Commuting Bodies Move, Creatively

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Where were you the last time you had a good idea? That is, a really good idea. The one that became a paper, or a book. What were you doing the last time you had an idea whereby your messy and meandering thoughts all nestled into unexpected but fortuitous alignment?

If you are anything like colleagues to whom I have spoken, perhaps this idea came to you while you were riding your bike to work. Or in the subway. Or in that limbo between waking and sleeping (convinced, usually falsely, that you would remember your epiphany in the morning). Or perhaps genius last struck while you were on a commuter bus, as was I, somewhere between Hamilton (in Southwestern Ontario) and York University, my temple propped against the cold, sweating safety glass, pretending to read de Beauvoir or Bataille, but really just staring, without focus, not entirely at the trees and construction sites as they came into view in the distance then swiftly accelerated towards me before urgently disappearing, streaks of nothing remarkable, into the already-forgotten landscape at my back. Somewhere in this (seemingly) not really being anywhere, sometime in this (seemingly) not really doing anything, an idea congealed, coalesced, and a paper with which I had been struggling for several weeks fell surprisingly into place.

Such experiences of commuting, and my efforts to develop a phenomenological sketch of them, are the departure point for this paper. Commuting is commonly understood as the experience whereby our bodies move, or are moved, from one place to another, usually by
necessity, on a routine basis. Our commutes to work or to school have become a common facet of a lifestyle that accompanies both an increasingly mobile work-force, and our growing suburban and ex-urban sprawl. Although many of us have developed strategies for “maximizing” and “capitalizing on” this otherwise “empty” time, commuting still holds connotations of drudgery—something we must simply “get over” and “get through”—in order to tie together the existences that for many of us are becoming increasingly spatially fragmented. In commuting we are neither here nor there, but in some way placeless, or at least in a space that seems contentless, with the sole purpose of tying together the more meaningful aspects and loci of our days.

However, as my phenomenological sketch deepened, it became clear that commuting, while perhaps “content-less,” was far from “empty.” And indeed, the experience of commuting turned out to be a key opening for me to unpack my preoccupations with a more general and confounding phenomenon, namely, the ways in which our bodies take up the phenomenon of “in-between-ness.” “In-between-ness” is an awkward noun, for certain, but perhaps its clumsy fit among that most palpable part of speech can help reveal my simultaneous perplexity with and attraction to the study of this phenomenon. If phenomenology asks us to go “back to the things themselves,” how do we “go back” to the ephemeral gaps, the fleeting interstices or holding places between those things, when such hinges or intervals are defined precisely by their presumed externality to the solid and substantive “things” they hold in relation? Can we, following a phenomenological method, “go back” to the in-between, too? In fact, my phenomenological sketch of commuting teaches me not only that we can, but also that by studying this specific example of in-between-ness, we can come to a better understanding of some of the structures that hold the in-between together as a recognizable entity or quality. As I explain, close attention to the ways in which our various bodily modalities are engaged while
commuting helps elucidate first, that a backgrounding or a loosening of our overt, deliberate perceptual engagement with the world is one key aspect of the experience of “in-between-ness.” Secondly, I discover that embodied movement and the taking up of a distinct rhythm of the in-between are two other such aspects. As my opening questions intimate, this sketch also reveals that within the rhythm and movement of the in-between, our bodies can open to a specific kind of conceptual creativity. While the example through which I discover this insight is commuting, this phenomenological sketch also invites me to consider other in-betweens more broadly. Such reflection suggests to me that much of our embodied experience of being in-between calls on the hard work of our moving bodies (at various levels or registers). These traversals of the in-between by our moving bodies in turn give rise to the fertile terrain of unanticipated innovation and transformation.

Before unfolding this sketch, however, I offer some brief notes on the phenomenological method I employed in its generation. I include here some reflections on the ways in which Merleau-Ponty’s embodied phenomenology, and its study and application by phenomenologist Samuel Mallin, have informed my own practice. And, in the paper’s concluding sections, I am again led back to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, but in two unanticipated ways. First, I reflect briefly on how Merleau-Ponty’s embodied practice invites an understanding of lived in-between-ness that might be foreclosed by phenomenological practices that do not adequately account for non-cognitive ways of bodily “knowing.” But secondly, I am brought back to Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the in-between of bodies and the world, and to the suggestion of ontological weight that this understanding carries. In closing, I briefly consider how my phenomenological sketch of commuting might lend credence to the fledgling notion among various commentators that a resonance can be found between the respective ontologies proposed by Merleau-Ponty and
Deleuze and Guattari. Specifically, my sketch here invites me to see how both of these philosophies offer an ontological understanding of things that depends on, rather than effaces, the in-between, and in this sense, how Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze and Guattari may be closer to one another in certain respects than is typically assumed. The zone of creativity I discover within the in-between suggests that while Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatics help us explain the findings of my phenomenological sketch of commuting, Merleau-Ponty’s embodied phenomenology can help to flesh out (quite literally) Deleuze and Guattari’s suggestion that all the work happens in the middle, in “the logic of the AND” (Thousand 25). While the method I call on here is decidedly phenomenological, the conclusions I reach invite me to explore further the promise that a more “rhizomatic phenomenological” practice might hold.¹

I. Practicing Phenomenology

Before turning to my phenomenological sketch of commuting, several preliminary notes on methodology are warranted. The practice I have honed in order to undertake such phenomenological sketches is based primarily on “body hermeneutics,” a method developed by phenomenologist Samuel Mallin and exemplified in his book, Art Line Thought. Mallin’s practice of body hermeneutics is grounded principally in Merleau-Ponty’s embodied phenomenology (on which Mallin has produced a noteworthy book-length commentary²), although it is also informed by his reading of both Heidegger and Nietzsche’s thinking about the body. Following Merleau-Ponty, Mallin agrees that consciousness is embodied, and maintains that the body knows the world through four overlapping yet irreducible modalities of bodily being: cognition, perception, affectivity, and motility—that is, roughly, by thinking, perceiving, feeling and moving.³ Each of these modalities has its own logic; each reveals some aspect of a
specific phenomenon or experience that is concealed, muffled, or backgrounded by the body’s other modes of bodily being. According to Mallin’s body hermeneutics, then, it is by carefully describing the way in which our body understands a phenomenon according to each of its four logics that we can loosen the conceptual sediment that a phenomenon has accrued, and allow it to become present to us in new and surprising ways.

