Re-Membering the Flesh and the Feminine: Illness, Coinherence, and the Creative Imperative

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Abstract

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This thesis, through heuristic and artistic-creative modalities, explores embodiment in the intersection of Merleau-Ponty's sensuous phenomenology and depth psychology's archetypal feminine. The research argues that illness evokes or *re-members* the often unconscious relationship with the body that is the legacy of Cartesian dualism. The author references her own experience with multiple sclerosis to found the premise of the work—that meaning making of self and world is done through and by way of one's perceiving body. As illness shifts the taken-for-granted sedimentations of the lived body, in tandem a new lived body and surrounding world must be oriented to and made meaningful. Following a scholarly inquiry of Merleau-Ponty and the archetypal feminine, three art pieces are presented. Based upon radical reflection, the art represents the author's embodied coinherence with her surroundings, and points to conclusions and principles to bear in mind while working clinically with the chronically ill.

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To Lauryn for being my witness.

*

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. . . my father's constancy, curiosity, and faith.

. . . my brothers' empathy, intelligence, and humor.

*

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*

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to those who are living with chronic illness and to those who love and care for them, and to my maternal grandmother, whose contemplative nature showed me early on that there was another way to be in this world.

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Chapter I
Introduction

> Focusing on the impact of a physical illness allows us to better understand that our embodied experiencing cannot be separate from who we are and from our experience of the world.
>
> Finlay, L. 2003, p. 158

Area of Interest

Illness is a common experience of the human condition. The flu, a bad cold—these things set one back, but as soon as they are gone, one somehow forgets that feeling of being physically and mentally taken over, and may re-enter the life stream as if nothing ever happened. But what happens when illness arrives and does not relent? What happens when it arrives early in life and there is no end to it in sight, or when illness alters one's perception of the world in such a way that nothing is familiar? This study tracks a shift in me as a result of the unwelcome arrival of multiple sclerosis (MS) in my late 20s. More importantly however, it tracks my welcoming back the healing intersection of psyche, soma, and world that the illness requires of me.

Multiple sclerosis is an autoimmune disease that attacks the central nervous system. By stripping and scarring the myelin sheaths that surrounds nerves, MS impairs the body's ability to send messages between areas of the brain and spinal chord, and out to the rest of the body (National Multiple Sclerosis Society, 2015a). An array of symptoms may occur, ranging from cognitive dysfunction and depression to blindness and paralysis (National Multiple Sclerosis Society, 2015b). Each person living with the

disease experiences it in an individual way, with one's own combinations and severity of symptoms. It is unpredictable, and although there are many treatments to slow its progress, the only treatment that halts it—an autologous hematopoietic stem cell transplant more popularly known as a bone marrow transplant—is currently undergoing clinical trials and not yet approved by the FDA (Burt et al., 2015, p. 276).

As a person living with MS, I bring my own experience to this research. Having to find new value in my life—value outside the current American cultural markers of value, like productivity, marriage, an able body, and youth—I became necessarily attuned to alternative, perhaps broader, understandings of my humanity. With the loss of certain abilities, I also gained keener awareness of my phenomenological existence as a body in relation to the world around me. I became further acquainted with and expanded what I refer to in this study as the *archetypal feminine* that allows the *being* and receptive nature of my existence to replace much of the masculine *doing* that seems to dominate modern Western societies. This shift was not just necessary in order to cope with my illness, it was my process of *re-membering* a body that had been decisively cut off from itself via my cultural inheritance of Cartesian dualism. Undoing the spirit-matter split was a significant ramification of my illness, and the foundation of this project.

Integrative-existential psychotherapist Linda Finlay (2003), in her phenomenological study of her friend's first year living with MS, carefully illustrated the critical interrelation of "body, self and world" (p. 158). In essence, as the body shifts, the other two concepts are equally sent into chaos as "illness threatens to 'unmake the world'" (Good, as cited in Finlay, 2003, p. 159). The ontological devastation is overwhelming and "the 'loss of self' and self-esteem which occurs with chronic illness . .

. makes the reconstruction of a valued self a daunting project" (Charmaz, as cited in Finlay, 2003, p. 159). This word *reconstruction* is worth pausing on, as I would like to suggest it also contains a process of re-membering, or recovering a forgotten part of oneself that becomes visible through the loss of the original body-self-world construct (Finlay, 2003). Re-membering is a process much larger than reconstruction of value alone, such that there is a loss that took place *before* the illness that the illness highlights and requires one to reclaim.

With a new appreciation for the body—my body—I reclaimed the feminine principle, which foregrounds the understanding that "consciousness . . . is itself corporeal" (Madison, 1981, p. 23). Perhaps nothing teaches a person this more acutely than illness or injury. In my case, I learned the corporeality of my consciousness from the impact MS had on my physical mobility, cognitive functioning, energy, eyesight and other sensations, mood, language facility, and social functioning. The lived body I had been up until age 28 was corrupted. As my lived body morphed, so did my abilities and perceptions, which suggested both a foreclosing and an opening of possible engagement with the world.

In my mind, a corporeal consciousness accounts for a heightened awareness of and availability to what is termed in this research as moments of the *flesh*. The term *flesh* comes from the work of 20th-century Continental phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and is explored at length in Chapter II, but for introductory purposes and in rudimentary terms, it is *being* itself, erupting as phenomena in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968). The flesh represents, for instance, when something from the visual field suddenly becomes distinct and engaging; when one is held almost captive as what is seen

floods the sensory experience of the seer, and the boundaries of body and world thin. In other words, "Things," said Merleau-Ponty (1947/1964) "have an internal equivalent in me; they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence" (p. 164). There is coinherence, or "things that exist in essential relationship with another, as innate components of the other" (Spaeth, n.d.). Indeed, there is a mutual possession—it has you and you have it. The seer and the seen are one thing, and as Merleau-Ponty (1945) believed, the human is, in that moment, returned to a "natural self, a current of given existence, with the result that we never know whether the forces which bear on us are its or ours" (p. 199). Thus, both the feminine principle and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy share a focus on embodiment, perception, coinherence, and intersubjectivity, which reflect my experience and drive the inquiry of this project.

When I became sick, I had to seek new ways to feel alive, as my old systems of living became less accessible and enjoyable. I had always noticed such moments of coinherence, but let them slip by without much reflection. Now they are treasures in which to linger. In them, I developed the receptive, feminine energy that dilutes boundaries with the pleasure of immediate phenomena partially as a stay against the horrific prospect of a life with debilitating neurological ailments, but also as a substitute for more coagulated, masculine, doing-energy and behavior. This feminine energy provides a way of being that was always—and perhaps humans are *all* always—destined to develop, but for me, it may have arrived sooner and more radically than most. It is a way of being that recognizes one's constant state of imagination and coinherence. To bring it back to the concept of the flesh, "The subject who sees is not . . . a pure gaze; he is himself a part of the spectacle, he 'is of it'" (Madison, 1981, p. 186).

Guiding Purpose

Based on the principles of the flesh by Merleau-Ponty and the archetypal feminine, and a desire to express my embodied imagination, this project is an attempt to deepen into these principles of life, and allow the play of imagination to move them forward. It is an attempt to develop "a highly nuanced reflective awareness of the lived body" (Saban, 2011, p. 107) as a way to further my connection to myself and my clinical work with clients. Therefore, the work of this thesis is two-fold. First, Chapter II brings awareness to the terms the *lived body*, the *flesh*, and the *feminine principle*. Second, Chapter III traces my creative exploration of these principles in art pieces.

Rationale

Perhaps this thesis is in part a record of energetic transitions. I could no longer exist in the energetic field of the masculine as my illness developed, and now I can no longer exist without imaginally and creatively engaging with the images that have so lovingly possessed and held me. Philosopher and theologian Andreas Nordlander (2013) observed,

> We live the sense of the world as though "perched on a pyramid of past life" and what will be is contingent on the creative participation of free agents. Our work matters—"our world . . . is an unfinished task." (Proust & Malebranch, respectively, as cited in Nordlander, 2013, p. 113)

My pyramid of past is my healthy, yet highly unconscious body. To move beyond this phase and into the next requires my creative pursuit to invest new meaning from a different location in this sensorial self. Borrowing the phrase *radical reflection* from Merleau-Ponty, defined as "that reflection which grasps itself as given to itself on the basis of bodily life" (Madison, 1981, p. 199), my project is to engage in radical reflection and creative manifestations of that bodily life. Increasing awareness of the body as the

space through which one exists may call the primordial forth and give one license to operate from a different source of wisdom. Ultimately, this work asks what the body—one that American culture has perhaps stopped listening to—has to say.

Methodology

The essential problem this research attempts to address is the impact of Cartesianism as it has separated mind from body and added to the disavowal of the archetypal feminine within many modern Western cultures. With this in mind, this thesis looks to answer the following question: Through radical reflection and re-membrance of the flesh and the feminine in personal art pieces, what will I as the researcher discover that will enhance my work as a psychotherapist and add to the body of knowledge regarding interventions for the chronically ill?

As a qualitative study, this thesis follows a heuristic (creative and reflective) modality. Weaving my interpretations of existing theories on embodiment and the feminine with my personal reflections and art productions, this research traces my personal expressions of emergent psychic material. Heuristic study places the self at its center. It asks a question intimately linked to the researcher's personal experience and requires a deep engagement with the topic. Clark Moustakas (1990), a leading expert on humanistic and clinical psychology, identified six phases of heuristic research: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis (pp. 27-32). These stages have occurred over years for me as I have explored what illness has had to teach. However, heuristic research does not intend to just explicate an experience, but to provide one—to keep on teaching, to roll over the next stone.

Heuristic study, therefore, assumes that the researcher may experience some transformation in the course of answering her or his question. Echoing the perceptual shifts that can happen through illness, the following observation by Michael Polanyi (1962) illustrates the intended perceptual shifts that come with heuristic inquiry.

> Having made a discovery, I shall never see the world again as before. My eyes have become different; I have made myself into a person seeing and thinking differently. I have crossed a gap, the heuristic gap, which lies between problem and discovery. (p. 143)

Incorporating interpretation, intuition, creativity, description, and reflection, I intend to engage both myself as the researcher, and the audience as readers, on multiple and integrated levels of being: intellectual, sensorial, and spiritual. The thesis is, in itself, not just a question to be answered, but a speech-act of repair; one that I hope will offer up an opportunity for me to be a person who continues to see and think differently, as Polanyi so eloquently suggested.

Ethical Concerns

The highly subjective nature of this thesis requires that it is ethically significant to point out that conclusions in this research may not apply to others. Additionally, any and all medical conditions require case-specific treatment, care, and attention.

Overview of Thesis

Chapter II locates the reader in the longer cultural history of disembodiment and duality in Cartesianism. After highlighting the psychic split in Western culture, the chapter then both complicates and undoes this dualism through a close study of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, focusing specifically on the concepts of the *lived body* and the *flesh*, and their parallels with the *feminine principle*. Illness and concomitant shifts in perception, as themes and aids to understanding one's embodiment, are highlighted.

Based upon and identified with the principles laid out in Chapter II, Chapter III examines three art pieces I created through the process of radical reflection. In conclusion, Chapter IV offers a brief summary of the preceding chapters, hypothesizes the implications of the findings, and discusses ways in which they may clinically impact the field of counseling psychology.

Chapter II
Literature Review

From Western philosophical and psychoanalytic perspectives, this research explores the phenomenon of the lived body, which has been made explicit in the wake of illness. To this end, this chapter explores two theoretical frameworks separately and in relationship: Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and the archetypal feminine. Both offer reentry into the body, displaced in Western traditions, and a reconnection with the animated matter of the world beyond the body's boundaries. Additionally, both converge to inform and ground my research question (see Methodology, p. 6., para. 1).

Although seemingly disparate in their particular frames, this literature review puts philosopher Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology into conversation with the archetypal feminine, establishing terms that underlie the experience of the researcher and inform the art productions explored in Chapter III. From Merleau-Ponty's (1945,1964/1968) phenomenology, two specific concepts are explored: the *lived body* and the *flesh*. Breaking with the Cartesian tradition, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology grounded the human subject in the perceptive body and explored the shared flesh of the world. The flesh is an ontology that suggests one is not only co-inhering with the objects of one's surroundings as a living body, but they are all in fact of shared "tissue" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 262).

