

Bodily Self-Awareness in French Phenomenology (forthcoming 2022)

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Abstract: Despite all controversies that might otherwise divide them, most phenomenologists agree that consciousness entails some form of self-consciousness. In fact, they go even further, as they virtually all agree on the necessity of fleshing out this insight in bodily terms: from the phenomenological point of view, self-consciousness is primarily experienced as a form of bodily self-consciousness (or self-awareness). Following Edmund Husserl's insight that the lived body (*Leib*), i.e. the body as it is subjectively felt or experienced, must necessarily be presupposed by all object consciousness, including the thematic consciousness of me as a body, there is a long-standing discussion within the phenomenological movement on how to conceive of this self-relation. This entry focuses on the French reception of Husserl and highlights the distinctive ways in which French phenomenologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Henry, Jean-Paul Sartre and Jacques Derrida have elaborated on and disputed this key insight. It will be shown that discussions on this question have open onto two further debates: one revolves around the paradigmatic role Husserl grants to touch in the analysis of consciousness, while the other concerns the differences between the experience of one's own body and the experience of the body of others. Finally, we point to the fact that one's body can be experienced and evaluated as other, as is shown in the critical analyses of Frantz Fanon, Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault, and recent critical phenomenology. Here, it becomes clear that the bodily self-awareness of concrete subjects is shaped by the material conditions, norms, and discourses of their respective situation.

I. Introduction

Most phenomenologists agree that consciousness is characterized by intentionality and that intentionality entails some form of self-conscious activity. In the phenomenological tradition, it is E. Husserl who first formulated this idea explicitly in his 1904/05 *Lectures on Internal Time-Consciousness* by asserting that “every act is consciousness of something, but there is also consciousness of every act.” (1966b: 126/130) The claim that self-consciousness and intentionality are interdependent features of experience specifically concerns the *pre*-reflective dimension of consciousness: *prior to* any subsequent reflective self-apprehension, intentional consciousness includes a form of self-reference thanks to which it acquires its experiential or first-personal character. This Husserlian insight has been taken over and developed by a majority of phenomenologist, most notably by Jean-Paul Sartre (1936, 1943), Michel Henry (1963, 1965), and more recently Dan Zahavi (2020) and Dorothee Legrand (2006, 2011), who have made it a central theme of their research.¹

There is a broad consensus among phenomenologists on the idea that self-consciousness (or self-awareness, which we will here use interchangeably) is primarily experienced as a form of *bodily* self-reference. Let us call this thesis T1:

¹ References in the text refer to the original French, German or English text. When available, page numbers of the English translation are given after the dash.

T1. Self-consciousness is primarily experienced as a form of *bodily* self-reference.

The emergence of T1 is rooted in an insight concerning the constitutive function of the body in perception. As the indexical ‘here’ of all directions and orientations (Husserl 1952: 158f./166), the body is not only the egocentric center around which perceptual space unfolds, but it is also the disclosing principle of all intentional objects, whose profiles are consciously given as the correlates of possible movements *I can* do (Husserl 1966a: 10ff./47ff.; 1976: 163ff./161ff.). While the importance of this idea plays perhaps no greater role in post-Husserlian phenomenology than in Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*, Husserl’s claim about the original first-personal givenness of the body has been unanimously endorsed by all major French phenomenologists, including Levinas (1974), Henry (1965) and Sartre (1943), who goes as far as to maintain that “to say [...] that there is a world, or that I have a body is one and the same thing.” (1943: 365f./419)

Crucial for a phenomenological account of self-reference is that it must have its own characteristic experiential quality. Bodily self-reference is not conceived as a purely formal or transcendental condition of experience (as the Kantian ‘I think’) or merely induced as inherent within every form of object-intentionality. The idea instead is that the body experiences itself, or rather manifests itself to itself, although not in an object-like (or intentional) way, but rather as the subject of that experience. Concretely, this means that it is not only the touched or perceived body (body as object) that is given to us; the claim is that we also have experiential access, however limited or unspecified, to the seeing, touching or moving body (body as subject).

If, then, phenomenologists concur that the body as it is subjectively felt or experienced must necessarily be presupposed by all object consciousness, including the thematic consciousness of me as a body (Husserl 1973: 57; Sartre 1943: 370f./424), there is a long-standing debate within the phenomenological tradition on how exactly to formulate this self-relation. Discussions on this specific question have taken two different, but interwoven directions.

