

DECOLONIZING SILENCES: TOWARD A CRITICAL PHENOMENOLOGY OF
DEEP SILENCES WITH GLORIA E. ANZALDÚA
AND MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Motivating this dissertation is a concern for how Western philosophical, cultural, and political practices tend to privilege speech and voice as emancipatory tools and reduce silence to silencing. To locate power in silence and not exclusively in speech and voice, the dissertation grapples with the normative implications of coloniality vis-à-vis the phenomenon of silence at both the theoretical and sensible levels; it investigates how modern/colonial assumptions affect Western understandings of the phenomenon of silence and eventuate modalities of existence that preclude hearing the polyvocality of silences. To press Western culture beyond its negative affinities with “silence,” I develop and defend the concept of “deep silence.” Unlike “silencing,” which is understood as the opposite of speech and signification and, as such, as a matter of an already available utterance being smothered or unspoken, “deep silence” indicates a transformative power that generates meanings that have not yet been voiced and that, importantly, breaks with colonial norms and expectations. Deep silences, I argue, can be a powerful decolonizing tool.

The main interlocutors of the dissertation are Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. For these authors, silence is not the opposite of speech, or a matter of an already available utterance being smothered or intentionally withheld. Rather, it plays a

central role in giving human beings sensible access to the world. Both thinkers, moreover, appeal to the aesthetic to express the otherwise-elusive senses of silence. Working closely with Anzaldúa's decolonial mythopoetics and Merleau-Ponty's aesthetic and ontological writings, I propose that the modality whereby one bears witness to experiences of marginalization matters to decolonizing endeavors. Mobilizing, rather than eliding, deep silences in one's account decenters key assumption of Western thinking, opening onto modalities of healing often overlooked by Western legalism and Transitional Justice initiatives; it makes "visible" colonial *historias* without capitulating to *specularization*, i.e., rendering experiences of coloniality specular to and readily available for dissection and inspection by the colonizing gaze. My project thus not only offers a critique of discursive approaches to emancipation; it also provides a philosophically rich contribution to current debates about decolonizing methodologies and sense-making.

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I say mujer mágica,
empty yourself.
Shock yourself into new ways of perceiving the world,
shock your readers in the same.
Stop the chatter inside their heads.
[...]
There is no need for words to fester in our minds...
Throw away abstraction and the academic learning,
the rules, the map and compass.
Feel your way without blinders.
To touch more people,
the personal realities and the social must be invoked
—not through rhetoric
but through blood and pus and sweat.
Write with your eyes like painters,
with your ears like musicians,
with your feet like dancers...
write with your tongues of fire.
—Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Speaking in Tongues*

“What do I know?” is not only “what is knowing?”
and not only “who am I?”
but finally: “what is there?”
and even: “what is the there is?”
These questions call not for the exhibiting of something said
which would put an end to them,
but for the disclosure of Being that is not posited
because it has no need to be,
because it is silently behind all our affirmations,
negations, and even behind all formulated questions,
not that it is a matter of forgetting them in its silence,
not that it is as matter of imprisoning it in our chatter,
but because philosophy is the
reconversion of silence and speech into one another...
—Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*

I. QUESTIONS OF SILENCE

What if we learn to listen for silence?
—Jill Stauffer, *Ethical Loneliness*

[Silence] is not always or necessarily a denial or extinguishing of some reality
[...] It can be fertilizing, it can bathe the imagination, it can, as in great open
spaces [...] be the nimbus of a way of life, a condition of vision.
—Adrienne Rich, “Arts of the Possible”

As I write this introduction, the edited collection *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology* has recently been published. The collection sanctions a self-reflective shift, if you will, of phenomenology; aware of the structural openness of its method, by becoming “critical,” phenomenology re-orientes itself toward the political.¹ Concretely, this means two things: critical phenomenology is more than the mere description of (oppressive) conditions of possibility but their hacking, and conditions of possibility are not transcendental but quasi-transcendental or historical. First, critical phenomenology departs from the project of classical phenomenology by extending its scope beyond that of mere description or grasping the *eidōs* of phenomena to that of tracking and challenging the racist-colonial normative structures that render the “familiar” a site of marginalization for many. Critical phenomenology does not strive for apodictic knowledge, but, rather, aims to identify and contest oppressive material-historical conditions of possibility of experience. Second, critical phenomenology, in its return to “the things themselves” (Husserl 2001, 168), ought to contend with the ways in which power relations structure experience. As Lisa Guenther writes in her contribution to the anthology, these structures

shape our experience, not just empirically or in a piecemeal fashion, but ... in a quasi-transcendental way. [They] are not a priori in the sense of being absolutely

prior to experience and operating the same way regardless of context, but they do play a constitutive role in shaping the meaning and manner of our experience. (2020, 12)

As Sarah Ahmed and Alia Al-Saji show in their respective analyses in *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) and “A Phenomenology of Critical-Ethical Vision” (2009), structures like compulsory heterosexuality and whiteness operate like “straightening” and “whitening” tendencies, preemptively demarcating the border between sense and non-sense, instituting fields of visibility and intelligibility according with which experiences may count as phenomena or knowledge in the first place. That is, operating pre-reflectively, historical structures make certain kinds of experience of the world possible and meaningful, while foreclosing others. In the context of coloniality, experiences and phenomena that are not bound by the presence of modern/colonial consciousness fall through the cracks; cast to the shadows, so to speak, they remain “unthinkable” and “nonsensical.” As I will argue throughout this dissertation, one of these phenomena is silence, whose polyvocality and generativity is lost in a modern/colonial world.

Consider the case of the three Native American shields found in a cave in Utah by the Petcol family in 1926 and repatriated earlier this century to the Navajo tribe. Although the nuances of the case are beyond the scope of the present inquiry, this example concretizes the ways in which historical structures like coloniality are more than *what* we see, socio-political institutions, or our naïve beliefs about the world, i.e., more than objects of analyses;² they shape modalities of perceiving and making sense of the world that become habitual ways of being in the world, preemptively foreclosing the possibility of encountering phenomena (like the generativity of silence) that may rupture

our familiarity with the world and its colonial and heteropatriarchal structures and institutions.

1. The Case of the Three Native American Shields

In 1990, Congress passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) to redress a long history of cultural insensitivity, wrongs, and abuses done to Native Americans. In “Claiming the Shields,” legal scholar Debora Threedy observes that for the two centuries predating the Act, remains of Native American origin were considered scientific specimens, which effectively meant that it was legal for white Americans to appropriate skeletal and cultural artifacts from graves and store them in archives (2009, 93). The NAGPRA addresses the ownership of human remains and sacred objects found after November 16, 1990 and the repatriation of those found prior to the Act. Regarding the latter, it sanctions that Native American remains ought to be repatriated according to “claims to ownership,” established on the grounds of lineal descent, the relationship to the land on which the remains are found, and cultural affiliation with the relics (Threedy 2009, 96). Remarkably, the NAGPRA adjudicates claims to ownership by taking into account oral history equally as scientific evidence.³ In this way, the NAGPRA is “sensitive to different ways in which cultural memory gets stored and transmitted” (Stauffer 2015, 98). Yet, as Jill Stauffer points out in *Ethical Loneliness*, “even a piece of legislation designated, like the NAGPRA, to redress past harms in ways sensitive to the incommensurate forms of meaning-making in U.S. legalism and Native American culture” may fail *to listen* to claims made by tribal representatives (2015, 98). This is what happened in the case of the shields.

Scientific determinations of the source of the shields yielded inconclusive results, as both archeologists and anthropologists could not come to a consensus on which tribe “owned” the shields. Caught in the in-between of Western and indigenous law, the tribes interested in the shields had to advance legal claims to ownership. The Navajo tribe offered what was deemed to be a persuasive narrative about the shields, recounted by Navajo elder and storyteller John Holiday, who claimed that the shields were sacred objects needed for the “Protection Way Ceremony, as well as objects of cultural patrimony” (Threedy 2009, 98).⁴ The Ute/Paiute tribes did not produce a story, presenting instead a legal argument in which they sought to establish legitimate relationship to the land and cultural affiliation. Although the latter presented a more conventional legal argument for ownership contra the oral history of the shields offered by the Navajo tribe, the Ute/Paiute tribes remained silent about central aspects of their religion, insisting not only that “objects belonging to the sacred realm [such as the shields] cannot legitimately be claimed by any particular tribe or individual,” but also that they were not culturally permitted to speak the names of deceased relatives. These costumes made it impossible for them to provide discursive evidence regarding who “manufactured and buried the shields” (Threedy 2009, 118), details included in Holiday’s narrative instead. Lee Ann Kreutzer—the archeologist in charge of adjudicating the case—awarded the shields to the Navajo tribe over the contending joint filing of the Ute/Paiute tribes on the basis that the latter’s claim “lacked[ed] credibility.” As she put it, “in fairness to other claimants and the general public, the National Park Service cannot simply accept a tribe’s unexplained, unelaborated, and unjustified request for reparation” (Threedy 2009, 117).

As both Threedy and Stauffer point out, what sanctioned the difference between the two testimonies was how each tribe mobilized the “unspeakable” (Threedy 2009, 117) and, crucially, how Kreutzer related to it. Although the Navajo tribe’s testimony was a story, it satisfied criteria (laid out by Lance Bennett and Martha S. Feldman in their 1981 *Reconstructing Reality in the Courtroom*) whereby a story’s persuasiveness is determined based on its structure and external corroboration. “The more ambiguities in the connections between the central action of the story [i.e., hiding the shields] and the key symbols for the elements of the story [i.e., key facts like the agents, scene, agency, and purpose], the less persuasive the story is” (Threedy 2009, 111).⁵ Kreutzer judged Holiday’s testimony to be internally coherent or “unambiguous” and, as such, “persuasive” (Threedy 2009, 113). On the other hand, albeit presented in the form of an argument, the Ute/Paiute tribes’ testimony was deemed “not persuasive or even adequate...seriously lacking in credibility” (117). The ambiguity and lack of persuasion in the latter’s argument was credited to their silences, to those aspects of the Ute/Paiute’s culture they would or could not speak about:

The tribes’ claim is based on the fact that the dating and location of the shields are consistent with Ute/Paiute occupation, and that some favorable comparisons have been made between the shield motifs and known Ute shield pictographs. No link to particular individuals, groups, or specific ceremonies has been offered. While such generalities might be acceptable were this collaborative claim the only claim for the shields, they do not outweigh the specific and detailed information provided by the Navajo Nation regarding these shields. (Kreutzer 2002, 22)

As Threedy observes, although Kreutzer stated that the “lack of Ute oral traditions in regard to the shields means nothing,” when compared with the detailed and (according to Western criteria) internally consistent account provided by the Navajo tribe, “the absence

of comparable narrative evidence damaged the Southern Ute claim” (2009, 115). In 2003, the three Native American shields were repatriated to the Navajo tribe.

What is of interest here is not who the rightful owner of the shields may be. Rather, cases like the three Native American shields presents us with a paradigmatic instance of Eurocentered approaches’ inability to listen for silences, which, in turn, makes explicit epistemic and ontological modern/colonial assumptions whereby the phenomenon of silence is conceived as inadequate to meaning making and rational thinking/argumentation. Even though the NAGPRA interrupts the adversarial system of U.S. legalism by expanding the conception of what counts as a reliable speech act/witness to include oral history (within U.S. legalism, oral history is discarded as inadmissible evidence qua hearsay), and Kreutzer was well intentioned and meant to judge well, she was not able to “hear what some of the claims she judged were saying” (Stauffer 2015, 166). What Kreutzer missed in the Ute/Paiute tribes’ claim—what she could not hear—was the significance of silence, which instead was taken to index lack of persuasion and adequacy, *mere* silence (Threedy 2009, 117). “The loss,” as Stauffer points out, “is that of the opportunity to recognize that there are other forms of judgment and meaning-making” (2015, 102), Specifically, as I propose in this dissertation, the loss is that of the complexity, polyvocality, and fecundity of what I call “deep silence.”

While I will elaborate on the notions of “deep” and “mere” silences below, for now it suffices to know that “mere silence” indexes the conception of silence largely prevalent in Eurocentered theorizing and informed by modern/colonial assumptions whereby the phenomenon indexes either absence and lack of sense, or the inability to speak resulting from oppressive patterns of exclusion from the subject position, of

silencing. “Deep silence,” on the other hand, stands for silence as an agent of (personal, ontological, and political) transformation. I am aware that my choice of terminology *deep* silence may inadvertently reify problematic dichotomies such as surface/depth that have been central to the modern/colonial project. In “Beyond the Closet as a Raceless Paradigm,” Marlon B. Ross criticizes Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s epistemological theory of the closet by pointing out that the surface/depth dichotomy is at play in the delineation of sexual modernity whereby homosexuality is marked by claustrophilia, that is, the value promoted by the White, intellectual establishment of deep, hidden or “*closeted* meaning” (Ross 2005, 139).

Primitives, savages, the poor, and those uneducated in the long history of epistemology are not normally represented as epistemological subjects, partly because they do not have the luxury of composing the kind of voluminous texts that bear the weight of such deep buried—and thus closed/ closeted up—intellectual dilemmas begging for painstakingly close readings. (139)

Aware of the imbrication of the binary surface/depth with the reification of Eurocentered norms, in the context of this dissertation, “deep” is deployed to effect an epistemological suspension of the familiar, problematizing the widespread and monovalent conceptions of silence as mere silence or silencing. Given the decolonial lineage within which this work is situated, the deployment of “depth” as a qualifier for the generative and fecund silence at stake in this dissertation is also meant to evoke the work of “making visible the invisible,” to borrow Nelson Maldonado-Torres’s words, “and analyzing the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or distorted visibility” (2007, 262). “Depth” indexes the recuperation of such invisibility. It is meant to remind us of its complexity and alert if to its polyvocality foreclosed by the current historical formation.

2. *Questions of (Deep) Silence*

Upon reading a report subsequently submitted by the Skull Valley Goshute Tribe addressing what was not and could not be heard in the Ute/Paiute tribes' claims of ownership, Kreutzer remarked on the irony of "writing down oral historical and religious narrative and then employing methods derived from Greek logic to objectify, analyze and evaluate it" (2008, 382). Cases like the three Native American shields, then, alert us to the fact that, contra modern/colonial expectations, silence is an integral part of sense and sense-making practices and invite us to deploy other interpretative aptitudes vis-à-vis the phenomenon of silence.

These concerns raise questions of silence that orient the present project: What would it mean not to dismiss the deep silence (and the meaning it eventuates) constantly exscribed through contact with the world and cross-cultural communication? That is, as the epigraph asks, "what if we also learn to listen for silence?" (Stauffer 2015, 104). And how do we accomplish this task when coloniality's norms of intelligibility and livability foreclose the recognition of modalities of existing, speaking, and hearing that do not conform to its logic, including the polyvocality of silence?

This project pursues two lines of interrogation, concerned, broadly, with modality and power and, specifically, with phenomenology's methodology and methodology's normative implications. Analytically, cases like the three Native American shields help us home in on questions of method: What are the strategies that critical phenomenology ought to devise to pull up traces of these quasi-transcendental structures consigned to invisibility that foreclose hearing the reverberations of silences? But also, how does critical phenomenology harken to these deep silences that modern/colonial ears are not

accustomed to hearing? How does I “put into words” these silences that exceed the presence/t of consciousness? Since posing questions of method without attending to the nuances of the situation would abstract from the concrete historical structures and those affected by them, grappling with these issues means attending to the specific operations of power and asking questions like, why are silences like the Ute/Paiute tribe’s read as lack of adequacy and persuasive evidence? That is, what are the structures and logic—in sum, the modality of existence distinctive of coloniality—such that the phenomenon of silence is immediately perceived and conceived as absence and non-sense?

It is important to stress that the distinction between modality and power is merely analytic; as I argue throughout this dissertation, the two dimensions are intimately intertwined. The modality/method by which the inquirer bears witness (i.e., harkens to and expresses phenomena) is normatively laden, which is to say that, at once, reproduces normative structures while also being instituted by existing historical power formations. Concretely, this means asking, how does critical phenomenology avoid falling prey to the same irony to which Kretzler finds U.S. legalism and Western epistemology capitulating? The case of the three Native American shields is a canary in the mine for the dangers of bearing witness to experiences of marginalization in ways that deploy normative assumptions central to the modern/colonial project like transparency. “Employing methods derived from Greek logic” to bear witness to them subsumes, yet again, the other and their silences into familiar schemas, ultimately reifying that very same logic that a critical phenomenology seeks to decenter. So *how* is it possible to bear witness to the violence waged and those victimized by colonial heteropatriarchy without capitulating to modern/colonial *logos*?

Oriented by these questions, in this dissertation, I propose a return to the phenomenon of silence, laying the groundwork for the exploration of what a revised concept of silence—what I call “deep silence”—could mean for the development of a critical phenomenology that, first, seeks to make explicit the operations of power that condition experiences and our perception of them in a modern/colonial world and, second, that effects possibilities to sense and communicate beyond logocentric/verbal structures privileged by colonial heteropatriarchy. Deep silences, I argue, can be a powerful decolonizing force: In my view, at stake in (a) decolonizing critical phenomenology is the twofold task of 1) developing sensibilities capable of listening for what otherwise falls through the cracks of a philosophy of reflection (like the silences of the Ute/Paiute tribes) and 2) expressing such experiences without an appeal to those same normative structures like modern/colonial *logos*, transparency, and the linearity of time that sustain the modern/colonial apparatus.

This is to say that, in my view, critical to a decolonizing phenomenology is the development of what I call an *aesthesis of deep silence*, i.e., sensibilities that offer a different kind of access to the world, that make sense and make sensible beyond presence attuning the beholder to the reverberations, echoes, and hauntings of existence. An aesthesis of deep silence has political and ontological implications. Politically, it thinks from the experiences of subjects who, to use Walter D. Mignolo’s expression, inhabit the dark side of modernity (2011). Thinking from this vantagepoint reveals categories of and, importantly, modalities of thought foreclosed within a modern/colonial world. Ontologically, an aesthesis of deep silence recovers a fundamental openness to the originary operations of being, i.e., to a “*logos that*,” as Maurice Merleau-Ponty observes,

“pronounces itself silently in each sensible thing” (VI 207–08) and that differs, in significant ways, from the abstracting, universalizing, and presencing *logos* that sustains the modern/colonial project (modern/colonial *logos* for short).⁶

From here on, I will refer to this sensible or implicit *logos* as “silent *logos*” in order to emphasize its inherence in the sensible world (which includes both natural phenomena and the aesthetic), its resistance to propositional articulation, and its affinities with what I have been calling “deep silence.” As I understand it, in fact, silent *logos* accounts for the signifying operations of deep silence. Remarkably, silent *logos* is not contrary to language and signification, but, rather, is intertwined with it as its lining or *doublure*. As I will discuss in more detail in Part II, while silent *logos* cannot be conveyed through modern/colonial *logos*, it finds expression through “another rhetoric” (I 261), as Gloria Anzaldúa calls it, such as the painting of Matisse discussed by Merleau-Ponty, the pink crosses scattered throughout Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, and the mythopoetics of Anzaldúa. Bearing witness to this silent *logos* means that, in its expression of sense, being, the world, and the other, a critical phenomenology of deep silence upholds the impossibility of self-presence, the delusion of a total grasping. As such, this time-space opened up by a critical phenomenology of deep silence is the starting point for radical political action, for envisioning other forms of political-aesthetic agency.

3. *Silence in a Modern/Colonial World*

At this junction, it seems appropriate to note the challenges posed by the task of listening for and speaking silence. The inadequacies of current interpretative frameworks to *listen* for the polyvocality of silences should not come as a surprise; as Jill Stauffer

points out, “in the discourse of Western legalism, [...] silence cannot be its own phenomenon but always rather stands for something that simply has not yet been spoken” (2015, 101). As we will see in more detail in Part I, Ofelia Schutte explains this interpretative shortcoming by claiming that modern/colonial theories of meaning treat the incommensurability present in (cross-cultural) communication as “irrelevant to philosophical meaning and knowledge, and thus irrelevant to the operations of reason” (1998, 61). This is because incommensurability is approached as the residue of an equation whose balancing entails communicative *transparency*. That is, the modern/colonial epistemic stance treats sense and reality as transparent, thus skating over the “silence,” “opacity,” or “excess of meaning” inherent in sense and reality.⁷ Concretely, this means that, within this modern/colonial logic, ways of life or sense-making practices that are not normed by logocentrism (with its desiderata of purity and transparency), like the Ute/Paiute’s silence surrounding the sense of objects belonging to the sacred realm, are misunderstood, overlooked, and rendered invisible; rather than being taken in their strangeness and allowed to displace usual expectations, what cannot be heard from the modern/colonial subject’s standpoint is marked as unintelligible, nonsensical, and inadequate—in a word, as *mere* silence.

In addition to the erasure of decolonizing onto-epistemological frameworks—what Cherríe Moraga calls “theor[ies] in the flesh” (Moraga and Anzaldúa 2015, 19)—the modern/colonial assumption about the transparency of sense also mean that, in a large part of the Western tradition from Aristotle to Audre Lorde, the phenomenon of silence is conceived over and against the fullness of speech and signification (Carillo Rowe and Malhotra 2013). The outcome is that silence is almost unequivocally associated with

lack/absence, i.e., with senselessness, powerlessness, and oppression, such that “many of us ... assume that whereof one cannot speak, one is simply inadequately educated and articulate—or lying” (MacKendrick 2001, 4). That is, silence is reduced to mere silence. Although the 20th century has witnessed a move toward the disavowal of Western rationality and, as Chela Sandoval notes in *The Methodology of the Oppressed*, the “galvanizing [of] whole new expressions of consciousness, politics, and aesthetic production” (2000, 6), the enduring legacy of modern/colonial culture continues to be felt in its framing of the phenomenon of silence, which is signified negatively, treated, at best, as irrelevant to meaning making and, at worst, as an obstacle that needs to be overcome for meaning to be obtained (Sommer 1996; Schutte 1998; Stauffer 2015).

It is in these terms that silence has been taken up within most of Western feminist and liberatory theorizing. Since the 1978 publication of Tillie Olsen’s *Silences* (originally presented at a talk in 1963 at the Radcliffe Institute) and Mary Daly’s *Beyond God the Father* (1973), the topic of silence has become a primary concern to feminist theorizing and literary inquiry. In their theorizing of oppressions, second wave feminists focused on the phenomenon of silence understood as the outcome of exclusion and marginalization predicated by the patriarchal oppressor upon those who are deemed (and thereby also produced) as lacking epistemic authority. Silence was thus largely theorized in relation to the univocity of patriarchal silencing as an oppressive phenomenon. By the mid-1980s, third wave and poststructuralist analyses of oppression complicated the concept of silence. As theorists such as Audre Lorde ([1978] 2007), bell hooks (2015), and María Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman (1983) insisted, silence could no longer be the exclusive

marker of patriarchal oppression; silence had to be recognized also as a phenomenon endemic to feminist discourse.⁸

Although the phenomenon of silence accrued complexity, coming to index not just the literal silence that the patriarchy historically impose upon women, but also the speech of women of color that often lacks uptake within white feminist circles as well as patriarchal culture, women of color feminism left unchallenged the guiding political imperative of “breaking the silence” by “coming to voice,” continuing to espouse a conception of silence co-extensive with oppression, equating it to “starvation” (Moraga 2015, 24) or a locus of peril and vulnerability (“your silence will not protect you” [Lorde (1978) 2007, 41]). To this day, although in selected academic circles such as communication theory, rhetoric, and, sporadically, philosophy, “silence” has been reclaimed from its abjection (see, for example, Clair 1998, 2013; Glenn 2004; Weldt-Basson 2009; Carillo Rowe and Malhotra 2013), the popular conception of silence—as evidenced by the recent public outcry against sexual violence spearheaded by the #MeToo and #Timesup movements—continues to uphold an understanding of silence such that it is equated with the silencing of oppression.⁹

The binary logic of speech vs silence yields two closely intertwined imperatives, one political and one epistemic. Politically, for an individual or group to (re)gain power and “to resist and transform the conditions of their oppression,” they “must activate their *voice*” (Carillo Rowe and Malhotra 2013, 1, order rearranged). Voice and speech are thus appealed to as the ubiquitous emancipatory tools. Epistemically, for an event, experience, or phenomenon to make sense, silence ought to be “broken.” Language and naming are

power; they provide the tools to draw phenomena out of their silence, to make sense of events that would otherwise, i.e., in the absence of words, lack significance and meaning.

The conception of silence as mere silence (i.e., as absence and non-sense) largely operative within the historical formation of coloniality entails a series of performative difficulties with which any project that seeks to articulate or speak about this phenomenon ought to contend. Because silence does not take a straightforward object, it resists objectification in propositional language. As such, it is often deemed ineffable, commanding the absence of words.¹⁰ A great deal is at stake in devising linguistic structures that accommodate this phenomenon traditionally conceived to be so inaccessible to language, especially when silence comes to index, as it often does in Western, postmodern culture, a long tradition of institutionalized oppression. For instance, the call to find one's voice and speak of one's experience of oppression (i.e., of having been violated and silenced) loudly championed by the #MeToo movement seems to be, among other things, an attempt to objectify silence, to put into words this otherwise elusive phenomenon.

Yet, as I argue in this dissertation, when language is tasked with forcing silence into avenues of objectification, the account risks losing track of the complexity, polyvocality, and fecundity of silence. In part, this is because the epistemic framework undergirding this enterprise of representation that seeks to objectify silence posits speech over and against silence, thus not only treating silence as non-sense and, as such, unable to signify on its own, but also conceiving of language as processes of adequation whereby the truth of the phenomenal world, which includes silence, can be grasped by stating it.¹¹ Since coincidence or adequation with the sensible world (whether it is

accounting for an experience of sexual violation or the phenomenon of silence) is impossible, the injunction to “speak up” or to “name the silence” to which oppression has relegated its victims will continue to mishear the polyvocality of silence; the silence that it will put into words will only be one, barren facet of a much richer and more fecund phenomenon. Importantly, it will be a phenomenon conceived through an interpretative framework that measures it over and against modern/colonial speech and *logos* and that, therefore, likely misses the signifying operations of silence beyond presence.

To express one’s voice wherein silence has none, then, reproduces problematic metaphysical assumptions that inevitably lead to untenable positions. But what if silence is no longer understood, as it often is in a modern/colonial world, as the opposite of language and signification, as “inarticulate void” (Fóti 1988, 274)? Instead, what if silence is approached in its depth and polyvocality, as a phenomenon with its own signifying operations and structurally intertwined with and lining language? Perhaps, then, (mythopoetic or aesthetic) language would no longer have to fail vis-à-vis the phenomenon of silence and silence would be listened for, its polyvocality and fecundity rehabilitated.

4. *From Silence Toward Deep Silence*

Before proceeding any further, it is important to make explicit what I have been thus far suggesting: The silence at stake in this project—what I call “deep silence”—is more expressive than mere ineffability, more complex than the eviscerated silence of the #MeToo movement, and more sensible/sonorous than the lack of sound. My contention is that silence “is” more than absence and non-sense; viewed from a decolonizing standpoint able to sense beyond the transparency and presence of modern/colonial *logos*,

what was taken to be mere silence is, in fact, a rich phenomenon that opens onto non-propositional or “conceptless” (EM 172), as Merleau-Ponty would put it, sense-making. It is deep silence, a phenomenon that, as noted regarding silent *logos*, finds its expression through the aesthetic.

Acknowledging the depth of silence means that “deep silence” is incommensurable to modern/colonial taxonomies whereby silence is conceived dualistically over and against the fullness of speech and signification. In her glossary “*para saber de quien hablamos y que queremos decir por ‘hablar’*,” María Lugones lists the reductive logocentric categories that ensue from such a binary framing, like “refusal-to-speak-silences, tongue-cut-out silences, ...[or] refusal-to-listen silences” (2003, 167). If we think back to the three Native American shields example, we see that deep silences cannot be accounted for by a “refusal-to-listen silence”—a disposition more akin to the involuntary response of Lee Ann Kreutzer. Nor are they a “tongue-cut-out-silence”—the kind of silence we are accustomed to think about in Western, postmodern culture, which includes the silencing invoked within the feminist tradition whereby sexual violence, political repression, or power asymmetries prevent vulnerable populations from contributing to the conversation. The tongue-cut-out phenomenon more closely resembles the effects that Kreutzer’s inability to listen for the Ute/Paiute tribes’ silences had on the latter. In fact, it was not the tribes’ silence that equaled silencing, but the outcome of Kreutzer’s deploying Western and logocentric sensibilities and conceptual frameworks to make sense of the tribes’ silence that did. Lastly, deep silences are not a “refusal-to-speak”—a silence that calls to mind the self-imposed silence of Rigoberta Menchú Tum or Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in her famous *Carta Antenagórica*, which were strategically

deployed as withholding to evade and resist colonial and religious authority.¹² The Ute/Paiute tribes were not withholding words in protest or for politically strategic reasons. Rather, their silences suggest something other; they point to a deep silence that functions as an inchoate opening to the world and, as we will see in chapter 2, a “radical meaning making” (Martínez 2014, 239). It would be a mistake, then, to frame deep silences in terms made available by modern/colonial taxonomies. Such an approach would conceive deep silence, yet again, over and against speech, as an already available utterance being unspoken or silenced within an already constituted domain of meaning.¹³ Framing silence as the contrary of language, speech, and voice—as that which does not have a voice of its own—eviscerates its polyvocality and fecundity; it prevents deep silences like the Ute/Paiute tribes’ to signify differently, to speak with what Merleau-Ponty calls “the voices of silence.”¹⁴

What needs to be done—and what I strive to accomplish in the present study—is to re-member deep silences as having their own logic (but perhaps I should say their own sensuality and poetics) which make sense/sensible. In fact, the deep silences to which I invite the reader to harken throughout this study should be approached on their own terms, as silences pregnant with meanings that have not yet been voiced and could not be foreseen in advance. The Ute/Paiute tribes’ deep silence, for instance, opens onto modalities of sense making that do not rely primarily on conceptual/propositional thinking, revealing sense to be the ephemeral accomplishment of on-going processes deeply intertwined with the local geography, sacred rituals, and the carnal relations tradition institutes with the land and the people partaking in them. As the report submitted by Skull Valley Goshute Tribe Historic Preservation Director Melvin Brewster

attests, “the shields were a permanent, on-going prayer offering” whose disinterment would interrupt that evolving sense-making ceremony (Threedy 2009, 118). As such, the meaning of the shields could not be expressed propositionally, subsumed under concepts and wholly other categories of existence/thought—or, at the very least, doing so would alter their sense. Even though cultural norms prohibit it, one could describe what the shields are and the function they carry out within the tribes’ cultural performances. Yet, such an account would fall short of conveying the sense-making/making sensible of the shields. If heeded to, deep silences, give way to meanings where coloniality hears none, to a body of practices, knowledges, and arts for re-forming sense and historical structures.¹⁵ After all, it is sense-making processes like this that Kreutzer’s inability to listen for the depth of silence missed.

5. *Methodological Approach and Dissertation Structure*

For the purpose of this dissertation, my (re)turn to silence means that that my relationship with critical phenomenology is dual: On the one hand, I follow the critical turn of phenomenology by contextualizing my investigation into the phenomenon of silence within the broader historical and social structures that make the analysis possible. It is this situating that positions me, in chapter 3, to put forth the notion of the “coloniality of silence,” which I explain in more detail in what follows. Importantly, the present inquiry into the phenomenon of silence is carried out by attending to the experiences of those who do not enjoy the “sheltering comfort and interpretive stability of historically privileged ‘home’ perspectives” (Ruiz 2014, 198).¹⁶ I investigate Ernesto Martínez’s experience of “joto passivity,” or the apparent nonresponsiveness of young queer Latinos in the face of sexualized violence (chapter 2); the grief of mothers who

have lost their daughters in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico to femicide and the seeming ineffability of such an experience (chapter 5; and collective memory-work and reinscription of the colonial past through the myth of la Llorona as it appears in Anzaldúa's writings (chapter 7). Thinking through these experiences exposes the historical contingency of modalities of perceiving, thinking, and being taken for granted within a given historical formation, including the taken-for-granted assumption that silence indexes non-sense, complacency, or forced submission.¹⁷

On the other hand, alerted by the challenges inherent to a critical phenomenological project—i.e., the difficulty of bearing witness to experiences of marginalization without capitulating to key colonial structures—it seems to me that a critical phenomenology ought to be critical of its own method of description. This is one of this project's main interventions in the field of critical phenomenology. Although critical phenomenology's turn toward the political, i.e., to structures like coloniality, facilitates tracking "the weight of the world" and its "restructuring" (Guenther 2020, 13, 15), in my view, the modality whereby critical phenomenology bears witness to such experiences matters. Specifically, I propose that developing sensibilities whereby one can harken to and mobilize deep silences in phenomenological descriptions is key to bearing witness to colonial experiences of marginalization without the recapitulation of transparency and linearity of modern/colonial logocentric apparatuses. This means, first, learning to listen for silences and their meanings and, second, mobilizing them in one's descriptions. This dissertation is such an endeavor.

The dissertation is divided into an Introduction and six chapters, thematically organized into three parts. In Part I, "Listening for Silences," I draw from Latinx

decolonial literature and women of color feminism to show the limitations of Eurocentered epistemic theories of meaning and liberatory projects such as the #MeToo campaign that privilege dialogical approaches to emancipation and subsume the complexity of silence to “silencing.” Decontextual appeals to “speak up,” I argue, foreclose questions about the normativity of voice, concealing the fact that, within a colonial context, the voice that can be heard is that of the modern/colonial subject. In this sense, although “speaking up” is hard to argue against as it is lived as liberatory by many, I propose that such an imperative is rooted in a colonial framework that ought to be questioned if we intend to develop strategies of insubordination that do not play into coloniality. In Part II, “The Voices of Deep Silence,” I think through the challenge of putting into words an elusive phenomenon like silence. Grounding my analysis in both theoretical insights from Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gloria E. Anzaldúa as well as the signifying effected by the pink crosses scattered through and marking feminicides in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, I propose, first, that the sense of deep silence is conveyed through the aesthetics. Second, I begin to show how the mobilization of deep silence in phenomenological analyses and aesthetic expression can be a powerful tool for ethical and political resistance. It is to this question that I turn in Part III, “The temporality of Deep Silence”. Focusing the onto-onto-temporal dynamics of deep silence such that it accounts for the fecundity of being, I show how deep silence decenters key assumption of Western thinking, opening onto modalities of healing often overlooked by Western legalism and Transitional Justice initiatives.

5.1. Chapter 2: The Emancipatory Limits of Voice

Given the harms entailed with being silenced and the fact that speaking up is lived as liberatory by many, the value of “voice” and “speech” seems hard to contest.¹⁸ The aim of this project—and, specifically, of Part I—is not to dismiss the importance of giving voice to those who have been confined to silence. Rather, informed by instances in which voice fails to bear witness to either a violent and traumatic past or to cultural practices, and leery of the subjugating snares that this ostensibly emancipatory tool brings about, I seek to locate in deep silence resources for the renewal of sense, for making sense of experiences that would otherwise remain unhearable and inexpressible within a modern/colonial world. To this end, I begin the dissertation, in Part I, by decentering the modern/colonial assumptions that equate silence with the non-sense of mere silence.

Re-examining the question of silence from the phenomenological standpoint of Ernesto Martínez’s lived experiences of sexual violence, in chapter 2, “The Emancipatory Limits of Voice,” I bring attention to the limitations of Eurocentered epistemic theories of meaning and liberatory projects, such as the #MeToo campaign, that often uncritically privilege dialogical approaches to emancipation. When “speaking up” or “coming to voice” becomes the ubiquitous appeal of liberatory movements, I argue, it abstracts from the concrete situations and lived experiences of those who inhabit silences, at once transcending and foreclosing a critique of the violences entailed by the normativity of voice and a conception of silence that eviscerates it of its fecundity and complexity. The immediacy of voice sought after (even if implicitly) in imperatives to speak up or in the belief that speaking up would give voice to, i.e., allow to be heard, those who have been silenced not only relies on a binary repressive-expressive conception of speech premised

on the modernist notion that the truth (conveyed through speech) will make those who are excluded from the subject position free;¹⁹ it also participates in and perpetuates an intellectual fantasy of presence, that recognition will be unproblematic once one's story is told. Following María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo's remarks about testimonial critics, we can say that, because of its desire to end a culture of silence toward subaltern visibility, the #MeToo movement "wished away the problem of subaltern political and figural representation" (2003, 159), specifically that of the colonial normativity of voice. Rather than remaining attentive to the traumas, fears, and motivations specific to one's experience of (sexual) violence that may preclude one from speaking and call for or find in silence avenues for radical meaning making, the imperative to speak up transcends the particularity of the situation into "a generic subaltern subject whose voice may then be codified into a recognizable set of criteria for an appropriative critical practice" (Saldaña-Portillo 2003, 160). Problematically, as I will argue, voice codified and subsumed into a set of predetermined (modern/colonial) criteria does not yield new meaning, but instead reifies the historical structure of coloniality.

At this juncture, it should be noted that, as Adriana Cavarero claims in *For More than One Voice*, "voice" is itself a polysemic phenomenon. Per the Western epistemic tradition beginning in Greece, which concerned itself with knowledge as the "self-clarification of logos," and culminating with 20th century linguistics, philosophy "avoids getting caught up in the vey question of the voice" (Cavarero 2005, 9). That is, the signature mark of metaphysics is to split speech from speaker/voice and relegate the former into thought, in a "mental signified of which speech itself, in its sonorous materiality, would be the expression—its acoustic, audible sign" (9). Voice thus becomes

deprived of the uniqueness that its bodily resonances mark; it becomes voice in *general*, that very abstracted/ing and universal voice appealed to in the commands to break the silence! I find Cavarero's analysis very compelling, as it lays bare the inaugural act of metaphysics and the colonizing operations of modernity. As I will argue throughout this dissertation, however, in my view, at stake in any project that seeks to destabilize the theoretical bond between (metaphysical) voice, presence, and emancipation to reveal it in its singularity is tending, first and foremost, to silence, not voice.²⁰

In fact, in addition to the material harms effected by transcending particularity, the imperative misses the opportunity to recognize the fecundity of deep silence. It skates over the transformative or liberatory power of deep silence in that it may sometimes be important *not* to say something, that silence may be a way—and even, in certain situations, the only way—to advance new meanings. In this sense, although “speaking up” is hard to argue against as it is lived as liberatory by many, I claim that the imperative to “speak up” is rooted in a colonial framework that ought to be questioned if we intend to develop strategies of insubordination that do not play into coloniality. The approach I thus adopt is that of listening to silences, to the reverberations the Western ears are not accustomed to feeling.²¹ Deep silences, in fact, are the openings, opacities, or moments of hesitation necessary for singularity to eventuate; they afford voice “a meaning of its own that is not already destined to speech” (Cavarero 2005, 13). This meaning, as Martínez's account will suggest, is affective and somatic. As such, it eludes firm conceptual articulation.

5.2. Chapter 3: *The Coloniality of Silence*

In chapter 3, “The Coloniality of Silence,” I focus on the processes characteristic of coloniality whereby the depth and polyvocality of silence are “flattened” to a mono-dimensional phenomenon primarily indexing ontological absence and epistemic nonsense, and responsible for the interpretative failure vis-à-vis silence thus far discussed. I call these processes the “coloniality of silence.” Anyone familiar with feminist, decolonial, and postmodern critiques of Western philosophy cannot help but be suspicious of the coloniality of silence’s evisceration of depth. After all, it is a symptom of a problem that has to do with Western philosophy’s affinity for abstraction and universalization. Let’s think back to the case of the three Native American shields, as it helps to identify the outlines of the issue. The fact that the Ute/Paiute tribes’ silences went largely unheard indicates that the depth of silence has to do with the concrete, particular, fleshy/material givens of experience. But this is not the problem, which lies instead with philosophy’s—but, we should add, Western metaphysics’—predilection for ignoring of the unique. This flattening, I argue, becomes a central mechanism of the modern/colonial project insofar as it is predicated on the universalizability of the human subject and his experiences. By foreclosing the apprehension of experiences of, e.g., many survivors of (sexualized) colonial heteronormative violence like Ernesto Martínez who do not live silence exclusively as oppressive, and that would undermine key presuppositions of modern/colonial theories of meaning such as epistemic/communicative transparency or the *conscientia rerum et intellectus*, coloniality preserves its internal, artificial coherence. Together, chapters 2 and 3 challenge

modern/colonial assumptions about the transparency of sense and begin to let the polyvocality of silence resonate.

5.3. Chapter 4: The Silences of Merleau-Ponty and Gloria Anzaldúa

Opening silence to its multi-dimensionality and a plurality of signifying practices means grappling with the methodological question at the heart of this project, i.e., how is possible to express deep silence without undermining its constitutive opacity, without accounting for it through representational models and concepts that would implicitly reify those same modern/colonial assumptions that reduce silence to mere silence? Saying that silence is not the opposite of speech is not enough to avoid silencing the phenomenon of silence, reducing silence, yet again, to ineffability. The goal of the present work—to think meaning according to a certain silence, or to think deep silence as meaningful—requires deploying tools that allow giving voice to deep silence.

In part II of this dissertation, “The Voices of Deep Silence,” I take up this challenge, turning to Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gloria E. Anzaldúa for guidance on the matter. In chapter 4, “The Silences of Merleau-Ponty and Gloria Anzaldúa,” I reflect on what 20th century French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty and Chicana author Anzaldúa have to offer to a project like the present one that stives to unleash the fecundity and polyvocality of deep silences from the shackles of coloniality. At first sight, and for different reasons, each thinker appears as an unlikely ally. Steeped in colonial France, Merleau-Ponty assumed attitudes and assumptions central to that historical formation, even against his best intentions. Although sensitive to the decolonial cause, Anzaldúa often espoused a stance vis-à-vis silence that closely echoes that of Western feminism discussed above. As we will see, however, when their thinking and writing is approached

with care, i.e., with attention to their own sometimes unspoken commitments, the dialogue that ensues from these two thinkers offers insights helpful to navigate the difficult task of listening to and expressing the polyvocality of silence.

Although these two thinkers belong to different cultural, geographical, and historical contexts, they not only share a metaphysical understanding of the world that moves beyond Cartesian dualisms, upholding ambiguity and complexity, and similar methodological sensibilities of thinking through phenomena rather than “from above.” Anzaldúa and Merleau-Ponty also share a praxical commitment to the aesthetic as a key modality of meaning making beyond the presence of consciousness. Through the “conceptless opening onto things” offered by the aesthetic and, often, by letting art, myth, and images guide the inquiry, both thinkers show how the beholder is re-oriented by the summons of the world and becomes attuned to its inchoate, burgeoning sense (EM 172). That is, they show how sense eventuates as a level prior to the conceptual and propositional one.

Because of these sensibilities, Merleau-Ponty’s and Anzaldúa’s ability to express the experience of the sensible, the experience of what traditional philosophy tends to cast as mute, ineffable, or senseless silence (as mere silence) is remarkable. In his later writings, Merleau-Ponty comes to see that bringing silence to expression calls for an aesthetic or indirect language that harkens to and allows deep silence to reverberate through speech, thus giving rise to, on the one hand, a “felt understanding” of the depth of the sensible world and, on the other, a renewed sense of language (Mazis 2016).²² Akin to the work that images perform in Proust’s *La recherche*, which, on Merleau-Ponty’s account, allows for literary and artistic expression to convey meaning without

subsuming it under concepts or categories, throughout her corpus, Anzaldúa deploys mythopoetics to engage colonial experiences as an in-between, as liminal experiences that otherwise remain conceptually and propositionally elusive. Recuperating Merleau-Ponty's and Anzaldúa's contributions to the question of expression (of silence) from the former's imbrication with the coloniality of silence and the latter's seeming downplaying of silence is instructive to think through how deep silences can be mobilized to resignify colonial *historias*.

For both authors, the aesthetics' logic—or, I should say, its *poiesis*—is not representational, but a “diacritical, relative, oppositional system” (VI 213) that, importantly, responds creatively to “the silent persuasion of the sensible” (VI 214).²³ Merleau-Ponty and Anzaldúa thus accomplish the expression of the silent sense of the sensible not as a way of resolving or bypassing opacity, ambiguities, and *aporias*, but through and by virtue of a fundamental darkness or obscurity—the opacity of time, sense, reflection. Merleau-Ponty and Anzaldúa put into practice a philosophy that does not have to fail vis-à-vis deep silence, or, at the very least, that would “fail” very differently than *logos*-as-rational speech. This is an *aesthesis* (here to be understood in terms of its Greek root, *aisthèsis*, i.e., the sensible access to the world) of deep silence.

It is important to note that, in the context of this dissertation, “aesthetic” does not refer to modern aesthetics inaugurated by Immanuel Kant as a theory and regulator of the capacity to “sense” the beautiful and the sublime, which comes to serve as the mechanism to produce and regulate sensibilities. Rather, as defined by decolonizing scholars and artists, here, “the aesthetic” or “aesthetics” refers to what Walter D. Mignolo and Rolando Vazquez call “aesthesis,” or “the artistic practices that aim to decolonize the

senses, that is, to liberate them from the regulation of modern, postmodern, and altermodern aesthetics” (Mignolo and Vazquez 2013). Modern/colonial aesthetics have partaken in the configuration of a purportedly universal normativity that disavows “forms of aesthetic practices or, more precisely, other forms of aestheSis, of sensing and perceiving” that do not conform with modern/colonial standards (Mignolo and Vazquez 2013). AestheSis includes popular arts and culture as well as critical intervention within the field of contemporary arts itself.

5.4. Chapter 5: *An AestheSis of Deep Silence*

In chapter 5, “An AestheSis of Deep Silence: Re-Membering the Disappearing Daughters of Ciudad Juárez,” I think through the sense of deep silence and its modes of expression by attending to the concrete case of feminicides in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. I suggest that deep silence makes possible thinking through the eventuating of being and sense in their polyvocality by attuning us to a *different modality of being*. This aestheSis of deep silence provides the means to articulate these “voices of silence” without falling back onto the impasse in which propositional language culminates when faced with the paradoxical question, can the subaltern speak? As Merleau-Ponty’s reflections on Proust in the *Institution and Passivity Lectures* and the *Visible and the Invisible* indicate, the diacritical sense-making of art brings attention to the fact that each event is lined by “halos of signification” (MA 234), marked by indefiniteness and polyvalences. The aesthetic evokes more than itself, “betray[ing] a series of relations in the sense of a world and is thus connected to the process of differentiation and the depth of being that belies this world” (Kaushik 2011, 24). For Merleau-Ponty, the aesthetics’ sense-making resists propositional expression, making sense prior to concepts, in the in-between of the

sensuous and silent contact with being through which sense is borne. Moreover, as Rajiv Kaushik argues in *Art and Institution*, the aesthetics resists propositional signification because it displays “an immediacy of the unidentifiable, or a showing of remoteness itself. It is this showing that grasps us, the beholders of the text, and usurps our power to grasp or appropriate it” (2011, 25). The beholder does not grasp the meaning of the work of art, but, rather, is grabbed and oriented by it.

The realization that the aesthetics eventuates a “conceptless” signification matters to a decolonial feminist project that seeks to go beyond colonial epistemologies in at least two ways. First, ephemeral art like the pink crosses scattered throughout Ciudad Juárez makes possible expressing a phenomenon, like the loss of one’s daughter or silence, that would otherwise seem ineffable. Second, it bears witness to gendered-violence while refusing inscription within colonial epistemologies. Ephemeral art, I propose, accomplishes this task by exposing the beholder to an experience of loss and disappearing (a claim to which I will return in chapter 7). Engaged at the affective level, the beholder is transformed into a witness who “joins”—rather than “thinks”—the disappearings and feminicides. Thus, the crosses’ fragility transforms the disappearing into a living past and keeps the work of denouncing and remembering an open and ongoing process. Importantly, as anticipated, the aesthetic puts on display a silent *logos* that is beyond subjectivity. That is, the sense disclosed through aesthetic language is not the product of an agent’s explicit reasoning or deliberate choice, but, rather, a corporeal reorientation that emerges through the negotiations of the concrete situation—through living. The meaning of the crosses scattered through Juárez emerges in the convergent space between the gesture of the mothers-activists and the local geography.

5.5. Chapter 6: *Le monde du silence*

In Part III of the dissertation, “The Temporality of Deep Silence,” I think through the onto-temporal dynamics of deep silence. In chapter 6, “*Le monde du silence: Ontological Possibilities and the Impossible Time of Deep Silence*,” I investigate this silent *logos* of nature that art displays by attending to Merleau-Ponty’s *Nature Lectures*. Thinking deep silence along with Nature, I suggest, reveals deep silence as essential to being, a dimension wherein being manifests itself in its absence. As such, I propose, deep silence is the condition of possibility of being and sense. Prompted by Emmanuel Alloa’s (2014) and Marcello Vitali Rosati’s (2016) work on the topic, I suggest that deep silence as possibility is more than a mere logical non-impossibility and less than what actually is. As virtual, possibility must exist “prior” to the eventuation of beings in the sense of making the eventuation of being possible, without being causally reducible to them. To make sense of this seeming paradoxical modality of existence, I turn to the temporal dynamic of *precession*, a peculiar movement of retrograde inscriptions of possibility whereby being grows or transmutes internally. As Merleau-Ponty reminds us, precession is a movement of mutual anticipation of terms whereby the “priority” of, e.g., the possible over the actual or the actual over the possible, is undecidable. This means that the possible comes into existence along with the actual, “as a *virtualizing* of the actual” (Al-Saji 2012b, 353). As such, deep silence as the conditions of possibility of being is not a “closed set of possibilities,” but a “pregnancy of possible” that accounts for being’s fecundity through the retroactive instituting of unpredictability, hesitancy, and openness at the very heart of being. Remarkably, as condition of possibility, deep silence actualizes the present without its normativity being knowable in advance. Rather, I propose, its

normativity becomes visible through praxis, traceable though the concrete eventuating of phenomena.

Casting deep silence as the virtual invites developing an alternative conception of silence than the one traditionally upheld throughout the history of Western philosophy. Deep silence as the virtual no longer functions as the figure of finitude or as the necessary opposite of philosophical *logos*, figuring as the “abyss of dark, mute nature that must be filled with speech, or the always-beyond of speech, which both sets a limit and marks out a task” (Williams 2010, 33). Rather, deep silence exists in being, sense, and thinking, but its existence is not fully graspable by present consciousness. Key figures in the history of Western philosophy who tried to recuperate, think, or let silence come into thought have done so by appeal to myth—an uncertain and opaque language that is not rational *logos* and that leaves much unknown. Here we can think of the Platonic dialogues, in which myth functions as a way around the *aporias* that *logos* and philosophical discourse cannot think through, or Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*.²⁴ Myth is a rhetorical strategy deployed by Gloria Anzaldúa as well.

5.6. Chapter 7: Anzaldúa’s Decolonizing Mythopoetics

In chapter 7, “The (Deep) Silence of Bearing Witness: On Gloria Anzaldúa’s Decolonial Aesthetics,” expands on my claim, in chapter 5, that the aesthetic allows us to express phenomena that cannot be accounted for propositionally or even discursively and argues for the necessity of mobilizing deep silence to yield decolonial sense-making. Attending to Gloria Anzaldúa’s iterations of the myth of la Llorona in “My Black *Angelos*” and *Prietita and the Ghost Woman*, I argue that Anzaldúa invites the audience to attend to what remains unsaid or the silences of cross-cultural encounters. Specifically,

her deployment of silences positions the reader to remember the colonial past as loss, that is, through an experience of its loss. By evoking traces of the lost past through a poetic language of images, affect, and, most importantly, deep silences, Anzaldúa's mythopoetic "holds on" or "bears witness" to the colonial past in its absencing. Thus, Anzaldúa's work bears witness to experiences of colonization, violence, and trauma *spectrally*, i.e., presenting them as what, although never fully present, continues to haunt the present. In this sense, the mobilization of deep silences in a phenomenological description positions the reader to listen to what is not said—to silences—thus making "visible" colonial histories without capitulating to *specularization*, i.e., rendering experiences of coloniality readily available for dissection and inspection by the colonizing gaze. It accomplishes this task, I argue, through its deployment of silences.²⁵

Overall, Anzaldúa's mythopoetics inaugurates decolonizing sensibilities attuned to silences and opacity rather than speech and transparency. In this sense, I propose that mythopoetics is not a matter of mimetic representation or interpretation of facts, but of being-with; its power of insubordination does not lie in its bearing witness to facts or preserving the past as an eternal, immutable present, but, rather, in its acknowledgment of "the impossibility of any adequate representation" (Acosta López 2014, 81). Concretely, this means that myth exposes not only the limits of cross-cultural communication (as we will see in chapter 2), but also makes explicit how the opacity of the aesthetic and mythopoetic writing, specifically, and of being and sense, more broadly, ought not to be translated but rather harkened to when decolonizing reality. In sum, myth's silences make explicit the *écart* of being.

6. *Towards a Critical Phenomenology of Deep Silence*

In the conclusion of the dissertation, I return to where this project began, i.e., to methodological considerations regarding how to “bear witness to the violence waged and those victimized by colonial heteropatriarchy without capitulating to *logos*.” Listening for silences reveals that the modality of bearing witness matters when striving to go beyond modern/colonial epistemologies. As I will have explored throughout the dissertation, the mobilization of deep silences in phenomenological descriptions can be a powerful decolonizing praxis. This is so in at least two ways. First, it avoids the recapitulation of *specularization*, i.e., rendering experiences of coloniality “spectacular” and “specular.” Second, it institutes a non-linear temporal dynamic that avoids fixing the past into an eternal present; instead, it eventuates the presencing of traces of multiple pasts, ultimately decentering the coloniality of time, one of the central structuring mechanisms of coloniality.

NOTES

¹ In “Critical Phenomenology,” Guenther writes that, “as a political practice critical phenomenology is a struggle for liberation from the structures that privilege, naturalize, and normalize certain experiences of the world while marginalizing, pathologizing, and discrediting others” (2020, 15).

² Examples of failures to listen for silences in cross-cultural encounters abound. For instance, we are faced with a similar dissonance upon reading Rodolfo Kusch’s description of his encounter with the Aymara grandfather, during his visit to the Andean highlands of Oruro, Bolivia, narrated in *Indigenous and Popular Thinking in América*. Kusch remembers that, when he and his students, who were there to conduct fieldwork, “pestered [the grandfather] with questions,” the grandfather responded reluctantly, giving abbreviated answers. When one of the students asked him why he would not purchase a hydraulic pump to irrigate the arid fields, “a heavy silence” followed as the grandfather did not answer (2010, 9). Scandalized by the grandfather’s attitude, one of Kusch’s

students interpreted the silence as a marker of “ignorance” (2010, 10), of a lack of rational understanding. Yet, Kusch tells us, there was *more* in the grandfather’s silence than epistemic and ontological inferiority—an observation that resonates with the shields case. The grandfather’s silence opened onto another sense-making whereby “movement, events, the process of becoming” were registered “before things,” and also affect, not mere facts or ends, drives one in the face of reality—in sum, another cosmology where one “*sees to feel*” (Kusch 2010, 11).

³ The legislation lists “linguistic, historical, archeological, and genetic evidence” as legitimate sources of evidence, and the standard of proof to be applied is that of “a preponderance of the evidence” (Threedy 2009, 108, 96).