Themes of embodiment, receptivity, coinherence, fragmentation, dehiscence (i.e., a vessel's bursting open), materiality, and creativity hinge Merleau-Ponty's work with

that of the archetypal feminine. Although distinct in their vocabulary, these two concepts—*lived body* and *flesh*—circle around the same conditions of life that have been exiled from the Western psyche, and for which it bears a burden. What Merleau-Ponty (1945,1964/1968) spoke of through the *lived body* and the *flesh* is also held by the *archetypal feminine*, as understood by the tradition of depth psychology. In essence, all of these terms voice a reacquaintance with embodiment and help articulate the process of re-membrance that illness can offer.

Finding the Flesh: From Disembodied Individualism to Embodied Intersubjectivity

Exploring the theoretical terrain of subjectivity is foundational to revealing the effects of illness on a person. From Cartesian dualism and positivist humanism to current phenomenological, psychological, and quantum theories of coinherence, this section briefly overviews the evolution of Western thinking related to selfhood. With this grounding, the focus then trains on the work of Merleau-Ponty, mining terms and concepts from his 1945 text, *Phenomenology of Perception,* and his unfinished final manuscript, *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964/1968); chief among such concepts are Merleau-Ponty's *lived body* and ontology of the *flesh*. This section will also relate the ways in which illness may orient one to the lived body*,* and how illness is, in itself, an enactment of the lived body as a phenomenological modality. Just as phenomenology relies on bracketing taken-for-granted relations and meanings in order to study the nature of a chosen phenomenon, illness enacts a bracketing by way of changes to the perceiving body of an individual, putting unconscious bias and bodily expectation into harsh relief, both inciting and requiring a distinctly altered relationship with the world (Carel, 2012).

Body Loss: A Cartesian Legacy

In the beginning is the body. It is through this human body of bones and blood that one comes into consciousness. The body is not an object, but a revealer. Philosopher Gary Madison (1981) noted that the body "is at once and the same time the way a subjective attitude both comes to know itself and express itself" (p. 23). The sensations, functions, gestures, and motilities of the body, from in utero until death, work to construct and reveal a subject in a world of meaning. In turn, consciousness is a perceptual consciousness. As the stimuli of the world work to pluck one's awareness into subjective coagulation, the subjective experience "must not be understood as an absolute interiority" (p. 23). It must instead be understood as an exchange with both the feelings of the body and the feelings the environment elicits in that body. In this frame, people are not subjects for whom their bodies are objects outside of their consciousness, but instead they are subjects for whom their bodies are the very foundation of their consciousness. For, "at the level of perception the subject *is* his body" (p. 25). With this perspective, Merleau-Ponty disrupted the Cartesian principle that plagues Western conceptions of the self—the belief that humans are transcendental beings caught in the materiality of a body.

Rene Descartes's famous statement, "Cogito ergo sum," translated as "I think, therefore I am," represents the powerful legacy of 17th century Cartesian dualism and the birth of modernity. Rudely summarized, it is the belief that humans are made of two distinct properties, that of mind and that of matter (Saban, 2011, p. 99). The impact of this belief, and its accompanying assumptions, marked an explicit and enduring orientation, prioritizing intellect over other experiencing, processing, and sensing

functions of the mind-body, therefore defining *being* as primarily *thinking*, and elevating or extricating that thinking being from the body.

With the elevation of the individual thinking mind, not only was the sensuous body exiled, so too were other, older systems of meaning making. Subject and object were solidified as distinct and different, and the human being was very powerful in determining the meaning of objects. For example, Jungian analyst Paul Kugler (2014) wrote of Descartes:

> The ideas developed in his text *Meditations* (Descartes, 1642) are basic to the modern view of the world as being divided into subjects and objects. Working from the proposition "Cogito ergo sum," "I think, therefore I am," Descartes established existence on the basis of the act of a knowing subject, not on a transcendent God, objective Matter, or Eternal forms. Descartes' theory of the thinking subject signaled a major change in Western psychological understanding by locating the source of meaning, creativity, and truth within human subjectivity. The human mind is given priority over objective being or the divine. (p. 82)

An important intersection lies here, involving the praise of human intellect and the diminution of other perceptual or imaginal meaning-making capacities, turning away from the divine and de-animating the body and surrounding objects of the world. In short, the Cartesian legacy is related to rationalism, empiricism, materialism, industrialism, and humanism, among others—the threads within them being linear, logical, left-brained, individualistic, and disembodied. All can be identified with elements of the patriarchal masculine, and may be referred to as a chapter in the longer history of a split in the European psyche. Psychology professor Robert Romanyshyn (2000) described the split as

> An eclipse of the imaginal as a third between matter and mind, with a de-animation of the flesh which transforms the vital, gestural body into a mechanism . . . a broken connection between the ensouled sensuous body and the sense-able world. (p. 37)

Such connection, perhaps dimmed in the Western collective consciousness, is relit in the work of Merleau-Ponty. The next section looks at Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as a radical realignment with embodied subjectivity and its correlative existence in the phenomenal, sense-able world.

The Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty: Finding the Lived Body

Merleau-Ponty (1962) loosened the tidy, dualistic frame of Cartesianism and provided new terms from which to consider the embodied subject. Pulling the transcendent subject back into materiality, he wanted "to re-establish the roots of the mind in its body and in its world" (p. 402). In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1945) suggested, "The union of soul and body is not an amalgamation between two mutually external terms, subject and object, brought about by arbitrary degree. It is enacted at every instant in the movement of existence" (pp. 88–89). This re-establishment bore the term *lived body*—a term that gestures toward a radical break with Cartesian dualism, and a reembodiment of consciousness. Romanyshyn (2011) suggested the lived body is "the body that one *is* compared to the objective body one *has*" (p. 41). Professor and physiotherapist Jennifer Bullington (2013) reflected,

> The body understood as a lived body is necessarily ambiguous, since it is both material and self-conscious. It is physiological and psychological, but Merleau-Ponty asserts that these terms are not as dichotomous as one would imagine. There is mind in the body and body in the mind. (p. 25)

One way to define the term *lived body* is as a system of circuits (Madison, 1981). Feedback loops between the psychic and somatic aspects of the self, and between the subject and his or her environment, constitute the subject in a deeply embodied and relational way. As such, "The relation of the perceived world and the lived body" are "an *internal* relation, such that the world and the body together constitute a *system*"

(Madison, 1981, p. 27). Framed thusly, the transcendent Cogito of Descartes is instead a sensuous and relational Cogito, blurring psyche and soma as well as what is internal and external.

Not only is subjective existence an inner correlation between psyche and soma, it is in communion with its environment on a much more complex level than the Cartesian understanding of intellectual man operating on and signifying the static objects of his world. As suggested by Madison (1981), "The qualities of things are not objective facts existing outside of perception. . . . Colors, for instance get defined and distinguished from each other because they are so many different meanings lived by the body" (p. 27). Therefore, one may ask, *What does green do to you? What do you do to green?* Such coinherence was Merleau-Ponty's exploration, about which Madison (1981) wrote:

> It is quite simply a question of a bodily cohabitation with things, of a "life in common," by which things receive a meaning which is the meaning of my life in them. . . . Sensation thus expresses a *circularity* between the lived body and the perceived world. The "gaze pairs off [*s'accopule avec*] with color" as does "my hand with hardness and softness," and in "this exchange". . . the thing and the body correlatively come to be. . . . The subject "plunges into the thing" and the thing "thinks itself in him." (p. 28)

According to Merleau Ponty (1945), "The lived body is in the world as the heart is in the organism; it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system" (p. 235). Consequently, there is a reciprocal relationship that relies upon a different kind of transcendence: one of the human subject *into* the objects of his world, not above them. It is a horizontal transcendence of "*ex-istence*" (Madison, 1981, p. 46). However, this does not happen as a reflective Cogito, it happens as a natural aspect of being, which is first and foremost a primarily perceptual existence. For example, Merleau-Ponty wrote,

> As I contemplate the blue of the sky I am not set over against it as an a-cosmic subject; I do not possess it in thought, or spread out towards it some idea of blue such as might reveal the secret of it, I abandon myself to it and plunge into this mystery, it "thinks itself within me." (As cited in Bullington, 2013, p. 24)

Moreover, he wrote, "Apart from the probing of my eye or my hand, and before my body synchronizes with it, the sensible is nothing but a vague beckoning" (As cited in Bullington, 2013, p. 24). Merleau-Ponty's perspective performed one's release from the purely projective subject who constitutes and signifies the things of this world; instead, the subject is a perceiving being who receives within him the experience of the blue. The blue is not made from a person, but instead is made within one. There is an ongoing surrender to and integration of the perceptual processes of the body, and a pre-reflective self is "abandoned" to the stimulus of the sensible. The sensible beckons, and the sensing responds. The lived body, in relation with the inexhaustible phenomenon that enters its frame, lives a correlative existence. Furthermore, "The lived body is always oriented towards the world outside itself (otherness) in a constant flow" (Bullington, 2013, p. 26).

Perhaps the flow, then, creates a meaningful existence, and the body works as an interlocutor making one's ability to move and engage with the world, and make choices in reference to it, profoundly meaningful. In essence, "Our cohabitation with the world is a relation of *expressivity* . . . where, in intermingling in 'a sort of dialogue,' the body and the world *articulate* themselves, *express* and *define* themselves" (Madison, 1981, p. 47). Through a body is how one comes to know oneself and the surrounding world. Therefore, if the body is the interlocutor of such articulation, expression, and definition, what happens when that body gets sick? What happens when that body, which "is in the world as the heart is in the organism," (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 235) begins to fail? How then does one keep "the visible spectacle . . . alive" or breathe "life into it" (Merleau-Ponty,

1945, p. 235)? How does one continue within the circular system of coinherence? Perhaps more than any other phenomena, illness forces deep appreciation for the perceptual foundation of one's relationship to the world and for the lived body as subject *and* object. Likely in illness, the object-ness of one's existence becomes increasingly central, and the subject-ness—that sense of a coherent inner being—murky and contingent.

Illness as Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology Enacted: The Body Explicit

Merleau-Ponty's sense of an embodied consciousness—the lived body—provides this discussion with its significance. To bring this to bear on an understanding of illness, one should consider Merleau-Ponty's (1942) terms *structure* and *sedimentation*, both of which express the built-up and taken-for-granted relationship between a body and its world. The following passage by Bullington (2013) illustrates these terms:

> Structures are the bodily, psychological and social ways of being oriented towards the world that guide our understanding and through sedimentation give us freedom by presenting the world as familiar and known. Our habitual, sedimented structures allow us to experience the world as comprehensible and manageable. We develop stable patterns of experience that tell us how to move our bodies, how to respond to various psychological and social situations, and how to understand our everyday ordinary life-world. These structures, built up over time, free our attention from having to form the "base" of experience over and over again. Our maternal language and bodily repertoire are second nature to us. We do not have to re-learn them in every new situation. Such sedimentations are the necessary pre-condition for us to be able to communicate fluently and move about in an unencumbered way. The experience of learning a new language or a new motor skill makes us aware of how effortlessly these sedimented structures actually work. (p. 35)

Illness, and Multiple Sclerosis in particular for this researcher, destroys the structures and sedimentations one takes for granted. The "fluency" and unconscious familiarity built up within one's cellular system are stymied, not only disrupting the body as a biological system, but the body as lived (Carel, 2012, p. 101). Merleau-Ponty (1947/1964) helped

articulate this disruption by way of "the intentional arc," which includes motor intentionality, temporal structure, setting, moral, and existential situation (p. 136). He explained, "It is this intentional arc which brings about the unity of the senses, of intelligence, of sensibility and motility. And it is this which 'goes limp' in illness" (p. 136). One's medium, the body, which potentiates and maintains this arc, may veer offline in illness. The arc itself may fall. In this frame of understanding, the potential effects of illness on human existence cannot be underestimated. It is, in the words of sociology professor Arthur Frank "narrative wreckage" (as cited in Finlay, 2003, p. 159).

