

FEED-

ON THE FUTURE OF

FOR-

TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY MEDIA

WARD

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Conclusion: Implication

The oneness of the universe, and the oneness of each element in the universe, repeat themselves to the crack of doom in the creative advance from creature to creature, each creature including in itself the whole of history and exemplifying the self-identity of things and their mutual diversities.

Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*

In his recent, prizewinning critical performance piece, *Gatherings* (2011), media artist Jordan Crandall implicates the subjectivity of his performance within larger, specifically technical, environmental confounds—what he characterizes as “diffuse, ‘animated’ surrounds” that offer “cognitive and ontological supplements to human agency.”¹ In the artist’s description, *Gatherings* “is a performative study of the nature of the event and the new forms of awareness, cognition, and material agency that are emerging in data-intensive environments. It is about how things come together as matters worthy of attention: how actors assemble, relate, and affiliate in entities and phenomenal occurrences that are more than the sum of their parts.”² To concretize the argument for the expansion of perception that I have been developing in this study, I shall now explore how Crandall’s performance foregrounds the transformation of subjectivity within contemporary media networks.

I propose to interrogate Crandall’s performance as indicative of a certain tension between the dispersal of experience

elicited by twenty-first-century media and the ongoing—and perhaps never more pressing—necessity for a return of and to human-centered attention. As I have stressed all along, my conceptualization of the *feed-forward* of data into consciousness lies at the very center of my interest in exploring the notion of experience in the light of twenty-first-century media. Indeed, it constitutes the core of my conviction that (human) experience remains crucial in the face of its apparent marginalization by the networked regimes of twenty-first-century media. For if the dispersal of experience produced by contemporary media marginalizes not simply the operation but the very role and relevance of consciousness, and if at times my focus has centered on analyzing such marginalization for its own sake, my aim throughout has been to discern and to develop what I take to be the “upside” for consciousness—and for humans—within the networked regimes of twenty-first-century media. That is why I have insisted on developing a theoretical account of consciousness’s reconfiguration capable of laying the ground for practical developments that directly engage the expanded access to sensibility afforded consciousness by the structure of feed-forward.

By focusing on Crandall’s *Gatherings* as exemplary of the way in which human bodyminds encounter and make use of the various kinds of information-rich, media-saturated environments within which we now typically live and act, I thus hope to thematize in a particularly clear and compelling manner the centrality of the operation of consciousness under the new conditions installed by twenty-first-century media. For, more than a simple inventory or diagnosis of media change, what Crandall’s performance brings to the fore is the imperative for human subjectivity to undergo a transformation that aligns it with—or as I shall prefer to say, that *implicates it within*—the vibratory sensibility of an ever-increasingly technified world. Crandall’s performance will accordingly be evaluated for its success in responding to the experiential challenges posed by our becoming implicated within the complex ecologies of twenty-first-century media. How, I shall ask, does Crandall’s performance engage the situation of consciousness coming to awareness—acquiring “presentational immediacy”—well after the occurrence of the events that cause, or, more precisely that will go on to cause, such awareness? By performatively enacting the human bodymind’s implication into mediated circuits of sensibility, Crandall’s work discovers—indeed, *inaugurates*—new modes of “acting” in which the *propensity* of the situation as a whole holds sway over any delimited agency that may operate, already fully constituted, within it, including the agency of a human subject understood as a minimally transcendent or otherwise separable constituting force.

What Crandall’s work thereby makes salient is how the *propensity* of the total situation that has been the focus of my analysis in this book im-

pacts our subjective experience. More precisely, Crandall's work exemplifies and performatively elicits how such propensity breaks fundamentally with the core phenomenological commitment to the principle of subjective transcendence: the subjectivity it extracts from the propensity of the total situation is not a subjectivity that withdraws from the world, but one that *expresses* the creativity of the total situation understood exclusively in and for itself, as a distinct and self-contained moment in the ongoing becoming of the universe. This subjectivity, which may be "anchored" in a human bodymind, does not however *belong to* that bodymind. Indeed, far from constituting the interiority of a transcendental subject, this subjectivity is radically distributed across the host of circuits that connect the bodymind to the environment as a whole, or, more precisely, that broker its implication within the greater environment.

Human bodyminds do, however, enjoy some privilege as the locus of the subjective expression of the propensity of a total situation. As I have sought to suggest at every turn in the argument developed above, human bodyminds are always implicated within—and always acquire their agency from—experiential situations that exceed their perceptual grasp. This implication generates a perspective that, though only one perspective among myriad others, nonetheless remains special for us: without being the sole or dominant agents of situations that exceed the scope of our survey, we nevertheless experience such situations, and their excess over our modes of apprehending them, from our point of view and in relation to our interests. Our implication within larger situational ecologies thus goes hand in hand with a newfound capacity to appreciate such implication, a capacity that, as I have underscored here, is facilitated by the technical feeding-forward of environmental information into just-to-come apprehensions of consciousness.

