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Reversibility in Rhetorical Spaces: The Problem of Self in Communicative Praxis

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Abstract
Communication is an intertwining of emergent selves in rhetorical spaces. I focus upon this intertwining as the space wherein not only interdependent meanings, but also interdependent selves emerge. I describe this rhetorical space as a reversibility of the roles of author, narrator, text, and reader when we seek to understand and to be understood. This account presents the self as a phenomenon that is dynamic rather than static, communal rather than individual, and emergent rather than given. In my account, I rely upon works by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Calvin O. Schrag, whose works I will address on the way to offering my own account. The self is a *phenomenon* that is pre-personal and non-identical; it emerges as differentiation as a self-to-be, replete with possibilities, an "identity" assigned only after the fact.

Keywords: Schrag, Merleau-Ponty, Lispector, personal identity, rhetoric, communicative praxis

[1] I dedicate this essay to the memory of Calvin O. Schrag. Cal was my mentor as an undergraduate at Purdue. He also was a special member of my Ph.D. dissertation committee at Penn State University. He was an inveterate supporter of my career and provided a wonderful role model of caring philosophical comportment.
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It is a commonplace that one of the perennial questions in philosophy is "Who am I?" But that formulation often, though not necessarily, bespeaks a conceit characteristic of the Western modern era: that the sovereign subject is the alpha and omega of the inquiry standpoint. This ascribes ideality to the self that knows itself immediately, transparently, and is adequate to itself. More specifically, modern analytic philosophers often parse this question as *the problem of personal identity*. I agree that there is a problem worthy of discussion here; but one aspect of the problem is that formulation itself. The "problem of personal identity" is an anemic and misguided formulation because, as we shall see, the self is a *phenomenon* that is pre-personal and non-identical. Let us try to understand the problem of the self from a different inquiry standpoint. And we will try to understand this phenomenon as it emerges where we are engaged right now—in the context of communication.

Communication is an intertwining of emergent selves in rhetorical spaces. I focus upon this intertwining as the space wherein not only interdependent meanings, but also interdependent selves emerge. I describe this rhetorical space as a reversibility of the roles of author, narrator, text, and reader when we seek to understand and to be understood. This account presents the self as a phenomenon that is dynamic rather than static, communal rather than individual, and emergent rather than given. In my account, I rely upon works by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Calvin O. Schrag, whose works I will address on the way to offering my own position.

Our Inquiry Standpoint 1: Merleau-Ponty

Let us begin in earnest by reconsidering the parameters of this problem in a more felicitous manner from an inquiry standpoint that is existential, phenomenological, and hermeneutic rather than one that is epistemologically and metaphysically besmirched. In this section, I offer some preliminary remarks marking our inquiry path in the following manner, noting some convictions and making some assumptions.

First, the self is *embodied*. The communicative self is an ineluctably embodied self.[2] This embodiment, anticipated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, rejects the

[2] The fast-changing world of artificial intelligence raises a whole spectrum of interesting questions about this assumption, ranging from issues related to large language models to transhumanism; but for now, at least, I stand my *Abgrund*. Or, if you prefer, I am limiting the domain of my inquiry to embodied selves of a certain kind. One could construe embodiment beyond a humanistic model. Other species communicate. Merleau-Ponty raised issues regarding animality throughout his career—from his first book, *The Structure of Behavior*, to his *Nature* lectures toward the end of his career. For a quite different and provocative approach, cf. Achille Mbembe, *The Earthly Community*, trans. Steven

subject/object dichotomy in favor of a pre-personal embodiment that is ambiguously related to the poles of that dichotomy. Our embodiment is neither subjective nor objective and, in another sense, is both subjective and objective. Obviously, our bodily selves are not established solely by subjective caprice.[3] But when we grant this, one must not leap from one reductive error to another. To reject the embodied self as subject ought not to entail assuming its purely objective corollate. The embodied self is not just another object; it is our orientation within a world and actively involved in the meaning and value of that world. The subjectivity and objectivity of the embodied self surely are important aspects of our experience, but both must be demoted to the status of useful abstractions rather than serving as epistemological or metaphysical foundations: we must rein-in their reign. Thus, the embodied self is "neither/nor and "both/and" subject and object.