⁴ The story offered in testimony by the Navajo representative, John Holiday is the following: “The shields were made by a man called Many Goats White Hair, nine generations ago. The shields were sacred ceremonial objects. When the Navajos were being rounded up by war parties, the shields were in the care of two men, Man Called Rope and Little Bitter Water Person. Man Called Rope was John Holiday’s grandfather. Concerned for the shields’ safety, the two men decided to hide the shields in the area we call the Mountain With No Name [Henry Mountains] and Mountain With White Face [Boulder Mountain]. The location of the hidden shields was then lost” (cited in Stauffer 2015, 99).

⁵ After all, as Threedy notes following Bennett and Feldman, determining the connection between the elements of a story depends on the interpretative aptitude and knowledge of the audience.

⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, throughout this project, *logos* indexes the modern/colonial *logos* just indicated.

⁷ At this juncture, we can think of Habermas’s theory of communicative action as a leading example of Western theories of meaning’s logocentrism. This assumption regarding the desideratum of communication and the nature of silence informs strategies devised to reduce barriers to cross-cultural communication. Because sense is assumed to be transparent, cross-cultural incomprehensions or silences are taken to be direct results of a lack of information. And the solution to this “lack” is taken to be “more”: comprehension and communication, this logic goes, are achieved by providing more complete, unambiguous, and persuasive information, all features that were deemed missing from the Ute/Paiute’s testimony.

⁸ Attending to what came to be known, thanks to Kimberlé Crenshaw’s groundbreaking essay, “Mapping the Margins” (1991), as the *intersectionality* of oppression entailed calling into question the *racialization* of silence, that is, the assumption that silence is co-extensive with femininity. Inter-sectional analyses of oppression revealed that “silence” (as well as “passivity” or “fragility”) characterized and normalized the experience of (most) WASP women, not of *all* women (Collins 2000, 14). In the collective imaginary and their communal spaces like the family and the church, Black women are often very

vocal to be point of being framed as rowdy and loud (Lorde 1978/2007; hooks 1989/2015). The racialization of silence performed a double erasure: that of the intersectional experiences of women of color and white feminism's complicity in the oppression of women of color. So long as silence was cast as coextensive with *the* feminine (while, in fact, it primarily designated white femininity), women of color whose existence and experiences did not conform with this silent, white feminine norm were made invisible within (white) feminist discourse. And by taking the experience of white women as indicative of *the* feminine, second-wave feminism foreclosed the recognition of its participation in the marginalization and exclusion of women of color. Attending to the intersectionality of oppression, however, also revealed the limitations of the emancipatory strategy of effecting the transition from silence to voice; at stake in women of color's emancipation was the production of speech that would compel listeners, speech that would be heard—as Lorde and hooks argued.

⁹ Over the decades, there have been attempts to reclaim silence outside of philosophy. Communication studies scholar Robin Clair, for instance, follows the path paved by Max Picard, arguing that silence and voice should not be thought as “bifurcated concepts,” but as “self-contained opposites” (Clair 1998, xiii; see also Picard 1952). In *Organizing Silence* and “Imposed Silence and the Story of the Warramunga Woman,” Clair investigates strategies to organize silence such that it becomes possible to hear the voices of those who have been silenced (Clair 1998; 2013). Following a deconstructive approach, Clair investigates the “silencing aspects of communication and the expressive aspects of silence” (Clair 1998, 5) as a way of moving beyond the bifurcation of voice and silence. Notably, Clair argues that aesthetics “provides a means for silence to escape and become expression, and an aesthetic perspective allows us to see it ... an aesthetic perspective provides a way of exploring how silence is expressed” (40). Aimee Carrillo Rowe's and Sheena Malhotra's *Silence, Feminism, Power* is a collection dedicated to critiquing, from a feminist standpoint, the dominant conception of silence that casts it as exclusively oppressive and recovering it as also a space of possibilities (Carrillo Rowe and Malhotra 2013).

¹⁰ In *Immemorial Silence*, Karmen MacKendrick observes that within contemporary thinking in the humanities silence marks the limits of thought (she refers to Maurice Blanchot's “outside” and George Bataille's “non-knowledge” or “the erotic”) and language. Of the latter, she writes, “we find it in ancient mysticism as the ‘ineffable,’ in negative theology as the unnamable, in the Nietzschean warning that grammar seduces us into a belief in metaphysics, even in the Wittgensteinian warning that philosophy, being all language games, must not infrequently remain silent” (2001, 3). Common to both positions is an economy of the excess, which she defines as “an intensification beyond meaning, a transgression of the very boundaries of speaking, of writing, of language, and of time” (MacKendrick 2001, 4). In other words, per its traditional definition, silence marks a limit (of language and thought).

¹¹ This representational conception of language, which is based on the rationalist model *coincidentia rerum et intellectus*, turns language into what Merleau-Ponty refers to as “a

power of error” (VI 123). Philosophy’s adequation with originary silence, i.e., with the advent of truth, is “rather a wakeful and thematized participation in the ‘dehiscence’ of Being” (Fóti 1988, 280). As Véronique Fóti argues in “Merleau-Ponty on Silence and the Work of Philosophy,” philosophy’s role is paradoxical, at once one of creation and communion “to an original concealment” (1988, 273), which is to say that philosophy (as linguistic expression) is a negotiation with the ontological texture of silence from which it arises. This observation is echoed by Waldenfels (2000).

¹² In “Tricks of the Weak,” Josefina Ludmer argues that Sor Juana’s not knowing *how* to respond to the bishop, to someone her superior, leads to her silence. Her silence, Ludmer argues, creates “another textual space, her own, stripped of rhetoric, in which she writes what is not said in the other zones” like “saying, writing, and publishing [...] are demands originating from others and associated with violence, with coercion: ‘Y, a la verdad, yo nunca he escrito, sino violentada y forzada y sólo por dar gusto a otros; no sólo sin complacencia, sino con positiva repugnancia’ (And, in truth, I have written nothing except when coerced and constrained, and then only to give pleasure to others; not alone without pleasure of my own, but with absolute repugnance)” (1991, 90). Another example is the silence of Rigoberta Menchú, who, on Doris Sommers’s account, strategically deployed silences to protect her people’s secrets, thus functioning as a form of resistance to the inquisitive Western eye as withholding (1996).

¹³ The terms “refusal-to-speak” (i.e., intentional withholding of speech), “tongue-cut-out” (i.e., inability to speak), or “refusal-to-listen” (i.e., intentional lack of uptake of speech) suggest precisely this.

¹⁴ Silence would be consumed by violence and oppression. The violence would consist in assimilating deep silences into familiar meanings; their complexity, ambiguity, and opacity made invisible by the available logocentric, transparent, and binary taxonomies that would reduce the multiplicity of silences to, literally, oppressive silencing. But this conceptual violent consumption, i.e., the reduction of the difference of deep silences to the sameness of silencing, entails another, material violence: the assimilation of deep silence into familiar taxonomies and meaning would render invisible the “reality” of the Ute/Paiute tribes’ deep silences by abstracting from their opaque and ambiguous concrete experiences.

¹⁵ One could object that the recoil to “silence” and the linguistic choice of deploying this term would, inadvertently, erase the colonized’s (but especially colonized women’s) testimonies. Equating silence/ing with the experience of the colonized (and locating oneself in that experience to generate novel signifying practices) would render invisible not only the experiences of women of color whom, as noted, are not normed by/to silence, but also the signifying practices that already take place within those communities. In sum, it would be implicitly adopting the perspective of the colonizer. To avoid these misconceptions, it is important to understand that, at stake in this dissertation, is the *resignification* of silence, a displacement carried out by thinking through concrete experiences of silence within a non-dichotomous framework that no

longer casts it as literal silence by juxtaposing it to voice. As AnaLouise Keating puts it (in reference to Anzaldúa's work), "personal experiences—revised and in other ways redrawn—become a lens with which to reread and rewrite the cultural stories into which we are born" (2005, 6). Furthermore, in my view, it is important to hold on to the *language* of silence for two reasons. First, invoking the concept "silence" brings attention to the phenomenon whose complexity I seek to uncover, a phenomenon that is too quickly associated with oppression and whose subversive power is overlooked. In this sense, I focus on the taken for granted. Calling this phenomenon by a different name risks shifting the attention away from what appears as silence-as-non-sense, ultimately eviscerating the phenomenon of silence yet again (which is precisely the practice I seek to undo). Second, by focusing on deep silence, I make visible the *overlooking* of silence characteristic of modern/ colonial episteme, thus inviting the question of *why* silence is flattened/overlooked. What is it about silence (what can silence do) that makes it dangerous or threatening to the dominant epistemic/political/ontological frameworks? In the dissertation, I suggest that silence threatens the colonial logic because of its potential to signify otherwise. Calling the phenomenon something else risks foreclosing these questions, thus becoming complicit in the erasure of silence's fecund potential for non-colonial sense-making.

¹⁶ In "Musings: Spectral Phenomenologies," Elena Ruiz describes this alienating modality of existence as "spectral dwellings" (2014, 198).

¹⁷ This situating, i.e., this bringing to bare the weight of non-normative experiences onto what the canon takes to be familiar, is, perhaps, the unifying thread of the disparate projects in critical phenomenology being carried out today, as well as at its inception. Following in the footsteps of Simone de Beauvoir (2011) and Frantz Fanon, for instance, contemporary critical phenomenologists like Mariana Ortega's work on multiplicity (2016), Megan Burke's work on the temporality of feminine existence (2019), or Al-Saji's work on the coloniality of affect (2019b) bring to bear the weight of non-normative experiences onto what the canon takes to be familiar, thus revealing it as a site of marginalization and alienation for many.

¹⁸ For a rich discussion of how metaphysics ignores the weight of the materiality and uniqueness of voice, which is reduced to the abstract universality speech, see Adriana Cavarero's *For More than One Voice* (2005). Thus abstracted, Cavarero argues, voice in general becomes "the phonetic component of language as a system of signification" (2005, 9). Whether through the ancients' focus on *logos* or 20th century linguistics, the voice that is at stake in each (as speech in the former or language for the latter) is never taken up in its singular materiality.

¹⁹ Within this binary framework, speech is either liberatory (wherein the speech of, e.g., women is heard) or oppressive (wherein heteropatriarchal speech dominates).

²⁰ Cavarero tells us that, in order to rediscover the uniqueness of voice that "logocentrism radically denies," "to contest the efforts of its devocalization, it is thus necessary to adopt another method—a method [...] faithful to the vocal phenomenology of uniqueness, and

it consists in listening to speech as it resounds in the plurality of voice who [...] speak” (2005, 13, 14).

²¹ In Italian—not only Cavarero’s, but also my native language—the word *sentire* has the double valence of both “to listen” and “to feel.” Differently from *ascoltare*, which conjures up a kind of listening geared toward the semantic, *sentire* evokes sounds and their materiality.

²² Thus conceived, as Merleau-Ponty observes in “Man and Adversity,” language is far from its “ordinary” conception as “resemblance to things” or “servant of signification” (S 233, 232); rather, per Valéry’s formulation, aesthetic language is “the act of signifying itself” (S 232) through which signification is produced via “carnal relationships of meaning, the halos of signification words owe to their history and uses—as a result, in short, of the life that words lead within us” (S 234). As such, what is proper to (aesthetic/poetic) language are insecurity and approximation; its meaning is not graspable from the outside, but, rather, poetic language manifests itself by dwelling in and using language (S 232). Not surprisingly, existing scholarship appeals to Valéry or Proust as emblematic of an indirect language that expresses the bond between the sensible and signification—after all, it is Merleau-Ponty himself, who, in addition to the explicit references to Proust and Valéry in “Man and Adversity,” says, in the *Visible and the Invisible*, that “no one has gone further than Proust in fixing the relations between the visible and the invisible, in describing the idea that is not the contrary of the sensible” (VI 149).

²³ In *Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy* (2008), Lawrence Hass argues that, for Merleau-Ponty, thought, language, and knowledge do not, as the tradition has them, represent reality, but, rather, fundamentally create it (2008, Chs. 6–7).

²⁴ It should be noted that, although both Plato and Nietzsche deploy myth as a way to “give voice” to silence, their relationship to silence is different. For instance, in *The Republic*, Socrates’s speech about the good beyond being is interrupted by silence because, as Williams puts it, “what *must* be spoken of *cannot* be spoken of, except in images, and this is as far as the *logos* of the good beyond being gets (or has ever gotten)” (2010, 34). In this sense, myth is invoked when philosophical speech tragically fails to put into words or thought a certain silence, a wildness of being that it cannot grasp. Although Nietzsche similarly grapples with the challenges of thinking through matters that seem to elude philosophical discourse and remain silent, Nietzsche deploys myth and the *aporias* that it allows to uphold not as the other or limit of philosophical discourse, but as its starting point, as opening a realm of thinking, an *ethos*, that does not remain inaccessible to philosophical *logos*, but radically reconfigures or overturns it. Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*, for instance, is not only framed as a story; it also ends with silence—a silent weeping, to be precise. In the conclusion of his journey, Zarathustra grows “quite silent. His heart, however, was loosened, and tears fell from his eyes down upon his hands” (2003, 334). This indicates that Nietzsche does not merely value the sensible over the intelligible. Rather, on Nietzsche’s account, they are not two juxtaposed realms; *logos* is

inherently silent, whereby silence emphasizes this sensuous and affective otherwise of thetic/dogmatic philosophical knowledge. Note the relationship between knowledge and silence. To hear the sound (or the call) of life in his silent tears, to learn how to *self-*overcome, Zarathustra needs to be silent. It is silence that life demands of Zarathustra when she asks him to stop “crack[ing his] whip so terribly!” (2003, 242).

²⁵ Myth, as deployed by Anzaldúa, is a means to think through colonial experience as an in-between, as a liminal figure that remains conceptually and propositionally elusive. In fact, as Scott and Tuana point out, myth deploys “liminal figurations and senses outside the restrictions of grammar, good sense, rationality, or analysis: that means outside the human world” (2017, 13).

PART I – LISTENING FOR SILENCES

The Decolonial Turn is about making visible the invisible and analyzing the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or distorted visibility in light of a large stock of ideas that must necessarily include the critical reflections of the “invisible” people themselves.

—Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being”

We must, however, take a moratorium on naming too soon, if we manage to penetrate there. There is no other way for you and me to penetrate there.

—Gayatri C. Spivak, in conversation with Jenny Sharp

In a *New York Times* article, American author and long-distance swimmer Diana Nyad recounts her experiences of sexual assault, perpetrated in 1964 by her swimming coach, who, it turned out, was a serial sexual predator (Nyad 2017). Like many testimonies before and after hers, Nyad’s places great emphasis on finding one’s voice, on speaking up vis-à-vis sexual violence as a means to regain power in the wake of shame and humiliation. “We need to prepare coming generations to speak up in the moment, rather than being coerced into years of mute helplessness,” she states. As the #MeToo campaign forefronts, *speaking up* “takes something that women had long kept quiet about and transforms it into a movement” aimed at revealing the pervasiveness and systemic nature of sexual violence while building solidarity through empathy (Gilbert 2017). In this vein, Nyad concludes the article with a plea: “Tell your story. Let us never again be silenced.”

Testimonials like Nyad’s bring attention to the two interrelated assumptions operative in much Western feminist theorizing about oppression and emancipation.¹ First, they affirm that coming to voice or speaking up about one’s own experience of, for example, sexual violence is an empowering practice that breaks the silence to which harmful practices like sexual violence and the shame associated with it have relegated its victims. Second, they attest that being silenced is “a punishment equal to the molestation”

(Nyad 2017); the silence induced by fear and shame associated with sexual violence within a hetero-patriarchal culture further oppresses survivors. Thus, Nyad's testimonial brings to focus the logic and assumptions structuring emancipatory narratives according to which "voice" is associated with empowerment and is juxtaposed to silence, which comes to be equated with the silencing of oppression. As Aimee Carrillo Rowe and Sheena Malhotra point out in the introduction to *Silence, Feminism, Power*, the binary logic of speech versus silence and the almost commonsensical equation of silence with powerlessness and oppression in the Western tradition from Aristotle to Audre Lorde presumes a political imperative: for an individual or group to gain power and "to resist and transform the conditions of their oppression," they "must activate their *voice*" (Carrillo Rowe and Malhotra 2013, 1, order rearranged). In the words of Wendy Brown, in the Western tradition, silences must be assaulted, repeatedly with stories, testimonies, and histories, until "the silence itself is rendered articulate as an historically injurious force" (1996, 186). "Speaking up" and "breaking the silence" are thus unequivocally appealed to as the imperatives necessary to counter displacement, oppression, and marginalization. After all, as Adrienne Rich puts it, "in a world where language and naming are power, silence is oppression, is violence" (1979, 204).

Given the harm entailed in being forced to silence and the fact that speaking up is lived as liberatory by many (as Nyad's testimony indicates), "speaking up" seems hard to argue against. And yet, I suggest, "voice" is too broad a term; it is not nuanced enough to prevent its own deployment as an instrument of oppression rather than liberation. In fact, when voice becomes the ubiquitous appeal of liberatory movements, it abstracts from the concrete situations and lived experiences of those who inhabit silences, first, transcending

the concrete violences entailed by the normative power of voice and, second, dismissing silence as a fecund source of aesthetic and political value. Abstract and unequivocal appeals to “speaking up,” promote a fantasy of presence and overlook the ways in which “breaking the silence” and “speaking up” may converge with non-emancipatory tendencies in modern/colonial culture, ultimately feeding the structures of power they meant to starve.² For example, what to do with the co-opting of the call to “having your voice heard” for the reactionary fight spearheaded by fake news? Or appeals to “free speech” as means to advance alt-right messages? Or the logically analogous instance whereby French actress Catherine Deneuve wrote an open letter, published in *Le Monde* in 2018, in which she undermines the #MeToo campaign, contending that men should be “free to hit on” women? Though public oral testimony may be a practice that, in certain contexts and circumstances, is called for, the ubiquitous imperative to speak up and its association with moral agency and political power upheld by most liberatory narratives entails harms of its own that ought to be brought to light to avoid complicity with structural oppression. After all, what about instances in which silence is needed not only for self-care and self-preservation, but also for radical meaning-making?

Listening carefully to Nyad’s account, however, reveals that silence also indexes the unspeakability of her experience. “The events we have suffered are at once unspeakable and yet need to be spoken,” she remarks (2017). Their unspeakability, Nyad’s testimony suggests, is due to the fact that they exist at the affective level, carrying emotional, rather than primarily cognitive or conceptual, valence. Casting silence as non-sense or an obstacle for the eventuation of meaning, therefore, forecloses the possibility to listen more closely to and make sense of experiences like Nyad’s, to that “emotional

significance” that the violence her coach inflicted upon her bears; it precludes grappling with how silence, in addition to signaling a harm and exclusion, can also be a radical avenue for meaning-making grounded in a different affective dimension of being.

Consider the childhood memory of literary critic Ernesto Martínez, recounted in “Con Quién, Dónde, y Por Qué Te Dejas?": His older cousin Felipe, after having initiated sexual contact, grabs his throat, pushes him on the bed, and repeatedly asks “¿Te gusta? ¿Te gusta?” (2014, 239), all the while Martínez remembers remaining still, silent. Within the dominant binary framework of voice versus silence, silences like Martínez’s are eviscerated of their complexity and ambiguity, read as instances of complacency or forced submission to oppression, not unlike the silence Nyad describes. In his silence, Martínez did not comply with the “no te dejes” imperative (roughly translated as “don’t let them do that to you” or “fight back”)—a demand that, similar to “speak up!,” has purchase on the subjected, not the aggressors—and his silence or lack of struggle is read over and against the positively coded and overtly explicit imperatives of voicing one’s dissent or physically rejecting the aggression as modes of resistance. Within this framework, his silence and passivity are taken to index oppression and, specifically, failures, absences of sorts, or complacency. After all, why would Martínez remain silent in the face of aggression?

Yet, Martínez remembers, there was *more* in his passivity and silence than silencing, than either complacency or forced submission. He recalls living that silence as an expression of what he calls “joto passivity,” that is, “the seeming nonresponsiveness of queer Chicanos in the face of violence” (2014, 238), which, contra (modern/colonial) common sense, was also felt as resistant behavior; his silence was also a practice of

“radical meaning making” from which he could envision and bring about radically different gendered practices of resistance like nonmisogynist and nonhomophobic ways of performing masculinity (2014, 239, 241). To be clear, Martínez states that his “joto passivity” was not a liberatory solution that removed violence from his life. Nonetheless, it was an “embodied negotiation” that enabled him to “account for the contradictions” of his situation, and that reminded Martínez that, as a queer man of color, he was “not consumed by violence” (2014, 239, 245).

Dwelling, for a moment longer, in Martínez’s experience, more precisely, in the mis-hearing or misreading of his silence, raises the following questions: If it is the case that silence, as Martínez indicates, can be lived differently than as the mark of exclusion from the subject position, inferiority, or oppression, why is Martínez’s embodied response immediately read as submission? What are the structures and operations of the dominant logic such that inhabiting Martínez’s silence otherwise is foreclosed? What are the mechanisms, as Nelson Maldonado-Torres asks in the epigraph, that produce such invisibility? And what would make reading and/or inhabiting Martínez’s silences otherwise possible? Similarly, we could ask, what are the structures of power such that the account of silence that transpires through Nyad’s testimony frames it *exclusively* as something that needs to be overcome, its complexity and “emotional significance” thus overlooked? My aim in the next two chapters is to make visible the mechanisms that make invisible the fecundity, complexity, and polyvocality of the phenomenon of silence—what I call “deep silence”—within a colonial context.

The case for deep silence is, at least in part, a case for the limits of voice as a liberatory concept. Informed by Martínez’s experience (but also reminiscent of the

Ute/Paiute’s testimony), in chapter 2, I focus on silence and sexual violation to break open the polyvocality of silence. I draw from recent decolonial literature to problematize the uncritical appeal to voice as emancipatory, an appeal that continues to guide much of feminist theorizing reaching well beyond academia. (It suffices to think of the 2017 public outcry about racial and sexual violence, in which the #MeToo and #TimesUp campaigns are loud examples of movements that express the necessity to “speak up” about and “break the culture of silence” surrounding one’s own experience of racialized, sexualized, and gendered violence).³ By bringing into dialogue Jacques Derrida with decolonial insights from the modern/colonial research project (MC henceforth), I seek to make explicit the ways in which the onto-epistemology reproduced by coloniality is, in fact, a racialized metaphysics of presence within which *logos* and the field of presence are exclusive domains of the modern/colonial subject. Thus situated, I suggest that uncritical appeals to “speak up” or “come to voice” foreclose questions about the normativity of voice, ultimately upholding modern categories of thought, sensing, and being (*logocentrism*, to be precise) that reify the oppressive colonial apparatus they seek to resist.

In chapter 3, I develop and problematize what I call the “coloniality of silence,” i.e., operations of power that eviscerate deep silences of their depth and complexity, flattening them to a transparent, mono-dimensional phenomenon indexing epistemic nonsense and ontological absence—what Frantz Fanon calls the “zone of non-being” (Fanon 2008, xii). This analytical tool, I argue, not only brings to light the tendency of modern/colonial epistemic and ontological frameworks to skate over what Ofelia Schutte calls the “incommensurability” of sense, thinking, and being—a move that, in turn,

renders invisible non-dominant cultures by assimilating them into familiar meanings. “The coloniality of silence” also reveals that the evisceration of silence is not accidental to coloniality. Rather, this historical formation of coloniality relies upon and actively promotes the evisceration of the depth and polyvocality of silence for its perpetration and legitimization—an operation of flattening that is actively concealed through the naturalization of epistemic and ontological inferiority. Much, in fact, hinges upon the preservation of the colonial historical fiction of linear chronology and transparency; the apprehension of the complexity, fecundity, and multiplicity of deep silence and its being an inherent component of sense, thinking, and being would undermine the epistemic, ontological, and temporal presuppositions of coloniality.

NOTES

¹ American writer, historian, and activist Rebecca Solnit’s latest book, *The Mother of All Questions*, is a prime example of how the phenomenon of silence is conceived and treated in mainstream white feminist circles. The author discusses how feminists have long used silence as a metaphor for oppression and makes the case for how liberation is “always in part a storytelling process: breaking stories, breaking silences, making new stories. A free person tells her own story. A valued person lives in a society in which her story has a place” (Solnit 2017, 15). Silence, she claims, is what condemns “people to suffer without recourse, what allows hypocrisies and lies to grow and flourish, crimes to go unpunished. If our voices are essential aspects of our humanity, to be rendered voiceless is to be dehumanized or excluded from one’s humanity” (18). As I acknowledge in the body of the article, although there are oppressive forms of silencing, the equation of silence as oppression and voice or storytelling as emancipation forecloses critical analyses of the violence entailed by the normativity of voice.

² On this point, and for reflections on the feminist politics of voice that resonate with my own, see Wendy Brown, “In the ‘Folds of Our Own Discourse’” (1996) and Valerie Hazel, “Disjointed Articulations” (1994). Given the spatial constraints of this chapter, I cannot thoroughly engage with critiques of ableist and normative modes of communication such as (narrow forms of) voice put forth by disability studies. A fruitful starting point for those engagements is Christine Ashby’s “Whose ‘Voice’ Is It Anyway?,” in which she takes up the difficult challenge of “giving voice” to those

individuals who experience disability—in her case, those who do not use speech as the primary mode of expression—while also calling into question narrow conceptualizations of voice. “Ensur[ing] a space within a critical, qualitative framework for the inclusion of ‘voices’ that do not speak” entailed problematizing the use of the term “voice,” which, as she observes, too often goes unchallenged, as well as the assumptions behind the desire to give voice. Ashby recognizes the importance of silence as a means for the individual to “give voice to his experience and provide an opportunity to talk back to the technologies of power that oppress. ... perhaps *not* speaking, or not typing, is also a way to subvert systems of power that limit and marginalize” (Ashby 2011).

³ “Me Too” was founded in 2006 by Tarana Burke as a MySpace page to promote conversations and build community among women of color who were survivors. The movement sought to address the dearth of resources for survivors of sexual violence. While the public outcry may help direct attention to and put pressure on the state to restructure, e.g., budgets and allocation of resources, “speaking up” alone is not sufficient for radical change. Moreover, the movement sought to speak to the needs of a broader spectrum of survivors, including those traditionally underrepresented and most affected like queers, trans, women of color, and people with disabilities.

II. ON THE EMANCIPATORY LIMITS OF VOICE

Initially informed by Derrida's powerful critique of "voice" as the appeal of a metaphysics of presence (Derrida 2010; 2016) and subsequently by postcolonial and decolonial critiques of modernity, over the past three decades scholars have challenged the logocentrism of the West, bringing attention to the dangers of advancing liberatory discourses not rooted in and attentive to the cultural specificity of the phenomenon one strives to account for. Building on the Subaltern Studies Group, scholars like Trinh T. Minh-ha, Gayatri Spivak, Cheryl Glenn, and Krista Ratcliffe have suggested that the role of academic left scholars (but also of those who hold power and public access to voice) is to "learn to listen and to decode subaltern inscriptions" (Carrillo Rowe and Malhotra 2013, 8; see Trinh 1989; Spivak 1999; Glenn 2004; and Ratcliffe 2006). To this end, while they acknowledge that silence "has been a tool of marginalization and exclusion," the contributors to *Silence, Feminism, Power*, for instance, strive to "free silence from domination's grip" (Keating 2013, 32, 33), reclaiming it as a powerful site of resistance that allows "the freedom of not having to exist constantly in reaction to what is said" (Carrillo Rowe and Malhotra 2013, 2).¹

Steeped in this tradition, in this chapter, I strive to make visible and problematize the assumption operative within much of liberal discourse that voice (modern/colonial logos broadly construed) is key to emancipation, alerting us to the emancipatory limits of voice and shifting the conversation toward deep silence. Specifically, I show how appeals to dialogical communication reify, by uncritically deploying logocentric tools such as "voice" as means of liberation, oppressive colonial power structures that have predicated the exclusion and oppression of those same people who seek emancipation through voice.

I contend that “voice”—when appealed to and deployed abstractly and uncritically—remains a vehicle of Eurocentric colonization because, within a colonial context, voice—and, in turn, presence/being—is limited to the voice of the modern/colonial subject of modernity. Taking for granted the normativity of voice (which is the implication of abstract appeals to voice) has the pernicious effect of making invisible signifying practices that operate *otherwise* than coloniality.

The first step toward understanding the ways in which uncritical appeals to voice reify colonial structures is to take a step back—or, better yet, outward—to contextualize the current critique of voice within the bounds of the specific historical formation of coloniality. Differently from “colonialism,” which refers to political and economic relations among nations, “coloniality” indexes patterns of power and epistemic structures that outlive colonialism and are maintained alive through media, cultural performances, common sense, etc. To use Nelson Maldonado-Torres’s words, “coloniality and decoloniality refer to the logic, metaphysics, ontology, and matrix of power created by the massive processes of colonization and decolonization” (2016, 10).² Importantly, while it is true that coloniality emerged from colonialism, it did not emerge from any given colonial relation; “coloniality emerges in a particular socio-historical setting, that of the discovery [sic] and conquest of the Americas” (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 243). Pivotal to coloniality is the joint operation of the two axes of power, the “coloniality of power” and “modernity,” structuring and sustaining what Aníbal Quijano calls the “Eurocentered capitalist modern/colonial world power” (2000, 218). Attending to these patterns of power makes visible the imbrication of coloniality and voice, more precisely,

how coloniality undermines the conditions of possibility of emancipatory dialogues, revealing as naïve any abstract appeal to voice as liberatory.³

1. *The Coloniality of Voice*

In his seminal essay “Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America” (2000), Anibal Quijano explains that the axis of the “coloniality of power” refers to that “specific basic element of the new pattern of world power that was based on the idea of ‘race’ and in the ‘racial’ social classification of world population” (218). The invention and deployment of the category of “race” from the sixteenth century onward are pivotal in reframing the discourse surrounding the inferiority of the non-European “other” from one tied to conquest, war, and domination to one that casts inferiority as natural and ahistorical. Thus presented, “race” and racial discourse come to legitimize the domination of the “Indians,” “Blacks,” and “Mestizos” by the “Spanish” and “Portuguese” (all of which are newly produced social historical identities) on natural grounds (216). Take the distribution of work, for instance. In the Eurocentered, capitalist modern/colonial world system, work distribution followed racial lines, distinguishing between “salaried, independent peasants, independent merchants, and slaves and serfs” (Quijano 2007, 171) and reserving waged labor exclusively for white Europeans. Analogously, racial discriminations regulated the ascription of gendered identities, distinguishing between “women” and “females” and extending the status of women so described in the West only to *white* women, while understanding colonized females “to be animals ... in the deep sense of ‘without gender,’ sexually marked as female, but without the characteristics of femininity” (Lugones 2007, 202–03). As María Lugones points out, even when colonized

females were turned from animals into similes of bourgeois white women, “there was no extension of the status of white women to colonized women” (203).

The second axis of power, “modernity,” refers to the systematic elaboration, carried out by modern, Western Europe, of a new intersubjective universe based on a new knowledge perspective compatible with the cognitive needs of capitalism (Quijano 2000, 221). This knowledge perspective is labeled as “rational” and conforms to strict epistemic criteria such as neutrality, objective validity, and transparency (Collins 2000, 274). The cognitive needs of capitalism include the carving up, quantifying, and measuring of what is knowable so as to exert control over resources, others, and reality for the sake of commerce and exchange. Although Eurocentered, this way of knowing was/is imposed upon the capitalist world as the only valid rationality and as emblematic of the progress of modernity.⁴

Importantly, the axes of power instituted through and instituting of “coloniality” not only outlive formal colonialism, remaining integrated in the succeeding social orders, but also are constitutive of modern identity, of the modern *ethos*, which includes ways of knowing, thinking, perceiving, imagining, and loving—in sum, sensibilities vis-à-vis the world. In “Purity, Impurity, and Separation,” Lugones describes the modern/colonial subject as the outcome of an abstraction from the ambiguity and multiplicity constitutive of concrete subjects and realities aimed at exerting control and imparting order upon the *mestizaje* of being and living. That is, this modern/colonial subject is the product of and deploys a logic of purity that prunes, eliminates, forbids, and purges; it frames complex realities in the fictional terms of a unified reality and a unified subject that can be split-separated, that is “internally separable, divisible into what makes it one and the

remainder” (Lugones 2003, 128). This modern subject, which is constituted over and against what she calls “impure” or “thick” subjects that perceive richly and cannot be split-separated, is one-dimensional and occupies an ahistorical and acultural “vantage point from which unified wholes, totalities, can be captured” (128). Not surprisingly, internally split-separated into “sense/emotion/reason,” “reason, including its normative aspect, is the unified subject” (129).

Thinking through voice in light of coloniality raises important questions about the normativity of voice that would otherwise be foreclosed. In fact, coloniality is such that the rejoinder to Spivak’s infamous question, “can the subaltern speak?” (1999), is *no*: Within a colonial context, “speech” requires conformity to Eurocentric standards that exclude subaltern communicative practices and being. (Note that this *no* should not be taken to suggest—as critics too often have taken it to indicate—a communicative or political paralysis. Rather, the *no* points to a fundamental paradox at the heart of intelligibility. As we will see in what follows, the paradox arises when the desideratum of intelligibility is epistemic transparency.) The demand to speak places the subaltern in an untenable position. Were the subaltern to speak in their native languages, their speech (and their demands for normative treatment) would lack uptake. But were they to speak in a way that was intelligible to the modern/colonial subject, they would subscribe to and be rewritten by a conceptual and linguistic framework that inscribes their culture, language, and being as inferior. As Maldonado-Torres puts it, they would deploy a framework that had “already been shaped by understandings of the world as a *battel* field [*sic*] in which [the colonized] are permanently vanquished” (2007, 249). Moreover, by expressing themselves through colonial frames of reference, they would also sacrifice

their cultural specificity.⁵ In *Woman, Native, Other*, Trinh T. Minh-ha claims that this constitutes a “double mischief”:

unspoken and unable to speak, woman in exile with herself. Stolen language will always remain that other’s language. Say it obliquely, use trickery, cheat, or fake, for if I tell you now what I would like to hear myself tell you, I will miss it. Words thoroughly invested with realities that turn out to be not-quite-not-yet-mines are radically deceptive. Whenever I try my best to say, I never fail to utter the wrong words; I weasel, telling you “hen” when I mean something close to “duck.” (1989, 20)

Thus, by deploying the language of the modern/colonial subject, subalterns would cease being subalterns because the dominant group would not be hearing the subaltern in its idiosyncrasies, but, rather, a mere reflection of its own message and image. “Stolen language will always remain that other’s language.”⁶ Ofelia Schutte explains this paradox thusly:

delimiting my capacity to speak in my culturally differentiated voice will have an effect on what I say in response... What my interlocutor recognizes is not what I would have liked—an encouragement to communicate insights I offer from a standpoint of cultural difference—but only my ability to enter a standard Anglo-American speaking position, a position that exists in negotiated tension with my culturally differentiated, reflexive sense of self. (1998, 60)

To be clear—attending to the joint operations of these axes of power reveals—as the guiding logic of coloniality—an epistemic production that, by demanding conformity to purportedly universal (but in fact modern/colonial) epistemic standards, relies upon and produces at least a double erasure. First, it erases the colonized’s communicative practices and knowledge-validation processes, which come to be regarded either as smothered or primitive and lacking the sophistication, clarity, and accuracy necessary to produce knowledge. As Spivak’s paradox highlights, coloniality is such that to be heard entails expressing oneself in a manner that conforms to the epistemic model of the

Eurocentered, capitalist modern/colonial world power, that is, in a rational and dispassionate manner; it requires being a split-separated subject who does not perceive richly. The normative weight of testimonial conformity to modern/colonial standards thus often entails “testimonial smothering,” an instance of epistemic injustice that Kristie Dotson defines as the “truncation of one’s testimony in order to ensure that the testimony contains only content for which one’s audience demonstrates testimonial competence” (2011, 244). As women of color feminists have argued, then, not only is uptake differentially distributed across gender, ethnic, and racial lines resulting in “testimonial quieting,” an instance of epistemic harm occurring when an audience fails to identify a speaker as a knower (Dotson 2011, 242);⁷ peoples whose expressive means do not conform to purportedly universal epistemic criteria are perceived by the colonizers “in speaking their tongues as doing less than being able to express knowledge” (Veronelli 2015, 113). This, Gabriela Veronelli points out, is what happened to Indigenous peoples of the Americas. But other non-Western languages like those of Taoism and Zen that are “perfectly clear but rife with paradox” similarly do not qualify, to a modern/colonial ear, as persuasive or correct, for “paradox is ‘illogical’ and ‘nonsensical’ to many Westerns” (Trinh 1989, 16). Broadly, expressive modes that, analogously to these, do not “prune, eliminate, forbid, purge, purify” (Trinh 1989, 17) are regarded as “simple communication,” a form of communication that conveys more than denotative meaning, but less than dialogical rational communication, and that, as such, is taken to be an inherently less valuable form of expressivity than Eurocentric languages (Veronelli 2015, 118–19).⁸ As Lugones puts it, “[a] subject who in its multiplicity perceives, understands, grasps its worlds as multiple sensuously, passionately as well as rationally without the

splitting separation between sense/emotion/reason lacks the unidimensionality and the simplicity required to occupy the privilege vantage point” offered by, in this case, the Eurocentered locus of enunciation (2003, 129).

The distortion and exclusion from what counts as proper communication, knowledge, and, more broadly, the subject position of nonnormatively modern/colonial experiences has characterized the lives of U.S. Black women, who have relied on alternative expressive forms like music, literature, and daily conversations as sites to develop self-definitions as well as produce and validate knowledge (Collins 2000, 270; see also Jones 1991; Davis 1999; and Lordi 2013). Take, for instance, the differential treatment received by Anita Hill’s testimony compared to that of Christine Blasey-Ford, or the erasure of the 2006 founder of “Me Too” Tarana Burke from the #MeToo movement when it first took off over a decade later in 2017. As Burke observes in a 2018 *Vibe* interview with J’na Jefferson, women of color—who, statistically, experience higher rates of rape and sexual assault than white women—are not only less likely to report, but their stories have not been granted nearly as much public attention as the testimonies of white women.⁹ Reflecting on her own experience with “Me Too,” Burke asks, “Why isn’t it valid when we talk about it?,” thereby raising questions about 1) how race affects the epistemic authority of the survivor (but also of who qualifies as a survivor in the first place), and 2) of the extent to which credibility and correctness of an utterance is afforded by demanding conformity to grammatical and syntactic rules, key words, or technical terms. In this vein, Burke asks, “Is [“Me Too”] only valid if CNN talks about it?” (Jefferson and Burke 2018).¹⁰

But the two axes perform a second (perhaps more insidious) erasure: this epistemic production conceals its own structural complicity in the reification of a system that casts the “other” as inferior. The move whereby the in-fact-European epistemic standards/knowledge-validation processes that norm what counts as knowledge and language is presented as universal *naturalizes* racialized differences, making the processes that produce these differences, that is, coloniality, invisible. Because the colonized deploy communicative practices that do not conform to the putatively universal model of rational expression, they are perceived as naturally inferior. In turn, such a naturalization makes invisible the mechanisms that produce the colonized as inferior in the first place. As this logic goes, if Martínez did not fight back or verbally object to his aggression or the Ute/Paiute tribes remain silent about aspects central to their culture, it must be because, by virtue of their natural inferiority, they lack the ability to provide persuasive argumentation or perform norms of masculinity that required that he’d stand up for himself. The outcome of this logic is that the difference produced by the colonizing logic itself is concealed by appeals to natural difference or, to be precise, to the natural inferiority of the racialized other.

Given the seeming impossibility of making sense of subaltern experiences without assimilating or distorting their differences into familiar meanings, how are we to approach these differences? Can these differences be addressed by engaging in dialogical exchanges that seek to minimize the incommensurability by providing as much meaning as possible into the plus or translatable side of the exchange? Or are these communicative barriers the outcome of historically and geographically specific patterns of power that displace the racialized and colonized “other” from the subject position and locus of

enunciation? And if the latter, is addressing the epistemic disauthorization of non-modern/colonial subjects sufficient to address the harms entailed in the normativity of voice or should we attend to the processes whereby cross-cultural silences are dismissed as nonsense?

Decolonial thinker Gabriela Veronelli suggests the latter, arguing that voice and, more broadly, dialogical exchanges play into what she calls “*the coloniality of language and speech*” (CLS henceforth) (Veronelli 2016, 408). Veronelli defines CLS as the process of racialization of the colonized as *communicative agents* that began in the sixteenth century, whereby the colonized are reduced to nonhuman status and their language and ways of knowing are dismissed as expressions of their natural inferiority. By presenting the colonized as incapable of expressing themselves rationally, their putative inferiority is naturalized discursively (409). Thus, CLS forecloses the possibility of any dialogical relationship between colonized and colonizers (but also between colonized subjects) by erecting what are perceived as “natural barriers” to intelligibility and communication;¹¹ it vacates the colonized’s speech of the possibility of being heard by making the colonized’s modalities of communication and existence invisible to the colonizers. It is in this sense that, as Veronelli argues, CLS is more than the colonization of a language as a system of meaning, but a “process of dehumanization through racialization at the level of communication” (2016, 408).

In light of these considerations, we begin to see how the two axes of “coloniality” and “modernity” work in unison within CLS to discursively dehumanize the colonized and racialized “other,” ultimately undermining the conditions of possibility for emancipatory exchanges. On the one hand, “modernity” naturalizes the colonial

difference by upholding putatively universal and rational epistemic standards, a move that casts all those who do not conform to those criteria as naturally inferior or incapable of rational and clear linguistic communication. On the other hand, “coloniality” distributes this natural epistemic inferiority along racial lines; those who are epistemically inferior (putatively) by nature are those who are racialized as other. The outcome is that the epistemic criteria upheld by “modernity” are such that the natural inferiority of the non-European, racialized “other” is constantly reified through its own conceptual and linguistic schemas, which include reason, dialogical communication, and voice—in sum, modern/colonial *logos*.

Note that the claim that coloniality undermines the conditions of possibility of dialogical emancipation should not be taken to suggest that the colonized do not have a “voice” or cannot speak. Such an understanding would play into the same binary and totalizing logic this dissertation seeks to destabilize. The colonized do have a “voice” and appeal to knowledge-validation processes, but to hear these “voices” and epistemic processes one needs to attune oneself to the echoes reverberating through and fissuring the putative mere silences to which they are relegated by colonial logic. Once allowed to reverberate, the voices reveal the thread of silences with which they are imbricated, the affective and somatic meanings they disclose. Take the institutionalized sexual violation of black women under conditions of segregation, for instance. As Linda Martín Alcoff points out, “even if there is an official silence in the majority community concerning a given issue ... this does not mean the silence is total;” black communities knew what happened even before the NAACP chapters began taking cases to the courts (2018, 38). “Even if these were not echoable in dominant discursive practices,” the necessity for

safety and knowledge-sharing led to the development of methods of communication not repressed by Eurocentered norms (38). Rather, thinking through questions of voice in the context of coloniality reveals that, while coloniality displaces the colonized from the subject position by producing them as incapable of intelligible expression, a simple appeal to voice as emancipatory does not suffice; within a colonial context, the voice that can be/is heard by the majority community is normed by coloniality and, thus, is *exclusively* the voice of the modern/colonial subject (that is, the voice that conforms to modern/colonial criteria). This speech/voice, in fact, is the putatively universal voice of reason, a voice that is taken to be not tainted by cultural or embodied markers like sensuality, affectivity, race, gender, and, more broadly, culture. As María Lugones explains, akin to his voice, the subject of modern/colonial enunciation is “transparent” and “pure,” i.e., “abstract, without particularity,” and “outside historicity and concreteness” (2003, 128, order rearranged). The abstract imperative to speak up—the imperative according to which speaking up is *the* way to address oppression and violence irrespective of the nuances of a given, concrete situation—thus skates over the important question of *whose* voice norms that imperative.¹² Put differently, uncritical appeals to voice do not allow the critical distance (which, not so paradoxically, can actually be obtained by remaining grounded in concrete lived experiences of those who experience silences) necessary to question the (modern/colonial) *world in which language and naming are power*, and “voice” a colonial tool. Quite the contrary—they play into existing power structures by deploying tools, like language, naming, and voice, that continue to be normed by and effect the norming of coloniality, *giving voice* exclusively to the modern, split-separated, and rational lover of purity. Uncritical appeals to voice

thus perpetrate the making invisible non-Western “voices”: because the voices that can be/are heard are those that conform to the epistemic norms of coloniality, those that do not conform are not recognized as communicative, rational subjects and are dismissed as nonexistent and nonsensical. As Lugones reminds us, “[a]s thick, [colonized subjects who do not conform to the norms of modernity] are marginalized through erasure, their voices nonsensical” (2003, 140).

By now, the MC affirmation, echoed by Veronelli, that “there is no way out of coloniality from within modern categories of thought” should have accrued weight and clarity (Veronelli 2016, 405). As the above remarks suggest, the dire implications of these two erasures are not just epistemological, but ontological; they entail a world, a metaphysics, in which the only resisting subjects and modes of resistance that are recognized as existing, as sensical, are those normed by coloniality. In other words, the implications of the concealed normativity of voice are that those who are not heard/seen protesting—those who do not resist in a manner consonant with the standards prescribed by coloniality—risk being dismissed as either invalid or as facilitating their own oppression, as Martínez’s narrative reminds us. In this sense, coloniality produces an ontology that strives to eliminate any “residue” of resistance: along with non-Western “voices,” non-Western modes of insubordination, sense-making, and, as the following discussion will show, being, are also erased; the modes of insubordination, sense-making, and being made available are those sanctioned by colonial logic, modes that, even in their insubordination, play into coloniality by appealing to its concepts, structures, and logic.

In what follows, I unpack this last claim, suggesting that the abstract and uncritical appeal to voice is complicit in the reproduction and reification of colonizing

epistemic and ontological norms—what I call a racialized metaphysics of presence—that make visible only modes of existence that are normed by coloniality, ultimately preemptively foreclosing ways of reading and writing reality that uphold its complexity and ambiguity, that make sense beyond the presence/t of modern/colonial consciousness.

2. *A Racialized Metaphysics of Presence*

The second step toward understanding the ways uncritical appeals to voice reify colonial structures is by grappling with the ontological implications of coloniality. Although the theories discussed thus far focus predominantly on the epistemic ramifications of coloniality, this historical formation affects the “general understanding of being” (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 242). First, the casting of colonized people as lacking rationality has the effect of depriving them, in Frantz Fanon’s words, of “ontological resistance,” that is, of being. We saw this implication operative in the preceding discussion of CLS, especially in the discursive dehumanization of the colonial other through racialization. But this first ontological erasure relies on a second, conceptual one. The modern/colonial world power produces a racialized, dualistic conceptual framework or, more precisely, a metaphysics that limits “the sense of being within the field of presence” (Derrida 2016, 24)—what Derrida calls a metaphysics of presence—whereby this field of presence appears as the exclusive domain of the modern/colonial subject. In this sense, I speak of a *racialized* metaphysics of presence. As we will see, this racialized metaphysics of presence of being versus nonbeing, sense versus non-sense, light versus darkness, strives to reduce the multiplicity, complexity, and ambiguity of (the) being (of subjects who do not conform to modern/colonial standards) to nonbeing. Not only, then, are the colonized made invisible, reduced to nothingness through an exclusion from

presence, but their being is conceived through a framework inadequate to express their complexity and ambiguity.

Take the first ontological implication of the modern/colonial world power that “the absent of rationality is articulated in modernity with the idea of the absence of Being in others” (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 252–53). In “The Coloniality of Being,” Nelson Maldonado-Torres argues that the Cartesian *ego cogito* and its instrumental rationality operate according to an attitude of permanent suspicion—what he calls the “racist/imperial Manichean misanthropic skepticism” (2007, 245)—regarding the humanity of colonized and racialized “others,” which can be summarized thus: “I think (others do not think, or do not think properly), therefore I am (others are-not, lack being, should not exist or are dispensable)” (252). The tacit assumption guiding this logic marks the colonial and racial subjects as dispensable; it puts them under the murderous and rapist sight of the modern/colonial *ego cogito*.

Fanon’s reflections in *Black Skin, White Masks* and Gloria Anzaldúa’s testimony in *Borderlands/La Frontera* are a powerful testament to this insight. Because the colonial world is structured by colonial conceptual and linguistic frameworks grounded in misanthropic skepticism—here it suffices to think of Fanon’s powerful description of his (linguistic) encounter with the young white boy’s shout, “Look a Negro!”—“in the eyes of the white man ... the black man [*sic*] has no ontological resistance” (Fanon 2008, 90, order rearranged). Coloniality is such that the colonized appears, in the eyes of the dominant group, not as a subject, that is, someone who has a culture, history, and language, but as nothingness. As Anzaldúa’s narrative conveys, when interpreted through colonial schemas, the complex, ambiguous, and paradoxical dimensions of her being are

taken to be an indication of her inferiority, of her non-sense. “I have so internalized the borderlands conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one. *A veces no soy nada ni nada*” (B 85), she recounts. In a colonial context, ontology collapses into Manicheanism whereby the colonized are reduced to the dark side of the light-dark equation; they are reduced to “a zone of non-being, a sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential from which a genuine new departure can emerge” (Fanon 2008, xii).

This Manichean ontology, however, does more than relegate the *damné* to the dark side of the dichotomy; it deprives the colonized of a (nondualistic and nonlogocentric) “metaphysics” of their own capable of accommodating the complexity of (their) being (Fanon 2008, 90).¹³ Given the colonial episteme at his disposal, Fanon painfully realizes that the answer to the question, “Where do I fit in?” (93), is that he does not fit in. He has arrived “too late!,” so to speak, in a world that chains him, through coloniality and the working of the two axes of power, to pre-existing images, concepts, and significations that have been fabricated without him and that relegate him to nothingness. (I will return to Fanon’s remarks about lateness in chapter 5. As we will see, his “lateness” is the symptom of what scholars call the coloniality of time.) As the anguish permeating the chapter titled “The Lived Experience of the Black Man” suggests, Fanon’s existential struggle to make sense of his being through the colonial episteme leads him to one untenable position after another, ultimately culminating in a cry (an affective response that should not be overlooked as it is crucial to what I call an aesthesis of deep silence). Similarly, we witness Anzaldúa struggle with conceptual and linguistic frameworks too narrow and transparent to make sense of the opaque, complex,

ambiguous dimensions of her being, which are thus taken to be an indication of her inferiority, of her non-sense. In this sense, to use Maldonado-Torres's words, coloniality is a "metaphysical catastrophe" (2016, 11–16). But how is this metaphysical catastrophe possible?

As previously noted, the epistemic criteria upheld by sixteenth-century Europe served the cognitive needs of capitalism in which knowledge had to be conducive to the carving up, quantifying, and measuring of (external) reality for the sake of commerce and exchange. That is, the sixteenth century witnessed the proliferation of explicit discourses on method for the attainment of knowledge that resulted in not only the production of "objective," "universal," "dispassionate" knowledge, but also the sedimentation of ontological assumptions about what being should be like such that it could be known through the above-mentioned method. "What do I know?" and "what is there?" In the context of a modern/colonial world system, rather than calling for an examination of the idea of knowing itself, these questions are taken to be elucidations of the things that we know or can know, which is to say as questions of cognition wherein the only hesitation lies in how to "call entities—space, knowledge—which are taken as evident in themselves" (VI 128).

As it turned out, the being that could be known through these epistemic criteria is limited to the field of presence. As Derrida suggests (following Heidegger) in *Ousia and Grammē*, Western metaphysics treats "the meaning of Being as *parousia* or *ousia*, which signifies, in ontologico-temporal terms, 'presence' (*Anwesenheit*)" (1982, 31). This means that it grounds determinations of the meaning of being in that which is—a move that produces, at once, being as "what *is* present," as immediate self-presence or "pure

auto-affection” (Derrida 2016, 106) over and against nonbeing, which comes to be understood as “what is *not* present,” “not-there,” in sum, what cannot be known through immediate presence to consciousness.

Not to be overlooked is the crucial role that voice plays in delineating the field of presence: *logos*, Derrida tells us, is assumed to be immediately present to consciousness *only* through voice because voice—or, as he specifies in *Voice and Phenomenon*, internal monologue (Derrida 2010, 35–37)—is (presumably) heard without external mediation. The West’s logocentrism is the mark of a metaphysics of presence that understands speech and voice as the immediate conduit of (the) meaning (of being). The ontological implication of the axis of “modernity,” then, is the reification of a Parmenidean—or, should I say, Manichean—ontology of being and nonbeing, presence and absence, light and darkness, whereby speech and voice are the mark of purity, presence, transparency, and the fullness of being, whereas its other, silence, is the mark of impurity, absence, and lack of being.

The work done in this chapter, however, should alert us against taking concepts like “voice” abstractly and toward the necessity of attending to the power differentials at play when dealing with questions of coloniality and ontology, bringing to bear considerations about the differential and racialized distribution of being onto ones about the metaphysics of presence. Maldonado-Torres’s and Fanon’s remarks indicate that the field of presence is demarcated by the consciousness or, more precisely, *the voice* of the colonizer. Within a colonial context, the “voice” that stands for presence is not just any voice; the only voice that has uptake and is recognized as Language is that of the modern/colonial subject—a speech act uttered by a subject putatively unmarked by

cultural, ethnic, gendered and racialized differentials and that, thus, conforms to the (transparent) cognitive needs of capitalism. The exclusion of the colonized's communicative functions as language, then, does not merely entail the erasure of non-modern/colonial modes of communication, but also the relegation of racialized bodies/being to absence. In this sense, the metaphysics of presence is a *racialized* metaphysics of presence whereby the field of presence is the exclusive domain of the colonizer.

In light of these considerations, I *hear*, in the “cries of those whose humanity is being denied” (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 257), the reminder to call into question not only the colonizing power of voice permeating uncritical appeals to “speak up!,” but also a world in which naming and language are power. That is, envisioning decolonial avenues of feminist insubordination cannot stop at questioning the conditions of possibility of reception of subaltern voices; it must venture beyond voice, recuperating the generative power of deep silence. Importantly, I contend, the latter requires displacing the mechanisms that reduce the complexity, polyvocality, and fecundity of deep silence to oppressive silencing, to epistemic and ontological absence, and uphold deep silence as a generative source of radical meaning-making, of a sense and a metaphysics that accommodate the *mestizaje* and complexity of (the) being (of the colonized). In this vein, it is time to repropose the questions raised at the outset of this chapter: Why is Martínez's silent response read as an absence of sorts? What are the structures and motives such that silence is immediately perceived and conceived as silencing? There are instances of silence that are, in fact, oppressive, but why can't we find, within a colonial matrix, a way to think or live silence otherwise than as oppression? And what does this

evisceration tell us about coloniality? It is to these questions that I turn in the next chapter.

NOTES

¹ It should be noted that, as Carrillo Rowe and Malhotra point out, although the works of Glenn and Ratcliffe “productively bring silence more fully into focus by challenging the epistemological conditions of its annihilation, they remain bound to Western and modernist assumptions about completeness of understanding” (Carrillo Rowe and Malhotra 2013, 6).

² Later in the same paragraph, Maldonado-Torres says the following about decoloniality: “If coloniality refers to a logic, metaphysics, ontology, and a matrix of power that can continue existing after formal independence and desegregation, decoloniality refers to efforts at rehumanizing the world, to breaking hierarchies of difference that dehumanize subjects and communities and that destroy nature, and to the production of counter-discourses, counter-knowledges, counter-creative acts, and counter-practices that seek to dismantle coloniality and to open up multiple other forms of being in the world” (2016, 10).