Losing the unencumbered freedom of reliable sedimentations, an ill woman, for instance, may be struck to understand just how much more than a biological entity her materiality allows her to be. She is all that she is as a creative, talented, and aspiring individual because she can rely on a system of circuitry and cells that gives her the freedom to go beyond basic biological functioning. Continuing with Merleau-Ponty's (1945) terms, a way to understand this point is to look at the distinction between a body as "gesture" and a body as "mechanism" (as cited in Madison, 1981, p. 48). To be a gestural body—a body that winks, kisses, runs, laughs, dances, and so on—relies on a body as its mechanism. As Romanyshyn (2011) elucidated, "This capacity for gesture not only makes us aware of the body as mechanism, but also shows us that the human body is more than mechanism. This awareness and knowledge is the tragedy of illness" (p. 44). Therefore, when the ill woman loses the mechanism that allows for certain gestures, or just notices that her body is in contest with, rather than in service of, certain gestural expressions, she may lose the more-than-mechanism aspect of self. There, in turn, exists a loss of expressiveness that she had come to know as living. In this way, illness may

magnify the "genuine condition" of one's existence, the very foundation of subjectivity—the uncertain, fallible body itself (de Beauvoir, as cited in Cameron, 1992, p. 16).

People are bodies that fail. This was primary to Merleau-Ponty's thinking on the lived body and how one is to understand one's experience. Upon this point, Madison (1981) reflected, "Merleau-Ponty accentuates to the utmost the finitude and contingency of existence. For Merleau-Ponty also, the nobility of man resides in his very wretchedness, in his awareness of his own contingency" (p. 227). The next section explores the Sumerian myth of Inanna as it both expresses and honors people's noble wretchedness. It is a tale in which the intentional arc is dismantled. The movement away from a living or gestural subjectivity in meaningful, signified relation with the objects of the world, and the concomitant disorientation, death, and renewal that must take place in its wake, lead to the realm of the archetypal Feminine.

Re-Membering the Archetypal Feminine: Space for Fragmentation and Reformation

The archetypal feminine, or *anima* in the Jungian tradition developed by the late Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung, has long had associations with embodiment. Having traced the loss of the body and its sensorial power in the development of Western Cartesianism, one could more easily parallel the path of the rejected feminine principle, both literally and figuratively, with the rise of patriarchal systems. Jungian analyst Barbara Stevens Sullivan (1989) elucidated the characteristics of the archetypal feminine. Significantly loosening the principle from its understanding as a primarily gendered term, she instead explored it as an energetic, oppositional reality present in all people. She wrote, "The words 'masculine' and 'feminine,' as I use them . . . do not refer to men and women; they

refer to energetic patterns of being, both of which are present in all people at all times" (p. 13). More specifically, the words "portray the way we sort out innately conflicting unconscious impulses and the way these inner oppositional tendencies relate to each other" (p. 13). Furthermore, and to be especially clear, "when either a man or a woman is saddled with a gender-based stereotype, his or her *human*ness suffers. . . . Within each individual is a whole universe that embraces all possible states of being" (pp. 15-16).

Both terms, *masculine* and *feminine*, have static and dynamic qualities according to Sullivan (1989), but still generally sort out into a masculine "doing" as compared to a feminine "being" (p. 21). Furthermore,

> the core feminine experience is one of being immersed in the living world, one link in an infinite chain. The corresponding masculine position emphasizes one's separateness from the rest of life and values behavior that acts upon the not-me world, effecting it, leaving one's mark on it, dominating and transcending it. Neither approach is superior to the other, both are essential for a full experience of life. (p. 20)

Therefore, within both gender frames exist oppositional aspects. Within the feminine frame, for example, static matter, death, and decay compose one side of the feminine (the dark feminine), while autonomous and ongoing generative activity marks the other. The feminine is playful and creative without competition, logos, or analysis. Spontaneity and unexpected outcomes define her realm, and her dynamic central principle is eros: "the connections between individuals, the relationships that encircle our lives" (p. 18). Less interested in the unique individual and more in the life of the whole living dynamic, the feminine "seeks an embodied relationship to the world" (p. 21). Consequently, one might claim that Cartesian dualism is the result of a hyper-masculine point of view without the balancing presence of the feminine.

Sullivan (1989) pointed to the imbalance between masculine and feminine that drives current Western, and in particular, American culture. Moreover, although fairly conscious of the way it discriminates against women, American culture is less aware of the way it discriminates against the feminine side of "each and every individual" (p. 16). Particularly good examples are little boys whose parents and culture tend to cut certain qualities off from their identities before they are even able to identify themselves in the world. Similarly, speaking of a client of hers who experienced somatic discomfort, Sullivan wrote, there is "an inadequate concern for her body and her body's natural emotions" (p. 5). This phrase could be applied to American culture at large, as it parallels "an overestimation of the traditionally masculine world of the spirit" (p. 5). Like Merleau-Ponty's (1962) attempt "to re-establish the roots of the mind in its body and in its world," the feminine principle may be required to reanimate the matter of one's own body, that of the world itself, and the relationship between them (p. 402).

Slipping back into an ancient Sumerian frame facilitates the recovery of some of the wisdom and requirements of the disavowed feminine. The myth of Inanna and Ereshkigal, as presented by Jungian analyst Sylvia Brinton Perera (1981), explores the cyclic quality of fragmentation (death) and formation (birth) as central to the archetypal feminine. It also highlights, and warns against, the co-occurring devaluation of matter and the feminine. It is a story that represents loss of a previous self in order to reclaim aspects that have been held unconscious. Within this research, the tale serves as a metaphor for the experience of illness as it undoes Merleau-Ponty's (1947/1964) intentional arc. In this undoing, what once held one together in meaningful relationship

with the world and oneself is dismantled. This research finds significance in what is found and re-membered in that process as it occurs in the tale.

In the myth, Inanna, queen of heaven and earth, descends to the underworld, where she may "see the limits of the fathers and be witness to what was repressed" (Perera, 1981, p. 52). It is there she encounters her sister, the dark goddess Ereshkigal. Important to the tale is the way Inanna is methodically stripped of her worldly signification as she enters the seven gates of the underworld. At each gate she loses meaningful symbols of identity and protection: her crown, her small lapis beads, her double strand of beads, her breastplate, her gold ring, her lapis measuring rod and line, and her royal robe (Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983, pp. 58-59). Applying the language from the previous section, these losses may symbolize the stripping of Inanna's gestural self, little by little. The myth reads:

> Naked and bowed low, Inanna entered the throne room.
> Ereshkigal rose from her throne.
> Inanna started toward the throne.
> The Annuna, the judges of the underworld, surrounded her.
> They passed judgment against her.
>
> Then Ereshkigal fastened on Inanna the eye of death.
> She spoke against her the word of wrath.
> She uttered against her the cry of guilt.
>
> She struck her.
>
> Inanna was turned into a corpse,
> A piece of rotting meat,
> And was hung from a hook on the wall.
> (As cited in Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983 p. 60)

Inanna is not only stripped of her gestures, bowing naked (symbolizing mechanism), she is further reduced to mere matter, "rotting meat," hanging on a hook (p. 60). Furthermore, "She is brought down to naked *muladhara*—the rigid, inert material of incarnation, the

bare ground of facts and bodily reality" (Perera, 1981, p. 61). Her movement from the upper world and all its transcendent signification toward matter alone coalesces with the archetypal feminine—the reminder that under all of one's gestural forms—one's performative identity—exists the body and its mortal materiality, the mechanism, and the basis of all one's possibly becoming.

Inanna's descent and subsequent death in the underworld can be read as a retaliatory rising up of the split-off or repressed aspects of the unconscious as a whole, or more specifically as the rejected archetypal feminine within the Western tradition. Although Inanna, too, is female, she is what Perera (1981) referred to as "a daughter of the patriarchy" with an "animus-ego" (pp. 11-12). Ereshkigal symbolizes the dark feminine, that aspect of humanity that has been cut off from itself, and that for which Inanna is judged. The Annuna (judges) see this split in Inanna, and Ereshkigal kills as an act of returning awareness to the realm of the feminine and the body. Ereshkigal wants Inanna to know this condition of self and life that has been kept in the dark.

Similar to what Merleau-Ponty suggested, that there is nobility in one's turn toward mortality, Inanna's descent to death may be a movement toward that mortal awareness and a noble submission. Indeed, as Perera (1981) observed, "Like the seed which must die in order to be reborn, the goddess of the granary submits . . . Inanna allows herself to be broken for a new creation" (p. 53). One can furthermore connect Merleau-Ponty's concept of a body as *mechanism* to the dark feminine as a submission to nature in its indifference to the aggrandized, intellectual, and *gesturing* subject. Accordingly, Ereshkigal's "eyes of death" undo the "post-organic" body and return one to the uncertain space of nature, to whom one must make a final surrender in death

(Farah, 2011, p. 216). Ereshkigal, then, may symbolically return one to the origin of the body as the foundational condition of life, and demand that one return to a new gestural form from there.

An emphasis on returning to origins in order for one to take on the next incarnation is central to this myth. Healing rituals in ancient societies often prioritized the return as the first step in a 4-step practice, as follows: 1) Return to origins; 2) Confrontation with and manipulation of evil; 3) Death and rebirth; and 4) Restoration of the universe (Sullivan, 1989, p. 60). "We get the impression," suggested religious studies professor and philosopher Mircea Eliade, "that for archaic societies life cannot be *repaired*, it can only be *re-created* by a return to the sources" (as cited in Sullivan, 1989, p. 60). The myth of Inanna suggests that a move toward corporeal awareness is a return to the source from which something may be born anew; and the aftermath of a death is a wholly new creation, not just a repair or replication of what existed before.

In the end, Ereshkigal releases Inanna after great compassionate effort from Enki, God of Wisdom and Healing, and his helpers, the kurgarra and galatur (Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983, p. 64). What is significant in Inanna's release is the connection she now emblematizes between above and below, masculine and feminine, conscious and unconscious, rational and affective realms of life, and body and self: in other words, an undoing of the Cartesian subject. As the first and only to be reborn in the underworld, there must be new rules, as "no one ascends from the underworld unmarked" (as cited in Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983, p. 68). Inanna is therefore the conduit whom must not forget the power of her dark sister's domain. Like Merleau-Ponty's (1953/1963) conception of noble wretchedness, in which one keeps the awareness of the body's eventual death in

mind, Inanna's mark symbolizes the constant reminder of the below while one is in the above.

Inanna, although not desiring or expecting death, does want something from the underworld. She is drawn there. Reflecting on this, Perera (1981) suggested, although not always forced into them, "We make descents or introversions in the service of life, to scoop up more of what has been held unconscious by the Self in the underworld," and that "The hardest descents are those to the primitive, uroboric depths where we suffer what feels like total dismemberment" (p. 50). The uroboros is a symbol of the cyclic devouring of the self for the sake of its next incarnation, shown as the image of a serpent swallowing its own tail, thus creating a circle. The dismemberment is perhaps of the cultivated, masculine, Western ego. However, one can reframe this dismemberment as a *re-memberment* insofar as it is a return to the feminine and the corporeal. It is a space that holds the cyclic wisdom of form rising from fracture. As in Shakespeare's Cordelia—"I make myself in my unmaking" (as cited in Duncan, 2003a, p. 87)—the existing, constellated *I* must first fall apart. In other words, the intentional arc must fail, and then be re-built with "what has been held unconscious" (Perera, 1981, p. 50).

In just this way, Inanna is unmade in order to be made anew, and increasingly whole. Coming down out of the "Great Above" with its clear logic, rules, significations, domains, protection, activity, and relationships, to the realm of the "Great Below" that has been systematically repressed, may represent one's return to the body, in all its affective complexity and material contingency (Wolkstein & Kramer, 1983, p. 52). The downward trajectory illustrates one's falling out of the symbolic order and returning to brute nature, yet also rising as made anew.

In relationship to the language of Merleau-Ponty, one can see the same destruction of the Cartesian model in the realm of the anima. This feminine archetype does not let the thinking function rule her domain and will lay a person down on her phallic spike in the underworld if she is not paid respect. It is she who reminds people to stay open to the will of the fates and aware that they cannot control life. To offer another useful metaphor, Jungian scholar and artist Andrea Duncan (1997) made an apt distinction between the image of a castle and that of a city. The two images compare the contained, masculine, heroic *I* and feminine openness, uncertainty, and anonymous generative activity. Duncan wrote, "Here, in the teeming, fragmented experience of the city, is that generative power which threatens at every point to demolish the carefully constructed castle of specific selfhood" (p. 193). Ereshkigal is at work here, demolishing as a pre-requisite to re-generation, reminding one to receive life as it manifests. Although new structures are inevitably built, they are not castles, but are more porous perhaps, and built with re-membrance.