Merleau-Ponty articulated this as an ambiguity between subject and object in various manners throughout his career in a *parcours* that made an implicit ontology increasingly explicit.[4] This ambiguity is our way of being-in-the-world. In his early work, the embodied self is thought of as *le corps propre*—a "lived body," as embodied consciousness geared-into the world through its intentional situation. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception involved an investigation into intentional *relations* rather than accepting the knower/known" or "subject/object" dichotomies. For example, let us consider a mundane example like reaching for a doorknob. A commonsense explanation attributes subjective agency to me and objectivity to the handle. From this point of view, when I reach out to grasp the doorknob, I choose the shape of my hand such that it conforms to the shape of the doorknob, allowing me to grasp it effectively and to open or close the door. But, from another point of view, one could just as well say that the doorknob chose the shape of my hand. Now someone—someone just like you—might say that is just crazy, since inert door handles do not choose anything independently. But alongside Merleau-Ponty, I maintain that both of these views are abstractions. That is, it is just as crazy to think that *we* choose anything independently of the things or the people of our situation. Instead, we should focus on the intentional relations from which our sometimes-useful abstractions of subject and object are

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Corcoran (V2, 2022), where he challenges conceptions of humanity and technology from an animistic perspective.

[3] If my embodiment were entirely up to me, I would do better than this!

[4] Though he is not the only one to wander down this pathway, no one has articulated this overview of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical development better than Martin C. Dillon, by whom I am inspired here and, indeed, throughout my career. Cf. Martin C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, (Indiana University Press, 1988).

made. But these abstractions ought not be taken to be pure epistemological or metaphysical foundations that could explain or at worst, explain-away, their opposed corollate. The truth of the real world is "neither/nor and both/and" subjective and objective. This is the ontological ambiguity at the heart of the matter.

We don't have time to explore this in detail here today, but in the middle part of Merleau-Ponty's career, He began to redescribe this ontological ambiguity in terms of *institutions* such that every instituted-institution calls for an instituting-institution. Likewise, at the very end of his career, Merleau-Ponty adopted the rich and enigmatic language of *la chair du monde* [the flesh of the world] to describe this ontological ambiguity. In these works, Merleau-Ponty speaks of the *reversibility* of the flesh that is at once *écart* [divergence, and the spread created by divergence]. This complex of notions and terms figures into my own account below, so we need to consider them more carefully.

Flesh is always flesh on flesh—hence the "promiscuity" of being. Merleau-Ponty reiterates over and over that the term flesh is no mere metaphor and must be read "*à la lettre*."[5] Things matter concretely in terms of our embodiment in the world we share with others. Our reversible existence is made manifest in embodiment and *intercorporeity* in Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh of the world. Merleau-Ponty develops this ontology to overcome the limitations of the opposition of subjectivity and objectivity. Subjectivity and objectivity emerge in their reversible intertwining.

> As soon as we see other seers . . . through other eyes we are for ourselves wholly visible . . . But what is proper to the visible is . . . to be the surface of an inexhaustible depth: this is what makes it able to be open to visions other than our own.[6]

Merleau-Ponty describes the intertwining of our existence with others as reversible bodies in the flesh of the world—as being "turned inside out under my own eyes" and "floating in Being with another."[7] This access to a the visible always implicates the

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[5] Cf. Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, *Vers une ontologie indirecte* (Vrin, 2017).

[6] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. A Lingis (Northwestern University Press, 1968, p.143; *Le Visible et l'invisible* (Gallimard, 1964), p.188. Parenthetical page references in the discussion of Merleau-Ponty's position refer to this text, with the French preceding the English.)

[7] "For the first time, the seeing that I am is for me really visible; for the first time I appear to myself completely turned inside out under my own eyes. For the first time also, my movements no longer proceed unto the things to be seen, to be touched, or unto my own body occupied in seeing or touching them, but they address themselves to the body in general and for itself (whether it be my own or that of another), because for the first time, through the other body, I see that, in coupling with the flesh of the world, the body contributes more than it receives, adding to the world that I see the

uniqueness of these intertwined bodies as phenomena, in their emergence. This uniqueness is not exhausted by objectivity. Merleau-Ponty describes a synergy, "as upon two mirrors facing one another where two indefinite series of images set in one another arise which belong really to neither of the two surfaces, since each is only the rejoinder of the other, and which therefore form a couple, a couple more real than either of them" (VI 183/139). This coupling, which involves a reversibility of the flesh of the world, manifest always through divergence, is never complete and thus manifests uniqueness. Rather than yoking two extant objects together, this coupling is the institution of subjectivity and objectivity in their interference and encroachment.