Mallin’s classroom teachings and unpublished working notes suggest that a practice of phenomenology might include the following “rough and ready” tips or steps: 1) Begin by articulating a spectrum of problems for yourself, which you think might be clarified by your chosen “thing itself,” while bearing in mind that only the phenomenology itself will reveal whether or not elucidations of these problems are to be found there. 2) Go to the thing itself. Describe it according to various basic methodological questions: How does this thing engage my cognitive body? My motor body? My perceptual body? My affective (including emotional and sexual) body? 3) Stay with the thing. Describe it. 4) When circling in a dead end, or veering off on a tangent, remind yourself of the key questions: What is this thing and why or how is my body telling me it is meaningful? What is revealed according to the various logics of my body? 5) Return again, the following day, for as many days as you can. You may need twenty or more sessions for even a provisional sketch. Away from the “thing itself,” notes are sorted and sifted, and one looks for patterns, reiterations and eventually a congealing of meaning. Were any of your initial questions or problematics elucidated? Patterns and problems are developed further. The result of this grappling leading toward some synthesis of the “field work” becomes the phenomenology.

While for the past seven years I have relied on a version of Mallin’s method for a variety of projects, I have adapted this method to bring it more in line with my own concerns, interests
and philosophical alliances. These have included extended attention to the ways in which our bodies can experience or know the world below or beneath the level of coherent subjectivity, but also interest and attention to the important ways in which various phenomena might “speak” to different bodies in very different ways. Moreover, when sorting my notes, not only do I look for the patterns and convergences, but I also pay close attention to the knots and incompossibilities, for I have come to recognize that it is often within the unexplainable or problematic glitches within an otherwise coalescing phenomenological sketch that key insights and illuminations emerge. Sometimes these glitches reflect poor attention on my part, but other times they highlight the very ruts in which our own phenomenology-enacting bodies are stuck, and the signposts they would thus rather ignore. In other words, while I cannot call my own method “body hermeneutics,” my own phenomenological practice nonetheless owes a very specific debt both to Mallin and to Merleau-Ponty (both by extension and by virtue of my own study of his texts), which must be acknowledged. Despite the divergences, most of the basic practical approaches of “body hermeneutics” remain at the core of my own practice.\(^5\)

In the case of my phenomenological sketch of commuting, I had in fact begun not with the specific act of commuting, but, as noted above, with a more general interest in experiences of “in-between-ness.” The two broad questions that inaugurated my inquiry thus included: What are the principal qualities of the in-between? How is it distinguished qualitatively from its “book-ends”? A third question was also hovering in the wings, although admittedly, I was intimidated by its implications: Is the in-between actually a “thing” I can “go back” to? In other words, if I could actually manage a phenomenology of the in-between, how might this phenomenon challenge our sedimented ontological paradigms? While the promise dangling from this last question was certainly tantalizing, initially it proved more of a conversation-stopper than an
impetus for action, and as a result delayed the beginning of my field work considerably. How would I “go back to” the in-between “itself,” when the in-between seemed to problematize the whole ontological status of the “thing?” After all, I did not really consider the in-between as a “what,” and rather imagined it to have more of a when- or a where-like quality, nestled in-between the “whats.” And even its when- and where-ness were flummoxing, for I speculated that as soon as I might pinpoint the in-between, its quality of in-between-ness would slip away, smothered by the weight of full-fledged thing-ness. Already this was a particularly demanding phenomenology, and I had not even started. Its challenge to some of phenomenology’s more comfortable positions was evident from the outset. Indeed, a phenomenology of the in-between might threaten to do away with “things themselves” altogether—or at least “things” according to our traditional identitarian ontological categories. But if the in-between wasn’t a “thing” in the conventional sense, then what was it? More to the point: where could I begin looking for this “thing” that was not a thing at all?

This problem was sleeping somewhere in my subconscious one day as I made one of my fairly regular treks from my home, south five blocks to the Bruce Trail, and then up the 256 stairs that snake up the Niagara escarpment limestone which divides lower Hamilton from the “Mountain,” to a residential neighbourhood off Scenic Drive. For me, this journey is a short half-hour commute, one that I often make to collect my kids from their grandparents’ house on childcare days, when the weather allows it. And it was on a crisp autumn day as I walked, propelled forward by my body’s own rhythm-generating habits, not really thinking about this paper at all, that the key idea for this study of the in-between occurred to me all at once: conceptual epiphany and the “becoming” of ideas happen, it seems, precisely in the in-between, spilling forth from our bodies when we least expect it.
II. Commuting as In-Between

This fledgling notion—that ideas pop out of in-betweens such as commuting—led to my decision to attempt to pursue the act of commuting as an in-between through which I might explore this phenomenon’s structures, movements and potential meanings. I initially chose to focus on my regular hike up the Hamilton Mountain, as I describe above, but to my field-work studies I soon added my twice-weekly nearly two-hour bus ride to York University. Indeed, as I noted above, once I started paying attention, I became aware that this otherwise dreary bus ride was also a surprising, bustling idea-lab. Moreover, the structures of both commutes exhibit important similarities. Both serve as holding time in my daily routines, and they are the distances that I need to traverse to connect the dots of my fully fledged daily activities. While they are rarely unpleasant, these journeys are undertaken by necessity rather than choice. I cannot get around them; they are required for me to “get” anywhere at all. Furthermore, I do not use up space in my day-planner to write “get to school” or “pick up kids” in their own time-blocks, even though these activities usually take around two hours or thirty minutes respectively, and despite the fact that I might allot a block for a fifteen minute phone date. These commutes belong neither to the space and time of the departure point, nor to that of the destination, and yet they do not really belong to the place of the journey either, even if they inhabit its space. In other words, my time spent on the highway, or along the Bruce Trail, is not a committed being or dwelling in either place, for, as I will describe below, in such commuting the particularities of the place traversed are not essential in their singularity to the experience of commuting. The gravel path might be dusty or muddy, just as the highway might be four-lane or two-lane, the scenery obfuscated by fog or warmly waking to the rising sun. While these particularities certainly
change the details of the experience, I was surprised to discover that they do not generally alter the basic structures of commuting as such.

Importantly, then, these commutes as in-between’s did indeed betray a certain thing-like quality. I could identify them, logically and rationally, as commutes, after all. Yet at the same time, their refusal to commit to the time and place of their bookends, or even to the place of their own unfolding, suggested that commuting might indeed reveal something about the enigmatic aspects of in-between-ness that confounded my first contemplations of this project. Commuting, it seemed, was a zone of traversal and transformation, a zone that did not properly belong to either of the things that mark its liminality. While I could provisionally locate the in-between in the commute, the most essential structures of the in-between seemed to be those aspects of commuting that did not quite want to commit to being in that place and time; the in-between was rather the skittish pond-bug skipping across the commute’s surface. I wanted to try to respect my early intuitions of the in-between as holding an indeterminate ontological status, and explore this notion further. But first, the identifiable “thing-ness” of commuting had to be dealt with more squarely.