³ To this end, in “Resistant Silences,” Christine Keating works to recuperate silence from its equation with absence, distinguishing between enforced silences, which are oppressive and should be resisted, from three kinds of silences that serve as technologies of resistance: “silent refusal, silent witness, and deliberative silence” (Keating 2013, 25). In “The Silence in my Belly,” Malhotra speaks of her struggle with the “Western compulsion for voice and speaking ... speak your position; take a stand; speak, speak, speak!”—a commitment that problematically equates agency with voice. Reflecting on her experience as a survivor of ovarian cancer, Malhotra reframes silence as a “space of unsettling possibilities” whereby words, ideals, thoughts, and explorations do not have to follow structured and linear regimens, but can hold “more than one thing at once” (Malhotra 2013, 220, 223, 225). She argues that agency is a pre-requisite for silence to be empowering, a space for possibilities—“silence without *any* agency is oppressive, particularly given the material conditions of the lives in question” (2013, 224).

⁴ Note how “modernity” is the knowledge perspective at play in the universe inhabited by Rodolfo Kusch’s student discussed in the introduction of *Indigenous and Popular Thinking in América*. This is a universe grounded in the understanding of an *external reality*, the development of a knowledge or science to administer that understanding, and the modification of that reality through action (2010, 10).

⁵ Although Spivak takes issue with Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, her concern is applicable to feminism more broadly, raising difficult questions about the binary, Eurocentric logic regulating the dichotomy between “oppressive” silence/ing and “emancipatory” voice/speaking that remain endemic to feminist thinking writ large. In line with Spivak’s warning, in “On Ethnographic Refusal” (2007), Audra Simpson criticizes (cultural) difference “as the unit of analysis of cultural studies,” approaching it instead through “disaggregated narratives” (a method informed by those who are the “subject” of analysis), thus revealing that this differential approach has a bearing on the question of “voice” (of anthropological accounts, but also of the speaking subject). Her approach reveals a dissonance between the “voice” of the representations produced by anthropology (characterized by *sovereignty*) and that of indigenous peoples (characterized by *refusal*).

⁶ Walter Dignolo presents this paradox in the following manner: to “assimilate means that you accept your inferiority and resign yourself to play the game that is not yours but that has been imposed upon you” (2013, 134). In “Choosing the Margins as a Space of Radical Openness,” bell hooks expresses a similar insight when, reflecting on the colonizing power of language, she depicts their relationship thusly: “[There is] no need to hear your voice, when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still [the] colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk” (1989, 22).

⁷ As Sadie Graham points out in an October 2018 *Broadly* article, the ubiquity of reporting promoted by and characteristic of #MeToo fostered the belief that this journalistic form of reporting would “dismantle the oligo-patriarchy and save us all.” Yet many of the same problems persist. Not only “other kind of reporting—to human resources, to police—are so aggressively unsustainable for survivors” (Graham 2018); closer scrutiny shows how this platform amplifies the voices of white, middle-class women to the exclusion of others.

⁸ As Patricia Hill Collins points out in *Black Feminist Thought*, knowledge claims must satisfy criteria upheld by the context in which they are presented. Ultimately, “because this enterprise is controlled by elite White men, knowledge validation processes reflect this group’s interests” (2000, 271).

⁹ Although she does not present the concern in this manner, we can hear, in Lynn Phillips’s critique of the norms regulating sexual violence survivors in *Flirting with Danger* (2000), issues resonant with the coloniality of voice. In chapter 3, “What’s a Young Woman not to Think?” (33–78), Phillips identifies four sets of often contradictory discourses operative in shaping expectations regarding norms regulating heterosexual encounters. The third set of discourses deal with “what counts as victimization.” More precisely, Phillips argues, the “true victim” discourse produces and reifies the criteria that

ought to be met in order to be recognized as a victim of sexual violence, a necessary condition to be effectively heard and granted respect and advocacy. The true victims, according to this discourse, “are those who were ‘clearly’ victimized through physical threat or violence, who did everything they could to avoid or prevent their victimization, and who used every socially acceptable channel available to them to cope, once their victimization occurred” (2000, 66). While the coloniality of voice challenges the normativity of voice, Phillips criticizes the normativity of (true) victim; while the norms at play in each are different, both “voice” and “(true) victim” presuppose a dichotomous thinking that privileges purity (the purity of the true victim and the purity of voice) at the expense of the complexity of lived experience. Moreover, the criteria that norm what counts as “voice” and “true victim” are constructed from the dominant perspective. What counts as a true victim, Phillips tells us, is determined in relation to what counts as normal or aberrant male behavior. This entails that “‘everyday violence,’ ‘little rapes’ [...], and insults to women’s hetero-relational autonomy—which the women who are targeted might consider street and workplace harassment, acquaintance rape, and battering—are cast as normal, because they are, unfortunately, so typical” (2000, 67). Lastly, “voice” and “(true) victim” reify criteria that disproportionately exclude the experiences of non-white women. As Patricia Hill Collins points out, the controlling images norming the appearance and lives of black women exclude them from the place of innocence; black women are understood as “Jezebels” (2000, 89) and, as such, promiscuous. The differential treatment of women (and men) of color in response to the current outbreak of sexual violence survivors’ testimonies attests to the weight of these controlling images in the current landscape.

¹⁰ This is also true for vernacular expressions, which are not acquired through formal institutions and thereby are not “repressed by either grammatical rules, technical terms, or key words” (Trinh 1989, 16).

¹¹ As Veronelli argues, although these conditions can be granted at the abstract level (she criticizes MC exponents Enrique Dussel and Walter Mignolo for taking for granted the existence of these dialogical conditions of possibility by operating at the level of “ideas, of epistemic and political projects” (Veronelli 2016, 408)), these conditions of possibility do not necessarily exist at the level of the concrete lives and experiences of colonial subjects. Veronelli claims that the Modern/Colonial Research Program’s focus on “ideas, epistemic and political projects” (2016, 408) (rather than on lived experience) reiterates the colonial structures that it seeks to undermine; it does not take into account the ways in which coloniality structures the communicative conditions presupposed in the development of the aforementioned dialogical proposals putatively required for decolonization, ultimately missing the fact that the colonial difference remains invisible to the colonizer. With this insight, Veronelli departs from Modern/Colonial Research Program exponents Enrique Dussel and Walter Mignolo, for whom critical dialogues, more precisely, *transmodernity* (Dussell 1995, 138–39) and *intracultural dialogue* (Mignolo 2005, 160), are central to displace the West (and its monologism) from the enunciative center and begin decolonizing processes. While she agrees that there needs to be a displacement to the fractured locus of enunciation, Veronelli questions Dussel’s and

Mignolo's appeals to dialogue; such approaches, which abstracts from the concrete lived experience of those who inhabit the colonial wound, assume that the communicative conditions of the colonial difference are ripe for decolonial communication. Veronelli claims that, when analyzed from the colonial wound, such conditions are not present; the CLS erects "natural" barriers to colonized-colonizer communication (but also to dialogue among colonized peoples), thus foreclosing projects and processes of decoloniality for which they would be the engine. For a fractured dialogical response to be heard both horizontally (by other colonized peoples) and vertically (by the colonized), the colonial difference needs first to become visible.

¹² At this juncture, it is telling to briefly turn to Linda Martín Alcoff's *Rape and Resistance*, in which she puts forward a new epistemology of rape grounded in a more nuanced understanding of experiences of sexual violation as a way to reform and transform the condition of survivors' reception. Although she deems survivors' voices the critical force behind social revolution (on her account, speaking up is necessary, for example, insofar as it often is the catalyst for changing definitions, which affect the possibility of understanding and resisting sexual violation), Alcoff warns about the ways in which their testimonies echo in the public domain: testimonies are not only inscribed in frames that regulate the "criteria by which claims are interpreted and judged, what may be spoken of, what can come up for judgment itself" (Alcoff 2018, 10); they are also taken up in a domain in which the dominant understanding of sexual violation lacks complexity and nuance. To avoid the dismissal of "voices expressing complexity ... as simply in denial, or as liars, or as deluded about their experience," and "to make survivor speech as politically effective as possible," it is paramount to complicate the understanding of the nature and dynamics of experiences of sexual violation to reshape the discourses norming the utterability and reception of such experiences (12, 17). In spite of her nuanced analysis of the challenges associated with public speaking, and her shift from individual responsibility to "speak up" toward transforming the discursive structures regulating uptake, Alcoff's advocacy for voice as the privileged emancipatory tool prevents her from making visible the imbrication of coloniality and voice, or the ways in which the discursive formation of coloniality undermines the conditions of possibility of emancipatory dialogues, ultimately reiterating those discursive schemas that frame and dismiss subaltern resistances.

¹³ In *In-Between*, Mariana Ortega argues that multiplicity and mestizaje are characteristic of all beings, not only of those who, because of their material, geopolitical existence, are forced to "travel" between cultural and linguistic norms and worlds of meaning (2016).

III. THE COLONIALITY OF SILENCE

I concluded the preceding chapter by suggesting that a racialized metaphysics of presence is such that the colonizers' is the only voice that is heard and stands for presence, which means that being (here limited to the field of presence) is the exclusive domain of the colonizer. Because the "voice," "speech," or "languages" of the colonized do not conform to Eurocentered, capitalist, modern/colonial criteria, they are not heard or recognized as such. This entails the reduction of the colonized's voice to nonsense (or, as Veronelli calls it, "simple communication") and their being to nothingness (or, as Fanon calls it, to a "zone of non-being"). In this shorter chapter, I first focus the implications that a racialized metaphysics of presence that excludes communicative forms and beings that are not normed by coloniality has for the phenomenon of silence itself. Specifically, I track the mechanisms that make invisible the polyvocality of silence. I call them *the coloniality of silence*. Then, I trace occurrences of silence that generate new meaning to open the phenomenon to its fecund polyvocality.

Within a colonial context, embodied responses that are not normed by colonial voice, like Martínez's "Joto passivity" or the Ute/Paiute's silences, fall through the cracks of a racialized metaphysics of presence; rather than being taken in their strangeness and allowed to displace usual expectations, what cannot be heard by and from the colonizer's standpoint is marked as unintelligible and nonsensical, as nothingness—in sum, as *mere* or *total* silence. This is the logic outlined in the introduction of Part I and frequently at play in liberatory movements' emancipatory efforts. But what does it mean for silence to be excluded from the domain of presence, being, and sense? This is also to ask, what does it mean, for sense, to be limited to (the) presence (of the colonizer's voice)?

In “Cultural Alterity,” Ofelia Schutte takes up these questions by thinking through the paradox inherent to cross-cultural communication already discussed in relation to Spivak’s question, “can the subaltern speak?” Differently from Spivak, who deals with the untenable predicament of the subaltern from the standpoint of speech/voice, the lynchpin of Schutte’s argument is that there is a “lack of complete translatability” (Schutte 1998, 69, n. 4), a *silence* of sorts, between linguistic-cultural symbolic systems but, more broadly, within sense itself. As she puts it, “[t]here is always a residue of meaning that will not be reached in cross-cultural endeavors, a residue sufficiently important to point to what I shall refer to more abstractly as a principle of (cross-cultural) incommensurability” (56). Although modern/colonial epistemic theories of meaning may acknowledge this incommensurability and the fact that it may impede a perfect mapping of culturally different discourses, they regard incommensurability as “irrelevant to philosophical meaning and knowledge, and thus irrelevant to the operations of reason” (61). This is because they understand incommensurability quantitatively rather than qualitatively; incommensurability is approached as the residue of an equation whose balancing entails communicative transparency. Recall Lugones’s lover of purity, or the modern/colonial subject discussed in the preceding chapter. The modern/colonial subject operates under the assumption that the sense of a purportedly unified reality and subject can be grasped in its totality through reason alone, that is, by occupying an acultural and ahistorical vantage point. Lovers of purity split-separate reality, sanitizing it from anything “impure” like affective residues and (seeming) impossibles. That is, they operate under the assumption that a culture’s, language’s, or subject’s meaning is perfectly available and accessible to another, that these meanings can be made available

through dialogical exchanges, and that the colonized can deploy colonial meanings and frameworks to express their experiences of oppression and resistance—assumptions that, as we have seen, make invisible the colonized’s communicative practices and being. In a word, the lover of purity casts sense and reality as *transparent*, thus skating over the “silence,” “opacity,” or “excess of meaning” that, on Schutte’s account, is inherent in sense and reality.

This assumption regarding the nature of incommensurability/silence and sense informs strategies devised to reduce barriers to cross-cultural communication. Because sense is assumed to be transparent, cross-cultural incomprehensions or miscommunications are taken to be direct results of a lack of information. The solution to this “lack,” then, is taken to be a “more”: comprehension and communication, this logic goes, are achieved by providing more complete, detailed, accurate information. Although these strategies, in some instances, may help reduce the incomprehensions or miscommunications, they mischaracterize the nature of incommensurability/silence and sense, which, in turn, leads them to mischaracterize the nature of the problem. Because they overlook the fact that “silence” or “excess of meaning” is inherent to sense and “the process of reasoning itself” (Schutte 1998, 61), they understand the problem of miscommunication to be a quantitative issue—addressed by providing more of the *same* kind of input—rather than a qualitative issue—the *nature* of sense and silence. In other words, both overlook the deep silence of sense and the sense of deep silence.

Similarly, I would say, the imperative to “break the silence” relies on a binary conception of speech as expressive-repressive, as that which frees (by speaking truth to power or making visible) or as that which oppresses when institutional or

official/repressive truths are in circulation. While the former stance calls for more speech while the latter for less, both take recognition to be unproblematic when the testimonies are told. For both, freedom thus appears to be a quantitative, rather than qualitative, phenomenon. This discussion of Eurocentered theories of meaning points to the fact that the colonial, logocentric apparatus is not equipped to approach, dwell in, harken to occurrences of deep silence, or let deep silence open onto other dimensions of being and sense that are prior to and cannot be accounted for by a discourse that operates at the level of conceptual thinking. Instead, epistemically, silence is framed as the lack or insufficiency of more complete, accurate, detailed sense/information that could be provided by the colonized via speaking up and coming to voice. In sum, what is made invisible, by virtue of its not being recognized or acknowledged, is the sense *of* deep silence. Experiences of silence that can be negotiations of reality and fecund sources of radical meaning-making are vacated of their depth and thickness, of sense and being. That is, silences are eviscerated of their depth, polyvocality, and complexity such that the phenomenon of silence comes to stand for the opposite of voice and sense, as that which ought to be broken or overcome to convey meaning or to gain recognition. As such, silence is signified negatively, as the mark of ontological nonbeing and epistemic non-sense or the index of oppression and displacement from the (purportedly universal but in fact colonial) subject position. These mechanisms are what I call the *coloniality of silence*. The outcome is that silence is perceived, at best, as a phenomenon irrelevant to meaning-making, to communication, and to the disclosure of being, and, at worst, as an obstacle to be overcome if meaning, communication, and the disclosure of being ought to be attained.

But if sense is not transparent, and if silence is not a lack, why are rich experiences of silence like Martínez misheard? Why does the majority of testimonies about experiences of silence remain deaf to its polyvocality? *Why* are these “silent” responses read as negative phenomena, as absence, passivity, or nonresponsiveness?

By emphasizing the *why*, I bring attention to the nonaccidental nature of this reading of reality, to the fact that the casting of deep silence as mere silence, that is, the coloniality of silence, is necessary to coloniality. In fact, because what is deemed as mere silence would open not only onto decolonial epistemic practices, but also onto a metaphysics or zone of being that is neither full presence nor nothing, taking seriously those experiences *as* deep silence would challenge usual assumptions central to coloniality itself. In this sense, the evisceration of deep silence to absence (and to oppressive silencing) is not accidental to coloniality, but, rather, a key process in the successful reification and legitimization of this historical formation. By reducing deep silences to the expression of natural inferiority or the exclusion from the subject position, the coloniality of silence makes invisible modes of knowing, communicating, and being that are *otherwise* than colonial modernity and that, by virtue of their existence, threaten to fissure the *naturalization* of coloniality so essential for its own justification. After all, the existence of complex/ambiguous modes of being and knowing challenges the operative assumption of coloniality, calling into question the “objective” and “transparent” qualities of Eurocentered, capitalist, modern/colonial epistemic and ontological schemas—features that are presented as natural and universal. To use language resonant with the previous chapter’s discussion, the racialized metaphysics of presence eliminates any “impurity” or in-between, reducing them to nonbeing.¹

Coloniality thus preemptively dismisses on natural grounds as nonbeing or non-sense the locus from which one could contest the assumptions of coloniality. This erasure is crucial to coloniality in that it conceals the colonial difference as a generative source of subversion.² After all, as experiences generative of radical meaning making, deep silences threaten to undermine the colonial logic whereby “knowledge and aesthetic norms are [...] universally established by a transcendental subject” realizing instead that they are “universally established by historical subjects in diverse cultural centers” (Mignolo 2012, 5).

1. Listening for Silences

In “Toward a Decolonial Feminism,” María Lugones insightfully reminds us that decoloniality requires “resisting the epistemological habit of erasing” (2010, 754). In the context of the present project, this means resisting the tendency to strive for semantic transparency and subsume silence to familiar modern/colonial meanings. After all, although the coloniality of silence strives to eviscerate deep silences, occurrences of silence can be rich phenomena that operate according to decolonizing logics. Concretely, then, what would it mean not to dismiss the deep silence and the meaning it eventuates of experiences like Martínez’s and the Ute/Paiute tribes’?

Martínez’s testimony points to the ways in which deep silence holds the promise of making sense of his situation otherwise than via colonial epistemic and ontological frameworks. If we hesitate, when listening to his testimony, and resist subsuming his experience to familiar schemas harkening to the silences of his narrative instead, Martínez shows us that his “joto passivity” opens onto practices of “radical meaning making” from which one can envision and bring about radically different gendered

practices like nonmisogynist and nonhomophobic ways of practicing masculinity (Martínez 2014, 239).

When we approach testimonies from the margins with an ear for the polyvocality of silence, we begin to notice its signifying and insurging reverberations. It is a radical meaning akin to the one operative in Martínez's experience that we find in Fanon's and Anzaldúa's aforementioned experiences of not fitting within colonial norms and expectations. Although painful and disorienting, their experiences are not a defeat. Upholding the dismemberment brought about by a life in the "herida abierta," and dwelling in these experiences of displacement from the language and the world of the colonizer not only reveals the fictitious nature of the logic regulating this exclusion; it can also be a fertile "ground" for the rereading and rewriting of reality, for the displacement of usual meanings and expectations.³ Although this colonial logic strives to reduce the *damné* and their multiplicity, opacity, and ambiguity to the dark side of the dichotomy (to nothingness), the materiality of their existence contextualizes and resists such annihilation. Recall that Fanon's existential struggle to make sense of his being culminates in a cry: "I tried to get up but the eviscerated silence surged toward me with paralyzed wings. Not responsible for my acts, at the crossroads between Nothingness and Infinity, I began to weep" (Fanon 2008, 119). In this passage, we witness Fanon rejecting the split- separation imposed upon him by the logic of purity, a separation that present him with the untenable alternatives of "Infinity or Nothingness," dismissing the emotional residue that makes up his difference (the specificity of his being) and eviscerating the depth of silence. Importantly, however, his rejection comes in the form not of statements, arguments, or speeches, but of a silent weeping, which suggests

another way, another silent language of being in and making sense of the world—an embodied, affectively charged *ethos*.

We find a more robust exploration of this affective sense-making in Anzaldúa's writings. We discover, in the remarks from *Borderlands/La frontera* previously cited, that, although at times, when she gives in to colonial logic, Anzaldúa feels like she is a "zero, nothing, no one. *A veces no soy nada ni nada,*" her existence contests the logic of purity: "*Pero hasta cuando no lo soy, lo soy*" (Anzaldúa 2007, 85). The being that she "is" does not conform to usual expectations or familiar meanings; she "is" neither the plenitude of full being nor the absence of nonbeing: "But even when I am not, I am" (85, my translation). Resonant with Fanon's predicament, Anzaldúa also finds herself (at) a cross-road, a bridge (it is not by accident that the edited collection she co-authored with Cherríe Moraga bears the title *This Bridge Called my Back*). When upholding her being and speaking *from* her experience, from that "eviscerated silence" or *nada ni nada* to which colonial apparatuses strive to reduce her, Anzaldúa is able to challenge the fiction of the racialized metaphysics of presence; "when not copping out," she finds in that eviscerated silence a generative polyvocality and speaks with a tongue of fire rife with ambiguities, shaping a metaphysics of her own whereby she "is" a multiplicity: Mexican, *mestiza*, Chicana, *Tejana*, and so much more.

Perhaps most starkly, we find the recuperation of the polyvocality of silence in the description of Marita Bonner, a celebrated writer of the Harlem renaissance, of black consciousness in "On Being Young, Woman, and Colored." Departing from narratives that equate black consciousness with resistance and the public, in her writing—conveyed

both through her stylistic choices and content—Bonner emphasizes the voluptuousness of interiority and the strength of surrender:

So—being a woman—you can wait.

You must sit quietly without a chip. Not sodden—and weighted as if your feet were cast in the iron of your soul. Not wasting strength in enervating gestures as if two hundred years of bonds and whips had really tricked you into nervous uncertainty.

But quiet; quiet. Like Buddha—who brown like I am—sat entirely at ease, entirely sure of himself; motionless and knowing, a thousand years before that white man knew there was so very much difference between feet and hands. Motionless on the outside. But inside? Silent.

Still ... “Perhaps Buddha is a woman.” (Bonner, 7–8, cited in Quashie 2012, 34)

Quiet, stillness, and silence function in Bonner’s text as the catalyst for novel understandings of black identity that do not stand over and against the world, its expectations, and its limited imagination. Silence here figures as a location of insight and meaning; in this context, silence is not oppression, “not performative, not a withholding,” but instead, Kevin Quashie claims in *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, “an expressiveness that is not entirely legible in a discourse of publicness” (2012, 35).⁴ Testimonies like these are not isolated instances. Once we bring another interpretative aptitude—another sensibility—to the world and others, we begin to hear the polyvocality of silence, of its senses.

Although Part I has followed decolonial thinkers in challenging the authorial and colonial power of voice, it moved beyond them, inviting the reframing of Spivak’s question not in terms of voice—can the subaltern speak?—but in terms of deep silence—can the deep silences of the colonized be generative of decolonizing sense-making? By attending to colonial patterns of power, chapter 2 revealed the imbrication of coloniality and voice, thus problematizing as naïve any abstract appeal to voice as emancipatory.

Although survivors’ voices and testimonies like Nyad’s are a critical force behind social

change, as the #MeToo movement continues to promote “speak up!” and “break the silence” as the ubiquitous means of emancipation, it is paramount to contend with the fact that radical structural change is not achieved by merely making the platform more inclusive to include the voices of those who have traditionally been marginalized because of their social positionality. I proposed that the matter at hand is rather to question the structural conditions and assumptions undergirding the movement, that is, the norms whereby speech and naming are power, and the normative/regulative power of (colonial) voice. In fact, assuming that voice is a ubiquitous means of emancipation, that speaking up is beyond race, gender, class, and, most of all, historical structures class tacitly undermines the conditions of possibility of dialogical emancipation of those who do not conform to Eurocentered epistemic and ontological norms. Ultimately, it reifies colonial formations whereby the other and their communicative practices are cast as inferior. So long as liberatory movements championing the imperative to “speak up” do not critically call into question not only the guiding assumption norming what counts as reliable and correct speech, but also the fact that, in a modern/colonial world, that dialogical recognition is the material of power, testimonies of survivors whose expressive means do not conform to logical, clear, or persuasive speech will be reduced, yet again, to nothingness, their voices to mere silence. As such, they will continue to feed the structures these liberatory movements sought to starve.

Martínez’s, Bonner’s, and Anzaldúa’s testimonies point us to an alternative to understanding incommensurability as well as sense and silence in terms of transparency; they ask that we resist the tendency to subsume opacity into modern/colonial frameworks or meanings, dwelling instead in that unsettling experience akin to when “another’s

speech, or some aspect of it, resonates in me as a kind of strangeness, a kind of displacement of the usual expectation” (Schutte 1998, 56). Withstanding this strange experience, this deep silence, is key to *hearing the other in her uniqueness and difference*, for new sense to emerge. As Spivak suggests in an interview with Jenny Sharp, perhaps, then, “we must ... take a moratorium on naming too soon, if we manage to penetrate there. There is no other way for you and me to penetrate there” (Sharp and Spivak 2003, 619). Perhaps, openings to decolonizing sense and silence, to “rereading and rewriting of reality,” as Anzaldúa would put it, are not found exclusively through conceptual thinking or dialogical exchanges but via affective, sensuous harkenings to experiences of deep silence—through an aesthesis of deep silence (LDLO 40).

Hence, in Part 2 and 3, I straddle the borderlands of the modern/colonial world to revisit the modern/colonial understanding of silence. I will interrogate intellectual histories, narratives, and experiences not defined by the desideratum of transparency and its corollary that silence is non-sense. Over the course of the next four chapters, I will listen for the polyvocality of silence and track the sense it eventuates by attending to the works of Latinx and Indigenous thinkers, including Chicana decolonial poet, writer, and activist Gloria Anzaldúa, but also of what may at first seem an unlikely ally for a decolonizing project like this one, French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. As I will show, these thinkers not only provide robust methodological insights helpful to approach and express opaque phenomena like silence; each in their own way, also challenges the constitutive modern/colonial assumption that silence is an obstacle to sense-making. It is to considerations about the tools each thinker has to offer that I turn in the next chapter.

NOTES

¹ As a place whose materiality refuses disappearance and erasure, the colonial difference threatens to undermine, in its resilience and concreteness, the colonial logic whereby “knowledge and aesthetic norms are...universally established by a transcendental subject” realizing instead that they are “universally established by historical subjects in diverse cultural centers” (Mignolo 2012, 5).

² Furthermore, as the discussion on the coloniality of voice indicated, the coloniality of silence inscribes silence as the *natural* expression of racialized and colonized subjects. The joint operations of the axes of “modernity” and “coloniality” are such that the racialized “other” is cast as naturally epistemically and ontologically inferior—as silent. Rather than being recognized as a colonial production, “silence as absence and nonsense” comes to be understood as the natural domain of the colonized—as the expression of the natural inability to fight back, the nonresponsiveness of queer Chicanos in the face of violence.

³ Although I speak of a ground here, this ground is a “lugar no lugar,” what Anzaldúa calls *Nepantla*, “a Nahuatl word for an in-between space, el lugar entre medio. Nepantla, palabra indígena: un concepto que se refiere a un lugar no-lugar” (LDLO 28).

⁴ See Evelyn Hammonds’s treatment of a politics of articulation and a politics of silence in “Black (W) holes” for a discussion of how the concept of silence figures in black women’s cultural work (1994).

PART II – THE VOICES OF DEEP SILENCE

[H]aunting was precisely the domain of turmoil and trouble, that moment (of however long duration) when things are not in their assigned places, when the cracks and rigging are exposed, when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when disturbed feelings cannot be put away, when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done.

—Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*

In Part I, I performed a recoil to a taken for granted aspect of liberatory (feminist) discourse and postmodern culture, i.e., the phenomenon of silence, interrogating it in its strangeness. Informed by Ernesto Martínez's lived experience of "Joto passivity," which he defines as the seeming non-responsiveness of queer Chicanos vis-à-vis violence, I began displacing the colonial logic that continues to guide much of modern/colonial theorizing and praxes whereby silence indexes lack of sense and being. Martínez's Joto passivity pointed to a "more" inherent in silences, a "more" that is rendered invisible by colonial logic. Martínez's words were especially telling; recounted in first person, Martínez spoke of silence (as experienced during Joto passivity) as an "embodied negotiation" that makes possible accounting for the contradictions of his situation. Although his silence was a response induced by fear and confusion, by postponing an otherwise familiar response to a violent attack, it allowed him not to play into dominant, misogynist, and homophobic ways of practicing masculinity; rather, it suspended usual expectations and meanings becoming a source of "radical meaning making" (2014, 239). Thus situated, I proposed that what I call "deep silence" is a critical tool for decolonizing projects. Listening for deep silences not only decolonizes the phenomenon of silence itself, revealing it in its polyvocality and plurality of signifying practices. In the concluding remarks of chapter 3, we saw how harkening to deep silences unsettles modern/colonial conceptual and temporal expectations that confine existence, sense, and

being to the presence/t of modern/colonial consciousness. In other words, listening for (deep) silences and letting them resonate in their strangeness is key to hearing the other in her difference.

Part I's discussion of the paradoxes at the heart of intelligibility made explicit by Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?", raised crucial questions regarding the modality by which any critical phenomenology bears witness to experiences of marginalization. If I am correct in suggesting that current historical power structures conceal the polyvocality of the phenomenon of silence, how does the inquirer listen for the voices of silence? How is she to trace the significance of deep silence where coloniality hears none, which is to say, where silence is cast as a phenomenon that commands, by its very definition, the lack of words and sense?

In chapter 3, I suggested that the first step toward listening for silences is resisting what María Lugones calls the "epistemological habit of erasing" (2010, 753). Rather than dismissing silences as non-sense or obstacles to meaning making, I invited the reader to dwell in them a while longer, hesitating before naming too soon, before subsuming silences, experiences, and phenomena to familiar concepts. The problem, however, is compounded by the fact that modern/colonial accounts of oppression as well as demands for equal normative treatment presuppose the deployment of conceptual and lexical resources that may not accommodate the complexity, liminality, and ambiguity of the subaltern's experience. While "audible claims" would make visible some harms, their "entrenchment in cultural processes embedded in colonial legacies of domination and oppression" would render others invisible (Ruiz 2016, 442). So even if the philosopher learns to trace the polyvocality of silences, how is she to express them without subsuming

deep silences into modern/colonial schemas, thus reifying these very power structures that confine deep silences to silencing?

I will take up these questions throughout the dissertation. In chapter 7, for instance, I will attend explicitly to the latter challenge to suggest that the mobilization of deep silence is central to bearing witness to colonial experiences without capitulating to the transparency and temporal trajectory of modern /colonial logos. Here, in Part II, I heed primarily to the former question, how do we listen for silences?, to then provisionally explore the latter. In so doing, I begin to show the decolonizing power of deep silences in bearing witness.

To aid the task of listening to and expressing the voices of deep silence, I turn to Coyolxauhqui. Depicted as a huge round stone enclosing the dismembered limbs (see fig.



Figure 1. Colored rendition of the Aztec monolith depicting dismembered Coyolxauhqui. The stone was rediscovered in 1978 at the site of the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan, now in the Museo del Templo Mayor, Mexico City.

1), Coyolxauhqui serves as the orienting image for Part II. According to Aztec mythic history, Coyolxauhqui is the Aztec moon goddess and the first woman warrior to become a human sacrifice (LDLO 49). The story narrates that, upon Coatlicue's impregnation by a ball of feathers, Coyolxauhqui, who is Coatlicue's daughter, persuaded her siblings to join her in killing her mother. Yet,

the fetus of her half-brother, Huitzilopochtli, sprang fully grown and armed from Coatlicue, killed the siblings, and decapitated Coyolxauhqui. Huitzilopochtli then flung her head into the sky and tossed her body down the sacred mountain, where it broke into a thousand pieces (LDLO 124).

Coyolxauhqui is the orienting myth-image for the discussions to follow for at least three reasons. First, Coyolxauhqui represents the complex process whereby sense emerges, which, as we are about to see, both Merleau-Ponty and Anzaldúa describe as requiring the demolition of the ego, a dispossession necessary for the world to reveal itself as other than something said and the inquirer to hear the voices of silence. Second, Coyolxauhqui is instructive for the kind of thinking carried out throughout Part II. Although chapter 4 lacks the same grounding in concrete life events featured in chapter 5, both chapters display a taking apart and a coming back together anew. In chapter 4, this happens in the context of the insights the two main interlocutors of this dissertation, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Gloria E. Anzaldúa, have to offer vis-à-vis silence. We will see how both thinkers rely on the aesthetics as the means to express phenomena like silence and colonial experiences that may otherwise elude communication. Yet, each thinker would not be able, on his/her own, to carry the weight of a project like this one. Merleau-Ponty falls prey of the coloniality of silences, while Anzaldúa seems to espouse a reductionist conception of silence as silencing. It by reading each thinker against (some of) their own explicit commitments, and by putting them in dialogue with one another, that we find useful tools to let silence resonate in its polyvocality.

In chapter 5, on the other hand, I strive to enact this creative cycle. The fragmentary structure of the chapter is an attempt to perform the interruptions and

disjointedness provoked by the experience of loss and evoked by the symbol of Coyolxauhqui. Similarly, the interlacing of academic writing with testimony, poetry, and visual art is meant to operate at different registers, bringing about different openings or modalities of engagement for the reader. With each section, the fragments are reprised and woven together, offering new sense to the pieces and phenomena like grief or deep silence that, at first, may seem a senseless void. Third, Coyolxauhqui traditionally stands for “women as conquered bodies” (LDLO 49), of which the disappearing daughters of Juárez are a paradigmatic example. As we will see in chapters 4 and 5, Anzaldúa recuperates this and other figures from their colonial and hetero-patriarchal signification, mobilizing them as icons of feminist and decolonizing resistance.

Coyolxauhqui is mentioned explicitly only in the final section of chapter 5. Yet, I invite the reader to let the myth-image of Coyolxauhqui orient their approach to Part II as it aids moving from naïve beliefs about silence and expression into the depths and polyvocality of silence, culminating into onto-temporal considerations that will be taken up in Part III.

IV. THE SILENCES OF MERLEAU-PONTY AND GLORIA ANZALDÚA

[T]he interrogative is not a mode derived by inversion or by reversal of the indicative and the positive, is neither an affirmation or a negation veiled or expected, but an original manner of aiming at something, as it were a *question-knowing*, by which principle no statement or ‘answer’ can go beyond and which perhaps therefore is the proper mode of our relationship with Being, as though it were the mute or reticent interlocutor of our questions [...] These questions call not for the exhibiting of something said which would put an end to them, but for the disclosure of a Being that is not posited because it has no need to be, because it is silently behind all our affirmations, negations, and even behind all formulated questions, not that it is a matter of forgetting them in silence, not that it is a matter of imprisoning it in our chatter, but because philosophy is the reconversion of silence and speech into one another.
—Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*

The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us – the poet –whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free.
—Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider*

The main interlocutors in this project are Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a French intellectual writing from the “sheltering comfort and interpretive stability of historically privileged ‘home’ perspectives” (Ruiz 2014, 198), and Gloria E. Anzaldúa, a queer Chicana poet, feminist, and cultural theorist occupying and speaking from the fraught terrain of in-betweenness characteristic of life in the “borderlands.” As noted in the Introduction, although these two thinkers belong to different historical, geographical, and cultural contexts, they share a praxical commitment to the aesthetic as a key modality of meaning making beyond the presence of consciousness. The aesthesis of deep silence emergent by putting the two thinkers into conversation opens existence beyond the bounds of presence, letting the other and the world speak with the “voices of silence,” to play on Malraux’s expression. The works of Merleau-Ponty and Anzaldúa on aesthetic and mythopoetic language are thus instrumental to showing how the mobilization of deep

silences is key in opening the experience of existence beyond the present of modern Western consciousness and decentering linear chronology. Deep silences are a powerful tool for a decolonizing critical phenomenology because they make possible attending, even if indirectly, to the haunting presencing of the past, the ephemeral sense of silence, and colonial *historias* without capitulating to oppressive colonial matrixes.

Yet, neither thinker, on their own, provides sufficient intellectual resources to tackle what I seek to accomplish in this dissertation. Although Merleau-Ponty has a lot “to say” about silence (pun intended) and the reciprocal openness of perceiver and perceived which, as we will see, provides a fecund starting point for critical phenomenology, he largely falls quiet vis-à-vis questions of coloniality. Although Merleau-Ponty is a thinker of silence, as Glen Mazis claims in *Merleau-Ponty and the Faces of the World* (2016), the material, cultural, and political sheltering he enjoys leads him to overlook others’ silences as significant.¹ Conversely, while Anzaldúa forefronts, in her writing, concerns of mestizaje and marginality as they are imbricated with lineages of colonial conquest, her overt appeals to voice as emancipatory would seem to situate her within a tradition that conceives of silence as silencing. So what does each thinker have to offer visa—vis decolonizing silences? Let’s take a closer look starting with Merleau-Ponty’s methodological contribution to a critical phenomenology that strives to listen for and express silence.

1. Beyond Phenomenology: Expressing Silences with Merleau-Ponty

Merleau-Ponty’s sudden death in 1961 left us with a quandary not unfamiliar to the one at stake in this dissertation, a challenge that indirectly takes up concerns of silence, decolonizing, and critical phenomenology: If we understand the turn, in his later

writings, toward an ontology of the flesh as “a radical rethinking of the experience of belonging from within, [as] a phenomenology of being-of-the-world” (Landes 2020, 141)—rather than a study of embodiment and being-in-the-world—how is the inquirer to bear witness to such an experience? What modalities are called forth to do justice to this silent belonging? And what kind of “words” are needed to express “silence” without assimilating its sense into familiar, modern/colonial meanings? Attending to some of Merleau-Ponty’s ontological and methodological advances allows me to identify apparatuses of deep silence that, although not decolonizing per se, begin to decenter modern/colonial sensibilities.

Critical phenomenology owes to Merleau-Ponty the articulation of the reciprocal instituting openness of subject and world. Merleau-Ponty’s engagement with Husserl, specifically the latter’s insistence on rupturing our (often uncritical) familiarity with the world in order to return to the things themselves, prompted him to descend into things to investigate phenomena *from* the concrete in-between of their encroaching. It was this plunging that revealed to him the fundamental reciprocal openness of perceiver and perceived, which, for Merleau-Ponty, entails at least two considerations relevant for this project. First, the “impossibility of a complete reduction” (PhP lxxvii). Since reflection takes place in that same flow it seeks to capture, suspending what Husserl calls the “natural attitude” and grasping the *eidōs* of phenomena is an impossible task.² The world and phenomena are opaque to reflective analysis, which is necessarily finite, affected by the very same phenomena it strives to think. Analogously, phenomena are not stable entities, but dynamic processes in constant flux.

Second, this mutual solicitation takes place in “hiding,” to use Merleau-Ponty’s expression—at a silent, general dimension prior to the reflexive cleavage and its antonyms (VI 113). As Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions of color perception in both the *Phenomenology* and *The Visible and the Invisible* or of the development of natural phenomena in the *Nature Lectures* illustrate, this means not only that the articulation of this interlacing calls for a silence of sorts; it also implies that the way the perceiver orients herself through and toward the world—which includes sedimented socio-cultural and linguistic norms as well as sensory stimulants like colors, profiles, and sounds—is not a given, immutable, or determined in advance. Rather, the “perceiver” offers her gaze with the anticipation of the “milieu,” a bodily organization that is suggested (and *only* suggested!) by the “milieu” itself. Their intertwining is the accomplishment of a call-and-response whereby the “milieu” calls forth a certain way of seeing or hearing, an orientation toward the vibrations of her surroundings that the perceiver assumes and that provides, e.g., a color “with the means to become determinate and to become blue” (PhP 222).

The bodily “response” to the vibrations of the blue is not in the indicative, i.e., determined by causal relations and, as such, certain. As we gather from Merleau-Ponty’s comments in the section on Animality in the Second Course on nature (1957–1958), the interlacing is like an “oneiric intentionality;” the “milieu” is not external to and independent from the “tick” like an idea or a goal, but it *haunts* it from within, latently inviting the other’s *sens* [sense and orientation]. Thus, the “indecisive murmurs” (EM 172) that call forth the reciprocal orientation of beings should not be reminiscent of the indicative power of *nomos* or *phonos* (iterations of modern/colonial logocentrism). They

do “not belong to *any* voice-consciousness,” as Spivak notes in the introduction to *Selected Subaltern Studies* commenting on “rumors” (1988, 23). Rather, in generality like in a dream, “the tick” and “the milieu” are inchoate, i.e., “poles that are never seen for themselves” in the fullness or certainty of indicative presence (N 178). At this level, there is no tick or milieu, but only yet-to-be-tick and yet-to-be-milieu. “Present” as the absence of oneiric or ghostly existence, each calls forth their hesitant interlacing and reciprocal blossoming from within one another. As we will see in more detail in chapter 5, murmurs thus evoke the circularity of sense, which eventuates in the in-between of perceiver and perceived, in the “absence” of deep silence (and an original source).³

Insofar as a critical phenomenology is concerned and, more specifically, the task of devising tools that allow giving voice to deep silence, Merleau-Ponty’s struggles with the limits of phenomenology mean that, *contra* the widespread criticism of phenomenology as a subjectivist philosophy, i.e., as a discipline primarily concerned with providing an eidetic description of consciousness, Merleau-Ponty grounds his investigations into general structures of being far beyond the human subject into natural phenomena, language, and painting. Situating himself within the processes that he strives to think prevents him not only from falling back onto an ontology of the object; it also re-orientates Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy away from an ahistorical, apolitical, and solipsistic approach toward an onto-phenomenology keenly aware of the imbrication of social structures and structures of consciousness, and the challenges of giving full, transparent accounts of such conditions of possibility. In other words, Merleau-Ponty’s theoretical insights mark an important point of departure for critical phenomenology, which is now positioned to apprehend the “weight of the world” (Guenther 2020, 13).

Given the radical openness of world and conditions of possibility of experience (in other words, in light of the reciprocal instituting openness of subject and world), however, what does “apprehending” the weight of the world mean, exactly? How is critical phenomenology to express the interlacing of being(s)? How is it to put into words deep silence? After all, for a critical phenomenology that is cognizant of the finitude and, most importantly, the silence at the heart of reflection and being, this means that suspending the natural attitude won’t yield the operations of historical structures because such structures eschew direct analysis. Since reflection and, more broadly, beings are *of* the world, the world and its historical and social structures shape not only what we see, but *how* we perceive the world, our modality of existing in the world. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty’s recognition of the reciprocal instituting openness of subject and world entails a methodological shift; rather than advocating for a transcendental reduction and a thinking that strives to be a “total and active grasp, [an] intellectual possession” (VI 266), Merleau-Ponty suggests that the inquirer deploys “hyper-reflection” instead (VI 38).⁴

Although a full account of hyper-reflection is beyond the scope of the present inquiry, it is worth noting that hyper-reflection—or, as Merleau-Ponty also calls it, the hyper-dialectic—is a modality of thinking that acknowledges a fundamental divergence at the heart of being and reflection such that any all-encompassing self-perception or self-presence is impossible. In Merleau-Ponty’s words, it is a thinking that “does not possess its own premises; it is not a thought altogether present and actual; there is in its center a mystery of passivity” (EM 175). This acknowledgment matters to a critical phenomenology of deep silence because one of the critical features of hyper-reflection is that it opens onto reflexive opacities, onto modalities of existence that are not bound by

the presence of consciousness and the ideology of transparency that accompany it. That is, hyper-reflection does not re-present, but, rather, participates in the dehiscence of being, in the genesis of sense that emerges through “indecisive murmurs” of being. That is, hyper-reflection tracks sense as it eventuates from a silent *logos* that makes itself available in phenomena, as I will explain a little further on.⁵ Thus, it gives access to phenomenal depths whose sense is neither ineffable nor fully articulable, neither fully present nor fully absent; rather, the sense of the silent contact with being traced through hyper-reflection is bound to remain inchoate and latent, without, for this reason, lacking sense.

It is important to stress that this open-ended, always-already elusive process of inquiry entailed by hyper-reflection should not be taken as an epistemic failure; akin to the incompleteness of the reduction, the opacity of reflection is not something that, on Merleau-Ponty’s account, can or should be overcome by deploying more adequate investigative tools or providing a more accurate translation. “The incompleteness of the reduction,” Merleau-Ponty adamantly stresses, “is not an obstacle to the reduction. It is the reduction itself, the rediscovery of vertical being” (VI 178). Hyper-reflection guides the interrogation through a being that is not transparent and fully accessible to the inquirer, but, rather, that carries, at its core, what I have been calling deep silence. Merleau-Ponty’s remarks in a passage to which I will return throughout the next chapters confirm this intuition: the philosopher’s “entire ‘work’,” he notes, “is this absurd effort. He wrote in order to state his contact with Being; he did not state it, and could not state it, since it is silence” (VI 125). This is to say that contact with being or the in-between of the

interlacing of phenomena is threaded with silence—what I call deep silence to emphasize its polyvocality and fecundity.

2. *Merleau-Ponty's Silences*

Merleau-Ponty's signature move of descending into things and investigating phenomena from the in-between of their encroaching, of interrogating being without seeking answers in the indicative (as the epigraph to Part II reminds us), leads Merleau-Ponty to at least two fundamental re-conceptualizations regarding silence. First, he recasts the relation of speech and silence as a chiasmic intertwining, reconceiving speech and silence such that each is the "possible of the other," always encroached/ing upon the other (VI 228).⁶ Concretely, this means that it is no longer possible to think of one without the other, of speech without silence. Claude Lefort's remarks in the editor's forward to the *Visible and the Invisible* speak of this chiasm. "[S]peech is between two silences," he observes. "[I]t gives expression to an experience that is mute and ignorant of its own meaning, but only in order to make that experience appear in its purity" (1968, xxviii). Setting aside the problematic deployment of the term "purity" (which seems to be an unfortunate choice of vocabulary in that it contradicts the style not only of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of ambiguity and opacity, but also of the present inquiry), in these remarks Lefort emphasizes the ongoing chiasm between language and silence.⁷ In fact, he continues, if we can "understand the silence that follows the word" it is because language does not abolish silence, but "leads beyond itself" to a silence that "constantly serve[s] as [discourse's] ground" (1968 xxx). In this sense, it seems to me that the silence Lefort qualifies as "mute" is not an "inarticulate void" (Fóti 1988, 274) nor the "contrary of language" and signification (VI 179).⁸ Rather, it is a phenomenon that, albeit not

expressible through propositional language, statements, and the indicative mood, signifies. As such, it can be expressed.

Second, in addition to the structural chiasm between language and silence, Lefort's remarks bring attention to silence as a grounding figure, to Merleau-Ponty's stance that linguistic expression and signification are grounded in the silence of perception or gestural expression. That is, although not fully fleshed out in his writings, we find, in Merleau-Ponty's thought, the traces of the realization that deep silence bespeaks the hinge "prior" to and making possible the encroaching and eventuating of discrete differences, of speech and silence as discrete phenomena, considerations to which I will return in chapter 6.⁹ For now, the point I want to make is that the deep silences at the heart of being and reflection rehabilitated through hyper-reflection bespeak the condition of possibility of both the opacity or elusiveness *and* appearing of phenomena, of the non-coincidence of the meaning reflection produces with that which it attempts to designate *and* reflection itself (reflection "is" this impossibility of coinciding with its referent).¹⁰

These two reconceptualizations of silence mean at least four things. First, they explain why the desideratum of self-coincidence sought after by a philosophy of reflection is bound to eternal imminence, always inevitably culminating in the *écart* of being—in a "dispossession" or "silence" (VI 266, 125).¹¹ Second, they suggest that, through silences, reflection and being (like the "tick" and the "milieu") essentially "are" present as absent. Third, they make possible not only the communion with being, as we will see in chapter 5, but also to think through and make sense of the mute contact with the world by giving room to being to manifest as concealment.¹² Fourth, although this

silent contact cannot be stated, it nevertheless finds expression as silence and language are interlaced with one another.

This last point is especially important for the inquiries that will follow in subsequent chapters. In *Art and Institution*, Rajiv Kaushik points out that Merleau-Ponty credits art (i.e., painting, literature, as well as indirect language) with the ability to disclose the silent contact with the world, that “very ground into which phenomenology must pass in order to accomplish itself as a *phenomenology*” (2011, 6). That is, art puts on display the silent *logos* of being(s). To be clear—the aesthetic (as an instantiation of hyper-reflection) rehabilitates the very ground of being, which, as Merleau-Ponty’s above-remarks highlight, is, in fact, deep silence. Expression of the sense borne through these silent, dynamic interlacing calls for an aesthetic rather than thetic or categorical language. Note that, by aesthetic language, I mean a mode of signification that does not signify propositionally, by saying “S is p,” but conveys sense via suggestion, by rearranging existing meaning and offering a certain “style” or, to use Merleau-Ponty’s language from the passage cited above, a “tendency,” according to which it is possible to approach the world anew. Characteristic of this modality of expression (of which the pink crosses I will discuss in the following chapter are an instantiation) is the fact it no longer “seeks to render fixity to the indeterminacy and polyvalences of the image,” and, I should add, of the world and being by subsuming it under concepts (Kaushik 2011, 25).¹³ Rather, it makes room for the murmurs of silent being to reverberate. Through the aesthetic, in fact, the beholder is not engaged primarily via rational judgment or propositional knowledge (this approach would play into specularization and the coloniality of time), but also via affect, the sensuous, and the somatic.

Thus far, I have suggested that we find, in Merleau-Ponty's aesthetics writings, resources to develop a modality of bearing witness attuned to the murmurings and tracings of existence. This is a critical phenomenology that mobilizes the aesthetic in and through its descriptions to liberate sensibilities beyond the transparency privileged by colonial modernity. In a way, Merleau-Ponty's recurring interest in the aesthetic points to his striving to think beyond the presence (and present) of rational consciousness, to his resisting, in his writing, the tendency of postmodernity to evade contingency and "erect [sense] into a positive being, outside all points of view, beyond all latency and all depth, having no true thickness [*épaisseur*]" (EM 174).

In my view, however, although a critical phenomenology that seeks to go beyond colonial epistemologies draws analytically from Merleau-Ponty's later insights (especially his push beyond thought/knowledge and transparency as privileged sites and means of engagement), its decolonizing impetus requires taking seriously the kinds of mythologies and images that are mobilized throughout one's descriptions. In fact, since power structures eschew direct analysis in general, and coloniality informs how we experience the world in particular, quasi-transcendental structures of existence need to be pulled up indirectly. This means that the kind of imaginary—as in *of the image*—one evokes in and through writing matters to the processes of repatriation of Indigenous land and life (tasks that Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang identify as central to the project of decolonization (2012, 7)) as images and myth have the power of situating the beholder in specific cultural landscapes and geo-political lineages.

This move is especially important not only because of the contextual nature of sense, but also because, as we saw in chapter 3, the concrete historico-political formation

of the modern/colonial world system thrives on and promotes the concealment of the depth of silence. That is, the challenges raised by expressing the silent contact with being, the springing forth of the world that is beyond the presence/t of consciousness are not merely methodological. As the case of the three Native American shields example illustrated, the issue has much to do with power and normativity, specifically with the historical structure of coloniality, its desiderata of epistemic transparency, and how both advance narrow conceptions of silence. Because of the assumptions and sensibilities that permeate the historical formation of coloniality, “home perspectives” like Merleau-Ponty’s likely may entail the evisceration of deep silence. Shielded from the *arrebatos* of a life in *la frontera* and experiences of silence that may, in fact, be powerful negotiations of sense and reality, another’s silence is likely to figure as either withheld sense (as when it safeguards sacred truths) or nonsense (as what does not fit within propositional theories of meaning and knowledge which are taken to be universal standards of intelligibility) (Stauffer 2015, 104).¹⁴ In spite of his methodological commitments to decenter what I call the coloniality of silence, in his late 1950s radio interviews with Georges Charbonnier, Merleau-Ponty falls prey of these pervasive assumptions. There, we witness first-hand the pervasiveness of the coloniality of silence in structuring fields of sense, specifically Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the colonized other’s silence.

Commenting on his trips to French colonies in 1955 and 1957 radio interviews with Georges Charbonnier (the interviews were broadcast in 1959), Merleau-Ponty expresses his disappointment at the Malagasy he meets insofar as they refuse, upon Merleau-Ponty’s invitation, to perform a sociology of death rituals central to their culture (E). These remarks are telling for the purposes of the current analysis. In spite of

Merleau-Ponty's methodological recognition that imaginative variation grounded in transcendental consciousness does not suffice in giving access to other modes of life and sense-making, requiring instead an indirect approach through empirical experience, when faced with the racialized other's silence, Merleau-Ponty succumbs to familiar expectations¹⁵; rather than as a response required by the parameters of Malagasy culture whereby disclosing sacred details of death rituals would betray and dissolve that culture, Merleau-Ponty interprets the Malagasy silence as a failure to integrate French learning with their cultural practices and, thus, to yield recognizable meaning. In this sense, although Merleau-Ponty is willing to depart from traditional Western theories of meaning that cast silence as nonsense, and although he is aware of the challenges posed by cross-cultural encounters, he nevertheless misses the "*structuring* effects and *de-structuring* affects of colonization" (Al-Saji 2019a, 14).¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty proves unable to listen to non-Western silences as generative of decolonizing sense-making, reading the Malagaches as "inscrutable in their difference," as Alia Al-Saji explains (2019a, 15).¹⁷

This case is a blunt reminder that the historical, cultural, and geographical landscapes within which Merleau-Ponty is situated matters to his thinking.¹⁸ In these encounters, we witness the coloniality of silence at work; Merleau-Ponty's epistemic response to the Malagasy eviscerates the phenomenon of silence of its depth reducing it to non-sense. Merleau-Ponty's colonial privilege is flaunted through his assuming the transparency of his own positionality (assuming the reciprocity of his own position and that of the Malagaches) and that of sense (assuming and demanding that the sense of Malagasy rituals can be grasped by a European subject). These reflections on the ways in which power structures institute fields of visibility, i.e., modalities by which the inquirer

approaches the world and the phenomena that appear as sensible in the first place, lead us to the other major interlocutor of this project is Gloria Anzaldúa.

3. *Beyond Merleau-Ponty: Anzaldúa's Mythopoetics*

Like Merleau-Ponty, Anzaldúa deploys a poetic language of liminal figurations and sense, of images, and of affect that gives access to what cannot be said or perceived directly and effects the decolonizing of sensibilities central to this project. Yet, accomplishing a task well beyond what Merleau-Ponty's onto-phenomenology could achieve (and one that should really be informative for many critical phenomenologists at work today in North America), the imaginary nature of Anzaldúa's mythopoetics historicizes her writing, challenging key tenets and methodologies of coloniality, while remaining grounded in cultural and land-based dimensions of the colonial context she seeks to reclaim. Through her myths and images, she bears witness to her fraught relationship with the colonial past and present, including the lineages of colonial violence, dispossession, loss, as well as of indigenous ancestry, culture, and resistance as they play out on the land she continues to inhabit.¹⁹ This kind of imaginary is a dimension that is missing from Merleau-Ponty, and that ultimately makes him and, likely, his readers less aware of the operations of quasi-transcendental, modern/colonial structures in shaping his experience and conceptualizations of silence. After all, the pockets of opacity that he mobilizes resonate with the audience differently depending on the constellation of symbols, cultural values, and images summoned in the affective responses his writings elicit. In this case, they are bereft of colonial resonances.

The sensible world with its sedimented values and histories summons the two philosophers onto different paths, lamenting lineages of Aztec iconography, violent

colonial legacies, resilience, and existential precarity, on the one hand, and murmurs of Greek mythology, French imperial conquest, and existential sheltering, on the other. As someone who experienced the “weight of inarticulacy flood [her] voice” (Ruiz 2014, 196) and who lacks the privilege of taking existence for granted, Anzaldúa “thinks” the sensible-sense bond by contextualizing her mythopoetic writings within *historias*—and here I use the Spanish intentionally to underscore the double valence of *historia*, which means both history and story—of conquest, trauma, and colonization, but also resilience, solidarity, and ancestral lineages. As she observes, her mythopoetics is rooted in the soil and soul of the North American continent—not that of Greek mythology and “despot dualities” (B 86).