Now might arise the following questions: What gestural form makes its way back once one is taken down so far? What is it to have illness cause such a descent? How does one re-member the feminine in new coagulations of self? Chapter III gives voice to these considerations. However, the next section connects the language of the archetypal feminine/anima with Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh.

Realm of the Pre-subject: Merleau-Ponty, Julia Kristeva, and Anima Consciousness

Intertwining Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and a discussion of the archetypal feminine, this next section connects the concepts of the anima and the primordial *being in itself* Merleau-Ponty (1945) put forth. As seen in the previously discussed quote about the

blue sky, Merleau-Ponty's (1945) formulation of a consciousness is multivalent. Whereas he was aware that he was an active, reflective self, he also was aware that he was a receptive, sensuous being. For example, in response to the blue of the sky, instead of creating and "possessing" it, he instead said, "I abandon myself to it and plunge into this mystery, it 'thinks itself within me'" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 214). Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty articulated the two valences of being as a "being for itself" and a "being in itself" (As cited in Madison, 1981, p. 39). The *being for itself* is the reflective Cogito; in the myth of Inanna, it is who Inanna is in the Great Above. However, there is also a pre-reflective or primordial characteristic of the lived body, "*meaningfully* related to its surroundings in a . . . pre-cognitive way" (Nordlander, 2013, p. 110). Thus, *being in itself* is an aspect of consciousness perceptually connected with one's surroundings. As Merleau-Ponty explained it, "the subject of perception is not that *I* which is familiar to me; it is only an anonymous 'One'" (As cited in Madison, 1981 p. 26), or a self that exists both prior to and in correlation with the reflective *I.* In mythological terms, *being in itself* appears when Inanna is brought down and stripped of her identity, naked and anonymous, and from there she rises back up, re-acquainted with that primordial aspect of herself.

Merleau-Ponty used multiple terms to describe this pre-reflective aspect of the lived body, including the "organismic *a priori*," the "anonymous One," the "knowing body," and the "natural self" (As cited in Madison, 1981, p. 26). All relate to the primordial realm of the pre-subject as follows:

> The subject who perceives and who is immediately in contact with a world of perceptual meanings is a *pre-subject*, a natural subject. It is a subject which only exists through what is worldly in it, its body. There is thus a pre-subjective realm in ourselves to be explored if we wish to understand perception. We must

> recognize the existence of a body-subject: we must view the body as our living bond with the world and as the umbilical cord which attached us to it. (Madison, 1981, p. 21)

The image of the umbilical cord, and the presence of an undifferentiated perceptual being, echo philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva's (1941/1987) "semiotic" state of union between infant and mother (pp. 4-5). *Semiotic* is another term for the *pre-subjective* referred to above—it is the "liquid" consciousness that exists between mother and child (Duncan, 2003b, p. 234). Duncan (2003b) explained these parallel states as "largely the experience of the shared body and of its rhythms and pulsations before entry into language and the patriarchy of the Symbolic order" (p. 232). The lived body prior to entry into the symbolic (i.e., language) realm is distinctively inter-subjective and perceptual, echoing the *being in itself* or *anonymous One* Merleau-Ponty traced (Madison, 1981). There is a boundary-less quality to this pre-symbolic lived body, as the body of child and mother are a single system through which the child eventually comes into separate subject-hood—its *being for itself*. It is an expression of "the core feminine experience . . . of being immersed in the living world, one link in an infinite chain" (Sullivan, 1989).

Kristeva's (1941/1987) semiotic does not just disappear once the child enters the symbolic. It is, however, repressed. Jungian analyst and scholar Susan Rowland (2002) wrote, the semiotic according to Kristeva "remains within to disturb and challenge symbolic representations" (pp. 119-120). In a Jungian context, however, the semiotic is related to the larger maternal archetype or anima consciousness. The Jungian perspective pushes past the conceptualization of the semiotic as just a rupture of the symbolic, and instead frames the semiotic as more productive. For, "what is repressed at the Oedipal

stage remains in the psyche as a proactive maternal that will continue to nurture and woo the subject throughout life" (Rowland, 2002, p. 120). It continues to push a subject's evolution, evoking both a rupture of accepted paternal patterns and creation of a more dynamic, interconnected awareness.

Staying with the creative force of the anima consciousness, and continuing to explore Merleau-Ponty's formulation of the *being in itself* and *being for itself*, one may see in his thinking a "dialectical synthesis of the two" (Madison, 1981, p. 39), or the moment when the reflective *I* brings awareness to a perceptual experience, but has not yet signified the experience as something precise. This synthesis speaks to the unknown but present *other*, the yet-to-be-known but potential aspect of the world and the self. In the synthesis is that same wooing quality Rowland (2002) identified in the semiotic, evoked by a feeling that points to a thought that cannot quite be said. The consequent energy is emergent but unformed. Duncan (2003a) connected this energy to the anima, who

> yearns for emergence; her eyes speak but the mouth is dumb. She has knowledge of an archaic time which she expresses in metaphoric silence. She gives voice to the "nothing-but-matter" state of mere visibility. . . . However, in her ability to "read" nature, she clearly presents the opportunity for an unfamiliar dialogue—no matter how "inexpressible" that longing for dialogue is within the context of the masculine narrative—a text which she offers but does not articulate. (p. 80)

Whether called the *semiotic*, the *anonymous One*, or the *anima*, this mute presence still hums with the energy of gestation. It "offers" (p. 80); it wants; it is felt; the body says it is so. There is eros connecting the body to others in this place that cannot quite be said, but still speaks. The dialectic between *being in itself* and *being for itself* calls one forward into new manifestations of self and world. One may think of this relationship as "a semiotically infused symbolic" (Rowland, 2002, p. 124); it is an embodied, sensuous Cogito that knows this place.

The next section continues to trace the ways in which Merleau-Ponty's philosophy connects to the archetypal feminine, especially in regard to its communal and generative properties. His ontology, or study of being, acknowledges an anima or semiotic presence that "does not articulate" and yet "yearns for emergence" (Duncan, 2003a, p. 80). Merleau-Ponty's (1964/1968) ontology reveals this same "relationship with being, as though it were the mute or reticent interlocutor of our questions" (p. 129).

Merleau-Ponty's Final Re-Membering: An Ontology of the Flesh

In his last but unfinished manuscript, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968) explored his final concept—and the final one for this research: his ontology of the flesh. It is a radical philosophy that performs a semiotic infusion beyond the frame of the individual and into the whole of the phenomenal world. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty's

> concept "flesh of the world" . . . was meant to describe the event where perception and meaning are born, not as a relationship between a constituting subject and a constituted object (traditional phenomenology) but as an intertwining or ensemble of being. (Bullington, 2013, p. 23)

In this way, he moved even more radically away from the dualism of subject and object, or spirit and matter. Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968) extended the concept of the semiotic shared-life, or "intertwining," between infant and mother to the whole of experience (Bullington, 2013, p. 23). As such, there is not a self and other, but a coemergence of both, through and by way of one another; at this point in Merleau-Ponty's thinking there is a primordial wholeness underpinning the distinct articulations that appear to be self and other, or self and object.

Although called *flesh* to maintain focus on the phenomenological reality of embodiment, Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968) wrote, "The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is

not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term 'element,'" and it is "in this sense an 'element' of Being" (p. 139). In essence, the flesh is "the concrete emblem of a general manner of being" (p. 177). An interrogation of his *general manner of being* articulates a distinct shift in Merleau-Ponty's focus and understanding of the phenomenal world. As Madison (1981) explained,

> instead of merely defining the subject and the world as reciprocal references, Merleau-Ponty now maintains that they imply each other and mutually define each other only because they are both *dimensions* and *differentiations* of a primordial Being which includes them both. Each thing is a dimension, and Being is dimensionality itself. . . . This ultimate dimensionality is what he calls the "flesh." (p. 183)

The terms *dimensions* and *differentiations* refer to "abstracts from one sole tissue" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 262); human consciousness is a witness to the uprisings of distinct forms from this same tissue. In other words, one can think of the seer and the seen, the sensing and the sensible, as being the same flesh. For, "when we turn in the direction of the seer, we do not discover a transcendental ego but a being who is itself *of* the sensible" (Merleau-Ponty, as cited in Flynn, 2011, p. 28). The body itself shares the materiality of that which it perceives and yet they are distinct expressions—they are *differentiations*. Furthermore, according to Merleau-Ponty, the constant manifestation of differentiation is the fundamental quality of "Being," and the human being, as lived body, as witness of and participant in the spectacle, "is rather a 'hollow' or a 'fold' in the world, the place where there occurs a 'dialogue'" (As cited in Madison, 1981, p. 28). One witnesses, then, through embodied consciousness as a "chiasm" of the sentient and the sensible, *Being's* nature—its endless articulation and dimensionality (Merleau-Ponty 1964/1968, p. lvi). Indeed, "Being is nothing in itself but is the 'there is' of the world; it

is the world appearing, 'surging up from polymorphism'" (Merleau-Ponty, as cited in Madison, 1981, p. 218).

The poet Ranier Maria Rilke (1939) wrote about that delicious spot in which one notices or is inspired by a thing within one's vision and then speaks its presence as the possible purpose of humankind. Inasmuch as people are the articulators of spirit arriving in matter, they are "bees of the invisible . . . perhaps, here just for saying: House . . . Earth, isn't this what you want: an invisible/re-arising in us?" (as cited in Romanyshyn, 2011, p. 47). Like Rilke, Merleau-Ponty argued for a consciousness that is in a sense one's watching of *Being's* own manifestation—its visible form—as well as a possession by the invisible.

Terms Merleau-Ponty used to describe the emergence of form from the invisible, formless flesh include "advent," "shining forth," "phenomenon," "bursting," "dehiscence," and "upsurge" (As cited in Madison, 1981, p. 218). These terms seem to echo the sentiment in Jung's later writing. As suggested by Jungian scholar Roger Brooke, the mature Jung expressed "consciousness as the illuminating realm within which the being of the world can shine forth" (As cited in Marlan, 2000, p. 186). The invisible nature of primordial being, likened to the mute anima, is perhaps the light that allows one to see the visible; thus, it is not what people see, but it is the "means by which we see" (Romanyshyn, 2011 p. 46). Furthermore, to see and experience the *phenomenon* or the *shining forth*, there is an erotic pull, a possession, a power that seduces one's visual attention and manifests significance in one's lived body. To this point, Merleau-Ponty wrote, "Things have an internal equivalent in me; they arouse in me a carnal formula of their presence," and "he who sees cannot possess the visible unless he is possessed by it,

unless he is of it" (As cited in Romanyshyn, 2011, pp. 45, 47). The seen things of the world that captivate people are expressions of the flesh—they are moments in which one and the other radiate beyond themselves and "intermingle," surrender to their inherence in one another, and thus create that "landscape of experience" (Romanyshyn, 2000, p. 30).

Provocation and Plenty: The Flesh and the Feminine

Where Merleau-Ponty (1945) identified an "unsurpassable plentitude" in the perceived world (p. 376), the feminine principle also delights in uncalculated variation and that which is outside the economy of a reductive, masculine, and categorical logos. The plentitude in the "landscape of experience" appears as endless articulations (Romanyshyn, 2000, p. 30). For example, what one sees in a black and white dog; what one feels when the animal dips its head to take a sip of water; what one senses as the dog shakes himself free from water after a bath—no two lived bodies experience and thus create these moments exactly the same way. That dog and the landscapes it may create between itself and others are endless. The idea of a dog goes on forever. It cannot just be canine. It does not just exist in its scientific, dictionary form. There are always the terms *and*, *also*, and *otherwise* to give human consciousness versatility and creative mechanism.

