

Jean-Paul Sartre:
Mind and Body, Word and Deed

Edited by

Jean-Pierre Boulé and Benedict O'Donohoe

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For Lya; and for Zoé—always
J-PB

To Tom and Ania
BPO'D

Jean-Paul Sartre:
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Edited by Jean-Pierre Boulé and Benedict O'Donohoe

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CHAPTER ONE

SARTRE'S TREATMENT OF THE BODY IN *BEING AND NOTHINGNESS*: THE "DOUBLE SENSATION"

DERMOT MORAN

Sartre's innovative analysis of embodiment: flesh and intercorporeity

Jean-Paul Sartre's chapter entitled "The Body" ("Le corps") in his *Being and Nothingness*¹ has regrettably been somewhat overlooked as a vital philosophical analysis of embodiment yet it is, by any standards, a ground-breaking piece of great subtlety and originality that deserves a fuller exploration.² For instance, Sartre should be credited with introducing the key concept of "the flesh" (*la chair*), which is so fundamental to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's later philosophy, and which is often thought to have originated with him. Another original aspect of Sartre's account is his discussion of *intercorporeity* (*intercorporéité*—a term that Merleau-Ponty employs in his later work—meaning the bodily engagement between lived bodies). While the term "intercorporeity" itself does not

¹ Sartre, *L'Être et le néant. Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique* (1943, *Being and Nothingness*, hereafter *BN*, followed first by the English pagination and then by that of the French original). A draft of this chapter was given as a paper at the conference of the UK Sartre Society at the Institut Français, South Kensington, in September 2009.

² Of course, one should not assume that everything Sartre says about the body is to be found in the chapter bearing that title. In fact, there are discussions of the body throughout *Being and Nothingness*. In particular, his discussion of hunger and desire, for instance, in the chapter on "Concrete Relations with Others", continues the analysis of the experience of one's own body and of the *flesh* of the other. For recent discussions of Sartre on embodiment, see Katherine J. Morris (ed.), *Sartre on the Body*.

appear in *Being and Nothingness*, nevertheless, the dynamic visual and tactual relations *between* the living bodies of conscious subjects has a central place. For Sartre, the flesh is presented as both the locus of contingency and also as the point of contact with the flesh of the other. Flesh is, as Sartre puts it, “the pure contingency of presence” (BN, 343; 410).³ It is our incarnation in the world in precisely this inescapable manner, our being “thrown” into the world. At the same time, my flesh “constitutes”—as Husserl would say; Sartre uses different expressions—the other’s flesh, especially in the acts of touching and caressing:

The caress reveals the Other’s flesh as flesh to myself *and to the Other* [...] it is my body as flesh which causes the Other’s flesh to be born [*qui fait naître la chair d’autrui*]. The caress is designed to cause the Other’s body to be born, through pleasure, for the Other—and for myself—as a touched passivity in such a way that my body is made flesh in order to touch the Other’s body with its own passivity; that is, by caressing itself with the Other’s body rather than by caressing her. (BN, 390; 459-60)

In fact, in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre objects to the Cartesian manner in which Husserl claims the other is constituted *within* my own subjectivity (according to the dominant tradition of reading the Fifth Cartesian Meditation). Sartre claims rather to interpret Heidegger’s conception of the solitude of *Dasein* when he asserts: “We encounter the Other, we do not constitute him.”⁴ But Sartre also believes that I make myself flesh in order to experience the other as flesh (see the complex discussion at BN, 389; 458). I turn myself into flesh, as it were; I become the soft body that greets the other.

Sartre’s chapter on “The Body” maps out much of the ground that is later retraced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his *Phenomenology of Perception*⁵, which appeared two years after Sartre’s opus and was deeply influenced by it. Indeed, even Merleau-Ponty’s last unfinished project,

³ Sartre develops the notion of the “flesh” (*la chair*) from Husserl’s conception of *Leibhaftigkeit*, the bodily presence of the object in perception. Indeed, Sartre already talks about the “flesh of the object in perception” in an earlier 1940 study, *L’Imaginaire* (see Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination*, 15). The French translation of *leibhaftig* in Husserlian texts (as also cited by Merleau-Ponty and Levinas) is *en chair et en os*, meaning literally “in flesh and bone”.

⁴ “On rencontre autrui, on ne le constitue pas.” (BN, 250; 307.)