Uncharacteristically sanguine at the vision of a nascent ontology, Merleau-Ponty proclaimed (baptized?) the *reversibility of the flesh of the world* as "the ultimate truth" (VI 204/155) and stated that "there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate" the flesh of the world (VI 183/139).[8] Heidegger indicated the necessity and immense difficulties of accounting for the being of beings; and Merleau-Ponty has complicated this further by forbidding ontology any indifference with respect to the "concretion" of reversible being as flesh (VI 174/132).[9] The "ontological priority" of our being is no longer merely that "in its very being, its being is an issue for it" (SZ 12/32); now, as Merleau-Ponty states, "the thickness of the body, far from rivaling that of the world, is on the contrary the sole means I have to go into the heart of things, by making myself a world, and by making them flesh" (VI 178/135). The flesh is a "concrete emblem of a general manner of being" (VI 194/147). Our being is corporeal. And it is clear throughout Merleau-Ponty's work that this is overall an account of value-laden intercorporeity. Without sacrificing the integrity of our experiences, we do have access to shared experiences: for better and for worse, it is phenomenologically apt to say that we are, in a sense, "of the same flesh."

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treasure necessary for what the other body sees. For the first time, the body no longer couples itself up with the world, it clasps another body, applying [itself to it] carefully with its whole extension, forming tirelessly with its hands the strange statue which in its turn gives everything it receives; the body is lost outside of the world and its goals, fascinated by the unique occupation of floating in Being with another life, of making itself the outside of its inside and the inside of its outside. And henceforth movement, touch, vision, applying themselves to the other and to themselves, return toward their source and, in the patient and silent labor of desire, begin the paradox of expression" (189/143-4).

[8] Leonard Lawlor takes these latter words cited of Merleau-Ponty very seriously in his brilliant and tendentious work: *Early Twentieth Century Continental Philosophy* (Indiana University Press, 2011). All citations in this essay cite the original language pagination first followed by the English translation.

[9] As in many places in Merleau-Ponty's work, one must hear the echo of Jean Wahl here. The *sens* of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is *vers le concret*.

The phenomenological orientation of our inquiry standpoint reveals the ontologically ambiguous embodied self as a phenomenon—an *appearance*. It is important to see the self as an *event* rather than reducing it to a thing which appears. As we mentioned before, the embodied self is not just some mere thing in the world. It is no mere object. (Indeed, perhaps there are no such mere objects, but that is a matter for another day.) The self appears as its embodiment engaged in projects and oriented within its world. When we understand appearances as events, we describe an emergent ontology, or an ontology of emergence.[10] Our embodied selves are events, our being-in-the-world.

Note also that this engagement is meaningful and always involves understanding our situations. Our ontological ambiguity rejects not only the subject/object dichotomy but also the equally pernicious dichotomy of fact/value.[11] Thus, our phenomenological inquiry standpoint at the same time celebrates its existential and hermeneutic posture as well. Our selves are embodied in such a way that the world matters to us. Let us keep handy this ontologically ambiguous embodied self [would some of you prefer the more formal trope, "keep in mind"?] as we turn our attention to describe a rhetorical space wherein the phenomenon appears.

Our Inquiry Standpoint 2: From Merleau-Ponty to Schrag

Calvin O. Schrag's philosophical career might be described in the similar playful manner that he approached the trajectory of Heidegger's thought: instead of "early" and "later" periods demarcating a "*Kehre,*" a turn in his thought between Schrag I and Schrag II, we may speak of *three* Schrags.[12] "Schrag I" was one of the leading voices of those introducing existentialism and phenomenology to North American readers, especially Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's thought. "Schrag II" provided crucial insights in hermeneutics and the social sciences. And "Schrag III" developed radical rehabilitations of the notions of the subject and reason in the wake of postmodern critiques. Of course, this is no schizoid model—these three Schrags are intertwined and not exclusively determined chronologically. Heidegger responded to the "endless prattle" of the *Kehre*: if there was a change, it was less a change in his inquiry standpoint

[10] I am also inspired here by Richard Polt's reading of Heidegger. Cf. Richard *The Emergency of Being*, (Cornell University Press, 2007).
[11] As we shall see below, it will also entail deconstructing the fact /fiction dichotomy.
[12] Cf. "The Three Heideggers," in Calvin O. Schrag, *Philosophical Papers: Betwixt and Between*, (State University of New York Press, 1994), pp.159-173. Hereafter, I shall cite this book as *Betwixt*.

than a change in the matter itself. "*Die Kehre spielt im Sachverhalt selbst.*"[13] Likewise, shifts of thinking in Schrag's later work reflects the changes in the philosophical community within which he was engaged. So, although I will focus primarily upon the pioneering work of "Schrag III," who adumbrated a space of subjectivity and a transversal rationality, it is obvious that there are existential, phenomenological, and hermeneutical aspects to this period of his thought that will figure into my account as well.

