denaturalize the body rather than embodiment.²⁷

One of the curious details in discussions of embodiments and bodies in their relation or dissolution is the tacit assumption that there are bodies and, at least in critiques of the disembodiment thesis, that it is not possible to escape embodiment. This begs the question: what kinds of bodies and forms of embodiment are we primarily writing about? For instance, I have been writing about bodies and embodiments for the last few pages, but I have not explicitly stated that I am writing about a human body. The fact that the body I am writing about is a human one is a silent assumption yet what, if any, evidence has been provided to support this? Personal pronouns – ‘we’, ‘our’ – have been used in the quotations from Hayles and Merleau-Ponty and in a quote from Hayles there is a specific reference to the human, yet all I have explicitly done is simply use the terms body and embodiment. In writing of Hayles' deployment of the terms through her treatment of incorporation and inscription what we have actually been met with is an instantiation of precisely the dynamic she has described. The body under discussion here is an idealization, and its context is humanism. Hayles clarifies the differences and relations between embodiment and bodies through an analysis of inscription and incorporation in a human body. Related to Hayles' discussion, Merleau-Ponty develops this dynamic differently through the body-subject. The body-subject will serve to guide the remainder of the discussion in this section. I must be clear that the body-subject that Merleau-Ponty is writing about is a human body.

²⁷ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 198.

In *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty puts forward a number of approaches to situating the body-subject; of particular note are the body schema²⁸ and the lived body. The body schema is ‘the bundle of skills and capacities that constitutes the body’s precognitive familiarity with itself and the world it inhabits’.²⁹ In order to navigate between intellectualist and empiricist accounts of perception the body schema provides

an open system of an infinity of different orientations. What we called the ‘body schema’ is precisely this system of equivalences, this immediately given invariant by which different motor tasks are instantly transposable. This is to say that the body schema is not merely an experience of my body, but rather an experience of my body in the world, and that it gives a motor sense to the verbal instructions.³⁰

Simply put, the body schema is a body’s ability to situate itself in the world. Taylor Carman describes the body schema lucidly by writing that it is a kind of poise or readiness that an embodied being has which is ‘ready to anticipate and incorporate a world prior to the application of concepts and the formation of thoughts or judgments’.³¹ I have to reiterate, however, that the point of *Phenomenology of Perception* is to develop a rigorous analysis of perception first. For Merleau-Ponty the body is crucial in understanding this as the analysis rests on an embodied perceiver. What the body schema illuminates for a body-subject is a familiarity with the world prior to the categorizations that a reflective movement provides. The lived body serves to complement the body schema as it situates bodies not within an ideal realm, but as ‘[retaining their] inherence within the world’³² through a ‘system of equivalences’, or what Merleau-Ponty will eventually call style.³³ It is perhaps even more pertinent to say that not only does a body experience but it also gathers up its various parts which inform how a body *as such* experiences and expresses a world: ‘our ongoing background perception of our own bodies is nothing like an object-directed awareness focused on

²⁸ The rendering of *schéma corporel* in the English translation of *Phenomenology of Perception* by Colin Smith as ‘body image’ as opposed to ‘body schema’ misrepresents Merleau-Ponty’s reason for using this term and the meaning associated with an image, as a particular, and a schemata, which allows for a range. Cf. Taylor Carman, ‘The Body in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty’, p. 218. The Landes translation no longer has this error.

²⁹ Carman, ‘The Body in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty’, p. 220.

³⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 142.

³¹ Carman, ‘The Body in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty’, p. 219.

³² Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology*, p. 131.

³³ Style is elucidated in Chapter 3. It suffices to introduce the term here in relation to the body schema and its ‘system of equivalences’.

any of its distinct parts...our sense of embodiment is bound up instead with a primitive understanding of the body as a global and abiding horizon of perceptual experience'.³⁴ Despite Carman's language here ('primitive') the acknowledgement that a body is one's global position for experience, perceptual or otherwise, is the critical component of my initial situating of embodiment. Drawing from Merleau-Ponty, embodiment can be situated as follows: prior to a reflective movement body is poised to experience and *experiences* because it is in the world. 'One's own body is in the world just as the heart is in the organism.'³⁵ The key difference between what Merleau-Ponty is doing in *Phenomenology of Perception* and what I am interested in is that the analysis of embodiment need not be limited to a human embodiment in its multiplicity of forms. Rather, embodiment, which also has multiple forms, discloses a being in the world. Information, then, perhaps has a material embodied basis. The bodily skills that other embodied beings have may not be the same as the ones that Merleau-Ponty aptly describes a human body as having, but that does not require them to be dismissed nor make a human body the condition for other bodies to appear; rather, it is through embodiment that an initial unreflective contact with another being's body in the world is possible. My body, for instance, is not the condition in order for the fly which is buzzing about my room to appear. We are in and of the same world and it can come and go as it pleases or it may simply rest on a wall, or search for food: it does not need my body in order to do these things. However, I may watch it move about. I may swat it away if it lands on my leg or chase after it to either catch or kill it out of annoyance. When my focus is directed at the fly and I observe its behaviour the fly's body furnishes an epistemic effect on my body encapsulated in terms like 'come and go', 'rest', 'search', 'fly' attributed to the fly's body, and 'swat', 'chase', 'catch', 'kill', 'my' attributed to my body. My body only makes *indirect* descriptions and inferences of the fly's body or it mine – I do not know how its body reads mine – much like Merleau-Ponty's criticism of Pavlov's reflexology in *The Structure of Behavior* when he writes that 'whether we examine the organism by means of the observation of behavior or by means of the measurement of reactions

³⁴ Carman, 'The Body in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty', p. 221.

³⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 209.

evoked in it by certain physical and chemical agents, only the manifestations of nerve functioning are grasped and the two procedures are equally indirect'.³⁶ Embodiment is a general poise or readiness of both my body and another's which, in distinction to Hayles, serves as the background condition and not a specific instantiation.

In Part I of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, 'The Body', Merleau-Ponty very carefully analyses the perceptual range of the body not only through the deployment of the body-subject, but also through the body schema, a body's motility, and intentionality, among other things.³⁷ However, it is the following section where the crux of *Phenomenology of Perception* is explicitly apparent. While the analysis of perception was made through a rigorous account of the body, Merleau-Ponty's central focus is the description of perception. As he readily makes clear through the title of the introduction to part II, 'The World as Perceived', 'The Theory of the Body is already a Theory of Perception'.³⁸ As my analysis is not focusing on perception I want to clarify why Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* does indeed disclose an initial way to a posthumanist corporeal ontology. To do this I will now turn to Merleau-Ponty's brief analysis of a cube at the beginning of his short introduction to Part II.

Merleau-Ponty begins his analysis of a cube by situating it through a pre-conceptualized idea of a 'cube' wherein,

³⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, trans. by Alden L. Fisher (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1963), p. 60.

³⁷ This thesis would become unmanageable if the entirety of the *Phenomenology of Perception* were elucidated. As this is not an exegetical work on Merleau-Ponty, but is focused on how to work with him and transform aspects of his work to a posthumanist context, large portions of the *Phenomenology of Perception* will be set aside. For more detailed exegetical work on this see Carman, 'The Body in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty'; Sean Dorrance Kelly, 'The Body in Merleau-Ponty', *Ratio*, XV. 4 (2002), 376-391; Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*; Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*; Lawrence Hass, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), and the following essay collections: *Merleau-Ponty Vivant*, ed. by M.C. Dillon, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, ed. by Taylor Carman and Mark B. Hansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); *Feminist Interpretations of Merleau-Ponty*, ed. by Dorothea Olkowski and Gail Weiss (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2006); *Merleau-Ponty and the Possibilities of Philosophy: Transforming the Tradition*, ed. by Bernard Flynn, Wayne J. Froman, and Robert Vallier (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009).

³⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, pp. 209-213.

from my body's point of view, I never see the six faces of a cube as equal, even if it is made of glass, and yet the word 'cube' has a sense: the cube itself, the cube above and beyond its sensible appearances, has it six equal faces. To the extent that I move around the cube, I see the front face, which was a square, lose its shape and then disappear, while the other sides appear and each in turn become square. But the unfolding of this experience is, for me, nothing but the opportunity for the conceiving of the total cube with its six equal and simultaneous faces, that is, the intelligible structure that makes sense of this experience.³⁹

As a body moves around a cube, despite not being able to see the equal faces of the cube, the term 'cube' maintains a meaning and dictates how the experience is conceived. The intelligible structure *completes* the experience and determines that all the squares that are successively perceived are, in fact, a cube. Therefore the cube is not disclosed by the object or even from one's own body, but by the term 'cube' which, through a reflective movement, dissociates the cube from an embodied experience of it. Yet, as Merleau-Ponty continues,

if there is for me a cube with six equal faces and if I can indeed meet up with the object, this is not because I constitute it from within, but rather because through perceptual experience I plunge into the thickness of the world. The cube with six equal faces is the limit-idea through which I express the carnal presence of the cube that is there before my eyes and beneath my hands in its perceptual evidentness.⁴⁰

For Merleau-Ponty the cube does not need to be determined prior to a bodily experience of it; rather it is through a body's pre-reflective awareness of it that the cube is experienced. The cube is not constructed, but expressed as a body explores the world. In distinction to pre-reflective awareness, a 'reflective analysis replaces the absolute existence of the object with the thought about an absolute object, and, by attempting to view the object from above or by attempting to conceive of the object from nowhere, reflective analysis destroys the object's internal structure'.⁴¹ If the object cube is previously completed through the pre-conceptualized term 'cube', and only this, then it is not an entirely accurate description of the object but provides only a direct correlation between the word and the object: a bodily experience of the cube is reduced in favour of a pre-given *telos* which completes the cube and lifts it away from its embodied being in the world and the bodies that interact with it. Embodiment, then, is not only a kind of poise or readiness, but this poise or

³⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, pp. 209-210.

⁴⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 211.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

readiness marks experience by delving into the ‘thickness of the world’. Merleau-Ponty is treading here between the poles of empiricism and intellectualism. If emphasis is placed on one term at the expense of the other then a reduction occurs; conversely, Merleau-Ponty is searching for a middle path between intellectualism and empiricism that does not privilege either. While *Phenomenology of Perception* does not, at least according to Renaud Barbaras,⁴² call into question the component terms which structure Merleau-Ponty’s argument on perception I would rather assert that they, like Hayles’ initial splitting of embodiment and bodies, are a functional differentiation which he is working-through. While Barbaras is right to point out that Merleau-Ponty’s argument is structured in relation to intellectualism and empiricism – Merleau-Ponty himself acknowledges and clarifies this weakness in *The Primacy of Perception* and *The Visible and The Invisible*⁴³ – what Merleau-Ponty is putting forward in *Phenomenology of Perception* is an attempt to carve a middle path between these two poles. In that respect he has to acknowledge both in order to develop a more solid foundation for the central role that the body plays in perception. What Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of a cube does is describe how a body is always interacting in the world. It demonstrates that the body, that a body-subject *is* through its body-schema, motility, and habits, is not the outward expression of an inward reflection *about* an object or other body in the world – I pick up or see a ‘cube’ or swat a ‘fly’ determined as such in advance. It is a pre-reflective experience of an object or body which is expressed *with* my body – I habitually reach out or see a cube, and only then do I recognize it as a ‘cube’, or I hear a buzz and only then do I recognize a ‘fly’. A body that touches, sees, or hears other bodies in the world is also capable of being touched, seen, or heard: a body that is *both* subject and object in the world. Taylor Carman remarks that

[for Merleau-Ponty] the body is neither an internal subject nor a fully external object of experience. Moreover, as embodied perceivers, we do not typically understand ourselves as pure egos standing in a merely external relation to our bodies, for example by ‘having’ or ‘owning’ them, instead the body is itself already the concrete agent of all our perceptual acts. In perception, that is, we understand ourselves not as *having* but as *being* bodies.⁴⁴

⁴² Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*, p. 7.

⁴³ Merleau-Ponty’s elucidation of the weaknesses and his clarification of them is explored in Chapter 3 as it is central in his development of an indirect ontology of Flesh.

⁴⁴ Carman, ‘The Body in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty’, p. 208.

The term ‘cube’ comes to describe a particular object ‘with six equal faces’⁴⁵ not because it is preconceived in advance, but because a body is expressive. For a posthumanist corporeal ontology, not only is my body expressive, but other bodies are expressive, including the bodies of objects and things. The cube is expressed through the ‘meaning-bestowing function of the body, the power of organizing experience grounded in bodily motility and its perceptual synthesis’,⁴⁶ a body – for Merleau-Ponty a human body – that organizes experience prior to a reflective movement.

However, Merleau-Ponty largely dissociates a body, any human body,⁴⁷ from *objects* or *things* because they are incapable of perception.⁴⁸ Yet he admits that ‘the thing and the world are given with the parts of my body, not through a ‘natural geometry,’ but in a living connection comparable, or rather identical, to the living connection that exists among the parts of my body itself’.⁴⁹

While the assertion that the body is not a full internal subject or a full external object is valid within Merleau-Ponty's framework, it is so because he approaches the body, the human body, through perception. In contrast, in a posthumanist corporeal ontology not all bodies are necessarily capable of perception; there are other forms of embodiment and expressive bodies. We cannot describe them as simply objects or things.⁵⁰ Therefore, in a posthumanist context, how can we describe other bodies, non-human or non-biological, interacting in the world? If the focus is shifted from a cube to a different object with a different meaning attached to it, for instance a debit card, how does the dynamic change?

⁴⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 211.

⁴⁶ Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, p. 146.

⁴⁷ Which, for Merleau-Ponty, is both subject and object.

⁴⁸ The body-subject, while being both subject and object, is capable of incorporating habits (habit-body), employs motor-intentionality (body schema), and is generally capable of experience and expression of the world. In *The Visible and the Invisible* this is refined and situated around sentience and sensibility. I will return to this in Chapter 3 with regards to flesh.

⁴⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 211

⁵⁰ I recognize that I am pulling aspects of Merleau-Ponty's work out of his intended context in order to subject them to a posthumanist transformation which in no way Merleau-Ponty would be aware of. However, by doing so I want to show both the efficacy and limits of some of what Merleau-Ponty does in *Phenomenology of Perception* before discussing his work on language shortly to clarify expression and prior to turning to the more robust ontology and descriptions found in *The Visible and the Invisible* (flesh, *chiasm*, *écart*) and his work on aesthetics (style) in Chapter 3.

As with Merleau-Ponty's cube we can describe the debit card via a body which moves around the card and sees its successive sides and faces, and further notes that it is made of plastic, feels the raised lettering, and notices the magnetic strip. But unlike the cube which is already there in its corporeal dimensions via its 'perceptual evidentness'⁵¹ the corporeality of the debit card is split because it is not primarily a geometric object, but an economic and informatic object. That is beyond the card's 'sensible appearance' of two by two equal faces and its raised lettering when touched, the raw data contained on the magnetic strip is largely invisible to a human body.⁵² This data cannot be touched or perceived in any straightforward manner and it is only rendered visible once certain procedures have been followed so that it may be displayed in a language that a human body can understand: this process is how we can describe this object as an informatic one.

It is not only a physical object that can be held and touched, but also has data on it that expresses information, in this case financial information. The 'unfolding of this experience is, for me, nothing but the opportunity for conceiving' the total debit card with its two by two 'equal and simultaneous faces, that is, the intelligible structure that makes sense of this experience'⁵³ which, through a reflective movement, isolate it as an economic object. Yet the debit card with its two by two 'equal faces is the limit-idea through which I express the carnal presence of the [card] that is there before my eyes and beneath my hands in its perceptual evidentness'⁵⁴ except that to accurately describe the corporeal presence of this card one has not only to take into account the perceptual evidentness of the physical object in one's hand, but also its status as both an economic and informatic object: a singular material dimension is no longer the limit, and the object no longer appears simultaneously

⁵¹ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 211.

⁵² In general the user of a card never sees the data of the transactions made aside from after the fact when it is rendered in a language intelligible to the user in their transaction history, nor do employees of banks who primarily deal only with a graphic user interface (GUI). Only a network or systems engineer (ideally, yet there are also hackers) has access to the raw data on the card should a data connection problem arise.

⁵³ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 236.

⁵⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 211.

only via a human body as it experiences and expresses it, but is experienced and expressed with other, non-human, bodies.

Therefore the debit card has at least three embodied forms: *physical* (it can be held in the hand or pocket and inserted into a cash point), *informatic* (the information contained on the magnetic strip is read and sent to a server which verifies the data and returns the information in a form that is intelligible to a human body) and *economic* (the information on the card and its purpose are defined by the fact that the card contains financial information). All three are corporeal dimensions of the card yet two of these embodied forms are largely invisible to an embodied perceiver until either a reflective movement occurs or the information returns in an intelligible language. The physical, economic, and informatic elements of the card are textures of the card's body. What I mean by texture at this stage is the circuit between a form of embodiment and an expressive body.⁵⁵ For instance, a human body is read as such because 'human' is an expression of a particular body which rests on a particular form of embodiment – an organic or biological embodiment. In turn 'human' is not only an expression of a particular body but is simultaneously a way to read that body, for instance when particularities are invoked by broad categorizations of human bodies through gender, ethnicity and so on. They are expressions of a particular body and a form of embodiment, yet also have an impact on how those bodies are read. This forms a circuit between a lived body in its multiplicity of expressions and the way that that lived body has already been expressed. In reading the embodiment of a debit card the physical takes priority as it is its most tangible and recognizable aspect, and the economic and informatic elements largely recede into the background. However, if the card was not an economic object then it would just be an ill or non-defined object in the world: rubbish or material mass. Consequently a humanist *telos* is asserted because it is something that is brought into a series of human relations by its economic status.

⁵⁵ Through a reading of Merleau-Ponty's ontology of flesh in Chapter 3 I elucidate how what I am describing here as a texture of a body is a style of being in the world.

The human body experiences this object, may attribute qualities to it, but does not coincide with it. Therefore, a human expression of another body or object cannot fully describe it, nor is a human body the condition for an object to be completed (*telos*) as if other bodies and objects must wait for a human interlocutor to provide them with a purpose furnished by its epistemic effect. The major error of a *telos* which sets out to subsume all objects and bodies in the world under the banner of only human significance and descriptive categories is that through this a direct ontology is formed which dictates a direct correlation and coinciding.⁵⁶ Merleau-Ponty, however, stresses non-coincidence in the following way:

Even if it cannot be defined as such, a thing has stable ‘characteristics’ or ‘properties,’ and we will approach the phenomenon of reality by studying perceptual constants. To begin with, a thing has its size and its shape beneath perspectival variations, which are merely apparent. We do not attribute these appearances to the object, they are an accident of our relations with the object and they do not concern the object itself.⁵⁷

A human body cannot experience other bodies in the same way that it cannot experience a tree falling in a forest miles away: a human body's experience can only be partial, indirect and fragmentary as it attributes features which are ‘an accident of our relations with the object’ as in the economic status of the debit card. Therefore, for posthumanism it is necessary to expand what a body is in order to more robustly describe an embodied experience without recourse to *only* a human body.⁵⁸

To return to Hayles briefly, she observes that

An incorporating practice such as a good-bye wave cannot be separated from its embodied medium, for it exists as such only when it is instantiated in a particular hand making a particular kind of gesture. It is possible, of course, to abstract a sign from [an] embodied gesture by representing it in a different medium, for example by drawing on a

⁵⁶ This dynamic will be explored more fully in the second section of this chapter when Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of expression is addressed. I pay particularly close attention to Chapter 6 of Part 1 of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, ‘The Body as Expression, and Speech’, and essays in *Signs* and *The Prose of the World*. Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of expression is further elucidated in Chapter 3 in relation to style and flesh.

⁵⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 312.

⁵⁸ Although I will continue to have to use understandable language and therefore nevertheless reiterate the issue which has just been brought up. However, I will do this in line with the notion that the *telos* of humanism is an epistemic effect, not a condition, of other bodies, as briefly mentioned above.

page the outline of a stylized hand, with wavy lines indicating motion.⁵⁹

Hayles touches here on how a particular gesture is a particular instantiation of a particular body: one gesture from one body reflecting an embodied medium in its movement. While she is right to assert that it ‘cannot be separated from its embodied medium’ it does not ‘exist as such only when it is instantiated in a particular hand making a particular kind of gesture’⁶⁰ as there is the other side of the gesture. While it is entirely possible to make a good-bye wave when one is alone, the gesture is self-referential: am I waving to myself? Or am I simply making a gesture, though embodied, that has no context? A good-bye wave is a gesture situated by the necessity that another body recognize it. To limit the existence of the gesture to one particular embodied instantiation is to replace its primary mode as an inter-body⁶¹ gesture. It would not be a ‘good-bye wave’ if there were no one that the gesture needed a response or acknowledgement from. Therefore, its existence is both in the gesture itself, but necessitates an embodied background that is expressed through the gesture. Further, Hayles goes on to discuss the ability to abstract this gesture by ‘representing it in a different medium, for example by drawing on a page the outline of a stylized hand, with wavy lines indicating motion’. However, this medium for the gesture does not necessarily entail that it is an abstraction. It still ‘incorporates’ an embodied background. A live hand making the gesture to someone in the world and a live hand drawing the gesture (in the world) both rely on an embodied background for the gesture to be a bodily gesture and be intelligible (its epistemic effect). What differentiates the two is that the body-subject of the one *making* the gesture requires another body-subject (that is not the one making it) in order for it to be acknowledged, and the body-subject of the one *drawing* the gesture only requires his or her own body. Both mediums are experienced by a body (whether my ‘own’ or another’s) and are two different embodied instantiations of the same gesture. The page that the gesture is drawn

⁵⁹ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, pp. 198-199.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ I am using inter-body at this moment as I do not yet want to get into the complexities associated with intercorporeality that I will be developing in the final chapters.

on has different elements which have an impact on how it is read,⁶² but it still remains a ‘particular hand making a particular kind of gesture’⁶³ in both the drawn gesture embodied on the page and the embodied hand doing the drawing. Hayles’ ‘abstract [...] representation’ of the embodied good-bye wave drawn on the page ultimately only tells her ‘the thought of the body, or the body as an idea’ as she elucidates the drawn good-bye wave as an abstract representation in a sign, and thereby appears unwilling to see ‘the experience of the body or the body in reality’⁶⁴ of the drawing itself. While omitting the embodied hand that makes the drawing is perhaps just an oversight,⁶⁵ she also omits that the *drawn* hand itself is an embodied expressive gesture⁶⁶ and not just a sign of abstract representation.

To reiterate, I have situated embodiment as follows: prior to a reflective movement a body is poised to experience and *experiences* because it is in the world; it is a background which marks a thickness of the world. The embodied medium of the drawing may be different from the human hand motion, but it remains an embodied gesture. The page itself, the marks on it, the bits of dust or loose chalk, and the decay of the page (is it folded, torn, or discoloured?) show a form of experience. Similarly, it is a form of experience when a body-subject encounters the embodied gesture on the page, experiences, and recognizes it. Merleau-Ponty argues that ‘I understand the other person through my body, just as I perceive ‘things’ through

⁶² Such as quality of the drawing, materials used (pen, paint, pencil, tablet pc), hue of the instrument, and quality of the paper.

⁶³ Hayles, *How we Became Posthuman*, p. 198.

⁶⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 205.

⁶⁵ In *Writing Machines* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2002), and *My Mother was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), which complete Hayles’ posthuman trilogy, she does, however, discuss the material aspects of a hand which writes, draws, or makes art. For instance, in *Writing Machines* she argues that ‘materiality [...] emerges from interactions between physical properties and a work’s artistic strategies [...] An emergent property, materiality depends on how the work mobilizes its resources as a physical artifact as well as on the user’s interactions with the work and the interpretive strategies she develops’. However, she continues that ‘materiality emerges from the dynamic interplay between the richness of a physically robust world and human intelligence as it crafts this physicality to create meaning’. p. 33.

⁶⁶ There is a difference in response, however, between the two. Were one to make a good-bye gesture at you, you may respond or at least acknowledge it, whether through an active taking up of the gesture or as an immediate wave or smile back (that is, prior to a reflective movement). Whereas with the drawing you may not respond actively as the drawing touches the viewer prior to a reflective movement or, upon reflection, disregard the gesture because it is general and anonymous.

my body. The sense of the gesture thus 'understood' is not behind the gesture, it merges with the structure of the world that the gesture sketches out...the sense of the gesture spreads across the gesture itself'.⁶⁷

How would the seemingly innocuous practice of placing a debit card into a cashpoint have some kind of bodily gestures surrounding it? There are the easily recognizable, and habitual, gestures of opening up a wallet, taking out the card, and placing it into the machine. However, once this has taken place and a PIN entered, another series of gestures occur. While moving from a gesture made by a hand to an informational gesture made by data may seem counter-intuitive, there is a precedent within Merleau-Ponty's work itself for this through his analysis not only of the cube detailed above, but in his brief analysis of a fireplace.⁶⁸ When the card is inserted into a machine and the information is read, does the information not make a gesture to the server on the other end through a kind of data wave which calls the server to task in order to elicit a response? Can we describe this as an embodied gesture through Merleau-Ponty's deployment of the body schema and the lived body? Even though Merleau-Ponty does not locate a body schema in a 'thing', in his analysis of a fireplace he writes that 'like the body schema, the fireplace is a system of equivalences that are not grounded upon the recognition of some law, but upon the experience of a bodily presence. I engage myself with my body among things, they coexist with me insofar as I am an embodied subject'.⁶⁹

Yet if, as discussed above, the body schema is a body's ability to situate itself, we can describe the card's body schema not through its physical properties – its perceptual evidentness under our hands and eyes – but through its status as both an informatic and economic object. While a traditional

⁶⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, pp. 191-192.

⁶⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, pp. 190-192.

⁶⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 191.

body, an organic or biological animal body,⁷⁰ is capable of a pre-personal, pre-conscious motor-intentionality (which defines the body schema)⁷¹ that engages the world at a pre-reflective level, by virtue of being incapable of reflection and perception, would the debit card provide perhaps one of the more lucid demonstrations of what a body schema means? The debit card example shifts the focus from a body schema, a system of equivalences, in a perceptual arc to the body schema as the condition for a body, any body, to engage with the world. Therefore, the body schema of the debit card is not only aligned to its physical properties but like any other body is disclosed when it engages the world through its poise or readiness to experience the world as one side of a body's corporeality. In this case, an informational body delves into the thickness of the world when the card is inserted into the slot and read by the receiver. Its world is not only the visible world of tactile or optic sensations, but the invisible informatic world which crosses over the visible.⁷² 'It is not merely the gesture that is contingent with regard to bodily organization, it is the very manner of meeting the situation and of living it.'⁷³ The data on the magnetic strip is read and in a flurry a response is provided which then displays the information the user seeks in a language he or she can understand. This process is entirely invisible to end users and only viewable by them if it is sought out in the information logs stored on the various computers which support the network. The body schema of the debit card provides 'an open system of an infinity of equivalent positions in difference orientations'⁷⁴ which situates it in the world. This process is not only activated when the card is inserted into the card reader, but is inscribed and incorporated, to use Hayles' terms, on the card

⁷⁰ Including a human body. For Merleau-Ponty's discussions of animals see, in particular: *The Structure of Behavior and Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*, trans. by Robert Vallier (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003). See also: Ted Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009), particularly Chapter 3, and Véronique M. Fôti, *Tracing Expression in Merleau-Ponty: Aesthetics, Philosophy of Biology, and Ontology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013), particularly Chapters 4 and 5.

⁷¹ See Kelly, 'Merleau-Ponty on the Body'.

⁷² This kind of phraseology is found throughout Merleau-Ponty's later works, especially *The Visible and the Invisible*. Central to Merleau-Ponty's elucidation of flesh in *The Visible and the Invisible* is *chiasm*. For Merleau-Ponty *chiasm* elucidates a criss-crossing, reversibility and intertwining between things and he situates it initially through the reversibility of the visible and the invisible in which they cross over one another and impact it each other. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

⁷³ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 195. Merleau-Ponty makes these remarks in relation to gesticulations of anger or love in a Japanese or Western person.

⁷⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 142.

itself – what Merleau-Ponty describes as ‘the experience of bodily presence’⁷⁵ in his analysis of the fireplace. The magnetic strip, the account numbers, expiry date, signature, and legal information all express the card: a quite literal writing of the body. The way it experiences the world, its lived body, is clearly not the same as other bodies. Yet not only can the card be cut, stepped on, run over, and decayed through use but the information is susceptible to disease (viruses), assault (hacking), and decay (corruption). Therefore while the body of the card may not be what has traditionally defined a body, it nevertheless curiously possesses attributes of a body.⁷⁶ It shows its experience as it is subject to entropy, expiration, dust, and all manner of marks and it can gesture as it must to a server in order to be recognized and retrieve information. However, it remains largely defined by its instrumentality. That is, in order to be of use to a human it has to be inserted into a series of human relations. A humanist *telos* is deployed which completes the card by force: an instrument, object, or other body is made to fit within quite strict parameters which do not necessarily encompass that body (in this case a debit card). An alternative form of embodiment expressed by the debit card is foreclosed by a humanist *telos*. Consequently a direct correlation and coinciding is posited between the usefulness of the object and what the object *is* in a strict sense. You have to pick up this card and insert it into a machine, and in the machine its data is read and transferred back and forth. It is not ‘just’ an economic object; it is also physical and informatic. Only when this process breaks down does a user become actively aware, such as when a card does not work or you run out of money, which signals how

The experience of one’s own body [...] is opposed to the reflective movement that disentangles the object from the subject and the subject from the object, and that only gives us thought about the body or the body as an idea, and not the experience of the body or the body in reality.⁷⁷

The instrumentality of the card is ascribed to a higher order because it involves it within the human world. However, there is much more going on when its body is no longer viewed as solely an

⁷⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 191.

⁷⁶ I recognize that I am treading a fine line between describing the card and anthropomorphism. However, things like disease, decay, and death are recognized aspects of organic or biological embodiment (although there are exceptions), so why should they not be equally recognizable in other forms of embodiment?

⁷⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 205.

object, but, in fact, is an expression of a form of embodiment. Even within the direct ontology of a humanist *telos* its embodiment is tacitly assumed. Within posthumanism, broadly, discussions of the body are largely confined to the human body and the particularities of its organic or biological embodiment. However these kinds of discussion make abstract categorisations of lived realities and provide ‘only the thought about the body, or the body as an idea’ which cleave ‘subject and object from each other’. What Merleau-Ponty does in *Phenomenology of Perception* is try to put subject and object back together in order to be able to read ‘the experience of the body or the body in reality’ and not simply the abstracted remainder of lived experience. At this stage what this means for posthumanism and the corporeal ontology that I am developing is that not only is the human body both subject and object and expresses a form of biological or organic embodiment, but what have largely been thought of as simply objects or things are, in fact, expressive bodies of different forms of embodiment and have a ‘corporeal relevance’⁷⁸ which has rarely been commented on.

As embodiment is the background condition which, prior to a reflective movement, assures that a body is poised to experience and *experiences* because it is in the world,⁷⁹ we can now situate a body as the *expression* of an experience of the world. The body, in distinction to Hayles, can be both an idealization and a specific instantiation. The debit card is embodied not only physically as a card that you can hold in your hand, but informatically as data in a network, and economically as an ideal distilled in the purpose of the card. All three disclose textures of the expressive body of the card as both an idealization rendered tactile and a specific instantiation. I now turn to the disembodiment thesis as it paradoxically opens up a discussion of alternative embodiments.

The Paradox of Disembodiment

No discussion of embodiments and bodies would be possible if we did not also discuss the

⁷⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 118.

⁷⁹ Similar to Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on perception.

disembodiment thesis. This is partially the crux of Hayles' discussion of how 'information lost its body'⁸⁰ in *How we Became Posthuman*. In order for Hayles to discuss virtual bodies and 'the body's dematerialization'⁸¹, notions of disembodiment must be engaged. For her this is largely in reference to processes which demonstrate the fantastical dreams of some IT professionals, futurists, cybernetic theorists and robotic engineers to render a space of pure information. Within posthumanism broadly, especially technological and cybernetic posthumanism, a disembodied space of information is contrasted with the embodied space of an end user.⁸² That is, the cyberspace wherein I am writing these words, or when moving about the internet, and the body that is sitting in the chair, here and now typing this. Hans Moravec⁸³ and Ray Kurzweil⁸⁴ are the two major popular proponents of this kind of differentiation within posthumanism broadly⁸⁵ as they argue for the overcoming of human biological embodiment. Both of these individuals are staples within technological and cybernetic posthumanisms as either objects of affection or scorn. In *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* Moravec develops the disembodiment thesis by arguing for the possibility that one may be able to download one's consciousness into a

⁸⁰ Hayles, *How we Became Posthuman*, p. 5.

⁸¹ Hayles, *How we Became Posthuman*, p. 193.

⁸² For instance with cyberspace and virtual reality. See the following for more detailed analyses of both cyberspace and virtual reality: Michael Heim, *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Michael Heim, *Virtual Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Vincent Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Margaret Wertheim, *The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A History of Space from Dante to the Internet* (New York: Norton, 2000); *Data Made Flesh: Embodying Information*, ed. by Robert Mitchell and Phillip Thurtle (London and New York: Routledge, 2004); *Virtual Realities and Their Discontents*, ed. by Robert Markley (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994); Misha Peters, 'Exit Meat: Digital Bodies in a Virtual World', in *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality*, ed. by Anne Everett and John T. Caldwell (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 47-59; Mark Poster 'Postmodern Virtualities', *Body & Society*, 1.3-4 (1995), 79-95. There is a plethora of other material devoted to this subject, however, were they all engaged with it would make this thesis unmanageable.

⁸³ Hans Moravec, *Mind Children: The Future of Robotic and Human Intelligence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

⁸⁴ Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* (New York: Penguin, 1999); Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

⁸⁵ Hayles explores how cybernetic and informatic theory led to proponents such as Moravec and Kurzweil coming to be. They are also generally the favoured easy targets in posthumanist theory. However, for the purposes of the argument I am not going to be elucidating a history of cybernetics. See *How we Became Posthuman* in its entirety for a detailed history of cybernetics from a posthumanist perspective, from work of early pioneers such as Alan Turing, the Macy conference participants (Norbert Wiener, Claude Shannon, among others), to more contemporary figures like Kevin Warwick. For further historical background on cybernetics see: Stuart Umpleby, 'A History of the Cybernetics Movement in the United States', *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences*, 91.2 (2005), 54-66; Nick Bostrom, 'A History of Transhumanist Thought', *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, 14.1 (2005), 1-25. For critical posthumanist re-evaluations and re-deployment of cybernetic theories see, in particular, the work of Bruce Clarke and Cary Wolfe. Cf: Bruce Clarke, *Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and System* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

digital or machine body. For Moravec one gains an amount of freedom when consciousness is no longer tethered to the organic body from whence it came.⁸⁶ The disembodiment thesis largely follows from the so-called Cartesian splitting of mind and body, with proponents of the disembodiment thesis arguing that the mind and body are two distinctly separate things and that the mind can be removed from the body without any ill effects. In short, the mind requires no body. I will bracket the history and question of mind-body dualism as it is not the focus. What I find most curious about the notion of disembodiment is that by virtue of discussing a mind or consciousness moving within an informational realm or gaining a robotic body it necessitates an exploration of alternative bodies and embodiments, many of which remain largely unconsidered. Disembodiment, oddly enough, seems to only work under the auspices of embodiment. An irony pervades the disagreement between proponents of disembodiment and proponents of embodiment. Both make the fulcrum of their argument the human body, neither seemingly willing to consider that what the disembodiment thesis does, paradoxically, is to silently ask the question of what kinds of other bodies beings have when a human or biological body is no longer the normative standard. If, as Merleau-Ponty points out, the body is a 'general means of having a world'⁸⁷ and 'it is the body that shows, that speaks'⁸⁸ then even if a consciousness is downloaded into a computer as Moravec highlights, while no longer having a biological body, that being has a different embodiment, a body that is distributed throughout the system, a body that gestures, points, and speaks in different ways. This leads to a whole different set of criteria for what makes up a body, such as the debit card example above. The complexities of this are explored more fully in the next chapter via an analysis of technological embodiment in David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* and Steven Spielberg's *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*, and in Chapter 4 through an analysis of virtual embodiment in Josef Rusnak's *The Thirteenth Floor* and Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*.

⁸⁶ Moravec, *Mind Children*, p. 192. Hayles also chooses this particularly vivid passage, quoted in my introduction, which describes the process by which the mind is 'scooped' out of the body and becomes information in a digital world, or gains a robotic body, for analysis and scrutiny.

⁸⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 147.

⁸⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 203.

There is simply no escaping embodiment and the fantasies of shedding the body are, quite simply, fantasies. Whether or not a 'posthuman' being is possible is not the question, as it is in much popular posthumanism. The point here is to highlight that the disembodiment thesis actually opens up more questions than it forecloses as it tacitly accepts the role embodiment plays within its own attempt to create a new expression. Hayles' criticisms of the disembodiment thesis, while necessary as she discusses the cultural elements which make such assertions possible, do not grasp this underlying element within it. Ultimately she situates the disembodiment thesis in terms of dematerialization and emergent subjectivity, not embodiment, where, she argues, pronouncements like Moravec's 'should be taken as evidence not that the body has disappeared but that a certain kind of subjectivity has emerged. This subjectivity is constituted by the crossing of the materiality of informatics with the immateriality of information'.⁸⁹ Hayles retains a subjectivist conception of the body so that a 'posthuman body' is one that signals new kinds of subjectivity. However, Hayles describes information as 'immaterial' and informatics as 'material' which re-opens a distinction between subject and object that Merleau-Ponty was trying to close via his third way, only now, in posthumanist terms, it is not between a subject and object as such, but between the so-called immateriality of information (the economic and instrumental aspects of a debit card for instance) and the materiality of informatics (the physical aspects of a debit card). Something as simple as a debit card example provides a third way by discussing different forms of embodiment, a third way that is not based on a subjectivist account, or one built on a division of 'materiality' and 'immateriality', but one offered by corporeality. By following and transforming Merleau-Ponty the third way offered by corporeality is described through an expansion of what embodiments and bodies are and how they are expressive.