Merleau-Ponty, in his work on aesthetics and painting, explored this concept in the essay, *Indirect Language and the Voice of Silence*. In response to a reverie about Renoir painting at the sea in southern France, and the confusion a hotelkeeper expressed about his choice of subject—bathers in the surf—Merleau-Ponty (1940/1993) offered the insight,

> Because each fragment of the world—and in particular the sea, sometimes riddled with eddies and ripples and plumed with spray, sometimes massive and immobile in itself—contains all sorts of shapes of being and, by the way it has of joining the encounter with one's glance, evokes a series of possible variation and teaches, over and beyond itself, a general way of expressing being. (p. 93)

Although Renoir was painting the actual behavior of the water, this moment in Merleau-Ponty's thinking is also a metaphor for the infinite configurations of flesh, of world, and other to which one may attune. Similarly, James Hillman (1985), the founder of archetypal psychology, wrote, "water is the special element of reverie, the element of reflective images and their ceaseless, ungraspable flow" (p. 93). Within those different angles and perspectives, one senses an ongoing and ambiguous energy, suggested at an angle, in this way or that, as playful "eddies and ripples" or "massive and immobile" weights (Merleau-Ponty, 1940/1993, p. 93). In any case, there may be something pulling on a person to attune to those variations of form. It is as if under the material surface ripples something known from some other time; as if through perceptual existence, "through this body . . . we have access to a 'communication with the world more ancient than thought'" (Merleau-Ponty, as cited in Saban, 2011, p. 106).

One may imagine a re-membrance of anima as Renoir painted the ocean. Perhaps Hillman gave anima her most important definition as "consciousness . . . mood determined . . . represented in mythological phenomenology by images of natural atmospheres" (As cited in Duncan, 2003b, p. 238). Renoir stood on the sand and responded to the natural atmosphere with brushstrokes. From Merleau-Ponty's point of view, "the 'remembering' of Being [or anima] is not the opposite of *creation*, . . . but Being is finally '*what requires creation of us* for us to experience it'" (As cited in Madison, 1981, pp. 199-200). Therefore, human beings are typically compelled to create,

to engage, to speak the words, to paint the image, and to think the black and white of the dog, the swirl of the eddy, the heft of the wave: "We are called forth by the voices of silence" to articulate that by which people are compelled. Being is not just "something that rests in itself . . . but is rather the possibility of and demand for creation" (Madison, 1981, p. 201).

Romanyshyn reflected on the importance of Merleau-Ponty's work as it championed the living, sensual coinherence and creation between the subject and her world. Metaphor is the way Merleau-Ponty articulated the mutual imaginal engagement. As such, Romanyshyn (2000) wrote,

> a phenomenology of the sensuous world reveals the world's metaphorical character. In its metaphorical structure, we find a world where we encounter things not as facts to be discovered, or as screens for our mental projections, but as invitations, or even temptations, or as occasions to participate in the world's continuous unfolding and realizations. (p. 39)

Unlike simile, which uses *like* or *as* to make a comparison, metaphor closes the gap created by those terms and instead makes an actual correlative claim: one *is* something, not just *like* something. Metaphor echoes that existent transcendence Merleau-Ponty framed in his early work and pushes it toward that other, elemental existence of being, the flesh that continuously unfolds in moment after moment and in form after form. One might even say that the only thing that is stable is the phenomenon of the world, of the flesh, erupting all around.

Romanyshyn (2000) further explained metaphor as

> a *third* between the two of things and thoughts. It is the halo which surrounds even perceptual things, like stones on a path, when in a moment to reverie they display their elusive charm and reveal their presence as mineral beings who know the patience of endurance and the peace of waiting. In such moments, one can long to be the stone because its imaginal presence is so strong, because its metaphorical character has been welcomed, because one has allowed oneself to be

> drawn out of the separation and isolation of one's subjectivity to be penetrated by the spell of its animate presence. (p. 32)

In other words, one is disclosed as a subject through one's engagement in the world, and yet one also discloses the world with one's creative, symbolic consciousness. Consequently, there is a life between, a *third*, which is the underlying principle in Merleau-Ponty's work. Madison (1981), early in his text on Merleau-Ponty, elucidated this point when he wrote,

> Genuinely human consciousness is . . . a symbolic consciousness; it has the ability to orient itself by the *possible,* the *virtual*. What indeed defines man is just this power he has of "going beyond created structures in order to create others." (p. 7)

That anonymous, generative power that is represented in the archetypal feminine as anima, or the upsurge of the formless flesh driving into formed phenomena, is the moment for exploration in Chapter III. In that moment, those stones suddenly speak of the subject and the subject of them. It is the moment "where the world is not yet an objective world and the subject is not yet a reflective *Cogito*, but where the world and the subject reflect each other and, so to speak flow into each other" (Madison, 1981, p. 21).

Chapter Summary

In meandering fashion, this chapter traced three threads connecting Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and ontology to the archetypal feminine, and landed upon the question that compels Chapter III. The parallel begins with the deep grounding in corporeality that assumes the *lived body* is the frame though which people emerge into selves, as well as the perceptual forms in which they exist, express, and ultimately fade as subjects in the world. Indeed, the mythical Ereshkigal seems to make sure people understand themselves as such. The second thread is the awareness of a presence that resists and yet urges articulation—an anima-consciousness, a semiotic *a priori* that is the

"mute or reticent interlocutor" of being, and is at the same time an intense creative force (Merleau-Ponty, 1964/1968, p. 129). Madison (1981) wrote of Merleau-Ponty's final work that, although continued as a philosophy of consciousness, was enlarged to "include in itself that which resists consciousness, that is sub-phenomenal Being" (p. 189). In other words, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy included the unconscious—that which is unknown to one's ego-self but surges, engages, and drives one in some un-nameable, yet evocative fashion. The final thread is the deep regard for the ongoing generative activity of life—its constant creative coagulations of form, its possibility, differentiation, and plenitude. What captures one's gaze and what one's gaze calls forward from metaphor, whether infinite water or patient stones, is the final landing place of this chapter, and the starting point of the art pieces to be explored in the next.

Chapter III
Findings and Clinical Applications

> Our body . . . to the extent that it is inseparable from a view of the world and is that view itself brought into existence, is the condition of possibility . . . of all expressive operations and all acquired views.
>
> Merleau-Ponty, M., 1945, p. 445

> All things are symbolic by their very nature, and talk of something beyond themselves.
>
> Merton, T., 1967, p. xii

Introduction

My illness began between 2006 and 2007, but I was not diagnosed until February 7, 2008, my mother's birthday. Even before I was told I had MS, the relationship between my body and its surroundings had begun to shift. Most dramatically, this shift came in the form of seizures. From time to time, I would lose eyesight on my right side as auras pressed into my field of vision. I did not realize these were seizures at the time, and just thought I was really tired or had an ocular migraine. Finally, one day an aura took my whole field of vision as I ate lunch in the school lunchroom, where I was an 8th grade English teacher. I looked down at my plate to pick up my sandwich and all I saw was a bright white light. I woke up in an emergency room having had a grand mal seizure. Three weeks later, after an MRI of my brain and spinal cord, and a test for elevated proteins in my spinal fluid, I was told I had multiple sclerosis, an incurable neurodegenerative disease that in most cases leads to moderate or severe disability.

On this day, I recall walking out of the doctor's office under the cold florescent lights and riding the slow elevator down toward the parking lot. My parents were there and we were in silence. The elevator doors opened, and in front of me was a vibrant red bougainvillea generously spread across the gray wall of the parking structure. The white light that took over in my seizures now seemed to be shining down on this gentle, absurd witness to my devastation, just like the "halo" around the stones Romanyshyn (2000) described (p. 32). The abundance of color and light infiltrated and held the whole experience for just a moment until we passed by it and into the dark hollow of the parking garage. The crawling vine was speaking and the *I* through which I saw it was entirely available to its presence. I was not inside a recognizable or stable self anymore and I lived, for that instant, somewhere in the particulate maze of leaf and bloom.

This was the first explicit example of the radical loss of distinction between the internal and external world that began to take hold of me in the new space of my diagnosis and increasing physical, cognitive, and emotional alteration. As noted in Chapter I, these moments arrived as both ruptures to my previous identity—which had been acutely attuned to masculine *doing* energy that relied upon a mechanistically sound body—and a swelling awareness and appreciation for my perceptive embodiment. My *lived body* was transitioning. Evolving into an open conduit, I felt like a raw receptor to the stimuli of the world. It was at times agonizing and at other times sublime, like a strange elixir of embodied hell and total release, because so much, too much, seemed possible.

The following descriptions of my art pieces, based on my recordings of coinherence experienced over the last 6 months, are emblematic of the principles traced

in the literature review. They are the principles that have been recovered in the *descent* invoked by illness—they are my newly *lived body*, which is now attuned to the archetypal feminine and the flesh. They are the answer to my research question: Through radical reflection and re-membrance of the flesh and the feminine in personal art pieces, what will I as the researcher discover that will enhance my work as a psychotherapist and add to the body of knowledge regarding interventions for the chronically ill?

The Three

Choosing to do three art pieces for this project was inspired by a dream I had about my maternal grandmother, in which she handed me three blue stones. The first two pieces are meant to be prototypes for what would be large, high impact installations. The final piece is a simple, minimalist expression based on a found object. Common to the first two pieces is my use of natural elements that were present during moments of coinherence. Themes running throughout include: the human body and organic materiality, inter-subjectivity and resonance, possibility, longing, decay, movement, blue, the primordial, and re-membrance. All work to invoke Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh and the archetypal feminine. I write about them below in the order in which I created them.

1. Between. The first piece "Between" (see Figures A1-A2), came from a moment in 2014 when my vision found the space separating two ring patterns in a cross-section of wood. The tension of that space, created by the intricacy of patterns reaching toward one another, but failing to touch, pulled me. There was desire from each side to connect, but impossibility to do so. Of that moment, I reflected this:

> I realize now that I have an intense awareness of the space between things—a lateral awareness of the tension and distance and dance between objects. This is

> one of the strong themes to come out of my illness—the isolation and loss of previous sedimentations and a concomitant awareness of it.

Interestingly, in this quick reflection, I commented both on the grief of losing some seamless existence—or in Merleau-Ponty's language, the *sedimentations*—and my increased lateral awareness of the constant interplay between subjects and objects—their dance.

Thinking more deeply on the thwarted connection, this aspect of the moment represents the trauma of having systems of meaning and joy undone. The image of the space between the two rings of wood reminds me now of a synapse between nerve cells. Part of what humans rely on to get messages sent through the body are the myelin sheaths surrounding neurons. Like the insulation around a basic electrical wire, myelin helps conduct impulses from nerve to nerve (National Multiple Sclerosis Society, 2015a). Multiple sclerosis destroys that sheath, thus limiting the ability of messages to be sent around the body (National Multiple Sclerosis Society, 2015a). In a sense, MS destroys connection on both microscopic and macroscopic levels. As the microscopic material of cells breaks down, so do "the underlying existential assumptions that people hold about themselves and the world," throwing one's whole identity "into disarray" (Crossley, 2000, p. 539). This breakdown of connection can open a chasm of uncertainty that is devastating, but if charted with incredible self-compassion and support, also liberating. Thus, the tension between two sets of meaning informs my first piece. The first set is grief and loss. The second is the freedom and possibility of renegotiating one's ontological relationship with the world.

The female figure is an image that echoes a feeling of reverie and longing. When I found her, she felt familiar. She looks down, but seems thoughtful as if captured by her

own inner landscape. She holds the tension between grief and possibility described above. She feels the pull between those two organic patterns of wood. Her imagination draws the lines. She sees the two blue seeds that recognize the other like eyes of a mother and a child gazing into one another. The separation is real but so is the connection. It is the space of desire. It is eros.

The seeds form a theme in all of the pieces. They are lotus seeds taken from pods I had collected from the Huntington Botanical Gardens. As mentioned above, the organic materials used in the pieces were objects that drew me into their world. The seeds are dead material from which grows new life. They symbolize that uncertain realm of the transition from death to potential beginnings. They return me to the image of Inanna, who was returned to death as mere matter, before her return to life and a more whole version of herself in the Great Above.