One revolves around the paradigmatic role Husserl grants to touch in the analysis of consciousness. My body is originally given and lived through as a phenomenally unified whole, but I can, thanks to a shift in attention, draw a distinction between the functioning, subjectively lived body (*Leib*) and the thematized, objective body (*Körper*). While I am permanently pre-reflectively self-aware of my lived body (*Leib*) as a sensing organism, this same body can also be sensed and localized in certain specific body parts. The experience of reversibility of the sensing and sensed body shows that the body is the object of a double constitution, which Husserl analyses in *Ideas II* through the so-called experience of double-sensation (1952: §36-

37). In the experience of two hands that touch one another, the living body appears as both the object and subject of experience. This is due to a remarkable feature of all tactile sensations, which can alternatively be apprehended both objectively as sensed (*Empfindung*) and subjectively as sensing (*Empfindnis*). Since none of the other bodily sensations (be they auditory, visual, olfactive or gustatory) display the reflexive specificity of tactile sensations, Husserl holds that *the body constitutes itself originally through the sense of touch*, which is thereby granted an ontological privilege over the other senses. For convenience, let's call this T2:

T2. Due to its unique reflexive power, the body constitutes itself originally through touch, which thus comes to enjoy an ontological privilege over the other senses.

This Husserlian thesis has drawn numerous comments and criticisms in 20th C. French philosophy, beginning with Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jacques Derrida, who, as we will see in s. II, challenged it in different ways.

However, if Husserl's analysis of the experience of double-sensation and double-constitution held such a fundamental importance in the phenomenological canon, and especially in 20th C. French phenomenology, it is first and foremost because it is supposed to demonstrate the distinctiveness of the self-affective experience of the body proper. This is important for, on this basis, Husserl could establish an asymmetry between the experience of my body and the experience of the body of others. This corresponds to the third thesis:

T3. The experience of one's own bodily self is originary and the experience of the others derivative, for while one's own body is directly and immediately present to consciousness, we can only appresent the body of others.

As we will see in s. III, this thesis has been heavily discussed and challenged by Merleau-Ponty, who disputes the asymmetry, by Sartre, Levinas and Derrida, who reversed the order and gave ontological priority to various figures of the other in their conception of subjectivity, and by Michel Henry, who is often taken to argue for a dissolution of the tension between auto- and hetero-affection in favor of the first.

Here's the plan: by examining closely how the thesis (T1) on the intrinsic relation between intentionality and bodily self-awareness has impacted those concerning (T2) the ontological priority of touch in the constitution of the body proper (s. II) and (T3) the dialectic between self and others (s. III), the aim of this entry is to highlight the distinctive ways in which 20th Century French phenomenologists have expanded or disputed Husserl's heritage with regard to bodily self-awareness. In the concluding section (s. IV), we briefly look at various cases of

bodily oppression and objectification as discussed in the work of Frantz Fanon and Michel Foucault, among others.

II. Sense and Sensitivity: Vision over Touch?

The essential role of the body for perceptual intentionality is a prevailing theme throughout the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Much like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty argues that spatial objects always appear to and for an embodied subject, for perception and action are essentially connected in consciousness. More generally, the claim is that there is an intrinsic relation between intentionality and bodily self-consciousness, which stand in a relation of reciprocal interdependency. Merleau-Ponty thus clearly endorses T1: just as it is by being affected that we appear to ourselves, it is only by being bodily present to ourselves that we can be conscious of the world and its constituents (1945: 431f./391).

If, on the whole, this conception of the *corps propre* comes very close to Husserl's *Leib*, Merleau-Ponty parts ways with Husserl in the specific manner of conceiving how bodily self-awareness occurs. Whereas Husserl saw touch as providing phenomenological evidence unique in its kind, thereby justifying its ontological primacy over the other senses (T2), Merleau-Ponty disputes this claim and developed a more holistic view of perception as the primary form of accessing the world. This section provides an overview of Merleau-Ponty's career-spanning engagement with this theme and briefly present some of the criticisms it has engendered.

According to Merleau-Ponty, it is first and foremost *as engaged in the world* that we experience our bodies. Throughout the *Phenomenology of perception*, the analyses center around the temporal and thus relational nature of every non-visual bodily self-awareness. Lived embodiment is not merely characterized by the actual seeing, moving or touching body, but is comprised of two layers: the actual and the habitual body (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 84/111). The latter results from our personal experiential history, our set of acquired habits and skills, as well as our more general and anonymous nature and biological dispositions (the body as an organic complex). As such, our past is 'present' in our current actions as it situates, enables and facilitates these very actions. Through repeated interactions with the environment, one establishes bodily habits, that is, typical patterns of behavior with regard to typical worldly situations. These bodily habits are in turn also perceptual habits: through our perceptual engagement in the world, we inhabit and acquire information on this world, which in turn enables our orientation within it (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 153/187).

