

Being Together with the World:
On Metaphoric Expression as a Clue to Merleau-Ponty's Ontology

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ABSTRACT

The guiding question of this study is: What is Merleau-Ponty's understanding of metaphor? It is widely appreciated that Merleau-Ponty himself never explicitly developed a theory of metaphor. He did, however, engage in a style of writing so tied up with literary style and thick with metaphor. Despite the absence of a distinct theory of metaphor on the part of Merleau-Ponty, the obvious importance of metaphor to his philosophy has motivated others to develop explicit and coherent theories of metaphor out of Merleau-Ponty's work that offer themselves as responses to philosophical history of metaphor theory.

I look at two interpretations of Merleau-Ponty that take up the topic of metaphor. Donald Landes suggests metaphor's importance stems from its being paradigmatic of what he calls the "paradoxical logic of [human] expression." Renaud Barbaras's take, on the other hand, is deeply ontological: metaphor is embedded in reality as its structure. Ultimately, I believe that neither of these theories is sufficient to capture the significance of metaphor in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy—specifically, metaphor as *experienced*. I argue that what is missed in both of these theories is a careful attention to how, in the experience of metaphor, we feel *solicited* to speak in certain ways, and that this experience suggests that the *activity* of metaphorical expression does not exist or operate only on one side of the expressive relation—on the side of being as Barbaras urges, or on the side of the one who speaks, as Landes urges. Rather, metaphor evinces a kind of expression that is not simply *about*, or even *according to*, the world—metaphor is a kind of expressing that works together *with* the world.

I. Introduction

This study is dedicated to understanding the place of metaphor in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. It is widely appreciated that Merleau-Ponty himself never explicitly developed a theory of metaphor beyond a few off-hand comments.¹ He did, however, engage in a manner of writing thick with metaphor and literary style. Despite the absence of a distinct theory of metaphor on the part of Merleau-Ponty, the obvious importance of metaphor to his philosophy has motivated others to develop thematic approaches to it through his work.² These approaches provide important contrasts to more explicitly developed and widely read philosophical theories of metaphor.³

In Part I of this study, I look at two interpretations of Merleau-Ponty that take up the topic of metaphor, the first by Renaud Barbaras and the second by Donald Landes. I choose these two theories as much for the influence of their broader theories in the literature as for their common goal yet opposing conclusions about metaphor. They both work to link language and ontology through metaphor by connecting these key topics of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and suggesting ways of situating metaphor therein. As a result, both help to emphasize the importance of metaphor as a topic of study in Merleau-Ponty—yet Landes's theory is, in fact written as a direct refutation of Barbaras's. I will argue that neither of these theories is alone sufficient to capture the significance of metaphor in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy—and specifically metaphor as *experienced*—although each contains important seeds for developing what I present as an accurate view of Merleau-Pontian metaphor.

In Part II, I turn to the experience of metaphor, and return to the texts of Merleau-Ponty. I argue that by carefully attending to how, in the experience of metaphor, we feel *solicited*,

motivated, and called upon to engage in metaphorical expression, we can further refine what we found valuable in the works of Landes and Barbaras. I draw upon the Merleau-Pontian concept of “dialogue” that has been developed in secondary literature to help us think through the way in which we are solicited to speak in metaphor. In conclusion, I argue that this experience of solicitation suggests that the *activity* of metaphorical expression does not exist or operate only on one side of the expressive relation—that is, there is activity not only on the side of the expressive human being, but also on the side of what it is she expresses, thus leading us to an ontological conclusion: the experience of the expression of metaphor evinces an expressive *relation*, the activity of which is not just within me, but *beyond* me. In expressing metaphor I do not just speak *about* (as if removed from what I express) nor do I speak *according to* (as if under the thumb of what I express); I speak *with*, my expression the result of dialoguing in a (to borrow David Abram’s term; see Abram 1997) *more-than-human* world.

II. Two leading Merleau-Pontian Theories of Metaphor

One of the rare instances of Merleau-Ponty’s use of the word “metaphor” is in a working note for the unfinished manuscript *The Visible and the Invisible*, dated 26 November 1959. He writes:

A “direction” of thought—This is not a *metaphor*—There is no *metaphor* between the visible and the invisible ... : *metaphor* is too much or too little: too much if the invisible is really invisible, too little if it lends itself to transposition [*s’il se prête à la transposition*]—
. (VI 221)

This passage is central to two of the leading interpretations of Merleau-Ponty that thematize metaphor: the theories of Renaud Barbaras and of Donald Landes. For both authors, this passage

suggests that Merleau-Ponty rejects a certain *kind* of theory of metaphor, and not metaphor as such (Barbaras 2009, 284; Landes 2013, 33). Specifically, they see him rejecting theories of metaphor that give metaphor “too much” or “too little” expressive power. A theory gives metaphor “too much” if it pretends that metaphor can express a *really* invisible invisible from which we are absolutely cut off in experience, that could never count as doing anything in the visible world. To avoid this, a theory of metaphor must not pretend to say what is not actually experienceable. It must, that is, include the ontological implication that the invisible is, in fact, *not* “really” invisible but is in some way accessible to us, yet *as* invisible—as, Merleau-Ponty says, a nothing “that is not nothing” but *counts* in the world.

What would it mean, in contrast, for metaphor to say “too little”? On this point, Landes and Barbaras do not agree—and their disagreement centres around what Merleau-Ponty might mean by “transposition.” Renaud Barbaras, as we will see below, understands transposition solely in terms of what he calls “*épiphore*”: a *displacement* or *substitution* of one term into the role of another, such that each term has an “original,” “proper,” or “objective” meaning, and, properly speaking, these meanings are *discrete*, except when forced into an epiphoric relation through an intellectual act of “metaphorical” connection. For Barbaras, *transposition* is thus always a term that implies an originary disconnection between terms, rather than indicating an ontological connectivity, supposing “*la partition du visible et l’invisible*” (Barbaras 2009, 285). On his reading, theories that rely on the concept of “transposition” thus say “too little” because they erase the ontological connection that, for Barbaras, is basic to metaphor’s possibility (*ibid.*), and replace it with a pure intellectual act of “*épiphore*” without ontological roots. While metaphor is given “too much” if it taken at arriving at connections we could never experience, it is given “too little” if these connections are pure projections of our intellect. Between these, as

we shall see, is a theory in which metaphor is taken to express connections that are at work in being, but where this connection cannot be accomplished from within ourselves, but only by our metaphorical expression working with and being solicited by the world.

It is worth keeping in mind as we go forward, however, that it seems that Barbaras misreads the convoluted sentences in this working note by identifying the “transposition” spoken of here with the epiphoric displacement of “wrong” theories of metaphor (Barbaras 2009, 285). It is not clear that this is how Merleau-Ponty uses the term. In fact, Merleau-Ponty’s usage of transposition is much closer to Barbaras’s own theory than Barbaras allows. Transposition is, in fact, a term that Merleau-Ponty connects intimately with his notions of ontological “flesh” and what he calls “Being as indivision” (VI 218). It is not a term that, as Barbaras says, paradoxically implies separation where there is none, but rather one that evinces the “universal” that is “beneath” or “behind” us, not “above” or “before”: the tissue that holds differences and differentiations together (VI 218-19). For Merleau-Ponty, transposition is always at play in the constantly changing perspectives of our experience, and the very fact of this transposition shows that there *is* some kind of originary *connectivity* at play.

It is more likely this, and not *épiphore*, that is on Merleau-Ponty’s mind in this working note—and in this sense, Landes gives a more faithful reading here, and further lends some clarity to a question that we should still have before us: If “a ‘direction’ of thought” is not an expression of metaphor, as Merleau-Ponty says it is not, of what *is* it an expression? Landes begins his own explication of the passage with the insight that “direction” and “thought” are not two categorically separate terms for Merleau-Ponty—but neither is it the case that they are both terms situated in objective space. For Landes, we must above all understand the note in terms of *direction* as an aspect of *place* as distinguished from *objective space* (Landes 2013, 33), a

distinction that Merleau-Ponty himself draws (VI 222). In these terms, transposition simply cannot be understood as *épiphere*, or *displacement* from one *objective* point to another. In Landes's view, the point to highlight in this working note is not simply the kind of metaphor that Merleau-Ponty rejects, but the way in which Merleau-Ponty highlights the *place* of the mind and of thought in the world: not "here, nor here, nor here" in objective space—that is, nowhere—and yet *not without bonds to*, not absolutely other than, the environs of its experience. For Landes, the importance of this note not solely that it rejects certain theories of metaphor as applicable to the thought he is trying to express, but that *in rejecting* these theories, it also rejects familiar dichotomous notions of visibility and invisibility, and instead shows invisibility to be an aspect of experience as *situated*, both in the way in which the experiencer is circumvented by the "vanishing lines," the horizons, of her landscape, and the way in which these horizons converge upon her own perspectival position, *itself* an invisible, vanishing point. And it is from these insights that Landes begins to construct his theory of metaphor.