This compatibility of implication with a new, technically mediated form of appearance [*Erscheinung*] suggests a potential trajectory for rethinking the role of phenomenology in the context of twenty-first-century media. For, when they feed data of sensibility forward into futural consciousness, today's microcomputational sensors and predictive analytic systems introduce technical mediation into the very heart of phenomenal appearance and, in so doing, call into question the "autonomy" of the transcendental subject of (orthodox) phenomenology. In accordance with my aim to explore the predicament of human beings in the new experiential environments created by twenty-first-century media, I want to conclude my theorization of the feed-forward structure of twenty-first-century consciousness by sketching out a phenomenology of implication. Rooted in Crandall's performative embrace of the propensity of the mediated lifeworld, such a phenomenology contrasts explicitly with the phenomenology of constitution still central to

much contemporary work in phenomenology: where the latter looks to consciousness to *constitute* phenomena, a phenomenology of implication looks instead to the world—to the worlding of the world (to "de-presencing")—as the source for the total situation within which appearances arise and can be made manifest to consciousness.

Engaging Crandall's *Gatherings* from this theoretical perspective, I shall focus on how his performative self-implication into twenty-first-century media circuits undercuts the distance of intentionality—the minimal self-transcendence—that allows the subject to *constitute* the phenomena of its experience. Taken as a contribution to a phenomenology of implication, Crandall's performance exemplifies how the world can manifest directly in and through the activity of human bodyminds, without requiring any form of subjective transcendence, including the distance of intentionality. Human activity materializes in *Gatherings* as a part of the propensity of the greater total situation; and the way in which the human bodymind can indeed *host* the manifestation of the world is precisely by implicating itself—or rather, by letting itself be implicated—within this propensity.

On this understanding, any appearance of worldly sensibility as a "content of consciousness"—as a element *constituted by* the activity of a separated and self-contained consciousness—is, at best, a derivative phenomenon, and one that, as we have seen, has become increasingly superfluous in the environments of twenty-first-century media. Or, to put it more simply, we could say (again) that the inaugural dream of phenomenology—to constitute consciousness at the moment of its self-present happening—has run its course: confronted with the networks of twenty-first-century media, constituted consciousness has been forced to relinquish any operational role it may have in creating sensible presencing. In the worst-case scenario, it relinquishes this role to the marketing campaigns of contemporary data and cultural industries which do everything they can to bypass the domain of consciousness. And in the best-case scenario—the theorization of feed-forward at the heart of my argument here—consciousness relinquishes its operationality to the feeding-forward of technically gathered data of sensibility into future or just-to-come awareness that comes to consciousness directly from the environmental outside, "contaminating" its "intimacy" with artifactually produced contents that not only haven't been lived, but *cannot ever be lived by consciousness*.³

Gathering as Implication

Crandall's performance begins with the artist adopting the persona of a familiar figure, a man sitting at a café watching people pass by; reminiscent

of that icon of modernity, Poe's "man of the crowd," this figure is almost immediately displaced as the artist quickly swaps it out for that of an "observational expert sitting at the interfaces of an intelligence agency, interpreting movements on images, maps, and screens."⁴ No more than a third of the way into the performance, this figure is displaced in turn, as the specialized eye of the observational expert finds it agency surpassed by "the vast reservoirs of datasets" that yield their "patterns" only to a "calculative seeing."

Enacting these discrete stages in the displacement of human seeing by machine vision, the performance features Crandall narrating the transformations of human agency and subjectivity—of his own agency and subjectivity—as various screen-based images and videos as well as environmental sounds materialize the agency of the environment and bring it to bear on his experience. The three main sections of the performance describe three stages in the advent of a hybrid agency composed of human elements implicated within larger technical circuits. As we witness the assimilation of the artist's subjective point of view into a broader environmental perspective, we participate in the gradual displacement of "the centrality of the human agent in the process of tracking": within the broader environmental picture materialized by technical tracking, human agency enjoys no *de jure* privilege and can lay claim to no transcendence or mastery.

As we might expect from our earlier consideration of Crandall's theoretical writing in chapter 4, *Gatherings* pays careful attention to the ways in which the technification of the urban environment has modified the modes in which humans act, perceive, and sense. More specifically, and most crucially, it directly engages the operation of sensibility at the level of the total environment. Indeed, Crandall's performative exploration of and experimentation with contemporary media makes common cause with the main argument of my study; he too accepts, indeed welcomes, the transformation wrought by twenty-first-century media, and he takes as the very basis for his practice some of the concrete ways in which today's microsensors and data-mining capabilities catalyze a wholesale revolution in the economy between narrowly subjective sensation and worldly sensibility.

In *Gatherings*, Crandall approaches this general transformative potential of twenty-first-century media through a specific lens—that of contemporary technologies of tracking; such technologies, he explains, undergird the experience of movement common to all levels of phenomena and operative *beneath* perception proper:

I explore the constitution of agency and event in terms of a very specific historical context: a contemporary environmental space driven by the techniques of tracking. Ascending with the rise of compu-

tation in mid-century wartime, . . . tracking as a science of movement optimization . . . has shaped a very specific kind of practiced timespace. It has shaped an urban environment where movement is understood as strategically calculable: a world where all entities are regarded as transported with some degree of predictive regularity. All urban phenomena are categorized, standardized, and rendered interoperable within the analytical architectures and procedures of this strategic, calculative mobilization. It constitutes a defining organizational horizon for the movements of the world—a sensory, cognitive, and calculative ambience against which the phenomena of urban life are understood.⁵