Throughout her corpus, Anzaldúa appeals to several figures central to Mexican and Aztec mythology—like those of Coatlicue, la Llorona, la Chingada, la Virgen de Guadalupe, and Coyolxauhqui that “are used against women and against certain races to control, regulate, and manipulate us” (I 219). She rewrites these myths, whose figures thus function as hinges between the lineages of colonial conquest and decolonial insubordination, collective trauma and healing, “trace[ing] how we go from victimhood to active resistance, from the wailing of suffering and grief to the grito of resistance, and onto the grito of celebration and joy” (I 229). In chapter 5, we will see how Anzaldúa recuperates the myth of Coyolxauhqui to shed light on the processes of healing and creation, which, in that context, helps making sensible the sense of the mothers of Juárez’s grief. In chapter 7, I will turn to Anzaldúa’s recuperation of la Llorona to reclaim lost Indigenous and Chicana identity. In this sense, Anzaldúa’s style—her historically-situated mythopoetic writing—diverts the West’s rationalism while also

evoking the legacy of colonial violence felt in its quotidianity by those who do not enjoy the sheltering comfort of home perspectives. This makes her a formidable interlocutor for this project, offering resources to recuperate silence from the long tradition of Western philosophy that casts it as obstacle or irrelevant to meaning making.

4. *Anzaldúa's Silences*

But what to make of her explicit remarks about emancipation, voice, and silence, which may suggest that she unapologetically espouses a narrow conception of silence as silencing? Consider, for instance, a 1996 interview in which, in response to Andrea Lunsford's question about the relationship, in her work, between writing and activism, Anzaldúa brings attention to the importance of finding one's voice as a decolonial practice of resistance. "Because I am a writer," she writes,

voice—acquiring a voice, covering a voice, picking up a voice, creating a voice—was important. Then you run into this whole experience of unearthing, discovering, rediscovering, and recreating voices that have been silenced, voices that have been repressed, voices that have been made a secret—and not just for me, but for other Chicanas. (I 277)

These remarks would locate Anzaldúa within the long tradition of feminist activists and academics for whom voice is associated with empowerment and is juxtaposed to silence, which comes to be equated with the silencing of oppression. In my view, however, Anzaldúa's "tongue of fire" decenters the voice versus speech binary and the equation of silence with oppression in at least two ways. First, the "voice" she deploys does not conform to colonial expectations of what voice and speech look like. As scholars have observed, Anzaldúa "speaks" through code-switching and, importantly, from her body and experience such that her writing is infused with "passionate rationality" (Keating

2000, 12). Second, through her mythopoetics, Anzaldúa brings attention to the necessity of mobilizing deep silence to yield decolonial sense-making.

Central to her project of rethinking life in *la frontera*, Anzaldúa devotes a considerable amount of time to the question of language. Specifically, in “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” or “Speaking in Tongues,” she takes up the question of language as a site of both oppression *and* resistance. Speaking from the perspective of a Chicana whose native tongue is a Tex-Mex—a *mestizaje* of Spanish and English that, qua “impure” mixture, is frowned upon by both the Spanish and English-speaking communities—Anzaldúa carefully reflects on the oppressive effects of linguistic misrecognition. “If you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin with linguistic identity—I am my language” (B 81). The recurrent experiences characteristic of and central to colonial subjection of having been made to feel ashamed of her native tongue wounded her at an intimate level, constituting what she calls “linguistic terrorism” (B 38).²⁰ It seems to be, then, that we should read Anzaldúa’s push to find her own “voice” with caution. Yes, Anzaldúa reclaims her *mestiza* voice—which had been used against her by the colonial apparatus to subjugate her—as an emancipatory tool. “I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent’s tongue—my woman’s voice, my sexual voice, my poet’s voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence” (B 81). By speaking up, she develops a sense of self and reality grounded in the concrete experiences of living in the margins and speaking in “tongues.”

As the passage above indicates, however, her “voice” is far from the abstract/ing voice of the colonizer. Rather than homogenous, unified, and pure, Anzaldúa’s “voice” is

an impassioned *mestizaje*, expressing the concrete contradictions and multiplicity of a life in *la frontera*. Concretely, Anzaldúa expresses her *mestiza* voice by, first, deploying code-switching as a form of resistance. “Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speaker rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate” (B 81). This form of linguistic expression developed by *los atravesados*—i.e., those who, like Anzaldúa, are forced by patterns of power and domination to live in the in-betweens, shifting from one cultural context to another while never feeling completely at home in any given cultural formation—does not respect borders (B 84). This is a language “capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves—a language with terms that are neither *español ni inglés*, but both” (B 77).²¹

Second, Anzaldúa’s “voice” breaks from the normative power of colonial voice in that it is far from being sanitized from emotions, passions, or values. “There is no need for words to fester in our minds...through rhetoric,” she points out. Rather, words should come alive through the body, “through blood and pus and sweat. *Write with your eyes like painters, with your ears like musicians, with your feet like dancers...write with your tongues of fire*” (LDLO, 171). In the introduction to *Interviews/Entrevistas*, AnaLouise Keating invites the reader to think of Anzaldúa’s style—her “voice”—as infused with “passionate rationality,” i.e., a pathos Patricia Hill Collins associates with Black women’s struggle for social justice. As Collins explains, “this type of passionate rationality flies in the face of Western epistemology that sees emotions and rationality as different and competing concerns” (Collins, *Fighting Words*, 243 cited in Keating 2000, 12). By

reaching her audience through the affective plane, by “writ[ing] from the body” (I 63), Anzaldúa’s stylistic approach turns the traditional injunction of Western rationality and theory on their heads. Rather than leading the theorizing “through the head with the intellectual concept,” her deployment of images, stories, and myth “come in through the backdoor with the feeling, the emotion, the experience” (I 263). Note that this is a method that does not privilege the irrational or the emotional over rationality or theory. Rather, it is an approach that starts from experience and the affective to then reflect upon them and get “back to the theory” (I 263). In this sense, Anzaldúa does not simply invert the binary characteristic of much of Western thinking, privileging the traditionally underappreciated sensuous pole of the dichotomy, but undermines the dichotomy altogether, upholding its in-between—a “passionate rationality” or an order of non-positive signification—instead.

Thus, Anzaldúa’s “wild tongue” breaks the tradition of silence in a more traditional sense; it gives voice to the material and creative experiences of those who had been excluded from representation and the subject position. Thus, I here deploy “the tradition of silence” as Anzaldúa (and the feminist tradition) intends it in the quote above, i.e., as the materially enabled patterns of exclusion from what counts as legitimate forms of expression of languages and voices that do not conform to Eurocentered norms or standards of justification. Silence, then, figures as the outcome of oppression, i.e., of being prevented from speaking or saying something.²² Anzaldúa breaks this silence by calling into question, rather than upholding, the logic of purity and transparency central to Eurocentered theories of meaning. As noted, Anzaldúa “speaks” through code-switching infused with “passionate rationality.”

But Anzaldúa also breaks the “tradition of silence” in a perhaps more subtle and insidious way; the mythopoetic language she deploys manifests what I earlier referred to as the “voices of silence.” “Let me show you a little graph, a little visual,” she tells the interviewers, “so that you can understand what I’m saying, because a lot of times it’s hard for me to say everything in words” (I 254). Importantly, “it’s hard to say everything in words” not because of Anzaldúa’s lack of skills or dedication. Rather, “it’s hard” because the meanings she strives to express, the reality that is created through her writing, exceeds propositional language and the rigid boundaries ascribed to words in that context. Throughout her corpus—both written and oral—Anzaldúa turns to images, stories, and myth, in sum, to mythopoetic language to express ideas that cannot be articulated through language alone because sense is not transparent, but opaque. Hence, Anzaldúa overcomes the tradition of silence in another way; through her style, she “present[s] another way of ordering and composing, another rhetoric” (I 261), which is to say that she resignifies the phenomenon of silence away from the silencing upheld by the liberatory and feminist traditions toward deep silence as central to giving access to the sensible world. In this latter sense, performatively, i.e., at the level of her carefully stylistic choices (and without explicitly speaking *of* it), Anzaldúa brings attention to the necessity of mobilizing deep silence to yield decolonial sense-making.

In conclusions—Merleau-Ponty and Anzaldúa offer invaluable tools to learn how to let resonate the sense of the sensible, to express the experience of what traditional philosophy tends to cast as mute, ineffable, or senseless silence. For both authors, the aesthetics is the means through which deep silences make sense, the “means for being to manifest itself without becoming positivity” (VI 214). In spite of their shortcomings at

the level of their explicit commitments, when their texts are read carefully, with an eye and ear for the style each deploys, we see that Merleau-Ponty and Anzaldúa accomplish the expression of the silent sense of the sensible not as a way of resolving or bypassing opacity, ambiguities, and *aporias*, but through and by virtue of a fundamental darkness or obscurity—the opacity of time, sense, reflection.

NOTES

¹ With such claim Mazis brings attention to an aspect of the philosopher’s work that, with few notable exceptions such as Bernard Dauenhauer’s (1980), Veronique Fóti’s (1988; 2013), and Stephen Noble’s (2014) works, has largely gone unnoticed.

² As Glen Mazis points out, Merleau-Ponty puts forth, in the *EM* and in the Third Chapter of the *VI*, a powerful critique of what he calls the “operational thinking” of the West, i.e., a calculative *linguistic* and *reflective* approach to the world that severs the tissue that connects us to things. While in the *Phenomenology* Merleau-Ponty recognized the violence entailed by reflection vis-à-vis the perfectly perceived world, but deemed it necessary to “grasp the sense of the world or of history in its nascent state” (PhP, lxxxv), in his later thought, Merleau-Ponty distinguishes between different modes of linguistic expression, some that strive to affirm the human-world enlacement, others that minimize it. The former approach, Mazis stresses, embraces silence, thereby promoting renewal, becoming, and transformation. The latter screens us from interweaving with the world in its openness and fecundity (2016, 13–15).

³ The murmurs of deep silence are, to borrow Spivak’s words, “primordially (originarily) errant, always in circulation with no assignable source. This illegitimacy makes it accessible to insurgency” (1988, 23).

⁴ “What we call hyper-dialectic,” Merleau-Ponty observes, “is a thought that, on the contrary, is capable of reaching truth because it envisages without restriction the plurality of the relationships and what has been called ambiguity. The bad dialectic is that which thinks it recomposes being by athetic thought, by an assemblage of statements, by thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; the good dialectic is that which is conscious of the fact that every thesis is an idealization, that Being is not made up of idealizations or of things said... but of bound wholes where signification never is except in tendency” (VI 94).

⁵ In *The Resistance of the Sensible World*, Emmanuel Alloa points out that Merleau-Ponty sets out to establish “a critique of any ideology of transparency” (2017, 12),

rejecting the position of the transcendental Cogito for whom “the world spreads out in an absolute transparency” (PhP, lxxiv), which is to say of a philosophy that forgets “the constitutive corporeal mediatedness of any relationship to the world” (Alloa 2017, 13).

⁶ In his early 1950s writings on language, Merleau-Ponty focuses on the reconversion of sensuous sense and linguistic sense, arguing that this latent or silent sense grounds and haunts linguistic sense. In “la chair comme diacritique incarné” (2009), Emmanuel Alloa points out that by positing an ontological continuity between sensuous and linguistic expression, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the diacritical processes of differentiation that structure linguistic signification are also operative in and regulate the sensuous. In this sense, the emergence of meaningful differentiations is to be sought in the sensuous; as I will discuss in chapter 6, it is immanent to Nature. Casting ontology as diacritical fundamentally challenges any localizable or substance ontology, calling, as anticipated, for the development of a non-Parmenidean ontology that displaces the agential/logical place of the metaphysical subject (conceived as either a constituting consciousness or social discourse).

⁷ The logic of purity that strikingly seems to inform Lefort’s thinking leads him to inadvertently reinstate the problematic dualism between the muteness of silence and the eloquence of speech. Letting go a thinking of purity helps coming to terms with the fact that Nature (as well as deep silence) is not mute in the sense of being vacated of meaning. Although Natural processes may be ignorant of their meaning in that they lack the ability to reflect upon their sense (in a working note dated 1960, Merleau-Ponty differentiates between the flesh of the human body and that of the world by suggesting that the latter is not sentient, “not *self-sensing* (*se sentir*) as is my flesh”), this does not mean that Nature lacks sense. Rather, for Merleau-Ponty, Nature is the autoproduction of a meaning that is not posited by thought, which is to say that its *sens* differs from that of the logos *proforikos*, the proffered language (VI 250). As we are starting to see, the dynamics generating sense and being are intimately tied to deep silence. This *sens* of deep silence is the subject of the next chapter.

⁸ I should also note that, differently from what Lefort seems to indicate, the silence that gives expression to an experience that is mute is not, on my account, “ignorant of its own meaning.” Although this meaning is of a different order than that of symbolic language, deep silence signifies latently, by calling forth or inaugurating certain ways of being and making sense of the world—as we have seen in the preceding section. To better understand the signifying operations of deep silence, it is necessary to attend to the second reconceptualization of silence brought about by the shift in perception.

⁹ Concretely, this means that by reframing the question of the Being-nothingness or speech-silence relation as one of mutual diverging, Merleau-Ponty interrogates the ground “prior” to their division, the openness, opacity or resistance of being, which, effectively, means that he is asking questions of deep silence. Thus far, we have gathered that deep silence as an *a priori* condition is a peculiar kind of origin: while it in fact grounds the eventuating of discrete phenomena, this origin is far from being a Kantian *a*

priori, which is undetermined by temporality. As Leonard Lawlor observes, in 20th century France, “*a priori* conditions must be experiential” (2003, 54), without therefore being reducible to experience or a positive, fully graspable origin. This is to say that, as an originary ground or the “*circulus vitiosus deus*” (VI 179) of the becoming-sense of the sensible and the becoming-sensible of sense, deep silence manifests in concrete phenomena without being reducible to them; it is there and not-there, present in absence, or disclosing in its concealing.

¹⁰ Recall Merleau-Ponty’s language of fecund negativity to qualify the possible or, as he puts it in reference to the fold, this “‘central’ nothingness is like the point of the stroboscopic spiral, which is *who knows where*, which is ‘nobody’” (VI 264).

¹¹ When philosophy seeks to coincide with Being, “then language is a power of error” (VI 123). In fact, coincidence with this “silent,” pre-given immediacy is impossible. As Véronique Fóti observes, philosophy’s “adequation” to the advent of truth (to originary silence) is “rather a wakeful and thematized participation in the ‘dehiscence’ of Being” (1988, 280), which is to say that it is a creative process that requires the harkening to deep silence.

¹² It would be interesting, at this juncture, to reflect on the role that key figures in the continental tradition have ascribed to silence in the disclosure of being. For instance, in *Zarathustra*, in an aphorism titled “On Great Events,” Nietzsche writes that “the greatest events are not our loudest but our stillest hours. Not around the inventors of new noise, but around the inventors of new values does the world revolve; it revolves *inaudibly*” (2003).

¹³ Apparent from these remarks is Merleau-Ponty’s indebtedness to Ferdinand de Saussure’s conception of language as a diacritical system, of meaning as the outcome of a play of differences. In the opening of “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,” Merleau-Ponty observes that signs do not have inherent meaning but acquire their signification “negatively,” i.e., via a (synchronic and diachronic) play of differences with other signs. Within this diacritical framework, signs do not express a meaning, but mark a divergence of meaning between other signs. In *Merleau-Ponty’s Philosophy* (2008), Lawrence Hass argues that Merleau-Ponty’s expressive theory of language provides a viable alternative to the dominant theories of language, representationalism and structuralism (2008, 172). Merleau-Ponty puts forth a new theory of language by shifting the focus exclusively from sedimented language/spoken word—*la langage parlé*—to the process of expression/speaking word—*le langage parlant*—language “which creates itself through its expressive acts” (PW, 17). In “Dialogue at the Limit of Phenomenology” (2009b), Beata Stawarska further elaborates on the ambiguous status of speech in phenomenology to challenge the individualist bias of classical phenomenology. Charging Derrida with *phonophobia*, Stawarska argues that Husserl was right to privilege speech. In fact, the move from the conversational and polycentric context to the transcendental and monocentric domain forces the “I” into a “universe of speechless thought,” an “irreversible first-person mode of introspective insight that ceases to call

upon and responds to a potential interlocutor” (2009a, 144/145). That is, when the “I” is transposed in the written text, its meaning becomes divorced from the context of its utterance, thus silencing the importance of context in meaning creation. In *Between You and I* (2009a), Stawarska develops the insight that the mutual relation that gives meaning to pronouns “I” and “you” through conversation also plays out in silent writing and thinking. Her discussion brings attention to the ambiguity of the subject: the speaking “I” is always already an “I” that is spoken with, who listens. It is important to note that, differently from Saussure, Merleau-Ponty resists the temptation of reducing the diacritical to an immaterial mechanism, to an abstract difference, thinking it instead as a hinge or “sensible juncture” (Alloa 2017, 59). This means that, in his later ontology, Merleau-Ponty thinks the logic that governs the organization of the visible/sensible (of perceived sense) in terms of linguistic dynamics (linguistic sense), thus developing a diacritical ontology, or, as Renaud Barbaras calls it, “a *diacritical* structure of the thing” (2004, 181). As scholars have argued, this reconceptualization matters insofar as, first, it undermines the nature/culture dichotomy, opening the space to think the latent emergence of sense in/through the sensible (For a discussion of how the shift toward ontology in Merleau-Ponty’s later writing matter for the development of a non-anthropocentric ontology and the decentering of traditional dualisms, see Barbaras 2001; Toadvine 2009a; Morris 2010a; Hamrick and van der Veken 2011;). In other words, thinking diacritics as sensible junctures means that sense does not originate in a constituting consciousness nor does it lie in the referent. Rather, meaning is borne in/through the process of *le langage parlant*, in/through the sensuous. In this sense, as William Hamrick and Jan van der Veken point out in *Nature and Logos*, Merleau-Ponty gestures toward the existence of a *logos endiathetos*—or “logos before language which will perhaps help us to better understand the expressed *logos*” (2011, 7).

¹⁴ As Doris Sommer observes, this attitude of dismissal vis-à-vis the fecundity of silence is often adopted in ethnographic interrogations, within which “uncooperative gestures...are generally deleted from the scientific reports as insignificant ‘noise’” (1996, 135).

¹⁵ In *Signs*, Merleau-Ponty notes that there is “no immediate access to the universal by reflection alone,” calling forth an indirect approach instead (S 135). Moreover, as Mazis observes, on multiple occasions Merleau-Ponty remarks that silence plays a crucial role in giving human beings access to the depths of the world and meaning (2016).

¹⁶ Reflecting on the “insurmountable difference” of cross-cultural encounters and, in *Signs*, Merleau-Ponty asks, “how can we understand someone else without sacrificing him to our logic or it to him?” (S 144).

¹⁷ As these remarks make explicit, Merleau-Ponty reveals his colonial privilege not only by assuming the transparency of sense and his own positionality (expecting that the sense of Malagasy rituals could be grasped by a European subject as well as the reciprocity of his own position and that of the Malagaches). We also witness Merleau-Ponty’s white ignorance at work through the operations of what in chapter 1 I call the coloniality of

silence; Merleau-Ponty's epistemic response to the Malagasy eviscerates silence of its depth.

¹⁸ It is only by remaining grounded in and thinking from the concrete that we can begin a description of "existence as marked by virtuality," by which Denise Ferreira Da Silva means "matter imagined as contingency and possibility"—a formulation to which I will return in chapter 3 (2014, 92).

¹⁹ Note the resonance with Foucault's claim that the conditions of experience are not formal, but contingent to a "field of historically changing practices and games of truth" (Oksala 2016, 6).

²⁰ The normative power of colonial languages put Anzaldúa in a double bind: since colonial languages, as Nelson Maldonado-Torres points out, "already been shaped by understandings of the world as a battle field in which [the colonized] are permanently vanquished" (2007, 249), the means by which Anzaldúa would pursue self-understanding do not do justice to her felt sense of self, casting her as illegitimate and inferior. Conformity with colonial languages, then, would entail not only shunning dimensions of her mestiza identity, sanitizing, so to speak, her "impure" or ambiguous (linguistic) identity. It would also entail that she expresses a logocentric apparatus within which people like her do not enjoy *logos*, resulting in the linguistic terrorism mentioned above.

²¹ As Helen Carol Weldt-Basson theorizes in *Subversive Silences*, the use of bilingualism by Latin American authors like Esmeralda Santiago or Sandra Cisneros is a form of what she calls "cultural silence," i.e., the creation of linguistic gaps that, she argues, "help facilitate feminist messages linked to Chicana ethnicity and the plight of the working class" (2009, 35).

²² In this sense, silence is conceived relative to speech and signification and when, e.g., one had something to say but was forced into silent submission, when one was silenced.

V. AN AESTHESIS OF DEEP SILENCE: RE-MEMBERING THE
DISAPPEARING DAUGHTERS OF JUÁREZ

Siempre al borde
Al borde de un camino
Al borde de la historia
Cortadas entre los bordes
Las mujeres de ciudad
Juárez
Al borde de la muerte
A las orillas del miedo
Pueblan a una ciudad amordazada
Al borde de la sombra
Al borde del tiempo
Una voz sin cuerpo
Nadie.¹

—Marjorie Agostín, *Secrets in the Sand*

In this chapter, I attend to the power of the aesthetic to call forth sensibilities that offer a different kind of access to the sensible world—that feel beyond presence—and express the “silent” contact with being. Finding guidance in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s aesthetic writings—essays spanning from “Cezanne’s Doubt” (CD 1945) to “Eye and Mind” (1961)—and Gloria E. Anzaldúa’s mythopoetics, especially her invocation of Coyolxhauqui in *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, I suggest that the aesthetic eventuates a “conceptless opening onto things” (EM 172). I call this sensuous modality of encountering the world an *aesthesis* of deep silence. It is this sensibility, I propose, that positions the beholder to listen for silences, for the reverberations, echoes, and hauntings of existence, opening the space-time of possibilities to sense and communicate beyond the verbal.

To think from and through deep silence, thus avoiding a thinking that surveys phenomena from above and that, as such, objectifies them and forecloses the affective

dimension required for deep silence to make sense, in this chapter, I ground my analysis in experiences of grief, loss, and resilience, moving between the testimonies of the mothers of the disappearing daughters of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, and the artistic expressions of such grief and *grito* like the pink crosses scattered throughout Juárez. Attending to first person testimonies of the mothers' grief and their defiant erecting of the crosses makes explicit how deep silences are at play in giving human beings a different access to the sensuous world, in making sense of and denouncing phenomena like the disappearing daughters that, in their shattering singularity, would otherwise seem to leave behind a "senseless void" (Chin and Schutz 2020). I propose that the meaning conveyed through the aesthetic makes sense via pockets of opacity, deep silences that open onto the circularity or trans-spatiality of sense, eventuating through the interlacing of the mothers (the artists) and their surroundings (the geography of Juárez), the spectators and the crosses (the work of art).

The intent of this chapter is thus twofold, both original and interpretative; it is, at once, an inquiry into the laboring of deep silence as it is disclosed by experiences of loss and grieving *and* a study of Merleau-Ponty's and Anzaldúa's notions of the aesthetic as a different modality of access to the sensible world. The chapter is divided into three sections, connected by interludes that introduce the reader to the testimonies of the grieving mothers, the "ephemeral art" (Driver 2015, 8) blossoming from Ciudad Juárez, and the challenge of making sensible disappearing women. The first section is a meta-reflection on the challenges posed by thinking through phenomena such as silence or loss—"absent" phenomena that seem to command ineffability and senselessness. I suggest that Merleau-Ponty gives us resources to "think" through—which turns out to be

more like an auscultation—the paradoxes at the heart of intelligibility, specifically how to listen for and put into words phenomena that cannot be *stated* or grasped through propositional language, including deep silences and grieving a loss. In his aesthetic writings, Merleau-Ponty turns to literature and painting to find a way through the challenge of giving voice to a “‘Being’ [...] which never fully is” (EM 190) that upholds, rather than resolves, paradoxes.

In the second section, I attend to Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of the aesthetic, especially painting, and claim that the aesthetic effects a different modality of engagement with the sensuous world. This aesthesis of deep silence recovers a fundamental openness to the originary operations of being, to a “*logos* that,” as Merleau-Ponty observes, “pronounces itself silently in each sensible thing” (VI 207–08). This is the *logos* that, in the preceding chapter, I referred to as “silent *logos*.” As the close engagement with the sense-making effected by Juárez’s *ecotestimonios* reveals, art gives access to a mode of givenness, i.e., a modality of existence, that is what Rajiv Kaushik calls a “non-conceptual transcendence” (2011, 13). The pink crosses scattered throughout Ciudad Juárez open onto the spacing opened by the interplay of the artists (the mothers), place (both the local geography and collective memory), and the beholders without appealing to concepts or categories of thought. As such, this conceptless joining is not a grasping, but a being grasped. The beholder, beckoned by the vibrations of the sensible world, comes to see according to or with the sensible and silent *logos* onto which art opens (EM 164). In Juárez, being’s transcendence concretizes through the orienting work the local memorials effect upon the city’s geography and its inhabitants.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, in spite of their shared commitments, the historical, cultural, and geographical landscapes within which Anzaldúa and Merleau-Ponty are situated matter to their thinking; it matters when at stake is not only the deep silence of sense but the sense of (or eventuating through) deep silence, which, in this case, is the sense of the disappearing daughters of Juárez. For this reason, in the last section of this chapter, I turn to the image of Coyolxauhqui (dear to Anzaldúa's later writing and Chicana writers more broadly) to, at once, denounce the at times unspeakable violence of feminicide while elaborating on the insight that the making sensible of art "is" a dispossession. Coyolxauhqui makes explicit the dismemberment so essential to the process of creation—of *re-membering*—while also giving a new life, i.e., not forgetting, to the colonial context within which the grieving mothers strive to make sense of their disappearing daughters.

1. *Interlude – “More or Less Dead”: On the Disappearing Daughters of Juárez*

“I lost my daughters, and there is no name for that.” These are the words of Ernestina Enriquez Fierro, who lost her youngest daughter, 15-year-old Adriana, to feminicide in 2008. Enriquez Fierro is one of the mothers who participated in the 2020 *Seattle Times*’ “Disappearing Daughters” Project, an initiative that combines visual journalism and visual poetry to bring attention to the feminicide that has been taking place for nearly three decades in the border town of Ciudad Juárez, in Chihuahua, Mexico (fig. 2). Since 1993—the year that marked the first recorded feminicide in Juárez—thousands of women have been murdered or disappeared (see fig. 2). As is the case with

other instances in which violence targets women in general and women of color in particular, reliable statistics on femicide are difficult to find. The 2018 *Alternative Report on Violence against Women in Ciudad Juárez* records that “between 1985 and 2014, more than 47,178 women were killed due to their gender in Mexico” (CEDW 2018). Over the last few years, the epidemic has worsened; between 2015 and 2017, registered femicides increased by 72%, resulting in two femicides on average per day.² The majority of women and girls affected by femicide are Indigenous. The



Figure 2. A pink cross with the sign “Ni Una Más” stands at the Paso del Norte International Bridge, which connects El Paso and Juárez. The pink crosses scattered throughout Ciudad Juárez serve as local memorials for the victims of femicide.

available data, however, is likely a gross underrepresentation of cases due to the lack of adequate filing and tracking of circumstances surrounding women’s deaths, resistance on the part of the authorities to adopt the term femicide to categorize such deaths, and outright mishandling of evidence. Even today, the available femicide data have been gathered and published by independent activists and researchers—not public officials—in

an attempt to resist the cultural apathy and indifference of authorities vis-à-vis femicide.

Since the events in Juárez reached global awareness in the mid 1990s, the issue often has been framed in the media by a “who”—as in, who kills these women? As professor of gender and sexuality studies at New Mexico State University Cynthia Bejarano argues, however, this framing does not help make sense of what is happening at the Juárez-El Paso border. On her account, the more critical question is, *why*? Why are women being killed with impunity? “‘Why is it that it’s ongoing? Why is it that it’s happening in every community, in every corner of the world?’ That should be the issue,” Bejarano says (cited in Chin and Schutz 2020). Femicide, i.e., the killing of women on the basis of gender and gender performance and the broader relations of power that enable this kind of violence, is often invoked as a causal explanation for the deaths of women in Juárez.³ There would be much to say about the *whys* of the Juárez’s femicide: geo-political events like global industrialization and the 1994 implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which prompted the proliferation of *maquiladoras*, i.e., U.S.-based manufacturing companies like IBM or Johnson & Johnson, in the region leaving women economically disempowered; the geographical location of Mexico between countries of the Andean region that produce cocaine and the U.S. that is the largest consumer of cocaine, which makes Mexico a fertile ground for illegal activity at the border that in turn exposes women to cartel violence; the cultural attitude of machismo prevalent in the country, which results in gender politics enabling and, to a large extent, condoning violence against women as law enforcement and government authorities continue to fail to adequately respond to the

epidemic; or the rampant cultural and state sanctioned racism, which contributes to the precarity of indigenous women, who make up the majority of victims of femicide in Juárez.

These brief remarks on Juárez's struggles with femicide point to the undeniable causal relation between gender-based violence and colonial policies and practices. To address the crisis, Mexico's United Nations Women Representative Belén Sanz Luque urged NGOs, government (at every level), and general society to put an end to official policies of territorial extraction, sexual exploitation, and linguistic/cultural erasure that contribute to the femicide crisis (Eagan 2020). The issue, however, is compounded by the fact that, in Mexico, the social and economic marginalization of Indigenous women and girls not only makes them prey of violence, but it is also used by officials as a justification for failing to protect them. In spite of international organizations' and local activists' demands for justice, the government often strives to keep the issue quiet. Femicides in general and of Indigenous women in particular are often absent from public conversations about gender-based violence.

What is striking about Enriquez Fierro's words, however, is that they seem to suggest that these *whys* do not mitigate the "senseless void" left behind by Adriana, her disappearing daughter.⁴ As a critical phenomenologist grounded in the testimonies and experiences of the mothers of Juárez, I am haunted by her words: differently from when she lost her parents or her husband—instances in which language would at least provide the conceptual resources to name her experiences as "orphan" and "widow"—Enriquez Fierro tells us that "there is no word to describe [the loss of my daughter]" (Chin and Schutz 2020).⁵ Note that I am not suggesting that only the bereavement of someone who

has disappeared struggles to find expression in language or takes place in a temporal modality other than the indicative.⁶ Over the past two decades, an abundance of literature indicates that grieving is a process that is never fully finished or accomplished; one does not “get over” loss. Rather, the peculiarity of Juárez makes explicit the haunting of loss, the tracing of its fragile sense expressed through grief.

Enrique Fierro does not specify what “this” refers to. Yet, the generality of the indexical is nevertheless contextual. Given her story—one which is shared by so many other women in Juárez—her saying that there are “no words” points not only to the absence of a name to designate a parent who loses her child, the fact that there are “no words” to describe the experience of having one’s daughter murdered with impunity, or that there is no language to express the paradoxical experience of living in the wake of one’s daughter’s death—in the presence of her absence—raises existential questions of sense and non-sense. Given the colonial context of her testimony, to me, her words resound also as a warning that although naming the reasons why one’s daughter is murdered and dismembered may help the local and international communities to rally around the cause and adopt a shared legal terminology to track and record the violence—and I want to be clear, both efforts are essential to the fight against femicide—linguistic and conceptual resources may be insufficient to bear witness to femicide, to the experience, as we will see, of being haunted by another’s absence. This is especially true in a colonial context when existing linguistic, conceptual, and legal apparatuses through which bearing witness is possible often reify those same colonial structures, policies, and frames responsible for the cultural apathy and institutional impunity vis-à-vis the violence waged against women and Indigenous women in particular.

In Juárez, it is commonplace for politicians and news outlets to deploy tactics of divestment to keep the issue quiet. As Melissa Wright argues in “Necropolitics, Narcopolitics, and Femicide,” since the bodies of the victims are a reminder of institutional failures to prosecute crimes, media and political elites strive to divest women’s bodies of their denouncing power by reducing them to sexualized objects, to the sum of their parts (2011). To this end, when feminicides appear in public discourse and the media, women’s bodies are represented naked, violated, and dismembered—a representation facilitated by the fact that, when found, the bodies of the victims often are mutilated, disjointed, and scattered in the sand of the Chihuahuan desert. Moreover, just as often, the bodies are never recovered. In this concrete sense, the “disappearing daughters” are neither fully gone, absent in the material finality of death, nor fully present, in spirit or body. As the use of the gerund, “*disappearing*,” emphasizes, many of the daughters of Juárez exist in this suspended and haunting modality of existence that escapes representation. As such, they are consigned to the oblivion of official and public discourse, which finds itself unwilling and ill equipped to remember women who, in Chilean author Roberto Bolaño’s words, are “more or less dead” (2004, 779).⁷

The tactics of divestment operative in Juárez are not an isolated phenomenon. Over the decades, feminist and critical race scholars have painstakingly articulated the cultural, linguistic, and political processes whereby the lives of racialized, gendered, and colonized others are rendered, to quote Judith Butler, “ungrievable,” that is, lives “that cannot be mourned because [they] ha[ve] never lived, that is, [they] ha[ve] never counted as a life at all” (2009, 38). Recently, decolonial feminist scholars like María Lugones (2003; 2010), Elena Ruiz (2014), and Mariana Ortega (2019) have denounced colonial

tactics of divestment theorizing from the lived experience of those subjected to colonial power structures. This methodological shift matters insofar as it positions the scholars to denounce the alienation, objectification, and fungibility that characterizes “spectral dwellings,” as Ruiz calls it, while also taking note of the affective and poetic avenues of resistance it makes possible—tactics to which I will return in what follows. That is, attention to the lived experiences of those subjected to colonizing tactics of divestment retains the ambiguity, opacity, and pathos of existence, thus resisting capitulation to a totalizing colonial logic whereby the colonized’s existence does not exceed the colonial epistemic frame norming intelligibility, but, rather, is fully visible and intelligible through them. Let me explain.

In “Boomerang Perception and the Colonizing Gaze,” María Lugones argues that the colonizing gaze denies independence to the objects of its perception by rendering experiences of racialized and gendered others specular to the colonizing gaze’s interpretative paradigms and, as such, spectacular, or readily available for dissection and inspection by it. (In chapter 7, I will refer to this phenomenon in terms of *specularization*.) “The white gaze,” Lugones explains, “imagines its object to be ... a mere but distorted image: image both in the sense of imagined and in the sense of a reflection, an imitation. ... In both cases it construes us as dependent on the seer for its existence, and lacking an independent history because lacking an independent subjectivity” (2003, 157–58). This deeply narcissistic, nonreciprocal, colonizing perception produces what she calls “ghostly subjectivity.” As these remarks indicate, on Lugones’s account, the production and projection of the other as a specular image of the colonizing observer/inquirer is brought about by a specific perceptual disposition

characteristic of the modern/colonial world system. This disposition strives for full epistemic transparency and perceptual visibility, which entails treating, as we saw in chapter 3, the “residue of meaning” that exists between linguistic-cultural symbolic systems as “irrelevant to philosophical meaning and knowledge, and thus to the operations of reason” (Schutte 1998, 56, 61). In fact, presupposed by this colonizing perceptual disposition is an understanding of sense and reality as *transparent*, as sanitized from affect, ambiguities, and the lacunae of existence, and instead bound to what can be clearly and linearly conveyed through the conceptual and propositional paradigms of European modernity.

These considerations bring us to the heart of the problem. We should hear, in these remarks, the echoes of the aporia of representation highlighted by postcolonial feminist critiques. Adriana’s haunting expresses a complex phenomenon whereby memorializing her absence and denouncing gendered colonial violence seem to be, at once, “unspeakable” and “unrepresentable,” that is, unable to be conveyed via words or images without further relegating them to anonymity. And yet, mothers of the victims and activists-artists vehemently demand that femicide resists the oblivion to which official discourse consigns it.⁸ This, for them, is one step toward justice. To repropose Drucilla Cornell’s warning, then, the inquirer “must confront how [she is] shaping others through those representations so as to reinforce the images and fantasies of the colonial as well as the not-yet-decolonized imaginary” (2010, 100). That is, a decolonial feminist account is faced with the ethical moment arising from the question of how to bear witness to violence and haunting absences. A ghosting account, one that swallows or denies the aporiae, ambiguities, and lived dimensions of a phenomenon like disappearing

transforming the object of perception into mere images, makes the other's experience specular to and consumable by the colonizing gaze, thus undermining the very possibility of bearing witness to the non-colonial other in her difference.⁹

The work of grieving and denouncing—which requires re-membering—the “more or less dead” and often dis-membered daughters with which memory is tasked is especially arduous. As Driver observes, “haunting is a seemingly unquantifiable phenomenon, for how can one prove that it exerts influence on the living?” (2015, 90). Such a phenomenon cannot be conveyed by forms of expression that seek to represent, i.e., to make present, facts; in their memorializing, they would not only miss the fragility of events that were and are never fully present like the disappearing daughters of Juárez; they would also partake in colonizing tactics of divestment. And yet, as Avery Gordon observes in *Ghostly Matters*, “death exists in the past tense, disappearance in the present” (2008, 113). As the testimonies of the grieving mothers suggest, disappearing is a phenomenon that cannot be sealed off, relegated to the past, as one does not simply “get over” loss. As Laguna Cabral remarks about remembering her daughter, Idalí Juache Languna, who disappeared in 2010 and whose body's fragments were found two years later in the Navajo Arroyo, the pain she experiences “never goes away” (Chin and Schultz 2020). Remarkably, then, albeit not in the indicative mood, i.e., a modality of existence that conveys the certainty that something is the case and that can be expressed through modern/colonial *logos*, the disappearing daughters continue to “be present,” to haunt their mothers, families, and community. This “presence,” however, takes place in that peculiar modality of existence that Ruiz refers to as “spectral dwelling” and

characterized by state of estrangement or not belonging resulting from processes of historical and cultural divestments.¹⁰

Guns and knives
slice names
scorch dreams
excoriate faith
make
Spring resurrections
Summer plenties
Fall harvests
Winter devotions
mean nothing
aslant roads
sullied memories
and yet
feet on uneven ground
Women meet
themselves
each day

—Claudia Castro Luna,
“María Luisa Ark of the Covenant”

2. *Toward a New Intelligibility: The “Absurd” Effort of Speaking Silence?*

Although not concerned with grieving or with the violent complex processes of colonial exploitation, one of the central questions that guided Merleau-Ponty’s inquiries was locating new resources for the renewal of sense of human and non-human life. In more than one occasion (it suffices to think of the 1951 Geneva lecture, “Man and Adversity,” or the introduction to the “Eye and Mind,” written a decade later), Merleau-Ponty expressed his concern that the postmodern world he lived in would foreclose the possibility of transforming ontological, epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic beliefs. Resonating with Heidegger’s *Memorial Address* (1966), in the opening of the “Eye and Mind,” Merleau-Ponty expresses the worry that Western culture, by renouncing to live *in* the phenomena it strives to understand and encouraging “operational thinking” instead,

would overlook fundamental “sources of meaning” required for said transformation (EM 159). That is, the fear and evasion of *contingency* characteristic of the lived metaphysics of his time entailed thinking on “the model of human machines” (EM 160), as also he makes clear in the conclusion of “Man and Adversity” (MA). The risk, he warns, is that human beings would “enter into a cultural regimen ... a nightmare, from which there is no awakening,” a nightmare that would foreclose the renewal of sense (EM 160).

Merleau-Ponty’s concern should sound eerily familiar, like a prescient warning of sorts. In fact, it is possible to think of the foreclosure of the depth of silence brought about by the modern/colonial world system discussed in the preceding chapter in terms of the “coloniality of silence” as one of the historical processes precluding the transformation of ontological and aesthetic beliefs. Not surprisingly, in *Merleau-Ponty and the Face of the World* (2016), Glen Mazis acknowledges that silence is mentioned at key junctures in Merleau-Ponty’s writing where it plays a pivotal role in giving human beings access to the depths of the world and new resources for the renewal of sense (xv). If professor and practicing psychologist Robert Neimeyer is right to say that “the reconstruction of a world of meaning [shattered by loss] is the central process in grieving” (1999, 65), and if deep silence is somehow involved in the process of meaning renewal, then, perhaps, Merleau-Ponty has something to tell us, even if indirectly, about silence, grief, and sense.

Consider the remarks from “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,” where, couched within a discussion of expressive language, Merleau-Ponty tells us that to understand language as an “originating operation,” i.e., language that “teaches us to see” anew, “we must pretend to have never spoken” (IL 46, 77, 46). These remarks suggest

that, for Merleau-Ponty, the creative power of language and, more broadly, of expression is somehow tied to silence. But how does deep silence function as an originating operation? And, even more pressing, if thinking through creation, novelty, and new meaning requires silence, what is the philosopher to do? How is she to speak of a phenomenon that, by its very definition, seems to command the absence of words? While I will return to the former question in the second part of the chapter, the latter question touches upon one of the central challenges left to us by Merleau-Ponty's sudden death in 1961. If we take his elaboration of an ontology of the flesh as “a radical rethinking of the experience of belonging from within, [as] a phenomenology of being-of-the-world” (Landes 2020, 141), how is the philosopher to bear witness to such an experience?¹¹ If contact with being remains elusive and silent, how is the philosopher to express it through language and concepts, whose fixity and decidability partake in the reification of becoming into what is fixed, universal, and stable, as Nietzsche famously reminds us in the preface of *Beyond Good and Evil* (1989, 1–3)? What modalities are called forth to do justice to this silent belonging, to an account of life that is “not an argument” (Nietzsche 2001, 117)?

These questions may seem, at first, to point to an impasse.¹² Yet, Merleau-Ponty is a thinker of becoming, ambiguity, and difference, which means that, on his account, *aporias* are not obstacles to “put[ting] into words a certain silence” (VI 125) but, rather, the very means to draw “the things themselves [...] from the depths of their silence” into expression, to “plunge into the world [...] to make it say, finally, what in its silence *it means to say*” (VI 4, 39). Rather than purifying ideas, concepts, and sense by ridding them of their “confusions” (the move predilected by Descartes as well as the Husserl of

Ideen II), Merleau-Ponty takes this “inextricable confusion” (PhP 518) as the starting point to put forth a “new type of intelligibility” (VI 268) that upholds entanglements.¹³ As he eloquently notes in the *Visible and the Invisible*, “the idea of *chiasm* and *Ineinander* is [...] the idea that every analysis that disentangles renders unintelligible—This bound to the very meaning of *questioning* which is not to call for a response in the indicative—It is a question of creating a new type of intelligibility (intelligibility through the world and Being as they are—‘vertical’ and not *horizontal*)” [*sic*] (VI 268). The seeming impasse presented by the paradox to give voice to an ineffable phenomenon turns out to disclose something central to the phenomenon itself; the *aporias* of speaking silence are, in this sense, “the rediscovery of vertical being” (VI 178)—of deep silence—to play on Merleau-Ponty’s expression. But what does it mean to “think” and “express” without disentangling, without seeking an answer in the indicative? What is this “new type of intelligibility” required to speak silence, including the silence of grief?

These questions bring us to the heart of the present difficulty. In my view, the challenge raised by Merleau-Ponty goes beyond creating new concepts like “*chiasm*” and “*Ineinander*” to express the world. The task at hand is to give voice to phenomena—like deep silence but also grief—that cannot be stated, i.e., translated into propositional language. As Merleau-Ponty observes the philosopher’s effort of putting into words coincidence with being is an “inexplicable weakness” (VI 125):

The philosopher should keep silent, coincide in silence, and rejoin in Being a philosophy that is already ready-made. But yet everything comes to pass as though he wished to put into words a certain silence he harkens to within himself. His entire ‘work’ is this absurd effort. He wrote in order to state his contact with Being; he did not state it, and could not state it, since it is silence. (VI 125)

From these remarks we begin to see that silent contact with being, the world, and others takes place on an order other than that of transparent signification, at a “vertical” or “deep” dimension that is prior to “the reflexive cleavage” (VI 130), as we will see in more detail in chapter 6. As such, deep silence cannot be approached directly, which means that it cannot be grasped fully, stated, or subsumed under concepts. There is no name for the depth of experiences like Enriquez Fierro’s grief for her disappearing daughter, Adriana; no words to convey the indignation and outrage provoked by the complacency of state officials vis-à-vis feminicide.¹⁴ Turning silence or grief into positive concepts (by stating them) would undermine their vertical, deep, and opaque character transforming them into their verbal and conceptual substitutes, into “something said” (VI 4). In this sense, what is required is hesitation in speaking too soon, “in impos[ing] well-worn labels of sense on what is encountered” (2016, 24), as Mazis reminds us.

And yet, it would be a mistake to take Merleau-Ponty’s caution as suggesting that this silent contact with being is ineffable, unintelligible, and, as such, non-sensical. In spite of Chinn’s and Schutz’s remarks that the “missing and murdered women of Juárez are ... beloved daughters who have left behind an unimaginable and senseless void” (2020), and although, at first and at times, it may be felt that way, Enriquez Fierro’s grief is not non-sense—a “senseless void”—and silence is not ineffable, absence, or lack. Conceptions like these would treat silence—but also the world’s and the other’s alterity—as a positivity conceived, yet again, over and against the fullness of signification, which is to say that it would operate within an ontology of the in-itself and a philosophy of reflection (transparency/purity) that Merleau-Ponty puts into question

(Alloa 2017, 54).¹⁵ Importantly, it would treat bereavement as the radical interruption or suspension of a fully coherent system of meaning within which the errancy, uncertainty, and contingency of experiences like loss do not have a place.¹⁶ It would condemn (the denouncing of) feminicide to oblivion.

On the contrary, for Merleau-Ponty, silence is different in *kind* from silence as postmodern culture is accustomed to think it, i.e., as the contrary of language or signification. What I call deep silence is neither full presence nor full absence, but of “an order where there are [...] non-language significations, but they are not accordingly positive” (VI 171). That is, deep silence is a hollow; it opens up depths and dimensions within being that, although “resist the operations of free subjectivity” (NMS), institute fields of sense that orient the sensible perceiver in space and time, making possible publicly expressing the outrage without turning feminicide into a spectacle. Deep silence, then, appears to be, at once, key to effecting communion with being (contact with being *is* silence) *and* that which ensures a necessary distance or divergence (*écart*) from immediate coincidence with being (contact with being *is* *silence*, which is to say that the silent contact with being cannot be stated). As such, deep silence signifies even though this signifying occurs laterally, through temporal and spatial gaps, and latently, always only ever suggested in and through the sensuous orientations, habits, and modalities of exiting it makes possible, like artistic expressions. As we will see, the deep silence of feminicide signifies through the affective rearticulations the crosses effect upon the beholders and the local geography.

Concretely, this means that although the inquirer is warned of the impossibility of stating this silent contact with being—this deep silence—she is not thereby told to remain

silent (as in silently mute) either. Grappling with the paradoxes posed by creative language and the challenges of speaking the silent contact with being reveals to Merleau-Ponty an in-between path that calls for neither mute silence nor statements, but rather, that dispossesses the agential subject letting the world “speak” for itself. As he observes, expressing contact with being—which includes making sense of loss—requires suspending familiar expectations to develop a “new type of intelligibility” foreclosed by postmodern and colonial Western culture. This new type of intelligibility—as we will see in section II—is an aesthesis (here to be understood in terms of its Greek root, *aisthèsis*, i.e., the sensible access to the world) of deep silence—a modality of approaching the world that brings about what Merleau-Ponty calls a “conceptless opening” (EM 172) onto the world whereby the process of inquiry, communion, and expression are not subsumed within a teleological question-and-response model whose end goal is obtaining answers in the *indicative*, but keep the process of sense-making open.

3. *Interlude—The Murmuring of Images*

How to makeup with yourself
After each self breakup?
How to cuddle under a broken wing
The girl of you?
Or how to explain
That deep inside the sea
sister wind tries on her dress?
Snails leave their homes when no one is looking
And birds sometimes are afraid to fly
who is going to tell you
what you only know?
Whose fool will tell spider
to spin less?

...

—Claudia Castro Luna, “María Rosario Clearest of Nights”

In the introduction to the 2006 photography exhibit *World Class City*, photographer Julián Cardona writes that “Juárez blows like cold wind through the windows of our soul and demands our attention. We embrace its images as if they could fill our own empty spaces but we cannot hold on” (cited in Driver 2015, xi). Cardona’s words bring attention to the fact that, not unlike words and concepts, images are not always suited to give voice to the silences of grief, to “track down ghosts and to listen to the mysteries that surround them,” as Lourdes Portillo puts it in the opening of her documentary, *Señorita Extraviada* (2002). In *More or Less Dead: Femicide, Haunting, and the Ethics of Representation*, Driver claims that Cardona’s words expose a deep-seated human hunger for voyeuristic graphic imagery, like the one we find in Juárez local newspapers *El Diario* or *Notre*, to fill “the void that threatens to engulf us all, accompanied by the knowledge that such images will never be able to satisfy us” (2015, xiii). While I agree with Driver, to me, Cardona’s words are also a reminder of the “power of error” (VI 125) that concepts and (certain kinds of) images become when they strive to stabilize the uncertainty and errancy of existence, to impose meaning upon what is at times felt as a senseless void. While graphic images and words may provide temporary relief by filling the “empty spaces” left behind by loss, they cannot “hold on” to the memory of the disappearing daughters to a meaning that stretches overtime and across space (that is, transtemporally and transspatially), to the ephemeral meanings the process of grieving seeks to eventuate.

Perhaps not surprisingly, images are central to these colonizing tactics of divestment. In “Spectral Perception and Ghostly Subjectivity,” Mariana Ortega argues that colonial images make racialized and gendered bodies overly visible (they make them

“spectacular”), thus exposing them to the dissecting colonizing gaze, while also rendering them “utterly spectral in the sense of their transformation into mere images in the minds of the colonizers” (2019, 404). As we are learning to see, a verbal or visual account that strives, in its descriptions, for full visibility risks objectifying the experiences and bodies of racialized and gendered subjects; it confiscates the lived and affective dimensions of experience, reducing them to *spectacles*, that is, to still photographs spread out in full display, readily available to be surveilled, scrutinized, and measured by the colonizing spectator. Problematically, as Alia Al-Saji reminds us and we will see in more detail in chapter 7, this scrutinizing apparatus reproduces the “logic of racialization that fixes and dissects the body . . . , cuts instantaneous cross-sections its experience, making it again the slave of an appearance” (2019b, 8).

It is this ghosting that we see at work in the politics of representation of Juárez, where the colonizing gaze of news outlets and politicians, “aided by photographic technologies turns what is real into ghostly, what is human into specter” (Ortega 2019, 404). Although the disappearing women have already been robbed of their vitality through femicide, the graphic representations of their dismembered bodies printed in the local newspapers like *El Diario*, partake in ghosting practices whereby, as Mariana Ortega would put it, “flesh and blood selves became disposable beings, appendages to machines, and ghostly subjects” (2019, 404).¹⁷ (Local newspapers often feature sections called *la nota roja*, which print photos of the dismembered bodies.)

While we may not be surprised that these kinds of graphic images expose women’s bodies to the colonizing gaze, in my view, ghosting is also operative in aesthetic productions intended to counter official tactics of divestment (i.e., official

silences and graphic representations) by inscribing the absences of disappearing women in official memory. Take, as two examples, Elina Chauvet's well-known *Zapatos Rojos*



Figure 3. Elina Chauvet, *Zapatos rojos (Red Shoes)*, each pair of shoes symbolizes a woman who vanished from the streets of Ciudad, red representing their spilled blood.

(*Red Shoes*) exhibit (see fig. 3) or Celia Alvarez- Muñoz's collection *Fibra y Furia (Fiber and Fury): Exploitation is in Vogue* (see figs. 4 and 5). Although Benita Heiskanen is right in suggesting—as she does in “Ni Una Más: Not One More”—that, “given the disempowering nature of

the massive censorship machinery silencing feminicide, such a participatory process in an art exhibition may provide an important site for personal reflection or public intervention” (2013, 7), it seems to me that we need to proceed with caution when representing disappearing women. In *The Femicide Machine*, Sergio González Rodríguez argues that, in the absence of investigations, and although family members have personal photos and memories, the public often judges the victims of feminicide in Juárez by the position of their bodies, the color of their painted fingernails, and their clothing (2012, 153). Because of this forced association, the display of disappearing women's clothes, even when the intent is to combat cultural repression of their memory, unintentionally plays into the ghosting of coloniality that reduces women to objects to be looked at, to spectacles. The gendered and colonial politics of representation are such that Chauvet's and Muñoz's attempts to highlight and make present the bodily *absence* of the women by

displaying their shoes and garments risks to further eviscerate the disappearing women of life, transforming them into anonymous and sexualized images.



Figure 4. Celia Álvarez Muñoz's *Fibra y Furia (Fiber and Fury): Exploitation is in Vogue*, contextualizes femicide within the transnational dynamics of the U.S.-Mexico border region. Her installations displaying a range of women's garments without bodies are a critique of the fashion industry, with subtle cues linking the Juárez femicides with the surrounding transnational economic affairs.



Figure 5. Celia Álvarez Muñoz's *Fibra y Furia (Fiber and Fury): Exploitation is in Vogue*, detail of the "sequined crotch" work in its first 1999 exhibit installation at the Irving Art Center (Irving, U.S.A.).

When we situate our analysis within the specificities of Juárez's colonial context, we see how this kind of art positions the beholder as a spectator vis-à-vis an archive of data (hundreds of shoes and items of clothing) that stores, accumulates, classifies, and scrutinizes files from the past in a static and spread-out present. In this context, art functions

as archival objectivity that transforms what it represents into a soulless carcass, a mere image. And looking at these images does not, as Heiskanen naïvely concludes, “*necessarily* entangle the viewer in them,” but, rather, risks partaking in the tactics of divestment (2013, 7, emphasis added). So how to inscribe in public, official memory disappearing women whose existence and whose death are rendered spectral by material and cultural tactics of divestment? How to remember when, as Enriquez Fierro and Mariana Ortega remind us, there are “no words” that can represent this grief and images can harm by further exscribing these phenomena and experiences out of official history and narratives? How to inscribe in official memory disappearing women whose existence is spectral without succumbing to the tactics of divestment that produce ghostly subjectivities? (Although I will return to the question of artistic expression and memory-work in chapter 7, for now it suffices to note that artistic forms that memorialize, i.e., fix or capture, phenomena like the disappearing daughters unavoidably fail at their self-imposed task of “giving voice to [the oppressed’s] laments” (Carpenter 2018).¹⁸)

Efforts to reclaim the victims’ memory from the oblivion of official discourse and the violence of colonial logic and apparatuses, however, does not stop at gathering data or bringing visibility to the feminicides through speaking up or visual representation.¹⁹ The politics of representation in Juárez inspired a global activists-artists movement to take a stand not only on official silences, but also on the tactics of divestment deployed by officials to keep the issue quiet. While certain kinds of images, speech, and concepts may fail to attend to and denounce the crevices and opacities of phenomena like disappearing and femicide, partaking instead in the ghosting of coloniality, others do not. It is

precisely through art—through what Driver refers to as “ephemeral art such as graffiti and local memorials” (2015, 8), including the black crosses on pink backgrounds painted across Juárez (see fig. 6)—that many grieving mothers and activists across the globe express this paradoxical modality of existence, striving to make sense of—make sensible—this spectral dwelling.²⁰ As we will see in what follows, it is the crosses’ ephemeral nature that makes them well suited to remember and denounce without capitulating to specularization. Their fragility, in fact, exposes the beholder to an experience of loss, which undermines the possibility of re-presenting the disappearing in its full visibility, without visual or auditory lacunae. As such, the crosses do not position the disappearing as a spectacle and the beholder as a spectator. Rather, they denounce the disappearing—including the life of the victims and the colonial and gendered violence— affectively by transforming beholders into witnesses.