And indeed, you may already find my choice of in-between, i.e., commuting, problematic, given the task I had set for myself. Surely walking, or riding in a bus, you might object, are activities in their own right. While they may occur, both temporally and spatially, between two other activities, you may protest that commuting is only an in-between by situational deixis, whereby things acquire an identity only through their relative position to other things. In other words, the in-between changes as soon as the activities that bookend it shift position. You might ask, then: while the bus ride might be in-between my breakfast and my class, is not my class equally in-between my bus ride and my lunch? But as I delved deeper into
my experiences of the in-between, my resulting phenomenological sketch revealed two distinct qualities of it that differentiated it from other activities and situations: first, the in-between enacts our disengagement with or distancing from the bodily modality of (overt) perception; and second, the in-between brings to the fore the bodily modality of motility and the generation of rhythm. I will now turn to explore these two distinct qualities of the in-between in more detail.

a) The Distancing of Perception: Why (and When) Travelling is Not Commuting

Although I have undertaken one and the same bus trip to school one or two hundred times, I am always amazed at the things I fail to notice. I know the driver takes a short-cut somewhere around Brampton, but when I try to duplicate this route in a car I become hopelessly lost. After several years of riding the bus I one day glanced up and saw an exit for Pine Valley Road. Was this a new exit, I wondered? Of course it had been there since the highway’s construction, long before the advent of my commuting tribulations, but I had never noticed it. Such failures of perception, I argue, are in part what distinguish the in-between-ness of the commute from the activity of journeying or travelling. Unlike commuting, I understand travelling as engaging in the journey and situating oneself in the unmediated presence of the trip. We can note this difference, for example, when we walk down Broadway in Manhattan: the tourists and travellers are distinct from the locals commuting between destinations, not necessarily in the speed of their journey or in their absence of the running shoes/business suit fashion combo, but in the focus of their sensory-perceptual faculties. To travel is to look at the clothes in the window, to smell the street vendor’s hotdogs, to feel the passage of the subway beneath the grates you pass over. It is not that the commuter does not perceive these things, but rather that she is held at a certain distance from her immediate perception. The sights, sounds and
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smells may traverse her perceptual surfaces, but they do not penetrate. The commuter may be
distanced from her perception by any number of things—a conversation, a newspaper, an
internal rehearsal for a talk about to be delivered, or nothing more than the fuzzy grey space of
no particular thoughts at all—but in each case the specific sensory qualities of the immediate
environment are overlooked and taken for granted, not least because this is a route taken many
times before. Perception falls back from the forefront of our bodily ways of being. Moreover,
even if one is taking a route never actually taken, if commuting, our perceptual faculties are still
likely to be muted. For example, a travelling business person on a plane to Vancouver, even if
she has never travelled this specific route out of Winnipeg, will likely remain unaffected by any
view out of her window if this trip is just another commute. She will accept her pretzels and
request her sparkling water, consuming both, likely without tasting either. Her body instead gears
into the drone of the engine, the familiar yet still always unnerving quality of moving incredibly
fast while also remaining still. We will return to the importance of this “gearing in” in relation to
movement shortly, but for the moment, the key point is that whether it be prairie vistas or
pretzels in the zone of her immediate sensorium, the commuter is mostly indifferent to it all.

But again, you may raise another objection. When I commute, you might be thinking, I
specifically use that walk to work to admire the gardens in the neighbourhood between my home
and my office. Or perhaps the state of traffic on your car commute is such that your perceptual
faculties must be acutely engaged in order to avoid crashing. Again, however, if you are
genuinely perceptually present, drawn into the immediacy of something in your perceptual
world, you are leaving the in-between space of commuting and instead engaging in a fully
formed activity in its own right (like garden-gazing or driving). Moreover, if you are commuting,
you may be aware of those robust hostas, or that sadly overwatered lawn, or the driver in front of
you who has a tendency to brake far too suddenly, but it is likely that these perceptions are again merely skimming the surface of our perceptual bodies in a way that is akin to the white noise that often fills our world. We know such “noise” is there, but we probably could not tell you precisely what it is that we saw, smelled or heard even ten minutes later. With commuting as an in-between, perception of our immediate environment is distinctly backgrounded. Furthermore, fully-fledged activities such as garden-gazing may indeed (and do) overlap with commuting, interrupting or perforating this experience. Of course it is also the case that unanticipated moments of other perceptually-presencing activities can and do impinge upon the perceptual mutedness of our commutes. A chance encounter with an old friend or a sudden lightning storm knocks us out of our perceptually detached semi-daze. But as my objective was to attempt to isolate the in-between itself within the commute, I left such adjunct activities behind to the extent possible. I am thus not claiming that commuting is always a bounded and discrete activity, but I do want to suggest that there is a certain quality of in-between-ness proper that permeates the commute, and which we can recognize in this perceptual distancing or muting.

b) Rhythm and Movement of the In-Between

The second and arguably more important quality that distinguishes the in-between of commuting relates to rhythm and movement. Checking in with my body’s response to my thirty minute commute up the Bruce Trail, I note a strong rhythm to my steps, one that I had not noticed until I actively drew my attention to my gait. My steps are even and brisk, but unhurried. They are automatic. This motility is supported by the songs I also fail to realize I am singing. On one particular day this is a simple four-line children’s melody, although at other times it will be that pop song I heard on the radio, or a TV ad jingle. These musical accompaniments count off
our steps and generate our forward momentum. Even though these songs are comprised of “language,” they do not arise primarily from my cognitive-linguistic faculties. I did not decide to sing this tune in my head and, like most people with musical spam floating around in their bodies, once I notice it, I would actually rather that it went away. This song is more about rhythm and movement than language and thinking. I note that it is an auxiliary motor, giving my legs the momentum they need to maintain their gait. My body gears into the rhythm of the song, not exactly picking up speed, but certainly finding a weight and a kinetic force that will push it on.