This same note thus motivates each author, though on different grounds, to offer a new view of metaphor. Barbaras wants a theory of metaphor that does not remain a discussion purely of linguistic structure but extends into an ontological register, while Landes looks to develop a theory that remains faithful to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the *place* of thought and experience in the world as one that disrupts our understanding of visibility and invisibility, objectivity and subjective experience. Both work to develop theories of metaphor walk the middle line between "too much" and "too little," and that do not take for granted the ways in which visibility and invisibility are at work in Being. We explore these theories below in preparation for the second section, where I continue the discussion of metaphor by emphasizing

certain conclusions in Landes and Barbaras's theories and arguing that the expression of metaphor requires an expressive relation that extends beyond the human being.

A. Barbaras's Theory

Renaud Barbaras sees the entirety of Merleau-Ponty's thought as motivated by the "question of metaphor" (Barbaras 1991, 194): the question of how metaphorical expressions actually *bear meaning* in the world. Merleau-Ponty, he argues, answers this question by first inverting it: What must the *world* be like such that metaphorical expressions are genuinely meaningful? From the beginning, Barbaras interprets Merleau-Ponty's insights into language as always, and primarily, tied up with ontology. Indeed, it is central to Barbaras's theory that metaphor *be a coherent and truthful expression of the world*. This being given, Barbaras's theory dives straight into the ontological: for him, meaningful metaphorical expression is possible because it is undergirded by a more fundamental "*métaphoricité au sein de l'Être*" (Barbaras 2009, 273). Metaphor is not just a decorative addition or rhetorical flourish, but is a basic ontological structure.

But metaphor *qua* ontological structure is not structured like the metaphor of the working note cited above. In Barbaras's view, Merleau-Ponty's discussion of "metaphor" in this working note is not concerned with the metaphor "at the heart of being," but metaphor as a rhetorical trope or part of speech (*ibid.*, 28). "Rhetorical metaphor" of this sort adheres to the form of metaphor that most of us learned in elementary school—"x is y"—and generally understand as a decorative and strictly speaking unnecessary flourish. For Barbaras, this rhetorical conception of metaphor is misguided, and hangs on three core traits. First, it is a linguistic process that works at the level of the word. Rhetorical metaphor is not considered in the context of the entire phrase,

but according to the way in which it changes our perspective on and transforms our understanding of the “original” meanings of the individual nouns involved in a metaphor.⁴ Second, this transformation of meaning is understood as a process of what Barbaras calls *épiphore*—a transposition or substitution that takes place because of the fundamental *disconnect* between the “original meanings” of the nouns at play in the metaphor. And finally, rhetorical metaphor is just that: merely rhetorical, merely linguistic. While it *may* express something true (though truth is not a necessary attribute), what it expresses could easily, and more directly, be said in non-metaphorical terms. Rhetorical metaphor is in this sense merely decorative, and entirely unnecessary: a linguistic bauble (Barbaras 2009, 268).

In Merleau-Ponty’s words, rhetorical theories of metaphor say, on their own terms, “too much” or “too little” (VI 221). Barbaras expands,

Too much, because if it is truly the case that the two terms are radically separated, one cannot even see how a relation could be established... too little, because if the terms consent to the transposition, one could no longer speak solely of transposition. (Barbaras 1991, 195)

For Barbaras, the usual view of metaphor is based upon an ontology of discrete individual objects that do not, of themselves, stand in any meaningful connection to one another. If any meaningful connections exist among objects, they require an external action to connect them: intellection, human thought. But this leads the view into a problematic dualism of thought and world, and ultimately to projectionism of thought *upon* world: meaning becomes nothing more than a *creation* of the intellect over and against the non-connection, and thus meaninglessness, of “reality.” This intellectual meaning does not, then, accomplish its goal, for in the end it has nothing to do with the “real” world, but is rather a creation apart from it. If we accept rhetorical theories of metaphor, then we must accept one of two things: that metaphor simply does not say

anything *real* about the world beyond pure human thought,⁵ or that *reality is constituted by* a dualistic paradox of thought and materiality.⁶ Barbaras responds to these conclusions with a very simple point: We *do* speak using metaphor all the time, and these expressions neither feel unreal nor paradoxical. Rhetorical theories of metaphor thus strike him as inadequate to our experience of the metaphorical.

And yet, Barbaras insists, the “transposition” between the terms in a metaphor *does* take place—and, this being the case, rhetorical metaphor says *too little*. For if the transposition is possible, then it is possible not simply by an act of intellect, but because of what the things themselves *are*, and how they are *already* interconnected. For Barbaras, a Merleau-Pontian theory of metaphor differs from the rhetorical both in linguistic and ontological registers because these registers are intimately intertwined in Merleau-Ponty—a notion not without motivation. As Merleau-Ponty says,

One has to believe ... that language is not simply the contrary of the truth, of coincidence, that there is or could be a language of coincidence, a manner of making the things themselves speak — and this is what [the philosopher] seeks. It would be a language of which he would not be the organizer, words he would not assemble, that would combine through him by virtue of a natural intertwining of their meaning, through the occult trading of the metaphor—where what counts is no longer the manifest meaning of each word and of each image, but the lateral relations, the kinships that are implicated in their transfers and their exchanges... [I]f language is not necessarily deceptive, truth is not coincidence, nor mute. (VI 125)

It is thus basic to Barbaras’s theory that metaphor says something true not *about* the world, as if from the outside, but *according* to it: I do not create or organize the words that speak this kind of

truth. It is, in a sense, given to me insofar as it is not *me* who creates it. Rather, I take my cues from the things themselves; I lend my voice to them. For Barbaras, there is no dualism at play: my speech and my thought are not things apart from the “real,” unthinking world, but involved in it—and in this way, my speech can really connect with that which it speaks. It is not a tool of pure thought and pure activity injected into a passive world, but a sensitivity to a world already teeming with meaning.

This connection is not a matter of perfect identity of myself and the world, or as Merleau-Ponty says of “coincidence.” That is, it is not a matter of what I say *coinciding*, being in a relation of perfect identity, with that according to which I say.⁷ Rather, it is a matter of “kinship,” “lateral relations”: natural associations among things that suggest *internal* structural affiliations (suggested by biological kinship) that, nonetheless, exist in differential tension with one another, as in physics a lateral impulse acts at right angles to an established line of motion, altering or affecting it in some way. These relations exist, Merleau-Ponty says, at the level of the “brute existence,” the environment of our life that we never quit (VI 116-17), in which the distinction between “fact”—what we *know* from thinking and talking about our experience—and “essence”—what *is* really—no longer reigns. This is not to say that fact simply *is* essence, but rather that the relations at play are never *only* factual or *only* essential (what “really is” is never separate from an experience of it, and yet it is not identical with it). Neither the factual nor the essential take hierarchical precedence over the other. That is, neither is *more real* than the other; both, in their differential but non-oppositional relation, are reality.

On Barbaras’s reading, then, it is not the case that there *is* an essence that we cannot get to except through the fact of our experience, but that *there is no essence without fact* and vice versa. For Barbaras, this diacritical tension of fact and essence is part and parcel with the real

world, and belongs not only to the human experience of the real, but to the “things themselves,” as things that themselves must be part of this reality of fact and essence. What an individual thing *is* is not fully and essentially *itself*; a thing is also its involvement in the fact of the existence of other things (Barbaras 2009, 274). Individual things exist as diacritical tensions with all other things.⁸

For Barbaras, this point is as much one about ontology as it is about expression. He suggests that to meaningfully express anything about the world, I *and every other “individual” thing in the world* must exist in and as lateral relations, “coherent deformations” (to use a Merleau-Pontian term explored in more detail below) of one another. This is the basis of his reading of Merleau-Ponty’s ontology as “dimensionality” (Barbaras 1991), a term he pulls directly from Merleau-Ponty, who writes in the note from December 1959 titled “World” that to understand what a world—what *reality*—is, we must “[r]eplace the notions of concept, idea, mind, representation with the notions of *dimensions*, articulation, level, hinges, pivots, configuration” (VI 224). The ontology that grounds Barbaras’s theory of metaphor is thus not one of pure difference between individual things, or between ideality and materiality (Barbaras 1991, 29; c.f. Hass 129-30), but the dynamic tension of individuation in which a distinguishable thing, idea, consciousness, or concept does not pull off its individuality on its own, but is engaged in a constant process of individuation from all other things. Better, it *is* this process of individuation. As Barbaras explains, what it is to *perceive* a world that we can express is to “dimensionalize” it (Barbaras 1991, 175); what *appears*, what is *present* or *visible*, to us is only so as a “crystallized dimension” (ibid., 196), a gathering up of the laterally-related processes of individuation that are *themselves* not positively visible, but that nonetheless belong to, and give

birth to, the visibility and the presence of the world at their points of jointure and dehiscence (Barbaras 2009, 281).