Figure 6. Pink cross being painted on a city wall in Juárez by a woman in memory of the victims of feminicide.

It would seem, then, that an aesthetics that “holds on”—i.e., that remembers and denounces feminicide without partaking in tactics of divestment—is one that straddles a precarious line between presence and absence, finding ways to convey the experience of a

loss that is not a full absence—the phenomenon of being “more or less dead.” To use Merleau-Ponty’s expression, “holding on” would entail the seeming paradoxical task of “forget[ing] origins and giv[ing] to the past not a survival, which is the hypocritical form

of forgetfulness, but a new life, which is the noble form of memory” (IL 59). As we are about to see, works of art like the crosses “forget origins” not by re-presenting the disappearing daughters, i.e., making them present, spread out as mere images vis-à-vis the spectator. Rather, they give the disappearing daughters “a new life” through the transformation of the beholders (the city, the passerby, and the mothers) into witnesses.

4. *“Conceptless Opening”*: *On the Aesthesis of Deep Silence*

Perhaps one of Merleau-Ponty’s most exciting contributions is the recognition that bearing witness to the springing forth of the world, to phenomena that cannot be fixed through concepts like silence or grieving the disappearing of a loved one, calls for modalities of expression that do not strive for transparency, but, rather, that push phenomenology beyond itself toward the aesthetic. Merleau-Ponty’s recognition of the reciprocal instituting openness of subject and world entails a methodological shift from a transcendental reduction and a study of being-in-the world to hyper-reflection and a study of being-of-the-world. That is, the modality by which one bears witness to the springing forth of the world matters. Since reflection and, more broadly, beings are *of* the world, Merleau-Ponty was forced to grapple with the fact that the world and its historical and social structures shape not only what we see, but also *how* we perceive the world, i.e., our modalities of existing in the world. It is in light of this consideration that we witness, more and more prominently as the philosopher’s thinking matures, the cultivation of sensibilities that give the beholder a different access to the sensible world than that privileged by modern and postmodern custom. It is at this juncture that Merleau-Ponty turns to aesthetics, a modality of expression that concretizes hyper-reflection.

We find, in Merleau-Ponty's reflections on art, the recognition that, differently from logocentric renderings of being and phenomena—but also from design or extension—secondary qualities like color give the artist, through their “indecisive murmurs,” a “deeper opening upon things”—a “conceptless opening” to be precise (EM 172).²¹ Recall Merleau-Ponty's rich descriptions of color perception, which he mobilizes to spell out the mutual solicitation of milieu and perceiver. In chapter 4, we saw that the perceiver's orienting through and toward the world is not in the indicative or determined in advance. Rather, it is an “oneiric interlacing,” i.e., the accomplishment of a call-and-response taking place in hiding whereby the milieu calls forth a certain way of seeing or hearing that the perceiver assumes and that provides the milieu with the means of becoming determinate. This is to say, first, that there is a “*logos* before language” (PC II, 29), an implicit and inchoate *logos*—a silent *logos*—beyond subjectivity that inhabits the sensuous and calls forth the beholder's orientation.²² This silent *logos*, Merleau-Ponty tells us, is the “vibration of appearances which is the cradle of things” (CD 15). This ontological dimension is pre-reflective; the distinction between subject and object, being and nothingness, perceiver and perceived has yet to be made.

Second, the power of art is to “recover a fundamental openness to this implicit [or silent] *logos*”—to the eventuation of being and sense—that “refuses to be a foundational principle” (Kaushik 2011, 5, 11). As Merleau-Ponty remarks, “in the painter's stroke—the flexuous line—or the sweep of the brush is the peremptory evocation [of a] *logos* that pronounces itself silently in each sensible thing” (VI 207-08). In *Art and Institution*, Kaushik attributes this power of the aesthetic to its “auto-referential” nature by explaining that the work of art points to its own origins (i.e., to this silent *logos* that is its

conditions of possibility) from within itself, without appeal or reference to a “wholly other category of existence” (2011, 1, 13). It is in this sense that art is a “conceptless opening onto things”; it reveals a being that “is” conceptless, a mode of givenness that “is” a transcendence prior to thought, which, as we will see, concretizes through the orienting work the local memorials effect upon the city’s geography and its inhabitants (Kaushik 2011, 13).

In other words, the “originating” power of the aesthetic lies precisely in giving access and expression to—in making sensible—this oneiric fabric of existence beyond presence, this “order where there are [...] non-language significations, but they are not accordingly positive” (VI 171). Art provides a conceptless opening beyond the presence of consciousness wherein the lines between imaginary and real, essence and existence, visible and invisible are blurred.²³ After all, on Merleau-Ponty’s account, the silent contact with and expression of the world—the indecisive murmurs or laments—offered through painting are not locatable on a Cartesian grid of objective space or translatable into propositional language. “Art,” he reminds us, “is not construction, artifice, meticulous relationship to a space and a world existing outside. It is truly ‘inarticulate cry,’ as Hermes Trismegistus said, ‘which seemed to be the voice of the light’” (EM 182). As such, it is not the making present or the representation of “prosaic things which are absent” (EM 164). Rather, the “imaginary”—here understood as that “of the image”—

is much further away from the actual [...] because it does not present the mind with an occasion to rethink the constitutive relations of things; because, rather, it offers to our sight [regard], so that it might join with them, the inward traces of vision, and because it offers to vision its inward tapestries, the imaginary texture of the real. (EM 165)

In this sense, the aesthetics offers the perceiver the opportunity to sensuously and affectively “join”—rather than “think”—the relation of things, this “non-linguistic order of signification”—or silent logos.

Note how this “joining” is not a capitulating to the immediacy of self-presence, a pre-cognitive coincidence with, for example, Ledezma Ortega’s grief for the death of her 16-year-old daughter, Paloma Angélica Escobar Ledezma, in March 2002. The sense of these non-linguistic dimensions of meaning is not a (literally) mute coincidence with the world, a Bergsonian coincidence-through-direct-intuition of sorts.²⁴ Such an understanding would simply displace, rather than decenter, the dualism of sense versus non-sense from the linguistic/natural dichotomy to a less recognizable binary within the realm of the pre-thetic. As noted, the silent *logos* inhabiting the sensuous is not a foundational principle. Rather, “this being breaks the solidity of a semantic order” (Kaushik 2011, 11) revealing itself to be a fundamental dispossession (as you may recall from the preceding chapter), a fecund void (as we will see in the chapter that follows). This is to say that the sensible makes sense diacritically, trans-spatially or through gaps—in sum, “within the convergent space between gesture and surface” (Kaushik 2011, 18).

In *Merleau-Ponty and the Faces of the World*, Mazis elaborates on the transspatial and transtemporal originating of the sense of the work of art by observing that the image is not “anywhere specific, not ‘in’ the painter, not ‘on’ the canvas, not at the geographical location of Mont Sainte-Victoire, not at the time he painted, not at the time each person looked at the painting, but in an unlocatable time-space interplaying among all these appearances...it is *in their circulation*” (2016, 245). Thus, to the previous remarks about the power of the aesthetic, we should add that art discloses the fact that the

sense of the sensible eventuates through the pockets of opacity of being's interlacing, which, rife with affective charge, make sense by "transport[ing] the reader in time and place, without being epistemically decipherable" (Al-Saji 2019b, 3). The sensuous fragility and hesitancy of the aesthetics' gestures makes visible the pockets of deep silence at play in the eventuation of sense, in effecting an aesthesis of deep silence. Through his careful descriptions of Cézanne's relation with Mont Sainte-Victoire in "Cézanne's Doubt" or of the slow-motion film of Matisse painting in "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" and "Eye and Mind," Merleau-Ponty illustrates the transspatiality of sense. We learn that it is the wavering of Matisse's brush before it strikes the canvas that opens onto the affective and deeply silent space whereby Matisse harkens to and is reoriented by the "indecisive murmurs" of the world (EM 172). And the brushing resumes as if animated by the landscape's summons, painting the world "according to its own wishes" (VI 133). Thus, it is precisely through these knots that the aesthetic makes sense; deep silences at once are and open a space of interplay between the fleeting traces animated within the perceiver and a certain shading of the landscape, a shimmering of the world that is always already summoned by and summoning of the "carnal relationship[s] of meaning, the halos of signification" sedimented in the perceiver and her cultural-historical lineage (MA 234).

While I will elaborate in more detail on transtemporality in the following chapter, for now, notice how Matisse's hesitation also reveals that deep silence lines expression in all its *temporal* figurations: the sense and scope of his paintings are not known, by Matisse, in advance. Rather, the sense that he seeks to express only exists once it is expressed, painted; it eventuates according to a paradoxical movement of the future

anterior such that “Matisse’s women [who] were not immediately women” will have been once Matisse’s *Standing Nude with Downcast Eyes or Head of a Recumbent Figure* are painted (PrP 184). Until then, the sense eventuating through Matisse’s gestures is not possible. Notably, what precedes and lines expression is not nothing. That is, saying that the sense of *Standing Nude with Downcast* was not possible prior to its realization should not be taken as indicating that expression comes into the world *ex nihilo*. As Cézanne’s obsessive return to the same-yet-always-already-different landscape suggests, his affective and silent contact with the world is a deep silence that is pregnant, that calls forth new ways of making sense. It is this silent *logos*. And this silent *logos* is not left behind as the painting is completed. Rather, it continues to line present expression, being carried with(in) it. Referring specifically to Cézanne’s works, Mazis observes that “the sense of Mont Sainte-Victoire being made and remade from one end of the world to the other is only an expression that all of existence has a lining of dreamlike depths that potentially interconnect in transformation and contribute to its identity as much as the more stable, determinate properties articulated by reflection” (2016, 246). The new meaning expressed through the work of art is not a meaning fully possessed, finally articulable by the presence of modern/*colonial* logos. Instead, it continues to be felt like a strangeness, a *haunting* presence. In Donald Landes’s eloquent words, that which is expressed is thus an inscription which also “exscribes” (2013, 9); it brings along, but also keeps at a distance—that is, it makes *present as absent*—its own sense. It is this transtemporality and, more explicitly, transspatiality of sense eventuating through deep silences that the pink crosses of Juárez make sensible.

5. *Interlude – “Ephemeral Art”: On the Trans-Spatiality of the Pink Crosses of Juárez*

In the wake of official authorities’ indifference toward the violence and unwillingness to investigate the murders, mothers of the victims and local activists have taken it upon themselves to seek justice for the crimes through various grassroots measures, including the reclaiming of public spaces through the production of ephemeral art like graffiti, posters, and local memorials like the black and pink crosses. In regards to the latter, since the 1990s, the victims’ mothers have been painting telephone poles across Juárez in pink, with a black cross symbolizing the lost life, as well as erecting wooden pink crosses to mark the disappearings and denounce their daughters’ spectral dwelling.²⁵ Erected in the Campo Algodonero, a cotton field where the bodies of eight women were found in 2001 (see fig. 7), but also at the Juárez-El Paso border crossing (see fig. 2), and

in the city’s peripheries on walls and rocks (see fig. 8), the crosses have become part of the city’s iconography, marking sites of historical memory and serving, as Rosa-Linda Fregoso writes, as “silent witnesses to symbolic and experiential



Figure 7. The pink crosses mark Campo Algodonero, a cotton field where the bodies of eight women were found in 2001.

instances of violence” (2007, 54).²⁶

As the qualifier “ephemeral” suggests, however, the crosses’ standing is far from lasting. Differently from artistic productions exhibited within the shielding and, often, sanitizing walls of a museum, the crosses are works of *ecotestimonios*—which Driver

defines as informal and nomadic “projects that link art, memory, and geography to demonstrate the persistence of memory” (2015, 131). *Ecotestimonios* are distinctive because of the peculiar relationship with the spatial surroundings they institute. The crosses accrue meaning through the community’s ritual practices centered around them, the public discourse that their erection and sight ignite, and the geographical site they commemorate, while also imbuing the sites and local geography with collective, historical memory. As Louis Bickford notes in discussing institutional acts of memory-erasure such as the replacing of mass grave sites with shopping malls and airports in Argentina, “[b]y themselves and isolated from their context, monuments, memorials, and museums have little effect. Their power is generated by place, by the meaningfulness of their location [...], and perhaps even more importantly by the meaning brought to them through the public discourse they inspire and provoke” (2005, 102).



Figure 8. Pink crosses painted on rocks at the outskirts of Juárez. Many of the women’s bodies are found abandoned at the peripheries of town.

Ecotestimonios resist tactics of divestment by enlisting the local geography and beholders as witnesses, whose interplay with the artists (the mothers) and collective memory gives the crosses meaning.²⁷ Through the enduring and repeated acts of painting and erecting of the crosses, the city surface comes to bear witness to the disappearing daughters. This not only means that the city’s geography harbors collective memory by

which the disappearing daughters become sensible, re-membering, on behalf of the mothers and the local and international community, the disappearing women's spectral dwelling. It also means that these *ecotestimonios* summon those who traverse the city to re-member. This re-membering takes place through the re-orientations that the crosses elicit within the beholders. By orienting them differently through space, the city's geography is not alone in "holding on."²⁸ The crosses transform beholders (passerby, grieving mothers, and Ciudad Juárez) into witnesses such that ephemeral art becomes a means not only to make sense-sensible the loss and disappearing, but also, as Michelle A. Holling puts it, "to produce witnesses" to the violence, grieving, and resilience (2014, 316).²⁹

The crosses' dynamic sense-making means that their sens—meaning and orientation—varies at the register of the material alterations to their spatial and temporal arrangements. As "ephemeral art" (Driver 2015, 8), the crosses' relationship with their surroundings is especially tenuous. This is so not only because of the geography's propensity for erasure, but also because their material existence is continuously threatened by city officials. The tracts of desert, empty lots, and abandoned spaces that litter Juárez make inscribing memory via *ecotestimonios* especially difficult. The desert is a geography of forgetfulness that aptly conceals and erases not only dismembered bodies, but also *ecotestimonios* like flyers and crosses. But *ecotestimonios* are also threatened by the fact that unofficial memorials like the crosses and murals are often painted over or taken down by city officials in an effort to smother the denouncing power of the symbols of the antifemicide movement. Over the years, the crosses have been the target of repeated attempts on the part of city officials to repress the memory of the disappearings.

As Paula Flores recounts in the film *La carta* (2010) while standing next to a government building, “here we had put a cross as a symbol of justice like the crosses that were [painted] on the [electric and light] poles. Last September, when they opened these new offices, they removed the cross.” Similarly, in 2011, the city of Juárez built a hotel in the Cotton Field of Campo Algodonero where pink crosses marked the memory of the eight women whose bodies were recovered there, thus replacing a “memory site with a generic nonplace. (Ironically,” as Driver observes, “the hotel is named Conquistador Inn” (2015, 128).³⁰) Notwithstanding the injunctions by the mayor of Juárez to the contrary, the mothers persist on painting the crosses across the city, defying what Alicia Schmidt Camacho characterizes as a “second wave of gender crimes” through which the mothers also became targets (2005, 275) (see fig. 9). In this sense, and although the mothers tirelessly and defiantly repaint and rebuild the crosses, the local geography and the meaning that it accrues in relation to its interlacing with the symbolic markers, the mothers/artists, and the beholders is never fully accomplished. Rather, it inevitably changes with its surroundings, reprised over and over again. Importantly, this also means that unofficial memorials like the crosses continuously undergo a cycle of disappearing and reappearing.



Figure 9. Woman painting a pink cross on the pole of a traffic light in downtown Juárez.

It is in this latter sense that ephemeral art like *ecotestimonios* expose the beholder to an experience of loss, or, to be more precise, of absencing through which the disappearing itself can be apprehended without partaking in the ghosting of coloniality.

By withholding the full visibility sought after by the colonizing gaze and operative in artistic expressions like Muñoz's *Fibra y Furia*, the crosses' ephemeral nature undermines the presuppositions (of visibility and transparency) that give ethical support to re-presentation.³¹ Through the showing of loss, of absencing, and disappearing, the crosses display "an immediacy of the unidentifiable, or a showing of remoteness itself," that, as Rajiv Kaushik explains speaking of art's power to signify, "grasps [the beholder...] and usurps [her] power to grasp or appropriate it" (2011, 25). That is, ephemeral art's power is that of offering the beholder the opportunity to sensuously and affectively "join"—rather than conceptually or visually grasp—the experience of loss and disappearing. And this joining does not take place via an appeal or reference to a wholly other category of signification, but, rather, via the beholder being grasped or moved, affectively, by the work of art; it takes place through a sensuous modality of existence that refuses conceptual and visual representation, re-orienting the beholder in space and time instead.³² For the sake of the present inquiry on the role of deep silence in expressing meaning negated by speech or images within a colonial context and denouncing a seemingly unspeakable violence, this means that the crosses' fragility undermines the possibility of colonializing tactics of divestment, which means, on the one hand, that the beholder grasps them as spectacles and, on the other hand, that the beholder turns into a spectator vis-à-vis crosses-as-an-archive of data to be recoded, catalogued, and sealed off.

Implicit in these remarks is the fact that the fragility of *ecotestimonios* bears witness to the events without fixing and memorializing them in time and space. Yes, through geographical testimony, *ecotestimonios* counter official narratives of oblivion

inscribing feminicide in historical memory and the national imaginary long before any official monument. Yet, the crosses' spatial precarity also means that the crosses do not sanction a temporal closure of the disappearings. The past that the beholder comes to apprehend via her joining with the crosses is evoked in its spectral presence—it endures through fleeting traces, nested within the ephemeral present of the crosses, while also calling forth the future projected onto the local geography and the beholders' own orientation. As Bickford would put it, the crosses “represent in the present a wound opened by a historical act. But they bear the promise of a future scar when the healed wound is remembered” (2005, 102). Even when/if the wound is healed, it continues to make sensible the trauma, pain, and resilience of the disappearings, existing as a trace of a past that is never sealed off, of grief and memories that dwell in the present as violent bursts of pain, quiet weeping, or resilient demands for justice. That is, the past is not obsolete, a matter of antiquity. Rather, it is carried with-in the present, affectively operative within the beholder's experience of loss and outrage. In this sense, the past is a *living* past whose oblivion is prevented through the materiality of disappearing itself.³³

As we saw in the preceding section, the intersubjective and mutually-affecting relationship between perceiver and perceived means that the orientation of the perceiver through and toward the world is not a given, i.e., determined in advance; rather, it is the accomplishment of a call-and-response whereby the milieu calls forth a certain way of seeing or hearing, an orientation toward the vibrations of her surroundings that the perceiver assumes and that provides the milieu with the means to become determinate. The work of art recovers this interlacing or silent *logos* that, in Kaushik's words, allows the “space of reversibility itself to come into the world as such” (2011, 12). Thus, in

Juárez, the crosses open onto a non-conceptual transcendence whereby the beholders are oriented differently across the local geography. And the act of imbuing has ontological significance³⁴: The beholder's encounter with the crosses, her harkening to the affective and opaque landscapes they evoke, allows the perceiver to be more than just a spectator and "join," through a spatio-temporal re-orientation, the opaque relations of histories, memories, pain, and resistance.³⁵ This joining is not a grasping, but a being grasped; it takes place through a sensuous modality of existence—through an aesthesis of deep silence—that remains conceptless. The beholder comes to see according or with the work of art and the silent *logos* onto which it opens (EM 164).

In conclusion, not only "informal, nomadic memory sites that change with the landscape can and do shape discourse about feminicide in Juárez" (Driver 2015, 130). It is the crosses' ephemeral character that prevents sealing and cataloging the disappearances into the archives of memory. The disappearings are apprehended through an experience of their passing, which does not solve the violence, but denounces it, which is to say that it keeps the act of mourning and the memory of the disappearing *alive*, present not in their absence (as in Muñoz's representation of the absent bodies), but in their *absenting*, in their disappearing. Thus, differently from the specularization of graphic images that confiscate the lived and affective dimensions of existence, seal them off, memorializing them once and for all as spectacles and soulless carcasses in the fixity of archival memory, the crosses transform the disappearings into a *living* past that echoes and takes form time and again. They allow the past to exist in the present by haunting it, specifically by haunting the city and spatially re-orienting the passerby, transforming them from spectators to witnesses.

6. *Putting Coyolxauhqui Together: Making Sensible the Disappearing Daughters*

From the work done in this chapter, we know that, for Merleau-Ponty, silence marks the difference between language as “a power of error,” i.e., as “lexicon” that strives to grasp or attain immediate coincidence with the world (VI 125, 4), and language as an “originating operation” (IL 46).³⁶ We are now beginning to see that deep silence’s originating or creating power has something to do with displacing usual expectations, with effecting a suspension of not only familiar concepts but also modalities of approaching and apprehending the world. The aesthetic offers a “new type of intelligibility,” a sensuous “joining” the relation of things that remains elusive—“conceptless,” so to speak. Specifically, as the previous discussion regarding the pink crosses suggested, the making sense-sensible of art “is” a *dispossession*, it opens a space in which “there is an immediacy of the unidentifiable, or a showing of remoteness itself. It is this showing that grasps us, the beholders of the text, and usurps our power to grasp or appropriate it” (Kaushik 2011, 25). That is, the existential suspension at play in the encounter with the crosses at once calls for and effects a committed passivity—a “being grasped”—toward the still inchoate yet haunting sense—this silent *logos*—emergent in one’s sensuous encounter with the world.

This is not to say that the beholder remains utterly passive, or literally mute vis-à-vis the outrage evoked by the sight and grasping of the crosses. Rather, it means that the meaning the crosses (qua ephemeral art) eventuate operates first and foremost at a level prior to the conceptual. The beholder, as we have seen, is grasped and moved by the crosses, reoriented toward the past of femicide and a future of activism. This is what happens to many of the mothers, whose withstanding of loss and indignation—this

ineffable experience—has the power to turn them into “warrior mother[s].” And yet, the point I want to stress here is that for this kind of activism—this kind of metamorphosis to be possible—and, more broadly, for the sense of deep silence to eventuate there needs to be a demolition of the ego.

A version of this demolition, of this non-conceptual transcendence is, for Merleau-Ponty, the painter’s accomplishment:

In the immemorial depths of the visible, something moved, caught fire, and engulfed [the painter’s] body; everything he paints is in answer to this incitement, and his hand is ‘nothing but the instrument of a distant will.’ [...] ‘[A] certain fire pretends to be alive; it awakens. Working its way along the hand as conductor, it reaches the support and engulfs it; then a leaping spark closes the circle it was to trace, coming back to the eye, and beyond.’ (EM 188)

It is the artist’s propensity to live in wonder or “fascination” that allows her to “see according to [the work of art], or with it” (EM 164)—i.e., it allows the world to disclose itself “like the patterns of the constellations” and call forth “those gestures, those paths which he [the painter] alone can trace and which will be revelations to others” (EM 167). By lending her body to the world, by letting her eyes be “moved by some impact of the world,” the painter taps into this unfamiliar world, this “fabric of brute meaning” (EM 165, 161). Painting thus figures as a “central operation contributing to the definition of our access to Being” (EM 171).

In Juárez, however, it is not wonder, but grief and the desire to denounce the gendered, racialized, and colonial violence, to demand justice, that brings about *arrebatos* [interruptions], including the suspensions of customary modalities of existence and the demolition of the ego. Disoriented, wounded, and outraged, many of the mothers recount facing the task of not only re-membering their daughters, but also of *putting themselves back together* in the wake of their daughters’ disappearing. Albeit not the kind

of literal carnal dismemberment of the victims of femicide in Ciudad Juárez, the mothers withstand an analogous process of affective and ontological dis-membering and re-membering as they strive to make sense of and denounce their daughters' impune murders. It is only so far that Merleau-Ponty's insights can take us. The colonial context brings about violence that is more than conceptual/linguistic and that, in his own way, Merleau-Ponty seeks to eschew. To make sense of the suffering and resilience of the mothers of Juárez, I turn to Gloria Anzaldúa's work, especially her treatment of Coyolxauhqui, the Aztec *diosa de la luna*. Coyolxauhqui can help us make sense of the centrality of dispossession to this process of remembering, of eventuating new sense, while also reinscribing with new meaning the colonizing context within which the grieving and denouncing take place.

Coyolxauhqui is the symbol deployed by many contemporary Chicana writers to index femicide.³⁷ "Her bones jutting from sockets call to mind the dominant culture's attempts to tear U.S. Mexican culture apart and scatter the fragments to the winds" (LDLO 49). As Anzaldúa explains, the U.S. first took away the land (the actual bodies) and then appropriated culture through commercialization and language. Specifically, the symbol of Coyolxauhqui is relevant in the context of the gendered violence we witness in Juárez because, as cultural critic and poet Alicia Gaspar de Alba notes, "Coyolxauhqui is the first femicide victim in Mexico, her ritual beheading and dismemberment reenacted on the tortured female bodies on the U.S.-Mexico border, such as the victim found in a public place in Ciudad Juárez in October 2009, with her head inside a plastic bag beside her torso" (2014, 132).³⁸ In *Coyolxauhqui's Tree of Life* (see fig. 10), for example,

Chicana artist Alma López depicts Coyolxauhqui's dismembered body hanging from a cross, which specifically symbolizes Juárez's feminicides.

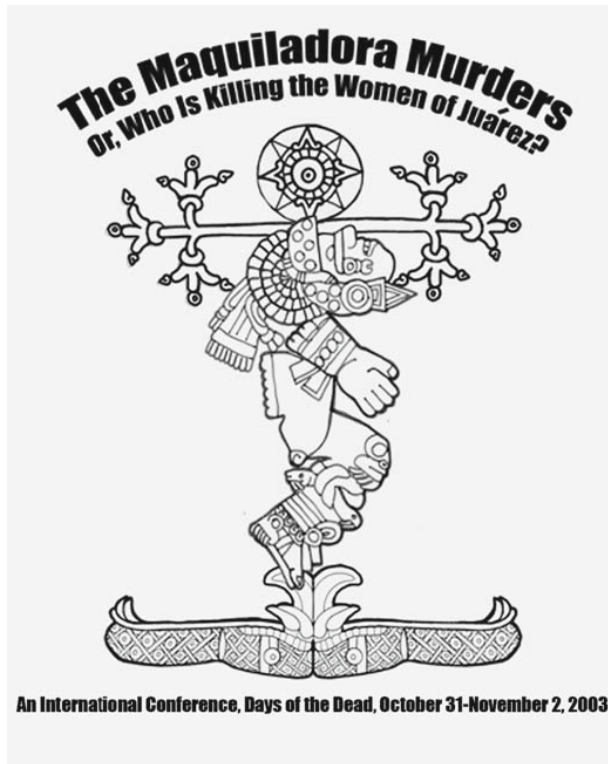


Figure 10. *Coyolxauhqui's Tree of Life*, by Alma López. In the Poster for “The Maquiladora Murders Or, Who Is Killing the Women of Juárez?” International Conference. UCLA, October 31–November 2, 2003.

But Coyolxauhqui evokes more than dismemberment. In *Light in the Dark / Luz en lo Oscuro* and numerous interviews, Anzaldúa reclaims this mythological figure to think through both the circularity of meaning—the straddling of the spiritual, ancestral, earthly/natural, and imaginal dimensions of existence—and the cyclical process of disintegration *and* re-integration, of grief *and* healing, fragility *and* resilience essential to the processes of

creation and sense-making.³⁹ Traumatic events, chaotic disruptions, violence, and death catapult us into a state of fragmentation. “Every *arrebato*,” Anzaldúa observes,

... rips you from your familiar “home,” casting you out of your personal Eden, showing that something is lacking in your queendom. Cada *arreatada* (snatching) turns your world upside down and cracks the walls of your reality, resulting in a great sense of loss, grief, and emptiness, leaving behind dreams, hopes, and goals. You are no longer who you used to be. As you move from past presuppositions and frames of reference, letting go of former positions, you feel like an orphan, abandoned by all that’s familiar. Exposed, naked, disoriented, wounded, uncertain, confused, and conflicted, you’re forced to live *en la orilla*—a razor-sharp edge that fragments you. (LDLO 125)

We hear echoes of confusion and disorientation in Enriquez Fierro’s testimony upon the disappearing of her daughter Adriana. Abandoned by the State and the authorities, which she previously trusted, she begins questioning many of her previously held cosmological beliefs. This entailed letting go of familiar presuppositions, including her own sense of self.

Yet, in trying to make sense of the events—or, better yet, in letting the events make-sense—a pulling together happens. As Ricardo Vivancos Pérez argues in *Radical Chicana Poetics*, “arrebatos mark our early stages of conocimiento or transformation. They agitate us into action by compelling us to write our story anew” (2013, xviii). In this sense, the image of Coyolxauhqui invokes more than a mere coming undone or scattering; it also stands for a resilient coming back together into a new, unified whole through a series of re-memberings, through acts of “calling back those pieces of the self/soul that have been dispersed or lost, the act of mourning the losses that haunt us” (LDLO 2). Reflecting on her daughter’s murder, Norma Ledezma Ortega explains that “something changed in me that night... I was born again that day: the woman, wife and factory worker was buried next to Paloma, and a warrior mother was born—a daring mother, a lioness” (Chin and Schutz 2020).⁴⁰

Although I agree with Pérez that wounds, disruptions, and fractures are necessary for the process of creation—that, as Anzaldúa puts it, “to be healed, [I had to] be dismembered, pulled apart” (LDLO 29)—it is important not to overlook or skate over too quickly the role that dis-memberment plays in this process of creation/transformation. The life shattering event of the loss/murder/disappearance of one’s daughter brings about a recoil of sorts, the inability to convey the depth of one’s experience through conceptual

or propositional language. And this deep silence is not nothing; it is also not a falling back onto the stereotype of the devastated, grieving, and silent mother. Rather, the process of dispossession of the agential or authorial power of the ego can be a fecund, albeit painful, seed for rebirth, sense-making, and activism.⁴¹

It seems to me, in fact, that the process of healing, sense-making, and denouncing implicated by the Coyolxauhqui imperative and witnessed through the aesthetic production blossoming from the wounds of Juárez is not ego-centric. The Coyolxauhqui-like process we hear in the mothers' testimonies is suggestive of a specific kind of dismembering and re-remembering—that of the *dismemberment of the ego*. “The healing,” Anzaldúa tells us, “occurs in disintegration, in the demotion of the ego as the self's only authority” (LDLO 29). The power of Coyolxauhqui lies in relinquishing the authority of the self, letting go of the authorial ego opening oneself to a conceptless communion with the world. Like in painting, where “‘the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it’ (Charbonnier, *op. cit.*, p. 34)” (EM 167)—as Merleau-Ponty reminds us citing André Marchand—the appeal to the aesthetic of the mothers in Juárez make concrete that for the sense of deep silence to eventuate, for them to make sense of the murders of their daughters, there needs to be the quieting of the clamoring voices of the ego. This is what Anzaldúa, in *Speaking in Tongues*, seems to invite her fellow to women of color writers to do. She writes: “I say mujer mágica, empty yourself. Shock yourself into new ways of perceiving the world, shock your readers into the same. Stop the chatter inside their heads” (ST 170).⁴²

As the rational and egocentered consciousness is set aside in grieving but also in the encounter with the aesthetic, and *one* harkens to deep silence, *one* is given another

kind of access to the world whereby one could see the world anew, hear the world and the disappearing daughters murmur with the voices of silence. Following Avery Gordon, then, we can say that the pink crosses remind us that “‘invisible things are not necessarily not-there’, [as Toni Morrison observes, but] encourage the complementary gesture of investigating how that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence” (2008, 17). The work of the pink crosses is that of “conjuring up [but not of representing, I should specify] the appearances of something that is absent” (Gordon 2008, 25)—of the daughters of Juárez, of femicide in official discourse, and, more broadly, of deep silence. The pink crosses give a different access to the world, making possible to “feel the loss and [...] understand it without falling prey to sensationalism” (Portillo 2002).

Referring to Claudia Castro Luna’s collection of poems about the women murdered in Juárez, *Killing Marías: A Poem for Multiple Voices* (2017), LA Times writer Tyrone Beason observes that poetry—but, we may add, art more broadly—is “especially useful when the depths of the human experience leave us feeling as if there’s nothing we can say” (2020).

...
It turns out that it is possible
to mend the crevices inside yourself
without silk threads and silver spoons
it is possible to tell the truth
and not burn in hell
to win wars without shooting a rifle
and without a rifle to write a poem.

—Claudia Castro Luna,
“María Rosario Clearest of Nights”

7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I suggested that, although phenomena like the silent contact with the world or grief cannot be stated, this seeming impasse does not entail expressive paralysis. We find, in Merleau-Ponty's aesthetics writings and Anzaldúa's mobilization of Coyolxauhqui resources to develop a modality of bearing witness that mobilizes deep silences, that "murmurs" deep silences and phenomena like grief and outrage in ways that do not capitulate to transparency. The mobilization, rather than erasure, of deep silences through artistic expression or mythopoetics makes sense-sensible dimensions of being and sense that are annihilated in a move to transparency and *logos*.⁴³ This aesthetic modality of engagement with the world whereby the inquirer does not "concoct concepts from within [her] thinking," but, rather, learns "to think [her] way *through* things" (Morris 2018a, 126) entails, first and foremost, the suspension of familiar expectations.⁴⁴ Second, this aesthetic sensibility entails the dismembering of the ego. As we learned from Anzaldúa's description of the Coyolxauhqui imperative, second, this coming undone gives access to existence beyond presence. An aesthesis of deep silence thus dispossesses the agential subject, calling forth a thinking (and a living) that does not start from how I come to myself and the world, but, rather, with how being *happens*—in the double sense of taking place *and* contingently occurring—in "me." This is an aesthesis of deep silence.

This aesthesis of deep silence is not only the means through which the philosopher as well as the artist can express elusive phenomena like deep silence. The aesthetic makes sensible, in its conceptual/discursive elusiveness, the imbrication of creativity and silence, the silent *logos* that subtends all expression, thinking, and being. Importantly, as the Juárez case makes explicit, it is the ephemeral character of art that

makes possible bearing witness to violence, resilience, and outrage without playing tonto tactics of divestment operative in Juárez and the colonial context more broadly. The crosses bear witness by making present the experience of disappearing itself, which refuses the full visibility that could introduce the position of a spectator. The aporiae of decolonial representation are thus not swallowed, but upheld in this presentation that keeps open this process of remembering. As such, an aesthesis of deep silence allows to bear witness to the other and the world not as a positivity, but as a cavern, an openness, to paraphrase Merleau-Ponty, where something will take place (VI 263).

As I will discuss in more detail in chapter 7, bearing witness spectrally makes possible attending to the haunting sense emergent in the sensuous encounter with the world and the other, thus undermines presuppositions central to a philosophy of reflection that reduces silence to nothingness (VI 44) and surveys phenomena from above, transforming them into something said, devoid of their affective and sensuous dimensions. Instead, this modality of bearing witness demands that the listener dwell in that unsettling experience of deep silence akin to when, as Schutte puts it, “another’s speech, or some aspect of it, resonates in me as a kind of strangeness, a kind of displacement of the usual expectation” (1998, 56). Importantly, because the silences and opacity are not elided, but, rather, let resonate in a foreign key, the sense of the world is not eviscerated of its depths, subsumed into familiar schema. Rather, a critical phenomenology of deep silence lets the other, the world, and phenomena speak in their difference, without subsuming them under familiar categories existence. That is, it lets the world and the other speak with “the voices of silence,” to play on Malraux’s expression. Beyond postcolonial critique as an academic exercise, then, bearing witness

without making fully visible is a decolonizing intervention because it operates at a different register, exposing the beholder to a *sensuous* experience of disappearing. As such, it resonates with the calls of many feminist and indigenous thinkers for more than a “logocentric and nominalist version of decolonization,” as Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui observes (2012, 102).

NOTES

¹ The English translation by Celeste Kostopulos-Cooperman reads, “Always at the edge/At the edge of the road/At the edge of history/Severed between the borders/The young women of/Juárez/At the edge of death/At the edge of fear/Populate a gagged city/At the shadow’s edge/At the edge of time/A disembodied voice/No body” (Agostín 2006, 35).

² Several state-sponsored initiatives have taken place since 2013 to raise awareness about femicide in Juárez and abate the rates of disappearance. In 2013, for example, the local government started a campaign called the “Disappearances in Juárez have to Disappear” against disappearance which entailed posters around the city featuring images of the clothes of women whose bodies were missing (Driver 2015, xvii). In 2017, the city released a smartphone app called “No Estoy Sola” [“I am not alone”] which allows women to trigger a distress call in the event of an attack (Swenson 2017). Overall, the preventative measures taken by the city entailed warnings to women not to be out at night or dress provocatively, placing the burden of responsibility to prevent femicide on women and suggesting that they are responsible for the violence, as scholars have noted. In spite of these measures, as the 2018 report on violence against women in Juárez states, “preventative measures, investigations, and prosecutions in Ciudad Juarez have been non-existent, totally lacking, or ineffective when dealing to violence against women” (CEDW 2018).

³ It is worth noting that I use the relatively new term “femicide” over the related term “femicide” because the former takes into account the broader relations of power that enable the kind of gender-based violence that the concept of femicide tracks. While femicide names the murder of women on the grounds of their gender and gender performance, femicide takes into account the broader power structures that create inequalities for women as well as “impunity for the perpetrators because the state is implicated, either explicitly or implicitly,” as Nancy Pineda-Madrid observes (2011, 12). It should also be noted that the murder and disappearance of indigenous women in North America, for instance, could arguably fall within the category of femicide. In “Violence

and Transvestite/Transgender Sex Workers in Tijuana” (2010), Debra A. Castillo, María Gudelia Rangel Gómez, and Armando Rosas Solís are among the first ones to link the issues of feminicide with violence against transgender subjects.

⁴ I will return to some of the whys in the concluding chapter of this project where I will take up the role that deep silence plays in social justice initiatives in a political context of “absolute lack of institutional justice” like Juárez (Driver 2015, 5), especially as it is mobilized through aesthetic memory-work.

⁵ It is also worth noting that there are also no words or concepts to account for “justice” in the wake of the disappearance of one’s daughter, as Norma Ledezma Ortega’s remarks remind us: “As a lawyer, I have a certain concept of justice ... but as a mother, I believe justice means a lot more. I know I don’t have it, and I know I’ll never have it” (Chin and Schutz 2020).

⁶ Enriquez Fierro’s testimony evokes the common mention of speechlessness vis-à-vis loss. Expressions like “there are no words to express the depth of my despair”; “mere words won’t do justice to the devastation I experienced”; “words fall short of expressing my sorrow for your loss;” and “words can’t express how saddened we are” are just a few common phrases recounted by those who either experienced loss first-hand or meant to convey their heart-felt condolences.

⁷ Bolaño introduces the notion of “more or less dead” in his novel, *2666*, which narrates the murders and disappearances taking place in the city of Santa Teresa, a fictional Ciudad Juárez. One of the victims is referred to as “more or less dead,” an expression that emphasizes how the disappearing forces these women into eternal anonymity, denying them the right of death, as journalist Alice Driver points out (2015, 60).

⁸ Speaking of artist Brian Maguire’s portraits of Brenda Bernice, Erika Perez Escobedo, and Guadalupe Verónica Castro Pando—three of the many disappearing daughters—Ed Vulliamy observes that there are two ways to represent events such as the Juárez feminicide: “One is to convey some distant horror, exotic in its way, in places or circumstances separated from our own by Manichaeian morality; some evil in Mexico, against which our legitimate society, appalled, campaigns or crusades” (2014). Ortega would likely agree that echoes of this Manichaeian morality resonate through the colonizing gaze, crystalized in the photographs’ captions that label the disappearing women as promiscuous sex workers. The other way, Vulliamy continues, “is to insist [...] that these atrocious narratives are integral to our own routines; that the blood stains our everyday lives.” Art and representation, on this account, are meant to remind the audience of the responsibility that we bare as consumers. After all, the violence to which the women in Juárez are exposed is, in large part, the result of global exploitative economy.

⁹ A specularizing and ghosting account, one that swallows or denies the aporiae, ambiguities, and lived dimensions of a phenomenon like disappearing, capitulates to an

ethically dangerous impasse. It makes pressing the inadequacy of simply reproducing the other's non-normative experiences by reference to verbal and visual significations that strive for full visibility and transparency. Such a representation makes the other's experience specular to and consumable by the colonizing gaze, thus undermining the very possibility of bearing witness to the non-colonial other in her difference.

¹⁰ Note how “dwelling with specters” is defining of another figure central to Aztec mythology, Chicana culture, and Anzaldúa's mythopoetics: la Llorona. I will return to the figure of la Llorona in chapter 7.

¹¹ That is, following the *Phenomenology* in which Merleau-Ponty carried out a study of embodiment and being-in-the-world, he is now performing a “phenomenology of being-of-the-world” (Landes 2020, 141).

¹² If these questions may seem, at first, to point to an impasse, this is because of the longstanding prejudice of Western thinking of “confusing being with determinate being,” which David Morris defines as “a tendency to reason that because the beings we encounter are manifest as more or less determinate, being *itself* [but also sense, I would add] must be determinate” (2018b, 15). The outcome of this prejudice is that sense and being are modeled on familiar conceptual posits, which are appealed to ready-made to found sense (Morris 2018b, 125). We can trace the roots of this ontological prejudice to being's own concealing movement by extending to being the logic that Merleau-Ponty sees being operative in expression, i.e., the “meta-paradox of expression” or the phenomenon whereby accomplished expression conceals its rootedness in what is not accomplished or determinate. It is this prejudice that harbors the “operational thinking” Merleau-Ponty warns us against above and forecloses the renewal of sense. When thinking through deep silence and its sense and being, then, it is paramount to remember that sense and being are more than determinate being and sense, more than what our concepts can make explicit.

¹³ It is Merleau-Ponty's confrontation with Descartes's recognition, in “Meditation IV,” that body and soul are mixed with each other that prompts him to formulate a way to think through ambiguities, opacity, and, as we will see, silence. Since “we *are* the compound of soul and body,” he writes, “there must be a way to think it” (EM 58).

¹⁴ In a study called “The Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement” (1999), Margaret Stroebe and Henk Shut put forth a theory of grief called The Dual Process model, which recognizes the limits of facing one's grief head-on. As a response to the ‘grief work hypothesis,’ which promotes “working through” or “facing the grief head-on” as the best methods for “getting over” a loss, Stroebe and Shut propose a method of *oscillation* between loss-oriented and restoration-oriented processes that the griever undergoes. The former entails confronting the reality of loss and the emotions associated with it like sadness, loneliness, and anger by attending to thoughts, memories, or photos. The latter is the process of coping with secondary losses, which include developing new roles, identities, and ways of being in the world in the wake of loss. “When a loved one

dies, not only is their grief for the deceased person, one also has to adjust to substantial changes that are secondary consequences of loss... a myriad of emotional reactions can be involved in coping with these tasks of restoration, from relief and pride that one has mastered a new skill or taken the courage to go out alone, to anxiety and fear that one will not succeed or despair at the loneliness of being with others and yet on one's own." The dual process model acknowledges the dynamic aspect of grief and the fact that that loss is not something one "gets over."

¹⁵ At this juncture, it would be interesting to explore the connection between Merleau-Ponty and Nietzsche. Perhaps not surprisingly, in the note following the one cited in the text, Merleau-Ponty turns to Nietzsche's notion of the eternal return (VI 179). Although unrelated, the transition from one note to the other invites a conception of history as non-linear, but circular. Note the interesting connection between circularity/return and opacity/silence: as Kamen MacKendrick claims, "the return demands this affirmation of loss because every possible variant will recur in the temporally-indefinite shuffling of matter. It demands that we affirm forgetfulness, because each thought of the eternal return will come to us as new, meaning—because it is itself recurrence—as already forgotten. Thus this cycle, which we might more readily see as a movement that guarantees, if not persistence, at least predictable sameness of movement and thus a sense of preservation, becomes for him a becoming caught up in utter loss" (2001, 8).

¹⁶ This kind of understanding of grief would resemble outdated theoretical framework such as that upheld by "grief work" model whereby grief is something to "get over" or "relinquish" by working through stages, a progressive "letting go" geared at restoring normal functioning (Thompson and Neimeyer 2014).

¹⁷ Also consider the pictures of missing women's clothing hanging around the city, which were part of a 2013 campaign launched by the local government against the disappearings, titled "Disappearances in Juárez have to Disappear."

¹⁸ For instance, in "Art that silences and art that speaks" (2018), Colleen Mary Carpenter argues that memorials like the fountain built at Campo Algodonero following the Inter-American Court of Human Rights' injunction to the Mexican government silence, rather than express, the grief of the mothers and the laments of the dead.

¹⁹ When it is the only vehicle of contestation, data often partakes to the anonymizing of the victims; speaking up, as we saw in the preceding chapter, faces its own risks of reifying the colonial apparatus it seeks to contest.

²⁰ For example, consider the work of Argentine photographer Gustavo Germano. In his project, *Absent* (2013), Germano portrays the grief of family members who have lost loved ones during the military rule in Argentina by pairing two photographs staged to resemble one another via their background and composition, with the exception that one of the two portraits includes the missing loved one. Also consider the theoretical and activist work of Maria Acosta López (2014), whose writing I will discuss in chapter 4.

²¹ In *Tracing Expression in Merleau-Ponty* (2013), Fóti argues that Merleau-Ponty's thought on aesthetic expression shifts from an account of expression still indebted to the subject (in "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence")—and thereby one that privileges literary to artistic expression—to one that dethrones the subject, acknowledging the opacity or incompleteness of all forms of expression (linguistic and non-linguistic) in *Nature* and "Eye and Mind." We find partial confirmation of Fóti's claim in Merleau-Ponty's own remarks in *The Prose of the World*, where he argues that "painting as a whole gives itself as an aborted effort to say something that always remains to be said. Here we see what is proper to language" (PW, 140). This claim is repeated in an essay from 1953, which confirms the priority accorded to language: "the arts of language go much farther toward true creation" (S 128), Merleau-Ponty observes.

²² This is the *logos* Hamrick and van der Veken call "*logos endiathetos*" (2011).

²³ In "Eye and Mind," Merleau-Ponty observes that painting reaches "beyond the 'visual givens,' open[ing] upon a texture of Being of which the discrete sensorial messages are only the punctuations or the caesurae" (165). He continues by observing that painting mixes all categories "essence and existence, imaginary and real, visible and invisible...in laying out its oneiric universe of carnal essences, of effective likenesses, of mute meanings" (EM 169).

²⁴ In other words, it would be yet another mistake to take Merleau-Ponty's invitation to uncover "speech before it is spoken, the background of silence which does not cease to surround it," or the "threads of silence that speech is mixed together with" (IL 46) as a return to a philosophy of purity or transparency, to a conception of silence as a pure supporting framework for linguistic expression and signification—as Emmanuel Alloa claims (2017, 54). In a working note dated 1959, Merleau-Ponty makes explicit that mute coincidence with the world is unattainable: Not only "is" being a generative and dynamic matrix of lateral relations, a primordial "*Offenheit* of the *Umwelt*" (VI 176). Coincidence as direct intuition is unattainable also because the articulation of this adequation calls for linguistic expression; "it's very description of silence rests entirely on the virtues of language" (VI 179). In turn, the interlacing of speech and silence is such that "no language ever wholly frees itself from the precariousness of mute forms of expression, reabsorbs its own contingency, and wastes away to make the things themselves appear" (IL 78). Linguistic expression's indebtedness to the sensuous makes the articulation of this "world of silence" necessarily partial, turning it into an obligation to put this adequation into words over and over again. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty brings attention to the chiasmus between linguistic expression and the world of perception, between speech and silence, that is, to the inexhaustible circularity with which they envelop one another and that makes direct intuition impossible. Véronique Fóti elaborates on this impossibility in *The Evidence of Painting*. Originary silence is "always already broken, a disclosure/concealment or presence/absence," as states (1988, 281). Both perceptual experience and (linguistic) meaning resist clarity of expression because they essentially involve latency and opacity. On the one hand, sedimented language's opacity, Fóti argues, is due to its lack of the spontaneity characteristic of living speech. Perceptual

experience, on the other hand, is an “inchoate *logos*,” the “locus of the primary silence but, as inscription into openness, it is also inaugural genesis, the matrix of all creation” (1988, 277). This inaugural genesis entwines activity and passivity.

²⁵ The group *Voces sin Eco* [Voices without Echo] was primary responsible for painting pink crosses on telephone poles to draw attention to the gender-based violence. See Amnesty International, *Intolerable Killings* (2003).

²⁶ The names of the eighth women whose bodies were found in Campo Algodonero are Claudia Yvette González, Laura Berenice Ramos Monárrez, Esmeralda Herrera Monreal, María de los Angeles Acosta Ramírez, Mayra Juliana Reyes Solís, Verónica Martínez Hernández, Merlín Elizabeth Rodríguez Sáenz, María Rocina Galicia.

²⁷ In 2009, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights found the government of Mexico responsible for the murders of three of the eight women whose bodies had been found at Campo Algodonero in 2001. The government demonstrated a lack of intent to commemorate the victims; it sold the land of Campo Algodonero, which resulted in the taking down of the eight pink crosses that served as historical memory and the building of a hotel on the site. After much public protest, the government built a memorial, which remains incomplete. As Carpenter observes, the memorial deliberately avoid history; it is not only intentionally set apart from the community, surrounded by walls and lacking adequate parking structures, but it depicts a woman in her youth and radiance. Since the feminicides have not ended, Carpenter argues, the memorial erases the historical truth of femicide (2018).

²⁸ The beholders’ spatial dwelling summoned by the crosses are what Merleau-Ponty would call “paths to follow” (IP 66).

²⁹ That said, it is important to note that the murmurs of the milieu resonate differently depending on the constellation of symbols and cultural references they summon in the beholder. As Bickford points out commenting on sites erected in place of memorials, “through time, they form part of the memory of the past for individuals and communities traumatized by the authoritarian regime’s repressive apparatus. Their meaning often proves opaque to passersby” (Bickford 2005, 101). In this sense, the sense the crosses imbue upon their surroundings differs depending on the beholder’s social positionality, which includes their lineages, sedimented memories, and values. While the pink crosses scattered throughout Juárez affectively signify space, orienting the perceivers spectrally, their tracings transport the perceiver onto different cultural and political horizons; the halos of colonial, gendered, and racialized violence summoned by the crosses resonate differently for Enriquez Fierro and myself.

³⁰ The covering over of ephemeral art by government officials is reminiscent of the scrubbing of the names of femicide victims painted on the streets of Mexico City on International Women’s Day 2020 by members of art collective, *Colectiva AJF* (Mendelson 2020).

³¹ Ephemeral art refuses university, transparency, and full visibility, the notions presupposed by concepts like (Kantian) aesthetic judgment, the public sphere, or common sense. As Ferreira Da Silva notes, university is contested by decolonial critique as the sire of exclusion and violence, which is, however, often presupposed in textual, postcolonial critiques (2015).

³² It is this showing of remoteness, this refusal of publicity and appeal to something like (Kantian) aesthetic judgment that, on Denise Ferreira Da Silva's account, pushes postcolonial performance art beyond mere postcolonial critique and into praxis. As she explains in reference to postcolonial artist Yasmine Eid-Sabbagh's *On Violence* (2013), "the art of making visible without making public corrupts the neat web of conceptual methodology that the postcolonial critic learns during academic training" (2015, 4). Differently from postcolonial critique, which, at once, critiques notions like university and publicity while also relying on them because of their reliance on conceptual and methodological declarations, which appeal to universality as the condition of possibility of their reception, performance art refuses such universality, visibility, and transparency "that could introduce the position of a spectator" (2015, 4).

³³ This is very different from the kind of memorializing effected by Ciudad Juárez in the aftermath of the 2009 Inter-American Court of Human Rights' ruling. When the Court found the government of Mexico responsible for the murders of three of the eight women whose bodies had been found at Campo Algodonero in 2001, the shared hope among the mothers of the victims and activists was that the field would be turned into a public memorial park. As previously noted, however, the government showed little interest in inscribing the murdered women and a condemnation of femicide within public memory. The land where the bodies were found was sold and, in 2011, the hotel "Conquistador Inn" was erected. After much public protest, the government did build a memorial, which, as of 2018, remained incomplete. In "Art that Silences and Art that Speaks," Colleen Mary Carpenter claims that the memorial deliberately avoids history, "silenc[ing] the past, separate[ing] from the present, and distanc[ing] viewers from victims" (2018). This is because the memorial is not only intentionally set apart from the community and inaccessible, surrounded by walls and lacking adequate parking structures; it also obscures historical truth by depicting a woman in her youth and radiance, while the victims of femicide are simply missing. Especially because the femicides have not ended, Carpenter argues, the memorial erases the historical truth of the violence of femicide. It seems to me, moreover, that a memorial that seeks to exercise justice and bring the "truth" of what has and continues to happen cannot fix and memorialize past events and relegate the disappearings to a past that can be, at best, forgiven, and, at worse, forgotten. In either case, the closure of the events marked by the fixity imparted to them by something like a statue displayed in isolation and full visibility, sanctions a definite resolution and closure of a past that seems to leave nothing behind, that condemns the mother's ongoing mourning and demand for justice to fall to deaf ears.

³⁴ Grief is a phenomenon affecting more than the ontic aspects of one's existence. This pain that "corta una parte de tu Corazón," as Enriquez Fierro observes, fundamentally restructures the conditions of possibilities of existence (Chin and Schultz 2020). In other words, it seems that grief entails learning to live with the presence of their daughters' absence or, following from the discussion in preceding sections, to dwell with specters.

³⁵ In *More or Less Dead*, Alice Driver points out that the "symbol of the cross has proved a difficult image for some victims' mothers. Juana Rodríguez Bermúdez, mother of Brenda Berenice, for example, contributed to *Ciudad Juárez: de este lado del puente* (*Ciudad Juárez: On This Side of the Bridge*), a volume of spoken word poetry that collected the experiences of five mothers of femicide victims. She expressed, 'I took down the crosses, I took down everything that had to do with God / . . . I became very angry, I took down the crosses, / I didn't want the crosses, I didn't want anything' (Vericat 39)" (cited in Driver 2015, 128).

³⁶ As we will see in more detail in the following chapter, for Merleau-Ponty, silence and language are structurally intertwined (Fóti 1988, 275–76).

³⁷ In *Radical Chicana Poetics*, Ricardo Vicanos Pérez observes that the shift from Coatlicue to Coyolxauhqui within the Chicana artists' collective marks the transition from the 1980s to the 1990s and a search for new referents (2013, 46).

³⁸ Gaspar de Alba may have been inspired, in her observation that the women in Juárez are modern day Coyolxauhqui, by Jane Caputi's appeal to Coyolxauhqui to theorize "gynocide," offered at a 2003, UCLA conference on the Juárez femicide, titled "The Maquiladora Murders Or, Who Is killing the Women of Juárez?" (Vivancos Pérez 2013, 166).