Interestingly, it is not the physical landscape, the temperature of the air, or the small change in altitude that separates the walk itself up the Mountain from my origin or from my destination. These details are in fact part of those perceptions that are backgrounded by the in-between, as noted above. So, just as I discover that it is not the content of the commute (walking, bus riding) that holds its in-between-ness, I also learn that the in-between of the commute is not dependent upon its particular coordinates on some space-time grid. The in-between-ness of the commute shows itself rather in a mode of being that strongly engages a certain modality of embodiment— the motor body—while backgrounding another—the perceptual body. According to the logic of our embodiment, neither of these modes (nor any other mode) can completely reign, while others disappear entirely from our embodied situation, but certainly some can become more prominent than others. The in-between of the commute distinguishes itself by movement and repetition that foreground the motor body, asking that it take up a certain rhythm.

Indeed, as I sink into the forward momentum of my walk, or as I ride the bus, staring half-focused out the window, it is the rhythm of the in-between that overtakes me: the ta-dum, ta-dum, ta-dum of passing hydro poles, or the daa-da, daa-da, daa-da, daa-da of my hikers on the
gravel path. The rhythm becomes the engine of my motor body, and upon this rhythm, in a sense, I surf. This rhythm of the in-between is distinct, as it distinguishes itself from the rhythm of the projects at either end of my journey. This *shift* in rhythm lets me know that I am in-between. My body gears into a journey, into a traversal. My body is not stopping to smell the roses; it devotes its labours to *getting through*. I recall a trick that a neighbour taught me when I was about eight years old for getting up a steep hill on my bike: count out a simple rhythm in your head—*one two three four, one two three four*. Let that rhythm keep your body moving, pushing it to get up, to get through. While modern bicycles can in part do the gear-shifting for us to alleviate some of the burden, our bodies themselves will still need to shift gears to get to where- or whatever lies ahead.

In order to traverse the in-between, one needs to *move*. In some of my commuting experiences, this movement was the gross motor movement of the body, as I hiked along the path and climbed those stairs; in other cases, this was the movement of my relatively still body being carried, transported by a vehicle. But in both cases—and I began to suspect, in many cases of the in-between—a more subtle bodily movement is also going on. The in-between always demands of us a movement that is not necessarily that of the body changing position or place, as it is in the case of commuting. This movement is, however, at the very least a shifting gears, a traversal. It is a movement perhaps more subtle than lifting your foot, perhaps more subtle even than isometric muscular flexion. It is a movement akin to what happens when a lecturer says “let’s move on to the next point,” when a poignant story “moves” you from one emotional state into another, or when a piece of music “moves” you, spiritually. These cognitive and affective movements are not mere synaesthetic metaphors. Such movements enact a shift of the body, and as such, are *work*. Granted, this “work” may not involve the physical perspiration or overt mental
exhaustion that we often associate with the idea of labour, but I nonetheless call this movement “work” in order to emphasize that something is going on, shifting, in our bodily being. Once we have fallen into sleep, or once our bodies have been overtaken by the rhythmic pressure of our feet on a bicycle’s pedals, it may seem as though we have fallen into such states without any labour at all. And, indeed, the chain of a bicycle may seem to effortlessly slip from the metal teeth of one gear to the next with a mere twist of the wrist or push of the thumb—but as in most projects, we remain unaware of the level of work involved in such transitions until something goes wrong, and we find ourselves arriving at work twenty minutes late, our hands and clothes stained with bicycle chain grease. Our bodies, too, may seem to slip effortlessly through their transformations, but the anxiety of insomnia, or the weight of one’s body when it refuses to wake up and get out of bed some mornings, should similarly remind us of the effort hidden behind a seeming effortlessness. Living the in-between demands movement that is in some way a material, bodily exertion. Even a pause, a rest, or a “breather” that is experienced as in-between involves this movement because it engages the work that a body must do when it loses the momentum of one trajectory, and the rhythm that sustained it, and moves on to a different trajectory and rhythm.

As I explore this work of the in-between, its distinctive rhythm becomes clearer. While the specific cadence or gait may differ from situation to situation, the rhythm of the in-between shows itself always in its momentous force, its arduous pulling of what the body must lug along behind it to its next project, teamed with the release of what it is letting go, leaving be.

Perhaps this is why I cannot read anything but novels and trashy magazines on planes and long bus-trips: it is as though these in-betweens demand a de-focusing, a de-intensifying of my standard multi-tasking, efficiency-maximizing way of being-in-the-world. I need to spend my
energy, instead, simply shifting gears. The rhythm of this in-between, both hungover with the bodily memory of what it is leaving and pregnant with the bodily anticipation of what comes next, blurs my ability to focus intently, either perceptually, as noted above, or cognitively. While not impossible, doing heavy, plodding brain-work, such as reading Hegel or crafting a grant proposal, is exhausting and difficult when up against the distinctive push-and-pull of the in-between.

But surprisingly, while inhospitable to a certain type of cognitive activity, the in-between also revealed itself to be exceptionally fertile ground for another: the Big Idea.

III. The Rhythm of the In-Between and Concept-Creation

Significantly, my body was ensconced in this rhythm of the in-between when the idea for this paper came. My hikers were hitting the pavement and the trees were becoming a peripheral, vaguely arboreal blur, when the thought popped into my head: commuting helps me think (the thought that commuting helps me think!). Such revelation has happened not once or twice, but for almost every thought-project with which I have engaged. It is generally in the in-between that I am able to make the connections that move a paper or article from some notions that seem scattered but potentially fruitful to an idea worth sharing. The in-between is where or when conceptual creativity happens. I use this particular wording—“conceptual creativity”—deliberately, as I wish to distinguish this notion from some of the other types of intellectual work. Concept creation is not the tedious and often gruelling labour required to transform great ideas—the fleshing out of concepts, the honing of their contours and the tracing of their boundary spaces—into cogent papers and sustained arguments. Rather, the specific type of creativity that happens in the in-between of the commute seems at first to be a kind of
immaculate conception. It falls upon us, always more than the sum of its parts. It seems to be something that literally comes to us, an apparition, rather than something we actively and purposively build or form from some existing materials at hand. Indeed, for many of us, to actively will this type of concept-creativity is usually futile and frustrating (as in: Have a good idea, *now*!). Of course, the creative concept does not come from nowhere, for surely it was germinating, working below the surface, as tidbits of thought and problems and questions and observations rubbing up against each other in the crowded cocktail party of our ruminating bodies. But significantly, such ideas do not seem to connect directly to what we are experiencing in that moment: the telephone poles slipping by, or the ta-dum of our shoes on the pavement. Strangely, between the telephone poles and the subdivisions, between the thudding of our feet on the steel stairs and the pretty little ditty on repeat in our head, the idea slips in, unnoticed, and then announces itself with a grand flourish. (Admittedly, the particular experience I have described of coming to an idea for this essay *about* the in-between while *in* the in-between is a rare sort of “metaphenomenological” coincidence or exception.) It was only once I was well into the final stages of this phenomenological sketch that it occurred to me that “to commute” means not only to travel back and forth, but also to alter, to convert, to transform. In the in-between rhythm of the commute, then, my body literally engages the work of commuting this congeries of half-formed inklings, ineffective on their own, into a coalescing moment of minor genius.