The groundbreaking work of "Schrag III" was his 1986 work, *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity*.[14] Its status as a philosophical masterpiece has nothing whatsoever to do with that ungainly title![15] In this work, Schrag aims to rehabilitate the subject in the wake of postmodern critiques that, he rightly argues, deserved critical attention. That is, these critiques merited a response to awaken traditional phenomenologues from their dogmatic slumber. Schrag did not dismiss the direction of this new generation out of hand. Unlike many of his generation, he even went so far as to read them--carefully. Schrag's work of this period is a critical response to the prevalent attacks on the notion of subjectivity *en vogue* at the end of the twentieth century. He genuinely engaged the sundry critiques offered by Roland Barthes ("the death of the author"), Michel Foucault ("the death of man"), Claude Levi-Strauss ("expiration of the subject in the domain of the human sciences"), and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction and de-centering of the subject.[16] Schrag's position was to advocate a transvaluation of subjectivity and rationality rather than to cast them aside altogether.

Part of this transvaluation involved the reframing of subjectivity in the domain of communication and rhetoric. The works of this period of Schrag's thought bear the standard of rhetoric against its (mis)appropriation by philosophy. *The Self after Postmodernity*, as well as several other ancillary works, offer important insights occasioned by responses to the great inaugural work.[17] In this essay, I focus primarily on two lesser-attended-to essays from this period: "The Narratival Space of

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[13] Of course, I refer to the celebrated work by William J. Richardson, S.J., *Heidegger: From Phenomenology to Thought*, (Martinus Nijhoff, 1963), p.xix. Heidegger famously agreed to endorse this monumental study with a Preface to include which questions the central thesis of the text—that there was a fundamental shift or turn in Heidegger's thought denoted as the *Kehre*.

[14] Calvin O. Schrag, *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity* (Indiana University Press, 1986).

[15] I blame the odious indirect influence of Jürgen Habermas for this performative contradiction of any possible conception of an ideal speech community.

[16] A summary of the careful readings Schrag gave to these critics is found in *Betwixt*, p.191-193. Schrag's patient and enlightening readings are elaborated at length in the major works of the period.

[17] Calvin O. Schrag, *The Self after Postmodernity* (Yale University Press, 1997).

Discourse," included in *Doing Philosophy with Others*[18]*;* and "Subjectivity and Praxis at the end of History," included in *Philosophical Papers: Betwixt and Between*.[19]

"The Narratival Space of Discourse" is the first essay in the second part of *Doing Philosophy with Others*. The first part is a collection of accounts pertaining to significant interactions with luminaries of the twentieth century, including Jaspers, Gadamer, Tillich, Marcuse, and Ricoeur, among other "others." But Schrag stresses that these conversations were not intended only in the context of intellectual autobiography. Indeed, he points out that, strictly speaking, there *are* no auto-biographical accounts: "there is always an 'other' in the narratival neighborhood."[20] Schrag describes this interaction between interlocutors as the "intermingling" of the roles of speaker and listener, writer and reader. Contributions to the conversation become blurred during the exchange; it is difficult to say which ideas and words belong to whom. An analysis that objectively assigns fixed roles is only possible as what Schrag calls a "post-mortem" account—and even then, it is possible only in a limited manner.[21] Though he is not cited here, this reflects Bergson's notion of the "retrograde motion of truth."