⁵ *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945, *Phenomenology of Perception*, henceforth *PP*, followed first by the page number of the English translation, then by that of the French edition).

published posthumously as *The Visible and the Invisible*⁶, is heavily indebted to Sartre’s explorations. To name some of the themes which Sartre discusses a few years in advance of Merleau-Ponty, one can point to the discussion of the artificiality of the psychological (behaviourist) concept of sensation; the intrinsic temporality of experience; the Müller-Lyer illusion; the Gestalt figure-ground relation; the “double sensation” (one hand touching the other); and so on. Sartre’s overall account of the embodied subject, and of his or her encounters with other embodied subjects, is in many ways more far-reaching than Merleau-Ponty’s. It is certainly far more dramatic. It is therefore worthwhile revisiting Sartre’s discussion of the body in *Being and Nothingness*.

Sartre’s three ontological conceptions of the body

Written in Sartre’s customary dialectical and sometimes tortured style, this long chapter is dense, difficult, and confused, yet it also throws up many brilliant insights. *Being and Nothingness* claims to be, according to its subtitle, an “essay of phenomenological ontology”⁷, and—as part of this project—in this chapter Sartre is proposing a new multi-dimensional approach to the body that he terms “ontological” in opposition to traditional *epistemological* approaches found in modern philosophy. For Sartre, traditional philosophy has misunderstood the body precisely because it has conflated or inverted the orders of *knowing* and *being*.⁸

Sartre’s starting point, of course, is the phenomenological discussion of embodiment as he creatively interpreted it from his readings of Edmund Husserl (drawn presumably from passages in Husserl’s then published works—namely *Logical Investigations*, *Ideas I*, *Formal and Transcendental Logic*, and *Cartesian Meditations*—since he had no direct access to the then unpublished *Ideas II*, apart possibly from conversations he might have had with his friend Maurice Merleau-Ponty).⁹ Sartre also

⁶ *Le Visible et l’invisible* (1964, *The Visible and the Invisible*, hereafter *TVTI*, followed by the pagination of the English translation).

⁷ William McBride has commented on Sartre’s subtitle in his chapter “Sartre and Phenomenology”, in Lawlor (see especially page 72).

⁸ Sartre speaks variously of the “order of being” (*l’ordre de l’être*, BN 305; 367), “orders of reality” (*ordres de réalité*, BN, 304; 366), and “ontological levels” (*plans ontologiques*, BN, 305; 367).

⁹ Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution* (*Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book*, hereafter cited as *Ideas II*, followed by the English

read Max Scheler¹⁰, and was hugely influenced by Martin Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* in *Being and Time* (which Sartre, following the French custom of the time, translates as *la réalité humaine*, human reality).¹¹ Sartre's academic formation would also have made him familiar with the established French tradition of physiological and psychological discussion of the body in relation to consciousness that stems from Descartes, and is elaborated in the work of Condillac, Maine de Biran, Comte, Bergson, Brunschwig¹², Pradines¹³, Marcel¹⁴, Bachelard, and others. The idealist Léon Brunschwig, a professor at the Sorbonne, was one of Sartre's philosophy teachers at the École Normale Supérieure and another formative influence. Similarly, Sartre refers to Gaston Bachelard's *L'Eau et les rêves* in his chapter on the body.¹⁵ Sartre's sources are diverse but he absorbs them into his own original and creative vision. In particular, his interpretation of phenomenology casts it as a philosophy of exteriority, no longer trapped in the epistemological paradigm. Intentionality means being thrust into the world.

The main purpose of Sartre's chapter on the body is to claim that one has to distinguish between different *ontological* orders in relation to the body. He means "ontology" in a phenomenological sense (deeply influenced by Heidegger); the ontological domain is the domain of phenomenality, of

pagination, the Husserliana (Hua) volume number and the German pagination). Sartre of course read Husserl's published writings, but had little access to the unpublished drafts, except perhaps through Merleau-Ponty, who was receiving material from Herman Leo van Breda, Director of the Husserl Archives in Leuven, even during the German occupation (see H. L. van Breda, *History of the Husserl Archives*).

¹⁰ For an interesting survey of the role of the body in Scheler's writings, see Daniela Vallega-Neu, "Driven Spirit".

¹¹ Before writing *Being and Nothingness* (while in the POW camp Stalag XIID at Triers), Sartre read Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (1927) and his 1929 essay "What is Metaphysics?", as well as some of his later essays of the 1930s and early 1940s. Although, strictly speaking, the body hardly makes an appearance in *Being and Time*, Sartre interprets the *facticity* and *contingency* of *Dasein*'s "Being-in-the-world" as referring primarily to our embodiment.

¹² See, for instance, Brunschwig, *L'Expérience humaine et la causalité physique* (1922), which is also criticized by Merleau-Ponty in *PP* (see 54-56; 67-69).

