

Vesselin Petrov (Ed.)

**Ontological Landscapes**  
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and Philosophy

# XIII. Revisiting Sartre's Ontology of Embodiment in *Being and Nothingness*

Dermot Moran

**Abstract:** In *Being and Nothingness* (1943) Sartre includes a groundbreaking chapter on 'the body' which treats of the body under three headings: 'the body as being for-itself: facticity', 'the body-for-others', and 'the third ontological dimension of the body'. Sartre's phenomenology of the body has, in general, been neglected. In this essay, I want to revisit Sartre's conception of embodiment. I shall argue that Sartre, even more than Merleau-Ponty, is the phenomenologist *par excellence* of the flesh (*la chair*) and of intersubjective intercorporeity while emphasising that touching oneself is a merely contingent feature and not 'the foundation for a study of corporeality'.

**Key words:** Phenomenology, Embodiment, Sartre, Intercorporeality

## 1. Introduction

Embodiment has recently emerged as a central topic in philosophy of mind and in the cognitive sciences in the attempt to understand consciousness especially as it engages with the world perceptually and cognitively. The manner in which humans are embodied knowers has importance consequences not only for epistemology but also for ontology. What kind of entity is a living, embodied, conscious human being? How does the living animate body relate to material things as well as to other living bodies? Recent cognitive science has further recognized that the objectivist approach fails to capture something significant concerning embodied personhood and that there is need for a first-person phenomenological account of the experiences of the subject as understood from the subjective point of view. In this regard, many philosophers (including Hubert Dreyfus, Charles Taylor, Sean Dorrance Kelly, and others) turn to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) as well as to his

later studies, for their rich account of the body-subject. In this paper<sup>1</sup>, however, I want to revisit Sartre's account of the body in the chapter entitled 'The Body' (*Le corps*) in *Being and Nothingness* (1943, hereafter 'BN')<sup>2</sup> and in particular examine it as an attempt at an original phenomenological ontology of the body. Sartre's phenomenology of the body is different from that of Merleau-Ponty in significant respects but is no less original and provocative. A return to Sartre may help us appreciate the range and depth of phenomenological thinking about embodiment.

## 2. Sartre's Phenomenology of Embodiment

The chapter on 'The Body' (*Le corps*) in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) offers a long, difficult, many-layered and challenging analysis of embodiment.<sup>3</sup> In terms of its subsequent impact, it was soon eclipsed by Merleau-Ponty's treatment of incarnation, and Sartre's account fell into neglect.<sup>4</sup> Sartre's approach, however, is very interesting and original. It

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was read at the Sofia International Conference on Ontology – 2009 (SICO'09), *The Stakes of Contemporary Ontological Thinking*, 18 – 20 June 2009; Sofia, Bulgaria. I wish to thank the participants for their comments, in particular Vesselin Petrov, Ivan Kolev, Roberto Poli, Johanna Seibt, and Fabrice Pataut.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'être et le néant. Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), trans. Hazel Barnes as *Being and Nothingness. An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (London: Routledge, 1995). Hereafter 'BN' followed by the English pagination and then the pagination of the French original.

<sup>3</sup> 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, the body pervades the whole of *Being and Nothingness*. In particular, the 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 *fleshly presence* of the other.

<sup>4</sup> For recent studies of Sartre's treatment of the body, see Katherine Morris, ed. *Sartre on the Body*, Philosophers in Depth Series (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010), and Kathleen V. Wider, *The Bodily Nature of Consciousness: Sartre and Contemporary Philosophy of Mind* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell U.P., 1997). Earlier discussions include Xavier O. Monasterio, 'The Body in *Being and Nothingness*', in *Jean-Paul Sartre: Contemporary Approaches to His Philosophy*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman and Frederick A. Elliston (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1980); Phyllis Sutton Morris, *Sartre's Concept of a Person: An Analytic Approach* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975) and Joseph Catalano, *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

is also phenomenological through and through. Sartre draws on the then available phenomenological treatments of the body, to be found in Edmund Husserl<sup>5</sup> and Max Scheler<sup>6</sup> (but also strongly influenced by his reading of Heidegger's account of Dasein's situatedness and facticity in *Being and Time*<sup>7</sup>). His ability to reconstruct the phenomenological approach is all the more remarkable given that, at the time of writing *Being and Nothingness*, he would have had no direct access to the canonical

<sup>5</sup> Sartre was familiar with Husserl's published works, especially *Logical Investigations*, *Ideas I*, *Lectures on Internal Time Consciousness*, *Formal and Transcendental Logic* and *Cartesian Meditations*, but it is highly unlikely that Sartre had read Husserl's *Ideas II*, though he presumably learned about it from conversations with his friend Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who had read a typescript of the work in the Husserl Archives in Leuven in 1939. Similarly, Husserl does not appear to know the *Crisis* essays which had been published in an obscure journal, *Philosophia*, edited in Belgrade, in 1936. In fact, Sartre is remarkable for his ability to successfully reconstruct Husserl's position on the basis of little direct familiarity with Husserl's texts. Sartre's discussion of the role of the image in imagination and memory, for instance, in *The Psychology of Imagination* (1940) has to have been distilled from scattered remarks found in *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas I* rather than based on the material subsequently published in the Husserliana series and recently translated by John B. Brough as Edmund Husserl, *Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory (1898-1925)* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005). Sartre obviously learned a great deal about Husserl and the phenomenological approach to the lived body also from his reading of Max Scheler. For instance, at BN, p. 330; Fr. 395, Sartre discusses Scheler's distinction between the pain of a toothache and the intention toward it (wishing it would end, rejecting it, accepting it with resignation, etc.)

<sup>6</sup> For an interesting survey of the role of the body in Scheler's writings, see Daniela Vallega-Neu, 'Driven Spirit: The Body in Max Scheler's Phenomenology', *Epoche* vol. 9 no 1 (2004), reprinted in idem, *The Bodily Dimension in Thinking* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005), pp. 43-58.

<sup>7</sup> M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (1927), 17th Edition (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1993), trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1962). Of course, the body as such is hardly made thematic by Heidegger in *Being and Time*. For an interesting discussion, see David Michael Levin, 'The Ontological Dimension of Embodiment: Heidegger's Thinking of Being', in Donn Welton, ed., *The Body: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 122-149. Nevertheless, Sartre takes his concept of facticity from Heidegger, and also discusses the practical encounter with tools and use-objects in a typically Heideggerian way. Heidegger's description of how the friend one encounters on the street is closer than the feeling of one's feet walking would also be confirmed by Sartre, see *Being and Time* § 23, p. 141; German p. 107).

Husserlian phenomenological discussion of the body in *Ideas II*<sup>8</sup>, for instance. He managed to have a solid grasp of many of Husserl's views (presumably through his studies in Germany in 1933 and conversations with other French Husserlians such as Raymond Aron and Merleau-Ponty, as well as Simone de Beauvoir).

