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# Alterity and the maternal in adoptee phenomenology

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# Alterity and the maternal in adoptee phenomenology

## **Abstract**

The project that I embark upon in this paper is an enquiry into the role of the maternal body in the development of alterity in the child. I begin by drawing on a previous publication in *Parrhesia*, where I explore the phenomenology of the maternal-foetal affective relation through the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, outlining how the foetal body schema develops through maternally structured movement while in utero.

## **Keywords**

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## **alterity and the maternal in adoptee phenomenology**

jane lymer

*The feeling that something is missing  
never, ever leaves you—and it can't, and it  
shouldn't, because something is missing ...  
Adoption is outside. You act out what it feels  
like to be the one who doesn't belong.*

—Jeanette Winterson, *Why be happy  
when you can be normal*

*Do a psychoanalysis of Nature: it is the flesh,  
the mother.*

—Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible  
and the Invisible*

The project that I embark upon in this paper is an enquiry into the role of the maternal body in the development of alterity in the child. I begin by drawing on a previous publication in *Parrhesia*, where I explore the phenomenology of the maternal-foetal affective relation through the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, outlining how the foetal body schema develops through maternally

structured movement while in utero.<sup>1</sup> In that paper, I described the maternal-foetal relation in terms of *accouplement*—an embodied coupling entailing an affective substratum, which moulds foetal ipsiety. I also identified that within Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, the place of maternal alterity in the development of foetal ipsiety is underestimated. There is no requirement, within Merleau-Ponty's theory of infant development, or his ontology of the flesh, for the biological mother to be a primal alterity that scaffolds the development of the child. In this paper I attempt to further explore this notion of the biological mother as a primal alterity and what this might mean for Merleau-Ponty's flesh ontology and our understandings of subjectivity more generally. As we shall see as this paper unfolds, it is in the taking up of the stereotype of the passive and all giving mother where Merleau-Ponty most errs in his assessment of developmental alterity. In the Sorbonne Lectures he describes pregnancy as "an anonymous process which happens through her and of which she is only the seat."<sup>2</sup> Being the passive recipient, the container in which the foetus grows through the power of nature, denies the necessity of maternal interaction and engagement with the foetus as necessary for foetal flourishing.

I begin by drawing on maternal-infant bonding and attachment theory which recognises that a mother or primary caregiver is required in order to scaffold the development of alterity in the child. It has been accepted since the 1950s that children need a particular carer with which to form an affective bond in order to cognitively flourish.<sup>3</sup> Through the study of institutionalised children, John Bowlby, the pioneer of bonding theory, was able to show that children not given the opportunity to bond develop autism like symptoms which increase in severity the longer a child is isolated from family life (a condition now referred to as reactive attachment disorder or RAD). Infants are most at risk of permanent cognitive impairment, should they remain institutionalised beyond the sixth month of age.

Maternal-infant bonding has been thought to develop from birth, so when a child is adopted, early placement within the adopting family is advocated in order to facilitate the bonding process. However, it has been identified that, although the cognitive impairment experienced by institutionalised infants is usually avoided by adoption, adoptees nonetheless take a different developmental pathway than their non-adopted counterparts. Although only recently acknowledged, psychologists have long suspected issues with adoption after a series of studies which date back to the 1970s, correlated adoption with psychological vulnerability and learning difficulties.<sup>4</sup> Just why adoptees might developmentally face more obstacles than

non-adopted children remains unclear, and although the research does indicate that there is ‘something’ about being adopted that sets the adoptee apart, just what this ethereal something is, is yet to be clearly defined. I think Ronald Nydam describes adoptee phenomenology best when he states that “adoptees can grow up well, but they grow up differently. They must inevitably follow an unusual developmental pathway as they attend to the sound of that dissonant echo”.<sup>5</sup> In this paper, my primary concern with adoptee phenomenology is to begin the process of trying to understand this ‘dissonant echo’ and one of the conclusions that I draw is that the experience of alterity both in the self and of others in the adoptee disrupts the ‘at birth’ notion of infant bonding and attachment, leaving us with questions about the role of the biological mother in infant cognitive development.

From the outset of this project I want to make it clear that it is not my intention to pathologise adoptee phenomenology. Although sadly, disproportionate percentages of adoptees experience difficulties growing up it is unclear if this is the result of the presumption, both medically and culturally, that an adoptee ought to be ‘normal’. The failure to recognise ‘adoption’ as an alternative embodiment could in and of itself contribute to the psychological vulnerability identified, making life far more difficult than it might otherwise be for those who have been adopted. Many personal accounts of adoptee experience, such as Jeanette Winterson’s biography *Why be Happy when you can Be Normal*, tell of adoptees who negotiate their difference, their sense of ‘abnormality’, in reflective and insightful ways.<sup>6</sup> As one researcher discovered, adoptees do not suffer lower than average intelligence, and often will be high achievers.<sup>7</sup> What appears to cause the greatest amount of difficulty is in the negotiation of alterity, both within the self and with others, and the awareness by many adoptees that they are different to their counterparts without knowing why. In terms of this project what I wish to take from adoptee phenomenology is the premise that something is different, that this something appears to be founded in the adoption process and results in differences and often difficulties in the negotiation of alterity both within the self and with others, even in cases where adoption has occurred at birth, where family life was healthy, and sadly, where all too often, the adoptee will only discover later in life that they were adopted.

In the final section of this paper, I situate this phenomenology back into Merleau-Ponty’s flesh ontology. Drawing upon Luce Irigaray’s critique of *The Visible and the Invisible*, I agree that Merleau-Ponty appropriates the maternal body in his

model of the flesh, and that it is this denial that allows us to imagine ourselves as individuated, but I question her claim that this translates into an overarching denial of sexual difference, if only because we are all born and we all forget our birth.<sup>8</sup> For Irigaray, the inability to see the other sex within phallogentric philosophies in general emerges out of the invisibility of the corporeal prenatal condition and the inability to see the mother as the source or origin of existence underpins the inability to acknowledge the existence of a sex different from, and incommensurable with, the subject. Drawing upon metaphors of fluidity and absorption rather than a womb which nourishes through amniotic fluid, and in giving precedence to vision over touch, Merleau-Ponty, according to Irigaray, appropriates, yet denies the maternal body which encases and nourishes the foetus, a relation that for Irigaray leaves a ‘watermark’ etched into the subject’s body.

In acknowledging foetal and adoptee phenomenology, I conclude this paper with the speculation that perhaps this watermark, of which Irigaray speaks, might well be what Nydam describes as a dissonant echo, and if so, this leaves us with the question of whether Merleau-Ponty’s flesh ontology is actually a phenomenology of gestation. In other words, the question of whether the maternal-foetal accouplement that I have described is the ontology which Merleau-Ponty claims as “a prototype of Being”, a flesh that includes not only the flesh of bodies, but also the flesh of the world; a primordial intersubjectivity that subtends cognition, an ontology that provides the possibility for intersubjective communication. A close examination of the phenomenology of gestation and adoption provides us with a simulacrum of this flesh.