¹³ Maurice Pradines, a follower of Bergson, taught Levinas at Strasbourg. See his *Philosophie de la Sensation, I: Le Problème de la sensation* (1928), listed by Merleau-Ponty in his bibliography to *PP* (see also *PP*, 13n; 20n).

¹⁴ Gabriel Marcel, *Être et avoir* (1918-33, *Being and Having*).

¹⁵ Gaston Bachelard, *L'Eau et les rêves: essai sur l'imagination de la matière* (1942, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*).

the manifest. The body has different modes of manifestation. The body manifests itself within my experience in one way, and there is another quite different experience of the body given from the perspective of the other. Sartre distinguishes the body as it is "for me" or "for oneself" (*pour-soi*) and the body as it is "for others" or "for the other" (*pour-autrui*). These dimensions are, Sartre claims, "incommunicable" and "irreconcilable". The first ontological dimension addresses the way that, as Sartre puts it, "I exist my body" (*j'existe mon corps*, *BN*, 351; 428), the body as non-thing, as medium for my experience of the world, but also as somehow *surpassed* or *transcended* towards the world. This is *le corps-existé*, the body as lived from the first-person perspective, as opposed to *le corps-vu*, the body as seen from the perspective of the other (*BN*, 358; 426), or of myself now in the position of an external observer of my body.

The second ontological dimension of the body refers to the manner in which my body is experienced and indeed utilized by the other (*BN*, 351; 418), and utilized by myself occupying the role of third-person observer of my body. This includes my ready-to-hand equipmental engagement with the world and my body as the "tool of tools". Sartre claims that "the original relation between things [...] is the relation of instrumentality" (*BN*, 200; 250). There are further characteristics of embodiment that relate to these points of view of *mine* and *other*; the body can be experienced as a physical thing, and no more; but it is also an instrument through which other things are disclosed: "Either it [the body] is a thing among other things, or else it is that by which things are revealed to me. But it cannot be both at the same time" (*BN*, 304; 366). For Sartre, I come to understand the other's body as a certain kind of tool for me and then, by analogy, I come to understand my own body as a tool: "The Other's body appears to me here as one instrument in the midst of other instruments, not only as a tool to make tools but also as a *tool to manage tools*, in a word as a tool machine" (*BN*, 320; 384).

Sartre posits a third ontological dimension that is far more complicated: it is the manner in which "I exist for myself as a body known by the other" (*BN*, 351; 419), what Martin Dillon has characterized as "the body-for-itself-for-others".¹⁶ This, for Sartre, captures both the dimension of facticity—I do not control myself completely and have, as it were, to accept its undeniable presence in the public world—and at the same time the *intersubjective* dimension; I have the definite *experience* of my body as it is experienced by others, and this is filtered in many different ways in

¹⁶ See Martin C. Dillon, "Sartre on the Phenomenal Body and Merleau-Ponty's Critique", in Stewart, especially page 126.

our “concrete relations with others”. Indeed, it is true to say that Sartre has explored the dialectics of this intersubjective co-constitution of my body more than any other phenomenologist (with the possible exception of Levinas). This third dimension of the body includes the manner in which I experience it under the gaze or “look” (*le regard*) of the other, as in the case of *shame* or *embarrassment*. I experience how the other sees me, even in the physical absence of the other: “With the appearance of the Other’s look I experience the revelation of my being-as-object, that is, of my transcendence as transcended” (*BN*, 351; 419).

In the first way of experiencing my body, I experience myself primarily, as Husserl puts it, as a series of “I can’s”, whereby my capacities to do something introduce transcendence into my current situation. I am here but I can look over there, move over there, and so on. This is what Sartre means by “transcendence”: I have the capacity from the very intentionality and ontological make-up of the “for-itself” to be always beyond my exact current situation. However, in the public sphere, in relations to others, as in this third way of experiencing my body, my transcending freedom is now inhibited or, as Sartre puts it, “transcended”. I am, Sartre says, “imprisoned in an absence” (*BN*, 363; 430). And, similarly, I too inhibit the other: “From the moment that I exist, I establish a factual limit to the Other’s freedom. I *am* this limit and each of my projects traces the outline of this limit around the Other” (*BN*, 409; 480).

“Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others”¹⁷, Sartre asserts at the beginning of his chapter on “Concrete Relations with Others”. This mutual relationship of self to the other also intimately involves the constitution of my body which remains, for Sartre, a contested domain. There is—and here Sartre draws heavily on Kojève’s reading of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*—a struggle to the death going on between my desire to impose myself freely and transcend myself towards the situation, and my experience of being defined and delimited by the other, over which I have very little power. My existence places a limitation on the other and vice-versa, but there are many modes of accommodation within this vital dance between us.