Perhaps the most striking feature of Sartre's account is that it is he who introduced the notion of 'flesh' (*la chair*), now more usually associated with Merleau-Ponty, and develops the flesh as that whereby *intercorporeity*, that is the interactions between human bodies, is possible. For Sartre, flesh is the locus of contingency and intercorporeity. Flesh is 'the pure contingency of presence', Sartre writes [BN, p. 343; 410].<sup>9</sup> Fleshly incarnation is the living testimony to my contingency. I simply find myself in the kind of body I have. I do not choose it but must come to terms with it.

Our deep sense of ourselves, for Sartre, is as a non-thingly living flesh, neither pure object nor pure consciousness. Moreover, for Sartre, it is the experience of this flesh precisely in its sheer irrational contingency

<sup>8</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie. Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*, hrsg. Marly Biemel, Husserliana IV (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991), trans. R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer as *Ideas pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989). Hereafter 'Ideas II' followed by English pagination, Husserliana (hereafter 'Hua') volume and German pagination. Sartre of course read Husserl's published writings, but had little access to the unpublished drafts, except through conversation with his close friend Maurice Merleau-Ponty who was receiving material from Herman Leo Van Breda, Director of the Husserl Archives in Leuven even during the German occupation. See Hermann Leo Van Breda, *History of the Husserl-Archives* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> 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 J.-P. Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1972), p. 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'.

that gives rise to the peculiar existential dis-ease that Sartre calls 'nausea' (*la nausée*). All flesh, for Sartre, has this nausea-provoking character [BN, p. 357; Fr. 425]: 'A dull and inescapable nausea perpetually reveals my body to my consciousness' [BN, p. 338; 404].<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, my body is constituted in relation to other living bodies, a relation both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty call 'intercorporeity'. My flesh interacts with and even *constitutes* the other's flesh, especially in the acts of touching and, more especially, in moments of tenderness 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 [*quit fait naître la chair d'autrui*, BN, p. 390; 459-60].

For Sartre, much more than for Husserl or Merleau-Ponty, the body as I encounter it through others is a contested domain: 'Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others' [*Le conflit est le sens original de l'être-pour-autrui*, BN, p. 364; Fr. 431]. There is, one could say, a socialized body. Despite the life-death struggle with the other, according to which the other person seeks to objectify me in fundamental ways, the other at the same time fulfils a necessary function: the other reveals to me something I cannot learn on my own: *how I really am* [see BN, p. 354; Fr. 421]. In fact, Sartre rejects the analogical constitution of the other's body on the basis of my experience of my own, since I must already have the other as object and have myself as object (which requires already being in the gaze of the other). It is, paradoxically, the other who assists me in constituting myself for myself.

### 3. A Three-Fold Ontology of the Body

What is particularly unusual in Sartre's approach, but which is particularly relevant for this study, is that he claims to be offering an *ontological* approach. The subtitle of *Being and Nothingness* is 'an essay on phenomenological ontology'. Sartre is of course taking his lead from Heidegger here, who proposed phenomenological ontology as a new ap-

<sup>10</sup> It is clear that Sartre genuinely experienced a kind of nausea in encounters with the body and with the external environment. These experiences are described in fictional form in Sartre, *La Nausée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), trans. Robert Baldick, *Nausea* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965).

proach in *Being and Time* (1927). But Sartre thinks there is a particular role for ontology. Moreover, he maintains that the philosophical tradition has misunderstood the body because the orders of *knowing* and the orders of *being* have been confused. Failure to distinguish between different 'ontological levels' [*plans ontologiques*, BN, p. 305; Fr. 367], or as he says 'orders of reality' [*ordres de réalité*, BN, p. 304; Fr. 366], or 'orders of being' [cf. *l'ordre de l'être*, BN p. 305; Fr. 367],<sup>11</sup> is the cause of our philosophical problems. The issue concerns what has primacy in our accounts. Those who have made the objective body-for-others the basis of all understanding of the body have 'radically reversed the terms of the problem' [BN, p. 358; Fr. 426]. In effect, as Sartre evocatively puts it, this is 'to put the corpse at the origin of the living body' [BN, p. 344; Fr. 411].

Sartre now wants to develop a set of reflections that follows the *order of being*, the *ontological* order, the various 'levels' (*plans*) of our understanding of the body. This 'ontological' approach is reflected in the tripartite structure of the chapter: 'The Body as Being-for-itself. Facticity' (*Le corps comme être pour soi: La facticité*); 'The Body-for-Others' (*Le-corps-pour-autrui*), and what Sartre simply calls 'The Third Ontological Dimension of the Body' (*La troisième dimension ontologique du corps*).

As we shall see, the first two levels map the distinction between body as grasped by oneself (for itself) and the body as perceived or seen by others (including the other's own body). I have one kind of knowledge of the body *within my* experience and another experience of the body given *through the perspective of the other*, the body as it is 'for me' and the body as it is 'for the other' (*pour l'autrui*). Sartre also characterizes these dimensions as '*le corps-existé*', the body as existed or lived, and '*le corps-vu*', the body as seen from the perspective of the other [BN, p. 358; Fr. 426]. Not only must these two ontological dimensions be distin-

<sup>11</sup> Merleau-Ponty, too, frequently speaks of the 'order of being'. The distinction between the 'order of knowledge' and the 'order of being' is frequently found in Scholasticism. Things as they are encountered first in knowing may not have ontological priority.

guished; they are, according to Sartre's radical claim, 'incommunicable' and 'irreconcilable':

Either it [the body] is a thing among other things, or else it is that by which things are revealed to me. But it can not be both at the same time. [BN, p. 304; Fr. 366]

There are 'insurmountable difficulties' [BN p. 303; Fr. 365] involved in attempting to unite an account of experiential consciousness (arrived at from within) with the more common 'externalist' [*du dehors*, BN, p. 303; Fr. p. 365] account of the living body possessing organs, nervous system, etc. The failure of previous philosophy is that it has, mistakenly and indeed absurdly, attempted to unite the paradoxical first-person experience of one's consciousness<sup>12</sup> with a conception of body that is in fact derived from others, or, as Sartre puts it, 'the body of others' [*corps des autres*, BN, p. 303; Fr., p. 365]. For Sartre, one cannot begin (Cartesian style) from the interiority of reflective consciousness and then attempt to graft on the physical body. One cannot assume that the third-person body belongs to the same ontological order as that of the transcendence-transcended.

#### 4. The Body is the For-Itself

Throughout *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre invokes the distinction between the 'in-itself' (*en-soi*) and the 'for itself' (*pour-soi*) in different and sometimes incompatible ways. This distinction, inherited from German Idealism, cannot be read as a simple ontological distinction of two orders of being. Sartre, following Heidegger, insists that ontology can only be done *through* phenomenology. The in-itself is always experienced through the for-itself and likewise the for-itself is supported by the in-itself. Sartre takes an important step forward when the body is identified with the for-itself:

The body is nothing other than the for-itself; it is not an in-itself *in* the for-itself; for in that case it would solidify everything [BN, p. 309; Fr. 372]

<sup>12</sup> Paradoxical, because our immediate first-person experience of the body is not actually of *the* body but rather of the *transcending* of the body, its having been surpassed.