⁸⁹ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 193.

Expression

In the *Phenomenology of Perception* not only does Merleau-Ponty provide a rigorous analysis of perception through the description of embodiment, but he also begins to develop a philosophy of expression.⁹⁰ In particular he focuses on bodily expressions through forms of linguistic or gestural expression. Specifically, in the chapter ‘The Body as Expression, as Speech’ Merleau-Ponty begins to show how ‘the body is a natural power of expression’.⁹¹ Expression, as conceived here by Merleau-Ponty and more generally, is aligned primarily to linguistic usage and, as one would expect, the meaning and significance of words.⁹² He argues that previously words uttered have been thought to be instantiations of thought *about* the world meant to translate thought and bring it into the world through the act of speech. To make those thoughts intelligible to another speaking subject there is a repository of words which are ready-made and already in the world. Merleau-Ponty largely argues against this framework and instead suggests that ‘the word, far from being the simple sign of objects and significations, inhabits things and bears significations. For the speaker, then, speech does not translate a ready-made thought; rather, speech accomplishes thought’.⁹³ Similar to how the body has an ability to situate itself in the world prior to a reflective movement and is poised to experience the world the body also has a power to express the world. This bodily ability to express the world is ‘one of the possible uses of my body’⁹⁴ and is partially marked by the ability to utter words without having to recall them as they are already established and have become habitual – incorporated into the body:

⁹⁰ Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of expression has only recently come to the close attention of Merleau-Ponty scholars. The only book-length study of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of expression was recently published by Véronique Fôti; Véronique M. Fôti, *Tracing Expression in Merleau-Ponty: Aesthetics, Philosophy of Biology, and Ontology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013). See also: Bernard Waldenfels, ‘The Paradox of Expression’, trans. by Chris Nagel, in *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, ed. by Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 89-102; Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon*; Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*; Lawrence Hass, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy*.

⁹¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 187.

⁹² Merleau-Ponty later develops a more robust version of his philosophy of expression through what he terms 'creative expression', particularly in his work on aesthetics where he primarily focuses on painting, and in his work on language. While I introduce 'creative expression' later in this chapter, it will not be fully discussed until Chapter 3 where we will see how 'creative expression' is folded into Merleau-Ponty's notion of style and the ramifications this has for his ontology of flesh.

⁹³ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 183.

⁹⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 186.

I relate to the word just as my hand reaches for the place on my body being stung. The word has a certain place in my linguistic world, it is a part of my equipment. The only means I have of representing it to myself is by pronouncing it, just as the only means that the artist has of representing to himself the work he is pursuing is by producing it.⁹⁵

Just as in uttering words a subject speaks, so too will one 'naturally' move one's hand to a sting or an itch on their body without a second thought. For Merleau-Ponty the act of communication does not form representations in me as a result of another subject arousing a verbal image. Rather, 'I do not primarily communicate with "representations" or with a thought, but rather with a speaking subject, with a certain style of being, and with the "world" that he aims at'.⁹⁶ Merleau-Ponty initially describes expression in terms of language, yet he must take account of expression as communication, intelligibility, and ultimately speech. In the experience of one's body and the significances and meanings bound up with it, Merleau-Ponty concludes that 'our gaze, informed by the experience of one's own body, will discover the miracle of expression in all other "objects"'.⁹⁷ Merleau-Ponty begins the chapter through a declaration of the body's natural power of expression and concludes that this miracle is available to 'all other 'objects''. In the following sections I elucidate both the process and paradox of expression found in *Phenomenology of Perception* and which is expanded and clarified in *Signs, The Prose of the World*, and *The Primacy of Perception*. I also clarify how a body, any body, functions as an expression of an embodied experience in the world. The power of expression detailed by Merleau-Ponty is one which discloses that the body is not entirely a 'linguistic or discursive construction'.⁹⁸ Within a posthumanist framework this needs to be expanded to include a multiplicity of other embodiments and bodies because 'for us, the body is much more than instrument or means, it is our expression in the world'.⁹⁹ This moves to a corporeal ontology that calls for being 'to be experienced and apprehended in its expressive

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 189.

⁹⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 204.

⁹⁸ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 192.

⁹⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *A Prospectus of his Work*', trans. by Arleen B. Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. by James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 3-11 (p. 5).

manifestations, [which] requires [it] to be creatively (and thus expressively) bodied forth'.¹⁰⁰

The Process of Expression

Merleau-Ponty writes in *Phenomenology of Perception* that

The experience of the body leads us to recognize an imposition of sense that does not come from a universal constituting consciousness, a sense that adheres to certain contents. My body is this meaningful core that behaves as a general function and that nevertheless exists and that is susceptible to illness.¹⁰¹

For Merleau-Ponty it is a body which generates, or rather radiates, meaning. To put this quite explicitly, *a body is expressive*. The question then arises of how to describe the movement from the experience that an embodied being is poised to have and does have at the moment it engages the world, and how the world is expressed by a body. Bernard Waldenfels and others¹⁰² detail a Husserlian 'guiding statement'¹⁰³ which leads Merleau-Ponty to discuss the passage from experience to expression, from a mute world to a speaking one. Taking his cue from Husserl when he writes in *Cartesian Meditations*¹⁰⁴ that 'the beginning is the pure, and so to speak, still mute experience, which now it is the issue to bring to the pure expression of its own sense',¹⁰⁵ Merleau-Ponty's development of a philosophy of expression throughout his work¹⁰⁶ tries to disclose a third way between empiricism and intellectualism which elucidates the 'passage of experience into expression'.¹⁰⁷ Waldenfels highlights that for Merleau-Ponty expression ultimately 'is to be understood [...] in a broad sense, including also bodily expression, and even the expressive content of things'.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁰ Fóti, *Tracing Expression in Merleau-Ponty*, p. 11.

¹⁰¹ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 148.

¹⁰² See especially Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*.

¹⁰³ Waldenfels, 'The Paradox of Expression', p. 90.

¹⁰⁴ Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. by Dorian Cairns (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1950).

¹⁰⁵ Husserl quoted in Waldenfels, 'The Paradox of Expression', p. 89.

¹⁰⁶ For the purposes of this chapter I focus on its use in *Phenomenology of Perception*, *Signs*, and *The Primacy of Perception*. The reason for this is that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of expression overlaps with his development of style in his writings on aesthetics and in *The Visible and the Invisible*. This dynamic is explored in Chapter 3.

¹⁰⁷ Waldenfels, 'The Paradox of Expression', p. 90.

¹⁰⁸ Waldenfels, 'The Paradox of Expression', pp. 91-92.

Within Merleau-Ponty's initial framework in the *Phenomenology of Perception* there are at least two forms of expression: linguistic and gestural. The process of expression is described in 'The Body as Expression, and Speech'.¹⁰⁹ Beginning by approaching the phenomenon of speech and its relation to thought, he writes that 'we give our thoughts to ourselves through inner or outer speech. It certainly moves forward instantly, as if through flashes, but it subsequently remains for us to appropriate it, and it is through expression that thought becomes our own'.¹¹⁰ For Merleau-Ponty speech does not necessarily function as a purely internal 'verbal image' conjured up when a word is spoken; rather, a certain form of meaning is unveiled through the act of speech predicated by one being a body. The act of speech, as one mode of expression of a human body, which 'alone is capable of sedimenting and of constituting an intersubjective acquisition',¹¹¹ is not the movement of a thought into the world, but draws upon the already formed meanings and ready-made expressions in the world and 'does not translate ready-made thought; rather, speech accomplishes thought'.¹¹² For Merleau-Ponty a speaking subject is caught between two kinds of speech: spoken speech (*langue parlée*) – which draws upon expressions which are already in the world and habitual to a speaker – and speaking speech (*langue parlant*) – which is not the mundane everyday use of language, but is fundamentally creative. In distinction to simple or mundane spoken speech used everyday for communication, recognition, and intelligibility what Merleau-Ponty details as the process of expression 'actualizes or accomplishes the signification and is not merely a matter of translating it'.¹¹³ The process of expression signals for the corporeal ontology that I am developing that not only are there recognizable expressions which circulate around bodies (man, woman, human, dog, cat, bird and so on) but, within a posthumanist framework, while these do have an impact on how a particular body is read they do not furnish a direct correlation or coincidence between a linguistic expression and a body. Merleau-Ponty comments that 'it is no more natural

¹⁰⁹ Merleau-Ponty, 'The Body as Expression, as Speech', *PHP*, pp. 179-205.

¹¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 183.

¹¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 196.

¹¹² Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 183.

¹¹³ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 188.

and no less conventional to cry out in anger or to express love through the kiss than it is to call a table a “table”.¹¹⁴ Rather, they are habitual and already expressed ways of disclosing a body that indirectly signal differing forms of embodiments and bodies.

Expression is not simply a process of translation, or even of mediation; rather, it is the expression of an embodied experience. An embodied background is the condition for a body's expressiveness.

Merleau-Ponty argues that the body

is not an assemblage of particles where each one would remain in itself; or again, it is not an intertwining of processes defined once and for all – it is not where it is, it is not what it is – since we see it in itself secreting a ‘sense’ that does not come from nowhere, projecting this sense upon its material surroundings, and communicating it to other embodied subjects. It was always observed that the gesture or speech transfigure the body, but no more was said than that they developed or manifested a different power, such as thought or the soul. It was not seen that, in order to express these, the body must ultimately become the thought or intention that it signifies for us.¹¹⁵

Due to a body's natural power of expression it is able to secrete significance of the world. That is, embodiment is not only a background condition which is poised to experience the world, but, by delving into the thickness of world the expressivity of a body comes to bear on the genesis of meaning and significance. The body is *lived meaning*. Complications arise, however, as a result of conventional and institutional usage of words. Dillon comments that ‘words, according to Merleau-Ponty, are linguistic gestures that have acquired institutional limitation within the conventions of a culture’.¹¹⁶ There are linguistic expressions already formed and in the world, what Merleau-Ponty calls the ready-made, and these inevitably impact on a body's ability to express the world. These former acts of expression become sedimented in culture and spoken speech, and can colour the way in which an embodied being expresses the world via their body.¹¹⁷ Dillon further notes that ‘on the

¹¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 195.

¹¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 203.

¹¹⁶ Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, p. 188.

¹¹⁷ Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between a ‘secondary speech, which conveys an already acquired thought, and an originary speech, which first brings this thought into existence’, *PHP*, p. 409. Within Merleau-Ponty's framework spoken speech (*langue parlée*) is of a secondary kind while speaking speech (*langue parlant*) is originary. Both are aspects of linguistic expression which Merleau-Ponty borrows from Saussure.

one hand, the transcendent reality of body and world grounds the movement of expression. On the other hand, the world is not immune to culture, nor does it sustain culture on its surface as an overlay which can be lifted to reveal a stratum of pure nature without the imprint of the human body'.¹¹⁸ Expression, then, is an interplay of a body's expressive and meaning-bestowing power, and former acts of expression which have become sedimented in culture and habit:

Available significations, namely, previous acts of expression, establish a common world between speaking subjects to which current and new speech refers, just as the gesture refers to the sensible world. And the sense of speech is nothing other than the manner in which it handles this linguistic world, or in which it modulates upon this keyboard of acquired significations.¹¹⁹

The common world of speaking subjects means that a body carries meaning with it just as when 'an important speech or a great novel imposes its sense. Thus, in a certain way, they bear their sense'.¹²⁰ In other words, a body lives those meanings. However, a body also has the capacity to create new expressions through a process that Merleau-Ponty calls creative expression.¹²¹ 'For the painter or the speaking subject, the painting and the speech are not the illustration of an already completed thought, but rather the appropriation of this very thought.'¹²² Within a posthumanist framework we must highlight this expressive power of a body and enlarge the scope to encompass not only speaking subjects but also non-speaking subjects, or, rather, embodied beings which express differently. This does not necessarily imply that only language denotes expressive content. Rather, bodies are expressive in multiple ways. For instance, the way that a body gestures, such as the good-bye wave described above, and how it moves about the world, such as the embodied gesture that the information from a debit card makes when it activates a server: they are just as expressive as the former acts of expression that a speaking subject uses in order to characterise and categorize other beings in the world. Merleau-Ponty comments that 'there is no fundamental difference between the modes of expression, and no privilege can be granted to one of them on the

¹¹⁸ Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, p. 196.

¹¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, pp. 192.

¹²⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 408.

¹²¹ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, pp. 62, 410-411.

¹²² Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 409.

assumption that it expresses a truth in itself'.¹²³ A humanist *telos* attempts to furnish a privileged position by completing other beings in the world and proffers a direct correlation and coinciding of an object, thing, or other body with a particular human body or human expression. Any supposed privileged position or direct correlation and coinciding between a linguistic expression and a gesture is an epistemic effect of another body's being in the world that denotes for speaking subjects a common world. What this means for posthumanism is that the human body is simply one expressive body among many other expressive bodies in the world.

If it were only the words uttered that are used to characterise another inhabitant of the world this would ultimately be a completion and invoke a humanist *telos* under which it is generally assumed that only humans have language or, more pointedly, whose bodies are expressive. The language used, gleaned from the epistemic effect of another body's expressivity, is only one form of expression. The 'expressive content of things' would then not only find expression in the language of a human interlocutor, but by being bodily – corporeal – that thing has expressive modes which cannot be completed by a human world and the epistemic effect remains indirect. This allows that, while the expressivity of another's body is brought into my linguistic-textual world and has an impact on how I engage with another body, it 'converts the alien into one's own, without effacing the alienness'.¹²⁴ Others become indirectly intelligible through their expressive bodies as my linguistic-textual world encroaches upon them, yet they remain different from my expressive body wherein 'any attempt to promote one of these values at the expense of the other—sameness at the expense of alterity or alterity sameness—would be an imposition upon and contrary to the balanced way things are'.¹²⁵

¹²³ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 411.

¹²⁴ Waldenfels, 'The Paradox of Expression', p. 96.

¹²⁵ Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor, 'Introduction – The Value of Flesh: Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy and the Modernism/Postmodernism Debate', in *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, ed. by Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 1-20 (p. 11).

Dorothea Olkowski calls the process, or operation, of expression that Merleau-Ponty details *auteur*, writing that ‘the *auteur* is less the author than the perpetrator, that name that lends itself to certain expressions [...] [one who] interrogate[s] the world of silence, out of which expressive language emerges, not passively but not under the control of the agent either’.¹²⁶ The speaking subject, as an *auteur*, interrogates the world in order to speak of it. Yet the speaking subject is not entirely under control of the way in which things are expressed, hence a speaking subject is a perpetrator of expressive content and not an author of it.

In the ultimately abandoned *The Prose of the World*, Merleau-Ponty elaborates on the gestural theory of language¹²⁷ developed in his earlier works. He writes in ‘The Specter of Pure Language’ that

we believe expression is most complete when it points unequivocally to events, to states of objects, to ideas or relations, for, in these instances, expression leaves nothing more to be desired, contains nothing which it does not reveal, and thus sweeps us toward the object which it designates.¹²⁸

He argues against this normative conception of expression as it does not allow for ambiguity, but attempts to posit a direct correlation and coinciding between the expression used to describe an object and the object itself: an expression *completed* by a speaking subject. Much like Merleau-Ponty's argument regarding the cube in *Phenomenology of Perception* in which ‘the cube with six equal faces is the limit-idea through which I *express* the carnal presence of the cube that is there before my eyes and beneath my hands in its perceptual evidentness’,¹²⁹ linguistic expression is reliant on the object as much as it is reliant on a speaking subject: the object is an expressive body with different gestures. However, a ‘gestural sense is not amenable to the same modes of analysis as linguistic sense; it is an indirect sense, more implied by the edifice of words than designated by

¹²⁶ Dorothea Olkowski, ‘Expression and Inscription at the Origins of Language’, in *Écart and Différance: Merleau-Ponty and Derrida on Seeing and Writing*, ed. by M.C. Dillon (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997), pp. 45-59 (p. 51).

¹²⁷ This characterisation is put forward by M.C. Dillon, particularly in the section ‘Merleau-Ponty's Early Gestural Theory of Language’, in the chapter on language in *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, pp. 186-194.

¹²⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘The Specter of a Pure Language’, in *The Prose of the World*, trans. by John O’Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973) pp. 3-8 (p. 3).

¹²⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 211. My emphasis.

them'.¹³⁰ For posthumanism there is an indirectness accorded to a body's expressivity when its epistemic effect meets a linguistic-textual world. This indirectness signals an ambiguity in expression that is more pronounced than a direct correlation and coincidence which only provides 'a sort of false recognition, [and] makes us feel that the word inhabited the thing for all eternity'.¹³¹ The *telos* of humanism marks this 'false recognition' as it attempts to *complete* other beings by placing them always and only within a human world. For posthumanism the process of expression is not a capacity of the human body alone, rather it is a generalized corporeal characteristic of all bodies. There is an ambiguity and paradox inherent to the process of expression which evades *completion* and the direct *telos* of humanism because when '[the process of expression] is successful [...] [it opens] a new field or a new dimension to our experience'.¹³²

The Paradox of Expression

Bernard Waldenfels summarizes the paradox of expression as follows:

The paradox of expression lies first of all in the act of expression and in the event of expression itself; therefore, the paradox lies in the relation between the actual expression and *what is yet to be expressed*, in other words, between what is yet to be expressed and its means, ways, forms, in short, the 'ready-made expressions', in which something *is already expressed*.¹³³

The paradox accorded to expression follows from the movement of experience to expression, the mute world to a speaking one. On the one hand there are ready-made expressions which a body can live and be expressed by; on the other there is the process of expression in which something has yet to be expressed. A tension is highlighted by the ambiguity of expressions as both something already expressed and an expression in the process of creation, or what Merleau-Ponty calls creative expression. The ready-made expressions inform how a body is to be expressed, for instance via the utterance 'cube' or 'debit card' which has an impact on how an object which goes by that name is read. My linguistic-textual world impacts the way in which the expression of another body is

¹³⁰ Christopher Watkins, *Phenomenology or Deconstruction?*, p. 56.

¹³¹ Merleau-Ponty, 'The Specter of a Pure Language', *PW*, p. 6.

¹³² Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 188.

¹³³ Waldenfels, 'The Paradox of Expression', p. 91. Emphasis in original.

incorporated into my body and that I inscribe on its. The paradox of expression seems to anticipate, in hindsight, the move within poststructuralism¹³⁴ in describing how a textual circuit is formed, and how bodies were read as primarily sites of discursive and ideological conflicts and reconfigurations: that is, the tension between a body which has already been expressed – animal, human, man, woman, bird, worm, plant, tree and so on – and bodies in the process of expression – which have no name.

This tension has been presented particularly in recent queer and feminist theorizations and analyses of the body¹³⁵ and the deployment of an analysis of a body as a text,¹³⁶ with a caveat that the bodies which are analysed are largely organized around human bodies. Vicki Kirby, in *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal*, argues that we must ‘rethink corporeality in a way that wrests it from the role of dumb and passive container [and] will need to grant that the body is already a field of information’,¹³⁷ which is strikingly similar to Merleau-Ponty's deployment of the body schema and his analysis of an embodied perceiver in *Phenomenology of Perception*. The expressivity of a body is a way to describe a body that is already in the world, how it acts in a world of ready-made expressions, and how, more importantly, it creates new expressions.

The paradox of expression is characterised by Waldenfels as the tension between an event of

¹³⁴ See Leonard Lawlor, *Thinking Through French Philosophy* for a broad characterisation of how Merleau-Ponty influenced French philosophers in the 1960s. For the relation between Merleau-Ponty and Derrida, particularly in their philosophies of language, see *Écart and Différance*, ed. by M.C. Dillon, and Jack Reynolds, *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida: Intertwining Embodiment and Alterity* (Athens: University of Ohio Press, 2004).

¹³⁵ The following is by no means exhaustive. See: Vicki Kirby, *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999); Rosalyn Diprose, *Corporeal Generosity: On Giving in Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty and Levinas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002); Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006); Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

¹³⁶ For a critique of this position see Vicki Kirby's *Telling Flesh*. More recently there has also been a shift to an interrogation of the matter of bodies, or rather of matter itself, particularly in the rise of New Materialism. For an excellent introduction to this see Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010). For posthumanist takes on this see Karen Barad, ‘Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of how Matter comes to Matter’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28.31 (2003), pp. 801-831, and Braidotti, *The Posthuman*.

¹³⁷ Kirby, *Telling Flesh*, p. 148.

expression and an act of expression in which an *event* of expression is creative and aligns itself with ‘the yet to be expressed’ and an *act* of expression aligns with ‘actual expression’ via ready-made meaning available in my linguistic-textual world.¹³⁸ Therefore, by positioning embodiment as a background condition, which is a kind of poise or readiness to experience the world by delving into the thickness of it, and a body as an expression of an experience of the world, expression manifests in both an embodiment and a body as the two sides of the same coin that cross over one another¹³⁹: corporeality. For posthumanism a human expression of another body in the world can only be indirect as other bodies in the world are as ambiguous as mine is and cannot be completed by a humanist *telos*. ‘[We must] rid our minds of the idea that our language is the translation or cipher of an original text, we shall see that the idea of a *complete* expression is nonsensical, and that all language is indirect or allusive.’¹⁴⁰ As bodies are both poised to experience the world *and* be the expression of the world, by delving into the thickness of the world ‘the meaning-bestowing function of the body’¹⁴¹ is recognized in the gestures that bodies (both mine and others) make and both aspects form the texture of a body. As Merleau-Ponty announces in *The Primacy of Perception*:

The study of perception could only teach us a 'bad ambiguity,' a mixture of finitude and universality, of interiority and exteriority. But there is a 'good ambiguity' in the phenomenon of expression, a spontaneity which accomplishes what appeared to be impossible when we observed only the separate elements.¹⁴²

In the next chapter I analyse David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* and Steven Spielberg's *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* to disclose an alternative form of embodiment, technological embodiment, through its

¹³⁸ Waldenfels, ‘The Paradox of Expression’, p. 91.

¹³⁹ Merleau-Ponty writes in the ‘Introduction’ to *Signs* that ‘there is that which is said, and which is as yet no more than a precise uneasiness in the world of things-said, expression is a matter of acting in such a way that the two gather one another and cross one another. I would never take a step if my faraway view of the goal did not find in my body a natural art of transforming it into an approaching view’. in *Signs*, trans. by Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 3-37 (p. 19).

¹⁴⁰ Merleau-Ponty, ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’, in *Signs*, trans. by Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 39-83 (p. 43).

¹⁴¹ Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, p. 146.

¹⁴² Merleau-Ponty, ‘A Prospectus of his Work’, *PRI*, p. 11.

expressive bodies. These expressive bodies are largely associated with artificiality and instrumentality and I detail how they form textures of the expressive bodies of a technological embodiment.

Chapter 2

**Technology and Artificiality
in David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* and Steven
Spielberg's *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*.**

In the previous chapter I situated embodiment as a kind of poise or readiness to experience the world and a body as an expression of that experience. By delving into the thickness of the world, expression manifests in both embodiment and bodies as the two sides of the same coin which cross over one another: corporeality. I now turn to that seemingly most posthumanist of genres: science fiction. Science fiction, broadly, has a lengthy history of engagement with the possibilities of technology¹ and, in particular, it is an ‘an important area where scientific, technological, and the cultural imaginary become thoroughly interdependent’.² Engagement with the possibilities of technology and scientific endeavours are in many ways what have driven much science fiction from early texts such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), Edisonodes³ such as Villiers de L’Isle-Adam’s *Tomorrow’s Eve* (1886), through the ‘golden age’ of science fiction in the middle of the twentieth century into the legacy of the 1980s cyberpunk movement. Therefore, I look at narratives which pivot around how technology and artificiality have been expressed and how they enact a humanist *telos* largely because ‘science fiction often remains a crypto-humanist genre, [which] produces closures’⁴ or performs what Elaine Graham calls ‘ontological hygiene’.⁵

In the expression of technology and artificiality in David Cronenberg’s *eXistenZ* and Stephen Spielberg’s *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* I describe what Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter have called ‘posthuman moments’.⁶ These are moments that

more or less deliberately threaten the integrity of a given 'human essence' and are fetishistically indulged in, but all too often they are in the end closed off by the reaffirmation and reconfirmation of the human on a different plane. Sometimes, more rarely, the posthuman moment is different, allowing the posthuman to arrive as such, or

¹ See the following for a broad overview of the history of science fiction: Paul K. Alkon, *Science Fiction Before 1900: Imagination Discovers Technology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002) and Brooks Landon, *Science Fiction after 1900: From the Steam Man to the Stars* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

² Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter, ‘What is a Posthumanist Reading?’, *Angelaki*, 13.1 (2008), 95-111 (p. 98).

³ An Edisonode is a form of science fiction based around the figure of Thomas Edison. It was particularly prevalent in the latter half of the 19th century. See: Robert Martin Adams, ‘Translator’s Introduction’, in Villiers de l’isle D’Adam, *Tomorrow’s Eve*, trans. by Robert Martin Adams (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), pp. ix-xxv.

⁴ Callus and Herbrechter, ‘What is a Posthumanist Reading’, p. 98.

⁵ Elaine L. Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 11.

⁶ Callus and Herbrechter, ‘What is a Posthumanist Reading?’, p. 98.

indulging that illusion.⁷

This is particularly seen in narratives which are popular posthumanist in orientation, that is, in works which deal primarily with technologies broadly, and more specifically with cybernetics and the development of robotics, artificial intelligence, and virtual reality commonly associated with science fiction literature and cinema, in addition to narratives involving alien species. Science fiction cinema broadly from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) to the Alien invasion narratives of the post-WW2 era, the cyberpunk films of the 1980s and early 1990s,⁸ the virtual reality narratives of the mid 1990s-early 2000s,⁹ and the most recent infusion of post-apocalyptic science fiction,¹⁰ have largely been associated as a quintessentially Western¹¹ genre. The vast majority of these narratives, despite their engagements with the possibilities of various kinds of technological and cybernetic posthumanisms 'all too often [...] in the end [close] off and [offer] a reaffirmation and reconfirmation of the human on a different plane'.¹² As Neil Badmington remarks in relation to narratives of aliens, the 'recent 'alien love' and the older 'alien hatred' are constructed upon precisely the same foundations'.¹³ Despite the possibilities offered by science fiction cinema there is a distinctive kind of humanist *telos* which is ultimately reaffirmed. Whether or not the narrative is developed around a 'love' or 'hate' for the non-human the *telos* of humanism remains. It inevitably resurfaces and *completes* these other styles of being in the world by invoking a direct correlation

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Most notably Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) for its enduring conceptualization of a cyberpunk visual aesthetic.

⁹ Most notably the Wachowski's *Matrix* trilogy (1999-2003), but also Alex Proyas' *Dark City* (1998), Josef Rusnak's *The Thirteenth Floor* (1998), and David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* (1999).

¹⁰ 2013 sees the release of at least three major studio 'post-human' apocalyptic films: Joseph Kosinski's *Oblivion*, M. Night Shyamalan's *After Earth*, and Neill Blomkamp's *Elysium*.

¹¹ Science fiction cinema has come to be largely associated with the United States and Great Britain, and more recently with Japanese cinema. However, two of the quintessential and earliest science fiction films are found in France, with the George Méliès short *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (1902), and in Germany, with Fritz Lang's 1927 feature length *Metropolis*. Japanese science fiction, particularly in relation to Kaiju (Giant Monster) films such as the *Gojira* (Godzilla) films, cyberpunk films such as Shinya Tsukamoto's *Tetsuo* series and anime such as Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira* and Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* in addition to numerous anime series and films. While there has been plenty written on US, UK, and Japanese science fiction, there was also a brief period between 2003-2008 when South Korean cinema produced a number of science fiction films such as Min Byung-Chun's *Natural City*, Kim Mun-Saeng's *Wonderful Days/Sky Blue*, Jang Jun-Hwan's *Save the Green Planet* and Boon Joon-Ho's *The Host* (which became the most commercially successful Korean film at the time). For more on South Korean science fiction cinema see: Phillip Roberts and Angus McBlane, 'Korean Science Fiction Cinema', section introduction in *The Directory of World Cinema: South Korea*, ed. by Collete Balmain (Bristol: Intellect, Forthcoming 2013).

¹² Callus and Herbrechter, 'What is a Posthumanist Reading?', p. 98.

¹³ Neil Badmington, *Alien Chic: Posthumanism and the Other Within* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 10.

and coincidence. This is particularly seen in expressions of technological embodiment through instrumentality and artificiality.

As discussions of the instrumentality of technology so often begin, I initially turn to Heidegger's 1953 essay, 'The Question Concerning Technology'.¹⁴ In this essay Heidegger's concern is to disclose the instrumental relation posited not only in relation to 'modern technology' but also to 'man'. He writes that 'the current conception of technology, according to which it is a means and a human activity, can therefore be called the instrumental and anthropological definition of technology'¹⁵ which is a frame that initially reveals a relation to technology defined through its usefulness as a human means to a human end. Yet as he continues the relation shifts from a *means* relation to an *ordering* one, we could even say a relation built on *completion*. 'Modern technology' is a technical term for Heidegger and is predicated on 'exact physical science'¹⁶ such as physics. Within posthumanist conceptions there is a degree of similarity between the ordering relation that Heidegger sees in modern technology; however, the exact science from which it is born is largely cybernetics¹⁷ and areas that Heidegger would have not been able to anticipate such as nanotechnology.¹⁸ Throughout the essay Heidegger develops the ordering hypothesis of technology by illustrating that the essence of technology enframes (*gestell*) both 'man' and technologies and reduces the actual (i.e.: the world) to a standing-reserve.

Heidegger's primary concern is disclosing that the 'essence of technology is by no means anything

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', trans. by William Lovitt with alterations by David Farrell Krell, in *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*, ed. by David Farrell Krell, revised and expanded edn (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993), pp. 307-341.

¹⁵ Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', p. 312.

¹⁶ Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', p. 328.

¹⁷ See Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), in particular, for a defence of the importation of cybernetic theories into the humanities, particularly as read through the work of systems theorist Niklaus Luhmann. Also see Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing (Kluwer), 1980).

¹⁸ See Colin Milburn, 'Nanotechnology in the Age of Posthuman Engineering: Science Fiction as Science', *Configurations*, 10 (2003), 261-295, and *Nanovision: Engineering the Future* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008).

technological'.¹⁹ Echoing Heidegger, and anticipating the kind of analysis that Hayles will make, Merleau-Ponty writes in the first few pages of his 1960 essay 'Eye and Mind' that

Thinking 'operationally' has become a sort of absolute artificialism, such as we see in the ideology of cybernetics, where human creations are derived from a natural information process, itself conceived on the model of human machines. If this kind of thinking were to extend its reign to man and history; if, pretending to ignore what we know of them through our own situations [...] then, since man really becomes the *manipulandum* he takes himself to be, we enter [...] into a sleep, or a nightmare, from which there is no awakening.²⁰

Quite clear echoes of Merleau-Ponty's sentiment are found in Hayles' discussion of her posthuman dream and nightmare. Merleau-Ponty shares with Heidegger a concern that the 'essence of technology is by no means technological' and its ordering hypothesis or 'operationality' has the potential to reduce the human. This is not my aim here.²¹ Rather than pursue a lengthy discussion of the essence of technology, tracing the history of technological evolution, and the relation of *techné* and *poiesis*,²² I limit this discussion to the instrumental definition of technology as it remains prevalent.²³ Therefore, I follow Heidegger's situating of this instrumentality:

Technology is a means to an end [...] Technology is a human activity. The two definitions of technology belong together. For to posit ends and utilize the means to them is a human activity. The manufacture and utilization of equipment, tools, and machines, the manufactured and used things themselves, and the needs and ends that they serve, all belong to what technology is.²⁴

The reason for doing so, as is discussed in relation to *eXistenZ* and *A.I.*, is that the instrumental relation continues to circulate widely and is largely the default way that a technological embodiment has been expressed. A posthumanist corporeal ontology and cultural practice necessitates that we re-read the way that certain forms of embodiment have already been expressed.

¹⁹ Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', p. 311.

²⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind', trans. by Carleton Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. by James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 159-190 (p. 160).

²¹ See, in particular: N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Literature, Cybernetics, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), and Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013) for discussions which take up precisely this theme from a posthumanist perspective.

²² See Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. by Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

²³ This is done much to Heidegger's chagrin I would suspect as he writes that the 'merely instrumental, merely anthropological definition of technology is [...] in principle untenable', 'The Question Concerning Technology', p. 326.

²⁴ Heidegger, 'The Question Concerning Technology', p. 312.

Parallel to instrumentality is artificiality which discloses the status of not only a useful body, but an artificial body. Three major narratives appear in general to characterise artificial beings. The first, and perhaps most recognizable, is the narrative which develops from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: Or, The Modern Prometheus*.²⁵ In this work an artificial being is created by Dr. Frankenstein through technoscience and the marshalling of natural forces in order to create a being by tethering body parts together and infusing them electrically with life. The central narrative revolves around the new creation, the Monster, yearning to enter the human world, most notably with his father. Ultimately shunned and failing to be allowed entry into a human-centric worldview, Frankenstein's Monster goes on a rampage, kills those whom Dr. Frankenstein loves, and leaves a general path of destruction about him. The Monster is approached as being unreal, artificial, and incapable of being anything other than a monster who is forever barred from human relations: 'Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend'.²⁶ The artificiality of the Monster dictates both his actions and the actions of those around him. He wants to be human, but is not allowed to be.

The second major narrative is found in Carlo Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio*.²⁷ In this fairy tale a master craftsman, Gepetto, whittles a marionette from a special wood given to him by his friend Mastro Cherry. The marionette Pinocchio, while only partially conceived from the outset as artificial due to his being fabricated from a magickal²⁸ piece of wood which 'wept and laughed like a child',²⁹ yearns to become a 'real boy'. Throughout the work Pinocchio is presented with a childlike innocence engaging in pranks on unsuspecting people. He eventually runs afoul of his community and leaves home after becoming a 'bad boy'. It is not the people around him who do

²⁵ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: Or, The Modern Prometheus* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003).

²⁶ Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 74.

²⁷ Carlo Collodi, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, trans. by Carol Della Chiesa (Project Gutenberg E-Book #500, 2006).

²⁸ I use the term magickal to highlight the distinction between occult forces, and magic as the performance of illusions, card tricks, and the like.

²⁹ Collodi, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, p. 1.

not accept Pinocchio as real or put a monstrous identity onto him as they tacitly accept him under a human-centric worldview by placing the moral identity of ‘bad boy’ upon him. Pinocchio ostracizes himself as he views himself as unreal and artificial. Pinocchio yearns to be human, and through his movement from being a ‘bad boy’ to being a ‘good boy’ is rewarded by maturing to become human. Pinocchio is punished for his irresponsible behaviour and yearns to be human, and is eventually granted his wish. As Thomas Morrissey comments, ‘Collodi's puppet learns and grows until he becomes a real boy’.³⁰

The third and final major narrative which has structured approaches to technological embodiment expressed through artificial beings is found in the various tales of the Golem of Prague in Czech-Jewish folklore. In these tales the Golem is a homunculus which is gathered together normally from clay, and given life via a Rabbi, usually Rabbi Loew, by placing an incantation in its mouth. Gustav Meyrink’s *The Golem*³¹ provides a particularly apt example of this tale from the early twentieth century as in this version the Golem at the outset has its body conceived as artificial. Meyrink links it directly to the suffering of the people in the Jewish ghetto of Prague and its body, in effect, acts as their will. The Golem is generally conceived as serving as a protector; the Golem does not yearn to be human like Frankenstein’s Monster or Pinocchio. From the outset the Golem is in the service of humanity. The Golem does not yearn to be anything, does not question its embodiment. It is simply in the service of whoever controls it.

These three forms of narrative engagement with artificial bodies, alongside instrumentality, have largely characterised the possibilities of technological embodiment: the bad bo(d)y Monster, the good bo(d)y Pinocchio, and the neuter Golem. In each case these beings are fabricated, whether through science or magickal marshalling of natural forces, have their embodiment expressed

³⁰ Thomas Morrissey, ‘Growing Nowhere: Pinocchio subverted in Spielberg’s *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*’, *Extrapolations*, 45.3 (2004), 249-262 (p. 251).

³¹ Gustav Meyrink, *The Golem*, trans. by Mike Mitchell (Cambridge: Daedalus, 2000).

through their artificiality, and, at least in the case of *Frankenstein* and *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, yearn to become human. The artificiality of these beings, however, lends a weight to them by forcing an acknowledgement, whether overtly or covertly, that they are embodied; it just happens that they are embodied differently. They are largely rendered as objects, that is, in non-biological terms, and are technologically constructed, fabricated in a literal sense. They also have a tendency to be read and engaged with as artificial, until, as with Pinocchio, they might transform from artifice to human. These beings are rarely allowed to simply be. Their embodiment is denied by placing a singular direct emphasis on their artificiality: they are not 'real', not like 'us'. This begs the question: why would these beings want to be human in the first place? While the Golem does not yearn to be human it is nevertheless caught up within a humanist *telos*, its status guaranteed by being a protector. Frankenstein's Monster is similarly afflicted by a humanist *telos* which dictates that he will always and only be artificial. Pinocchio becomes human by embracing the humanist *telos* and completes himself by becoming human. Because they are made from clay, dead body parts, or wood their bodies are paradoxically ostracized but also completed by a humanist worldview.³² In any case none of the beings embraced their embodiment as different from the one which they yearn to be. These narratives put forward a kind of posthuman moment which 'threaten[s] the integrity of a given 'human essence' ...[but it is] closed off by the reaffirmation and reconfirmation of the human on a different plane'.³³ Shadows of the possibility of alternative embodiments are presented, but remain tethered to a humanist-biological conception. As with the disembodiment thesis and the debit card example, this paradoxically asserts a body's expressivity and an alternative form of embodiment. It just happens that these bodies have already been expressed by instrumentality and artificiality. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that 'in expressions already habitual, there is a direct

³² Collodi's *Pinocchio* is an interesting example because as a *bildungsroman* his narrative is one of growing into becoming 'human'. Pinocchio leaves the community due to bad behaviour, but is ultimately welcomed back once his behaviour has changed and he has matured. See: Morrissey, 'Growing nowhere: Pinocchio Subverted in Spielberg's *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*' for more.