Barbaras especially sees this ontological-expressive tension at play in metaphorical expressions where he argues we find this same kind of diacritical tension—what he calls the “*métaphoricité de l’Être*”—laid bare in language. And because of the *real existence* of this tension in the world, Barbaras is able to make one of his most interesting claims about metaphor: a metaphorical expression is not an expression of *paradox* but of reality, of its real structure. That is, while he agrees that there is tension at play in metaphor—that what is expressed in metaphor is not a fact that can be immediately untangled and grasped in terms of clear-cut concepts—this tension is not, as most have argued, paradoxical.⁹ Rather, Barbaras argues that the tension at play in metaphor is evocative of a non-paradoxical *existential tension*: a tension of brute existence, and of the brute world, a *real* tension that, because it is real, is not a paradox. It must instead be understood as difference *without* paradoxical opposition (Barbaras 1991, 30).

For Barbaras, a Merleau-Pontian reading of the very possibility of metaphorical expression *evinces what we can call a metaphorical ontology* such that metaphor, as a structure, is not only part of linguistic expression but is a constitutive feature or dynamic ontological aspect of the world. For Barbaras, the “occult trading of metaphor” (VI 125), as Merleau-Ponty calls it, is not only a phenomenon of metaphorical expression; this phenomenon of expression *itself expresses* ontological truths that, he says, hold “universally” (Barbaras 1991, 61) for all beings that emerge in Being. Thus, the truth that metaphor communicates is the truth of the “brute world”: the truth of the world as *originarily* and *preconceptually experienced* (Barbaras 2009, 285)—the world prior, that is, to an excess of intellectual activity that parses it, analyzes it, breaks it into categories, and acts *upon* it rather than according to it. For Barbaras, metaphorical

expression expresses a World that exists behind [*en deçà*] the *individual worlds* of our individual experiences; a World, that is, that allows these individual worlds to coherently deform into one another; a World that is not a solid and unmoving ultimate reality, but a reality of dynamic connections of “universal kinship” (Barbaras 1991, 308) among individuals that are only themselves individual insofar as they overflow themselves, and extend into others.

B. Landes’s theory

Turning now to Landes’s theory of metaphor, I must note that, both for reasons of limited space and in order to focus the discussion and develop clarity on the topic of metaphor, I centre my interpretation and criticism on the sections of Landes’s work in which he speaks explicitly about metaphor. I argue that what Landes gets right in his interpretation of “transposition” (outlined above) turns his focus on the topic of metaphor too much to the production of metaphor from the human perspective. As a result, he risks overlooking some of the important ontological points we find in Barbaras. While this overemphasis does not carry through the whole of his work, and my criticisms should not be taken to be directed at his project as a whole,¹⁰ it is important to note them in our discussion of metaphor.

While Landes agrees with Barbaras that Merleau-Ponty does not reject metaphor *as such*, he strongly disagrees with Barbaras on his central ontological point. For Landes, Merleau-Ponty saying that there “is no [rhetorical] metaphor between the visible and the invisible” (VI 221) does not imply that “the richness and creativity of metaphor *as a phenomenon of expression* needs to be replaced by a fundamental metaphoricity that turns metaphor into literal-ontological description” (Landes 2013, 33). Where Barbaras sees the possibilities of expression as *belonging to* and *evidence of* certain universal truths of the World, Landes claims that the experience of

metaphor does not give us any universal, ontological truths, but is the paradigm of what he calls the “paradoxical logic of expression” (ibid., 34). That is, metaphor does not give us the “world itself,” but how we express the world.

The notion of a “paradox of expression” is one that Landes develops out of Bernard Waldenfels’s essay “The Paradox of Expression.” It is the idea that what we express, when we do express meaningfully, “precedes *itself*, ... is younger and older than itself” (Waldenfels, 96), and thus can neither be thought of as pure repetition of a ready-made meaning given to us, nor pure creation of a meaning that in no way existed prior to its expression. Expression is, paradoxically, always distanced from itself, subject to an internal *écart*. But Landes does not simply repeat Waldenfels. Waldenfels’s theory of paradoxical expression is, as Landes notes, an attempt to perform an eidetic reduction upon the paradox of expression, and to display, from what Merleau-Ponty would call an impossible “God’s eye view,” the operative concepts that ground it. Landes, however, is more interested in what he calls a “phenomenological description” of paradox (Landes 2013, 16): What is the paradox of expression that *we live from within*? The paradox, that is, that does not relate only to a world of ideas, but to the world of embodied experience (ibid., 17)? Landes extends Waldenfels’s paradox to include a paradoxical *logic* of expression, a logic that does not belong solely to the realm of language as an idealized structure of expression, but to *all human action* as it is experienced from within (ibid., 16).

Landes draws the structure of this logic out of the same working note, cited above, from which Barbaras begins his metaphorical ontology: “A “direction” of thought——this is not a metaphor.” While the importance of this passage was, for Barbaras, its rejection of rhetorical theories of metaphor, for Landes it is its assertion of thought as *direction*, or what he will call “trajectory.” Using the Simondonian concept of a “metastable equilibrium,” he clarifies his

point. A metastable equilibrium is the state of a system that is “stable” not because of actual, unchanging relationships within the system, but because of the *movement* of these relationships according to the *potential energy* at play therein. Landes adds to this concept that of “trajectory” to underline the significance of temporality in such metastable systems. We may begin to think of “metastable trajectory” as the “existential eternity” that Merleau-Ponty describes in *The Prose of the World* as the “overlap of one temporal phase upon another” (PW 29), or the “existential universal” (PW 39): my experience as an ever-shifting present that is, nonetheless, always mine. But for Landes, my experience of *now* is not only one of temporal *overlap*, but of temporal *trajectory*: the directional navigation and activation of the “weight” of past and future that introduce a sort of potential energy into the system (Landes 2013, 10). In other words, the temporal-historical “weight” of past and future attribute a sort of *momentum* to the trajectory of thought: a *minimal determination* of what is to be expressed, just as a speeding car, with the weight of its forward motion, can only turn within a certain radius.

“Thought as direction” thus situates the experience of thought as something that happens not at a neutral spatio-temporal point, but as the *expression* or *articulation of place*, of a “locality by investment”: the place *of* our individual experience, the articulation and ongoing definition of which we are always already invested in because this place *is* our thought, and our thought is the place of sense-making (ibid., 26). This place is not, however, just the metastability of the present, but the metastable trajectory *of past, present, and future*. This is why the experience of time is not, for Landes, simply the “overlap” of temporal phases. Insofar as these phases are themselves experienced from the perspective of the thinker, none are *set in stone* as said or lived once and for all; rather, each *weighs in* on the direction of our next expression (ibid., 33), and each expression responds to and *transforms* these weights. The past is not just a solid agglomeration

of events unchangingly lived, but a shifting aspect of the context of my expression. My expression thus “coherently deforms” the *place*—the past-present-future context as a whole—of my expression.

To understand Merleau-Ponty’s notion of coherent deformation, we must be familiar with his notions of institution and sedimentation. *Institution* is the establishing of a new norm, tradition, or habit; *sedimentation* is the acquisition and integration of these norms and traditions into structures that shape our present experience. Institution is thus the fodder of sedimentation, but at the same time requires sedimented structures, *old* traditions, to push against in establishing new ones. As we see in “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,” these terms can be understood as the obverse and reverse of one another: not *opposed* to one another in a relation of negation, but in a relation of difference in which the one side feeds off the other, and vice versa. What is *most* important to note, however, is that an institutionalizing gesture accomplishes what Merleau-Ponty calls *coherent deformation*: a gesture that both takes up the sedimented structures that are given to it—what has, in the case of language, “already been said”—and *transforms* them retrospectively (IL 89-92).

Coherent deformation is crucial to Merleau-Ponty’s thought, and we have already seen it used in Barbaras in more distinctly ontological terms. Landes emphasizes, however, that Merleau-Ponty does not develop coherent deformation as an ontological concept, but as part of his theory of expression. For Landes, it is a mistake to use coherent deformation as a description of pre-thetic, unexpressed “Being of the world”; we must instead focus on it as a description of *the ground out of which expression is born* (the temporally-inflected place of our experience) and the ongoing experiential instability found there as a result of expression itself. The past as experienced is not a set of determined facts, and the future not a determinate result of a

sedimented trajectory. The place of expression is, thus, one in which there is always more to express, since each expression transforms the place of its birth. It is *ex*-pression insofar as it does not simply repeat what is already there, what has already been *in*-scribed, but rather *ex*-scribes its own metastable field, actualizes connections between ideas and things that were only *potential* before their *ex*-scription, each time it inscribes itself in the metastable field as expressed (Landes 2013, 9). These *ex*-scriptions are more than just effects within thought; for Landes, expression also *leaves material traces* such as writing or oral/aural vibrations (*ibid.*, 35), and thus reconfigures the material world with each utterance.

