Existing otherwise:
from Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty
to a critical phenomenology of bodily otherness

Thesis submitted for the degree of
DPhil in Medieval and Modern Languages

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For Billy, and Tal, and everyone else who left us.

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Short Abstract

With their existential phenomenologies, Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty insisted upon a radical new conception of consciousness as embodied, in the world, and among other subjects. Their *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception* have made perhaps the most lasting impression of any modern intellectual tradition on theories of the body and the social world, in philosophy as in the human sciences, in France as elsewhere. They have proven uniquely valuable for critical theorists of race, gender, sexuality, disability, and illness looking to give accounts of the lived experience of 'bodily otherness'. In their will to rework French existential phenomenology to take stock of othering, violence, and oppression, accounts of this kind point at once to its shortcomings and its promise as a framework for making sense of such experiences. This thesis seeks to explore the depth of those shortcomings, in the first place, and the scope of that promise, in the second. Opening with a discussion of 'bodily otherness' and a comparative appraisal of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's theories of the body and *autrui*, it moves through to critique their engagements with othering and oppression, positing that those engagements are circumscribed by a normativity that operates at the most basic level of their thought to foreclose the realisation of the very ideals that they themselves place at the heart of

phenomenology. The thesis thus contends that existential phenomenology might yet illuminate the lived experiences of ‘others’, should it remain alive to, and refuse complicity with, its own normative biases. It closes by taking up that mantle, reading Sartre and Merleau-Ponty with and against one another to propose some elements of a critical phenomenology of ‘bodily otherness’, and to stress the imperative of empathy as a philosophical and political practice.

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Long Abstract

Philosophy, Maurice Merleau-Ponty tells us in the opening pages of his *Phénoménologie de la perception*, is about "rapprendre à voir le monde". "Nous avions un même désir", says Jean-Paul Sartre, of his and Merleau-Ponty's coming together in a shared philosophical and political movement, in existentialism, "sortir du tunnel, voir clair". As a will to see the world differently, and with clarity, French existential phenomenology refused absolute or objective pretensions to truth in favour of a view of truth, and meaning, as intersubjective, and human: to see and to know, for Sartre as for Merleau-Ponty, we must be in a body, in the world, and among other subjects. As a desire to overcome a perceived impasse in French philosophy, and to definitively transcend substance dualism, their phenomenologies articulated a radical new conception of consciousness as necessarily incarnate, worldly, and social: the body, herein, is both subject, and object, as much a moment in the structure of consciousness as a moment in the world. As a search for the conditions of a practical subject, one which might ground interrogations into moral and existential questions such as action, freedom, and responsibility, their *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception* made space for thinking about the contingency and particularity of bodies, and of material, social, and historical situations, as well as the ways

in which they shape our engagements in the world. In its insistence, then, on a subject who is always and endlessly embodied, in the world, and among other subjects, and on a view of truth and meaning as contingent upon such a subject, French existential phenomenology, and notably its theories of the body, and *autrui*, might serve as a compelling framework for thinking about embodiment, and the social world, and thus for formulating accounts of 'bodily otherness'.

Certainly, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's thought has made a deep and lasting impression on conceptions of the body, and the social world, in philosophy as in the human sciences, both within France, and without. Acting at times as an inspiration, and at others as the negative term in the dialectical progression of thought, their philosophies, and most notably their conception of the subject as embodied, and in the world, prepared the ground for some of the ideas central to structuralism and post-structuralism. Perhaps their most profound impact has been on critical theories of 'bodily otherness', such as feminist theory, critical race theory, decolonial and post-colonial theories, crip theory, queer theory, and theories of illness. Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949) and Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952) inaugurated a tradition of reworking French existential phenomenology to better account for the experiences of 'others'. In the decades since, it has been taken up, critically or otherwise: by feminists, to shed light upon women's experiences, and misogynistic violence; by Black philosophers, and philosophers of colour, to interrogate racism, and anti-Blackness; by women philosophers of colour, to grapple with existence at the crossroads of racialised and gendered violence; by queer and trans theorists, to take stock of queer and trans lives, and forms of embodiment and desire beyond cissexuality, and heterosexuality; by phenomenologists of illness, to make sense of the personal and political dimensions of health, and illness; and by crip theorists, to come to terms with lived experiences of disability, and the social realities of ableism. All of these studies turn, explicitly or implicitly, upon three basic contentions: first, that 'bodily otherness' exists, and

must be accounted for; second, that Sartre and Merleau-Ponty fail to give any such account; and third, that their theories might none the less serve as a compelling framework for doing so.

The present thesis addresses each of these contentions in turn, beginning with a study of the nature of 'bodily otherness'. Western society, it contends, is underwritten by a series of norms that function as ideals of embodiment, prescribing imperatives of appearance, motility, desire, etc., and motivating unequal distributions of resources, and power, which favour those within the norm, and disadvantage those outside of it. Taking some norms as its principle axes of reflection – whiteness, masculinity, heterosexuality, cissexuality, able-bodiedness, and good health –, it posits that to deviate from any of these norms – to be a person of colour, a woman, queer, trans, disabled, or ill – is to be 'other', and thus to be materially, socially, and politically disenfranchised. The existence of norms, and of unequal distributions of resources, and power, along normative lines, is, it suggests, predicated on a presumption of their normalcy, as given in and by nature. Here, it points to the fallacy at the heart of that presumption, revealing that the categories of norm and 'other', and the realist view of bodies in which they are grounded, are not given in nature, but contingent upon certain cultural and historical formations, and thus social constructions. This gives onto two questions: *why* do norms exist, and *how*? Cautioning against the dangers of reductionalism, it responds to the first by advancing some functionalist accounts of norms, arguing that – as vectors of exploitation, productivity, reproduction, social control, and extermination – they have long contributed to the development and survival of Western capitalism. In response to the second, it locates four processes that operate in harmony and in symbiosis to sustain norms, and their material, social, and political effects: definition, normalisation, othering, and naturalisation. Together, in this view, these processes function not only to secure norms, but to make them appear given, thus obscuring their contingency, and artifice. Herein, it turns to face the dominant epistemic regime in Western society, outlining its role in justifying and reproducing norms, and inviting us to think critically about knowledge,

and ignorance. Taking up critical epistemologies and standpoint theories, it sets out to turn the Western epistemic regime on its head, tracing the limits of perspectives from within the norm, and the promise of those outside of it. It thus impresses the necessity and urgency of alternative epistemic and reflexive practices for thinking about and through 'bodily otherness'.

In this light, the thesis moves through to a discussion of the philosophies at its bedrock, asking: what is existential phenomenology? Inviting us to read Sartre and Merleau-Ponty both with and against one another, it sets out with two principal concerns: to examine the material, intellectual, and socio-historical conditions of the emergence of French existential philosophy, in the first place, and to give an overview of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's philosophical projects, and their theories of the body, and of *autrui*. Turning briefly to the debate over how far they can, or even should, be considered "phenomenologists", it examines the attitudes that they each take towards the works of Edmund Husserl, and Martin Heidegger. Establishing that they both depart from these works in significant – albeit different – ways, it dismisses critiques that would attribute such departures to a misreading of German phenomenology, arguing instead that they reflect a belief that it is too abstract to properly account for experience-as-lived, and, crucially, to ground an interrogation into moral and existential questions. Hence, it conceptualises French existential phenomenology as a reorientation of Husserl and Heidegger, away from the abstract, and toward the concrete. Having for the most part taken Sartre and Merleau-Ponty as bound up in a shared philosophical and political movement, in existentialism, the focus here shifts to the relationship between their philosophies, with a critical appraisal of the points of harmony and of discord between their theories of the body, and *autrui*. Taking each of these theories in turn, it interrogates the concordances and dissonances between them, through the prism of Merleau-Ponty's critiques of Sartre's work, and of critiques of his critiques, with a view to parsing the nature of their respective conceptions of embodiment, and the social world, and of existential philosophy more broadly. It closes with an examination of a central moment of harmony in

their thought, one which founds and structures their theories of the body, and *autrui*, namely, the belief that the phenomenological subject is universal insofar as it is singular, and *vice versa*, or 'universal-singular'. In so doing, it opens up a space for a critical reflection about the extent to which such a subject does, and indeed *can*, foreground an account of 'bodily otherness'.

Moving into this space with a will to operate precisely such a reflection, the thesis then grapples with how far Sartre and Merleau-Ponty take stock of 'bodily otherness', in *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, and in later writings grounded in their existential phenomenologies. Starting with these writings, and notably those which explicitly engage with 'bodily otherness' – principally, anti-semitism, and racism – it conducts a critical assessment of those engagements, questioning how far the accounts of norms, normative socio-economic constellations, and the experiences of 'others' that they put forward are accurate, and insightful. It strikes out with optimism, pointing to moments where Sartre and Merleau-Ponty display a striking awareness of the nature of norms, and normative social structures, one that is proximate to and even anticipates claims made by critical theorists in the decades since. Shortly thereafter, however, it begins to pull apart their accounts, picking up on inconsistencies and ignorances that belie a true and truly discerning appraisal of the social and experiential realities of norms, and 'others'. Such inconsistencies and ignorances, it speculates, spring from two adjacent sources: the material and historical conditions of the emergence and evolution of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological projects, for one, and the particular nature of those projects – their aims, methods, motives – for another. Recognising the formative role of their experiences of conflict and occupation in shaping their appreciation of 'bodily otherness', it gestures toward some of the shortcomings of French existential phenomenology for accounts of norms, and 'others', contending that its apparently general subject is in fact a normative one: a cisgender, straight, white, European, able-bodied man, in good health. In this, the collapse of the universal-singular framework, it locates a normativity at the cornerstone of their

philosophies, one which proscribes not only a proper recognition of 'bodily otherness', but the pursuit of their own phenomenological ideals, and which, at the same time, conceals itself and its effects behind those selfsame ideals. It is not, it concludes, simply that Sartre and Merleau-Ponty fail to account for norms, or for 'bodily otherness', but that such accounts are inarticulable in the normative terms of their philosophy. Warning of the perils of misconstruing the depth of normativity therein, it ends with an appeal to critical phenomenologies, which, it emerges, are none other than existential phenomenology taken to its proper conclusions.

The thesis finds itself, here, before an impasse: if Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's failure to takes stock of 'others' is not incidental, but inevitable, on account of a normativity that operates at every level of their theories, how might we take up those theories to that very same end? Or, more urgently: is this even possible, or desirable? This, it ventures, is not so much an impasse, as an opportunity: the normative bind of French existential phenomenology lies not in its aims, or its methods, but in the ways in which they are put into practice by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. In this view, their thought might yet be reworked to illuminate the lived experiences of 'others', should we remain alive to – and refuse complicity with – normative biases: those that structure *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, and our own. In this optic, it looks to put forward some elements of a critical phenomenology of 'bodily otherness', building upon Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's accounts of embodiment, and the social world, to make sense of othering, and violence. Weaving together testimony and critical reflections from 'others', it picks apart some of the normative threads running through those accounts, arguing that the presumption of the universality of certain moments therein – of a being in the world in terms of comfort, freedom, and competence, in Merleau-Ponty's case, of an experience of the *regard* as infrequent, and transient, in Sartre's – radically delimits their scope, precluding a description of existence outside of the norm. Turning this schema on its head, it invites us to take seriously the challenge that 'others' bring to Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's theories of the body, and *autrui*,

and to expand those theories in that light. Exploring what this might look like, it takes up those theories to interrogate experiences common to 'others' – objectification, violence, fear – and to consider the implications of these experiences for embodiment, and being in the world, both in the present, and over time. It concludes with an appeal to empathy, as a philosophical and political practice of listening, and speaking, to secure the fragile promise of French existential phenomenology. Empathy, it ventures, might foreground the pursuit of the philosophical ideals that Sartre and Merleau-Ponty set out, but ultimately abandon, and thus lay the foundations of a critical phenomenology of 'bodily otherness' in and on their terms.

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Les circonstances souvent atroces de notre combat nous mettaient enfin à même de vivre, sans fard et sans voile, cette situation déchirée, insoutenable qu'on appelle la condition humaine. […] Ainsi la question même de la liberté était posée et nous étions au bord de la connaissance la plus profonde que l'homme peut avoir de lui-même.

— Jean-Paul Sartre*, La République du silence (1944)*

Notre seul recours est une lecture du présent aussi complète et aussi fidèle que possible, qui n'en préjuge pas le sens, qui même reconnaisse le chaos et le non-sens là où ils se trouvent, mais qui ne refuse pas de discerner en lui une direction et une idée, là où elles se manifestent.

— Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, Pour la vérité (1945)*

Introduction

From its very earliest articulations, French existential phenomenology has proven a productive framework for thinking about the body, other subjects, and 'bodily otherness'. With *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, its principal exponents, Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, laid the groundwork for much of the discussion of these themes in philosophy and the human sciences in the latter half of the twentieth century. Arguably, in fact, their existential phenomenologies have made the most profound and lasting impression of any modern intellectual tradition upon such discussions, both within and without France. In a sense, they acted as an inspiration for those who came after them. This is perhaps most true of Merleau-Ponty, who some regard as "un passeur essentiel, entre la philosophie transcendantale du début de siècle et les décennies structuraliste et post-structuraliste".[1] Indeed, scholars have suggested that at least some of the major theories put forward by French thinkers such as Paul Ricœur, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michel Foucault should be considered an effective prolongation of the Merleau-Pontian project.[2] In another sense, however, their most significant contribution is to be found in existentialism's emergence as the negative term in the dialectical evolution of structuralist and post-structuralist thought. Put simply, the value of existential phenomenology resides as much in its refutation, as in its uptake, if not even more so, notably in Sartre's case. Many French philosophers – those above, but also Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, among others – followed parallel trajectories from an appreciation to a condemnation of existential phenomenology, turning away from and against Sartre and Merleau-Ponty in the constitution of their own thought. To make space for new philosophical movements, they committed what

[1] Etienne Bimbenet, *Après Merleau-Ponty: Études sur la fécondité d'une pensée*, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 2011), p. 19.
[2] For discussions of his influence: on Ricœur, see François Dosse, *Paul Ricœur: Les sens d'une vie (1913-2005)*, (Paris: La Découverte, 2008), p. 13.; on Bourdieu, see Derek Robbins, 'La philosophie et les sciences sociales: Bourdieu, Merleau-Ponty et Husserl', *Cités,* 51 (2012), 28.; on Foucault, see Philippe Sabot, 'Foucault et Merleau-Ponty: un dialogue impossible ?', *Les Études philosophiques,* (2013), 318-319.

Christina Howells terms, in a reflection upon Sartre's legacy, a "parricide".[3] The lasting effect of this œdipal gesture was to obscure the debt owed by many later thinkers to their existential forebears. Far from being disregarded outright, many of Sartre's earlier writings "have long since been absorbed, at least selectively, into the current philosophical doxa, constituting, indeed, a vital part of the formation of his structuralist and poststructuralist detractors."[4] Howells's view echoes Jean Hippolyte's homage to Merleau-Ponty, delivered at a lecture in Oxford shortly after his death: "Ce que nous devons à Merleau-Ponty est bien plus considérable que nous ne le croyons. Son œuvre est devenue pour nous comme ces paysages familiers qu'on ne voit plus parce qu'ils sont toujours déjà là et comme impliqués dans notre regard."[5]

Perhaps one field more readily recognisant of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's contributions on these matters are critical theories concerned with various forms of 'bodily otherness', such as feminist theory, critical race theory, decolonial and post-colonial theories, crip theory, and queer theory. In effect, existential phenomenology has long served as a fertile resource for scholars working in these fields. Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949) inaugurated a tradition of critiquing and reworking Sartre and Merleau-Ponty to better account for women's experience. Situating her work squarely within the existentialist worldview – "La perspective que nous adoptons, c'est celle de la morale existentialiste." – Beauvoir grounds her reflection in a series of clear critiques of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty.[6] Not long after, Frantz Fanon gestured toward the possibilities for exploiting existential phenomenology to further decolonial and anti-racist critiques with his *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), a work that, Jean Khalfa contends, "pourrait se lire comme une phénoménologie de la conscience colonisée."[7] Herein, he makes sense of the lived experience of Black people through Sartre's *être-pour-autrui*, and Merleau-

[3] Christina Howells, 'Conclusion: Sartre and the deconstruction of the subject', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre,* ed. by Christina Howells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 318-352 (p. 326).
[4] Ibid., p. 326.
[5] Jean Hyppolite, *Figures de la pensée philosophique*, (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1971), p. 685.
[6] Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe: Les faits et les mythes. Tome I*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), pp. 30, 34-35.
[7] Jean Khalfa, 'Fanon, Corps perdu', *Les Temps Modernes,* 635-636 (2006), 100.

Ponty's *schéma corporel*. Many scholars have since taken up where Beauvoir and Fanon left off. Feminist thinkers including Iris Marion Young, Sandra Lee Barky, Elizabeth Grosz, and Gail Weiss have mobilised existential phenomenology to illuminate women's experiences. Elsewhere, Black theorists such as Gordon K. Lewis and George Yancy have wielded Sartre and Merleau-Ponty to interrogate racism, anti-Blackness, and the lived experiences of people of colour more widely. Both critical traditions have been further enriched with interventions from women philosophers of colour, such as Linda Martín Alcoff, Alia Al-Saji and Emily Lee, whose thought grapples with various aspects of lived experience at the crossroads of racial and gender marginalisation, and violence. Another philosopher situated at this crossroads, Sara Ahmed, has proposed for her part a "queer phenomenology". Hers is one of several voices, along with Gayle Salamon and Zoe Belinsky, attempting to rework Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's thought to take stock of queer and trans lives. We also find phenomenological studies of illness, from philosophers including S. K. Toombs, Havi Carel and Richard Zaner, and of disability, such as those proposed by Robert McRuer, and Lisa Diedrich. All of these studies turn *ipso facto* upon three assumptions. First, that 'bodily otherness' exists, and must be accounted for. Second, that no adequate account of this kind is given in Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenologies. And third, that those phenomenologies constitute a generative framework for accounts of 'bodily otherness', even if they themselves fall short in this regard.

This thesis will seek to address each of these contentions in turn. Hence, it will set out to establish: the nature of 'bodily otherness', in the first place; the extent to which Sartre and Merleau-Ponty do – and indeed *can* – take stock of 'bodily otherness' within their existential phenomenologies, in the second; and, finally, the extent to which we might do so, should we take up and rework those existential phenomenologies to that end, in the third. The structure of the thesis is for the most part dictated by the logical demands of these contentions, and the relations between them: the first grounds the second, which itself lays the foundations of the

third. Chapter One will therefore address the question implicit in the first contention, namely, what is 'bodily otherness'? Drawing on various academic disciplines and critical theories, it will examine the somatic norms in Western society, their 'others', and the unequal distributions of power and resources that they motivate. This, in turn, will foreground a discussion of critical epistemologies, pointing to some of the methodological and conceptual barriers to reflections upon 'bodily otherness', and exploring some of the tools that feminist theorists have proposed to navigate those barriers. Chapter Two acts as conceptual bridge between the first and second contentions, tracing the emergence of existential phenomenology in France, and sketching out the broad strokes of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's thought. Reading them in concert, both with and against one another, it will outline their accounts of the body, and of other subjects, as well as their pretensions to a truth that is universal insofar as it is singular, and *vice versa*. Chapter Three is then concerned with the second of the above contentions. First, it will examine how far Sartre and Merleau-Ponty do – or don't – take stock of 'bodily otherness' with *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception* respectively. Second, it will contemplate the extent to which this is inevitable within the conceptual frameworks that they themselves place at the foundation of those works. Building upon all of the preceding discussions, Chapter Four will address the third contention. It, too, will pursue two related lines of inquiry. For one, how might we rework Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's theories to account for 'bodily otherness'? For another, what might they make sense of, or shed light upon, if and when we do so? It will thus serve as a preliminary exploration of the concrete conditions and possibilities of an existential phenomenology of 'bodily otherness', in and through the terms laid out by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Lastly, the thesis will close with a gesture of hope, acknowledging some of the impasses that lie before anybody who might look to formulate such a phenomenology, and proposing empathy as a philosophical and political means of circumnavigating those impasses.

In light of the questions at the heart of the present reflection, our relation to Sartre and Merleau-Ponty will for the most part be one of critique. This should not, however, be mistaken for an ambivalence. Nor is our position one of antagonism. Far from it: much of that critique stems from a conviction that they deviate from their own principles, and a concomitant desire to pursue those principles to their logical end, and, in so doing, provide a thorough account of 'bodily otherness'. In a word, this is not a rebuttal of their thought, but an investment therein, or, perhaps, a continuation thereof. Indeed, there are many commonalities between the present thesis and those by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Some of these are personal. Others relate to a broader socio-political and historical context. French existential phenomenology emerged out of global instability and crisis, namely, the Second World War. It articulated the disorientation of a French society reeling from the horrors of conflict, and Nazi occupation, and desperate for answers: "La cruauté même de l'ennemi nous poussait jusqu'aux extrémités de notre condition en nous contraignant à nous poser ces questions qu'on élude dans la paix …"[8] *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception* were written, at least in part, under these conditions. Here, we find a serendipitous point of harmony with the present thesis: it, too, was produced in Paris, under curfew. It, too, was composed at the École Normale Supérieure, where Sartre and Merleau-Ponty met, studied, and, later, gave lectures. It, too, materialised out of a global crisis marked by death, debilitation, and loss, one which might have been avoided or mitigated should those in power have put human interests before capital ones. And so, it, too, has emerged at the threshold of widespread existential crisis: like Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, and the post-war generation, many of us have been led to reconsider our values, and to search for meaning in a world that feels increasingly meaningless. The pandemic has shone a light upon a lot that was formerly hidden from view, at least for many people in the global north. As a vector of social murder, in the sense put forward by Friedrich Engels, namely, "when society places

[8] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations, III: Lendemains de guerre*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), p. 12.

hundreds of proletarians in such a position that they inevitably meet a too early and an unnatural death", it has forced us to think about the cost of life, and to recognise that some lives are worth more than others in our society.[9] As a mass disabling event, it has put paid to a great many of the myths that shape our response to illness, and disability: that they are avoidable; that those who fall ill, or become disabled, deserve it; and that if, in spite of this, we do fall ill, or become disabled, doctors will cure us. The ill, Drew Leder writes, "[recall us] to the acute vulnerability of embodied life and the inevitability of our death".[10] "It is," then, "natural to wish to escape from sickness."[11] And yet, the pandemic has brought us irresistibly face to face with the reality of illness, and disability, a reality that many of us had for so long ignored. It has stripped us of our blinkers, pushing any "escape from sickness" beyond our reach, compelling us instead to confront the vertiginous knowledge of our own human vulnerability, and mortality.

Nor have we been able to escape from a number of other abhorrent social realities that many of us likely dismissed prior to the pandemic. The preferential distribution of vaccines to the global north, for one, has laid bare extreme inequalities in wealth and resources across the world. The murder of George Floyd brought police violence against people of colour, and state-sponsored anti-Blackness, sharply into focus. In France, the assault by police of another Black man, Michel Zecler, sparked outrage at the mundanity of institutional and interpersonal racism, and anti-Blackness. In the UK, another murder at the hands of law enforcement, Sarah Everard, and the aggressive response to peaceful protests in her name, drew attention to the ubiquity of misogynistic violence. The murders of several women of colour, the disdain shown for those women, as where policemen took selfies with the bodies of Nicole Smallman and Bibaa Henry, and the relative paucity of attention they received compared to Sarah Everard, as with Sabina Nessa, another woman killed by a man while walking home, have stressed the role of race in

[9] Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844: With Preface Written in 1892*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 95-96.
[10] Drew Leder, 'Illness and Exile: Sophocles' Philoctetes', *Lit Med,* 9 (1990), 6.
[11] Ibid.

misogynistic violence, and in collective responses to such violence. In the U.S., the deaths of many Black and Latina transgender women, and of trans men of colour, has paid further tragic testament to gendered and racialised marginalisation as a vector of violence.[12] Meanwhile, in France, the recent trial of the men charged with the murder of Vanesa Campos, a trans woman of colour, sex worker, and undocumented migrant, has shone a light upon the prevalence of misogynistic, racist, and transphobic violence in the country, in particular for people subject to more than one of these forms of hate. In the UK, homophobic hate crimes have tripled over the past six years: transphobic hate crimes have quadrupled in that time.[13] These figures have found concrete expression in a number of violent attacks on gay men in the past year, such as those that led to protests in Liverpool last summer. Once again, the murder of Ranjith 'Roy' Kankanamalage, and its relative obscurity in the media, at least set against the aforementioned attacks, has revealed the double bind of queer people of colour, at the intersection of racism and queerphobia. These acts of queerphobic violence must be situated in the context of a sharp rise in anti-trans sentiment, one grounded in the spread of a transphobia rendered palatable by a purported – if entirely fallacious – concern for women. Setting up a false dichotomy between women's safety and trans rights, its "gender critical" proponents and their allies on the political far right have not only fought attempts to improve the material and medical conditions of trans existence, and transition, but have sought to degrade the already unstable and dangerous ones in which so many trans people are currently trying to survive. Not all of us do.

What does global vaccine inequality have to do with police violence against Black men in the US or France, and that, in turn, with legal battles over access to hormones in the UK? At first glance, perhaps, little of note. And yet, as the historical backdrop of French existentialism

[12] For information about the epidemic of violence against trans people of colour in the US, and a list of some of the trans people killed in 2021, see: Human Rights Campaign, 'An Epidemic of Violence 2021: Fatal Violence Against Transgender and Gender Non-Confirming People in the United States in 2021', (2021).
[13] Ben Hunte, '"Don't Punish Me For Who I Am': Huge Jump in Anti-LGBTQ Hate Crime Reports in UK', in *VICE World News,* (VICE, 2021).

attests, events that appear disparate in the present can, with hindsight, or critical distance, come to figure as so many moments in a broader phenomenon. What did the vandalisation of Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Sciences in 1933 have to do with the Nuremburg Laws passed in 1935, criminalising relationships between Jewish and non-Jewish people, and stripping Jewish people of German citizenship? Or with the extension of those laws to Roma and Black people shortly thereafter? It is likely far easier to parse the relation between those events in retrospect than it would have been for people living through them. How might anybody conceive of them as forming a pattern of discrimination against minorities tracing the rise of fascism through to the Holocaust, if the latter is yet to occur? We might, at this juncture, be struck by a claim made by Judith Butler of "gender critical" transphobia in a recent interview: "The anti-gender ideology is one of the dominant strains of fascism in our times."[14] It "will not be part of the contemporary struggle against fascism", because that struggle both "requires a coalition guided by struggles against racism, nationalism, xenophobia and carceral violence", and, critically, "is mindful of the high rates of femicide throughout the world, *which include* high rates of attacks on trans and genderqueer people."[15] Crucially, they locate the proximity between transphobia and fascism in anti-intellectualism, which turns out to be both a symptom and a vector of the normalisation of "neo-fascism".[16] It follows, then, that we might join "the contemporary struggle against fascism" by doing the kinds of intellectual work antithetical to "neo-fascism". What might that work look like? The answer to that question is as yet unclear. Indeed, answering it is likely a part of that work itself. It will surely mean addressing the dual crises precipitated by the global pandemic: existential, on the one hand, socio-political, on the other. And so, it might look a lot like that being done by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty in the wake of the war: a reorientation of a search for truth, meaning, and the conditions of human existence

[14] Judith Butler and Jules Joanne Gleeson, '"We need to rethink the category of woman': Interview with Judith Butler', (Ill Will, 2021).
[15] Ibid. [my italics]
[16] Ibid.

towards an account of the experiential, material, social, and political dimensions of hatred and violence directed at marginalised groups. The extent of the commonalities between their work and the present thesis remains to be seen. What is sure, however, is that they strike out from a shared desire to make sense of the apparently senseless, and with the same urgency of the need to exploit the insight of philosophical inquiry to moral, human, and practical ends.

Chapter I: What is 'bodily otherness'?

Before any exploration of Sartre or Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, we must begin by addressing the first of the above contentions. What, then, is 'bodily otherness'? Critical theories of various kinds – race, gender, sexuality, illness and disability, among others – tend to take for granted that Western society is subtended by a system of corporeal norms, wherein 'bodily otherness' is ascribed to those bodies, desires and acts that are outside of any such norm. Corporeal norms are both grounded in and dictate the kinds of bodies and ways of being that are seen as 'normal' in a given society. In Western society, health, able-bodiedness, masculinity, heterosexuality, cissexuality, and whiteness figure as some central norms.[1] Their apparent normalcy is derived from two distinct but complementary understandings of the word 'normal' that Georges Canguilhem points to, referencing André Lalande's definition of the term in his *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*: "… est normal ce qui est tel qu'il doit être : est normal, au sens le plus usuel du mot, ce qui se rencontre dans la majorité des cas d'une espèce déterminée …"[2] In everyday use, as theorist Michael Warner argues, these distinct definitions, which he terms 'evaluative' and 'statistical', are often confused, or seen as indistinguishable from one another.[3] On the one hand, corporeal norms are taken as such because they reflect a statistical norm: it is 'normal' to be healthy or able-bodied in Western Europe because these groups are in the majority, as opposed to sick or disabled people. On the other, their supposed normalcy is sometimes derived from an evaluative norm, which Warner describes as "a

[1] The term *cissexuality* refers here to the norm of identifying with the gender assigned at birth, being *cisgender*, as well as the identity formations and experiences that configure around this norm. It is situated in a conceptual oppositionality with *transsexuality*, being *transgender* or *transsexual*: the identity formations and experiences of people who do not identify with the gender assigned at birth. The use of the terms *transgender*, *transsexual* and *trans* remains a hotly-contested semantic and political ground within queer communities. *Transgender* and *trans* are most commonly used, by both trans and cis people, but a large number of trans people describe themselves as *transsexual*, a term some trans people are strongly opposed to. Here, the terms *transgender*, *trans*, and *transsexual* will be used interchangeably to refer to people who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.
[2] Georges Canguilhem, *Le normal et le pathologique*, 12th edn (Paris: PUF, 2013), p. 101.
[3] Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*, (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 56.

standard, a criterion of value".[4] In this sense, corporeal norms reflect judgements about how bodies should be, many of which relate to a natural state or order of things. The normativity of cissexuality, for example, reflects a belief that it is more natural to identify as the gender one has been assigned at birth than not to do so, just as that of heterosexuality is justified by the assumption, based on a teleology of procreation, that it is 'natural' for a man to desire a woman, and *vice versa*. Indeed, following Jonathan Katz, heterosexuality's status as "an immutable fact of nature—a naturally given norm" is justified by the commonly-held belief that humans share a basic "procreate-or-perish imperative".[5] Similarly, norms of gender and race are rooted in a presumed natural order: the normativity of masculinity and of whiteness hinge upon hierarchies of natural difference between gendered and raced bodies. In some cases, as with the norms of health, heterosexuality and whiteness, the statistical and evaluative understandings of normalcy overlap; in others, such as masculinity, they do not, but, as noted by Warner, are presumed to.

Further, and concomitantly, corporeal norms function as paradigms: implicit in their conception as 'normal' ways of being, from both the statistical or evaluative standpoint, is a prescription of ideals of corporeality, embodiment, and desire. Here, as feminist scholar of disability Susan Wendell remarks, the valorisation of bodies that fall within a given norm presupposes the depreciation of those outside of it: "Implied in any idealization of the body is the rejection of some kinds of bodies or some aspects of bodily life."[6] Measured against the standard of corporeal norms, these forms of 'bodily otherness' are taken to be abnormal or unnatural, or both: illness and disability come to figure as physical aberrances, queerness and transsexuality as unnatural – even sometimes *contre-nature* – or forms of deviance, and people of colour are viewed as a minority in Western Europe. The normalcy and ideality of corporeal norms, along with the ancillary abnormality and un-ideality of corporeal 'others', both founds

[4] Ibid.
[5] Jonathan Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality*, (New York: Dutton, 1995), pp. 29, 13.
[6] Susan Wendell, *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*, (New York; London: Routledge, 1996), p. 85.

and justifies a hierarchy of value that yields socio-economic and political effects. Bodies and ways of being seen as 'normal' are valued and encouraged, while those seen as abnormal or aberrant are devalued, discouraged, and even penalised. Following another feminist scholar of disability, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson: "Corporeal departures from dominant expectations never go uninterpreted or unpunished, and conformities are almost always rewarded."[7] On the one hand, those within the norm benefit from certain privileges, as cultural anthropologist Gayle Rubin states in relation to sexuality: "Individuals whose behaviour stands high in this hierarchy are rewarded with certified mental health, respectability, legality, social and physical mobility, institutional support, and material benefits."[8] On the other, those outside of the norm are not only denied such privileges, but are at a socio-economic and political detriment. In a discussion of disability that we might expand to diverse forms of 'bodily otherness', Wendell outlines some socio-economic disadvantages, which include "verbal, medical, and physical abuse", "sexual abuse and exploitation", "enforced poverty", "job discrimination", and "social isolation".[9] Similarly, in a reflection on race, political philosopher Charles W. Mills argues that norms, in this case whiteness, establish "a political system, a particular power structure of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege" which founds "the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties."[10] The legitimacy of such differential distribution rests upon a presumed statistical or evaluative justification: socio-economic disparities tend to be taken for granted because they are seen to reflect either the interests of the majority or the natural order of things, or both. The relative lack of people of colour or transgender people in positions of power in Western society, for example, might be regarded as a logical derivative of their numerical inferiority, while the exclusion, implicit

[7] Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies: figuring physical disability in American culture and literature*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 7.
[8] Gayle S. Rubin, 'Thinking sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality', in *Culture, Society and Sexuality: A Reader,* ed. by Richard and Aggleton Parker, Peter (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), pp. 150-187 (p. 158).
[9] Wendell, pp. 31-32.
[10] Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*, (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 3.

or otherwise, of some women and disabled people from certain professions will often be seen as a reasonable reflection of perceived natural capacities or incapacities given in their bodies.