This intermingling that is characteristic of authentic discourse belies the determination of static rhetorical roles germane to authoritative discourse. It is worth noting in passing that, at first glance, the common etymological roots of *author* and *authentic* do not serve Schrag's distinction particularly well. "Authoritative" derives from the Latin root *auctor*, connoting mastery, and control. This is also the root for *author*, implying the originator or promoter of something. "Authentic" derives from the Greek roots *autos* (self) and *hentes* (doer) combined in *authentikos* (authentic), connoting self-directedness. Yet it is important for Schrag that the distinctions between authoritative and authentic discourse emerge in *rhetorical* space—in communicative *praxis*. Likewise, Schrag associates authentic discourse with mutual *acknowledgement*, which he contrasts with *recognition*.[22] Once again, while the sense he is after is clear: recognition is objectifying knowledge while acknowledgement means something more positive, the common roots of both terms connote an epistemological orientation. The principal philological difference of these terms lies in acknowledgement's connotation of admission or confession of knowledge rather than

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[18] Calvin O. Schrag, *Doing Philosophy with Others* (Purdue University Press, 2010), 55-61. Hereafter, I shall cite this work as *Doing*.
[19] *Betwixt (Op. Cit.),* 191-202.
[20] *Doing*, (*Op. Cit.*), 55.
[21] Ibid., 55-56.
[22] Ibid., 56-59.

a difference in kind between two ways of knowing. Both derive from the same root, and both seem mired in the classical spectral-epistemological vocabulary. Yet, once again, Schrag's point is that the differences emerge in the realm of communicative praxis.

> The project of the recovery of the subject that we have sketched in the wake of the subject's deconstruction as a nexus of philosophical concepts raises anew the question of a possible ontology of subjectivity. If such an ontology is to appear on the scene it will of necessity have to be an *interpretive/descriptive* rather than a *constructive* ontology. It will take shape as a *hermeneutical* and *praxeological* ontology rather than one informed by metaphysical and epistemological protocols.[23]

I will argue below that this important gesture can be clarified by making more explicit the emergent ontology of reversibility and divergence.

Schrag describes discourse as communicative praxis not only in homage to Habermas, but because all of our discourse is situated in a rhetorical space that has a "binding ethos" shared with others.[24] As "*homo narrans*," the space of subjectivity is limned with "an acknowledgement of the integrity of the interlocutors and an agreement, sometimes tacit and sometimes explicit" available in the rhetorical space that affords praxial promise.[25]

> The space of discourse allows for a creative advance on the part of engaged interlocutors. The power and resources of language as a saying in the refiguring of the said, as the innovative dynamics of the life of the narrating self, opens a space for new perspectives and untried courses of action. This power and resource makes possible new forms of discourse and new associated social practices.[26]

The possibility of creativity emerges within the praxis of authentic rather than authoritative discourse, where mutual acknowledgement rather than recognition is

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[23] *Betwixt* (*Op. Cit.*), 201.
[24] Ibid., 58. Schrag points out that the conversations related in the first part of this book were not applications of some theoretical position, but descriptions of emerging praxial norms. Every one of those conversations emerged within and reconfigured a binding ethos. I treasure my own interactions with him in this same spirit.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 60.

possible in intermingled roles. Drawing upon language employed by both Merleau-Ponty and Levinas, in authentic discourse, the freedom of the saying is squarely situated in the facticity of the said. Schrag states that our hermeneutic posture is such that our interpretation is situated in a world shared with others that is "always already interpreted."[27] This promise must emerge within the binding ethos which Schrag ascribes to narratival space.[28] This includes the facticity of socio-political situations in which we live.

> Hence, there is a rhetoric of action as there is a rhetoric of the spoken and written word . . . The subject implicated by its discourse and action in the hermeneutical space of communicative praxis is a subject decentered and decentralized, bearing the inscriptions of a language community and a community of social practices as it undergoes the odyssey of self and social formation.[29]

Thus, the rhetorical space Schrag describes has a factical socio-political horizon, "Hermeneutical self-implicature is operative both in discourse and action."[30]

It is important to note that this situation is factical and neither purely transcendental nor given *a priori*. Schrag's transvalued notion of subjectivity is situated factically in our engagement within rhetorical space, for better and for worse. We are reminded that Schrag III is also Schrag I, the advocate of existentialism, when he describes the pre-reflexive hermeneutic implicature of subjectivity in rhetorical space: "The subject is implicated in its discourse in the way that an unfaithful husband implicates himself in his unguarded conversation."[31]

Finally, Schrag stresses the intersubjectivity of subjectivity when he describes a "triadic intentionality of discourse": rhetoric is by someone, about someone, and for someone.[32] This complication of the intentional structure of rhetorical space gestures toward the reversibility of roles in my own account below.