Normally, the habitual and the actual body go hand in hand as both are integrated in the body schema. In Merleau-Ponty's interpretation, the body schema stands for the set of motor skills and control mechanisms that allows perceptual agents to navigate the world. Its enactment

involves an implicit and first-order form of self-conscious activity, or more specifically, a form of pre-reflective, operative and practical awareness of ourselves as bodies. As Merleau-Ponty puts it: “I hold my body as an indivisible possession, and I know the position of each of my limbs through a body schema that envelops them all.” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 127/100-1) This is to be differentiated however from the body-image, where we refer to our body as a perceived or evaluated object (cf. Gallagher 2005). The body schema is not a mere sum of experiences or the result of an association of images (as the psychology of his time had defined it). Rather, the body schema stands for an intersensory and spatiotemporal unity that has to be constantly achieved and actualized through interactions with the environment. However, in borderline experiences or pathologies, the habitual and actual body can dissociate. In his interpretation of the phantom limb, Merleau-Ponty argues that the habitual body (viz. the embodied set of practical possibilities set before one has lost a limb) can dominate the actual body and thereby hinder its adaptability when faced with changed circumstances. This is neither explainable on purely physiological grounds (as the phantom limb can suddenly arise or vanish due to a change of psychological conditions) nor in psychological terms as a mere recollection of false beliefs (as there has to be some physiological cause). Since bodily subjects incorporate their past existence, one can still be aware and hold on to a body one no longer is (or has) (cf. 78f./104f).

The body schema thus shows that bodily self-awareness necessarily entails an awareness of myself in a perceptual and practical relation to the world. For Merleau-Ponty, this is comprised of global awareness of my situatedness in the intersensory world and not merely an association of bodily parts. Rather it integrates these bodily parts according to their value for current actions or projects of the organism (102/129). Due to this dynamic, the body schema acts as the habitual layer of the body that supports the actual acting body, while the current actions in turn actualize, update, transform or extend the body schema. What becomes clear here is that our awareness of ourselves while being a body (body as subject) is different from our perception of our bodies as body (body as object) (cf. Wehrle 2020). On this score, Merleau-Ponty sides with Husserl against Brentano (1874: 179f./127f.), and anticipates on positions defended more recently by a growing number of analytic philosophers of mind (e.g., Flanagan 1992, Bermudez 1998, Kriegel 2009). However, what is distinctive of Merleau-Ponty’s approach, is how he conceives of this self-reference as being intrinsically linked to the world, that is, as a dependent part of what he calls bodily intentionality: the “body schema is another way of expressing that my body is in and towards the world” (1945: 103/130).

In his later works, Merleau-Ponty’s holistic approach to perception gradually receded into the background as he was growingly fascinated by vision. Vision is an enigma: it takes place in the midst of things, “in the place where something visible undertakes to see” (1961: 19/124). As

such, Merleau-Ponty finds in vision the same reversibility as in touch: “we could not possibly touch or see without being capable of touching or seeing ourselves.” (1960: 23f./16) The reflexivity of the visible and tangible spheres led Merleau-Ponty “to restore the parallelism between seeing and touching that Husserl contested” (Dastur 2001: 106/41), a move that seems to have reached its peak in *Signs* in 1960, but which was well underway in 1945 in *Phenomenology of Perception*.² This earned him severe criticisms amongst French philosophers (cf. Derrida 2000: 212ff./186ff.). The “exorbitant privilege” (Dastur 2001: 105/40) that Merleau-Ponty came to confer on vision in his last two publications (*Eye and Mind* (1961) and *The Visible dans the Invisible* (1964)), which not only comes to “contradict the Husserlian privilege of touch, and the ensuing logic, but also break apart any symmetry to the benefit of sight” (Derrida 2000: 222/196), was also severely decried (cf. Irigaray 1982: 163).

