The title of this essay refers to a passage in the essay “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence” (in *Signs*) where Merleau-Ponty makes a distinction between what he calls the “noble memory,” and a “survival that is a hypocritical form of forgetfulness.” This passage and the distinction came to my mind one day as I passed a plaque in Tavistock Square, London, one of the sites of the terrorist bombings in London on July 7, 2005, that I used to walk by almost everyday on my way to the British Library. The plaque lists the names of the people who died when a bomb ripped a double-decker bus apart during the morning rush hour that day. Below the names, the plaque reads: “London will not forget.” Being in the process of re-reading Merleau-Ponty’s essay at the time, it struck me to try to understand the opposition between the idea of a “noble memory” and a “hypocritical forgetfulness” or “survival” in terms of such an injunction or appeal. This essay will surely fall somewhat short of that goal. But, by looking at Merleau-Ponty’s theory of institution, I hope to at least provide a framework through which to think this distinction. Further, I will give some indications as to how this opposition could help to establish and elucidate an institutional theory of democratic practice.2

Specifically, what I hope to accomplish here is to unpack the ideas of “resistance” and “adversity,” which had played central roles in Merleau-Ponty’s work since the *Structure of Behavior*, in their role as fundamental components of the theory of institution, which, in turn, forms the cornerstone of Merleau-Ponty’s later thought on history, politics, democracy, and arguably also his ontology of the “flesh.” What this essay seeks to accomplish is to develop the idea of institution in such a manner that it contains what we can call a “principle of resistance” that is not external or opposed to the movement of institution, but rather inherent and necessary to it. In terms of the injunction on the plaque mounted in Tavistock Square, I would like to try to understand it through and in terms of this principle of resistance.

The motivation for this stems from the distinction that Merleau-Ponty makes between the “noble memory,” which he calls the “unlimited fecundity of each present,” and the “survival” of the past, which is a “hypocritical form of forgetfulness,” rather than the “creation of new life.” In “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,” the idea of a “noble memory” is directly related to Husserl’s idea of *Stiftung* (institution). Moreover, the idea of “life,” in this essay, and more specifically, “the historicity of life,” is introduced in terms of the movement and development of a field of sense or “field of investigation,” which is the unlimited fecundity of products of culture. The “institution” or *Stiftung* comprises both the field of sense, and its movement and development, that is, both its synchronic and diachronic being.

Another reason to try to understand the movement of institution as carrying within it a principle of adversity and resistance can be found in the “Epilogue” of *Adventures of the Dialectic*. In this text, Merleau-Ponty states that history is always both “movement” and “inertia.” In other words, adversity is not external to the movement and development of a historical field, but is an inherent characteristic of that movement and development itself.

The example that Merleau-Ponty uses in “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence” when he refers to the “historicity of life” is painting. This idea of life is encapsulated in the movement of the painter who, with a brush stroke, takes up the whole of the tradition and recasts it, to create a new field of sense, or a new sense of the field, understood here in terms of the particular canvas, the artist’s oeuvre, or the history of painting. All three “fields” are examples of institution, and we are not dealing with an either/or situation. The brush stroke sets all of these institutions—the canvas, the oeuvre, and the tradition—into movement in relation to one another. The new
sense of any of these fields emerges only out of the interrelated development of all three. As such, institution introduces a tension between the recovery of the past and the inauguration of new sense, a tension between an instituting ground or foundation and a new instituted sense. The question for us here is how the ideas of resistance and adversity play a role in relation to this tension, or perhaps better, communication, between the instituting and the instituted.

Adversity and Resistance

The first important upshot of adversity and resistance being inherent to the movement and development of a historical field or institution is that the conservation of the past does not necessarily preserve the life of the past. To the contrary, conservation, in this negative sense, is the inhibition of the movement of life. For example, Merleau-Ponty even uses the term “necropole” to refer to that paradigm of conservation, the museum, where what we see are “dead productions scattered about the world and engulfed in cults or civilizations they sought to ornament as unified aspects of a single effort.” Yet the tension between the conservation of the instituting ground and the novelty of the instituted need not be conceived in an exclusive manner. The ideas of resistance and adversity demonstrate that the recuperation of the past is not adverse to the birth of new life. To understand how this is so, we must approach the idea of resistance in terms of an opening of latent horizons of the past, which is intrinsic to the movement of institution.