I painted the seeds in the wood pieces blue, a choice informed by the dream I once had of my grandmother, but also by the color of lapis lazuli that symbolizes the divine feminine. After that decision, I found Hillman's (1997) article, "The Seduction of Black," which explored the color tones of the alchemical imagination and noted that following blackness is blueness, "not cynical, but sad; not hard and smart, but slow. The blues bring the body back with a revisioned feeling, head and body rejoined" (p. 42). He articulated clearly the impact of illness in my life: first a death, and then a slow and blue reawakening to a revisioned body and embodied mind. The space between, when black becomes blue and blue is just a slow suggestion of emergence, can be harrowing but it is also the space of desire. The unknown, unspeakable, but wished-for manifestation is anima's presence. She, in her unformed but relational energy is the beginning of desire.

Her presence may instigate one's necessary libidinal force to keep going and bring new life to fruition.

Continuing with alchemical references, anima also gives one a cooling home to let one's coagulated ego-self soften into the *solutio* of the semiotic realm. I suggest that French aviator and writer Antoine de Saint-Exupery's description of night can be likened to this state. He reflected,

> Night, the beloved. Night, when words fade and things come alive. When the destructive analysis of day is done, and all that is truly important becomes whole and sound again. When man reassembles his fragmentary self and grows with the calm of a tree. (Saint-Exupery, n.d.)

Essentially, the aggressive day with its ceaseless judgment and "destructive analysis" is followed by the dark mystery of lost edges, where one may reunite with the secrets of the body and the power of the unconscious as one dreams. With night, people's lives briefly become "more private and more singularly our own . . . cloaked in the protective mantle of the shadows" (Chard, 2010, p. 95). Night offers a different kind of wholeness. It is the dark feminine, Ereshkigal's underworld, where the interplay of fragmentation and wholeness—form and fracture—undo the requirements of day and allow for dissolutions of persona, reclamations of self, and uncertain arrivals of life.

Whereas "the construction of *I* entails a heroic (male) imposition of form upon soma as raw material" (Duncan, 2003a, p. 79), the archetypal feminine provides a space for shape shifting, an integral aspect of the individuation process—the always unfolding and never foreclosing self. Indeed, Duncan (2003a) wrote that people are culturally without a functioning feminine archetype that can hold such shape shifting, yet so much of human experience exists outside the phallic economy of discourse and heroic conceptualizations that operate within a system of foreclosure, a system of specificity and

definition. Similarly, against this masculine culture of foreclosure, illness, like night, unfolded in me. Thus, Saint-Exupery's metaphor voiced not just the archetypal feminine, but the impact of illness for me. The night, although frightening and uncertain, offered me a place to hide from the judgments and interrogations of the heroic day (the Great Above); it offered a place where life reclaimed and made me whole in its mystery. Certainly, illness brought me to the *nigredo* of night, that state of total decay and darkness, but also to the slow, blue possibility of "head and body rejoined" (Hillman, 1997, p. 13) and a curious turn toward my own polymorphous nature.

Although all three pieces articulate this theme on some level, this first piece is most directly about being in between, where there is loss, tension, and promise, perhaps best articulated as a state of incubation or "pregnant darkness" (Wikman, 2004, p. 1). It represents both the desire and the calm of the feminine principle—the eros and the semiotic. Duncan's exploration of the anima through the phenomenon of a child engaging with her mother's face may help articulate these two qualities further. Duncan (2003b) suggested, "in that animated surface . . . come[s] together an emotional inscription which both *precedes* entry into the Symbolic and *exceeds* it" [emphasis added] (p. 241). It is prior to the Cogito and beyond it. It is both what has been before and what will come to be.

2. Anonymous. My next piece, "Anonymous" (see Figures A3-A6) started with the sound of evening crickets in mid-July. Alone, I was getting ready for bed. My journal read:

> Hearing the crickets from my bedroom while busily clearing off my bed for sleep, I was filled with the rhythmic sway of their sounds. I closed my eyes and lifted my right arm, compelled to create arcs in the air like a gestural joining in their

> dark, gentle song. For a few seconds, I was theirs. (Author's personal journal, July 7, 2014)

This felt so good: a flash rapture, a full and unexpected surrender in which the busy *I* was lost in sound. From all of my recorded moments, this one speaks most potently of Merleau-Ponty's conception of the "anonymous One," the pre-reflective aspect of the lived body to which he ascribed multiple names including the "organismic *a priori*," the "knowing body," and the "natural self" (as cited in Madison, 1981, p. 26). Merleau-Ponty (1947/1964) wrote,

> It is before our undivided existence that the world is true and exists . . . which is to say . . . that we have in [the world] the experience of a truth which shows through and envelops rather than being held and circumscribed by our mind. (p. 6)

The *undivided existence* is that semiotic state before ego-consciousness, before the *I* to which one has become accustomed takes over and further splits one from that primordial state. However, healthy adults may not typically connect to that primordial state unless by way of an *I* that must rediscover that state. Madison (1981) clarified,

> For as a matter of fact what exists is not first of all a "One" and then afterwards an *I*; the case is rather that it is an *I* which discovers the One as a dimension of its *own* being. Rather than say that what exists is a natural subjectivity and that this subjectivity is impersonal and anonymous, it would be better to say that nature penetrates to the very heart of the personal, thinking subject and that the latter encounters *in himself* an anonymous element, a certain abyss into which his being escapes (or rather, perhaps, an abyss out of which his being arises). (p. 43)

The sound of the crickets came from such an abyss, a state of being I have come to re-member. The stick-like structure of the figure in my "Anonymous" piece is without any identifying features. It is just that anonymous *One* leaning into the stimulus that has pulled the *One* from the abyss and said, *Here, here you are. This sound, this sound is you. Be it with us for an instant, before your ego splits off and heads back to the Great Above*.

In this piece, I used lotus seedpods. Their shape, both contained yet open, concrete yet suggestive, builds a gently curving wall that implies sound. They also rise up and in through a crack within the ground—a "dehiscence," of *being*, "shining forth" as a phenomenon, evoking its equivalent in the listener (Merleau-Ponty, as cited in Madison, 1981, p. 218). In the spirit of Inanna, as seedpods, they must die in order to become the source of new life. Floating above the water, their stems eventually weaken and they fall below the surface and down into the muddy depths where they deposit their treasure. Then, within the dark and unknown waters of one's psyche, something new takes form. One must listen with an ear for its voice—this feminine eruption in the masculine frame. She is the beginning and the end, what has been and what will be.

"Anonymous" is also about the inter-subjective or dialectic quality of being. A lotus pod suspended in the chest-area of the figure mirrors the others. One may imagine the pod as if it is the heart. The chest is often where people do much of their deepest feeling, where the intensity of love and loss grips with pressure. The cage of the chest holds and reflects that unquantifiable potential to connect, create, and destroy. It is perhaps the space in which people feel themselves haunted by that which captivates or repulses them. With this piece, I wanted to evoke the feeling of the chest in the viewer and also comment on the human impulse for mimicry, wherein people attune their consciousness to the phenomena of the world and respond with likeness as a way to express their connection. This quality, Duncan (2003b) suggested, is anima consciousness; "the quality of anima consciousness is not 'fixed' but liquid; the associations are clouds, waves, and other semi-fluid forms that are always *in play* and 'mimic' themselves" (p. 241). When I heard the crickets, my gesture of raising my right

arm and re-creating their rhythm with my body was this kind of mimicry. From their song to my arm to the sculpture, my paying attention created some endless cascade, and brings me to my next thought: people are in constant participation with the unfolding of their world. At the most basic level people are creators, and according to Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968), being ultimately "*requires creation of us* for us to experience it" (p. 197).

However, there is both conscious creation and unconscious creation; that is, people can behold their participation or lack thereof. For instance, illness triggered a shift in my consciousness so that changes to my perceptual body were a complete threat to my existence. Out of nowhere talons plucked me off the ground, and soaring high above the earth in the grip of their force, I looked down at my unconscious patterns, my own mimicries—both joyful and painful. Likewise, philosopher and writer Havi Carel (2012) noted, "Illness imposes such a distancing from everyday routines and meaning and contains opportunity for questioning and rediscovery" (p. 100). Illness, therefore, is not just disease in the body; it is an existential crack through which one is called "to see the world anew" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. xiii).

Illness can also put into relief one's creative complicity in it all—the lived body is in a constant creative exchange with its surroundings. As the original intentional arc falls away, one may become aware that it existed at all, thus becoming more conscious of the co-creative and complicit exchange in which one performed. One may be left to wonder, *What now can I do? What do I desire? What now will I mimic?* There is, after all, a new now. However, before an individual can arrive at the new now, the old one must perhaps be made conscious and mourned. As for a therapist's role in this process,

> Attuned to this field, the therapist has to be a compassionate witness who not only is able to hold for the patient the grief over the loss of a world, but also is able to

> help the patient bury the ‘dead body’ whose symptomatic gestures have fallen into a void. (Romanyshyn, 2011, p. 55)

New gestures must be cultivated, sometimes time and again, as illness can be a constant renegotiation of one’s ability. Indeed, chronic, degenerative illness can put one through this cycle of gestural death and resurrection again and again.

3. The Ocean. The final, minimal piece is a found object (see Figure A7). I saw the small metal rectangle with a gold foot on blue background in a basket of trinkets at a garden store. I recalled a moment when my maternal grandfather was taken to the hospital after a heart attack, just two months after I had been diagnosed with MS. With my mother and father, I walked along one of the sterile, beige floors looking for his hospital room. I peered down a hallway and saw the barely visible feet of a man who was lying on a gurney and disappearing into an elevator. He was far away, at least 100 feet. I turned to my parents and said, “There he is.”

I have always been interested in the aesthetics of things. I study carefully the shapes, forms, colors, and qualities of my physical world, and perhaps of bodies in particular. I can bring to mind the slight overlap between my grandfather’s lower front teeth or the way his wide fingers slimmed toward their tips, and the way my mother’s hands do the same. I suppose my last piece, “The Ocean,” is a gentle meditation on the particularities of each person and what I have inscribed in my own soul as their presence to me. For example, my grandfather loved to swim and he had a sailboat. If there was water around, he was barefoot and generally got in. My awareness of his pale, slender feet connects to my memories of him loving the ocean. They were emblematic of his gestural self. To see them in that hospital elevator was to witness that gesture go silent. In other words, Ereshkigal’s eyes of death had arrived.

The Great Below was coming for my grandfather, but accompanying my shock of sadness was also an eerie solace that revealed him as part of something larger. Enveloped and cradled in a new kind of energy, re-membering this moment brings to mind again Saint-Exupery's (n.d.) soothing description of night, "When the destructive analysis of day is done, and all that is truly important becomes whole and sound again." There is a strange kind of healing that may happen in seeing the gestural body go quiet. As illness "makes firm, nails down into material reality, embodies, and grounds spirit in matter and the moment," it also may calm and connect people (Perera, 1981, p. 39). They may feel in those moments—seeing the body in failure—less alone. This experience is perhaps a common denominator for all.

For over 2,000 years, the image of Christ hanging upon the cross has provided a message of hope. It is, suggested psychologist Edward Smink (2010), a culturally potent example of how, paradoxically, "Healing is accomplished by gazing upon woundedness," (p. 204). That woundedness may be psychological, but in this case I refer to the wounded physical as a way to connect to that healing consciousness such as I have traced to be an anima consciousness. As Duncan (2003b) so aptly suggested, this consciousness both precedes and exceeds the symbolic field, and is a source from which one can exhume potential meaning and transformation. For if one turns over the feminine coin, Ereshkigal's eyes of death are countered with Aphrodite's vision, "divine enhancement of any ordinary thing" (Hillman, 1992, pp. 20-21).

Findings and Clinical Applications

What I discovered in researching and producing the art pieces is that illness can bring one to a deep irony held by the two sides of the feminine coin. Indeed, at the center

of this study is the ironic intersection of the embodied and boundless, in which, until one goes back to the confines of the perceptual body and finds it as a "knowing body," one may be trapped. The two quotes that introduce this chapter articulate this irony. The matter that is the body is perhaps also the way through which one can transcend one's failing frames of reference and ego identifications.