More so than perhaps anyone else in France, Derrida was very attentive to this surreptitious movement of radicalization, in which the haptic sphere now seemed totally resorbed into the visual one. While the analysis of the structure of self-awareness in terms of self-affection undertaken in the early works (1967a and b) centered on the question of temporality, which Derrida considers the most fundamental type of self-affection, in *On Touching* (2000), the demonstration bears more directly on its bodily forms of self-manifestations. However, the point, which bears directly on T2, is exactly the same: just as the retentional dimension of all consciousness introduces a (temporal) point of exteriority within the interiority of consciousness, which prevents it from coinciding with itself in self-presence, the experience of touching-touched relies on a similar “introjection” (2000: 202/176) of the outside world in the sensing body, thus undermining the possibility of a *pure* self-affective relation. This, however, is not a negative outcome. On the contrary, therein lies the possibility of constitution: this “detour by way of the foreign outside is at the same time what allows us to speak of a ‘double’ apprehension (otherwise there would be one thing only: only some touching or only some touched) and what allows me to undergo the test of this singular experience and distinguish between the I and the non-I, and to say ‘this is my body.’” (2000: 200/175) In short, if the body becomes a proper body (*Leib*) only by incorporating real or ‘objective’ tactile sensations (*Empfindungen*), or if, more generally, some form of “exteriority is needed” (Id.) for self-affection or self-awareness *even in touching*, it follows that “according or restoring a privilege

² If this motif certainly took a radically new, ontological turn in his last works, Merleau-Ponty sought very early on to flatten or reduce the relative weight of the senses. In *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), for instance, perceptual things are described as soliciting us across multiple sensory registers at once. In the way they call for our engagement and interaction with them, they speak indifferently to *all* our senses. Therein lies the “inter-sensory unity of the thing” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945: 286/248). In return, Merleau-Ponty asserts that the senses are indistinct in the way they *jointly* respond to the thing’s solicitation. This is how Merleau-Ponty famously came to endorse the claim about the synesthetic character of *all* perceptions (1945: 275/238; cf. Doyon 2021).

or priority to any sense [...] no longer come[s] into question” (2000: 206/180), since they are all subject to the same law.

III. Self and Other

The problems raised in the previous section are, in Derrida’s eyes, the places “of the strongest resistance vis-à-vis the authority” of phenomenology’s “intuitionistic ‘principle of principles.’” (2000: 198/173) It comes as no surprise, then, that it also directly bears on T3, which concerns, to recall, the asymmetrical treatment of self- and other-perception (*Selbst- und Fremderfahrung*) on the basis of the possibility of a pure self-affective experience of the lived body. The goal of this section is to present Derrida’s, Henry’s and Sartre’s critical responses to Merleau-Ponty on this theme, which provoked some of the most heated debates of 20th C. continental philosophy.

For Derrida, the connection between T2 and T3 is simple enough: “if there is some introjection and thus some analogical appresentation starting at the threshold of the touching-touched, then the touching-touched cannot be accessible for an originary, immediate, and full intuition, any more than the alter ego.” (2000: 202/176) Again, the perception of *both* self and others is subject to the very same law of spacing, which is why Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of “the other man’s being-there when I shake his hand” (1961: 210/167) in *Signs* undergoes a relentless criticism on the part of Derrida. For in holding that “it is in no different fashion” that I am bodily self-aware in the experience of double-sensation than “the other’s body becomes animate before me when I shake another man’s hand or just look at him” (Id.), Merleau-Ponty not only turns Husserl “upside down” (2000: 207/190) while pretending to remain faithful, but – worst still – it also wrongly insinuates that the alter ego could, like the ego, be given in an immediate, spontaneous and originary experience. For Derrida, our experience of both ego and alter ego faces the same challenges.

While Derrida’s criticism might at times seem unfair because of its harshness, it nevertheless has the merit of drawing attention to a latent, but powerful tendency in Merleau-Ponty’s work to abolish or overturn the structural hierarchies of Husserlian phenomenology. Another example (not discussed by Derrida however) can be found in his 1951 lecture-course on *Child Psychology and Pedagogy*, where Merleau-Ponty argues that ego and alter ego—or self and other—are in an initial state of undifferentiation. The argument is rooted in a critique of classical psychology, which wrongly assumes that our access to the experiential life of others is indirect and mediated. As such, it cannot provide a satisfactory account of our perception of other minds. Merleau-Ponty’s solution, which is inspired by Scheler (1913), consists in arguing that self and others are in “an initial state of undifferentiation” (Zahavi 2016: 79). At first, there is a sort of “anonymous collectivity” or “undifferentiated group life” (1964a: 119) from which