³³ Callus and Herbrechter, 'What is a Posthumanist Reading?', p. 98.

meaning which corresponds point by point to the established phrases, forms, and words'.³⁴ Because notions of instrumentality or artificiality are already expressed and habitual when discussing embodied technological forms (which are rarely discussed as embodied) it necessitates that posthumanism re-read them in order to see how an instrumental or artificial body is, in fact, an expressive body which has particular ways of being in the world. The terms are unable to directly correlate and coincide with their being in the world, yet they are still with and in the world. Instrumentality and artificiality are textures which form a circuit, or system of equivalences, between a form of embodiment and an expressive body. Therefore, I will now turn to how these bodies are expressed, beginning with the biological inversion presented in David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*, which ultimately relies on an instrumental logic, and then through the Frankensteinian-Pinocchio narrative of artificial bodies in Steven Spielberg's *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*.

'This Strange Little Creature': Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*³⁵

eXistenZ opens with a posthuman moment by inverting what could be presumed to be a form of technological embodiment by having a game system not strictly be a technological interface which creates a virtual game world as in traditional forms of video game entertainment. Rather, the gamepod is a biological system which interfaces directly with the nervous system of the user. In available analyses of the film the status of the gamepod has largely been downplayed in favour of readings which are either based on the reality play of the narrative, or via a reading of sexuality and gender in the film.³⁶

Around the time that *eXistenZ* was released in the late 1990s a number of films were also released

³⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Science and the Experience of Expression', in *The Prose of the World*, trans. by John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 9-46 (p. 46).

³⁵ *eXistenZ*, dir. by David Cronenberg (Dimension Video, 1999) [on DVD].

³⁶ See: Beard, *The Artist as Monster*, pp. 423-470; Bowler, 'eXistenZ and the Spectre of Gender in the Cyber-generation', Lia M. Hotchkiss, "Still in the Game": Cybertransformations of the 'New Flesh' in David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*, *The Velvet Light Trap*, 52 (2003), 15-32; de Lauretis, 'Becoming Inorganic'; John Muchelbauer and Debra Hawhee, 'Posthuman Rhetoric: 'It's the Future Pikul'', *JAC*, 20.4 (2000), 767-775; Calvin Ritch, 'The real eXistenZ transCendz the unreal'.

which dealt with similar thematics regarding the nature of reality: of particular note were Alex Proyas' *Dark City*³⁷ and Josef Rusnak's *The Thirteenth Floor*³⁸, and found their widest disclosure in the critical and commercial success of the Wachowski's *The Matrix*.³⁹ As William Beard comments, unlike films like *Dark City* and *The Thirteenth Floor*

where all of them present a spectacle of uncertainty and confusion about the ontological basis for how their characters – and by extension their viewers – experience the world, only to re-establish a firmly grounded 'reality' by the end of the story. *eXistenZ* goes much further than any of these films with its insistence that there is no difference between reality and virtual reality, between a base reality of stable facts and an ungroundable 'reality' consisting only of our shifting perceptions and beliefs.⁴⁰

Further, Calvin Ritch details the legacy of and homages made to the reality plays in the work of Philip K. Dick, particularly *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch*.⁴¹ Teresa de Lauretis provides a Freudian psychoanalytic reading of the sexuality of the film, paying particularly close attention to the bioport at the base of each character's spine which allows them to play *eXistenZ*,⁴² writing that 'Cronenberg seems to be refiguring the psychoanalytic understanding that any part, organ, activity or function of the body can acquire erogenous value'⁴³ which is particularly seen in two main characters, Allegra Geller and Ted Pikul. However, she concludes that

the film uncouples sexuality from nature, from anatomy, from gender, from reproduction, and from the binding force of Eros, and at the same time carries it back to the body, to the *biological*, via the technology of the *bioport*; carrying it back in the form of mutated neural tissue, diseased sexual organs and terminally infected erogenous zones.⁴⁴

While de Lauretis focuses on the bioport, Alexia L. Bowler focuses an analysis on the supposed disembodiment of cyberspace writing that '[notions] of gender and the body haunt the seemingly free spaces of cyberspace in contemporary science fiction film, and indicate the conservative

³⁷ *Dark City*, dir. by Alex Proyas. (New Line: 1998) [on DVD].

³⁸ *The Thirteenth Floor*, dir. by Josef Rusnak (Columbia Pictures, 1999) [on DVD]. I analyse *The Thirteenth Floor* in Chapter 4.

³⁹ *The Matrix*, dir. by Andy and Lana Wachowski (Warner Bros, 1999) [on DVD].

⁴⁰ William Beard, *The Artist as Monster: The Cinema of David Cronenberg* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), p. 425. Beard comments that perhaps only *Dark City* is the other exception to this rule, and I am inclined to agree with him given the conclusion of *Dark City* when John Murdoch, the protagonist of the film, remakes the world.

⁴¹ Calvin Ritch, 'The real *eXistenZ* transCendz the unreal', *Extrapolations*, 45.3 (2004), 276-293.

⁴² *eXistenZ* in italics refers to the film, *eXistenZ* without italics refers to the game within the film.

⁴³ Teresa de Lauretis, 'Becoming Inorganic', *Critical Inquiry* 29.4 (2003), 547-570 (p. 567).

⁴⁴ de Lauretis, 'Becoming Inorganic', p. 568. Emphasis in original.

apprehension about re-figuring our understanding of gender, the body and sexuality in a post-human world'⁴⁵ through which she critiques the film for being unable to move beyond a conservative approach to gender.

I am not primarily interested in the reality play narrative or the sexuality and gender in the film, although they will inevitably be part of the analysis. My analysis is focused on the gamepod. The gamepod has two primary roles in the film. First, Geller's concern for it is a catalyst for the plot, where, in addition to Allegra Geller and Ted Pikul, the gamepod is one of the main characters. Second, they enter the gamepod in order to play eXistenZ, wherein the gamepod is explicitly responsible for one of the three layers of reality in the film. Further, there is a reality-bleeding effect which occurs about halfway through the film when the diseased gamepod seems to actively introduce the thematic of disease into the eXistenZ world and has a subsequent bleeding into the second reality of the film, the world of transCendenZ. The gamepod is a body which experiences care and concern from Geller, becomes diseased, and ultimately experiences death, and the textures of its body are felt through each narrative reality. Building from Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of expression in the previous chapter a texture is the circuit, or system of equivalences, between a form of embodiment and an expressive body – in this case a technological embodiment and the gamepod respectively. Yet Geller, perhaps the audience too, largely only regards it as a technologically useful object. The gamepod's expression of a form of technological embodiment is made into a direct correlation between its status as the housing of Geller's game and its usefulness to her because of this. There is an instrumental logic at work in Geller's care for the gamepod which expresses a humanist *telos* even as the gamepod sustains a world, the world of the game eXistenZ. Therefore, the focus for the remainder of my analysis are the textures of the gamepod's body and Geller's relation with it.

⁴⁵ Alexia L. Bowler, 'eXistenZ and the Spectre of Gender in the Cyber-generation', *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*, 5.2 (2007), 99-114 (p. 103).

To the shout of ‘death to the demoness Allegra Geller’ a failed assassination attempt begins the plot wherein the creator of the game eXistenZ, Allegra Geller, goes on the run with corporate lackey Ted Pikul and a damaged gamepod. In the moments following the assassination attempt Geller begins to refer to her gamepod being sick, that it is in fact ‘crying out for help’. Despite being shot in the failed assassination attempt⁴⁶ Geller readily states that her care for the gamepod is her overriding concern having devoted ‘five years of my life to this strange little creature’, which could either be a reference to the gamepod itself, to the game eXistenZ, or, in fact, a reference to both. The relationship between Geller and *her* gamepod is explored in the initial and central narrative of the film.⁴⁷

Fearing that the game is damaged she insists on testing the software to ensure that it has not been corrupted, and forces her companion Pikul to have a bioport installed in his spine. While there are direct allusions made to the sexual nature of the bioport, Geller’s interest lies in ensuring that her game is not damaged.⁴⁸ Following the faulty installation of the bioport in a rundown country gas station by would-be assassin Gas, Geller visits a doctor of sort, Kiri Vinokur, for her pod. While we are moving through the plot rather quickly, the central point here is that Geller has an overriding concern for the gamepod, she deals with her injury quickly by having Pikul patch her up on the go, but she requires a doctor for the gamepod.

She has an almost post-human⁴⁹ concern for the gamepod, forcing even her companion, despite his objections,⁵⁰ to get a bioport installed in order to check on the game. This signals a post-human moment where Geller is less concerned about the safety and security of herself or her companion.

⁴⁶ Geller is shot with an organic tooth gun which embeds a tooth in her shoulder.

⁴⁷ In the final act of the film the world which the viewer believes to have been real is revealed to be, in fact, a part of another game, transCendenZ, and the assassination plot restarts. I am primarily concerned with the events leading up to this point and set aside question concerning cyberspace and virtual reality until Chapter 4.

⁴⁸ See Bowler, ‘eXistenZ and the Spectre of Gender in the Cyber-generation’; de Lauretis, ‘Becoming Inorganic’; Beard, *The Artist as Monster*, particularly pp. 447-456, for analysis of the gender dimensions of the film.

⁴⁹ I use the spelling post-human here to refer explicitly to the idea of the posthuman as after or beyond the human.

⁵⁰ Both de Lauretis and Bowler comment on Pikul’s fear of penetration in getting a bioport fitted and Geller’s sexual arousal at the prospect of introducing him to the world of bioport games.

Her concern for the gamepod trumps her human companion or herself. Given the inversion of the technological posited in the central narrative this is likely due to the gamepod being rendered biologically and Geller's subsumption of this by referring to the gamepod as a 'creature'. Beard asserts that

Geller [has a] protective concern about the 'vulnerability' and possible injury suffered by the eXistenZ prototype, and [she makes] constant references to the gamepod as 'my baby' [...] [displaying] an almost hysterical emotional connection with this strange animal [which] is queasy and weirdly intense, and seems as mutant as the pod.⁵¹

His reading is quite telling as, on the one hand, he invokes hysteria as Geller's emotional response to the gamepod, her 'baby', and, on the other, by reading this emotional response as 'mutant as the pod'. The kind of post-human care that Geller displays toward the gamepod is downplayed in order to '[reaffirm] and [reconfirm] [...] the human on a different plane'.⁵² Her emotional bond to the gamepod is 'queasy', 'intense', 'mutant', a divergence from normative humanist conceptions. With Geller's emotive response to the gamepod we can see one texture of the gamepod: Geller *completes* the pod through her 'weirdly intense' bond. She expresses its body through her behaviour towards it, for instance when she strokes it when it 'cries out for help'. In a sense she adheres to a kind of post-human care detailed by Callus and Herbrechter which revolves around the question of 'Do you care enough for your humanity to allow the posthuman to be?'⁵³ as Geller puts the gamepod's safety above even her own.

Geller's behaviour, despite being overtly one of caring for the gamepod, has a dehumanising effect which Beard finds 'queasy' and 'weirdly intense'. Yet her emotional bond with the gamepod is on display emphasizing that 'the meaning must, so to speak, adhere to the behavior' and is not 'accessible to one single witness: the person who feels them', but that 'there are types of behavior or styles which are visible from the outside'.⁵⁴ Similar to Geller's behaviour the gamepod's

⁵¹ Beard, *The Artist as Monster*, p. 440.

⁵² Callus and Herbrechter, 'What is a Posthumanist Reading?', p. 98.

⁵³ Callus and Herbrechter, 'What is a Posthumanist Reading?', p. 108.

⁵⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'The Film and the New Psychology', in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. by Hubert L. Dreyfus

diseased state is rendered through its discolouration and its gestures when plugged into, its embodied state existing ‘on *this* face, or *in* those gestures, not hidden behind them’.⁵⁵ The reason, however, that we, as the audience, are able to see these gestures is that the technology of the gamepod is biological and formed from the innards of mutants. Therefore we can read Beard's assertion that Geller's emotional bond is ‘queasy’ and ‘mutant’ because the gamepod has a lived body (*corps propre*); it is able to experience, to move to a certain degree, and is ostensibly a creature, a ‘strange animal’, despite also being a technology. The technological inversion has its desired effect on the audience: had the gamepod been another shiny box it would not have made Beard queasy. Because the gamepod is biological it is much more readily seen as at least *having* a body, even if with a humanist *telos* it cannot *be* that body. Yet, as Beard himself observes, ‘Cronenberg also abolishes the culturally central dichotomy between shiny machines and not-shiny bodies’.⁵⁶ Putting the film within the larger context of Cronenberg's work, Beard's appraisal of Geller's emotional bond with the gamepod ‘can be thought of as the obsessional byproduct of the artist's creative frenzy’⁵⁷ which is a ‘reaffirmation and reconfirmation of the human on a different plane’.⁵⁸

However, even if Geller's care for the gamepod is a result of the ‘jealous *care* of the artist for her work’⁵⁹ she still maintains a relation to the gamepod as an instrument. It is not necessarily the pod itself that she is concerned about; it is the game that it holds. The body of the gamepod is viewed instrumentally even as she discusses her concern for it; it is only what it can do for her via the information that is stored within it that represents five years of her life. The gamepod's embodiment is then expressed in terms of its usefulness by having a function to perform: to house

and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 48-59 (p. 52).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Beard, *The Artist as Monster*, p. 445.

⁵⁷ Beard, *The Artist as Monster*, p. 440. This quotation is the way Beard introduces the ‘almost hysterical connection’ that Geller has with the gamepod.

⁵⁸ Callus and Herbrechter, ‘What is a Posthumanist Reading?’, p. 98.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Emphasis in original.

her game, to be played. Even though it is a technology inverted by Cronenberg to be biological, it expresses a body that, while organic, is, in fact, technologically embodied. We could even say that Pikul is also embodied technologically as he becomes an instrument for Geller as she forces him to get a bioport and, in effect, *plays* him just as Geller relishes in the opportunity to *play* eXistenZ⁶⁰ – which aligns much more with what Heidegger was centrally concerned about in ‘The Question Concerning Technology’.

At the doctor Pikul looks on curiously as Kiri operates on the diseased pod and states that it ‘looks like an animal in there, seems like you’re operating on someone’s pet dog’, to which Kiri replies, ‘I tell you, we are becoming glorified veterinarians’. This is a potential posthuman moment which ultimately reasserts another form of a body already expressed, in this case a pet. By operating on the gamepod and showing its innards, and despite Geller’s care, or Pikul’s curiosity, this scene lays bare that the gamepod is simply a manufactured device. Even if this creature is biological, it is nevertheless technologically embodied.⁶¹

However, the useful body should not necessarily be conceived as a negative within a posthumanist approach. A useful body, while questionable, is an already expressed body. This expression is one which already circulates and has become habitual, particularly when references are made to technologies. There is a tacit embodiment at work here precisely because its body has already been expressed by the term ‘instrument’: a technological embodiment. By approaching the gamepod through its usefulness, or through a care rendered instrumentally, *eXistenZ* highlights the necessity of another body being present: a using body.

It would be almost ludicrous to assert that I am not *using* a computer while typing these words. Not

⁶⁰ Geller herself could also be considered to be embodied technologically through her body expressed instrumentally as she becomes a character in eXistenZ and acts out the game’s will, which, however, is by her design.

⁶¹ This is even more pronounced when the characters shift to ‘The Trout Farm’ in eXistenZ wherein gamepods are manufactured, and one sees the visceral creation of the gamepods.

only that, but I am *using* the screen by seeing it, the keyboard by touching it, the chair by resting on it, in addition to all the background noise which comes above the music playing in my headphones.⁶² As much as I am arguing for the possibilities for alternative embodiments within the narrative of *eXistenZ* I am similarly afflicted by the instrumental logic in my relation to the bodies around me which I interact with as they are rendered as objects that I use. These formerly embodied beings having turned into objects by their relation to a user: my body is a using body. Yet, as I highlighted above through Geller's care for the gamepod and its body's expression as an instrument, there is a paradoxical reassertion of the embodiment of the object in the habitual expression: an expression that demonstrates a connection between a using body and a useful body. As Merleau-Ponty emphasizes, '[the] experience of one's own body...is opposed to the reflective movement that disentangles the object from the subject and the subject from the object'.⁶³ We would not be able to describe a body that is useful without a body that uses: neither is a singularity, but are intertwined. Therefore, Geller's relation to the gamepod through its being an instrument simultaneously and indirectly expresses her body as a using body. It is just easier to make the leap to say the gamepod has a body because it is biological than to disclose its technological embodiment. The inversion that Cronenberg makes initially is crucial in demonstrating this because if the game system is a 'living' system then it is more likely to be at least conceived as being embodied, whereas if a game system is not classified as 'living' it is not considered to be embodied or corporeal. I must assert here that I am not implying an overcoming of an organic embodiment. I am asserting that there are other forms of embodiments that do not necessarily equate directly to an organic or biological form of embodiment and the variety of bodies expressed thereby – that is, a posthumanist corporeal ontology recognizes that not all embodiments are organic or biological.⁶⁴

⁶² It is not particularly useful but is nevertheless there. If you are curious, at the time of writing, the gentle sounds of roadworks are interspersed with the sounds of Frank and Nancy Sinatra, Lee Hazlewood, and Julie London.

⁶³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Donald A. Landes (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 205.

⁶⁴ My aim in the analytical portions of the thesis (Chapter 2 and Chapter 4) is not to analyse organic or biological embodiments and bodies, particularly human bodies, as there is an unmanageably large amount of material written on this subject. If one wants to find discussions of these embodiments and bodies one needs simply to pick up and open any book that has 'body', 'embodiment', 'corporeality', or derivations thereof in the title.

The gamepod discloses a second texture of its body, its body expressing not only a useful body, but expressing the user's body. These two textures of a body function similarly to how language does for Merleau-Ponty, in that not only are there expressive silences in language and a 'good ambiguity', but the body, similar to language, is expressive. The expressive body needs to be taken account of just as much as the passage of experience to expression or the paradox of expression found in the relation between what has already been expressed and what is in the process of expression in language. There are a plethora of bodies already expressed which circulate in discussions of the body. Yet, the body is normally conceived as a human body, and a multiplicity of other beings, and for that matter other human bodies, are disembodied or non-corporeal, a point with some resonance in the work of Rosalyn Diprose⁶⁵ and Gail Weiss,⁶⁶ although largely only in reference to a human body.

Returning to the central narrative of *eXistenZ*, once Geller and Pikul finally enter the game to test it out the theme of disease becomes prevalent.⁶⁷ They seemingly become part of a realist underground bent on destroying technologies which they view as anti-realist and the reality play of the narrative fully begins by prompting a questioning of reality. The realists assert that these technologies are a viral manifestation of the loss of the real and subsequently of embodiment. As the theme of disease becomes increasingly prevalent and the reality-bleeding begins to occur, Geller comments that because her gamepod is diseased the game they are playing begins to demonstrate this theme, even though they do not recognize it fully until it is too late. What the gamepod is doing here is disclosing a third texture of its body by ostensibly experiencing its lived body through the

⁶⁵ *Corporeal Generosity: On Giving with Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty and Levinas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002) and 'Towards an Ethico-Politics of the Posthuman: Foucault and Merleau-Ponty', *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy*, 8 (2009), 7-19.

⁶⁶ *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁶⁷ Technology as a form of disease or virus has a latent undercurrent especially in science fiction. This is particularly seen in technophobic films such as Shinya Tsukamoto's *Teisuo: The Iron Man*, and now forgotten schlock sci-fi films of the late 1980s and early-mid 1990s like *Virtuosity*.

experience and expression of its users experiencing it. William Beard comments on this possibility in reference to the bioports when he writes that the ‘*novo-anus-bioports produce, or at any rate are the conduits for, the virtual worlds of games, they are talking assholes, and what they are saying is the game experience[s] itself*’.⁶⁸ The gamepod itself is discoloured and makes pathetic gestures before Geller and Pikul enter it, and the game *eXistenZ* demonstrates disease through the violent transgressions allowed during the Gamer-Realist war.⁶⁹ Beard remarks further that ‘the virtuality – that is, non-reality – of the game environment is constantly invoked by Geller as a defence for all the transgressions going on inside it (‘It’s only a game’)’.⁷⁰ Yet even as Geller and Pikul interact with the gamepod, which, let us not forget, is responsible for the environment that they are in, they are unable to fully recognize its embodied experience of disease until it is too late as they, especially Geller, are too wrapped up in playing the game.

The Gamer-Realist war reaches its conclusion when Geller kills Pikul by detonating a bomb she had previously inserted into his bioport while at the doctor’s and the reality shifts once more. The audience discovers that the characters have been, in fact, playing the game *transCendenZ* wherein the entire narrative of the assassination plot against the ‘demonness’ Allegra Geller, the gamepod which houses the game *eXistenZ*, and the gamer-realist war took place. The game system shifts from being an organic system to being a distinctly technological system in the third reality and the entire narrative comes full circle as Geller and Pikul restart the assassination plot by attempting to kill the creator of *transCendenZ*, Yevgeny Nourish, who had been the leader of the realist underground in the game world. The film concludes with one of the characters pleadingly asking if they are still in the game.

I described three textures of the gamepod in *eXistenZ*. The first is that it is a body that is used,

⁶⁸ Beard, *The Artist as Monster*, p. 455.

⁶⁹ I borrow this term from William Beard, *The Artist as Monster*.

⁷⁰ Beard, *The Artist as Monster*, p. 443.

expressed by Geller's overriding 'hysterical' and 'weirdly intense' concern for it. The second is that its body simultaneously expresses Geller's and other's bodies as using bodies and in order for it to be an *instrument* it necessitates that there is another body which uses it. The third is that it is the environment of the eXistenZ world and experiences itself through its users experiencing it. The third texture is only indirectly recognized through the theme of disease and the second texture is not recognized at all. Yet Geller puts forward a humanist *telos* in her instrumental relation to the gamepod in *completing* it by expressing it as a useful body. If one were to singularly rely on the already expressed body of a technological embodiment as a useful body, this would foreclose alternative bodily expressions which can be seen in the second and third texture of the gamepod's body, just as Geller and Pikul do not see the effects of disease until it is too late: despite Geller's care the gamepod is just an instrument to be used. The ability to see this is largely a result of the gamepod being presented biologically, 'a strange little creature'. Its status as an instrument is a habitual way that its body has already been expressed and this dictates a direct correlation between its body and its use: it is always and only an instrument 'through a sort of false recognition [which] makes us feel that the word inhabited the thing for all eternity'.⁷¹ Instrumentality is a default way that technological embodiment has been expressed and is a texture of an expressive body, in this case the gamepod's. More important for posthumanism is the fact that the second and third textures of the gamepod's body disclose alternative ways in which technological embodiment is expressed. These are textures in the process of expression where the gamepod's body discloses the body of a user, and, through its sustaining of the game world, the gamepod experiences its lived body through users experiencing it: the gamepod intertwines with other expressive bodies.

At the end of the film the reality shifts from eXistenZ to transCendenZ and then to the 'real' world where the biological inversion posited by Cronenberg in the central narrative returns the game system to a distinctly technological system. This passage highlights the reality play of the narrative

⁷¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'The Specter of a Pure Language', in *The Prose of The World*, trans. by John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 3-8 (p. 6).

in its oscillation between 'reality' and the 'virtual', and hints at a second way in which technological embodiment has already been expressed: artificiality.

'But I want to be a 'real' bo(d)y': Spielberg's *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*⁷²

Steven Spielberg's *AI: Artificial Intelligence* provides an excellent example of a second way that technological embodiment has already been expressed and details an interplay of the three narratives of artificial bodies introduced above. However, before discussing the narrative of the film it is critical to point out that while the film holds the directorial name Steven Spielberg, the main story and pre-production work was largely carried out by Stanley Kubrick, inspired by Brian Aldiss's short story 'Supertoys Last All Summer Long'.⁷³ This creates an interesting internal tension in the film as Spielbergian and Kubrickian elements collide. Vivian Sobchack highlights that

In Kubrick's ironic cinema, the robotic, technological and repetitively technical are hardly magical and, indeed, threaten to supersede the originality and spontaneity of the very human beings who brought them into existence. Unlike Spielberg, who believes in fairy tales and wish fulfilment [...] the more Swiftian and Grimm Kubrick knows that wish fulfilment in fairy tales is usually perverse: that is, it grants desire exactly (and quite literally) what it asks – and often with dire consequences that are not only ironic but also poetically just.⁷⁴

There is an oscillation between the wish fulfilment of Spielberg, which is seemingly *completed* by David at the end of the film, and the irony of Kubrick, found softened in Gigolo Joe and perhaps Teddy, which would possibly explain why the film was so poorly received.⁷⁵ It was both but neither and as a result has shifting dynamics at play between nostalgia, love, and melancholy, with Spielbergian elements coming out on top. Bert Olivier comments that the film is largely framed between a notion of Heideggerian care and a Lacanian 'wishing to be loved'.⁷⁶ Olivier finds this emblematic of more general issues involving artificial intelligence as a whole wherein David's

⁷² *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*, dir. by Steven Spielberg (Dreamworks Video, 2002), [on DVD].

⁷³ See Morrissey, 'Growing Nowhere'.

⁷⁴ Vivian Sobchack, 'Love Machines: boy toys, toy boys and the oxymorons of *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*', *Science Fiction Film and Television*, 1.1 (2008), 1-13 (p. 5).

⁷⁵ Sobchack, 'Love Machines'.

⁷⁶ Bert Olivier, 'When Robots would really be Human Simulacra: Love and the Ethical in Spielberg's *AI* and Proyas's *I, Robot*', *Film-Philosophy*, 12.2 (2008), 30-44 (p. 36).

‘defining trait as human simulacrum is his capacity for ‘care’, and more specifically his love for, and desire to be loved in return by, his human ‘mother’, Monica’ which belies a ‘conception of robots as the embodiment of artificial intelligence, in terms restricted to ‘intelligence’ in the narrow, ‘quantitative’ sense (of the storing and processing of information)’.⁷⁷ Because David’s defining traits are care and yearning to be loved he no longer appeals to a strictly informatic and quantifiable notion of artificial intelligence. Rather, appealing to the Spielbergian technophilic aspects of the film David is humanized, to certain degree, through his emotional intelligence. In distinction to this Vivian Sobchack finds that the film expresses a different kind of technophilia, a masculine technophilia, expressed through nostalgia and mourning where there is ‘a ‘forever after’ in which male bodies (and, by extension, all human beings) are figured as abandoned, hollowed out, in pieces – and then memorialised long after they have actually vanished from the earth’,⁷⁸ expressed, on the one hand, via the ‘abandoned’ ‘toy boy’ body of David and, on the other, the ‘hollow’ ‘boy toy’ body of Gigolo Joe.⁷⁹ The film also draws significantly on the tale of Pinocchio as it informs the child robot David’s quest to become ‘real’ and his oscillation between declaring ‘I’m a boy’, and ‘I want to be real’. Thomas Morrissey explores the relation between Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio* and *A.I.* detailing that the film draws from Collodi's original text for its script and the Disney version for its visual aesthetic. He writes that while *A.I.* is quite explicitly drawing from Collodi's tale, the ‘film's ultimate tragic core [is that] David is Pinocchio-like but he is not Pinocchio, for if he were, his suffering would have character-building implications. He would have a future’.⁸⁰

As David endures on his quest to be ‘real’ the supporting characters of Teddy and Gigolo Joe each

⁷⁷ Olivier, ‘When Robots would really be Human Simulacra’, p. 42.

⁷⁸ Sobchack, ‘Love Machines’, p. 2.

⁷⁹ Sobchack writes that ‘Joe, the ‘boy toy, is a *hollowed-out* and *empty body* imagined and anatomised as completely superficial and hard: a dream lover and tirelessly performative adult sex machine who enjoys his work until he is framed and hunted for the murder of one of his human clients. David, the ‘toy boy’, is an *abandoned body*: a mechanical love-child who is literally left in a forest by his human ‘Mommy’, and who seeks thereafter (Pinocchio is his model) to become the ‘real boy’ he thinks she will love’. ‘Love Machines’, p. 3.

⁸⁰ Morrissey, ‘Growing Nowhere’, p. 251.

provide alternative ways of approaching technological embodiment by viewing their artificiality differently. Their technological embodiment is expressed in the film not only through their useful bodies – Gigolo Joe is a robot male sex worker, as one would expect from his name – and their artificial bodies – Teddy is a robotic ‘supertoy’ teddy bear – yet they simply do not question their ‘artificiality’ to the extent that David does, and potentially provide a counterexample to David's narrative quest to be ‘real’. As David poses the question and oscillates between declarations of being real and wanting to be ‘real’ he is caught within a humanist *telos*, where to be 'real' is to be human, and he cannot be complete until he is human. Gigolo Joe and Teddy, on the other hand, appear to not deny their embodiment; rather, they seem to accept their status as artificial. David, Gigolo Joe, and Teddy each respond differently to their bodies already expressed as artificial and I analyse each act of the film closely attuned to how it puts forward a technological embodiment expressed by artificiality as a texture of each of their bodies.

Act 1: ‘Birth’ and Abandonment

Following natural disasters and the depletion of natural resources, the world of *A.I.* is structured through the tightly controlled management of resources, including a licensing system for potential parents, with robots having become ‘an economic link in the chainmail of society’. *A.I.* opens with the creator of David, Professor Hobby, opining on the possibilities of the development of a robot who can be hardwired to love, arguing that previously robots had been little more than ‘sensory toys, perfect simulacrum’ – they do the hard labour or are playthings, including satisfying sexual desire. Professor Hobby proposes to develop a robot capable of love by means of neuronal feedback wherein the robot can develop an unconscious and be able to be self-motivated and, more importantly, to dream. While Hobby argues that the current generation of robots are ‘little more than sensory toys, perfect simulacrum’ his use of the terms ‘toy’ and ‘simulacrum’ seem to be at odds with each other. Both 'toy' and 'simulacrum' render themselves as artificial, yet a toy is something that one plays with, that one uses, while simulacrum is seemingly much more

encompassing as a simulacrum, in the non-Baudrillardian sense, is a full replica. Faced with two forms of technological embodiment within the first few moments of the film, we are introduced to a robot both as a ‘sensory toy’, which renders it instrumentally, and as a ‘simulacrum’, which invokes it artificially. Yet if these robots were simply artificial then the full weight of the descriptor ‘simulacrum’ would be untenable as simulacrum invokes a kind of perfect replica of an existing being – a direct exacting copy. If these beings were perfect simulacrum, in the sense that Baudrillard uses it,⁸¹ then they could not be considered simply as ‘sensory toys’ or replicas, as there would be no way to tell that they were artificial unless one were to open them up, and, as it were, view their mechanical innards – unless one has some vague way of ‘knowing’ a potential doppelganger that wears the skin of a human. Bearing this in mind, at the outset Hobby’s argument for creating an emotional robot is designed to replicate the human, a ‘perfect simulacrum’ in the form of David. Like a futuristic Dr. Frankenstein Professor Hobby wants to develop a being unlike anything the world has seen, arguing that love can be hardwired into this new leap in robotics through a process of imprinting. Users utter a series of words which then locks the being into loving them for the rest of their lives with the caveat that in this moment a contract is made. If they tire of their robot-child it can be returned to Hobby’s facilities to be destroyed – in essence a contract is made for the lives of the robots. Despite Hobby’s assertions otherwise they appear to be nothing more than a more advanced version of the ‘sensory toys’ which do the manual labour and satisfy sexual desire or some variation thereof.

Upon the ‘birth’ of David a suitable family is chosen to be test subjects. The Swinton family is given the honour of being the first to engage with David as they have met the criteria: personal tragedy – the Swinton’s son, Martin, is in cryostasis due to medical problems until a cure is invented – and the father is a loyal worker. The first act of the film follows David from this ‘birth’ to his abandonment by his ‘mommy’, Monica. Prior to the imprinting Monica only approaches David

⁸¹ Which are not direct exacting copies but beings without reference to ‘reality’. Cf: Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006).

through his artificiality. Everything that David does around Monica is viewed as a product of his artificiality which emphasizes a very real, to Monica, uncanny valley between David's human appearance and 'artificial' behaviour. This sets up the central theme of David's story arc: his desire to be 'real'. Initially David is almost too real for Monica as he talks and acts like a child, curiously replicating the Swinton's behaviour, yet also commits social faux-pas such as walking in on Monica while she is on the toilet, silently sneaking up on Monica, and having a habitual blank and vacant stare. Monica's reactions are quite telling as she is seemingly frightened by David. He fulfils the Frankensteinian role of an outcast, an 'artificial' conglomeration which walks and talks but is denied entry to the world of human relations. David's technological embodiment is expressed through his 'artificial' and exaggerated gestures, with Monica arguing that 'there is no substitute for your own child'.

Unlike the narrative of *Frankenstein*, however, the parental figure eventually attempts to adopt the artificial being. Monica attempts to *complete* David by following the imprinting protocol and bonding David to her. At this point David does not fully comprehend or identify with his artificial body, and as Monica becomes 'mommy' through the imprinting protocol, it partially withers away as he is embraced by her. While David remains technologically embodied and it conditions his modes of interaction, it is not a detriment to his being as he is allowed entry into the human world through the imprinting protocol. He is allowed to be his artificial body, just like Pinocchio, until the biological son, Martin, returns. At this point the narrative diverges and there is a gradual shift in David's behaviour. Bert Olivier comments that as a result of the imprinting protocol 'David changes from an intelligent companionable machine that resembles a human child, to an intelligent machine that simulates being-human in a very specific sense that may be described as 'loving another' and, even more importantly, 'wanting to be loved by another'.⁸² It is this 'wanting to be loved by another', principally to be loved by his 'mommy', which drives the main narrative. Yet,

⁸² Olivier, 'When Robots would really be Human Simulacra', p. 31.

David is not the first robot we are introduced to in the first act; we are also introduced to Teddy, a teddy bear 'supertoy'.

Teddy is introduced as a former toy of Martin's before he went into stasis. Eventually presented to David, Teddy provides a counterexample to the negative way in which David eventually comes to experience his technological embodiment. The relationship between the two is compelling as not only is Teddy quite readily seen to be technologically embodied due to his being fabricated, but there is also an instrumentality which further defines him as a 'supertoy', the 'sensory toy' and, albeit a diminutive teddy bear, the 'perfect simulacra' which Professor Hobby opined on in the first few sequences of the film. David's relation to Teddy manifests through his not being able to identify with Teddy despite both of them being artificial, which curiously appears as a non-issue for Teddy. In one particularly evocative scene, Martin has returned to the family home and is having a discussion with David and Teddy about their status, asking if David is just the latest 'supertoy' as Teddy once was. Martin declares that Teddy is an 'old' and 'stupid toy' who no longer fulfils his function as a supertoy which, for Martin, David appears to have possibly taken. It is Teddy's reaction, however, which is most revealing in this scene: after this accusation Teddy declares 'I am not a toy!' This statement provides a posthuman moment in which Teddy rejects the way in which his body is treated: his 'artificial' body is not artificial to him, but is his embodiment in the world and simply calling him a toy forecloses this. Teddy is only a toy when his 'artificiality' is viewed as a negative: he may be fabricated, used by those around him, but to him he is neither 'artificial' nor a toy. Teddy views himself as embodied and real; why else would he take umbrage at being called a toy? His experience of technological embodiment, while ostensibly situated and expressed by his status as artificial and an instrument (a toy), exceeds these expressions. Teddy recognizes his corporeality and rejects the notion that his embodiment can only be expressed through artificiality or instrumentality, a position he will express throughout the remainder of the film in direct confrontation to David's search to become real. David, on the other hand, is unable to view not

only himself, but also other mecha, as anything but unreal after he takes the tale of Pinocchio to be his own.

David begins to move away from having his body circulate along Frankensteinian lines when he is initially let into the human world through Monica's following the imprinting protocol and subsequent bond with him. When Martin returns David's body slips back into being artificial, at least for Martin. Sibling rivalry inevitably erupts and Martin callously makes his mother read the story of Pinocchio to himself and David. As David has already essentially fulfilled the criteria of the Pinocchio narrative upon having entered the human world through the imprinting process, albeit without the maturing central to Collodi's narrative, it is curious that he so radically adopts the narrative of Pinocchio as his own, and it motivates him for the remainder of the film. David's artificiality and monstrosity reassert themselves after Martin goads him into cutting a lock of hair from Monica and David startles her in her sleep with a pair of scissors in his hand, and, near the conclusion of this act, David becomes frightened and tries to protect Martin by clasping him, but he inadvertently drags him into a pool and almost drowns Martin. Following these two events, with David's Frankensteinian artificiality reasserting itself, the family decides to get rid of him by returning him to Hobby's facility to be destroyed. For reasons unclear Monica is unable to do so and abandons him in the forest.⁸³ Thomas Morrissey suggests that 'David is not just a robot; he is Monica's toy, a plaything that she discards – not without misgivings and pain – when he is no longer wanted and needed'.⁸⁴ The Frankenstein narrative is reasserted as David is ultimately rejected by his 'parent' and, as he has internalized the Pinocchio narrative, he declares to her as she runs back to her car that he 'will be so real for you' – an unsettling and uncanny comingling of both the Frankensteinian and Pinocchian narratives.⁸⁵

⁸³ I would think despite her alienation from him as a result of her organic child returning, she does not want to be responsible for his death.

⁸⁴ Morrissey, 'Growing Nowhere', p. 257.