Taking our cue again from the Adventures of the Dialectic, and specifically the chapter “Western Marxism,” where Merleau-Ponty describes truth as the indefinite elaboration of a field of praxis, I interpret the idea of resistance epistemologically, politically, and ontologically, as a principle of truth. By the time of The Visible and the Invisible, the vocabulary has expanded and the “field of praxis” of Adventures of the Dialectic has become the “ontological field” or “landscape.” Thus, the question that needs to be posed is what is being resisted? The response seems to be, “survival” (or the “hypocritical forgetting”) understood in terms of the perpetuation of sedimented structures of meaning, and the inhibition of the creation of new sense, through the limitation of what we can call “institutional pathways.”

One of the clearest definitions of the idea of sedimentation, and how we are using the term here, can be found in a supplement to §58 of Husserl’s Ideas II: “The Constitution of the Personal Ego Prior to Reflection.” Husserl writes, “All personal ‘intentionality’ refers to activity and has its origin in activities. For it is either an intentionality which has arisen originally and then it is active, or it is a ‘sedimentation’ of activities, which as such are meaningful and in their ‘sense’ refer back to the active or constitutive nexus, and that by means of many levels built one on the other.” “Survival,” in this sense, designates a certain idea of the stability of an instituted field of sense. It is the unimpeded and unaltered passive movement of the sense of the past “active nexus” to the present, an un-interrogated informing of the present by the past. Rather paradoxically, this smooth movement of sense from the sedimented (past) nexus to the present is, in fact, an inhibition of the movement of institutions, and, significantly, an inhibition or repression of the potentialities that emerge from the interaction and development between instituted fields of sense or, in Husserl’s vocabulary, “nexuses.”

This idea of resistance, and the opposition between a “noble memory” and “survival,” can also be taken up in an explicitly political context. In a very brief essay from 1951, published in Les Temps Modernes, titled “Human Engineering: the New ‘Human’ Techniques of American Big Business,” Merleau-Ponty introduces what we can take to be a political analogue of this idea of “survival,” in what he calls “statistical democracy” or a “dictatorship of the ‘normal.’” It is a democracy that goes through the procedural motions of democratic institutions, without opening the possibility of substantial social or political change. Merleau-Ponty does not specify, but we can assume that he is referring to both the participatory aspects of democracy, i.e., voting, and the more procedural workings of the legislature, like parliamentary debate. This political conception of “survival,” in terms of “statistical democracy,” provides the reverse of what we are aiming at with the idea of “resistance,” The critique of democratic institutions, or at least their contemporary functioning, is particularly
important, as four years later, in Adventures of the Dialectic, Merleau-Ponty will take the opposite stance, stating, without providing much argument, that the institution of parliamentary democracy provides the guarantee of a minimum of truth and opposition. What we wish to argue here is that this guarantee can only be made by situating the ideas of adversity and resistance, not merely at the heart of the institution of parliament, but also at the heart of the idea of institution (Stiftung).

This takes us toward the ontological significance of these ideas. As an ontological term, resistance should be understood as the tendency toward movement and development that is inherent to the ontological field itself. This tendency is the consequence of the general ontological field or the field of praxis being a field of institutions. As such, its movement can also be inhibited and restricted by other institutions, which is how the conditions of a statistical democracy are brought about. We can connect this to a comment that Merleau-Ponty made in a 1951 radio interview, where he stated that he wanted to generalize Sartre’s concept of “adversity.” The idea of resistance in relation to the general ontological field, as a field of institution, is precisely this attempt at such a generalization. In 1951, Merleau-Ponty also presented a lecture in Geneva with the title “Man and Adversity.” In the discussion that followed the lecture, he described adversity as the “dead weight” behind reflection that makes ambiguity possible. Without refuting the general sentiment of this idea, what I argue here is that by approaching the ideas of resistance and adversity through the concept of institution, we can see that the weight of adversity is anything but dead. Rather, it is a driving force of the life or movement of the ontological field.