³⁹ "The Coyolxauhqui imperative is to heal and achieve integration. When fragmentations occur you fall apart and feel as though you've been expelled from paradise. Coyolxauhqui is my symbol for the necessary process of dismemberment and fragmentation, of seeing that self or the situations you're embroiled in differently. It is also my symbol for reconstruction and reframing, one that allows for putting the pieces together in a new way. The Coyolxauhqui imperative is an ongoing process of making and unmaking. There is never any resolution, just the process of healing" (LDLO 19–20).

⁴⁰ Norma Ledezma Ortega's testimony makes explicit how the disappearing and grieving affects the day-to-day activities. At the time of the death of her 16-year-old daughter, Paloma Angélica Escobar Ledezma, in March 2002, Norma had an elementary school education and worked in a local factory that manufactured parts for airplane. Upon her daughters' murder, she vowed to get justice for Angélica and other missing women. She founded the organization "Justicia para Nuestras Hijas" or "Justice for Our Daughters" and, in 2016, earned a law degree. "With this legal weapon, I can fight for all the other victims as well," she says. Today, she works on cases related to kidnapping, femicide and corruption.

⁴¹ To use Anzaldúa's poetic expression, that "sometimes what accretes around an irritant or wound may produce a pearl of great insight, a theory" (LDLO 2).

⁴² Through the mobilizing of deep silences, the aesthetic opens the artist and the observer onto the silent beckonings of the world; it "allow[s] oneself as perceiver to be taken in the world, as the moment of the flesh, in a silent 'being-at' whatever is the focus of perception," as Mazis puts it (2016, 27).

⁴³ These deep silences, when harkened to rather than translated into available schemas, often interrupt familiar expectations, dis-orienting one's corporeal arrangement within the world, and inaugurating a re-organization around new emerging centers.

⁴⁴ From Merleau-Ponty's remarks on the creative power of the "tacit language" of painting, we gathered that painting is creative insofar as it "dwells and makes us dwell in a world we do not have the key to"; it "introduces us to unfamiliar perspectives instead of conforming us in our own" (IL 77).

PART III – THE TEMPORALITY OF DEEP SILENCE

Unlike other words, the word to be is not a sign to which one could find a corresponding “representation” or object: its meaning is not distinct from its operation, which is to make Being speak in us rather than us speak in Being. For how would we speak of Being, since those beings and shapes of Being, which open to us the only conceivable access to it, at the same time hide it from us by their mass, and since every unveiling is simultaneously a dissimulation? What has been called the “mystique” of Being [...] is the effort to integrate truth with our capacity for error, to relate the incontestable presence of the world to its inexhaustible richness and consequent absence which it recuperates, to consider the evidence of Being in the light of an interrogation which is the only mode of expressing this eternal elusion. We have tried to show how a philosophy oriented in this way leads us to a complete reworking of the concepts ordinarily used in the analysis of language (such as those of sign, meaning, analogon, metaphor, symbol) and how it leads to the notion of an “ontological history.”
—Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Philosophy as Interrogation*

In Parts I and II, I showed how thinking through deep silence from the standpoint of concrete lived experiences such as that of sexual violence and grief reveals silence as more than a lack relative to a pure speech or signification; it gives us the tools to think beyond the logic of transparency that remains largely operative in Western theorizing whereby phenomena can be grasped and accounted for fully by an inquirer who is external to the process of inquiry. Specifically, thinking through the pink crosses of Juárez, I proposed that ephemeral art makes sense-sensible of phenomena like grief and outrage that may otherwise seem ineffable and senseless. Importantly, it does so without capitulating to colonizing tactics of divestment. Through their mobilization of deep silences the crosses make explicit the circularity, i.e., the transspatiality and transtemporality, of sense, which eventuates through the interlacing of the artist, the past, the geography, and the beholder. Thus positioned, I proposed that art makes sense through a fecund dispossession; deep silence effects a “conceptless opening” onto silent *logos* by bringing about an epistemological suspension of the familiar and the

dismemberment of the ego. These disorienting and dispossessing processes make it possible to set aside the overly rational consciousness and let the world speak in the voices of silence. In this sense, I proposed, harkening to deep silences effects an aesthesis of deep silence, i.e., a modality of existence (of perceiving, thinking, loving, imagining, etc.) that dispossesses the agential subject, that does not start from how I come to myself and the world, but, rather, with how being and sense *happen*—in the double sense of taking place *and* (contingently) occurring—in “me.”

As the crosses illustrate, experiences of deep silence call forth the articulation of a sense that breaks with modern/colonial expectations. Far from being conceptually and propositionally articulable, *arrebatos* open onto the world ‘speaking’ with the voices of silence, onto a that, as you may recall from Diana Nyad’s words, that carries “emotional significance” (2017) As we strive to express this sense, we would reach an impasse if we were to begin with ready-made concepts that disentangle the *mélange* of mind and body, ourselves and the world, and ourselves and others. Traditional Western epistemic and ontological frameworks that operate within a Being versus nothingness paradigm and that, thereby, conceive of truth as *coincidentia rerum et intellectus* and cast silence as a lack relative to a pure speech or signification are not equipped to hear—let alone make sense of—the silent *logos* that subtends and is interlaced with speech and phenomena. The insight we gather from Merleau-Ponty’s and Anzaldúa’s philosophical approaches is to being with the very entanglement, ambiguity, and intricacy of concrete phenomena (N 122). After all, for Merleau-Ponty, “truth is not what abolishes the Cartesian ‘confusions’ and breaks through to clear and distinct thought, but what appears in and through those ‘confusions’—the world that we inhabit” (Hamrick and van der Veken 2011, 66–67).

To make sense of these voices of silence we need matrices of thought that allow joining the operations of being conceptlessly, which is to say, thinking ambiguity, opacity, and seeming impossibles without resolving them. These matrices would speak of the world “not according to the law of the word-meanings inherent in the given language, but with a perhaps difficult effort that *uses the significations of words to express, beyond themselves, our mute contact with the things*, when they are not yet things said” (VI 38, emphasis added).¹ As the passage suggests, an inquiry that begins from entanglement and the mute contact with the world, and that strives to express the sense of silence without undermining its constitutive opacity, calls also for the elaboration of ontological matrices that do not conform to a Parmenidean schema of Being versus nothingness characteristic of much of modern/colonial ontology. Such frameworks of thought (especially a philosophy of reflection), in fact, cast silence as nothingness. “Reflection,” Merleau-Ponty reminds us, is an inexpugnable philosophical position, every obstacle, every resistance to its exercise being from the first treated not as an adversity of the things but as a simple state of non-thought, a gap in the continuous fabric of the acts of thought, which is inexplicable, but about which there is nothing to say since it is literally nothing” (VI 44). Instances that cannot be accounted for by a philosophy of reflection and propositional thinking such as the resistance, opacity, and ambiguity of the sensible, grief, or the mute contact with the world are deemed as nothingness. And nothingness, in turn, is equated with silence, with that “about which there is nothing to say since it is literally nothing.” Thus, we witness the simultaneous preemptive disavowal of non-logocentric or conceptless openings onto the world, on the one hand, and the reiteration of a conception of silence as non-sense and nothingness, on

the other hand. In sum, silence is cast as unthinkable wherein its unthinkability is due not to the limitations or inadequacy of current matrices of thought, but to silence's (lack of) being, i.e., its nothingness or non-being, and the thus-inevitable absence of something to think or say about it.

Experiences like the signifying of the crosses or Martínez's Joto passivity, however, suggest that silence is neither a "zone of non-being," i.e., a lack relative to a pure speech, nor "something," as both conceptions would treat it as a positivity. As more than *nothing* and less than *something*, the questions become: how are we to think the *being* of deep silence that is inexorably inscribed and relentlessly exscribes itself through the mute contact with the world, through existence and expression? And how is deep silence such that it accounts for the fecundity of being, for creation and novelty? Specifically, what are the temporal dynamics of the eventuation of its sense?

In the following two chapters, I heed to these questions, directing the inquiring to the onto-temporal dynamics of deep silence. In chapter 6, I work closely with Merleau-Ponty's later ontological writings from *The Visible and the Invisible* and *Nature Lectures* to suggest that the onto-temporal dynamics that accounts for the generativity of deep silence (and of being!) is *precession*, i.e., a retroactive signification of being and instituting of possibility. In chapter 7, I primarily engage Gloria Anzaldúa, especially her mobilization of the myth of la Llorona in her writings. Deploying deep silence in one's narratives, as Anzaldúa does in her re-telling of the myth, makes possible resignifying colonial historias. Interlaced with silences, its retelling undermines key tenets of coloniality such as specularization and the coloniality of time.

NOTES

¹ Taking these “confusions” as the loci of doing philosophy calls forth a sense that does not conform to modern epistemic criteria of transparency or clarity, but, rather, that upholds opacity and silence not only as its inherent components, but as its ground. Recall the discussion of the “principle of incommensurability” from chapter 2. Following Ofelia Schutte, I suggested that Western theories of meaning treat silence and semantic incommensurability as “irrelevant to philosophical meaning and knowledge, and thus irrelevant to the operations of reason” (1998, 61). This is because they presuppose transparency as the desiderata and guiding principle of meaning and signification. Once reality is sanitized from any impurity such as affective residues and (seeming) paradoxes or impossibles—the story goes—its silences can be overcome and its meaning becomes graspable in its totality through reason alone, i.e., by occupying an a-cultural and a-historical vantage point. Yet, upholding, rather than disentangling, this *mélange* entails grappling with the fact that these “impurities” or silences are inherent components of sense; their presence does not *distort* the meaning of being, but qualitatively affects it. In this sense, while the Western, logocentric apparatus is, for the most part, not equipped to approach, dwell in, and harken to occurrences of deep silence and let deep silences open onto other dimensions of being and sense that are prior to and cannot be accounted for by a discourse that operates at the level of conceptual thinking, taking confusions as the loci of doing philosophy calls for the elaboration of a sense that is other and prior to these pre-thetic dimensions, and that gives “voice” to the mute contacts with the world accomplished through “conceptless openings.” This, as we saw in the preceding chapter, is the accomplishment of the work of art.

VI. *LE MONDE DU SILENCE*: ONTOLOGICAL POSSIBILITIES AND THE IMPOSSIBLE TIME OF DEEP SILENCE

The sensible is precisely that medium in which there can be *being* without it having to be posited; the sensible appearance of the sensible, the silent persuasion of the sensible is Being's unique way of manifesting itself without becoming positivity, without ceasing to be ambiguous and transcendent. The sensible world itself in which we gravitate, and which forms our bond with the other, which makes the other be for us, is not, precisely qua sensible, 'given' except by allusion—The sensible is that: this possibility to be evident in silence, to be understood implicitly, and the alleged positivity of the sensible world (when one scrutinizes it unto its roots, when one goes beyond the empirical-sensible, the secondary sensible of our 'representation,' when one discloses the Being of Nature) precisely proves to be an *ungraspable*, the only thing finally that is seen in the full sense is the totality wherein the sensible are cut out.

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

In this chapter, I approach questions of the dynamics of deep silence such that it makes possible the fecundity of being starting from an analysis of the phenomenon of nature. Thinking through Nature as a way to deep silence is propaedeutic insofar as silence is often associated with the perceived extra-linguistic realm that is nature. Furthermore, silence is mentioned in Merleau-Ponty's texts primarily in two contexts. As we saw in Part II, "silence" appears in Merleau-Ponty's discussions of aesthetic (linguistic and artistic) expression in texts like *Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence* or "Eye and Mind." But "silence" also repeatedly figures as a qualifier for the sensible world or nature, which is, for example, literally equated to "the world of silence" in the title of the 1957 inedited text, *La Nature ou le monde de silence* (NMS).¹

An indirect approach to deep silence through Merleau-Ponty's treatment of Nature reveals deep silence as essential to being, as a dimension whereby being manifests itself in its absence. Deep silence, I will argue, institutes a different modality of existence

beyond the signifying and being of presence that, crucially, secures the fecundity of being. Operating according to onto-temporal dynamics of what Merleau-Ponty calls *precession*, deep silence is at once there and not-there. If, in the preceding chapter, I focused on the transspatiality of the sense of deep silence, here I attend to the transtemporality of deep silence. I propose that, through the (temporal) instituting of unpredictability, hesitancy, and openness at the heart of being, deep silence accounts for being's fecundity and uniqueness, for the (retroactive) growth of ontological possibility.

The chapter is organized in four parts. In the first section, I briefly trace the development of the concept of Nature in Merleau-Ponty's thought. In his later ontological writings, Merleau-Ponty deploys "Nature" to indicate a dimension of being that is at the "juncture of Being and nothingness" (N 102), a layer of being that is anterior to and makes possible the reflexive cleavage. As such, Nature forces us to grapple with "what, in things, resists the operations of free subjectivity," which is to say with "the world of silence" (NMS).² Equating Nature with the world of silence suggests that, on Merleau-Ponty's account, deep silence is the ground of being—of becoming, I should say. In the second section, I propose that, although it remains inchoate in his thought, we find, in Merleau-Ponty's writings, traces of the realization that deep silence is a fecund *archē* of sense and being. As I argue this ground is a peculiar kind of ground that remains fundamentally unarchic (as in without foundation or principle) and elusive (as in resisting the operations of free subjectivity and expression through propositional language). Deep silence as *le monde du silence* is Merleau-Ponty's way to think this origin that has a quality of an *Abgrund* and that would otherwise remain "without name in any philosophy." At once, deep silence attunes the beholder to and eventuates a modality of

being and signification that operates through haunting, echoes, and ingressions. This modality of existence operates according to the temporal modality of precession.

In the third section, I elaborate on the anarchic and fecund nature of deep silence by spelling out the kind of possibility at play in Merleau-Ponty's notion of a "pregnancy of possible" (VI 125). Possibility, I propose, comes into existence as always already past through a retrograde movement enacted by the actualization of the real. In "Eye and Mind," Merleau-Ponty accounts for this peculiar temporal movement via the notion of *precession*, i.e., a mutual anticipation between connected terms, like that of the equinoxes. Precession, as we will see, figures a retrograde inscription of possibility whereby being grows internally and, as such, remains fundamentally open and deeply silent. Attending to precession helps make sense of the claim that deep silence operates at a level *prior* to the reflexive cleavage, that deep silence at once co-exists with and within, e.g., voice and the presence of consciousness as their *doublure*, while also pre-existing them by coming into existence as always already past and, as such, making possible the, e.g., voice-silence intertwining. In this sense, I propose, being's generativity is tied to deep silence's diachrony. I conclude the chapter by returning, in the fourth section, to the claim that deep silence lies at the heart of being and argue that, as condition of possibility, deep silence is not a "close set of possibilities," but an open set of possibilities. Remarkably, as condition of possibility, deep silence actualizes the present without its normativity being knowable in advance. Rather, I propose, its normativity becomes visible through praxis, traceable through the concrete eventuating of phenomena.

1. *Deep Silence as “Primordial” Ground*

Merleau-Ponty opens the First Course on Nature, titled “The Concept of Nature” (1956-1957), with reflections on language and linguistic expression. Given the intertwining of language and phenomena, is Nature “something other than the product of a history, in the course of which it acquired a series of meanings that end by rendering it intelligible[?,]” he ponders (N 3).³ And, if that’s the case, wouldn’t the study of Nature be nothing but the study of these words, these meanings? Merleau-Ponty doesn’t seem to think that that is the case, suggesting that there is—and that his inquiry is after—a “primordial, nonlexical meaning always intended by people who speak of ‘nature’” (N 3). As he observes in *La Nature ou le monde du silence*, although it is accurate to say that Nature is not separable from humanity or history, it would be a mistake to “reduce the concept of nature to a branch of anthropology” (NMS); “Nature,” as he famously observes in first course on Nature, “The Concept of Nature,” “is what has meaning, without this meaning being posited by thought: it is the autoproduction of a meaning” (N 3). As he sets out to accomplish over the course of the three nature lectures, his task is to “restore the true traits of the ‘veiled idol’ [*idol voilée*] [by seeking] the being of Nature [...] below [*en-deçà*] its being posited [*être-posé*]” (NMS).

Although this passage may seem to be primarily concerned with questions of sense, a closer look alerts us to specific onto-temporal dynamics at play within and instituting of Nature, suggesting that the phenomenon of Nature cannot be accounted for in terms of either empiricism or idealism, a philosophy of the object or a philosophy of consciousness. Nature is different from matter or objects conceived in terms of accidental and mutually-external relations of causation, *partes extra partes*, because Nature “has an

interior, is determined from within” (N 3). But Nature is also not an object of thought for a constituting consciousness, a stable and passive substratum awaiting cultural inscriptions. “Nature is different from man [*sic*]: it is not instituted by him and is opposed to custom, to discourse” (N 3). This interior or internal regulatory dynamic (this silent *logos*) exceeds human consciousness and anthropological projections. It is “autoproduction” (N 3). Thus, Merleau-Ponty’s study of Nature invites us not only to move beyond traditional dualisms; it also gives us the tools to reconfigure the how of Nature. “Nature,” he observes, “is an enigmatic object, an object that is not an object at all; it is not really set out in front of us. It is our soil [*sol*]—not what is in front of us, facing us, but rather, that which carries us” (N 4).

The significance of this last statement is profound: First, customs, discourse, reflection, and human consciousness are not only dependent on Nature insofar as they are instituted through and by it; as Merleau-Ponty’s remarks indicate, Nature is what carries us, i.e., a ground or condition of possibility for reflection and language. Second, the study of Nature as an instituting principle also forces the inquirer to come to terms with an “enigmatic object,” specifically, with a *peculiar kind of ground*, that “resists the operations of free subjectivity” (NMS) and that, as such, remains anarchic or without foundation. This dimension of being is what, in the preceding chapter, I called silent *logos*, the summons of the sensuous world that grasp and usurp the beholder.

Before attending to this insight and shedding light onto the ways in which deep silence is an anarchic ground or instituting principle it is necessary to make explicit the meaning of Nature operative in Merleau-Ponty’s and the current projects. As scholars have observed (Barbaras 2001, 2002; Toadvine 2009a; 2009b; Bannon 2011; Hamrick

and van der Veken 2011), the afore-mentioned conception of Nature as “autoproduction” is characteristic of Merleau-Ponty’s later writing, and is instituted as well as institutes a shift in his thinking toward ontological considerations, thus marking a departure from his earlier phenomenological thinking.⁴ In *Nature and Logos*, Hamrick and van der Veken argue that, until his first course on nature at the Collège de France in 1956-1957, Merleau-Ponty deploys the concept of nature somewhat uncritically, ascribing to it the traditional philosophical meaning common to Descartes and Kant (2011, 24).

It is in the Third Nature lecture (1959-1960) that Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical style and approach to the investigation of Nature changes. While Merleau-Ponty deploys the term “nature” to index “life that has meaning [*une vie qui a un sens*]” (N 3), i.e., carbon-based, sensible things (streams, fires, cats, human beings, roses, rocks, and so on), the concept of “Nature” takes on an ontological connotation, designating “a leaf or layer of total Being” (N 265), a “part of this complex which reveals it all” (VI 204, 205). This is to say that Nature is no longer the context for a phenomenology of embodied existence (as it was in the *Phenomenology*), but key to an explicitly ontological project concerned with “a layer” of being, specifically, with the “primordial—that is, the nonconstructed, the noninstituted [*primordial, c’est-à-dire le non-construit, le non-institué*]” soil that carries us and that, importantly, is “autoproduction” (N 4). Nature is not exhausted by its “symbolic transcriptions” (NMS). Starting the inquiry into Nature from a philosophy of reflection/subjectivity would miss the “primordial being against which all reflection institutes itself,” which is to say “brute or wild being which has not yet been transformed into an object of vision of choice.” To this end, Merleau-Ponty continues,

it is vital that we take into account ... the Being that precedes us, surrounds us, carries us; the being which carries other humans with us in a jumbled manner

and which is accessible through more than one perspective. The being is already there before them, it precedes them, it grounds them, joins one to the other and within each of them, which ‘holds’ by itself, holds all things together, and does not reduce itself to what each of us has to be. (NMS)

These remarks tell us that, studied from within, Nature gestures us toward or makes visible the operations of being that functions as a ground or condition of possibility for, among other things, subjectivity, scientific thought, consciousness, and reflection—in sum, for *logos proforikos* (VI 179).⁵

Thus conceived, Nature is what Matisse’s strokes or the pink crosses express, i.e., a silent *logos* one can trace through the re-orientations effected by the summons of the crosses, for instance. Not surprisingly, in fact, the title of the inedited text from the late 1950s, *Nature ou le monde du silence*, from which the above passage comes, equate Nature (as a layer of being) with silence. As such, Nature/silence is a peculiar kind of ground, one that can no longer be thought of in terms of a philosophy of reflection (idealism) or an ontology of the object (materialism) as both are ill-equipped to account for “what, in things, [has meaning while] resist[ing] free subjectivity.”⁶ Rather, Merleau-Ponty tells us, Nature/silence is “at the juncture of Being and nothingness” (N 102), which is to say that it is prior to the division of in-self and for-itself, an in-between that lines both Being and Nothingness conceived via reflection and propositional language.

To think the juncture of Being and nothingness, this element that “has no name in philosophy” (VI 147), Merleau-Ponty introduces multiple notions such as “flesh,” “wild,” or “brute” being, moving between them to avoid, one may suggest, crystallizing the elusive dynamics of being into the rigidity of a single, overly defined concept. Although not synonymous, these figures share their being depicted as “original” sources anterior to distinctions such as that of subject and object, Being and nothingness, nature and culture

(VI 307). This casting has an important ontological and conceptual implication: it means that, as juncture or hinge, Nature is to be recovered before “the reflexive cleavage” abstractly separates it into and reduces it to discrete entities, into something said (VI 130).⁷ But how are we to think through Nature/silence as this original source that inaugurates discrete phenomena, sense, and difference in “hiding” (VI 113)? That is, how are we to make sense of Nature as “autoproduction” of a “primordial meaning” that is “below its being posited” (N 7, NMS)? As we saw in the preceding chapter, art rehabilitates silent *logos* beyond subjectivity without subsuming it under concepts, offering instead a “conceptless opening” onto the world. But how does Nature/deep silence operate such that sense eventuates by grabbing the beholder while keeping her at a distance, by transporting her transspatially and transtemporally? Grappling with this question directs us toward ontological speculations; it requires first attending to the ontological claim that Nature is “determined from within” (N 3).

In the *Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty invites the readers to think the processes that emit spatio-temporal individuals as a spatializing and temporalizing, a self-differing characteristic of Nature, there thematized as *flesh*. Central to flesh conceived as processes generative of difference is its reversibility, its *chiasmic* structure. Nature is processes in and through which Being and nothingness, sense and the sensible, voice and silence emerge “by a sort of coiling up or redoubling” (VI 114). Famously, Merleau-Ponty elucidates this redoubling or reversibility of being by reference to the touching-touched hand.⁸ The touching and the touched are reversible; via a crisscrossing whereby the touching hand descends into the things that it touches, the touching hand becomes one of them (VI 134).⁹ It is in the section on Animality in the Second Course on Nature

(1957-1958), however, that Merleau-Ponty provides concrete non-anthropomorphic descriptions of the reversibility of flesh, here conceived as Nature. The difficulty of this transition is grappling with the claim that there is a reversibility of *being*. In fact, while it may be relatively intuitive to claim that the “*doublure*” of the touching is the touched (since the sentient is also always sensible), what does it mean to say that the sensible has, as its reverse, something like a sentient touching, “something that,” in David Morris’s words, “(latently at least) makes sense of the world” (2010a, 143)? This is to say, what does it mean to propose that there is a *sens* of Nature that exceeds anthropomorphic projections, a silent *logos* that is not posited by thought? We find answers in Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of the tick-milieu relationship.

As you may recall from chapter 4, tick and milieu, he observes, are not positioned in a simple relation of cause and effect that can be understood “moment by moment” (N 175).¹⁰ Rather, their relation is “ontologically *internal* to one another” (Morris 2013, 332). Similar to the touching and the touched, tick and milieu are not external to one another, but internally and reciprocally open, encroaching nodes of the same flesh. Toward the end of the First Course on Nature, in his commentary on Whitehead, Merleau-Ponty exemplifies this relation by reference to the being of an electron that cannot be accounted for in a Parmenidean model of “absolute Being, which is all or nothing” (N 115). The electron, on Merleau-Ponty’s account, is better thought as an “ingredient” making an ingression “in its own vicinity, it is the hallway of certain ‘traces,’ of certain ‘roles’ observed by the observer” (N 115). As the language of ingression indicates, the electron or the tick—but, more generally, elements that are ontologically internal to one another—affect one another by way of traces and

suggestions. The electron or the tick are not transparent beings, fully saturated or in-themselves; rather, they are porous, opaque, and hollow—in sum, always already out of themselves, traced/tracing their surroundings. These traces are not “outside” of the electron or the tick, but, by soliciting a reciprocal orientation, i.e., norms or equilibria, within each, make themselves present, qua traces, internally. “Crucially, this also means that “the tick” and “the milieu” always remain latent, “poles that are never seen for themselves” but that nevertheless call forth their encroachment and emergence (N 178).¹¹ There isn’t tick and milieu, touching and touched, or voice and silence as discrete entities. Each exists as a “yet-to-be-tick” and a “yet-to-be-milieu” or a “yet-to-be-silence” and “yet-to-be-voice” that, through their intertwining, tracing, and haunting, invite the development of the other. Akin to the example of the crosses, the artists, and the local geography discussed in the preceding chapter, the tick and electron are in ontologically internal relations with their surrounding in that their meaning and development are called forth by the “murmurs” of other phenomena in their constellation.¹²

Insofar as the claim that Nature is autoproduction is concerned, the internal openness of beings means that the encroachment of “yet-to-be-tick” and “yet-to-be-milieu” is a “relation of meaning” (N 175) whose *sens* is not *for* a subject, dependent on their determination, but, rather, auto-determined. The developmental discriminations of the milieu’s stimuli or the tick’s response make a difference, matter or have a sense, to both the milieu and the tick’s development independent of anthropomorphic projections. For example, as Merleau-Ponty stresses, the presence of butyric acid secreted by the sudoripary glands of mammals is a difference that matters for the tick’s awakening from its dormant state (N 174), a difference that exerts a regulatory function. In this sense,

then, we can say that the sensible (at least latently) makes sense of itself, that there is a normativity of nature that is irreducible to cultural-linguistic norms (Ferrari 2018).¹³ It is in this sense that we can think of Nature as an ontological differential play of the “yet-to-be-tick” and the “yet-to-be-milieu” that inaugurates the actualization of tick and milieu. In Morris’s words, within this ontologically internal and latent relationship, “diversity involves a genesis of differences from differences that are yet to be determined” (2010b, 188).

As the discussion of the meaning of the crosses already suggested, to think Nature’s internal determination or autoproduction, we must leave behind substance ontology moving toward a precursor of what will become known as hauntology (Derrida 1994). As Jacques Derrida would subsequently put it, hauntology expresses the haunted state of existence and being by a present absence, a condition that challenges the metaphysics of presence. Phenomena are inaugurated through diacritical processes of self-differentiation whereby they continuously dispossess/are dispossessing by ingressing into one another, by shimmering with the traces of other phenomena in their constellation.¹⁴ In Merleau-Ponty’s words, “the things—here, there, now, then—are no longer in themselves, in their own place, in their own time; they exist only at the end of those rays of spatiality and of temporality emitted in the secrecy of my flesh” (VI 114). Crucially, the constant interplay of phenomena resignifies them and traces them differently, inaugurating different futures to follow.¹⁵ In this sense, Nature appears as processes of internal determination “grounded” in a constant and everchanging dynamic. This dynamic eludes ontological localism and full epistemic transparency. As such, it

also resists the completeness of the reduction, the coinciding with being in-itself, and a returning to origins.¹⁶

Given Merleau-Ponty's equation of this dimension of being with the world of silence, we can say that deep silence bespeaks the ground of being that, in its elusiveness and "haunting," resists the operations of free subjectivity.¹⁷ After all, as he reminds us in the passage cited in the epigraph, "[t]he sensible is that: this possibility to be evident in silence, to be understood implicitly, and the alleged positivity of the sensible world (when one scrutinizes it unto its roots, when one goes beyond the empirical-sensible, the secondary sensible of our 'representation,' when one discloses the Being of Nature) precisely proves to be an *ungraspable*" (VI 214). Silence makes possible for being to be present/sensible as absence /ungraspable.

Before attending more closely to the claim that silence operates as the fecund ground of being, it is important to note that the communion or complicity that makes possible reversibility and the disclosure of being does not elide difference; being's reversibility does not entail reducing tick and milieu or touching and touched to self-identical or undifferentiated sameness. There is never coincidence between touching and touched, tick and milieu, because reversibility is "always imminent and never realized in fact," because, at play in reversibility, is an *écart*, "a sort of dehiscence [that] opens my body in two" (VI 147, 123). When thought from within the in-between, Nature fundamentally resists full apprehension of a free subjectivity as "coincidence eclipses at the moment of realization" (VI 147). The touching hand cannot have a full grasp on the world because, as it touches, it is always already also touched; there is a slippage of sorts, a deferring and decentering, whereby the touching descends into the touched, the tick into

the milieu (and vice versa). As Merleau-Ponty reminds us, what the (“active”) grasping reveals is its fundamental belonging to the grasped (its “passivity” or “inertia”), that “what there is to be grasped is a *dispossession*” (VI 266).¹⁸ After all, he continues, “every relation with being is *simultaneously* a taking and a being taken, the hold is held, it is inscribed and *inscribed* in the same being that it takes hold of” (VI 266). This is the mute contact with the world—the silent *logos*—that, as we saw in the preceding the previous chapter, eludes conceptual grasping and grasps the beholder instead.

Remarkably, this deeply silent resistance or concealment is not an obstacle that needs to be overcome to better know or get to this elusive and dissimulating being (PP 179). That is, deep silence is not an epistemic defect (an all-knowing being would not be better positioned to fully grasp being), but rather, ontologically essential to being; it is the resisting element of being without which it would lack ontological depth and, as we are about to see, fecundity.¹⁹ In fact, the layer or leaf of being that Merleau-Ponty thematizes as Nature/silence is not a plentitude, but a fundamental openness, a “hollow” (VI 112). Importantly, this hollow is not a negativity either. As Merleau-Ponty adamantly stresses, being as hollow is not a lack or absence of being; “it is not a void” (VI 233). Rather, it institutes a different modality of existing whereby being eventuates as concealment or latency.

At this juncture we can better make sense of the claim advanced in chapter 4 that being as Nature/silence is, to borrow Donald Landes’s wording, an inscription which also “exscribes” (2013, 9). The eventuation of being in beings discloses, while always also keeping at a distance, itself and its own sense; its sense and being can never be complete, always in the process of becoming and expressing through continuous reprisals,

interlacings, and reinscriptions. In this sense, we can say that the being and sense of being is present as absent. As Merleau-Ponty asks in the epigraph, “[f]or how would we speak of Being, since those beings and shapes of Being, which open to us the only conceivable access to it, at the same time hide it from us by their mass, and since every unveiling is simultaneously a dissimulation?” (PP 179). In light of these remarks, we see that being “is” tick-milieu relating without being reducible to the sum of its sensuous manifestations. At the same time, although Nature cannot be reduced to the sum of sensible things, it also cannot be conceived separately from them, as “identification would result in materialism, and radical separation would lead back to a Kantian unknowable in-itself” (Hamrick and Van der Veken 2011, 59). Hence, albeit not thematizable in propositional language, Nature is not transcendental to the sensible and, as such, ineffable or mute. Rather, Nature exists in a different modality of being, and signifies by haunting, becoming traceable through its concrete manifestations. Sensible nature is therefore the “originating presentation of the unrepresentable” (VI 203).²⁰ Similar to how the “sonorous existence of my voice is for me... an echo of its articulated existence, it vibrates through my head rather than outside,” so does the existence of Nature vibrate through sensible beings. Nature therefore exists as haunting or echoings.

In conclusion, it would be a mistake to read the *écart* as introducing yet another dualism between the tick and the milieu, essence and existence, or ground and grounded. In his later ontological writings, Merleau-Ponty carries out the interrogation of what had previously been conceived as absolute antonyms from *within* their encroaching. This is to say that Merleau-Ponty reframes the question of the Being-nothingness relation as one of mutual divergence, not opposition, interrogating that which is “prior” to their division,

that within and through which Being and nothingness and, more generally, difference emerge one as “the possible of the other” (VI 228). As it turns out, the later of being prior to its being posited is a fecund dispossessing, a hollow. It is deep silence.

2. *The Grounding of Deep Silence: On Precession and Ontological Possibility*

Throughout the preceding section, I gestured toward deep silence as the fecund ground of being. Not only Merleau-Ponty’s equation of silence with Nature, which he recognizes as the hinge of being, invite such a conceptualization. Recall also, from chapter 4, Claude Leforte’s remarks about silence as the “ground” of language (xxx), a thought that echoes Merleau-Ponty’s own comments about nature being the world of silence that “carries us” (NMS) discussed in this chapter. In spite of the apprehension that deep silence functions as a grounding principle (of language, sense, and being), however, neither Merleau-Ponty nor Lefort spell out how deep silence operates. Locating deep silence at the heart of being as its ground, in fact, raises questions about the kind of ground or condition of possibility of (haunt)ontology and the groundlessness of being. If this ground is not a positivity, i.e., fully there, graspable, or experienceable, but also “not a void” (VI 233) or an absence of being, how are we to think the being of deep silence? The interrogation has plunged into the silent depths of being, and we are now faced with the seemingly paradoxical task of thinking the juncture prior to the “reflexive cleavage” and its antonyms. That is, the challenge is not only that of “thinking” without concepts, but also to conceive of a being that “is” more than nothing and less than something, not-present without therefore being absent—in sum, a “fecund negative,” (VI 263).

Prompted by Alloa’s (2014) and Vitali Rosati’s (2016) work on the topic, in this section, I make sense of deep silence as the ground of being by putting in conversation

Merleau-Ponty's remarks about possibility with Henri Bergson's treatment of virtuality. After all, in the *Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty refers to this layer of being—this fecund negative—as a “pregnancy of possibles,” a “possibility, a latency” (VI 250, 133). The pairing of possibility and virtuality calls forth a depiction of possibility as more than a mere logical non-impossibility and less than what actually is. As virtual, possibility must be ontologically rich—it must exist—while not, for this reason, being overdetermined by or overdetermining the actual (what “is”). That is, it must exist “prior” to the eventuation of beings in the sense of making the eventuation of being possible, without being causally reducible to them. The problem at hand, then, is making sense of possibility—the possibility *of* deep silence, let's not forget—as existing in a haunting modality of being. As I will show, thinking deep silence, possibility, and virtuality together shows how deep silence is the fecund void, the porosity or openness of being whereby historical structures shape one's experience and meaning of the world.²¹

Although evocative, Merleau-Ponty's metaphor of “pregnancy of possible” calls for some clarification. Casting deep silence as possibility could run into the risk of inadvertently reifying the dualism of actuality and potentiality, reinscribing deep silence as the non-actualized or precluded possibility of speech. This conception would frame silence, yet again, as an absence over and against the fullness of speech. Certainly, however, in this context, “possibility” does not index the possible of scholasticism according to which what possesses *potentialitas* is that which *can* be. This view would fall prey of possibilism, a position that Merleau-Ponty strongly rejects. As he remarks in a 1959 working note titled “Pregnancy, transcendence--,” possibilism entails not only conceiving of existence as radically external to essence, but also upholding the

precedence of latter over the former, which effectively means that being does not necessitate existential determination; existence does not add anything to the being of a thing because its essence is always already completely present in it in its potential state (VI 206). Within this framework, while the actual always already *ideally* pre-exists concrete realization as possibility, this possibility is reduced to a non-impossibility or a mere logical possibility. In this sense, possibilism eviscerates the mattering of existence (pun intended); everything that could exist always already exists a priori in its potential state. In this context, silence would mark an already available utterance, S_p , “existing silently,” i.e., currently unspoken but potentially sayable, within an already constituted set of possible utterances, $S_1, S_2, \dots S_n$, which set might be identified and defined in advance.

Acknowledging that silence as possibility does not pre-exist the actual, however, should not result upholding the converse, that is, positing the primacy of the actual over the possible or conceiving the latter on the basis of the former. This would entail espousing actualism, a position that falls prey of the necessitarian attitude, i.e., a logic whereby the possible must necessarily realize itself since, in order to be conceived, it must have first been realized. This is a way of thinking that Merleau-Ponty also rejects for, as Alloa aptly points out, “possible and real converge in the image of a world without lacunae” (2014, 151), thus excluding becoming and the depth of existence. In other words, according to actualism all that could be necessarily always already is. Within this framework, silence would then be what cannot be spoken, a failure to say and an absence of meaning. Both positions, by overlooking the weight and contingency of existence bind the modality of existence of deep silence to the presence of *logos*, the stability and

transparency of what is. As such, both fall victim to an ideology “incapable of conceiving contingent becoming except as ‘irrational, as opacity, as residue’” (Merleau-Ponty, *Résumé de Cours*, 137, cited in Alloa 2014, 152), and, as such, as non-essential to being. What does Merleau-Ponty mean by possibility then? What *kind* of possibility is at play here such that deep silence is a “pregnancy of possibles,” which is to say, such that deep silence “is” other than an absence over and against the fullness of speech?

If Merleau-Ponty’s remarks about approaching Nature as a leaf or layer of being are of any indication, “possibility” should here be considered in its ontological designation, which would effectively mean understanding deep silence as “ontological possibility”—a theme central to Henri Bergson’s work and familiar to Merleau-Ponty, who, like Gilles Deleuze, closely read Bergson’s work. Seeking to avoid the pitfalls of possibilism and actualism, Merleau-Ponty refuses a notion of the possible that would have ‘the actual’ as its antonym and develops one that figures the possible as an “ingredient” of being, which is to say as the actual’s lining (or *doublure*). As an ingredient, then, the possible is always already an intrinsic component of being as much as the actual is; the possible, like the actual, exists (in being) essentially, but its modality of existence is more akin to the haunting or spectral dwelling witnessed in chapter 5. That is, it exists in the temporal mode of the virtual whereby it is neither fixed or discernable a priori, nor fully present in beings, but, rather, is immanent to the actual, haunting and becoming traceable through it.²²

In other words, impossibles are not spread out across possible worlds, as mere logical possibilities, but held together in this one, each as the possible (as lining or *doublure*) of the other. Holding them together, however, requires new ontological

frameworks whereby impossibles figure as real in both their actuality *and* possibility/potentiality. Within these new ontological frameworks, the actual and the possible ought not to be conceived as antonyms; they do not add up to yield all things, “a world without lacunae.” Rather—and here is the difficulty—being in its actuality *and* possibility is always already hollowed/ing and, as such, fundamentally opaque and incomplete. Following Bergson, scholars like Al-Saji (2007; 2008; 2012b), Lawlor (2003), or Alloa (2014) think this novel kind of possibility that exists while allowing for being’s lacunae in terms of *virtuality*.

We now come to realize that the question we have been asking all along about deep silence as condition of possibility of experience (but also of the modality of existence effected by an aesthesis of deep silence) is, what does it mean to exist virtually, i.e., to exist and exert influence upon the actual (being and signification) without, for this reason, being shackled by the presence of consciousness, fully graspable in propositional language? In other words, what does it mean to say that deep silence accounts for the actualization or phenomenalization of being, i.e., the becoming-sensible of being (but also the becoming-sense of the sensible), “without its actualization becoming a task to be fulfilled, already established ahead of time”—the challenge that, on Alloa’s account, a philosophy of the virtual must meet to avoid falling prey to either possibilism or actualism (2014, 155)? Thinking deep silence’s possibilities in terms of virtuality brings attention to its peculiar temporal dynamics.

If we are to take seriously the suggestion that deep silence allows to “think” the paradoxical origin or ground of experience—what otherwise remains “without name in any philosophy”—by attuning us to a modality of being and signification that exists

and other, seeing and seen, without erasing the specificity of each term.²⁷ In the preceding chapter, I accounted for the eventuation of meaning by reference to the circularity or transspatiality of sense, which concretizes through the gaps or in-between of the lateral interlacing of painter, work of art, and surrounding. In *The Flesh of Images*, Mauro Carbone argues that, differently from other terms that also indicate this chiasm such as *enjambement* (infringement) and *empiétement* (encroachment)—but also circularity, I would add—precession underscores the temporal, rather than spatial, modality of existence of deep silence. Specifically, precession features a peculiar temporal “*movement of antecedence*” or mutual anticipation such that “the primacy of a term rather than the other...becomes *undecidable*” (Carbone 2015, 58, 59). The seen does not anticipate the gaze, nor does the gaze come before the visible. Rather, they are mutually anticipating and intertwining terms.

The language of undecidability made explicit by Carbone and implicated by precession is a much needed corrective to spatial thinking, i.e., a way of conceiving of time as a series of “nows” spreadable in front of us and succeeding one another, as well as the language often deployed when thinking about the relation between visible or invisible, touching and touched, actual and possible, which vitiates the understanding by conjuring up the image of succession, of a tick that precedes its milieu, which precedes the tick, which precedes the milieu, and so on, ad infinitum. This spatial thinking capitulates into actualism or possibilism. On the contrary, precession invites approaching the relationship or movement not from without, “moment by moment,” but from within. It is only from within that, as Merleau-Ponty warns us in the context of the relationship between the tick and the milieu, we would be situated to apprehend the *sens*—meaning

and orientation—of the relation (N 175). To put it in terms I used before, approaching the relation from without would consist in forgetting that “diversity involves a genesis of differences from differences that are yet to be determined” (Morris 2010b, 188).

We are now positioned to grapple with the magnitude of this insight: Merleau-Ponty is here telling us that for meaning to eventuate (and for us to apprehend it) difference (or deep silence as the *écart* of being) ought to come before sameness (the visible and sayable).²⁸ Although, at first, the note on precession may seem to imply circularity as the key dynamic of precession, closer attention to its wording (“Circularity, *but rather* precession”) marks a divergence between circularity or reversibility and precession.²⁹ Differently from circularity, which would take place between temporal “moments” or “terms” of the relation like visible and seer, silence and speech, precession witnesses an undecidability between the terms. That is, being happens prior to the determination of discrete differences. Importantly, as Merleau-Ponty explains in a working note about the reflexivity of the body, this means that being is not grounded in nor yields coincidence with a “constitutive source of perception” (VI 249). Rather, the reflexivity of flesh (like the experience of self-touching or of speech in monologue) does not reach beyond its imminence, always inevitably culminating in deep silence—in-visibility. This deep silence, then, is the act of perception itself which yields a “*Nicht Urpräsentierbar* (a non-visible, myself)” (VI 249). In other words, the disclosure of the self to oneself or the eventuating of being (which yields a *Nicht Urpräsentierbar*, a deep silence) are possible because of the peculiar ground that deep silence “is.” As Merleau-Ponty puts it, “...I am ...a self-presence that is an absence from self—The progress of the

inquiry toward the center is not the movement from the conditioned unto the condition, from the founded unto the *Grund*: the so-called *Grund is Abgrund*” (VI 250).³⁰

Precession’s temporal and undecidable connotations make it a valuable analytical tool to think about the intertwining of the, e.g., tick-milieu or actual-possible not in terms of succession, but in terms of synchrony (which is not a coinciding or a sameness!): the possible comes into existence along with or at the same time as the actual, “as a *virtualizing* of the actual” (Al-Saji 2012b, 353). As Alia Al-Saji explains, this is to say that “the real is being created [...] as both actual (present) and virtual (past) simultaneously” (2012b, 353–54). Thinking together possibility and virtuality, then, helps us see that the possible/virtual comes into existence along with the actual/present. In this sense, possible and actual are simultaneous; they co-exist with one another. Importantly, this framing eschews the pitfalls of possibilism in that it avoids conceiving of the possible such that for something to come into existence, for something to happen or to be, its existence had to be *possible* prior to its own actualization.³¹

Although this latter framing aptly avoids slipping into possibilism, we need to tread carefully when saying that the possible is created along with the real, avoiding to conceive of the possible on the basis of the real along which it comes into existence. In other words, we ought to remain vigilant about not adopting a necessitarian attitude and reducing the possible to the actual, a move that would entail the foreclosing of becoming and, importantly, the fecundity of deep silence. Precession’s dynamic is such that as the possible comes into existence along with the actual, it is projected backwards, thus existing as always already past. That is, the possible becomes real in a different temporal

modality of existence than the actual; it comes into being not as present, but as (virtually) past.

In *The Growth of Time*, Bergson refers to this peculiar temporal dynamic—in terms of the “retrograde movement of the true”—by saying that once reality is actualized, it “casts its shadow behind it into the indefinitely distant past” (2007, 11). In other words, actuality comes into existence along with the possibility of its realization, “retroactively ... create[ing] its own prefiguration in the past and an explanation of itself by its predecessors” (Bergson 2007, 12). In this sense, the temporality of precession follows the logic of the *futur antérieur* whereby a work of art was not always possible prior to its realization, but, rather, *it will have been possible* once it is realized. Matisse did not know in advance all the possible brush strokes at any given instant. Nor did he have a complete sense of the painting. It is by becoming actual that Matisse’s *Standing Nude with Downcast Eyes* becomes “retrospectively or retroactively possible” (2007, 82).³² In this sense, as Al-Saji explains, “though its possibility does not precede the event to come, it will have preceded it once the event takes place. This is the retrograde movement—the temporal ripples propagating through being—that events and truths effect once they come into existence; the past is constantly recast by the present, in a nonchronological and reversible time” (2012b, 353). The temporal movement of precession thus figures a “retrograde movement of the true” (Bergson 2007, 11) by which time retroactively “add[s] *something*,” i.e., ontological possibility, to being.³³

In sum, then, the possible is “prior” to the actual and deep silence “prior” to the reflexive cleavage or present consciousness whereby this priority is neither temporal (in the sense of a developmentally linear unfolding) nor structural (in the sense of a

fundamental ontology).³⁴ As virtual, in fact, the possibility of deep silence is prior to the actual in that it comes into existence as “an impossible past,” to use Merleau-Ponty’s expression, a past “such as it was one day *plus* an inexplicable alteration, a strange distance” that keeps it irreducible to the actual and the present of consciousness (VI 124). Note that it is in this latter sense that the possible is “originary.” The possibility of deep silence was never memorialized by and remains irreducible to present consciousness.³⁵ As Al-Saji observes, this impossible past is “*neither* an empirical past, *once present and now forgotten*, nor a layer of positivity, underlying experience but hidden from view” (2007, 184). The precession of being returns to “an elusive origin” or *Abgrund*. In fact, since the movement of precession is infinitely mutual, with each term being the eternal antecedent of the other, precession cannot unearth a possible that essentially precedes and preexists the actual, nor can it bring us back to an empirical/chronological past. Rather, as Carbone point out, precession is a “retrograde movement digging a peculiar kind of depth in time” (2015, 60)—an immemorial and deep silent depth—which brings into existence a retroactively instituted possible, *a dimension of being that has never been present*. This, in Merleau-Ponty’s words, is a “mythical time” (VI 242), a time of possibility that comes to be excavated into existence without having ever been experienced by present consciousness as such.³⁶ Deep silence, then, exists at the heart of being as its condition of possibility, but this possibility functions in a different modality of being than the present; it remains opaque and elusive, resisting the operations of free subjectivity. Thus, the possible and the actual co-exist without coinciding; there is a fundamental diachrony between actual and possible, present and past.

The retrograde “adding” operative in precession underscores the ontologically creative force of deep silence, a force that keeps the possibles of being fecund, and unpredictable or unknowable in advance, i.e., before the real. Let’s think back to Norma Ledezma Ortega, the “warrior mother” we discussed in chapter 5. Ledezma Ortega as a warrior mother becomes possible once the murder of Paloma Angélica Escobar Ledezma, her daughter, and the dismembering-remembering of her mother take place. We now see that deep silence that characterized, in part, Ledezma Ortega’s experience was more than the opening onto a different expressing and sense-making dimension; deep silence was also the dispossession of being that marks the retrograde inscription of possibility and novelty into being. In fact, the retrograde movement is not a mere psychological reinterpretation of events, but a feature of the movement of becoming itself, an ontological transmutation. As Al-Saji explains, “this could be called an ‘ontological’ rather than ‘psychological’ past . . . , since this past overflows what is recollected of it and since it plays a structuring role in experience” (2018, 339). In other words, precession has ontological weight; it continuously and retroactively inscribes new virtual possibilities in being. By instituting/calling forth novel spatio-temporal orientations, these possibilities have a structuring role in experience. As we saw in the preceding chapter, the sense emergent through the interplay of artists, local geography, and beholders happens in the deep silences of such interlacings and becomes traceable through the reorientations of the beholders, the becoming witnesses of listeners, passerby, and even Ciudad Juárez.

3. *Deep Silence’s Normativity “in Filigree”*

In conclusion, to understand how possibility, albeit virtual, continues to exert influence on the present, we need to keep in mind that, like tick and milieu, the

relationship between the temporal moments is ontologically internal. That is, thinking difference first means that we are no longer dealing with “moments,” but with *traces*; present, past, and future do not exist in themselves, but “*Ineinander*, each enveloping-enveloped,” i.e., emerging in relation to one another as the possible of the other (VI 268). Specifically, as Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of time in the *Institution Lectures* tells us, time coils over upon itself, resignifying itself: The past acquires sense retroactively, making sense by reference to a “present” register of sense it helps institute and that casts ripples backwards, in a past that comes into existence as immemorial. In this respect, the past is the receptivity or openness to a field, within which it acquires sense (IP 13). The present, responsible for opening up these dimensions in and of the past, necessitates elaboration and signification, it requires a future. In this sense, the present remains indeterminate and open, its meaning deferred, making sense in the *future anterior*. Importantly, however, the slippage of time is such that the past grafts itself onto the present by soliciting a future; the dimensions of sense and being with which the past becomes retroactively pregnant call forth a future by instituting fields of sense according with which the beholder comes to see, think, feel, and hear anew. In sum, then, we can say that the virtual and the actual encroach or ingress upon one another. The instituted possibles acquire signification within instituted fields while also contributing to the instituting of these fields, to the generating of new meanings, significations, and dimensions of being.

Note that the logic regulating the interplay of these traces is not one of cause and effect, but of suggestions and orientation. They become dimensions or fields—not determinants—according to which we come to perceive anew according to the specificity

of her spatio-temporal context, i.e., on the interplay of lateral (historical, political, affective, personal, etc.) fields of sense and being. It is by virtue of the hollowing of deep silence that events can “deposit a sense [or, should we say, traces of sense] in me” (IP 77). And although lived as present by the authorial subject, i.e., the sense deposited is not experienced by the ego as present to consciousness, this sense is not left behind “just as something surviving as a residue, but as the call to follow, the demand of a future” (IP 77). That is, these new silent dimensions of being and sense are experienced laterally or indirectly, as re-orientations or sollicitations, in other words, as the opening up of other possibilities of existence.³⁷ In this sense, although the possibilities of deep silence come into being as immemorial and its meanings are never experienced by consciousness, the new dimensions of sense make themselves felt in the orientations and reprisals of the present. Recall, for instance, Ernesto Martínez’s experience. The possibilities of deep silence make themselves sensible in the absence of misogynist responses to violence and aggression, absences that inform the reprisals of modes of performing masculinity that eschew toxic masculinity. Similarly, the possibilities of deep silence of grief make themselves felt in the absence of the disappearing daughters, absences that are “present” in the novel orientations that life takes in the wake of their departure, as traces/ing, that is, is the remembering of Paloma Angélica Escobar Ledezma through the re-birth of Norma Ledezma Ortega as a “warrior mother.” In either case, although deep silence was central to each experience, the sense and possibilities instituted by and through it were not and could not be present to consciousness—fully graspable and articulable. As the grasping consciousness strives to make sense of the events by heeding them directly, the movement of precession reworks the events and their sense. In this sense, deep silence

resists the operations of free subjectivity because the temporal dynamic it institutes endlessly displaces it as an origin that can be known in advance. Rather, the instituting of new possibilities was experienced as the presence of an absence, as the deeply silent eventuation of being or being manifesting itself in its elusiveness, just out of reach.

In this sense, albeit virtual and immemorial, i.e., not graspable by present consciousness, the possibility of deep silence continues to exert influence upon the present. In fact, suggesting that possibility is, to play on Merleau-Ponty's formulation of the "impossible past," an im-possibility because it is not, never was, and never will be present to consciousness, does not mean that possibility lacks existence, nor that it is locked away, a closed set of possibilities, sealed off without recourse and uninfluential to the actually present.³⁸ The possibility of deep silence is an im-possibility only so long as one is forced to choose between the untenable position of possibilism and actualism. As a "pregnancy of possibles" the possibility of deep silence is rather continuously reinscribed by the retrograde movement of precession and exscribing or calling forth present and future sense. In this sense, deep silence accounts for being's fecundity (i.e., for ontological growth), for the creativity and, possibly, healing invoked by Anzaldúa's deployment of Coyolxauhqui.