Sartre, therefore, identifies the lived body (my body—not the objective body of the other) with the *for-itself*. The body as a *for-itself* 'is never a given (*un donné*) that I can know' [BN, p. 309; Fr. p. 372]. It is everywhere something that is surpassed and hence, in Sartre's language, 'nihilated'. The body is that which I nihilate [*ce que je néantise*, BN, p. 309; Fr. 372]. On the other hand, the body provides the 'situation' of the *for-itself* as the foundation of its possibilities. It 'indicates' my possibilities of being in the world. Sartre's strong claim is that the body is the very order of the world as ordered by the *for-itself*. It is the body which gives the subject its orientation and point of view. However, Sartre repeatedly points out that we 'surpass' or 'transcend' the body in seeking to experience the world. We go beyond our sensations, eye movements, and limb-movements to apprehend the world directly and are not immediately aware of our bodily movements. This leads Sartre to explore some essential 'paradoxes' (Merleau-Ponty's term in *The Visible and the Invisible*) or oppositions that belong to our embodiment.

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 is the very *contingency* of our being; our facticity. Consciousness never ceases to have a body (or to be a body) even when that body does not intrude as in the case of being in pain. This perpetual apprehension of the body is what Sartre calls 'nausea' and which he takes to be there prior to all feelings of disgust, vertigo, etc [BN, p. 338; Fr. 404]. This nausea is a kind of ontological un-ease with having a body, with being limited to a *point of view* which can only ever be partial.

Sartre's *for-itself* is not closed off from the *in-itself* but is already in the world, it is best understood as a 'relation to the world' [*rapport au monde*, BN, 306; Fr. p. 368]. The body belongs to a lived space, where there is left, right, here, there, up, down, and so on. These lived mutual relations (from which the subject cannot be abstracted) can only be suspended in an abstract scientific view of space, a 'world without men' [BN, p. 307; Fr. 369].

## 5. The First Ontological Dimension

As a phenomenologist Sartre begins with the body as lived in the first-person perspective, the manner in which, as Sartre puts it 'I exist my body' [*J'existe mon corps*, BN, p. 351; Fr. 428]. This is the body experienced not as a thing but as a 'non-thing', almost a transparent medium for my experience of the world. In this regard my body is *surpassed* towards the world. In contrast to the 'objective body' [the object of 'objectivating knowing', *savoir objectivant*, BN, p. 355; Fr. 423], Sartre maintains there is an immediately, but somewhat indefinitely, *intuited* body<sup>13</sup> (akin to Merleau-Ponty's 'phenomenal body' with its *schéma corporel*).<sup>14</sup> Most of the time, this felt body is not objectified but rather is experienced in a diffuse, amorphous, and almost invisible and impalpable manner (which is precisely its mode of appearing). This non-apprehended body swims in the world, as it were, unnoticed.

The lived, experienced body (*le corps-existé*) is not to be construed as an 'object' at a remove from consciousness, and certainly not a *material* object. Rather the body is best understood as a 'psychic object', that is almost a project of consciousness or the way a consciousness becomes enfolded:

The body is the psychic object par excellence—the *only psychic object*. [BN 347; Fr. 414]<sup>15</sup>

The body in this sense permeates our psyche. The psychic body is experienced from *within*, from which perspective it is, in a sense, invisible, 'impalpable', even 'ineffable' [*ineffable*, BN, p. 354; Fr. 421].<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Sartre frequently emphasises that this body is immediately *intuited*. see, for instance BN, p. 357; Fr. 424 where Sartre speaks of the stomach as 'present to intuition'.

<sup>14</sup> Underscoring this theme, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty writes: 'We have relearned to feel our body; we have found underneath the objective and detached knowledge of the body that other knowledge we have of it in virtue of its always being with us and of the fact that we are our body' [PP, p. 206; Fr. 239].

<sup>15</sup> Sartre refers to the body of the other person as a 'psychic object' [BN 393; Fr. 463].

<sup>16</sup> Merleau-Ponty makes a similar claim about the inapprehensibility of my body in *Phenomenology of Perception*: 'Insofar as it sees or touches the world, my body can

The way we experience our body cannot be readily mapped onto the body as understood in the medical sciences. I do not know *experientially* that I have a brain or endocrine glands [BN, p. 303; Fr. 365]; that is something I learn from others (even a 'headache' or 'brain-freeze' does not reveal the brain as an 'in itself'). Likewise, I don't know experientially or phenomenologically the inner anatomy of my body. Of course, I have, to put it in different terms, a 'folk anatomy' – where I *think* I feel my heart, stomach, ribs, liver, and so on. This is guided by a kind of inner sense of our organs, the felt beating of the heart, the felt expansion of the lungs and so on. This can be more or less well informed by science, more or less accurate, and this scientific map of the body structure, while it is superimposed on the felt body, does not necessarily coincide with the body *as felt*, as immediately *experienced* in what earlier psychologists misleadingly called 'inner perception'. Sartre makes this clear in his discussion of his experience of an ulcerous stomach:

At this level, however, "the stomach" is an inexpressible; it can neither be named nor thought. Objective empirical thought ... is the knowing of a certain objective nature possessed by the stomach. I know that it has the shape of a bagpipe, that it is a sack, that it produces juices ... In any case, all this can constitute my illness, not as I enjoy possession of it, but as it escapes me. The stomach and the ulcer become directions of flight, perspectives of alienation from the object which I possess. [BN, p. 356; Fr. 424]

This intuitively felt body becomes obtrusive in illness (I become dizzy and lose my balance), failure (the stone is too heavy to lift), disability (I cannot feel my leg), or in psychosomatic conditions (in anorexia nervosa I *experience* my body as too gross<sup>17</sup>), or, as Sartre emphasises

therefore be neither seen nor touched. What prevents its ever being an object, ever being 'completely constituted' is that it is that by which there are objects" [PP, p. 92; Fr. 108]. Here Merleau-Ponty is referring to Husserl's claim that the body is always incompletely constituted.

<sup>17</sup> There is a huge literature on the manner in which anorexics relate to images of their own and others' bodies (as shown in photographs), see, for instance, Monique A. M. Smeets, and Stephen M. Kosslyn, 'Hemispheric Differences in Body Image in Anorexia Nervosa', *The International Journal of Eating Disorders*, vol. 29, no. 4 (2001), pp. 409-416.

with great force and originality, in the look of the other.

## 6. The Second Ontological Dimension

Sartre's account of the second ontological category – has again two aspects. First there is the constitution of the 'objective' body as that which is the normal model of the body in the sciences. Second, and this largely follows Heidegger's account of *Zuhandensein*, there is the body which mediates the instrumentality of things in the world and itself (as hands, eyes, etc.) is revealed as an instrument of instruments, 'being-a-tool-among-tools' [BN, p. 352; Fr. 420]; a centre of reference in the world.