Institution

It is important to briefly characterize how the idea of institution is being used here. First, institution is always the opening of a field, and always occurs within a field. As Merleau-Ponty explains, in reference to Ferdinand de Saussure, at the beginning of “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,” a field is a diacritical configuration of relations between signs. Sense does not belong to positive particulars, but emerges in the relations between elements, such that each element or sign receives its sense from its dynamic of relations within a whole.

The subject, for example, can be thought of in this manner. Furthermore, as Merleau-Ponty emphasizes in the 1954–55 lecture notes on institution and passivity, as a field, a subject, or we could say a subjective field, is always both instituting and instituted. To say that a field is instituted means that it receives its sense from without, in its situation within a constellation or matrix of relations. Moreover, the instituted is always also instituting. In entering into a matrix of relations, or in being instituted within this matrix, it re-creates or re-institutes the sense of the dynamic or field, in which it is itself instituted. This new institution of sense, instituted by the inauguration of the field of the subject, within and in relation to a constellation of other institutions, is neither exclusively proper to the field of the subject, nor external to it. When we say that an institution opens a field, what we mean is that it creates a new relation of elements—a diacritical Gestalt—and in this regard, it is instituting. Yet, that instituting develops out of previous relations, and as such, it is always also instituted.

Second, institution also designates the unlimited fecundity of every moment in its singularity. “Fecundity” must also be put in terms of the opening and development of a field. The configuration of elements that form a field—its current dynamic—has a developmental or institutional history. This history institutes a “style,” which is not only the current dynamic of relations, and its history, but also, their tendency or orientation toward future development: the potentiality of the field. A field of institution, in its development, is manifest both in its style and as a style, in its relation to the world around it, and its developmental orientation, as a movement that takes up a sedimented past and institutes a potential future. When we say that a field is manifest as a style, this means that what appears, and what is perceived is a movement of institutions. The institutional history and developmental orientation of a field are in some sense both manifest and “perceived,” much the way that the future orientation and development of a bodily movement, an expressive gesture, or a conversation, are in
relation to Being. We understand Being here in a smile, for example, is a certain instituted speaking, or the sadness of a lifetime manifest style, an unmistakeable walk, a manner of relation to Being.” This means that a perceived (fields) in their style, as “emblems of a certain the Voices of Silence,” that we perceive beings furthermore, he writes, in “Indirect Language and the V oices of Silence,” that we perceive beings however, he writes, in “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,” that we perceive beings moreover, he writes, in “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,” that we perceive beings hence, within every institution lies the possibility of a re-institution of its own developmental history, i.e., the past institutional movement(s) of the field, in its total dynamic of relations with and within the general “ontological landscape.” This reinstitution is not a mere repetition, because the reinstituted field is re-born into a new dynamic of relations. It lives a new life, while at the same time retaining its character as past. The reinstitution of the sense of the past, in terms of a configuration of institutional fields, includes the re-institution of the actualized pathways which lead from the past configuration or Gestalt to the present dynamic of relations. But, and this is key, it is also the re-institution of unsedimented horizons of past institutions that were not actualized in the movement from the past to the present. This requires some explanation.

Every institution has a horizon of pathways of potential development, but only certain pathways are actualized in the movement from the past to the present. However, the reinstitution of the past in the referral-back, which occurs in the present, includes the reinstitution of the un-actualized potentiality of the past, along with its actualized pathways, which lead to the institution of the present field. We can refer to this ongoing creation of latent or potential horizons of institutional development, as what Merleau-Ponty calls, a “hollowing out of Being.” This hollowing out of being is the stylization of the openness of Being, through the bringing of its openness or latency into relation with sedimented formations of sense. Or, likewise, the dilation of instituted fields into the latency of Being through the continuous renewal or re-institution, which is also a new-institution (Neustiftung), of the latency of the past. What we are talking about specifically here is the re-institution of past hollows, which are non-actual or have not been actualized, but remain potentiality. The world as a unity of co-existence of fields is inhabited—we could even say haunted—by these latent horizons, which fill the divergences between actualized pathways of institution, and exert a pull on their developmental tendencies.

