THEME: Merleau-Ponty: Doing Philosophy From the Outside

The conference theme plays on one of the 1948 Causeries radio lectures, “Man Seen from the Outside,” which begins with some preliminary anti-Cartesian insights about matter and the cogito and ends up, with reference to Voltaire, Kafka and Blanchot, pointing to the need for a philosophy that doesn’t divide up existence in this way and is instead faithful to it – the need for what he would later call “non-philosophy.” Non-philosophy is a term repeated often enough in Merleau-Ponty scholarship, and yet the idea it expresses remains under-explored in its radicality. It indicates that philosophy itself is in question, that it stands in need of going beyond itself and thinking from some other vantage point. However, we should always keep in mind that the act of transgressing philosophy is nevertheless philosophically worthwhile. Merleau-Ponty famously reminded Emile Bréhier of this fact in his address to the Société francaise de philosophie in 1946.

Merleau-Ponty ultimately saw a need to augment all avenues of his thought (e.g. aesthetics, ontology, philosophy of nature etc.) from the outside of each, and his writings give us all the resources to grasp this need. But what would adopting such a stance look like? How can it at all be thought, related to, or indeed exercised? Who counts as a philosopher? It’s our hope that, with this conference, we can take up this task inherited from Merleau-Ponty.

Some possible topics include:

Merleau-Ponty Frequenting the Arts: Once philosophy loses its ‘foundational stature’ as the ‘mirror of nature’ it is free to go afield, and to draw its sustenance from the arts. We know that ‘painting and phenomenology share the same task,’ but does this not also mean that aesthetic praxis is more basic to disclosure than intellectual theoria? Insights into this from art practitioners, historians, theorists would be most welcome!

Being outside Philosophy: Merleau-Ponty’s ontology proposes a ‘non-conceptual being’. To what extent does this ontology demand a shift in ‘philosophical attitude’ or a new ‘ontological attitude’ apart from the tradition of philosophy? Would its discovery or
Disclosure even be possible? If it remains impossible to appear in principle, does this not mean that Merleau-Ponty’s ontology slides back into the conceptual, despite what he wants? If anything, this is a problem of reversibility: Merleau-Ponty’s ‘outside philosophy’ is at the same time an ‘endo-ontology.’ To think ‘outside philosophy’ is also to think from ‘inside being.’

*Merleau-Ponty and his Successors:* At first glance, the sentiment of the ‘outside’ – if not the ontology – in Merleau-Ponty aligns with other thinkers’ work, such as Foucault and Blanchot’s *Thought from the Outside.* It might align, too, with De Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life.* There are also strong resonances here with the thought of Jean-Luc Nancy. Can Merleau-Ponty’s notion of non-philosophy be brought into dialogue with other thinkers in a fruitful way?

*Hyper-Dialectic:* The whole idea of an ‘outside’ seems to run counter to Merleau-Ponty’s last ontology, reversibility, and the inter-changeability of dimensions in general. The need for each discipline’s augmentation by another seems to demand a broader, ‘hyper-dialectical’ stance. Does the hyper-dialectic have something to say about disciplinary interchange?

*Nature and Life:* The strictly biological formulation of nature is concerned with the functioning of organisms with respect to their physical-chemical constitution. Its method assumes, in advance, what counts and does not count as a ‘natural event’ to be investigated. In this sense, biology already circumscribes a subspecies of nature. What is nature for Merleau-Ponty beyond this subspecies? Is there a notion of biological life available to him that doesn’t succumb to this methodological problem?

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**Submission Guidelines**

Paper submissions of no more than 3,500 words accompanied by a 200 word abstract should be submitted via email to mpcircle2016@gmail.com by midnight EST June 1st, 2016. Please place papers and abstracts together in one document that is suitable for anonymous review. Paper submissions directly pertinent to the conference theme are especially encouraged, but papers on any area of current research in Merleau-Ponty studies will be considered for inclusion on the program.

The conference features the annual *M.C. Dillon Memorial Lecture and Award,* which is an honor conferred upon the best graduate student submission. The winner will receive a monetary award and deliver an address at the conference that will be published in *Chiasmi International.* Eligible participants wishing to be considered for the Dillon Award should indicate this in the submission form.

Alternative presentation styles such as performances, interviews, and demonstrations will also be considered for inclusion in the conference activities, either in the main program or as an optional event depending on content, although space is
limited. In these cases, please send a proposal of 500-750 words that explains the nature of the presentation and its rationale for inclusion.

Notification of paper and proposal acceptance will occur by July 15th, 2016. Questions should be addressed to the conference director, Rajiv Kaushik, at rkaushik@brocku.ca