Certainly, not all concept creation happens while “commuting” in the ways I describe in the examples above. Big ideas come to us in other in-betweens as well. In fact, I have since taken note of similar epiphanic moments that have erupted not only during my commutes, but also during showers, making my first morning coffee, and insomniac semi-sleeping lucidity. But because each of those in-betweens also has that distinct rhythm, generated by the need to carry,
or drag, my body from one bodily project to another, I suspect that a phenomenology of those instances would also reveal something interesting about the relation between concept-creation and the taking up of an “in-between” rhythm. As our bodies must traverse a space-time of a commute, or as they must similarly traverse the distance between one task and another, something old must be left behind and something new must be opened to. Such traversals demand of our bodies a desisting of attention to whatever is perceptually most present, and a giving over of our bodies to some level of movement, of shifting, of work. For example, in semi-sleep, as the body shifts gears from waking to sleeping, we take on a rhythm that is a tension between struggle and release, a tugging in two directions. The in-between invites this specific type of rhythm that pulls our bodies taut under the burden of their labour of getting through, at the same time as they are released and relieved of the task or space they are leaving behind them. Could it be that in this staccato of tugging and tension, ideas are literally able to pop up, pop out?

An idea has a weight and a force that needs to be dealt with appropriately by our (undeniably material) bodies. This suggests to me that the bodily movement of the in-between that pushes out creative concepts is not just an animated metaphor for the way in which we come to some disembodied, transcendent “thought.” The materiality of ideas, even if not “solid” in the Newtonian sense, is at least bound up with a materially energetic or kinetic force. So when we get that great big shiny idea that makes “everything fall into place,” I wonder: does everything really just fall into place? Or do we actually need to move those ideas—to bump them, jostle them, make room around their edges, quite literally through the rhythms and movements of our bodies, in order for the felicitous combinations to emerge? It seems that concept creation is an embodied, material action that is not merely cognitive, but which necessarily enlists the motor
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body. We come to ideas not just by “thinking,” but by moving, too. And hence, the in-between—a zone in which we must move—becomes a particularly fecund zone of concept-creation.

IV. Methodological and Ontological Lessons: In-Between Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze and Guattari

My phenomenological sketch of commuting and creativity elucidates the difficulty of latching on, purely cognitively, to this phenomenon. I can certainly describe a particular instance of the in-between, i.e., commuting, and thus point to it and name it, but the most revealing qualities of the in-between are those ephemeral ones that a common-place definition of “commuting” ignores: how our bodies are perceptually toned down, how our motor bodies are geared up and how the rhythm they gather is a laborious one of tension and release. While I may refer to my commute as a “two-hour bus ride,” it is neither the duration nor the activity itself that expresses and holds the “in-between-ness” of this phenomenon. In-between-ness reveals itself in the force of movement or doing, and it is this movement, rather than a concrete “thing,” that invites the eruption of a Big Idea. In-between-ness is something we take up, a zone we perhaps temporarily inhabit, a work that our bodies do, a fleeting but arduous getting through, rather than a fully formed thing that we can facilely delineate. But while it may be difficult to define in-between-ness according to an identitarian logic, our bodies certainly recognize this phenomenon; they certainly live it.

One broader lesson of this phenomenology, then, seems to be about phenomenological method. If the phenomenon of in-between-ness seems, at some level, to evade the ways in which our logical, thinking bodies understand “things,” then an embodied phenomenological practice that can specifically tap into the way the in-between is experienced by our other bodily ways of
being seems not only helpful but necessary, if we actually want to go to the in-between itself. In other words, we need a phenomenological practice that can explicitly address the movements, sensations and affective dimensions of a phenomenon via a dialogue with those corresponding regions of our bodies. Our bodies reveal aspects of phenomena to us that will continually elude our cognitive or rational faculties (which seek to discretely categorize and delineate), and thus we must continue to hone and develop phenomenological methods of inquiry that can explicitly allow such non-cognitive bodily “knowledge” to tell us something. As I suggested in my brief methodological comments above, paying close attention to what Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy and practice teaches us can open precisely to the further refinement of such methods.

But the provisional conclusions of my sketch also return us to the in-between’s perplexing ontological status. Here we circle back to one of the questions with which I began this paper. If the in-between is not exactly a thing that we can clearly and discretely hold up for scrutiny, then what is it?

I have just suggested that Merleau-Ponty’s texts are an important source for refining our phenomenological practices in order to more fully account for our various bodily ways of “knowing” and understanding phenomena, such as the in-between-ness that reveals itself in acts of commuting. Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, however, is just as valuable for beginning to think through this phenomenon’s strange ontological status. We can begin, for example, by highlighting the various ways in which in-between zones are a key aspect of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of embodiment, and of the ontological paradigms of being/becoming that he develops. As Merleau-Ponty notes in *Phenomenology of Perception*, the phenomenological body is “always something other than what it is;” it is “never hermetically sealed” (*Phenomenology* 198). It is through contact with the world that the body learns how to engage the world, and
knowledge of this world comes from this engagement that is literally an intertwining of self and world. The capacity for bodily creativity, in other words, does not come exactly from the body, nor exactly from the world, but from the work of their mutual traversal of an *in-between*. Every moment of contact and traversal is an opportunity to draw on the habitual body and reshape it.