the child only progressively emancipates (cf. 1961: 174). In this process of self-objectification, in which the child becomes aware of his body and what distinguishes it from those of others, bodily self-awareness—or more specifically proprioceptive awareness—occupies the center stage. For “at the same time that I begin to live my intentions in the facial expressions of the other and likewise begin to live the other’s volitions in my own gestures”, I realize that “his body”, just like mine, “is, after all, closed in on itself.” (Id.) While some commentators have quite justly pointed out that there are other passages both in this and other texts that bear witness to Merleau-Ponty’s own ambivalence with regard to the indistinction thesis just sketched out (Zahavi 2016: 80, 86f.), there is an undeniable trend in his last writings towards a kind of leveling of the self-other relation which was not present in earlier texts. This conception of self and other, which are conceived as equiprimordial from a developmental perspective, was designed as a corrective to what he took to be the weak spot in Husserlian phenomenology, namely its inability to provide a satisfactory account of our experience of alterity.

Elsewhere in France, the reactions to this perceived difficulty took two diametrically opposed directions. While on the one hand, Michel Henry appears to side neatly with Husserl in giving priority to the self, he does so in a way that differs markedly from Husserl. On the other hand, Derrida, Sartre and Levinas gave priority to the other, conceived either as spacing/exteriority or, more radically still, as another person. Let’s discuss both trends in turn, concentrating on the work of Henry and Sartre.

Michel Henry agrees with Husserl and Merleau-Ponty on the original givenness of the body (1965: 79) and also differentiates between the body as the perceiving subject (*Leib*) and as a perceived object (*Körper*), which are conceived, respectively, as the condition and content of experience. However, in contrast to Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, Henry understands this bodily subjectivity not as the unity of a *Leibkörper*. Rather, he argues that the subjective body is neither a biological body, a lived body nor a human body; it is rather an entirely different ontological region, an absolute subjectivity (Henry 1965: 11). The subjective body is a purely immanent and an independent ontological region, which, by the same token, stands as the a priori condition of every world-directed intentionality or appearance. This absolute subjectivity manifests itself implicitly in a non-intentional, immediate, non-objectifying, and passive experience that is best described as bodily self-affection (1963: 288ff.). Importantly, this self-affection involves no difference, distance or mediation between that which affects and that which is affected. It is absolute in that sense.

Through his radical reading of Maine de Biran’s in *Philosophie et phénoménologie du corps* (1975), Henry came to reject the Husserlian conception of bodily subjectivity as the unity of *Leibkörper*

and to develop instead an *ontological* conception of the body as subjectivity. The book starts with the question of how my lived body manifests itself to me. How do I know that I am my body? This knowledge cannot be empirical in nature, otherwise I could not differentiate my body from those of other subjects. For Henry, this is not a knowledge of *anything*, but the immediate and a priori awareness of the identity of my subjectivity with my lived body. But more concretely: what exactly do we come to experience here? Henry answers this question by giving the example of ‘My hand now grips the book.’ This sentence can refer either to the hand as an organ or tool that grasps the book (body as object), or it can refer to myself, who, without being aware of the hand as an instrument of grasping, reaches for the book (body as subject). Similarly, the act of ‘grasping’ can refer both to my hand as an organ directed towards the book and as the felt sensation of force in the act of moving or aiming at the book. Following Maine de Biran, Henry describes the latter as sensation of voluntary effort (*le sentiment de l’effort; effort voulu*, cf. Henry 1965: 18). In concrete movements, this sensation of effort is correlated to a worldly resistance, as when I need effort to move and overcome a spatial distance. However, for Henry an action does not coincide with the realization of its external goal. Action is not reducible to the actuality of movement, but must rather be thought uniquely in terms of its potentiality. For this reason, the sensation of force must be understood in purely subjective terms viz., as a potentiality that does not depend at all on external factors. Every living body is in this sense characterized by such an indeterminate sensation of force, even before it starts to act in the world concretely (Henry 1965, 50). Already in 1965, and increasingly so in later texts, Henry will refer to this original being of the (bodily) subject as life (cf. Scheidegger 2012: 107). For this reason, self-affection must not be understood as self-spontaneity but rather as a radical ontological passivity. I am given to myself, but I am not the initiator of this ‘self-affection’; this is rather a gift from life (cf. Zahavi 1999: 112; Henry 1963: 363, 371, 854).