## MERLEAU-PONTY AND MATERNAL ALTERITY

Within the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty it is through perception that we have access to the world as a relation of our embodied consciousness with the social and the organic situation in which we discover ourselves as selves. As situated, neither our world nor our consciousness is uniquely private, but shared, in that it is only as both perceiver and perceived that I exist. The substratum of this interaction is what Merleau-Ponty, in his final unpublished text, *The Visible and the Invisible*, names flesh. The flesh is not a genetic but rather a description, a name for the way that we experience ourselves as both sensing and sensed as intertwined and reversible within ourselves and with others. Merleau-Ponty most often exemplifies the flesh by the way our hands, when placed together,

can alternate between touching and being touched, each in turn but never in coincidence: “Either my right hand really passes over to the rank of the touched, but then its hold on the world is interrupted, or it retains its hold on the world, but then I do not really touch it”.<sup>10</sup> The temporal gap between the touching and being touched is alterity, generated by a doubling of the flesh back upon itself, “by dehiscence or fission of its own mass”.<sup>11</sup>

As a primordial intersubjectivity that subtends cognition, it is flesh, within Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy, that provides the possibility for an inter-communication with both ourselves and with others that preserves the alterity of the other. The descriptions of our experiences that we give as subjective are reflections from a certain vantage, a certain spaciality; they are given from our individual perspective within the flesh. Like the touching hands, I cannot assume more than one vantage point at any given time, either I am touching or being touched. Similarly, I cannot see through the eyes of another and should I attempt to move to their position, I can only do so through the passage of time. The time that it will take to shift position opens up an unbridgeable gap between my experience and that of another, a radical alterity that can never be closed even though we share the same world.

Alterity as an immanent experience of ourselves as other, develops sometime during the second year of life at what is commonly known as the mirror stage. As we come to recognise ourselves as situated we discover “an anonymity innate to myself”.<sup>12</sup> For Merleau-Ponty, it is through the mutual crossing over and intertwining of the touching with the tangible and the visual with the invisible, that difference within the self is discovered through the non-coincidence between the corporeality which the ‘I’ inhabits (ipsiety) and the ideality that I recognise others are witnessing. Because I cannot see the body which I experientially inhabit, I come to see myself as situated through the fold or cavity that allows me to experience myself through the things that I see.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, in order for us to perceive the world through the eyes of a self, we must render invisible the radical alterity of the other, subsuming her into our corporeal rootedness as an imprint of the other within the self in a narcissistic moment.

Once again, the flesh we are speaking of is not matter. It is the coiling over of the visible upon the seeing body, of the tangible upon the touching body, which is attested in particular when the body sees itself, touches itself seeing and touching the things, such that, simultaneously as tangible

it descends among them as touching it dominates them all and draws this relationship and even this double relationship from itself, by dehiscence or fission of its own mass.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, a mature alterity requires the emergence of a double sided otherness whereby the sense of immanent alterity becomes in some ways the condition for the possibility for the perception of a transcendent alterity, and visa versa. It is thus “by a sort of chiasm, [that] we become the others and we become world”.<sup>15</sup>

Merleau-Ponty first outlines how the infant developmentally comes into herself in ‘The Child’s Relations With Others’ where he describes how she is born into syncretism, where self and other are indistinguishable; a bodily possession that he thought could not begin until around the 8<sup>th</sup> month of age.<sup>16</sup> Before being able to phenomenologically engage in the world, the neonate must emerge out of being the passive beneficiary of experience to possessing herself through the capacity for embodied intentional movement; a skill which ultimately grounds perception as situated. The postural schema is the term Merleau-Ponty gives to this self-possession, this ipseity, which he argues to be formed in coordinated and familiar patterns of behaviour, moulded through the sedimentation of proprioceptive and muscular movement that sit below our level of conscious thought; “that is, a global consciousness of my body’s position in space, with the corrective reflexes that impose themselves at each moment, the global consciousness of the spatiality of my body”.<sup>17</sup> Postural schematic movement (often referred to as the body schema) is what permits us to experience a sense of possession over our bodies as spatially situated concomitant with and through an experience of alterity.

Although Merleau-Ponty never formally revised this thesis, in his later writings there are indications of a rethinking of the developmental process outlined in ‘The Child’s Relations with Others’. In the Sorbonne lectures, for instance, he states that even though the neonate does “not remember the fact of birth, he conserves a memory of discomfort and can imagine the well-being that preceded this period”<sup>18</sup>, a description that suggests that something is carried from the womb into the world or perhaps even that he was beginning to suspect that intrauterine life is our first world. The flesh ontology of *The Visible and the Invisible*, which Merleau-Ponty describes as “a prototype of Being” also potentially alters the possibility of an absolute neonatal syncretism.<sup>19</sup> Within the flesh the relationship between ipseity and alterity is indivisible and yet reversible, so rather than ipseity preceding and developmentally grounding the experience of alterity as it did in



his earlier work, both ipseity and alterity emerge from an impersonal flesh. Thus, the infant is born of the intertwining's of the flesh rather than needing to emerge from a homogenous existence. The implications here are that alterity is no longer experientially developed, but rather, discovered as already and always there, a claim that I will soon show, was a very insightful modification to his understanding of infant development. However, the key to this modification is in the recognition that the body schema develops in utero through a maternal alterity and this Merleau-Ponty could not have known, simply because the empirical research was not available at that time.

Research that has outlined the way that foetal movement occurs in patterned ways was one of the agreed findings to emerge out of the 1998 National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) conference where a cross-disciplinary group of clinicians, neurologists and scientists, came together in order to consolidate existing findings and to formulate strategies for continuing research into foetal development. At this conference, there was concurrence that foetuses display structured bodily movements which they develop through habituation (or practicing) that begin to appear around the 9th week of gestation.<sup>20</sup> These movements progress in complexity, appear to be adapted responses to the individual foetus' situation and have neurological import in that specific coordinated movements appear to play a role in the nervous system development relevant to that function.<sup>21</sup> Foetal movement therefore elicits and nuances foetal neural function rather than the behaviour flowing out of the required a priori neurology. By 2008, Graven and Browne identified how researchers now understand that "the physical, sensory, and social environment of the foetus...[is] of critical importance in supporting healthy appropriate development of the brain and neurosensory systems".<sup>22</sup>

For a short time, researchers were curious as to how a 9 week old foetus could possibly move in habituated ways prior to the development of the cortex, proprioception, and perception, all required for body schematic movement and reflexive possibilities were examined.<sup>23</sup> Proprioception, for example, does not emerge until the 15th week of gestation, the cortex and perception, not until the third trimester of pregnancy. The answer was found in 2004, when DiPietro et al. discovered, by accident, that foetal motor activity affects maternal functioning such that the mothers' body unconsciously responds to foetal movement in a manner that regulates that movement.<sup>24</sup> The researchers suggest that the sympathetic maternal response may be regulating or limiting the degree of

uterine contraction in relation to foetal movement which in turn regulates and structures the way that the foetus moves in utero. Early foetal movement patterns are therefore maternally structured and regulated and this pattern is observable throughout gestation. Essentially what this means is that foetal movement patterns which form our most primal neurological structures are moulded into existence by the maternal body through what Merleau-Ponty would describe as *accouplement*—an embodied moving with, or coupling—the functional style of which has implications for how the child develops neurologically. Breech foetuses for example, developed normally but nonetheless neurologically differently to cephalic or downward facing foetuses.<sup>25</sup> To at least some extent this maternal moulding appears to leave an imprint of maternal function.