The material objective body is the body as understood in an idealized way by the objective sciences (physics, biology, physiology, and so on); it is the body one hears about from others. It is, in Sartre's pithy phrase, the 'body of others' (*le corps d'autrui*), the body in the region of the anonymous other. Sartre here speaks about 'the physical point of view', the 'point of view of the outside, of exteriority' [*le point de vue du dehors, de l'extériorité*, BN, p. 305; Fr. p. 367]. This second dimension includes the manner in which my body is utilized by the other (and utilized by myself occupying the role of third-person observer of my body), e.g. the way I encounter my body as a 'tool of tools' in its instrumental interaction with things in the world. Sartre says: 'We do not use this instrument, for we *are* it' [BN, p. 324; Fr. 388]. Sartre has interesting things to say about this tool which is not experienced as a tool. Of course, this understanding of the body (and specifically 'the hand') as the tool of tools goes back to Aristotle ('the soul is analogous to the hand; for as the hand is a tool of tools, so the mind is the form of forms and sense the form of sensible things', *De Anima*, Book III Part VIII).

## 7. The Third Ontological Dimension

The third dimension is the most complicated and difficult to grasp – it is exploring the manner in which 'I exist for myself as a body known by the Other' [BN, p. 351; Fr. 419], what has been characterized as 'the

body-for-itself-for-others'.<sup>18</sup> This is the body in its intersubjective, intercorporeal, socialized dimension. The body, Sartre says, is a site of *action*-- including interaction. According to this ontological dimension, I experience my own body not on my own, but as reflected in the experience of it by others, the dialectics of which Sartre has explored perhaps more than any other phenomenologist (with the exception of Levinas). For example, Sartre writes:

I cannot be embarrassed by my own body as I exist it. It is my body as it may exist for the other which may embarrass me. [BN, p. 353; Fr. 421]

This third dimension of the body includes the manner in which I experience it under the 'omnipresent'--but often empirically 'absent'--*look* (*regard*) of the other, as in the case of shame, shyness, or embarrassment, where I experience how the other sees me. I am as Sartre says 'imprisoned in an absence' [BN, p. 363; 430]. The other is a kind of 'internal hemorrhage' [BN, p. 257; Fr. 315] in my world; who robs me of the total control I seek to exercise over it.

Sartre's three-fold ontological distinction is awkward since the ontological categories appear to overlap (since the body can be experienced in two different ways in relation to others--as instrument or object or by me as seen by the other) and also because there are not three bodies as the ontological distinction might imply. However, there is something both original and insightful about his approach. He claims that my experiencing my body in the gaze of the other does not make my body a simple object to me, rather I experience the 'flight of the body which I exist' [BN, p. 354; Fr. 422]. In other words, the other both presents me as I really am and also takes control of my body-image away from me. For instance, one cannot completely control the impression one makes on others; even the actor is depend in a certain sense on the manner the audience receives him or her. According to Sartre, the other is entwined with my body from the start. Sartre begins not with the body seeing or tou-

<sup>18</sup> See Martin C. Dillon, 'Sartre on the Phenomenal Body and Merleau-Ponty's Critique', in Jon Stewart, ed., *The Debate between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty* [Evanston, IL: Northwestern U. P., 1998], pp. 121-143, see especially p. 126.

ching itself but with the body as seen or touched by the other. There is, in Husserlian terms, a *co-constitution* going on between my body and the other which challenges more traditional approaches to the constitution of the other's body through empathy, as found especially in Scheler.<sup>19</sup>

## 8. The Transcendence of my Consciousness towards the World

According to Sartre, most of the time my conscious awareness is not directed towards this vaguely felt, internally apprehended body, but rather my intention is toward the 'world' or more exactly toward *my* world in the first instance. In Sartre's language, the body (itself a transcendence beyond my immanence) is itself *transcended* in an act of intending towards the world; the body becomes a 'transcendence transcended' [BN, p. 347; Fr. 414]. Against this, Sartre argues, the psychologist's concept of subjectivity is of an immanence which cannot get outside of itself [BN, p. 314; Fr. 377]. Furthermore, while there is a profound sense that the body is available to me *as an object*, when I see and touch parts of my body, I am in these situations, for Sartre, still experiencing my body *from without*, from what Sartre calls the point of view of an 'other': 'I am the *other* in relation to my eye' [BN, p. 304; Fr. 366]. Following similar remarks I can see my eye as a sense organ but I cannot 'see the seeing' (*ibid.*). I see my hand, Sartre acknowledges, but only in the way that I see the inkwell (this experience is well documented in Sartre's other writings e.g. in *Nausea*). For Sartre, I cannot *see* the *sensitivity* of the hand or even the 'mineness' of *my* hand:

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, p. 304; Fr. 366]

This notion of a 'distance' between the ego and the experience of body is something already discussed by Husserl (see *Ideas* II § 54 where Husserl speaks of the body as 'over against' the ego) and by his student

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of empathy in the phenomenological tradition, see Dermot Moran, 'The Problem of Empathy: Lipps, Scheler, Husserl and Stein', in *Amor Amicitiae: On the Love that is Friendship. Essays in Medieval Thought and Beyond in Honor of the Rev. Professor James McEvoy*, ed. Thomas A. Kelly and Phillip W. Rosemann (Leuven/Paris/Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2004), pp. 269-312.



Edith Stein. Stein writes that sensation (e.g. pain) is always localized somewhere at a distance from the ego.<sup>20</sup> There is a kind of experienced distance between myself and my body yet my body cannot be separated from me.<sup>21</sup>

Husserl and Merleau-Ponty both emphasize the continued presence of the body felt from within in all cases of perceiving, whereas Sartre maintains that our perceivings *objectify*, externalize and alienate what we perceive and also displace us from ourselves. What Sartre calls 'thetic consciousness' is objectifying, for Husserl, is reifying and objectifying. I see the bodies of others (in scientific textbooks, etc.) and conclude that I have a body like that of others. 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 p. 303; Fr. 365]. This is the body in its 'being for others' [*être-pour-autrui*, BN p. 305; Fr. 367]. Sartre's originality is his claim that my own body is present to me in this way most of the time. I see my hand as something relatively extraneous from me, at a distance from me, as an object in the world.<sup>22</sup> There is then a kind of 'for-others' objectivity of the body.

### 9. Being in a Situation

Rejecting the traditional philosophical attempt to unite mind and body as hopeless, Sartre maintains that the starting point for any phenomenological description has to be the recognition that our naïve experience is first and foremost not *of the body* strictly speaking at all, but rather, of the *world*, or the *situation*. As Sartre asserts early in *Being and Nothing-*

<sup>20</sup> Edith Stein, *Zum Problem der Einfühlung* (Halle, 1917; reprinted München: Gerhard Kaffke Verlag, 1980), p. 46; trans. Waltraut Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy*, The Collected Works of Edith Stein Sister Benedicta of the Cross Discalced Carmelite 1891-1942, Volume Three, 3<sup>rd</sup> revised edition (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1989), p. 42.

<sup>21</sup> Of course this experienced distance can become pathological as in those cases of body dysmorphia where the person thinks part of his or her body is an alien adhesion.