Gatherings focuses on how tracking, with its contemporary reliance on "algorithmic procedures" and "automated systems," now operates within complex "distributed network environments" where its functionality is supplemented and augmented by microsensors and location-aware technologies that are typically embedded into mobile devices, automobiles, buildings, and urban spaces. In Crandall's theoretical vision, but also in his performative practice, this expanded functionality of tracking technologies, and of the "interoperability" of movements that it facilitates, induces crucial modifications not simply in how humans experience their lived environments, but also, and most strikingly, in how environments themselves directly contribute—as *sensors*—to the genesis of experiences. As Crandall puts it, "Environments become able to *directly sense* phenomena and respond to what they apprehend, in ways that complicate distinctions between body and space, as well as between human, artifact, and computer."⁶

Consider the striking way in which Crandall's piece manages to move beyond simply thematizing this new situation in order directly to implicate the very agency of the human subject within the technological shift it chronicles. In contrast to theoretical writing, his own not excepted, Crandall's *Gatherings* is able to *express* the impact of this shift literally—as the progressive modification undergone by the artist (and, by extension, the spectator) across the duration of the performance. *Gatherings* advances a subtle, indeed subterranean, "argument" that the impact of the "interoperationality" of twenty-first-century media *can be accessed only via a logic of expression*, which is equally to say, only through and by means of the subject's implication within its broader environmental logic.

To understand why, we need only consider Crandall's rejection of the media theoretical figure of the "interface" in favor of what I would propose to call "implication." As he sees it, the figure of the interface only serves to reinforce long-standing philosophical divides—between subject and object,

human and world—that themselves stand in the way of a fuller theorization of what is at stake in twenty-first-century media. That is why *Gatherings* approaches the new sensing capacities of the technologized environment not “in terms of formed and distinct objects or subjects” but “in terms of their complexes of practices” which, moreover, it understands “as involving affective transmission and absorption”—elements that break down the separation between human and world—far more than “reflective distance.”⁷

In the place of the “interface,” which can only impose distance, Crandall proposes the “program.” More than simply algorithmic, the program is “a guiding principle of structural inclination” that is equally technical, social, and practical. Every program, claims Crandall, “is sensitive to the patterns, rhythms, and affects of its surrounding environment—speeds, material constitutions, and regulations; flows for pedestrians, vehicles, information, utilities, and goods. It meshes with the very scene it contemplates, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the common. Everywhere at home, it is a fluid regulating agency that registers the world, yet remains hidden from it: a mechanism of awareness, as vast as the streets themselves, whose flickering presence it both gathers, reflects, and incorporates.”⁸ The program thus furnishes an alternative principle of organization—of *gathering*—that differs fundamentally from the figure of the subject. As developed in Crandall’s performance, the concept of the program underscores the retreat from any internal, subject-constituted process of unification; thus, programs are said to operate at multiple levels: as the code underlying the technical script of the performance; as the gravitational center around which materials, themselves already burgeoning with “inherent awareness,” gather; as the principle for opening onto and accommodating “more structures of life,” and thus more potentiality; as the organizing principle for a “diffuse, ‘animated’ surround [that] offers a cognitive and ontological supplement to human agency.”⁹

The program is the operation by which affiliations are forged across technical, affective, symbolic, and rhythmic dimensions of experience. It is what facilitates the production—in Crandall’s performance specifically, but also in general—of *gatherings* understood as continuously and incrementally *renewed*, distinctly *horizontal* and *anticipatory* compositions. Gatherings implicate distinct elements, including humans, into their immanent and future-directed inclination, and for this reason must be considered expressions of worldly metamorphosis rather than products of subjective synthesis.

Because they generate worldly sensibility as I have sought to theorize it here, gatherings anchor an account of human implication within larger worldly confounds where the human element remains one among many. Such an account contrasts in significant ways with phenomenological posi-

tions that introduce a transcendental subject as the—allegedly necessary—recipient of the world’s manifestation. At once theoretical and performative, Crandall’s notion of gathering furnishes nothing less than an account of how the technically facilitated self-sensing of the world, despite positioning the human as one agency among (a multiplicity of) others, nevertheless implicates the human in a special way: as the “observer” of what Merleau-Ponty would call the reversibility of the flesh (or, as I would prefer to say, of worldly sensibility).

In one description of how such implication occurs, Crandall draws attention to the way the interoperability of today’s media environments compel human agents to attune their activity to the “inclinations” of larger compositions: “In order to endure, I must continually ‘update,’ extend, maintain and be maintained in continuing moves. I must affiliate, cultivate my modulation in gatherings that can carry me forth. As I do so, I must negotiate adherence to the demands for movement and attendance that these affiliations seek. I must push forth and be pulled forth through gatherings and adjust myself to the prevailing terms of their movement-constitution, their structural inclination.”¹⁰ Taken in its full radicality, Crandall’s notion of attunement would require him to put the “I” in parentheses, since it—the “I”—emerges precisely and always transitorily from out of the process of gathering. In this it makes common cause with the conceptualization of affective attunement proposed by child psychoanalyst Daniel Stern:¹¹ for Crandall no less than for Stern, what is at issue is precisely a process of attuning—or *gathering*—that occurs prior to and beneath the level of any self-referential, substantial subject or “I.”