As in Barbaras, we thus see in Landes an interesting intertwining of the material and the ideal. Using the example “Juliet is the sun,” Landes argues that the lived experience of this expression—the *material* expression itself, “Romeo’s words echo[ing] throughout the theatre, the sun shin[ing] forth... and Juliet tak[ing] her place” (*ibid.*)—*is* that which provides the *place* in which “Juliet” and “sun” intertwine, and opening toward the possibility of future re-performances of this and other intertwinings such as “Juliet is the moon” (*ibid.*). But these intertwinings nonetheless require thoughtful engagement in these material traces, such that metaphor not *as such* but as *an intellectual act* “allows for this possibility [of intertwining] to become real for this life and for this situation” (*ibid.*, 35). To say, “Juliet is the sun,” then, is not to point to the material-ontological *facts* that stand before us, already true in reality, but to *effect* the truth of the meaningful intertwining of “Juliet” and “sun.”

For Landes, it *is* this thoughtful engagement in the world, and the directionality of thought, that *makes the world a world*, that makes it the place in which we live and experience. The real world, for Landes, just *is* this expression and *ex*-scription of sense. The experience of reality is not the repeating of so many static, material facts, but the experience of constantly

shifting *potentialities* that weigh in on the open trajectory of subsequent, and never-ending, expression *of this world of ongoing potentiality*. This paradoxical logic of expression thus adds a paradoxical situation to the one defined by Waldenfels: it is no longer just a question of *how* we express what has never before been expressed, but how this action both *emerges out of* and ongoingly *sustains* potentiality within the world. It sustains it as *écart*: the unbridgeable space between the expresser and their world, a consequence of every expression coherently deforming the very “real” world we try, with an “abortive” effort (ibid., 3) to capture in our words, and out of which the potential for expression is born. And this is the way Landes argues we ought to understand metaphor: as the paradigm of the paradoxical logic of expression (ibid., 28), the best example of a semantic structure that reminds us that “all expressive gestures are in fact... the exscription of *sense*” (ibid., 36) and an ex-scription *of the world*. In expressing a metaphor, we take up a structure of sedimented significations and use them in a way that coherently deforms the particular context of all future re-performances of that particular metaphorical sign.

Ultimately, Landes argues that Barbaras misses the importance of *expression* to the notion of coherent deformation, translating it too quickly into an ontological register. He reads Barbaras as giving an “ontological-literal” description of the world that understands coherent deformation to be a fact, an ontological concept that applies to the world as *real* and *actual*, not *possible* or *potential*, and that sees the connections among things and objects as actual connections within a stable, objective world. Barbaras sees metaphor as a paradigmatic structure not only of *human expression*, but of reality. For Barbaras, there is nothing paradoxical about metaphor because the connections found in a metaphorical expression (“your cheeks *are* roses”) do not require human expression in order to be *effected*—these metaphorical, “lateral” connections of impossible individuals are already at play in the pre-human expressive

world—but they require human expression for the sense to be *heard* in the human world. By contrast, Landes argues that the intertwining of impossible individuals *becomes part of the world only by being expressed*. This “making public” is the making of a real trace—e.g., a mark, a vibration of the eardrum—that *literally reconfigures the world*. Thus, the possibility of these intertwinings are, Landes argues, *not possible* in advance of the expressive gesture, but are the very event *of* expression.

C. Passivity and Activity in Barbaras and Landes

Both theories contain important seeds for developing an accurate view of metaphor in Merleau-Ponty. In Landes, we see a robustly developed understanding of how, and why, the logic of *expression* in Merleau-Ponty, and particularly the importance of coherent deformation as an *expressive* concept, cannot be omitted from our understanding of metaphor. In Barbaras, we see an ontological sensitivity, and a devotion to understanding the world both in terms of *reality* and as something that is beyond us not just as an unactualized potentiality, but as already actively taking part in coherent deformation at the ontological level.

But both theories also present problems. The problem is not, however, one of either author entirely omitting any discussion of the other side of the relation. The problem rests, instead, on the way in which their arguments’ emphases lend themselves to the possibility of misunderstanding the relation of passivity and activity at play in metaphorical expression as one of unidirectional polarity.

Barbaras’s gives too much emphasis to the passivity of the human subject: he relies too much on *receiving* meaning from the world beyond us, and not on creating it. The active role of expression falls primarily to the ontological prior to human expression, in the process of

individuation in which all things of the world engage. It is this *ontological* activity that is then “echoed” in human expression (Barbaras 1991, 193). We may note that an echo is not a case of pure repetition without any deformation taking place, as Landes seems to read it. An echo does not have precisely same sonic quality as the voice that it echoes—the initial impulse is transformed in the echoing reply—but it is nonetheless a phenomenon that feels more passively receptive than actively productive. In Barbaras’s case, it is human expression that comes in the form of an echo: it passively receives the dehiscent activity of the world, which echoes out of it in the form of metaphorical expression. We could say that metaphorical human expression is “passively shaped” by the activity of the world. But how, then, is it that I speak “incorrectly,” or even that I use the less- or non-expressive rhetorical metaphors that Barbaras argues against, but that are nonetheless part of human expression? Barbara’s theory leaves little room with which to understand metaphors, or expression in general, that do not seem a result of ontological echoing. In other words, Barbaras’s theory cannot account for the very kinds of “metaphorical” expression that he argues *against*—he can’t account for metaphors that “get it wrong.”

Landes’s, on the other hand, gives too much weight to *activity*: the way in which human expression shapes the world, and not on the way in which we are shaped by it. For Landes, it is human expression as the *active* side of the relation that shapes and reshapes the passive, sedimented significations of the world as lived and expressed. But by emphasizing the active role of human expression, we risk forgetting the importance of being impressed upon by a more-than-human world that is not of our own human-expressive creation, because even the *passive* side of this relation—the “world”—is a product of the activity of human expression.¹¹ But if this is so, how is it that the desire to express, or even to perceive, is awakened in the first place? What is it that attracts my gaze? And again, how can we understand the experience of speaking

“incorrectly?” As in Barbaras, it could be argued in the Landesian model that everything I say effects a new reality. It would seem I could never get it wrong—and yet “getting it wrong” is an experience most of us are quite familiar with.

In both cases, there is something problematic in the way these authors distinguish *what is real* (active in Barbaras, passive in Landes) from *what is thought and expressed* (passive in Barbaras, and active in Landes), a distinction that makes it difficult to understand how it is that we are motivated to speak in the first place, and how it is that we feel our expression to more or less succeed in expressing what we strive to express. And these problems lead to another: while both authors try to situate the expressive human being *within* the world, blurring subject/object distinction as Merleau-Ponty strives to, particularly in his later writings, they both end up reinscribing this distinction and the problems that come with it¹² by emphasizing a binary relation of passivity and activity between human being and the world they experience and express.

III. Metaphor as the experience of solicitation

The theories of Landes and Barbaras do, however, both lend us conclusions that are worth looking at further. From Landes, we find that human expression effects the world; from both authors that the world effects human expression; and from Barbaras, that there is more than just human being that are actively at play in the kinships and lateral relations that make up a world. As an attempt to both bring clarity to the conclusions we have drawn out of Barbaras and Landes, and to show how they can be fruitfully read together, I appeal to the way in which metaphor can be seen not just as a semantic structure (x is y), a repetition of a ready-made meaning, or a product of re-performance of human-expressed signs, but more importantly as an expression that both evokes a perspectival view upon the world, and is *actively solicited* by

something other than us to express in certain ways—to say *this* and not *that*. In non-metaphorical expression, such solicitation could to a certain extent be explained by the strict systematicity—cultural norms of grammar and vocabulary, often archived in dictionaries and similar documents—that serve as baseline references upon which a linguistic community generally agrees. In metaphorical expression, we cannot rely on such a systematic view precisely because, compared to this systematic view of language, it is the *stretching* or even *breaking of the system*. Barbaras makes precisely this point (Barbaras 1991, 196n9), and Landes’s point is similar: what makes metaphor a paradigmatic example of expression is that it is not, and cannot be, laid out in advance (Landes 2013, 34). And yet, in the experience of metaphorical expression, there is more than this. We experience some metaphors as being *called for*—ourselves called *upon* to say them—and others not.