<sup>22</sup> Sartre describes this feeling of distance from his hand very evocatively in *La Nausée* (*Nausea*).

ness:

Our being is immediately "in situation;" that is, it arises in enterprises and knows itself first insofar as it is reflected in those enterprises." [BN, p. 39; Fr., 76]

Sartre reiterates this claim in the chapter on the body:

... the 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; Fr. 372]

Sartre emphasizes in all his writings that we are first and foremost *in the world* or 'in the situation'. This 'in-the-worldness', so to speak, of our experience is the central lesson that Sartre believes phenomenology has given to correct both traditional empiricist and idealist approaches to the relation of subject and object. For instance, in his short but important 1939 essay, "Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl's Phenomenology," Sartre declares that Husserl's phenomenology has put us in direct contact with the world and restored the world to us:

Consciousness and the world are given in one stroke: essentially external to consciousness, the world is nevertheless essentially relative to consciousness.

And again:

Husserl has restored to things their horror and their charm. He has restored to us the world of artists and prophets: frightening, hostile, dangerous, with its havens of mercy and love.<sup>23</sup>

For Sartre, phenomenology has decisively rejected all efforts to give a *representationalist* account of knowledge whereby somehow external reality is represented in the mind of the knower. Sartre wants instead to empty the knower out into the world; to overcome the false concept of consciousness as a box with contents (Husserl also rejects this conception of consciousness). While, on one standard approach, consciousness may be considered an 'absolute interiority' [BN, p. 305; Fr., 367] which

<sup>23</sup> J.-P. Sartre, "Une idée fondamentale de la phénoménologie de Husserl: l'intentionnalité," *Situations I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p. 32, trans. by Joseph P. Fell, "Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea in Husserl's Philosophy," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, Vol. 1 No. 2 (May 1970), pp. 4-5; reprinted in Dermot Moran and Tim Mooney, eds, *The Phenomenology Reader* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 383.

somehow is directly accessible to itself (in illustration, Sartre quotes Descartes' *Meditations* claim that the soul is easier to know than the body), Sartre in fact rejects this notion as a construction of idealism.

Furthermore, Sartre connects this, as it might be termed, 'externalist' orientation of intentionality as found in Husserlian phenomenology with Heidegger's notion of Dasein as 'being-in-the-world' [*In-der-Welt-sein*, which Sartre translates as *être-dans-le-monde*, BN, p. 306; Fr., p. 368] with its facticity and finitude. Sartre absolutely accepts the facticity of embodiment. I have the body I have in this place and time; that is an absolutely meaningless, contingent truth. That is 'facticity'. Sartre's adoption of the Heideggerian concept of being-in-the-world overcomes any kind of pre-Kantian conception of the world as divided into 'things in themselves' and subjects. For Sartre, all being is experienced in and through subjectivity; just as subjectivity is essentially and primarily world-directed. In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre writes:

Man and the world are relative beings (*des êtres relatifs*), and the principle of their being is the relation. [BN, p. 308; Fr. p. 370]

Sartre, therefore, fully accepts and indeed emphasizes the revolutionary character of describing human existence as 'being-in-the-world'. Our experience is world-oriented; we find ourselves in the midst of worldly situations. We *transcend* or surpass (*dépasser*) ourselves towards a world.

Attempting to give his own twist to the Heideggerian conception, Sartre gives this notion of 'being-in-the-world' a more dynamic sense: 'to be is to fly out into the world'<sup>24</sup>. Sartre thinks the Husserlian phenomenological conception of 'transcendence in immanence' means essentially that the whole thrust of human subjectivity is to overcome or cancel itself out, 'nihilate' itself (*néantiser*, in Sartre's terminology) by *intending* towards the world. Intentionality is world-directedness; human desire and knowing is towards-the-world and already in the world. Sartre frequently speaks of the manner in which the embodied consciousness

<sup>24</sup> Sartre, 'Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea in Husserl's Philosophy', *The Phenomenology Reader*, op. cit., p. 383.

has to 'surpass' itself. This 'surpassing' (*dépassement*) constitutes the essence of intentionality understood as self-transcendence.<sup>25</sup> It is because of our intentional directedness to the world that we have to overcome, surpass, transcend the body. But of course, this surpassing of the body does not by any means eliminate the body:

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, p. 326; Fr. 391].

For Sartre, our transcendence towards the world is part of what he takes to be our original 'upsurge in the world' (*surgissement dans le monde*).<sup>26</sup>

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, p. 308; Fr. p. 370].

All through *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre speaks of this 'upsurge' (*surgissement*) of the *pour-soi* towards the world. This 'upsurge' has both a certain necessity and a certain contingency, this combination going by the name of 'facticity'.

A significant part of Sartre's claim is that by intending the world, humans also *constitute* or *make* the world. The world comes into being at the same time as our intentional engagement with it. For Sartre takes the nature of the 'for-itself' as necessarily surpassing the world and also causing 'there to be a world by surpassing it' [BN, pp. 326-27; Fr., p. 391].<sup>27</sup> Indeed, it is my flesh that so to speak 'creates' the flesh of the

<sup>25</sup> For further analysis of Heidegger's reading of intentionality as transcendence, see Dermot Moran, 'Heidegger's Critique of Husserl's and Brentano's Accounts of Intentionality', *Inquiry* Vol. 43 No. 1 (March 2000), pp. 39-65.

<sup>26</sup> Merleau-Ponty also speaks of the 'unmotivated upsurge' (*le jaillissement immotivé du monde*) of the world in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (PP xiv; Fr. viii).

<sup>27</sup> This is what Joseph Catelano calls the 'world-making' capacity of humans, see his 'The Body and the Book: Reading *Being and Nothingness*', reprinted in Jon Stewart, ed., *The Debate Between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern U. P., 1998), pp. 154-171, see especially, p. 165. Catelano characterises

other, and so on.

Nevertheless, despite the fact the object of our experience is *the world* (things, events, projects), it is also true that the world is experienced *in and through the lived body*. Sartre, following Husserl's phenomenological tradition, insists that consciousness can only be consciousness as *embodied* or *incarnate*: the body is the 'condition of possibility' for the psyche [BN, p. 338; Fr. 404]. Consciousness is necessarily and essentially embodied.

Embodiment situates and locates consciousness, gives it the orientation and point of view that makes it possible as consciousness, as for-itself. Sartre writes:

... the 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; Fr. 372]

I am in contact with the world through my body: Things are experienced as heavy or light, near or far. There is a visual scene because I have eyes that can see and also be seen. As Merleau-Ponty says: 'to see is to enter a universe of beings that display themselves, and they would not do this if they could not be hidden behind each other ... in other words to look at an object is to inhabit it'. Moreover, he says:

Apart from the probing of my eye or my hand, and before my body synchronizes with it, the sensible is nothing but a vague beckoning. [PP, p. 214; Fr. 248]

The room feels warm because we are sensitive to heat. Other bodies too present themselves in a special way. We experience them as *sensitive* (Sartre claims, however, that we distance ourselves from that experiencing in our ordinary behaviour). In pre-reflective normal consciousness we are entirely oriented to and in the world. We are *worldly* through and through. We are, in Husserl's words, 'children of the world' (*Weltkin-der*). We are, for Merleau-Ponty, 'connatural with the world' [PP, p. 217; Fr. 251]. Sartre too emphasizes that the world is a world that has been humanized by us: 'the world is human' [BN 218; Fr. 270]. Every-

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Sartre's account as 'anthropocentric'.