Additionally, I realized how my relationship to my immediate surroundings had shifted. I became aware that it is through horizontal depth that I am offered vertical depth. In other words, my way to my soul is through my embodied relationship to particular objects and phenomena in my environment. In illness, when space, time, and ability are reduced, the immediate environment apparently must expand. As such, life is always now, happening right in front of me. I cannot count on a body that will be able to do something in the future. Amplification of the immediate environment thus reflects my need to reconfigure and expand my identity, too. This speaks to the strengths of the language both depth psychology and phenomenology offer in providing support for those with chronic illness.

Depth and phenomenology. Jung (1956/1970) wrote,

> In the unconscious are hidden those "sparks of light" (*scintillae*), the archetypes, from which a higher meaning can be "extracted.". . . The "magnet" that attracts the hidden thing is the self . . . or the symbol representing it, which the adept uses as an instrument. (p. 491)

In other words, Jung suggested that one must pay attention to that which pulls her or him, because the thing that pulls is the self as it tries to come into being. I think of my recorded moments of the flesh as just such "sparks of light" (p. 491). They are offerings that reflect the depth perspective that "our primordial holistic situatedness prefigures our

potential for developing our humanity beyond the limitations of a personal ego" (Levin, 2000, p. 167).

This depth perspective is one that relies on a phenomenological awareness. It is an approach that expands the concept of self from a concretized identity to an always-becoming process that can be witnessed without judgment or expectation. This perspective is perhaps especially important for those with illness, as the uncertainty of the lived body can be so keenly threaded into their daily consciousness. They are perhaps always on the brink of the next possible articulation by way of shifts occurring in their mechanistic foundation. The ill person may need to feel that a therapist can ride along without any agenda—there is enough pressure to do illness right.

The necessity to be optimistic and have hope (see Appendix B for more on the concept of *hope*), as the MS Society motto urges for people with MS (National Multiple Sclerosis Society, 2015c), can cage a person into an articulation about one's condition that is not true. Although fabulous in bringing awareness to issues of support and research for cures, there is a certain dogma attached to experiences like a Breast Cancer Walk with all that pink! Cultural studies scholar Barbara Ehrenreich's (2009) recent book, *Smile or Die*, is a good example of someone who finds herself firmly and frustratingly outside the positive rhetoric of breast cancer, which only deepens the isolating experience of her illness. She wrote,

> The cheerfulness of breast cancer culture goes beyond mere absence of anger to what looks, all too often like a positive embrace of the disease . . . it requires the denial of understandable feelings of anger and fear, all of which must be buried under a cosmetic layer of cheer. (pp. 27, 41)

Both a depth psychological and a phenomenological approach to treating those with chronic illness may mitigate the impact of such bleached perspectives on those coping with the threat of death.

The feminine: Self-determination and receptivity. I woke up in the middle of the night a couple months ago with a very distinct thought. I realized that this whole thesis project is about a deep unconscious need to believe that I can in fact transform myself. More specifically, the project is not just a recognition of and acceptance for the way the illness could transform me, but an acknowledgment that I could transform myself, too, even with the illness. In a way, it is about self-esteem, self-determination, and power—the most difficult and seemingly impossible feelings to achieve in the realm of illness. I have come to believe that my deep need to feel like I could in fact evolve myself and find new ways to live with illness needs a particularly feminine approach in psychotherapy, similar to the one Sullivan (1989) outlined thusly:

> The receptive approach believes everything the patient needs is inside his own psyche; the issue is to mobilize and actualize the patient's own health rather than to cure him. Somehow the therapist must facilitate a process that is already trying to happen . . . she is trying to welcome the patient's wholeness into the room. (p. 81)

Not only does a receptive approach potentially believe in and restore a source of power to the individual, it enacts and models the unknowing anima-consciousness that illness asks one to re-member. Such a consciousness can offer incredible comfort as it "accepts the weight of the body, an acceptance that necessarily includes the gruesome ills of the body and its ultimate death" (Sullivan, 1989, p. 21). It is a counterpoint to both the positive and medical rhetoric American culture seems so determined to project upon illness, which in all likelihood dismisses the actual phenomenon of one's experience. Indeed, both types of

rhetoric may operate as attempts to do away with the dark by dominating its inherent chaos.

However, what one may need in illness is a witness who simultaneously allows for mirroring and containing the chaos. The power of being witnessed in all of one's forms is echoed in the myth of Inanna, when the empathic witnessing Ereshkigal receives also allows for Inanna's re-incarnation to life in the Great Above. Through a fully attuned mirroring of her pain, Ereshkigal transforms and lets Inanna go. Ereshkigal is not forced by a knowing perspective. She is received. She is witnessed.

The archetype of the blind seer made its way through a dream into my thinking during this project, and connects directly to my feelings about re-membering the feminine. It also returns me for a moment to the issue of self-esteem and power that began this section, and their re-definition in illness. The archetype of the blind seer symbolizes the power of those who have lost an ability, which makes them appear less powerful to the outside world. However, a loss of one function may provide for the arrival of a much more powerful and unusual one. The blind seer, such as Tiresius in *The Odyssey* (see Appendix C), "represents a person who, while having lost his eyes, has gained some otherworldly knowledge or wisdom" (Blind seer, n.d). In this project, I have identified *otherworldly knowledge* or *wisdom* as the feminine principle.

The blind seer and the feminine principle remind me of the poem, *The World is Too Much With Us*, by William Wordsworth (c. 1802; see Appendix D). It suggests that people are blinded to the beauty in the world by their busy "getting and spending" (line 2). The irony of the blind seer is that he is free to ignore that which keeps the rest of humanity so entangled, miserable, and short sighted. He is beyond the logic of

patriarchal, Western capitalism and truly sees, by way of his deformity, beyond the frame—perhaps he is "Proteus rising from the sea," as the poem suggests (line 13).

Nature, belonging, and the creative imperative. If people can become more in tune with their authentic selves, not only will they service the needs of their individual psyches, but they may also offer up their gifts more fully to the collective. The rank-and-file nature of what is and is not worthy of one's time, energy, and love is a deep distortion and trauma, not just to the individual, but to the larger world that then misses out on a person's unique and valuable expression. As Jungian analyst Marie-Louise von Franz (1980) noted, "One aim of analysis is to get consciousness to function again according to nature" (pp. 156-57). What von Franz suggested and I suggest is that humans are part of a larger ecosystem or *cosmology* that calls people's psyches to function in tune with it. Romanyshyn drew a parallel between alchemical Jungian psychology and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenal ontology based on this concept. The two disciplines, Romanyshyn (2000) wrote,

> Move toward a psychology which is in fact no longer a psychology in the modern sense of an interior soul or self, but a cosmology where the self is a star. They move toward a consciousness which surrenders to its participation in the order of creation. (p. 38)

Continuing this thought forward, people's participation as humans in the cosmology is perhaps to create via the synchronistic coming together of mind and matter in new and unexpected ways—in metaphors. In essence, "the vision of metaphor is the way in which we continue the work of creation, releasing the promise of the world into its fulfillment" (Romanyshyn, 2000, p. 41). Thus, in whatever form I take, in illness and in health, I belong to this process. I am of it.

In creating my art pieces for this project, I was humbled by how little skill for fine art I have, but I also felt I did not have to worry about that. Along similar lines, famous American dancer and choreographer Martha Graham affirmed,

> There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening, that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost. (As cited in Cameron, 1992, p. 75)

Perhaps people need to open the channels and stop judging the outcome. This idea may be especially powerful for those living with illness. So much rejection tends to occur in an ill state—rejection from work, from loved ones, from what feels like life itself. Therefore, efforts to soften the self-rejection and resource one's sense of belonging should be key components in working with the chronically ill. Reviving a belief that they are part of a larger project of creation, in whatever state they exist, may offer powerful recourse. My recourse was a growing understanding that I am in part a holder of the feminine principle, even if simply by my way of sitting in a room with others. That is something I may offer now.

In this holding state and expressed in my art pieces, I am in touch with what Merleau-Ponty (1945) called the "insurpassable plentitude" (p. 376). When the things I encounter become not things that my *being for itself* subjectivity possesses by way of re-constituting my relative meaning in them, I am dealt a sort of poetic reduction that allows for a whole new world to betray itself. This reduction is liberating, rich, at times the trigger for tremendous releases of emotion, and a powerful source of healing. It is also a mirror for the *insurpassable plentitude* within the self: there is always more to possess and be possessed by.

Chapter IV
Summary and Conclusions

Summary

Chapter I introduced the reader to the area of interest, which included the experience of illness in the lived body as formulated by Merleau-Ponty, and the concomitant re-membrance of the feminine as a result. The guiding purpose and rationale were articulated as an effort to develop "a highly nuanced reflective awareness of the lived body" (Saban, 2011, p. 107) as a way to further a connection to my own embodied experience and expand my sensitivity in clinical work with clients. In light of this, the project sought to find what I would discover through radical reflection and re-membrance of the flesh and the feminine in art pieces that would enhance my work as a psychotherapist and add to the body of knowledge regarding interventions for the chronically ill. Additionally, my personal experience of chronic illness became a foundation for inquiry and exploration. Summarily, this project was a personal study on the phenomena of illness, embodiment, and creativity. It was about *re-orienting* to a body with illness, *re-constructing* a valued self, and most significant to this thesis, *re-membering* a lost aspect of the self that was split off prior to illness and the illness called back to consciousness

Chapter II thoroughly explained and explored the terms introduced in Chapter I and opened with a brief account of Cartesian dualism. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and the archetypal feminine were individually mapped and connected as a consciousness

that unsettles the legacy of Cartesian dualism and voices an awareness that I experienced as a result of illness. The myth of Inanna provided a metaphor for the feminine principle and its relationship to embodiment, mortality, uncertainty, and creativity. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and ontology were tied to the feminine by way of embodiment, the intersubjective primordial semiotic and anima-consciousness, and the generative creativity and plenitude of phenomena.

Chapter III followed with a discussion of the art pieces produced as "radical reflection," understood as "that reflection which grasps itself as given to itself on the basis of bodily life" (Madison, 1981, p. 199). Upon this foundation, away from that "Great Above," away from the "castle," and into the "teeming" and uncertain "city," I noticed and recorded my reflections, and how they "expresse[d] the meaning of the silent life of perception" (Madison, 1981, p. 200). Out of these embodied moments of reflection, I created three art pieces entitled "Between," "Anonymous," and "The Ocean" (see Figures A1-A7).

"Between" (see Figures A1 & A2) speaks of the tension of eros. It alludes to the space between things, expressing both loss of and possibility for connection. It entangles death and desire, nodding at pain as the prerequisite to transformation. It also cools with a meditative tone and offers a sense of return to the gentle, holding space of the semiotic. "Anonymous" (see Figures A3-A6) speaks more directly of that undivided existence of the "organisimic *a priori*," or "anonymous One" (Merleau-Ponty, as cited in Madison, 1981, p. 26), which may be felt when one is so consumed by a perceptual experience that it fades almost fully as the reflective cogito, "where the world and the subject reflect each other and, so to speak, flow into each other" (Madison, 1981, p. 21). "Anonymous"

highlights the fluid quality of anima-consciousness, its playfulness, mimicry, and creative collusion with its surroundings as forms join and boundaries collapse. “Anonymous” also features the visceral space of the chest as a particularly sensitive zone in the body, wherein one may notice a draw toward that which returns oneself to a larger system of being. Finally, “The Ocean,” (see Figure A7) as a minimalist piece based on a personal experience with my grandfather, symbolizes this deep irony in the feminine principle: in material death is the divine. In gazing upon both one’s gestural expressions and mechanistic failures as a body, one is released from its confines. In embodiment one finds the way to what is more than one’s body.

The end of the chapter drew additional thematic conclusions and clinical applications for working with the chronically ill. These included the inherent and necessary relationship between phenomenology and depth psychology as a way to invite shifts in experience without judgment and increased compassion and tolerance; the significant relationship between a receptive therapeutic approach and a sense of self-determination in the client; and the significance of belonging to and participating in the creative unfolding of the world in whatever ways one is capable.