It is precisely the re-institution of these past hollows that resists the re-institution of the actualized pathways from past to present. Again, we can put this in terms of subjective experience. As an institution, each new experience enters into a relation with all past experiences. Our lives only have sense (and style) in terms of this diacritical whole of the co-existence of institutions and styles. In referring back to prior sedimented experiences and invoking a passive transfer of their sense into the present,
the past horizons are re instituted in the present. We can say that their sense institutes, to a large degree, the sense of the present. Simultaneously, every experience, as an institution, opens a horizon of potentiality. What I learn today, as an institution, will open or facilitate a horizon of potential other things that I might learn in the future: a horizon of potential institutional pathways or stylistic orientations, along which my subjective field could potentially develop, in relation to the constellation of institutions that it is instituted within, and that it institutes. Thus, the institutional horizon of the subjective field both is encroached upon and encroaches upon the open totality of other institutions that make up the Gestalt of the general ontological field. In this way, today’s institution institutes a certain style of development, which orients my subjective field toward the actualization of certain potential pathways, but also stylizes or orients the general institutional Gestalt within which my subjective field is instituted. The “encroachment of everything upon everything,” which Merleau-Ponty calls the “world,” is the open totality of institutional fields and the interplay of their styles.\(^18\)

With regard to the narrower example of a subjective field, if any of those potentialities of my subjective field are realized in the future, they will re-institute today’s institution, which had since become sedimented. Thus all experience is the opening of a horizon, which extends into a potential future and a sedimented past. The key is that the opening of the sedimented past, in relation to a potential future, gives, and gives back, to the past new horizons of potentiality, that have not, so to speak, already been played out. It is not just the present, which opens onto a potential future, but also the past made present in its fullness, that is, in its (past) potentiality, as well as the actualized institutional pathways leading from past to present.

We have been taking the subject as an example of a field of institution. The subject, in its instituting power, is itself instituted. This means that the particular style of our subjectivity is instituted in a vast matrix, of not only our subjective relations with the world, but also, for example, social relations, which precede our own subjective style. The subject, as a continuously developing field of sense, is not a closed or autonomous structure. Its Being as a field is the movement of institution in terms of the oscillation or tension between instituting-instituted, both in relation to other, for example, subjective fields, and more general fields, such as communities, states, or other social, political, and cultural institutions. The Being of a subject, or any other institutional field, is its institution in a verbal sense, which is, in turn, its continuously reborn latency or openness.

Thus, while we can say that the subject is instituted within a social field, which has its own dynamic, this does not mean that it is an enclosed or insulated dynamic. The social field is also instituted only in relation to the fields around it, the fields within it (subjects and cultural products), and the more general fields that it is within. The university, as an example of a particular social field, is situated within the institutional field of a city or town. As such, the sense of the two can develop only in relation to one another.

Moreover, we can always think of the development of a field, its stylization or movement, as both individuation, the development of its particular and singular history, and generalization, in the fact that the movement of the field is instituted in its relations with other fields, and, in its continuous movement of re-institution, refers back or simultaneously re-institutes the field(s) that it is instituted within. Thus, all individuation is simultaneously generalization or integration with (and within) the general ontological field of the world. In their institutional development, the university and the subject, as narrower and more individuated fields, continuously re-institute the matrices or constellations that they are instituted within, the city, for example. This movement is at once the development of a singular style and institutional history, and the integration into a more general field. Furthermore, this movement of generalization or integration also re-institutes the (more general) instituting fields. If we take the case of the university in the city, we can say that the generalizing aspect of the movement of the institution of the university, in its re-institution of the field of the city, is also a singularizing or individuating movement of the more general field of the city. Simply put, the development of the university, its participation with the more general institution of the city, individuates and further particularizes the

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institutional development—the history and future orientation, i.e., the style—of the city.

Thus, when we speak of Being as the general ontological field in its openness, we are referring to the whole of the world, in the sense of the open totality of all of this movement, that is, all of the fields, and their relations, and their styles of development. The world does not exist as a positive entity, but as a field of fields, a general Gestalt of sedimentsed and potential (non-sedimentsed) relations between institutions. Most importantly, the world is not a static field. Rather, its movement encompasses the totality of the movement of the fields within it.