Indeed, it is this third intersubjectively constituted ontological dimension of embodiment that has perhaps found most resonance (although rarely with acknowledgement to Sartre) in the social and political language of empowerment, of assertion of one’s own sense of self over and against the assignment of meaning conferred by the other, as found in the politics

¹⁷ “Le conflit est le sens original de l’être-pour-autrui” (*BN*, 364; 431).

of gender, for instance.¹⁸ Sartre’s account is deserving of much closer scrutiny in this regard. It is surprisingly subtle and sensitive to the complexities of the dynamics of these relations.

The body as “psychic object”

Sartre begins from the concrete, phenomenologically experienced unity of body and consciousness, with the body as lived and experienced *from within* (although that spatial metaphor is shown to be inadequate), from the first-person perspective. This experience cannot be characterized either as pure consciousness or as physical thinghood. The lived, experienced body—corresponding to Husserl’s *Leib*—can never be construed purely as a transcendent object (even in the most extreme efforts at *self-objectification*), and certainly not something purely *physical*. In fact, Sartre paradoxically asserts: “The body is the psychic object par excellence—the *only psychic object*” (*BN* 347; 414). The lived body is experienced as something that haunts consciousness through and through. The body dominates the psyche; it is present even in dreams, and the body we experience from within is itself psychically constituted. This is what Sartre means when he states: “I exist my body” (*BN*, 351; 418).

The objectified body of others and the felt body

By contrast, the material, objective body, the body as *idealized* in the natural and life sciences (physics, biology, physiology) is, in Sartre’s pithy phrase, the “body of others” (*le corps d’autrui*), that is the body as constituted by the *anonymous* and *collective* other (*l’autre*) in which I also participate. Sartre distinguishes sharply between this body understood as an object in the world, seen from “the physical point of view”, the “point of view of the outside, of exteriority”¹⁹, and the body as experienced *from within*. From within, the body as lived is invisible, impalpable, “ineffable” (*BN*, 354; 421). I do not know, for instance, experientially that I have a brain or endocrine glands (*BN*, 303; 365): that is something I learn from others, from science textbooks, from conversations with doctors, from scientific investigations, PET scans, and so on. Likewise, I do not know the precise inner anatomy of my body. I have, as it were, only a phenomenologically experienced “folk” anatomy: where I *think* my

¹⁸ See, however, Jane Duran, “Sartre, Gender Theory and the Possibility of Transcendence”.

¹⁹ “[...] le point de vue du dehors, de l’extériorité” (*BN*, 305; 367).

stomach is, where I *think* I can feel my liver, where I *believe* the heart is located, and so on. This folk-map can be more or less well informed by science, more or less accurate, but this scientific map, superimposed on the felt body, does not necessarily coincide with the body *as felt*. I can *visualize* my ulcerous stomach but I *live* its discomfort in a different way (BN, 355-56; 423).²⁰ I feel my heart pounding when I run, but normally I do not apprehend it at all. There is an immediately intuited or *felt* body, Merleau-Ponty's "phenomenal body", *le corps phénoménal*. He writes:

As far as bodily space [*l'espace corporel*] is concerned, it is clear that there is a knowledge of place which is reducible to a sort of co-existence with that place, and which is not simply nothing, even though it cannot be conveyed by a description or even by the mute reference of a gesture. A patient of the kind discussed above, when stung by a mosquito, does not need to look for the place where he has been stung. He finds it straight away, because for him there is no question of locating it in relation to axes of co-ordinates in objective space, but of reaching with his phenomenal hand a certain painful spot on his phenomenal body [*son corps phénoménal*]. (PP, 105; 122-23)

Merleau highlights the dexterity of this phenomenal body which has an immediate relationship to itself. Sartre prefers to point up the manner in which objective science challenges our own immediate corporeal self-presence. Thus he writes:

The disease as psychic is of course very different from the disease known and described by the physician, it is a state. There is no question here of bacteria or of lesions in tissue, but of a synthetic form of destruction. (BN, 356; 424)

In this example, Sartre claims my disease is in fact objectified by others who can often apprehend it better than I can.

However, most of the time, this felt body is non-objectified and experienced in a diffuse, amorphous and almost invisible manner (which is precisely its mode of appearing). It becomes obtrusive in certain forms of illness (such as when I become dizzy or nauseous), or failure (the stone is too heavy to lift), or disability (the anorexic *experiences* her body as too

²⁰ Or, for example, in challenging Freudian psychoanalytic accounts of the child's fascination with holes, Sartre claims that the child could never experience his own anus as a hole (as part of the objective structure of the universe). The child learns this from another person (see BN, 612-613; 704).

gross), or (as he emphasizes) in the *look* of the other.²¹ The other's look is a peculiar form of experience of embodiment. As Sartre writes perceptively, I do not see the other's eyes when I experience his or her look; rather, the other appears to me to be out *in front* of their eyes: "The other's look hides his eyes; he seems to go in front of them" (BN, 258; 316).