Final Thoughts and Clinical Implications

The following is taken as the premise and the fortified conclusion of this research and my work as a therapist going forward: “It is through the understanding and development of our various capacities in perception, gesture, and motility that we must work out first, and work out last, our potential for Selfhood in relation to Being as a whole” (Levin, 1985, p. 8). In light of this, and in working with those who are ill, I would thread in modalities that engage the perceptual body. Eye movement

desensitization and reprocessing (commonly known as EMDR), art therapy, the Hakomi method, somatic experiencing, and authentic movement are all examples of such modalities. For when those capacities for gesture, motility, and perception shift because of illness, one must likely mourn that original selfhood and must reorient, reconstruct, and perhaps, as in my case, re-member aspects of self that have been held unconscious.

As such a return to the body relates to the larger field of depth psychology, the philosopher David Michael Levin (2000) articulated,

> Our story, therefore, is an attempt to recollect, for depth psychology, the primordial body of feeling and perception which Merleau-Ponty celebrates in his work. Because of its holistic, gathering nature, the *recollection* of this body is key to the *metamorphosis* of that body, thanks to which Psyche can become whole at the level of consciousness. (p. 163)

Like the ancient healing rituals discussed in Chapter II, the first step may require a "return to origins" (Sullivan, 1989, p. 60). The body may be the origin. A move toward corporeal awareness is perhaps a return to the source from which something may be born anew, and likely, closer to whole.

Appendix A
Production Images

List of Figures

Figure A1. *Between*. Acrylic, collage, wood, lotus seeds, and thread on board by the author, A. Wullschlager, completed in 2014. Photograph by the author.

Figure A2. Between. Acrylic, collage, wood, lotus seeds, and thread on board by the author, A. Wullschlager, completed in 2014. Photograph by the author.

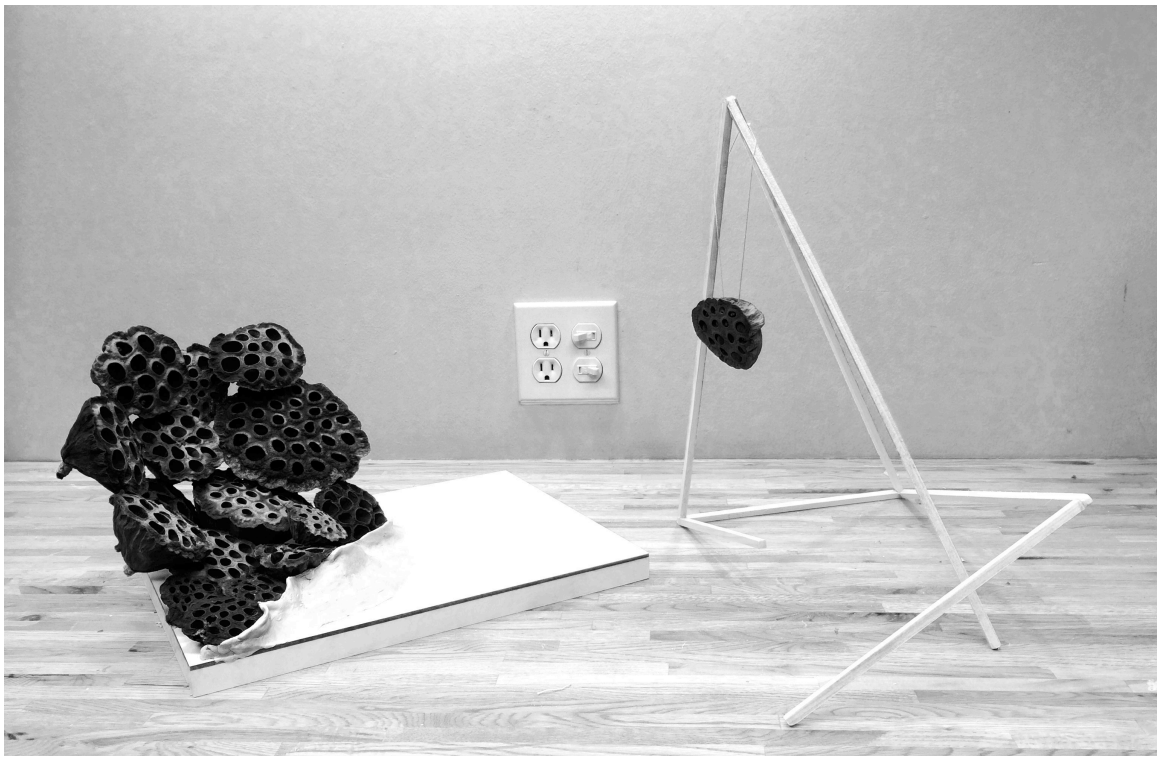

Figure A3. Anonymous. Lotus pods, clay, wood, and thread by the author, A. Wullschlager, completed in 2014. Photograph by the author.

Figure A4. Anonymous. Lotus pods, clay, wood, and thread by the author, A. Wullschlager, completed in 2014. Photograph by the author.

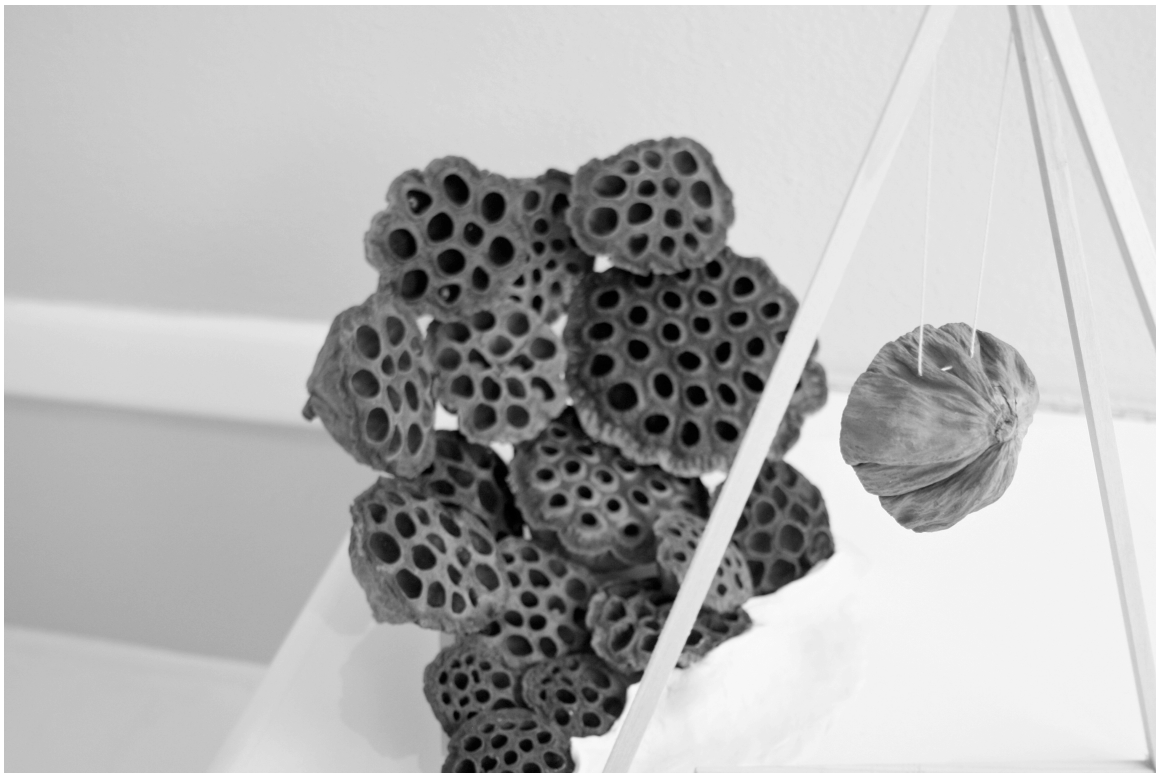

Figure A5. Anonymous. Lotus pods, clay, wood, and thread by the author, A. Wullschlager, completed in 2014. Photograph by the author.

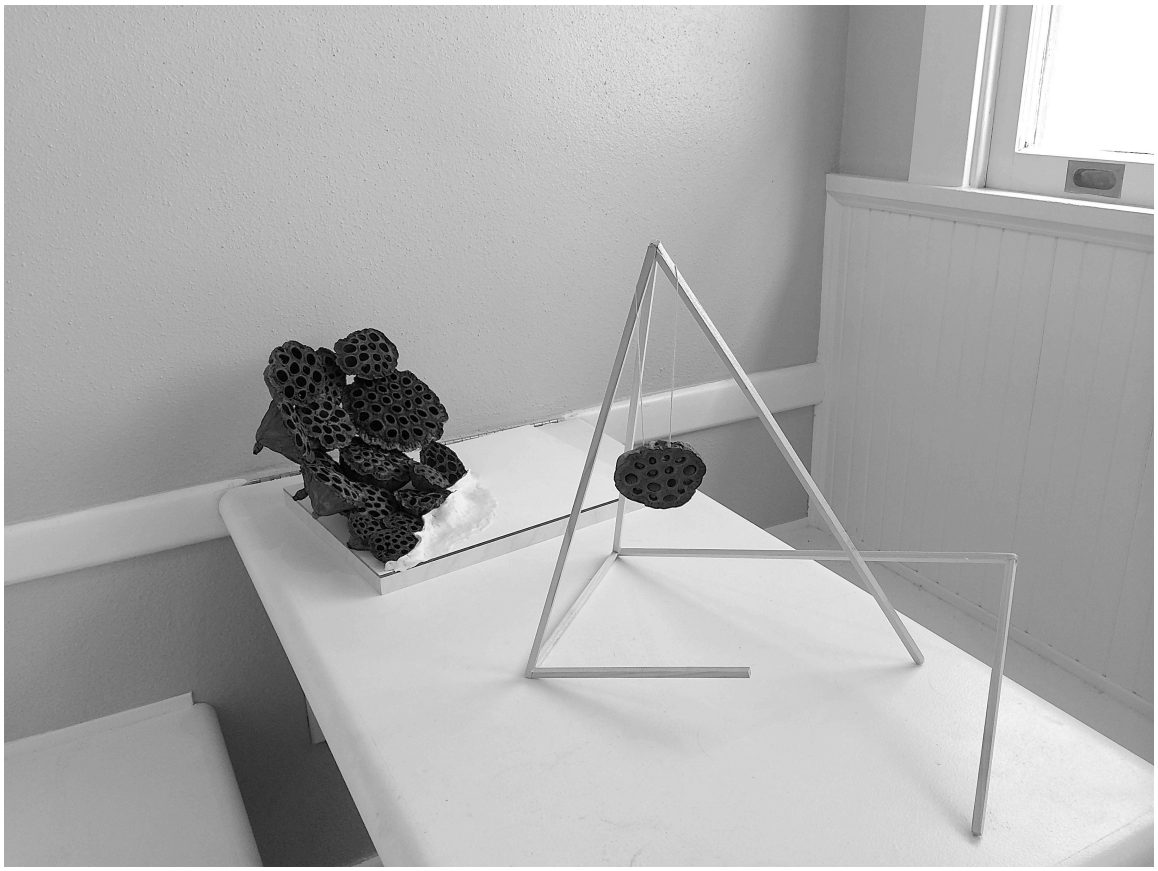

Figure A6. Anonymous. Lotus pods, clay, wood, and thread by the author, A. Wullschlager, completed in 2014. Photograph by the author.

Figure A7. The Ocean. Found object, metal and acrylic on canvas, by the author, A. Wullschlager, completed in 2014. Photograph by the author.

Appendix B
Notes on Hope

I have a fair amount of discomfort with the positive rhetoric placed on illness, and I prefer the word possibility to hope. In my experience, hope can create foreclosure on witnessing one's actual experience by way of clinging to a specific desire or set of desires, especially for cures and miracles. The word possibility is less specific and may therefore allow for the arrival of whatever may come, healing and pain. It does not ignore the dark. I appreciate the way T. S. Eliot (1943) articulated a similar sentiment in "East Cocker" from his poem, *Four Quartets*. He wrote,

> I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
> For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
> For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
> But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
> Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
> So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.
> (p. 28, lines 125-132)

Appendix C
Tiresias—Blind Prophet of Thebes

So, you mock my blindness?
Let me tell you this.
You with your precious eyes,
you're blind to the corruption of your life,
to the house you live in, those you live with—
(Sophocles, n.d.)

Appendix D
The World Is Too Much With Us

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;

Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.
(Wordsworth, c. 1802)

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