Consider this example. In the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty writes: “Nature must be our interlocutor in a sort of dialogue” (PhP 334). An expressive struggle is evident here—an uncertainty of the words used that at the same time expresses a *necessity* of this kind of image. “Dialogue” might not quite catch or grasp the meaning that Merleau-Ponty reaches for, but nonetheless this “sort of dialogue” is what nature “*must be*”: there is a clarity to his thought, an understanding of necessity,¹³ though the thought is, itself, not yet completely crystallized. The words may not entirely coincide with that which they stretch to express (an experience in the world). And yet there is a way in which they do “fit”: they feel not only well chosen, but well-chosen in *response* to a situation that *asks* for them. They feel *called for*. This does not mean that another image could not be chosen—another person in a similar situation may well, with their own unique history, choose other words. What it does show is, rather, that the level of truth or clarity that a metaphorical utterance may give does not depend wholly on my

capacity either to passively receive the world, or to actively produce the world, but to *listen and respond* to a call. The measure of the quality of a metaphorical expression is, at least in part, beyond me: not immediately absolutely evident to me, hence my uncertainty, yet also not entirely *inevident*, hence my certainty of having *something* to express.

Lawrence Hass calls such experiences of linguistic fit “creative *insights*” that gives us the feeling of having “‘breakthroughs,’ ‘inspirations,’ or ‘aha moments’” (Hass 2008, 152). The resulting expressions are those that surprise us when they come out of our own mouths: words that we don’t know we will say until we have said them because the crystallization of thought that we typically call “knowing” is *accomplished in speech* (PhP 182-83), language of which we are not the organizers (VI 125), thoughts we did not know we did, or could, possess (PhP 32), but that nonetheless feel inspired in us by the “faces and objects themselves as [we] see them” (CD 21), as we breathed their breath, *their* inspiration, from beyond our own individual limits. And indeed Merleau-Ponty says that there is “*inspiration et expiration de l’Être, respiration dans l’Être, action et passion si peu discernables qu’on ne sait plus qui voit et qui est vu*” (OE 31-32), nor who expresses and who is expressing. That is, our having experiences in which we feel we receive even a scrap of meaning *from the outside* suggests that there is a *positive* communicative experience of that which is beyond ourselves, not only as individuals but as expressive human beings.

In the context of metaphor, Luca Vanzago calls this experience one of “good metaphor”: the experience of finding something that “is new and yet always already known” (Vanzago 2005, 468). A good metaphor feels like a falling into step with something other than ourselves, almost without knowing it. But “falling into step” does not indicate a *literal* meaning of metaphor in the usual way of understanding literality (as *direct, representational* reference to a pure, positively

existing individual object). Whatever it is that we “already know” in a good metaphor is thus not something solid or graspable—and yet, Vanzago notes, metaphors should also be considered “*the original, the literal meanings*” of Being (ibid., 473). Like Barbaras, Vanzago’s metaphor allows us access to meaning beyond [*en deçà*] the conceptualized, categorized, and analysable meaning of reflective thought and expression in linear prose. They differ, however, in *how* this meaning is presented: unlike Barbaras, for Vanzago a metaphor’s meaning “can be given only as a never present, and yet always present, unrepresentable presence” (ibid., 473). We may hear notes of Landes’s paradoxical logic here, but there is also an ambiguity in Vanzago’s explanation of metaphor that suggests that there *is* something about our perception, something *in* our experience of the world that is other than us, even if this something isn’t present *in the “usual” way*.

The pseudo-presence of this something is further suggested by the experience of metaphors that *don’t* fit with the world—what I call “bad” metaphors. As Vanzago notes, it is “clearly not the case” that “any unexpected comparison whatsoever could be a metaphor” (ibid., 468). That is, any combination of the form “x is y” does not a metaphor make. If I tell you, “The parrot is the bookshelf,” while this may well be a novel collection of words, it is unlikely (though not impossible) that this expression will feel meaningful, or like a falling-into-step. The point is: fitting the formula “x is y” is not the defining quality of metaphor; there is something more going on. What is it that *pushes* us to say *this* metaphor in *this* way, struggling for *these* words and not those, making linguistic choices that feel, at the same time, like the discovery of something new?

Attending to the *experience* of metaphor as *specifically called for*, we note that a metaphor’s meaning is felt as more than just *ex*-pressive, in the Landesian sense, but also *im*-pressive—that is, we are, to a certain point, *impressed upon* by an expressive activity that is not our own, and that is not, in any familiar sense, specifically human. A metaphor is not just

“evocative language,” (Hass 2008, 5); it is also *evoked* by something beyond—or perhaps *beneath* [*en deçà*]*—my own trajectory, my own world.*

A. Solicitation: The evocation of the world of silence

We are *solicited*—a term that Merleau-Ponty makes much use of in *The Phenomenology of Perception*¹⁴—to speak metaphorically. Here I look at Merleau-Ponty’s usage of this term, and argue that the experience of metaphor as solicited only makes sense in a world that is not simply of my own making, nor even of only inter-human thought, but must include a silent *something*, an actively soliciting more-than-human other.

The first example of solicitation in the *Phenomenology* is found in the context of a perception of what, ultimately, we realize to be a ship with a mast. The perception begins as something confused before that which is perceived changes into itself:

If I am walking on a beach toward a boat that has run aground, and if the funnel or the mast merges with the forest that borders the dune, then there will be a moment in which these details suddenly reunite with the boat and become welded to it. As I approached, I did not perceive the resemblances or the proximities that were, in the end, about to reunite with the superstructure of the ship in an unbroken picture. I merely felt that the appearance of the object was about to change, that something was imminent in this tension, as the storm is imminent in the clouds. (PhP 17-18)

At first, I see a forest—but it isn’t *just* a forest; I see a forest with the vague feeling that there will be something more, some difference that I haven’t yet gathered or clearly seen—and yet that I *feel* to already be gathering itself. Later, Merleau-Ponty offers a precision: while it is true that the act of “gathering” up the differences in my perception until I can clearly differentiate the boat

from the forest—and, more specifically, *express* the success of this gathering, or “crystalize” it, a process that is “partly given to us ready-made is in other respects never terminated” (VI 100)—requires *activity* on my part by way of the effort of gathering and clarifying, he is quite clear that the burden of this expression does not fall entirely to me and my power of expression. As he says, “[A] sensible that is about to be sensed poses to my body a sort of confused problem. I must find the attitude that *will* provide it with the means to become determinate” (PhP 222). There is a part of my experience of perception in which I do not simply receive data, nor do I simply draw distinctions and connections as they please me—I do not just speak *any* metaphor. I am, rather, solicited by this “vague question” of a to-be-sensed—a to-be-crystallized or achieved by perception-expression, to be *made* ‘sens’ of—that calls on me to fit *my* body, my perception, my trajectory to *it*.

It may, however, be argued that the experience of solicitation, and *responding* to solicitation, is one of pure passivity: simply an obedient “correct” response on the part of the one solicited. But this is not so. To *be solicited*, I must first *be engaged in the world* in such a way as to actively “allow my body to respond to [the] solicitation” of the world (PhP 140). Merleau-Ponty’s examination of the case of a patient with apraxia¹⁵ shows this: “objects no longer exist for the arm of the person suffering from apraxia, and this is what renders his arm immobile” (PhP 140). If a person ceases to be able to purposefully *intend* an object, then that sort of object as such ceases to exist for them—but purposeful intention is not the whole of experience. My point is this: it is not in *becoming crystallized*, in *being named* that the ship is first present; yet neither is it present *prior* to being named. There is a moment in my engagement with the world, with things, and in my perception of them, when they *are*, but only vaguely: they *are not obvious*, *have not been solidified* into recognizable wholes, have not entered into the *sens* of

thought, *but are nonetheless there*. What Landes called the paradoxical logic of *expression* is itself echoed in the more-than-human world: like the ship and mast, things themselves manifest solicitation by soliciting us *as* a tensional unity that “precedes the cross-checkings that verify and determine it” and thus a unity that “precedes itself,” a unity that we at last *name* a unified (PhP 17).

This experience of being solicited by a vague unity on the peripheral edges of our experience is, I believe, an experience of what Merleau-Ponty calls the “world of silence.” Before continuing, we must understand that particularly in his later writings, it is rare that Merleau-Ponty uses the word “silence” to mean literal silence. We may instead understand it as the mode in which “indirect” or “tacit” expression” (expression that is still ambiguous, moving, unsettled, and most importantly *evocative*, and contrasted with “direct,” referential, crystallized, or sedimented expression)¹⁶ expresses. Tacit expression is “not the contrary” of sound (VI 178), nor of meaningful expression; it does not refer to anything individual (or *individuated*), but rather evokes something ambiguous, something yet undecided by us. Tacit expression *evokes silence* as the very medium through which it is expressive; perhaps we can even say that the silence itself is expressive.