The movement of individuation and restriction, on the one hand, and opening and generalization, on the other, are two aspects of the same movement. Each institution is the opening of a field of new relations, and hence the opening of a future. However, this opening occurs along historical pathways of sedimentsation, which give certain tendencies—style—to the opening. Concurrent, the reopening of these pathways, sedimentsed life experiences, for example, allow these past fields to live again, to open themselves again onto a future. What makes this special is that it is the virtual future of a past that is not the present, a genuine new future which exists in what we called earlier, “past hollows”—in a potential or virtual form—contained in a past that is never exhausted by the present, because it is constantly being made simultaneous with the present in institution, and as such, it is constantly remade and infinitely fecund.

Resistance and Survival

This is how the idea of resistance inserts itself into this institutional movement of restriction and opening. In the re-institution of the un-actualized potentiality of the past, the institution of the present field or dynamic undermines or resists its own style. This resistance is itself part of the movement of the stylization of a field. Thus, the stylization of a field always contains an originary reflexive auto-critical or auto-interrogative moment in its movement. Inversely, “survival,” in this context, becomes the restriction of the latency of the past. The past is allowed to persist only in terms of its actualized pathways, such that the present seems to proceed almost causally from it. The survival of the past supports the present, without in any way undermining its style or orientation by drawing it into a relation with the world, for which it would be, so to speak, unprepared. The past persists in this way as a stable and reified backdrop to the present.

As we noted above, the political correlate of this idea of “survival” is what Merleau-Ponty referred to as “statistical democracy.” The institution of the sense of existing social relations in this manner bestows upon them a quasi-naturalized status. The social field appears as the inevitable residue of “natural relations,” rather than a contingent historical style. What is “hypocritically forgotten,” in the preservation of this limited sense of the past, is precisely the openness of each institution. This restriction can itself only be accomplished through institutions of its own. In the article we are referring to, Merleau-Ponty singles out the social sciences for criticism, writing: “Social psychology can degenerate into a means of governing and an apparatus of conservation as soon as it posits as natural existing social relations, as normal the integration of the individual into those relations, and explains the difficulties it encounters through the failings of a private order.”

In this dynamic, whence does “resistance” come, and how does it function. In the essay, “Man and Adversity,” we receive a good indication. Resistance against the smooth or unencumbered movement of sense, its being ushered into well-established pathways, comes about initially in our passive institutional intertwining with the world, our being simultaneously instituted and instituting. This passive intertwining with the world, wherein the resistance inherent to the movement of institution manifests itself, occurs in language, and in the relation between the field of the body and the world that it is instituted within. Merleau-Ponty writes in “Man and Adversity”: “When our initiatives get bogged down in the paste of the body, of language, or of that world beyond measure which is given to us to finish . . . it is only a matter of a sort of inertia, a passive resistance, a dying fall of meaning—an anonymous adversity.” What this bodily and linguistic “adversity” points to is the institution, in the passive sense, of the subject and the body as a field, in relation to the general field of the
This is the “death of meaning” only in the sense of a smooth or unobstructed progression of the movement of institution, as it takes up the past in the formation of the sense of the present, in its style or orientation toward the future. When the tongue slips and an association we did not intend appears, or the body, in its habitual being, surprises us, coming to the fore in its anonymous intentionality, rather than sinking back, for example, in a blush or inadvertent gesture, it is the anonymous or passive institution of “adversity” and “resistance” from the side of the world. The world, as the general ontological field intercedes, disrupting, so to speak, the “survival” of the institutions that make up the subjective field. But this disruption of the “survival” of institutions breathes new life into their style. The life of the past, which is the movement of the field, resists its individuation qua limitation or suppression, i.e., qua survival, and forces its way through passivity. Rather than transforming itself into activity, this resistance undermines the distinction between passivity and activity.23 The passivity of the “past hollows” exerts an affective pull on all the activity of a (subjective) field, altering its style and development. The “noble memory,” in this sense, is the institution of adversity or resistance that originates in the re-institution of the latent—non-actualized—horizons of past institutions. This adversity or resistance in one sense impedes the movement of institution, but it is also itself an institution, the creation of new sense alongside the re-institution of sedimented meaning, hence transforming that meaning. Thus movement and adversity, rather than being opposed to one another, complement and facilitate each other.