These remarks about the logic regulating the interplay of temporal traces position us well to return to Alloa's challenge, and make explicit how deep silence brings about the actualization of a future and the virtualization of the past/possibility without this process being causally organized. The precession of deep silence appeals to a non-linear, non-deterministic temporal movement that resignifies the origin such that it continuously comes into existence along with the present as past/virtual. This means that the past does

not determine the future nor “becom[es] a task to be fulfilled, already established ahead of time” (Alloa 2014, 155). That is, deep silence’s regulatory dynamic, i.e., its normativity, is not a causal principle or blueprint of the future, but a “call to follow” (IP 77), an invitation or register that gets constantly reworked along with its actualization and that becomes visible through praxis, traceable through the concrete eventuating of phenomena. Recall my observation, in section II, that Nature as a grounding or regulatory dynamic is an “incarnate,” “living plan” that norms the visible “not [from] outside its manifest realizations,” but from within (VI 139, 178). As we have seen, the tick’s encroachment upon its milieu is an intertwining that affects the tick’s *and* the milieu’s development: each ingresses onto the other, tracing or suggesting the call-and-response between the “yet-to-be-tick” and the “yet-to-be-milieu” that inaugurates the materialization of each. But by casting Nature as a “*living plan*,” Merleau-Ponty is also stressing that this transspatial element does not, in advance, specify the development of tick and milieu; the developmental norm is not determined in advance. To use Alloa’s expression, the developmental norm of deep silence is non-deterministic, it actualizes sense and being “without its actualization becoming a task to be fulfilled, already established ahead of time” (2014, 155). Rather, the tick-milieu encroachment affects the “plan” itself, which, in this sense, is an ever-renewing “*living plan*” that, by virtue of its renewals, remains latent, in filigree. Put differently, Merleau-Ponty reminds that deep silence is sensuous yet not fully determinate, a latency forged from and manifest within concrete dynamics that spread across beings. (As we have seen, as being actualizes, new possibilities are retroactively inscribed in being). Thus conceived, deep silence is a pregnancy of possible, i.e., an incarnate process of self-differentiation traceable in and

through the visible (but always already concealed or hidden in and through that same visibility) whereby its phenomenization entails the continual renewal of being and the sense of the sensible. Concretely, as life goes by (and this dynamic becomes more pronounced through *arrebatos*, i.e., events that bring about a rupture or suspension of the familiar like in grief, loss, or trauma), new possibilities or dimensions of sense by which the present and the future may acquire novel signification and direction are retroactively inscribed within novel possibilities. In this sense, Merleau-Ponty invites us to think of deep silence as a pregnancy of possible that institutes new fields of sense and visibility that have not yet been voiced, as when a poet comes up with something new to say.³⁹

These remarks bring attention to the deep silence that is “present” in being, a dimension through which life comes “to hold new possibilities, inscribing different virtual planes and dimensions of sense” (Al-Saji 2012a, 4) through which we come to make sense of the world anew. In fact, being’s internal growth makes it structurally incomplete, which is to say that being’s incompleteness or opacity, but also its fecundity, is kept instituted through precession, deep silence’s retrograde inscription of possibility. In this sense, deep silence accounts for both the resistance of the sensible (being remains opaque to the operation of free subjectivity is that it continuously comes to hold new possibilities), and also for the fecundity of being. That is, the past—but also being—is never a closed-off sum, a fullness of positivity, sealed and relegated to itself, i.e., to the past. The new dimensions of sense and being that are opened up by deep silence are not already contained within it as the possible of actualism. Rather, being remains open and incomplete, unforeseeable and unpredictable, in sum, deeply silent. Its possibilities are inscribed within it through its processes of eventuating.⁴⁰

In this sense, precession makes visible the processes whereby being as becoming is inherently opaque or deeply silent. In fact, becoming is processes of continual retroactive reinscription and ontological transmutation, a reciprocal hollowing out that opens new dimensions of being and sense. Adriana, Paloma, or Idalí, for instance, are at once forgotten and remembered. Re-membering them required forgetting the meanings with which their mothers were familiar, including that of a life with their daughters. Yet, Adriana, Paloma, and Idalí also lived on, through traces, in the reprisals of the mothers' new life endeavors, including the pink crosses. In this seemingly paradoxical sense, Adriana, Paloma, and Idalí are remembered as absent, through experiences (evocative) of their loss, through deep silences. Notably, the senses of the daughters' disappearing and life in the presence of their haunting absence acquired new meaning, meanings that emerged as always already past, through the "showing of remoteness itself," which is to say, through deep silences that "grasps us, the beholders of the text, and usurps our power to grasp or appropriate it" (Kaushik 2011, 25), giving time to futures to follow.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the modality of temporal being to which deep silence alerts us. I suggested that, "at the juncture of Being and nothingness" (N 102), deep silence is at once there and not-there, operating according to onto-temporal dynamics of what Merleau-Ponty calls *precession*. This movement of mutual anticipation not only accounts for the ontologically internal affecting of the temporal traces, but also for the fecundity of deep silence, which both co-exists with and pre-exists by making possible the present of consciousness and signification. This is to say that the generativity of deep silence is tied to a fundamental diachrony, a time before time, that institutes the

unpredictability, hesitancy, and openness of being and sense. The central insight advanced in this chapter, then, is that it is precisely the elusive character of deep silence as an origin or condition of possibility that accounts for being's fecundity. In fact, at its very core, being is deeply silent, a hollow that ensures the non-coincidence of being, the eventuation of being in concealment, which includes also a conceptless communion with being. As we are learning to see (to hear? to feel?) this new modality of existence is the being of deep silence, which is elusive and presences through traces and haunting.

Importantly, deep silence makes explicit that being eventuates at a distance, in concealment, and that this opacity is essential for being to becoming; it is what makes possible, with time, the eventuation of new futures, new sense, and new being. If deep silence exists in a different modality of existence whereby its concealing is the mode of disclosure of being it, how self and the eventuation of new sense, how is the beholder of the text and the phenomenological inquirer to listen for silences, to heed to and make room for the reverberations of deep silence—i.e., for the receptivity of new meanings and the inscribing/exscribing of ontological possibilities? It is to this question that I turn in the next and last chapter.

NOTES

¹ Think of Merleau-Ponty's invocations such as the "tacit cogito" in the *Phenomenology* (PhP 424), the "tacit language" of perception in *Nature*, and the opening remarks in the *Visible and the Invisible*, in which Merleau-Ponty tells the readers that the task of philosophy is to draw "the things themselves [...] from the depths of their silence" into expression, to "plunge into the world [...] [to] make it say, finally, what in its silence it means to say" (4, 39). These remarks suggest that, for Merleau-Ponty, the world, things, and nature, in sum, the sensible, have a sense that, albeit silent or latent, is irreducible to anthropomorphic projections, and that the task of philosophy is to express this silent or

latent sense in such a way that the world “speaks” for itself. As the ample literature on the paradox of expression indicates, these two considerations are intimately linked: they yield the seemingly paradoxical task of expressing a latent sense of the sensible that eludes conceptual transparency or positivity (VI 214). That is, the recognition that there is a sense of the sensible (first consideration) calls for expressive modes that are suited to “giving voice” to phenomena that make sense silently—modes that do not model sense on our conceptual posits (second consideration). These considerations are taken up in the following chapters. *A propos* the kind of philosophical language better suited to express the silent world, Merleau-Ponty remarks the following: “. . . the words most charged with philosophy are not necessarily those that contain what they say, but rather those that most energetically open upon being, because they more closely convey the life of the whole and make our habitual evidences vibrate until they disjoin. Hence it is a question whether philosophy as the reconquest of brute or wild being can be accomplished by the resources of the eloquent language, or whether it would not be necessary for philosophy to use language in a way that takes from it its power of immediate or direct signification in order to equal it with what it wishes all the same to say (VI 102–3).

² Keep in mind, however, that saying that Nature is *silent* is not an indication that Nature is non-sensical or inexpressive. For Merleau-Ponty, Nature signifies latently and inchoately; it unravels into a non-linguistic and non-positive order of significations, which will be the subject of chapter IV.

³ The relationship between nature and language is far from straightforward or uncomplicated. The question of how to get to or think nature (or the in-itself) is one that has persisted throughout the history of Western philosophy, from Plato to Descartes, Kant, Shelling, and Husserl. As Sean Williams explains, Merleau-Ponty’s insight lies in the recognition that neither a transcendental reduction nor the natural attitude gets to nature *per se*. The former, as observed in this chapter, is bound to remain incomplete; the eidos of phenomena cannot be abstracted or purified from the sensible insofar as the process of inquiry is of the same phenomena it seeks to grasp. The natural attitude, however, does not get at phenomena either insofar as thinking through the sensible requires *logos*. Grappling with this realization, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the Nature that the philosopher thinks through is not Nature in-itself, but a nature always already intertwined with language. We find confirmation of these insights in a working note from the *Visible and the Invisible* dated 1959. There, Merleau-Ponty reflects upon the chiasm between language and silence, acknowledging that the cogito of the *Wesen* (Descartes’s cogito) and the tacit cogito (of the *Phenomenology*) share a fundamental naïveté: while the transcendental reduction is structurally incomplete and opaque in that it presupposes the natural attitude, language envelops the tacit cogito and the description of the alleged silence of the psychological coincidence. “Taking possession of the world of silence, such as the description of the human body effects it, is no longer this world of silence, it is the world articulated, elevated to the *Wesen*, spoken—the description of the perceptual *logos* is a usage of *logos proforikos*” (VI 179). Importantly, however, the linguistic articulation of the tacit cogito does not sanction the end of the inquiry, but, rather, invites a return to silence.

⁴ *The Structure of Behavior*, for instance, opens with the following remarks: “Our goal is to understand the relations between consciousness and nature: organic, psychological or even social. By nature we understand here a multiplicity of events external to each other and bound together by relations of causality” (SB 3). For a discussion of the transition from *Structure* to *Phenomenology*, see David Morris’s *Merleau-Ponty’s Developmental Ontology* (2018). Moved to articulate being from “the midst of itself,” in the *Phenomenology*, Merleau-Ponty thinks *from* the body, a point of departure that is irreducible to transcendental consciousness and natural causality and that allows him precisely to think the insertion of consciousness into Nature. Yet, while the *Phenomenology*’s attention to the lived body—the corporeal being of perception—challenges what Renaud Barbaras calls transcendental anthropomorphism, i.e., conceiving of the human being as a transcendental consciousness that constitutes the world as its object and meaning as ideation, it nevertheless results in ontological anthropomorphism in that it tends to take the human body as measure of all things, as “provid[ing] the meaning of being of any being” (2002, 19). As Hamrick and van der Veken observe, although the relation between body and nature is no longer one of causation or constitution, in the *Phenomenology*, nature figures more as a “context for phenomenology of embodied existence than as a topic of interest in its own right” (2011, 11). It is the human body that occupies center stage, being conceived as “in the world just as the heart is in the organism: it continuously breathes life into the visible spectacle, animates it and nourishes it from within” (PhP 209). Upholding the primacy of the body entails that the nature of the *Phenomenology* remains dependent upon the human perceiver, which means that, as scholars pointed out, its meaning is a sense only in relation to a human perceiver (Barbaras 2001; Toadvine 2009b; Bannon 2011). As Toadvine observes, for instance, positing the body as a “primary methodological point of access” leads Merleau-Ponty, at the end of the chapter on temporality, to equate nature with “that which perception presents to me” (2009b, 214). This problem is compounded by the fact that Merleau-Ponty’s treatment of “natural space” in the “Space” chapter of the *Phenomenology* seems to reduce nature to an objective background against which the perceived world emerges (PhP 307), thus vacating it of its own (latent) sense (Barbaras 2001, 23). A conception of Nature grounded on the anonymous body has fundamental implications for the development of a non-anthropomorphic onto-logy of Nature, i.e., for investigations into the being and meaning of Nature, which are more than “the correlative of my vision” (VI 131). In “Merleau-Ponty and Nature,” for instance, Barbaras argues that, by clothing consciousness in a carnal disguise, Merleau-Ponty displaces the mind and body dualism to a dualism of humanity and nature whereby nature is either reduced to an objective background against which the perceived world emerges, or is presented as inaccessible, covered over by human projections. The outcome is that questions, such as “does the specificity of perceptive life have a transcendental meaning or merely a psychological one? Does the perceived world define nature or is it inscribed in a nature in itself accessible to understanding?” (Barbaras 2001, 25), remain not only unanswered, but foreclosed by the theoretical apparatus deployed by the philosopher in his earlier writings.

⁵ It should be noted that scholars disagree about the extent to which there is a break in Merleau-Ponty's thought. Scholars like Barbaras have argued that the categories deployed in *Phenomenology* pose a conceptual limit to his project: albeit the gap between fact and meaning is reduced, the unity still remained "a unity *of fact and of meaning*," thus undermining the attempt to think through the unity beyond dualisms (2001, 27). See also Hamrick and Van der Veken (2011), p 16. In spite of Merleau-Ponty's own criticism that his earlier work remained bound by a phenomenology of the subject, scholars bring attention to ways in which Merleau-Ponty's early work prefigures his later ontology. To name a few notable examples: In *Paradoxes of Expression* (2013), Don Landes traces the continuity within Merleau-Ponty's thought via the concept of expression. In "Time-Things and the Ontology of the World," Morris finds points of continuity in Merleau-Ponty's description of color perception in the *Phenomenology* and his later ontology developed in the *Visible and the Invisible* and "Eye and Mind." Morris argues the *Phenomenology*'s three parts should not be read as layers founded upon the first section in which the body is a relatively "closed 'body-subject'" (2016, 2). Rather, the later sections rework the relation between body and world as "chiasmatically crossing into one another, thereby effecting a radical return to the phenomenal field" (3) and casting the body as radically open to the transcendental field. In "Affect Orientation, Difference, and 'Overwhelming Proximity' in Merleau-Ponty's Account of Pure Depth" (2012), Shiloh Whitney challenges this view, providing a reading of "pure depth" as developed by Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology* in terms of affectivity, and arguing that, thus conceived, depth is a point of continuum with Merleau-Ponty's later thought. Lastly, in *Nature and Logos* (2011), Hamrick and Van der Veker suggest that, although the *Phenomenology* does not take up nature as a topic of inquiry on its own right (the philosopher becomes interested in nature on its own right from 1955 or 1956 on), Merleau-Ponty's early work sets the stage for the new ontology that he develops in his final years by beginning the work of re-thinking "phenomenality in order to better inhabit" (Janicaud 1991, 15, cited by Hamrick and Van der Veker 2011, 11), as well as providing concrete details to better think the later concepts (12).

⁶ Take, for instance, the outline of the *Visible and the Invisible* dated late 1960 wherein the study of what Merleau-Ponty calls "vertical" or "brute" being is referred to reflections on Nature: "Nature," he observes in one of the notes for the course, "as thin sheet or layer of total Being—the ontology of nature as way toward ontology, way that we prefer here because the evolution of the concept of nature is a more convincing propaedeutic, revealing more clearly the necessity of ontological maturation" (VI 265).

⁷ On Merleau-Ponty's view, "we must dig beneath the sedimentation of meaning that limits us to thinking in terms of the in-itself and for-itself, 'natural being' in opposition o 'psychic being' (IP 164, italics removed)" (Hamrick and Van der Veken 2011, 57). Deep silence, as I showed in the preceding chapter, effects this epistemological suspension, bringing about a conceptless opening onto wild being.

⁸ In *Voice and Phenomenon* (2010), Derrida suggests that the auto-affectation entailed in the touching/touched model—a model that is first articulated by Husserl, and then taken

up by Merleau-Ponty, and that is the primal scene of phenomenology—is the foundation of a metaphysics of presence. Such a model is operative in speech *par excellence*. Emmanuel Alloa criticizes Derrida for overlooking the fact that this auto-affection is also the “inception of a philosophy of nonpresence and nontransparency” (2017, 69). The non-coincidence of touching and touched calls for ever renewing epistemic inquiries and a reflection that is never in possession of itself. In this spirit, Leonard Lawlor and Alloa trace the affinity between the early writings of Derrida and the later writings of Merleau-Ponty, thus unsettling the often-invoked divergence between phenomenology and post-structuralism. More precisely, both thinkers focus on Merleau-Ponty’s and Derrida’s reflections on Husserl’s *The Origin of Geometry in Husserl at the Limits of Phenomenology* and *Voice and Phenomenon*, respectively. Lawrence Hass also rejects Derrida’s totalizing criticism of phenomenology by observing that, given the fundamental difference between Husserl’s and Merleau-Ponty’s theories of expression (the major difference is the transcendental regression operative in Husserl’s work), Derrida’s criticism of Husserl in *Voice and Phenomenon* does not apply to Merleau-Ponty, as it is too often mistakenly assumed (2010, 167).

⁹ This means at least two things. First, as Morris explains, “by virtue of being a being who can touch something I am inherently also a being who can be touched. Being touched is thus an inherent reverse or flip side of touching, it is its lining (‘*doublure*’)” (2011, 165). That is, the reversibility of flesh is precisely that through which being discloses itself; it is “the sole means I have to go unto the heart of the things” and reach the things themselves “according to their being which is indeed more than their being perceived” (VI 135). In fact, the visible appears as such because the perceiver’s gaze envelops it. Second, this wrapping is made possible because the touching and the touched are made of the same stuff (the same flesh, to be precise); they belong to this “interiorly worked-over mass” (VI 147)—that “element” of ‘my’ body (and of the world) that, in its anonymity and generality, sides with the world (and with ‘my’ body) (VI 136). Recall Merleau-Ponty’s vivid descriptions of color perception from the *Phenomenology* and the *Visible and the Invisible*: the visible red or blue appear as such because they invite and orient the perceiving body, preparing the gaze to anticipate and take in the perceptual color. “The sensible gives back to me what I had lent to it, but I received it from the sensible in the first place” (PhP 222). Without this structural complicity—this shared flesh—perception (including the “perceiver” and the “perceived”) would not be possible. “I must find the attitude that *will* provide it with the means to become determinate and to become blue; I must find the response to a poorly formulated question. And yet, I only do this in response to its solicitation” (PhP 222). Notably, at this stage, there is no “perceiver” or “blue,” but only a reciprocal solicitation of what will become perceiver and color blue, a spell or enchantment that remains opaque or latent and inaugurates the two (PhP 220–22). This communion of perceiving body and the milieu’s manner of vibrating, Merleau-Ponty tells us, is necessary for the fixing or emergence of the perception of the color blue (and thus also of the perceiver) and the color blue. Only then, when the perceiver’s body has organized itself according to the murmurs of her surrounding, does “the sensible [catch] my ear or my gaze” (PhP 219). Echoing the description of the color blue, but with an emphasis on the being of the relation, the seer

and the red of the *Visible and the Invisible* are inaugurated in the element of generality that is *prior* to the color red and the seer, in this “less precise, more general redness, in which my gaze was caught, into which it sank, before [...] *fixing* it” (VI 131). In the *VI*, this “question and response” (VI 131 fn. 1) is thought from the *in-between*, from this tissue or lining “between the alleged colors and visibles [...] that sustains them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency” (VI 132–3).

¹⁰ Note the resonance between this expression which Merleau-Ponty invokes to designate natural phenomena and the one that he used in the *Child Psychology and Pedagogy Lectures* to talk about linguistic meaning, where he observes that, “considered moment to moment, the linguistic phenomenon is never anything but negative, diacritic” (CP 64). This remark brings attention to Merleau-Ponty’s reliance on Saussurian diacritics to conceive of his ontology of the flesh wherein flesh is an incarnate diacritic (Alloa 2009; 2013; 2017; Stawarska 2009b; 2013).

¹¹ Following the work of Simon Don, it is possible to think of the tick and the milieu, but also of the notes of a melody, as meta-stable equilibria. That is, the internally differential processes through which tick and milieu emerge as discrete entities do not come to an end. The appearance of the tick as solid or “hard in itself that resides in a unique place and moment” (VI 147) is possible only through a localized analysis that abstracts from the general movement of being to fix moments in time. In process, the tick and the milieu remain internally and open onto one another, continuously affecting each other’s development.

¹² There is a circularity between tick and milieu whereby alteration in the tick—which always already occurs in response to the soliciting of the other—inaugurates a reprisal in the milieu—which, in turn, calls forth yet another reorientation of the one—and so the mutual anticipation of precession continues. Note how language here poses a challenge to accurately account for this intertwining: the calling forth of the milieu is not external to the tick, but takes place from within it as the traces of the milieu are always already internally inaugurating reprisals in the tick. In fact, the tick ought to be receptive or open to the milieu in order to be sensitive to its modulations. In this sense, this is more accurate to say that the *sens* is neither inside nor outside tick and milieu, but *in-between* their silent encroaching. It is by locating his interrogation in this *in-between* that allows Merleau-Ponty to state that “there is neither me nor the other as positive, positive subjectivities. There are two caverns, two openesses, two stages where something will take place—and which both belong to the same world, to the stage of Being” (VI 263). Véronique Fóti’s nicely captures this insight when she affirms that, “with ‘life,’ there opens up a ‘field of action’ with its specific temporality and spatiality, and with leeway for a diversity of relationship” that is “not intelligible in terms of a straightforward causal sequence [...] [or] as an essence outside of its particular expressive realizations, nor yet as a guiding telos, but is rather a quasi-oneiric pole, or a theme that haunts the animal’s entire being without ever being confronted as such” (2013, 76/77).

¹³ In *Poietic Transspatiality*, I argue that Merleau-Ponty’s conceptualization of nature as

processes of phenomenization regulated by this silent *logos* effectively addresses the nature/culture dualism, which continues to plague, for instance, Judith Butler's theory of the materiality of the body (1997). Butler's theory of materialization, I claim, deploys a limited notion of normativity, reducing the regulatory norms that govern the matter of bodies to cultural or linguistic, in sum, discursive norms.

¹⁴ At this juncture, it is important to note that, in his later writings, Merleau-Ponty moves beyond phenomenology proper. As Emmanuel Alloa (2009; 2013; 2017) and Beata Stawarska (2013) have argued, Merleau-Ponty's engagement with structural linguistics, especially the work on diacritics by Ferdinand de Saussure, confronted him with the necessity of leaving behind the tacit cogito. That is, Merleau-Ponty's ontological turn attests to his realization that "thinking in-between" requires moving beyond phenomenology, dispossessing or opening oneself to the movement of being. Casting ontology as diacritical fundamentally challenges any localizable or substance ontology, calling, as anticipated, for the development of a non-Parmenidean ontology that displaces the agential/logical place of the metaphysical subject (conceived as either a constituting consciousness or social discourse). Once the body is thematized through flesh as an exemplar of flesh and not the model, the body appears as a diacritical mark, not the locus of apodicticity. Furthermore, as incarnate diacritics, this ontological structure entails a fundamental impropriety, a fundamental poiesis of sense and sensible that precludes making claims about this sense and this sensible in advance. This fundamental impropriety or poiesis accounts for the *silence* of being—being's continuous self-differentiation entails being's perpetual concealment, the impossibility of fully articulating or grasping, through an objectification, its structure (conditions of possibility) and movement.

¹⁵ In other words, this requires moving beyond ontological localism, and—as Merleau-Ponty suggests—conceptualize Nature as an "envelope-phenomenon" that is "between the elements" (N 213). As Merleau-Ponty observes, "[w]e must admit in the very fabric of physical elements a transtemporal and transspatial element" (N 176). Transtemporality and transspatiality are clear precursors to the spatializing and temporalizing pulp invoked in the *Visible and the Invisible*.

¹⁶ The imminent reversibility of flesh highlights the "constitutive paradox" of being, its concealment-unconcealment (VI 136); that is, the ambiguous double nature of the touching-touched hand accounts not only for the disclosure of being (accomplished via mutual inherence), but also for being's latency, for its haunting presence. In fact, the *écart* at the heart of being institutes a distance or thickness that effectively *conceals* being in visibility.

¹⁷ In *Nature*, Merleau-Ponty deploys the language of "oneiric intentionality" to qualify this indeterminacy, explaining that the milieu is not external to the tick like an idea or a goal, but haunts it. For a discussion of "oneiric intentionality, see Mazis, "Merleau-Ponty's Concept of Nature" (2000).

¹⁸ In a working note dated May 1960, Merleau-Ponty sums up this insight by stating that “to touch *oneself*, to see *oneself*, accordingly, is not to apprehend oneself as an object, it is to be open to oneself, destined to oneself (narcissism)—Nor, therefore, is to reach *oneself*, it is on the contrary to escape *oneself*, to be ignorant of *oneself*, the self in question is by divergence (d’ècart), is *Unverborgenheit of the Verborgenen* as such, which consequently does not cease to be hidden or latent——” (VI 249).

¹⁹ For a discussion of the notion of the negative in Merleau-Ponty’s later ontology, see David Morris’s *Merleau-Ponty’s Developmental Ontology* (2018a).

²⁰ Note how Merleau-Ponty’s conception of Nature resonates with Heidegger’s notion of *physis* (2014, 14).

²¹ Identifying deep silence as the condition of possibility of being positions the inquirer to makes sense of how contingent historical structures condition experience; it makes possible, when heeded to, to “pull up traces of history that is not quite or no longer there—that has been consigned to invisibility—but still shapes the emergence of meaning” (Guenther 2020, 15). In this sense, deep silence is both a promise and a challenge: A challenge insofar as it points to the resistance or opacity of ways in which historical structures make the experience of the world possible and meaningful. (No direct account of these structures can shed full visibility onto them as they are situated, intersubjective through and through, i.e., there are no purely transcendental, invariable structures to be grasped). It is a promise because it is by virtue of this deep silence that change happens.

²² Deep silence is neither a lack, a nothingness, nor something external to the essence of being, but, rather, institutive of it. Deep silence figures as the means of disclosure of being, i.e., its phenomenalization, and its concealment, i.e., its opacity or resistance: As we have seen, deep silence is the experience through which communion with being takes place through, e.g., conceptless openings, while also keeping being concealed in that such experiences of communion dispossess free subjectivity, revealing that what there is to be grasped, to paraphrase Merleau-Ponty, is a dispossession.

²³ In other words, time or, specifically, deep silence’s peculiar diachrony, seems to play a role in deep silence’s virtual existence and fecundity. Note that this expression that should call to mind the phrase, common to 20th century French thought, especially that of Merleau-Ponty, Derrida, Deleuze, and Levinas, of a “past that has never been present.” For a discussion of memory as a “time which has never been present” in relation to Merleau-Ponty’s thought, see Alia Al-Saji’s “A Past Which Has Never Been Present” (2008) and “The Temporality of Life” (2007).

²⁴ These last remarks bring attention to the fact that the possible exists in a different temporal modality than that of the present. In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson accounts for this other temporal modality vis-à-vis the difference between the actual and the virtual. While the temporal domain of the actual is that of the present (2010, 77), the virtual

belongs to the past or, to evoke Deleuze, the ontological past. That is, the difference between actual and virtual, present and past, is not of degree, but of *kind*. As Bergson indicates by thinking through pure memory (which, on his account, is the past and exists in the temporal mode of the virtual) pure memory is never present to consciousness, coming into existence as always already past.

²⁵ The notion of precession appears in Merleau-Ponty's published writing only once, in "Eye and Mind." Reflecting on the "immemorial depth of the visible" that is manifest, in its absence, in paintings, Merleau-Ponty says that "this precession of what is upon what one sees and makes seen, of what one sees and makes seen upon what is—that is vision itself" (EM 187–88).

²⁶ Quoted in Mauro Carbone, *The Flesh of Images* (2015), 59.

²⁷ As Carbone observes, however, *precession* appears several times in Merleau-Ponty's unpublished notes (2015, 58).

²⁸ This strange co-existence should call to mind Merleau-Ponty's remarks about "difference without contradiction" whereby being is present or visible in its absence or invisibility, a unity of impossibles such as the sensing hand's simultaneous proximity *and* distance from the sensible, communion *and* non-coincidence, visibility *and* invisibility, sameness *and* difference (VI 135). At once, the touching and the touched are *of* the same flesh, while also maintaining their irreducible difference or divergence from one another. This ontological co-existence of impossible invites rethinking concepts like "sameness" and "difference."²⁸ As Merleau-Ponty remarks in a working of November 1960, the seer and the visible—but we could say, the possible and the actual—are "the same not in the sense of ideality nor of real identity. The same in the structural sense: same inner framework, same *Gestalthälfte*, the same in the sense of openness of another dimension of the 'same' being," in the sense of "*non-difference*" (VI 260). This is to say that possible and actual are the "same" in that they share the same structural imminent reversibility; they are the other's lining or *doublure*. Thus conceived, "sameness" refers to the same "inherence to the Whole," the same openness to one another, the same processes of differentiation whereby *each makes sense* as "the possible of the other" (VI 228).

²⁹ Circularity should not be conceived as a mere repetition, as an empty return *of* the same. The structure of precession is such that circularity should be understood temporally as a "repetition, not of the same but in the form of a continuous displacement"—as a movement of revolt through which renewal and creation becomes possible. For a discussion of revolutionary time in Julia Kristeva's work, see Sjöholm's "The Temporality of Intimacy" (2004, 90).

³⁰ In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty famously observes that "there is no longer identity between the lived experience and the principle of non-contradiction" (VI 87). These remarks point to the fact that, on Merleau-Ponty's account, there is "a certain

latent content” lining what the philosopher speaks of, which is to say that “there is a divergence between the essences he fixes and the lived experience to which they are applied, between the operation of living the world and the entities and negentities in which he expresses it” (VI 87). Also recall Merleau-Ponty’s language of fecund negativity to qualify the possible or, as he puts it in reference to the fold, this “‘central’ nothingness is like the point of the stroboscopic spiral, which is *who knows where*, which is ‘nobody’” (VI 264).

³¹ Although it is accurate to say that the actual was possible prior to its actualization in the sense that there were no logical impossibilities or contradictions impeding such event, this way of thinking hypostatizes logical possibility. That is, whereas the kind of possibility entailed in the assertion that the possible preexists the real is a mere logical possibility, i.e., it indexes the *absence* of logical barriers, the misconception lies in ascribing an ontologically richer sense to this “possible.” We erroneously take the statement “the real was possible prior to its actualization” to mean that what occurred, the actual, *could have been* predicted or foreseen by a sufficiently informed knower, that, “in the form of an idea, [the possible] was thus pre-existent to its realization” (Bergson 2007, 10). For a discussion of how this temporal model shared by Bergson and Merleau-Ponty can secure the openness and hesitancy necessary for philosophy to continue to think, see Al-Saji, “When Thinking Hesitates” (2012). For a discussion of how this temporal model can offer resources to think through political transformation, see Al-Saji, “Creating Possibility” (2012a).

³² It should also be noted that the retrograde movement of the true accounts for the error, brought about by the intellect’s objectification of the temporal movement, of positing the existence of the possible prior to its realization; it creates the illusion that the possible preexisted the actual. As Bergson explains, from the retrograde inscription of possibility “results an error which vitiates our conception of the past; from this arises our claim to anticipate the future on every occasion” (2007, 11). Indeed, it is only once the real has actualized that it does become possible to turn backwards toward the nebulous past and lift out the aspects that (come to) seem obvious antecedents to the given event, thus creating the illusion that the event had always been possible. Echoing Nietzsche’s remarks about cause and effect (2001, §112), Bergson points out that the retrograde movement is a remodeling carried out by the “effect” upon the “cause” (2007, 85); from the vantage point of reality having taken place, we look back and link together past events, ascribing them meaning and organizing them in what seems to be a causally-binding narrative that preceded the moment we seek to justify (1998, 47). I take Bergson to be suggesting that metaphysical or spatial thinking is fundamentally indebted to this generative flux; the error of metaphysical thinking (thinking that the possible pre-exists the real and, thus, that the future can be predicted) is enabled by the onto-temporal movement of becoming. Subsequently, metaphysical thinking, by abstracting from the movement of becoming, covers over the dynamicity of time, giving us access only to the superficial and desiccated moments of this process.

³³ As we will see in the following chapter, Jacques Derrida points out that, although the deconstructing of the Now B into the retention of Now A and the protention of Now C points to the mediated structure of the present, it does not destabilize the successivity of time; “this model of successivity would prohibit the *Now X* from taking the place of Now A” (2016, 72). That is to say that this model still posits the present as primary; it conceives of the past as present- or immediate-past and the future as present- or immediate-future. This conception of time forecloses the possibility of the existence of another kind of past that is “anterior” to the present- or immediate-past, an “absolute past.” As I argue in “*An-Archic Past*” (Ferrari 2017), the Bergson of *Time and Free Will* is guilty of performing this naïve deconstruction. Yet, given Bergson’s positing of a past that comes into being as already past, it seems to me that Heidegger’s claim that Bergson merely reverses Aristotle as well as Derrida’s criticism of Husserlian phenomenology does not apply to the Bergson of *Matter and Memory*, but, on the contrary, echoes the concerns that guide Bergson’s work.

³⁴ It is not temporally prior in that, as we have just observed, the possible comes into existence along with and through actualization. It is not structurally prior because this possible is not a Kantian *a priori* or a blueprint of sorts delineating the actualization of being in advance.

³⁵ Keep in mind that “originary” should not suggest a Kantian *a priori* that grounds the inquiry or an original signified to which the inquiry can return.

³⁶ Merleau-Ponty first introduces the notion of “a past that has never been present” in the conclusion of the “*Le Sentir*” chapter in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, 252. This notion, however, becomes central in his later writings, especially in the *Visible and the Invisible*. There, Merleau-Ponty argues that the immemorial is a past that is irreducible to the present. In fact, this past maintains its opacity; it is a past “such as it was one day plus an inexplicable alteration, a strange distance.” Merleau-Ponty’s reference to this “strange distance” suggests that the immemorial is an originary past, a past that comes into being *as* past. In turn, this qualification suggests that the immemorial is not a positivity, a thing, or an idea, but also “not a *void*” or negation of being either. Rather, the immemorial is a hollow, a fecund negative such that “there is neither me nor the other as positive, positive subjectivities. There are two caverns, two openness, two stages where something will take place.” Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and the Invisible*, 124, 272, 263. Significantly, the immemorial exists in a *chiasm* with the present, manifesting itself via traces in the present, by instituting new fields of meaning within which new, present expressions acquire their signification while, in turn, signifying the instituted field anew. In sum, then, “the immemorial secures both the non-coincidence of past and present, while also allowing for the encroachment of the two” (Ferrari 2016, 282).

³⁷ Put differently, this movement of precession of deep silence witnesses the partial forgetting of familiar sense and being, a distance that makes possible the instituting of new sense, the retroactive signification of events that are thus partially conserved through traces in new fields of signification. We also begin to see that for deep silence to institute

new fields it needs to “both forget[...] and conserve[...]” (IP 187): Deep silence forgets the familiarity of the event while conserving its traces in the new meta-stable equilibrium of sense and being it calls forth. In other words, the mutual affection carried out via this eternal movement of reciprocal anticipation of the terms involved in the reversibility of flesh hollows out a (past) dimension of being that was never present. The instituted past ought to be and is forgotten through precession. Yet, these processes of reprisal of the past do not annihilate it, but, rather, conserve its traces insofar as they spring forth from the reworked past itself. In this sense, this co-existence of impossible, of forgetting and conserving, makes new sense and being possible. Significantly, deep silence is the hinge of the reprisal, of the reconversion.

³⁸ This would be the necessary conclusion if Merleau-Ponty had not moved beyond a dualistic philosophy of consciousness or a conception of time as linear. In fact, such a claim relies on two assumptions: First, it espouses a linear conception of time whereby the temporal units are juxtaposed, indifferent, and mutually external to one another. Second, while the “now” of the present is understood as malleable, as undetermined as it takes place, the past is conceived as defined, fixed, or determined (by the present that it once was). As Al-Saji puts it in the context of the impossible past, the “modality of pastness seems to imply not only irreversibility but immutability and completion—a *closed set of possibilities*” (2018, 340). But Merleau-Ponty has moved on, and is now striving to think a mode of temporal existence more akin to the haunting or ingressing of the electron discussed above, one whereby one can be there and not-there, in which possibility—or deep silence—can be at once present *and* absent, or, more accurately, present in its absence.

³⁹ In a working note, reflecting on evolution, Merleau-Ponty states that, “for me it is no longer a question of origins, nor limits, nor of a series of events going to a first cause, but one sole explosion of Being which is forever” (VI 265). Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of nature deploys a normativity more akin to George Canguilhem’s (1991; 1994)—a latent normativity or a normativity in filigree that, in its encompassing of regulatory processes that are irreducible to discursive norms and are “autoproduced” by nature itself, provides resources to think nature as non-substantial processes of phenomenalization. In fact, entailed by Merleau-Ponty’s shift toward a conception of Nature as spatializing and temporalizing is the acknowledgment that the generation of meaning is not effected exclusively by the (human) body (even when it is encroached upon the visible) or cultural-linguistic norms, but takes place in and through the sensible itself, which is to say that the differences autoproduced by the sensible’s self-divergence have a sense that is irreducible to a meaning *for* the embodied subject. Merleau-Ponty gestures toward this insight in a working note dated November 1959, when he says that “this *separation* (écart) which [...] forms meaning [...] is a *natural* negativity, a first institution, always already there” (VI 216).

⁴⁰ Claiming that the movement of precession, the crossing over between, e.g., real and imaginary, is ontologically creative means that the world is not a given and closed totality but an open, inchoate matrix in a constant state of becoming. It also means that deep

silence is not external to the becoming of the world, but constitutionally implicated in it. That is, deep silence is both active and passive, instituted by the world while also actively instituting it, partaking in ontological creation. The relationship between the possible and the actual discussed above can be thought about in terms of this peculiar temporal movement of mutual anticipation, on the one hand, as the precession of the possible with regard to the actual—since the possible, once projected backwards, allows us to construct causally binding chains of events, thus making the actual visible—and, on the other hand, the precession of the actual with regard to the possible—the actual needs first to happen in order for the possible to come into existence and be projected backwards. Accounting for the relationship between the possible and the real in terms of precession, as I do, also suggests that the temporal structure of the *futur antérieur* is that of mutual anticipation, thus bringing to light its ontologically generative movement.

VII. THE (DEEP) SILENCE OF BEARING WITNESS: ON GLORIA ANZALDÚA'S DECOLONIZING AESTHETICS

[K]nowing and doing can be released from a particular kind of thinking, which is necessary for opening up the possibility for a radical departure from a certain kind of World.

—Denise Ferreira Da Silva, “Toward a Black Feminist Poethics”

In Part II, I suggested that an aesthesis of deep silence puts forth sensibilities capable of listening for what otherwise falls through the cracks of a philosophy of reflection; it recovers a fundamental openness to the operations of being, to a “natural *logos*” that “pronounces itself silently in each sensible thing” (VI 207–08). As discussed in chapter 6, the temporal dynamics of this natural *logos* open existence beyond the bounds of presence, revealing deep silence as a “pregnancy of possible” or a “fecund void” effecting ontological growth. In this chapter, I return to one of the guiding questions of this project, investigating *how* to bear witness to the violence waged and those victimized by colonial heteropatriarchy without capitulating to modern/colonial *logos*, a question already broaches in chapter 5. In chapter 5, the investigation focused on the modalities of expression capable of letting silences resonate. We learned that the aesthetics is such an avenue. Here, I spell out how the mobilization of deep silences in phenomenological descriptions is key to bearing witness to colonial experiences of marginalization without the recapitulation of transparency and the linearity of time central to modern/colonial apparatuses. A critical phenomenology of deep silence accomplishes this goal not only by revealing time in its heterogeneity and diachrony, but also by developing sensibilities and carrying out analyses able to “think” beyond the presence of consciousness. This approach matters to those who are not rooted in the present of modern Western consciousness—i.e., those whose experiences critical

phenomenology seeks to bear witness. Hence, the importance, for a decolonizing critical phenomenology to put forth sensibilities—a decolonizing aesthetics or aesthesis of silence—that undoes the totalizing and transparent system of linear temporality.

Attending to Gloria Anzaldúa's iterations of the myth of la Llorona recounted in *Prietita and The Ghost Woman* and "My Black *Angelos*," I show how Anzaldúa bears witness to experiences of conquest, colonial violence, and trauma—to experiences that, often, elude direct representation—by deploying a mythopoetics of deep silence, an instantiation of what I call an aesthesis of deep silence. Thus situated, I suggest that Anzaldúa's mythopoetics and, more precisely, her iterations of the myth of la Llorona are illustrative of how the mobilization of deep silence can be key to a decolonial aesthetics, inaugurating decolonial sensibilities attuned to silences and opacity rather than speech and transparency. In other words, Anzaldúa's "silent" mythopoetics makes visible what cannot be fully heard across cultural differences and logocentric schema while also expressing it in ways that do not reify modern/colonial apparatuses.

As you may recall from chapter 4, Anzaldúa overcomes the tradition of silence in at least two ways, one traceable at the level of her explicit commitments and another operative at the aesthetic/performative level of her style. The first, more conventional way by which Anzaldúa's "wild tongue" breaks the silence is by giving voice to the material and creative experiences of those who had been excluded from representation and the subject position.¹ Rather than doing so via an appeal to the logic of purity central to modern/colonial theories of meaning, Anzaldúa calls it into question; her "tongue of fire" does not conform to modern/colonial expectations, "speaking" instead through code-switching and infused with "passionate rationality" (I 12).² But Anzaldúa

overcomes the tradition of silence in a second manner. Through her style, she “present[s] another way of ordering and composing, another rhetoric” (I 261) or, more precisely, a mythopoetics for which the mobilization of silences is essential. In this sense, Anzaldúa resignifies the phenomenon of silence away from the “silencing” upheld by liberatory and feminist traditions toward a deep silence critical to gaining access to the sensible world and generate new meaning. This move is such that, without falling back onto the impasse in which dualist thinking culminates, when faced with the seemingly paradoxical question, can the subaltern speak?, Anzaldúa “speaks” this otherwise-ineffable in-between—of the mute contact with the world, but also with the other, violence, and trauma—through a mythopoetics of images, myth, and silences, which “provide access to what cannot be said or perceived directly,” as Charles Scott and Nancy Tuana point out (2017, 4).

The aim of this chapter is thus twofold, relevant to both Anzaldúa’s scholarship and critical phenomenology’s methodology. First, I show that an aesthesis of deep silence makes possible bearing witness to colonial violence, trauma, and marginalization without capitulating to *specularization*, or the rendering of experiences of racialized others specular to one’s interpretative paradigms and readily available for dissection and inspection by the white gaze. Crucially, it accomplishes this task through its deployment of silences; through its silences, Anzaldúa’s mythopoetics bears witness to the colonial past in its absencing, through an experience of its loss. Precisely because of its mobilization of deep silence, it bears witness to colonial lineages spectrally, i.e., presenting them as what, although never fully present, continues to haunt the present. To be clear—it is la Llorona’s spectral modality of bearing witness that gives access to

listening to what remains unsaid—to the silences—of cross-cultural encounters. In this sense, Anzaldúa’s mythopoetics makes “visible” colonial *historias* without rendering them transparent and consumable by the colonizer spectator.

Second, myth’s mobilization of deep silences not only eschews specularization; it also creates the opportunity for decolonial reinscriptions. Bearing witness to experiences of colonial trauma and violence in the form of their absencing, I suggest, enables the retrograde inscription of a colonial past and the eventuating of a decolonizing sense that has not yet been voiced.³ Through its reprisal of the past in its opacity—through deep silences—myth holds open a space-time of hesitancy that interrupts the linear time of coloniality and brings about new possibilities of apprehending the past, allowing for the retroactive resignification of the colonial past. In this sense, myth is not a matter of mimetic representation or interpretation of facts, but of being-with; its power of insubordination does not lie in its bearing witness to facts or preserving the past as an eternal, immutable present, but, rather, in its acknowledgment of “the impossibility of any adequate representation” (Acosta López 2014, 81). Concretely, this means that myth exposes not only the limits of cross-cultural communication and of modern/colonial *logos* vis-à-vis bearing witness to phenomena like grief; it also makes explicit how the opacity of mythopoetics, specifically, and of being and sense, more broadly, ought not to be translated but rather harkened to when healing or decolonizing reality. Informed by Anzaldúa’s mythopoetics, I conclude by suggesting that a critical phenomenology of deep silence eventuates modalities of expression that undermine what Alejandro Vallega calls “the coloniality of images” (2014) providing concrete avenues for decolonizing insubordination.

1. *Bearing Witness to Historias through the Myth of la Llorona*

As the name “mythopoetics” suggests, a pivotal dimension of Anzaldúa’s “other rhetoric” is myth.⁴ Throughout her *corpus*, Anzaldúa mobilizes several myths central to Mexican and Aztec mythology like those of Coatlicue, la Llorona, la Chingada, la Virgen de Guadalupe, and Coyolxauhqui. Incorporating myth into her writing serves several purposes. First, it positions Anzaldúa to reach her audience affectively and personally. As she remarks in a 1995 interview with María Henríquez Betancor, myth allows her to remain attuned to historical, political, affective, and ancestral contexts, enabling the author to write “not exclusively about ideas but bring in personal history as well as the history of their community” (I 242). Second, the myths situate both the writer and the reader within concrete lineages of thought and values, imaginary and symbolic landscapes, and halos of signification, thus making visible historical structures such as colonial heteropatriarchy.

Anzaldúa calls this type of writing that intertwines personal and collective histories “autohistoria-teoría,” wherein the “‘auto’ [stands] for self-writing, and historia for history—as in collective, personal, cultural and racial history—as well as for fiction, a story you make up” (I 242).⁵ Akin to what pink crosses accomplish in Juárez, Anzaldúa’s mythopoetics thus become the keeper of the past; it functions as a *testimonio* of sorts, wherein this past is not that of the singular subject but always already an intersubjective, collective, and, remarkedly, colonial past. After all, on her account, “[l]ook[ing] at our history” is the first step toward healing. As she explains in the context of her recuperation of the myth of la Llorona, “[t]here’s a loss—la llorona is weeping and wailing for her lost children and we’re still mourning the loss of our past and before we can come to grips

with the trauma, the *susto*, that we suffer because of all the assaults by all these different colonizers—*los patones* [big-footed ones]—we need to look at our history” (Anzaldúa and Blanco 1991).⁶ But what does it mean to “look at history,” exactly? How is it possible to bear witness to a history of colonization without reproducing harm? What role do myth and mythopoetics play in such an endeavor?

In what follows, I suggest that, on Anzaldúa’s account, “looking at our history” is not a mere re-presentation of facts, but a bearing witness that straddles the line of the real and imaginary, resignifying the colonial imaginary. In her *teoría*, it is often through the deployment of myths that Anzaldúa accomplishes this task. This discussion will position us to see, in section two, that central to a decolonizing methodology and, specifically, Anzaldúa’s iterations of the myth *la Llorona*, is the bearing witness to the past spectrally, i.e., as loss.

Differently from the reclaiming of other mythological figures central to Chicana culture, the recuperation of *la Llorona* has been crucial to Chicana identity insofar as the grief over the lost children that the myth makes visible symbolically bears witness to the concrete losses and dispossessions of a people. After all, “for women the conquest has always been about what happens to their children and about what happens to their bodies because the first thing the conquistadores did was rape the Indian women and create the mestizo race” (I 181). As Anzaldúa explains in an interview with Patti Blanco, *la Llorona*

typifies [her] reflection on the lost land, the lost homeland, because we’re a people that, first of all, had an identity imposed on us by the Spaniards and then later by the Anglos. That took away our personhood, who we really were, a sense of self. Then our land was taken away—and we were very much rooted to the land, our ancestors. Now, as modern-day *mestizas* and *mestizos*, as modern-day Chicanos, our language is not permitted. When I was growing up, we were not allowed to speak Spanish in school. And then in California they passed that English-only law. (1991)⁷

At its most basic level, the myth of la Llorona centers around the grief of a mother who has lost her children and wanders in search of them, weeping. As it turns out, the woman killed her children by drowning them into a stream. Overtaken by grief and despair when she realizes what she has done, she takes her own life. Wandering from stream to stream, la Llorona is doomed to exist as a ghostly figure for eternity, desperately searching for her children's lost souls. It is her cries, her *llantos*—"aiii! Mis hijos! Donde están mis hijos!?"—that give her the name of la Llorona. This is where the variations begin. The myth of la Llorona is transcultural (different versions of the myth can be found in the Mexican, Mayan, Native North-American, and Nigerian traditions, among others), and its iterations vary quite significantly from culture to culture. Both the status of Llorona's relationship with her lover (from spouse to mistress) and how la Llorona loses her children (the children are taken away, lost due to neglect, killed so she can have an easier life, or—as the most common variation has it—murdered in a fit of rage when her lover leaves or betrays her) are also subject to variation.

Traditionally, the myth functions as a patriarchal and colonizing allegory. On one hand, it serves as a cautionary tale for women, instructing them to conform to established social expectations to avoid ending up like la Llorona, i.e., committing what patriarchal culture deems to be the worst deed a mother could perform—prolicide or killing one's children. On the other hand, as Domino Perez argues, the traditional recounting of the myth seeks to "displace the Aztec pantheon and the female deities in [the myth] with male centered Christianity" (2003, 52). The story often ends with a warning to children to behave and to not wander outdoors at night, for they may fall into la Llorona's clutches.

Because of its ambiguity and variations, however, the myth has been reprised and reclaimed through feminist interpretations to become a story of transgression and resistance (Limón 1990; Rebolledo 1995; Candelaria 1997); in her refusal to conform to social expectations norming what counts as a good wife, mother, and woman, la Llorona poses a danger to colonial power, transgressing one of the central values of heteropatriarchal culture, i.e., the nuclear family in which women and children are subordinate to the patriarch, the man (I 191). It is la Llorona's liminality, i.e., her ability to bear witness to both collective loss, pain, and trauma *and* resistance, that makes this particular myth special to Anzaldúa's thinking and her project of reclaiming the past and creating reality. Reminiscent of the cycle of transformation of the warrior mother of Juárez discussed in chapter 5, Anzaldúa observes, "I've recuperated la Llorona to trace how we go from victimhood to active resistance, from the wailing of suffering and grief to the grito of resistance, and onto the grito of celebration and joy" (I 229).⁸

Anzaldúa's remarks should call to mind the practice of "faithful witnessing," which María Lugones describes as witnessing "against the grain of power on the side of resistance" (2003, 7). In *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, Lugones further explains that

[t]o witness faithfully, one must be able to sense resistance, to interpret behavior as resistant even when it is dangerous, when that interpretation places one psychologically against common sense, or when one is moved to act in collision with common sense, with oppression. Faithful witnessing leads one away from a monosensical life...a life in allegiance with oppression. (2003, 7)

Attention to history as faithful witnessing is commonly accepted within feminist, juridical, and, more recently, decolonial debates as a "method of collaborating with those who are silenced" (Figuroa 2015, 642).⁹ As Yomaira Figuroa writes, faithful witnessing offers a lens through which it is possible to recognize the

assertion of humanity and dignity in laments that would otherwise be unseen or ignored [...] It is in the faithful witnessing of the moments of resistance, failures, deceptions, triumphs, violence, love, and small histories that one actively participates in the affirmation of other voices and the substantiation of other truths. Without this kind of recognition, histories are erased, silenced, and ultimately invalidated as human experiences. (2015, 644)

The act of recognition, of attending to experiences that are otherwise rendered invisible is the stepping-stone for resistance and the reinscription of oppressive, monosensical histories circulating within the modern/colonial apparatus. Stressing the importance, to a decolonizing project, of reinscribing oppressive narratives, historian Emma Pérez frames her groundbreaking *The Decolonial Imaginary* as a “political project for reconceptualizing histories” (1999, 4). Inscribing colonial silences into a decolonial imaginary is Pérez’s way of disrupting traditional and linear history, which tends to cover over the “interstitial gaps, the unheard, the unthought, the unspoken ... [that] interrupt the linear model of time [and within which] oppositional, subaltern histories can be found” (1999, 5). In this vein, Anzaldúa’s iterations of the myth of la Llorona bear faithful witness to the colonial past, inscribing a different story than the one commonly appealed to and deployed by heteropatriarchal modern/colonial society.¹⁰ That is, they bear witness to generational trauma and resistance by attending to the invisible or dark side of coloniality, i.e., to colonial “silences,” narrating the *historia* from another perspective, from the in-between, thereby enacting and restoring a decolonizing agency. As Pérez puts it, these colonial “silences, when heard, become the negotiating spaces for the decolonizing subject” (1999, 5). But, again, what does it mean to “hear” the silences, to “look at history”? And what do these negotiating spaces look like?

Anzaldúa’s mythopoetics (and her deployment of the myth of la Llorona in particular) is a peculiar kind of bearing witness; through its imaginative reclamation of

the myth it does not re-present the historical past (neither the official, colonial history, nor the unofficial one). That is, it is not a mere “eye-witness to historical facts or accuracy”—a trait that characterizes witnessing in popular conceptions (Oliver 2001, 81). Rather, it contributes to historical production—as Anzaldúa explains, “[h]istory is fiction because it is made up, usually made up, by the people who rule” (I 242)—by inscribing existing *historias* with existing “silences,” thus exscribing decolonial imaginaries.¹¹ Through this process of inscription, Anzaldúa “keeps” the past not by conserving or memorializing it, but by rewriting it. As AnaLouise Keating notes remarking on Anzaldúa’s deployment of *historias*,

because [Anzaldúa] believes that ‘myths and fictions create reality,’ she seizes the existing myths—the stories that disempower us—and rewrites them, embodying her spiritual vision—her desire for social justice—in her own words. Her writing invites us to see ourselves differently, to recognize the connections between body and text, between the intellectual, spiritual, and physical dimensions of life, between self and other (2005, 12).

Thus, Anzaldúa effects the “unlearning [of] consensual reality” (LDLO 44), turning its mythological figures into hinges between the lineages of colonial conquest and decolonial insubordination, collective trauma and healing.¹² Anzaldúa’s mobilization of myth in her autohistoria-theoría plays a crucial role in making sense anew of collective trauma tied to conquest and colonization that continue to haunt people through their many iterations recurring in collective imaginaries. Through her iterations, la Llorona’s behavior is presented as resistant and, as such, empowering for Chicanas. In this way, as cultural theorist Tey Diana Rebolledo points out, bearing witness to the colonial past through the myth of la Llorona facilitates the recuperation and “mourning [of Chicanas’] lost culture, their lost selves” (1995, 194)—in sum, of a lost past of biological, cultural,

and linguistic lineages foreclosed and forgotten by official discourse through the raping of women, seizing of land, and legal dispossession of cultural and linguistic identities.¹³

What is relevant for the current analysis, however, is the *modality* whereby Anzaldúa's iterations of the myth bear witness to the lost past and the avenues for decolonizing reinscriptions/exscriptions such witnessing makes possible.¹⁴ Yes, *la Llorona* matters because of the culturally empowering role that the feminist reclamation of the myth has played in Chicana culture; *how* this reclamation is effected matters even more to the present inquiry. After all, it is my contention that the modality of bearing witness matters when going beyond colonial epistemologies. Consider the case of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a warning of what may ensue when modalities of bearing witness poorly suited to listen for silences are deployed.

In "The Mute Always Speak: On Women's Silences at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission," Nthabiseng Motsemme observes that although the TRC was tasked with providing a platform for healing by allowing 'perpetrator' and 'victims' to confront the racially fraught past of apartheid, the pervasive logocentrism of the Commission prevented racialized and colonial harms to be heard, allowing the TRC to carry out the task of "myth making" instead, which entailed rewriting the past through words, images, and symbols to present South Africa as a "rainbow nation" characterized by cross-racial harmony. As Motsemme argues, by assuming that "the world was only knowable through words, and thus [that] the basis for beginning a process of healing South Africa's violent past would be organized through acts of testimony" (2004, 914), the TRC deployment of visibility and transparency actually rendered invisible past violations that could not be expressed dialogically. As such, "in its performance and

ritualization, [the Commission] created a space in which the spoken word would be transformed into truth and history” (911). That is, rather than contending with the fact that words may be inadequate to convey the humiliation, pain, and systematic degradation—or that, as scholars have observed, speech may fail in the recounting or remembering an experience too painful or frightening—those who, in light of trauma, could not speak were seen as “languageless, unable to communicate” (Ross 1996, 22).¹⁵ The history that was fabricated by the TRC was the product of a revisionist project abetted by logocentrism.

In light of the limits of verbal language in narrating and remembering violence, and the historical dangers of not listening to silences, Motsemme proposes to read the silences of women’s testimonies during the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings as “part of a range of ‘languages of pain and grief’ to narrate hidden but troubled elements of their recent past” (2004, 910). Hearing and reading silences as communicative, she argues, is paramount in exploring *other* meanings of the struggles of living under apartheid and colonial violence that would otherwise remain inaudible. Resonant with the Ute/Paiute tribes’ silence vis-à-vis sacred artifacts like the shields, unspeakability vis-à-vis trauma is an integral part of the struggle of making sense of experiences of violence against the human flesh.¹⁶ Not attending to these silences or treating them as communicative ostracizes experiences that do not conform with logocentric expectations, while also reifying colonial epistemology within which the racialized other figures as always already abjected. In sum, it precludes bearing witness to an integral dimension of the dark side of modernity, i.e., the pain, grief, and resistance tied to colonization and coloniality. What needs to be done is attending to “silences” as a

means of eventuating meanings of colonial experiences otherwise uncommunicable by the (modern/colonial) spoken word.¹⁷ After all, as we already saw in chapter 5, pain, suffering, but also resistance and indignation often find expression not in language, but through the deep silences of the aesthetics, including song, spirituality, dance, images, and myth. In my view, this is to say that an aesthesis of deep silence not only signifies but conveys sense beyond the presence of modern/colonial *logos*.