Take Merleau-Ponty’s example of tacit expression in Stendhal’s novel *The Red and the Black*. Merleau-Ponty writes that what is reported in the book—Julien Sorel’s trip to Varrières and his attempt to kill Mme de Rênal—comes along with a “silence,” a “dream-like journey,” and an “unthinking certitude” that are even more important to the development of the story. But, ... these things are nowhere said. There is no need of a “Julien thought” or a “Julien wished.” To express them, Stendhal had only to insinuate himself into Julien... had only to

decide to narrate in one page instead of five. That brevity, that unusual proportion of things omitted to things said, is not even the result of a *choice*. (IL 76)

Not the result of a choice because, Merleau-Ponty is suggesting, *the significance of Julien's actions cannot be expressed except tacitly as silence*. This suggests a *positive* significance of silence in our experience of expression. This is not to say that every reader will glean exactly the same positive meaning from, and have exactly the same experience of, Stendhal's writing. It is rather to say that silence is not just an absence that calls to be ongoingly filled and shifted by *human* expression; defining the positive experience of silence negatively as that which has not been, or even is not *yet* been, expressed is not an exhaustive definition. For my suggestion is that the positive experience suggests an activity that is not mine, that comes from outside of me. Silence must, to some extent, itself be playing an active role in this expression, soliciting the reader as much as it solicited Stendhal.

The positive experience of silence such as the one we experience in Stendhal is clarified in Bernard Dauenhauer's essay "On Silence," where he distinguishes three ways in which silence may be positively experienced. The first two—"intervening silence" and "fore-and-after silence"—are developed narrowly in relation to aural and sonar experience, and are thus not taken up here.¹⁷ The third type of silence, "deep silence," is where our interest lies, and this is for two reasons. First, Dauenhauer argues that deep silence is "not correlated with a specified sound expression in a fashion that would permit a reciprocal mapping" (Dauenhauer 1973, 18): it cannot be directly *grasped* or *contained* by any expression, sound or otherwise, just as we see in Merleau-Ponty's description of indirect expression. Second, he says that "there is no reason...to claim that deep silence can be encountered apart from any sound expression whatsoever" (*ibid.*). Keeping in mind that we are not concerned here with "sound expression" as such (except insofar

as metaphorical expression can be expressed orally), but expressive gesturing more broadly, this latter statement on Dauenhauer's part reminds us of Landes: the human experience of deep silence *requires* expression on the part of the human. But importantly in Dauenhauer's case *this expression does not define it*. Rather, deep silence "pervades discourse" by "running through...expression" and appearing "to abide" (ibid., 22), to *continue* without fading or being lost.

It is in the sense of Dauenhauer's positive experience of "deep" silence that I understand the "world of silence" outlined by Merleau-Ponty in his essay "*La nature ou le monde du silence*." Here, Merleau-Ponty describes nature as a "*monde du silence*" that "*ne nous intéresse donc ni pour elle-même, ni comme un principe universel d'explication, mais comme index de ce qui dans les choses résiste à l'opération de la subjectivité libre*" (NMS 53). As human beings, it is still true that we cannot conceive of nature except from a human standpoint, and thus as something which we cannot think apart from "human being." But Merleau-Ponty insists that this "*ne [permet] pas de renvoyer le concept de Nature à un chapitre de l'anthropologie*" (NMS 45) or a "*détail de l'histoire humaine*" (NMS 46). And further, though every *positing* of a nature—for instance, the kind of *positing* that we see in the work of Barbaras—necessarily implies both the work of a subject, and even—as we see in Landes—the work of a "*intersubjectivité historique*," there is something more. As Merleau-Ponty says, while this expressive subjectivity is necessarily embedded in and part of nature, "*cela ne fait pas que le sens de l'être naturel soit épuisé par ses transcriptions symboliques, qu'il n'y ait rien penser avant elles : cela prouve seulement que l'être de la Nature est à chercher en deçà de son être-posé*" (NMS 46). There is something below [*en deçà*] discourse, below anything we, as human beings, can say, that

pervades discourse, that abides there, neither as identical with human speech and discourse, nor as absolutely other than it like some Kantian thing-in-itself.

But as much as this positive silence does not denote an absolute reality, neither is it a “pure positivity” that Merleau-Ponty rejects, and that would—as Landes has rightly argued—dissolve the *écart* that is necessary for expression to be possible in the first place: we would not *express* if we were able to grasp what silence is with eidetic clarity. “Nature,” the “world of silence,” interests us—indeed, it is *able* to interest us and solicit our attention—*because* it is an “*index de ce qui dans les choses résiste à l’opération de la subjectivité libre*” which is also an “*accès concret au problème ontologique*” (NMS 53): it shows there is something that *is* independent from the human subject, a certain negativity or *resistance* to the subject’s drive to know it absolutely. This resistance belongs, Merleau-Ponty says, to “things” that are beyond the subject’s operative control. But it is not as simple as drawing a divide between “nature” or “world” and “human being.” Rather, like we see in Dauenhauer, the positive experience of deep silence is one that “cannot be completely performed by an individual acting alone” (Dauenhauer 1973, 26). The key is to notice that this “world of silence,” nature, is one that includes human beings—that in part *is* very much human. But there is yet an aspect of our experience of the world that is *not pulled off* by the expressive powers of human beings, but that calls upon those powers, *awakens* them, in the first place—actively, even if this activity is only felt by *us* as silence. Indeed, the implication seems to be in “*La nature ou le monde du silence*” that nature is “silent” insofar as there is a *resistance* of “free subjectivity,” an absence of expressive action and eidetic distinction on the part of human being. The positive experience of silence *is* felt on our side, from our perspective, but as our own *being* silent. This “being silent” is not a giving up in the face of a reality that we will never reach, but rather a *listening* to a world outside of us. A

world that is built not just upon human *expression* but also an *impression* of sorts: a being expressed *to*—upon something that is not simply evoked *by* us, but impresses upon us its own action, evokes *our* expression.

B. Imagining solicitation: solicitation as dialogue

This experience of “*evoking the world in expression because evoked by the world to express*” involved in expressing a good metaphor shows that activity and passivity are not divided along a line between human beings and the world; rather, there is activity and passivity on *both*, or rather *all*, sides of the relation.¹⁸ I am active insofar as I ex-press (in the Landesian sense) the world, and the world is active insofar as it solicits me to express in a manner appropriate to it; I am passive insofar as I am solicited by the world, and the world is passive insofar as *it* is solicited *by me*. We thus need a way of understanding expression, perception, and our experience of the world that neither over-emphasizes the passivity or activity of human being in the expressive relation, nor separates passivity and activity along a human/world divide.

i. Solicitation and the image of dialogue

David Abram and, more recently, Glen Mazis have used the image of dialogue as a way of feeling their way through this problem (Abram 1997, 49-53; Abram 2005, 171, 184; Mazis 2016, 37-41, 247-48). I here present this image in their terms, and extend by pushing my own point: that we must attend to the passivity and activity that is at play on both sides of the expressive relation.

Merleau-Ponty presents the concept of dialogue very clearly in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, where he describes it as an experience of “être-à-deux” (PhP 370) in which it is no longer clear who is speaking and who is listening, and in which my thoughts *could not have been thought* without my communicative connection with the other. This ability to think beyond the boundaries of my own thoughts *with* the other comes not simply from finding ourselves in agreement, but also in disagreement: “the objection raised by my interlocutor draws from me thoughts I did not know I possessed such that if I lend him thoughts, he makes me think in return” (PhP 370-71). It is precisely in being *challenged* by the other that my thought is evoked, and in being mutually evoked by the other, members in an interlocutive relation “are, for each other, collaborators in perfect reciprocity: our perspectives slip into each other, we coexist through a single world” (PhP 370). This single world is, of course, only shared by those within the immediate interlocutive relation—in this case, two human others. But Merleau-Ponty stretches the boundaries of this relation further, saying as we saw above that we also dialogue with *nature*, the “world of silence” (NMS)—with a world, that is, that includes human beings, but that is *more* than human.

As early as *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty writes about a kind of dialogue “between subject and object” (PhP 134). Abram takes this to mean that we dialogue with non-human beings and things, and the image of dialogue underlines for him an aspect of active *participation* of the non-human other in this kind of dialogue (Abram 1997, 49). Mazis extends this point:

Entering into our words, if they are spoken with the artist’s attention to what is about us, are the silent voices of other beings. We say what they would say if they were to have the power of our speech. This is not to deny our distinct human, linguistic voice, but is rather to say we

can use our language as a source of reverberation for the many voices in the world with which we are interrelated. (Mazis 2016, 102)

Abram and Mazis expressly apply the idea of “voice” to the non-human world, thus dispersing the agency of thought and expression beyond the boundaries of what is typically understood to be human and into the silence of nature. They argue that *what it is* to be human is to be dialogically connected to “voices” that do not resemble our own, but that we can, rather, hear *within* our own as a result of our *speaking with them*, our being in a “perfect reciprocity” in which each evokes or solicits the expression *of the other*, and in which voices intermingle, making it unclear, even when empirically only one voice is heard, who is speaking and who is listening.