Merleau-Ponty also links freedom, in a “general” ontological sense, to the interjection of the anonymity of the world in the instituting of subjective fields.24 In the 1954–55 lectures on institution and passivity, as well as in the Working Notes of *The Visible and the Invisible*, he points to dreams and the unconscious, and also to perception itself (described as the “unconscious,” and as the “vibration” of a field), not as examples of movement within closed fields of subjectivity, but as instances of the instituting power of an anonymous world, with which, as instituted fields, we are “inter-twined” and “reversible,” precisely in the relation of instituting and instituted.25 As with the idea of intertwining, we are interpreting the idea of reversibility here through the relation instituting-instituted. In these phenomena, the “vibration” of the perceptual field (insofar as it is a field of style) in the “play of the affective field,” is its radiating outward into the temporal depth of the world. We might say that this allows the past and the present to resist one another, not per se, but insofar as either may contain certain tendencies, certain instituted style(s) of social being, which restrict the openness of either past or present, and hence of the future, and which are an inhibition of what Merleau-Ponty calls the “Stiftung of Being.” This idea of the “Stiftung of Being” is the institution of latency and openness in the development of sense, and as such the institution of a style or tendency toward an indefinite elaboration of the general field of the world, in other words, recalling the definition from *Adventures of the Dialectic*, the institution of truth.26

**The Noble Memory as Democratic Practice**

In conclusion, I would like to try to open this idea of the “noble memory,” understood in terms of the movement of institution, and specifically the institution of resistance, toward Merleau-Ponty’s cautious endorsement of parliamentary democracy in *Adventures of the Dialectic*, and his rather less cautious claim that the institution of parliament is a guarantee of opposition and truth. We have already established the idea of “statistical democracy” as the inhibition of the resistance of the past in the movement of the social field. How can we conceive of the idea of parliamentary democracy as the institution of resistance, or as the “noble memory”? The political instantiation of this idea of the noble memory in democratic practice would entail an interrogative activity that takes place within the institution of parliament. The interrogative role of the parliament as an institution is to make manifest, that is, to make visible, in debate and dialogue, both within the institution itself—in parliamentary discussion and debate—and in the interaction between parliament and the public, the stylization of the social field over which the democratic institution exercises its authority, but also in which it is itself reciprocally instituted. This activity of making visible the invis-
ible stylization of the field—which I think we can also say is what Merleau-Ponty, in the “Introduction” to Signs and in “A Note on Machiavelli,” calls virtù—is the re-institution of the institutional pathways that have led to the current state of the social field. The key to this is of course that these pathways are not re-instituted as the causal precedents of the present, but in their fullness, that is, in their latent as well as actualized dimensions.27

There is at least one significant difficulty here, while Merleau-Ponty names the condition of “statistical democracy” as what we could call a reification of institutional pathways and a repression of resistance, it is not clear that the activity of democratic virtù, as carried out by individuated subjects (citizens), is possible from within these conditions. This would be a restricting upshot of the field of the subject always being instituted from within a social field. There does not seem to be an obvious manner in which the movement of a “reified” or “repressed” field can be resisted.

The possibility for breaking free of this reified condition of the social field, and hence of subjectivity, would have to be found, not in an activity of democratic virtù, but rather in the passivity of our general freedom: the adversity presented by the body and by language in its relation of instituting-instituted with the world. As I stand before the plaque at Tavistock Square, this is perhaps what I want it to ask or demand of passers-by. I want its appeal to memory to be a form of adversity and resistance, to let the past be in its fullness, meaning in its latency. In this case, to let the perception of this plaque, of this demand inscribed on a piece of metal, serve as a re-institution of the institutions of death, and of horrific violence, and of the vulnerability of our institutions—our cities, our governments, our style of life—in their full potentiality. Our unequivocal condemnation of such violence should not detract from the “adversity” that its “noble memory” inaugurates in our institutional pathways, or from the institutional vulnerability that it opens us to. The recovery of a social institution—a subject or a city—from such sense-destroying violence may in fact, to some extent, depend on the reopening of an institution to its latent horizons. We use the word vulnerability here in the sense of a vulnerability that is inscribed into the structure of institution qua the structure of Being: a vulnerability of institutions that is in fact an openness to latency, a “Stiftung of Being.” This sense of the word is irrevocably tied to the vulnerability of the body to injury and violence, and to the loss of words and corporeally manifest disruption of sense that the memory of such violence elicits. On the level of passivity, of the body and of language, the vulnerability of institutions is what preserves the possibility of political virtù. To let our perception of the city, as a perception of the style and stylization of a field, serve itself as a “noble memory.” It is in the possibility of resistance—inherent in the movement of institution as it manifests itself in language, the body, and in perception as the “vibration” of the “ontological landscape”—that we are free. Subsequently, it is in this idea of resistance and adversity that we have the possibility of freeing ourselves, and our institutions from the grip of a “statistical democracy,” and hence, reopening the horizon of our democratic virtù. And thus, on an active level, it is the task of political virtù to preserve the vulnerability and latency of the social field, by re-instituting the field in the discursive activity of parliament, making its institutional development and pathways—its style—visible, and thereby continuously re-instituting the possibility of adversity and resistance.