where in the world, all one encounters is oneself. The world is coloured because we have eyes that pick up colour. The steps appear as something we can climb up. As Sartre puts it:

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, p. 344; Fr., 411]

Sartre's claim is that consciousness is primarily an active engagement with the world which is not necessarily *explicitly* conscious of itself at the same time. Explicit, reflective self-consciousness is not a part of our original, 'unreflected' or 'pre-reflective' conscious engagement with the world. As he puts it in his 1936 essay 'The Transcendence of the Ego', if I am chasing a streetcar, there is only consciousness of the streetcar-having-to-be-overtaken, nothing else.<sup>28</sup> There is a bus *to be caught*; there is a road surface *to be walked*, and so on. I experience all instrumentalities (handles, tools) because I have a body and yet I don't somehow encounter my body. Rather I encounter objects that are to be lifted, that are to be walked around. There is, Sartre says, a quality to reality that is well captured by the Latin gerundive or future passive participle: *Carthago delenda est*; Carthage is 'to be destroyed' (for the Romans), and yet 'to be served' (for the Carthaginians). Reality is always revealed in the intentional project of the subject engaged in the situation. Sartre's insistence on the lack of self-consciousness of our original 'positional' or *thetic* consciousness requires him to play down the level of immediate consciousness of our body and our perceivings. He claims instead that we have an 'immediate, non-cognitive relation of the self to itself' [*rapport immédiat et non cognitive de soi à soi*, BN, p. xxix; Fr. 19].

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28 J.-P. Sartre, "La Transcendance de l'égo. Esquisse d'une description phénoménologique," *Recherches philosophiques*, 6 (1936/7), pp. 85-123, reprinted as a separate book, *La Transcendance de l'égo* (Paris: Vrin, 1966), trans. Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick, *The Transcendence of the Ego* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1957, reprinted 1972). Hereafter 'TE' followed by English page number and then French page number of the 1936 article. The reference here is 'TE, p. 49; Fr. 94).

Merleau-Ponty makes a similar--if somewhat more carefully modulated--claim concerning our preoccupation with the world, and our mutual embodied belonging with it. For Merleau-Ponty, as for Sartre and Husserl, consciousness is essentially embodied:

Insofar as, when I reflect on the essence of subjectivity, I find it bound up with that of the body and that of the world, this is because my existence as subjectivity is merely one with my existence as a body and with the existence of the world, and because the subject that I am, when taken concretely, is inseparable from this body and this world. [PP, p. 408; Fr. 467]

Merleau-Ponty goes on to make an important point which is also relevant for Sartre's ontological exploration of the body:

The ontological world and body which we find at the core of the subject are not the world or body as idea (*le monde en idée ou le corps en idée*) but on the one hand the world itself contracted into a comprehensive grasp, and on the other the body itself as a knowing body. [*comme corps-connaissant*, PP, p. 408; Fr. 467]

The usual concepts of objective world in itself and objective body as such have to be replaced with the phenomenological concept of an animate lived embodiment in the world as the living context for the embodied subject who has an immediate but almost impalpable sense of itself.

Moreover, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, even in moments where our intimate consciousness of our body takes the upper hand, this by no means cancels out *the world*:

Even if I become absorbed in the experience of my body and in the solitude of sensations, I do not succeed in abolishing all reference of my life to a world. At every moment some intention springs afresh from me, if it is only toward the things round about me which catch my eye, or toward the instants, which are thrown up, and which thrust back into the past what I have just lived through. I never become completely a thing in the world; the density of existence as a thing always evades me, my own substance slips away from me internally, and some intention is always foreshadowed. [PP, p. 165;

Fr. 192-3] 29

Merleau-Ponty goes on to talk, in terms reminiscent of Sartre, about the manner in which the body becomes prey to an 'active nothingness' [*un néant actif*, PP, p. 165; Fr. 193] when it reaches forward to its projects, to its temporal futurity.

Sartre's 'third ontological' level concerns the body as personally experienced in relation to others. Here Sartre wants to introduce the necessary intersubjective dimension into the discussion of the body, the socialized body.

### 10. Lived Body: Omnipresent but Inapprehensible

For Sartre, as we have seen, in our experience the body is somehow 'inapprehensible' and yet always present. It is this 'inapprehensible given' [*cet insaisissable donné*, BN, p. 327; Fr. 392]. 'I exist my body' [*j'existe mon corps*, BN p. 329; Fr. 394; see also p. 351; Fr. 418], yet the body in itself is 'inapprehensible' and 'ineffable'. Sartre here is repeating Husserl's position, also maintained by Merleau-Ponty, that the body is somehow present in all perception.<sup>30</sup> It escapes our consciousness and it is not objectified in our incarnate acting and doing. In fact, the body as lived is difficult to localize. Sartre's specific contribution (which will be followed by Merleau-Ponty) is his evocative description of the manner the body spreads itself over things with which it is in contact. Sartre writes:

My body is everywhere: the bomb which destroys *my* house also damages my body insofar the house was already an indication of my

29 The claim that our experience is primarily *world-oriented* is now commonplace in much philosophy of mind and cognitive science. Recently, for instance, Jesse Prinz, *Gut reactions. A Perceptual Theory of Emotion* (Oxford & New York: Oxford U.P., 2004), has argued that even emotional 'bodily' feelings do not have the body as their intentional object; rather, these feelings, although *caused* by bodily changes and *felt* "in" the body, are primarily *about* significant events or objects in the world. As Prinz puts it, emotional bodily feelings *register* bodily changes but *represent* things going on outside the body.

30 For an interesting discussion of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty on the body, see Taylor Carman, 'The Body in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty', *Philosophical Topics* vol. 27 no. 2 (1999), pp. 205-226.

body. This is why the body always extends across the tool which it utilizes: it is at the end of the cane on which I lean and against the earth; it is at the end of the telescope which shows me the stars; it is on the chair, in the whole house; for it is my adaption to these tools.

[BN, p. 325; Fr. 389]

Sartre describes the body as omnipresent because it is our way of being inserted into the situation.

### 11. Vision, Touch and the 'Double Sensation'

Sartre's phenomenological discussion of the body focuses especially on the concept of living flesh, especially as experienced in touching and being touched as well as in being seen (which has priority over seeing). Sartre in particular singles out the phenomenon of the double sensation which had earlier been discussed by Husserl and others. The phenomenon of the 'double sensation' was a recurrent theme in nineteenth-century German psychology,<sup>31</sup> and it is likely that Husserl learned of the concept of 'double sensation' from the Göttingen psychologists who worked with his colleague Müller. Husserl employs the term 'double sensation' (*Doppelempfindung*) in his *Ideas* II § 36 [pp. 152-54; Hua IV, 144-47], and, indeed, he had already discussed the phenomenon even earlier in his *Thing and Space* lectures of 1907.<sup>32</sup> There he discusses the example of one hand touching the other, and the manner in which sensations of touching can be reversed into sensations of being touched. Husserl here speaks of this 'intertwining' and of the constitution of the physical object with the constitution of the 'ego-body' (*Ichleib*).