That gestational maternal emotions may leave their imprint on neonatal neural structures has also been suggested. Suspicion that this was the case interestingly dates back to the first world war, when Lester Sontag detected similarities between maternal emotional characteristics and infant behaviour. In particular, he noted how mothers whose husbands were at war and at risk of death birthed babies that seemed to be nervy, restless and difficult to settle.<sup>26</sup> More recently, studies have shown maternal emotions to be deeply implicated in foetal flourishing. Sable et al., for example, studied the responses to a survey of 2,828 mothers where the wantedness of a pregnancy was assessed according to whether the pregnancy was either mistimed and/or unwanted in otherwise healthy women. How each woman felt about her pregnancy while she was pregnant was also scaled. These researchers found that “mothers of very low birth weight infants were significantly more likely than those who had a normal-weight baby to report that they had felt unhappy about the pregnancy (odds ratio of 1.53).”<sup>27</sup> While one might think that these outcomes could well be the result of poor personal care due to the unwanted pregnancy, this was not found to be the case.

Caroline Lundquist, in her paper ‘Being Torn: Toward a Phenomenology of Unwanted Pregnancy’ describes a similar interrelation. Drawing on the phenomenon of denied pregnancy, where women do not realise they are pregnant until they go into labour, she notes how, very often, neonates born out of a denied pregnancy suffer from low birth weight.<sup>28</sup> As Sarah LaChance Adams observes, this is especially interesting because the human species is one where ordinarily, the mother will suffer nutrient deprivation in favour of the foetus she carries, yet in denied pregnancies, the foetus can and often “will be deprived of vital nutrients, even when there are enough for both”.<sup>29</sup> Supporting this claim is a 1994 study of

denied pregnancy by Brezinka et al. where the histories of twenty seven women who did not know they were pregnant until term, and when labour contractions began, were examined. From this small sample, four foetal deaths occurred and three cases of prematurity. None of the women committed infanticide and all were otherwise physically healthy. When queried about their denial, most women reported irregular, sometimes menstruation-like bleedings during pregnancy and few reported actual symptoms of pregnancy, such as nausea and weight gain. From this phenomenology it seems difficult to continue to sustain the view that a pregnant woman is a passive receptacle that houses a growing foetus who, like a parasite, will extract its needs; a trope of compliant maternity that is immensely ingrained in both the imaginary and metaphors of gestation and birth. Although I was unable to find any studies on pregnant women whose infants were to be adopted, one might legitimately wonder if the outcomes would show a particular pattern, especially as it has been identified, at least in Australia, that the vast majority of adoptions that historically occurred in this country were coerced if not forced.<sup>30</sup>

Returning to the empirical account of foetal development, we can see that by the 22nd week of gestation there are marked changes in foetal behaviour. It is at this developmental stage that we can discern postural schematic movement patterns that are the result of foetal, rather than maternal, ipsiety. In 2007, Zoia et al. published the results of their work on intentional or foetal directed movement.<sup>31</sup> Their methodology was to examine the kinematic patterns of foetal movements which showed that by 22 weeks gestation foetal movement regularly involved tighter and more accurately aimed trajectories toward the target with acceleration and deceleration phases consistent with the size and sensitivity of what the foetus was going to touch. Thus, foetal movement by the 22nd week of gestation begins to display muscular and co-ordinated indicators that are highly suggestive of goal directed bodily action, and these actions begin at this stage to cut across rather than move with, both maternal body directives and maternal goal directed action. It is interesting that it appears to be these movements, which have been observed in some foetuses as early as 17 weeks, which coincide with the quickening, the first movements felt by the mother. Also at this time, the hands of the foetus will now begin to manipulate parts of her body; she begins to trace out her feet, legs, and genitals, moulding her hands around these parts.<sup>32</sup> She explores her own hands and fingers and grasps and manipulates the umbilical cord. Hand to mouth movement is very common and mouth exploration appears to stimulate sucking. She also explores the uterine wall where we can see her hand firstly finding the wall and then flattening and slowly sliding the palm against the surface.<sup>33</sup>

For Merleau-Ponty, the experience of doubly sensing, the sense of touching one's self, is a crucial precondition for the development of ipsiety, and here we can begin to understand how the postural schema emerges in conjunction with, or through maternal alterity. Through foetal self-exploration proprioceptive perception will emerge concomitantly with foetal ipseity. In fact, it would seem that the unification of the body through experience is a condition of foetal experience. Once this basic self-awareness is apparent, as displayed through goal directed action and self-exploratory behaviour we can say that foetal functioning is consistent with body schematic behaviour, which is inclusive of proprioceptive awareness by around 26 weeks gestation. Foetal EEG readings then begin and the connection between the spinal cord and the thalamus completes.<sup>34</sup> Following very closely afterwards, at 24 to 26 weeks, thalamocortical connections will grow into the cortex.<sup>35</sup> The foetus' preconscious body schematic substratum, a bodily familiarity which is intentional (in the Merleau-Pontian sense of bodily intentionality) and of which he or she will be perceptually familiar in a proprioceptive kind of way, thus emerges by the 26th week of gestation and will be evident in both the premature and full-term neonate. So although Merleau-Ponty's work has proven invaluable in understanding what this foetal developmental pathway means, he did not, could not, apply his own philosophy to foetal phenomenology and so although insightful, his account of infant development nonetheless requires revision, especially in regard to the timing of some developmental milestones and to the role of the maternal body as a primal alterity which makes foetal ipsiety possible.<sup>36</sup>

For Merleau-Ponty, alterity as distinctions between self and other begin to emerge as a "lived distance" through the creation of a perceptual space that pushes others farther away, opening a space for the child to exist as individuated.<sup>37</sup> This pushing away, for Merleau-Ponty, not only creates the felt sense of spatial separation, but also an affective space and so, as alterity develops, the space between the child and others is not just seen but also affectively negotiated. Applied to foetal phenomenology we can see that the foetus has evolved from moving with the maternal body in syncretism to a pushing away as intentional movement that opposes maternal movement, action and emotion. The pregnant woman, who, prior to the quickening, may well have enjoyed imagining her foetus, a manifestation that could only ever be temporal, obscure or for some, not there at all, may now begin to concretely experience this other. In late pregnancy I often played with my foetus by pushing my stomach in order to illicit a kick back, a game I have heard many women speak of playing, as is the use of particular movement patterns or classical music to sooth overactive or nocturnal foetal movement.