Furthermore—and this is also Sartre's original contribution—even when I see and touch my body, I am in these situations experiencing my body *from without*, from the point of view of another: "I am the other in relation to my eye". I can see my eye as a sense organ but I cannot, *pace* Merleau-Ponty, "see the seeing" (BN, 304; 366). I see my hand, Sartre acknowledges, but only as an external thing. It is simply an object lying on the table like any other object. I cannot *see* the *sensitivity* of the hand or its *mineness*: "For my hand reveals to me the resistance of objects, their hardness or softness, but not *itself*. Thus I see this hand only in the way that I see this inkwell. I unfold a distance between it and me" (BN, 304; 366). I see my hand as another object in the world. In other words, my sight (and indeed my touch) manifests my body to me in precisely the same way as it is available to *another*. Here Sartre and Merleau-Ponty are in fundamental disagreement. Merleau, following Husserl, emphasizes the feeling body as a continuing presence in cases of seeing and touching (the body is never absent from the perceptual field); whereas Sartre maintains that our acts of perceiving *objectify* what we perceive and displace the *feeling* onto the *felt*. In Sartre's terminology,thetic or positional consciousness is objectifying or reifying. Physicians and others have an experience of my body, but they experience it as a piece of the world, "in the midst of the world" (*au milieu du monde*, BN, 303; 365). This is the body in its "being-for-others" (*être-pour-autrui*, BN, 305; 367). Of course, both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty agree that when the body is functioning normally, I do not notice it at all; it does not become salient in my consciousness.

Sartre claims that my own body is primarily present to me in this "for-others" (*pour-autrui*) way, or in what might today be called the *third-person* approach. He writes:

Now the body, whatever may be its function, appears first as the *known* [...] the body—our body—has for its peculiar characteristic the fact that it is essentially that which is known by the Other. What I know is the body of another, and the essential facts which I know concerning my own body come from the way in which others see it. (BN, 218; 270-71)

²¹ In *Ideas II*, Husserl had already distinguished between normal or optimal cases of experiencing and impaired ones, e.g. touching a surface with a blistered finger.

Despite this dominance of the *pour-autrui* body, Sartre strongly rejects the view that our ontology of the body should begin from this third-person, anonymous, “externalist” (*du dehors*, *BN*, 303; 365) view. This is, as he puts it graphically, “to put the corpse at the origin of the living body” (*BN*, 344; 411). To invoke a concept from Gilbert Ryle, it would be, for Sartre, a “category mistake”—indeed precisely the mistake made by all previous philosophy—to attempt to unite the first-person experienced body with the third-person “body of others” (*corps des autres*, *BN*, 303; 365), such that the fundamental fissure between the two approaches is elided. This is indeed a profound conceptual confusion, as far as Sartre is concerned.

The invisible body in the primacy of the situation

Rejecting this third-person, externalist, body-of-others approach, Sartre maintains one must start from the recognition that, first and foremost, our experience is not of *the body* as such (or indeed of our own consciousness as such), but rather, of the *world*, or the *situation*: “Our being is immediately ‘in situation’; that is, it arises in enterprises and knows itself first in so far as it is reflected in those enterprises” (*BN*, 39; 76). And again: “[T]he body is identified with the whole world inasmuch as the world is the total situation of the for-itself and the measure of its existence” (*BN*, 309; 372). We do not first experience ourselves as embodied and then experience the world as impinging on our bodies, but rather we are completely out there *in the world*: “The concrete is man within the world in that specific union of man with the world which Heidegger, for example, calls ‘being-in-the-world’” (*BN*, 3; 38).

It is because of our intentional directedness to the world that we have to overcome, surpass, transcend the body. The whole thrust of human subjectivity is to overcome or cancel itself, to negate or “nihilate” (*néantiser*) itself by *intending* towards the world. Intentionality is world-directed. The embodied consciousness has to “surpass” itself, go beyond itself toward the world: this is the thrust of the long Chapter Three on “Transcendence”, which tries to set out the manner in which the *for-itself* transcends. This “surpassing” (*dépassement*) constitutes the essence of intentionality understood as self-transcendence. This surpassing of the body, however, does not mean its elimination: “The body is necessary again as the obstacle to be surpassed in order to be in the world; that is, the obstacle which I am to myself” (*BN*, 326; 391). For Sartre, our transcendence towards the world is part of what he takes to be our original “upsurge in the world”: “But it is we ourselves who decide these very dimensions by our very upsurge [*notre surgissement*] into the world and it

is very necessary that we decide them, for otherwise they would not be at all” (*BN*, 308; 370).