Corporeal norms are not limited to whiteness, health, able-bodiedness, masculinity, heterosexuality, or cissexuality. None the less, these figure as some of the primary vectors of normativity and otherness in Western society, and ground the fields of thought – feminist, crip, critical race and queer theories, among others – that form many of the conceptual frameworks guiding the present thesis. Accordingly, these norms will serve here as the principal axes in a study of 'bodily otherness'. To draw parallels between these phenomena is not to posit their identity, or interchangeability: there are crucial differences between each of these norms that reflect the singularities of their historical formations, as well as the value systems and socio-economic constellations that these generate. Some such differences have already come into view: those between statistical and evaluative claims to normalcy, for example, and those between appeals to a natural ideal, as with health, and appeals to a natural hierarchy, as with masculinity. Rather, it speaks to a desire to locate moments of affinity and communication beyond and between these singularities, and in so doing to highlight structural similarities between diverse normative systems. Such an approach also acknowledges the limitations of what philosopher Kimberlé Crenshaw terms "single-axis" analysis in accounting for norms and the social hierarchies they sustain.[11] Working from the outlook of Black womanhood, as 'other' in relation to the norms of both masculinity *and* whiteness, Crenshaw critiques "the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis" and in so doing "[distort] the multidimensionality of Black women's experiences".[12] For Crenshaw, identities and experiences are "intersectional": a person's positions within certain norms, and

[11] Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', *The University of Chicago Legal Forum,* 140 (1989), 139.
[12] Ibid.

without others, speak to and shape one another.[13] Against a view of norms as discrete, wherein the multiplicity of these positions is understood to be "additive", Crenshaw affirms the "fundamentally reconstitutive" nature of identities and experiences at and through the intersection of various normative and non-normative positions.[14] To conceive of Black women's experience as the sum of being Black and being a woman is to misrecognise the ways in which these forms of 'otherness' are mutually constitutive. Intersectionality lays bare the shortcomings of single-axis analysis, which tends to "[limit] inquiry to the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group", and "[obscure] claims that cannot be understood as resulting from discrete sources of discrimination", advocating instead for a holistic view of norms and otherness that accounts for the ways in which they shape and inform one another.[15]

Such a view does not seek to disregard the diversity of norms, nor of the value systems and socio-economic differentiations that they motivate, but to recognise their imbrication and mutual constitution. It also invites us to approach the question of 'bodily otherness' by seeking to pinpoint parallels between ostensibly distinct registers of norms and 'others', and in so doing reveal social, political and experiential commonalities between diverse phenomena. We have already highlighted some such commonalities: the basic claim to normalcy, and to ideality, that underpins every norm, as well as the socio-economic hierarchies that hinge upon these claims. Further, all of these norms articulate a realist view of bodies, one grounded in Western science, wherein features such as race, health, and gender are taken to be objective corporeal facts whose categories and meanings are given in and by nature. Health and illness, just like able-bodiedness and disability, are seen as fixed in the body, and thus locatable and quantifiable in anatomical or pathological terms. Norms of gender and sexuality all rest upon binary biological sex, taken as an immutable feature of human bodies, which we might locate in chromosomes,

[13] Ibid., p. 166.
[14] Kimberlé Crenshaw, 'Intersectionality is not additive. It's fundamentally reconstitutive. Pass it on.', ed. by @sandylocks (Twitter, 2020).
[15] Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex', p. 140.

hormone levels, or genitals: claims to natural superiority, as with masculinity, and to 'natural' ways of being and desiring, as with heterosexuality and cissexuality, depend upon sexual dimorphism. Queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick asserts the interdependency of these norms, arguing that sexuality "may seem to be of a piece with 'chromosomal sex'", and that "without a concept of gender there could be, quite simply, no concept of homo- or heterosexuality."[16] Similarly, whiteness and the racial hierarchies it sustains are based in a tacit belief that race or ethnicity are objective realities, expressed in genetics and phenotypes. Bodies are thus seen to fall into discrete, binary categories – healthy and unhealthy, male and female, white and non-white, etc. – wherein one term, the norm, is coded positively, on account of its normalcy or ideality, and the 'other' negatively. Hence illness and disability are regarded as unfortunate, undesirable somatic aberrations, and queerness is properly *queer*, an unnatural deviation or perversion, as trans communist Xandra Metcalfe explains: "… the transgender subject is seen as an aberration from the cissexual subject, a swerve from an otherwise straight line."[17] Herein, whiteness functions as a yardstick of good and bad forms of embodiment: ideals of beauty, physicality and temperament constellate around those features most often associated with white bodies, while those associated with non-white bodies are degraded and demonised.

Insofar as all norms are set up in a Manichean oppositionality to 'others', then, they reciprocally inform and confirm one another: their shared figuring as facets of the standard or ideal body establishes a basic complementarity between them. In some cases, as with the norms of masculinity, heterosexuality and cissexuality, such complementarity is already evident. The writer James Baldwin, himself Black and gay, couches homophobia in terms of the division between men and women: "The problem of the homosexual, so vociferously involved with good and evil, the unnatural as opposed to the natural, has its roots in the nature of man and

[16] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 29, 31.
[17] Xandra Metcalfe, ''Why Are We Like This?': The Primacy of Transsexuality', in *Transgender Marxism,* ed. by Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke (London: Pluto Press, 2021), pp. 219-229 (p. 219).

woman and their relationship to one another."[18] Elsewhere, gay communist Mario Mieli argues that the norms of gender and sexuality are inextricable: "The Norm maintained by a repressive society marked by male supremacy cannot but be heterosexual."[19] Health and able-bodiedness, too, share a set of ideals: of capacity for action or work, of freedom from pain or limitation, etc. Health is of particular interest in any reflection on the complementarity of norms because it acts not only as a gauge of somatic normalcy or ideality, but also as a vector of morality. In effect, Robert Crawford posits that "the 'healthy' self" comprises "an interrelated set of oppositions", both "a biologically healthy self conceived in opposition to disease and death", and "a metaphorically healthy self […] opposed to the qualities of 'unhealthy' persons".[20] In practice, these map onto one another, as social psychologist Hélène Joffe remarks: "« Être en bonne santé », et le fait de paraître tel, est devenu une métaphore pour « être un citoyen bon et responsable »."[21] In short, the binaries that subtend norms and 'others' – normal/abnormal, natural/unnatural, good/bad – also speak to a healthy/unhealthy dichotomy. Further still, certain norms that initially appear unrelated turn out to be in fact constructed and sustained through similarly interdependent processes. For Mason Stokes heterosexuality is "the chief ally in whiteness's normalizing mission", while Richard Dyer focuses upon the conjunction of whiteness, heterosexuality, and masculinity: "Race and gender are ineluctably intertwined, through the primacy of heterosexuality in reproducing the former and defining the latter."[22] Roderick A. Ferguson describes "a technology of race" wherein "heteronormativity" is of a piece with whiteness, and "nonheteronormativity" with non-white people, desires and sexual

[18] James Baldwin, 'Preservation of Innocence', in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays,* ed. by Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), pp. 594-600 (p. 594).
[19] Mario Mieli, *Towards a Gay Communism: Elements of a Homosexual Critique*, (London: Pluto Press, 2018), p. 15.
[20] Robert Crawford, 'The boundaries of the self and the unhealthy other: Reflections on health, culture and AIDS', *Social Science & Medicine,* 38 (1994), 1348.
[21] Hélène Joffe, '"L'Autre" et la construction identitaire: entre dynamiques psychiques et dynamiques sociales', in *L'autre: regards psychosociaux,* ed. by Margarita Sanchez-Mazas and Laurent Licata (Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 2005), pp. 95-116 (p. 100).
[22] Mason Stokes, *The Color of Sex: Whiteness, Heterosexuality, and the Fictions of White Supremacy*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), p. 14.; Robert Dyer, *White*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 30.

acts.[23] Similarly, crip theorist Robert McRuer claims that heterosexuality, itself shaped by what he terms "dominant ideologies of gender and race", is inherently able-bodied.[24]

The nature of the normal

What is needed, then, is a view of norms as simultaneously singular and interdependent, one which posits their mutual implication in a Manichean value system without effacing their particularities. Herein, we might begin to question some of the basic assumptions that structure norms and the socio-economic hierarchies that they establish. Scholars in a range of fields have demonstrated that rather than being given or coherent, norms rest upon a series of tensions and paradoxes. The first of these might be found in their conception as both what is normal and what is ideal. In effect, if something is natural, it should be given; if something is an ideal, it is precisely *not* given, but rather must be aimed at or worked toward. Hence philosopher Georges Canguilhem points to "une confusion" in medical understandings of health, wherein "l'état normal désigne à la fois l'état habituel des organes et leur état ideal".[25] Moreover, when we take stock of the complementarity of norms, the tension between 'normal' and 'ideal' is further strained: therein, the ideal body in the Western world is that of a healthy, able-bodied, white, cisgender, and heterosexual man – possessing also a range of normative features outside of the scope of this thesis – and therefore far from typical. Sociologist Erving Goffman sheds light on this phenomenon: "… even where widely attained norms are involved, their multiplicity has the effect of disqualifying many persons."[26] The normative ideal, Garland-Thomson claims, is thus revealed to be "an image that dominates without material substance, a phantom 'majority'

[23] Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 14.
[24] Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*, (New York: New York University Press, 2006), pp. 1, 6.
[25] Canguilhem, p. 101.
[26] Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, (Penguin, 1979), p. 153.

opposed to an overwhelming and equally illusory 'minority.'"[27] Indeed, for Warner, this ideal is not simply improbable, but inexistent: "Moreover, to be fully normal is, strictly speaking, impossible. Everyone deviates from the norm in some way."[28] Insofar as the norm functions as an ideal, the statistical grounds of its normalcy thus fall away: the vast majority of people, if not everyone, are excluded from an absolute normativity. Concomitantly, the tension between the normal and the ideal also undermines evaluative understandings of normalcy. In effect, where health functions as an ideal bodily state, absolute health is statistically and evaluatively abnormal: periods of sickness, pain and limitation are a ubiquitous feature of human existence. Canguilhem adopts this view: "En un sens on dira qu'une santé parfaite continuelle est un fait anormal."[29] Other evaluative justifications of normalcy also turn out to be underwritten by logical fallacy. Many rest upon the claim that certain bodies or ways of being are natural, and others unnatural, or even *contre-nature*. But an 'unnatural body' is a contradiction in terms. Following Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, as summarised by Canguilhem: "… dans la nature, toutes les espèces *sont ce qu'elles doivent être*, présentant également la variété dans l'unité et l'unité dans la variété."[30] Beyond the incoherence of 'natural' and 'unnatural' bodies, appeals to nature as an arbiter of normalcy are further undermined by their presumption of an equivalence between what is 'natural' and what is 'good' or 'ideal'. And yet, as philosopher Julian Baggini has argued, this equivalence is far from given: "There is no factual reason to suppose that what is natural is good (or at least better) and what is unnatural is bad (or at least worse)."[31]

These inconsistencies expose a basic equivocation at the heart of appeals to nature as a foundation for norms. Rather than an objective or ahistorical truth, what is 'natural' turns out to be a particular interpretation of variations in bodies. The success of appeals to nature lies in

[27] Garland-Thomson, p. 32.
[28] Warner, p. 54.
[29] Canguilhem, p. 113.
[30] Ibid., pp. 108-109.
[31] Julian Baggini, *Making Sense: Philosophy Behind the Headlines*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 151-152.

a tacit acceptance of a realist view, wherein, as seen above, certain qualities – such as sex and race – are regarded as immutable facts of the body whose objective truth might be substantiated and quantified in scientific terms. In reality, a closer look at those apparently immutable facts, and the discrete categorisations they motivate, reveals the realist view to be a reductive one. Neither sexual dimorphism nor ethnicity are objective truths given in human bodies. Biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling summarises the realist view of sex: "In the idealized, Platonic, biological world, human beings are divided into two kinds: a perfectly dimorphic species."[32] This "idealized story", she argues, "papers over many obvious caveats": "… on close inspection, absolute dimorphism disintegrates at even the level of basic biology."[33] Even those features so often regarded as absolute or infallible arbiters of binary biological sex turn out to frustrate the binary division of all bodies into male and female: "Chromosomes, hormones, the internal sex structures, the gonads and the external genitalia all vary more than most people realize."[34] And scholars of race have affirmed that neither race nor ethnicity are biological realities. Following historian Pap Ndiaye: "… il est bien clair que, d'un point de vue biologique, les races n'existent pas."[35] Certainly, for Sarah Mazouz: "Il n'y a pas de hiérarchie entre les groupes humains, qui pourrait être fondée en nature et reposerait sur une origine manifestée notamment par des différences phénotypiques."[36] In both of these cases, as well as with illness and disability, the realist view imposes discrete categorisations on variations which might be more accurately regarded as a continuum, or even a constellation, of attributes or states. This is particularly salient in the case of race, where clear distinctions between racial or ethnic groups, or between 'white' and 'nonwhite', are manifestly artificial, and sex, where a bimodal distribution of primary and secondary sexual characteristics is flattened into a dimorphism. The imposition of

[32] Anne Fausto-Sterling, 'The five sexes, revisited', *Sciences (New York),* 40 (2000), 19-20.
[33] Fausto-Sterling, p. 20.
[34] *Ibid*.
[35] Pap Ndiaye, *La condition noire: Essai sur une minorité française*, (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), p. 35.
[36] Sarah Mazouz, *Race*, (Paris: Éditions Anamosa, 2020), p. 24.

discrete groupings that distort corporeal realities is equally evident in the case of sexuality, where a hetero/queer dichotomy obscures a range of desires, acts and identifications that cannot be neatly fitted into either box: if a heterosexual man enjoys being penetrated by the women he sleeps with, where do we place him? Health and able-bodiedness further reveal the artifice of such categorisations. The notions of 'falling ill' and 'getting better' thwart any view as health and illness as dichotomous states. Further, both illness and disability regroup a range of bodies and experiences that vary greatly – in nature, temporality, severity, etc. – wherein their respective categorisations as discrete entities belies a material and experiential heterogeneity. What is more, the line between illness and disability is not an easy one to draw: the example of certain chronic conditions that are both illnesses and disabilities bears testament to this.

Against the realist view, scholars of illness and disability have asserted that health and able-bodiedness, as well as their 'others', are contingent and relative to particular socio-cultural and environmental contexts. In his study of the normal and the pathological, Canguilhem puts forward a view of somatic normalcy as necessarily relational: "Le vivant et le milieu ne sont pas normaux pris séparément, mais c'est leur relation qui les rend tels l'un et l'autre."[37] In his view, pathology is equally relational: "Il n'y a pas de trouble pathologique en soi, l'anormal ne peut être apprécié que dans une relation."[38] Crucially, he affirms that what is normal in one setting may well be pathological in another, thus positing the relativity of health and illness: "Ce qui est normal, pour être normatif dans des conditions données, peut devenir pathologique dans une autre situation, s'il se maintient identique à soi."[39] Wendell makes an analogous claim of disability: "… 'normal' structure, function, and ability to perform an activity all depend to some degree on the society in which the standards of normality are generated."[40] Garland-Thomson has pushed back against "entrenched assumptions" that able-bodiedness and

[37] Canguilhem, p. 120.
[38] Ibid., p. 162.
[39] Ibid., p. 156.
[40] Wendell, p. 14.

disability are "self-evident physical conditions" in favour of a view of both as determined by particular environments and expectations.[41] Canguilhem provides compelling evidence for this claim: "Avec une infirmité comme l'astigmatisme ou la myopie on serait normal dans une société agricole ou pastorale, mais on est anormal dans la marine ou dans l'aviation."[42] This view of norms and 'others' as relative is not restricted to health and disability. The affinity between Canguilhem's position and the one adopted by a member of the Front Homosexuel d'Action Révolutionnaire is striking: "On ne peut considérer l'homosexualité comme anormale que d'un point de vue socio-historique : anormal est ce que, à un moment de l'histoire d'une civilisation, n'est pas admis."[43] Elsewhere, Jewish scholars Noel Ignatiev and Karen Brodkin have respectively traced the processes through which Irish and Jewish communities in the U.S. "became white", proving conclusively that race is not biological, but rather contextual.[44] These studies mirror Mills' claim that "the membership requirements for Whiteness" are not absolute, but "rewritten over time, with shifting criteria".[45] Against the presumption that whiteness and the racial categories it presupposes are objective truths, such a critique highlights their relativity and mutability so as to posit them as contingent upon particular socio-historical formations.

Queer theorists have articulated an analogous understanding of gender and sexuality. Katz describes heterosexuality as "a modern invention", while Rubin argues that "the concrete institutional forms of sexuality at any given time and place are products of human activity."[46] Queer philosopher Guy Hocquenghem expresses a similar view of heterosexuality's 'others': "L'homosexualité est une fabrication du monde normal …"[47] Conrad and Schneider's study of

[41] Garland-Thomson, pp. 6-7.
[42] Canguilhem, p. 175.
[43] Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire (FHAR), *Rapport contre la normalité*, (Paris: Éditions Champ libre, 1971), p. 94.
[44] Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, (New York; Oxford: Routledge, 2009).; Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says about Race in America*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998).
[45] Mills, p. 81.
[46] Katz, p. 14.; Rubin, p. 150.
[47] Guy Hocquenghem, *Le Désir homosexuel*, (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1972), p. 13.

deviance and medicalisation echoes these claims: "Illness and disease are human constructions; they do not exist without someone proposing, describing, and recognizing them."[48] They adopt a 'social constructionist' perspective, wherein norms and 'others', discrete categorisations of bodies, and normative socio-economic hierarchies, are seen to be not only relative to particular social and historical formations, but actively produced therein. The social constructionist approach has proven fruitful in conceptualising a range of norms: it subtends both Ndiaye's conception of races as "catégories imaginaires historiquement construites" and queer theorist David M. Halperin's view of homosexuality as "a constructed reality, a social and not a natural reality."[49] Here, illness figures as a particularly productive case study of the social construction of norms: if gender and race are increasingly conceived of in these terms, illness still tends to be regarded as a biological reality. Accordingly, scholars of illness have looked to expose the social processes through which bodily states are defined and rendered meaningful. To do so is not to deny the lived experience of corporeal events characterised by pain, limitation, or even death, but to show how the meanings and values of such events are culturally dependent: "There are, of course, naturally occurring events, including infectious viruses, malignant growths, ruptures of tissues, and unusual chromosome constellations, but these are not ipso facto illnesses. Without the social meaning that humans attach to them they do not constitute illness or disease."[50] Ivan Illich summates this claim: "Each civilization defines its own diseases."[51] Further, anthropologist Robert F. Murphy has expanded this view to encompass disability: "Disability is defined by society and given meaning by culture; it is a social malady."[52] Like race, gender, and sexuality, then, disability, Garland-Thomson states, is best

[48] Peter Conrad and Joseph W. Schneider, *Deviance and Medicalization: From Badness to Sickness*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), p. 30.
[49] Ndiaye, p. 39.; David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 45.
[50] Conrad and Schneider, pp. 30-31.
[51] Ivan Illich, *Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), p. 118.
[52] Robert F. Murphy, *The Body Silent*, (New York; London: W. W. Norton, 2001), p. 5.

understood as a "culture-bound, physically justified difference".[53] As her claim shows, social constructionist approaches seek to deny neither the existence nor the corporeality of norms. Rather, they look to expose the lie upon which normative systems turn, by showing that difference and its meaning are not given *a priori* in bodies, but applied *a postiori* to them.

The 'how' and the 'why'

In demonstrating that norms and 'others' are social rather than natural realities, social constructionist approaches lead us to pose two basic questions: why do they exist, and how? Scholars of 'bodily otherness' have provided manifold answers to the first question, many of which point to the ways in which norms can be seen to structure and sustain Western capitalism. Social theorist Michèle Barrett warns that "functionalist" accounts such as these can easily fall into teleology and "reductionalism" and thus obscure the reality of complex social processes.[54] None the less, she also stresses that "some processes are most usefully understood in these terms", herself providing one such account of some aspects of women's oppression.[55] This born in mind, functionalist answers to the above question might provide useful insight, so long as we remain vigilant of sliding into teleological or reductional explanations. Broadly speaking, these understandings affirm the pivotal role played by norms and 'others' in the development and maintenance of Western capitalism, as vectors of exploitation, productivity, reproduction, social control, and extermination. Black scholars have placed racism, notably anti-Blackness, at the heart of a rationalising logic of exploitation: for Ndiaye, "le racisme antinoir, de par son association avec l'esclavage et la colonisation, fut d'abord un racisme d'exploitation", while

[53] Garland-Thomson, p. 5.
[54] Michèle Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today: Problems in Marxist Feminist Analysis*, (London: Verso Editions, 1980), pp. 23-24.
[55] Ibid., p. 24.

for Mills the racial structure of society is primarily one of "economic exploitation". [56] Feminists such as Silvia Federici and Monique Wittig have long argued that the norms of masculinity and heterosexuality secure the exploitation of women.[57] Scholars of illness and disability have attributed ideals of health and able-bodiedness to an injunction to maximal productivity, itself determined by the needs of Western capitalism: Claudine Herzlich and Janine Pierret claim that illness figures as "une réelle menace contre l'ordre social" precisely because "elle porte atteinte à la capacité productive".[58] Not dissimilarly, queer theorists have affirmed that gay and trans people figure as 'others' in relation to an injunction to maximal reproductivity, of children and the dominant social order. Following Mieli: "The system […] condemns homosexuality as a rebellion against the subjection of Eros to the order of production and reproduction, and against the institutions (in particular the family) that safeguard this order."[59] Lee Edelman echoes this view, arguing that queerness is necessarily 'other' in a society driven by "reproductive futurism", because it "names the side of those not 'fighting for the children'".[60]

Here, it is not simply procreation, but the family that is at stake. Queer scholars have sought to paint the nuclear family as an axis of social control, productivity, and reproductivity. David Fernbach thus points to its role in "[providing] a continuing supply of labor-power for capitalist production", while Susan Williams regards it as "absolutely vital to the capitalist system" insofar as it extracts unpaid domestic labour from women.[61] Accordingly, Christine Riddiough asserts that gay people must figure as 'other' against a heterosexual norm because

[56] Ndiaye, pp. 238-239.; Mills, p. 32.
[57] See Monique Wittig, 'LA PENSÉE STRAIGHT', *Questions Féministes,* (1980)., and Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, (Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 2014).
[58] Claudine Herzlich and Janine Pierret, *Malades d'hier et malades d'aujourd'hui: de la mort collective au devoir de guérison*, (Paris: Payot, 1991), pp. 228-229.
[59] Mieli, p. 244.
[60] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 3.
[61] David Fernbach, 'Towards a Marxist Theory of Gay Liberation', in *Pink Triangles: Radical Perspectives on Gay Liberation,* ed. by Pam Mitchell (London; New York: Verso, 2018), pp. 148-163 (p. 149).; Susan Williams, 'Lesbianism: A Socialist Feminist Perspective', in *Pink Triangles: Radical Perspectives on Gay Liberation,* ed. by Pam Mitchell (London; New York: Verso, 2018), pp. 107-116 (p. 110).

they not only defy the injunction to reproductivity, but also "challenge many of the ideas on which the family is based and thus threaten the hegemony of the ruling class."[62] These claims are reminiscent of Jack Halberstam's account of the cissexual norm, wherein trans children pose a threat because their presence "throws all kinds of assumptions about gender, childhood, and embodiment into question and ultimately casts doubt on the validity of the family itself."[63] And social control is not restricted to the family. Scholars in a range of fields have pointed to the efficacy of norms and 'others' in pitting members of disenfranchised groups against one another, further sustaining the social structure. To return to Williams: "Racism and sexism are both profitable, and further serve as a stabilizing force in capitalist society by dividing the exploited working class and all oppressed people."[64] Likewise, Dyer recounts how the norm of whiteness has been "enormously, often terrifyingly effective in unifying coalitions of disparate groups of people […] against their best interests."[65] In other words, even within the most impoverished groups, those within the norm have a vested interested in maintaining the system. Following Mills: "No matter how poor one was, one was still able to affirm the whiteness that distinguished one from the subpersons on the other side of the color line."[66] Norms have also been conceptualised as ways of justifying and furthering processes of extermination. Indeed, Colette Guillaumin views the very idea of race as "un engin de meurtre": "Elle est un moyen de rationaliser et d'organiser la violence meurtrière …"[67] Her view recalls Michel Foucault's conception of racism, which in his vocabulary expands to cover a range of 'others': "… le racisme est indispensable comme condition pour pouvoir mettre quelqu'un à mort, pour pouvoir mettre les autres à mort. La fonction meurtrière de l'État ne peut être assuré […] que

[62] Christine Riddiough, 'Some Thoughts on Gay/Lesbian Oppression', in *Pink Triangles: Radical Perspectives on Gay Liberation,* ed. by Pam Mitchell (London; New York: Verso, 2018), pp. 136-147 (p. 144).
[63] Jack Halberstam, *Trans*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), p. 46.
[64] Williams, pp. 113-114.
[65] Dyer, p. 19.
[66] Mills, p. 59.
[67] Colette Guillaumin, *Sexe, Race et Pratique du pouvoir: L'idée de Nature*, (Paris: Côté-femmes, 1992), p. 217.

par le racisme."[68] If, as he claims, contemporary Western society turns on the value of life – "capital biologique", the source of productivity and reproductivity – the system of norms and 'others' rationalises its antithesis, death, where this might serve a purpose for the status quo.

While the answer to the question of *why* norms exist as they do is far from resolved, as the range of perspectives above makes clear, we might none the less venture two basic claims. First, that norms ground socio-economic differentiations. Second, that they are beneficial in some way, or perhaps in various ways, to Western capitalism, whether historically or currently. This is not to claim that such norms are unique to Western society, but rather that, therein, they have a particular function, and utility. Here, the question of *how* norms and 'others' exist comes sharply into focus: if they are not given, but social constructions, and if they play a pivotal role in Western society, then we are led to contemplate how they are produced and sustained. Once again, the answer to this question is far from clear, and a variety of possible explanations have been put forward. In general terms, scholars have pointed to four main processes that can be seen to work with and through one another in the mutual constitution of normative systems: definition, normalisation, othering, and naturalisation. The first of these, definition, figures as a logical entry point into this discussion: if norms lack a natural basis, then how are they and their 'others' defined? This is of particularly interest given that, as theorists of 'otherness' have shown, when we pare back the realist view and naturalistic assumptions, the norm turns out to be definitionally incoherent, even empty. Heterosexuality, says Warner, writing with Lauren Berlant, "is not a thing": "We speak of heterosexual culture rather than heterosexuality because that culture never has more than a provisional unity."[69] Able-bodiedness, states McRuer, "even more than heterosexuality, still largely masquerades as a nonidentity, as the natural order of things."[70] And whiteness, for Elsa Dorlin, figures as a kind of "transparence sociale" that grants

[68] Michel Foucault, *"Il faut défendre la société": Cours au Collège de France (1975-1976)*, (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en sciences sociales, 1997), p. 228.
[69] Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, 'Sex in Public', *Critical Inquiry,* 24 (1998), 552.
[70] McRuer, p. 1.

"le privilège d'être socialement interpellé comme une personne, plutôt que comme un individu métonymique".[71] Dyer summarises this claim: "At the level of racial representation, in other words, whites are not of a certain race, they're just the human race."[72]

Taken together, these statements reveal that norms function as the universal, the reference point, whose apparent definitional coherence or homogeneity is predicated not upon their actual content, but upon their oppositionality to 'others'. Halperin elaborates on this point: "The marked (or queer) term ultimately functions not as a means of denominating a real or determinate class of persons but as a means of delimiting and defining – by negation and opposition – the unmarked term."[73] Devoid of definitional consistency, but dependent upon a façade of such consistency to function effectively, the norm is defined against its 'other', which figures as what it is not. Further, as Mills demonstrates in the case of race, such oppositional definitions serve to establish and reinforce the norm as a the ideal or good against an abject or evil 'other': "Whiteness is defined in part in respect to an oppositional darkness, so that white self-conceptions of identity, personhood, and self-respect are then intimately tied up with the repudiation of the black Other."[74] Critically, feminist philosopher Christine Delphy regards definitional power as the mark of being within the norm: the person within the norm is "celui qui peut définir l'Autre."[75] Conversely: "Les Autres sont d'abord ceux qui sont dans la situation d'être définis comme acceptables ou rejetables, et d'abord d'être nommés."[76] Her stance is mirrored by Garland-Thomson: "Though any human trait can be stigmatized, the dominant group has the authority and means to determine which differences are inferior and to perpetuate those judgments."[77] In short, those within the norm possess the power to define those outside

[71] Elsa Dorlin, 'Introduction: Vers une épistémoloogie des résistances', in *Sexe, race, classe: Pour une épistémologie de la domination,* ed. by Elsa Dorlin (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009), (p. 13).
[72] Dyer, p. 3.
[73] Halperin, p. 44.
[74] Mills, pp. 58-59.
[75] Christine Delphy, *Classer, dominer: Qui sont les "autres"?*, (Paris: La Fabrique Éditions, 2008), pp. 18-19.
[76] Ibid., p. 19.
[77] Garland-Thomson, p. 31.

of it, and do so negatively, so as to secure the norm, as well as the socio-economic and political power that it grants. Given the power at stake and the definitional vacuity of the norm, the boundary separating it from its 'other' becomes fraught. Indeed, oppositional definitions are arguably as much about securing this boundary as they are about setting up the norm as the good or ideal term. In her reflection on AIDS, philosopher Susan Sontag places this dynamic at the heart of the social construction of the illness, which she argues "[depended] on notions that separated one group of people from another […] while implying the imminent dissolution of these distinctions."[78] Speaking of illness more broadly, Crawford sees the norm of health as "fashioned in opposition" to both the ill and the unhealthy precisely because "the boundaries that secure the 'healthy' self–in *both* of the stated senses–are never secure."[79] Inherent, then, in a view of norms as defined against their 'others', is a recognition of their inherent instability, that such definitional processes look to both buttress and obscure.

Making normal, making other

In light of this instability, we might locate processes of normalisation and othering that work to actively reproduce norms and normative distributions of social and political power. In a sense, these processes figure as two sides of the same coin: normalisation works to valorise and reward conformity to the norm, and therefore undermines non-conformity *ipso facto*, just as any mechanism of othering that demonises and degrades such non-conformity will in the same gesture imply the promotion of the norm. Hence, while it may prove productive to treat them in turn, we should not lose sight of the ways in which they function symbiotically. Scholars of 'bodily otherness' have pointed to various processes that we might group under the

[78] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors*, (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 116-117.
[79] Crawford, p. 1348.

term ‘normalisation’. On a basic level, as Rubin argues in a discussion of sexuality, individuals encounter “structural constraints”, in this case those “that impede free sexual choice”, and these constraints “operate to coerce everyone towards normality.”[80] Wendell aligns with this view in her reflection on disability, where she points to what she terms “disciplines of normality” which are the “preconditions of participation in every aspect of social life”.[81] Most often, she goes on, able-bodied people are unaware of such disciplines, precisely because they can “conform to them without conscious effort.”[82] Wendell’s “disciplines of normality” speak to what queer and crip theorists have termed “compulsory” norms, notably “compulsory heterosexuality”, as formulated by Adrienne Rich. She understands compulsory heterosexuality as a “cluster of forces”, including “cultural propaganda”, through which “[heterosexuality] has been both forcibly and subliminally imposed upon women”.[83] Building upon this, McRuer argues for a recognition of “compulsory able-bodiedness”, which works in tandem with compulsory heterosexuality “to (re)produce the able body and heterosexuality.”[84] Both norms are thus seen to be imposed upon people in Western society through a variety of social and structural forces.

Taking up this reworking of Rich’s concept, in view of the complementarity of norms, we might expand these notions to think about the possibility of “compulsory health”, or “compulsory cissexuality”. Sociologist Talcott Parson’s provides a compelling framework for thinking through “compulsory health” with his “sick role” theory. Therein, those who fall ill are ascribed a “sick role”, wherein they are granted a “relative legitimation” – the right, for example, to sick pay, or sympathy – conditional upon an obligation to “get well”, and thus to submitting to “reintegrative forces” that try to restore the person’s health, and productivity.[85] In other words, Parsons exposes the normalising forces at work upon those who deviate from

[80] Rubin, p. 177.
[81] Wendell, p. 88.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs,* 5 (1980), 640, 660, 653.
[84] McRuer, p. 31.
[85] Talcott Parsons, *The Social System*, (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 294, 211.

good health. Queer thinkers have pointed to the centrality of education, both formal – in schools or social institutions – and informal – in the family, or wider society – in mechanisms of normalisation. Hence Metcalfe claims that because "cissexual identification and heterosexual desire are not inborn, 'natural' functions of the subject", they must be "*educated* into us through repression, like a cookie-cutter through dough."[86] This finds echo in Mieli's "*educastration*", which works to "eradicate those congenital sexual tendencies deemed 'perverse'" and secure "the transformation of the infant, in tendency polymorphous and 'perverse', into a heterosexual adult, erotically mutilated but conforming to the Norm."[87] In a similar vein, Black philosopher Lucius T. Outlaw has argued for an acknowledgement of the ways in which racial ontologies and hierarchies are sustained through education. In his view, whiteness has historically been secured by schools, which "[inculcate] in successive generations the legitimated orderings" and thus "[continue] the agenda of racial separation and differentiated social provisioning".[88] He outlines two dimensions of this process: the education of white children, "[being] socialized into the country's defining and ordering racial realities", and that of children of colour, who are "*mis*educated", which is to say taught "to be racially inferior adults subordinate to white adults and children".[89] The bifurcated structure of this normative education points back to the symbiosis between normalisation and othering. In effect, as queer theorists have made plain, normalisation is not guaranteed. As Mieli notes, the very existence of queer people is testament to the fact that *educastration* "does not always succeed".[90] In fact, as is immediately evident in the case of norms and whiteness and able-bodiedness, some if not all forms of normalisation

[86] Metcalfe, p. 222.
[87] Mieli, p. 4.
[88] Lucius T. Outlaw, 'Social Ordering and the Systematic Production of Ignorance', in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance,* ed. by Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), pp. 197-212 (pp. 200-201).
[89] Ibid., pp. 200, 197.
[90] Mieli, p. 5.

are doomed to failure: no amount of pressure can change the colour of somebody's skin, or restore physical capacities irreversibly altered through illness or accident.