Clearly, Henry, just as Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, emphasizes the necessary role of self-awareness for intentionality (T1). However, while Husserl conceives of self- and hetero-manifestation as correlative (although asymmetrical), and Merleau-Ponty explicitly as co-original (T3), Henry dissolves this tension in some of his texts (though not all) toward an absolute priority of self or auto-affection: “Never, however, would affection by the world nor consequently by a being happen if this ek-static affection did not first affect itself in Life, which is nothing other than this primitive auto-affection.” (Henry³) He thereby understands bodily

³ It should be noted that the interpretation of Henry's account as solipsistic belongs to the first period of the critical reception of his work (cf. Van Riet, 1966). Since then, the reading of Henry's published texts on the other (cf. Henry 1990; Brohm/Leclercq 2009), as well as the edition by G. Jean of Henry's *Notes sur l'expérience d'autrui* (cf. Henry 2011), have questioned this reading of Henry's concept of subjectivity or immanence as something in which the subject could be enclosed.

self-awareness not within the concrete realm of either touch or vision (T2), but as expression of a transcendental force of life. Although Henry has convincingly argued against what he terms an ontological monism, namely that all manifestation necessarily must be object manifestation, and showed that the body we are manifests itself in a unique way, he leaves us with a lot of questions. With regard to a theory of action, one might ask how it is possible, within this framework, to differentiate between actual and possible actions if both actuality and potentiality are subjectively felt as an inner force? One may also wonder what is left of this unique subjective bodily awareness if the body sometimes seems to be understood in a metaphorical way as some general force of self-affection (cf. Barbaras 2008: 7-8; Legrand 2011: 210)? And even more urgently, how can we be aware of other bodies as subjects if each seems to be enclosed in their respective absolute immanence?

In almost every respect, Jean-Paul Sartre's position in *L'être et le néant* stands diametrically opposed. For Sartre, the body as subject can never be given as such as it assumes a merely inherent function of intentionality that enables our direction toward things and our projection into the world. This function still includes a pre-reflective self-reference, viz. an operative and non-thetic first-order awareness of itself. Since a proper self-consciousness is always an object-consciousness, however, this pre-reflective consciousness is '*nothing*'. In a sense, we *are something*, but this something (our properties) is *determined by* the gazes of others and thus dependent on their recognition. As subject for the world, we are thus nothing, while as being in the world, we are primarily not for ourselves, but for-others.

Sartre can thus be surely counted among those who defend a broadly Husserlian view on T1 as he deems that intentionality necessarily entails an inherent pre-reflective self-awareness. This is perhaps nowhere as clear as when he writes in the introduction to *Being and Nothingness* that "This self-consciousness we ought to consider not as a new consciousness, but as *the only mode of existence which is possible for a consciousness of something* (Sartre 1943: 20/10)." Specifically, Sartre contends that "Consciousness can only be non-positionally aware of itself if it is positionally aware of something" (Zahavi 2020: 131). Thus, although the body as subject (perceiving) must precede the body as object (perceived), this means in turn that "originally, I do not have any consciousness of my body. I am not perceiving it, I am it." (Zahavi 2020: 107). My body as subject is indeed "the point of view on which I can no longer take a point of view." (Sartre 1943: 369/353) No one can see the seeing itself. But am I not able to see and touch my hand while it is touching, as Husserl argued in analyzing the phenomenon of double sensation? Sartre answers in the negative, as he conceives of the seeing and the seen, or the touching and the touched, as two separate ontological regions which cannot be united. The

consequence is clear: for Sartre, and contrary to Husserl and Henry, there is no such thing as a purely immanent sensation or self-affection. Sensation or sensory activity can never be felt or grasped as such but only induced or abstracted retrospectively. Sartre sums things up by holding that “I never encounter anything but objects in the world” (Sartre 1943: 355/340).

Since it is *not* characterized by a special kind of awareness, sensing or self-affection, the body’s presence in experience is comparable to that of a sign which is “neglected for the sake of meaning” (Sartre 1943: 370/354). In support of this view, Sartre gives the example of reading while one’s eyes hurt. While reading, I am normally not attending to my body but following the narrative. In this situation, we do not distinguish the movements of the eyes from the reading experience. Both coalesce and are given at once. Similarly, when my eyes start hurting, I am not experiencing my organs or pain sensations as such; I rather experience a change in my reading: the letters get blurred, my attention drops, I lack focus, it takes more time and more effort to read a passage, etc. Sartre captures this by asserting that *I am my pain* or *I exist my pain*, even if this pain is not originally given to me, but rather disappears in the total situation. In other words, the pain of the eyes is precisely given in my reading and it is nothing separate from it. Only in a second, subsequent step can I indicate or identify that ‘my eyes hurt’, but in pointing this out, I already assume an external perspective on my situation. This is significant, for it entails that when we experience our eyes as parts of our bodies, we have already entered the realm of the objective world. In that sense, Sartre asserts that during a doctor’s visit, he perceives his ailing foot no differently from the body of the doctor sitting at his bedside.