Sartre frequently speaks of the “upsurge” of the *pour-soi* towards the world, of the “upsurge” of the other in my world, and so on. In a sense, this upsurge is the primal situation: consciousness and world emerging together in one blow. Merleau-Ponty also speaks of the “unmotivated upsurge of the world”.²² For Sartre, this upsurge has both a certain necessity and a certain contingency, this combination he calls “facticity”. For Sartre, paradoxically, while the body is that which necessarily introduces the notion of perspective and point of view, at the same time the body is a *contingent* viewpoint on the world. Our body exemplifies the very *contingency* of our being: it is a body *in pain*, or whatever. To apprehend this contingency, is to experience “nausea”: “A dull and inescapable nausea perpetually reveals my body to my consciousness” (*BN*, 338; 404). Being embodied brings ontological un-ease (dis-ease) or discomfort which is essential to the functioning of the for-itself. The for-itself can *only* function because it already is a body.

For Sartre, as for Husserl, consciousness requires incarnation, which situates and locates consciousness, gives it a point of view, and makes it possible *as* consciousness. Sartre writes: “[T]he very nature of the for-itself demands that it be body, that is, that its nihilating escape from being should be made in the form of an engagement in the world” (*BN* 309; 372). Moreover, the world in which we are embodied is a world that has been humanized by us: “the world is human” (*BN*, 218; 270): “The body is the totality of meaningful relationships to the world [...]. The body in fact could not appear without sustaining meaningful relations with the totality of what is” (*BN*, 344; 411).

Sartre insists on the synthetic union between body and world. Merleau-Ponty also comments on the remarkable fit there is between my body and the world. The visible world has just that array of colours which my eyes are attuned to register. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, he writes: “[T]he seer and the visible reciprocate one another [*se réciproquent*] and we no longer know which sees and which is seen” (*TVTI*, 139; 181). Similarly, according to Merleau in “Eye and Mind”²³: “The mirror appears because I am seeing-visible [*voyant-visible*], because there is a reflexivity of the sensible. [...] My outside completes itself in and through the sensible” (*EM*, 168; 24). And in his “Working Notes” (May 1960), Merleau says that the flesh is a “mirror phenomenon” (*TVTI*, 255; 303). Sartre too sees

²² “[...] le jaillissement immotivé du monde” (*PP*, xiv; viii).

²³ *L’Œil et l’esprit* (cited as *EM* with English then French pagination).

the embodied subject as intertwined with the world. On the other hand, he rejects the deep significance that Husserl and Merleau-Ponty accord to the phenomenon of the “intertwining” (*Verflechtung* in German, *l’interlacs* in French) in the double sensation, to which we shall now turn.

Sartre on intertwining and the “double sensation”

As we have seen, Sartre clearly distinguishes between my body as experienced (ambiguously and non-objectively) by me in the first person, and the body as it is perceived or known by me occupying the perspective of another person. These points of view are irreconcilable and indicate an ontological gulf that separates the two dimensions. These different “bodies” underpin different and *irreconcilable* ontologies. Sartre’s analysis of the well-known phenomenon of the double sensation aims to reinforce this irreconcilability between these opposing “ontological” dimensions.

Although many philosophers think the phenomenon of the “double sensation” is a discovery of Husserl or Merleau-Ponty, in fact it is a recurrent theme in nineteenth-century psychologies, from Weber²⁴ to Katz.²⁵ Husserl discusses the phenomenon of the “double sensation” (*Doppelempfindung*) in his *Thing and Space* (1907)²⁶ and in *Ideas II* § 36 (152-54; *Hua IV*, 144-47). For Husserl, when one hand touches the other, the sensations of touching can be *reversed* into sensations of being touched. Husserl calls this “intertwining” (*Verflechtung*), a concept taken up and expanded by Merleau-Ponty until it becomes the very epitome of human engagement with the world.

²⁴ Weber published two studies of touch: *De Tactu* (1834, *On Touch*) and *Tastsinn und Gemeingefühl* (1846, *Touching and General Feeling*). He carefully documented the different sensitivities to touch in various parts of the body, the perception of weight, heat, cold, etc., and the ability of the perceiver to distinguish when being touched by two points of a compass at the same time. In *Der Tastsinn*, for instance, Weber discusses the issue of whether two sensations arise when sensitive areas of the body touch each other. He claimed that the two sensations do not merge into one: a cold hand touching a warm forehead, for example, reveals both heat and cold.