ENDNOTES

1. “Husserl has used the fine word Stiftung—foundation or establishment—to designate first of all the unlimited fecundity of each present which, precisely because it is singular and passes, can never stop having been and thus being universally; but above all to designate the fecundity of the products of culture which continue to have value after their appearance and which open a field of investigations in which they perpetually come to life again. It is thus that the world as soon as he has seen it, his first attempts at painting, and the whole past of painting all deliver up a tradition to the painter—that is, Husserl remarks, the power to forget origins and to give to the past not a survival, which is a hypocritical form of forgetfulness, but a new life, which is a noble form of mem-

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2. Another question troubled my reflection on the plaque. I am not quite sure to whom the appeal or command inscribed on the plaque is addressed. What I am inclined to say is that the addressee is also the subject of the declaration: the city of London. This introduces another question that we can also only try to provide a framework for thinking about here: how is it that a city, an institution, or group of institutions that make up a city can remember or more precisely, not forget?


5. Cf. for example, the description of the “historicity of life” in relation to painting in “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,” which is explained in terms that cannot be called otherwise than the movement of institution: “This is the historicity which lives in the painter at work when with a single gesture he links the tradition that he recaptures and the tradition that he founds. It is the historicity which in one stroke welds him to all that has ever been painted in the world, without his having to leave his place, his time or his blessed or accursed labour. The historicity of life reconciles paintings insofar as each one expresses the whole of existence—insofar as they are all successful—instead of reconciling them insofar as they are all finished like so many futile gestures” (*Signs*, 101–02/63).

6. Ibid., 77/62.

7. In “‘Western’ Marxism,” Merleau-Ponty provides a “Marxist” definition of “truth” as a “process of indefinite verification.” This process should be understood in terms of the unending elaboration or development of the “field(s) of investigation” or “field of praxis” that in “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence,” Merleau-Ponty states, constitute cultural institutions (cf. *Adventures of the Dialectic*, 73/53).

8. “Like perceived things my tasks, are present to me, not as objects or ends, but as reliefs or configurations, that is to say, in the landscape of praxis” (*Adventures of the Dialectic*, 268/199); “Philosopy does not decompose our relationship with the world into real elements, or even into ideal references which would make of it an ideal object, but it discerns articulations in the world, it awakens in it regular relations of prepossession, of recapitulation, of overlapping, which are as dormant in our ontological landscape, subsist there only in the form of traces, and nevertheless continue to function there, continue to institute the new there.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, suivi de notes de travail, ed. Claude Lefort (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 137; *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 101 (cited hereafter with original pagination preceding the English). Cf., also, Bernhard Waldenfels, “‘The Paradox of Expression,” in Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor, eds., *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty’s Notion of the Flesh* (Albany: SUNY press, 2000), 91.


11. “As for the limitations of parliamentary democracy and democratic action, there are those which result from the institution, and they should be accepted, for Parliament is the only known institution that guarantees a minimum of opposition and truth. There are other limitations which are the result of parliamentary usage and manoeuvres; these deserve no respect at all, they can be denounced in parliament itself” (*Adventures of the Dialectic*, 304/226).