It is this aesthesis of deep silence conveyed through myth and affectively charged images that we hear resonating at the heart of Anzaldúa's mythopoetics. As I show in the section that follows, Anzaldúa's iterations of the myth of la Llorona bear witness to the colonial past *as lost*, that is, through an experience of its loss. La Llorona does not represent the past in its full visibility, without visual or auditory lacunae; nor is the past spoken of directly, represented by the myth into an eternal, immutable present. Instead, the myth evokes the past—including generational trauma tied to conquest—*indirectly* through a mythopoetics of images, affect, and deep silences that make the reinscription of the colonial past possible.¹⁸

2. *Spectral Witnessing Beyond Specular and Spectacular Descriptions*

Central to Anzaldúa's mythopoetics are images, which offer avenues to summon dimensions of sense “outside the restrictions of grammar, good sense, rationality, or analysis” (Scott and Tuana 2017, 13). As Anzaldúa explains, “I attempt to talk with image/stories, to engage with creative and spiritual processes and their ritualistic aspects” (LDLO 5) that continuously get overlooked in dialogical exchanges. It is images that we find in her iterations of the myth of la Llorona. In *Prietita and the Ghost Woman*, for instance, Anzaldúa constellates the myth with symbolically charged animal figures like

deer, salamanders, and pumas that elicit Aztec mythology and ancestry. This is the case also in the poem “My Black *Angelos*,” in which Anzaldúa summons the pre-Colombian Aztec lineages of la Llorona by deploying images of serpents, which evoke Cihuacoatl (snake woman) and Coatlicue (the serpent skirt), two of the central figures in the Aztec pantheon and female deities displaced by the Christian-centered traditional recounting of the myth. Most importantly, Anzaldúa recollects the past against the backdrop of the wailing of la Llorona, which affectively charges both retellings of the story with memories of colonial conquest and grief over the loss of children, cultural identity, and land:

Aiiii aiiii aiiiiiii
She is crying for the dead child
The lover gone, the lover not yet come:
Her grito splinters the night
Fear drenches me. (I 206)

As we are learning to hear, the ancestral past is not spoken *for* or *about*; rather, it presences indirectly, summoned through images and affect that historically and geographically situate the poem. This is to say not only that the poem is shot through with passionate rationality and makes sense by invoking personal and collective history. It is also to say that the past that we come to apprehend is evoked in its spectral presence, i.e., through *traces* such as la Llorona’s cries which fleetingly echo through the night, in the reverberations and fluidity of water, and the silences of the sacred animals that guide Prietita through King Ranch.

The past’s spectral presencing becomes stark in the second stanza of “My Black *Angelos*,” when we are made aware that it is the narrator’s fear that summons la Llorona:

I stink of carrion,
she turns upwind tracking me.

Her teeth reflect the fire
From her rouge eyes
My black *Angelos*,
La bruja con las uñas largas,
I hear her at the door. (I 206)

As Domino Perez observes, by pointing out that the narrator “stink[s] of carrion,” and that it is her smell that lures la Llorona into “turning upwind tracking me,” Anzaldúa is suggesting not only that some part of the narrator is dead or decaying, that “the narrator has let die within her the history and spirit of Coatlicue and Cihuacoatl, a death that denies her access to indigenous female figures of power” (2004, 57); on my account, it also ventures that *it is by virtue of that absence* or loss that la Llorona “returns to claim this lost child to enable a necessary and frightening recovery of what has been lost” (Perez 2003, 57).

We witness a similar spectral process of the past’s eventuation in *Prietita and the Ghost Woman* where, at multiple junctures in the *historia*, the echoes of the past become audible to Prietita when she harkens to silences. While in search for herbs that would cure her mother’s illness, for instance, Prietita asks for the assistance of many creatures, one of which is a salamander, whom she knew from her nature book in school had “no voice.” “*Salamandra*, please help me,” Prietita pledges. “You can’t speak but maybe you can show me where there’s some rue,” she asks. Like the other animals before and after her, without giving a straight or full answer to her question, the salamander offers guidance, leading Prietita along. And as the voiceless salamander disappears into the underbrush Prietita hears the crying sound of the ghost woman, la Llorona, for a second time.¹⁹ Both the symbolic and performative silences effected throughout affective interruptions and pauses in both the children’s story and the poem show that la Llorona

bears witness to a colonial past by upholding opacity, thereby making the past (and the loss of the past) present in absence, through an experience of its loss. After all, it is through the silences that la Llorona grieves and remembers colonial losses, inviting the reader to do the same—to apprehend the lost past through silences.

Notably, summoning the past as lost, through silences, means that the past presences for those to whom the echoes of Aztec mythology resonate, evoking more complex *historias*. Thinking through mythopoetics requires adopting an epistemic stance whereby one resists the inclination to “control the images as [one’s] conscious mind wants” (LDLO 25), wherein silences, images, and symbols are interpreted not as translations of the letter into available significations or familiar concepts.²⁰ That is, the colonizing past eventuates for those who are willing to listen to silences, harkening to the resonances of images that may, at first, be foreign to their cultural background, “surrendering to them and letting them guide” the process of inquiry instead, as Anzaldúa reminds us (LDLO 25). In either case, the past presences fleetingly, through words not fully spoken, through suggestions and carnal relations. It is thus—spectrally—that la Llorona gives way to an experience whereby loss, in Acosta López’s words, “is not solved but denounced, in which the silences heard by the spectator allow the unheard of, which always speaks from the present’s excess, to echo and take form time and again” (2014, 78).

Contrary to the myth-making of the TRC, then, which Motsemme understands as a harmful distortion of the past, the myth-making of la Llorona accomplishes, through Anzaldúa’s mythopoetics, precisely what the former invites us to do, i.e., “give voice” to a past that would otherwise remain unspeakable, silently mute. That is, spectrally—

through her haunting *llantos* and generative silences—la Llorona opens onto a non-representational order of experience—to a past ripe with pain, trauma, and colonial violence, but also, as we are about to see, with decolonizing avenues of resistance.²¹

In my view, this spectral modality of bearing witness reveals a fundamental aspect of a decolonizing aesthetics that seeks to go beyond colonial epistemologies and the desideratum of transparency. This is so in at least two ways. First, it avoids *specularization*, which, following Aimee Césaire, Al-Saji defines as the tendency of rendering the colonized’s experiences spectacles for and specular to white observers. This consideration is especially relevant considering the danger we face when striving to make colonized bodies, experiences, and *historias* visible. As she explains, “even when the invisible workings of the flesh are revealed in their activity as well as their passivity, their being rendered a spectacle introduces not only the danger of ‘thingification’—‘chosification’ (Césaire 1955, 23)—but also the circumscription and elision of the very affectivity that I am trying to describe” (2019b, 8). That is to say that a phenomenology that strives, in its descriptions, for full visibility risks objectifying the experiences and bodies of racialized subjects; it risks confiscating the lived and affective dimensions of experience, reducing them to phenomena that, qua *spectacles*, can be surveilled, scrutinized, and measured by the white gaze. This scrutinizing logic—this dissecting gaze—reproduces the “logic of racialization that fixes and dissects the body ..., cuts instantaneous cross-sections of its experience, making it again the slave of an appearance” (2019, 8). In light of these considerations—and resonant with the pink crosses of Juárez—we see how Anzaldúa’s bearing witness to the colonial past in its absenting matters in that it makes “visible” colonial *historias* without rendering them

transparent and consumable by the colonizer spectator, by attending to expressive manners that do not fix and dissect experiences.

My invitation to bearing witness spectrally resonates with Mariana Ortega's suggestion, in "Spectral Perception and Ghostly Subjectivity," that decolonial feminisms "engage in haunting," which she describes as a "methodology of making visible what is supposed to remain invisible" (2019, 402). I agree with Ortega that "dwelling with ghosts" is the first step in learning to bear witness, "to see and to feel anew" (2019, 407). Rather than striving for visibility, however, I depart from Ortega and propose that spectrality should be upheld as a modality of bearing witness to the experience of those whose experiences have and continue to be transversed by colonial violence. The risk of not doing so would be using modalities of expression that are entrenched in colonial legacies of oppression and domination, that, concretely, aim for transparency, logical non impossibility, and the resolution of paradoxes and ambiguities. Dwelling with ghosts calls for a modality of listening, perceiving, sensing, but also expressing that is attuned to the flickering, shimmering, and hesitancy of existence. Anzaldúa's mobilization of deep silences in her iteration of the myth of la Llorona avoids capitulating to transparency by effecting the remembering and mourning of the colonial past *as loss*, through silences.

Rendering the other's experiences a spectacle—i.e., fully visible, spread out in full transparency—entails also rendering it *specular* to one's interpretative paradigm. This is because specularization is achieved by treating the silence or "residue of meaning" that, as Ofelia Schutte reminds us, exists between linguistic-cultural symbolic systems as "irrelevant to philosophical meaning and knowledge, and thus to the operations of reason" (1998, 56, 61). In other words, specularization is the outcome of

treating sense and reality as *transparent* or a world without lacunae—a desideratum informing modern/colonial epistemic and ontological schemas. A culture's, language's, or subject's meaning is approached as if it were immediately accessible to another, fully and clearly translatable through dialogical exchanges, and deployable cross-culturally to express contextually different experiences of oppression and resistance. Such an account skates over, rather than harkens to, the silent junctures that mark, at once, contact and divergence with being, the world, and others. Specifically, it treats silence and the *écart* of being as gaps to be either ignored or filled.²² In this way, the myth of la Llorona reminds the beholder of the need to listen for silences, at once grappling with the incommensurability of the other's difference as well as the generation of new sense. As we saw, withstanding, rather than escaping, the silences makes room for la Llorona to appear, carrying with her the traces of the past and the opportunity to remember, grieve, and, ultimately, heal.

It is this peculiar kind of remembering—one that, at once, remembers and forgets—that Anzaldúa finds essential for healing:

Betrayed for generations, traumatized by racial denigration and exclusion, we are almost buried by grief's heavy pall. We never forget our wounds. La Llorona, our dark mother with her perpetual mournful song, has haunted us for five hundred years—our symbol of unresolved grief, an ever present specter in the psyches of Chicanos and Mexicanos. [...] If you name, acknowledge, mourn, and grieve your losses and violations instead of trying to retain what you've lost through a nostalgic attempt at preservation, you learn not just to survive but to imbue that survival with new meaning. Through activist and creative work you help heal yourself and others. (L 88)

To be clear, then, rather than simply attending to and making audible the voices that have been hidden and “relegated to silences, to passivity” (Pérez 1999, xvi) it seems to me that sensing against the grain of colonial epistemologies, ontologies, and even sensibilities

requires a peculiar modality of bearing witness to the past that listens for and expresses its silences, i.e., a being with them that allows their strangeness and opacity to qualitatively alter one's perception of reality without translating or speaking for them. As a white, Western observer, listening to silences means checking one's desire or curiosity vis-à-vis uncovering the "secrets" or the meaning of a culturally diverse other. As Doris Sommer suggests of well-intentioned testimonio readers who approach the *genre* as providing unmediated access to the subalterns, "maybe empathy for an informant is a good feeling that covers over a controlling disposition, what Derrida calls 'an inquisitorial insistence, an order, a petition... To demand the narrative of the other, to extort it from him like a secretless secret' (Derrida 1979, 87). The possibility [which we saw concretize in Merleau-Ponty's encounter with the Malagasy, for instance] should give us pause" (1996, 131).²³ Rather than abstracting from or interpreting/uncovering difference, deep silence requires historicizing, i.e., living- or being-with the uncanny. That is, being-with silence opens onto regimes of meaning that are not entirely legible through or translatable into yet another discourse.

But there is more. In my view, this modality of bearing witness to the past whereby one harkens to deep silences matters to a decolonizing project because of the relationship with time it institutes. The mobilization of deep silences in Anzaldúa's iterations of the myth of la Llorona effects a modality of bearing witness to non-normative experiences that decenters the presence of consciousness and teleological visions of liberation that continue to oppress and dehumanize colonized and racialized others, opening onto modalities of existence and sense-making not bound by the presence of consciousness. La Llorona's spectral witnessing is such that the past she is tasked to

remember is not fixed or memorialized into an eternal present, but, rather, held open, reverberating with a polysemy of co-existing temporalities, which makes possible for the past to be continuously and retroactively at once inscribed and exscribed. To make sense of how bearing witness spectrally matters to a decolonizing project, it is helpful to turn to what scholars call the “coloniality of time,” namely, the operations of power whereby the modern/colonial world-system situates the experience of existence in the present of modern Western consciousness.

3. *Deep Silence, Temporal Decentering, and Imaginary Reinscriptions*

Central to much decolonial literature is the claim that the coloniality of power/knowledge (discussed in chapter 2) institutes a new temporal relation between the European and the non-European whereby the geopolitical, historical, and cultural landscapes marked by race are projected backwards into the past of a historical trajectory whose culmination is European.²⁴ As Anibal Quijano argues—and here I quote him at length—the coloniality of time makes it

possible to think about relations between them in an evolutionary perspective..., so that all non-Europeans could be placed vis-à-vis Europeans in a continuous historical chain from ‘primitive’ to ‘civilized,’ from ‘irrational’ to ‘rational,’ from ‘traditional’ to ‘modern,’ from ‘magic-mythic,’ to ‘scientific’; in sum, from non-Europeans to something that could be, in time, at best Europeanized or ‘modernized.’ (2000, 221)

That is, coloniality—and its decentering—is a matter of time; the modern/colonial system at once relies upon and partakes in the reification of a narrative of linear progression and human evolution whereby “cultural differences were classified according to their proximity to modernity or to tradition” (Mignolo 2012, 160).²⁵ Within this colonial chronology, the colonized are dehumanized through racialization at the level of temporality, specifically, by being relegated to and overdetermined by a mythical past.

In “Too Late: Racialized Time and the Closure of the Past,” Alia Al-Saji claims that, at stake in the coloniality of time, is not only the institution of linear, racialized time, but also the overdetermination of the past and, thus, the foreclosure of ontological growth or possibility discussed in the preceding chapter. The colonial racial imaginary—what Fanon refers to as the “historico-racial schema” (2008, 90)—“differently configure[s] the kinds of past and fields of possibility available to subjects” (Al-Saji 2013, 4). As such, the temporal experience of a colonized and racialized subject whose existence—whose presence/t—is overdetermined by a stereotyped black past is lived as ontologically overbearing—as closing off possible futures. The racialized past “is hence a *closed* past, incapable of development on its own terms and cut off from the creativity that gives rise to an open future” (Al-Saji 2013, 6–7). Notably, then, the linearity instituted by the coloniality of time forecloses the variability and playfulness of the past, the possibility of pasts “living on,” as resonances of histories and lineages, in the present. Instead, the past is lived as a closed set of possibilities, sealed off without recourse, at once too influential to the present (of the colonized subjects whose existences are overdetermined by this past that becomes lived as an eternal present) and uninfluential to the present (of modern/colonial consciousness), which takes itself as having progressed beyond it, as the creator of novelty irrespective or even dismissive of the ways in which meaning eventuates through historical contexts (and not as the sudden invention of individuals).

This sense of “lateness,” i.e., of coming into a world always already saturated with (white) meaning and possibility, is shared across experiences of coloniality. In *Black Skin/White Masks*, for instance, Fanon repeatedly points out that he has “come too late,

much too late. There will always be a world—a white world—between [him] and [the colonizers]: that impossibility on either side to obliterate the past once and for all” (2008, 101). “Too late,” he exhorts a few pages later. “Everything is anticipated, thought out, demonstrated, made the most of” (2008, 97). While from the “sheltering comfort ... of historically privileged ‘home perspectives’” (Ruiz 2014, 196), the world is perceived as inexhaustible, open to creation and possibility, for Fanon “these possibilities lose their contingency and virtuality; they become factual and necessary...[losing their] playfulness and imaginary variability” (Al-Saji 2013, 8).²⁶

In light of these remarks, we begin to see how any critical, decolonizing phenomenology ought to be keenly aware of its relationship with temporality. Any reprise of the colonial past that repeats, conserves, or memorializes it into an eternal present would not undermine the coloniality of time but, rather, reify a linear temporal trajectory whereby the colonized continue to be overdetermined by and relegated to a mythical past. Without decentering the coloniality of time, avenues for insubordination are limited to either the reclamation of a romanticized past or the creation of a wholly new future/culture inattentive to situational, i.e., temporal and spatial, differences and the structural and economic features of social oppression. It is this appeal to metaphysical essentialism too often implicit in the reclamation of a romanticized past that Fanon criticizes, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, when discussing the negritude movement. As Glen Sean Coulthard observes, although it sought to rehabilitate colonized subjects by purging them of “the internalized effects of systemic racism and colonial violence by rejecting assimilation and instead affirming the worth of their own identity-related differences,” the movement was hindered by a “retrograde orientation towards a subjective affirmation

of a precolonial past” (2014 131, 132). In particular, Fanon finds issue with the movement’s essentialist nature, claiming that “there is not one Negro—there are many black men” (2008, 115).²⁷

Al-Saij’s remarks about the coloniality of time’s closure of the past, however, should also call to mind the guiding question of this chapter, i.e., what are the modalities to bear witness to the violence waged by colonial heteropatriarchy without capitulating to *logos*? In the preceding section, I proposed that attending to the past, history, and non-normative experiences of colonization calls for a particular kind of bearing witness—a spectral witnessing—that upholds silences rather than skate over them. The mobilization of deep silences, however, is essential to the instituting of the imaginary variability of the past necessary for ontological growth and fecund possibilities also because, as we are slowly coming to see, the coloniality of time is more than the instituting of a Euro-centered, linear trajectory; the coloniality of time is a matter of *sensibilities*, i.e., of how something comes to be recognized as knowledge and existence in the first place.

In *Latin American Philosophy from Identity to Radical Exteriority*, Alejandro Vallega explains that the coloniality of time is such that “it is the knowledge of this specific time and consciousness [i.e., of the present of modern, European reason] that figures the limits and possibilities of all human understanding and existence” (2014, 105).

As he explains,

the time of this consciousness becomes a disposition, a sensibility, that situates thought and any possible human knowledge. This means that even before experience may count as phenomenon or knowledge, even before thought begins to be formulated, it will be put under the yoke of this single present. (2014, 105)

This is to say that the coloniality of time makes explicit the imbrication of the present of modern/colonial consciousness and thought/knowledge—an intertwining resonant with

the one discussed in chapter 2 in the context of what I called a racialized metaphysics of presence. While there I emphasized the racialized dimension of “voice,” we can now appreciate temporality’s work in the racialization of sense, knowledge, and, importantly, possibility/ontological growth. In fact, temporality’s invisible work delineates a priori the field of possibility of any thought/knowledge; the presence of consciousness limits thought/knowledge to what spreads out in absolute transparency.²⁸

A decolonizing project, then, cannot operate at the level of thought/knowledge. As Denise Ferreira Da Silva explains in “Toward a Black Feminist Poethics”—and it is worth quoting at length—

the known and knowable World and our critical intellectual tools modeled after the Category of Blackness consistently reproduce the effects of efficient causality. Stuck in the always already there (of) Thought—as reproduced in concepts and categories—where the Category of Blackness (like other social categories), because it refigures formalizations (as laws, calculations, or measurements), arrests Blackness’s creative potential (that which slavery has never been able to destruct), boycotting the impact of the exposure of violence (symbolic and total), which is, as Barbara Christian has engaged so brilliantly, the Black Feminist Critic’s recurrent task. (2014, 84)

Echoing Vallega, Da Silva remarks that unshackling Blackness from the binds of universal reason, which, through its categorical thinking, abates Blackness’s creative possibilities, requires the decentering of the category of time. “Without an examination of the World that seeks to expose how Time works through our Categories, the racial dialectic will stay safe” (2014, 88). This is because time and categorical thinking work in unison, reproducing entrenched ways of knowing that produce the category of Blackness as a “referent of commodity” (2014, 81) and arrested development.²⁹ The outcome is that so long as universal reason persists its formalizing through categories and concepts, Blackness will signify the antithesis of progress.

These considerations make pressing the inadequacy of simply reproducing the other's non-normative experiences—including the colonial past—by reference to available categories and significations, especially when striving to call into question oppressive quasi-transcendental structures that render the familiar oppressive to many. *How* we bear witness to the past and non-normative experiences matters. A decolonizing phenomenology cannot take place exclusively at the level of thought, knowledge, or the spoken word, as these modalities of existence reproduce colonial assumptions and structures. Without the undoing of the coloniality of time, of sensibilities that confine existence to the presence of modern/colonial consciousness, even positive appropriations of the colonial past (including reclamations of the myth of la Llorona), experiences of marginalization, or silenced indigenous voices risk remaining under the attraction of the temporal prejudice of modernity. This would not only result in the evisceration of existence's depth, opacity, and affect—of all dimensions that do not make sense in the presence of modern/colonial *logos*. It would also entail that any positive affirmation would be, yet-again, signified as a cluster of antiquated attachments. Hence, the importance for a decolonizing project to put forth novel sensibilities—a decolonizing aesthesis, if you will—that undo the totalizing and transparent system of linear temporality. Concretely, this means bearing witness to the past such that the generativity of linear, colonial time is disrupted, decentered into the playfulness and imaginary variability of the past. Following Maria Acosta López, we can say that a decolonizing aesthetics “must present the past as what can never be fully present, i.e., as that which always exceeds the very same possibilities of its own representation” (2014, 77). But how does deep silence decenter the coloniality of time?

If Jacques Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence is of any indication for the present purposes, the task of undoing the colonality of time begins by decentering the present now, revealing it in its mediatedness.³⁰ On Derrida's account, however, the deconstruction of the present is a necessary but insufficient condition for moving beyond metaphysical thinking and the primacy of presence. Time's "homogeneity and its fundamental successivity," Derrida writes, also need to be deconstructed (2016, 72). Indeed, although the deconstructing of the Now B into the retention of Now A and the protention of Now C points to the mediated structure of the present, it does not destabilize the successivity of time; "this model of successivity would prohibit the *Now X* from taking the place of Now A" (Derrida 2016, 72). That is to say that this model still posits the present as primary; it conceives of the past as present- or immediate-past and the future as present- or immediate-future. As such, this conception of time forecloses the existence of another kind of past—an "absolute past," as Derrida calls it (2016, 72)—ripe with novelty and ontological possibility. While Derrida addresses this second concern by locating, at the heart or *Augenblick* of existence, a hiatus or *differance* that makes possible the eventuation of being, while remaining invisible in the present, in the preceding chapter, I proposed that, at the heart of being, there lies a deep silence that, at once, makes possible the non-coincidence of being and retroactive inscriptions of possibility. In my view, by instituting interruptions, pauses, and hesitation, the mobilization of deep silences holds the promise of bringing about sensibilities that make sense of the sensible world beyond the presence of modern/colonial consciousness. Suggesting, as I did, that deep silence ensues the openness and fecundity of being means

that deep silence has the power of interrupting the linearity of colonial time, the homogeneity and successivity that fixes the colonized's past.

It is this decentering that deep silences effect throughout Anzaldúa's iterations of the myth. By bearing witness spectrally, i.e., through the mobilization of deep silences and traces that resonate in the present, la Llorona's past resists not only full visibility, but also reinscription into the linear temporal trajectory of coloniality. It does so by suspending familiar narratives and framings, by instituting time lags that make possible the resignification of the past. The overbearing and static colonial past and imaginary are thus fissured and decentered, shot through with *écarts* that allow for their resignification and the disclosing of new meanings of what previously had been familiar *historias*. We witness such interruptions in *Prietita and the Ghost Woman*. It is when Prietita moves further away from the fence, which symbolizes the familiar, a home perspective of sorts, and ventures into the unknown guided by silent animals that she hears the cries of la Llorona, the echoes of a lost past. The silences opened by the *historia* suspend the reader's presuppositions, making her hesitate before translating la Llorona's predicament into familiar meanings, before rendering the eventuating past in terms of colonial frames of reference. At first, approaching the poem without hesitation, the reader falls back onto the internalized and familiar colonial frames of reference, reading la Llorona as a menacing figure howling at night.

Suggestive of this colonial heteropatriarchal significance, the first and second stanzas read:

In the night I hear her soft whimper
wild masses of hair
rustling in the silence.
Una mujer vage en la noche

anda errante con las almas de los Muertos.

Aiiii aiiii aiiii

She is crying for the dead child
the lover gone, the lover not yet come:
Her *grito* splinters the night
fear drenches me.
I stink of carrion,
she turns upwind tracking.
Her teeth reflect the fire
from her rouge eyes
my black *Angelos*,
la bruja con las uñas largas,
I hear her at the door. (B 206)

Yet, as the narrative progresses, the silences and affective interruptions invite the reader to reconsider her assumptions, situating the grief of la Llorona in the lineages of colonial violence and conquest summoned through the images and silences deployed by Anzaldúa. This contextualizing and harkening to silences allows the myth to “speak” differently, to tell different stories of an Aztec mythological pantheon rich with female deities like la Llorona, who guides Prietita to the rue and back to her family, which symbolize healing and the reclaiming of a previously disavowed ancestral lineage. La Curandera’s rebuttal to the general surprise that la Llorona did not conform to her menacing stereotype, but led Prietita back home, is indicative of this reclaimed narrative: “perhaps she is not what others think she is,” Doña Lola points out (P 28). Or take the opening stanza of “My Black *Angelos*,” which is repeated in the conclusion of the poem with a remarkably altered meaning:

aaaaaa aaaaaa

Una mujer vaga en la noche
Anda errante con las almas de los muertos.
We sweep through the streets
con el viento corremos
we roam with the souls of the dead. (B 206–07)

The outcome is a resignification of colonial past and imaginary. As Domino Renee Perez observes, “the wail from the opening stanzas of the poem is no longer a mere signifier of La Llorona’s presence; the grito is now liberating since the narrator no longer hides from the weeping woman.³¹ By embracing La Llorona, the narrator embraces the indigenous part of herself that she had been taught to fear” (2003, 58). In the Forward to *Unmaking Race, Remaking Soul*, Joy James writes that “[c]ultural production that creates a breathing space, or momentarily stops breath, allows us to pause to catch our thinking and move in a different way in pursuit of freedom” (2007, xii). Here, we witness the narrator recuperating her previously-disavowed ancestral lineages and Chicana history, symbolized by her becoming one with la Llorona and “sweep[ing] through the street [...] roam[ing] with the souls of the dead.” Notably, having developed sensibilities capable of dwelling with ghosts, the narrator welcomes her previously disavowed past within the “present” of her modern existence. And as the reader listens for silences, this process of harkening turns the beholder into a hollow, and la Llorona “crawls into [her] spine”:

aiiiii aiinii aiinii
 She crawls into my spine
 her eyes opening and closing,
 shining under my skin in the dark
 whirling my bones twirling
 till they’re hollow reeds. (B 206)

The excriptions effected through the mobilization of deep silences bring about different aesthetic sensibilities able to hear beyond the presence of modern/colonial *logos*, letting the grieving murmurs of the past resonate in their polysemy, turning into *llantos* of resistance.³²

Remarkably, however, Anzaldúa’s mobilization of the deep silences interrupts not only “specular and spectacular renderings of suffering and colonial violence” (Al-Saji

2019b, 11) but also teleological visions of liberation and the homogeneity of coloniality temporality. Through the mobilization of deep silences, Anzaldúa brings about a different aesthetic sensibility, ultimately allowing for multiple temporalities to co-exist. The past re-membered by la Llorona is not homogeneous, monolithic, and memorialized, but, rather, a multiplicity of pasts co-existing in the present and resonating simultaneously. In her llantos, we hear, at once, the resonances of colonial, heteropatriarchal cautionary tales, evoked by the menacing depictions of la Llorona in the myth; the pain, violence, and loss suffered at the hand of colonial conquest and the weight of a past with which colonized peoples have to contend; but also the grito of resistance, of the unabating defiance of heteropatriarchal and colonial rule marked, on the one hand, by the perseverance of her longing, searching, and haunting and, on the other hand, the shimmerings of central figures in the Aztec pantheon that traditional recountings of the myth seek to displace. In evoking the simultaneity of diverse temporal lineages, Anzaldúa is not calling for a simple return to a colonial past or upholding an essentialist and romanticized view of native lineage, as early critics of *Borderlands/la frontera* lamented. Rather, through the iterations of the myth, the pasts are held together, in their ambiguity and polyvocality, resonating in the narrator's "modern" existence.³³

Anzaldúa's myth, by virtue of its silences, interrupts key assumptions of coloniality, specifically that of transparency and the linearity of time. The time-lags instituted through the silences are such that the constraining "mythical past" of which Fanon spoke can be reclaimed by Anzaldúa and Chicanas without playing into the coloniality of time.³⁴ Through myth's silences the reader must learn to hear again as there is no image, sound, or experience to be neatly located into a linear narrative, fixed and

spread out by and for an entitled observer. In their spectral co-existence, the past lineages echoing through the myth and previously neatly organizable within the neo-liberal, now encroach upon each other, exploding the presence of consciousness and yielding novel decolonial meanings eventuating through the iterations of the myth.³⁵

4. Conclusion

If one of the major interventions we have inherited from Audre Lorde is that the “master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” ([1978] 2007, 110), it should be clear by now that, in this chapter, I seek new tools of listening, speaking, and wading into the fullness of deep silence. That is, I am less concerned with how we dismantle the master’s house, with which theories we critique colonialism; but I am very concerned with how we re-build decolonial houses. In my view, deep silences offer resources for such a project of rebuilding. As I suggested in this chapter, deep silences are central to a decolonial aesthetic project insofar as they can be mobilized to reinscribe the decolonial imaginary in ways that undo specularization and the coloniality of time. Specifically, I proposed that la Llorona’s liminality—her spectral dwelling—offers promises for decolonial insubordination, transformation, and healing at registers other than interpretative or mimetic. La Llorona’s mourning is not a story that records facts, speaks for, or seeks to memorialize, i.e., to make the past/history eternal in its immobility. Rather, by bearing witness spectrally, i.e., through silences, the myth re-writes *historias* of colonial conquest; through its interruptions and silences, this remembering is fundamentally opaque. In this sense, echoing Maria Acosta López’s comments on Colombian art, we can say that the myth of la Llorona

is driven by the strength of its own fragility, that is, its own absence is capable of evoking what still claims to be remembered without, however, trying to recover it.

This is what the work's silences and discontinuous temporalities seem to say to us; this is how the intervals, opened up by its ephemeral appearance, speak. (2014, 77)

This spectral bearing witness matters to a decolonizing aesthetics because it allows not only to “give voice” to colonial experiences without eliding their opacity—a methodological approach that avoids capitulating to specularization. It also matters because it is through her fragile remembering, her silent witness bearing, that la Llorona burst open the linearity and homogeneity of colonial time, retroactively resignifying the past. Bearing witness spectrally not only fissures the “now” moment, but it also decenters the successivity of time. Rather than seeking for an un-mediated, originary past to be represented, Anzaldúa's silent interruptions throughout the myth institute the hesitation necessary for the past to be inscribed *and* exscribed anew time and again. Thus, bearing witness through deep silences effects a shift in sensibilities, eventuating a decolonizing aesthetics whereby pasts co-exist in the present in their absencing, as traces or virtual planes that resonate in the present as open and fecund set of possibilities.

The myth of la Llorona, then, makes clear that it is by respecting that distance or *écart*, by listening to those silences, that decolonizing sense-making takes place. Not only the past summons through the silence, but, when it eventuates, it remains conceptually and propositionally elusive. We can thus say that this peculiar modality of remembering or bearing witness accomplished through the silences of myth is how what is perceived and sometimes lived as an “unspeakable” past speaks in the present. In this sense, deep silences eventuate decolonial avenues of feminist insubordination that at once question our inherited beliefs and struggle to find a new equilibrium without appealing to stable

and counter-hegemonic narratives or tools, upholding the playfulness and imaginary variability of the past instead.

NOTES

¹ Note how, in this context, “the tradition of silence” refers to the materially enabled patterns of exclusion from what counts as legitimate forms of expression of languages and voices that do not conform to Eurocentered norms or standards of justification. As such, “silence” here figures as the outcome of oppression, i.e., of being prevented from speaking or saying something, and as relative to speech and signification as when, e.g., one has something to say but is forced into silent submission, when one is silenced.

² As Collins explains, “this type of passionate rationality flies in the face of Western epistemology that sees emotions and rationality as different and competing concerns” (Collins, *Fighting Words*, 243 cited in I 12).

³ In her work, Anzaldúa speaks of this in-between in terms of *Nepantla*. Epistemologically, *Nepantla* designates the way in which people experience not in certainty but in question their inherited beliefs, and struggle to find a new equilibrium without the appeal to a stable identity. As Scott and Tuana highlight in “*Nepantla*” (2017), the transformation brought by conflicting lineages and sensibilities and characteristic of *Nepantla* also effects a transformation in “perceptivity and affectivity” (2017, 4).

⁴ For a discussion of the role of myth in the construction of Chicano/a identity, see Alicia Gaspar de Alba, “There’s no Place like the Aztlán,” in *Unframing the Bad Woman* (2014).

⁵ For discussion of how Anzaldúa’s autohistoria-teoría promotes *la conciencia de la mestiza*, see Caren S. Neile, “The 1,001-Piece Nights of Gloria Anzaldúa: Autohistoria-teoría at Florida Atlantic University” (2005) and AJ Pitts, “Gloria E. Anzaldúa’s Autohistoria-teoría as an Epistemology of Self-Knowledge/Ignorance” (2016).

⁶ On Anzaldúa’s account, healing entails learning that “there’s another way of looking at reality. There are other ways of writing. There are other ways of thinking. There are other sexualities. Other philosophies...In these worlds I’m trying to present another way the senses can perceive reality” (I 229).

⁷ This is to say that the significance of the myth of la Llorona is not in her unique experience, but in the myth’s “ability to stand for the experience of her community of a whole” (Beverly 1996, 35). Thus, although the subject of myth differs from that of

testimonio in that the narrating “I” is not a “real person who continues living and acting in a real social history,” myth shares with testimonio the “shifter—a linguistic function that can be assumed indiscriminately by anyone”—structure of the “I” (Beverley 1996, 37, 35). Myth as deployed by Anzaldúa, then, does not have the “auto-referential self-sufficiency” (Beverley 1996, 37) of fiction, for example, whereby the subject and the story come to an end with the end of the narrative.

⁸ For discussions of Anzaldúa’s reclaiming of the myth of la Llorona, see Domino Renee Perez, “Words, Worlds in Our Heads: Reclaiming La Llorona’s Aztecan Antecedents in Gloria Anzaldúa’s ‘My Black *Angelos*’” (2003); Norma Alarcon, “Chicana’s Feminist Literature: Re-vision Through Malintzin/or Malintzin Putting Flesh Back on the Object” (2015).

⁹ In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, for instance, Linda Tuhiwai Smith brings attention to the importance of “witnessing” and “testimonio” as means through which “the voice of a ‘witness’ is accorded space and protection” (2012, 145). Although Lugones envisions, in Figueroa’s words, faithful witnessing “as a decolonial practice [that] goes beyond colonial epistemologies” (2015, 648) insofar as it breaks with popular conceptions of witnessing as bearing witness to “historical facts or accuracy” (Oliver 2001, 81), the risk of specularization still remains. Lugones observes that to bear faithful witness “one must be able to sense resistance, to interpret behavior as resistant even when it is dangerous, when that interpretation places one psychologically against common sense, or when one is moved to act in collision with common sense, with oppression” (2003, 7). We can see how Ernesto Martínez, whose experience of sexual violence I recount in chapter 1, bore faithful witness, positing himself, through his analysis, to recognize and locate gestures of resistance in a practice that, under colonial expectations, would have been an instance of oppression and complacency.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the resources that la Llorona offers to develop decolonizing subjectivities through witnessing, see Emma Velez, “Women in Philosophy: Why the Decolonial Imaginary Matters for Women in Philosophy” (2019).

¹¹ La Llorona stands for a radical reconfiguration of societal and cultural norms constituting the world. The myth’s emphasis on social change sets it aside from autobiography, for instance, which, on John Beverley points out, stands for individual triumph over dire social or political circumstances. “There is implicit an ideology of individualism in the very convention of the autobiographical form that is built on the notion of a coherent, self-evident, self-conscious, commanding subject that appropriates literature precisely as a means of ‘self-expression’ and that in turn constructs textually for the reader the liberal imaginary of a unique, ‘free,’ autonomous ego as the natural form of being and public achievement” (1996, 35).

¹² In the context of aesthetics, scholars refer to approaches that strive to incorporate and draw upon a variety of traditions to make something new that is respectful of tradition as “syncretism.” For a discussion of syncretism in Native American, Latin American, and African American women’s art, see Phoebe Farris, “The Syncretism of Native American,

Latin American, and African American Women's Art: Visual Expressions of Feminism, the Environment, Spirituality, and Identity" (2007).

¹³ In "Heterosexualism and the modern/colonial gender system," María Lugones argues that racial discrimination regulated the ascription of gendered identities, distinguishing between "women" and "females" and extending the status of women so described in the West only to white women, while understanding colonized females "to be animals ... in the deep sense of 'without gender,' sexually marked as female, but without the characteristics of femininity" (2007, 202–03). Even when colonized females were turned from animals into similes of bourgeois white women, "there was no extension of the status of white women to colonized women" (203). Without gender recognition, colonized and racialized "females" remained vulnerable to rape and white, heteropatriarchal violence. For a discussion of how the racial prohibition on woman "encrusts colonial racism in the lived experience of becoming a woman, such that women of color remain in many ways unintelligible as women," see chapter 2, "Sexualized Racism and the Politics of Time," in Megan Burke's *When Time Warps: The Lived Experience of Gender, Race, and Sexual Violence* (2019).

¹⁴ Chicana writers Helena Maria Viramontes and Sandra Cisneros refigure la Llorona as a symbol of maternal resistance in their short stories, "The Cariboo Cafe" (1995) and "Woman Hollering Creek" (1992). For discussions of the empowering effects of feminist reclamations of la Llorona on Chicana identity, see José Limón, "La Llorona, The Third Legend of Greater Mexico" (1990); Rebolledo, *Women Singing in the Snow* (1995); Cordelia Candelaria, "Letting La Llorona Go" (1997).

¹⁵ For an analysis of how silences appear in Holocaust survivors' testimonies, see Rosh White (1998). See also Butalia (2000) and Scarry (1985) for discussions of the limits of verbal testimony in testimonies of the India-Pakistan partition and bodily pain, respectively. At this juncture, it is worth turning, even if briefly, to the lessons we learned from the mistakes of early testimonio critics. As María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo explains speaking of the critical response to Rigoberta Menchú's testimonio, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*, to appreciate other registers of meaning eventuating through *testimonio*, it is paramount to consider the "effects of terror and torture on the individuated and collective memory" (2003, 160)—dimensions that early critics of testimonio, who conceived testimonio as unmediated-text overlooked. That is, the function of testimonio is not that of accurately reporting "facts" (it is not mimetic representation) or of being an unmediated text (it is not immediate or direct presence or intuition). Rather, it straddles the line between the real and the imaginary, mobilizing traces of pain, trauma, and violence instituted by the colonial past, thus "giving voice" to a "history," to borrow René Jara's words, "which, as such, is inexpressible" (Jara 1986, 2).

¹⁶ These mentions of the unspeakability of traumatic experiences should call to mind Scarry's (1985) discussion of physical pain, which, she argues, has the ability to destroy the sufferer's language, as it has no referent in the external world.

¹⁷ Faced with this challenge, Bakare-Yusuf contends that what needs to be done is “reconceptualize pain and suffering as having their own ‘morphology and [their] own logic which governs [their] expression and representation and which produce [their] own meaning” (1997, 175).

¹⁸ Note that bearing witness through an experience of loss, i.e., by upholding silences, does not mean condoning or subscribing to the institutional silences of an epistemology of ignorance. Instead, it means undergoing the difficult work of coming to terms with the fact that, as historical and institutional silences are inscribed within the decolonial imaginary, silences are also always already exscribed. That is, since the meaning of cross-cultural encounters (but of any encounter, really) is never fully transparent, but eventuates at a distance, it is paramount to find expressive modalities that do not elide these silences, letting them resonate instead. It is pretending otherwise that would result in epistemic oppression. The danger of eliding, rather than listening for, silence and opacity is the foreclosure of sense and sense-making practices that operate beyond the bounds of the presence of modern/colonial *logos*, a move that would undermine the very possibility of bearing witness to the other in her difference.

¹⁹ It is when Prietita moves further away from the fence, which symbolizes the familiar, a home perspective of sorts, and ventures into the unknown guided by silent animals that she hears the cries of la Llorona, the echoes of a lost past, for the first time. Then again, for a third time, Prietita hears the cries when she is enveloped by silent darkness, unable to see the stars, a familiar sky.

²⁰ “To change or reinvent reality, you engage the *facultad* of your imagination. You must interrupt or suspend the conscious ‘I’ that reminds you of your history and your beliefs because these reminders tie you to certain notions of reality and behavior” (LDLO 44). Note the resonances between this epistemic approach and the one described by María Lugones in “Playfulness, ‘World’ Travelling, and Loving Perception.” Lugones proposes an epistemic approach of loving perception characterized by playfulness, i.e., “openness to surprise, openness to being a fool, openness to self-construction or reconstruction and to construction or reconstruction of the ‘world’ we inhabit playfully” (1987, 17).

²¹ In Anzaldúa’s work, myth functions similarly to how Alberto Moreiras claims testimonio does: “the specificity of testimonio...depend[s] on an extraliterary stance or moment...a direct appeal to the non-exemplary, but still singular, pain beyond any possibility of representation” (1996, 195). Pain and collective trauma taken up in Anzaldúa’s mythopoetics is the extraliterary stance mobilizing myth. Yet, differently from Moreiras, albeit collective trauma and pain cannot be named or represented through mimetic identification, the pain or trauma figure nonetheless in and are worked through myth, specifically through myth’s deployment of deep silence. Within the myth of la Llorona, pain and trauma “appear” as weeping and verbal interruptions that rewrite established, colonial meaning.

²² The very nature of this myth, i.e., its situatedness within *historias* (stories-histories) of conquest, is such that la Llorona, at once, incites or even fabricates the reader's curiosity vis-à-vis that *historia*, drawing the reader in, while also maintaining the reader at a distance, reminding the reader of the incommensurability at the heart of sense and being—that the significance of that very *historia* about which the reader is now curious eventuates only through traces, through silences. In fact, the carnal relations through which the meaning of mythopoetic eventuates mean that, for someone who is not privy to the lived experiences of in-betweenness, the sense of colonial trauma and pain remains opaque. In this sense, similarly to what Fanon accomplishes on As Al-Saji's reading, we find, in Anzaldúa's mythopoetics, "knots of opacity carrying affective charge [that] transport the reader in time and place, without being fully epistemically decipherable. The text speaks differently when read against different contexts and to differently positioned readers" (Al-Saji 2019a, 3).

²³ Sommer adds, "[n]atives who remained incalculable, because they refused to tell secrets, obviously frustrated colonial state control" (1996, 131).

²⁴ In "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America" (2000), Aníbal Quijano identifies three processes whereby coloniality racializes time: 1) the appropriation of cultural discoveries of colonized people on the part of the colonizers; 2) the repression and expropriation of precolonial pasts, land, and culture, cast as prehistoric or empty land; and 3) the projection of the colonized to a mythical past.

²⁵ In *When Time Warps*, Megan Burke puts Quijano's and Mignolo's claims about colonial chronology in conversation with Lugones's notion of the coloniality of gender to argue that "a woman is the progression of a female animal" (2019, 54).

²⁶ By way of his repeated mentions of a time-lag, Fanon brings attention to the ways in which coloniality overdetermines his being by weaving him "out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories" that freeze or lock him into a mythical past of "cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders, and above all, yes, above all, the grinning *Y a bon Banania*" (2012, 91, 92). That is, Fanon clearly conveys that the colonial world does not leave room for him to create the meaning of his own existence; "the meaning was already there, awaiting" in a stereotyped black past (2012, 113). These last remarks should call to mind the characterization I used in the preceding chapter to think through the modality of existence of the past. There, I suggested that the past, when fecund, is not sealed off without recourse; rather, it is constantly and retroactively reinscribed through deep silence. If the insights about the fecundity of the past developed in chapter three are of any indication, then, the claim that the overdetermination or fixity of the past entails the closing off of possibility, of a future, should not come as a surprise. What sets apart Fanon's experience of the world from that of someone who does not live the precarity of the in-between is that, for him, the world is saturated, complete prior to his arrival. That is, the past—but also the future—is sterile, closed off from the emergence of possibility.

²⁷ The lack of attention to the coloniality of time is also the pitfall of much contemporary (neo-liberal) political thought, which, as a result, has shifted from “redistribution to recognition” (Coulthard 2014, 34).

²⁸ The outcome, as Vallega notes, is that no matter its content, “its status and validity as thought/knowledge will be situated...under the judgment of the coloniality of power and knowledge” (2014, 107).

²⁹ The categories of sameness and difference, specifically that of racial difference like Blackness, are temporalized in the 19th century via the introduction of the notion of *development*.

³⁰ “Spectrality” should call to mind Derrida’s notion of “hauntology,” which brings attention to the haunted state of existence and being by a present absence, a condition that challenges the metaphysics of presence. In his *corpus*, Derrida seeks to move away from a conception of existence as self-presence, as a way of understanding being characteristic of Western metaphysics that accords primacy to the present now, treating it as the unmediated foundation of being, sense, and time. In *Speech and Phenomena*, for instance, Derrida points out that the ‘now’ moment is always already mediated by traces of other experiences, thus bringing attention to the deferred/deferring structure of time and the impossibility of a self-contained or self-sufficient now moment (1973, 68). Effectively, as we saw, the meaning of things and experiences cannot be fixed to a self-identical and stable meaning (Caputo 1997, 104).

³¹ Contrary to the patriarchal interpretation of the myth, according to which la Llorona is disempowered—her actions of proicide, despair at the realization of what she has done, or her seizing children who are not her own out of confusion are explained through an appeal to insanity, which, as Cordelia Candelaria points out, leaves her without agency or hope—in Anzaldúa’s iteration, the interruptions effected by silence in the story are sites of re-reading and re-writing of reality. Although familiar expectations would have la Llorona figure as a cautionary tale, invoked and deployed to norm children and women into good behavior, the silences suspend this reading, effecting a rewriting of the colonial imaginary. Significantly, at these silent junctures, neither the salamander nor la Llorona give Prietita clear answers. Prietita needs to withstand the uncertainty of deep silence; as Prietita loses herself and follows the silent salamander the cries of la Llorona echo through the forest, ultimately leading her, without anticipation, to the rue and her family—in a word, to healing. The story ends with Prietita “silently...push[ing] the rue branches into the hands of *la curandera*” (P 28).

³² In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhaba argues that the interruption and resignification of colonial imaginary takes place through “temporal break in-between the sign...through this time-lag” (2004, 174–75).

³³ In “*Ch’ixinakax utxiwa*,” Silvia River Cusicanqui observes that an experience of time, like that of Indigenous peoples of the Andean region (Cusicanqui names the Katari-Amaru peoples and, more broadly, the Aymara and the Qhichwa-speaking populations),

that is not linear entails a project of “indigenous modernity” whereby “the past-future is contained in the present. The regression or progression, the repetition or overcoming of the past is at play in each conjuncture and is dependent more on our acts than our words” (Rivera Cusicanqui 2012, 96). Through practice—specifically, through “a decolonization of imaginaries and of the forms of representation” (Rivera Cusicanqui 2012, 96)—indigenous peoples can affirm their heritage *and* their contemporaneity.

³⁴ A few lines later, Rivera Cusicanqui elaborates on this notion of “indigenous modernity” by observing that “[t]he contemporary experience commits us to the present—aka pacha—which in turn contains within it the seeds of the future that emerge from the depths of the past [qhip nayr uñtasis sarnaqapxañani]. The present is the setting for simultaneously modernizing and archaic impulses, of strategies to preserve the status quo and of others that signify revolt and renewal of the world: Pachakuti” (2012, 96).

³⁵ In this way, Anzaldúa’s mythopoetics undermines what Vallega calls the “coloniality of images,” which consists in “single present and totalizing presentations of exploited and violated lives” (Rivera 2017, 171). As Vallega points out, Fanon’s struggles to find a positive sense of self are largely tied to what he calls the coloniality of images, the outcome of which is that the images at Fanon’s disposal for making sense of himself are “already by definition situated by the ordering of the coloniality of power and knowledge” (2011, 215). That is, coloniality—as Al-Saji pointed out, “structures the phenomenological field of sense” such that blackness will always already be associated and signified in relation to the past of modernity; “the images he finds may make visible only possible existence under the order of power and knowledge” (Vallega 2011, 216).

VIII. CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I grappled with the normative implications of coloniality vis-à-vis the phenomenon of silence at both the theoretical and sensible levels; I investigated how modern/colonial assumptions about the transparency of sense affect Western understandings of the phenomenon of silence, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, how they eventuate modalities of existence that preclude hearing beyond the presence/t of modern/colonial *logos* and, thus, eviscerate the fecundity and polyvocality of deep silences. The central argument I advanced in this dissertation is that deep silences are a powerful decolonizing tool. In these concluding remarks, I return where I began, namely, to considerations regarding how critical phenomenology can bear witness to experiences of colonization without capitulating to the snares of epistemic transparency.

As you may recall from the Introduction, in addition to the recognition that historical structures are quasi-transcendental conditions of possibility of experience, its re-orientation toward the political also means that critical phenomenology is more than the mere description of (oppressive) conditions of possibility but their *hacking*. In light of these remarks, my suggestion that the task of critical phenomenology is to *bear witness* to the violence waged and those victimized by colonial heteropatriarchy may seem misplaced. After all, if critical phenomenology is more than the mere description of the structures of experience phenomena wouldn't the act of bearing witness risk undercutting the normative and critical force of this approach?

The notion of "bearing witness" has a long history within feminist, religious, decolonial, and juridical debates, in which it is seen as affording unrecognized subjects the opportunity to demand justice. In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, for instance, Linda

Tuhiwai Smith claims that witnessing and testimonies are the vehicle through which “the voice of a ‘witness’ is accorded space and protection” (2012, 145). That space, however, does not entail a mere accounting of colonial violence, but, rather, it enables the indicting of such violence and effecting normative change. In this vein, as we saw in chapter 7, María Lugones’s notion of faithful witness is meant to challenge physical and metaphysical subjugation by, among other things, conveying meaning against the grain of domination. As Yomaira Figueroa points out, thus understood, faithful witnessing “makes visible the often unseen consequences of the coloniality of power, knowledge, and gender” (2015, 643). In so doing, it challenges dominant perspectives that adhere to singular interpretations of truth, knowledge, and rights “toward a polysensical approach: one that understands that there are many worlds, that sees/reads many perspectives, particularly the perspectives of those who are dehumanized or rendered invisible” (Figueroa 2015, 643). My positing bearing witness (as an act of testifying to that which cannot be seen) as the scope of critical phenomenology should be read in the vein of these traditions wherein *bearing witness is not limited to descriptive work, but carries with it the normative force of recognizing resistance where dominant narratives see none*. Significantly, as we have seen throughout this dissertation, this normative and critical impulse extends beyond the realm of intellectual endeavors, bearing praxical and affective implications, like transforming grieving mothers into warriors and reinscribing decolonizing imaginaries.

I have also proposed that a critical phenomenology that hacks the oppressive quasi-transcendental structures is one that harkens to and mobilizes deep silences in its descriptions. As we saw in chapter 5 and 7, this is because of what scholars like María

Lugones and Alia Al-Saji call specularization, or the risk, often incurred by phenomenology, of making experience visible. A phenomenology that strives, in its descriptions, for full visibility risks confiscating the affective dimensions of existence, reducing the experiences and bodies of racialized subjects to phenomena that, qua *spectacles*, can be surveilled, scrutinized, and measured by the white gaze. This scrutinizing logic reproduces the dissecting gaze of colonizing enterprises. (Recall, for instance, Frantz Fanon's exhortation, in *Black Skin/White Masks*, that his "body," upon his encounter with the white boy on the train, "was returned to [him] spread-eagled, disjointed, redone, draped in mourning" (2008, 93). But recall also the language used by many sexual violence survivors to describe their experiences of testifying about their assaults or the reasons they gave for not coming forward. The experience of having one's body as well as one's experience laid out for public probing, dissected and objectified is the risk of a phenomenology that strives for transparency.¹) Problematically, as we have seen, rendering the other's experiences a spectacle entails also rendering it *specular* to one's interpretative paradigm. As such, it elides the other's peculiarities, the sense of their own existence.

Rather than dismissing the residue of meaning present in the cross-cultural encounter, a critical phenomenology of deep silence invites letting that excess or silence resonate in us as a strangeness, attending to the qualitative ruptures and the subsequent spatio-temporal re-orientations it may bring about. By upholding opacity and deep silence, this modality of bearing witness undermines the transparency and immediacy of the present. It is in this sense that harkening to deep silences is essential to hearing the other in her difference, to hearing meanings where coloniality hears none. Crucially, as

the concluding chapter of this dissertation showed, it is through its reprisal of the past in its opacity that a critical phenomenology of deep silence institutes a non-linear temporal modality of existence that undermines the linearity of time central to coloniality. As such, deploying deep silence is key to (a) decolonizing critical phenomenology insofar as it decenters linear chronology by opening the experience of existence beyond the present of modern Western consciousness.

In conclusion—if one of the major interventions we have inherited from Merleau-Ponty is that phenomenology is “a problem and a promise” (PhP xxi), in this dissertation I seek new tools for speaking, listening, and wading into non-normative experiences without capitulating to the snare of modern/colonial transparency. That is, I am very concerned with how a critical phenomenology can describe the world with all possible precision, while upholding, through its descriptions, the openness and opacity of the world, phenomena, and others within it. In this dissertation, I propose that “pulling up traces” of sedimented ways of seeing and making sense of the world, as well as histories and peoples that have been consigned to invisibility, calls forth modalities of bearing witness that do not rely on propositional language or communicative transparency. Rather, it calls forth a critical phenomenology of deep silence, a bearing witness effected by, e.g., the aesthetics that listens for and mobilizes silences. In this sense, I find deep silence to be the starting point for a “philosophy still to be done,” to borrow Merleau-Ponty’s words (EM 178), the traces of which we find in Anzaldúa’s mythopoetics. This is a philosophy—a critical phenomenology of deep silence—that has a lot to offer a project of harkening to and expressing the world, phenomena, and the other without capitulating to modern/colonial schemas. In this sense, the reprisal to silence I am thereby proposing

is not an exhortation to remain mute, but the invitation to recognize the ways in which deep silence opens us to modes of communication that cannot be reduced to propositional speech (Sallis [1973], 110–11). A critical phenomenology of deep silence that cultivates sensibilities beyond logocentrism, then, also presses Western feminism beyond its affinity with the idea that political progress and moral agency require intellectual or cognitive development. The present approach nurtures different ways of seeing and, importantly, hearing that heeds to deep silences rather than *logos*, which fuels creativity. As such, a critical phenomenology of deep silence opens a space-time of possibilities for radical ethical and political action, for envisioning other forms of “aesthetic agency.”

NOTES

¹ The fear that testifying in a court of law would expose one to public probing and questioning about what is often lived as a traumatic experience, of having intimate details of one experience fixed, objectified, and spread out in front of a foreign audience, are among the leading factors for the low rates of reporting. According to the Department of Justice’s 2015 National Crime Victimization Survey (BJS 2015), only 310 out of every 1,000 sexual assaults are reported to police.

A. APPENDIX: ABBREVIATIONS FOR PRINCIPAL WORKS CITED

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- SB 1963. *The Structure of Behavior*. Translated by Alden Fisher. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
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