²⁵ *Der Aufbau der Tastwelt* (1925, *The World of Touch*). The German psychologist David Katz studied at Göttingen under the renowned psychologist Georg Elias Müller and Edmund Husserl, who was one of his doctoral examiners in 1907 and whose seminars he continued to attend. Merleau-Ponty relies heavily on Katz’s *World of Touch* for his account of touch in *PP* (see 315-18; 364-68). For more on Katz, see Arnheim, Boring, Krueger and Spiegelberg.

²⁶ *Ding und Raum. Vorlesungen 1907 (Thing and Space: 1907 Lectures*, cited *DR* with English then German pagination. This reference is *DR* § 47, 137; *XVI*, 162.)

In *Ideas II* § 36 Husserl is interested in the manner in which the lived-body (*Leib*) is constituted as a “bearer of localized sensations”. These localized sensations or “sensings” (*Empfindnisse*, a Husserlian neologism) are not directly sensed but only indirectly by a “shift of apprehension”.²⁷ The touching hand must make *movements* in order to feel the smoothness and softness texture of the touched hand. Husserl says that the “indicational sensations” of movement, and the “representational sensations” of smoothness to the touch, belong in fact to the touching right hand, but they are “objectivated” in the touched left hand. Husserl speaks of the sensation being “doubled” when one hand touches or pinches the other. Each hand experiences this double sensation. Furthermore, for Husserl, the double sensation belongs essentially to touch but does not characterize vision (*Ideas II* § 37); there are no comparable visual *sensings*. We see colours but there is no *sensing* colour: “I do not see myself, my body, the way I touch myself” (*Ideas II* § 37, 155; *IV*, 148). All Husserl allows is that the eye is a centre for touch sensations (the eyeball can be touched, we can feel the movement of the eye in the eye-socket through muscle sensations, and so on). Overall, in these discussions, Husserl employs the double sensation to distinguish touch from vision and to accord primacy to touch. For Husserl (following Aristotle), it is primarily touch that anchors us in the body. He writes:

Everything that we see is touchable and, as such, points to an immediate relation to the body, though it does not do so in virtue of its visibility. A subject whose only sense was the sense of vision could not at all have an appearing body. [...] The body as such can be constituted originally only in actuality [...]. (*Ideas II*, § 37, 158; *IV*, 150)

Touch localises us in the world in a way that seeing does not.

Merleau-Ponty discusses the phenomenon of the double sensation most fully in *The Visible and the Invisible*.²⁸ Since his account is well known, I will not summarize it here, but only say that it follows Husserl closely, except that Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the continuities between seeing and touching and their interconnection.²⁹

²⁷ Husserl famously distinguishes between “sensations” (*Empfindungen*) that are interpreted as properties of the object, and the “sensings” (*Empfindnisse*) themselves which he speaks of as “indicational or presentational” (*Ideas II*, 154; *IV*, 146). See Behnke, “Edmund Husserl’s Contribution”.

²⁸ See “The Intertwining—The Chiasm”, in *TVTI* (130-55).

²⁹ For a fuller discussion of the double sensation in Husserl, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, see Moran in Morris (ed.), *Sartre on the Body*.

In contrast to Merleau-Ponty, however, Sartre claims that the phenomenon of double sensation does not reveal something essential about embodiment. For Sartre, the double sensation is simply a contingent feature of our embodied existence and is not a significant or exemplary phenomenon. Sartre claims the double sensation can easily be removed by morphine which makes my leg numb and insensitive to being touched (BN, 304; 366). The intertwining of touching and touched is not revelatory of our being-in-the-world. Rather, for Sartre, to touch and be touched reflect different “orders” or “levels” of being. When one hand touches the other hand, I directly experience the hand that is being touched first. In other words, I am intentionally directed at the *object*. It is only because of the possibility of a *certain reflection* that I can turn back and focus on the sensation in the touching hand. This reflection is not inbuilt into the primary act of intending. Sartre maintains that this constitutes ontological proof that the body-for-me and the body-for-the-other are entirely separate intentional objectivities. Merleau-Ponty’s metaphysical use of the double sensation, then, is precisely the opposite of Sartre’s. Merleau-Ponty claims that both vision and touch exhibit this “doubling” (*dédoublement*) and, furthermore, that this doubling-up and crossing over, this “interlacing” (*l’interlacs*) and “chiasm” is precisely constitutive of human being-in-the-world. Sartre, on the other hand, wants to prioritize not one hand touching the other, but one body touching or caressing *the other’s* body; where a caress is already a touch that has overcome mere touch and which is setting itself up as flesh precisely in order to awaken and reveal the flesh of the other. Primacy, however, is given to *the other* in the caress, not to the reflexivity of self-experience. Intercorporeity, for Sartre, is prior to and is the source and the ground of self-experience. Sartre also appears—although he does not make this thematic—to contrast seeing and touching. “Being-seen” (*être vu*: BN, 259; 316) is a particularly informative form of self-experience through the other. I experience myself as vulnerable, exposed, caught in a particular place and time, seized and frozen by the look. Touching, on the other hand, sets up a different chain of relationships.