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[27] Ibid.
[28] Here we see an important divergence from Habermasian communicative praxis, which is grounded in a transcendental ideal speech community.
[29] *Betwixt* (Op. Cit.), 200.
[30] Ibid., 199.
[31] Ibid., 198.
[32] Ibid., 196-197.

Intercorporeal and Intracorporeal Reversibility

So far, we have touched upon the emergent ontology of Merleau-Ponty's reversibility and divergence in the flesh of the world as well as Schrag's hermeneutic implicature in the rhetorical domain of communicative praxis. Now we can draw upon these resources to offer an account of selves that is phenomenologically apt.

Recall that the emergent ontology of the flesh of the world described reversibility and divergence as two sides of the same coin. The event of the appearance of the self that is at once a situated divergence and a reversible relation with others. The self diverges from others as it emerges as a self; but it also diverges from itself as transcendence. I want to adapt the notions of reversibility in these two ways: *intercorporeal* and *intracorporeal* reversibility. But we must keep in mind that these two terms are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, the "inter-" can only be distinguished from the "intra-" in what Schrag called a "post-mortem account."

Let us first consider intercorporeal reversibility: the reversibility and divergence among selves. The radical authority of the author has been called into question and deconstructed. My emergent self is situated in a world shared with others in our intentional matrices. We become who we are through our relations with others. My being-in-the-world is reversible divergence. To take the simplest particular example favored by Schrag, dialogue, when I communicate with another person I can be said to choose words as an agent that hopefully another person could understand. But it could be said that the other person chooses the words insofar as they are fashioned for that person. I become the author of my words through hermeneutic implicature. My style of being is called-for by the other person as much as I affirm it. My identity, an emerging phenomenon, can only be isolated as a divergent entity by virtue of a reversible appearance. My identity is not explained-away in this account, but it is achieved in a rhythm established with the other interlocutor. But just as Schrag taught us that, strictly speaking, there is no auto-biographical account since "there is always an other in the narratival neighborhood," our account must not make the similar mistake of reducing the rhetorical space of communicative praxis to dialogical interactions. We must complicate this deconstruction even more and insist on a nicer neighborhood where there are others rather than one other—where my self is not determined only by my interlocutor and by me, but by a host of others through a complex array of intentional interconnections. Rhetorical space is polyrhythmic.

Every text has both sense and context. Others figure into this context in an active manner. Our rhetorical space involves both sense and *con-sense*. The sense [meaning and direction—*sens*] of rhetorical space is implicated as an integral sensing

that exceeds itself. The sense [again, meaning and direction] of a situation is never entirely one's own.

The sense of my rhetorical space diverges from my expectations of the scripting of the narrative.[33] This divergence is also detachment and alienation, which are not obstacles to the appearance of the self but occasion it. We participate in the narratives we construct that are perpetually out of control. The detachment from our retrospectively constructed selves is the propensity for narration. The divergence involved in the con-sense arises from our own divergence from ourselves as well as our interactions with others in our socio-political context. We are literally *con-scripted* within the rhetorical space in our relations with others (including ourselves). To be clear: when I speak of the collaborative aspect of con-sense and con-scription, I do not endorse some Gadamerian "fusion of horizons" nor some Habermasian "concurrence" even as an ideal.[34] Sometimes we can be unexpectedly written-into a narrative, and sometimes we can be completely written-off or even written out of the script.

Clarice Lispector offers many passages in her work that help us understand our intercorporeal reversibility. Her short story, "Involuntary Incarnation," beautifully presents the reversibility of the rhetorical space intrinsic to the emergent self. Lispector's story invokes the ways we inhabit another's comportment through our interactions as part of understanding one another. She relates how she tries to understand another person on the plane beside her by an "intrusion" into the other woman's body. Lispector describes how she adopts the style of being of the other woman.

> Sometimes, when I see someone I've never seen before, and have some time to observe that person, I incarnate myself in the other person and thus take a great step forward in knowing who it is. And this intrusion into a person, whoever it may be, never ends in self-accusation: once I incarnate myself in someone else, I understand her motives and forgive. I must be careful not to incarnate myself into a dangerous and attractive life, and thus not want to return to myself.[35]

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[33] Cf. Adrianna Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood,* trans. P. Kottman (Routledge, 2000).

[34] Indeed, I have often half-jokingly maintained that a good slogan for Habermas' position might be, "I came, I saw, I concurred"—inviting the question of what is so critical in his transcendental "critical theory"?