The inevitable failure of normalisation thus speaks to a basic truth: not everyone can be in the norm, whose existence and favourability are predicated upon an opposition to its 'other'. Given the inevitability that mechanisms of normalisation will not find unilateral success, they are complemented by processes of othering that help to secure the Manichean binary of the norm and its 'other'. Stigmatisation is often regarded as a primary axis of othering, one which can be seen to foreground several other such dynamics. Sociologists Bruce G. Link and Jo C. Phelan regard stigma as the convergence of several "interrelated components": the distinction and labelling of difference; the ascription of negative traits or stereotypes to difference; the creation of an 'us' and a 'them'; a loss of status, and an increase in discrimination.[91] Crucially, herein, stigmatisation is "entirely contingent on access to social, economic, and political power": echoing Delphy, they posit that the definitional and discriminatory acts central to stigma presuppose socio-political power.[92] It follows, then, that scholars of 'bodily otherness', such as Garland-Thomson, have pointed to the stigmatisation of those outside the norm: "… the physically disabled becomes a repository for social anxieties about such troubling concerns as vulnerability, control, and identity."[93] Sontag notes that "moral judgements [are] attached to disease" in the process of social construction, which are often tightly bound up with "aesthetic judgments about the beautiful and the ugly, the clean and the unclean, the familiar and the alien or uncanny."[94] And Rubin points to the moral flavour of the stigmatisation of sexual 'others': "The stigma against sexual dissidents renders them morally defenceless."[95] Others have evoked the consequences of stigma. Murphy does so with disability: "Just as the bodies of the disabled

[91] Bruce G. Link and Jo C. Phelan, 'Conceptualizing Stigma', *Annual Review of Sociology,* 27 (2001), 367.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Garland-Thomson, p. 6.
[94] Sontag, p. 127.
[95] Rubin, p. 171.

are permanently impaired, so also is their standing as members of society."[96] Sociologist Denise Jodelet highlights several such consequences, including but not limited to "diverses formes de violence, de mépris, d'intolérance, d'humiliation, d'exploitation, d'exclusion".[97] In a word, stigma provides the symbolic and ideological justification necessary for those within the norm to effect a range of discriminatory and damaging practices against those outside of it.

Scholars in the social sciences often credit Erving Goffman with providing one of the first comprehensive studies of stigmatisation. Therein, he points to a belief subtending any and all such processes: "By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human."[98] This claim is backed up by theorists of race and disability: Mills argues that racialising logics posit people of colour as "subpersons, *Untermenschen*", against "white personhood", while Murphy asserts that disabled people "become changed in the minds of the rest of society into some kind of quasi-human."[99] Sontag echoes this view: "The most terrifying illnesses are those perceived not just as lethal but as dehumanizing, literally so."[100] Goffman argues that this mechanism of dehumanisation has social and material repercussions: "On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances."[101] Indeed, following Mills', this is not a collateral damage, but rather the driving force behind stigmatisation: "Subpersons are humanoid entities who, because of racial phenotype/genealogy/culture, are not fully human and therefore have a different and inferior schedule of rights and liberties applying to them."[102] Further still: "… it is possible to get away with doing things to subpersons that one could not do to persons, because they do not have the same rights as persons."[103] In short, stigmatisation functions to

[96] Murphy, p. 135.
[97] Denise Jodelet, 'Formes et figures de l'altérité', in *L'autre: regards psychosociaux,* ed. by Margarita Sanchez-Mazas and Laurent Licata (Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 2005), pp. 23-48 (p. 39).
[98] Goffman, p. 15.
[99] Mills, pp. 55-56.; Murphy, p. 110.
[100] Sontag, p. 24.
[101] Goffman, p. 15.
[102] Mills, p. 56.
[103] Ibid.

ground and confirm normative socio-economic hierarchies, adding depth to the Manichean opposition of norm and 'other' to justify differential treatment. In so doing, these processes of othering – stigmatisation, and its repercussions – actually generate the difference presumed to exist between those within and without the norm *post factum*. We might, here, turn to Edward Saïd's discussion of orientalism: "… it is [possible] for many objects or places or times to be assigned roles and given meanings that acquire objective validity only after the assignments are made."[104] This, he says, "is especially true of relatively uncommon things, like foreigners, mutants, or 'abnormal' behavior."[105] McRuer makes an analogous claim: "… queers are *made* different by an oppressive society […] a minority identity emerges precisely because of the positions gay men and lesbians occupy within a larger, dominant structure …"[106] Hence Ndiaye talks about "la condition noire", which he conceptualises as "une *situation* sociale […] d'une minorité, c'est-à-dire d'un groupe de personnes ayant en partage, *nolens volens*, l'expérience sociale d'être généralement considérées comme noires."[107] Pierret and Herzlich speak of illness in similar terms: "… *la maladie est devenue pour l'individu une condition sociale*, structuration nouvelle des rapports à ce que nous appelons la société."[108] Subject to discrimination and violence, 'others' develop what Guillaumin terms "une forme particulière de conscience", so that socially-constructed difference generates a very real distinction between groups.[109]

The natural and the pathological

The final piece of the puzzle in the social construction of norms, and 'others', are mechanisms of naturalisation, whereby difference – notably created through normalisation and othering –

[104] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 54.
[105] Ibid.
[106] McRuer, p. 163.
[107] Ndiaye, p. 29.
[108] Herzlich and Pierret, p. 292.
[109] Guillaumin, p. 119.

is made to appear given, natural: normal. Such mechanisms secure the categories of norm and 'other', along with normative socio-economic hierarchies, whose existence is dependent upon a façade of naturality. Science has been perhaps the most privileged vector of naturalisation in Western society, as is clear through its centrality to the realist view upon which norms are predicated. In a society where openly supremacist views are regarded as dogmatic, philosopher Tzvetan Todorov explains, "le scientisme" – the belief that science, and science alone, provides neutral, universal truths – serves to repackage normative ideologies as objective facts: "… personne, ou presque, n'est fier de se dire ethnocentriste […] alors que se réclamer de la science revient à s'appuyer sur une des valeurs les plus sûres qui soient dans notre société."[110] Through science, perceived as an impartial arbiter of universal truths, particular and normative readings of the body come to be taken by the majority as objective facts, as with sex, and race. Scholars of race and racism have highlighted the role of Western science in justifying the norm of whiteness, as well as the othering of people of colour: "Western scientific thought simply took its place as the latest formal grammar for the expression of a racial metaphysics to which its most natural response was acquiescence".[111] Elsewhere, philosopher Nancy Tuana has shown how science served to secure men as the norm, as "the standard against which female structures […] were to be compared".[112] Women's sexuality was thus relegated to a secondary plane, and the primacy of men over women presented as natural. It is in precisely this sense that we might heed Foucault's warning to think critically about "la force d'une science", and to ask ourselves "comment, dans notre société, les effets de vérité d'une science sont en même temps des effets de pouvoir."[113] To fully grasp the character and workings of normative social distributions, we

[110] Tzvetan Todorov, *Nous et les autres: La réflexion française sur la diversité humaine*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1989), pp. 511-512.
[111] Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), p. 76.
[112] Nancy Tuana, 'Coming to Understand: Orgasm and the Epistemology of Ignorance', *Hypatia,* 19 (2004), 199.
[113] Michel Foucault, 'L'extension sociale de la norme', in *Dits et écrits, 1954-1988: III, 1976-1979,* ed. by Daniel Defert, François Ewald, and Jacques Lagrange (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), pp. 74-79 (p. 78).

must begin with a recognition of the epistemic and cultural hegemony of Western science, and its role in rendering natural and impartial what is, in fact, artificial and partisan.

Most notable in this process are the medical and anatomical sciences. Not only have they served to present particular readings of the body as given in nature – as we have seen, for example, with sexual dimorphism – but they have participated in a second movement that has complemented the first: the pathologisation of 'others'. Herein, those outside of the norm have been consistently categorised as 'pathological' and thus rendered deviant, further establishing their non-normativity, and their opposition to 'healthy' norms. This phenomenon is perhaps most evident in the case of queer and trans people, whose 'otherness' was first articulated and set up within medical frameworks. Following Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke: "In the aetiology of clinical life, transsexuality is understood as deviation, excess to or deficient from an otherwise desirable state of embodiment."[114] Importantly, they demonstrate that the pathologisation of trans people constituted "a rear-guard reaction to sustain a conceptual binary."[115] Katz makes a similar claim of homosexuality, which figured as "the doctors' totem of the monstrous abnormal, an assurance of the heterosexual's benign normality."[116] Ferguson argues that these processes laid the foundations for the pathologisation of people of colour in the U.S.: their 'otherness' was conceived in terms of "gender and sexual nonnormativity", and hence "produced discourses that pathologized nonheteronormative U.S. racial formations."[117] Women have also been long subject to pathologisation: for Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, "[medicine's] prime contribution to sexist ideology has been to describe women as sick, and as potentially sickening to men."[118] Perhaps the most salient indication of such

[114] Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke, 'Introduction', in *Transgender Marxism,* ed. by Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke (London: Pluto Press, 2021), pp. 1-32 (p. 23).
[115] Ibid., p. 24.
[116] Katz, pp. 81-82.
[117] Ferguson, p. 14.
[118] Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Complaints and Disorders: the Sexual Politics of Sickness*, (England: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative, 1973), p. 9.

processes can be found in illness and disability, which are, in a sense, doubly pathologised: first, medicine locates 'illness' and 'disability' as non-normative bodily states, and then, those states serve as indications of moral or mental affliction. Indeed, Sontag has articulated two complementary "hypotheses" through which illness functions: "The first is that every form of social deviation can be considered an illness."; "The second is that every illness can be considered psychologically."[119] In short, through pathologisation, 'others' are made sick, and thus contagious, which reinforces their 'otherness' on two related counts: on the one hand, it secures the norm and normative hierarchies, by buttressing the abnormality or abjectness of the 'other'; on the other, it further stresses the need for strict, hermetic boundaries to be drawn between those within and without the norm.

Mechanisms of naturalisation, foregrounded by science, and notably pathologisation, thus come to shore up the various other processes through which norms and 'others' are socially constructed and sustained. These are furthered in the human sciences and philosophy, where scientific knowledge is often reproduced and confirmed. Following Foucault:

> Si les sciences de l'homme sont apparues dans le prolongement des sciences de la vie, c'est peut-être parce qu'elles étaient *biologiquement* sous-tendues, mais c'est aussi qu'elles l'étaient *médicalement* : sans doute par transfert, importation et souvent métaphore, les sciences de l'homme ont utilisé des concepts formés par les biologistes ; mais l'objet même qu'elles se donnaient (l'homme, ses conduites, ses réalisations individuelles et sociales) se donnait donc un champ partagé selon le principe du normal et du pathologique.[120]

Accordingly, Black scholars have sought to highlight the ways in which sociology reproduces normative ideologies and assumptions about people of colour, and notably Black people. Hence Patricia Hill Collins claims that the dominant "sociological paradigms" centre white men,

[119] Sontag, pp. 57-58.
[120] Michel Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988), p. 36.

along with their particular concerns and assumptions, while Ferguson argues that "canonical sociology […] has constructed African American racial difference as the exemplar of social pathologies that suggest gender and sexual disorders".[121] Striking, and of immediate concern here, is the role that Western philosophy has played, and continues to play, in the expression and confirmation of norms and 'others'. Outlaw argues for a recognition of just how far it has been "affected by the habits formed over many years in a society ordered by the agendas of racial apartheid and White Racial Supremacy", which have shaped "the ontologies, philosophical anthropologies, and epistemologies undergirding notions of a 'proper' philosopher and 'proper' philosophizing."[122] In a similar vein, feminist philosopher Michèle Le Dœuff asserts that philosophy has "une longue et pesante tradition de connivence avec [l'oppression des femmes]".[123] This tradition, in her view, is testament to the existence in philosophy of "un imaginaire qui n'est pas importé d'ailleurs, qui lui est spécifique, et qui pose les conditions de ce qui s'y construit comme rationalité."[124] Another feminist philosopher, Sandra Lee Bartky, lays out the basic contention of such claims: "Philosophical reflection […] is always already rooted in some inherited schema or, as is more commonly said today, in some text; these texts are bound to be class-, race-, and gender-biased."[125] As such, she invites us to "approach our tradition with deep suspicion": "… we must test its claims against our own hard-won insights; we must sort and sift among its materials to see what we can use and what we must discard."[126] Phenomenology is not spared such a critique: Elizabeth Grosz asks us "to

[121] Patricia Hill Collins, 'Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought', *Social Problems,* 33 (1986), S26.; Ferguson, p. 23.
[122] Outlaw, p. 203.
[123] Michèle Le Dœuff, *L'Étude et le Rouet: Des femmes, de la philosophie, etc.*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1989), p. 58.
[124] Ibid., p. 35.
[125] Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 5-6.
[126] Ibid., p. 6.

seriously question whether phenomenological descriptions are appropriate for women's experience".[127] The same might well be said for other groups outside the norm.

Knowing, and not knowing

These critiques orient us towards questions of epistemology, through which we might better grasp the relation between philosophy and bodily otherness, and the ways in which we might productively rework existential phenomenology to account for 'others'. In effect, philosophy is in many senses the paragon of a Western epistemic regime that is both underwritten by and serves to secure normative biases that shape what knowledge is produced, how, and by whom. To develop a philosophical reflection on bodily otherness, then, is inevitably to run the risk of reproducing such assumptions, and thus contributing to the very processes of naturalisation that it seeks to critique. We might look to guard against this risk by first turning to critical epistemologies, and notably epistemologies of ignorance, to establish an epistemic framework through which this thesis might be elaborated. These critical epistemologies begin with the assertion that Western society and its institutions are structured by an epistemic regime that privileges certain ways of thinking and certain kinds of knowledge, and devalues others. This regime privileges objectivity, and thus comprises three central features: a subject/object distinction, wherein the subject knows and the object is known about; impartiality and rationality in the production of knowledge; knowledge as universal, and of a 'real' world. While this regime has been called into question, notably in recent philosophical and critical thought, it remains the dominant paradigm of knowledge production and dissemination in Western society. Following Chicana theorist Gloria E. Anzaldúa: "Culture forms our beliefs.

[127] Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 111.

We perceive the version of reality that it communicates. Dominant paradigms, predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable, unchallengeable, are transmitted to us through the culture."[128] In line with this view, Le Dœuff points the role of such beliefs in shaping thought production: "Chacun et chacune a bien, dans une zone brumeuse de sa tête, une belle collection de vues rudimentaires, acquises on ne sait trop comment ; ces vues sont toujours prêtes à déferler en lieu et place d'un travail théorique …"[129] Not only do most people take such assumptions for granted, but the epistemic regime bolsters itself through two basic beliefs: first, that objective knowledge of a 'real' world is possible, and indeed being produced, and second, that such knowledge and its production are superior to any other kind.

Against these basic beliefs, critical epistemologies have sought to demonstrate the flaws in dominant epistemic paradigms, and reveal how they subtend the social construction of norms and 'others'. Most notably, they have located issues and biases in the subject/object dichotomy that it presupposes. More often than not, subject and object positions map onto norm and 'other' positions. In the first place, as Le Dœuff has shown, the object of knowledge is not given, but reflects a prior choice: "… la connaissance est régie par une structure plus primaire que tous les cadres *a priori* de la perception ou du jugement qu'on voudra : quand on voit et juge, c'est déjà qu'on a daigné aller jusqu'à l'objet."[130] Further still: "Car un objet n'est pas donné, ou là en attendant d'une plume qui s'en occupe. Il faut d'abord l'identifier, le mettre en évidence et le nommer."[131] In a word, following Tuana: "What we attend to and what we ignore are often complexly interwoven with values and politics."[132] Through such choices, those within the norm most often position themselves as subject, against 'others' who tend to figure as objects. Hocquenghem highlights how this occurs along gender lines: "Le monde se divise en objet et

[128] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: the new mestiza*, (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), p. 16.
[129] Le Dœuff, p. 49.
[130] Michèle Le Dœuff, *Le Sexe du savoir*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), p. 187.
[131] Ibid., p. 342.
[132] Tuana, p. 219.

en sujet, en femme et en homme."[133] Indeed, in Mills' view, this epistemic regime posits the West as the "*global locus of rationality*", wherein "the European cognitive agent" is required to validate claims to knowledge, and "European perception is required".[134] Herein, 'others' are precluded from the position of subject on two grounds. On the one hand, through processes of naturalisation, those outside the norm are made to appear irrational, mentally unwell, or intellectually inferior. Grosz points to this in philosophy, which has "surreptitiously excluded femininity, and ultimately women, from its practices through its usually implicit coding of femininity with the unreason associated with the body."[135] Delphy summarises this pretension: "… les opprimé-e-s ne possèdent pas les moyens intellectuels pour analyser correctement leur situation."[136] On the other hand, those outside of the norm are discredited as biased. Following Simone de Beauvoir: "… [l'homme] croit appréhender [le monde] dans son objectivité, tandis qu'il considère le corps de la femme comme alourdi par tout ce qui le spécifie …"[137] Returning to Delphy: "C'est typiquement une attitude de dominant que de voir les autres, et surtout les Autres, comme partisan-e-s, « juges et parties », tandis qu'eux, qui en tant que dominants sont des « parties » à l'affaire aussi, se conçoivent uniquement comme « juges »."[138] In short, dominant paradigms of Western thought presume a normative subject, and discount 'others' from that subject position on the grounds of their apparent incapacity or bias.

Under this epistemic regime, the only legitimate subjects are those who fall within the norm, insofar as they are the only people assumed capable of adopting the rational, impartial worldview that figures as the ideal of knowledge production and dissemination. There is a deep irony, then, to be found in critical epistemologies that claim that those within the norm – and notably those within most norms: heterosexual, white, cisgender, able-bodied men – are the

[133] Hocquenghem, p. 87.
[134] Mills, pp. 45-46.
[135] Grosz, p. 4.
[136] Delphy, p. 35.
[137] Beauvoir, p. 14.
[138] Delphy, p. 37.

least capable of rationality and impartiality. In effect, as philosopher Linda Martín Alcoff illustrates, those within the norm are actually at an epistemic *dis*advantage. People in dominant social groups, she says, often have neither "an interest in pursuing all the ramifications of social injustice" nor "a marginalized experience from which to critique accepted social conventions."[139] Delphy puts it plainly: "Les dominants ne peuvent se défaire de ces attitudes […] en raison du fait qu'elles servent directement leurs intérêts."[140] Put simply, those within the norm have a vested interest in the upkeep of socio-economic hierarchies, and do not have the experiences of marginalisation that are often productive spaces for critical thought. Mills applies this critique to whiteness: "Part of what it means to be constructed as 'white' […] is a cognitive model that precludes self-transparency and genuine understanding of social realities."[141] Importantly, while his discussion focuses on race, he expands his theorisations to other forms of bodily otherness, notably gender.[142] Hence, philosophers in a range of critical fields have made the claim the Western epistemic regime is underwritten by what they call a series of "epistemologies of ignorance". Against a reductive understanding of ignorance as a mere lack of knowledge, Alcoff argues for its conceptualisation as "a substantive epistemic practice that differentiates the dominant group."[143] Tuana develops this position: "Ignorance is frequently constructed and actively preserved, and is linked to issues of cognitive authority, doubt, trust, silencing, and uncertainty."[144] Ignorance, in a word, is deeply political. It has what philosopher Lorraine Code terms "darker effects […] ethico-politically and epistemologically negative dimensions" which constitute its power "to promote and/or sustain unjust social

[139] Linda Martín Alcoff, 'Epistemologies of Ignorance: Three Types', in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance,* ed. by Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), pp. 39-58 (p. 48).
[140] Delphy, pp. 37-38.
[141] Mills, p. 18.
[142] Ibid., pp. 21-22.
[143] Alcoff, p. 47.
[144] Tuana, p. 195.

orders."[145] Anzaldúa paints a similar picture: "Ignorance splits people, creates prejudices. A misinformed people is a subjugated people."[146] And this, for Mieli, is precisely a function of *educastration*, which secures a cycle of ignorance: "This lack of awareness is a product of the repression they have undergone, and it serves in turn to perpetuate this repression."[147]

In this optic, Sedgwick invites us to contemplate the possibility that there exist "a plethora of *ignorances*", and "to ask questions about the labor, erotics, and economics of their human production and distribution."[148] Accordingly, critical epistemologies have pinpointed three kinds of ignorance – omission, distortion, and unlearning – all of which they place at the heart of the Western epistemic regime. In sociology, Collins highlights both "the omission of facts or observations about Afro-American women" and "distortions" of such facts, which are evidenced where these women are "struck by the difference between their own experiences and sociological descriptions of the same phenomena."[149] Echoing Collins' view, Mills places "an agreement to misinterpret the world" at the bedrock of Western thought: "One has to learn to see the world wrongly, but with the assurance that this set of mistaken perceptions will be validated by white epistemic authority…"[150] Under this epistemic regime, ignorance of certain kinds, namely of anything that might unsettle the status quo, is encouraged, and, indeed, following Outlaw, made "*legitimate*".[151] These ignorances come to be "valued positively [by] sufficient numbers of persons and groups in dominant positions in the racialized hierarchy": they form part of "common sense" as well as "authoritative 'knowledge,' of *reality.*"[152] Hence Mills argues for a recognition that whiteness secures itself, and its epistemic hegemony, through "structured blindnesses and opacities", one of which, of course, is the fact of such

[145] Lorraine Code, 'The Power of Ignorance', in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance,* ed. by Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), pp. 213-230 (p. 215).
[146] Anzaldúa, p. 86.
[147] Mieli, p. 214.
[148] Sedgwick, p. 8.
[149] Collins, pp. S27-S28.
[150] Mills, p. 18.
[151] Outlaw, pp. 197-198.
[152] Ibid., p. 198.

blindnesses, which constitute a basic flaw in dominant epistemic paradigms.[153] Those within the norm are thus conditioned to make claims to knowledge on the basis of ignorance, generating what Halperin refers to, in relation to heterosexuals, as "a knowingness that is not only distinct from knowledge but is actually opposed to it […] a form of ignorance".[154] These forms of knowing and non-knowing are both quotidian and academic, as is evident where Le Dœuff talks of "acognition masculiniste" to describe lacuna in philosophy written by men.[155] Such epistemologies of ignorance are not merely an accident or a by-product of Western paradigms of thought, and the socio-economic hierarchies that they rationalise. Rather, they are a central thread running through the epistemic fabric of the West, binding normative ideologies and hierarchies together where they threaten to come apart.

Towards a *prise de position*

Epistemologies of ignorance show us that Western epistemic regimes actually function to preclude the production of the very rational, impartial worldview that they promote as the ideal. The question then becomes one of which kinds of knowledge are desirable, and indeed possible, and how we might look to produce them. Here, the standpoint theory formulated by feminist philosophers provides a compelling epistemic framework. Standpoint theory sets out from two interrelated claims. First, it argues for the recognition that all knowledge is situated, and thus shaped by individual and collective histories and experiences. Donna Haraway grounds this recognition in "a doctrine of embodied objectivity", wherein objectivity might be reworked in light of what she terms "*situated knowledges*".[156] Building on this, standpoint

[153] Mills, p. 19.
[154] Halperin, p. 35.
[155] Le Dœuff, *Le Sexe du savoir*, p. 179.
[156] Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 188.

theory turns the subject/object choice of the Western epistemic regime on its head, investing in precisely those knowledges produced outside of the norm. This grounds Sandra Harding's theory of "strong objectivity", wherein "a causal critical view of the interests and values that constitute the dominant conceptual projects" must necessarily begin "from *outside* those conceptual schemes", or, in other words, from "marginal lives".[157] Against the dominant assumption that such positions are particular and therefore biased, she makes the claim that these are the only perspectives from which we might account for "not only those lives but also the rest of the micro and macro social order, including human interactions with nature and the philosophies that have been developed to explain sciences."[158] In short, following Haraway: "'Subjugated' standpoints are preferred because they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world."[159] If those within the norm have a vested interest in sustaining certain forms of knowledge and ignorance, those outside of it are uniquely placed to see clearly: far from being blinkered by privilege, they have a vested interest in laying bare the reality of society and its inequalities, as well as the mechanisms that serve to make such inequalities appear normal or given. For bell hooks, Black women's perspectives are productive because they have "no institutionalized 'other' that [they] may discriminate against, exploit, or oppress" and "often have a lived experience that directly challenges the prevailing classist, sexist, racist social structure and its concomitant ideology."[160] Likewise, Le Dœuff argues that women's "condition" grants "un avantage cognitif quant au social et au politique, celui de mieux voir les injustices existantes parce qu'on en a fait l'expérience et qu'on les prend au sérieux."[161]

[157] Sandra Harding, '"Strong Objectivity": A Response to the New Objectivity Question', *Synthese,* 104 (1995), 342.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Haraway, p. 191.
[160] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, (Boston, Massachusetts: South End Press, 1984), p. 15.
[161] Le Dœuff, *Le Sexe du savoir*, p. 102.

In effect, those outside of the norm can be seen to benefit from what Mills calls "second sight", the antidote to the "structural blindnesses" he places at the base of the Western epistemic regime.[162] bell hooks describes her own experience of this way of seeing: "Living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both."[163] These conceptions of the perspectives of 'others' as bifocal echo Collins' theory of the "outsider within", which focuses on the experience of Black women in sociology. Both "rooted in their own experiences" and able to "master sociological paradigms", which, as notes above, prescribe the omission and distortion of such experiences, these women are "in a better position to bring a special perspective not only to the study of Black women, but to some of the fundamental issues facing sociology itself."[164] While care must be taken not to efface the specificity of Black women's positions as "outsiders within", Collins herself seeks to expand the scope of her theory to include a range of 'others', including those outside of norms of race, gender, and sexuality.[165] Le Dœuff conceives of women in philosophy in an analogous way: "… les femmes devraient savoir que le sexisme du discours philosophique leur offre une prise sur ce discours, et qu'elles peuvent le réexaminer comme cela n'a encore jamais été fait. Et qu'à cette occasion, des questions peuvent émerger, qui intéressent tout le monde."[166]

To claim that "outsiders within" figure as a unique possibility for critical viewpoints on the world is not to regard such viewpoints as infallible. Indeed, as Alcoff notes, standpoint theory does not ascribe "*absolute* epistemic advantage" to those outside the norm, but rather invests in the idea "that the pattern of epistemic positionality created by some identities has the

[162] Charles W. Mills, 'White Ignorance', in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance,* ed. by Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), pp. 11-38 (p. 19).
[163] hooks. Preface.
[164] Collins, p. S29.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Le Dœuff, *L'Étude et le Rouet*, p. 25.

potential for relevance in broad domains of inquiry".[167] The valorisation of non-normative perspectives therefore requires an understanding of *all* perspectives as partial, one provided by Haraway: "The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another."[168] Against dominant paradigms, she is arguing for "politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims."[169] Crucially, this stance refuses "the view from above", insisting instead upon the primacy of "the view from a body".[170] Striking, here, are the parallels between this critique and those expressed by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty of the *pensée de survol*. Indeed, what is perhaps most exciting about Haraway's epistemological framework is the extent to which it aligns with the epistemic principles set out in *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception*. Sartre is critical of disembodied claims to knowledge, arguing that therein "je survole le monde sans m'y attacher, je me mets dans l'attitude d'objectivité absolue et le sens devient un objet parmi les objets, un centre de référence relative".[171] Such claims, he argues, undermine the very objective truths that they purport to produce: "Ainsi, le concept d'objectivité […] se détruit lui-même si on le pousse jusqu'au bout."[172] Further, Haraway's advocacy of "partial, locatable, critical knowledges", through which we might build up "webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology", resonates deeply with Merleau-Ponty's view of the phenomenological world.[173] If meaning emerges "à l'intersection de mes expériences et à l'intersection de mes expériences et de celles d'autrui, par l'engrenage

[167] Alcoff, p. 47.
[168] Haraway, p. 193.
[169] Ibid., p. 195.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*, (Gallimard, 1943), p. 359.
[172] Ibid., p. 346.
[173] Haraway, p. 191.

des unes sur les autres", he surely must conceive of truth and knowledge as constituted through such "webs of connections".[174] Standpoint theories thus provide a uniquely compelling critical framework for the present study, on two counts. In the first instance, they align with many of the epistemological principles set out by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. In the second, they offer the possibility of interrogating French existential phenomenology, and, crucially, establishing the extent to which its exponents ultimately adhered to those principles.

The necessary corollary of standpoint theory is a recognition of positionality: both my own, and that of those cited in this thesis. By positionality, we refer to the unique position of an individual at the intersection of various norms, whether within or without these norms, and their relation to the subject matter. Without positionality, standpoint theory is somewhat defunct: how can we centre the perspectives of 'others' without knowing who is within and who is without a given norm? The majority of those cited in this thesis sit on the fault lines of various oppressions, occupying a combination of normative and non-normative positions. To begin with my own position: on the one hand, my whiteness, somatic health, able-bodiedness and position as a scholar in Western Europe place me within such norms; on the other, as a queer transsexual, my lived experience is one outside of norms of gender and sexuality. On those questions where normativity limits my perspective, I will look to the voices of those who figure as 'others': people of colour, disabled people, ill people. Where outside the norm, I will still look to such voices – of queer and trans people, and women –, but will do so in concert with my own experience. This overview is necessarily reductive: in line with Crenshaw's view of intersectionality as reconstitutive, each of these elements of my position shapes the others. None the less, an awareness of my relation to any given norm will shape my discussion, and use of sources. There are, of course, limitations to this approach. It is not always possible to know somebody's identity or experience, notably under an epistemic regime that punishes

[174] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 14th edn (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. xv.

particularity as a marker of bias. Further, sometimes those within the norm produce compelling critiques of the normative structures from which they profit: to discount them on the grounds of identity would surely amount to little more than cutting off the nose to spite the face. Another potential issue can arise when those outside of one norm are within another, and thus cultivate normative systems from which they profit. Black feminists have long critiqued white feminists for reproducing racist assumptions, for example, and several of the cisgender women cited here have recently espoused transphobic views. In such cases, we are left asking how to disentangle the constructive elements of their thought from such bias, and whether this is even possible.

While such concerns might serve as a useful reminder of the limitations of our epistemological framework, they might be productively countered with an understanding of standpoint theory as a blueprint, rather than a strict set of rules. One of the basic contentions of critical epistemologies of gender and race is that no system is perfect. Indeed, one of the flaws of the Western epistemic regime is its presumption to an absolute and infallible form of knowledge production and dissemination, namely objective truth. Against the absolute or the infallible, critical epistemologies invite us to reflect upon the matter at hand, and to seek to redress imbalances of perspective and power therein. The present study seeks to shed light on the lived experiences of bodily otherness, as well as the ways in which norms and normative social structures operate on bodies and shape those experiences. It also sets out to locate the normative bias, omissions, and distortions in French existential phenomenology in order that we might rehabilitate Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, and use their theories to shed light on the very experiences that they tend to leave in the dark. Herein, the critical epistemological approaches outlined above – standpoint theory, partial perspectives, webs of connections – are not perfect, but offer a particularly productive and compelling framework for the task at hand. The same can be said of positionality, itself bound up with those approaches: it is by no means faultless, but is instrumental for a critical engagement with Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's thought, and for

formulating an existential phenomenology of bodily otherness. In other words, where we take up these critical tools of knowledge production and dissemination, we are not looking to replace one absolute system with another. Instead, we hope to turn the Western epistemic regime on its head, finding value not in objective truth but in the multiplicity and marginality of perspectives, and thus laying the foundations for a phenomenology of bodily otherness.

Chapter II: What is existential phenomenology?

The philosophy of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty might broadly be seen to fall into two theoretical traditions: phenomenology, on the one hand, and existentialism, on the other. Indeed, *L'Être et le néant* (1943) and the *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945) are often regarded as the foundational works of existential phenomenology, certainly within the context of French thought. These texts take up the project and methodology of phenomenology, as elaborated and pursued by German philosophers, first Edmund Husserl and later Martin Heidegger, not uncritically, but with a view to reworking them to better respond to the particular concerns that would come to characterise existentialism, such as freedom, humanity, and meaning. Neither *L'Être et le néant* nor the *Phénoménologie de la perception* represent their respective author's sole engagement with phenomenology; the former was preceded and indeed foreshadowed by Sartre's *L'Imagination* and his *Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions*, while the latter was complimented by a range of articles and works, including classes given by Merleau-Ponty, such as his *Les sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie*. None the less, these texts constitute the clearest and most comprehensive expression of existential phenomenology formulated by either thinker. In his study of Sartre, Alain Renaut describes the former as "le premier (et le plus certain) couronnement [de la production proprement philosophique de Sartre]", arguing that it was the last meaningful development in Sartre's thought.[1] Further, as Graham Daniels asserts in his discussion of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's 'existentialist quarrel', these works are of particular interest insofar as they "firmly established the philosophical reputation of their respective authors".[2] Crucially, both later shifted further away from Husserl and Heidegger.

[1] Alain Renaut, *Sartre, le dernier philosophe*, (Paris: Grasset, 1993), p. 13.
[2] Graham Daniels, 'Sartre and Merleau-Ponty: An Existentialist Quarrel', *French Studies,* 24 (1970), 381.

Not only are these works their most comprehensive articulations of existential phenomenology: they are the only ones we might consider to fall wholly within that tradition.

Insofar as *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception* comprise both the most concrete and most faithful expression of French existential phenomenology, they will serve as the primary texts in this thesis. To consider Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, or these texts, as speaking to the same philosophical movement – existential phenomenology – is not to regard their thought as indistinguishable, far from it. There are significant differences at every level of their respective projects, from their interpretations of Husserl and Heidegger to the directions in which they take those interpretations, and, crucially, in the preoccupations that structure both of their engagements with phenomenology. Indeed, to regard them as bound up within the same philosophical movement is not to deny these differences, but to recognise that they share many fundamental convictions and concerns in spite of them. Further, it is to see those divergences as an integral and generative feature of existential phenomenology, and a lucrative space for an exploration of that very movement. In a word, given their harmony on some of the most foundational points of their respective reflections, the moments at which they draw apart might serve to better cultivate our understanding of their individual projects and theories, as well as the ways in which they speak to one another. This is nowhere more evident than where they discuss the two questions that lie at the heart of this thesis: the body, and *autrui*.[3] Therein, as we shall see, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty share several basic convictions, and yet ultimately produce theories which are not only distinct from but, at points, antagonistic to one another. A critical and comparative reading of these works, then, might foreground a fuller appreciation of their philosophies, notably their theories of the body and *autrui*, as well as of the wider

[3] The term *autrui* is used interchangeably with *l'autre* in both *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception*. It is tendentially translated as 'the Other'. Given the potential for confounding *l'autre* or 'the Other' with 'others', as defined in our first chapter, the French term *autrui* will be used throughout this thesis, as will the phrase 'other subjects', where Sartre or Merleau-Ponty would have used *autrui* or *les autres*. Both 'the Other' and 'the other' will appear, however, in citations where they are written thus in English.

movement of existential phenomenology. The case for such a reading is strengthened in light of the fact that the *Phénoménologie de la perception* is to some degree a response to and critique of *L'Être et le néant*. So much so, in fact, that Margaret Whitford considers the "work of Merleau-Ponty and Sartre" to be "a major philosophical dialogue".[4] To read their works in concert, both with and against one another, is to listen attentively to that dialogue. In so doing, over the course of this chapter, we might attain the most comprehensive view of their thought, and notably of their theories of the body, and *autrui*. This, in turn, might foreground a critique of their respective engagements with the question of bodily otherness, or the lack thereof, as the case may be. Even more critical, to read them in this way – in parallel, as in opposition – is precisely to enter into that dialogue, to participate in a conversation first held between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, but which has long since incorporated a range of voices, even those from outside of the norm, such as Frantz Fanon, and Simone de Beauvoir. A reading of this kind might therefore prepare the ground for the task ahead, namely, to formulate an existential phenomenology of bodily otherness.