I believe the image Mazis and Abram develop can be stretched further by blurring the line *between* individual interlocuting agents, and Merleau-Ponty’s own writing supports this. The image of “être-à-deux” subverts the structure of dialogue as something that happens “between two people” who are, in themselves, discrete individuals. Instead, what it is to *be* an individual being is to be blurrily so: to be, that is, at least “à-deux.” What it is to express my own individuality is thus to express that I do not belong to myself entirely: that everything “comes to pass as though [we] wished to put into words a certain silence [we hearken] to within [ourselves]” (VI 128). What is most important about dialogue, then, is not that it emphasizes with Abram the way in which I might commune with this bird or this rock, but that it shows my own voice to be called for beyond the boundaries of my own individuality. It is not just an understanding that there are things in the world that are not me, but that *I speak because of these things*—not only because I have the power to evoke them, but because they have the power to solicit this evocation: to evoke me. Mazis says that what I express in a dialogical relation with

the more-than-human is “what [other beings] would say if they were to have the power of our speech” (Mazis 2016, 102), but this is not quite right, for in letting the things, the world, speak *through* me does not mean putting words into the figurative mouths of those objects—the words “I would say if I were these things.” It means selecting the right words such that the silent voice of nature—a voice that is neither human nor non-human, but *more* than human—*can be heard through them as silence*; that the world of silence can be heard *through sound* without it being rendered sound. Like Merleau-Ponty’s example of tacit expression through Stendhal, what is thus expressed in dialogue is more than what is *said*.

I suggest that the image of dialogue allows us to think through perception, expression, and specifically the experience of “good” metaphor as something that is doubly called for, doubly activated and evoked by me and something beyond, but not separate from, me—by, that is, the “world of silence.” Further, dialogue allows us to see this relation as one that can be fraught with disagreement and tension—what I have called “falling out of step” or “bad metaphor”—while keeping a communicative connection and evoking me to think further. And finally, dialogue, specifically in way in which Merleau-Ponty develops the image, is something that I am *in*, and not simply that which is *between* two interlocutors. Dialogue is a relation in which I and my interlocutors *are what we are* through relational reciprocity in and according to which *both* are solicited to speak, and *both* “listened to” and “impressed upon,” the one through the other and vice versa.

ii. Solicitation as the Dialogical Impression of Style

Landes worries that, when we speak about impression, we can only be speaking about the “real”—the objective, stable, ready-made, purely positive—world (Landes 2013, 137)—and

this is what worries him most about Barbaras. It is true that impression as an *echo* of the world *is* important to Barbaras's theory, and though Barbara's understanding of impression is far from the "ready-made" meanings Landes takes it to be, it still suffers from being defined along semantic-metaphorical lines: every impression in Barbaras is an impression of the same *style*, limited to the form "x is y." Though a more detailed study is warranted, it is worth giving a brief suggestion as to what it *is* that is impressed upon me, and upon my interlocutor, in a dialogical relation. I suggest that when we speak of solicitation and impression, as we do when we speak about the experience of metaphor, we certainly *are* speaking of the *real* world, but this real world is a world of reciprocal solicitation and impression of polyvocal ontological *styles*.

As Linda Singer notes, style is both an aesthetic and ontological notion in Merleau-Ponty. It is a concept that is used, in all cases, to express the "suchness" of an embodied being pre-conceptually perceived, or a living, pre-sedimented moment of expression (Singer 1981, 159-161). Style thus permeates *both* perception and expression such that perception "already stylizes" the world it perceives (IL 53-54). We may thus easily fall into saying that everything I see, I see *according to my own style*, and that in perceiving the world, I express it according to my own style the same way I express the world in a distinctive style of painting. The world of my experience would then be an entirely unique product of my own suchness. But such a reading is not quite what we find in Merleau-Ponty, who speaks of a "fecund moment" in which style "germinates" (IL 53), is "born" in a perceiving and expressing being "almost as if he were unaware of it" (IL 54). The style by which I perceive and express is *evoked* in this being.

Following the image of dialogue, we can also see how this being may *evoke style in the world*, style that is not simply his own, but that is born *in* the world as the suchness *of* the world, and not the stylizing power of the human side of the relation that envelopes everything it sees.

Rather, it is the reciprocal evocation of unique styles, the dual calling forth of the other in its or their own suchness, that makes dialogue such an interesting image for this study. In saying that I dialogue with a world that I do not envelope, I mean this: I do not simply ask questions of a world beyond me that, because of its individual and discrete style, directly answers my queries; rather, I actively accommodate *myself* to the possibility of perceiving the world, I stylize *myself*, because I am called to do so by the style of the world that I, at the same time, call for. The world's style impresses upon me a need to respond in a certain way, and the world responds to my own soliciting expressions similarly. In Merleau-Ponty words, I believe this dialogical language is one that is "everything, because it is *the* voice of no one, since it is the very voice of things" (VI 155).¹⁹ I enter into a relation in which I am no longer sure if I am speaking or listening, seeing or being seen, evoking or being evoked, because I am doing both, and I am doing neither on my own. The expressive voice that comes out of this relation has no clear owner, and no determinate style—it is not mine, nor that of the silent world—because it is not a single voice that simply speaks. It is a voice that is neither one nor two nor many, but a voice of speaking *with*.

IV. Conclusion:

By highlighting the importance of the phenomenon of solicitation as at the same time a phenomenon of impression, specifically read through the image of dialogue, and the notions of reciprocity and style, I hope to have supplemented the theories of metaphor found in Barbaras and Landes by offering a view in which we can reap the valuable insights of both. From Landes, I have borrowed and emphasized the importance of attending to the *way* in which human expression, particularly metaphorical expression, manifests in the world not simply as *reportage*

of what the world is, but as an indication of how expression is involved in the *activation* of the way the world *itself* manifests. From Barbaras, I have taken and stressed the importance of understanding that this “activation” exists in the world beyond human being, and that metaphorical expression evinces an ontology that is deeper than the human perspective alone. But in emphasizing these points, we must also strive to avoid readings of Merleau-Ponty that deliver a “full-blown” ontology (Landes 2013, 32) described through the semantic structure of metaphor—theories, that is, of ontology and expression that imply the possibility of “literal-ontological” description, as if we could eidetically grasp the Being of the world without any remainder, any invisibility or silence. Barbaras’s theory risks being read in this way. But we must also avoid readings that see silence as merely a product of human expressive sedimentation and institution. This is the risk Landes’s theory runs.

To interpretations that risk going off track in the ways we have discussed, Merleau-Ponty might respond first that “we do not have the right to say that the essences we find [in such a metaphorical structure] give the primitive meaning of being” (VI 109), for doing so would be *dominating* a relation that requires an attention to sollicitation and to that which *we* do not control. And second, we must be sensitive to a “silence of language” that does not involve “acts of reactivated signification” (VI 268) on my part, but that come from beyond me. My own response is that we shift our focus to metaphor as a *solicited experience*, and its implication of an active sedimentation and institution that takes place outside of us. We must focus, that is, on reciprocal expressive coherent deformation that allows for an active interlocutor beyond, or below [*en deçà*] us, such that we come to realize that we can only understand what our *own* words evoke within a dialogical relation in which they are, at the same time, evoked.

As a point of conclusion, it is also worth noting once again that there is no theory of metaphor in Merleau-Ponty. Eleanor Godway has suggested that there is good reason for this (Godway 1993, 393): speaking thematically about metaphor carries with it so much rhetorical weight—the weight, that is, of the kinds that both Landes and Barbaras construct their theories in response to. But in the case of Barbaras and Landes, they still adhere to the basic analytic definition of metaphor’s semantic structure: “x is y” provides the basis upon which both argue metaphor to be structurally paradigmatic of either ontology or expression. The focus I have placed on metaphor is different and, I believe, more the *kind* of focus that is given to metaphor by Merleau-Ponty, who does not *thematize* it, but *uses* it. A focus, that is, on the *experience* of metaphorical expression as the experience of a language that can say without possessing, without confining or crystallizing within a name, that can *silently express* to us, and thus solicit us to express in turn. This is not to say that theory, or the linear prose of theoretical language, that attempts to analyse the “what” and “how” of experience is in no way useful. Rather, I suggest, as Godway has written, that “[t]here is no non-metaphorical account which is adequate to the real world” (Godway 1993, 391): that endeavours to theoretically explicate the world of experience will not lead us, once and for all, to answers sufficient to the questions they ask.