[35] Clarice Lispector, *Complete Stories,* trans. K. Dodson (New Directions, 2015), 404-406.

Lispector describes hilariously and poignantly how she incarnates in a missionary woman sitting next to her.

"One day on the airplane . . . 'Oh my God,' I pleaded, 'not this, I don't want to be that missionary!'

But it was no use. I knew that three hours in her presence would make me a missionary for several days. Her missionary gauntness and extremely polished refinement had already claimed me."

The intrusion is an incarnation—inhabiting a rhetorical space with its style of being and comportment.[36] In a profound sense of reversibility, her gait does not simply accompany her understanding, it *is* her understanding of the missionary. She incarnates into her. She is the missionary, only never quite so—lest she never return to being herself. And that self, keep in mind, is a self she did not author solely and a self she never was. It is better to say that she is not herself, and she is not the missionary, and this reversibility is a unique difference of differences.

The reversibility of the incarnation into the missionary also involves a *reversal* of narrative—in the sense of *peripeteia*, an essential element in Aristotelian tragedy. We can change the narratives from within because of our intercorporeity.[37] Yet this incarnation is "involuntary." Reversibility is not an act of will. The other woman's presence complicates her own presence—her embodied rhetorical space is scripted collaboratively. She is conscripted by the other woman in her own corporeality. There is aptness in the intrusion of the contrivance of the rhetorical space. She recoils at the awareness of the (fictional) incarnation into the missionary because the strictly moral life does not befit her own (fictional) life.[38]

Sometimes these intentional intersubjective relations are described as part of our "facticity." However, for Merleau-Ponty, the concrete, the factical, always carries with it a latency, which he refers to as the "invisible" of the visible. Merleau-Ponty

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[36] "Right there on the plane I notice that I've already started walking like a lay saint: then I understand how patient the missionary is, how she effaces herself with that step that hardly wants to touch the ground, how if she treads more heavily it would eventually harm others. Now I am pale, my lips unpainted, my face is thin, and I wear that missionary hair" (Lispector, *Complete Stories*, 404-405).

[37] "When I land I'll probably already have that air of suffering-transcended-by-peace-at-having-a-mission. And stamped across my face will be the sweetness of moral hope. Because above all I have become utterly moral. Yet when I first boarded the plane I was so robustly amoral" (Lispector, *Complete Stories*, 405).

[38] Likewise, later in the story, she recoils at her incarnation into a prostitute, which "fell flat" because her (fictional) body-self differed from the (fictional) prostitute-body, was not alluring to the man ignoring her in favor of the newspaper, and because her (fictional) perfume was "too discreet" (Lispector, *Complete Stories*, 406).

states in a working note—in English—that the invisible is "in" the visible. The factical visible is more than itself, pregnant with meaning and being, full of mystery—and this indeterminacy and latency are the promise of value, not something to be overcome. But the flesh which exceeds itself is nothing other than the divergence revealed within the visible bodies within the experiences we share. This means that the truth and value of our fleshly facticity hold promise because it is *fashioned* even as we *fashion* our own existence.

It is important to note that the opposition between fact and fiction is a modern conceit (alongside the conceit of pure reason). Fact and fiction both derive from the Latin *facere*, [to make or to do]. The difference is temporal. Inauthenticity might be described as ignoring the latency of our facticity: facts are so fashionable only insofar as they are understood bereft of their fashionability. Let us move forward and assert that *facticity* must be rehabilitated to include the *ficticity* of our intercorporeity. That is, the allegedly *given* body is given as a fiction of a non-fiction. Facticity is our retrospective reconstruction of the intersectionality we are as we become who we are. An account of the authentic self emerging in the rhetorical space of communicative praxis must feature the ficticity of its facticity.