This notion of the latent transformative capacity of this zone in-between bodies, or in-between bodies and worlds, is further developed in his posthumously published work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, where Merleau-Ponty moves to articulate an ontology of chiasm and the flesh. According to this ontology, all bodies participate in an elemental being, and thus also in each other. The flesh, in Merleau-Ponty’s words, is an “interconnective tissue” and a “mesh” or a “web” that interimplicates bodies. The flesh is a “generality of being” into which the body extends and therein intertwines with other bodies in the world (*Visible* 149). But a key aspect of the chiasm and the flesh is that they lie latent *in-between* bodies and the world, or within an intermundane space (*l’intermonde*) (*Visible* 48–49). Moreover, the meaning of bodies for Merleau-Ponty emerges from this intermundane zone, where flesh is a “pregnancy” (*Visible* 149) that keeps the meaning of this relation between bodies and world, and thus of bodies themselves, always open. Concomitantly, the chiasm is an interval that both connects and differentiates. The perdurance of this interval does not result in the coincidence of body and world but on the contrary, holds them apart within this necessary relation. The flesh of *l’intermonde* thus makes bodies intelligible as bodies. The metastability of these very bodies or things is absolutely dependent on this in-between, but the moment of contact and traversal within the in-between is also what will allow for these bodies’ transformation. Hence, through these notions of bodily intertwining with the world in an intermundial zone of in-between-ness, we already have a nascent sense in Merleau-Ponty of the in-between as something that is more than mere place-
holder. While this flesh may seem less substantial than bodies themselves, it certainly seems to carry great ontological weight.

Yet while Merleau-Ponty certainly suggests that the in-between is no “mere” copula, his philosophy nonetheless seems to remain on the mere threshold of explaining how such in-between-ness might fit into a revised ontological schema. I would suggest that the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari can help us come to terms with the strange ontological propositions to which my phenomenological sketch of commuting has led. Here, the power of the in-between is extended beyond the relation of human body to world, and moves to take on an ontological status relevant to all “bodies,” which Deleuze and Guattari define as any entity held together in a loose unity, with a capacity to both affect and be affected. In the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari, equal ontological weight must be given not only to “actual” and “virtual” bodies or things, but also to the “intensive.” Briefly summarized, the intensive is comprised of the morphogenetic processes that enact the becoming of things. Intensities are the operators of relations and connections that produce a consistency of things in time and space. The intensive works and moves so that the bodies that flank it on either side might either be held in position, or shifted and reshaped. In other words, the intensive is the in-between force that organizes matter into what we understand as “things.” The intensive consists of forces or energies or drives that are not secondary to things, but which themselves are ontological. In short, the intensive, as necessarily in-between, reveals an ontological quality of not necessarily being something, but rather of doing something.

Significantly, Deleuze and Guattari also help explain the important connections between in-between-ness, becoming, and rhythm. In the in-between, state Deleuze and Guattari, “chaos becomes rhythm” (Thousand 313). Rhythm for Deleuze and Guattari is not a “beat,” or a string
Astrida Neimanis

of measured units sharing a repeated pulse or pace, such as basic Western music theory might teach us. As they put it, “productive repetition” (such as we might find in the rhythm of the repeated commute) “has nothing to do with reproductive meter” (Thousand 314). Rhythm for Deleuze and Guattari is rather that very intensive, morphogenetic force of differentiation that allows something to become recognizable as a thing, and as different from another thing. The “things,” bodies or bookends held in relation by such a rhythm are necessarily affected by this force. They are not stable, for the in-between is no simple copula. The in-between is not subservient to the terms on either side, but rather, the terms are identifiable as such because of the force and rhythm of the in-between. Rhythm as “passage” or “bridging” always partakes in a “transcoding,” and as such creates “surplus value” (Thousand 314). In other words, in this work of holding together, holding apart, and transforming, the rhythm of the in-between has a force of creativity, where something new can also emerge. Again, this rhythm is not secondary to “things themselves,” but is itself ontologically primary.

Hence, for both Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze, an adequate understanding of the ontology of bodies (or “things”) is utterly dependent upon relations between bodies, the passages that connect bodies both spatially and temporally, and above all, the ways in which the in-between both holds bodies apart and also works to enact their transformations. While Merleau-Ponty’s ontology gestures in this direction, the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari takes up these suggestions and works them into a radically revised ontology that grants as much weight to becoming as to being, and to processes that hold and transform things as to the “things themselves.”

Deleuze and Guattari thus provide us with clever and exciting explanations of the in-between, and argue for its ontological weight with recourse to concepts of “rhythm” and “the
intensive.” Yet still, these explanations, if read on their own, might seem highly theoretical, abstract, even enigmatic. As phenomenologists, we still want to know how we live this in-between, and how the in-between reveals itself in our life-world. Indeed, for a theory to have any force at all, our bodies must be able to feel its contours, sense its cadence, intuit its directions, trace its scars upon and within our lived experience, even if we cannot always directly see and cognize a theory’s processes or effects. In other words, while my phenomenological sketch of commuting finds a weighty theoretical corroboration in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, this philosophy also needs the phenomenological sketch in order to make bodily, lived sense of it. A phenomenology of commuting as in-between-ness elucidates, in a way intelligible to my lived body, what Deleuze and Guattari mean when they state that everything happens in the between, that more significant than “starting and finishing” is “proceeding from the middle, through the middle, coming and going” (Thousand 25). Unless I proceed through this middle of my commuter bus journey, or through the middle of my half-hour commute up the Bruce Trail, or undergo some other passage in which the in-between can shift its gears, the ideas that are swimming around, half-formed, in my gut-brain, will never be able to jockey for position, sending one up and out of their chaos. After following the contours of the in-between through commuting and concept-creation, I am now able to grasp the sense of Deleuze and Guattari’s claims that “[t]he middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed” (Thousand 25). This is the speed of creativity, of morphogenetic transformation.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the in-between is not simply where meaning shows itself; it is itself an ontologically significant entity. The in-between is not simply the holding-place of transformation, but transformation itself. This idea is difficult to express in our accustomed philosophical language, which favours binary oppositions, such as active and passive, or here
and there, with little thought to the pivots or hinges that make such relational concepts even possible. Our inherited philosophical paradigms thus also tend to denigrate the copular function as less significant than the import of content, matter, things, ideas. But this is again why a phenomenology of commuting is so helpful. Even if we remain wedded to a language of “content” and “things,” commuting shows us that even between “things,” a special type of thing still persists. This in-between is not empty, but nor is it a stable entity in the way we are accustomed to thinking about “things.” The in-between is teeming, and its ontological weight is in its capacity to do or to become, rather than in its claim to be.