Phenomenology is generally seen to have been first fully formulated into a distinct and coherent branch of philosophy by Husserl. Certainly, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty take his work as their starting point, albeit focusing on different themes and periods therein. We might trace their understandings of Husserl's philosophy in texts published before and after the publication of *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, and perhaps most saliently in those texts themselves. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty opens the latter with the question, "Qu'est-ce que la phénoménologie ?", a question that speaks to its relative novelty for French readers, as well as to the difficulty inherent in defining it. We might begin to overcome that difficulty with another French philosopher, Paul Ricœur, whose conception of phenomenology as "moins une

[4] Margaret Whitford, *Merleau-Ponty's critique of Sartre's philosophy*, (Lexington, Ky: French Forum, 1982), p. 25.

doctrine qu'une méthode" provides us with a compelling point of departure for an account of existential philosophy, and its origins. [5] In effect, where Sartre and Merleau-Ponty put forward definitions of phenomenology, they tend to focus upon its method, and perhaps most notably upon the imperative to describe. For Sartre, it is "une description des structures de la conscience transcendantale fondée sur l'intuition des essences de ces structures", while for Merleau-Ponty, it is taken to be an "étude des essences" that advances through description: "Il s'agit de décrire, non pas d'expliquer, ni d'analyser."[6] In a word, phenomenology might be best understood as an attempt to describe the fundamental structures of consciousness. Insofar as those structures are given to us as essences, the phenomenological method hinges upon "l'intuition eidétique" – the intuition of essences – to take up Sartre's interpretation of Husserl, which he understands with Merleau-Ponty to mean attending to that which is immediately given to consciousness.[7] This, in turn, is predicated upon perhaps the most well-known feature of the phenomenological method: the eidetic reduction, or ἐποχή (epoché). In order to attend to that which is immediately given to consciousness, we must first bracket the "attitude naturelle", which we might grasp, as does Merleau-Ponty, as "le lien qui nous rattache au monde physique, social et culturel", or, following Christina Howells, as "the empirical, personal irrelevancies" of all lived experience.[8] It is only by putting those personal, empirical irrelevancies between parentheses that one might access that which is given intuitively, the essence of consciousness. The illuminative function of the reduction is thus twofold. On the one hand, in suspending the natural attitude, it invites us to "comprendre" and "expliciter" that which often goes unnoticed.[9] On the other, in so doing, it serves to "[faire] voir" or "faire apparaître" the fundamental structures of consciousness.[10]

[5] Paul Ricœur, *A l'école de la phénoménologie*, (Paris: Vrin, 2004), p. 8.
[6] Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Imagination*, (Paris: F. Alcan, 1936), p. 140.; Merleau-Ponty, p. ii.
[7] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions*, (Paris: Hermann, 1965), p. 10.
[8] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Les sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie*, (Paris: Centre de documentation universitaire, 1975), p. 11.; Christina Howells, *Sartre: The Necessity of Freedom*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 7.
[9] Merleau-Ponty, *Les sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie*, p. 20.
[10] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, pp. iii, ix.

The eidetic reduction and intuition are contingent upon a first-person perspective: the philosopher begins with their own lived experience. It would be a mistake, however, to deduce that phenomenology is predicated on relativism. Indeed, part of its appeal for Merleau-Ponty was the promise it held for going beyond what he perceived to be an epistemological impasse in relativist thought: "… restaurer la certitude, restaurer le vrai et le faux …"[11] Its appeal also lay in its refusal of the kinds of truths, and ways of arriving at them, to which traditional schools of thought had tended to subscribe, most notably that of a *pensée de survol*: thought that takes place from outside or above the subject matter. Phenomenology, he argues, is not "la science des vérités éternelles" but that of "l'*omni-temporal*", by which he means "ce qui est valable de tout le temps, plutôt que de vérités qui échapperaient absolument à l'ordre du temps".[12] Herein, the first-person perspective is the only viable threshold that might open onto the universal, or *omni-temporal*, structures of consciousness:

> … le propre du philosophe est bien de considérer sa propre vie dans ce qu'elle a d'individuel, de temporel, de conditionné, comme une vie possible parmi beaucoup d'autres, et dans cette mesure de prendre recul par rapport à ce qu'il est actuellement pour saisir à travers ce qu'il est actuellement tout ce qu'il pourrait être.[13]

The phenomenological method involves a singular agent – the philosopher – but is predicated upon and indeed necessitates the suspension of everything which makes that agent singular:

> … il suffit que je me sois arrêté dans l'établissement de la liste de mes principes de pensée à ce qui est vraiment essentiel, à ce qui vraiment ne peut être détaché en pensée de moi, pour être sûr que cette pensée là est règle pour tous les hommes, est règle pour tout être.[14]

[11] Merleau-Ponty, *Les sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie*, p. 10.
[12] Ibid., p. 11.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., p. 12.

For so long as I effect the reduction, he states, "je ne suis pas enfermé dans quelque particularité de ma vie individuelle, j'accède à un savoir qui est valable pour tous."[15] Sartre shares this view, arguing that after the reduction, we are left with essences, and these are necessarily universal: to the extent that the phenomenological reflection "cherche à saisir les essences", "elle débute en se plaçant d'emblée sur le terrain de l'universel."[16] For both, then, to the extent that it seeks to go beyond the particularities of the philosopher's perspective to uncover the fundamental – universal – structures of consciousness, phenomenology is grounded in a rejection of relativist or objective truths in favour of transcendental ones.

It is precisely its pretension to such truths, and the rejection of idealism and realism that this implied, which drew Sartre and Merleau-Ponty to Husserl's work. Both clearly sought to situate themselves within the field of phenomenology, as evidenced by the title of Merleau-Ponty's text, and the subtitle of Sartre's: *Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*. None the less, the nature of their relation to Husserl – and to Heidegger – has long been a subject of debate. On the one hand, some have accused Sartre of plagiarism on the grounds that *L'Être et le néant* "[transpose] certains thèmes heideggériens", and might thus be seen as little more than a "vulgarisation" of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*.[17] On the other, and somewhat at odds with this first accusation, some scholars believe that existential phenomenology "cannot really be called phenomenology", so great is its departure from Husserl's method.[18] Both French thinkers have been accused of radically deforming the work of their German counterparts: in Sartre's hands, Heidegger's thought "is no longer the same philosophy", "its original structure is crushed as he digests it", while Merleau-Ponty is charged with "dismemberment" of Husserl, whose ideas he "cannibalizes".[19] The case for such claims is strengthened in light of Heidegger's insistence

[15] Ibid., p. 19.
[16] Sartre, *L'Imagination*, p. 140.
[17] Renaut, p. 32.
[18] Whitford, p. 13.
[19] Robert Denoon Cumming, *Phenomenology and Deconstruction*, (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 33.

upon distancing his philosophy from Sartre's in his 1946 'Lettre sur l'humanisme', wherein he "récuse toute paternité vis-à-vis de la tentative sartrienne", stating that there is not "le moindre point commun" between their basic principles.[20] Critics have similarly dismissed his proximity to Husserl, lamenting that he "erases what phenomenology was all about for Husserl".[21] While they vary in tone and substance, these critics share a view of Sartre as operating idiosyncratic readings of German phenomenology: "… il n'est pas un continuateur, même critique de Husserl comme le fut Merleau-Ponty, ou un disciple de Heidegger …"[22] The same has, to some extent, been said of Merleau-Ponty, who, in one scholar's view, "extrapolates from Husserl's later and unpublished writings and develops them in a way which is highly personal and which there is no reason to suppose that Husserl would inevitably have chosen", and, in so doing, effects what another describes as "a highly subjective interpretation of Husserl".[23]

All of the varied and ostensibly contradictory charges made against Sartre and Merleau-Ponty – of plagiarism, of deformation, of misinterpretation, etc. – fall into place if we consider their relation to Husserl and Heidegger to be a primarily critical one. For both French thinkers, the value of phenomenology lies less in what has already been said, but in what might be said, should it be taken in a different direction. They are drawn to Husserl's work not simply because it presents unique opportunity for interrogating existence, but also because that opportunity has not yet, in their view, been adequately exploited. Within such a framework, what appears to be a misreading of Heidegger on Sartre's part might be better regarded as "une prise de distance *délibérée*" that reflects a fundamental difference in their outlooks: "… le prétendu *malentendu* entre Sartre et Heidegger […] s'explicite en réalité comme un *désaccord de fond* — et comme un désaccord parfaitement assumé et maîtrisé par Sartre …"[24] More evidence for such a claim

[20] Renaut, p. 39.
[21] R. Aronson, 'Interpreting Husserl and Heidegger: The Root of Sartre's Thought', *Telos Telos,* 1972 (1972), 51.
[22] Marc Froment-Meurice, *Sartre et l'existentialisme*, (Paris: Nathan, 1984), p. 7.
[23] Whitford, p. 14.; Matthieu Casalis, 'Merleau-Ponty's Philosophical Itinerary: From Phenomenology to Onto-Semiology', *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy,* 6 (1975), 64.
[24] Renaut, pp. 65-66, 69.

comes in Sartre's own recognition, in a footnote in *L'Imagination*, that he is extrapolating from Husserl's writings: "Nous reconnaissons bien volontiers qu'il s'agit ici d'une interprétation que les textes nous ont paru autoriser mais qu'ils ne contraignent pas d'admettre."[25] Time and again, Sartre laments what he regards as lacunae in Husserl's work: "ses remarques", he states on one occasion, "demandent à être approfondies et complétées", while the "explication" given on another "demeure encore très incomplète".[26] Elsewhere, he expands this critique to address phenomenology as a whole: "Mais enfin la phénoménologie est à peine née et toutes ces notions sont fort loin de leur élucidation définitive."[27] Merleau-Ponty articulates a parallel critique. His *Phénoménologie de la perception* strikes out with the claim that phenomenology is far from fully-formed: the question "Qu'est-ce que la phénoménologie?", he asserts, "est pourtant loin d'être résolue".[28] For both, the answer to that question mandates a critical reading of Husserl and Heidegger that refracts each through the other to distil the most productive elements. We find this in Sartre's desire to "bring together the most fruitful themes of both thinkers […] using each as a corrective for the other", and in Merleau-Ponty's will to "mettre en question les présupposés phénoménologiques de Husserl et Heidegger" by "les penser *ensemble*".[29] In a word, the singularity of their interpretations of German phenomenology is not, as some have claimed, a misstep, but in fact a calculated and intentional change of direction.

From abstract to concrete

Sartre and Merleau-Ponty thus share a conviction that phenomenology needs to shift its focus in order to properly account for existence. In this sense, we might grasp their approach less as

[25] Sartre, *L'Imagination*, p. 152.
[26] Ibid., pp. 143-144, 157.
[27] Sartre, *Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions*, p. 12.
[28] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. i.
[29] Aronson, p. 52.; Franck Robert, *Phénoménologie et ontologie: Merleau-Ponty lecteur de Husserl et Heidegger*, (Paris: Harmattan, 2005), pp. 31-32.

a continuation, and more as an adaptation, in line with one scholar's description of Merleau-Ponty's attitude: "… phenomenology must make a radical and fundamental change of orientation…"[30] The imperative for such a "change of orientation", in Sartre's case at least, is grounded in a desire to make use of phenomenology to certain ends: "… loin de s'enfermer *en phénoménologie* comme un sanctuaire, il a inventé un certain *usage* de la phénoménologie pour aller plus loin et frayer sa propre voie."[31] In effect, phenomenology provided the tools necessary for interrogating so many of the themes that came to interest both philosophers in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Some of these themes were already present in Husserl and Heidegger's thought: others were not, and others still held only a peripheral role therein. Sartre wielded phenomenology to explore a range of subjects, initially emotions and imagination, and later, action, freedom, and authenticity, while Merleau-Ponty sought to reflect on a range of existential questions, as Sartre recalls: "La vie, la mort ; l'existence, l'être : pour mener sa double enquête, c'est à ce carrefour qu'il voulut s'établir."[32] Critical to understanding how they each came to ask such questions, and how their respective reorientations of phenomenology took shape, is the historical context, namely, the Second World War. Both locate the war as a turning point in their philosophical trajectories: a shift away from a focus on the individual toward an interest in the collective, or political. "La guerre", Sartre recalls, "a […] divisé ma vie en deux", and this "avant, après" was none other than a "[passage] de l'individualisme et de l'individu pur d'avant la guerre au social".[33] Merleau-Ponty evokes this selfsame evolution, claiming that neither he nor Sartre could continue de "rester neutres", and instead, "[pour] la première fois", had to acknowledge their roles and responsibilities as social actors.[34] Crucially,

[30] Eugene F. Bertoldi, 'Phenomenology of Phenomenology', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy,* 7 (1977), 249.
[31] Florence Caeymaex and Gregory Cormann, 'Sartre en phénoménologie: A propos de "Sartre phénoménologue" (ALTER, "Revue de phénoménologie", n° 10, 2002)', *Études sartriennes,* (2004), 181.
[32] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations, IV: Portraits*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p. 266.
[33] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations, X: Politique et autobiographie*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p. 80.
[34] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'La guerre a eu lieu', in *Sens et non-sens,* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), pp. 169-185 (p. 175).

as Sartre relates, it was precisely this political awakening that concretised their interest in phenomenology, and the directions in which they sought to take it: "… les mots essentiels furent dits ; phénoménologie, existence ; nous découvrîmes notre vrai souci."[35]

If we can speak of a reorientation of Husserl and Heidegger's thought in line with the particular concerns that emerge and are solidified over the course of the conflict, it might be best grasped as a shift from the abstract to the concrete. This is not to claim that, for Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, German phenomenology was not at all concrete, but that it was not *concrete enough* to engage with the manifold existential themes that they sought to interrogate. Scholars have characterised their work in such terms: Sartre can be seen as aiming "[to] break Husserl's study of abstractions, to explore the concrete", while Merleau-Ponty "looks from the standpoint of *praxis* rather than that of *theoria*."[36] Phenomenology in their hands is to become properly existential. Hence Merleau-Ponty takes up Husserl's definition of it as "l'étude des essences", but only insofar as those *essences* are sufficiently concretised: "… une philosophie qui replace les essences dans l'existence".[37] The same might be said of what Heidegger terms "le principe premier de Sartre", his claim that "l'existence précède l'essence", which Pierre Thévénaz has shown to be an inversion of the terms of German phenomenology: "Le rapport de l'essence et de l'existence est renversé : l'existence n'est plus le « complément » de l'essence […] elle apparaît dorénavant comme la condition de possibilité transcendantale de l'essence."[38] More exactly, the shift from abstract to concrete is both motivated by and implies a focus upon lived experience. This is evident as early as the first page of the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, where Merleau-Ponty underscores the imperative to undertake "un compte rendu de l'espace,

[35] Sartre, *Situations, IV*, p. 193.
[36] Aronson, p. 51.; Hwa Yol Jung, 'The Radical Humanization of Politics: Maurice Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy of Politics', *ARSP: Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie / Archives for Philosophy of Law and Social Philosophy,* 53 (1967), 246.
[37] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. i.
[38] Martin Heidegger and Jean Beaufret, *Lettre sur l'humanisme*, (Paris: Aubier, 1964), p. 73.; Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, (Paris: Nagel, 1946), p. 17.; Pierre Thévenaz, 'Qu'est-ce que la phénoménologie?', *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie,* 2 (1952), 300.

du temps, du monde « vécus »".[39] Indeed, he explicitly conceptualises his uptake of Husserl's thought as a process of concretisation that advances through an insistence upon the primacy of lived experience: "Car la Wesenschau, en tant qu'elle est expérience, en tant que l'essence est à saisir à travers l'expérience vécue, sera une connaissance concrète …"[40] He is not alone in this endeavour: scholars have spoken in similar terms of Sartre's phenomenological reflections, arguing that, therein, the "*vécu* phénoménologique acquiert […] une dimension existentielle".[41]

Their desire to reorient phenomenology in line with these more concrete preoccupations itself dictates a remoulding of phenomenology, and notably of its terms, methods, and aims. Hence both philosophers take up concepts central to German phenomenology – intentionality, essence, consciousness – but take care to define them in relation to their particular existential outlooks. This is even more salient in their reproduction of terms used by each of their German predecessors, such as Husserl's *Lebenswelt* (life-world) and Heidegger's *Dasein* (being-there): in Sartre's preferred translation of the latter – *réalité-humaine* – we find a clear desire to rework Heideggerian language to be more reflective of the concrete, lived human experience that he is seeking to place at the heart of his philosophical enquiry. The redefinition of terms runs parallel to a reformulation of the phenomenological method, namely, the eidetic reduction, which they consider to be overly abstract. Indeed, for Sartre, "effectuer une réduction phénoménologique, comme Husserl […] c'est commencer délibérément par l'abstrait."[42] Time and again in *L'Être et le néant*, he questions the feasibility of the reduction, thus demarcating himself from Husserl: "… à supposer que la réduction soit possible – ce qui reste à prouver …"[43] His problematisation of the reduction speaks less to a wholesale abandonment of Husserl's method, and more to a desire to radically revise that method on his terms. Indeed, according to one scholar, ultimately,

[39] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. i.
[40] Merleau-Ponty, *Les sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie*, pp. 18-19. Husserl uses *Wesenschau* to refer to the intuition of essences.
[41] Caeymaex and Cormann, p. 182.
[42] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 38.
[43] Ibid., p. 355.

the reduction does in fact resurface in Sartre's phenomenology: it is none other than what he terms "néantisation".[44] Merleau-Ponty is perhaps less radical than Sartre in his critique of the *epoché*, but insists all the same upon its limitations: "Le plus grand enseignement de la réduction est l'impossibilité d'une réduction complète."[45] This, in his view, does not constitute a departure from German phenomenology: "Voilà pourquoi Husserl s'interroge toujours de nouveau sur la possibilité de la réduction."[46] None the less, his particular framing of those limitations shortly thereafter is strongly suggestive of the existential concerns that structure his singular deployment of the reduction: it is precisely because "nous sommes au monde", and therefore that "nos réflexions prennent place dans le flux temporel qu'elles cherchent à capter", he insists, that "il n'y a pas de pensée qui embrasse toute notre pensée."[47] Both thus maintain a critical distance from the reduction, whose utility they recognise to varying degrees, but only insofar as it is subject to constant evaluation through the prism of lived experience.

A further moment in their respective reworkings of German phenomenology relates to its aims, and principally to its pretension to transcendental truths. On the one hand, both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty broadly concur with the basic epistemological premise of phenomenology, namely, that it is possible and in fact desirable to formulate universal truths from a first-person perspective by going beyond the particularities of that perspective to the fundamental structures of consciousness. And yet, they also share a conviction, itself grounded in their desire to move away from the abstract and toward the concrete, that the transcendental truths thus formulated are dependent upon the world and other subjects given in lived experience. Sartre locates the starting point for absolute truth in the *cogito*: "Il ne peut pas y avoir de vérité autre, au point de départ, que celle-ci : *je pense donc je suis* …"[48] All other truths, he goes on, are grounded in

[44] Thévenaz, p. 298.
[45] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. viii.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., p. ix.
[48] Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, p. 64.

this primary "vérité absolue": "… se saisir sans intermédiaire …"[49] Crucially, as will become clear in our discussion of *autrui*, the *cogito* is for Sartre necessarily and always intersubjective: "Ainsi, l'homme qui s'atteint directement par le *cogito* découvre aussi tous les autres, et il les découvre comme la condition de son existence."[50] It follows, then, that his own pretension to phenomenological truth is not only transcendental, but intersubjective. The same can certainly be said of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, wherein truth and meaning are contingent upon the world and other subjects: "… vérité et valeur ne peuvent être pour nous que le résultat de nos vérifications ou de nos évaluations au contact du monde, devant les autres et dans des situations de connaissance et d'action données …"[51] In this, their shared emphasis on the intersubjective dimension of truth, they communicate a critique of Husserl's model – as overly abstract – in favour of a more concrete epistemological framework. As with the reduction, this is far from a total rejection of that model. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty's own pretension to truth is grounded in the Husserlian universal-singular subject: "C'est dans notre différence même, dans la singularité de notre expérience que s'atteste l'étrange pouvoir qu'elle a de passer en autrui, de réaccomplir les actes d'autrui, et donc que se trouve fondée une vérité …"[52] Rather, it is yet another instance of their reshaping German phenomenology to better acknowledge and respond to existential themes, and to properly take stock of lived experience.

Divergences and accords

Thus far, our study of the ways in which Sartre and Merleau-Ponty reorient phenomenology has tended to present their projects as a coherent whole. While they do share many of the same concerns, and are bound up in a common movement, any comparative appraisal of their work

[49] Ibid., pp. 64-65.
[50] Ibid., p. 66.
[51] Merleau-Ponty, 'La métaphysique dans l'homme', p. 116.
[52] Ibid., pp. 114-115.

would be incomplete if it did not also acknowledge and address the critical differences between those projects, many of which emerge most forcefully on questions of the body and *autrui*. To do so, we must take each in turn, beginning first with Sartre, before turning to Merleau-Ponty: given that the *Phénoménologie de la perception* is, at least at times, a response to *L'Être et le néant*, published two years prior, such a chronology will ground a fuller appreciation of both texts in context. Sartre is primarily interested in the earlier Husserl, notably as found in the *Ideen*, as well as in Heidegger, whose influence comes through in the focus upon ontology, the use of terms such as *Dasein*, and the interest in themes like authenticity. More so than Merleau-Ponty, his engagement with phenomenology might be best comprehended as an appropriation of its methods and concepts, notably insofar as they allowed him to explore certain pre-existing themes, and, to some degree, to justify certain pre-existing convictions. Hence, Alain Renaut regards his relation to Husserl as less a "découverte patiente d'une œuvre par un jeune auteur respectueux et désireux de s'instruire" than "une mobilisation passionnée, animée par le désir frénétique d'arracher à la phénoménologie tout ce qu'elle pouvait apporter à l'accomplissement d'un programme d'ores et déjà sartrien".[53] This view is shared by Marc Froment-Meurice, who conceives of Sartre's approach to his predecessors in terms of instrumentality: "La pensée des autres, fût-elle la plus forte, n'est jamais pour lui qu'un instrument. Il l'adapte à ses propres, et quand il estime ne plus en avoir besoin, il s'empare d'une autre."[54]

What is this "programme d'ores et déjà sartrien" that phenomenology was mobilised to realise? Sartre is principally concerned with interrogating the conditions of subjectivity, so much so that he has often faced charges of solipsism, or individualism.[55] More precisely, he is concerned with uncovering the conditions of a practical subject insofar as this might ground a subsequent interrogation of questions of freedom, action, and authenticity. This, for Renaut,

[53] Renaut, p. 132.
[54] Froment-Meurice, p. 7.
[55] Daniels, p. 383.

lies at the heart of his radical reorientation of Heidegger's thought: "Recherchant les conditions d'un sauvetage du sujet, Sartre a orienté la phénoménologie dans une direction diamétralement opposée à celle qu'avait voulu lui imprimer Heidegger …"[56] In a word, his phenomenological ontology turns out to be a calculated and singular reformulation of his German predecessor's thought so as to properly account for a concrete – practical – subject. Hence, he empties out Husserl's consciousness, leaving nothing but *être* and *néant*, and shifts the resultant ontology, itself indebted to Heidegger, onto the register of the human, both of which are vital precursors to a later discussion of freedom, and responsibility. Discussions such as this reveal the breadth of his ambitions for phenomenology: in moving through questions of authenticity and bad faith, to those of freedom and responsibility, and finally onto a *psychanalyse existentielle*, which we might consider to be entirely foreign to Husserl and Heidegger, we can trace the manifold ways in which Sartre mobilised their work. In effect, one of the primary terms of his philosophy, the *être-pour-soi*, itself a composite of Husserl's conception of consciousness, and Heidegger's ontology, is explicitly posited as the foundation of his *pyschanalyse existentielle*.[57] What is more, the project and nature of that *psychanalyse existentielle* – "*dégager* le sens [du choix du pour-soi]" and "comprendre l'*individuel*" – reflect a search for meaning through and beyond a purely ontological account of existence, which turns out to be both the culmination and logical conclusion of his reorientation of phenomenology.[58] This is perhaps the most lucid expression of his phenomenological project: away from what he regards as the abstractions of his German predecessors, and toward the concrete conditions and meanings of a practical human subject.

We might, at this juncture, remark a primary distinction between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies: if Sartre can be seen to distance himself from German phenomenology, his contemporary is often considered "un continuateur, même critique de Husserl".[59] In effect,

[56] Renaut, p. 153.
[57] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 602.
[58] Ibid., pp. 595, 619.
[59] Froment-Meurice, p. 7.

against the Sartrean relation to phenomenology as primarily a tool for interrogating pre-existing themes, Merleau-Ponty appears more invested in phenomenology itself than in its utilisation to a particular end. This is not to say that Merleau-Ponty does not also make use of Husserl and Heidegger to explore existential themes, far from it. But his own relation to their work is less one of instrumentality, and more one of adaptation. To some extent, the divergences in their approaches might be attributed to their focus on different moments in Husserl's thought. Sartre not only preferred the latter's earlier work, but was openly critical of his later reflections: "Et c'est bien, malheureusement, l'orientation de la nouvelle pensée de Husserl …"[60] Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, is far more interested in these later articulations, notably because they were marked by a shift to more existential concerns, such as the *Lebenswelt* (life-world) and intersubjectivity: "… à mesure que Husserl avance […] le rapport à autrui, comme en général le rapport de la conscience avec le corps s'approfondit."[61] In a word, where Sartre is primarily engaging with the most abstract iterations of the Husserlian project, and therefore adopting a more critical and radical stance, Merleau-Ponty is principally concerned with the most concrete ones, so that his attitude is more constructive. He is looking to take up and rework the nascent existential themes found therein: "En présentant les choses comme je le fais je pousse Husserl plus loin qu'il n'a voulu aller lui-même …"[62] Ultimately, he wants to see what phenomenology might do, should it be run through to what he perceives as its logical conclusions. This grounds a further feature of Merleau-Ponty's project that distinguishes it from Sartre's, namely, a desire to bring phenomenology into contact with the human sciences, and in so doing "reprendre un à un les acquis des sciences humaines dans une perspective phénoménologique".[63] Herein lies

[60] Jean-Paul Sartre, *La transcendance de l'ego et Conscience de soi et connaissance de soi: précédés de Une idée fondamentale de la phénoménologie de Husserl: l'intentionalité*, (Paris: Vrin, 2003), p. 99.
[61] Merleau-Ponty, *Les sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie*, p. 58.
[62] Ibid., p. 43.
[63] Dosse, p. 17.

the singularity of his thought. Like Husserl, he perceives a crisis in philosophy and the human sciences. And, like Husserl, he regards phenomenology as the solution to that crisis.

If there is a driving force behind Merleau-Ponty's reworking of phenomenology, it is arguably a search for meaning. Sartre makes this plain: "… voilà par quels détours il vint à la philosophie. Il s'étonna, rien de plus : tout est joué d'abord et pourtant l'on continue ; pourquoi ? Pourquoi mener une vie disqualifiée par des absences ? Et qu'est-ce que vivre ?"[64] Hence his interest in the later Husserl, who is asking, following Michel Lefeuvre, the questions Merleau-Ponty is seeking to answer: "… comment penser le sens en son ancrage dans le monde sensible, dans le monde vécu, comment décrire l'émergence même du sens, sa genèse, son historicité ?"[65] Indeed, according to one of his contemporaries, Jean Hyppolite, this search for meaning motivates his particular reworking of Husserl's thought: he "[reprend] le problème des choses elles-mêmes là où Husserl l'avait laissé, au niveau du monde perçu, berceau de toutes les significations", and "[rattache] la problématique du sens et des significations à l'exploration de l'expérience vécue."[66] In concrete terms, as the title of his 1945 work suggests, the reorientation of phenomenology around questions of "sens" and "signification" translates to a focus upon perception, which moves from a peripheral concern, in Husserl's thought, to a central one, in Merleau-Ponty's. Crucial, here, is the primacy that this shift grants to the body: against Husserl's treatment of perception, which reflects a clear privilege of consciousness over the body, Merleau-Ponty insists upon its centrality, thus placing the body at the heart of his inquiry. In other words, his is less "une phénoménologie de la conscience *plutôt que* du corps", to take up Franck Robert's description of Husserl's thought, and more *une phénoménologie de la conscience* autant que *du corps*.[67] In formulating this, a phenomenology of consciousness as

[64] Sartre, *Situations, IV*, p. 191.
[65] Michel Lefeuvre, *Merleau-Ponty au-delà de la phénoménologie: du corps, de l'être et du langage*, (Paris: Klincksieck, 1976), p. 13.
[66] Jean Hyppolite, *Sens et existence dans la philosophie de Maurice Merleau-Ponty: the Zaharoff Lecture for 1963*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 4.
[67] Robert, p. 26. [my italics]

incarnate, Merleau-Ponty creates the conditions for an interrogation of another theme that had only briefly emerged in Husserl and Heidegger's work: intersubjectivity. In fact, according to Hwa Yol Jung, the emphasis he places upon perception and the body make possible an account of the social world that was simply beyond the scope of his German predecessors.[68] There is a certain irony here: in pursuing the very existential inquiries that draw Merleau-Ponty to Husserl and Heidegger, he comes up against the limits of their thought. It is in this sense that we might see his reorientation of phenomenology onto more concrete ground – perception, the body, the social world – less as a departure, and more as a continuation, one whose apparent infidelity to that work is in fact symptomatic of a desire to stay faithful to its most fundamental principles.

It thus becomes clear that while Sartre and Merleau-Ponty share many central concerns, notably a will to move from the abstract to the concrete, they diverge in both the nature of their existential concerns, and the particular direction in which they take phenomenology. In part, at least, these divergences reflect their focus upon different moments in Husserl's thought, itself grounded in "a considerable difference in their philosophical aims": "the relation between pre-reflective experience and conceptualization", for Merleau-Ponty, and "the problem of human freedom and its implications", for Sartre.[69] They share a common ambition – "to elucidate the relationship between consciousness and its world" – but not a common impetus: that ambition is motivated by a desire "to define the nature and the limits of our *understanding* of the world", in Merleau-Ponty's case, and "to provide the basis for a philosophy of *action*", in Sartre's.[70] This, in turn, foregrounds distinctive readings of Husserl, as is clear where they discuss each other's work. Sartre's portrait of Merleau-Ponty is especially insightful: "… nous poursuivîmes nos lectures et nos recherches ; au même rythme mais séparément …"[71] In retrospect, he notes, dissonances in their readings of Husserl and Heidegger were manifest from the outset:

[68] Jung, pp. 246-247.
[69] Whitford, p. 9.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Sartre, *Situations, IV*, p. 194.

> Seul, chacun se fût trop aisément persuadé d'avoir compris l'idée phénoménologique ; à deux, nous en incarnions l'un pour l'autre l'ambiguïté : c'est que chacun saisissait comme une déviation inattendue de son propre travail le travail étranger, parfois ennemi, qui se faisait en l'autre.[72]

Merleau-Ponty, for his part, is a vocal critic of Sartre's idiosyncratic readings: "Ce grief n'est absolument pas fondé, si l'on se reporte à ce que Husserl voulait."[73] There are, at the most basic level, significant disparities in their engagements with phenomenology, which both reflect and reinforce divergences in the driving concerns behind their respective philosophical projects.

These moments of dissonance in the foundations of their phenomenological inquiries foreground resultant distinctions in their theories. In this respect, Christina Howells has pointed to "clear differences between Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, especially with respect to the role of the body" that set their reflections against one another.[74] This is clear in the very framings of their works: *L'Être et le néant* is primarily an ontology, as the subtitle – 'Essai d'une ontologie phénoménologique' – sets out, while the *Phénoménologie de la perception* takes the latter term – perception – as its centrepiece. Indeed, following Howells, we might read Merleau-Ponty's philosophy as in some sense antagonistic to Sartre's: "… he emphasises precisely those aspects of existence that he believes Sartre puts in question, arguing that habit and sedimented structures are what enable us to function in the world and to see it clearly…"[75] Perhaps the most oft-cited point of discord lies in their accounts of intersubjectivity. If, as we have seen, Sartre has often been subject to accusations of solipsism, the opposite might be said of Merleau-Ponty, who has regularly been lauded for his emphasis upon the social. "To Sartre's philosophy of subjectivity," Whitford states, "he opposes a philosophy of intersubjectivity."[76] While the

[72] Ibid., p. 194-195.
[73] Merleau-Ponty, *Les sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie*, p. 47.
[74] Christina Howells, *Mortal Subjects: Passions of the Soul in Late Twentieth-Century French Thought*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), p. 46.
[75] Ibid., p. 43.
[76] Whitford, p. 24.

charge of solipsism so often levelled at Sartre merits scrutiny, as we shall see, this is something that Merleau-Ponty himself laments in his appraisal of Sartre's work: "Cette théorie du social, *L'Etre et le Néant* ne nous la donne pas encore."[77] He does so, however, precisely because he considers him to have provided a novel problematisation of the question of other subjects and the social world: "… il pose le problème des relations réciproques entre la conscience et le monde social de la manière la plus vigoureuse …"[78] Indeed, somewhat ironically, we might consider intersubjectivity to be a moment of basic coherence between their respective projects: for both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, the shift from abstract to concrete points to a conception of the subject as in the world, and among other subjects. There are, of course, critical moments of discordance between their thought, but to argue that Sartre's is a philosophy of subjectivity, and Merleau-Ponty's a philosophy of intersubjectivity, is to misread *L'Être et le néant*, and distract from other, crucial instances of disagreement, most notably in their treatment of *autrui*.