Some women report their foetus waking and moving in response to a call from their partner or having likes and dislikes of certain sounds. Foetuses also use maternal responses to modify their own. For example, foetuses have been shown to adjust their response to unfamiliar noises based on the maternal response to that noise.<sup>38</sup> Through these engagements, the foetus that began as a part of the maternal body is beginning to create a lived distance within the body of a woman who, in order to go about her day, will continually attempt to incorporate her foetus into her bodily habituations. This embodied negotiation between mother and foetus has developmental import because to experience ipsiety the foetus needs an experiential alterity and so can only gain the lived distance required for individuation in the presence of a maternal body which is simultaneously a familiarity and an alterity. At this stage alterity is thus a necessary imperialism that forecloses the possibility of the foetus as a radical other because during gestation it is always, at least in part, my body that moves, even if only to regain a comfortable position that accommodates that foot in my ribs.

A very startling ‘pushing away’ will of course occur at birth when the foetus becomes the neonate, launched into a world where the body schema that formed in utero will no longer serve. As Iris Marion Young describes, seeing your baby for the first time can come as a shock, the reality and relief are enormous.<sup>39</sup> It is a difficult feeling to describe, seeing the reality of what was within you manifest without. There is recognition yet profound strangeness; it is wonder. Like an astronaut launched into space, the infant must now learn anew where she is in this vast spatiality, fluidless, unrestrictive of her movements and devoid of embodied maternal alterity. How much of the uterine body schema will remain after induction into this new world is very unclear. However, what has formed are the cognitive structures that will in some way influence a ‘style’ of being, a watermark that will stylise the infant’s intersubjective communications in the world. Neonates who have assumed different positions within the womb will have different yet identifiably ‘normal’ neurological structures and those who have shared the womb with a twin, especially one of similar size, will at this early stage, share both movement and affect similarity.<sup>40</sup> In fact, even if these twins are to be separated at birth, should they meet again in later life they will still share a striking similarity in their styles of movements and emotional dispositions; a phenomenon that has also been observed in adoptees reunited in their adult years with their biological mothers.<sup>41</sup>

If the foetal body schema has been moulded through the maternal body then one might ask about the need for a developmental continuation of this 'style' of body schematic movement after delivery in order to sustain the cognitive development that the foetus began in utero. Yet, the foetal body schema seems to be situated, purpose built for the inter-uterine world and not particularly well designed for life after birth; thus adaption is required whether or not the maternal body schema remains available.

A more cautious conclusion would be that at least some aspects of the foetal body schema do remain and these can be seen in the way that infants are calmed by swaddling and will draw to the mother as a source of familiarity in what is now an alien world. It also seems to explain some discrepancies in the debate surrounding neonatal imitation as infants imitate their mothers more readily than strangers in imitation trials.<sup>42</sup> As they grow, securely bonded infants rely on their primary care giver for 'reality checks' modelling their emotional reaction on his or hers; insecurely attached infants do this less so, instead either self-testing, often to a dangerous degree, or fearing to move from close proximity to their primary carers.<sup>43</sup> The securely attached child will slowly, over time and with guidance from her carer, begin to test the world on her own terms, pushing her carer further and further away, opening a space for herself as a self. Perhaps in this developmental story, it is not too far a jump to speculate that within the adoptee something of a trace, a watermark, from the biological mother might be carried into this infant world interaction, a trace that will leave her always and already a bit further away than the child who can better synchronise, form a tighter accouplement, with her primary carer.

Understanding the importance of this primary third, the biological mother, also leads me to suspect that what might occur at the mirror stage of development is the internalisation of this primal alterity, what has up until this time been an external alterity which scaffolds self-experience in the child. As Jack Reynolds has identified, it is the experience of asymmetry in our relations that founds our capacities to perceive the absolute alterity of the other as a sphere of incomprehensibility that emerges out of the asymmetry.<sup>44</sup> Thus developmentally, immanent alterity may not be an internal divergence nor might it result from the visible body becoming internalised as a captivated body image as Merleau-Ponty suggests. Rather it may be the discovery that this primary (m)other, who is also a part of me, bonded to me, folded over me, is a radical other who can leave me and who I will never truly comprehend. To discover that the mother is an alterity that



is both within and yet distant from the self could open the fissure, the *écart* that would enclose the circuit of reversibility within the self and in doing so permit entry to the flesh in maturity. To take the mother, my primal alterity into me as an aspect of me and not of her is to be able to carry forward without her and perhaps this is why a bonded relation is so important in the first two years of life and less so beyond those years. It also explains, at least phenomenologically, why it is that we forget our birth, absorbing the very condition of our existence, our mother's gestation, into our individuation as an alterity, an *écart*, a blindspot. However, before finalising this argument, I wish to introduce a phenomenology of adoption into the discussion, to better argue the claim that something from the uterine environment seems to remain as an aspect of how we develop, and ultimately experience ourselves as selves.

## BONDING, ATTACHMENT AND A PHENOMENOLOGY OF ADOPTION

In March 2012, the Australian NSW Government released a final report into adoption practices in New South Wales. The report entitled *Releasing the past: Adoption practices 1950-1998* was commissioned in 2000 and outlines the policies and practices within NSW Hospitals that facilitated the removal of an estimated 150,000 newborn babies, primarily from single mothers during the past half-century. The release of the report has sparked a media controversy in Australia, culminated in more State enquiries, and ultimately was the basis for the 2013 Australian Government apology to those affected by forced adoption. The overall findings have been that many mothers who gave up their children for adoption were denied their rights and that many hospital practices of the time were unlawful and unethical.<sup>45</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the adoption practices themselves, what is most relevant about these findings is that the more controversial actions undertaken by adoption workers and hospital staff were strongly motivated by maternal-infant bonding and attachment theory;

Such theories developed the notion that children could be placed with other, unrelated families and be 'saved'. Studies on attachment and bonding suggested that the child could completely bond to another person, and suffer no ill effects, provided that person was available shortly after birth.<sup>46</sup>

Attachment theory was developed by Mary Ainsworth in 1973, as an extension of the initial work on bonding carried out by Bowlby that I outlined in the introduction. Through an examination of the qualitatively differing styles of

bonding behaviours that mothers and infants display post birth, Ainsworth was able to define different styles of maternal-infant interaction and correlate those with particular psychosocial outcomes that graduate along a spectrum.<sup>47</sup> A secure attachment is characterised by positive psychosocial outcomes in that the child is able to develop independence while also seeking intimate and satisfying personal relations and friendships with others. An avoidant attachment style is correlated with antisocial and often violent behaviours in later adult life due, according to Ainsworth, to the failure within the child to properly develop empathic connections to others. Anxious or ambivalent attachment styles display varying degrees of both a secure and avoidant attachment style. An attachment style, for Ainsworth is thus a description of the nature and interactive features of a particular maternal (primary caregiver)-infant bond.<sup>48</sup>