As I note above, perhaps Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of lived embodiment does not quite attain the ontological break of Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of the intensive, but Merleau-Ponty certainly encroaches upon this territory, and arguably even sets part of the stage for Deleuze and Guattari’s departure. This leads me to ponder, then, the extent to which the anticipation found in Merleau-Ponty’s work for this ontological break might have been facilitated by his close attention to the ways in which our bodies live, and by his commitment to bracketing what we think we know about our bodies and instead allowing their various modalities of living to teach us something that our sedimented theories had long overlooked or forgotten. For when we do pay close attention to our bodies, as this phenomenological sketch of commuting suggests, we notice that we do indeed live our zones of in-between-ness. Even in their seeming abstraction, Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts can nonetheless be located and corroborated in our bodily, lived experience—but only if we allow this experience to subvert our sedimented knowledge about embodiment according to traditional ontological categories of “being.” So we notice here a certain oscillation emerging, another rhythm of the in-between: phenomenology needs to be set free of our old ontological paradigms, but our new paradigms
still need to be lived. And in this tension, this tugging between two bodies of thought, unsurprisingly, another idea pops out: rhizomatic phenomenology.

Here I must point out that Deleuze and Guattari, as well as many of their contemporary readers and followers, would likely balk at my suggestion that Deleuzian concepts can—and even must—be corroborated by bodily, lived experience. Indeed, as Deleuze and Guattari note in What is Philosophy?, subjects derive from concepts, and not the other way around (16); concepts are multiplicities, the virtualities out of which particular subjects emerge; “The concept is an incorporeal, even though it is incarnated or effectuated in bodies ... It does not have spatiotemporal coordinates, only intensive ordinates ... The concept speaks the event, not the essence or the thing” (21). Such claims are precisely why Deleuze and Guattari state later in this same work, and why many of their commentators agree, that phenomenology is inadequate for the production of concepts: “The lived turns the concept into nothing more than an empirical opinion as psychosociological type” (What? 149). But, as I also argue elsewhere, such rejections of phenomenology’s adequacy depend on an understanding of “lived experience” as only actual (in Deleuzian terms)—that is, as already severed both from the realm of virtuality from which it emerges, and from the intensive potential that negotiates the actual’s relation to that virtual. What if phenomenology could contact, even if only ephemerally, our own lived virtuality, and its intensive morphogenetic potential, and hold onto this long enough to tentatively describe some aspect of our bodies’ multiplicities? If we acknowledge that our lived experience is not cut off from our virtuality as bodies, but rather that this plane of immanence coexists with our actuality as its very wellspring, perforating it and providing its very potential of existence, and if we acknowledge that we are constantly already in contact with the intensive, as it holds our intelligibility as specific bodies in some sort of metastability, then we no longer
need to dismiss lived experience as only yielding opinions, and as unable to help us produce concepts. Instead, we might see how attempting to contact and describe the virtual and the intensive might even elucidate “concepts” in all of their multiplicity. In fact, my proposal here is that only by doing so can we ever make sense of any concepts, Deleuzian or otherwise, that we encounter. We can only understand and grasp concepts as (thinking, perceiving, feeling, moving) bodies. Except by sensing out their contours through our own embodied experience, how else could we even fathom their meaning, their import? Deleuzian rhizomatics would do well to be reminded that we can only know the world because we are bodies, because we are embodied (Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology). But at the same time, phenomenologists would do well to remember that lived experience is not only our actualized experience, and the phenomena we “live” are not always hypostatizable, graspable as “objects of study” in the conventional sense of the term. Phenomenologists require additional tools and an expanded ontological vocabulary in order to deal with those phenomena, such as in-between-ness, that skim across the surface of “the things themselves” and flicker at the barely-graspable edges of our comprehension. For if we cannot describe such in-between-ness, then we will surely never grasp our lived experience in its fullness.

Indeed, in part because of the anticipations, complements and resonances that I continue to locate between Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze and Guattari, and because of such gifts I feel they might have to give one another, I have begun to explore the possibility of a “rhizomatic phenomenology.” I have outlined the tenets of such a project elsewhere in detail, but here I simply wish to draw attention to the potential such a practice might open up in terms of thinking through the in-between (at the same time as thinking through the in-between helps me to think more carefully about a rhizomatic phenomenological practice). If we open ourselves to reading
Deleuze and Guattari through phenomenology, while also doing phenomenology with a Deleuzian ontology in mind, it seems that describing the in-between becomes less of a conundrum. The in-between, once granted ontological status and weight, becomes a phenomenon as worthy of description as any other “thing.” Yet at the same time, by learning something from Deleuze and Guattari, we can also remain wary of allowing the distinct rhythm of the in-between—always moving, always traversing—to petrify into a stable, abiding entity. Moreover, I wonder: what might we open ourselves to if such rhizomatic phenomenological approaches were brought to bear on phenomena other than only “special cases” of in-between-ness? What might we learn about things themselves if we paid more attention to their inevitable bleed into other things, their trembling border-zones, their non-committal edges, their verging on an in-between? Things are always beyond their time, excessive of their space, permeable and porous in their form. In these senses all things have a dimension of the in-between, and are sustained by the hard work of the in-between that holds them, at least temporarily or metastably, as separate from their others. To me, at least, there is a need to continue honing phenomenological practices that can respond to such a metaphysics.

In short, then, not only can Deleuze and Guattari help us corroborate our phenomenological findings on the work, rhythm and creativity of the in-between, but our phenomenology of the in-between also helps us, literally, flesh out rhizomatic theories. And, by finding an in-between space between Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze and Guattari, we are moreover invited to think more deeply about the sort of phenomenological practices we engage in, and also the sort of ontological paradigms they might support. These are some of the lessons from this particular study of the in-between.
V. Conclusion

I embarked upon this phenomenology of the in-between with a sense of this phenomenon as transitory, as a sort of no-place, a mere joint, hinge or pivot, that held together two far more substantial “things.” Operating under this assumption, I had difficulty beginning an actual phenomenological sketch, for fear that any “thing” I went back to would fossilize and betray any fledgling in-between-ness I might find there. But luckily, one day I went for a walk, giving my body over to the rhythm of the in-between, and somewhere from within the butter churn of my zygote-thoughts, an idea emerged and things began, quite literally, to move into place. In the in-between, my body engages in the work required for “big ideas” to coalesce. In its moving in-between-ness, commuting gives itself over to a specific sort of creativity: concept-creation. I discovered that while indeed, the most telling qualities of the in-between seem in some way to transcend or at least supersede the solid thing-ness of a concrete, nameable activity (such as “two-hour bus ride”), these most elemental structures of in-between-ness are not without their own kinetics, force, materiality. The in-between can be a bustling zone of creativity. We live the in-between not in our plodding, exacting labour, but in our potential for surprising eruptions, shifts, transformations. I found that while commuting, this movement or rhythm that is not in the in-between, but rather is the in-between, can create breathtaking, heartbreaking, deal-making moments of sweet, staggering demi-genius.