Many scholars who have taken up this conceptualisation of the relation between their works are in fact building upon Merleau-Ponty's own critiques of Sartre. In effect, if we take those critiques at face value, we necessarily see their projects as divergent, if not fundamentally antagonistic to one another. If, on the other hand, we subject them to scrutiny, a picture emerges less of an antagonism, and more of a proximity between their reflections. We might begin by noting, with Whitford, that Merleau-Ponty's criticism of Sartre is symptomatic of an anxiety to stress the originality of his work, which leads him to be overly critical of his contemporary: "… areas of divergence are dwelt on; points of convergence receive little more than a mention."[79] Further, if Howells gestures towards "clear differences" in their work, she also points to moments of harmony: "This is the conclusion to *Phénoménologie de la perception*, it could equally well be part of *L'Etre et le Néant*."[80] Sartre and Merleau-Ponty do diverge in

[77] Merleau-Ponty, 'La querelle de l'existentialisme', p. 100.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Whitford, p. 10.
[80] Howells, *Mortal Subjects*, p. 45.

significant ways, as we shall see in our study of the body and *autrui*, but those do not detract in any meaningful way from the basic coherence between their reflections, to the extent that we might view them as bound up in a common project: that of existential phenomenology. In essence, returning to Whitford, their phenomenological enquiries share a "central theme": "the relationship between consciousness and its world", and "between activity and passivity in the creation and acceptance of meaning".[81] And the same basic aim for phenomenology: "… a new definition of the consciousness/world relationship."[82] Sartre's account concurs with this view: "Nous avions un même désir : sortir du tunnel, voir clair."[83] Indeed, Sartre provides us with perhaps the most lucid description of their relation to one another: "Trop individualistes pour mettre en commun nos recherches, nous devînmes réciproques en restant séparés."[84] He speaks of their proximity in language that indicates distance: "Nous étions des égaux, des amis, non pas des semblables …"[85] Sartre is inviting us to observe the relation between their thought as he does, through a prism of individuality, and reciprocity. To do so is not to deny the powerful tension that subtends that relation, but to see it as uniquely productive, rather than destructive.

Theories of the body

In this light, moments of dissonance between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's inquiries turn out to be a symbol not of their distance, but of their imbrication in a mutual philosophical endeavour, namely, existential phenomenology. Just as a musical note can only sound off-key in the context of a harmony, such moments stand out precisely to the extent that they signal the limits of sympathy between their theories. It follows, then, that points of disagreement might be fertile

[81] Whitford, p. 13.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Sartre, *Situations, IV*, p. 206.
[84] Ibid., p. 193.
[85] Ibid., p. 189.

ground for an appraisal of their basic affinities, as well as of their wider philosophies, and of existential phenomenology. The imperative to read Sartre and Merleau-Ponty both with and against each other thus impresses its urgency: such a reading favours the localisation and exploitation of sources of friction between their reflections. This is nowhere more true than on the questions at the heart of this thesis: the body, and *autrui*. Not only are these questions central to our study of bodily otherness: they are also some of the principle fault lines along which Sartre and Merleau-Ponty come into conflict. Hence, a thorough interrogation of their theories of the body, and *autrui*, will not only ground a comprehensive understanding of these theories. It will also shed further light upon the broader relation between their work, and upon existential phenomenology as a whole. Therein, for both, albeit in distinct ways, the body plays a primordial role in our relation to *autrui*: it is that through which we encounter other subjects. Further, many of their disagreements with regard to *autrui* turn out to be anchored in a more fundamental conflict, that between their theories of the body. In this optic, our reflection will open with the body, and move through to *autrui*, with a view to foregrounding a more holistic appreciation of their accounts of both, and the relation between them.

To examine such disagreements is not to posit Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies as fundamentally antagonistic. Quite the opposite: the aim is to parse the discordances so as to better appreciate their harmony on so many basic questions. If scholarship on the body in their work has tended to dwell on these discordances, at the expense of recognising their affinities, this is likely a symptom of Merleau-Ponty's own insistence upon the differences between their theories of corporeality. And to his apparent desire to distance himself from Sartre, one which only hardened in the later years of his life. The present study is principally concerned with his position at the time of the publication of the *Phénoménologie de la perception*. While there are clear critiques of Sartre's conception of the body therein, care must be taken not to confound them with those found in later works, such as his *Les Aventures de la dialectique* or *Le Visible*

et l'invisible, by which point his stance is far more severe. A reading of such works may prove informative for the present study, so long as it takes stock of the shift in his intellectual position: as and when we do engage with them, it will be in this light. Indeed, while there are some real points of divergence in their discussions of the body, they are rarely highlighted by Merleau-Ponty, who tends instead to stress other points of conflict grounded in his own idiosyncratic and, as we shall see, highly contentious reading of Sartre's work. As such, scholarship that takes up his reading of Sartre uncritically tends not to do justice to either of their accounts. This is perhaps most salient on the question of the significance of the body in their work. On the one hand, it would be wrong to claim, as some critics, following the later Merleau-Ponty, have done, that Sartre disregards or fails to account for the body. On the other, there is some weight to the claim that the body is more central to Merleau-Ponty's thought. In *L'Être et le néant*, it is one of several features of conscious existence to be accounted for in the terms of Sartre's ontology: in the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, it figures as the cornerstone of a philosophy of worldly, embodied consciousness. Hence, Sartre is able to formulate his ontology of being and nothingness, and to begin his treatment of *autrui*, before turning to the body. This is not incidental, but intentional: "Il n'entre pas dans notre dessein de méconnaître ou de négliger le rôle du corps. Mais il importe avant tout, en ontologie comme partout ailleurs, d'observer dans le discours un ordre rigoureux."[86] In contrast, Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the body precedes and grounds that of most other aspects of lived experience, such as the world, and *autrui*. His is a phenomenology of perception, wherein the body is the absolute and defining centre. There is, then, a clear difference in the emphasis that they place upon the body, one which is indicative of deeper conflicts between their philosophical projects. And yet, to conceive of this difference in absolute terms – of absence in Sartre, and presence in Merleau-Ponty –, is not only to misread their theories of corporeality. It is also to obscure the very real divergences between them.

[86] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 255.

Indeed, a comparative reading of the theories of corporeality found in *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception* reveals them to be far more concordant than much of the literature would suggest. For one, they begin from the same starting point: the belief that earlier philosophies have failed to adequately account for the nature of the body and its role in lived experience, or its relation to the mind. Both are concerned with demonstrating not only that idealism and realism have yet to provide such an account, but also that no coherent theory of the body can be produced on idealist or realist terms. Where Merleau-Ponty candidly lays out his aspirations in the *Phénoménologie de la perception* – "… dépasser définitivement la dichotomie classique du sujet et de l'objet …" – we find a refusal of those terms, as well as a further moment of consonance with Sartre: a desire to conclusively refute substance dualism, and as such dualist conceptualisations of the body as distinct from the mind.[87] Hence, both he and Sartre critique the ways in which science and psychology tend to conceive of the body, as an organism or mechanism separate from the mind: for Merleau-Ponty, "l'homme […] n'est pas un psychisme *joint* à un organisme", while, for Sartre, the *être-pour-soi*, the mode of being of consciousness, "ne saurait être *uni* à un corps"[88]. Neither looks to deny that the body exists as a kind of object. Rather, they take issue with a view of the body as *nothing more than an object*, insofar as this view fatally misunderstands its nature, and its role in lived experience. To this end, they distinguish between the body as object – *le corps-objet* or *le corps objectif* – and the body as lived – Sartre's *corps-pour-moi* and Merleau-Ponty's *corps phénoménal*. In a word, the body does exist as a kind of object, but it does not exist as such *for consciousness*. Taking up Merleau-Ponty: "… le corps objectif n'est pas la vérité du corps phénoménal, c'est-à-dire la vérité du corps tel que nous le vivons …"[89] It is here that they locate the failure of scientific and earlier philosophical accounts of the body, whose error is to begin with the body-

[87] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 203.
[88] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 104.; Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 344. [my italics]
[89] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 493.

as-object and not the body-as-lived. For Sartre, the problem of the relation between body and mind is "souvent obscurci par le fait qu'on pose de prime abord le corps comme une certaine *chose*", while, for Merleau-Ponty, "le problème des relations de l'âme et du corps ne concerne pas le corps objectif qui n'a qu'une existence conceptuelle, mais le corps phénoménal."[90] They thus frame their discussions of the body in similar ways: a rejection of substance dualism, along with those conceptual frameworks predicated upon it, and a parallel conviction that the answer to the mind-body problem is not to be found in the body-as-object, but in the body-as-lived.

The proximity in their framings of the question foreshadows several significant points of agreement in their respective solutions to it. Most notably, both look to overcome substance dualism by conceiving of consciousness as necessarily incarnate. Hence Merleau-Ponty refers to the subject as a *sujet incarné* throughout his work, and describes conscious existence as "une incarnation perpétuelle".[91] Sartre, too, is at pains to show that the body is part of consciousness, and views the body as "une structure consciente de ma conscience".[92] Herein lies his solution to the mind-body problem: "… il n'est pas vrai […] que l'union de l'âme et du corps soit le rapprochement contingent de deux substances radicalement distinctes ; mais, au contraire, il découle nécessairement de la nature du pour-soi qu'il soit corps …"[93] Elsewhere, Simone de Beauvoir's defence of his philosophy echoes this conception of consciousness: "Ma conscience ne peut dépasser le monde qu'en s'y engageant […] et c'est pourquoi il n'y a de conscience qu'incarnée."[94] For Sartre, consciousness must be incarnate, because it is in the world, and the body is the "condition nécessaire de l'existence d'un monde".[95] This recalls Merleau-Ponty's view, within which the body figures variously as the "médiateur" and "pivot" of the world, and

[90] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 342.; Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 493.
[91] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 194.
[92] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 369.
[93] Ibid., p. 349.
[94] Simone de Beauvoir, 'Merleau-Ponty et le pseudo-sartrisme', in *Privilèges,* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), pp. 201-272 (p. 207).
[95] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 368.

indeed as "notre moyen général d'avoir un monde"[96]. The body is that through which we have a world and indeed the foundation of our being-in-the-world, what Sartre terms our *être-dans-le-monde* – "… ma facticité d'être « au-milieu-du-monde » en tant que je la dépasse vers mon être dans le monde …" – and Merleau-Ponty our *être-au-monde*, "le véhicule de l'être au monde"[97]. And this *être-au-monde* is a concrete experience of being in the world: "… se joindre à un milieu défini, se confondre avec certains projets et s'y engager continuellement".[98]

Here we find a further point of concordance: that if the body grounds our being-in-the-world, it does so through intentionality, the term used by both, following Husserl, to describe the relation between actual or possible acts of consciousness, and their correlates in the world. The body is not simply a neutral hinge or bridge between consciousness and the world: it is a part of consciousness and shapes our intentional engagement in the world precisely and only insofar as it enables and realises perceptions, actions, and projects therein. The body is thus a "système d'actions possibles" and a "posture en vue d'une certaine tâche actuelle ou possible", for Merleau-Ponty, while, for Sartre, it manifests the "possibilités que je *suis*".[99] Consequently, it is the foundation of our *situation*, our position in the world as natural, social and historical beings. Indeed, following Sartre, "le corps ne se distingue pas de la *situation* du pour-soi, puisque, pour le pour-soi, exister et se situer ne font qu'un".[100] Merleau-Ponty concurs: "… notre corps n'est que cette situation même en tant qu'elle est réalisée et effective."[101] Further, the body is that which gives us the world, not as an objective or abstract reality, but, in Sartrean terms, as the "l'esquisse énorme de toutes mes actions possibles."[102] The body thus figures as the "ordre du monde", for Sartre, and as a "certain montage à l'égard du monde", for Merleau-

[96] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, pp. 169, 97, 171.
[97] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 399.; Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 97.
[98] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 97.
[99] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, pp. 289, 116.; Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 362.
[100] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 348.
[101] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, pp. 391-392.
[102] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 362.

Ponty.[103] Indeed, for the latter, to have a body is "être noué à un certain monde"; insofar as our body determines our possibilities for action in the world, it shapes the way the world appears, and thus our experience of and in it.[104] This claim hinges upon a further moment of consonance in their discussions of corporeality, namely, the belief that the body is *contingent*. Sartre describes it as "*la forme contingente que prend la nécessité de ma contingence*".[105] The nature and capacities of my body are not general or predetermined, they are contingent: they are the way they are, but they could have been otherwise. In other words, the body that determines our possibilities for action and our experience in and of the world is not neutral or abstract. It is a specific body, with unique capacities and limitations, so that these possibilities and experiences in the world are also particular and unique. This does not mean that our bodies are arbitrary for us, as Merleau-Ponty makes plain: "… il ne m'est pas seulement essentiel d'avoir un corps, mais même d'avoir ce corps-ci."[106] In fact, the contingent form of my body as the vector of my actual or possible engagement in the world grounds my individuality. For Sartre, the body "représente l'individuation de mon engagement dans le monde", while, for Merleau-Ponty, the subject "ne réalise son ipséité qu'en étant effectivement corps et en étant par ce corps dans le monde".[107] They thus agree on several major points: that consciousness is incarnate, and that the body – as contingent – grounds our experience in the world, and our individuality.

Sartre's body: *en-soi* and *pour-soi*

This is not to say that they conceive of the body in entirely homogenous ways. In fact, there are some basic and crucial differences between their accounts, both in terms of their focus and

[103] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 332.; Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 350.
[104] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 173.
[105] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 348.
[106] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 493.
[107] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 349.; Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 467.

the conclusions they draw. Given that Merleau-Ponty's is to some extent a response to the one formulated in *L'Être et le néant*, we will study them in turn, beginning with Sartre's. His account of the body must be understood in the context of his ontology of being and nothingness, or, more accurately, as a development and consolidation of that ontology. Therein, *être-en-soi* is the mode of being ascribed to objects, while *être-pour-soi* is the mode of being ascribed to consciousness. For Sartre, consciousness originates at birth with an original tearing away – *arrachement* – of the *pour-soi* from the *en-soi*, that which is fixed. Henceforth, the *pour-soi*, or consciousness, is separated from the *en-soi* by nothingness – *néant* – and is condemned to perpetually try to rejoin the *en-soi*, without success: to do so would signal the end of consciousness, or death. Insofar as the body has a material reality, the body figures as *en-soi*, or that which the *pour-soi* must ceaselessly attempt to rejoin in the movement of existence. The body as *en-soi* is *facticité*: "… la facticité, c'est-à-dire notre existence comme corps au milieu du monde."[108] The *facticité* of the body is not merely its materiality in the present, but everything about the self which is fixed: "Naissance, passé, contingence, nécessité de point de vue, condition de fait de toute action possible sur le monde : tel est le *corps*, tel qu'il est *pour moi*."[109] As such, the body as *facticité* manifests our contingency: "… s'il est nécessaire que je sois engagé dans tel ou tel point de vue, il est contingent que ce soit précisément dans celui-ci …"[110] Further, the body as *facticité* grounds our situation: "… la situation trahit ma *facticité*, c'est-à-dire le fait que les choses *sont là* simplement comme elles sont, sans nécessité ni possibilité d'être autrement, et que je *suis là* parmi elles". At all of these levels, the body is the *dépassé*, insofar as it figures as the *en-soi* which the *pour-soi* must take up and go beyond in its intentional existence in the world: "… le corps ne peut être que le dépassé : il est ce que je dépasse […] et ce que j'aurai perpétuellement à dépasser …"[111] In other words, consciousness

[108] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 401.
[109] Ibid., p. 367.
[110] Ibid., p. 348.
[111] Ibid., p. 365.

never experiences the body as *en-soi*, and if the body is a kind of object, it can never be an object *for us*. Neither is the body solely *en-soi*, as Sartre makes clear: "… il n'est pas un en-soi dans le pour-soi, car alors il figerait tout."[112] The body is not only *en-soi*, but also *pour-soi*. Indeed, insofar as we experience our own body, it is *pour-soi*. The body-as-lived, for Sartre, is "rien d'autre que le pour-soi".[113] Herein lies Sartre's original solution to substance dualism: granting the body a dual or ambiguous ontological status. Put simply, the mind-body problem is no longer *a problem*, because the body is both *en-soi* and *pour-soi*, both object and subject, and it is precisely this duality that grounds consciousness as incarnate.

In light of this discussion of Sartre's theory of the body, we might be surprised to find that one of Merleau-Ponty's most consistent critiques of this theory was that it not only fails to refute but indeed reproduces substance dualism. According to Margaret Whitford: "At one time or another in the course of his criticism, he accuses Sartre of reinstating all the familiar dualisms: subject/object, mind/body, interior/exterior, consciousness/world, active/passive, being/nothingness."[114] While Merleau-Ponty's stance certainly grows more polarised later in his life, we can nonetheless locate the germ of such a critique in the *Phénoménologie de la perception*. Notably, he problematises any theory of existence that makes a distinction between *en-soi* and *pour-soi*, which he sees, respectively, as synonymous with the "physiologique" and the "psychique", on the grounds that, from the perspective of existence, "ils ne se distinguent plus comme l'ordre de l'en soi et l'ordre du pour soi, et [ils] sont tous deux orientés vers un pôle intentionnel ou vers un monde."[115] Even where he publicly defended Sartre's thought, in his 1945 'La Querelle de l'existentialisme', he considers it to be "trop exclusivement antithétique", and laments "l'antithèse du pour soi et de l'en soi [qui] font souvent figure d'alternatives, au lieu d'être décrites comme le lien vivant de l'un des termes à l'autre et comme

[112] Ibid., p. 348.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Whitford, p. 23.
[115] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 103.

leur communication."[116] This echoes his assertion in the *Phénoménologie de la perception* that the mind-body problem "ne se résout que si l'on cesse de distinguer le corps comme mécanisme en soi et la conscience comme être pour soi".[117] Indeed, as Christina Howells has argued, Merleau-Ponty's basic contention is that Sartre's ontology precludes the very non-dualist model of the body which the latter is looking to espouse: "… despite Sartre's insistence that the body represents the situation and the *soi* of the *pour-soi* […,] Merleau-Ponty cannot accept that this is even really thinkable for Sartre, given his description of the *pour-soi* as a *néant*."[118] Simply put, for Merleau-Ponty, insofar as it is articulated in the terms of his ontology, Sartre's theory of the body is not wilfully dualist, but inevitably so.

Merleau-Ponty is not alone in such a critique. Whitford, for example, has argued that Sartre "cuts the ground from under his own feet" insofar as the ontological categories of *en-soi* and *pour-soi* "reintroduce the dichotomy he has been trying to avoid".[119] Others, however, have sought to demonstrate that Merleau-Ponty fatally misconstrues the position adopted by Sartre in *L'Être et le néant*. Perhaps the most vocal such counter-critiques is Simone de Beauvoir: "Contre *la Nausée*, *l'Être et le néant*, contre tout ce que Sartre a écrit, il maintient que le sartrisme ne connaît rien entre le sujet et l'en-soi."[120] His major error, in her view, is that he confounds consciousness with subjectivity: "Pour Sartre, la conscience, pure présence à soi, n'est pas un sujet …"[121] In doing so, he is unable to grasp Sartre's account of consciousness and of the body in the actual terms of his ontology, and is therefore condemned to misinterpret that account as dualistic. Howells, too, regards Merleau-Ponty's reading of Sartre's philosophy as overly reductive: "… Merleau-Ponty can be seen to simplify Sartre's position and push him

[116] Merleau-Ponty, 'La querelle de l'existentialisme', pp. 89-90.
[117] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 163.
[118] Howells, *Mortal Subjects*, pp. 43-44.
[119] Whitford, p. 19.
[120] Beauvoir, 'Merleau-Ponty et le pseudo-sartrisme', p. 209.
[121] Ibid., p. 205.

towards the very dualism he is striving so strenuously to avoid."[122] Against Merleau-Ponty and Whitford, she contends that Sartre's view of the relationship between mind and body is "resolutely anti-dualist", not only in intention, but in practice. [123] Further, Merleau-Ponty's own position in 1945 is somewhat equivocal. If, at times, he appears to claim that *L'Être et le néant* fails to refute substance dualism, elsewhere he defends it as an anti-dualist work: "… nous ne sommes pas esprit *et* corps, conscience *en face du* monde, mais esprit incarné, être-au-monde."[124] There is a certain ambiguity in Merleau-Ponty's critique, which we might attribute, as Howells does, to his "desire to mark himself off from Sartre and demonstrate his own originality."[125] It is this desire, following Whitford, which leads him to "overemphasize certain aspects of Sartre at the expense of others", so much so that, returning to Howells, he ultimately detracts from the very real points of conflict between their theories of the body.[126] There is, then, a certain irony here: while there are "clear differences" between their theories, "especially with respect to the role of the body", Merleau-Ponty "unintentionally masks these".[127] Sartre's account of the body is not impervious to criticism, nor does it align entirely with the one given by Merleau-Ponty, but charges of dualism only serve to detract from both of these realities.

Merleau-Ponty's body: *schéma corporel*, *corps sujet*

Why, then, does he level the charges he does at Sartre? The answer, for Whitford, lies in "his own preoccupations": he "[does] less than justice to the more positive aspects of Sartre's philosophy because he tends to discard all those elements which he cannot make use of for his

[122] Howells, *Mortal Subjects*, p. 42.
[123] Ibid., p. 26.
[124] Merleau-Ponty, 'La querelle de l'existentialisme', p. 92.
[125] Howells, *Mortal Subjects*, p. 46.
[126] Whitford, pp. 26, 10.; Howells, *Mortal Subjects*, p. 46.
[127] Howells, *Mortal Subjects*, p. 46.

own purposes."[128] Which "preoccupations" and "purposes" motivate Merleau-Ponty's account of the body? Like Sartre, he is writing against dualistic models of embodiment. Crucially, however, he regards *L'Être et le néant* as one such model. He makes his intentions clear early in his discussion of the body in the *Phénoménologie de la perception*:

> Nous ne pouvons demeurer dans cette alternative de ne rien comprendre au sujet ou de ne rien comprendre à l'objet. Il faut que nous retrouvions l'origine de l'objet au cœur même de notre expérience, que nous décrivions l'apparition de l'être et que nous comprenions comment paradoxalement il y a *pour nous* de *l'en soi*.[129]

Herein, we find not only a refusal of substance dualism, but a further foundational moment in the genesis of his theory of the body: the belief that it lies at the heart of existence. In seeking to reconceptualise the body on these terms, he formulates radical new theories of embodiment that indicate the scope and significance of its role in lived experience. The first of such theories is the *schéma corporel*. For Merleau-Ponty, we don't experience our body as an object, but as a posture in light of actual or possible acts in the world: our body-as-lived, or *corps phénoménal*, is not an "assemblage d'organes juxtaposés dans l'espace", but an integrated whole.[130] It is precisely the *schéma corporel* that guarantees our experience of our bodies as such an integrated whole in light of our possibilities for action in the world. We find compelling evidence of the *schéma corporel* in everyday life: when faced with familiar objects or tasks, we don't have to locate and mobilise each individual body part: we move our whole body, at once and in cohesion.[131] In a word, at the level of the *corps phénoménal*, the body is not "des os, des muscles, des nerfs", but "des puissances déjà mobilisées par la perception", which are underwritten by the *schéma corporel*.[132] It is thus a basic structure of our intentional existence

[128] Whitford, p. 10.
[129] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 86.
[130] Ibid., p. 114.
[131] Ibid., p. 123.
[132] Ibid.

in the world, one so fundamental that it grounds Merleau-Ponty's claim that to speak of a *schéma corporel* is simply to say "mon corps est au monde".[133]

This theory is bound up with a further – equally radical – moment in his account of corporeality, that of the 'body subject', or *corps sujet*.[134] As established, the *schéma corporel* underpins an experience of our bodies as "puissances *déjà mobilisées* par la perception".[135] Implicit therein is a level of bodily existence prior to the mobilisation of such *puissances*, which is none other than perception itself. At this level, the body figures as a kind of subject: "… le corps est un moi naturel et comme le sujet de la perception."[136] Perception for Merleau-Ponty thus turns out to be "une expérience non-thétique, préobjective et préconsciente" that involves not the conscious self but "un sujet prépersonnel", which is precisely the body in the world.[137] He summarises this elsewhere in the *Phénoménologie de la perception*:

> Il y a donc un autre sujet au-dessous de moi, pour qui un monde existe avant que je sois là et qui y marquait ma place. Cet esprit captif ou naturel, c'est mon corps, non pas le corps momentané qui est l'instrument de mes choix personnels et se fixe sur tel ou tel monde, mais le système de « fonctions » anonymes qui enveloppent toute fixation particulière dans un projet général.[138]

Conscious existence is predicated upon a preconscious subject: the body situated and situating itself in the world through the act of perception, or the *corps sujet*. Insofar as this subject exists prior to conscious or reflexive thought, it is pre-personal and as such general or anonymous. At this level, the body is in "une sorte de dialogue" with the world – "… une communication avec le monde plus vieille que la pensée …" – through which objects and surroundings are

[133] Ibid., p. 117.
[134] While Merleau-Ponty himself never uses the term *corps sujet*, he proposes a theory which is commonly referred to as such, in both English, and French, and which we will refer to as such in line with other scholars of his work.
[135] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 123.
[136] Ibid., p. 239.
[137] Ibid., pp. 279, 405.
[138] Ibid., p. 294.

given as correlates of intentional actions.[139] Hence, the *corps sujet* grounds our experience of space, and time. Distance and depth, for example, are not objective realities, but vectors of possible or actual actions in the world: "… l'expérience du corps propre nous enseigne à enraciner l'espace dans l'existence."[140] The body is therefore "ici", insofar as it manifests "l'ancrage du corps actif dans un objet, la situation du corps en face de ses tâches."[141] And the body is "maintenant", the cornerstone of temporal experience: "Mon corps […] fait exister un passé et un avenir pour un présent, […] il fait le temps au lieu de le subir."[142] The subject of perception and that through which we experience time and space, the body further shapes the meaning of the world: "II y a un sens autochtone du monde qui se constitue dans le commerce avec lui de notre existence incarnée …"[143] It thus figures as the source and centre of meaning: "L'expérience du corps nous fait reconnaître une imposition du sens qui n'est pas celle d'une conscience constituante universelle […] Mon corps est ce noyau significatif …"[144]

To some extent, Sartre shares with Merleau-Ponty a conception of the body as the foundation of our experience in the world. As we have seen, his is also a model of corporeality wherein the world is given through intentionality in relation to actual or possible actions within it. He argues that space is "hodologique", in the sense that "il est sillonné de chemins et de routes, il est instrumental et il est le *site* des outils".[145] Space and the world thus exist for us in relation to our possibilities for intentional action: "… le monde, dès le surgissement de mon pour-soi, se dévoile comme indication d'actes à faire, ces actes renvoient à d'autres actes, ceux-là à d'autres et ainsi de suite."[146] Through our bodies we are "dans l'espace" and "dans le temps", and thus "dans le monde".[147] And the Sartrean body manifests the "totalité des relations

[139] Ibid., pp. 370, 294.
[140] Ibid., p. 173.
[141] Ibid., p. 117.
[142] Ibid., p. 277.
[143] Ibid., p. 503.
[144] Ibid., p. 172.
[145] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 361.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid., pp. 391, 357.

signifiantes au monde", and indeed "ne saurait apparaître, en effet, sans soutenir […] des relations signifiantes".[148] Like Merleau-Ponty, then, Sartre articulates a model of corporeality where the body grounds space, time, the world, and meaning therein. None the less, Merleau-Ponty is anxious to distance his own model of space and time from the latter's: "Il ne faut donc pas dire que notre corps est *dans* l'espace ni d'ailleurs qu'il est *dans* le temps. Il *habite* l'espace et le temps."[149] He goes on to clarify this distinction: "… je ne suis pas dans l'espace et dans le temps, je ne pense pas l'espace et le temps ; je suis à l'espace et au temps, mon corps s'applique à eux et les embrasse."[150] To Sartre's *être-dans-le-monde*, which he finds to reproduce a mind-body dualism, insofar as self and world are conceptually distinct, he opposes his *être au monde*. Here, the shift from *dans* to *au* intimates a desire to stress the immediacy and solidarity of the body-world relationship and, in so doing, more definitively dispense with substance dualism. While we may consider his reading of Sartre on this question to be reductive, or simply flawed, it never the less conveys a conviction central to Merleau-Ponty's thought: that dualistic models of embodiment cannot account for lived experience, and that the ultimate disproof of such models lies in a theory that places the body at the very foundation of existence. His philosophy seeks to conclusively refute substance dualism by demonstrating that the body cannot be an "accompagnement extérieur" to existence; it necessarily "exprime l'existence totale" precisely because "elle se réalise en lui".[151] Rather than a mere term or feature of existence, for Merleau-Ponty, the body is as fundamental as existence itself: "Ni le corps *ni l'existence* ne peuvent passer pour l'original de l'être humain, puisque chacun présuppose l'autre et que le corps est l'existence figée ou généralisée et l'existence une incarnation perpétuelle."[152]

[148] Ibid., p. 385.
[149] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 162.
[150] Ibid., p. 164.
[151] Ibid., p. 193.
[152] Ibid., p. 194.

Theories of *autrui*

There are notable differences between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's theories of the body, many of which speak to fundamental divergences in their phenomenological projects. And yet, as has become clear, they also have more in common than they tend to be willing to concede. A further point of harmony lies in their shared belief that the body plays a foundational role in our relation to other subjects. Both of their accounts of *autrui* build upon and nourish their reflections upon corporeality. This comes through in the structures of their work: the reflection on the body in the *Phénoménologie de la perception* advances through interrogations of social themes such as sexuality and language, and precedes the discussion of *autrui*, while in *L'Être et le néant*, the account of the body both departs from and returns to Sartre's discussion of *autrui*. To perhaps a greater extent than with regard to the body, scholars have tended to emphasise the points of discordance in their respective treatments of the question of *autrui*. As we have seen, many of Sartre's harshest critics, including, to some degree, Merleau-Ponty, consider his philosophy to be individualistic or solipsistic, and have thus found his account of other subjects wanting: "La perspective de Sartre est celle de l'exaltation d'un individualisme […] Il tourne ainsi le dos à toute forme de dialogique ou d'intersubjectivité." Consciousness, therein, "se constitue à partir d'une dialectique entre l'en-soi et le pour-soi, mais à l'écart d'autrui."[153] It is in this sense that he has been so often set against Merleau-Ponty on the question of *autrui*, as noted above. While it is certainly true that our relations to other subjects are a major theme of the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, the claim that *L'Être et le néant* is solipsistic is not only wrong, but serves to obscure the reality of both theories of *autrui*, and the moments of harmony between them.

In spite of some important disagreements, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty do concur on some critical issues in their accounts of *autrui*. For one, they ground those accounts in their theories

[153] Dosse, p. 9.

of the body. More than this, though, they share a common view of two foundational aspects of the question of other subjects. The first is their shared belief that the question is not *whether* other subjects exist, but *how*: Sartre argues that "toute conjecture sur [autrui] est totalement dépourvue de sens" if *autrui* is not "immédiatement présent à moi" and if the existence of other subjects is not "aussi sûre que la mienne", and Merleau-Ponty claims that *autrui* must be given to us in some way in lived experience, otherwise "je ne parlerais même pas de solitude et je ne pourrais même pas déclarer autrui inaccessible".[154] They conceptualise their respective theories of *autrui* accordingly. "Une théorie de l'existence d'autrui", Sartre explains, must "simplement m'interroger dans mon être, éclaircir et préciser le sens de cette affirmation et surtout, *loin d'inventer une preuve*, expliciter le fondement même de cette certitude."[155] Merleau-Ponty, for his part, conceives of his theory in terms of questions that take the existence of *autrui* as given:

> Mais la question est justement là : comment le mot Je peut-il se mettre au pluriel, comment peut-on former une idée générale du Je, comment puis-je parler d'un autre Je que le mien, comment puis-je savoir qu'il y a d'autres Je, comment la conscience qui, par principe, et comme connaissance d'elle-même, est dans le mode du Je, peut-elle être saisie dans le mode du Toi et par là dans le monde du « On » ?[156]

In a word, for both, the question is not whether we can be certain that other subjects exist: the certainty of their existence is implicit in the very fact of asking that question. Rather, it is how we are certain, and how they exist for us. The second point of convergence is their conviction that we can never know other subjects as we know ourselves, or as they know themselves. For Merleau-Ponty, "autrui n'existera jamais pour nous comme nous-même", while *autrui* figures for Sartre as "ce sujet pur que je ne puis, par definition, *connaître*, c'est-à-dire poser comme objet".[157] At least in their framings of the problem of other subjects, then, and on some of the

[154] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 290.; Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, pp. 412-413.
[155] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 290. [my italics]
[156] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, pp. 400-1.
[157] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 495.; Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 310.

most basic points of their solutions to that problem, they turn out to share more common ground than much of the scholarship would indicate. This is not to suggest that their accounts of *autrui* are indistinguishable from one another, far from it. In fact, there are many moments where they do not align, notably where disagreements over the body resurface and become consolidated in their discussions of *autrui*: the charge that Merleau-Ponty levels at Sartre, of reproducing substance dualism, for example, recurs in his critique of the latter's model of other subjects. A reading of their works in turn, and comparatively, will once again serve to better conceptualise both their conflict on this point, and their respective theories of *autrui*.

In *L'Être et le néant*, Sartre clearly lays out his intentions for his discussion of *autrui*. He wants to produce a "théorie positive de l'existence d'autrui", which has been achieved by neither idealist nor realist thinkers, nor by Husserl, Hegel or Heidegger.[158] This theory is not a search for "une *preuve* nouvelle de l'existence d'autrui" or for "*des raisons de croire* à autrui".[159] Instead, it is an attempt to account for how and in which ways *autrui* exists for us, and to do so within the terms of his phenomenological ontology. His discussion takes off from his reflection on consciousness, and thus from a resolutely first-person perspective:

> Sans sortir de notre attitude de description réflexive, nous pouvons rencontrer des modes de conscience qui semblent, tout en demeurant en eux-mêmes strictement pour-soi, indiquer un type de structure ontologique radicalement différent. Cette structure ontologique est mienne, c'est à mon sujet que je me soucie et pourtant ce souci « pour-moi » me découvre un être qui est mon être sans être-pour-moi.[160]

This framing reveals two of the guiding themes in his account of the existence of other subjects: the desire to explain how we know that they exist, and the intention to provide an ontological justification for their existence. We must, he says shortly thereafter, "répondre à deux questions bien autrement redoutables": "celle de l'existence d'autrui", on the one hand, and "celle de

[158] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 271.
[159] Ibid., pp. 289, 291.
[160] Ibid., p. 259.

mon rapport d'*être* avec l'être d'autrui", on the other.[161] To answer the first, he posits that the existence of other subjects must be a "nécessité de fait" like the *cogito*, which is to say that it is necessary but contingent: other subjects exist, but they could not do so.[162] Indeed, he states that for the existence of *autrui* to be more than "une vaine conjecture", there must be "quelque chose comme un *cogito* qui la concerne".[163] This "*cogito* de l'existence d'autrui", he claims, is grounded in the *cogito*, and argues for a reconceptualisation of the *cogito* that attests not only to the certitude of the subject's own consciousness, but to that of other consciousnesses:

> Il faut que le *cogito* […] me jette hors de lui sur autrui, comme il m'a jeté hors de lui sur l'En-soi ; et cela, non pas en me révélant une *structure a priori* de moi-même qui pointerait vers un autrui également *a priori*, mais en me découvrant la présence concrète et indubitable de tel ou tel autrui concret, comme il m'a déjà révélé mon existence incomparable, contingente, nécessaire pourtant, et concrète.[164]

Therein, the relation of the *cogito* to other subjects is one of negation: "Autrui doit apparaître au *cogito* comme *n'étant pas* moi."[165] In this way, the answer to the first of the questions that he poses leads him to the second, namely the search for an ontological justification.