During the 1970's Klaus and Kennell took up and moulded the research by Bowlby and Ainsworth with the aim of bringing into hospital policy and practice a set of concrete criteria aimed at facilitating the development of secure maternal-infant bonds.<sup>49</sup> Drawing upon animal studies of imprinting Klaus and Kennell argued the need for a reduction to the crucial time period for secure bonding to around 24 to 48 hours post-birth and developed a set of bonding behaviours that mothers should implement in order to facilitate a secure 'at birth' bonding process. Controversially, Klaus and Kennell also added to Bowlby's thesis the need for a secure bond to be established in order to facilitate good maternal behaviours. Should a mother or mother substitute, not securely bond with her infant then she risked neglecting the child in the same way that animal mothers will reject young who have failed to imprint. Klaus and Kennell also conflated bonding and attachment theory when they applied Bowlby's findings of cognitive retardation, as a potential risk to children who were not securely attached, a finding that Ainsworth did not report.<sup>50</sup> The work of Klaus and Kennell in particular, and perhaps unfortunately, has been very influential to the policies and practices of maternity hospitals throughout the western world, even though the basis of their claims have come under much scrutiny.<sup>51</sup>

Applied to cases of infant adoption, a theory of bonding as occurring 'at birth', facilitated by certain sorts of behaviours, such as the degree and length of time an infant experiences skin to skin maternal contact, particularly within the first 48 hours (and beyond), meant that hospitals emphasised procedures that ensured that the maternal-infant bond did not occur with the biological mother at birth. As one can image, these were very often traumatic:



I was pushed down and a pillow was shoved in front of my face. I had no ideaway. I thought it must have been because I had given birth to some kind of freakish monstrosity that they didn't think I could bare (*sic*) to look at ... I didn't know that the pillow in front of your face was a common hospital policy to prevent mothers from bonding with their babies.<sup>52</sup>

Yet, despite these extreme precautions, and although adoptive parents report at times extra-ordinary efforts to bond with their new charges, many adoptees seem to have experienced difficulties forming secure attachments with their new parents as per Ainsworth's criteria. Kirshner, a social worker, describes how there is typically a shallow quality to the attachments formed by the adopted child, and a general lack of meaningful relationships in both infancy and their adult lives.<sup>53</sup> The child often reports feeling 'different' or 'empty' and seeks solitude from others. Many seem to live in their head, in a fantasy, a phenomenology that Kirshner came to label 'the adopted child syndrome'. Triseliotis, a psychiatrist who studied adoptee phenomenology, quotes adoptee no. 1 from consultation notes; "I look in the mirror and cannot recognise myself", and adoptee no. 4; "I never really felt I belonged. I feel empty and I find it difficult to make friends or be close to people".<sup>54</sup> In the NSW Australian Government report cited above, the Committee identifies how, for many adopted people, their identity has been shaped by the fact of their adoption and many can trace this back to before they were aware that they were adopted. One adoptee explains how adoption is "at the core of my very being ...It has had more than its fair share into who I am, my life experiences, my personality, attitudes, feelings about myself and about others".<sup>55</sup> Erika Berzins, to cite a second example, told the Committee how,

Adoption is, and will always be, a part of who I am because it is such a fundamental part of my life experience, and as such adoption will quite often play a part in my attitude to values and belief systems in daily life as well as in response to life's stresses.<sup>56</sup>

Andersen, an adoptee himself whose research focuses on the need for adoptees to search for their origins, suggests that feelings of isolation, of solitude, of never having been really attached to their adoptive family and never had the feeling of real belonging, underpin the obsession some adoptees have with finding their biological mothers, and I would note that it is the mother that adoptees seek.<sup>57</sup>

Even more interesting is recent research that allows a comparison between the psychological outcomes of children who are not biologically related to their parents. In a 2013 study by Golombok et al., parenting and children's adjustment were examined in 30 surrogacy families, 31 egg donation families, 35 donor insemination families, and 53 natural conception families. Children's adjustment was assessed at ages 3, 7 and 10. The results disclosed that although children born through reproductive donation obtained scores within the normal range, surrogacy children showed higher levels of adjustment difficulties at age 7 than children conceived by gamete donation. Thus, "the absence of a gestational connection to the mother may be more problematic for children than the absence of a genetic link"<sup>58</sup>

Foetal developmental phenomenology and adoptee phenomenology, taken together, raise questions about the place of the biological mother in the development of our intersubjective relations after our birth and the possibility for an alternate 'normal' developmental alterity—one which holds within the self not one, but two alterities, or perhaps a primal and a secondary alterity. The question that interests me most is: is it possible that the echo of which Nydam speaks is a trace of the biological mother?

Has she left an imprint of herself inscribed in our neurological structures through the moulding of our movement experienced as an aspect of our identity? Is that even possible? What does this mean for an understanding of the self as forming from the dehiscence of ipsiety and alterity in the flesh as Merleau-Ponty describes? If as Merleau-Ponty advocates, being produces itself through a body rooted in the sensible world, through a chiasmic intertwining of the body with itself, then what is this echo and why does it result in an embodiment that holds others further away?

## IRIGARAY AND PRIMAL MATERNAL FLESH

Luce Irigaray is interested in the denial of the sexed body within philosophical theory and to carefully and clearly articulate how sexual difference is foreclosed by the way that phallogocentric philosophers employ metaphors drawn from the maternal body to ground masculine models of being while simultaneously disavowing their maternal origins.<sup>59</sup> In the case of Merleau-Ponty, mother becomes nature and maternal nurturance merely another infant-world interaction. As Tahlia Welsh highlights, Irigaray's claim isn't just that "pregnancy is a subject area

that can and should be discussed by phenomenology, but rather that pregnancy is at the heart of the phenomenological project.”<sup>60</sup> In this last section I wish to show both the error and the consequence to understanding humanity as devoid not only of maternal origin but also of maternal interaction. In keeping with this project, what I wish to propose is the possibility that Merleau-Ponty’s flesh ontology is an absolute appropriation of gestational phenomenology such that the flesh refers to a phenomenology of gestation that occurs in the bodies of actual women.

Outlining how Merleau-Ponty utilises a whole series of metaphors that are embedded in and derived from maternity, metaphors that are the conditions of possibility of his understanding of the flesh, which is itself the condition of possibility of intersubjectivity, Irigaray identifies the maternal as the unspoken underbelly of the flesh. Couched in terms of vision, of the strand and the sea and of immersion and emergence, Merleau-Ponty, according to Irigaray, renders invisible the womb, leaving the maternal unacknowledged in his flesh ontology:

If it was not the visible that is in question here, it would be possible to believe that Merleau-Ponty alludes here to intra-uterine life. After all, he employs the ‘images’ of the sea and strand. Of the immersion and the emergence? And he speaks of the risk of disappearance of the seer-seeing and the visible. What doubly corresponds to an existence in the intra-uterine nesting: who is still in this night does not see and remains without any visible ... Especially without memory of that first event where he is enveloped-touched by a tangible invisible out of which even his eyes are formed but which he will never see: without seeing, neither visible nor visibility in this place.<sup>61</sup>

Also the target of critique for Irigaray is the way that Merleau-Ponty describes being as self-generating like the embryo, a description which clearly denies maternal interaction, origins and nurturance. Merleau-Ponty’s chiasm becomes “another world, another landscape, a topos or a locus of the irreversible”.<sup>62</sup> She identifies in Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions, especially of the visible, a morphology that echoes the archaic state that one “remembers without remembering thematically”,<sup>63</sup> a dimension of ourselves kept in the depths of our corporeal prehistory, etched into our bodies as a “watermark”.