Moreover, I learned that just as the in-between-ness of commuting skips across and ultimately evades the thing-ness of commuting as a nameable activity, the in-between more generally gathers this ontological audacity. In-between-ness is not exactly a “thing in itself” from a sedimented ontological point of view, but, like Deleuze and Guattari suggest, a morphogenetic potential or force. The in-between is a movement of traversal, differentiated from the “things”
that bookend it, not by its form or identity, but by its rhythm. And in all of its arduous labours, this movement and rhythm can either hold things for the time being stable in their thing-ness, or alternatively, rechoreograph things into more than the sum of their parts. So while commuting opens up to the specific creativity of big ideas, any in-between zone has the potential for transformation and creativity. However, what erupts does not stay in the between: a brilliant idea, for example, will either enter the world of more intelligible things, or disappear back into the teeming fray from which it came. The in-between itself slips between our fingers, ephemerally. But without this in-between—this intense zone of movement, this specific rhythm of getting through—we are left only with the metastable, sedimented “things” we already have. We require the movement, rhythm and labour of the in-between to give us something new. And rhizomatic phenomenological practices, I suggest, pushing up through the in-between space of Merleau-Ponty’s embodied phenomenology and Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatics, might provide us with the tools to contact such in-between-ness, to describe it, hold it, even if only temporarily, fleetingly, before it dives back down into its teeming abyss.

Notes

1 I am grateful to two anonymous PhaenEx reviewers for their comments to this paper, particularly as regards section IV on “Methodological and Ontological Lessons.” Moreover, I thank Brett Buchanan for his thoughtful and inspiring commentary on an earlier version of this paper delivered at Back to Things Themselves! I: The In-Between (Saskatoon, May 2007).

2 S. Mallin, Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy.

3 While viscerality, or the movements and sensations of our mostly internal biological bodies, is not explicitly noted as a distinct fifth mode, Drew Leder’s argument in the Absent Body has convinced me that the way in which our internal physiological bodies understand the world indeed warrants a place in this list, and Mallin, in his classroom, has not ruled out the possibility that such a fifth modality might also require an account.
Mallin has explicitly noted that these steps should not be taken as definitive or authoritative, but should rather be approached as a series of “tricks” that can help one come closer to a phenomenon. My list here is a paraphrase and adaptation of Mallin’s classroom teachings.

While such divergences from Mallin’s method are not of paramount importance in this particular sketch of commuting, I explicitly note these as they also point towards my methodological debt to Deleuzian rhizomatics, which I note in Section IV below. (See also Neimanis, “Becoming Grizzly” and Bodies of Water for a deeper description of what I call “rhizomatic phenomenology.”). I also wish to be clear that my application of Mallin’s methodology is indeed an adaptation.

I thank one of my anonymous PhaenEx reviewers for the suggestion of this last example.

I do, however, suspect that there is a similar in-between phenomenon playing out in the commute of our ideas from our cognitive intentions to the words on the computer screen. The mere activity of moving fingertips across a keyboard, or a pen across a page, for many writers in addition to me, I have learned, is not a mere transcription of fully formed thoughts, but an integral aspect of bringing those thoughts into being. Fleshing out this particular aspect of conceptual creativity, however, would require a filial phenomenological sketch.

An argument along these lines is made by Renaud Barbaras (see The Being of the Phenomenon, “Life,” “Merleau-Ponty and Nature”), where he concludes that Merleau-Ponty’s ontology remains “incomplete,” because it does not fully cast off a philosophy of consciousness. See also Somers-Hall’s discussion on the extent to which Merleau-Ponty approaches a language of the virtual, and thus a major ontological break, but ultimately cannot accommodate it (“Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty”).

This concision of definition owes a debt to Baugh’s helpful elucidation of Deleuze’s concept of bodies (“Bodies” 30-32).

For deeper descriptions of the actual and virtual see Deleuze, “The Actual and the Virtual” (in Deleuze and Parnet) and Difference and Repetition (e.g. 208-214). While Deleuze’s ontology is most often characterized by the distinction of the actual and virtual, I concur with DeLanda’s convincing argument that this ontology cannot be understood without the morphogenetic force of a middle term as well—i.e., the intensive (Intensive Science). This view is also upheld and thoughtfully explained by Bonta and Protevi (Deleuze and Geophilosophy).

Despite his quarrels with certain aspects of phenomenology, even Deleuze acknowledges the potential of embodied phenomenology in various ways. For example, in his essay on Sartre entitled “He Was My Teacher,” Deleuze notes that the work of Merleau-Ponty is “brilliant and profound,” even if (unfortunately, in Deleuze’s estimation) “tender and reserved” (Desert Islands 77). Moreover, despite Deleuze’s criticisms of phenomenology in Difference and Repetition, he
also acknowledges Heidegger and Meleau-Ponty’s contributions to the development of an ontology of difference (64-66).

In addition, eminent Merleau-Ponty scholar Renaud Barbaras notes that “The Visible and the Invisible is, in my eyes, an extraordinary example of non-dialectical thought, and it is not surprising that many readers recognize in Gilles Deleuze what they find in Merleau-Ponty, and vice-versa” (The Being of the Phenomenon xxii). Barbaras further nuances this statement in other places (e.g. Desire and Distance; “Merleau-Ponty and Nature”). While Barbaras does not go so far as to say that Merleau-Ponty achieves the ontological break of a Deleuzian philosophy, in his estimation the work of Merleau-Ponty is certainly at the brink of this achievement. See also note 8 above.

Other prominent Merleau-Ponty scholars who note the continuities between Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze include Lawlor (e.g. “The End of Phenomenology”) and Toadvine (e.g. “Singing the World”). Feminist phenomenologist Gail Weiss is one of the few philosophers who has pointed out the debt that Deleuze owes to Merleau-Ponty in the context of rethinking difference through intercorporeality, although she does not pursue this connection in great depth (Body Images; see chapter six “Écart”).

12 I am grateful to my anonymous reviewers for suggesting that an earlier draft of this section might require deeper clarification.

13 See Neimanis, “Becoming Grizzly.”

14 Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari are very clear that the plane of immanence or consistency (virtuality) and the plane of organization or stratification (actuality) are not discrete, but rather continuously fold into one another, in a constant interplay of territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization. See, for example, A Thousand Plateaus, 54, 70.

15 Indeed, as Lyotard provocatively asks in his essay of the same title, “Can Thought Go On Without A Body?” His answer is delightfully blunt: “To think, at the very least you have to breathe, eat, etc. You are still under an obligation to ‘earn a living.’”(133).

Works Cited