Husserl is interested in the interaction between the sense of vision and that of touch in the way in which they build up and disclose the uni-

<sup>31</sup> The phenomenon of fingers touching each other, or one hand touching the other is discussed by Weber as well as by Wilhelm Wundt and others. There is also a mention of it in Section 56 of Titchener's *Manual of Experimental Psychology* (1924), pp. 383-84.

<sup>32</sup> Husserl, *Ding und Raum. Vorlesungen 1907*, ed. Ulrich Claesges (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1973), Hua XVI, trans. by R. Rojcewicz, *Thing and Space: Lectures of 1907*, Collected Works VII (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997). Hereafter 'DR' with English and then German pagination. The reference here is DR § 47, p. 137; XVI 162.

fied spatial world we experience.<sup>33</sup> In *Thing and Space* § 47 he claims that the 'ego-body' (*Ichleib*) is a unique kind of entity different from physical objects. Husserl's first point is that visual experiences (seeing the visual scope) are not experienced as 'localized' in the body in contradistinction to the way in which I locate touch sensations in the body. Vision in this sense is 'transparent'. Husserl then discusses the fact that although I touch the smoothness or roughness of the object, I also have a sense of that smoothness 'on or in the appearing finger tips'. He goes on:

If with my left hand I touch my right, then along with the touch sensations and the kinaesthetic sensations there is constituted, reciprocally, the appearance of the left and right hands, the one moving over the other in such and such a manner. At the same time, however, i.e., with a reversal of the apprehension, the self-moving appears in an other sense, which applies only to the body, and in general the same group of sensations which have an objectivating function are apprehended, through a reversal of the attention and apprehension, as subjectivating and specifically as something which members of the body, those that appear in the objectivating function, "have" as localized within themselves. [*Thing and Space*, p. 137; Hua XVI 162]

In *Ideas* II § 36 he is interested in the manner in which the lived-body (*Leib*) is constituted as a 'bearer of localized sensations'. These 'localized sensations' he also calls 'sensings' (Husserl uses the neologism *Empfindisse*), which are not directly sensed but can be brought to attention by a shift of apprehension. 'Localization' means, for Husserl, both that the sensations are somehow distinguished with regard to a certain

<sup>33</sup> For a useful recent overview of the phenomenology of touch which discusses Merleau-Ponty's hand touching hand scenario in the light of current analytic philosophy of mind, see Matthew J. Ratcliffe, 'Touch and Situatedness', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* vol. 16 no. 3 (2008), pp. 299-322. See also Mark Paterson, *The Senses of Touch: Haptics, Affects and Technologies* (Oxford & New York: Berg Publishers, 2007) which contains a good review of classical and contemporary approaches to touch. For an eclectic set of studies on the concept of touch in different disciplines, see Constance Classen, ed., *The Book of Touch* (Oxford & New York: Berg Publishers, 2005).

place in the body, and that they present the body as objectified in space in a specific 'fleshly' way [see *Ideas* II, p. 153; IV 145]. In *Ideas* II § 36 Husserl introduces the situation of one hand touching another: in this case, the right hand touching the left. The touching hand has to make movements in order to feel the smoothness and softness texture of the touched hand. This touching gives rise to sensations which Husserl calls 'indicational sensations' of movement and with them come the 'representational' sensations or 'appearances' of smoothness. These representational senses of smoothness in fact belong to the touching right hand but they are 'objectivated' in the touched left hand. But Husserl goes on to say that in the touched left hand I also have sensations which are active and 'localized' within it. In other words, the left hand *is sensitive to being touched* and this sensitivity is its own peculiar kind of sensation complex.

If I speak of the physical thing, "left hand," then I am abstracting from these sensations ... If I do include them, then it is not that the physical thing is now richer, instead *it becomes Body (Leib)*, it *senses*. [*Ideas* II, p. 152; IV 145]

As with Sartre, to grasp the hand as a hand is to abstract from or, as Sartre would put it, 'surpass' this field of sensory experiences and objectify the hand as a distinct object on its own. If I apprehend the hand with its sensings, Husserl continues, then I am apprehending a living body, *Leib*.

In this context, Husserl speaks of the sensation being 'doubled' [*Ideas* II, p. 153; IV 145] when one hand touches or pinches the other. Husserl claims that each hand experiences this 'double sensation'. Each hand has a sensing and a sensed and both occur simultaneously. Moreover, Husserl restricts this 'double sensation' to touch: 'in the case of an *object constituted purely visually* we have *nothing* comparable' [*Ideas* II § 37, p. 155; IV 147]. Likewise: 'I do not see myself, my body, the way I touch myself' [*Ideas* II § 37, p. 155; IV 148]. I do not constitute my eye as an external object in the same way I constitute the touching hand as an object over and against a second touched object. All Husserl will allow is that the eye can also be 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). Husserl concludes:

The role of the visual sensations in the correlative constitution of the body and external things is thus different from that of the sensations of touch. [*Ideas* II § 37, p. 156; IV 148]

Merleau-Ponty develops this account of the double sensation, borrowing heavily from David Katz's study in his discussion of touch in *The Phenomenology of Perception* [see esp. pp. 315-17; Fr. 366-68]. For instance, Merleau-Ponty draws on Katz to support the claim that temporality is an integral aspect of touching. Not only must the fingers be moved over a surface in objective time, but the temporal extension of the touched sensation is an important feature in our sense of the spatial continuity of the surface. As Merleau-Ponty writes:

Movement and time are not only an objective condition of knowing touch, but a phenomenal component of tactile data. [*des donnés tactiles*, PP, p. 315; Fr. 364]

In contrast to Husserl, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the parallels and continuities between touch and vision which are more usually contrasted in regard to constituting the sense of materiality and spatiality. For instance, it is often thought that the sense of touch disappears when one lifts one's hand off one kind of surface before touching another surface. Merleau-Ponty, on the contrary, thinks a kind of indefinite sense of touch remains. It is not, Merleau-Ponty, says 'a tactile nothingness' but 'a tactile space devoid of matter, a tactile background' [PP, p. 316; Fr. 365]. Similarly, for both Katz and Merleau-Ponty, there is a kind of tactile memory. When I touch the surface of a material (e.g. silk or fur), I have a sense of what that surface feels like and I will expect that sense in future contacts with the material. There is a kind of 'memory' in my body for what it feels like to lean against a wall, to have my back touching the chair and so on. Through this memory I gain a sense of the 'constancy' of the object [PP, p. 317; Fr. 366].

Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the manner in which touch brings body and world literally into contact with one another, unlike the situation of sight (which gives me the sense that I am 'everywhere and nowhere':

Tactile experience, on the other hand, adheres to the surface of the body; we cannot unfold it before us and it never quite becomes an object. Correspondingly, as the subject of touch, I cannot flatter myself that I am everywhere and nowhere; I cannot forget in this case that it is through my body that I go to the world. [PP, p. 316; 365]

## 12. Sartre and the 'Double Sensation'

As we have seen, Sartre clearly distinguishes between my body as it is experienced (ambiguously and non-objectively) by me and the body as it is for the other or even for myself but now occupying the perspective of another. These different 'bodies' are in opposition and in fact are, for Sartre, irreconcilable. That these two different views of the body are incompatible is reinforced by Sartre in his discussion of the phenomenon of the double sensation. Sartre claims that the phenomenon of double sensation is not essential to my embodiment; it is something contingent.<sup>34</sup> It can be inhibited or entirely removed through morphine, making my leg numb and insensitive to being touched. The anaesthetized leg is not the same leg which belongs to my possibility of walking, running, playing football, etc. To touch and be touched belong different orders of reality, according to Sartre, and it is philosophically pernicious to conflate these different 'orders' or 'levels' of being.<sup>35</sup> When one hand touches the other hand, I directly experience the hand that is being touched first. It is only with a certain reflection that I can turn back and focus on the sensation in the touching hand. Sartre maintains that this constitutes ontological proof that the 'body-for-me' and the 'body-for-the-other' are different intentional objectivities.

<sup>34</sup> Sartre's account of the double sensation is rarely discussed but see Ann Murphy, 'Sexuality', in *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism*, ed. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 491 and also Donn Welton's essay 'Soft, Smooth Hands: Husserl's Phenomenology of the Lived-Body', in Donn Welton, ed., *The Body. Classic and Contemporary Readings*, op. cit., p. 48. I believe Welton misses the originality in Sartre's account.

<sup>35</sup> See the interesting discussion by David Vessey, 'The Body as *Anstoss* in Sartre's Account of Constitution', paper presented at the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy Boston, 1998.

Sartre is challenging fundamental aspects of Husserl's account. Husserl's account is focused on the sensational 'matter' involved in perception and the differences between seeing and touching. Sartre, on the other hand, sees the 'double sensation' as a misleading phenomenon which occludes the true *ontological* situation of the different phenomenological bodies. Furthermore, Sartre departs from Husserl in not thinking vision and touch differ in regard to this doubling. The seeing is not the same as the object seen, for Sartre, and indeed, the two are incompatible dimensions of being. Moreover, for Sartre, mutual sensing cannot take place simultaneously and can be frustrated by anaesthetics. This 'double sensation' is not an essential characteristic of embodiment.

Interestingly in the later Merleau-Ponty there is an effort to develop a more metaphysical or indeed ontological approach, an attempt to overcome traditional dualisms in philosophy and to project the 'flesh' as the ambiguous and unitary first principle, an 'element' (in the sense of the four elements) of Being [VI, p. 139]. Merleau-Ponty writes:

If we can show that the flesh is an ultimate notion, that it is not the union or compound of two substances, but thinkable by itself, if there is a relation of the visible to itself that traverses me and constitutes me as seer, this circle which I do not form, which forms me, this coiling over of the visible upon the visible, can traverse animate bodies as well as my own. [VI, p. 140].

In his famous chapter on 'The Intertwining—The Chiasm' in *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty tries to articulate that phenomenological sense in which we find ourselves as perceivers in a world of the visible. That visible seems to have its own 'in itself' character: 'The visible about us seems to rest in itself' [VI, p. 130] yet we form part of it. We don't have any sense that we create the visible, yet we ourselves are visible within this sphere of visibility: 'my seeing body subtends my visible body and all the visibles with it' [VI, p. 138]. Merleau-Ponty's answer is to try to express this 'intertwining' of visible and vision which is for him at the heart of the notion of flesh and at the heart of the body-world relation.

Merleau-Ponty's metaphysical use of the double sensation is, how-



ever, the opposite of Sartre's. Merleau-Ponty wants to claim, paradoxically and counter-intuitively, that both vision and touch have this doubleness.

This is a very important point. Seeing our body is a way of orienting to other things in a visible way. My particular orientation is contingent but there must be some orientation in my 'upsurge' in the world.

### 13. Conclusion

Sartre's account of the body is subtle, complex, and many layered. It is of course largely a promissory note for a kind of larger study which he himself never carried out. However, his view of the body is a healthy corrective to what is often seen as his rather crude Cartesianism. Sartre is often criticized for his metaphysical claims concerning the gulf between different orders of being (*for-itself* and *in-itself*), but, in fact, his phenomenological account overcomes this crude 'Cartesian' dualism by stressing our embodied-being-in-the-world. It is true that Sartre invites confusion by using the term 'ontology' where he is speaking about matters that are phenomenologically manifest. While Sartre's account of the body is not as deeply informed by psychological studies as Merleau-Ponty's<sup>36</sup>, on the other hand, in some respects, his account of intersubjective embodied relations (shame, desire, the erotic caress) is more concrete and dynamic. As we have seen, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre disagree to a certain extent about the role of our self-perceivings. Whereas Merleau-Ponty, following Husserl, emphasizes the ineliminability of the felt body in all perceiving, Sartre maintains that our perceivings *objectify* what we perceive. Hence, for Sartre, the phenomenon of 'double sensation' or 'touching-touched' is contingent, irrelevant and indeed falsely described

<sup>36</sup> Merleau-Ponty is deeply influenced, as we have seen, by David Katz's studies of vision and touch, and also by studies such as Jean Lhermitte, *L'Image de notre corps* (Paris: Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Critique, 1939), which introduces the idea of the 'body image' which Merleau-Ponty refers to as '*le schéma corporel*' (translated by Colin Smith as 'body image'). For further discussion of this concept, see Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), who explains Merleau-Ponty's '*schéma corporel*' as the 'dynamic functioning of the body in its environment' (p. 20).

in psychology. For Sartre, the ability to touch oneself or see oneself is a merely contingent feature of our animality and cannot provide 'the foundation of a study of corporeality' [BN, p. 358; Fr. 426], whereas for Merleau-Ponty, especially in his last unfinished *The Visible and the Invisible*, following Husserl, it becomes the very essence of flesh and our 'entwinement' (*l'entrelacement*) in the world.

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## XIV. On the effects of a fictitious encounter between Alfred North Whitehead and Gilbert Simondon

Emeline Deroo

**Abstract:** Alfred North Whitehead and Gilbert Simondon never knew one another. They actually belong to two different historical and philosophical landscapes. However, it remains surprising, when we investigate their thoughts, to notice how close their claims are as to the reversal of a metaphysical tradition that has too long used inadequate categories to understand some key notions, like change, process or becoming. Whitehead and Simondon each set up a philosophical system respecting at the same time rationalistic and empiricist requirements. We aim to show here that a joint reading of these two authors can help us in defining new stakes in contemporary process ontology.

**Key words:** Metaphysical empiricism, axiomatic plane, process of individuation, relation, singularities.

### 1. Introduction

My aim is to suggest the very first lines of a fictitious dialogue between Whitehead and a French philosopher of the second part of the twentieth century, Gilbert Simondon. This encounter is a fiction insofar as the two philosophers were not actually acquainted. However, despite the absence of any factual influence, we cannot help being surprised by a significant proximity between them. I will try here to display some of these elements of proximity as well as their relevance for the sake of a new way of reading Whitehead today.

Thus, I will point out the connection between Whitehead and Simondon through two topics, namely the construction of an axiomatic plane on the one hand, and the development of a processual and relational ontology on the other hand.

Before starting this exercise, I should warn the reader about the intentions of this paper. Comparison remains a difficult and perilous mode