Like the experience of subjectivity as understood by Whitehead (and in particular by Whitehead as read through Judith Jones’s *Intensity*), the “I” of Crandall’s performance is itself a composition, a *gathering*, of a host of agencies that act on one another (thereby generating intensity) and that, as superjective potentiality, are in excess over their own proper subjective power: actors, Crandall tells us at the end of Section 1, “solicit one another, act upon one another, recruit one another, harness and channel one another’s transmissions. They are agency of one another. Concentrated and networked. Analytical and active. Objective and immersive. They band and disband, accumulate and release. They extend and consolidate. They attune . . . to the sensory, rhythmic and atmospheric exchanges that compose them.” With this explanation, and particularly with his claim that gatherings are “agency of one another,” Crandall taps directly into the power of the Whiteheadian superject: by hosting superjectal relations, gatherings facilitate the interoperability—the interagency—of the world’s worlding.

Implicated within this interagency, actors find their power

to act in the potentiality of the relational field itself: "Actors," notes Crandall, "are less constituted in movement, however directed or distracted" than "in a teeming, vibratory instantaneity. They are excessive, 'beyond themselves'—impersonal, . . . rendered public and precarious, not at the center, not primary or alone."¹² Mobilizing the very same vibratory power that animates the extensive continuum and real potentiality, Crandall's performative gatherings enact a *phenomenology of implication* that is equally an ontology of potentiality. Operationalized by programs which are as much technical as social, as much rhythmic as affective, gatherings always implicate more than what can be calculated and tracked. That is why, at the heart of Crandall's practice, and at the culmination of his performance, programs are explicitly identified with potentiality. "The challenge" faced by the phenomenology of implication is how "to meet an external agency without preconceptions, without filtering it through a scaffold of preferences, classifications, or rules-based requirements. Without reducing it to an object." To meet this challenge requires Crandall—and us in turn—to move beyond resistance: we must ride the wave catalyzed by the program not to close it in on itself, but to open out onto the world's potentiality. What is required, Crandall reiterates, "is not a resistance to program but *the amplification of its potential*—the extension of program to allow for *the accommodation of more structures of life*." In his conjuncture of implication with potentiality, program with gathering, Crandall thus positions the interoperationality of contemporary tracking technologies—standing in for twenty-first-century media as a whole—as a critical, productive, and no longer avoidable mediation of potentiality.

In a move that cuts through whatever lingering opposition continues to inform my above juxtaposition of Whiteheadian potentiality and the probabilistic models of predictive analytics, Crandall positions tracking itself—tracking as a technical mediation of activity—as a crucial means of generating experiential excess. Where I focused on the disparity between the closed models of predictive analytics and an open ontology of potentiality, Crandall introduces the possibility to view tracking as an ontological potentiality *in its own right*, and one that is in itself *in excess over its own instrumental functioning*: "The approach is not resistant so much as extensive and excessive—not a resistance to tracking so much as *an exceeding of it, a washing over it*. It involves the creation of flexible databases—scaffolds on which categories are crafted and make sense—that are as rich ontologically as the social and natural worlds they map." With this ontologizing of tracking, we come back to the expressive dimension of *Gatherings* alluded to above, though in an expanded frame that speaks to the specificity of the *aesthetic* dimension of twenty-first-century media. What is productive about

Crandall's performance—its channeling of tracking through its impact on Crandall's own bodily agency—is here extended to the impact of tracking as such. Thus, when Crandall's performance expresses the experiential impact of twenty-first-century media as the displacement his own agency undergoes following its implication into machinic arrangements of sensibility, so too does it position the impact of tracking in the aesthetic register. More specifically, by amplifying tracking well in excess of what could be captured by any human perceiver, Crandall manages to unveil a dimension of tracking's operationality that can be accessed *neither* instrumentally *nor* theoretically, but can only be experienced performatively. Accordingly, it is only through practice—and indeed only through a practice dedicated to keeping open the relational potential of technics—that the aesthetic dimension of tracking, its excess over its instrumental function, can be accessed at all.

Appearance as Sensibility, or the World Is Self-Sensing

With its conjunction of implication and potentiality, Crandall's performance helps specify how the transformation of human subjectivity explored here—its becoming implicated within and as part of the propensity of a total situation—finds its source in the potentiality generated by twenty-first-century media's direct modulation of sensibility. To the extent that potentiality constitutes the mode in which the settled world—what I have been calling worldly sensibility—expresses its power to create future worlds, the conjunction of implication with potentiality calls for a conception of subjectivity as *the power of potentiality*. We have already seen how this conception requires a modification of Whitehead's philosophy that brings the superject to the fore: in its role as subjective power of potentiality, the superject expresses the creativity of worldly sensibility, or, more precisely, the propensity of its total situation.

My invocation of the late work of Merleau-Ponty at the end of chapter 4 was aimed precisely at fleshing out this superjectal creativity of worldly sensibility and specifically at understanding how its propensity encompasses subjectivity, including human subjectivity, as part of its potentiality. There we saw how worldly sensibility, once it is conceptualized on the basis of Merleau-Ponty's final ontology, is revealed to be consubstantial with the continually growing real potentiality of the universe. As an alternative to Whitehead's overtly Platonizing account of eternal objects, such an account of worldly sensibility not only avoids privileging concrescence (or any delimited subjective operationality), but manages to integrate it as one element in a broader and continuous intensification of the settled world's potentiality. On this picture, far from forming a separate process primarily responsible

for the universe's creativity, concrescence (or any operation of subjective actualization) assumes a more modest role as part of a larger operation of ongoing sensibility—as one element in a larger propensity—that is only *as a whole* generative of creativity.

