**(Un)wanted feelings in Anorexia Nervosa – making the visceral body mine again**

In my paper “Controlling the noise”, I present a phenomenological investigation of bodily experience in AN. Turning to descriptions of those who have suffered from AN, which repeatedly describe the experience of finding their bodies threatening, out of control and noisy, I suggest that the phenomenological conceptions of body-as-object, body-as-subject and visceral body can help us unpack the complex bodily experience of AN throughout its various stages. My claim is that self-starvation is enacted by a bodily-subject who wishes to quell or reassert authority over a visceral body whose demands and needs she finds threatening to her autonomy.

The relationship between body-as-object and body-as-subject, while well-established in phenomenology, is a complex one. While the body-as-object is intended to pick out the body as a material object and the body-as-subject is intended to pick out how we as embodied subjects engage with the world *through* our bodies, these cannot be teased apart into a neat binary – for me to experience my body as an object, I must be the bodily subject experiencing my body-as-object; likewise, my experience as a body-as-subject is always shaped by the structure of my body in terms of how I can act in the world and what possibilities I experience the world as having for me.

As both Maiese and Leder note in their generous and insightful commentaries, things are no less complex when it comes to the visceral body. Here I explore how the suggestions posed by both commentators can further enrich our understanding of the visceral body and how it is experienced in AN. Leder (1990) coined the term visceral body to refer to the inner workings of the body. That we are visceral bodies highlights why we should not mistake descriptions of the body-as-object as an inert physical thing but a living thing in the world. It is the visceral body that gives rise to feelings such as hunger and tiredness. In his commentary, Leder draws attention to the fact that living with the physical needs and constraints of our bodies is the “lot” of being human. We are not pure, unfettered subjectivity but a subjectivity rooted in the flesh of the body.

Perhaps what is most perplexing about the visceral body is that while I, typically, experience my body’s hunger as *my own hunger*, I can experience the feelings of the visceral body as unwanted, as pressing in on me from elsewhere, as in conflict with my projects, desires, even with (aspects of) my *self*. I can feel betrayed by the workings of my own body, let down by it - for instance, when I wake wanting to get on with a busy day and find myself tired and sluggish. And yet, as Maiese highlights, the visceral body is part of being an embodied subject and need not always be experienced in the foreground of our experience, nor as necessarily in tension with the body-as subject. Indeed, Maiese rightly notes that the visceral body can shape the experience of the body-as-subject, without being experienced as a troublesome part of the body-as-object: “When I am hungry, I may perceive the stack of papers I have to grade as even more daunting. When I am stressed, I may perceive someone’s comment as particularly insensitive. This means that in many instances, the visceral body is not in tension with, but rather *part of,* the body-as-subject”. This adds a refinement to my own descriptions of the visceral body, highlighting that the visceral body may shape the body-as-subject’s being in the world without creating the kind of conflict that we find in AN.

This insight should not surprise us. Although Leder (1990) talks of how the body-as-object becomes *absent* when we smoothly engage with the world as body-as-subject, we should be careful not to conceive of the physical body as disappearing altogether. Being a body-as-subject does not mean that we engage with the world as pure, unfeeling subjects. Indeed, as a body-as-subject we are *feeling* bodies (Colombetti 2014): I perceive the texture of the sofa as rough through feeling the sofa against my palm, I experience the election results as scary through the clenching of my stomach, I experience the apple as *soliciting* my attention when I am hungry. Here, my bodily feelings do not direct me to my body as an object but rather are directed to and shape my experience of the world around me (Ratcliffe 2008). As such, I agree with Maiese when she states that the visceral body can form part of the body-as-subject.

I claim that individuals with AN often experience the ‘voice’ of the visceral body as intrusive and that self-starvation is a way of co-opting the voice of the body, taking back control of the visceral body’s demands. Yet, as Maiese asks, if the visceral body is a normal part of being an embodied subject, why is the visceral body’s ‘voice’ not experienced as the subject’s own, as not part of the body-as-subject? As mentioned above, it is often the case that the inner demands of the visceral body are experienced as a constraint on what I want to do as a body-as-subject. Feeling hungry when I am trying to work can be distracting, feeling tired when I want to go to a party can be frustrating. However, while this might be experienced as inconvenient, I still experience these visceral feelings as *mine*. I do not mistake my hunger for my sister’s hunger. Yet, I can experience this hunger as pressing in on me, as a demand on me. How can we account for this experience of a bodily feelings as both mine and not mine?