This relation of negation is a fundamental building block of Sartre's ontological account of other subjects: "… nous saisissons donc ici une négation comme structure constitutive de l'être-autrui."[166] He begins this account with the claim that my relation to *autrui* is one of reciprocal negation: "Autrui, c'est celui qui n'est pas moi et que je ne suis pas."[167] This relation is not a secondary or superficial feature of the *pour-soi*, but one of its fundamental structures: "… le pour-soi, comme soi-même, enveloppe l'être d'autrui dans son être en tant qu'il est en

[161] Ibid., p. 261.
[162] Ibid., p. 289.
[163] Ibid., p. 290.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid., p. 291.
[166] Ibid., p. 269.
[167] Ibid.

question dans son être comme n'étant pas autrui."[168] Sartre's basic claim is that our relation to other subjects is not epistemological, but ontological: "… mon rapport à autrui est d'abord et fondamentalement une relation d'être à être, non de connaissance à connaissance …"[169] Indeed, the existence of other subjects grounds the third and final term of his ontology: the *être-pour-autrui*, or being-for-others. No account of existence as *pour-soi* would be complete without this final term: "… la réalité-humaine doit être dans son être, d'un seul et même surgissement, pour-soi-pour-autrui."[170] In Sartre's view, we exist not only for ourselves, as *pour-soi*, but for other subjects, as *pour-autrui*. At the most basic level, *autrui* reveals a hitherto undisclosed dimension of our being: "S'il y a un autre, quel qu'il soit, où qu'il soit, quels que soient ses rapports avec moi, sans même qu'il agisse autrement sur moi que par le pur surgissement de son être, j'ai un dehors, j'ai une *nature* …"[171] If we exist for other subjects, it is not as *pour-soi*, just as those subjects do not exist as *pour-soi* for us, but as an object: "Ainsi autrui est d'abord pour moi l'être pour qui je suis objet, c'est-à-dire l'être *par qui* je gagne mon objectité."[172] We can never know exactly *how* we exist for others, because to see ourselves as an object would require adopting an external perspective, that of other subjects, which is impossible: "Je suis, par delà toute connaissance que je puis avoir, ce moi qu'un autre connaît."[173] In the mode of the *pour-autrui*, then, we have an awareness of ourselves as an object for another subject: "… la personne est présente à la conscience *en tant qu'elle est objet pour autrui*."[174] Crucially, given that we encounter other subjects in the world, the body figures as the primary term of my objective existence for them. Indeed, the body is only an object to

[168] Ibid., p. 323.
[169] Ibid., p. 283.
[170] Ibid., p. 255.
[171] Ibid., p. 302.
[172] Ibid., p. 309.
[173] Ibid., p. 300.
[174] Ibid.

the extent that it is *pour-autrui*: "Et, certes, la découverte de mon corps comme objet est bien une révélation de son être. Mais l'être qui m'est ainsi révélé est son *être-pour-autrui*."[175]

Insofar as the body is that through which we encounter other subjects in the world, Sartre posits that our relation to them is mediated by the *regard*, which is, for him, none other than "la relation originelle de moi-même à autrui".[176] In effect, when we become aware that we are exposed to the *regard* of another subject, we experience ourselves in the mode of the *pour-autrui*. In other words, we become aware of our objective existence for another *pour-soi*: "Avec l'apparition du regard d'autrui, j'ai la révélation de mon être-objet …"[177] With the *regard*, we experience not only ourselves differently, but also the world: "Le regard d'autrui m'atteint à travers le monde et n'est pas seulement transformation de moi-même, mais métamorphose totale du *monde*."[178] The appearance of another subject in our world triggers a dislocation of the world as the locus of our possibilities for action therein. Hence Sartre claims that *autrui* is experienced initially as "la fuite permanente des choses vers un terme [qui] déplie autour de lui ses propres distances", inaugurating "une spatialité qui n'est pas *ma* spatialité" and "une orientation *qui me fuit*".[179] The *regard d'autrui* elicits the fixation not only of the world, but of the very possibilities for action themselves, which become "mortes-possibilités": "… je vis une aliénation subtile de toutes mes possibilités qui sont agencées loin de moi, au milieu du monde, avec les objets du monde."[180] Faced with the objectifying and alienating *regard d'autrui*, the *pour-soi* can invert the situation by subjecting *autrui* to its own *regard*: "Je puis donc tenter […] de nier cet être qui m'est conféré du dehors ; c'est à-dire que je puis me retourner sur autrui pour lui conférer à mon tour l'objectité … "[181] The *pour-soi* thus

[175] Ibid., p. 344.
[176] Ibid., p. 296.
[177] Ibid., p. 392.
[178] Ibid., p. 308.
[179] Ibid., pp. 293-294.
[180] Ibid., pp. 328, 304.
[181] Ibid., p. 403.

disposes of two modalities of relation to other subjects, which correspond to two modes of existence of other subjects: *autrui-objet* and *autrui-sujet*. In the encounter between two *pour-soi*, each necessarily looks to subject the other to its own *regard*, so as to guarantee its own primacy and refuse the alienation of its possibilities. Hence Sartre posits that the "sens original de l'être-pour-autrui" is conflict.[182] In relation to *autrui*, the *pour-soi* must adopt one of two "attitudes primitives": "Transcender la transcendance d'autrui ou, au contraire, engloutir en moi cette transcendance sans lui ôter son caractère de transcendance …"[183] Each of these is doomed to fail, and in so doing, to prompt the *pour-soi* to adopt the opposite attitude: "Chacune d'elles est la mort de l'autre, c'est-à-dire que l'échec de l'une motive l'adoption de l'autre."[184] If, then, we grasp our relation to *autrui* in terms of conflict, it is not in the sense of a Hegelian master/slave dialectic, but as a "cercle" of "rapports réciproques et mouvants": faced with *autrui* as a permanent possibility of alienation from the world and possibilities for action therein, the *pour-soi* is thus condemned to endlessly adopt one of two attitudes, each after the other, to try to stave off that permanent possibility.[185]

Merleau-Ponty's critiques of Sartre

Just as on the question of the body, Merleau-Ponty repeatedly found fault with Sartre's account of *autrui*, both in the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, and later works. Indeed, many scholars consider his critique of this account to be at the heart of his philosophical discord with Sartre. For Monika Langer, "all his criticisms of Sartre resolve themselves ultimately into the question of the presence or absence of [an interworld] in the latter's philosophy".[186] From the outset,

[182] Ibid., p. 404.
[183] Ibid., p. 403.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid., p. 403-404.
[186] Whitford, p. 98., Monika Langer, 'Sartre and Merleau-Ponty: A Reappraisal', in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre,* ed. by Paul Arthur Schilpp (La Salle, Ill: Open Court, 1981), pp. 300-325 (p. 304).

Merleau-Ponty is concerned with demonstrating that Sartre does not adequately account for the existence of other subjects, or even that such an account is not articulable in the terms of his ontology. By extension, he appears to want to show that Sartre has failed to provide an account of the social world. Whitford argues that he adopts two lines of argument in his critique of Sartre's account of *autrui*. For one, "that Sartre provides no adequate ontological foundation for intersubjectivity", and for another, "that conflict is not our original and primordial relation with the Other."[187] His reasoning for the first line of argument, concerning ontology, largely echoes that found in his critique of Sartre's body, namely that his ontology reproduces the very dualism it is seeking to refute. Indeed, the accusation cited above, that *L'Être et le néant* is "trop exclusivement antithétique", is a critique not only of Sartre's ontology, but also of his account of *autrui*: the antithesis he takes particular umbrage with here are "l'antithèse de ma vue sur moi-même et de la vue d'autrui sur moi" and "l'antithèse du pour-soi et de l'en-soi".[188] Merleau-Ponty's basic claim, following Whitford, is that Sartre's ontology is "polarized by a subject/object dualism which makes intersubjectivity incomprehensible."[189] The issue appears to come down to his view of Sartre's *pour-soi* as a "conscience constituante": "Si je constitue le monde, je ne peux penser une autre conscience, car il faudrait qu'elle le constituât elle aussi, et, au moins à l'égard de cette autre vue sur le monde, je ne serais pas constituant."[190] In this optic, Sartre's theory is "necessarily solipsistic": such a consciousness is "wholly constitutive of the world", so that "other consciousnesses are inevitably incorporated into that world as objects".[191] Elsewhere, he takes issue with the *pour-soi* and the *pour-autrui* on the grounds that such distinct ontological orders cannot adequately account for the existence of *autrui*: "… s'il y avait deux sortes de catégories, comment pourrais-je avoir l'expérience d'autrui, c'est-à-dire

[187] Whitford, p. 98.
[188] Merleau-Ponty, 'La querelle de l'existentialisme', p. 89.
[189] Whitford, p. 106.
[190] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 402.
[191] Langer, p. 305.

d'un *alter ego*?"[192] At least as they are formulated in *L'Être et le néant*, he claims, these categories cannot ground a theory of the social world.[193]

Merleau-Ponty's second line of critique is a challenge to Sartre's conception of our relations with *autrui*, namely that they are restricted to the *regard*, and therefore to conflict. This critique stems from his problematisation of Sartre's ontology, as Whitford argues:

> If the *en-soi/pour-soi* framework were valid, I would never, as Sartre claims I do, encounter another subjectivity; I could only encounter an *en-soi*, an object. For this reason, Merleau-Ponty continues to maintain that *le regard* is the only possible relationship for Sartre; it is the only relationship intelligible in terms of Sartre's ontology.[194]

He lays out his opposition to Sartre's *regard* clearly in the *Phénoménologie de la perception*: "Autrui me transforme en objet et me nie, je transforme autrui en objet et le nie, dit-on. En réalité le regard d'autrui ne me transforme [pas] en objet, et mon regard ne le transforme [pas] en objet …"[195] Such an objectification is possible, he goes on, but only with the heavy caveat that "nous nous retirons dans le fond de notre nature pensante" and as such "nous nous faisons l'un et l'autre regard inhumain".[196] In other words, Sartre's theory of the *regard* only applies to very specific moments in our experience of other subjects, notably when we come across "un inconnu", and fails to account for many of our everyday modes of relation to them. He is clear in his opposition to the idea that other subjects figure as objects for the *pour-soi* through its own *regard*: "Autrui n'est […] jamais tout à fait objet pour moi."[197] We can never truly, in his view, experience another subject as an object: "Autrui-objet n'est qu'une modalité insincère d'autrui …"[198] Merleau-Ponty's critique of the *regard*, and of a conceptualisation of relations

[192] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 511.
[193] Ibid., p. 512.
[194] Whitford, p. 102.
[195] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 414.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid., p. 511.
[198] Ibid.

to *autrui* in terms of conflict, hinges upon the conviction that they are a reductive or incomplete understanding of such relations. This is evident in the stance he adopts in his *Aventures de la dialectique*. For Sartre, he argues, insofar as "je me sens immédiatement regardé", "il n'y a pas de charnière, de jointure ou de médiation entre moi et autrui".[199] To understand our relation to *autrui* as Sartre does is to foreclose an adequate account of the social dimension of existence: "Le social n'apparaît jamais de face, il est tantôt piège, tantôt tâche, tantôt menace, tantôt promesse, tantôt derrière nous comme un remords, tantôt devant nous comme un projet …"[200] This is a later critique, but as early as 1945 he had already made clear his belief that Sartre fails to account for the social world. Indeed, if in 'La Querelle de l'existentialisme' he credits Sartre insofar as he "pose le problème des relations réciproques entre la conscience et le monde social de la manière la plus rigoureuse", he later laments the absence of a theory of the social world: "Cette théorie du social, *L'Être et le néant* ne nous la donne pas encore."[201]

On the one hand, Merleau-Ponty's critiques of Sartre's theory of *autrui* are many, and among his most stringent objections to the latter's philosophy. On the other, taken as a whole, they are also somewhat obscure and, at certain points, at odds with one another. There is what Whitford terms "a latent ambiguity" in his wider criticism of Sartre, one which becomes even more pronounced in his discussions of intersubjectivity and the social world.[202] For one, he appears to contradict himself, even within the same text. For another, more so here than on the question of the body, many of his lines of argument don't hold up to any real scrutiny. We have already seen that his reading of Sartre's ontology as dualistic is reductive at best. Hence, those critiques in his account of *autrui* predicated on that reading should not be taken at face value. Further, the argument that the *pour-soi* is a "conscience constituante" and therefore unable to account for other subjects appears untenable on two counts. First, Merleau-Ponty himself

[199] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Les Aventures de la dialectique*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), p. 191.
[200] Ibid., p. 209.
[201] Merleau-Ponty, 'La querelle de l'existentialisme', p. 100.
[202] Whitford, p. 98.

credits Sartre with formulating a philosophy that attempts to go beyond traditional approaches, including those which begin with a "conscience constituante du monde".[203] Second, Sartre is candid in his critique of such conceptions of relations with other subjects: "On *rencontre* autrui, on ne le constitue pas."[204] As for his argument that Sartre only sees relations with other subjects in terms of *regard* and conflict, and thus fails to adequately conceptualise these relations, there are also significant issues. Whitford posits that Merleau-Ponty is "incorrect" in his assumption that "the only relation between people, for Sartre, is the nihilating *regard* which reduces the Other to the status of object in order to avoid being objectified itself".[205] Simone de Beauvoir's defence of Sartre prefigures this claim: "Nous sommes loin de la philosophie du Je et de l'Autre où le seul rapport des hommes entre eux serait affrontement immédiat, par le regard."[206] Crucially, even within *L'Être et le néant*, the *regard* is far from the only modality of relations to and with other subjects. We only need turn to Sartre's discussion of desire, for example, wherein the relation is one of reciprocal incarnation, to conclusively refute such a claim.

Merleau-Ponty's critique of the theory of the *regard* itself – as objectifying – also falls down, not least because he himself appears to adopt Sartre's description in his own discussion of sexuality. Therein, we find a near reproduction of the Sartrean *regard*, albeit one formulated in the terms of Hegel's master/slave dialectic:

> La pudeur et l'impudeur prennent donc place dans une dialectique du moi et d'autrui qui est celle du maître et de l'esclave : en tant que j'ai un corps, je peux être réduit en objet sous le regard d'autrui et ne plus compter pour lui comme personne, ou bien, au contraire, je peux devenir son maître et le regarder à mon tour […] Dire que j'ai un corps est donc une manière de dire que je peux être vu comme un objet et que je cherche à être vu comme sujet …[207]

[203] Merleau-Ponty, 'La querelle de l'existentialisme', p. 142.
[204] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 289.
[205] Whitford, p. 101.
[206] Beauvoir, 'Merleau-Ponty et le pseudo-sartrisme', p. 220.
[207] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, pp. 194-195.

If Merleau-Ponty's account of *autrui* tends to focus more on coexistence than conflict, it is far from lacking in moments of alienation or objectification. There is, in his philosophy, both "an element of alienation at the most fundamental level of human existence" and "a violence which is an inevitable element of the human situation".[208] Indeed, he himself asserts the inevitability and permanence of conflict in our relations with other subjects: "Le conflit du moi et d'autrui ne commence pas seulement quand on cherche à *penser* autrui et ne disparaît pas si on réintègre la pensée à la conscience non thétique et à la vie irréfléchie : il est déjà là si je cherche à vivre autrui …"[209] Scholars have suggested that the apparent inconsistency in this critique might be due to a misreading of Sartre, namely a confusion of ontological conflict, which does underpin the account in *L'Être et le néant*, with psychological conflict, which does not.[210] Conflict in the Sartrean sense, Langer claims, is "separation", and "need not imply hostility": "It simply means that the Other's subjectivity is ultimately inapprehensible and that he and I can never coincide."[211] Further, where Merleau-Ponty looks to show that conflict and coexistence are two sides of the same coin, he does not undermine Sartre's account, but in fact reinforces it: "Autrui ou moi, il faut choisir, dit-on. Mais on choisit l'un *contre* l'autre, et ainsi on affirme les deux."[212] Crucially, as Whitford points out, regardless of the validity of each of his lines of argument, he cannot hold them both at the same time: "Merleau-Ponty cannot claim simultaneously that for Sartre there is no intersubjectivity and that relations are always relations of conflict. For if there is no intersubjectivity, there is no conflict either …"[213]

Once again, we might attribute such "latent ambiguity" in Merleau-Ponty's critique on the question of other subjects to the particular "preoccupations" and "purposes" that structure his *Phénoménologie de la perception*. As we have seen, some of those are shared with Sartre:

[208] Langer, pp. 318-319.
[209] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 409.
[210] Whitford, p. 111.
[211] Langer, p. 317.
[212] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 414.
[213] Whitford, p. 114.

he too is looking not to prove that other subjects exist, but to locate the source of our certitude that they do, as well as to elucidate the nature and modalities of our relations to them. Others are more idiosyncratic expressions of his particular phenomenological project, such as his clear desire to place *autrui* at the most fundamental level of existence. This is, in a sense, what he holds against Sartre: that, in his account, *autrui* is not fundamental enough. This is certainly a driving force behind his critique of Sartre's account of relations with other subjects: "… from Merleau-Ponty's point of view […] his discussion of our *être-pour-autrui* is not fundamental enough because it does not go beyond alienation to the intersubjective world which makes alienation and conflict possible."[214] He takes issue with the *pour-autrui* because it figures, in his view, as a secondary or cursory moment in the Sartrean theory of the subject, and he cannot concede a model of subjectivity where the social isn't immediately given with the personal: "Le social est déjà là quand nous le connaissons ou le jugeons. […] Avant la prise de conscience, le social existe sourdement et comme sollicitation."[215] For Merleau-Ponty, the subject is always and irremediably social: "La subjectivité transcendantale est une subjectivité révélée […] et à ce titre elle est une intersubjectivité."[216] Just as he has shown, in his discussion of the body, that we are in the world – *au monde* – before we are anything else, he wants to posit that we are social before we are anything else: "Notre rapport au social est, comme notre rapport au monde, plus profond que toute perception expresse ou que tout jugement."[217] Indeed, our *être au monde* comprises not only the material world, but the social one: "*Je suis donné*, c'est-à-dire que je me trouve déjà situé et engagé dans un monde physique et social …"[218] In short, for Merleau-Ponty, the social is not simply a dimension of our existence, but its very foundation: "Il nous faut donc redécouvrir, après le monde naturel, le monde social, non

[214] Ibid., p. 109.
[215] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 415.
[216] Ibid.
[217] Ibid.
[218] Ibid., p. 413.

comme objet ou somme d'objets, mais comme champ permanent ou dimension d'existence : je peux bien m'en détourner, mais non pas cesser d'être situé par rapport à lui."[219]

Insofar as the existence of other subjects is given with the world, and forms part of our *être au monde*, he locates our certitude that they exist in the body, and notably at the level of perception and the *corps sujet*: "… il y a pour nous des choses et des « autres » […] par un acte violent qui est la perception même."[220] Other subjects exist for us prior to conscious or reflexive thought because we encounter them at this level, through our senses: "En tant que j'ai des fonctions sensorielles, un champ visuel, auditif, tactile, je communique déjà avec les autres, pris aussi comme sujets psychophysiques."[221] Indeed, it is only because that encounter takes place at this prepersonal, preconscious level that we can account for the existence of *autrui*:

> Mais si je trouve en moi-même par réflexion, avec le sujet percevant, un sujet prépersonnel, donné à lui-même, si mes perceptions demeurent excentriques par rapport à moi comme centre d'initiatives et de jugements, si le monde perçu demeure dans un état de neutralité, ni objet vérifié, ni rêve reconnu pour tel, alors tout ce qui apparaît dans le monde n'est pas aussitôt étalé devant moi et le comportement d'autrui peut y figurer.[222]

As *corps sujets*, we encounter other *corps sujets* who engage intentionally in the world just as we do: "… c'est justement mon corps qui perçoit le corps d'autrui et il y trouve comme un prolongement miraculeux de ses propres intentions, une manière familière de traiter le monde …"[223] It is here that Merleau-Ponty locates the origin of our certainty that other subjects exist: "Quelqu'un se sert de mes objets familiers. Mais qui ? Je dis que c'est un autre, un second moi-même et je le sais d'abord parce que ce corps vivant a la même structure que le mien."[224] In a

[219] Ibid., p. 415.
[220] Ibid.
[221] Ibid., p. 406.
[222] Ibid., p. 405.
[223] Ibid., p. 406.
[224] Ibid.

word, the existence of *autrui* is given at the level of perception to the extent that the *corps sujet* encounters other *corps sujets* whose intentional engagement in the world mirrors its own.

By situating our encounter with *autrui* at the level of perception and the anonymous *corps sujet*, he seeks to overcome some of the conceptual difficulties that he perceives in accounts that start from the first-person view, such as Sartre's. "Dans la perception d'autrui", he affirms, "je franchis en intention la distance infinie qui séparera toujours ma subjectivité d'une autre, je surmonte l'impossibilité conceptuelle d'un autre pour soi pour moi, parce que je constate un autre comportement, une autre présence au monde."[225] At the level of perception, we encounter not another body, but another *comportement*, and hence the presence of another subject: "… si le corps d'autrui n'est pas un objet pour moi, ni le mien pour lui, s'ils sont des comportements, la position d'autrui ne me réduit pas à la condition d'objet dans son champ, ma perception d'autrui ne le réduit pas à la condition d'objet dans mon champ."[226] It is worth noting, as Whitford does, that Sartre also argues that the body of *autrui* is not for us an object, but a *comportement*: "Mais aussi ne percevons-nous jamais *un poing serré* : nous percevons un homme qui, dans une certaine situation, serre le poing."[227] None the less, where Sartre tends to underscore conflict and alienation, Merleau-Ponty principally conceives of relations to other subjects in terms of "coexistence". In locating the encounter with *autrui* at the preconscious, anonymous level of perception, he stresses a fundamental relation of coexistence that exists prior to and indeed grounds conflict: "La coexistence, doit être en tout cas vécue par chacun."[228] Like Sartre, he sees relations to other subjects as necessarily reciprocal: "Sans réciprocité, il n'y a pas d'alter Ego, puisque le monde de l'un enveloppe alors celui de l'autre et que l'un se

[225] Ibid., p. 494.
[226] Ibid., p. 405
[227] Whitford, p. 101.; Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 387.
[228] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 410.

sent aliéné au profit de l'autre."[229] Unlike Sartre, however, this is not primarily a reciprocity of *regard* or alienation, but of perceptive and intentional engagement in the world.

The 'universal-singular'

Merleau-Ponty sees his account as distinct from Sartre's insofar as he stresses a basic relation of *coexistence* with other subjects on the level of the *corps sujet*, that he places in opposition to Sartre's "cercle" of conflict and alienation. As we have seen, though, to conceive of Sartre's theory of *autrui* solely in terms of conflict is reductive: not only are there other modalities of relating to other subjects in *L'Être et le néant*, but conflict therein is ontological, rather than psychological. Further, as Merleau-Ponty himself concedes, conflict is simply one modality of relation to *autrui*, itself affirmatory of the existence of other subjects in the world, and of our solidarity with them: "La conscience du conflit n'est possible que par celle d'une relation réciproque et d'une humanité qui nous est commune."[230] He thus acknowledges that Sartre's theory, while emphasising conflict, must necessarily imply coexistence: "Nous ne nous nions l'un l'autre qu'en nous reconnaissant l'un l'autre comme consciences."[231] Thus, while they do diverge in important ways in their accounts of *autrui*, and of our relations to other subjects, the claim that Merleau-Ponty accounts for intersubjectivity and Sartre does not, which the former can be seen to make, turns out to be a fundamental misreading of *L'Être et le néant*. The origin of this misreading might be located in the difference in emphasis in their discussions of *autrui*: "In confronting conflict with communication, Merleau-Ponty prefers to stress those aspects of our relations with others which are fruitful. Sartre's emphasis in *L'Être et le néant*, in contrast, is on those aspects which present conflict and menace."[232] Likewise, Langer claims that "there

[229] Ibid.
[230] Merleau-Ponty, 'L'existentialisme chez Hegel', p. 85.
[231] Ibid.
[232] Whitford, p. 114.

are genuine grounds for [Merleau-Ponty's] (mis-) interpretation of Sartre", namely, that "[his] whole emphasis is on intersubjectivity, on community, on dialogue, on participation", and that "Sartre's philosophy seems to deny these outright".[233] As our study has shown, however, this difference in emphasis belies what is in reality a point of accord, that our relation to *autrui* is simultaneously and always one of coexistence *and* conflict. Returning to Whitford: "For both, the social world is one of conflict in which positive coexistence has to be worked for."[234] In a word, to speak of conflict is also to speak of coexistence, and *vice versa*, because each of these terms necessarily implies the other. Crucially, both stress the reciprocity of relations with *autrui*, which turns out to be a further point of concordance in their theories: for Merleau-Ponty, "une réciprocité parfaite" subtends our communication with other subjects, while for Sartre, desire involves a "relation réciproque" and a "réciprocité d'incarnation".[235]

Their shared view of our relation to other subjects in terms of reciprocity speaks to their common conviction that *autrui* is in essence another 'me' who is not 'me'. Hence, as we have seen, Merleau-Ponty argues that reciprocity is necessary for there to be an "Alter Ego".[236] He evokes a "relation interne" between the self and its other, one which "fait apparaître autrui comme l'achèvement du système", and which is necessarily mutual.[237] To some extent, this echoes Sartre's account of our relation to *autrui* as one of mutual negation, where ontological negation structures a basic reciprocity between subjects: "… il est un autre pour moi et […] je suis pour lui un *autre*."[238] Therein, *autrui* is principally an ontological category that is defined by being that which is not the self, as he makes clear in his *Cahiers pour une morale*:

> L'Autre n'est pas une personne déterminée mais une catégorie ou si l'on veut une dimension, un élément. Il n'y a pas d'objet ou de sujet

[233] Langer, p. 308.
[234] Whitford, p. 14.
[235] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 407.; Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, pp. 456, 438.
[236] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 410.
[237] Ibid., p. 405.
[238] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 424.

> privilégié qui doive être considéré comme Autre, mais tout peut être Autre et l'Autre peut être tout. C'est seulement une manière d'être.[239]

The self is a *pour-soi*, and *autrui* is also a *pour-soi*, albeit one that cannot be experienced as such by the self. They exist for one another as "that which is not the self" through an ontological relation of negation. The first-person perspective that subtends his phenomenological ontology is not a specific self, in this case Sartre's, but any self: he intends for his reader to adopt that perspective as their own. All *pour-soi* are thus equivalent, and interchangeable. Hence, he conceives of the "multiplicité des « autrui »" as a "totalité" because "chaque autrui trouve son être en l'autre", and further because it is impossible for any subject to place themself outside of the "totalité": to do so would be to adopt a *pensée de survol*.[240] Insofar as it must necessarily be viewed from the perspective of one *pour-soi*, this "totalité" is thus always "détotalisée": "… l'existence-pour-autrui étant refus radical d'autrui, aucune synthèse totalitaire et unificatrice des « autrui » n'est possible."[241] Sartre's understanding of the self and *autrui* as interchangeable is also reflected in his methodology: "II revient au même d'étudier la façon dont *mon* corps apparaît à autrui ou celle dont le corps d'autrui m'apparaît."[242] Indeed, as Whitford notes, the conviction that all *pour-soi* are interchangeable is so fundamental he "takes [it] for granted at the beginning of his analysis of l'être-pour-autrui", rather than seeking to prove its validity.[243]

In spite of his emphasis on generality and anonymity, Merleau-Ponty also adopts a first-person perspective in the articulation of his philosophy. As such, as we have seen in his framing of the problem of other subjects, he too adopts a view of self and *autrui* as interchangeable: "… comment le mot Je peut-il se mettre au pluriel […] comment puis-je parler d'un autre Je que le mien, comment puis-je savoir qu'il y a d'autres Je […] ?"[244] His solution to this problem,

[239] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Cahiers pour une morale*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), p. 396.
[240] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 291.
[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid., p. 379.
[243] Whitford, p. 102.
[244] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, pp. 400-401.

explored above, further cements this view. We encounter other subjects not as "Je" – the *ego* only being found in reflexive thought – but at the preconcious level, as *corps sujets*, and we recognise them as subjects through our intentional engagement in the world, which reflects our own. Here, the existence of *autrui* no longer poses a conceptual difficulty: "Ce monde peut demeurer indivis entre ma perception et la sienne, le moi qui perçoit n'a pas de privilège particulier qui rende impossible un moi perçu …"[245] Crucially, the coherence of this theory rests upon the assertion that the self and *autrui* are equivalent, or interchangeable. And yet, as he himself notes, this does not resolve the problem of *autrui* on the level of conscious or reflexive thought: " … si le sujet qui perçoit est anonyme, l'autre lui-même qu'il perçoit l'est aussi, et quand nous voudrons, dans cette conscience collective, faire apparaître la pluralité des consciences, nous allons retrouver les difficultés auxquelles nous pensions avoir échappé."[246] While we may locate the source of our certainty of the existence of other subjects at this level, we cannot account for the existence of other conscious or personal selves therein, because it is by definition prepersonal and preconscious. In other words, when we shift from perception to conscious thought or reflexion, we are still faced with the same enigma of the existence of other "Je": "Il y a là un solipsisme vécu qui n'est pas dépassable."[247] Once again, his solution to this enigma, which we might consider the second moment in his account of other subjects, consolidates the interchangeability of self and *autrui*: "Les consciences se donnent le ridicule d'un solipsisme à plusieurs, telle est la situation qu'il faut comprendre."[248] In his view, all subjects are "Je" for themselves, and other for others, and hence fundamentally equivalent.

In both philosophies, then, we find an equivalence or interchangeability of subjects, so that the position of self and *autrui* are simply a question of perspective: any subject can adopt the first-person stance of the philosopher, and any other subject can figure as *autrui*. Such a

[245] Ibid., p. 405.
[246] Ibid., pp. 408-409.
[247] Ibid., p. 411.
[248] Ibid., p. 412.

conception of subjects, and the methodology that it subtends, is not a superficial or fortuitous feature of their thought: it is an expression of the basic project of phenomenology. As we have seen, phenomenology, whether that of Husserl or Heidegger, or the existential iterations thereof proposed by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, is predicated upon the assumption that the first-person – or singular – is the requisite starting point and prism through which the basic or universal structures of existence might be uncovered. Phenomenological theories thus necessarily assert the fundamental equivalence of all subjects, and the method reflects this. While they diverge in their particular reorientations of German phenomenology, they none the less share two basic convictions. First, that philosophy must start with the first-person, so as to avoid a *pensée de survol*. Second, that this does not inevitably lead to relativism, certainly when the philosopher aims to explicit universal structures of existence that transcend the particularities of the first-person perspective. We see this in Sartre's ontology, wherein the structures of being are prior to or beyond the specificities of lived experience, and thus apply to every subject. And in the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, where Merleau-Ponty's attempt to explicit the fundamental structures of existence uptakes the phenomenological project of "[revenir] aux choses-mêmes", which he understands to mean "revenir à ce monde avant la connaissance dont la connaissance parle toujours".[249] Therein, the subject has both a general or anonymous existence, as *corps sujet*, and a personal or individual one, as consciousness. The Merleau-Pontian subject is thus simultaneously universal and particular, as he states in a 1947 article: "Ma vie m'apparaît absolument individuelle et absolument universelle."[250] The meaning and truth of the world, he claims, as we have seen, emerge "à l'intersection de mes expériences et de celles d'autrui".[251]

Implicit, then, in Merleau-Ponty's thought, which looks to uncover the basic structures of existence from a first-person perspective, is the belief that such a perspective is equivalent

[249] Ibid., p. iii.
[250] Merleau-Ponty, 'La métaphysique dans l'homme', p. 115.
[251] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. xv.

to and can open on to any other. Sartre, too, works from the assumption that the experiences he describes are universal: "Chacun reconnaîtra, dans cette description abstraite, cette présence immédiate et brûlante du regard d'autrui qui l'a souvent rempli de honte."[252] Indeed, on some occasions, he refuses outright the possibility that his description does not apply to everyone: "Que chacun se reporte à son expérience : il n'est personne qui n'ait été un jour surpris dans une attitude coupable ou simplement ridicule."[253] Regardless of the validity of these particular claims, they betray a tacit assumption that there is a universality of existence, one which can be accessed through the first-person perspective. For both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, then, the phenomenological subject is both singular and universal, or more precisely, a subject whose singularity is that through which the universal might be accessed. The subject of existential philosophy is thus at once individual and general, particular and abstract, or, as it tends to be termed, a 'universal-singular' subject. It follows, inevitably, that all of the features of this subject are equally singular insofar as they are universal, and vice-versa. This comes through in the linguistic architecture of their works. Both tend to use the direct article in the singular: Sartre talks about "le" *pour-soi* and "le" *pour-autrui*, for example, while Merleau-Ponty refers to "l'existence anonyme" or "le sujet de la perception". Crucially, this is also true of the body, which figures as "le corps" in both of their works, and of other subjects, who appear variously as "l'autre" and "autrui", both of which are singular, and thus general. The use of the singular to describe the fundamental structures of existence further consolidates the universality of the particular subject, of all of its constituent features, and of other subjects. Neither Sartre nor Merleau-Ponty deny that all subjects are particular – that there are differences in bodies or in situations –, rather, they assert that the particularities of bodies and situations are ulterior to the basic structures of existence. Put simply, they recognise that each subject has a unique body

[252] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 309.
[253] Ibid., p. 307.

and situation, but only in so far as they circumscribe such particularities to the realm of the contingent, and thus outside of the scope of their universal theories.