What remains to be theorized is how this liberation of the propensity of the total situation yields a notion of subjectivity as implication that breaks with the phenomenological commitment to subjective transcendence, no matter how minimal. In this respect, it is significant that the integrated operation of worldly sensibility I have sought to develop in this study manages to rebut a crucial recent criticism that has been raised against Merleau-Ponty's final ontology, and that would by extension apply to any post-phenomenological ontology whose aim is to dissolve subject-object dualism and extend subjectivity beyond higher-order phenomenological beings.

By critically interrogating contemporary French philosopher Renaud Barbaras's recent criticism of Merleau-Ponty's final ontology, I hope to make clear that there is a crucial subjective dimension to the experience of consciousness within the environments created by twenty-first-century media, but also—and this is the key point—that this subjective dimension *substitutes for* the orthodox phenomenological subject and indeed for any figure of the subject understood as transcendent in relation to the world. With twenty-first-century media, we are able to see clearly what has perhaps always been the case: namely, that our subjectivity is due not to some purported "autonomy" of our interior experience but to our implication in dispersed and heterogeneous circuits that modulate the total situation we always find ourselves within and that—by way of their tensions and "metastability"—make up its propensity, its power to create the future.

In his 2008 essay "The Three Meanings of the Flesh: On an Impasse in the Ontology of Merleau-Ponty," Barbaras raises doubts about the adequacy of Merleau-Ponty's monism of the flesh to overcome the persistent dualism of his earlier phenomenology of perception. Recognizing the allure of this monism, Barbaras compares it to the work of a magician: "Just as the rabbit that reappears in the hat of the spectator is not, in reality, the same as the one that disappeared in the prestidigitator's scarf, it is not certain that this inversion of the circuit of phenomenality gives us a point of arrival that coincides with the point of departure." With this in mind, Barbaras is able to clarify what he calls his "malaise":

In other words, in making the flesh, as visibility, the subject of phenomenality, do we give ourselves the means to account for the subject from which we started? By the intermediary of its own flesh,

the subject is dissolved into a world that thereby becomes Visible. It is in this sense that one can speak of a flesh of the world. But can we make the inverse journey and account for vision beginning from the Visible? Can we climb back up from the flesh of the world to the flesh as *mine*? In Merleau-Ponty's terms, how can the relation of the visible to itself move through me and constitute me in seeing? We have passed from an ontic concept to an ontological one, but can this latter integrate that to which it has opened access?¹³

At the heart of Barbaras's objection here is a conviction that Merleau-Ponty's overriding desire to ontologize phenomenology conflicts with the very imperative of his final philosophy to account for the appearance of the flesh of the world. For Barbaras, there simply is no way to get from the ontological continuity of body and world to the experience of a subject in and to which this ontological continuity—the flesh—would appear.

Barbaras's further elucidation of this conflict makes clear the target of his criticism: what he ultimately objects to is the very notion *that the world could be self-sensing*, that the "Visible" could self-assemble in a way that would produce vision. As Barbaras will conclude (in righteous and, as I shall explain below, overly literal defense of Merleau-Ponty's claim that "the flesh of the world is not self sensing like my flesh"),¹⁴ the subject is the very condition for the sensing of the world, which has no other means to become sensed: "The subject," insists Barbaras, "is not a *moment* or a degree of concentration of visibility but simply its *condition*."¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty's effort to ontologize phenomenology thus comes at the expense of what is, for Barbaras, the very kernel of phenomenology: intentionality, or the irreducible, minimally transcendental distance between sensing and sensed.

Returning to his "impression of malaise," Barbaras can now pinpoint its provenance. This malaise

stems fundamentally from the fact that Merleau-Ponty advances a univocal concept of the flesh, to which the fundamental distinction of the sensing and the sensed, which is to say, ultimately, the intentional distance, must be able to be traced back. In effect, the ontological generalization of the carnal reversibility leads inexorably to a transformation of one of these terms. My flesh manifests a yoking together of sensing and sensed, which is to say that my body is always and throughout present to itself. But this relation cannot be transposed *willy nilly* to what is exterior to the body [*à l'extériorité*] *because it makes no sense to say that the world senses itself*, is present to itself as is my flesh.¹⁶

On Barbaras's account, the body and the subject simply can never coincide. They designate what he considers to be distinct and to some extent non-correlated operations: on one side, the immanent, ontic body senses itself; on the other, the transcendental, ontological subject receives the appearance of the world.