In order to better understand the ficticity of our facticity, let us turn our attention to intracorporeal reversibility: the reversibility and divergence within selves. John Barth, in his brilliant work, *Chimera*, has a character who humorously expresses his anxiety to another character: "What if we are only fictional characters in some author's work? What if we are our only readers?" Just as there are others in our neighborhood, there are latent others within us as well—characters in search of an author, so to speak. Here I want to complement and complicate Schrag's account of rhetorical space as the space of *homo narrans*. Schrag did this as part of the deconstruction and de-centering of the exclusively authorial and authoritative subject. But instead of foregrounding narration, I suggest that we author this text, we narrate the text, we *are* this text, and we read the text as we suffer it. And, of course, we are never exclusively any of these reversible roles. The rhetorical space of communicative praxis features the self emerging as self through its four reversible roles. Here is a new *Geviert*, a new fourfold, such that the ontology of the rhetorical space of communicative praxis is authorial, narratival, textual, and lexical. Moreover, we suffer the fate, and weight, of accumulating interpretations in the narratival space of embodiment. This is the *power* of the fictive self: the power to shape and to suffer the rhetorical space—to impart the determination of aptness even as we are subject to it. And, again, keep in mind that all of this intracorporeality is situated in its

intercorporeality. We are authors, narrators, text, and readers of our embodied selves alongside and because of others who are authors, narrators, texts, and readers.

Let us return to Clarice Lispector—this time for wisdom regarding our intracorporeity. She published a very short piece, "If It Were Me," as brilliant and provocative as it is brief, on November 30, 1968.[39] The everyday situation with which we all can identify trades upon a suddenly appearing and apparently minor lack of knowledge: in this case, the location of a mislaid document. So she poses the question to herself (a *subjunctive* being who must be other than her present indicative self), "If it were me, and I wanted to keep a document in a safe place, where would I put it?" (C 51) Through reflective consciousness and then through narration, Lispector then takes two steps outside of the situation in order to assess it and then to relate that assessment—all the while trading on the purported identity fashioned only through this divergence. "Sometimes this works. But at other times, I am so harassed by the phrase 'if it were me' that the search for that document becomes secondary and I begin to think. Or rather, to feel" (C 51-2). Here is an anti-*cogito* where, far from providing a guarantor of identity and providing transparent and immediate knowledge serving to orient oneself in the world, this reflective conjuring of the self is haunting rather than reassuring. Reflection can be as paralyzing as it can be instructive.

Next, she breaks the fourth wall of the rhetorical space: "Try it: if it were you, what would you do?" (C 52). And this imperative to the reader is important, because it further complicates the fashioned identity through the feelings we share—through our intercorporeity. The imperative invites the reader to translate traditional *subjectivity* in order to embody *subjunctivity*: insofar as subjectivity is both and neither I or me (the sovereign reflecting subject and the objectified reflection): "What would you do if you *were* the I/me who *might* be you?" The *indeterminacy and instability* between the subjectivity and the subjunctivity of the reader is the basis of value.[40] Reversibility is ontological and not always an epistemological matter alone: we do not always will reversibility nor are we aware of it immediately, as we saw in *Involuntary Incarnation*. Here, the reversibility is complex: there is the person who mislaid the document, the person looking for the document who *might* be the person reflecting about (i.e., reading) her situation, the person narrating the reflective person's account, and other readers, who are invited to suffer and enjoy such a predicament.

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[39] Clarice Lispector, *Selected Chrônicas*, trans. G. Pontiero (New Direction, 1996).

[40] "'If it were me' seems to sum up the greatest risk we face in life, a new entrée into the unknown. Yet I cannot help feeling that, after those first mad moments of euphoria, we would finally experience the world" [C 52].

This is my sketch of the intercorporeal and intracorporeal reversibility of the rhetorical space wherein we emerge as selves. It is how we are and are not our own bodies; how our being-in-the-world is neither/nor and both/and subjective and objective. It is an emergent ontology that emphasizes the ficticity of our facticity and the subjunctivity of our subjectivity. I described the rhetorical space as at once authorial, narratival, textual, and lexical. The rhetorical space is the *sine qua non* of the misnomer "personal identity." But this may not be reassuring, and it is no more real than the people who suffer and enjoy the lives emerging therein. Lispector beautifully describes the uncanny moment her character realizes that she does not know where the documents are. That is to say, the authentic moment when she realizes that she is not who she was—the woman-about-to-leave-with-the-documents. "From the outset, one feels a certain inhibition: the lie into which we have settled has just been ever so slightly disturbed" (C 52). Our personal identities are vexing mislaid documents; and all we can do is retrace our steps in search of them. What else would I do, if it were me?

So, back to the original problem: "Who am I?" which I hope to have complicated sufficiently to prevent any definitive answer. But these complications allow us to say a few things. I am and am not me. I am not me differently than you are not me. I am not me differently than I am not you. I am not you differently than you are not you. If I really *were* me, completely, there would be no *we*. I am still the same self-same self I never was.