Interestingly, the term ‘watermark’ is also used by Merleau-Ponty and although Irigaray does not specify a connection, the appropriation is not without reference.

In his course notes from the Collège de France, Merleau-Ponty describes the organism as an “enveloping phenomenon” whereby, “between the microscopic facts, global reality is delineated like a watermark, never graspable for objectivizing-particular thinking, never eliminable from or reducible to the microscopic” and how “*Alltäglichkeit* [everydayness or commonplace] is always in the in-between world, always as a watermark”.<sup>64</sup> Finally, “[t]he concern is to grasp humanity first as another manner of being a body—to see humanity emerge just like Being in the manner of a watermark, not as another substance, but as interbeing, and not as an imposition of a for-itself on a body in-itself.”<sup>65</sup> I have no doubt that Irigaray’s use of the term ‘watermark’ is a play on these descriptions of humanity as a watermark of Being; substituting the uterine environment for Being, Irigaray writes the mother’s body back into the picture, rendering this watermark of Being, a bodily inscription left by the uterine fluid in the womb rather than the imprint of an anonymous Being.

Although Irigaray’s identification that Merleau-Ponty appropriates the womb in his flesh ontology, leaving the mother unacknowledged is well placed, I do not think that this appropriation is as clear a denial of sexual difference as Irigaray suggests. I think LaChance Adams is correct when she identifies that while it is true that Merleau-Ponty has no theory of sexual difference, many theorists critical of Merleau-Ponty’s flesh ontology, including Irigaray, make the mistake of conflating anonymity with universality. As she identifies, “the body [in Merleau-Ponty] is always situated within a biological, social, and historical context, even in its anonymous mode. This means that sex and gender will necessarily be a factor in embodied experience”<sup>66</sup> He also does not completely deny the importance of the maternal-infant relation. He does after all ask us to “do a psychoanalysis of Nature: it is the flesh, the mother” and he clearly identifies that the infant’s relation to the mother is one of total identification in ways that exceed her relation with others.<sup>67</sup>

It is not so much the inscription of the mother that is missed, but rather a failure to grasp the significance of this inscription for developmental alterity. In *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty writes that “[i]n spite of all our substantialist ideas, the seer is being premeditated in counterpoint in the embryonic development; through a labor upon itself the visible body provides for the hollow whence a vision will come”<sup>68</sup>. Also, “[w]hen the embryo’s organism starts to perceive, there is not a creation of a For itself by the body in itself, and there is not a descent into the body of a pre-established soul, it is that the vortex of the embryogenesis

suddenly centers itself upon the interior hollow it was preparing-----A certain fundamental divergence, a certain constitutive dissonance emerges”<sup>69</sup> What can be seen so clearly here is the denial of the necessity of maternal interaction and engagement with the foetus as necessary for foetal development and flourishing, reducing the gestational woman to a passive environment within which an active foetus can do the work of developing within the flesh. This oversight is core, not only to understanding how foetuses develop but also in acknowledging that the flesh, as a prototype of Being, does not form through exposure to the ‘natural’ ontological chiasm of the world, but rather through the chiasm that is moulded by and through a woman’s engagement with foetal matter.

That a pregnant woman is not passive but rather engaged in foetal development is a position taken up by Frances Gray in her chapter “Original Habitation: Pregnant Flesh as Absolute Hospitality”.<sup>70</sup> Grounding the Levinas/Derrida notion of unconditional or absolute hospitality in Merleau-Ponty’s flesh ontology, Gray argues pregnancy to be the “original host-guest relationship” which she claims is “ethically primitive”.<sup>71</sup> To be pregnant for Gray, is not to be a host who offers her hospitality to a pre-existing guest as a gift, but rather as an act of embodied intentionality in a Merleau-Pontian sense of habituated pre-conscious action, which facilitates an “actualising of being, an enabling of life that has not previously existed”.<sup>72</sup> Gray’s substitution of the Levinasian ‘stranger’ who comes from the exterior with Merleau-Ponty’s flesh ontology as a primal intersubjectivity is insightful. However, her preservation of a foetal emergence as a ‘dehiscence or fission of its own mass’ and her description of the foetus as a second subject, one that is “a subject other than, but simultaneously the same as, the woman’s flesh, a subject who inhabits her body, a separate consciousness created in, and as a result of her bodily environment” somewhat waters down the degree of maternal engagement to that of a preconscious bodily facilitation.<sup>73</sup> The preservation of foetal development as a dehiscence that unfolds in a woman’s bodily environment, albeit a more active environment than Merleau-Ponty proposes, nonetheless preserves the notion of gestation as devoid of maternal subjectivity, and in doing so Gray opens her thesis to questions about the development of alterity within the flesh because without the mother as a primary other, the foetus could not sustain the ipsiety required to develop consciousness.

In fact Levinas, in a critique of Merleau-Ponty’s flesh ontology has himself identified that the alterity of the other cannot be accommodated within a flesh that develops through a relation of reciprocity as a fission.<sup>74</sup> For Levinas, while

dehiscence might explain the presence of an imminent alterity, the alterity I find within myself, it fails to account for how the infant comes to recognise the radical alterity of others in the world as different to that found in the self. In fact for Levinas, the only possibility relies upon a perception rather than an experiential difference which he argues, ultimately structures the other as a type of knowledge rather than a felt experience of the unknown. For Levinas, this forecloses the possibility of an absolute alterity of the other because the other is thereby reduced to a product of consciousness, an imperialistic projection of 'me' as being like 'you'.<sup>75</sup> Claude Lefort and Dorothea Olkowski have also identified that a relation of reversibility and dehiscence fails to show how, developmentally, the child comes to experience the radical alterity of others as different to that within herself.<sup>76</sup> Each philosopher in their own way insists on the necessity of something beyond the infant-world relation as necessary to scaffold the development of self-recognition. For Lefort, what a relation of reversibility and dehiscence cannot take into account is how, developmentally, alterity is, at least in part, moulded by a culture. Olkowski's critique is similar, only for her, it is maternal nurturance and care that is the missing link, appropriated and reduced to the status of a 'natural' event within Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. Like Irigaray, she argues that Merleau-Ponty's flesh ontology strategically erases the role of the mother in order to preserve understandings of development that support a masculine fantasy of liberal individuation.