This noncoincidence of body and subject explains why, for Barbaras, Merleau-Ponty's ontological transposition "gives rise to a reformulation":

The flesh of the world signifies that being is everywhere and always on the side of phenomenality and that a being that would be foreign to phenomenality makes no more sense than a body that would be foreign to its sensibility, incapable of sensing itself. It is thus the subject of sensing or of appearing that disappears as the cost of the ontological transposition. In other terms, the descent of subjectivity in the world by the body corresponds to an ascent of the world toward phenomenality, but *never toward subjectivity*. The two inverse movements do not coincide; the point of departure of the one (the subject of sensing) cannot be the point of arrival of the other because one simply cannot understand how an appearing that is immanent to the world can give rise to its own subject, how visibility can give birth to vision.¹⁷

The final result of Merleau-Ponty's ontologization of phenomenology can only be an "inconsistent concept": a "doubling" of the flesh into two fleshes—flesh of the world and sensing flesh—that simply cannot be brought together.

My conjunction of the final Merleau-Ponty with a de-Platonized Whitehead lets us question precisely what remains unquestionable for Barbaras: the impossibility for the world to sense itself. Barbaras's entire account literally stands or falls with this purportedly unquestionable impossibility: indeed, it is precisely what justifies his phenomenological commitment to the transcendental subject—his insistence that the world can only manifest itself *to a transcendental subject*. What Whitehead brings to the table is an account of subjectivity—and thus a source of self-sensing, of generalized sensibility—that does not have to be possessed by a subject separate from or transcendent to the world. Subjectivity, for Whitehead, is generated from out of the world's worlding, from the intensities produced by its vibratory tensions. On this score, Whitehead's thinking helps us appreciate the radicality of Merleau-Ponty's final ontology, and in particular, helps us to see precisely how it manages to overcome the subject-object split that attaches to any commitment of transcendence.

Indeed, by excavating how worldly sensibility continuously gives rise to novelty, and thereby to its own renewal, Whitehead's account of process lends a certain concreteness to Merleau-Ponty's notion of the *écart* and to the "dehiscence" between sensing and sensed that it informs. Specifically, Whitehead's insight into the potentiality—the power—of the settled world opens up a source for subjectivity that would no longer need to be a function of a narrow subjective unification. That is why Whitehead is able to encompass subjective unification within a broader model of process: his account can explain how actualities-in-attainment are catalyzed by the real potentiality of attained actualities (or superjects) in order to be added, or to add themselves, to this potentiality in an unending cosmic dance. Once again, we see how Whitehead's technical account of concrescence, far from forming the cornerstone of his speculative empiricism, is simply one element in a larger account of process: the ongoing production of ever new actualities and relationalities.

In their own rendition of this same conjunction, philosophers Hamrick and Van der Veken turn their back on this broader model of process in order to stress, as countless commentators have done before them, the synthesizing capacity of concrescence: "Whitehead's concept of concrescence," they suggest, "offers Merleau-Ponty . . . a way to disentangle the concept of synthesis from that of constitution, and to keep the idea of synthesis at the same time as the reversibility of the flesh. This is possible because the synthesis of an actual occasion, the formation of its prehensive unity, is the *sentant*-half of the reversibility relationship, but which already includes the *sensible* within it."¹⁸ How we understand this passage hinges entirely on how we understand the word "within" that here qualifies the correlation of *sensible* and *sentant*. If we take "within" to qualify the "synthesis of an actual occasion," as Hamrick and Van der Veken do, then the reversibility of *sensible* and *sentant* can only be a function of concrescence; on this account, reversibility cannot serve to expand the scope of subjectivity in any consequential way. If, however, we take "within" to qualify reversibility itself, as I would propose, then the coupling of *sentant* and *sensible* can no longer designate the product of some operation of a subject narrowly defined; rather, reversibility would take on its proper and expansive role as the very subjective texture of the world as such, as worldly sensibility.

By attributing reversibility *to the operation of concrescence*, Hamrick and Van der Veken effectively compromise the promise of their juxtaposition of Whitehead and Merleau-Ponty. This is because their attribution simply reinstalls the orthodox valuation placed by Whitehead and the vast majority of his commentators on concrescence as sole source for subjective agency. On such a valuation, as we have seen, the settled world—the

domain in which reversibility operates—is and can only be relegated to the status of pure passivity, of mere *sensible* that can only await a *sentant* for its (re)activation. Whether this agency be conceptualized as a concreting actuality or a phenomenological subject proper, the resultant privileging of synthesis removes the agency *for* worldly sensibility *from* worldly sensibility in order to ascribe it to some mysterious, metaphysical operation.

With their appeal to concrecence, Hamrick and Van der Veken fatally compromise their own more general goal of developing a “radically new conception of subjectivity.” For whereas concrecence provides these philosophers with a means to sneak synthesis in the back door, the crux of their new conception of subjectivity, as they themselves make clear, centers on the displacement of synthesis in favor of metamorphosis that animates Merleau-Ponty’s final work. The fruit of Merleau-Ponty’s effort to dispense definitively with Husserl’s concept of constituting consciousness, this displacement is intended to yield “a contact with being across its modulations or its reliefs,” a contact that *would not be mediated* by any subjective synthesis. As should be clear by now, such a radically new conception requires a subjectivity without a transcendental subject—a radically democratic, if still differentiated, distribution of subjectivity to all elements of worldly sensibility.