Indeed, this contingency itself turns out to be a universal feature of experience. "[Il] est tout à fait contingent et absurde," Sartre states in no uncertain terms, "que je sois infirme, fils de fonctionnaire ou d'ouvrier, irascible et paresseux et [il] est pourtant *nécessaire* que je sois *cela* ou autre chose".[254] And where Merleau-Ponty conceives of variations between bodies in terms of "les hasards du corps objectif", he makes this selfsame claim: if my particular body is a pure matter of chance, "hasard", then it is necessary that I have *a* body, but entirely contingent and absurd, to take up Sartre's language, that I have *this* or *that* body.[255] It is in this sense that, for Merleau-Ponty, "[tout] est contingence dans l'homme": this particular body, this particular situation, "cette manière humaine d'exister n'est pas garantie à tout enfant humain".[256] Hence, to be free, in Sartre's view, "n'est pas choisir le monde historique où l'on surgit – ce qui n'aurait point de sens – mais se choisir dans le monde*, quel qu'il soit*."[257] The subjunctive – "*quel qu'il soit*" – recalls Merleau-Ponty's "hasards": important, here, is the situation *as contingent* – the fact of having a situation – rather than the situation *as particular*. In effect, once again, their linguistic choices are instructive: their tendency to refer to "la situation", or aspects thereof – "la classe", "la nationalité", etc. – in the singular further cements the reality that what matters is the fact of having a situation, class, or nationality, rather than the concrete particularities that define a given subject's situation. This is not to say that they only speak of class, for example, in such abstract terms: both discuss concrete social classes, and differentiate to some degree between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Rather, it is to claim that what matters, in each of their existential phenomenologies, is the situation *as contingent*. Or perhaps, more exactly, that only the situation *as contingent* is articulable in the terms of those phenomenologies. Therein,

[254] Ibid., p. 367.
[255] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 199.
[256] Ibid., pp. 198-199.
[257] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 566.

the situation *as particular* is thus not merely unimportant, it is quite simply inconceivable, and therefore inexpressible. Put simply, to the extent that existential phenomenology is grounded in the universal-singular, its framework and methodology are antithetical to an appreciation of the concrete particularities of bodies, and situations. And, given the centrality of the universal-singular to Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies, this incapacity to engage with the body or situation *as particular* turns out to be a fundamental, rather than incidental, feature of their thought. Hence, the theories of the body and of *autrui* that they formulate from the perspective of the universal-singular are wholly dispossessed of the means to acknowledge and interrogate the concrete particularities of bodies, and situations. Insofar as those theories are the necessary cornerstone for any account of bodily otherness, we are faced with a pressing question: to what extent do Sartre and Merleau-Ponty take stock of bodily otherness in *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception*? Indeed, to what extent *can* they do so within the terms of the existential phenomenologies that they themselves set out?

Chapter III: Elements of a critique of existential phenomenology

Philosophy and the human sciences have historically failed to accurately portray experiences of bodily otherness on two counts. On the one hand, they have tended to disregard such people and experiences, often subsuming them under an ostensibly abstract model that turns out to be a particular, normative one. On the other, they have been complicit in the reproduction and confirmation of normative ideologies, taking the socially-constructed categories, values and hierarchies of norms and 'others' as given, rather than interrogating them. In theory at least, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenologies share a series of basic principles that should preclude them falling into either of these traps. The universal-singular framework is one such principle: against an abstract universal subject, they begin with a recognition that bodies and situations vary – are contingent – and that this shapes lived experience. Their philosophy thus rests upon a refusal to presume the identity of all existences, and a will to take stock of the concrete particularities of their own bodies and situations. This is complemented by their critique of the *pensée de survol* and their view of knowledge as embodied: if "[tout] ce que je sais du monde […] je le sais à partir d'une vue mienne ou d'une expérience du monde", then we find a recognition that these concrete particularities determine our relation to knowledge and truth.[1] This critique is most often levelled at science, and its realist understandings of the world, which Merleau-Ponty considers "toujours naïves et hypocrites" because they "sous-entendent, sans la mentionner, cette autre vue, celle de la conscience".[2] Here, he echoes Sartre's insistence upon the need to "réintégrer l'observateur au sein du système scientifique […] comme un rapport originel au monde, comme une place, comme ce vers quoi s'orientent tous les rapports envisagés."[3] Their critique of the *pensée de survol* is not merely conceptual, but

[1] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. ii.
[2] Ibid., p. iii.
[3] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 346.

also political: both decry democratic or liberal worldviews that herald an abstract universality, and in so doing obfuscate systems of exploitation and domination. For Merleau-Ponty: "… une politique fondée sur l'homme en général, le citoyen en général, la justice en général, la vérité en général […] fonctionne au profit d'intérêts très particuliers …"[4] In a word, French existentialism turns upon a refusal of abstract universalities and presumptions of disembodied objectivity, be they scientific, political, or philosophical, in favour of a recognition of concrete particularities, their variations, and their influence on our worldview.

The scepticism that they exhibit towards science is perhaps most striking where they problematise scientific conceptions of bodies. In effect, both consider such conceptions to be inadequate to account for lived experience in a body. Merleau-Ponty repeatedly highlights the inconsistencies in scientific models of embodiment, insisting that we are not "le résultat ou l'entrecroisement des multiples causalités qui déterminent [nos] corps", nor can we conceive of ourselves as "le simple objet de la biologie, de la psychologie et de la sociologie".[5] Similarly, Sartre regards science – namely "*l'anatomie*" and "*la physiologie*" – as singularly dispossessed when it comes to descriptions of experience: "[La science] s'est condamnée, dès le départ, à ne rien comprendre à la vie puisqu'elle la conçoit simplement comme une modalité particulière de la mort …"[6] It is particularly significant that he makes this claim in a discussion of *autrui*: "Il y aurait donc une erreur énorme à croire que le corps d'autrui qui se dévoile originellement à nous, c'est le corps de l'anatomo-physiologie."[7] Herein, we find one of several guiding axes of existential phenomenology that lay the foundation for a refusal of normative conceptions and evaluations of bodies. Put simply, if the categories and meanings of norms, 'others', and normative hierarchies are sustained and naturalised through a tacit acceptance of the scientific

[4] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanisme et terreur: Essai sur le problème communiste*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p. 133.
[5] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. ii.
[6] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, pp. 388-389.
[7] Ibid., p. 389.

view of the body as universal and objective, then a philosophy that challenges this view might problematise such categories, meanings, and hierarchies. What is more, the eidetic reduction, which both adopt to varying degrees, offers a similar possibility of suspending normative conceptions of bodies: such conceptions surely form part of the "affirmations spontanées dans lesquelles je vis" that Merleau-Ponty seeks to "mettre en suspens et comme hors action" with the reduction.[8] While Sartre's relation to the reduction is at times ambivalent, his claim that *l'existence précède l'essence* operates similarly to criticise notions of human nature or instinct that prop up normative categorisations, valorisations, and hierarchies. Put simply, if man "n'est pas définissible" because "il n'est d'abord rien", and if "l'homme existe d'abord, se rencontre, surgit dans le monde, et se définit après", then the guiding principle of existentialism turns on a pledge to strip back normative preconceptions about how bodies should be or act.[9] From the outset, then, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenologies are motivated by a series of theoretical and methodological commitments that offer a compelling framework for resisting normative beliefs about bodies, acts and desires, as well as for seeking to account for a range of experiences, including those marked by bodily otherness.

We might therefore be somewhat surprised to discover that both philosophers have been subject to a range of critiques that charge them on both counts: of failing to take experiences of bodily otherness into account, on the one hand, and of reproducing normative ideologies, on the other. Many have lamented the absence of bodily otherness in their works: Le Dœuff notes that "Sartre ne propose nulle part une théorie de l'être-femme", while Zoe Belinsky argues that Merleau-Ponty disregards disability insofar as he "does not reckon with a subject whose *in*capacities haunt the perceptual horizon through which they appraise their sense of their own

[8] Merleau-Ponty, *Les sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie*, p. 20.
[9] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, pp. 21-22.

bodily possibilities".[10] Elsewhere, Gail Weiss has pinpointed "an absence of any discussion of how racial, sexual, age, ethnic, class, moral, and technological differences are marked on our bodies" as a "serious difficulty" in Merleau-Ponty's work.[11] Against these critiques, scholars such as Sara Ahmed have argued that we might read between the lines to infer an account of bodily otherness: "… in Merleau-Ponty's writing bodies are already rather queer."[12] This recalls Gayle Salamon's belief that it is precisely the ambiguity of Merleau-Ponty's conception of sexuality that constitutes its appeal for "more identitarian conceptions of sexual difference and sexual identity."[13] Others still regard these absences as productive, insofar as they might shed light on experiences both within and without the norm. Following Julien S. Murphy: "Without intending to, Sartre has provided us with a particularly useful description of women's experience of devaluation in a world where men are dominant."[14] Herein, we find an inflection of the second charge, namely that their philosophies reproduce normative conceptions of bodies and social relations. Sartre has regularly been accused of misogyny, perhaps most notably with Margery Collins and Christine Pierce finding him guilty of "blatant sexism".[15] Jeffner Allen has broadened the scope of this charge to include Merleau-Ponty: "Existentialism is, in principle, patriarchal existentialism."[16] Indeed, Allen goes as far as to claim that "existentialism cannot be reformed", so foundational is its investment in patriarchy.[17] Her scepticism echoes Grosz's petition, cited above, for feminists "to seriously question whether

[10] Le Dœuff, *L'Étude et le Rouet*, p. 76.; Zoe Belinsky, 'Transgender and Disabled Bodies: Between Pain and the Imaginary', in *Transgender Marxism,* ed. by Jules Joanne Gleeson and Elle O'Rourke (London: Pluto Press, 2021), pp. 179-199 (p. 188).
[11] Gail Weiss, *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality*, (New York; London: Routledge, 1999), p. 3.
[12] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 106.
[13] Gayle Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality*, (New York: Colombia University Press, 2010), p. 49.
[14] Julien S. Murphy, 'The Look in Sartre and Rich', *Hypatia,* 2 (1987), 113.
[15] Margery Collins and Christine Pierce, 'Holes and Slime: Sexism in Sartre's Psychoanalysis', *Philosophical Forum,* 5 (1973), 117.
[16] Jeffner Allen, 'An Introduction to Patriarchal Existentialism: A Proposal for a Way Out of Existential Patriarchy', in *The Thinking Muse: Feminism and Modern French Philosophy,* ed. by Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 71-84 (p. 78).
[17] Ibid., p. 75.

phenomenological descriptions are appropriate for women's experience" or "whether, instead, altogether new and different theoretical terms are necessary".[18] Conversely, some scholars have not sought to discount accusations of misogyny or normativity, but insisted instead that these are irrelevant to their fundamental theories: Constance Mui argues that Sartre grants women "full-fledged consciousness" "in spite of his ill feelings toward [them]", while Hazel Barnes conceives of Sartre's sexism as "contingent" and therefore "not essential to our judgment on the philosophy and its potential value as a support to feminism".[19]

Two sites of contestation thus emerge in critical discussion of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty on the matter of bodily otherness. In the first place, there is disagreement over how far they are able to distance themselves from abstract universalities and normative ideologies. In the second, there is debate over the extent to which their success or failure therein impacts their philosophies as a whole. If, then, we are to build upon their thought and formulate an existential phenomenology of bodily otherness, we must set out by engaging with both of these points, and thus situate ourselves in these sites of contestation. Indeed, an immediate objection to any suggestion that Sartre and Merleau-Ponty failed to account for bodily otherness might emerge in light of their respective legacies: both are renowned for their political engagements on questions of oppression, social inequality and discrimination. In effect, in the years during and following the publication of *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, they explicitly engaged with questions of bodily otherness in a range of works, articles and literary contributions. While not all explicitly philosophical in nature, most of these texts reflect and indeed elaborate the frameworks set out in their existential phenomenologies. Their discussions of bodily otherness are not limited to the 1940s, but only those produced during this period will be considered here: given the shifts in their philosophical outlooks by the turn of the decade,

[18] Grosz, p. 111.
[19] Constance Mui, 'Sartre's Sexism Reconsidered', *Auslegung: A Journal of Philosophy,* 16 (1990), 32.; Hazel E. Barnes, 'Sartre and Sexism', *Philosophy and Literature,* 14 (1990), 341.

later texts cannot serve as a reliable reflection of their phenomenological projects. Even in this relatively short time, however, they produced a wealth of writing on norms, bodily otherness, and normative socio-economic distributions. Sartre's discussions of race, anti-Blackness and colonialism are well-documented. Perhaps most notable of these are his 1947 contribution to the first issue of the revue *Présence africaine*, 'Présence noire', and his preface to Léopold Sédar Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, 'Orphée noir', published in 1948. His conceptions of race and racism are also outlined in his *Réflexions sur la question juive*, arguably his most comprehensive interrogation of racial prejudice and its effects, written in 1944 under Nazi occupation, wherein he talks about Jewish identity in terms of *race*, and sees anti-semitism and racism as synonymous.

Merleau-Ponty's writings on matters of bodily otherness and normative social hierarchies are somewhat sparser, with the discussion running through many of his written interventions in the latter half of the 1940s, rather than figuring as their explicit subject. There are, however, some texts where he explicitly addresses such matters: he too reflects upon anti-semitism and its social repercussions in his 1945 article 'La Guerre a eu lieu', while his 1947 *Humanisme et terreur* comprises a sustained critique of racism and colonial exploitation. An interrogation of these texts might shed light upon both thinkers' respective relations to bodily otherness. It is important to note, however, that they often use terminology that would now be regarded as discriminatory, if not actively violent. This is most notable in their reflections upon race and racism, although not limited to them. In what follows, we will cite the sources in the original, including such terminology. Our decision to do so reflects neither a disregard for the present sense of these terms, nor a dismissal of the destructive material, social or emotional effects that they may have in contemporary Western society. Rather, it speaks to a desire to reproduce their views of norms, 'others', and bodily otherness as faithfully as possible, so as to formulate a robust critique of those views. Any such critique might begin with a recognition

that these writings bear witness to a genuine and at points discerning recognition of the reality of norms and 'others': of their social construction, and the fallacies therein, and of the socio-economic hierarchies and inequalities that they motivate. There are some differences in their approaches to these matters, as there are in the conclusions that they draw, and their discussion here in tandem is not intended to flatten those differences. Rather, the conviction that they might and in fact should be read together speaks to their implication over this period in a shared philosophical and political movement – existentialism –, made tangible with their co-founding of the revue *Les Temps Modernes* in 1945. Hence, while discordance in their engagements with bodily otherness should not be dismissed – it is perhaps significant, for example, that Sartre's are more, for the most part, more explicit and frequent than Merleau-Ponty's – we might none the less interrogate them jointly, as two allied but distinct expressions of existential thought.

Perceiving norms, and 'others'

In this optic, we can locate moments in their writings where they display a certain lucidity of the reality of norms and normative ideas, notably where they point to their social construction. In a discussion of Marxism, Merleau-Ponty highlights the artifice of the very notion of "nature sociale", arguing that those traits attributed to such a nature "sont en réalité les attributs (et les masques) d'une certaine « structure sociale », le capitalisme".[20] Elsewhere, he manifests an awareness of the particular, historic construction of Jewish people as 'others' in his assertion that anti-semitism "s'est conçu aux creux de l'histoire".[21] Sartre too recognises the 'otherness' of Jewish people as socially constructed, arguing that they have been made into an "espèce d'hommes qui n'a de sens que comme produit artificiel d'une société capitaliste (ou féodale),

[20] Merleau-Ponty, 'Marxisme et philosophie', p. 153.
[21] Merleau-Ponty, 'La guerre a eu lieu', p. 173.

qui n'a pour raison d'être que de servir de bouc émissaire".[22] Further, both philosophers seek to expose the fallacy of some of the naturalistic accounts that ground certain norms. Merleau-Ponty problematises the presumed natural supremacy of heterosexual monogamy: "Pas plus que le trio, le couple humain n'est une réalité *naturelle* ; l'échec du trio […] ne peut pas être mis au compte de quelque prédisposition naturelle."[23] Similarly, Sartre critiques naturalistic accounts of race, racial difference, and racial hierarchies: "Si l'on entend par race ce complexe indéfinissable où l'on fait entrer pêle-mêle des caractères somatiques et des traits intellectuels et moraux, je n'y crois pas plus qu'aux tables tournantes."[24] Crucially, he wields a sophisticated grasp of the processes of naturalisation through which norms and 'others' are manufactured and obfuscated: "Qu'on ne s'y trompe pas : les explications par l'hérédité et la race sont venues plus tard, elles sont comme le mince revêtement scientifique de cette conviction primitive …"[25]

This understanding of norms and 'others' as social constructions does not entail a dismissal of their social and material effects. Anti-semitism, following Sartre, is a "structure sociale régressive", one which rests upon a "conception du monde prélogique".[26] In stressing the concrete role of ideology in sustaining norms and 'others', themselves regarded as a social structure, Sartre mirrors his contemporary's claim that dominant ideologies "ne sont pas des apparences […] Elles sont exactement aussi « réelles » que les structures de l'économie capitaliste, avec lesquelles elles forment un seul système."[27] Merleau-Ponty expands on this in a discussion of anti-semitism: "… les idéologies, une fois constituées, ont leur poids propre, elles entraînent l'histoire comme le volant entraîne le moteur."[28] They thus share a view of norms and 'others', and notably those of race, as social constructions whose material and social

[22] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 165.
[23] Merleau-Ponty, 'Le roman et la métaphysique', p. 45.
[24] Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p. 73.
[25] Ibid., p. 44.
[26] Ibid., p. 173.
[27] Merleau-Ponty, 'Marxisme et philosophie', p. 160.
[28] Merleau-Ponty, 'La guerre a eu lieu', p. 181.

effects are produced and justified by normative ideologies. What is more, Sartre displays an awareness of the nature and extent of such effects. He provides a particularly astute observation of these effects in the case of anti-semitism as "une atmosphère": "… un sens subtil des visages et des mots, une menace qui se dissimule dans les choses …"[29] He goes on to exhibit an appreciation of how 'others', in this case Jewish people, experience this atmosphere:

> Un Israélite n'est jamais sûr de sa place ou de ses possessions ; il ne saurait même affirmer qu'il sera encore demain dans le pays qu'il habite aujourd'hui, sa situation, ses pouvoirs et jusqu'à son droit de vivre peuvent être mis en question d'une minute à l'autre ; en outre, il est, nous l'avons vu, hanté par cette image insaisissable et humiliante que les foules hostiles ont de lui.[30]

Further still, Sartre provides a compelling description of the nature of mechanisms of othering, arguing that they promote the "abaissement", "humiliation", "bannissement" of 'others' – here, Jewish people – and in so doing constitute so many "meurtres symboliques".[31] He and Merleau-Ponty alike are cognisant of how normativity, and the socio-economic inequalities it motivates, are not abstract social structures, but enshrined in and indeed preserved by the law, and state practices: writing about anti-Blackness in the US, Sartre notes that slavery is "[institutionnel]", that is to say "[garanti] par la loi".[32] For his part, Merleau-Ponty seeks to lay bare the fallacy of *de jure* equality in Western democracies, gesturing towards its complicity in concealing and reproducing *de facto* inequality: "… l'égalité formelle des droits et la liberté politique masquent les rapports de force plutôt qu'elles ne les suppriment."[33]

Central to their recognition of norms and normative social systems is an understanding of them as mutually-constitutive and complementary. Sartre outlines this clearly: "Le Juif n'est

[29] Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p. 111.
[30] Ibid., p. 161.
[31] Ibid., p. 58.
[32] Jean-Paul Sartre, 'La violence révolutionnaire', in *Cahiers pour une morale,* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), pp. 579-594 (p. 579).
[33] Merleau-Ponty, 'Autour du marxisme', pp. 124-125.

ici qu'un prétexte : ailleurs on se servira du nègre, ailleurs du jaune."[34] This conception of a specific 'other' as a pretext challenges realist justifications of norms and normative hierarchies: to see the 'other' as a social role rather than a natural reality is to reveal the lie of essentialism at the bedrock of normative ideologies. It also gestures towards the utility or function of norms and 'others', and normative socio-economic inequalities, in and for capitalist society. In effect, both he and Merleau-Ponty regard these phenomena as inextricably bound up in the emergence and evolution of Western capitalism. This comes through in Sartre's claim that anti-semitism "ne saurait exister dans une société sans classe".[35] As it does in Merleau-Ponty's assertion that the dominant – bourgeois – ideology in Western society, which, as we have seen, he charges with sustaining norms and 'others', is made up of "les vues et les valeurs qui en fait rendront possible le maintien du capitalisme".[36] In other words, both philosophers align in a conviction that normative categories, values, and hierarchies, serve a clear purpose for Western capitalism, and those in power therein. Indeed, following Sartre, if anti-semitism "canalise les poussées révolutionnaires vers la destruction de certains hommes, non des institutions", it functions as a "soupape de sûreté pour les classes possédantes": it foments "une haine bénigne contre les particuliers" in place of "une haine dangereuse contre un régime".[37] Merleau-Ponty paints a similar picture of Western society in the aftermath of the war, wherein "les rapports de classe sont plus que jamais masqués par d'autres oppositions".[38] They recognise that norms function as a cohesive force, allying members of diverse social groups and classes against a common 'other', and thus diverting attention away from economic disparities. Sartre claims that anti-semitism subdues "les distinctions entre riches et pauvres, entre classes travailleuses et classes possédantes", by "les [résumant] toutes en celle du juif et du non-juif".[39] Elsewhere, he points

[34] Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p. 63.
[35] Ibid., p. 191.
[36] Merleau-Ponty, 'Autour du marxisme', pp. 134-135.
[37] Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p. 51.
[38] Merleau-Ponty, 'La querelle de l'existentialisme', p. 99.
[39] Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, pp. 180-181.

to the vested interest that even the most disenfranchised white people have in racial hierarchies: "… en dépit de lui-même l'ouvrier blanc profite un peu de la colonisation ; si bas que soit son niveau de vie, sans elle il serait plus bas encore."[40] His analysis here is particularly striking in its insight, prefiguring some of the claims made by scholars of race and racism cited in our discussion of bodily otherness: "Plus généralement le mythe de l'égalité des classes supérieures est maintenu au point que les pauvres Blancs ne s'aperçoivent pas de l'exploitation dont ils sont victimes, tout occupés qu'ils sont à penser leur appartenance à la classe supérieure."[41]

The same might be said of his understanding of how norms are produced and sustained. In several discussions of race, he displays an awareness of how norms function as the universal. He remarks that Christians in Europe "ont eu l'art et l'audace de prétendre en face du Juif qu'ils n'étaient pas *une autre race*, mais purement et simplement *l'homme*", and thus that they figure in Western society as "l'anonymat, l'humanité sans race".[42] Similarly, he describes whiteness as "cette abstraite humanité incolore".[43] Such a conception of the norm as universal, and thus marked by an absence of essence or particularity, chimes with Merleau-Ponty's claim on the subject of illness that "l'homme sain est un mythe, proche parent des mythes nazis".[44] In effect, both reveal an understanding of the reality of the norm as definitionally incoherent or inconsistent, if not empty, and even as an impossibility. Hence Sartre points to "un brouillard insaisissable" that characterises "la *vraie* France, avec ses *vraies* valeurs, son *vrai* tact, sa *vraie* moralité" in anti-semitic thinking.[45] This foregrounds an appreciation of norms as defined in opposition to 'others', one manifest in Sartre's reflection on race: "… la valeur de la Blanche vient très exactement de ce qu'elle est celle qu'on ne traite pas comme une Noire."[46] Here,

[40] Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Orphée noir', in *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* ed. by Léopold Sédar Senghor (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1948), (p. xiv).
[41] Sartre, 'La violence révolutionnaire', p. 588.
[42] Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p. 119.
[43] Sartre, 'Orphée noir', p. xiv.
[44] Merleau-Ponty, 'L'existentialisme chez Hegel', p. 84.
[45] Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p. 100.
[46] Sartre, 'La violence révolutionnaire', p. 589.

'others' are constituted against the norm, by those within the norm: "… si le Juif n'existait pas, l'antisémite l'inventerait."[47] 'Otherness', he states in a discussion of Black people, is nothing more or less than the fact of being made 'other': "Mais ce qui les rend autres, c'est que nous les avons mis a priori dans une situation où ils ne peuvent nous apparaître que comme Autres."[48] Further, to be made 'other' is to figure as particular in relation to an abstract or universal norm, as is clear in the case of Jewish people: "Mais le Juif a comme nous un caractère et par-dessus le marché, il est Juif […] Il est surdéterminé."[49] This particularity excludes them from the norm, as with Jewish children whose "*nom spécial*" sets them apart from their non-Jewish peers, "des enfants normaux".[50] His analysis thus posits the existence of an asymmetric, Manichean binary that subtends the relation between norms and their 'others'. This is particularly salient where he asserts that the very concept of race necessarily implies inequality: "… n'englobe-t-elle pas, dans sa structure profonde, un jugement de valeur, puisque l'idée même de race implique celle d'inégalité ?"[51] In short, Sartre's account of racial norms and 'others' – of norms as universal and empty, and as constituted in opposition to particular 'others' – is compelling in the context of the present study, most notably in its coherence with the vision set out by many of the scholars of bodily otherness cited earlier in this thesis.

Along with Merleau-Ponty, he also describes how this Manichean binary posits those within the norm as superior to those outside of it. Herein, the 'other' is rendered "un moindre Autre, un Autre inférieur et soumis."[52] Both philosophers point to the ascription of inferiority and note how it works to strip 'others' of their humanity, in turn foregrounding discrimination and violence. Anti-semitic violence is predicated, in Merleau-Ponty's view, on a misreading of Jewish people, which is precisely a refusal to consider them as real people: "Un antisémite ne

[47] Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p. 14.
[48] Sartre, *Cahiers pour une morale*, p. 443.
[49] Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p. 96.
[50] Ibid., p. 96.
[51] Ibid., p. 145.
[52] Sartre, *Cahiers pour une morale*, p. 398.

pourrait pas voir torturer les juifs s'il les voyait vraiment, s'il percevait cette souffrance et cette agonie dans une vie individuelle, mais justement, il ne voit pas les juifs qui souffrent, il est dans le mythe *du* juif."[53] Similarly, Sartre's discussion of the dilemma faced by white people in the US – of whether to treat Black people "humainement", and "les [reconnaître] comme hommes" – speaks to a conviction that the exploitation of Black people has historically required a refusal to regard them as human.[54] Building upon this, we find an appreciation of the ways in which these processes of othering and dehumanisation shape the experience of those outside the norm. Consider Sartre's description of the experience of Jewish people in Western society: "Vigoureusement attaqué, faiblement défendu, le Juif se sent en danger dans une société dont l'antisémitisme est la tentation perpétuelle."[55] He notes how 'others' are forced to confirm to normative expectations, and behave in the ways prescribed by those within the norm: if Black people appear to behave differently from white people, he says, this is precisely because "nous obligeons les Noirs à se comporter ainsi".[56] In other words, he recognises the mutual processes of othering and naturalisation through which difference between groups is fabricated by the very social differentiations that it is supposed to ground. He expands this view to include Jewish people – "Les antisémites ont raison de dire que le Juif mange, boit, lit, dort et meurt comme un Juif. Que pourrait-il faire d'autre ?" – and women: "J'ai rencontré parfois ce genre de sottise chez les hommes mais elle est plus fréquente encore chez les femmes. Cela parce que justement la femme est tenue a priori pour inefficace ; elle est mise entre parenthèses."[57]

Crucially, Sartre shows an awareness that these processes shape not only the behaviour, but the consciousness of those designated as 'other'. He describes the experience of a Jewish person in Western society: "On lui a aliéné jusqu'à son propre corps, on a coupé en deux sa vie

[53] Merleau-Ponty, 'La guerre a eu lieu', p. 174.
[54] Sartre, 'La violence révolutionnaire', p. 591.
[55] Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p. 94.
[56] Sartre, 'La violence révolutionnaire', p. 591.
[57] Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p. 107.; Sartre, *Cahiers pour une morale*, p. 315.

affective …"[58] This in turn is seen to have repercussions upon embodiment. The Jewish 'other' is "[mal] à l'aise jusque dans sa peau, ennemi irréconcilié de son corps", and Jewish people, in his view, "n'adhèrent pas à leur corps avec cette complaisance, ce sentiment tranquille de la propriété qui caractérisent la plupart des « Aryens »."[59] In this sense, his view of anti-semitism might be read as the articulation of a Jewish 'condition', similar to Ndiaye's "condition noire", insofar as it evokes a collective experience of being made 'other' – here Jewish, and in Ndiaye's work, Black – and treated as such in a society underwritten by the supremacy of those within the norm. In fact, he locates the "lien commun" between Jewish people in the fact that "ils ont une situation commune du Juif, c'est-à-dire qu'ils vivent au sein d'une communauté qui les tient pour Juifs."[60] Sartre also meditates on the reverse dynamic: the ways in which normative ideologies and social differentiations shape the consciousness of those within the norm. In a discussion of slavery, he points to the perceptive limitations generated by normative epistemic regimes, describing something akin to Mills's 'structural blindnesses': "Ainsi l'oppression ne se découvre pas d'abord à l'oppresseur. Elle est masquée."[61] He goes on to underscore the role of naturalisation in this phenomenon: "L'oppression est *dans la Nature* puisque c'est un fait naturel que le Noir est inférieur au Blanc."[62] Recollecting life before the war, Merleau-Ponty, too, acknowledges the perceptive shortcomings of those within the norm, notably in relation to identifying normative hierarchies and systems of domination: "Si nous avions mieux regardé, nous aurions déjà trouvé, dans la société des temps de paix, des maîtres et des esclaves …"[63] This stance is developed further in Sartre's thought, where his claim that "pour voir clair dans une situation injustifiable, il n'est pas suffisant que l'oppresseur la regarde honnêtement, il faut aussi qu'il change la structure de ses yeux" speaks to a recognition of the fact that perception

[58] Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p. 164.
[59] Ibid., pp. 161, 144.
[60] Ibid., p. 81.
[61] Sartre, 'La violence révolutionnaire', p. 589.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Merleau-Ponty, 'La guerre a eu lieu', p. 173.

and knowledge are restricted, under the Western epistemic regime, to that which confirms and justifies normative ideologies and the socio-economic constellations they motivate.[64]

The limits of that perception

In the years following the publication of *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, during which most – if not all – of their writing was anchored in their existential phenomenologies, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty can thus be seen to display a striking appreciation of the reality and nature of norms, 'others', and normative social hierarchies. At times, as we have seen, their grasp of these social phenomena is particularly remarkable, mirroring and even anticipating perspectives put forward by later scholars of bodily otherness. At this stage, then, the claim that they do not – let alone *can* not – account for bodily otherness within the terms of their existential philosophies may appear unfounded. Upon closer inspection, however, their understanding of norms and 'others' often falls short, even and perhaps most saliently in those moments where they come closest to a true appraisal of social realities. If we begin with some of these later writings, and explore where even they betray normative biases, we will be well placed to turn that critical light on the existential phenomenologies in which they are grounded. Indeed, Sartre's discussion of the perceptive and epistemic limitations of those within the norm provides a compelling starting point for such a critique. In effect, if he states in a discussion of *négritude* that "un blanc ne saurait en parler convenablement, puisqu'il n'en a pas l'expérience intérieure" and that he "[devrait] donc laisser le lecteur la rencontrer au fil de ces pages", he immediately contradicts himself, beginning his next sentence with "Mais …", and writing several more pages on the subject.[65] In spite of an apparent sensitivity to his complicity in

[64] Sartre, 'La violence révolutionnaire', pp. 590-591.
[65] Sartre, 'Orphée noir', p. xxix. "Mais cette introduction serait incomplète si, après avoir indiqué que la quête du Graal noir figurait dans son intention originelle et dans ses méthodes la plus authentique synthèse des aspirations révolutionnaires et du souci poétique, je ne montrais que cette notion complexe est, en son cœur, Poésie pure. Je

normative regimes, he ultimately draws a distinction between himself and those white people that he regards as more actively implicated in racism, and anti-Blackness: the use of "nous" in "nous obligeons les Noirs à se comporter ainsi", cited above, for example, is tempered shortly afterwards by his use of "vous" to address other such white people, which quietly exonerates him from many of the most serious charges of racial oppression: "Mais si vous les traitez humainement, c'est que vous les reconnaissez comme hommes et ils prennent davantage conscience de leur état."[66] Merleau-Ponty's view of German anti-semitism as "un mystère" for French people operates similarly to obscure his collaboration in normative regimes: "… formés comme nous l'étions, nous devions nous demander chaque jour pendant ces quatre années : comment l'antisémitisme est-il possible ?"[67] His incredulity in the face of racial discrimination, taken alongside his claim that occupation forced people to adopt "conduites puériles", such as "juger des gens sur l'habit", itself suggestive of a belief that people did not judge others based upon their appearance before the war, point to a basic ignorance of the ubiquity of normative social structures and processes.[68] Against a nascent recognition of their complicity in such processes, and their inability to see clearly in systems of domination, then, both he and Sartre ultimately tend to regard themselves as exceptions from the rule, able to distance themselves from and disengage with normative ideologies.