Admittedly, my own work is in important ways non-metaphorical, but my conclusions are, I hope, still useful. I do not pretend here to give a *theory* of metaphor, but to think through Merleau-Ponty’s own prevalent use of metaphorical language, and to appeal to the experience of metaphor as a clue to understanding Merleau-Ponty’s ontology, and my conclusions suggest that my own work, and work that constricts itself to a theoretical and prosaic form, is not enough. To approach anything like a “complete” understanding of ontology—of, as Merleau-Ponty says, “*L’Être comme distant et comme non-caché (c’est-à-dire aussi caché)*” (Merleau-Ponty 2007,

426)—we must allow ourselves to find answers in a different way: answers, for instance, in the experience of metaphor as solicited and soliciting, as expressing together *with* the world.

Endnotes

¹ See, for instance, VI 125; VI 221-22. Note: all text abbreviations are listed in the works cited.

² See especially Vanzago 2005; Wiskus 2103; Edie 1976. See also Godway 1993; Sellheim 2010.

³ See especially Davidson 1978; Black 1977, 1979; Lackoff and Johnson 1980. Arguably the most influential phenomenological account of metaphor that adheres in many ways to the analytic structure of metaphor is found in Paul Ricoeurs's (1977) *The Rule of Metaphor*.

⁴ See especially Black 1977; 1979.

⁵ This is more or less Donald Davidson's point: metaphor only expresses paradox, and is only meaningful because it is obviously *false*. For Davidson, metaphor cannot mean in any "special" way, or give us any special cognitive content that non-metaphorical language cannot. The meaning of metaphor is nothing more than its "literal" meaning, its meaning parsed according to the same rules as any other phrase. See Davidson 1978, 32; 45-47.

⁶ Lawrence Hass has rightly noted that this dualism leads us to a paradox even in non-metaphorical language. We might expect that direct expression—giving one name to each discrete object—might solve the problem of "real" meaning in language. However, Hass argues that language as a phenomenal *object*—the written word read, the spoken word heard—would also belong to the "discrete objects" of reality. The problem, then, is more than one of how metaphor can be meaningful, but how, if *none* of my words would then have any real connection to anything that they apparently say, *any* linguistic expression, "direct" or "indirect," actually bears meaning (Hass 2008, 32; 175).

⁷ We may hear this in another way: not only does the saying not coincide with that according to which it says, but also that it does not just *so happens* that truth is truthful. In the word “coincidence” we find two important and related significations: language does not bear meaning because it coincides with what it expresses, but the meaningful relation of non-coincidence between language and what is expressed is not a matter of pure chance.

⁸ Merleau-Ponty names Saussure’s linguistic insight—the notion that language consists of differences without positive terms—“diacritical difference” or “unity of coexistence” (IL 50). Ted Toadvine argues that Merleau-Ponty then develops this diacritical notion to include not only language, but perception and ontology (Toadvine 2015, 239; see VI 213-14). Toadvine himself further develops Merleau-Ponty’s insight into the notion of “biodiacritics,” or the diacritics of *life*: a unity of coexistence in difference that “connects every level and aspect of life as moments of its own dehiscence” (ibid., 244). Toadvine goes on to say that this diacritic of life, as a concept that applies to expression as it does to perception and the world and thus to the living experience of reality, is not “mysterious” or inaccessible. It is, rather, “what we rely upon constantly in the case of language [in the Saussurean sense] and perception [as of figure/ground or gestalt, in which the joining of figure and ground is according to their differentiation]” (ibid.). See Toadvine 2015 241-48. C.f. Kearney 2013.

⁹ See for example Ricoeur 1977, 103; 301-02.

¹⁰ See especially Landes 2013 chapters 5 and 6.

¹¹ Landes goes so far as to begin, at one point, to reject the use of the word “real,” favouring instead “potential,” when speaking of the world (Landes 2013, 135-37). An interesting discussion could be had about the specific distinction Landes is trying to draw here—apparently

a distinction between the stable and the metastable—and its likely Aristotelian roots in the terms *entelecheia* and *dunamis*—terms which do *not* necessarily draw the same kind of distinction.

¹² Merleau-Ponty is famous, in a working note to *The Visible and the Invisible*, for declaring the problems of *The Phenomenology of Perception* to be insoluble because his thought in this work at points emphasizes the “‘consciousness’-‘object’ divide” (VI 200); in response to this, he develops his concept of *flesh*. See VI 130-155.

¹³ C.f. Sellheim 2010.

¹⁴ “Solicitation” is a significant word in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. An interesting direction for further study would be a comparative study of the use of this term in Hegel and Merleau-Ponty.

¹⁵ Apraxia is the inability to perform certain purposive or intentional actions, usually as the result of some sort of brain damage.

¹⁶ The terms “direct expression” and “indirect expression” are developed out of Merleau-Ponty’s reading of Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Course on General Linguistics* (see IL 39-45). I do not use the terms, here, in their canonical usage. As Beata Stawarska has noted, however, Merleau-Ponty’s reading of Saussure differs significantly from the canonical reading in that it takes Saussure’s method of diacritical analysis, usually understood to apply *only* to *la langue*—direct or sedimented language [*langage parlé*]—and uses it to think through *la parole*—indirect, synchronic speech [*langage parlant*], expression, and perception (Stawarska 2013 159-161). For Merleau-Ponty, the “linguistic turn” that Saussure inspires in him is not a turn to the systematicity of sedimented language, but toward a phenomenology of lived experience more broadly understood (see Edie 1976, 89; Stawarska 2013, 159-61). Thus, we can understand Merleau-Ponty’s reference to the “silence” of indirect expression according to a

phenomenological account that goes beyond the structural silence we find in canonical structuralist accounts of Saussure.

¹⁷ Intervening silence is a positive experience of silence as that which gives rhythm to sound, insofar as it is felt as something that sound must *bridge* (Dauenhauer 1973, 10-13). Fore-and-after silence describes the silence that we feel “on the fringes” of sound expression, immediately preceding and immediately following it (ibid., 15-16). Note that, depending on the scale we are working with, fore-and-after silence may be thought of as intervening silence, giving rhythm to expression more broadly speaking. Dauenhauer argues, however, that there is “only one fore-silence” because “all modes of its appearance are directly related to the single issue of the appropriateness of starting a sound expression when and where one was started” (Dauenhauer 1973, 16). Fore-silence thus may be an interesting rejoinder to our discussion of solicitation, but its limitation to the aurality of expression makes it of less interest to us here.

¹⁸ For further study, this could be understood in terms of the Husserlian logic of horizons to which Merleau-Ponty often appeals in *The Phenomenology of Perception*. According to Husserlian “horizon,” more is given in the *experience* of an object than the immediately perceived profile. I thus perceive more than is present as visible, but I don’t *positively* perceive all of this. Rather, I perceive the hidden sides of the object through the “horizons” of its presentation, which in turn are available to me as horizons because of my own perceptual intending of the *object*, and not just its immediate profile. Merleau-Ponty notably expands the idea of horizon to include the experience not only of what we habitually call objects, but of *time* (PhP 442-44) and, arguably, of language (IL 45)—aspects of experience that, because of their horizontal structures, are respectively experienced as “a subject” (PhP 445) or “a sort of being” (IL 43). For Husserl, the horizon of experience exists only on the side of the experiencing

subject. In Merleau-Ponty, I am suggesting, we can understand this horizon to be doubled: the horizon of my experience is not just on *my* side of the experience, but also beyond it. The horizon exists outside of me.

¹⁹ This thought is repeated in a working note of 22 October 1959, where Merleau-Ponty writes: *La subjectivité, c'est vraiment personne. C'est vraiment le désert. Ce qui est constitutif du sujet, c'est d'être intégralement aux choses, au monde, de n'avoir pas d'intérieur positivement assignable, d'être généralité. ... Le désert de la subjectivité, cette notion est solidaire de celle de l'Être-objet*" (Merleau-Ponty 2007, 425-26). Subjectivity, that is, is not a power of an *individual* as such, but of "*L'Être-objet*" the subject-integrated-in-object, the subject as a being without clearly defined or unbroachable boundaries, the subject-integrated-with-Being. And in fact we see something similar in some Aboriginal Australian and Canadian understandings of subjectivity, speech, and dialogue (see Povinelli 1995; Amundsen-Meyer 2015). Such Aboriginal philosophies of language, speech, and subjectivity both give legitimacy to Merleau-Ponty's own theories and show them to be preceded by a wealth of long-neglected (and often actively dismissed or destroyed) cultural knowledge. I suggest them here as paths of further study.

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