There have been several well placed responses to these critiques that support Merleau-Ponty's thesis and for the most part the responses adequately support the specific arguments that these theorists raise. As Gary Madison identifies, "Otherness ... is constitutive of ipseity itself" and so there is no need for a developmental step, alterity is a discovery, not something that the infant must cognitively develop.<sup>77</sup> Alterity exists in the incommensurability of our reciprocal relations, the greater the temporal gap, the *écart*, the greater the experience of the unknown. Yet this position, although true, does not adequately respond to the developmental issue because should the child always and already be for itself an other, enclosed within what David Michael Levin describes as a "circuit of reversibilities"<sup>78</sup> then when and how did this occur gestationally? Not only is this question important in terms of understanding the ontology of being that Merleau-Ponty proposes, it also carries a heavy political weight. Should the zygote be self-forming through 'dehiscence or fission of its own mass' and not an aspect of the maternal body, the maternal flesh, then we will perhaps need to ethically rethink our conceptions of when it is that we come into being and subsequently the



policies and practices surrounding abortion and maternal consent to treatments while pregnant. Should the zygote ever be considered one with the mother then we must admit a point in development where divergence occurs and then we have the developmental problem the Lefort and Olkowski discern. The solution I have shown is that the self is formed within and out of the alterity of our biological mother, an absolute alterity that is constitutive of the ipseity that our postural schemas embody; an alterity that will eventually come within but remains outside of our infantile phenomenal world.

## CONCLUSION

In Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, being produces itself through a phenomenal body, situated in the world, orientated through the mutual crossing of the touching with the tangible and the visual with the invisible. Through the intertwining of touch and vision the embryo develops into interaction, not through the dichotomy of this interaction but as a reversibility situated within the flesh. The flesh is an excess produced in this intertwining, a generation of difference that is the non-coincidence between corporeality and ideality. The body, for Merleau-Ponty is a "difference without contradiction, that divergence (*écart*) between the within and the without that constitutes its natal secret".<sup>79</sup> Because I am blind to the body from which I see the world because it is from the body that I see, vision of myself is a fold or cavity that allows me to see myself only through the things that I see.<sup>80</sup> As Cecelia Sjöholm puts it "[t]he way that we perceive the world, therefore, presumes the suppression of an invisible other, a radical form of alterity making its imprint on our corporeal rootedness."<sup>81</sup>

Many philosophers have criticised Merleau-Ponty's philosophy as giving an inadequate account of radical otherness due to the way we seem to integrate and suppress the other into our self. For Emmanuel Levinas, this integration forms a kind of imperialism that denies the capacity to perceive radical alterity. For Claude Lefort and Dorothea Olkowski, it leaves unaccounted the narrative of development—just how do we get from syncretic infant experience to the flesh without social scaffolding? For Irigaray, this understanding of alterity explains how phallogentrism relies upon the integration and suppression of what should be a visible other, into our own being so as to sustain a masculine world through the rendering of this radical other (the other sex), invisible.

In this paper I have examined the place of alterity in Merleau-Ponty's flesh ontology from a different angle again, arguing through a phenomenology of gestation and adoption that the flesh of which Merleau-Ponty speaks is the flesh of the biological mother; a real embodied woman whose body has scaffolded the development of our own. Actual women whose imprint has left us with a watermark that the adoptee can more easily discern due, most likely, to the radical reformation that must be undertaken in body schematic development when there are two, rather than one primary alterities that will need to be internalised, rendered invisible within the self. As Winterson explains,

That isn't of its nature negative, the missing part, the missing past, can be an opening, not a void. It can be an entry as well as an exit. It is the fossil record, the imprint of another life, your fingers trace the space where it might have been, and your fingers learn a kind of Braille.<sup>82</sup>

This Braille, this watermark, the trace of the biological mother that remains, explains well adoptee phenomenology, while simultaneously creating problems for bonding at birth theories of infant development. For Merleau-Ponty's flesh ontology, from the perspective of thematics, not much needs to change, we do not even really need to do a psychoanalysis of nature, but rather simply insert the prefix 'maternal' before the term 'flesh'.

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## NOTES

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6. Jeanette Winterson *Why be Happy When You Could be Normal?* London: Vintage Books, 2012.
7. Marinus H. van IJzendoorn, Femmie Juffer and Caroline W. Klein Poelhuis “Adoption and Cognitive Development: A Meta-Analytic Comparison of Adopted and Nonadopted Children’s IQ and School Performance” *Psychological Bulletin* 131: 2 (2005, 301-316).
8. Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. New York: Cornell UP, 1993.
9. Maurice Merleau-Ponty *The Visible and the Invisible*. Trans. Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968, 140.
10. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 148.
11. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 146.

12. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 133.
13. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 146.
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19. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 140.
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23. See Maxine Sheets-Johnstone “Emotion and movement. A beginning empirical-phenomenological analysis of their relationship” *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 6: 11-12 (1999, 259-277) for a discussion of various theories as well as her own that foetal movement begins with the stimulation of genetic reflexes in the foetus.
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38. Graven and Browne, "Auditory development in the foetus and infant", 188.
39. Iris Marion Young "Throwing Like a Girl" and *Other Essays*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2005.
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41. Coon and Mitterer *Psychology: A Journey*, 412. For adoption accounts see J. Triseliotis *In search of origins*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973.
42. This debate is ongoing and the majority of studies do not identify the relationship between the adult model and the neonate. See for example E. Ullstadius "Neonatal imitation in a mother-infant setting" *Early Development and Parenting* 7 (1998, 1-8) and A. Vinter "The role of movement in eliciting early imitations" *Child Development* 57 (1986, 66-71) for the argument that the neonate is emulating familial movement patterns rather than imitating. For a review of the debate see E. D. Ray and C. M. Heyes "Imitation in infancy: the wealth of the stimulus" *Developmental Science* available at <http://www.all-souls.ox.ac.uk/users/heyesc/Celia%27s%20pdfs/2011%20Ray%20&%20Heyes%20supplement.pdf>. Last accessed 29/3/15.
43. M. D. S. Ainsworth, M. C. Blehar, E. Waters and S. Wall *Patterns of attachment*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1978. Infants seek and use emotional expressions especially those provided by primary caregivers to disambiguate potentially dangerous situations and to guide their own behaviour. Securely attached infants differ in their social referencing as compared to insecurely attached infants as-reflected by Ainsworth's Strange Situation behaviour test. Securely attached infants reference their mothers when faced with uncertainty, and decrease the frequency of their referencing as they become more comfortable with the situation. In contrast, insecurely attached infants may either (a) reference little in novel, uncertain situations, or (b) reference persistently because of their continued uncertainty with the situation. See also S. Feinman, D. Roberts, K. Hsieh, D. Sawyer and D. Swanson, "A critical review of social referencing in infancy" *Social referencing and the social construction of reality in infancy*, Ed S. Feinman New York: Plenum, 1992, 15-54 which shows how infants seek and use emotional expressions especially those provided by primary caregivers to disambiguate potentially dangerous situations and to guide their own behaviour. James F

Sorce and R. N. Emde, "Mother's presence is not enough: Effect of emotional availability on infant exploration." *Developmental Psychology*, 17, (1981, 737-745), tested to see how maternal emotional signaling affected the behaviors of 1-year-olds on the visual cliff where the child is placed on one side a man—made cliff with a perspex bridge to the mother. Sorce et al. placed the infants on the shallow side of the visual cliff apparatus and had their mothers on the other side of the visual cliff eliciting different emotional facial expressions. When the mothers posed joy or interest most of the babies crossed the deep side but if the mothers posed fear or anger, most of the babies did not cross the apparatus. In the absence of depth, most of the babies crossed regardless of the mother's facial expressions.