13. “Taken singly, signs do not signify anything, and that each one of them does not so much express a meaning as mark a divergence of meaning between itself and other signs. Since the same can be said for all other signs, we may conclude that language is made of differences without terms; or more exactly that the terms of language are engen-

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15. The Visible and the Invisible, 242/188.
17. Cf., the discussion of what Husserl calls “intuitive ‘flair’” in Ideas II. “Intuitive ‘flair’” is described as the apperception of the “style” of the other, in terms of the developmental history (or “historical nexuses”) of their personality. This style of the other is apperceived through a bodily index, that is, it is manifest in the movement of the body (Husserl, Ideas II, 273–74/286).
18. “It is in the universal structure ‘world’—encroachment of everything upon everything, a being by promiscuity—that is found the reservoir whence proceeds this new absolute life” (The Visible and the Invisible, 287/234).
19. I am not entirely comfortable with calling the potentiality of past institutions “non-sedimented,” though in the sense that the re-institution of this potentiality in simultaneously a new-institution (Neustiftung) and a re-institution (Nachstiftung), it is certainly more than the sense of a past constitutive nexus, as Husserl describes it. The other option would seem to be to speak of sedimentation in terms of sedimented actuality: past active constitutive nexuses or institutions; and sedimented potentiality: the horizons of potentiality that are part of each institution and are neither “retained” as determinate sense, nor “forgotten,” though we are indeed talking about a forgetting of these horizons when we use the term “survival.” Such horizons of potentiality have something like a “traumatic” structure wherein they are neither “remembered” nor “forgotten,” but still exert an affective pull upon development or stylization of the field. It could be that the traditional concepts of sediment and sedimentation are not adequate to the theory of institution that Merleau-Ponty is developing in his last works. Merleau-Ponty indicates that the problem of sedimentation and re-activation lay at the heart of his attempt to articulate an ontology of the “flesh” through the philosophy of institution. In a working note from June 1, 1960 he writes: “In fact it is a question of grasping the nexus—neither ‘historical’ or ‘geographical’ of history and transcendental geography, this very time that is space, this very space that is time, which I will have rediscovered by my analysis of the visible and the flesh, the simultaneous Urstiftung of time and space which makes there be a historical landscape and a quasi-geographical inscription of history. Fundamental problem: the sedimentation and the reactivation” (The Visible and the Invisible, 307/259; my italics).
21. Ibid.
22. Signs, 304/239.
23. This leads, inexorably, to the difficulty with the idea of sedimentation that we pointed to above, see note 19.
24. “And even freedom has its generality, is understood as generality: activity is no longer the contrary of passivity” (The Visible and the Invisible, 323/269).
25. Cf. Merleau-Ponty’s descriptions of the unconscious, dreaming, and perception in L’Institution, La Passivité and The Visible and the Invisible: “The noise of the sea, this activity of the state that is its own, this indefatigable push against all defeats, this indistinguishable rumor, symbol in the distribution of our choice, of our freedom against the groundswell of our life, both distant and near, symbol of our temporal ubiquity—of existential eternity—a tumult of such silence. Freud’s error is only to conceive this push of the unconscious, of our life distributed across an entire field, past and present, near and far, undivided, and coherent as a lying thought” (L’Institution, La Passivité, 262). “Perception itself, in its time was not intuition but a vibration of a field—how would memory be anything other than differentiation, gap, lack of . . .” (L’Institution, La Passivité, 264). “Dreaming is letting the affective field play, its relations, the allusions, the correspondences that the provocation-defense rapport poses. Dreaming is not an I think that. But, thinking according to signifying nuclei that are not present as objects” (L’Institution, La Passivité, 280); “The meaning is ‘perceived’ and the Rückgestaltung is a ‘perception.’ This means: there is a germination of what will have been understood. (Insight and Aha Erlebnis)—And that means: the perception (the first one) is of itself an openness upon a field of Gestaltungen—And that means: perception is unconsciousness” (The Visible and the Invisible, 243/189).
26. Merleau-Ponty refers to the “true Stiftung of Being” in relation to dreams and in the imaginary, he writes: “Understand the imaginary sphere through the imaginary sphere of the body—And hence not as a nihilation that counts as observation but as the true Stiftung of Being of which the observation and the articulated are special variants” (The Visible and the Invisible, 316/262).

27. “The remedy that we seek does not lie in rebellion, but in unremitting virtù” (Signs, 47/25); “[Machiavelli] describes under the name virtue, a means of living with others” (ibid., 271/214).

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