The other is first and foremost not an object that appears in my visual horizon (although he or she can appear thus) but rather the one who sees me, who characterizes me, who fixes me in the “look”. The other does not present himself or herself to me primarily as an object, but precisely as another subject for whom I am an object. In the look of the other, the “I” of pre-reflective experience encounters the “me” as posited by the other’s gaze, and I experience the identity between these two as an ontological bond. As Sartre proclaims:

Thus, originally the bond between my unreflective consciousness and my Ego, which is being looked at [*mon ego regardé*], is a bond not of knowing but of being. Beyond any knowledge which I can have, I am this self which another knows. (BN, 261; 319)

In the erotic caress, as opposed to the look, Sartre says, it is not a matter of my taking hold of the other’s body as a body understood as an object, defining it—gripping it, as it were—but of placing my body as flesh alongside the body of the other, also construed as flesh. This is not pushing or active touching, but rather an allowing of the other’s flesh and my flesh to awaken together:

Thus the revelation of the Other’s flesh is made through my flesh; in desire and in the caress that expresses desire, I incarnate myself in order to realize the incarnation of the Other. The caress, by *realizing* the Other’s incarnation reveals to me my own incarnation; that is, I make myself flesh in order to impel the Other to realize *for-herself* and *for me* her own flesh, and my caresses cause my flesh to be born for me in so far as it is for the Other *flesh causing her to be born as flesh* [*chair la faisant naître à la chair*]; I make her enjoy my flesh through her flesh in order to compel her to feel herself flesh. And so *possession* truly appears as a *double reciprocal incarnation* [*comme double incarnation réciproque*]. (BN, 391; 460)

This is an extraordinary passage that deserves fuller commentary. It shows that Sartre has an extraordinarily rich sense of what he calls here “reciprocal double incarnation”, which is Sartre’s equivalent of Merleau-Ponty’s later notion of intercorporeity. Of course, Sartre also describes in great detail various deviant forms of possession and desire, as in his discussions of sadism and masochism where the other’s body is surpassed in ways that deny the other’s original look, the other’s free transcendence. Discussion of these topics lies beyond the scope of this chapter.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have only scratched the surface of Sartre’s subtle, complex, and many-layered ontological account of the body in its relation to other embodied free subjects. Whilst not as deeply informed by psychological studies as Merleau-Ponty’s theories³⁰, Sartre’s account of

³⁰ Merleau-Ponty was deeply influenced not only by David Katz but also by studies such as Jean Lhermitte’s *L’Image de notre corps* (1939, *The Image of Our Body*): this introduced the idea of the “body image” which Merleau-Ponty refers to as *le schéma corporel*. For further discussion of these concepts, see Gallagher,

intersubjective embodied relations (such as the erotic caress that expresses desire) is possibly more original, and certainly at least as challenging philosophically. Our analysis also suggests that Merleau-Ponty and Sartre essentially disagree concerning the role of bodily consciousness in perception. Whereas Merleau, following Husserl, emphasizes the ineliminability of the felt body in all perceiving, Sartre maintains that our perceivings *objectify* what we perceive, such that our perceived body belongs to the objective world. Furthermore, he contends that we discover ourselves as the ego that is objectified in the look of the other. Hence, for Sartre, the phenomenon of double sensation—or what Merleau-Ponty calls “touching-touched” (*le touchant-touché*)—is incidental to the point of being irrelevant to our embodiment, and indeed is falsely described in psychology. For Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, especially in the last chapter of his *Visible and Invisible*, this double sensation encapsulates the very essence of flesh and of our inextricable and living entwinement in a sensible world which itself responds reciprocally to our sensitive probings. For Sartre, on the other hand, it is in desiring and caressing the other that we *create* ourselves as flesh; we become flesh for the other as the other reveals his or her flesh to us. There is much to be learned from comparing these rich and still largely untapped explorations of embodiment.

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