⁸⁵ The tone of David, played by Haley Joel Osment, saying 'I will be so real for you' would make even the most ardent technological posthumanist stop for a moment and rethink their lives. There is something truly uncanny and unsettling

The technological embodiment of David found in the texture of his already expressed body as an artifice is initially, for Monica, somewhere between a Frankensteinian monstrosity and a Pinocchian uncanniness, which, however, is circumvented when she imprints and subsequently bonds with him. While technologically embodied David is real to her as she adopts a parent-child relation for a brief moment as the film transitions into the Pinocchian narrative. David is ‘artificial’ yet is allowed to be real: the hardwired love he has for his ‘mommy’ *completes* him. The story of *Pinocchio* told by Monica, at the goading of Martin, to her children plants the idea in David that he is not, in fact, real, and through sibling rivalry he becomes akin to Frankenstein’s Monster and must be denied entry to the human world. David ‘cannot grasp why his Mommy does not love him back or why she might find his insistent adoration and constant focus on her extremely unsettling and, eventually, downright frightening’.⁸⁶ Teddy, however, provides an alternative. While technologically embodied, his status as artificial circulates somewhat differently: nowhere in the first act, nor for the remainder of the film, does Teddy wish to ‘become real’. His technological embodiment, while deployed through artificiality, is expressed differently. Teddy is more aligned to the Golemic narrative as he was created to serve humanity by being a toy. Teddy’s experience of technological embodiment provides an alternative to the Frankensteinian-Pinocchian narrative which colours David’s arc. For instance, while Hobby remarks in the beginning that he wants to create a robot that is self-motivated and can dream with David, during this act Teddy is shown in one scene repairing himself. This is a very clear posthuman moment as a diminutive robotic teddy bear ‘supertoy’ is self-aware enough that when he is damaged he silently repairs himself with a needle and thread.⁸⁷ Moments where artificial beings repair themselves are perhaps one of the few posthuman moments *par excellence* that I have come across, a moment that ‘is different, allowing the posthuman to

in David’s seemingly jilted ex-lover style delivery of ‘I will be *so* real for you’, which would be unsettling, and downright shiver-inducing creepy, even if David were biological.

⁸⁶ Sobchack, ‘Love Machines’, p. 7.

⁸⁷ See Morrissey, ‘Growing Nowhere’ for a brief commentary on ‘toys-come-to-life’ narratives, and how they, quoting Lois Kuznets, ‘embody human anxiety about what it means to be ‘real’’, p. 257.

arrive as such'.⁸⁸ They need not be reduced to a humanist *telos* by reading it as an anxiety of the human as this simply performs ontological hygiene. As with his outburst that 'he is not a toy', there is a certain kind of recognition that Teddy has about his technological embodiment that David is simply unable to grasp: Teddy knows that he is already real and has to take care of himself. An organic or biological body in the process of healing would not produce such anxiety. The central narrative of David and the way artificiality is approached not only by him, but by Hobby, Monica, and the other humans, circulate around David's already expressed body. It forms one texture of his body that he does not want to recognize, whereas Teddy quite clearly does and is already ostensibly the robot of which Hobby dreamt.

Act 2: On the Run – Flesh Fair and Rouge City

The second act opens with the introduction of high-end lover mecha Gigolo Joe. His appearance is explicitly conceived to highlight his artificiality via his shiny plastic looking hair and gaudy clothing. He is introduced via the seduction of a female client as he highlights his 'unrealness' by the cocking of his head to turn on sexual mood music and reassuring his client that 'once you have a lover mecha, you'll never want a real man'. At this point in the narrative Gigolo Joe is the third⁸⁹ human-looking mecha that the audience is introduced to, and he quite clearly recognizes his artificiality. In fact, he accentuates it. His hair, clothing, words, and gestures are designed to appeal to his artificiality, constructing him in opposition to a 'real man' whom he vastly outperforms. He is a 'slick sex machine, [who] has no desire to be 'really human'. He is agile, sharp, self-reflexive, a cynic performing the moves of a romantic'.⁹⁰ Joe navigates the human, or 'orga' in the film's parlance, world with skill largely because he is aware that he is a mecha designed to fulfil a human want and is both artificial and an instrument to them: a walking, talking, fully licensed sex machine. His behaviour, however, is dictated by whether he is around orga or mecha. Around humans he

⁸⁸ Callus and Herbrechter, 'What is a Posthumanist Reading?', p. 98.

⁸⁹ The first is a mecha which sits in on the meeting where Hobby opines on the creation of David and is used as an example of the current state of robotics. The second is, of course, the robot child David.

⁹⁰ Sobchack, 'Love Machines', p. 3.

highlights his artificiality by playing the role he has been assigned and in this way he knows that he has to be 'unreal' for the humans. On this stage, regardless of how he experiences his embodiment, his body is expressed by what humans want him to be: a kind of perverse Golem. However, just as David must go on the run after being abandoned by his 'mommy', Joe is accused of murdering one of his clients and must also go on the run, eventually meeting David as they are hunted and brought to the 'Flesh Fair'.

Both David and Joe find themselves in a forest where rubbish is dumped and older, broken and decaying mecha scavenge for parts. These old, broken, decaying mecha scour the rubbish in order to repair themselves and we see that Teddy's posthuman moment is not his alone, but rather appears to be part of a self-preservation programming in each mecha. Having been discarded, their bodies are no longer instruments; rather, they are simply waste. The usefulness of their bodies is no longer applicable as there is no user. Some continue to nostalgically fulfil their function, as when a nanny mecha soothes David as they come to be hunted down by members of the 'Flesh Fair' who seek to capture mecha in order to destroy them in front of an audience for fun and profit. Captured by these hunters and appearing to fear for his life David clasps onto those around him to protect him, searching in many ways for someone to act as 'mommy' as Monica once had. While David continues to bemoan his status and yearns to be real, in this particular sequence the way the mecha behave with one another and the way the humans despise them is quite telling.

These mecha, like Frankenstein's Monster, are assaulted for being monstrous abominations which are an affront and threat to 'human dignity'. Technological embodiment is quite clearly expressed by their artificial bodies, yet they are certainly not the 'perfect simulacrum' which Hobby remarked on at the beginning. Many are early generation models which bear little resemblance to humans or have decayed to such a degree to demonstrate their 'unrealness' and 'artificiality' to their human interlocutors. At the 'Flesh Fair' they are destroyed in front of a large and uproarious audience by a

variety of means from severing limbs, being shot out of a cannon, or having molten liquid poured onto them. Yet the mecha demonstrate a series of relations to each other which is removed from a humanist *telos*. Their artificiality is almost unrecognisable to one another and their technological embodiment is experienced and expressed by different bodies, of which only partial glimpses are offered. One mecha, who knows that it is about to be destroyed, asks another to ‘kindly turn off my pain sensors’ which the other obliges; another begs to be saved by appealing to his instrumental status, crying ‘I still work don’t I’, as he is carried off to be executed. Throughout this scene David is held in the jail and remains cloaked in shadow until spotted by a young girl roughly the same age as him. The proprietors soon come to investigate and upon inspection determine that David is, in fact, a robot and that he should be summarily executed. Grasping for anyone to save him, David latches onto Joe and they are both pulled onto centre stage. As the proprietor, Johnson, launches into his preaching on the evils of artificiality, David begins to cry out that he is ‘a boy, I’m a real boy’.

Two major elements can be found in this sequence. The first, as described above, is the relation that the mecha have with each other where their status as artificial is a non-issue, or at least is not a negative, with them recognizing their shared technological embodiment despite the Frankensteinian monstrosity placed on them by the humans. The second is David’s oscillation from only yearning to be a ‘real bo[d]y’ to declaring that he is. As the first act closes with David developing a full-blown Pinocchio complex, his immediate reaction to the danger of the human crowd, however, is to downplay his artificiality. This is indicative of the confusion which can arise from technological embodiment being already expressed largely as either instrumentality or artificiality and is in explicit confrontation to how Joe accentuated his artificiality with a client. David’s appeal demonstrates that, although he has internalized the Pinocchian narrative and yearns to be ‘real’, he is confused as to what this means. That is, in order to be real he does not have to be human, misrecognizing that he is already real, just embodied differently. His status as artificial is unable to

fully account for his experience of technological embodiment, even if it is the way he experiences and expresses his embodiment. Yet artificiality, as a habitual and already expressed body, need not be read as purely negative within a posthumanist framework. For the other mecha in the jail at the 'Flesh Fair' it is a non-issue among them; it only becomes an issue when the humans decide that what is 'artificial' is unreal. When artificiality is completed by humanist *telos* and there is a 'sort of false recognition, which makes us feel that the word inhabited the thing for all eternity',⁹¹ the mecha will always and only be artificial, rather than viewing artificiality and instrumentality for that matter, as two inadequate already expressed bodies of a technological embodiment.

David's confusion is quite understandable given the disparate, and extreme, reactions he encounters. He appeals to the audience by downplaying his 'unrealness' point blank stating that 'I am a real boy' repeatedly, with a 'special and unique' status. His status as real is then picked up by the audience when one yells 'he's just a kid' and further to 'let him go', as a result of which a riot breaks out which allows David and Joe to escape. David's appeal here to be real is reinforced through the reactions with which his human interlocutors provide him: they move to recognize him as real even though it is demonstrated, at least to the proprietors of the 'Flesh Fair', that he is a new generation and leap forward in robotics. Downplaying his artificial status by yelling and screaming that he is a 'real boy', David seemingly becomes so real as to be indistinguishable from a biological human body enacting the perfect simulacrum that Hobby remarked at the beginning of the film. David's child status overrides his artificiality. As the riot continues David and Joe flee, grabbing Teddy, who has been searching for David since they were hunted in the forest, and Joe seemingly develops a life debt to David for inadvertently saving him.

The final part of this act occurs in Rouge City, where David attempts to search for the Blue Fairy whom he believes can make him real, by asking Dr. Know. As they enter the city Joe candidly

⁹¹ Merleau-Ponty, 'The Spectre of a Pure Language', *PW*, p. 6.

remarks of the other lover mecha that they are ‘Siren class robots who have no idea how to live’. This referencing to living is in continuity with Joe’s role as a lover mecha who has to make a living, although this is never fully explored in the narrative. He is a high-end lover mecha who ostensibly performs the same function as these Siren class robots, yet decries their lack of ability to live, providing an uncanny posthuman moment: the quality of life which these artificial beings have is a thing of mockery to another mecha. Despite the unity seen at the ‘Flesh Fair’ among the mecha, there appears to be a hierarchy, or at least an underlying complexity, which governs the lives of mecha. The mecha have a life without humans, although this is not fully explored in the narrative.

Despite David’s declarations at the ‘Flesh Fair’ that he is a ‘real bo[d]y’, he returns to being enveloped by the Pinocchian narrative as Joe guides him to Dr. Know, with David muttering about his special and unique status. They use the Dr. Know search engine and information provision service to learn the whereabouts of the Blue Fairy and how to become ‘real’. While David returns to the Pinocchio quest to be ‘real’ and return to his ‘mommy’, Joe provides a distinct counterpoint. Joe, in a sense, leaves the role he has been assigned as a lover mecha when he goes on the run, and instead of becoming drawn into David’s dream of becoming real, he attempts to explain to David that, in fact, he already is real. Joe does not call himself an artificial being; rather, he declares that mecha are an entirely different species altogether, opining that ‘Orga believe in what cannot be seen or measured. It’s that oddness that separates our species’. As David defends his status as ‘special’ and ‘unique’, Joe attempts to tell him that this sense of status is brought on by David’s ‘love’ for his mother, in which her reaction is no different than the way in which Joe’s clients ‘love’ his services. David and Joe's technological embodiment is completed by a humanist *telos* which circulates in their status as artificial instruments for the humans. They are only what they can provide to those that use them, with Joe telling David that ‘You were designed and built specific like the rest of us’. While David has internalized the narrative of Pinocchio and yearns to be ‘real’ for his ‘mommy’, Joe recognizes that David is already real just as he is. The unreality of artificiality and

instrumentality that David reads into his embodiment is inflected differently by Joe, who does not view these as a detriment. For Joe they are a badge of honour and a seductive trick which he accentuates around humans in order to distinguish himself from them. Paradoxically, however, Joe's appeal to rationality demonstrates that Joe is as equally caught within a humanist *telos* as David is. While David views his embodiment as unreal, Joe views his as *so* real as to be a different species, one more rational than humans.⁹² The crux of this sequence is that being fabricated, manufactured, or artificial does not have to be read in an unreal light; rather, it is precisely because their technological embodiment is different from biological embodiment, even if is not recognized as such, that, like a biological or organic embodiment, they are an expressive embodied being in the world as complex as the plurality of the expressive bodies of biological and organic embodiment. David, Joe, and Teddy's status read through artificiality or instrumentality are just two of the many textures of a technological embodiment. They just happen to have already been expressed similar to terms which have already expressed organic or biological embodiment such as human, animal, woman, man, cat, fly, water, leaf, and so on.

Despite David's yearning to be 'real', or perhaps as a result of this, the way David treats Teddy throughout this act is telling. While David objects to being viewed as a toy, he treats Teddy as such by paying very little attention to him when they are separated as 'robot David's imprinting is monomaniacal; his one love is Monica, his one need her undivided attention'.⁹³ At the end of this act, as David and Joe leave Dr. Know to go to the End of the World/Man-Hattan, Joe is chased by police for the murder which forced him on the run in the first place. David immediately jumps into action and climbs inside a police amphibicopter to help the fleeing Joe. As David treats his embodiment as unreal, and further continues to treat Teddy as a toy, it is quite poignant when Teddy

⁹² Joe provides a distinction between the emotionality of the humans and the rationality of the mecha wherein he continues the lengthy historical construction of how intelligent machines separate themselves from humans while at the same time maintain anthropomorphism. This sequence also echoes back, to a certain degree, to David's statement that he 'will be so real' for Monica.

⁹³ Morrissey, 'Growing Nowhere', p. 254.

subtly chastises David by reminding him that the amphibicopter 'is not a toy' which echoes the declaration by Martin that Teddy was an 'old' and 'stupid toy'.⁹⁴ Teddy, like Joe, provides an alternative way of reading technological embodiment. While David rejects technological embodiment, and Joe embraces technological embodiment to such an extent as to declare that mecha are another species, Teddy is somewhere in the middle.

Act 3 and Epilogue: End of the World/Man-Hattan

As the film moves into the final act, Joe, Teddy, and David fly to the End of the World or Man-Hattan, a flooded area beyond the boundaries of urban life with only the top levels of skyscrapers peaking above the sea. Here, David returns 'home' and is greeted by his double with David asking him if 'this [is] the place they make you real?' However, as he encounters this double he is unable to handle that he may not be 'special' or 'unique' and is in fact only the first of a soon to be manufactured line of robot children. This uncanny double enrages David and he destroys the functional double, screaming 'You can't have her, she's mine...I'm the only one...I'm special, I'm unique, I'm David' as he beats it to death. The uncanniness of the double frightens David so much because it destroys his dream of becoming a real bo(d)y by demonstrating his sheer artificiality: he is no longer 'unique' and 'special', but is manufactured and replicable. His Pinocchio dream reverts to a Frankensteinian nightmare as he sees himself once again disallowed entry into a human-centric world, an entry based on his monomaniacal desire for love from Monica. David's negative relation to his technological embodiment pinpoints this aggression. Had he been like Joe, who has no desire to be real as he knows that he is, he may have been able to circumvent the entire central narrative. David's entire world is thrown into relief as he is imprinted by both Monica *and* the Pinocchio narrative and his reading of his embodiment through artificiality continues in a negative fashion. He never experiences his embodiment any other way. For David this overrides the alternative ways of approaching technological embodiment that Joe and Teddy put forward. David quite literally

⁹⁴ In addition this scene could be read as Teddy enacting a parental relation to David having taken over the role from Monica following their abandonment.

views himself as disembodied because of his artificiality, encapsulated when he sees his double and subsequently beats him to death.

Following David's outburst Professor Hobby appears to explain the situation to David, declaring to him: 'but you are a real boy'. David has surpassed all that Hobby had hoped for. He is able to dream and desire which enables him to have self-motivated reasoning. Hobby only intervenes in his quest through Dr. Know in order for David to be returned to him as the prodigal son: the first of a mass-produced kind, modelled after Hobby's own son. David's oscillation, then, between declaring that he is a 'bo(d)y' and that he 'wants to be real' is undone even in the moment that Hobby declares to him that he is a 'real bo[d]y'. His 'special' and 'unique' status is undone when he sees his doubles and discovers that he is modelled after Hobby's own quest to replicate his biological son. David sees that he is mass-produced and declares 'My brain is falling out' as he is unable to process his status. He seemingly attempts to commit suicide in his despair by plunging into the depths below the building, whispering 'mommy' as he falls, his once promising dream of becoming human shattered.

Joe, having apparently disappeared following David's beating of his double and discussion with Hobby, reappears to save David just as David comes into contact with his Blue Fairy. Joe, having rescued David, returns the life debt from the 'Flesh Fair' and it is his reaction and startling departure that provides another posthuman moment. As we now know, Joe's artificial body is neither a hindrance nor a negative; rather, it is what separates him from the humans. He recognizes that he is fabricated, even utilizing it as part of his seduction technique, yet he never views himself as unreal. While David is locked into his dream of becoming 'real' by denying his embodiment, Joe recognizes embodiment as the ground of his being. As Joe is unexpectedly grasped and pulled away by another police amphibicopter he utters his final lines: 'I am. I was'. Vivian Sobchack reads Joe's final lines as a kind of pithy and pathetic tragic joke as a result of Joe's being a

‘hollowed-out boy toy [which has] serious and tragic consequences for the human who tyrannically and superficially shaped this formless block in their own idealised and superficial wish-fulfilling image’.⁹⁵ Yet Joe’s final lines attest to his recognition that he is real as he recognizes his impending death even as his body is already expressed as artificial and an instrument – Joe was trying to disclose this to David while in Rouge City, but David simply ignores him.

David ultimately, however, returns to the depths with Teddy. His Pinocchian dream is reasserted once again as he has found his Blue Fairy in the watery wreckage of a fairground. Taking the amphibicopter down into the depths to a statue of a blue fairy, David makes his wish to the fairy to ‘make me real’. A minor eruption occurs and a Ferris wheel collapses on top of the amphibicopter. David becomes locked, literally and figuratively, into his dream of becoming ‘real’ for Monica, into a stasis, echoing the position of Martin at the beginning of the film. Uttering his final wish he prays to a blue fairy forever. This would-be quasi-poetic ending, however, is capped with an epilogue that occurs 2000 years in the future. After humans have succumbed to extinction and the sea has turned to ice, David is thawed out and removed by his post-human descendants.

This epilogue, however, provides an intriguing move towards inverting the question of becoming ‘real’ which has run through the entire narrative. David is pulled from the ice and the statue of the blue fairy shatters, seemingly along with his dream. As humans have become extinct and advanced technological beings have taken over, they have engineered a way to make a biological being real for a limited amount of time: one day. As David’s quest has been primarily about becoming real for Monica, he is delighted to hear this, and Teddy assists by providing the lock of hair needed to engineer her. As Sobchack comments:

Reunited for a single perfect day with an illusory resurrection of his now-loving Mommy [...] David lives a *faux* fairy-tale *mise-en-scene*...[where] there was ‘just the two of them.’ Here it is only in fantasy – a robot-fantasy ironically programmed (and

⁹⁵ Sobchack, ‘Love Machines’, p. 6.

filmed) by adult human males – that David can momentarily (and falsely) realise his own programmed identity as a love child.⁹⁶

Yet the Pinocchian narrative inverts itself here as it is no longer David that has to become real; rather, it is his ‘mommy’, Monica. Monica is created from a lock of hair and made real through a process of genetic engineering. Her embodiment is now a technological embodiment as she is a manufactured being just as David is and his dream of becoming ‘real’ *for her* morphs into Monica becoming real *for him*. Idealized through David’s memory so that he may have his ‘happy day’ Monica is no more or less real than David was when he was hunted by members of the ‘Flesh Fair’, even as she is formed from his idealized memories: the Pinocchio narrative is reversed. Although David was unable to experience embodiment beyond a negative relation he finally moves away from this approach, albeit to one still coloured by his imprinted relation to his ‘mommy’ as his idealized memory is engineered by advanced robots. David spends his ‘happy day’ with Monica falling asleep never to wake, and David follows suit. Morrissey comments on the alternative meaning of the Pinocchio narrative found in *A.I.* that, like Pinocchio,

[David] travels through a dystopian world, hunted by villains and aided by friends. [Yet] unlike Pinocchio, his goal is to become the unreal boy his owners, a.k.a parents, want: a static, perfect mobile manikin. David is not only denied real boyhood and thus the potential for manhood, he is also transfixed by the tale of a mythic fairy with whose help he thinks he can become real.⁹⁷

However, it is not only David who becomes a ‘static, perfect mobile manikin’ when he is ultimately locked undersea by the Ferris wheel to pray to a blue fairy for eternity, but, with the epilogue, it is Monica. David's selfish monomaniacal desire to be loved by her turns her into just as much of a one-dimensional character as he is.

The overall narrative of *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* discloses a number of textures of artificiality as an already expressed body of technological embodiment. David oscillates between the Frankensteinian and the Pinocchian; Joe enacts a kind of perverse Golemic role which he ultimately

⁹⁶ Sobchack, ‘Love Machines’, p. 8.

⁹⁷ Morrissey, ‘Growing Nowhere’, p. 262.

couches in terms of his rational superiority over the humans; and Teddy is a discarded Golemic figure. The posthuman moments of the film are tempered by the ‘reaffirmation and reconfirmation of the human on a different plane’,⁹⁸ in that while Teddy has a posthuman moment when he repairs himself we ultimately see that other mecha share this specific kind of *programming*. Teddy is perhaps the most interesting and sympathetic figure in the narrative as, unlike David, he does not have the monomaniacal desire to be real. Teddy remains throughout the narrative largely forgotten and discarded, even by David, and is rendered simply as David's toy helpmate. Teddy is thereby in the service of whoever controls him serving as the figure who keeps Monica's lock of hair in order for David to have his one ‘happy day’. While David's quest is to become real for Monica, in his relation with Teddy we can see that he is already like her and the Swinton family. He treats Teddy as poorly as the Swintons’ treated him. Morrissey acknowledges that ‘*A.I.*'s conclusion appears to reinforce the Disney image of the all-important family but it does so at its own peril. David's family treat him about as badly as they can’,⁹⁹ in which the irony of his quest to become real ‘adhere[s] to the behavior’¹⁰⁰ by which he treats Teddy. David is already real in the sense that he has adopted the Swintons’ hostile and uncaring behavior and Hobby's selfishness, that is, while his body is expressed as artificial it nevertheless has a ‘behavior or style which [is] visible from the outside’.¹⁰¹ Regardless of David's belief that he is ‘unreal’ his behaviour and frustration regarding the limitations of being artificial demonstrate that he nevertheless has a style of being in the world. David was already completed by the humanist *telos* of the Swinton family in their negative approach to his artificiality, by which there is a direct correlation between his artificiality and his body, and the cycle of abuse repeats itself in his treatment of Teddy.

David's frustration is a result of a humanist *telos* and this colours the way he lives his body through its already expressed status as artificial. A closure is attempted to directly correlate artificiality with

⁹⁸ Callus and Herbrechter, ‘What is a Posthumanist Reading?’, p. 98.

⁹⁹ Morrissey, ‘Growing Nowhere’, p. 258.

¹⁰⁰ Merleau-Ponty, ‘The Film and the New Psychology’, *SNS*, p. 52.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

his body which he gets not only from the Pinocchio narrative but also from the Swintons' negative approach to him as 'artificial'. Joe and Teddy are similarly afflicted, yet they provide alternative ways to read artificiality: it is perhaps a positive way of describing their being in the world, which nevertheless is unable to fully encapsulate their lived bodies.

With artificiality and instrumentality there is an impossibility of a 'complete expression'¹⁰² and 'culture [...] never gives us absolutely transparent significations: the genesis of meaning is never *completed*'.¹⁰³ Both films' deployment of instrumentality and artificiality are much more complex and help us to 'see the bond between subject and world, between subject and others, rather than *explain it*'.¹⁰⁴ They help to describe the limitations of already expressed and habitual ways of being in the world which attempt to directly complete the reality of a lived body: there are always remainders and alternatives. Even within an often 'crypto-humanist genre'¹⁰⁵ like science fiction technological embodiment and its expressive bodies are much more complex and nuanced than a direct humanist *telos* can posit. The gamepod in *eXistenZ* does not speak, yet it screams. Teddy speaks but, as with the gamepod, recedes into the background. Just as when Hayles argues that when a theorist approaches corporeality one of the component elements has a tendency to move into the background, and when Merleau-Ponty deploys a mixture of gestalt psychology and a Husserlian inflected existential phenomenology in the *Phenomenology of Perception* I am interested in that which recedes into the background and which is a critical *element*: flesh.

For the Merleau-Ponty of *Phenomenology of Perception* there is the pre-reflective background of an embodied perceiver. For a posthumanist corporeal ontology there is both the background of embodiment and the expressive body: expressive textures which cross over one another as two sides of the same corporeal coin. Artificiality and instrumentality, as already expressed and habitual

¹⁰² Merleau-Ponty, 'ILVS', p. 43.

¹⁰³ Merleau-Ponty, 'ILVS', pp. 41-42. My emphasis.

¹⁰⁴ Merleau-Ponty, 'The Film and the New Psychology', *SNS*, p. 58. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁵ Callus and Herbrechter, 'What is a Posthumanist Reading?', p. 98.

textures of a body, describe two different, yet interrelated, expressions of technology embodiment that may not directly align with experience. By describing these textures we have moved one step further in disclosing the ‘corporeal relevance of every being’.¹⁰⁶

The next chapter develops Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of expression and indirect ontology of flesh. What has been termed textures of a body throughout this chapter is refined, through Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of expression, to corporeal styles of being in the world. Merleau-Ponty's ontology of flesh discloses and sustains these styles of being in the world and marks an intertwining and divergence between the flesh of a body and the flesh of the world.

¹⁰⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 118.

Chapter 3

The Flesh of Bodies: Style and Flesh

The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should speak of the old term 'element,' in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth and fire, that is, in the sense of a *general thing*, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an 'element' of Being.¹

- Merleau-Ponty, 'The Intertwining – The Chiasm', *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 139.

To recapitulate, I have situated embodiment as a kind of poise or readiness to experience the world and a body as the expression of that experience. I have also deployed Merleau-Ponty's elucidation of the paradox of expression which discloses a tension between what has already been expressed, various meanings and bodies that are already in the world which have no need to be recalled and are habitual, and the yet to be expressed, meanings and bodies which are in the process of expression but which have not yet emerged. Further I characterised expression through embodiments and bodies as the two sides of the same corporeal coin. Taken together they disclose textures of an expressive body in the world. However, we also saw a limiting factor through the humanist *telos* which attempts to *complete* bodies through the imposition of a direct correlation between the 'word' and the 'thing', wherein 'a sort of false recognition makes us feel that the word inhabited the thing for all eternity'.² In order to redress this direct correlation I invoked Merleau-Ponty's development of indirectness which details that 'the idea of a *complete* expression is nonsensical, and that all language is indirect or allusive'.³ But we also must keep in mind that, as Bernard Waldenfels highlights, for Merleau-Ponty expression ultimately 'is to be understood [...] in a broad sense, including also bodily expression, and even the expressive content of things'.⁴ This move initiated a description of the 'corporeal relevance of every being'.⁵

¹ Emphasis in original.

² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'The Spectre of a Pure Language', in *The Prose of The World*, trans. by John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 3-8 (p. 6).

³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence', in *Signs*, trans. by Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 39-83 (p. 43). Emphasis in original.

⁴ Bernard Waldenfels, 'The Paradox of Expression', trans. by Chris Nagel, in *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, ed. by Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 89-102 (pp. 91-92).

⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 118.

I also had to take into account the various ways in which familiar textures have been expressed. I framed this for posthumanism through what Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter have called ‘posthuman moments’ which ‘deliberately threaten the integrity of a given 'human essence'‘ yet are ultimately foreclosed or ‘more rarely, [allow] the posthuman to arrive as such’⁶ by turning to expressions of technological embodiment in *eXistenZ* and *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*.

Technological embodiment was characterised through two already expressed bodies, instrumentality and artificiality, and each film deployed them in different yet overlapping ways. In *eXistenZ* I analysed the central role of the gamepod in the narrative despite both critics and the characters in the film largely not recognizing its body. Further, I analysed the relation between Allegra Geller and the gamepod, extrapolating that even though Geller approaches the gamepod through an instrumental relation and expresses its body by its use, this simultaneously also expressed Geller's body as a using body. This revealed an intertwining and encroachment between bodies so that in order for a body to be useful it required a using body and vice versa. Through these two elements I detailed that instrumentality is largely the default way of discussing technological embodiment. In *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* we saw the shifting ways in which artificiality is read via the three main characters of the film: David, Joe, and Teddy. Each central character echoed approaches to artificiality through Frankensteinian, Pinocchian, or Golemic styles of narrative. First, David is a Frankensteinian-Pinocchian figure who oscillates between ‘wanting to be real’ and declaring that he is a ‘real boy’. Second, Joe is a sort of perverse Golemic character who was designed to sexually service humans yet never questions his status as artificial, in fact arguing that the artificial mecha in the universe of the film are a different species altogether more rational than humans. Finally, Teddy is also a kind of Golemic, yet ultimately tragic character who is largely forgotten, discarded, and ignored by David despite taking on a parental role following their abandonment. Joe and Teddy provide alternative ways to read artificiality as it was a non-issue for them. They emphasize that

⁶ Ivan Callus and Stefan Herbrechter, ‘What is a Posthumanist Reading?’, *Angelaki*, 13.1 (2008), 95-111 (p. 98).

there are shifting ways in which artificiality and instrumentality is lived by the characters. They cannot be locked down and completed by a humanist *telos*. Ultimately, perhaps David fully succumbs to a humanist *telos* by treating Teddy as poorly as the human Swinton family treated him and having his 'one happy day' in the post-human epilogue by reversing the Pinocchian narrative.

In the *Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty seeks to redress, refine, and revise aspects of his earlier work by explicitly developing an ontology. He writes in a working note there is a 'necessity of bringing [the results of *Phenomenology of Perception*] to ontological explication'.⁷ He sees an insoluble problem in *Phenomenology of Perception* as he writes in another working note that '[he] starts there from the 'consciousness'-object distinction'.⁸ This problem entailed that while Merleau-Ponty was putting forward an analysis of an embodied perceiver and its relation with the world he reinstated a cleft between the two, where a problem of two worlds arose between an 'outside' shared world and an 'inside' private world. Consequently, this turned the objects that one perceives into only objects *for* a consciousness, rather than objects intertwined *with* an embodied consciousness. He addresses this by arguing in 'Eye and Mind' that 'it is not a matter of things belonging simultaneously to the huge, real world and the small, private world. It is a thinking that deciphers strictly the signs given within the body'.⁹ They are of one sole flesh as he details in *The Visible and the Invisible*. While I will not be going into detail on this problem, the reason for highlighting it is that Merleau-Ponty himself recognizes some of the difficulties and shortcomings of the *Phenomenology of Perception*.¹⁰ Crucial for posthumanism is Merleau-Ponty's development and

⁷ Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated Feb 1959, *VI*, p. 183.

⁸ Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated July 1959, *VI*, p. 200.

⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind', trans. by Carleton Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. by James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 159-190 (p. 171).

¹⁰ For an excellent analysis of Merleau-Ponty's problems with philosophies of consciousness and his explicit development of an alternative ontology see Renaud Barbaras, 'The Turn to Experience: Merleau-Ponty and Bergson' trans. by Robert Vallier, in *Merleau-Ponty and the Possibilities of Philosophy: Transforming the Tradition*, ed. by Bernard Flynn, Wayne J. Froman, and Robert Vallier (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), pp. 33-60. Also see: Renaud Barbaras, 'Perception and Movement: The End of the Metaphysical Approach', in *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, ed. by Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 77-87; Renaud Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon: Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, trans. by Leonard Lawlor and

elucidation of style and flesh in his later works and his indirect ontology. This is not a ‘collective self-styling’¹¹ as Braidotti would have it, but something which directs posthumanism into being able to elucidate that ‘meanings move without the human [and that] culture does not begin and end with “us”’¹² in a way which pays particularly close attention to the nuanced and often subtle ways that styles of being in the world are disclosed by the intertwining and divergence of expressive bodies, sustained by flesh as an ‘expressive multiplicity [and] a matrix of expression’.¹³ Style is largely developed in his works on aesthetics, primarily ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’, ‘Cézanne’s Doubt’, and ‘Eye and Mind’, and flesh is largely developed in *The Visible and the Invisible*.

In ‘Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style’ Linda Singer details two ways in which Merleau-Ponty develops style: first as an aesthetic category and second as an ontological category. Style as an aesthetic category is normally associated with being a tool for the categorization and evaluation of works in which ‘as a categorical tool, style is that in terms of which such questions as attribution, periodization, and authenticity may be resolved’ wherein ‘style is used to catalog works into genres or schools, and to determine the work’s historical origins’.¹⁴ However, it is also used as an ‘evaluative concept [as] a distinguishing mark of quality, that which separates the extraordinary work from the pedestrian [...] .an object of discernment’.¹⁵ Yet Merleau-Ponty’s deployment of style as an aesthetic category is much more complex than this standard usage and is subdivided into the affective and generative phases. The affective phase is when the work of art goes out into the world, as it were, and there is a danger of concerning oneself with the minutiae of detail at the

Ted Toadvine (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004).

¹¹ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 101.

¹² Neil Badmington, ‘Cultural Studies and the Posthumanities’, in *New Cultural Studies: Adventures in Theory*, ed. by Gary Hall and Clare Birchall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 260-72 (p. 270).

¹³ Véronique M. Fóti, *Tracing Expression in Merleau-Ponty: Aesthetics, Philosophy of Biology, and Ontology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013), p. 117.

¹⁴ Linda Singer, ‘Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style’, in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painter*, ed. by Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), pp. 233- 244 (pp. 233-234).

¹⁵ Ibid.

expense of the general motif. Singer comments that Merleau-Ponty ‘cautions against the temptation to dissolve a style into a series of effects’¹⁶ which would mistake the means of painting, such as the brushwork, for the ends. The generative phase ‘is concerned with describing the processes by which style emerges for the painter, and in capturing the divergence between his standpoint and that of his audience’ and there has been a temptation to ‘[psychologize] or [romanticize]’¹⁷ the painter through a ‘cult of genius’.¹⁸ Rather, Merleau-Ponty argues that ‘style germinates at the surface of the artist's experience, and when an operant and latent meaning finds the emblems which are going to disengage it and make it manageable for the artist and at the same time accessible to others’.¹⁹ Therefore, style as an aesthetic is also a way to become familiar and recognizable. Yet style also has ontological implications. Through style as an aesthetic category Merleau-Ponty develops style as an ontological category, which, as Singer comments:

refers to a generalized structure of being-in-the-world, a fundamental component of all phases of existence. Merleau-Ponty uses style as a way of characterizing that persistent and characteristic manner of appearance that we recognize in things and other people, without having to constitute it completely.²⁰

Merleau-Ponty takes the quintessential example of style as an aesthetic category of the painter and enlarges it in ontological scope. For a posthumanist corporeal ontology I deploy style as a refinement of what I have previously elucidated as texture, which is a way of disclosing the intertwining of the experience that a body has and the expression that a body is. Merleau-Ponty turns to painting to discuss style precisely because, as he sees it, painters live *with* things rather than manipulate them.²¹ To that extent, while Merleau-Ponty does privilege the painter, to a certain degree, his discussion of style in aesthetics points towards posthumanism through discussions of co-implication, co-existence, and living in the world with others, where the world is a ‘universal

¹⁶ Singer, ‘Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style’, p. 235.

¹⁷ Singer, ‘Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style’, p. 236.

¹⁸ Singer, ‘Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style’, p. 235.

¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, ‘ILVS’, p. 53.

²⁰ Singer, ‘Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style’, p. 234.

²¹ Merleau-Ponty, ‘EM’, pp. 159-162.

style'²² which 'teaches...a general way of expressing being'.²³ Style is then expanded ontologically as Merleau-Ponty elucidates an ontology of flesh in *The Visible and the Invisible*.

He asserts in *The Visible and the Invisible* that

The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should speak of the old term 'element,' in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth and fire, that is, in the sense of a general thing, midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an 'element' of Being.²⁴

Flesh is a kind of expressive connective element between bodies and the world, a reversibility (*chiasm*) and a divergence (*écart*) that signals their encroachment but also maintains difference and a distance. Nevertheless, Merleau-Ponty argues that flesh can be thought on its own. Crucial for posthumanism is that flesh brings a 'style of being wherever there is a fragment of being'.²⁵ For a posthumanist corporeal ontology flesh is a way of sustaining the corporeal relevance of every being. While it may seem counter-intuitive to discuss the expressive bodies of a debit card or a cube, as in Chapter 1, or a manufactured gamepod and artificial bodies, as in Chapter 2, I discussed how these bodies point towards alternative forms of embodiment and have particular ways of being in the world. They interact in the world in different embodied ways than an organic or biological embodiment, yet because of their supposed status as objects, things, or their instrumentality and artificiality their corporeality has been downplayed in favour of only one privileged relation and arbiter of meaning: the human. With flesh, however, we are able to disclose that not only is there a corporeality to them, but they have particular styles of being in the world which can only be grasped indirectly and are unable to be subsumed within a humanist *telos*.

Posthumanism will find with style and flesh a more refined way of situating and describing beings

²² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'The Primacy of Perception and its Philosophical Consequences', trans. by James M. Edie, in *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology and the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. by James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 12-42 (p. 16).

²³ Merleau-Ponty, 'ILVS', p. 56.

²⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 139.

²⁵ I explain this statement in detail in the next section.

in the world so that, following Cary Wolfe,

Far from surpassing or rejecting the human – [posthumanism] actually enables us to describe the human and its characteristic modes of communication, interaction, meaning, social significations, and affective investments with *greater* specificity, once we have removed meaning from the ontologically closed domain of consciousness, reflection and so on.²⁶

That is, we can describe not only human styles of being in the world with greater specificity but also other corporeal styles of being in the world. Style furnishes a way to read characteristic ways of beings in the world, which, however, evade *complete* definition, with flesh sustaining and intertwining them.