44. Jack Reynolds, "Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and the Alterity of the Other" *Symposium* 6:1 (2002, 63-78).

45. NSW Parliament, *Releasing the Past—Adoption Practices 1950—1998 Final Report*.

46. NSW Parliament, *Releasing the Past—Adoption Practices 1950—1998 Final Report*, 18.

47. Ainsworth *The Development of mother-infant attachment*.

48. A further attachment category, reactive attachment disorder (RAD) was included in DSM-III in 1980 and applies to children who are unable to form an ongoing bond with a particular caregiver most often due to institutionalisation, abuse, neglect, or frequent disruptions in primary caregivers. Unlike those bonded children who Ainsworth studied, RAD children have experience deprivation to the degree that they exhibit not just a behavioural style of social interaction but cognitive, physical, and social-emotional delays. RAD criteria includes symptoms such as failure to thrive, a lack of developmentally appropriate social responsiveness, and apathy. These children can improve but often suffer permanent cognitive delay. I have not referred to this category in any detail in this paper as it seems fairly conclusive that this condition develops as a consequence of post-partum circumstances. See M. M. Richters and F. R. Volkmar "Reactive Attachment Disorder of Infancy or Early Childhood" *American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 33 (1994, 328-332).

49. Klaus and Kennell, "Early mother-infant contact. Effects on the mother and the infant"; *Parent-infant bonding*.

50. See Jane Lymer *The phenomenology of the maternal-foetal bond* PhD Dissertation University of Wollongong Australia, 2010 for this argument.

51. See D. E. Eyre *Mother-Infant Bonding: A Scientific Fiction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992. Also M. Crouch and L. Manderson, "The Social Life of Bonding Theory" *Social Science and Medicine* 41 (1995, 837-844) who, after examining a decade of research findings, want to challenge the concept of bonding itself because they find too many inconsistencies in the empirical research,

The use of such a general concept [as bonding] in research inhibits the investigation of specific circumstances, particularly since the ambiguity of 'bonding' (as both process and result) conflates the descriptive and explanatory functions of propositions containing the term. The circularity inherent in such reasoning may be attractive at an intuitive level since it neatly rounds up a straggly line of questions into a ring of generalizations—but it hardly advances our understanding of particular conditions that affect the relationship between children and their parent (841).

Frank W. Hatch & Lenny Maietta "The Role of Kinesthesia in Pre- and Perinatal Bonding" *Pre- and Peri-natal Psychology Journal* 5 (1991, 251-270) have also identified similar shortcomings. The problem that they ascertain is that the definition is so broad and unclear that whenever the concept is empirically researched, too many varying interpretations and applications are permitted. See also

W. R. Arney “Maternal-Infant Bonding: The Politics of Falling in Love with Your Child” *Feminist Studies* 6 (1980, 547-570) who suggests that “one can understand the widespread acceptance of bonding theory and its rapid development in obstetrics, only by concentrating on the political uses of the theory” (547). His conclusion is that bonding theory has been an unsubstantiated political tool employing discourses of biological naturalism aimed at “keeping women by the hearth” (567).

52. NSW Parliament, *Releasing the Past—Adoption Practices 1950—1998 Final Report*, 98.

53. David Kirschner, “The Adopted Child Syndrome: Considerations for Psychotherapy,” *Psychotherapy in Private Practice* 8:3 (1990, 93-100). Kirschner provides a rather grim view of the adopted child’s prospects for healthy development and is concerned particularly with the overrepresentation of adopted children who have stood trial for murder in the in US arguing that though adopted children commit murders more often than commonly believed, there is resistance to making an issue of this fact. Kirschner argues this to be primarily due to the secrecy associated with many adoptions and the failure of criminal justice agencies to record the nature of an offender’s family background. From a legal posture, an adopted child is simply the child of his adoptive parents and the psychodynamics of adoption are easily overlooked in forensic mental health evaluations. He states that 500 estimated serial killers in U.S. history, 16 percent were adopted as children, while adoptees represent only 2 or 3 percent of the general population. Adoptees are 15 times more likely to kill one or both of their adoptive parents than biological children.

54. Triseliotis, *In search of origins*, 43.

55. NSW Parliament, *Releasing the Past—Adoption Practices 1950—1998 Final Report*, 154.

56. NSW Parliament, *Releasing the Past—Adoption Practices 1950—1998 Final Report*, 154.

57. R. S. Andersen “Why adoptees search: Motives and more” *Child Welfare* 67 (1998, 15-19).

58. Susan Golombok, Lucy Blake, Polly Casey, Gabriela Roman, and Vasanti Jadva “Children Born Through Reproductive Donation: A Longitudinal Study of Psychological Adjustment” *Journal of Child Psychological Psychiatry*. 54:6 (2013, 653).

59. Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*.

60. Tahlia Welsh *The Child as Natural Phenomenologist: Primal and Primary Experience in Merleau-Ponty’s Psychology* Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013, 139.

61. Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 27.

62. Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 153.

63. Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, 164.

64. Maurice Merleau-Ponty *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France* Trans. Robert Vallier. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003, 207.

65. Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 208.

66. LaChance Adams, *Mad Mothers, Bad Mothers & What a Good Mother Would Do*, 126-127.

67. Merleau-Ponty, “The Childs Relations with Others”.

68. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 146.

69. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 233.

70. Francis Gray “Original habitation: pregnant flesh as absolute hospitality” *Coming to life: philosophies of pregnancy, childbirth and mothering*. Eds Sarah LaChance Adams and Caroline R. Lundquist, Baltimore, Maryland: Fordham University Press 2013, 71-87.

71. Gray, “Original habitation”, 72.

72. Gray, “Original habitation”, 72.

73. Gray, “Original habitation”, 72.

74. Emmanuel Levinas “Two Texts on Merleau-Ponty” *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*. Eds

- Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990, 53-66.
75. While there have been many responses to Levinas's critique of Merleau-Ponty, many of which I will discuss in chapter four, let me just earmark here, that my conclusion will be that Levinas is correct to say that the flesh cannot emerge through a relation of dehiscence.
76. Claude Lefort, "Flesh and Otherness" *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*. Eds Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990, 3-13; Dorothea Olkowski "Only Nature Is Mother to the Child" *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty*. Eds Dorothea Olkowski and Gail Weiss, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006, 49-70; Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*.
77. Gary Brent Madison "Flesh as Otherness" *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*. Eds Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990, 31.
78. David Michael Levin "Justice in the Flesh" *Ontology and Alterity in Merleau-Ponty*. Eds Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1990, 37.
79. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 135-136.
80. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 146.
81. A Cecilia Sjöholm "Crossing Lovers: Luce Irigaray's Elemental Passions" *Hypatia* 15:3 (2000, 95)
82. Winterson, *Why be Happy When You Could be Normal?*, 5.

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