With regard to the problem of what is primary for self-awareness (T2), Sartre thus *sidesteps* the debate alluded to earlier between touch and vision as he gives us reasons to think that neither give us such direct or immediate access. If I am engaged in the world through my body, I do not experience my body as subject, however minimally. Therefore, hetero-affection or the other has to be ontologically primary and is a necessary condition for every proper self-consciousness. The body of which I am conscious is thus, prior to any form of self-awareness, an object that is intersubjectively accessible to the gaze of others.

As such, I exist for myself only as a body perceived by the other. This means in turn that the moment I get conscious of myself as embodied, I am faced with the fact that this very body necessarily escapes me: my senses are indeed apprehensible, but by others and not for me: “Thus at the very moment when I *live* my senses as this inner point of view (...), their being for others haunts me: they *are*.” (Sartre 1943: 393/376). My lived body is for the other as a table or tree is for me. While apparently trivial, this existential insight is fundamental to Sartre’s ontology, because it leads to alienation. Others do see me in a way that I cannot see myself

and define what I am in classifying or identifying me (old, young, un/attractive, ab/normal etc.). The origin of self-consciousness can thus be at once the cause of embarrassment, shame or concern. Sartre illustrates this in his famous description of the look (Sartre 1943: 298/282). Here, a subject is glued to a keyhole. He is totally absorbed by what he is doing, his attention is directed toward what he sees through the keyhole, he has nothetic consciousness of himself or his body. Then he hears footsteps, he is caught in the act, seen while seeing, objectified by the gaze of the other, and identified as a peeping tom. All of a sudden, he is aware of himself but in a way that is already mediated through an actual or potential other. In sum, then, one is thus either a not self-aware subject that objectifies the other through his gaze, or it is a self-aware object viz. an objectified entity that exists only for others. According to Sartre, this antagonistic structure is reversible and dynamic, but the inherent tension can never be dissolved.

IV. Self as Other: the objectified body

In critically applying insights from Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's analyses of the gaze and the body schema, Frantz Fanon (1952/1988) describes in *Peau noir, masques blancs* the violent objectifying power of the colonial gaze. "Look, a Negro", the beginning scene of the chapter 'the fact of blackness' describes how the gaze of others not only temporarily objectifies the racialized bodies, but permanently marks, defines, dominates, and excludes them by keeping them at odds with the so-called normalcy of white civilization. There is no way to escape this gaze (say, by rationalizing or ignoring it); one cannot disregard the visibility of one's otherness either. This is the problem hinted at by Fanon: the gaze reduces the subject to an object ('a Negro'), whose history, values, nature and possibilities are pre-defined, determined and constituted by a racist western society. The consequences are that as a black man or a black woman in a white society, one is forced to be constantly self-conscious, painfully aware that one is seen and appraised in everything one does. This, however, makes it impossible to be self-evidently absorbed in one's actions or projects, that is, being towards the world through one's body as subject (non-thetic consciousness). It is in this sense that Fanon argues that, as a black man in a white colonial world, one has difficulties in developing a body schema. The body schema, which stands for the implicit expression of one's 'I can', is thus turned into an I-cannot. Instead of enabling a smooth interaction with the world, the body schema turns into an explicit image of oneself, a historico-racial body-image that is pre-defined by colonial society. As such, bodily self-consciousness is entirely alienated: "I is a third person consciousness." (Fanon 1988: 83). Fanon illustrates this with the example of smoking, no doubt a critical allusion to Sartre: If a 'normal' subject can self-evidently reach for a pack of cigarettes, lean back slightly to grasp the matches lying in the left pocket, light the cigarettes, and inhale, all these steps become explicit and thought out in Fanon's own experience. The

anonymity of the body schema painted by Merleau-Ponty thus seems to belong to a certain class of individuals only.