Experience, Expression, and Style

As Merleau-Ponty shifts to explicitly developing an ontology in his later works the themes and descriptions presented in *Phenomenology of Perception* take on a second life as they are refined and revised. His development of a philosophy of expression coalesces through a discussion of style primarily in his work on aesthetics. In Merleau-Ponty's work on aesthetics he focuses on painting in order to deploy style in the first instance as an aesthetic category and, more crucially, as an ontological category. Focusing on the expressive body of the painter Merleau-Ponty finds an emblematic way to describe style more ontologically as it details the passage from experience to expression. An expressive body 'is a field of experience where there is only sketched out the family of material things and other families and the world as their common style'.²⁷ Style is developed as an aesthetic category through the affective and the generative phases as the painter's expressive body brings the two together in the act of painting. The painter's style is recognized through their expressive gestures and the audience is then able to *see* a particular style that a painter has. In this respect the style of a painter is an intertwining of their embodied experience and the expression of that experience through the act of painting which, however, is not a '[technique of] projection of the

²⁶ Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. xxv. Emphasis in original.

²⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 111.

existing world which respects it in all aspects and deserves to become the fundamental law'.²⁸ The painter's development of a style has a certain respect for the allusive way that the world denotes a 'general way of expressing being'.²⁹ There is a temptation here to align style to the notion of self-expression and more broadly to the liberal humanist subject that Hayles rightly critiques; style as an aesthetic category could be seen as a 'chronicle of the human effort to preserve and capture the meaning of the visible world as it unfolds'.³⁰ While this is an aspect of Merleau-Ponty's development of style in relation to the painter, for a posthumanist corporeal ontology I take style to be much more expansive in scope where we must recall that style, as a refining of his philosophy of expression, 'is to be understood [...] in a broad sense, including also bodily expressions, and even the expressive content of things'.³¹ Expression does not take place solely in language, but there is a bodily expressivity, which, for posthumanism, is not found only in organic or biological embodiments, but in alternative forms such as technological and virtual embodiment. Even what are simply seen as objects or things have a bodily expressivity through their 'expressive content'.

Style as an aesthetic category, Singer notes, is 'a range of practices and sensibilities, but these are not necessarily fixed. They can also be transferred, put to uses other than those for which they were originally intended, and thus can open new possibilities'.³² Singer is commenting here on how Merleau-Ponty describes the transference of a style between a master painter and an apprentice, who may adopt that style and simply be a creature of their master, or transfer it to other uses and move in divergent directions if the apprentice chooses to transform that style. With this in mind the expressive style of the painter's body is emblematic of a more generalized notion of style: style as an ontological category. Style is expanded by Merleau-Ponty to other expressive bodies. In particular he generalizes it as a way of characterizing the human body via the intertwining of an

²⁸ Merleau-Ponty, 'EM', p. 174.

²⁹ Merleau-Ponty, 'ILVS', p. 56.

³⁰ Singer, 'Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style', p. 239.

³¹ Waldenfels, 'The Paradox of Expression', p. 91-92.

³² Singer, 'Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style', p. 239.

expressive body and the world which, however, is expanded so that ‘style constitutes the horizons of significance which reveal the Other as an alternative orientation toward existence, a presence to the world analogous with and divergent from my own’.³³ Other styles of being in the world are demonstrative of alternative ways of navigating the world and existing within it. For instance, in the styles of being in the world which are not organic or biologically embodied, but technologically or virtually embodied. They share the same world and intertwine with other bodies, yet maintain their difference so that there is no direct correlation and coinciding of their body with my own. Style, therefore, becomes recognizable in other beings and ‘is a way of characterizing that persistent and characteristic manner of appearance that we recognize in things and other people, without having to constitute it *completely*’.³⁴ This incompleteness is due to the fact that ‘every being presents itself at a distance’³⁵ which means ‘that to comprehend is to apprehend by coexistence, laterally, *by the style* and thereby to attain at once the far-off reaches of this style’.³⁶ For a posthumanist corporeal ontology this means that style is not only an intertwining of the experience that a body has and the expression that a body is, but that style details an encroachment between expressive bodies while maintaining differences. Different styles of being in the world are comprehended through co-existence, not through abstract representation which would survey other beings from above: they are of and in the same world – they are concrete, lived. A humanist *telos* attempts to complete other beings by positing a surveilling presence through the human and seeks a direct correlation and coincidence. Yet because others are apprehended ‘by coexistence, laterally, *by the style*’,³⁷ this attempt ends in failure as other beings must be approached indirectly as there is the ‘impossibility of a *complete* expression’ in which the language used to describe another's style of being in the world ‘is indirect or allusive’.³⁸ A process described in Chapter 2 through the analysis of instrumentality and artificiality and showed that these terms describe textures of a body, or what I

³³ Singer, ‘Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style’, p. 242.

³⁴ Singer, ‘Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style’, p. 234.

³⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 127

³⁶ Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated May 1959, *VI*, p. 188.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Merleau-Ponty, ‘ILVS’, p. 43.

now call styles of being in the world. There is nevertheless a multiplicity of ways of approaching styles of being in the world when they are lived by a body described as such. By necessity they must be indirect and unable to be *completed*. Merleau-Ponty highlights in a working note that ‘*one cannot make a direct ontology*’.³⁹ Style evades *complete* definition because

every being presents itself at a distance, which does not prevent us from knowing it, which is on the contrary the guarantee for knowing it: this is what is not considered. That the presence of the world is precisely the presence of its flesh to my flesh, that I ‘am of the world’ and that I am not it, this is what is no sooner said than forgotten: metaphysics remains coincidence.⁴⁰

A posthumanist corporeal ontology's task is to disclose these styles of being in the world, as they are apprehended laterally and indirectly, and that alternative forms of embodiment disclose unconsidered or ignored corporeal styles.

In the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty elucidates the paradox of expression which displays a tension between what is already expressed and what is in the process of being expressed. Crucially he develops the notion of creative expression as a quintessential way of describing the process of expression by which new expressions emerge. In ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’ Merleau-Ponty refines creative expression arguing that

Since perception itself is never complete, since our perspectives give us a world to express and think about which envelops and exceeds those perspectives, a world which announces itself in lightning signs as a spoken word or as an arabesque, why should the expression of the world be subjected to the prose of the senses or of the concept? It must be poetry; that is, it must completely awaken and recall our sheer power of expressing beyond things already said and seen.⁴¹

Expression, therefore, as highlighted by its paradox, and redeployed above, is a process which is able to furnish new ways of disclosing the world ‘beyond things already said and seen’ as the world ‘exceeds’ previously provided ‘perspectives’, or expressions which have become habitual because they are already expressed. Merleau-Ponty looks to the creative domains, particularly painting, as

³⁹Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated Feb 1959, ‘*One cannot make a direct ontology*. My ‘indirect’ method (being of the beings) is alone conformed with being’, *VI*, p. 179. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁰Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 127.

⁴¹Merleau-Ponty, ‘ILVS’, p. 52.

essentially *the* site where new expressions emerge from the mute world. The mute or silent world is, for Merleau-Ponty, the world of things not-yet said, yet to be expressed, and where expressions are not solely linked to linguistic expression, but are more gestural in orientation. The creative domains ‘awaken and recall our sheer power of expressing beyond things already said and seen’ through a ‘*primordial expression*’.⁴² As he shifts his language and focus to style we find that the painter becomes emblematic in the development of new expressions found in their style as an aesthetic. The language of the process of expression shifts to the generative and affective phases in the development of the painter's style. As Singer comments, in this instance style ‘constitutes a highly articulated instance of the phenomenal self-presentation of meaning – an achievement, an emergence, a hard-won expression’.⁴³ What this means is that the painter struggles, in a sense, to intentionally develop a style which will be a new or ‘hard-won’ expression through their particular experience of the world. This, however, does not mean ‘that the representation of the world is only a *stylistic means* for the painter, as if style could be known and sought after outside all contact with the world, as if it were an *end*’.⁴⁴ This would confuse means for ends and overlook the general motif that the painter is painting, whereas ‘for the painter, the development of a style constitutes the actualization of the possibility of expression’.⁴⁵

The development of a painter's style, as briefly discussed above, emerges through two phases: the generative and the affective. In the generative phase the painter explicitly tries to develop his or her own style wherein ‘the painter can paint while he is looking at the world because it seems to him that he finds in appearances themselves the style which will define him in the eyes of others, and

⁴² Merleau-Ponty, ‘ILVS’, p. 67. Emphasis in original. The full quotation is as follows: ‘all perception, all action which presupposes it, and in short every human use of the body is already *primordial expression*. Not the derivative labor which substitutes for what is expressed signs which are given elsewhere with their meaning and rule of usage, but the primary operation which first constitutes signs as signs, makes that which is expressed dwell in them through the eloquence of their arrangement and configuration alone, implants a meaning in that which did not have one, and thus – far from exhausting itself in the instant at which it occurs – inaugurates an order and founds an institution or a tradition’.

⁴³ Singer, ‘Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style’, p. 235.

⁴⁴ Merleau-Ponty, ‘ILVS’, p. 54. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁵ Singer, ‘Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style’, p. 236.

because he thinks he is spelling out nature at the moment he is recreating it'.⁴⁶ There is thus a kind of reciprocity in the generative phase where the style that a painter is developing is an exchange, or system of equivalences, between expressive bodies and the world, one that at the same moment that the painter attempts to 'capture' nature it eludes his or her grasp. Therefore, style 'is an interpretation, an optional way of depicting the world'⁴⁷ which is more readily surmised in the affective phase when a spectator views the work and is able to recognize a particular style.

Merleau-Ponty insists that '[the painter] is no more capable of seeing his paintings than the writer capable of reading his work. It is in others that expression takes on its relief and really becomes signification'.⁴⁸ One does not see their own gait as they walk down the street, nor does a fly notice that they do 'fly things', and perhaps we could say that a human does not notice that they do 'human things': these styles only become recognizable through others in the way their expressive bodies intertwine with yet diverge from one another.

The linkage between the generative and affective phases of style as an aesthetic category is that 'style appears as an expressive gesture'.⁴⁹ Merleau-Ponty notes that

like the functioning of the body, that of words or paintings remains obscure to me. The words, lines, and colors which express me come out of me as gestures. They are torn from me by what I want to say as my gestures are by what I want to do. In this sense, there is in all expression a spontaneity which will not tolerate any commands, not even those which I would like to give to myself.⁵⁰

The expressive body has a spontaneity to it that is unable to be *completed* and cannot be subjected to a kind of command which would seek to define it once and for all. The style of an expressive body is thereby a 'recognizable way of being-in-the-world that, despite being recognizable evades definition' which nevertheless 'we can get a sense or feel for without being able to conceptualize or

⁴⁶ Merleau-Ponty, 'ILVS', p. 56.

⁴⁷ Singer, 'Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style', p. 238.

⁴⁸ Merleau-Ponty, 'ILVS', p. 52.

⁴⁹ Singer, 'Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style', p. 238.

⁵⁰ Merleau-Ponty, 'ILVS', p. 75.

even become fully aware of'⁵¹ as a kind of pre-reflective bodily awareness. We must recall that for Merleau-Ponty this spontaneity in expression is a 'good ambiguity' which is formulated in distinction to the 'the study of perception [that] could only teach us a 'bad ambiguity,' a mixture of finitude and universality, of interiority and exteriority.'⁵² The painter's expressive body coalesces experience and expression of the world through a style which elucidates a spontaneity or 'good ambiguity' of expression. Merleau-Ponty explains:

Before the style becomes an object of predilection for others and an object of delectation for the artist himself (to the great detriment of his work), there must have been that fecund moment when the style germinates at the surface of the artist's experience, and when an operant and latent meaning finds the emblems which are going to disengage it and make it manageable for the artist and at the same time accessible to others.⁵³

Style is a way to express the experience of the painter's expressive body. For Merleau-Ponty style as an aesthetic category becomes emblematic of style as a general ontological category through the painter's struggle and his or her ability to see the world and transform, recreate, and interpret it in the work of art. Merleau-Ponty privileges the painter precisely because

from the writer and the philosopher, in contrast, we want opinions and advice. We will not allow them to hold the world suspended. We want them to take a stand; they cannot waive the responsibilities of men who speak [...] only the painter is entitled to look at everything without being obliged to appraise what he sees.⁵⁴

Merleau-Ponty's elucidation of style as an ontological category finds its emblem in the painter.

However, extrapolating from Merleau-Ponty's development of style, in the corporeal ontology I am disclosing we must briefly return to the body schema that Merleau-Ponty develops in

Phenomenology of Perception in order to flesh out, as it were, style. Merleau-Ponty describes the body schema as

an open system of an infinity of equivalent positions in different orientations. What we

⁵¹ Mark A. Wrathall, 'Existential Phenomenology', in *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, ed. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 31-47 (p. 37).

⁵² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *A Prospectus of his Work*', trans. by Arleen B. Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. by James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 3-11 (p. 11).

⁵³ Merleau-Ponty, 'ILVS', p. 53.

⁵⁴ Merleau-Ponty, 'EM', p. 161.

called the 'body schema' is precisely this system of equivalences, this immediately given invariant by which different motor tasks are instantly transferable.⁵⁵

The body schema is a way for the body to situate itself prior to a reflective movement. Merleau-Ponty also analyses a fireplace and indicates that 'like the body schema, the fireplace is a system of equivalences that are not grounded upon the recognition of some law, but upon the experience of a bodily presence. I engage myself with my body among things, they coexist with me insofar as I am an embodied subject.'⁵⁶ There is a bodily presence that the fireplace discloses when another body is present as the fireplace co-exists with another expressive body as a system of equivalences. As expression is expanded to aesthetics and Merleau-Ponty begins to write about style, he notes that 'for each painter, style is the system of equivalences that he makes for himself for the work which manifests the world he sees.'⁵⁷ Further, Singer comments that the 'body [schema] has the coherence of a style because, like the work of art, it is the expressive vehicle of a point of view.'⁵⁸ Finally Singer notes that

Before we have penetrated a philosopher's thought through a process of analysis, we sense its meaning, Merleau-Ponty says, by assimilating its style. The work of the philosopher reaches us in a way akin to the impact of the work of art. Both are systems of equivalences which establish a coherent orientation toward the world they articulate.⁵⁹

For instance, when first encountering the work of a philosopher or theorist one may struggle with terminology, writing style, phraseology and a myriad of other things, yet will glean meaning. As they become more adept through analysis the world that a philosopher or theorist is articulating is opened up and there is a coherence that may have appeared to be the obtuse ramblings of a madman or woman or the thought that a five-year old could paint what Pollock paints.

Therefore, style is deployed as a system of equivalences in at least four ways: body schema, bodily

⁵⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Donald A. Landes (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 142.

⁵⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *PHP*, p. 191.

⁵⁷ Merleau-Ponty, 'ILVS', p. 54.

⁵⁸ Singer, 'Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style', p. 242. Singer writes 'body image' in the original article, however as she was using the erroneous Colin Smith translation of *Phenomenology of Perception* I have taken this to mean that she meant body schema.

⁵⁹ Singer, 'Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style', p. 243.

presence, the work of art, and the work of the philosopher. Merleau-Ponty's initial privileging of the painter is expanded in scope as style is ontologically developed as a system of equivalences – a thread which is seen throughout Merleau-Ponty's work. The body schema of an embodied perceiver, the bodily presence of a thing, the work of art, and the work of the philosopher all have styles in the sense that they co-exist and intertwine with an expressive body, and, at least for Singer, are an 'expressive vehicle of a point of view.' Yet Merleau-Ponty details a fifth system of equivalences when he deploys the notion of 'empirical pregnancy' in a working note dated Sept 1959: '[empirical pregnancy] consists in defining each perceived being by a structure or a system of equivalencies about which it is disposed, and of which the painter's stroke – the flexuous line – or the sweep of the brush is the peremptory evocation'.⁶⁰ Style is this system of equivalences which articulates the world through, as we shall see below, the intertwining and divergence of flesh. Painters are emblematic for Merleau-Ponty because they disclose this procedure in the intentional act of painting, through the 'painter's stroke' and 'flexuous line' which moves towards an equivalency with the world. For instance, in a painting a tree is made of lines, but in the world that is being painted a tree has no lines.⁶¹ The way to transform style for a posthumanist corporeal ontology is that these systems of equivalences are deployed in all bodies, whether they are organic or biological, technological, virtual or otherwise. On the one hand a style of being in the world is the intertwining of an experience that a body has and the expression that a body is. On the other hand style is a general corporeal disposition of expressive bodies. Style refines what was previously called texture. A texture was situated as the circuit or system of equivalences between a form of embodiment and an expressive body. For Merleau-Ponty a 'texture [...] is [a] concretation [...] of a unique space which separates and reunites, which sustains every cohesion'⁶² which opens up new possibilities. These new possibilities, encapsulated by style, are disclosed as

⁶⁰ Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated Sept 1959, *VI*, pp. 207-208.

⁶¹ Cf. Merleau-Ponty's discussion of line, colour, vision, and movement in painting in 'EM', pp. 178-188; his discussion of red, tactility, and vision which opens 'The Intertwining – The Chiasm', *VI*, pp. 130-135. The discussion of the tactile and the visual remains prominent throughout the essay.

⁶² Merleau-Ponty, 'EM', 187.

The lived object is not rediscovered or constructed on the basis of the contributions of the senses; rather, it presents itself to us from the start as the center from which these contributions radiate. We see the depth, the smoothness, the softness, the hardness of objects [...] If the painter is to express the world the arrangement of his colors must carry with it this indivisible whole, or else his picture will only hint at things.⁶³

The ‘expressive content of things’, or other ‘bodily expressions’, radiate from them to disclose styles of being in the world. What this means for posthumanism is a way to feel that my body, as an expressive body, co-exists with the expressive bodies of others. Styles radiated by expressive bodies can only be grasped indirectly and are laterally recognized through ‘persistent and characteristic manner[s] of appearance’ which does not, however, ‘constitute it completely’.⁶⁴ Styles of being in the world have a depth or smoothness, softness, or hardness, among other things, through expressive bodies and corporeal styles of being the world so that ‘when I find again the actual world such as it is, under my hands, under my eyes, up against my body, I find much more than an object [...] there is overlapping or encroachment, so that we must say that the things pass into us as well as we into the things’.⁶⁵ A body that is used is also a body that uses; a body that sees is also a body capable of being seen; a body that touches can be touched; a body that feels is one which can be felt. ‘More than an object’ a style of being in the world is disclosed as expressive bodies encroach on one another in an intercorporeal dynamic, ‘a relationship with oneself and with the world as well as a relationship with the other.’⁶⁶ The painting is emblematic for Merleau-Ponty because ‘there will also be [in the painting] the emblem of a way of inhabiting the world, of handling it, and of interpreting it by a face as by clothing, by agility of gesture as by inertia of body – in short, the emblem of a certain relationship to being.’⁶⁷

I have aligned style on the one hand as the intertwining of the experience that a body has and the expression that a body is, and on the other that a style is a recognizable system of equivalences of

⁶³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘Cézanne's Doubt’, in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. by Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 9-25 (p. 15).

⁶⁴ Singer, ‘Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style’, p. 234.

⁶⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 123.

⁶⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 145.

⁶⁷ Merleau-Ponty, ‘ILVS’, p. 54.

expressive bodies that encroach upon and diverge from one another. Style, as a system of equivalences, is disclosed in order to demonstrate that ‘the world is in accordance with my perspective *in order to* be independent of me, is for me *in order to be* without me, and to be the world.’⁶⁸ This is the lesson that Merleau-Ponty details in relation to aesthetics as it is expanded ontologically. In a posthumanist corporeal ontology this is to disclose that things, objects, instrumentality, artificiality, information, code and virtuality⁶⁹ – corporeal styles of being in the world – are initially seen, touched, and felt in accordance with my body to be without, that is, to be their own bodies: reversible yet divergent from my body, as theirs to mine. Not a direct correlation or coinciding, but an indirect lateral recognition of other styles of being in the world.

To expand this ontologically I begin again by approaching Merleau-Ponty's deployment of the artist's body as emblematic of style as an ontological category. Merleau-Ponty writes in ‘Eye and Mind’⁷⁰ that:

It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings. To understand these transubstantiations we must go back to the working, actual body—not the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement.⁷¹

The painter in the act of painting gains his or her style from the world, but he or she is only able to do this because of their expressive and experiencing body. Merleau-Ponty aligns this to the ‘working, actual body’ or, to simplify, the doing body which takes up the world through the expressive – and intentional – *act* of painting. The painter's ability to do this is secured via the refinement of the embodied perceiver, with its body schema and motor-intentionality, among other things, developed in the *Phenomenology of Perception* to an embodied perceiver that is an ‘intertwining of vision and movement.’ Merleau-Ponty is here detailing that experience can only be

⁶⁸ Merleau-Ponty, ‘EM’, p.187

⁶⁹ Information, code, and virtuality are discussed in the next chapter.

⁷⁰ We should note that ‘Eye and Mind’ was written around the same time that Merleau-Ponty was working on *The Visible and the Invisible* (late 1950s -early 1960s) and thus there is a large thematic overlap between the two. ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’ (early 1950s) and ‘Cézanne's Doubt’ (late 1940s) were written much earlier.

⁷¹ Merleau-Ponty, ‘EM’, p. 162.

a perceptual experience: ‘everything I see is in principle within my reach, at least within reach of my sight, and is marked upon the map of the “I can”’⁷² and that ‘the eye is an instrument that moves itself, a means which invents its own ends; it is *that which* has been moved by some impact of the world, which it then restores to the visible through the offices of an agile hand’.⁷³ Recall that Merleau-Ponty situates the visible as ‘a quality pregnant with a texture, the surface of a depth, a cross section upon a massive being’.⁷⁴ That is, the visible is not necessarily vision or sight *as such*, but what discloses the vision of an expressive body which has eyes to see.⁷⁵ For Merleau-Ponty the painter's eye is moved by the world and, through the act of painting, he or she returns to the world what he or she sees through the movement of the hand: there is reciprocity between the expressive body of the painter and the world, wherein it ‘gives everything it receives; the body is lost outside the world’⁷⁶ – style as a system of equivalences.

This approach can be clarified through Merleau-Ponty's discussion of Renoir's *The Bathers* in ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’ where he writes that

Because each fragment of the world – and in particular the sea, sometimes riddled with eddies and ripples and plumed with spray, sometimes massive and immobile in itself – contains all sorts of shapes of being and, by the way it has of joining the encounter with one's glance, evokes a series of possible variants and teaches, over and beyond itself, a general way of expressing being.⁷⁷

For Merleau-Ponty the world that Renoir paints in *The Bathers* is one ‘possible variant.’ The World denotes ‘a general a way of expressing being’ and is expressed by Renoir when he returns to the world what he sees by painting it. The reciprocity and intertwining of an expressive body and the world or of expressive bodies is taken up by vision which, for Merleau-Ponty, ‘alone makes us learn that beings that are different, “exterior,” foreign to one another, are yet absolute *together*, are

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Merleau-Ponty, ‘EM’, p. 165.

⁷⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 136.

⁷⁵ For a critique of Merleau-Ponty's semi privileging of sight (he places more emphasis on touch and, in fact, models vision on touch) see Edith Wyschgrod, ‘Blind Man Seeing: From Chiasm to Hyperreality’, in *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, ed. by Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 165-176.

⁷⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 144.

⁷⁷ Merleau-Ponty, ‘ILVS’, p. 56.

“simultaneity”⁷⁸.

Yet even as the painter attempts to formulate a style through the act of painting, ‘what is given to him with his style is not a manner, a certain number of procedures or ties he can inventory, but a mode of formulation that is just as recognizable for others and just as little visible to him as his silhouette or his everyday gestures’.⁷⁹ Therefore even though a style for a painter may be a ‘hard-won expression’ when a painting is finished, the ‘actual, working body’ of the painter has its own style which is largely recognizable only by others. What we can extrapolate from this is that although the painter style's is emblematic of style as a general ontological category, a painter's style is not only found in the final, or, as it were, completed painting but the painter's expressive body itself. The expressive body has a characteristic manner of appearance in its expressive gestures which are, in a sense, invisible to the expressive body and largely only recognizable through others. What this furnishes is a preliminary way to situate the intercorporeality of style where, for the painter, what the eye takes it gives back with the hand through a system of equivalences. The expressive body of the painter becomes emblematic of style as a general ontological category because not only does style denote this system of equivalences between an expressive body and the world, but style is recognizable largely only through others. As Merleau-Ponty writes, ‘*associated bodies* must be brought forward along with my body – the ‘others,’ not merely as my cogeners [...] but the others who haunt me and whom I haunt’⁸⁰: an intertwining of expressive bodies. A posthumanist corporeal ontology expands the range of expressive bodies by acknowledging other corporeal styles of being in the world. There are different embodiments and different expressive bodies felt through their styles of being in the world. Other beings have a recognizable corporeal style of being in the world even if it evades *complete* definition by another expressive body or by the way that that style of being in the world has already been expressed. This admits that ‘the Other

⁷⁸ Merleau-Ponty, ‘EM’, p. 187.

⁷⁹ Merleau-Ponty, ‘ILVS’, p. 53.

⁸⁰ Merleau-Ponty, ‘EM’, p. 161.

exists, not behind the flow of his activities and gestures, but through them'.⁸¹

Therefore, style furnishes an epistemic effect when two expressive bodies encounter each other. Recall in *eXistenZ* when I remarked that Geller's body was simultaneously expressed as a using body when she engaged the gamepod as a useful body. The body of the gamepod was grasped laterally, by its style, as a useful body when another body recognized that style, and, as style is a system of equivalences, the gamepod's body expressed Geller's body as a using body. Despite Geller invoking an instrumental relation with the gamepod, the meaning of the gamepod was grasped indirectly through its style which would not admit the completion of a humanist *telos*. The instrumental relation was simply a habitual and already expressed way of approaching the gamepod. Expressive bodies, in a sense, carry the weight of the already expressed and thus it impinges on an expressive body's ability to experience. As seen in the analysis of *eXistenZ* and *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* in Chapter 2 the already expressed does not directly coincide with experience and therefore causes confusion, trepidation, reductions, and the enforcement and patrolling of bodily boundaries. I agree with Merleau-Ponty that there is an indirectness because of the inability of the already expressed to *complete* expressive bodies. However, I disagree with him because the already expressed nevertheless impacts expressive bodies. Even as they disclose corporeal styles of being in the world through technological embodiments and its expressive bodies, instrumentality and artificiality would not have caused such confusion if they did not have their lengthy histories and contexts.

What Merleau-Ponty's deployment of style does is provide the ability to describe styles of being in the world with 'greater specificity' as he has 'removed meaning from the ontologically closed domain of consciousness [and] reflection'.⁸² In a posthumanist corporeal ontology style is a corporeal disposition of all beings. The experience that a body has and the expression that a body is

⁸¹ Singer, 'Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style', p. 242.

⁸² Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*, p. xxv. Emphasis in original.

are intertwined as two sides of the same corporeal coin. These expressive bodies intertwine with other expressive bodies disclosing that because style is intercorporeal it is recognizable as a style of being in the world. The intertwining and divergence of style, as a system of equivalences, is sustained by flesh.

Flesh, Style, and Corporeality

Merleau-Ponty's elucidation of flesh (*chair*) is perhaps the most enigmatic, elusive, and ambitious aspect of his philosophical legacy because with the term he was trying to designate something which has 'no name in traditional philosophy to designate it'.⁸³ There is no robust terminological history which could be recalled through the term and thus allow it to be situated in the same way that style has a history as an aesthetic term. In a sense Merleau-Ponty achieves with flesh the creative expression that he views as emblematic of the painter: a new expression.

Françoise Dastur makes it clear that '[no] stable referent [can] be assigned to the flesh [...] there is no 'concept' of the flesh'.⁸⁴ There are, however, terms which radiate around flesh and situate it: *chiasm* and *écart*. Merleau-Ponty enlarges style to a general ontological category for the painter's, and eventually the human, expressive body as the expressive body of a painter is demonstrative of an intertwining of vision and movement. Further the expressive body encounters other bodies as they encroach on and diverge from one another. What an expressive body which has eyes to see takes from the world it gives back, if it has hands to give, with the hand. An expressive body which sees can also be seen, which touches can also be touched, and which feels can also be felt.

While flesh, as Merleau-Ponty deploys it, may not have a history *chiasm* does. As Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor explain 'Merleau-Ponty uses the French word 'chiasme' for the Greek 'khiasmos,'

⁸³ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 139.

⁸⁴ Françoise Dastur, 'World, Flesh, Vision', trans. by Ted Toadvine, in *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, ed. by Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany: State University of New York Press. 2000), pp. 23-49 (p. 34).

which means a crosswise arrangement' and 'there are two meanings for 'khiasmos' in both French and English'⁸⁵ of which one is rhetorical and one is anatomical. The anatomical meaning is written as 'chiasma' in both French and English and means 'the criss-crossing of the optic nerves in the brain'.⁸⁶ The rhetorical meaning, one that the French 'chiasme' and the English 'chiasmus' designate, is found in a phrase like 'to stop too fearful, and too faint to go,' where the second phrase inverts the grammatical order of the first'.⁸⁷ Further, they comment that both 'chiasme' and 'chiasma' connect to the Greek verb 'chiazein', which means to mark with a *chi* (X), as in the sign of the cross'.⁸⁸ The reason I have elucidated this very brief definitional history is that the English rendering of 'chiasme' as *chiasm* recalls two meanings. Rhetorical and anatomical meanings are already expressed ways of situating the reversibility denoted by *chiasm* and it has a history. *Chiasm* may be a technical term, but it is one that has been around for some time. Following Evans and Lawlor I will continue to use the common English translation of 'chiasme' as *chiasm*, with a note that the rhetorical meaning of the term is implied in this.

However, while the relation of *chiasm* to 'chiasme', 'chiasma', and 'chiasmus' is a technical clarification I want to recall here the discussion of style in the previous section. Evans and Lawlor comment: 'the convention among [Merleau-Ponty's] English commentators has been to assume, evidently, that Merleau-Ponty intended the anatomical rather than the rhetorical meaning'.⁸⁹ It is quite clear that there is an implicit dissatisfaction with the status quo, as the term 'evidently' shows. The confusion around the English rendering 'chiasm' can be read as a result of the weight of the already expressed. 'Khiasmos' is deployed in both rhetorical and anatomical terms as two co-existing, or 'co-functioning',⁹⁰ definitions. While this could be read as simply a technical squabble,

⁸⁵ Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor, 'Introduction – The Value of Flesh: Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy and the Modernism/Postmodernism Debate', in *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, ed. by Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 1-20 (pp. 17-18f).

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated Nov 1 1959, *VI*, p. 215.

I want to take this relatively minor footnote and detail how it is emblematic of the reversibility that *chiasm* denotes.

The confusion arises as the meaning of 'khiasmos' has been taken in two directions which nevertheless encroach upon one another. The meaning of 'khiasmos' as 'a crosswise arrangement' has maintained a consistent manner of appearance which has been translated into the two languages detailed (I assume that it has also been translated into others) and has at least two meanings: the anatomical and the rhetorical. Both definitions take the crosswise arrangement that 'khiasmos' denotes and fit it to a particular context. The rhetorical inversion as a grammatical folding back, and the anatomical as a description of the particular arrangement of the optic nerves which criss-cross or fold over one-another: the two definitions, in a sense, criss-cross with each other as they denote within two differing contexts a similar thing. That is, *chiasm* as reversibility describes that what the term 'chiasme' takes from 'khiasmos' it gives back as a rhetorical definition and what 'chiasma', or 'chiasm', takes from 'khiasmos' it gives back as an anatomical definition. The two meanings have a sameness but are different. They encroach upon one another but are divergent. Each definition has a certain (anatomical or rhetorical) style of being in the world.

Merleau-Ponty writes in a working note dated Nov 1960 that 'the idea of *chiasm*, that is: every relation with being is *simultaneously* a taking and a being taken, the hold is held, it is *inscribed* and inscribed in the same being it takes hold of'.⁹¹ The differing translations and definitions of 'khiasmos' cause a confusion precisely because the terms refer to the same world and they denote a reversibility with the world through the two contexts of which their definitions are meaningful. I will expand on this in the pages that follow; however I wanted to point out here that what may seem like a relatively minor footnote detailing a technical squabble is emblematic of what the notion of *chiasm*, reversibility, denotes.

⁹¹Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated Nov 1960, *VI*, p. 266. Emphasis in original.

The second term which radiates around Merleau-Ponty's elucidation of flesh is *écart*. Merleau-Ponty deploys *écart* in a number of ways, sometimes referring to it as a spread⁹² sometimes as a divergence,⁹³ and others as a dehiscence.⁹⁴ The key is that what *écart* marks for flesh is difference.

Evans and Lawlor comment that

A flesh that *is* its dehiscence ensures that its elements are, and remain, the same and yet are, and remain, fundamentally different from one another. Any attempt to promote one of these values at the expense of the other – sameness at the expense of alterity or alterity sameness – would be an imposition upon and contrary to the balanced way things are.⁹⁵

Écart signals that as close as expressive bodies can get to each other, or the world, they are divergent from each other and it is flesh which sustains this encroachment and divergence: the two cannot merge. In order to maintain differences and not simply put two terms together in a false or quasi-unity, *écart* signals the divergence or dehiscence of flesh as a counterpoint to its chiasmatic reversibility. A style of being in the world is of the world yet is not the world. An expressive body intertwines with other expressive bodies but is not them. They do not directly coincide. Flesh sustains the intercorporeality of expressive bodies as they encounter other styles of being in the world. For a posthumanist corporeal ontology this means that even the most seemingly minute and fragmented being has a style of being in the world: the flesh of the body.

For Merleau-Ponty the reversibility which characterises flesh is situated initially through the touching-touched relation. Emblematic of the touching-touched reversibility is when my left hand touches my right hand or vice versa, and because they are part of the same body we do not know which is touching and which is being touched. For Merleau-Ponty there is an intracorporeal system in which when one hand touches another of its same body there is an 'initiation to and the opening

⁹² Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated Sept 1959, *VI*, p. 209.

⁹³ Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated, Dec 1959, *VI*, p. 223.

⁹⁴ Merleau-Ponty uses dehiscence to characterise flesh through 'The Intertwining – The Chiasm', *VI*, pp. 130-155.

⁹⁵ Evans and Lawlor, 'The Value of Flesh', p. 11.

upon a tactile world'.⁹⁶ Merleau-Ponty's initial model for flesh is this intracorporeal system, one hand touching the other hand of the one same body opens up to the reversibility and divergence that flesh denotes. David Brubaker explains that 'although I explore my left hand as the surface of an external thing, I can at any moment reactivate its system of tactile flesh and the reversibilities latent within, simply by touching my right hand in return'.⁹⁷ There is the possibility that when my right hand is touching it is also being touched yet 'the touching hand does not coincide with the touched hand'.⁹⁸ The two hands are reversible, but do not coincide with each other. They remain different and the same: reversible and divergent.

Similarly, although divergently, in vision there is a seeing-being seen relation. In order for the human body to *see* it must simultaneously also be able to be seen. Yet, the human eye is a blind spot as we cannot see our eyes except in a mirror. Therefore, for Merleau-Ponty, to see is to be caught up in the visible.⁹⁹ Merleau-Ponty asserts that 'the visible about us seems to rest in itself. It is as though our vision were formed in the heart of the visible, or as though there were between it and us an intimacy as close as between the sea and the strand'.¹⁰⁰ Unlike touch, which is capable of touching itself, vision is found through the *possibility* that my body can be seen because my body, like the bodies of things in the world, is visible. Merleau-Ponty comments that 'the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we do not know which sees and which is seen'.¹⁰¹

Consequently the touching-touched relation opens onto a tangible world and the seeing-being seen relation opens onto a visible world. Françoise Dastur notes that Merleau-Ponty is detailing '[a] parallelism between seeing and touching'¹⁰² as the 'same body sees and touches, [the] visible and tangible belong to the same world'.¹⁰³

⁹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 133.

⁹⁷ David Brubaker, 'Merleau-Ponty's Three Intertwinings', *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 34 (2000), 89-101 (p. 94).

⁹⁸ M.C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, 2nd edn (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997), p. 159.

⁹⁹ See Merleau-Ponty's discussion of mirror phenomenon and visibility in 'EM', pp. 168-178.

¹⁰⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, pp. 130-131.

¹⁰¹ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 139.

¹⁰² Dastur, 'World, Flesh, Vision', p. 41.

¹⁰³ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 134.

What Merleau-Ponty is doing here is detailing a specific body's ability to intertwine with the world and other bodies: the human. He is elucidating one instantiation of flesh: flesh of the human body. The human body is sustained by a flesh which reveals it not only as an intracorporeal intertwining of visibility and tangibility in the seeing-being seen and touching-touched relation, but this procedure discloses how it intertwines with other bodies sustained by a flesh that is as reversible yet divergent as a human body. M.C. Dillon remarks that 'the human body is [a] particular kind of flesh'.¹⁰⁴ The point of this for a posthumanist corporeal ontology is that Merleau-Ponty describes a human body's intertwining with the world and other expressive bodies with greater specificity. The human body opens to a world of expressive bodies that are visible and tangible to a human body precisely because the human body, like the flesh of the world, is also visible and tangible. The flesh of a body is reversible but divergent from the flesh of the world. A body that sees must also be able to be seen, a body which touches must also be able to be touched, and a body that feels must also be able to be felt. There is a 'divergent' reversibility [that marks flesh and] makes there be a visible and a tangible through the openness of a corporeality onto the world and being. This openness is that of a corporeality that participates in the world and being and not that of a consciousness, of a thought, that would 'survey' them'.¹⁰⁵ A human body, as with any other body, *corporeally* participates in the world and with other expressive bodies. Flesh discloses a levelling as it does not survey other beings, but co-exists with them. Precisely why flesh is so important for a posthumanist corporeal ontology is because it denotes a 'belongingness of the body to being and the corporeal relevance of every being'.¹⁰⁶

The encroachments and differences of expressive bodies in their styles of being in the world are sustained by a flesh that marks reversibility and divergence where flesh is a 'fabric common to all

¹⁰⁴ Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, p. 169.