Maiese helpfully suggests that we employ Albahari’s distinction between personal ownership and perspectival ownership to differentiate between the experience of identifying oneself as the owner of an experience (personal ownership) and the experience of something being presented to *me* in a first-personal manner (perspectival ownership). Albahari’s distinction is already used in work on schizophrenia and thought insertion to capture how a thought might be presented in a first-personal manner to a subject (i.e. as available to the subject but not available to anyone else) but not experienced as coming from the subject (i.e. not generated by the subject) (Henriksen et al. 2019). I agree with Maiese that we can make a similar move in relation to the individual with AN, who experiences their hunger or their feelings of stress and anxiety as theirs but not personally owned in the sense of fully belonging to her. This distinction allows us to capture how an individual can experience something both as *mine*, while also experiencing it as somehow *foreign* or *alien.*

It should be noted, though, that this lack of full personal ownership of the visceral body’s feelings can be part and parcel of non-anorectic experience, such as when I feel tiredness as impeding *me*. As Leder puts it, we can experience our body as something (or even some*one*) who we are *with* – sometimes for better and sometimes for worse – and we can experience the visceral body as having “characteristics that we attribute to subjects, like being untrustworthy and treacherous”. What, then, is different about the experience of the visceral body in AN compared to ‘normal’ cases of hunger or tiredness? The experience of a diminished sense of personal ownership over the visceral body might be best thought of as an issue of degree. In the case of AN, an individual might feel a *chronic and persistent* lack of ownership over the feelings of the visceral body, in such a way that those feelings are experienced as particularly intrusive and in tension with her own autonomy. This is what Leder describes as the “renegade” body.

To return, then, to question of how this relates to a project of self-starvation. If we understand an individual as experiencing a diminished sense of personal ownership over the feelings of the visceral body, we can see self-starvation as a way of reclaiming a sense of ownership over what the visceral body feels. AN typically takes hold in individuals at times of bodily upheaval, such as during puberty, during periods of emotional difficulty, stress, heartbreak and so on. Experiencing these feelings as pressing in on oneself, as happening to oneself, can leave someone feeling out of control, as viewing the body as untrustworthy, even, as Leder puts it, as a hostile *other*. While we are feeling bodies, we are not capable of infinite feeling. Through self-starvation, one can *saturate* the body with a controlled and deliberate experience of hunger which can take the place of other *unwanted* feelings. We might, then, draw a comparison between self-starvation and other forms of self-harm such as cutting, where an individual deliberately inflicts pain on themselves in order to block out unwanted feelings, such as emotional pain (Brown & Kimball 2013).

Self-starvation does not render the body-as-subject an *unfeeling* body, rather it dictates what the body feels and reintegrates (at least in the early stages) the experience of personal ownership over the visceral body. The feeling of hunger becomes my own once again, something *I* have imposed on my body, as *flowing from my own action*. In turn, this leaves less bodily ‘room’ for *unwanted feelings* of intrusive hunger, stress, anxiety and so on. The visceral body, then, is subjugated by the individual with AN, forced to feel what the individual imposes on the body. The visceral body is objectified in terms of stilling its own ‘voice’, but it is not rendered silent.

Leder highlights that when our relationship *with* our body is good, the body can act as a “wise councillor, one potentially protective of [our] health and well-being”. The visceral body can shed light on how things are going for us, can disclose what we *need*. In AN, where the relationship with the visceral body becomes characterised by control, there is an additional concern that the individual with AN loses an important form of epistemic access to the visceral body’s needs and demands - only experiencing what they impose on the visceral body, rather than being sensitive to what their body can tell them. This, then, helpfully points to another disruption that occurs in AN.

In summary, both Maiese and Leder’s critical commentaries provide nuance and texture to the way we understand the visceral body, the experience of bodily ownership, and our complex relationship *with* our bodies, which can be used to enrich our understanding of bodily experience in AN.

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