By taking women as example, Simone de Beauvoir (1949) arrived at a similar conclusion: embodied subjects that are identified and objectified as ‘other’ in oppressive societies lose the privilege of self-evidently acting in the world. Instead, they become overly conscious of how they appear and are evaluated by others. Their bodies turn into an object of concern and are “surrounded by a certain atmosphere of uncertainty” (Fanon 1988: 83). A similar argument has been brought forward by Iris Marion Young (1980) with regard to women in patriarchal societies in her famous essay *Throwing like a girl*. She speaks in this regard of an inhibited intentionality. If, then, an implicit bodily awareness is, from the phenomenological point of view, a necessary feature of intentionality, when this awareness is constantly overridden by an explicit consciousness of one’s body, this very intentionality is experienced as fragmented or alienated.

Finally, in the work of Michel Foucault (1975, 1976), it is the non-awareness of how our bodies *as disciplined*, that is, *normalized* according to social norms, that comes to the fore. Insofar as they shape how we behave (as proper men, women, soldiers, workers, students, etc.), these institutionalized norms have a transforming, albeit implicit impact on bodily awareness, which is seen here as a socio-political construct. In his late ethical writings, Foucault (1984a, 1984b) emphasizes the positive impact of a heightened attention to one’s body. In going back to the stoic ethical tradition, Foucault (2001) shows how the experience of mastering one’s body as in cases of ascetics or bodily training and meditation can serve a positive role. These practices, which Foucault describes as a care of the self (*souci de soi*) or an aesthetic of existence, aim to enhance autonomy and increase the independence of one’s bodily (and mental) existence from external circumstances (cold, periods of hunger, imprisonment). As such, they prepare one for existential limit situations or specific communal tasks, like taking a political office or a leadership position. Hereby, the role of the other is not necessarily objectifying. Just like a teacher, the other can help me to develop my autonomy and give my existence a specific meaning and shape. To this extent, Foucault stresses how being constantly aware of one’s body not only comes with inherent possibilities of resistance (to existing norms), but also opens the way – however limited – to actively re-affirm and transform one’s existence (Wehrle 2016).

Continuing this line, contemporary phenomenological approaches, like critical phenomenology (cf. Weiss et al. 2019), discuss and apply concepts like the body-schema and bodily self-awareness to concrete contexts of gender, patriarchy, racism, inequality or disability. In this regard, the body schema is understood as a “historical record of experience,

context, emotion, taboos, and desires”, and thus “an invaluable resource for a critical phenomenology”. However, the body is not only understood a tool of philosophical analysis but also of possible political and social change, that is, “as the site of a dynamic process through which habits and norms are reconfigured” (Guenther 2019, 13).

Conclusion

While we see in all positions a phenomenological differentiation between being and having a body, the body as subject (*Leib*) and the body as object (*Körper*), only Sartre and Henry interpret this (in opposed ways) as an ontological split that is difficult to overcome. This would leave us with two related problems: if the subjective body is purely immanent and enclosed in itself, how can we then ever experience the other as subject? And, if the body has no qualitative experience of itself as subject, how can I then experience my body and its movements as either a) initiated by me (when I move, touch or perceive) or as owned by me (as when I am moved, touched or perceived by someone)?

However, following Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's approach as overall framework, one can combine these seemingly opposed perspectives in a gradual phenomenological account of bodily self-awareness that moves from more subjective (implicit and global) to more objective (explicit and focused) forms of bodily self-awareness. In taking Dorothée Legrand's example of 'perceiving and touching of a rose' (Legrand 2011, 213ff.), one could thus differentiate between a) the *perception of an object* coupled with an implicit awareness of one's overall orientation and localization in relation to the sensory world; b) the *movement towards/grasping of an object*, in which one is not only aware of oneself as orientation but also of this body itself, for example the contraction of muscles, velocity of my moving hand or skin sensations when touching the rose; c) the *attentive movement or attentive exploring of an object* (squeezing the rose), where one is more explicitly and object-like aware of one's body (as moving hand or injured hand); and finally d) the *perceiving or scrutinizing one's body as object*, where we adopt an objective attitude towards our own body. This, however, puts us in a situation not much different from perceiving or scrutinizing someone else's hand, as Sartre emphasized.

If this model is correct, self-awareness appears to be a necessary and essential feature of intentionality. Husserl and Merleau-Ponty thus fittingly defend (against Sartre) the idea that there is a specific and non-intentional way of being aware of oneself as body-subject. While such a self-awareness is neither intentional by itself nor a pure or transcendental form of self-affection, it can nevertheless only occur within and through intentionality.

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