¹⁰⁵ Dastur, 'World, Flesh, Vision', p. 43.

¹⁰⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 118.

beings' and a 'principle of differentiation'.¹⁰⁷ In other words, as Merleau-Ponty details a flesh of the body in the intertwining of its visibility and tangibility, and a flesh of the world in its visibility and tangibility, there is a 'divergent reversibility'¹⁰⁸ of flesh as a generality. Experience that a body has and the expression that a body is are intertwined as two sides of the same corporeal coin through flesh. An embodiment, be it organic or biological, technological, virtual, or otherwise, is the background condition for lived experience and bodies express these experiences. The divergent reversibility of flesh intertwines these elements as corporeality: 'not being able to view the head and the tail of a coin at the same time brings home to us that the head and the tail are parts of the same coin.'¹⁰⁹ What this means in a posthumanist corporeal ontology, rather ambitiously, is that all beings are corporeal wherein the poise or readiness to experience that situates an embodiment, and the expression of that experience which situates a body are the obverse and the reverse of corporeality: its two sides. Similar to the way that Merleau-Ponty remarks that the human body is 'a being of two leaves, from one side a thing among things and otherwise what touches and sees them'¹¹⁰ in a body that both experiences and is experienced, which expresses and is expressed, there is a 'doubling up of my body into inside and outside'¹¹¹ in its style of being in the world.

Yet the experience that a body has and the expression that a body is, while the obverse and reverse (*chiasm*) of corporeality, are also divergent from each other. If they directly correlate or coincide with each other, if experience *is* expression, or expression *is* experience then on the one hand, corporeality is locked into pure immanence, and, on the other, pure transcendence. In order that this direct coincidence does not occur flesh signals a reversibility that remains divergent because

¹⁰⁷ Dastur, 'World, Flesh, Vision', p. 37.

¹⁰⁸ Dastur, 'World, Flesh, Vision', p. 43.

¹⁰⁹ Isis Brook, 'Can Merleau-Ponty's Notion of 'Flesh' Inform or even Transform Environmental Thinking?', *Environment Values*, 14 (2005), 353-62 (p. 360).

¹¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 137.

¹¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated Nov 16 1960, *VI*, p. 264. The full passage is as follows: 'chiasm my body – the things, realized by the doubling up of my body into inside and outside – and the doubling up of things (their inside and their outside). It is because there are these 2 doublings-up that are possible: the insertion of the world between the two leaves of my body the insertion of my body between the 2 leaves of each thing and of the world. This is not anthropologism: by studying the 2 leaves we ought to find the structure of being'.

the reversibility is never realizable: it cannot be *completed* or else it would make of a body a sole world. Reversibility, for Merleau-Ponty is ‘always imminent and never realized in fact’¹¹² because flesh as divergence (*écart*) forecloses this possibility. A right hand never directly coincides with a left hand. My body never exactly coincides with yours. Experience and expression do not exactly or directly coincide with each other: *chiasm* is a principle of unity and *écart* is a principle of difference. Flesh, as a divergent reversibility, marks what Merleau-Ponty calls the flesh of the body which, through its intertwining and divergence with the flesh of the world and other bodies, has a style of being in the world. What this means for a posthumanist corporeal ontology is that a style of being in the world, while recognizable to other beings laterally and indirectly, is disclosed through the divergent reversibility of the flesh of a body and the flesh of the world, where ‘meanings move without the human’.¹¹³

Style comes to bear on Merleau-Ponty's elucidation of flesh through the enigmatic statement that ‘[flesh] brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being.’¹¹⁴ To clarify why this statement is so important for a posthumanist corporeal ontology we must return to style, and, in particular, the passage in ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of the Silence’ where Merleau-Ponty writes of Renoir's *The Bathers* that

Because each fragment of the world – and, in particular the sea, sometimes riddled with eddies and ripples and plumed with spray, sometimes massive and immobile in itself – contains all sorts of shapes of being and, by the way it has of joining the encounter with one's glance, evokes a series of possible variants and teaches, over and beyond itself, a general way of expressing being.¹¹⁵

Crucially in this passage Merleau-Ponty is describing how a painter develops his or her style, wherein a ‘fragment of the world’ can evoke all sorts of things by joining with an expressive body and teaches ‘a general way of expressing being.’ The painter *learns* how to disclose a style of being

¹¹² Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, pp. 147-148.

¹¹³ Neil Badmington, ‘Cultural Studies and the Posthumanities’, in *New Cultural Studies: Adventures in Theory*, ed. by Gary Hall and Clare Birchall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 260-72 (p. 270).

¹¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 139.

¹¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty, ‘ILVS’, p. 56.

because he or she meets and joins with the world, intertwines their expressive body with the world, and what they take from the world they give back with their style. Yet, the expressive body is reversible with and divergent from it: 'I 'am of the world' and that I am not it'.¹¹⁶ To expand this I must unpack the statement which sustains the initial reading, that is 'each *fragment of the world* [...] contains all sorts of shapes of being.' When an expressive body glances at the world, provided they are capable of sight, they do not see the whole of the world but only see a tiny fraction of it, a 'fragment of the world' that Renoir sees and paints and thereby expresses a style. Yet this 'fragment' also 'contains all sorts of shapes of being.' Therefore, since the expressive body cannot see or for that matter touch or feel the whole of the world from which it gains a style how is it that the expressive body has a style of being in the world?

For Merleau-Ponty a style of being in the world, or the flesh of a body, is detailed through the reversibility of the sentient-sensible. The seeing-being seen and touching-touched relations are at their base, for Merleau-Ponty, a reversibility of sentient-sensible. The intracorporeal crisscrossing or folding back that Merleau-Ponty develops is what, he says, allows us to situate flesh as the crisscrossing or folding back of the visible and the tangible: the flesh of the world. For Merleau-Ponty the sentient-sensible is a 'remarkable variant'¹¹⁷ which finds its emblem in the human body. However, Merleau-Ponty is quick to point out that he does 'not mean to do anthropology, to describe a world covered over with all our own projections, leaving aside what it can be under a human mask'.¹¹⁸ Rather, it is to disclose the reversibility of the sentient-sensible as an intracorporeal dynamic that elucidates the human body as a 'being of two leaves'.¹¹⁹ A human body as both sentient, it can see, touch, and feel, but is also sensible, it can be seen, touched, and felt. As he continues its 'double belongingness to the order of the 'object' and to the order to the 'subject'

¹¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 127.

¹¹⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 136.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, 137.

reveals to us quite unexpected relations between the two orders'¹²⁰ as the intracorporeality of the sentient-sensible discloses an intercorporeality of visibility and tangibility.

If [my body] touches them and sees them [other bodies or things], this is only because, being of their family, itself visible and tangible, [my body] uses its own being as a means to participate in theirs, because each of the two beings is an archetype for the other, because the body belongs to the order of the things as the world is universal flesh.¹²¹

My body is just as visible and tangible as other bodies are and I can only participate in the world through my body's being, just as others participate in the world through theirs. Rather than putting forward tired notions of human intelligence, rationality, or linguistic ability Merleau-Ponty describes the human body with greater specificity through the sentient-sensible as a body which sees, touches, and feels (its sentience) but is able to be seen, touched, and felt (its sensibility). The following, from 'Eye and Mind', will illuminate this quite clearly and it must be quoted despite its length:

The enigma is that my body sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the 'other side' of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing: it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for itself. It is not a self through transparence, like thought, which only thinks its object by assimilating it, by constituting it, by transforming it into thought. It is a self through confusion, narcissism, through inherence of the one who sees in that which he sees, and through inherence of sensing in the sensed—a self, therefore, that is caught up in things, that has a front and a back, a past and a future...¹²² This initial paradox cannot but produce others. Visible and mobile, my body is a thing among things; it is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing [...] [things] are incrustated into its flesh, they are part of its full definition; the world is made of the same stuff as the body.¹²³

A human body *is* only through an intercorporeal relation with other bodies and the world.

They are 'part of its full definition.' The human body is a body among other bodies, with the flesh of its body disclosing a style of being in the world because it is in the world 'made of the same stuff as the body'. The intracorporeality of its sentient-sensibility, as a body which sees and is visible, which touches and is tangible disclosed when one hand touches the other,

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ellipsis in original.

¹²³ Merleau-Ponty, 'EM', pp. 162-163.

expands to an intercorporeality of visibility and tangibility as one's body is both these things.

However, while this model is applicable to human bodies and their particular styles of being in the world, this would not necessarily be the case in all forms of organic or biological embodiment nor of technological or virtual embodiment. It holds the potential to discount a myriad of other bodies which are not sentient or which are sentient in different ways. The sentient-sensible model is Merleau-Ponty's way to describe 'the living body as sentient/sensible, or as flesh that both (actively) incorporates and is (passively) incorporated by the flesh of the world'.¹²⁴ Yet, as has been developed in Chapters 1, 2, and above, the divergent reversibility of flesh also furnishes a model through experience and expression, a posthumanist model. A posthumanist corporeal ontology that discloses that a style of being in the world is, on the one hand, the intertwining of an experience that a body has, and the expression that a body is, and, on the other, that style is a general corporeal disposition and capacity of expressive bodies. There is an embodied poise or readiness to experience and an expression of that experience which are two sides of the same corporeal coin.

As detailed above style is a system of equivalences and 'the world is that which affords a style'.¹²⁵ Even though an expressive body only encounters a small fraction of the world this fragment is nevertheless 'pregnant', as Merleau-Ponty would say,¹²⁶ with all 'sorts of shapes of being'.¹²⁷ What flesh does then is 'bring a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being'.¹²⁸ It sustains the expressive body's intertwining with the world through its divergent reversibility so that the world, which Merleau-Ponty develops as the flesh of the world, discloses a style of being in the world which is different from its style. Analogous but divergent from the flesh of a body, the 'world

¹²⁴ Fóti, *Tracing Expression*, p. 115.

¹²⁵ Watkins, *Phenomenology or Deconstruction?*, p. 29-30.

¹²⁶ 'No more than are the sky or the earth is the horizon a collection of things held together, or a class name, or a logical possibility of conception, or a system of 'potentiality of consciousness': it is a new type of being, a being by porosity, pregnancy, or generality, and he before whom the horizon opens is caught up, included within it. His body and the distances participate in the one same corporeity or visibility in general, which reigns between them and it, and even beyond the horizon, beneath his skin, unto the depths of being'. *VI*, pp. 148-149.

¹²⁷ Merleau-Ponty, 'ILVS', p. 56.

¹²⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 139.

exists like a style – as something that organizes and unfolds the things we encounter. It is thus something we can get a sense or feel for without being able to conceptualize or even become fully aware of.’¹²⁹ This implies that every being has a style of being in the world, and the lived experience of the human body is only one ‘remarkable variant’.¹³⁰ Things, objects, and other styles of being, or in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological language the things themselves, are ‘not flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world’,¹³¹ and grasps them laterally, by their style. As Merleau-Ponty remarks, flesh is ‘the concrete emblem of a general manner of being’,¹³² A posthumanist corporeal ontology discloses that there are other corporeal styles of being in the world, the flesh of the body, and that there are different experiences, different expressions, different embodiments, different bodies, and different styles of being in the world, some of which exceed the purviews of what has already been expressed (whether linguistic, gestural, or bodily).

In the next chapter I discuss another alternative form of embodiment: virtual embodiment. By analysing Josef Rusnak's *The Thirteenth Floor* and Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* I elucidate how the expressive bodies of a virtual embodiment are disclosed in notions of information, code and virtuality which elucidate different corporeal styles of being in the world.

¹²⁹ Wrathall, ‘Existential Phenomenology’, p. 37.

¹³⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 136.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* The full passage reads: ‘It is the body and it alone, because it is a two-dimensional being, that can bring us to the things themselves, which are themselves not flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world. When we speak of the flesh of the visible, we do not mean to do anthropology, to describe a world covered over with all our own projections, leaving aside what it can be under the human mask. Rather, we mean that carnal being, as a being of depths, of several leaves or several faces, a being in latency, and a presentation of a certain absence, is a prototype of Being, of which our body, the sensible sentient, is a very remarkable variant, but whose constitutive paradox lies in every vision’.

¹³² Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 147.

Chapter 4

Information and Virtuality

**in Josef Rusnak's *The Thirteenth Floor* and
Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell***

From the mid to late 1980s through the 1990s and into the 2000s the question of virtual reality was an ever-present and heavily explored motif in the humanities.¹ The explosion of cyberpunk film and literature in the 1980s seemed to engender a paradigm shift towards an exploration of the dreams of fluidity, intertextuality, and discursive constructions which characterised postmodernism at that time. Virtual reality represented an instantiation of the very real possibilities of networked assemblages and the supposed fluidity of identities and subjectivities. At the same time cyberpunk literature and film, and cyberculture theorists explored the limitations of this mentality and the inevitability of its entrapment within power dynamics, among other things. Much popular posthumanism grew out of this particular period. However, there were two key issues which were largely downplayed in the rampant embracing of the possibilities associated with technologies of the virtual, and, by extension, the metaphor of the cyborg – including the process of cyborgification and the rise of cyborgology. First, there was a reduction of the body – after the body is gone, one is simply left with informational patterns. Second, were questions concerning reality and the overturning of the real in favour of the simulacrum. Virtual reality potentially provided a very real application of the simulacrum where there were supposedly limitless possibilities and a fluidity to identities.

An informatic undercurrent ran through much of the literature with the body if not completely reduced to, at least conditioned by information theory and cybernetics. Hans Moravec asked in

¹ See, for example, Howard Rheingold, *Virtual Reality* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991); Michael Heim, *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Sadie Plant, 'The Future Looms: Weaving Women and Cybernetics', *Body & Society*, 1.3-4 (1995), 45-64; Claudia Springer, *Electronic Eros: Bodies and Desire in the Postindustrial Age* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); Michael Heim, *Virtual Realism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Arthur Kroker, *The Will to Technology and the Culture of Nihilism: Heidegger, Marx and Nietzsche* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006); and the following edited collections: *Virtual Realities and their Discontents*, ed. by Robert Markley (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994); *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. by Chris Hables Gray (London and New York: Routledge, 1995); *Cyberspace, Cyberbodies, Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows (London: Sage Publication, 1995); *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. by David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy, 2nd edn (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

1988² if a consciousness could be downloaded into a virtual world or a robot body, and now free from a body gain immortality? – a 'consciousness' rendered through informational patterns and codes, completely dissociated from its embodiment, and a virtual-only being. Feminist critics were very quick to dismantle this reduction of the body by highlighting the gendered assumptions implicit in this dream, and more broadly in cyborgology and conceptions of the body.³ As posthumanism slowly found its footing in this period N. Katherine Hayles' 1999 *How we Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* provided a powerful critique of an informatic reduction and dismissal of bodies. Analysis of virtuality has been one of the central concerns of posthumanism since at least Hayles' work. As we saw in Chapter 1, Hayles' work was specifically designed to address the question of 'how information lost its body' and she traces this process through the development of cybernetics and information theory arguing that

information, like humanity, cannot exist apart from the embodiment that brings it into being as a material entity in the world; and embodiment is always instantiated, local and specific. Embodiment can be destroyed, but it cannot be replicated. Once the specific form constituting it is gone, no amount of massaging data will bring it back.⁴

Hayles argues at length that information has been disembodied and she forcefully states that information cannot be dissociated from embodiment. If, however, information cannot be dissociated from embodiment, what form of embodiment does it have then? Can its embodiment be based through an organic or biological conception of embodiment? I outline in this chapter an alternative embodiment that information is an expression of, and with it a style of being in the world: virtual embodiment. Therefore, I describe the expressive bodies of a virtual embodiment

² Hans Moravec, *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 92.

³ For explorations which encompass virtuality and the cyborg see: Anne Balsamo, 'Forms of Technological Embodiment: Reading the Body in Contemporary Culture', *Body & Society*, 1.3-4 (1995), 215-237; Sadie Plant, 'The Future Looms'; Margrit Shildrick, 'Posthumanism and the Monstrous Body', *Body and Society*, 2.1 (1996), 1-15; *The Gendered Cyborg: A Reader*, ed. by Gill Kirkup, Linda James, Kath Woodward, and Fiona Hovenden (London and New York: Routledge, 2000). For more broad works on embodiment, bodies, and corporeality see: *Posthuman Bodies*, ed. by Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995); Vicky Kirby, *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999); and Rosalyn Diprose, *Corporeal Generosity: On Giving in Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty and Levinas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

⁴ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 49.

through two already expressed styles of being in the world: code and information.

Closely aligned to the critique of informatics and the loss of the body that it implies for Hayles is the salient question that these explorations open up: how is the virtual embodied? While I agree with large portions of Hayles' critique, yet, as we saw in Chapter 1, the disembodiment thesis has its uses because it invites posthumanism to seriously consider alternative forms of embodiment and opens up to more complex interrogations of corporeality, embodiment, and bodies. Hayles herself, while adopting the rhetoric of posthumanism throughout her work, ultimately moves into the same space as earlier critics of VR, namely that a critique of the disembodiment thesis is almost always done only via reference to a biological or organic embodiment which finds its emblem in the human. Even as critics and theorists attempt to re-invert or re-embody discourses the body is only a human body. Virtual embodiment is not taken seriously enough because it confuses the confines of common sense, an irony that pervades many analyses which revolve around virtual reality⁵ and paralleled the rise of discourse on cyborgs and hybridity.

Hayles provides perhaps the most notable history and critique of the question concerning the status of the body in cybernetics and information theory, while Baudrillard provided the most widely used critique of the simulacrum. Baudrillard writes of simulation/simulacrum by reading it through Borges' fable where the 'map becomes the territory' which seeks to 'make the real, all of the real, coincide with their models of simulation'.⁶ Baudrillard seems to echo in a different register Heidegger's point regarding the essence of technology and Merleau-Ponty's concern regarding cybernetics. Virtuality is viewed as a simulated reality based in informational patterns and models

⁵ For example, see Jacquelyn Ford Morie, 'Performing in (Virtual) Spaces: Embodiment and Being in Virtual Environments', *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*, 3.2-3 (2007), 123-138, for an attempt to situate how the 'body has been recontextualised in the age of digital technology' which relies on the transposition of normative ways of thinking about the body – particularly as only a human one – and supplants this into rhetoric of the virtual via reference to five 'modes' in which the human engages with virtual environments wherein the virtual is unable to thought 'fully' and instead is only measured with reference to certain forms of embodiment aligned to the human body.

⁶ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 2.

of simulation which seeks a direct correlation and coinciding between the real and the virtual: hyperreality. Baudrillard reads hyperreality first through ‘faking’ an illness in reality and how by ‘faking’ the symptoms one produces them where ‘objectively one cannot treat him as being either ill or not ill’.⁷ In contrast, hyperreality, as a simulated reality, has no real which can be faked. Baudrillard differentiates ‘faking an illness’ from simulating an illness as ‘faking an illness’ at least relies on a real thing to be faked, whereas simulation, for Baudrillard, implies no real connection to the real. However, in a posthumanist corporeal ontology if an illness is faked or simulated it still expresses a body that is ‘ill’. A body still expresses an experience, even if it is dishonest. I find it quite curious that an experience which is faked has more merit than an experience which is simulated. They are both experiences which express a body and a particular style of being in the world. Even if the simulacrum is an ‘illusion’, as it were, it signals towards a style of being in the world. One can either bemoan the loss of the ‘real’ as Baudrillard does, or engage with these already expressed bodies and styles of being in the world. The question of strictly differentiating between what is real and what is not is reduced in the face of the question of how one can move between multiple or mixed realities. Hayles and Gessler write in a 2004 article that ‘a decade ago, virtual reality was popularly seen as a realm separate from real life...now the buzz is about “mixed reality,” the promiscuous mingling of computationally intensive simulations with input from the real world’⁸ – a mixed reality where simulation is no longer a hyperreality, but shifting perhaps to a hypervirtuality.

The question of the simulacrum, specifically the potential pervasiveness of a virtual reality which supplants ‘reality’, also gained a renewed prominence near the end of the twentieth century with the success of *The Matrix* films and others which revolved around similar questions such as *Ghost in the Shell*, *eXistenZ*, *Dark City* and *The Thirteenth Floor*. In many ways the late twentieth century is

⁷ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 3.

⁸ N. Katherine Hayles and Nicholas Gessler, ‘The Slipstream of Mixed Reality: Unstable Ontologies and Semiotic Markers in *The Thirteenth Floor*, *Dark City* and *Mulholland Drive*’, *PMLA*, 119.3 (2004), 482-499 (p. 482).

defined, at least in the Western popular culture of science fiction cinema, through a perceived ontological instability which is further reflected in the theories and philosophers which arose to diagnose this 'problem' or 'crisis' and describe its symptoms. For instance, Melanie Chan uses the notion of simulacrum and hyperreality as developed by Baudrillard to remark of *The Matrix* that 'whilst Neo has memories of sensory experiences and associated physiological responses, the foundation for those experiences was not embodied interaction rather they were mediated by and through mental stimulation in the matrix'.⁹ However, the only world that Neo knows, at least at the start of the film, is the virtual world which he navigates by the body that he is. If anything the reverse is true: when the film shifts to the 'real' world his 'new' body is atrophied and he must learn to experience the new world of organic or biological embodiment, perhaps basing his 'sensory experiences and associated physiological response' on the foundation of the only world that he knew: a virtual one. On the same page Chan notes that 'rather than other notions of embodiment, cyberpunk cinema, while ostensibly offering a release or escape from the confines of the physical body, nevertheless imposes conventional rules of heteronormativity in its representations of virtual reality, the supposed space of limitless possibility'.¹⁰ She condemns alternative forms of embodiment via recourse to only one particular form of embodiment, an organic one, as well as through the implicit and explicit ideologies provided by filmmakers. While the process she describes is at work and does generate an interesting analysis of the content of the film as designed by the directors, and *The Matrix* did re-open lines of questioning concerning what one takes to be real, Chan's analysis details a view of information without reference to virtual embodiment. It is laudable to use Baudrillard and attempt to push, as he does, the 'signifying system to its extremes so that it implodes'¹¹ and thereby open it up. However, this should not be at the expense of other kinds of styles of being in the world and 'other notions of embodiment.'

⁹ Melanie Chan, 'Virtual Reality and Really Virtual: Baudrillard's Procession of Simulacrum and The Matrix', *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, 5.2 (2008), unpaginated. http://www.ubishops.ca/baudrillardstudies/vol-5_2/v5-2-melanie-chan.html

¹⁰ Chan, 'Virtual Reality and the Really Virtual'.

¹¹ Chan, 'Virtual Reality and the Really Virtual'.

The Matrix films have been repeatedly explored¹² and it is for this reason that I choose to only make a brief reference to them. Through their commercial success they re-opened questions concerning ‘reality’ – with these questions once again re-opened for a short time with the critical and commercial success of Christopher Nolan’s *Inception* in 2010¹³ – yet discussions have tended to favour an overzealous use of Baudrillard and the notions of simulacrum and hyperreality. Prior to the release of *The Matrix* (1999), two other films which explore similar questions yet have not come to dominate theoretical analysis are Josef Rusnak’s *The Thirteenth Floor* (1999) and Mamoru Oshii’s *Ghost in the Shell* (1995). These two films, along with David Cronenberg’s *eXistenZ* (1999), and Alex Proyas’ *Dark City* (1998), provide less commercially successful but no less salient explorations of the role of information and questions concerning memory and narrative coherence. Each explores virtual embodiment through two styles of being in the world: code in *The Thirteenth Floor* and information in *Ghost in the Shell*. Memory provides an attempt at narrative coherence in each of them and *Ghost in the Shell* provides the most nuanced and philosophical exploration of virtual embodiment. *Ghost in the Shell*, in particular, is, for me, *the* posthumanist film *par excellence* as it is concerned not only with questions that arise in popular posthumanism, but also provides a nuanced exploration, albeit not unproblematically, of many of the themes associated with critical posthumanism.

I have chosen to separate virtual embodiment and technological embodiment rather than analyse both under a broad form of technological embodiment. The reason for this is that while both can be conceived as being technological, virtual embodiment functions in a variety of ways both in relation

¹² A number of edited collections were released on *The Matrix* following its success and release of its sequels such as *The Matrix and Philosophy*, ed. by William Irwin, (Chicago: Open Court, 2002); *More Matrix and Philosophy*, ed. by William Irwin (Chicago: Open Court, 2005); *The Matrix in Theory*, ed. by Stefan Herbrechter and Myriam Diocaretz (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006).

¹³ Arguably *Inception* continues the legacy of cyberpunk cinema. However, it removes the overtly technological aspects of it in favour of organic dreamscapes (albeit with technological assistance and drugs). For instance, compare the trope of brain-hacking in cyberpunk to the driving plot of implanting an idea in *Inception*.

to technology and the organic wherein it cannot be fully aligned with either. Virtual embodiment is expressed in a double sense: embedded in computers and networks and embedded in users of data.¹⁴

'Hey, What'd you do to the World?...I Turned it off': Rusnak's *The Thirteenth Floor*¹⁵

As with instrumentality for technological embodiment the most common way that virtual embodiment has been expressed is code. Code provides an initial point to analyse virtual embodiment as code is generally associated with what makes technologies of the virtual possible¹⁶: the binary logic of machine language with the basic premise of compiled code in the form of on (1) or off (0) position – a carry-over from when machines were coded literally with switches. Various programming languages have arisen to manage and mediate the human interlocutor (programmer) and the machine which executes the code. Therefore, code is the language which enables programmes to run.¹⁷ Josef Rusnak's *The Thirteenth Floor* provides an excellent introduction to this thematic in addition to posing ethical questions pertaining to virtual forms of being. If the first *Matrix* film revolved around questions concerning how to discern reality from the virtual, *The Thirteenth Floor* takes this aspect and complicates it, just as *eXistenZ* does, via an elevation of the disembodiment thesis and all that it entails in a body already expressed by code.¹⁸

The Thirteenth Floor revolves around the creation of a virtual world and the subsequent murder of its founding architect, Hannon Fuller. Initially there is a dual narrative set in the virtual world of 1930s Los Angeles and the contemporary world. The film follows Douglas Hall, the second key architect in the design of the virtual world, in his investigation into what led to the murder of its

¹⁴ Yet the question of the possibility of an informatic totality does still loom.

¹⁵ *The Thirteenth Floor*, dir. by Josef Rusnak (Columbia Pictures, 1999), [on DVD].

¹⁶ Cf. N. Katherine Hayles, *My Mother was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005). In particular Chapter 2, 'Speech, Writing, Code: Three Worldviews', pp. 39-61.

¹⁷ Compiled code translates the programming language into the binary language of machines to be executed whereas interpreted coding languages are not translated into machine code. The basic premise, however, is that code provides the directions of how a program is to be run regardless of the type of language that it is written in.

¹⁸ The key difference to highlight, at least in relation to the first *Matrix* film, is that *The Matrix* sets up a dichotomy between the 'real' world and the 'virtual' world wherein analyses such as Chan's, which draw explicitly from Baudrillard, can be made. Like *eXistenZ*, *The Thirteenth Floor* presents layers of realities as opposed to a distinct dichotomy of what ones take to be 'real' and 'virtual', although this is lessened by the ending when a 'true' reality is revealed.

creator. Upon discovering that Fuller had spent a large period of time within the simulation, Hall endeavours to enter the simulation in order to discern what specifically Fuller had been doing there as the project was not supposed to be fully functional. Upon entering the simulated 1930s Los Angeles Hall takes over the body of John Ferguson, a low-level bank employee whose appearance is based on Hall's. Eventually he discovers that Fuller had been entering the simulation in order to have sex with young women, contrary to his behaviour in the contemporary world. The movement between contemporary LA and the simulated 1930s LA provides the first demonstration of how code has already been expressed. In the simulated world, both Fuller and Hall assume the identities of what would normally be referred to as avatars. These avatars are the form through which they navigate the virtual world. To put it more pointedly it embodies them in the virtual world. Yet as the computer technician Whitney states to the LAPD investigator McBain: '[the system] does not need a user to interact with: its units are fully formed cyberbeings...they think, they work, they eat' with McBain adding 'they fuck'; the inhabitants of this world have styles of being in the world. The system of the virtual world is self-enclosed, a world unto itself, except for when users enter into avatars to play, or at least to explore it, disrupting lives of the avatars they inhabit. The distinction that Whitney makes to McBain is that there really is no distinction between the two worlds: they function in similar ways – as the narrative will demonstrate that Hall's world, which created the 1930s simulation, is also a simulation.

Bearing in mind the fantasies of downloading one's consciousness, which this film only partially explores and essentially takes for granted, Whitney states that 'while my mind is jacked in, I'm walking around experiencing 1930s America, my body stays here and holds the consciousness of the program link unit.' A consciousness is ripped from one body and moved into a coded body that replicates information patterns in continuity with the consciousness that now inhabits it. Similar to the disembodiment thesis bodies are only sites which hold an endlessly transferable mind or consciousness, one that is 'reduced' to informational patterns. The narrative puts forward a body

reduced to such a level that only the informational patterns of the mind which create an 'I' are allowed to fully exist. A body is just a vessel or housing unit. This is the prospect that so worried Hayles in *How We Became Posthuman*. I want to follow Hayles on this point, but offer an alternative reading. The expressive body learns a 'general way of expressing being'¹⁹ from the world and it elaborates a style of being in the world through its divergent reversibility with the flesh of the world. A coded body does not necessarily imply the loss of the body. It is a variant, a different way of expressing the experience of embodiment, only in this case it is not the experience of an organic or biological embodiment, but a virtual embodiment – a virtual embodiment that has characteristic manners of appearance and styles of being the world. As Hall later states, '[the virtual beings of the simulation] are as real as you or me.' The problem in the film becomes one of moving between worlds, what is lost or gained in that transition, and how this affects the inhabitants of each world level.

This dynamic is explored in two particular ways. First, via the process of transferral between the characters in the film in which, like *eXistenZ*, a bleeding effect occurs as the characters do not remain static and unchanged by their movement between 'realities'. Second, when Ashton, a bartender-pimp and Whitney's avatar, in 1930s LA and Hall in the contemporary world both discover that their worlds are, in fact, simulations. The process of transferral works through a literal taking over of another's body which leads the characters that are taken over (Ferguson, Hall, Whitney, and Natasha) to suffer from traumatic memory lapses. While this can be read in relation to Chan's assertion about Neo in *The Matrix* 'that the foundations for [sensory and physiological] experiences was not embodied interaction rather they were mediated by and through mental stimulation in the matrix',²⁰ this is undercut by the narrative itself through the use of multiple realities. I want reassert here, as I did in Chapter 2, that I am not implying an overcoming of

¹⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence', in *Signs*, trans. by Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 39-83 (p. 56).

²⁰ Chan, 'Virtual Reality and Really Virtual', p. 5.

organic or biological embodiment. I am asserting that there are other forms of embodiment that do not necessarily equate directly to an organic form of embodiment and the variety of bodies expressed thereby. Not all embodiments and bodies are organic or biological. The ‘foundations for [sensory and physiological] experience’ may have shifted, but they are no less embodied in the first instance through the underlying system, their virtual embodiment, and secondly through their embeddedness in the world, virtual or otherwise: the intertwining of the flesh of the body and the flesh of the world. They have styles of being in the world and a ‘corporeal relevance’.²¹ Yet as the film predicates itself on the ability to move between realities and the subsequent discovery that at least two of them are virtual a bleeding effect occurs. Hall takes on some of the characteristics of Ferguson, most notably by smoking, demonstrating simply, yet no less saliently, that when a mind is ripped from a body the process is one which can and will engender transformations. It is not a seamless unitary transition, as Fuller’s ‘daughter’ Jane explains to Hall ‘You can’t expect to plug into a machine and be unaffected’.

Hall is also taken over by David, the husband of Fuller’s ‘daughter’ from the third world of 2025, who treats Hall’s world, and other virtual worlds, as a playground for destruction and murder acting as a ‘corrupted God’, including killing Hannon Fuller. While the effects of Hall taking over Ferguson are explored, David’s murderous intentions appear to not bleed into Hall or vice-versa. Due to the memory lapses each body that has been taken over appears to be haunted by a variety of consciousnesses: as Hayles and Gessler write, ‘traffic flows from lower to upper world as well as from upper to lower world’.²² In effect each character’s body is haunted by the one that is taken over, or when they themselves are taken over. As Merleau-Ponty notes, ‘*associated bodies* must be brought forward along with my body – the ‘others,’ not merely as my cogeners [...] but the others

²¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 118.

²² Hayles and Gessler, ‘The Slipstream of Mixed Reality’, p. 485.

who haunt me and whom I haunt'.²³ Yet Hall, Fuller, and Jane approach 'their' virtual world in a similar way to David. While they do not go about murdering people, Fuller takes over the body of the old antiques dealer, Grierson, and uses it to have sex with young women; Hall takes over the body of Ferguson, and Jane takes over the body of Natasha Molinaro, a young clerk at a supermarket (and also uses it to have sex with Hall). All three appear to have absolutely no compunction about disrupting the lives of 'their' avatars. They in part use the virtual world as a playground, with Jane eventually managing to get Hall, whom she now loves, into the body of David. Because the bodies they are taking over are *only* virtual they have no claim to corporeality as they do not necessarily exist in any real sense, despite their assertions otherwise. They are suffused with 'a hypothesis of inexistence'.²⁴ Hyperreality is reversed as it is no longer the 'real' that must coincide with models of simulation, rather, simulation (virtuality) must coincide with the 'real': hypervirtuality.

Prior to his death Fuller left a message for Hall in the 1930s world extolling Hall to travel to the 'ends of the world' and see for himself that his world is, in fact, a simulation. Yet Ashton, who was supposed to deliver the message, reads and follows its instructions descending into madness as a result. After Hall discovers that his world is also a simulation he has a posthuman moment when he states that 'we are screwing with people's lives... These people are real, they are as real as you or me.' Hall appears to recognize explicitly that, as Whitney explained earlier, the inhabitants of the virtual world do not need a 'user' to interact with, it is fully formed. The inhabitants of the 1930s simulation are simply living their lives. However, Whitney retorts to this change in Hall with 'Yeah, that's because we designed them that way, but in the end they're just a bunch of electronic circuits.' Echoing Ashton's malaise and eventual madness at being 'just a bunch of electronic circuits' for Whitney, and implied by the way Hall inhabits Ferguson's body and Jane takes over Natasha, a coded existence is a lack of existence. This refers to the common-sensical approach to

²³ Merleau-Ponty, 'EM', p. 161.

²⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 38.

code and virtuality that what takes place in virtual worlds is unreal, 'artificial' in the fullest sense, just as David in *A.I.* read his artificiality as a negative and in *eXistenZ* when the transgressions in the game mirror the diseased state of the pod. While Whitney may have asserted earlier that there is fundamentally no difference between the 1930s simulated world and his own he denies the flesh of the body disclosed through the 'electronic circuits' which sustain the world and those within it: their virtual embodiment.

Ashton moves into Hall's world following the death of Whitney in the 1930s world. In the contemporary world Ashton provides a posthuman moment as he walks through the banks of computers, stating 'It's breathing, this is where I was born.' Ashton (along with Hall, Ferguson, Fuller, Grierson, McBain, Natascha and Whitney) is born from the sea of information.²⁵ Ashton sees and recognises his coded existence: the intertwining of a virtual embodiment and his expressive body through code – a corporeal style of being in the world. Hall and Ashton provide two differing dynamics when their bodies are revealed to be code. Until this they operate under the assumption of an organic embodiment with Hall not particularly caring about what happens to Ferguson as Ferguson is not 'real' at this point, nor does the film actively explore the role of Ferguson aside from being reduced to an avatar for Hall. The film concludes with Hall seemingly drawn to at least partial acceptance of his instability and the development of a form of ethics, whereas Ashton is drawn towards schizophrenia and madness. Ashton is eventually killed and Hall is granted freedom to the 2025 world to be with Jane and reunite with Hannon Fuller in the form of Jane's father.

The ethical point is only partially developed in Hall as he is only ever fully concerned about 'his' reality, asserting that 'None of this is real. You pull the plug, I disappear, and nothing I ever say, nothing I ever do, will ever matter' a position he just barely grants Ferguson and Grierson. Hayles and Gessler highlight this when they write that 'if the simulants are in fact real people, shutting the

²⁵ I analyse an informational body, particularly in relation to the Puppet Master of *Ghost in the Shell* who makes this statement, in the next section.

simulation down can only amount to mass murder, since all its inhabitants will then be wiped from existence',²⁶ an everyday genocide, which differs from the novel the film is based on as 'the film emphasizes metaphysical complexity over [the] political satire [of the novel]'.²⁷ Hayles and Gessler conclude their analysis by highlighting that 'reality may be simulations all the way up, a view that renders every level ontologically unstable but nonetheless restores the possibility of meaning at every level'.²⁸ In the virtual worlds of the film 'meanings move without the human'²⁹ in a strict, narrow sense. It moves through virtual beings and their corporeal styles of being in the world without a biological or organic embodiment: different embodiments, different bodies, different materialities.

The Thirteenth Floor begins to explore virtual embodiment through code as an already expressed style of being in the world. Despite its posthuman moments it only offers two paths: the partial acceptance and one can assume continued doubt of 'reality' in Hall, or the schizophrenic madness of Ashton. Neither is able to accept virtual embodiment as they operate under the assumption that they are organically embodied despite their realisations. The few posthuman moments that the film provides ultimately rest on humanistic assumptions while partially pushing for an ethics. Even though 'every level [is] ontologically unstable [and there] is the possibility of meaning at every level', the film is unable to render meaning and value outside of a humanist *telos* and information is reduced to the trope of consciousness transference, rather than code itself being a corporeal style of being in the world. The styles of being in the virtual world, while expressing virtual embodiment, are unable to be recognized as authentic even as it provides the expression of the experiences that the characters have.