Conceptualized in relation to Whitehead’s larger account of process, where both concrecences and superjects wield subjective power, Merleau-Ponty’s account of the *écart* and the reversibility between sensing and the sensible furnishes precisely such a conception of subjectivity without subject: specifically, it accords subjectivity, that is, the power of sensing, to every entity in the world. Merleau-Ponty’s reversibility thereby liberates superjectal subjectivity and situates it as the power of worldly sensibility. On his account, not only would every actual occasion become “on the basis of its sensibility to its past actual world that it incorporates within it,” as Hamrick and Van der Veken point out, but it would become *because of the power of the sensibility of all past actualities now operating as superjects and acting, as it were, within it*. Such an account makes the power of superjectal subjectivity autonomous from and broader than its operation within concrecence: this power designates nothing less than the capacity for the world to sense itself, to be a primordial domain of sensibility from which all else springs. As the “wielder” of the real potentiality informing the superjective subjectivity of all things, the settled world must be understood to enjoy a sensory relation to itself: it is a primary texture of sensibility whose potentiality is incessantly “realized” by the superjective intensity of its elements.

In preserving the distance between sensing and sensed (though, importantly, not as a distance of intentionality), Merleau-Ponty’s conception of

the *écart* parallels Whitehead’s distinction of concrecence and superject: in both cases, a structure of oscillation or reversibility is crucial for the power of sensibility. And in both cases, what fills in the space of the *écart* is temporalization, conceptualized not as a product of constitution (as on Husserl’s account of time-consciousness) but as a power of worldly metamorphosis. Rather than requiring some transcendence of a subject over the world, the temporalization that informs this reversibility is resolutely a worldly temporalization: the power of worldly sensibility to act through its own agency and to enhance its own potentiality. Conceptualized in this way, temporalization is “de-presencing” [*Entgegenwärtigung*] (following Fink’s development of the term), which I have elsewhere positioned as a worldly temporalization underlying and giving rise to the retentions and protentions that structure phenomenal experience.¹⁹ Yet, where Fink’s theorization remains abstract, Merleau-Ponty’s perspective adds a much-needed concreteness: as a specification of how worldly sensibility self-proliferates, reversibility encompasses a plethora of degrees of sensitivity that inform subjective processes of vastly differing force.

In this respect, reversibility qualifies the above-cited Working Note in which Merleau-Ponty specifies that the flesh of the world “is not self-sensing *like my flesh*.” Far from marking an either-or relation (being self-sensing or not), as Barbaras maintains it does,²⁰ this claim might better be read as an opening onto a continuum of differentiation, a plethora of modes of self-sensing, only one of which is that of the human body (“my flesh”). When he says that the flesh of the world is not self-sensing *like my flesh*, Merleau-Ponty does not mean that the world is not self-sensing. What he *does* mean is that the flesh of the world *is* self-sensing *in a different way than my flesh*, or, more precisely, that it is self-sensing *in a host of ways all of which differ from that of my flesh*.

We can thus conclude, with Hamrick and Van der Veken, that the world is not univocally or indifferently self-sensing, but also, contra Barbaras—and this is the fundamental point—that it *is* self-sensing: “There are various degrees and modalities of reversibility depending on the degree of sentience possible. A ‘univocal sense of flesh’ would mean one kind of flesh with many modalities. . . . With regard to Merleau-Ponty’s monism some entities, such as the pen, are clearly not sentient in the ways that we are. Others—such as the experiences of higher life forms—are very like our fleshly reversibilities. And there is a vast array of lower life forms with various degrees of sentience and, therefore, reversibilities.”²¹ As the fundamental operation of temporalization, sensible reversibility informs every actuality in the universe, from the most minuscule speck of dust to the greatest achievements of collective consciousness. At every level and scale of being, this reversibility yields

a subjectivity *without* any subject, a superjectal subjectivity *prior to* and *necessary for* the emergence of any higher-order subject, including the transcendental subject of (orthodox) phenomenology.

As a specification of superjectal subjectivity, reversibility opens onto a sensibility produced by the causal efficacy of the world itself in all its variety. That is why reversibility makes up the general texture of worldly sensibility. Reversibility characterizes the human relation with the flesh of the world *in the same way* as it does any other relation—as concrete productions of worldly temporalization, of sensibility's self-proliferation. That is why, its special status and its distinct perceptual capacities notwithstanding, the human bodymind is rooted in worldly sensibility just as is every other entity in the universe. If the human bodymind has unique capacities to experience reversibility directly (to perceive the causal efficacy underlying presentational immediacy or the “withness of the body”), this perceptual reversibility is in turn rooted in a deeper and more general reversibility involving the worldly sensibility (the vectors of causal efficacy) informing this very “withness.”

In the convergence of Whitehead's non-perceptual sensation with the phenomenological concept of worldly sensibility, we thus acquire what is needed to treat sensations as elements of the world, even when they are experienced (or “lived”) by perceivers (or consciousnesses). This convergence allows us to generalize subjectivity to *any entity that is capable of reversibility*—to any entity that is produced from other (or hetero) sensibility and that generates further worldly sensibility on the basis of its own operation.