²⁶ Hayles and Gessler, 'The Slipstream of Mixed Reality', p. 485

²⁷ Hayles and Gessler, 'The Slipstream of Mixed Reality', p. 486. The film is based on Daniel Galouye's novel *Simulacron 3*. Hayles and Gessler provide a brief comparison between the two from pp. 485-486.

²⁸ Hayles and Gessler, 'The Slipstream of Mixed Reality', p. 487.

²⁹ Neil Badmington, 'Cultural Studies and the Posthumanities', in *New Cultural Studies: Adventures in Theory*, ed. by Gary Hall and Clare Birchall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 260-72 (p. 270).

'I am a lifeform that was born in a sea of information': Oshii's Ghost in the Shell³⁰

Based on the original manga by Masamune Shirow,³¹ Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* (*Kokaku Kidotai*) pushes the dynamic outlined in *The Thirteenth Floor* further and develops many thematics commonly associated with popular posthumanism: cyborgs, mixed realities, ontological instability, and transformation. Dani Cavallaro highlights that Oshii's films provide 'numerous variations on the inseparability of illusion and reality, virtuality and actuality, facts and dreams [which] are arguably the most insistently recurrent component of Oshii's signature'.³² This is strikingly similar to what Merleau-Ponty sees in painting: 'essence and existence, imaginary and real, visible and invisible—a painting mixes up all our categories'.³³ In contrast to *The Thirteenth Floor* which explicitly, albeit not unproblematically, takes place in a virtual world, *Ghost in the Shell* complicates and expands this dynamic through its multiplicity of forms of embodiment and bodies which are expressed. Virtual beings exist alongside cyborgs, hybrids, and minimally or non-augmented humans. Bodies already expressed by code are joined by the most salient expression of virtual embodiment: information.

Set in a futuristic noir-cyberpunk world the film follows a special covert police force known as Section 9 which investigates cybercrimes focusing on the 'ghost hacking' of individuals with cyber brains by someone known as the Puppet Master. Two major arcs are elucidated in *Ghost in the Shell*: the first pertains to the tension and transformation of the lead protagonist, Major Motoko Kusanagi, and the second pertains to the tension and transformation of the lead antagonist, Project 2501 or the Puppet Master. I will reiterate the arc of Motoko Kusanagi as I have discussed it

³⁰ *Ghost in the Shell*, dir. by Mamoru Oshii (Manga Entertainment, 1995) [on DVD]. I have chosen to analyse only the first *Ghost in the Shell* film as I want to read it against many of the analyses which have already been done on it. I also personally prefer it over its 2004 sequel, *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*, as *Ghost in the Shell* is much more subtle and one of the few films which elucidates multiple forms of posthumanism.

³¹ Masamune Shirow, *Ghost in the Shell*, trans. by Frederick L. Schodt and Toren Smith, 2nd edn (Milwaukie: Dark Horse Manga 2004); *Ghost in the Shell 2: Man-Machines Interface*, trans. by Frederick L. Schodt and Toren Smith (Milwaukie: Dark Horse Manga, 2005); *Ghost in the Shell 1.5: Human Error Processor*, trans. by Frederick L. Schodt (Milwaukie: Dark Horse Manga, 2007).

³² Dani Cavallaro, *The Cinema of Mamoru Oshii: Fantasy, Technology and Politics* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland, 2006), p. 20.

³³ Merleau-Ponty, 'EM', p. 169.

elsewhere,³⁴ specifically concerning the status of cyborgs and hybridity in the film with an emphasis on the diving sequence and subsequent conversation between Motoko and Batou on her boat. The remainder of the analysis focuses on Project 2501 and the Puppet Master particularly during two sequences: first, when the Puppet Master is held by Section 9 in the torso of a female cyborg shell, and second, in the final merging sequence and discussion between Motoko and the Puppet Master. The Puppet Master and his body have largely been excluded from analysis of the film as most tend to focus on Motoko. This is as a result of the assumption that the Puppet Master exists largely in the ‘non-corporeal realm of cyberspace’.³⁵ Cyberspace as a virtual space is generally viewed as a ‘non-corporeal’ realm yet in a posthumanist corporeal ontology it is replete with bodies. A virtual embodiment expressed by information has a clear instantiation in the body of the Puppet Master.

Cyborgs and Hybridity: The Arc of Major Motoko Kusanagi

The notion of the cyborg, and other hybrids, is one of the many pathways through which posthumanism has developed. Largely building on Haraway’s ‘A Cyborg Manifesto’ the cyborg has had a tendency to be read as the posthuman being *par excellence*, at least in popular posthumanism.³⁶ While Haraway’s ‘Manifesto’ played a key role in developing early forms of posthumanism in relation to virtual reality and cyborgology the concepts that she developed were largely torn away from the context of her analysis; in essence Haraway’s cyborg has less to do with what is now called posthumanism, and is rather an attempt to situate and critique feminism and postmodernism of the mid-1980s by moving towards the metaphor of the cyborg. The cyborg

³⁴ Angus McBlane, ‘Just a Ghost in a Shell?’, in *Anime and Philosophy: Wide Eyed Wonder*, ed. by Josef Steiff and Tristan D. Tamplin (Chicago: Open Court, 2010), pp. 27-38. Although this article was written for a non-academic audience it argues that Motoko's arc is mired in references to humanism which limit her ability to fully engage with a posthumanist subjectivity as she is caught in a transformative tension between human to posthuman. I clarify and develop some of the points made in this article, as well as move away from others.

³⁵ Austin Corbett, ‘Beyond Ghost in the (Human) Shell’, *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, 20.1 (2009), 43-50 (p. 47). While this article is an analysis of the TV series *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* it nevertheless provides the typical offhand reference to cyberspace as non-corporeal.

³⁶ Hybrids of all types, including technological ones, have a long history in popular posthumanism. This is prevalent in especially in science fiction literature and film going back to at least the nineteenth century. The history goes even further if mythological creatures (such as the Chimaera, Behemoth, and Leviathan) and religious accounts are included.

‘[serves] as a representational figure that embodied the capacity of information technologies to erase gender and racial boundaries and the structures of oppression which have historically accompanied them’.³⁷ What the literature which purports to build from Haraway’s ‘Manifesto’ does is demonstrate the seductive appeal of the metaphor of the cyborg and other hybrids. Austin Corbett opens his analysis of *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*, a television series which omits the merging section at the end of *Ghost in the Shell* and is based on Shirow's manga, by declaring that the cyborg ‘[stands] at the crossroads of multiple genres, politics, temporal and spatial movements, the cyborg is a cipher of the ever-changing relationships between humanity, technology, and politics’.³⁸ For Corbett, and others who invoke it, the metaphor of the cyborg stands as a potentially radical encapsulation of the dynamic questions and tensions that define modes of interactions between ‘humanity, technology and politics’. It is no surprise then that the cyborg status of Motoko in *Ghost in the Shell* is the focal point for analyses as her arc questions the validity of a radical break between humanity and technology, yet with curiously little said about her virtuality. Motoko’s arc is fascinating because it intertwines three notions of embodiment. Organic embodiment read through humanity, technological embodiment read through artificiality and instrumentality, and virtual embodiment via her access to cyberspace and merging with the Puppet Master.

Yet Motoko largely reads her embodiment only through one particular form: an organic or, more pointedly, a human one. Motoko’s tension throughout the film is based on the authenticity of her being. The opening credit sequence follows the creation of a cyborg body. Limbs come together, a brainstem is encased, skin is overlaid in a fluid vat onto this body – from the outset a cyborg body is coded from ‘birth’ to be a fabricated one, with this reasserted through the informatic overlay which details the progress of construction. Similar to David in *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* Motoko’s body

³⁷ Carl Silvio, ‘Refiguring the Radical Cyborg in Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*’, *Science Fiction Studies*, 26.1 (1999), 1-15 (p. 1).

³⁸ Corbett, ‘Beyond *Ghost in the (Human) Shell*’, p. 43.

is presented via a technological embodiment through its artificiality, and further through the status of informatic patterns that construct her mind or the titular ‘ghost’. Her body is literally constructed through the fusion of information and technology. Stefan Herbrechter remarks ‘that Cyborgization is...not merely a hybridization of the organic and the mechanical, but the grafting of an informational and digital...coded and simulated...reality onto human embodiment’.³⁹

Although her body is constructed in such a fashion Motoko maintains a relationship to it built upon a human one. The grafting of the ‘informational and digital’ or of information and technology is only a question of how this reshapes ‘human embodiment’ not that this process occasions the opportunity to think and express embodiment differently. The authenticity of her body (although it is owned by Section 9) has to be reassured through a continual process of narrative coherence.

Motoko has a human brainstem, yet questions if that is all one needs in order to make one ‘human’. This provides the source of the tensions that run through Motoko for the duration of the film and is encapsulated in a simple scene near the beginning when Motoko wakes up following a successful Section 9 operation and looks at her hand to verify that it is indeed there, that it is indeed her. Her body forms the basis for the way in which she interacts with the world, yet unlike the human characters of the film she needs to verify this on a regular basis through simple bodily gestures. She is haunted by a humanist *telos* which states that her body is not real; that it is artificial, and that her ‘I’ is constructed through informational patterns.

This tension is demonstrated less subtly in one sequence near the middle of the film when Motoko goes diving and waxes eloquent upon the status of individuality and what it means to be human. She goes to the sea to calm herself and utilizes it as a way to test the limitations of her cyborg body by putting it at risk of being pulled into the abyss due to its weight. The sequence is presented in such a fashion that as Motoko rises to the surface her watery reflection meets her body, a lucid

³⁹ Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), p. 188.

exposition of her body's 'intertwining of vision and movement',⁴⁰ the paradox of expression, and a corporeal ontology that is composed 'not [of] flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above, open to him alone that, if it be possible, would coexist with them in the same world'.⁴¹ Discussing her status with Batou following her return to the surface Motoko states:

Just as there are many parts needed to make a human a human there's a remarkable number of things needed to make an individual what they are. A face to distinguish yourself from others, a voice you aren't aware of yourself. The hand you see when you awaken. The memories of childhood, the feelings for the futures. That's not all. There's the expanse of the data net my cyber-brain can access. All that goes into making me what I am, giving rise to a consciousness that I call 'me'. And simultaneously confining 'me' within set limits.

Simply being a cyborg does not necessarily imply radical transcendence of the human nor does it escape problems associated with power dynamics, particularly in relation to who owns a cyborg body. Motoko clearly signals in this sequence that she yearns to move outside the confines of what she thinks she may be. What can be seen from this tension is that her difficulty arises because of her status as a cyborg is forced to fit within particular categories. She is not allowed to simply be a corporeal style of being in the world. Parallel to the paradox of expression which discloses a tension between the already expressed and the yet to be expressed, there is a tension between a humanist reduction, signalled and enforced by a humanist *telos*, and a posthumanist emergence located through bodies which have already been expressed and bodies in the process of expression, or which express differently. Yet Motoko yearns for transcendence, for uniqueness ironically similar to David in *A.I.*, which despite her posthuman moments ultimately rests partially on liberatory fantasies associated with the virtual. This yearning is one conditioned by the liberal humanist subject that Hayles attacks in *How We Became Posthuman*.

I agree with Carl Silvio when he writes

The radical cyborg thus imaginarily gratifies various liberatory fantasies which have, in

⁴⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 136.

⁴¹ Ibid.

a sense, already been coded in the terms of the dominant because they have been naturalized within the social imaginary itself... *Ghost in the Shell*... appears at first sight to subvert radically the power dynamics inherent in dominant structures of gender and sexual difference, while covertly reinscribing them.⁴²

However, this is a process that is distinct to Motoko's status as a cyborg and is complicated by the Puppet Master and 'his' virtual embodiment, as well through the seemingly automatic assumption that Motoko is 'female' because of her cyborg body: her 'her' is taken for granted – her cyborg body is presented as 'female', yet the human brainstem is not gendered. As such one cannot clearly delineate if 'she' is in fact a she in the first place. This tension is engendered by Motoko's status as a cyborg, a hybrid in the conventional sense. She does not know what she is and the options available to her to read her embodiment are limited via their reference to organic and biological embodiment.⁴³ She may not have an organic embodiment but it nevertheless conditions the meanings available to her as she attempts to move within categories that are unable to encapsulate alternative bodies and forms of embodiment. Her difference is not viewed as authentic which explains why she yearns to push the boundaries to their breaking point. As Giorgio Hadi Curti writes of Motoko's arc, 'it is not a matter of corporeal versus noncorporeal, but an understanding of body (and mind) as open and changing...in a relational association capable of difference: it is not an escape from nor a transcendence of the physical, but a challenge to the very boundaries of substance dualisms'.⁴⁴ Or, in other words, a disclosure of the divergent reversibility of a flesh which is not 'matter, mind, or substance'.⁴⁵

The concept of hybridity, most closely aligned to the cyborg, was introduced into posthumanism as a way to demonstrate the 'leakiness' of boundaries, to be able to capture the way in which the

⁴² Silvio, 'Refiguring the Radical Cyborg', p. 2.

⁴³ Silvio makes the point about the sexualisation of Motoko throughout the film. On the one hand, he is correct in this assertion due to the fan-service of the original manga which had much more graphic and detailed sexualisation of the characters which is partially imported into the film. Alternatively, and more importantly, Motoko's nudity particularly in the section on the boat that lingers on her back does not necessarily have to be read as sexualized. Rather, her nudity is simply that: nudity.

⁴⁴ Giorgio Hadi Curti, 'The Ghost in the City and a Landscape of Life: A Reading of Difference in Shirow and Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 26 (2008), 87-106 (p. 95).

⁴⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 183.

notion of the human relies on rigorously patrolled boundaries and limits which demarcate the fault lines of the so-called 'human condition', a process which Elaine Graham, building from Foucault, has called 'ontological hygiene'.⁴⁶ While the cyborg and the hybrid became a celebrated way of approaching and potentially deconstructing these boundaries and limits, the logic of hybridity in posthumanism serves a different purpose than the one which authors such as Graham and Chris Hables Gray employ.⁴⁷ Motoko's corporeality is delimited on all sides: not only is she part organic, part technological, and part virtual, they are forced together through the metaphor of the cyborg. The 'leakiness' of the boundaries does little to preserve difference as she is enveloped by a humanist *telos* which attempts to complete her, made more effective through her status as a cyborg. Each component element is rendered as distinct yet are forced together to form a unity that has no coherence and a hierarchy is re-formed. This does not take into account alternative bodies or forms of embodiment, but attempts to force meanings onto a being where these meanings mean little or have absolutely no relevance. The only way she can be in the world is through her body, even if it is in tension between a humanist reduction and posthumanist emergence, between what has already been expressed and what is in the process of expression. Perhaps this is her style of being in the world as there is no lexicon yet available which is able to describe her corporeal style of being in the world, the flesh of her body. While the cyborg provides a way to read a particular style of being in the world, it is unable, nor should it be able, to completely demarcate Motoko's style of being in the world, particularly if it continues to be regarded as something which pertains only to a 'human embodiment'.⁴⁸ The cyborg is an inadequate expression. Similarly, the Puppet Master is not merely a 'disembodied...electronic entity'. Just like Motoko the Puppet Master can only be because of 'his' body. It becomes a question of what one takes to be embodiment, a body, and how the Puppet Master demonstrates what Merleau-Ponty demarcates by flesh as a 'new type of being

⁴⁶ Elaine L. Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 11.

⁴⁷ See Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human* and Chris Hables Gray, *Citizen Cyborg: Politics in the Posthuman Age* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁴⁸ Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*, p. 188.

[...] [whose] body and the distances participate in the one same corporeity'.⁴⁹

Project 2051, the Puppet Master and Information

The standard reading of Motoko is made through her status as a cyborg and aligns her to the 'blurring the mind/body and organic/artificial dichotomies'.⁵⁰ In continuity with these kinds of readings the Puppet Master is read as simply 'disembodied...an electronic entity...[which] represents a truly technologized, posthuman subject, an example of a non-human cyberconsciousness whose computerized existence enables rather than limits'.⁵¹ This analysis would seem amenable to posthumanism if it did not reinscribe tired arguments about disembodiment which re-cast alternative forms of embodiment through ready-made variations without taking alternative forms of embodiment and expressive bodies seriously. As the arc of the Puppet Master develops we can see that the 'computerized existence' of the Puppet Master is also a limiting factor, and not, once again, reinscribed into liberatory fantasies of untethered consciousness within a virtual realm. It simultaneously enlarges corporeality by offering a different form of embodiment and is a style of being in the world that has previously been unconsidered – the flesh of the body. However, it is in tension with notions of information as an already expressed style of being in the world. Silvio claims that '[the film]...gives an outlet, and a voice to the liberatory potential of the cyborg [...] while simultaneously containing that potential by re-narrating it within another older and better known myth: the dominance of masculine mind and spirit over the feminine materiality of the body'.⁵² He rightly points out certain forms of gendered constructions in the film yet is unable to adequately portray the alternative forms of embodiment presented without recourse to a gendered dichotomy. This is particularly difficult given that while the characters are partially coded via gender in the film, a being like the Puppet Master and even Motoko can be read from a perspective wherein a gendered reading is simply a projection underpinned by an organic or

⁴⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 149.

⁵⁰ Brian Ruh, *Stray Dog of Anime: The Films of Mamoru Oshii* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), p. 131.

⁵¹ Silvio, 'Refiguring the Radical Cyborg', p. 6.

⁵² Silvio, 'Refiguring the Radical Cyborg', p. 3.

human embodiment – gendered bodies as bodies which are already circulating to make sense of only one form of embodiment, not all. Is Motoko actually female? Is the Puppet Master actually male? The Puppet Master is an informational being in a virtual world, how does ‘he’ become a he when these terms are meaningless in this instance and only reduce ‘him’, just like Motoko, to a particular type of knowledge? Similar to Motoko ‘he’ is caught in tension between a humanist reduction and a posthumanist emergence, and it is not enough to simply align the category ‘gender’ to a being which has none, which is information, or, if we must use this term, where its ‘gender’, if you will, is information. This is not to say that gender as conceived in contemporary discourse does not affect the Puppet Master or Motoko considering that they circulate within meanings attached to what bodies are supposed to be – not only in their ‘performance’, but even in analysis by critics. The embodied forms that the film portrays are seemingly unable to have a language within which their being can be properly expressed and aligned with their lived experience, so they are forced to move within these problematic categories enforced by a humanist *telos* which attempts to complete them through a direct ontology which ‘makes us feel that the word inhabited the thing for all eternity’.⁵³ The Puppet Master is viewed as disembodied, existing in a realm of cyberspatiality in which, as Hayles has argued, ‘information has lost its body’,⁵⁴ and Motoko is caught between a multiplicity of bodily expressions attempting to define how ‘her’ embodiment is read. Subsequently an alternative way of approaching the Puppet Master as an informational being is not through aligning it to traditional forms of embodiments, but recognizing that corporeality is much broader than has been previously assumed. The Puppet Master is embodied. He is virtually embodied and the experience of ‘his’ body is expressed through information⁵⁵: the two sides of his

⁵³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘The Specter of a Pure Language’, in *The Prose of The World* trans. by John O’Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 3-8 (p. 6).

⁵⁴ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 5.

⁵⁵ I do concede and agree with Silvio when he argues that ‘we would have no reason to make these associations were it not for the fact that the film rhetorically presents and explains the union of these two characters in a language that replicates the rhetoric of conventional heterosexual reproduction’, p. 11, complete with notions of transcendence and requisite angelic imagery. However, I completely disagree that the film ‘curiously seems to rely upon a traditional conception of the body’. Rather the film points to alternative bodily forms which critics have been unable to take account of as a result of a misplaced reduction to only one form of embodiment. Shirow’s original manga, on the other hand, is replete with hyper-sexualised imagery.

corporeality. The habitual already expressed bodies enforced by a humanist *telos* are unable to cope with the Puppet Master. As Motoko's arc is pointedly characterised by a tension regarding her status as human, a similar process occurs with the Puppet Master. The same instability arises in both and it is not simply a case of 'the dominance of masculine mind and spirit over the feminine materiality of the body'.⁵⁶

The Puppet Master spectrally appears throughout the first half of the film as a hacker who attempts to disrupt talks between dignitaries by 'ghost hacking' a binman in order to use him to further ghost hack an interpreter at this important meeting. Implanting false memories in the binman's cyberbrain the Puppet Master gives him an ex-wife and children, and plants the seed of doubt concerning her motivations so that the binman fulfils a desire to get back at his ex-wife while actually hacking the interpreter. The memories that are implanted provide a certain type of coherence to the otherwise unconnected binman. Following his capture the binman is interrogated and told that these memories are an implanted 'virtual experience.' Asking what this means the interrogator replies, 'I mean your wife, your daughter, the divorce, the affair. They're all fake memories, like a dream...Your family only exists in your mind'. At this point we can more clearly delineate one particular issue involving information and its relation to experience. The binman fully believed that he was getting back at his ex-wife through his hacking, that he in fact had a wife in the first place. His thought of his wife was read as something which was fully experienced, that made an impact on his life. Regardless of the status of these memories as 'fake', the experience of them is not. Even though in the narrative they simply existed 'in his mind', they were embodied. If experience is expressed through a virtual embodiment then it is largely considered to have no basis in 'reality', or, more pointedly, in the world as such. As a result of this it is plain to see why the binman's experiences are immediately dismissed by the interrogators, experience only comes in one form: in 'reality' through an organic or biological embodiment. There is no leeway for alternatives.

⁵⁶ Silvio, 'Refiguring the Radical Cyborg', p. 3.

Lived experience tells a completely different story than the one that the interrogators are trying to put forward. Through the denial of this person's experience they have denied thought of anything that cannot be aligned to a perfectly symmetrical reality. Regardless of the status of the binman's ex-wife and children as 'falsehoods' they are experienced, lived. While Motoko stares ponderously (perhaps even pitifully or in solidarity) at the binman, Batou opines following the interrogation that 'virtual experiences, dreams...all data that exists is both reality and fantasy.' The virtual experiences that the binman has are not reducible to tired abstractions on what one takes reality to be, rather his ex-wife and kids, like Monica in the epilogue of *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*, have a corporeal style of being in the world. They are expressions of a virtual embodiment: they are bodies that the binman interacted with, experienced, and deeply affected him. The common-sensical status of them as illusions or falsehoods does not reduce the (epistemic) effect that they had on him. Counter-intuitively, these 'illusions' are corporeal styles of being the world. The experience just happens to have been implanted, his 'ex-wife' and 'kids' have an expressive body and the flesh of their bodies intertwined with the flesh of the binman's body in an intercorporeal dynamic: their expressive bodies radiate an experience, and their gestures impact the lived body of the binman.

The second half of the film aligns into two particular sequences involving the Puppet Master and they further elucidate virtual embodiment. The first sequence is when the Puppet Master is held by Section 9 and asks for political asylum. The second is the merging sequence with Motoko.

Puppet Master in Section 9 HQ Sequence

As Motoko and the rest of Section 9 search for the Puppet Master a cyborg shell is hit by a vehicle outside of the secure facility in which it is housed. Ripped apart by the vehicle, the torso of the body is taken by Section 9 to their facility since the shell is from a company, Megatech, associated with them. Workers are confused about how a shell body would be able to move on its own so they

proceed to investigate the shell. They discover in readings taken on the body that it appears to have a ‘ghost’, albeit one that does not fully align with the organic. Another covert police force, Section 6, appears and says that they were attempting to lure the hacker into the body in order to find out its identity. At this point in the narrative the Puppet Master has yet to speak, but Batou describes the process that a hacker would have to go through in order to enter the body, saying that the hacker would have to swim through the heavy cyberspatial protection in order to reach it. Echoing the diving sequence that Motoko engaged in previously, cyberspatiality is described through the metaphor of swimming and diving. The more common way of expressing how one moves through a virtual world has been to render it as surf, at least in relation to the world wide web, which was on the verge of exploding at the time the film was released. The metaphor shifts from one of superficiality, surfing, to one of depth resonating with the sequence of Motoko diving into the sea and swimming. This is demonstrative of a ‘quality pregnant with a texture, the surface of a depth, a cross section upon a massive being’⁵⁷ and a corporeality that is replete with beings which are not ‘flat beings but beings in depth, inaccessible to a subject that would survey them from above’.⁵⁸

Section 6 describes how they wanted to lure the Puppet Master, also known through the nickname ‘him’ even though its gender is unconfirmed⁵⁹, in order for them to reveal themselves. As Section 9 gets to work a member ecstatically says ‘time to rip her apart’.⁶⁰ The torso suddenly powers up and the Puppet Master utters: ‘there will be no corpse. Because, until now, there never was a body’, inscribing their embodiment through the rhetoric of disembodiment. The Puppet Master, just like David and Motoko, views his being in the world through the lens of a supposed artificiality, where

⁵⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 36.

⁵⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 136.

⁵⁹ As Silvio points out in his first reading of the film: ‘The Puppet Master seems to lack any clear specification of gender or sex. More significantly, this character does not evidence the total absence of sexual specificity, but seems to exhibit characteristics of both sexes while technically, as a machine, belonging to neither’, ‘Refiguring the Radical Cyborg’, p. 6. However, Silvio goes on to explicate that this first reading is difficult to maintain due to how the filmmakers gender the bodies and language used.

⁶⁰ I will refer to the Puppet Master through he, him, and his in the remainder of the chapter. This is done for clarity and consistency, however, with the caveat that she, it, and they can also be used and are interchangeable. The English pronouns available to describe the Puppet Master are inadequate expressions of the Puppet Master’s corporeal style of being in the world, just as ‘she’ is an inadequate expression of Motoko’s corporeal style of being in the world.

he explicitly defines his existence through a virtual existence that is informational and disembodied which then transitions into a more recognizable existence in a female cyborg torso. Following this claim he asserts that ‘I may have entered the cyborg body because I was unable to crack Section 6’s attack protection, but it was of my own free will that I came here. As an autonomous life-form, I request political asylum’. The Puppet Master is a paradox: he recognizes that he moves through cyberspace, but does not become ‘real’ until he inhabits the cyborg shell. The Puppet Master is just as confused as Motoko and similarly is drawn into ready-made and inadequate categories which circulate around forms of embodiment. His existence is not as a ‘cyberconsciousness whose computerized existence enables rather than limits’,⁶¹ rather, it *is* limited. The Puppet Master as a ‘cyberconsciousness’ is unable to fully encapsulate how he would be able to move within a virtual world. That is, how he is embodied in that world. The notion of mixed reality can perhaps go some way to explaining this process in relation to the Puppet Master. The Puppet Master is embodied both within the virtual world through information and is able to enter the more common visible and tactile world through the cyborg torso. As the Puppet Master initially views himself as an AI, or cyberconsciousness, within a virtual world it is curious why he has to move into a cyborg torso in order to have a corpse. The Puppet Master that ghost hacks the interpreter and the binman is a being which not only exists primarily within the virtual world, but is also able to extend its reach to other embodied beings, just as a human body is able to extend its reach to other embodied beings in a virtual world. His ability to interact in this world and engage with other embodied beings is a clear demonstration of a corporeal style of being in the world. It just happens that the Puppet Master has a very different expressive body as its embodied basis is not organic, or even technological in the sense discussed in Chapter 2, but virtual: his body *is* information.

As the sequence unfolds a Section 6 official incredulously exclaims that the Puppet Master is ‘just a self-preserving program’ to which the Puppet Master responds and waxes eloquent on the status of

⁶¹ Silvio, ‘Refiguring the Radical Cyborg’, p. 6.

memory:

By that argument, I submit the DNA you carry is nothing more than a self-preserving program itself. Life is like a node which is born within the flow of information. As a species of life that carries DNA as its memory system, man gains his individuality from the memories he carries. While memories may as well be the same as fantasy, it is by these memories that mankind exists. When computers made it possible to externalize memory, you should have considered all the implications that held. I am not an A.I. My code name is project 2501. [And as the Puppet Master looks up and faces the viewer] I am a life-form that was born in the sea of information.

Two things are striking in this response. First, is the Puppet Master's reflection on memory and narrative. Second, is his declaration of being a 'life-form that was born in the sea of information.' Just as the narrative coherence for most of the characters in *The Thirteenth Floor* is disrupted through memory lapses, the inverse finds itself promoted by the Puppet Master. The Puppet Master's memory is sedimented in the code, the information that he expresses, and the virtual world within which he was initially born. He demonstrates the linkage between an informational existence and one based on memory. They are both forms of expression linked to the world of which they are expressions: an intertwining of the flesh of the world and the flesh of the body. According to the Puppet Master the memories of human characters are utilized as a way to structure individuality which is what gives the coherence wherein an 'I' can be formed. What the Puppet Master demonstrates here, albeit with various tensions arising from his self-imposed humanist reduction and speaking the language of individuality and the liberal humanist subject, is the inability and lack of foresight on the part of the humans to be able to comprehend how exactly he was able to come to be. They are unable to comprehend that he moved from being 'simply' an A.I, that is as an expression of virtual embodiment through a body already expressed by information, to the ontological status which he now believes he has gained through self-awareness and interacting with the 'physical' world. As the Puppet Master is forced to move within the already expressed body attached to virtual embodiment this provides the reason why he believes that he was not a body before and can only be a corpse now that he has entered the cyborg body. Information, cyberspatiality, and virtual embodiment are seen to lack 'full' existence and be non-corporeal. It is only when a human

interlocutor engages with it that it has any being as such with the common reading conceiving the Puppet Master as a disembodied 'life form made of pure data'.⁶²

An irony pervades statements such as 'pure data' or 'cyberconsciousness' disclosed by the Puppet Master's declaration that he 'was born in a sea of information.' Once again echoing the diving metaphor used throughout the film, the Puppet Master is pinpointing that although he is coded from 'birth' as information, this nevertheless provides him a certain lived reality. He can experience and express the world which he would be unable to do if he was not a body. He is able to swim and dive – gesture – around the various nets. He is able to have an impact not only within the virtual by inhabiting it, but affect others in 'reality' through ghosthacking and residing in a cyborg torso. Put more pointedly, there is more depth to virtuality than has been previously considered. Information is an expression of a certain form of experience. Experience that in order to be intelligible is forced to move within questionable meanings, where tensions between a humanist reduction and posthumanist emergence are located: what has already been expressed and what is in the process of expression.

Georgio Hadi Curti makes a similar point to the one I am making about information. He does this through a reading of the city. He asserts that

much like the Puppet Master, born from a complex sea of information, the city as an external memory is also a form of complexity; and like the Puppet Master the city too exists autonomously from human memories. Despite the common belief that the city is merely a sum and totality of human constructs, the city, like the Puppet Master, strives and endeavours in its own way with a certain level of active autonomy and vitality. As it is autonomous from humans in its own complexity and with its own phenomenal realities – it exists as its own spirit. This cannot be directly sensed or experienced through direct observation, not because it is less potent or real than our spirited vitality but because it is different.⁶³

Just like Motoko and the Puppet Master, the city contains within it a different corporeal style of being than a common sensical approach can manage. None of these styles are singularly reducible

⁶² Silvio, 'Refiguring the Radical Cyborg', p. 3.

⁶³ Curti, 'The Ghost in the City and a Landscape of Life', p. 97.

to human experience since human experience cannot express the types of experiences that these embodied beings have. For Curti, the landscape itself is a different style of being. He continues that

[the city] is a different body, a different mode, made up in a different complexity and intensity, and thus may be barely sensible to human understanding. A true gaining from filmic experiences and expressions of material realities and conditions of everyday lives therefore must expand to include difference in all its imaginable (and even unimaginable) forms.⁶⁴

This echoes what I describe in *The Thirteenth Floor* regarding how, in its virtual worlds, ‘meaning move without the human’⁶⁵ in a strict and narrow sense. The city’s corporeal style of being in the world is ‘barely sensible to human understanding’, as are both the Puppet Master and Motoko. They express differently and are only indirectly recognizable, which furnishes the tension between a humanist reduction and a posthumanist emergence: they can only be apprehended ‘by coexistence, laterally, *by the style*’,⁶⁶ so that ‘accidental feature[s] of our relations with [them]’⁶⁷ do not engender a ‘false recognition’.⁶⁸

However, due to the Puppet Master’s statement that ‘there will be no corpse because, until now, there never was a body’, I still have to clarify why exactly the Puppet Master does not read his virtual embodiment as embodiment and clarify the corporeality of his existence. The Puppet Master describes his existence similar to the process of memory and the transference of meaning. His retort to the charge that he is simply a self-preserving program by highlighting that that argument is similar to the notion of DNA demonstrates that the way in which he reads his embodiment is predicated, in part, on a reduction to an organic one. Like the characters in *The Thirteenth Floor* he reads his existence only through the lens of an organic embodiment. As a result he is forced to engage common-sensical frameworks and meanings in order to render his style of being in the world intelligible. The incredulity of the Section 6 official at the Puppet Master’s request for

⁶⁴ Curti, ‘The Ghost in the City and a Landscape of Life’, p. 103.

⁶⁵ Badmington, ‘Cultural Studies and the Posthumanities’, p. 270.

⁶⁶ Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated May 1959, *VI*, p. 188.

⁶⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Donald A. Landes (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), p. 312.

⁶⁸ Merleau-Ponty, ‘The Specter of a Pure Language’, *PW*, p. 6.

political asylum demonstrates the Puppet Master's use of the rhetoric which structures a human world in order to operate within it. The Puppet Master is seemingly bound to it, no matter how he may exist. He has to render his existence – his body, his corporeal style of being in the world – fundamentally in terms which make sense to the human interlocutors, or else they will deny his existence. Just like Motoko, he does not really know what he is and is caught between a humanist reduction and posthumanist emergence.

At this point in the narrative an explosion occurs and in the resulting chaos the torso is taken. It emerges that the Puppet Master was originally a program, Project 2501, designed by Section 6 to perform covert operations principally for industrial espionage and political subterfuge. The ghost-hacking that it committed on the binman and interpreter were done on the orders of Section 6. To cover this up they set off the explosion and take the Puppet Master. Following a chase Motoko eventually catches up with the culprits in an abandoned warehouse but is confronted with a tank. She struggles to do any damage to the tank with the low level weapons she has, eventually attempting to tear open the tank and in failing to do so rips her body apart. Damaged beyond repair, Motoko finds herself defenceless until Batou appears with an anti-tank rifle, disables the tank, and retrieves the Puppet Master. As Motoko's torso sits next to the Puppet Master's, she asks Batou to setup a link between them so that she may dive into the Puppet Master.

Diving and Merging Sequence Between Motoko and the Puppet Master.

The story arcs of Motoko and the Puppet Master are mirrored through the film as Oshii deploys a doubled narrative. They are both caught in similar predicaments and forced to engage in certain ways: their styles of being in the world are not seen as authentic. Their bodies are forced to engage with questionable and inadequate institutionalized meanings. Regardless of the fact that they themselves partially reduce their experiences and embodiments to a 'human' conception, this nevertheless demonstrates at least an initial way of expressing their embodiment. In relation to the

Puppet Master it is his informational style of being in the world, and its expression of a virtual embodiment: the flesh of an informational body. If they were not embodied the Puppet Master and Motoko's corporeal status would falter and could continue to be reduced to the trope of disembodiment. Yet, as I have previously stated, the disembodiment thesis, despite its numerous problems, invites us to explore alternative forms of embodiment of which the virtual is only one, and its expression through informational bodies is similarly one variant.

As the sequence begins the Puppet Master explains: 'as I wandered the various nets I became self-aware. Programmers considered it a bug and forced me into a body to separate me from the net.' There are two ways to read this declaration. The first is that the Puppet Master was not embodied until he entered the body of the cyborg shell, and the second is that he already was a body and something else occurred when he entered the cyborg torso. The 'masculinist' fantasies that Silvio outlines, however, are inverted in this statement. The Puppet Master does not feel that 'his' informational body is a 'real' body even though it was what enabled him to swim through the nets, which aligns with Silvio's reading to a degree. However, it is only when the Puppet Master is in the cyborg shell that he begins to speak and lay claim to the same rights as those granted to some humans: that is, he has to be embodied before he is able to request political asylum. Oshii treats embodiment here as only aligned with certain forms and is unable to provide an expansion of it. Silvio comments that '[the film] [...] [contains] that potential [of expansion] by re-narrating it within another older and better known myth: the dominance of masculine mind and spirit over the feminine materiality of the body'.⁶⁹ However, the 'older and better known myth' is not that of a complacent masculine/feminine duality, but the 'myth' which gives rise to that reading in the first place: a reduction of embodiment(s) to only one form, an organic embodiment or more pointedly, an embodiment read only through the 'human' (whatever that may be).

⁶⁹ Silvio, 'Refiguring the Radical Cyborg', p. 3.

The first reading maintains that the Puppet Master is disembodied until he enters the cyborg shell, reiterating the reading that Silvio provides through a mind-body split. This continues the insistence that virtual beings are disembodied rather than approaching virtuality as a form of embodiment with its own expressive bodies and particular corporeal styles of being in the world. The Puppet Master contradicts his earlier statement that ‘I may have entered the cyborg body because I was unable to crack Section 6’s attack protection, but it was of my own free will that I came here’ by stating that, in fact, he was *forced* into that body.⁷⁰ This contradiction pointedly demonstrates his confusion as well as that his existence, supposedly one in which ‘computerized existence enables rather than limits’,⁷¹ is caught within the same circuit as Motoko. The second reading, however, provides much more as it takes seriously that the supposedly untethered cyberconsciousness that he is when he is roaming the nets is, in fact, embodied: an intertwining of the flesh of the (virtual) world and the flesh of an (informational) body. The Puppet Master has a lived experience of virtual embodiment expressed through information: he has a corporeal style of being in the world. The virtual is corporeal.

As Motoko dives into the Puppet Master she opines on the idea of the ‘human condition’, and the notion of ‘life’. The Puppet Master explains, now speaking through Motoko’s torso,⁷² ‘I called myself a life-form but I am still far from complete. For some reason my system lacks the basic life processes of either death or the ability to leave behind offspring.’ Motoko replies asking if he can copy himself, to which the Puppet Master responds:

A copy is merely a copy. There’s the possibility a single virus could utterly destroy me. A mere copy doesn’t offer variety or individuality. To exist, to reach equilibrium, life seeks to multiply and vary constantly at times giving up its life [as the camera pans up

⁷⁰ The ‘here’ is never really specified and remains ambiguous to a degree as it can be read that he chose to go to Section 9 (which he did) because he entered a megatech shell, or that he was specifically forced into a megatech shell.

⁷¹ Silvio, ‘Refiguring the Radical Cyborg’, p. 6.

⁷² Cavallaro highlights the different ways an audience may receive this sequence as it can be quite jarring to hear the Puppet Master’s words uttered through Motoko. ‘The overall effect is a baffling sense of dislocation. From the viewpoint of Western liberal humanism, this strategy may be seen to allude to an irretrievably lamentable loss of selfhood and self-containedness, yet from an Eastern perspective, the dissolution of Kusanagi’s identity and personal boundaries carries positive connotations. Indeed it is consonant with the Japanese concept of *seishinhugi*: namely, spiritual catharsis and growth through suffering and self-deprivation’. *The Cinema of Mamoru Oshii*, p. 190.

to a bullet-riddled tree of life] cells continue the process of death and regeneration, being constantly reborn as they age. And when it comes time to die, all the data it possesses is lost leaving behind only its genes and its offspring: a defence against catastrophic failure of an inflexible system.

The Puppet Master views himself as being incomplete because of his perceived inability to create. He wishes to guard against extinction because of the inflexibility of the system under which he is forced to operate: humanism. The Puppet Master cannot be read simply as a cyberconsciousness, a being of pure data, or a masculinist projection whose ‘existence enables rather than limits’⁷³ - this simply misses the point. The tensions which arise in the Puppet Master and Motoko, the confusion and contradiction that he puts forward, like Motoko, the informational body that he is, and the virtual embodiment that that expresses *are limiting* because of the imposed meanings that they are forced to navigate. Information, like artificiality, instrumentality, and code, has a multiplicity of meanings that do not necessarily have to be tethered by a humanist *telos*. Rather, they demonstrate styles of being in the world that can only be grasped laterally and intercorporeally. The transition, however, that the Puppet Master has already made from the virtual world to the more recognizable world of the other characters by being forced into the cyborg shell mitigates parts of his claims regarding being unable to create; perhaps there are two Puppet Masters, one which exists as a virtual being and goes by the name Project 2501 and another, or perhaps a copy, which was forced into the Megatech body. The Puppet Master may have already transformed once. He wishes to merge with Motoko in order to guard against a perceived extinction remarking that after the merging a coherence will still be there and Motoko will not lose everything in this transformation. Motoko is in the identical predicament as the Puppet Master: she has no genes to pass on nor does her cyborg body have the capability to provide offspring.⁷⁴ The Puppet Master’s embodiment continues to be read through a humanist *telos* and an organic embodiment; he places the authenticity of his being explicitly on the ability to be a ‘full’ life-form, one which has the ability to die and procreate. The

⁷³ Silvio, ‘Refiguring the Radical Cyborg’, p. 6.

⁷⁴ The manga varies here from the film quite explicitly due to its heavily sexualised imagery and detailed passages of the lesbian relations that Motoko engages in. That is, while the cyborg body of Motoko is not able to have offspring she can certainly have sex and does so explicitly in the manga. This divergence between the two media’ would make an interesting analysis, particularly from a feminist or queer perspective, however this is not the place to do it.

Puppet Master yearns to be *complete* instead of living a supposed half-life as an embodied virtual being incapable of the transmission of life. He attempts to model his existence on an organic or biological embodiment, perhaps projected from it, even though it really should have no bearing on the being that Puppet Master is – ‘simulation’ no longer a hyperreality but a hypervirtuality. The Puppet Master is differently embodied by being ‘born in a sea of information’ with a different corporeal style of being in the world, yet is not allowed to be different through the meanings which circulate and force him (just as Section 6 ‘forced’ him into the Megatech body) to operate under parameters which are inadequate. Nevertheless by reading the Puppet Master through information, as an already expressed body of virtual embodiment, a corporeal style of being the world is disclosed.

When the discussion draws to a close the Puppet Master explicitly states he went into the Megatech body due to the company's relation to Section 9, so that he would be able to interact with Motoko since ‘in [her], [he saw himself] as a body sees its reflection within a mirror’. As a result of their shared predicament, suspended between a humanist reduction and posthumanist emergence, Motoko and the Puppet Master are drawn together. They are both limited because of the ways they are forced to exist – the already expressed styles of being available to them. Both are confused, contradictory, yet as Silvio points out:

the final psychic union of Kusanagi and the Puppet Master seems to valorize cybertechnology for enabling the progressive recoding and manipulation of the material constraints of the body by a newly liberated mind, it curiously seems to rely upon a traditional conception of the body in order to make this point.⁷⁵

While the imagery that is attached to the final merging sequence is couched in ‘traditional conceptions of the body’ through gendered language and the requisite discussion of ‘higher planes’ and angelic imagery to convey a certain kind of transcendence, in no instance is there the mention of a mind-body split or of a cybertechnology that ‘enables the progressive recoding and

⁷⁵ Silvio, ‘Refiguring the Radical Cyborg’, p. 10.

manipulation of material constraints of the body by a newly liberated mind.’ While the human characters are largely incredulous regarding the status of the Puppet Master and the virtual experiences of the binman, this is simply because they do not understand, as Motoko, and to a degree Batou, do. Motoko does not take her ability to access cyberspace – a virtual world – as a sort of prosthetic engagement. As an embodied being created through the intertwining of information and technology Motoko ability to access the virtual world is a birthright. While many of the analyses of the film have tended to focus on Motoko’s arc, they are largely done in relation to the ‘traditional conceptions of the body’ that Silvio highlights. The appearance of the Puppet Master’s body as an expression of virtual embodiment is not a jarring development for Motoko. There is an immediate recognition on her part of the Puppet Master’s being, a recognition that is denied, and which she denies herself (just as the Puppet Master denies his virtual being), and it is not a question of a mind-body hierarchy, or a removal of ‘material constraints...by a newly liberated mind’. It is an expansion of what corporeality, embodiment, and bodies are. Virtual embodiments have just as much a claim to being as any other embodiment: the flesh of a (virtual) body.

Ultimately, however, through the use of angelic imagery and discussion of transcendence to a higher plane the film does re-encode liberatory fantasies, but they are liberatory fantasies of a different type than one of ‘substance dualisms’.⁷⁶ The new entity that emerges through the union of Motoko and the Puppet Master is one that is able to move, just as Motoko had, through a variety of worlds, and is explored in more detail in the sequel *Ghost in Shell 2: Innocence* and in Shirow’s original manga. The liberatory fantasy is one of being able to be a different form of embodiment with different expressive bodies, and different corporeal styles of being the world without recourse to the limiting assumptions that they were each forced to move under when they were suspended between a humanist reduction and posthumanist emergence. Perhaps the new entity ‘born in a sea of information’ is a posthuman being, but the arc of Motoko and the Puppet Master both elucidate

⁷⁶ Curti, ‘The Ghost in the City and a Landscape of Life’, p. 95.

virtual embodiment already expressed by information and styles of being in the world regardless of whether that world is virtual or otherwise: the intertwining the flesh of the (virtual) world and the flesh of an (informational) body.

Conclusion

Corporeal Ontology

Near where I live there is a large urban park consisting of recreation grounds, pleasure gardens, and a lake. The pleasure gardens and the lake are a two minute walk from my door, so I visit them quite regularly. At the lake there is a piece of poetry that has been placed on a plaque at an elevated platform which overlooks the lake from the east side. The inscription on the plaque reads:

A local resident, Mr Greg Freeman, submitted a poem to the Millennium Library of poems, an action which remained undiscovered until after his death. The work was selected and published in 'Memories of the Millennium' an anthology featuring poems and poets of the 20th Century.

While the inscription with its contextualization did not capture my eye, as it were, having sat at the bench which faces the plaque on multiple occasions I actually decided to read the poem one day.

The poem is as follows:

The Lake

Rippled wave with tinselled top
 always make me look and stop.
 Sculptured moving work of art
 reflecting nature's changing charts.
 Trees like sentinels surreal
 give the lake a guarded feel.
 Overlooking from their height
 the waves that glisten in the light.
 Each one an echo of its neighbour
 their shape in time no one can measure.
 Never alone for each one twinned
 they change direction with the wind.
 Patterned patchwork, scalloped down
 the surface heaving without sound.
 No lapping can be heard...no cry
 as each wave lives, it's soon to die.
 It's birth was only for a second
 and I was there to see it happen.
 No one else will ever see
 the wave that lived life just for me.

Initially the poem invokes a description of the relation between trees and the waves of the water by describing them as if the poet was, as it were, in the position of and at the same level as the trees.

The trees are described as 'sentinels', 'overlooking' and guarding the lake against possible transgressions. The waves, in a sense, come under the protection of the trees around them which details a relation between the trees and the lake based on their mutual encroachment. The trees

‘guard’ while the waves ‘glisten.’ The description then shifts to the relation between the waves where they encroach and ‘echo’ one another via their twining. The waves intertwine with each other and with the trees. Wind invokes a change in the direction of the waves. Four intertwinings are disclosed with the wave as the pivot that radiates them: tree and wave, light and wave, wave and wave, wind and wave. The waves are grasped laterally by their style and the intertwining they have with tree, light, wave, or wind: guarding, glistening, echoing, and moving. The waves heave as the surface closes back in on itself, returning to the mute world where ‘no lapping can be heard...no cry’. While the initial description moves towards an intertwining and encroachment between the waves and other elements particularly through the description of each wave twinned, this step is foreclosed as the waves are subjected to the gaze of the poet. The pivot shifts from the body of the wave to the human body in its glance.

Merleau-Ponty writes of the human body that

we must therefore recognize that which is designated by the terms ‘glance,’ ‘hand’ and in general ‘body’ is a system of systems devoted to the inspection of a world and capable of leaping over distances, piercing the perceptual future, and outlining hollows and reliefs, distances and deviations, – a meaning – in the inconceivable flatness of being.¹

The poet's body as a system of systems devoted to the inspection of the world, however, expresses a humanist *telos* in which ‘No one will ever see/the wave that lived life just for me.’ In the instance of this poem, while initially pointing to the wave as the central pivot of the four intertwinings of tree, light, wave, and wind and their encroachment upon one another, when the human body is invoked it puts forward a surveying presence. The corporeal beings that the poet is trying to describe are instead held captive by the poet's gaze. The wave only ‘lived life for me’ because the poet was the only one who had eyes to see its fleeting life before it coiled back. The poet's body *completed* the wave through the denial of other beings that also pivoted around it. The flesh of the wave's body is only grasped indirectly, by its style of being in the world, at the moment that the poet

¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’, in *Signs*, trans. by Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 39-83(p. 67).

sees this other being. The poet's bodily relation to the wave is dialectical where 'the relationship of 'humanity' and 'nature' is to be understood as a *totality*; the world is what it is as a result of its being lived in and transformed by humanity, while humanity in turn acquires its character through its existence and situation in the world'.² In the instance of the poem the poet's gaze surveys and transforms the world acquiring sense of the world. However, the world is reduced as the wave which simultaneously expresses an intertwining with a multiplicity of other beings in the world is rendered simply as a wave which 'lived life just for me.' What is disclosed here is an example of what Merleau-Ponty calls 'bad dialectic'.³

Just as Merleau-Ponty writes that there is a 'bad ambiguity'⁴ there is also a 'bad dialectic' which 'against its own principles, imposes an external law and framework upon the content and restores for its own uses the pre-dialectical thought'⁵: the humanist *telos* is an enforcer, as it were, of this bad dialectic as it imposes a framework. In distinction to the bad dialectic there is a 'good dialectic' or 'hypercentic' which 'envisages without restriction the plurality of relationships and what has been called ambiguity'⁶ wherein, like 'good ambiguity',

signification never is except in tendency, where inertia of the content never permits the defining of one term as positive, another as negative, and still less of a third term as absolute suppression of the negative by itself [...] that must rediscover the being that lies before the cleavage operated by reflection, about it, on its horizons, not outside of us and not in us, but where the two movements cross, there were 'there is' something.⁷

Chiasm is the name for when the two movements cross: the flesh of bodies and the flesh of the world. It is where a posthumanist corporeal ontology becomes possible. Prior to a reflective movement which would survey them from above what we have with flesh and style is a kind of levelling. This is a levelling which demonstrates a chiasmatic intertwining and divergence – for

² Kate Soper, *Humanism and Anti-Humanism* (Chicago: Open Court, 1986), p. 24.

³ Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 94.

⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'An Unpublished Text by Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *A Prospectus of his Work*', trans. by Arleen B. Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History and Politics*, ed. by James M. Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), pp. 3-11 (p. 11).

⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 94.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 94-95.

instance, by a body that uses and a body that is used or the elucidation of alternative embodiments and styles of being in the world. These are grasped laterally and are unable to be completed by habitual and already expressed ways of reading them. While artificiality, instrumentality, information, and virtuality are ways of describing different corporeal styles of being in the world, they are already expressed ways in which different bodies circulate and are demonstrative of alternative forms of embodiment. They nevertheless have multiple registers of meaning, of which a human meaning is only one and it cannot be teleological. Corporeal styles of being in the world furnish a posthumanist corporeal ontology which discloses that ‘every meaning, whatever its degree of abstraction, has its roots in corporeal life’⁸ and there is a corporeal relevance of every being. Posthumanism cannot think of technological ‘objects’ as being disembodied or of a non-corporeal space of virtuality nor reduce these other corporealities to simply human forms and expressions or ‘organic essentialism’.⁹ Rather, like the multiple registers of meaning associated with expressive bodies and the styles of being in the world they disclose, there are multiple forms of embodiment and bodies: each a side of the same corporeal coin.

With Merleau-Ponty's development of style and flesh there is an unprecedented degree of openness and levelling with the world and corporeal beings wherein

in order that this openness take place, in order that decidedly we get out of our thoughts, in order that nothing stand between us and it [...] it is necessary that nothing detain me within myself far from them – no ‘representation,’ no ‘thought,’ no ‘image,’ and not even that epithet ‘subject,’ ‘mind,’ or ‘Ego,’ with which the philosopher wishes to distinguish me absolutely from the things.¹⁰

The corporeal ontology that I have been detailing allows one to see, hear, touch, and, most importantly, to *feel* other beings and ourselves with greater specificity by describing the multiplicity of relations of beings via the intertwinings of the flesh of bodies and the flesh of the world, even as

⁸ Renaud Barbaras ‘A Phenomenology of Life’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*, ed. by Taylor Carman and Mark B. Hansen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 206-230 (p. 211).

⁹ Elaine Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens, and Others in Popular Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), pp. 233-34.

¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 52.

they become complex through the way they have already been expressed.

Corporeal Gestures

Merleau-Ponty lucidly states his ontological project in a working note:

Ontology would be the elaboration of the notions that have to replace that of transcendental subjectivity, those of subject, object, meaning-- the definition of philosophy would involve an elucidation of philosophical expression itself [...] as the expression of what is before expression *and sustains it from behind*.¹¹

To recall, I have situated embodiment as a kind of poise or readiness to experience the world with a body as the expression of that experience as the two sides of the same corporeal coin; an expressive body details a style of being in the world through its intertwining with other expressive bodies and the world and that that style of being in the world is the flesh of its body. There are alternative embodiments, such as the technological and virtual forms outlined in Chapters 2 and 4, which express different bodies with different corporeal styles of being in the world. The flesh of these bodies is furnished by the world as, following Merleau-Ponty, it is the world which ‘teaches [...] .a general way of expressing being’.¹² The flesh of a body is analogous with but divergent from the flesh of the world and the flesh of other bodies: corporeal beings are of the world but they are not it. They are expressive bodies which gesture and demonstrate that ‘the gesture, or something like the gesture, [...] is [...] capable of providing [an] [...] alternative’.¹³ For Merleau-Ponty expression ‘is to be understood in a broad sense, including also bodily expression, and even the expressive content of things’.¹⁴ Expression is not limited only to language. Merleau-Ponty declares that if

we compare language to mute forms of expression such as gesture or paintings, we must point out that unlike these forms language is not content to sketch out directions, vectors, ‘a coherent deformation,’ or a tacit meaning on the surface of the world.¹⁵

There are expressions which are not of language but are mute: these are corporeal gestures. What I

¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated Jan 1959, *VI*, p. 167. Emphasis in original.

¹² Merleau-Ponty, ‘ILVS’, p. 56.

¹³ M.C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, 2nd edn (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997), p. 188.

¹⁴ Bernard Waldenfels, ‘The Paradox of Expression’, trans. by Chris Nagel, in *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, ed. by Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 89-102 (pp. 91-92).

¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty, ‘ILVS’, p. 81.

mean by this is that expression is not only found in language, but through expressive bodies and the corporeal gestures associated with them. I do not mean gesture here only in the sense of a movement of a particular body such as handshake or a good-bye wave. I mean gesture in a more generalized sense as the corporeal capacity to intertwine with another expressive body. Gestures are not only a movement nor are expressions only linguistic. The flesh of a body demarcates an ebb and flow: the *chiasm* and *écart* of flesh in which ‘the Other exists, not behind the flow of his activities and gestures, but through them’.¹⁶ To clarify this I return to Merleau-Ponty's elucidation of the cube and how he refines it in *The Visible and the Invisible*.

Merleau-Ponty elucidates the cube in the *Phenomenology of Perception* at first through the pre-conceptualized idea of a ‘cube’ and how this impacts one's bodily experience of the cube by demarcating in advance the meaning of the cube. That is, one is determining by the term ‘cube’ what a cube is, not constructed by the object itself or even from one's own body, but by the term ‘cube’ which through a reflective act dissociates it from its embodiment: a direct correlation is posited between the ‘word’ and the ‘thing’ as the cube is *completed* by the term ‘cube’. Yet he continues that one has no need to determine it in advance of bodily experience. It is through a bodily engagement with it that the cube is experienced and expressed. Merleau-Ponty's analysis of the cube in *Phenomenology of Perception* is to describe how a body is always interacting with the world. As he refines his thesis in *The Visible and the Invisible*, we find that the cube is grasped laterally, by its style, as the cube is an expression of the same world as my body. The flesh of the cube's body and the flesh of my body intertwine. Merleau-Ponty writes:

For if there is flesh, that is, if the hidden face of the cube radiates forth somewhere as well as does the face I have under my eyes, and coexists with it, and if I who see the cube also belong to the visible, I am visible from elsewhere, and if I and the cube are together caught up in one same ‘element’ [...] this cohesion, this visibility by principle, prevails over every momentary discordance.¹⁷

¹⁶ Linda Singer, ‘Merleau-Ponty and the Concept of Style’, in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. by Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), pp. 233-244 (p. 242).

¹⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 140.

The experience that a body has of the cube is through the expressive radiation of the cube. Like my body, it is an expressive field. The cube and the body seeing it coexist within the same world and it has a ‘hidden face’ as I have a face ‘under my eyes’. The intertwining of my body and the cube ‘prevails over every momentary discordance’ so that the cube has a recognizable style of being in the world, which nevertheless evades *complete* definition. When I write that an object is an expressive body which gestures I mean that it is a corporeal being in the world and the flesh of its body radiates expression: gestures are a mark of this ambiguous intertwining of its flesh with the flesh of another expressive body and the world – its corporeal style of being in the world. Technological and virtual embodiment and their already expressed bodies through instrumentality, artificiality, code, and information are just different ways of marking this. Merleau-Ponty comments further in a working note that there is

an openness upon the cube itself by means of a view of the cube which is a distancing [...] to say that I have a view of it is to say that, in perceiving it, I go from myself unto it [...] I, my *view*, are caught in the same world with it; i.e.: my view and my body themselves emerge from the same being which is, among other things, a *cube* [...] And it is for my flesh, my body of vision, that there can be the cube itself which closes the circuit and completes my being-seen.¹⁸

For Merleau-Ponty in order for a body which has eyes to see the seer must also be capable of being-seen. It is not my body which completes another's body; rather, it is their body which completes mine: the humanist *telos* is upended and the situation is reversed. Even if another expressive body cannot see, touch, or feel, it can still be seen, touched, and felt. These are corporeal gestures that it does not have to make, as it were, but are already parts of its corporeal being. If we were to place the cube on a bed of grass, the cube is still touching the grass and the grass touching the cube. The grass bends as an object falls or is intentionally placed on it. If there was no intertwining, no corporeal basis in the world, the grass would have no need to bend, nor would the cube, for instance, draw moisture from the ground. In distinction to Merleau-Ponty a body's ability to intertwine need not be intentional. It is these ambiguous intertwinings that are corporeal gestures

¹⁸ Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated Sept 1959, VI, pp. 202-203.

with flesh sustaining them through its *chiasm* and *écart*, a reversibility and divergence ‘which does not destroy their bonding synergy, that therefore does not announce a divorce into separate substances or categories of Being’¹⁹ nor ‘cut the organic bonds between the perception and the thing perceived with a hypothesis of inexistence’.²⁰ There is a ‘belongingness of [a] body to being and the corporeal relevance of every being’²¹ in which a levelling occurs via style and flesh. ‘The flesh (of the world or my own) is not contingency, chaos, but a texture that returns to itself and conforms to itself.’²²

Corporeal Ontology

Flesh brings a ‘style of being wherever there is a fragment of being’.²³ A style is a system of equivalences between expressive bodies where other beings are grasped laterally, the flesh of their bodies detailed through a ‘divergent reversibility’²⁴ which brings bodies together but also preserves difference. Even in the painter’s emblematic vision of the world he or she only sees fragments of the world which ‘contain all sorts of shapes of being’.²⁵ Yet flesh ‘can traverse, animate other bodies as well as my own [...] [and] if it lets itself be captivated by one of its fragments...opens for an “intercorporeity”’.²⁶ An intercorporeality that is detailed and sustained by flesh. While Merleau-Ponty takes the flesh of the human body as emblematic I want to expand this as there is a levelling with style and flesh so that, as Françoise Dastur comments:

One does not pass from the experience of the lived body to the experience of the world's flesh by analogy, precisely because the experience of the lived body is already in itself the experience of a *general* reversibility. Rather than folding the subject back onto its private world, this reversibility opens the lived body on the contrary to an

¹⁹ Galen A. Johnson, ‘Ontology and Painting: ‘Eye and Mind’’, in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. by Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), pp. 35-55 (p. 49).

²⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 38.

²¹ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 118.

²² Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 146.

²³ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 139.

²⁴ Françoise Dastur, ‘World, Flesh, Vision’, trans. by Ted Toadvine, in *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty’s Notion of Flesh*, ed. by Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 23-49 (p. 37).

²⁵ Merleau-Ponty, ‘ILVS’, p. 56.

²⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 140-141. I take Merleau-Ponty’s use of intercorporeity to be interchangeable with intercorporeality.

‘intercorporeity’.²⁷

The human body in its styles of being in the world is already caught up in co-existence and co-functioning with other corporeal styles of being in the world, a ‘general reversibility’ marked by flesh which does not return a human body to its ‘private world’. Like other bodies the human body opens to an intercorporeality, yet is also different from these other bodies as they are different from my body. Véronique Fóti comments that

Rather than seeking to surmount or marginalize difference, intercorporeity foregrounds it, in keeping with the divergence essential to chiasmatic articulation. The Other with whom I am inextricably interlinked is not just, as the French language expresses it forcefully, *mon semblable* (literally, my 'similar'), but may belong to orders of sentience remote from the human.²⁸

The *telos* of humanism, which posits a direct correlation and a completeness of expression, cannot be ‘reified, completed or contemplated’ as ‘it is dispersed, always incomplete in itself and yet calling for its completion, while at the same time denying that possibility.’²⁹ The *telos* is upended by the divergent reversibility of flesh: as bodies encroach and diverge from one another in an intercorporeality a multiplicity of corporeal styles of being in the world come to be recognized. These styles are grasped laterally and indirectly and these corporeal styles of being in the world speak ‘not according to the law of word-meanings inherent in the given language, but with a perhaps difficult effort that uses the significations of words to express, beyond themselves, our mute contact with the things, when they are not yet said’.³⁰ This is perhaps why the posthumanist corporeal ontology put forward may seem counter-intuitive when discussing alternative forms of embodiments and describing the expressive bodies of an object, thing, or virtual being. The paradox of expression, which I elucidated in Chapter 1, is what Merleau-Ponty is redeploying in the quotation above: the tension between what has been expressed and what is in the process of

²⁷ Dastur, ‘World, Flesh, Vision’, p. 34.

²⁸ Véronique M. Fóti, ‘Chiasm, Flesh, Figuration: Towards a Non-Positive Ontology’, in *Merleau-Ponty and the Possibilities of Philosophy: Transforming the Tradition*, ed. by Bernard Flynn, Wayne J. Froman, and Robert Vallier (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), pp. 183-196 (p. 189).

²⁹ Christopher Watkins, *Phenomenology or Deconstruction? The Question of Ontology in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricoeur and Jean-Luc Nancy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 31. Watkins makes these comments in reference to Merleau-Ponty’s indirect ontology.

³⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 38.

expression, or, as detailed in Chapter 4, a tension between a humanist reduction and a posthumanist emergence. If we begin to think about the body no longer limited to the confines of a human body or of only organic or biological embodiment, then we have begun to push discussions of bodies, embodiment, and corporeality towards a ‘mute contact with the things, when they are not yet said’. This is the lesson of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of expression and indirect ontology of flesh: there are a multiplicity of styles of being in the world disclosed through the reversibility and divergence of flesh, both the flesh of a body and the flesh of the world. As Véronique Fóti notes, ‘the expressive multiplicity of flesh [...] [is] a limitless proliferation of 'styles,' both natural and cultural, that are expressive in their own right’, with flesh ‘not only an expressive multiplicity but also a matrix of expression’³¹ which, for the posthumanist corporeal ontology developed here, includes not only styles which mark organic or biological embodiments, but also technological and virtual embodiments. Where the difficulty arises is that there are habitual ways which have already expressed these other corporeal styles of being in the world in terms like instrumentality, artificiality, information, code, and virtuality. Yet, they are nevertheless unable to be *complete* because they can only be grasped laterally and indirectly. The difficulties seen in each of the films discussed revolves around this tension within expression and attempts to force alternative forms of embodiment and bodily expressivity to conform to ‘the law of word-meanings’ not only within the narratives of the films themselves, but through directorial choices and discussions of the films by critics. Even though there are bodies which have already been expressed in a multiplicity of ways this does not mean that the already expressed serves to define or *complete* them once and for all as if they were singularities. Jack Reynolds comments that, for Merleau-Ponty

there is a divergence or dissociation between self and other, but they are also chiasmatically intertwined in such a way that to speak of radical singularity of the self, or the radical otherness of the other, is to ignore the fact that both paradigms are conceivable only on account of partaking of the one flesh (VI, 248-251).³² For Merleau-Ponty we might suggest, all singularities emerge out of this intercorporeal and pre-

³¹ Véronique M. Fóti, *Tracing Expression in Merleau-Ponty: Aesthetics, Philosophy of Biology, and Ontology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013), pp. 116-117.

³² In-text reference to Working note dated May 1960, *VI*, pp. 248-251.

subjective or 'anonymous' flesh.³³

When I discussed technological embodiment through instrumentality and artificiality and virtual embodiment through code and information I was pointing out that even if these terms are inadequate they still elucidate different corporeal styles of being in the world, different bodies and different embodiments. They have corporeal gestures which are interpreted by a human style of being in the world through an intercorporeal dynamic. The flesh of another's body is of the same flesh as my body, of the same world. Singer observes that 'by emphasizing style's interpretive character, Merleau-Ponty reminds us that all ways of deciphering the world are inventions, and that no style has privileged access to presenting the world as it is'.³⁴ Human styles of being in the world grasp these other corporeal beings through a style which is indirect. What this means is that the flesh of another's body has an epistemic effect which provides a recognition, but eludes *complete* definition. Human styles of being in the world are unable to be privileged as flesh maintains an intercorporeal levelling and this levelling lends itself to perhaps that most difficult and nearly impossible task: ethics.

The ethical demands of posthumanism have largely been explored on two major fronts: one which moves beyond a notion of 'rights' and another which stresses processes of becoming and emergent subjectivities. The first of these demands is located in the work Cary Wolfe in his exploration of animals, disability, and systems posthumanism in *Animal Rites* and *What is Posthumanism?*. In both works he argues against a simplistic notion of 'rights' which would expand the 'rights' of humans to the 'rights' of animals. To this end he follows Derrida's illumination³⁵ of Bentham's question of 'can [animals] suffer?'.³⁶ In *What is Posthumanism?* he criticises bioethics for primarily being focused not on life implied by *bios* but that 'the very title 'bioethics' is itself

³³ Jack Reynolds, *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida: Intertwining Embodiment and Alterity* (Athens: University of Ohio Press, 2004), p. 170.

³⁴ Singer, 'Merleau-Ponty on the Concept of Style', p. 239.

³⁵ Jacques Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I am*, trans. by David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

³⁶ Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), pp. 61-78.

misleading insofar as the word means an ‘ethics’ of the *living* and not, say, “biomedical research and health care decision-making procedures”³⁷. Wolfe implies an embeddedness of animals and other forms of life in questions concerning suffering, vulnerability, and care.

Notions of shared vulnerability, compassion and care are also implied within the second form of ethics grounded in processes of becoming and emergent subjectivities found in the work of N.

Katherine Hayles, Stefan Herbrechter, and Rosi Braidotti. Hayles' vision of the posthuman is one which ‘recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival’³⁸ and stresses the need to disclose new forms of subjectivity and the implied ethical demands that these new forms would open up. Stefan Herbrechter seeks to base an ethics on shared vulnerability and a form of care that necessitates a

demand for an anthropology of a new, posthuman society with its moral, political, ecological and so on, premises, on the one hand, and for a history of technology (technics) and media with their fundamental co-implications between human, technology, information, culture and nature, on the other hand.³⁹

As he and Ivan Callus highlight, this revolves around the question of ‘Do you care enough for your humanity to allow the posthuman to be?’⁴⁰ To this end Herbrechter calls for a ‘strategic misanthropy’ based ‘out of care for the human and for a future of and for humans, including their natural and cultural environment’ against ‘humanistic self-indulgence and uncritical complacency’.⁴¹ Similar to Hayles' and Herbrechter's stressing of processes of becoming and emergent subjectivities, Rosi Braidotti⁴² seeks to base a posthuman ethics on these processes which produce a ‘radical relationality’ of becoming-subjects (animal, earth, machine) and calls for a ‘sustainable ethics for non-unitary subjects [which] rests on an enlarged sense of inter-connection

³⁷ Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*, p. 51.

³⁸ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 5.

³⁹ Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), p. 193.

⁴⁰ Callus and Herbrechter, ‘What is a Posthumanist Reading?’, *Angelaki*, 13. 1 (2008), p. 108.

⁴¹ Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*, p. 73

⁴² Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), pp. 55-104 in particular.

between self and others, including the non-human 'earth' others, by removing the obstacle of self-centred individualism on the one hand and the barriers of negativity on the other'⁴³ through her own particular brand of posthumanist vital materialism and nomadic subjectivity. This particular brand of posthuman ethics, she argues, should not be 'bound negatively by shared vulnerability' but rather by 'compassionate acknowledgement of [...] [communal] interdependence'.⁴⁴

What unites the ethical projects of these various critical posthumanisms is a principle of non-anthropocentrism. Non-anthropocentrism is *the* guiding element of any critical posthumanist ethics. Each of these ethical projects, despite their sometimes divergent ways of disclosing what posthuman ethics would look like, is further framed through principles of relationality (yet not necessarily reciprocity⁴⁵), vulnerability, and compassion and care. I am sympathetic to these accounts and share with them the principles of non-anthropocentrism and relationality. A similar call has also recently been put forward by Merleau-Ponty scholars and is particularly centred on environmental ethics.⁴⁶ Yet, in following and transforming aspects of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of expression and ontology of flesh, posthumanism finds 'good ambiguity' and a

spontaneity which accomplishes what appeared to be impossible when we observed only the separate elements. A spontaneity which gathers together [a] plurality [...] the past and present, nature and culture into a single whole. To establish this wonder would be metaphysics itself and would at the same time give us the principle of an ethics.⁴⁷

Where I diverge from previous accounts of posthuman ethics is that I envisage a posthuman ethics which no longer speaks the language of subject, object, agency, identity, affect, or even life itself, but of corporeal styles of being in the world and the chiasmatic intertwining and divergence of the

⁴³ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 190.

⁴⁴ Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, p. 101.

⁴⁵ See Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?*, pp. 127-142 and, in particular, pp. 141-142 for a critique of a posthuman ethics based on reciprocity.

⁴⁶ See: Ted Toadvine, 'Singing the World in a New Key: Merleau-Ponty and the Ontology of Sense', *Janus Head*, 7.2 (2004), 273-283; Ted Toadvine, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Nature* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2009); Véronique M. Fôti, *Tracing Expression in Merleau-Ponty*; Rosalyn Diprose 'Toward an Ethico-Politics of the Posthuman: Foucault and Merleau-Ponty', *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy*, 8 (2009), 7-19; Isis Brook, 'Can Merleau-Ponty's Notion of 'Flesh' Inform or even Transform Environmental Thinking?', *Environment Values*, 14 (2005), 353-362.

⁴⁷ Merleau-Ponty, 'A Prospectus of his Work', *PRI*, p. 11.

flesh of bodies and the flesh of the world. However, I can only provide a very provisional sketch as the development of a robust posthumanist ethics is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Merleau-Ponty's indirect ontology is one less situated on the ontological-ontic relation or difference⁴⁸ than in *describing* the being of all beings.⁴⁹ By drawing on Merleau-Ponty we can outline that there is a doubleness in corporeal ontology wherein not only can we describe other beings in their styles of being in the world, we can also describe human styles of being in the world with greater specificity. They share often deeply complex intertwinings between them and we will finally be able to *feel* the corporeal relevance of every being while still maintaining difference without absolute or singular difference. Hierarchical dualisms simply become one operative way of approaching these differences as an already expressed way of approaching the world, one that has been privileged for so long as to have become completely habitual and teleological.

Embodiment, body, artificiality, instrumentality, virtuality, information, style, flesh, and corporeality all have a polysemy of meanings which circulate around them. It is not enough to simply state that one meaning is more valid than any other, or to redeploy a term through a technical definition limited to one specific context. The everyday uses of the terms and the meanings which circulate around the technical definitions of terms both have to be taken into account. This is elucidated, in part, through Merleau-Ponty's disclosure of the paradox of expression: the tension between the already expressed and the yet to be expressed, or, as discussed in Chapter 4, between a humanist reduction and a posthumanist emergence. In building and transforming Merleau-Ponty's

⁴⁸ In a working note dated November 1960, Merleau-Ponty remarks 'No *absolute* difference, therefore between philosophy or the transcendental and empirical (it is better to say: the ontological and the ontic)', *VI*, p. 266. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁹ Merleau-Ponty argues that 'Philosophy elects certain beings—'sensations,' 'representation,' 'thought,' 'consciousness,' or even a deceiving being—in order to separate itself from all being. Precisely in order to accomplish its will for radicalism, it would have to take as its theme the umbilical bond that binds it always to Being, the inalienable horizon with which it is already and henceforth circumvented, the primary initiation which it tries in vain to go back on'. *VI*, p. 107. See also working note dated Feb 1959: 'One cannot make a *direct ontology*. My 'indirect' method (the being of beings) is alone conformed with being'. *VI*, p. 179.

philosophy of expression, expression is not only linguistic expression, but corporeal. Style, as Merleau-Ponty's refined way of discussing expression, is a general disposition of corporeal beings. This is marked by flesh which, we must remember, is not 'matter, mind, or substance', but is an expressive matrix. Flesh characterises the divergent reversibility of the flesh of the body and the flesh of the world. In posthumanist corporeal ontology this discloses not only that other beings can speak, touch, and feel (even if they are not sentient or are incapable of perception) but also that they have already been spoken for, touched and felt (as we saw in Chapters 2 and 4 through technological and virtual embodiments). In other words, a corporeal ontology that is not a closure but a profound openness where I do not have, own, or possess my body but *I am my body*, just as other corporeal beings are theirs – 'to feel one's body is also to feel its aspect for the other.'⁵⁰

Crucially for posthumanism this is the acknowledgement

that every being presents itself at a distance, which does not prevent us from knowing it, which is on the contrary the guarantee for knowing it: this is what is not considered. That the presence of the world is precisely the presence of its flesh to my flesh, that I 'am of the world' and that I am not it.⁵¹

We can situate corporeal beings in what they *are* instead of what they *are not*. An indirect corporeal ontology allows us to *feel* this, rather than *explain* it: 'meanings move without the human: culture does not begin and end with "us".'⁵² This, however, remains only a minor step. I was not interested in *how* differences are created or *how* meaning or signification is created nor was I interested in turning to an explanation of the genesis of relations between corporeal beings.⁵³ The object of a posthumanist corporeal ontology is only to allow us to *see* and *be seen* with renewed eyes, to *touch* and *be touched* with renewed hands, and, more importantly, to *feel* and *be felt* with renewed bodies: the corporeal relevance of every being.

⁵⁰ Merleau-Ponty, Working note dated April 1960, *VI*, p. 245

⁵¹ Merleau-Ponty, *VI*, p. 127.

⁵² Neil Badmington, 'Cultural Studies and the Posthumanities', in *New Cultural Studies: Adventures in Theory*, ed. by Gary Hall and Clare Birchall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 260-72 (p. 270).

⁵³ The work that was posthumously published as *The Visible and the Invisible* was once called the *Origin of Truth*, and Merleau-Ponty addresses what he terms 'ontogenesis' throughout. This is also why I have not invoked Merleau-Ponty's elucidation of carnality, wild, brute and savage Being, or the *Grund/Abgrund* (abyssal) faultline.

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