This transformation—of other sensibility into worldly sensibility—gives the formal recipe for conceptualizing how the proliferation of objective sensation accompanying the advent of mobile media and ubiquitous computing is able to generate an intensification of our properly *human* sensibility *that is at the same time* an expansion of the domain of *worldly* sensibility from which it arises. With the unprecedented capacities of our digital devices and sensors to gather information about behavior and about the environment, we literally acquire new and alien “organs” (which must not be confused with prostheses of *our* human sense organs) for excavating extraperceptual dimensions of experience—our own as well as that of other entities. By experimenting with the potential for the sensibility of twenty-first-century media networks to catalyze new forms of human experience, Crandall's *Gatherings* foregrounds the *exteriority* of these new and alien organs in relation to the human body: displacing his own agency as the privileged (or exclusive) channel for media to enter experience, Crandall implicates his sensibility within the circuits and flows created by the ubiquitous media surrounding him precisely in order to open new possibilities for

experience. Specifically, his self-implication allows this media environment to express its potentiality directly, as primary elements in the very gatherings in which Crandall himself is implicated and, importantly, to which he can bear witness.

With this clarification, we arrive at a solution to—or rather a dissolution of—the problem posed by Barbaras. Far from requiring a subject that transcends the appearing of the world and that would have the burden of giving subjectivity to it, Crandall's bearing witness entails nothing more than a “going-along-with” the gathering of potentialities. The subjective perspective his witnessing introduces is simply one perspective among others, and, as such, it remains partial and immanent to the gathering within which it emerges. If this perspective enjoys a privilege, it is one that differs in kind from the privilege Barbaras claims for the transcendent subject of phenomenological manifestation: for whereas the latter privilege sets the subject off from the world that manifests itself through it, the privilege claimed by Crandall's performance positions the subject—or rather the coalescence of superjective subjectivity that occurs around every human-implicating event of gathering—as fully immanent to the world and as directly emergent from the total situation of any given gathering. To put it more simply, we could say that the privilege claimed by Crandall's performance is wholly relative: it marks the specifically human experience of a process—gathering—that can neither be reduced to this experience nor fully grasped from its perspective.

Far from being a mere accident of its particular configuration, the partiality of the witnessing at issue in Crandall's piece is an endemic aspect of the experience of any gathering whatsoever. And what his performance underscores so effectively—here in marked contrast to most contemporary theorizations of computational networks and sensor technologies—is how the specifically *human* experience of gatherings remains central. By repositioning the human witness as an emergent phenomenon that is fully immanent to the world from which it emerges, Crandall's performance manages to capture *both* the particular “marginalization” of the human subject that occurs as human bodyminds are implicated within twenty-first-century media networks *and* the continued, if repositioned, “centrality” of human witnessing that alone can make this implication, and the greater expansion of environmental agency it betokens, meaningful for *human experience*.

I have been arguing throughout this study that the transformation of human experience within twenty-first-century media networks must not be viewed as a purely negative development. If it is a reality that we must live with, one that we must adapt to, such adaptation need not take the form of a purely passive acquiescence. Rather, as I have sought to emphasize with my concept of feed-forward, the transformation of experience wrought by

twenty-first-century media furnishes an unprecedented opportunity for us to reconceptualize our agency, to implicate our agency within the larger total situation of environmental gathering. And this can lead, as I suggested in my introduction, to a fundamental reconceptualization of the human that embraces the marginalization of consciousness and the environmentality of process as catalysts for new modes of collective becoming on the far side of the human-inhuman divide. We must, let me reiterate, embrace this opportunity: for what we lose in the way of perceptual access and cognitive mastery over experience is recompensed by what we gain in the way of participation within larger environmental gatherings. Following our re-embedding within the multi-scalar complexity of an always flowing, massively technified world, we come to enjoy an expanded sensory contact with worldly sensibility that affords us new potentialities for experiencing ourselves and the world—and for understanding how we experience ourselves and the world. Such possibilities are, needless to say, simply not available through our historically privileged modes of perception and conscious access.

Let me underscore, however, that this potentiality for recompense will be actualized only if we struggle against the myriad contemporary entities and institutions that seek to capitalize on the technical revelation of sensibility in ways that bypass our agency entirely. We must fight to appropriate the fruits of our expanded sensory contact with worldly sensibility for non-instrumental purposes—for making our lives better. Such struggle requires concrete appropriations of the operations of twenty-first-century media as well as a recognition of the generality of sensibility beyond any human-world division. If we have any hope of bringing our newly acquired alien or exterior organs to bear on the way we experience and the way we theorize our experience, we will need to make sensibility once again central to our being-in-the-world. But crucially, and in contrast to any narrowly phenomenological framing of sensibility, we must embrace the technical dimension of sensibility in its entirety. For, it is only on the basis of and through our primitive and preperceptual sensible contact with the world—a contact that in today's world *can only be* mediated by twenty-first-century media—that the world can appear to us. Far from being a product of some minimal transcendental distance, some transcendence generative of subjectivity, the world's appearance is the strict correlate of our immanence within its sensible texture. Or, as Merleau-Ponty believes, “sensibility only makes the world appear because it is already on the side of the world.”²²

Adapting it to our media-saturated world, we can inflect this principle with a recognition of the centrality of technics in the sensory circuits linking humans to the world. Technical media only make sensibility appear *because they themselves are already on the side of and are already immanent to sen-*

sibility. As autonomous supplements that operate in place of our limited perceptual faculties, technical media are resolutely *of the world*: they are responsible for our contemporary implication within worldly sensibility, for our primordial sensible contact with the world, and for any resultant complexifications of the human as a form of process.