This presumption of innocence rings particularly false if we subject these writings to further scrutiny: upon closer inspection, they contain a multitude of normative assumptions, some of which are not merely incidental, but foundational. In fact, both thinkers turn out to be heavily invested in the very epistemic regime that they outwardly critique. Sartre's critique of scientific models of race, and crucially of the role of science in justifying racism, ultimately

me bornerai donc à examiner ces poèmes objectivement comme un faisceau de témoignages, et à recenser quelques-uns de leurs thèmes principaux."
[66] Sartre, 'La violence révolutionnaire', p. 591.
[67] Merleau-Ponty, 'La guerre a eu lieu', p. 173.
[68] Ibid., p. 172.

falls short: "… nous n'acceptons d'utiliser les concepts ethniques que dans les domaines où ils ont reçu des confirmations expérimentales, à savoir ceux de la biologie et de la pathologie …"[69] Perhaps most critical, both he and Merleau-Ponty collude in flagrant eurocentrism. If Merleau-Ponty begins by problematising the eurocentrism of descriptions of countries in terms such as "arriérés" and "avancés", he later characterises colonised countries in those very terms, as in an "état arriéré".[70] Sartre's eurocentrism and racism are manifest where he employs references to non-Europeans allegorically to degrade anti-semites, depicting them as acting "comme les primitifs qui dotent le vent ou le soleil d'une petite âme" and "comme les indigènes frappés d'un tabou".[71] For both, this eurocentrism belies an adherence to normative ideologies and their devaluation of 'others', including racial stereotypes. In his reflection on *négritude*, for example, Sartre reproduces racist imagery. Black people are at once degendered – "… la négritude, en sa source la plus profonde, est une androgynie …" – and hypersexualised: "… le noir reste le grand mâle de la terre, le sperme du monde."[72] The ascription of an abnormal sexuality to Black people, and notably to Black men, recalls both Ferguson's assertion that people of colour are sexualised as non-heteronormative, and Fanon's pastiche of white attitudes, itself possibly a reference to this very passage in 'Orphée noir': "Les nègres, eux, ont la puissance sexuelle […] Il paraît qu'ils couchent partout, et à tout moment. Ce sont des génitaux."[73] Moreover, their critiques of anti-semitism are interwoven with anti-semitic imagery. Merleau-Ponty locates "le rôle que les juifs ont joué jadis dans le développement d'un certain capitalisme" as contributing to anti-semitism, thus resurrecting the age-old anti-semitic association between Jewish people and wealth.[74] Even where he looks to defend Jewish people, Sartre repeatedly describes them

[69] Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, pp. 71-72.
[70] Merleau-Ponty, 'Pour la vérité', p. 189.
[71] Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, pp. 43, 50.
[72] Sartre, 'Orphée noir', pp. xxxiii, xxxii.
[73] Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1971), p. 128.
[74] Merleau-Ponty, 'La guerre a eu lieu', p. 175.

as physically inferior to their non-Jewish counterparts: "… il s'agit la plupart du temps d'un être faible et qui, mal préparé à la violence, ne parvient pas même à se défendre."[75]

Throughout, Sartre positions 'others' as sites of weakness and passivity. Jewish people are frequently typified by "faiblesse", as are women, with references to "l'impuissance de la femme" and "sa faiblesse".[76] So fundamental is this weakness to womanhood that it operates even at the level of ontology: "Dans l'être même de la femme, dans son impuissance …"[77] Women are not only physically inferior to men, but mentally so: "Le recours à *l'intuition* est fréquent chez les femmes …"[78] In line with the dominant epistemic regime, time and again he dismisses the intellect and lived experiences of various 'others': "Il y a toujours une manière de comprendre l'idiot, l'enfant, le primitif ou l'étranger, pourvu qu'on ait les renseignements suffisants."[79] Those outside the norm are positioned as passive, as evidenced by his view of the history of Jewish communities as "une longue passivité", and a description he gives of women: "Et comme la femme est passivité, le monde est senti comme pénétrant en elle …"[80] Manifest in this description is the objectification of women through the prism of masculine heterosexual desire. Women figure as passive, sexual objects for men, both literally and figuratively. This is not only true of Sartre, but of Merleau-Ponty, who likens revolution to "un accouchement [qui] peut se terminer par la mort de la mère et de l'enfant si quelqu'un n'est pas là pour aider la nature."[81] Throughout their writings, we can trace the erection of the subject/object binarism that we have already located at the heart of the Western epistemic regime, wherein those within the norm are granted subjectivity, while those outside of it are constituted as objects for the normative subject. Their language is further testament to this dynamic. The ostensibly general

[75] Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p. 54.
[76] Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p. 54.; Sartre, *Cahiers pour une morale*, p. 245.
[77] Sartre, *Cahiers pour une morale*, p. 246.
[78] Ibid., p. 222.
[79] Sartre, *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, p. 70.
[80] Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p. 81.; Sartre, *Cahiers pour une morale*, p. 330.
[81] Merleau-Ponty, 'La querelle de l'existentialisme', pp. 100-101.

subject of their work – "on" or "nous" – turns out to be specific: that of the normative subject. Sartre sets Jewish people against an "on" and a "nous", thus excluding them from a non-Jewish subjectivity: "Les Juifs qui nous entourent …"[82] Merleau-Ponty, for his part, pits his own 'on' and 'nous' against non-European people of colour: "Que répondre quand un Indochinois ou un Arabe nous fait observer qu'il a bien vu nos armes, mais non notre humanisme ?"[83] Even here, in a discussion of racial inequality and colonialism, "nous" is opposed to "les autres".[84] Just as even at the most lucid moments in Sartre's analysis of anti-semitism, those outside of the norm are often "ils" or "eux": "Ils se sentent séparés, retranchés de la société …"[85] Throughout their writings, the subject is a patently normative one – white, non-Jewish, European, masculine, heterosexual, etc. – for whom 'others' of various kinds figure as objects.

The ambiguity of the subject of these works – sometimes general, often implicitly coded as normative – reflects a basic flaw in their accounts of normative categories and hierarchies. In effect, these instances of linguistic slippage are indicative of a wider dynamic through which normative, unilateral structures of othering and domination are stripped of their specificity, and thus their very foundation. If, as we have seen, both thinkers appear to recognise the historic construction of certain groups as 'others', they ultimately fold these realities back into universal models of oppression that can never truly reflect the reality of norms and the social distributions they establish. This is notably evident in Sartre's appraisal of anti-semitism, where he argues that "nous risquons d'en être, nous aussi, les victimes", and that "le destin des Juifs" is that of each and every one of us.[86] This echoes Merleau-Ponty's assertion that non-Jewish people under occupation "[n'étaient] pas plus libres […] que le juif ou le déporté".[87] In affirming the equivalence of non-Jewish and Jewish people and experiences in discussions of anti-semitism,

[82] Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, pp. 45, 79, 96, 143.
[83] Merleau-Ponty, *Humanisme et terreur*, p. 182.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Sartre, *Réflexions sur la question juive*, p. 92.
[86] Ibid., pp. 184-185.
[87] Merleau-Ponty, 'La guerre a eu lieu', p. 179.

they efface its historical contingency and unilaterality, bending it into an abstract universal worldview that precludes an appreciation of the very unilateral power relations that they seek to highlight elsewhere. Merleau-Ponty gives succinct testimony to this: "… nous sommes tous les juifs dans la mésure où nous avons le souci de l'universel …"[88] This dynamic is not restricted to their engagements with anti-semitism, as is evidenced in Sartre's shift away from an apparent awareness of the historic specificity of *négritude* to an insistence upon the universality of both its authors and its audience: "Je voudrais montrer par quelle voie on trouve accès dans ce monde de jais et que cette poésie qui paraît d'abord raciale est finalement un chant de tous et pour tous."[89] The strength of this commitment to universal frameworks should not be underestimated: it subtends the totality of their reflections on bodily otherness, revealing a basic incapacity to take stock of norms and the processes that sustain them, and, critically, of their complicity therein. Such a critique does not undermine the insightful claims that they do make, but rather contextualises them as rare moments of perspicacity that stand out against a backdrop of misrecognition and a fidelity to universal theories. A close reading of the texts that emerge in the wake of their major phenomenological works thus paints a more nuanced picture of their relation to 'others', one which underscores their failure to account for bodily otherness, and their complicity in reproducing normative ideologies and epistemic frameworks.

Cracks in the foundations

The deficiencies in these accounts speaks to two factors that played a decisive role in their emergence: the influence of their own personal experiences during the war, on the one hand, and the nature of existential phenomenologies that serve as their foundation, on the other. As

[88] Merleau-Ponty, 'L'existentialisme chez Hegel', p. 84.
[89] Sartre, 'Orphée noir', p. xi.

we have seen, the advent of the Second World War signalled a shift in Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's political and philosophical outlooks. The vast majority of the works cited above, where they grapple with questions of bodily otherness, were written either in the latter years of the conflict, or in its immediate aftermath. This is hardly a coincidence: their discussions of anti-semitism and other systems of domination emerge directly from those very experiences. In effect, both acknowledge that the war triggered an awakening to social realities, and notably to systems of domination: Merleau-Ponty states that Nazi anti-semitism laid bare "une vérité que nous ignorions en 1939", while Sartre charges the enemy with "nous contraignant à nous poser ces questions qu'on élude dans la paix".[90] Residing within many of the norms central to this thesis, othering and anti-semitism had previously been confined to "l'univers de la pensée": with the advent of conflict, they were for the first time "en présence de la cruauté de la mort", and forced to engage with normative social structures and processes.[91] Reflecting on Sartre's engagements with race and colonialism, Noureddine Lamouchi notes that the philosopher, who "s'était désintéressé, jusqu'à la guerre, de la politique et de tout engagement", underwent "une première évolution nette dans sa pensée et son comportement politiques", namely the "passage d'un apolitisme total à un engagement".[92] Significantly, Lamouchi regards this "passage" as "né d'une situation concrète".[93] Sartre's own account of mobilisation corroborates this claim:

> Ce qui a fait éclater tout ça, c'est qu'un jour de septembre 1939, j'ai reçu une feuille de mobilisation et j'ai été obligé d'aller à la caserne de Nancy rejoindre des gars que je ne connaissais pas et qui étaient mobilisés comme moi. C'est ça qui a fait entrer le social dans ma tête : j'ai compris soudain que j'étais un être social quand je me suis vu arraché de l'endroit où j'étais, enlevé aux gens qui comptaient pour moi et emmené en train quelque part où je n'avais aucune envie d'aller …[94]

[90] Merleau-Ponty, 'La guerre a eu lieu', p. 175.; Sartre, *Situations, III*, p. 12.
[91] Merleau-Ponty, 'La guerre a eu lieu', pp. 169-170.
[92] Noureddine Lamouchi, *Jean-Paul Sartre et le Tiers Monde: Rhétorique d'un discours anticolonialiste*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1996), pp. 32-34.
[93] Ibid., p. 34.
[94] Sartre, *Situations, X*, p. 79.

Central to the politicisation of his thought, then, were his experiences of mobilisation, captivity as a prisoner of war, and occupation, wherein "[la] présence [des Allemands] était parmi nous, on la sentait à une certaine manière qu'avaient les objets d'être moins à nous, plus étranges, plus froids, plus publics en quelque sorte, comme si un regard étranger violait l'intimité de nos foyers."[95] His description of occupation also evokes processes of objectification – "… pour les autres nous n'étions qu'un *objet* …" – and, notably, "déshumanisation", which constitute what Sartre terms the "condition" of those living in Nazi-occupied France.[96]

The similarities between these accounts and his description of Jewish experiences of anti-semitism are striking, and may shed some light upon his failure to adequately account for othering. In effect, his awakening to the realities of othering and normative hierarchies took place just as his own freedom was curtailed for the very first time: "Jusque-là je me croyais souverain et il a fallu que je rencontre par la mobilisation la négation de ma propre liberté pour que je prenne conscience du poids du monde et de mes liens avec tous les autres et de tous les autres avec moi."[97] Hence the resultant shift towards discussions of bodily otherness turns on a presumption of the equivalence of his own experiences of repression, which could happen to anybody, with those of 'others', which could not. Herein, he confounds two distinct forms of violence – one predicated on norms, one distinct from them – stressing the parallels between his own experiences and those of 'others': "… on nous déportait en masse, comme travailleurs, comme Juifs, comme prisonniers politiques …"[98] Merleau-Ponty's description of Sartre's political awakening is also of note: "Il a découvert depuis qu'il faut bien [penser la politique] puisque nous la vivons, et qu'il doit y avoir du valable puisque nous y avons fait l'expérience d'un mal absolu."[99] The emphasis upon "nous" reveals the centrality of their own experiences

[95] Sartre, *Situations, III*, p. 23.
[96] Ibid., pp. 28-29, 38.
[97] Sartre, *Situations, X*, p. 80.
[98] Sartre, *Situations, III*, p. 11.
[99] Merleau-Ponty, 'Un auteur scandaleux', p. 58.

to their burgeoning interest in violence and oppression. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty's recollection of the war chimes with Sartre's insofar as it constituted the first real challenge to a sense of more or less absolute freedom that characterised his life beforehand: "Habitués depuis notre enfance à manier la liberté et à vivre une vie personnelle […] comment aurions-nous appris à engager notre liberté pour la conserver ?"[100] He, too, tends to efface the distinctions between different kinds and degrees of violence, notably between that done to Jewish and non-Jewish people under Nazi occupation: "Mais c'est nous qui étions les prisonniers."[101] Even where he does display some limited recognition of these distinctions – "Certes, ceux d'entre nous qui n'étaient ni juifs, ni communistes déclarés pouvaient, pendant quatre années, se ménager des méditations …" – he ultimately reverts back to a universalising conceptual framework: "Méditant sur nos grands hommes, nous n'étions pas plus libres […] que le juif ou le déporté devenu une seule douleur aveugle et sans choix."[102] At least in part, then, their failure to account for bodily otherness reflects the material conditions of their initial encounters with normative hierarchies and their effects. Subject themselves to Nazi repression, albeit of a different calibre, they drew parallels between their own lived experiences and those of 'others', and in so doing fatally stymied their analysis before it had even begun to take shape.

Their failure to account for bodily otherness should not, however, solely be chalked up to this crucial misstep. The other key vector of this failure, as stated above, is the nature of their existential phenomenologies, and the possibility these offered for thinking through social phenomena such as norms, normative hierarchies, and the mechanisms that sustain them. In effect, all of the above writings are grounded in their phenomenological reflections, some more explicitly than others. As we have seen, these should serve as an ideal philosophical foundation for accounts of bodily otherness: in their refusal of disembodied viewpoints and knowledges,

[100] Merleau-Ponty, 'La guerre a eu lieu', p. 170.
[101] Ibid., p. 172.
[102] Ibid., p. 179.

and their desire to strip back that which we often take for granted, we find an ideal framework for avoiding the abstract universalisms and normative ideologies that so often undermine such accounts. Indeed, at first glance, there is cause for optimism. In his *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Merleau-Ponty plainly points to the social imposition of meaning on bodies and acts: "L'usage qu'un homme fera de son corps est transcendant à l'égard de ce corps comme être simplement biologique."[103] It is, he says, no more "naturel" to "embrasser dans l'amour" than to "appeler table une table": "Les sentiments et les conduites passionnelles sont inventés comme les mots."[104] Crucially, he extends this to a notion integral to the norm of masculinity: "Même [ces sentiments et conduites] qui, comme la paternité, paraissent inscrits dans le corps humain sont en réalité des institutions."[105] In the particularly illuminating passage that follows, he disavows any view of human behaviour that would separate the natural from the cultural:

> Il est impossible de superposer chez l'homme une première couche de comportements que l'on appellerait « naturels » et un monde culturel ou spirituel fabriqué. Tout est fabriqué et tout est naturel chez l'homme, comme on voudra dire en ce sens qu'il n'est pas un mot, pas une conduite qui ne doive quelque chose à l'être simplement biologique – et qui en même temps ne se dérobe à la simplicité de la vie animale, ne détourne de leur sens les conduites vitales par une *sorte d'échappement* et par un génie de l'équivoque qui pourrait servir à définir l'homme.[106]

In a similar vein, we find in *L'Être et le néant* a critique of how cultural assumptions have distorted understandings of sexuality: "On a donc joint une connaissance au désir lui-même et, pour des raisons extérieures à son essence (procréation, caractère sacré de la maternité, force exceptionnelle du plaisir provoqué par l'éjaculation, valeur symbolique de l'acte sexuel), on lui a attaché du dehors la volupté comme son assouvissement normal."[107] Equally remarkable

[103] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 220.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid., pp. 220-221
[107] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 425.

is Sartre's recognition that "le désir n'est désir d'aucune pratique amoureuse spéciale", which is justified by "la diversité de ces pratiques, qui varient avec les groupes sociaux".[108] And if, here, he refers to a "normal" sexuality, elsewhere he problematises that very notion, putting the term "normale" in quotation marks.[109] Merleau-Ponty, too, at one point punctuates the word in the same way – "… dans les conditions « normales » …" – which, in his view, means "les plus fréquentes".[110] Hence both can be seen to exercise a certain critical distance in relation to cultural assumptions about bodies, as well as to the concept of normality in lived experience.

A more thorough engagement with these texts, however, paints a very different picture, and reveals these moments of clarity to be at odds with the driving forces therein. As with their later writings, when we read between the lines, it becomes clear that neither Sartre nor Merleau-Ponty are able to adequately distance themselves from normative assumptions, or to provide a compelling account of any of the forms of bodily otherness cited above. It is worth noting that both philosophers encourage the practice of reading between the lines where they discuss the semantics and interpretation of texts. In his *Éloge de la philosophie*, Merleau-Ponty argues that the value and meaning of a work are liable to expand over time: "Le livre, s'il est valable, se déborde lui-même comme événement daté."[111] More broadly, he espouses a view of our actions wherein their impact takes precedence over their intention: "Le monde est fait de telle sorte que nos actions changent de sens en sortant de nous et en se déployant au dehors."[112] In this optic, everything that we say or do, and thus write, is polysemic, to the extent that its sense is constituted from both our intentions and its effects: "Simplement toutes nos actions ont plusieurs sens, en particulier celui qu'elles offrent aux témoins extérieurs, et nous les assumons

[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid., p. 444.
[110] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 351.
[111] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Éloge de la philosophie: Leçon inaugurale faite au Collège de France le jeudi 15 janvier 1953*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), p. 78.
[112] Merleau-Ponty, 'Le roman et la métaphysique', p. 48.

tous en agissant, puisque les autres sont les coordonnées permanentes de notre vie."[113] Sartre makes a similar claim with regards to writing in his *Qu'est-ce que la littérature ?* :

> Mais l'opération d'écrire implique celle de lire comme son corrélatif dialectique et ces deux actes connexes nécessitent deux agents distincts. C'est l'effort conjugué de l'auteur et du lecteur qui fera surgir cet objet concret et imaginaire qu'est l'ouvrage de l'esprit. Il n'y a d'art que pour et par autrui.[114]

While his discussion here turns on artistic rather than academic literature, the conclusions he draws might usefully be applied to the latter, notably given how often his own work blurs the lines between those categories. His conception of writing, as reliant upon a hypothetical reader for its realisation, is particularly striking: "Écrire, c'est faire appel au lecteur pour qu'il fasse passer à l'existence objective le dévoilement que j'ai entrepris par le moyen du langage."[115]

Perhaps most significantly, he affirms that meaning is as much derived from that which is left unsaid as from that which is rendered explicit: "… le silence même se définit par rapport aux mots, comme la pause, en musique, reçoit son sens des groupes de notes qui l'entourent. Ce silence est un moment du langage ; se taire ce n'est pas être muet, c'est refuser de parler, donc parler encore."[116] He develops this point further:

> Si donc un écrivain a choisi de se taire sur un aspect quelconque du monde, ou selon une locution qui dit bien ce qu'elle veut dire : de le *passer sous silence*, on est en droit de lui poser une troisième question : pourquoi as-tu parlé de ceci plutôt que de cela et — puisque tu parles pour changer — pourquoi veux-tu changer ceci plutôt que cela?[117]

Sartre thus invites us in no uncertain terms to interrogate his own silences. To do so with his thought, following Jeffner Allen, is to uncover its shortcomings: "Existentialism's limits are

[113] Ibid., p. 47.
[114] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), p. 50.
[115] Ibid., p. 53.
[116] Ibid., p. 30.
[117] Ibid.

evidenced precisely by what it renders absent : reflection, both conceptual and descriptive, which situates itself within the cycles of life which are lived by women."[118] This recalls Mills' view in a discussion of white philosophers: "Intellectuals write about what interests them, what they find important, and – especially if the writer is prolific – silence constitutes good prima facie evidence that the subject was not of particular interest."[119] Scholars of bodily otherness ask us to take stock not only of that which is present in a given philosophical work, but of that which is absent. Sedgwick underscores the need to identify and engage with thematic or existential lacunae therein, arguing in line with the feminist tradition for "the recognition that categories of gender and, hence, oppressions of gender can have a structuring force for nodes of thought, for axes of cultural discrimination, whose thematic subject isn't explicitly gendered at all."[120] Taken together, such critical stances, along with Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's conceptions of literature – of writing as polysemic, and of silence as constitutive – invite us to interrogate both the said and the unsaid of *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception*. In so doing, they make space for a plurality of meanings, including those that might emerge in later socio-historical and cultural contexts, such as the present study, and tacitly endorse even those interpretations that find them most wanting.

Being, perception, and bodily otherness

Turning to what is made explicit in their major works, we find examples of most of the forms of bodily otherness central to this thesis: women, queer people, people of colour, ill people, and disabled people. In almost all of these instances, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty can be charged with reproducing normative beliefs and values relating to those outside of the norm. This comes

[118] Allen, p. 78.
[119] Mills, *The Racial Contract*, p. 94.
[120] Sedgwick, p. 34.

through strongly on matters of sex, gender, and sexuality. In effect, despite their recognition of the contingency of the human body, Sartre takes sexual dimorphism to be given: "Que la différence sexuelle soit du domaine de la facticité, nous l'accepterons à la rigueur."[121] In a similar vein, Butler accuses Merleau-Ponty of naturalising gender: "Although he generally tends to discount natural structures of sexuality, he manages to reify cultural relations between the sexes on a different basis by calling them 'essential' or 'metaphysical'."[122] In their view, he ultimately "[fails] to acknowledge the extent to which sexuality is culturally constructed", instead positing normative sexual desires and acts as universal: "… his descriptions of the universal features of sexuality reproduce certain cultural constructions of sexual normalcy."[123] Sartre's engagement with sexuality is ostensibly more nuanced: a homosexual man figures as an example in *L'Être et le néant*, and his claim that "[être] sexué" means "exister sexuellement pour un autrui qui existe sexuellement pour moi" is bracketed by the caveat that neither self nor other are necessarily "un existent *hétérosexuel* mais seulement un être sexué en général".[124] Upon closer inspection, however, he too betrays normative assumptions and judgements about sexuality. Queer desire is seen as uncommon, even aberrant: "… il n'est pas fréquent que l'on désire explicitement les autres « du même sexe »."[125] Perhaps most damning, where he does explicitly engage with such desire, adopting the perspective of his hypothetical homosexual, sex between men is repeatedly referred to as a "faute", and as an "erreur".[126] Crucially, the apparently universal model of sexuality in both texts turns out to be a normative one: that of a cisgender, heterosexual man. Throughout, desire is almost always for a woman, as is clear in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of that which "rend une femme attrayante", and in Sartre's claim

[121] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 423.
[122] Judith Butler, 'Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description: A Feminist Critique of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*', in *The Thinking Muse : Feminism and Modern French Philosophy,* ed. by Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young (Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 85-100 (p. 86).
[123] Ibid., p. 92.
[124] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 424.
[125] Ibid., p. 447.
[126] Ibid., pp. 98-99. One might argue, here, that he is adopting the self-deprecating voice of the homosexual man himself in the use of such terms: this does not, in our view, detract from the depiction of homosexuality as fault.

that "nous désirions *une* femme et non simplement notre assouvissement."[127] The sexual act is a heterosexual one, conceptualised from the standpoint of a cisgender man: even where Sartre appears to degender his description – "En particulier l'érection du pénis et du clitoris." – the centrality of the cisgender man's body ultimately predominates: "… il *se fait* que l'incarnation se manifeste par l'érection et que l'érection cesse avec l'éjaculation."[128] In much the same way, Merleau-Ponty's ostensibly abstract account of sexuality turns out to be profoundly normative: "l'acte sexuel" turns out to be synonymous with "*l'intromissio*".[129]

We find further evidence of their uptake of normative ideology in their treatment of ill and disabled people, notably in Merleau-Ponty's work. Despite an explicit recognition that health and illness are not binary or oppositional terms – "On ne peut pas déduire le normal du pathologique …" – the use of 'normal' as a synonym for 'in good health' is telling of his basic approach to these phenomena.[130] Throughout the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, ill people are referred to as a "le" or "la" "malade", and are consistently set against "le normal", and "le sujet normal".[131] The "normal" subject is also opposed to the "pathologique", the "hystérique", and to people with impaired vision, with "cécité" or "aveugle".[132] In this oppositionality, we find a conflation of all kinds of illness, and of these illnesses with a range of disabilities. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty posits good health and able-bodiedness as the norm, and tends to regard any deviation from those norms as a "maladie". Sartre's references to illness are far less frequent, but those that do appear betray an analogous normativity. In his discussion of *mauvaise foi*, in theory distinct from somatic or mental illness, he uses the term "pathologique" to ascribe a negative or deviant value to behaviour or dispositions.[133] Further, he codifies somatic illness

[127] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 183.; Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 425.
[128] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 437.
[129] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 181.
[130] Ibid., p. 125.
[131] Ibid. For examples, see pp. 121, 140, 149, 153, 204, 228, 327.
[132] Ibid. For "pathologique", see p. 16.; for "hystérique", see p. 33.; for "cécité" and "aveugle", see pp. 135, 259, 267.
[133] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*. p. 88.

negatively, describing it as "une forme synthétique de destruction".[134] His normativity comes through most powerfully in *L'Être et le néant* in his espousal of the norm of whiteness, and of the racialised judgements that it motivates. In effect, here we can locate the foundations of the sexual non-normativity he ascribes to Black men in his later writings: the only Black man evoked explicitly in this work is Christmas, a character from a William Faulkner novel, who is "emasculé", and thus distanced from cisgender masculinity.[135] Further, both philosophers use the word "primitif" in two ways – the basic or incomplete stage of a phenomenon, on the one hand, and non-European peoples, on the other – that inevitably speak to one another, reflecting a common worldview wherein European society and culture are valued positively precisely through their opposition to those found outside its borders. Sartre displays his tacit uptake of this worldview where he situates "les sociétés primitives" as at an anterior stage of a linear development whose conclusion is contemporary Europe, notably in his use of "encore": "… où le lien conjugal n'est pas encore légitime et où la transmission des qualités est encore matronymique …"[136] For his part, Merleau-Ponty repeatedly compares what he describes as a "primitif" state or outlook to that of children, and also of ill people: "La maladie, comme l'enfance et comme l'état de « primitif » …"[137] Here, we find further evidence of their uptake of normative judgements, namely in their use of 'others' to devalue one another. Perhaps the most flagrant instance of this dynamic appears in Merleau-Ponty's work: "Un malade sent dans son corps une seconde personne implantée. II est homme dans une moitié de son corps, femme dans l'autre moitié."[138] Likewise, Sartre uses illness to ascribe negative value, as with his use of "maladie de l'être" to describe states that he considers ontologically deviant, and thus bad.[139]

[134] Ibid., p. 397
[135] Ibid., p. 446.
[136] Ibid., p. 632.
[137] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 125.
[138] Ibid., p. 104.
[139] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 388.

There is thus a tacit acceptance of normative ideologies evident in the devaluation of all forms of bodily otherness, which is furthered through the allegorical use of 'others' as the negative term. Crucially, this devaluation functions not only to degrade those outside of the norm, but to consolidate the predominance of norms, which derive their positive value from the debasement of bodily otherness. Hence Sartre and Merleau-Ponty can both be seen to participate in the mechanisms of oppositional definition and Manichean binaries that we have placed at the heart of the constitution and reproduction of norms and 'others'. This is evident in their treatment of illness and disability, which tend to be regarded as departures from health and able-bodiedness. Thus they are repeatedly characterised in terms of lack or loss in relation to the 'normal' body and its capacities, notably in Merleau-Ponty's work: "Il ne peut être question de transférer simplement chez le normal ce qui manque au malade …"[140] He describes illness and disability in terms of "défaillances" and "rétrécissement".[141] Time and again, illness is described as a loss, in opposition to the integrity of good health: "Ce que le malade a perdu, ce que le normal possède …"[142] Moreover, his treatment of ill people speaks to another aspect of the oppositional construction of norms and 'others', namely, the use of those outside of the norm as examples to shed light upon the experience of those within it. Throughout the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, ill and disabled people's experiences are brought into view not to provide an account of bodily otherness, but rather to further an understanding of health and able-bodiedness. Sartre, too, takes 'others' as counter-examples that might serve to further our understanding of normative experiences, most notably in his discussion of *mauvaise foi*, where his primary examples are two women and a homosexual man. Le Dœuff has discussed at length the implications of his use of 'others' in this discussion, describing Sartre's *mauvaise foi* as "une spécialité des êtres inférieurs" and pointing to the normative schemas at play therein:

[140] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 125.
[141] Ibid., pp. 136, 331.
[142] Ibid., p. 204.

"… [la] mise en évidence du mensonge à soi s'opère toujours par une mise en scène, avec une distribution des rôles qui n'est pas neutre du tout, et qui renvoie à des rapports sociaux de domination, de hiérarchie, ou de grande ascendance d'un personnage sur l'autre."[143] People of colour and non-Europeans also serve as counter-examples in *L'Être et le néant*, as where Sartre situates himself in relation to other subjects: "… je me situe aussi comme Européen par rapport à des Asiatiques ou à des nègres …"[144] Likewise, Merleau-Ponty makes allegorical use of "primitif" people to illuminate the experience of the white, European norm: "… je sais où est ma main et où est mon corps, comme le primitif dans le désert est à chaque instant orienté …"[145] Returning to Sartre, women, and most notably their bodies, also figure as similes: "… comme l'étalement, le raplatissement des seins un peu mûrs d'une femme qui s'étend sur le dos."[146] In short, references to 'others' in these works tend to reflect less a will to account for bodily otherness, and more a desire to shed light upon normative experience.

Subject/object, norm/'other'

In the above analysis, it becomes clear that their linguistic choices often render salient the normative assumptions that are initially hidden beneath their apparent impartiality. Indeed, when we put these choices under further scrutiny, we find still more evidence of their failure to distance themselves from such assumptions. Perhaps most remarkable on this level is their reproduction of a subject/object dichotomy that maps onto the categories of norm and 'other', one which we have positioned as central to the Western epistemic regime and its reproduction of normative categories and hierarchies. Put simply, in their philosophy, those within the norm tend to figure as subjects, whereas those outside of it tend to figure as objects. This is perhaps

[143] Le Dœuff, *L'Étude et le Rouet*, p. 85.
[144] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 319.
[145] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 117.
[146] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 654.

most evident in the treatment of women, whose emergence as objects of sexual desire in Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's thought foregrounds their presence as objects more widely. Women often appear in lists of objects whose meaning is derived from their importance to men. This occurs regularly in *L'Être et le néant*: "… c'est le costume que j'ai choisi il y a six mois, la maison que j'ai fait bâtir, le livre que j'ai entrepris l'hiver dernier, ma femme, les promesses que je lui ai faites …"[147] These lists position women as objects for normative subjects, men: "Cet objet sera tantôt un morceau de pain, tantôt une automobile, tantôt une femme, tantôt un objet non encore réalisé et pourtant défini …"[148] Merleau-Ponty, too, places women as objects for men: "… Paul souffre parce qu'il a perdu sa femme ou il est en colère parce qu'on lui a volé sa montre …"[149] Women primarily exist as possessions for men, as is clear in Sartre's language in his discussion of *mauvaise foi*, where he refers to "*notre* jeune femme".[150] Merleau-Ponty extends this to another form of 'otherness', referring to an ill person as "notre malade".[151] His treatment of ill people reveals the extent to which normative subject and object positions are reproduced and reinforced in their linguistic choices. Ill and disabled people, throughout the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, tend to feature as the objects of phrases: "Le médecin qui fait agir sur le malade …"[152] *L'Être et le néant* reserves the same treatment for women – "… une femme qu'un passant surprend …" – and people of colour – "… donnant à certains Asiatiques […] les pénétrant …" – who tend less to act, and more to be acted upon.[153]

Implicit in the passivity ascribed to 'others' is a normative subject, rendered salient in those moments where they openly adopt that subject position, or share it with another person within the norm. Sartre positions himself as such through his masculinity: in one example, all

[147] Ibid., p. 654.
[148] Ibid., pp. 621-622.
[149] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 409.
[150] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 92. [my italics] While Sartre uses "notre" shortly thereafter for a man – "… notre homme …" (p. 100.) – there is a distinct difference in tone, and an absence of descriptor – "jeune" – which merit, in our view, a reading of "notre" here as indicative of a wider trend of treating women as objects to be possessed.
[151] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 122.
[152] Ibid., p. 133.
[153] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 624.

of his "actes dans le monde" posit a woman as a passive object, whether it be "rendre cette femme heureuse", "sauvegarder sa vie ou sa liberté", or "lui « faire des enfants »".[154] Merleau-Ponty regularly adopts the subject position in relation to ill and disabled people, identifying himself with doctors through the use of "on": "Si l'on présente au malade un stylographe …"[155] Equally notable in his accounts of illness and disability is his refusal to grant full agency to those outside of the norms of health and able-bodiedness. Where they do figure as the subject of the sentence, the verb is often in the negative: "le malade", in one instance, "ne peut exécuter dans le vide le geste de frapper ou d'ouvrir", in another "ne comprend pas des analogies", and in yet another "ne sait pas copier un triangle".[156] Where such verbs aren't negated, they often come with caveats: "Le malade exécute, même les yeux fermés, avec une rapidité et une sûreté extraordinaires, les mouvements nécessaires à la vie, *pourvu qu'ils lui soient habituels* …"[157] This recalls Sartre's ascription of a limited agency to women, manifest in the rare moments where they figure as subjects, and deploy their subjectivity to invite men to position them once again as objects: "… la femme appelle une chair étrangère qui [doit] la transformer en plénitude d'être par pénétration et dilution."[158] Significantly, 'others' only tend to appear as subjects where the philosopher places himself in their position, most often to explain their experience. Sartre does this with Jewish people, people of colour, non-European people, and ill people.[159] It is particularly evident in his discussion of *mauvaise foi*, where the agency he grants to women – "Elle sait fort bien les intentions que l'homme qui lui parle nourrit à son égard." – and to the homosexual man – "Un homosexuel a fréquemment un intolérable sentiment de culpabilité …" – serves to impose and legitimate his interpretation of their experience.[160] Merleau-Ponty acts

[154] Ibid., p. 579.
[155] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, pp. 152, 127.
[156] Ibid., pp. 136, 148, 161-162.
[157] Ibid., p. 120. [my italics]
[158] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 660.
[159] Ibid. For an example involving Jewish people, see p. 569; for an example involving "primitifs", see p. 653.
[160] Ibid., pp. 89, 98.

similarly with regards to ill and disabled people, as well as non-European people: "Le primitif vit ses mythes sur un fond perceptif assez clairement articulé pour que les actes de la vie quotidienne, la pêche, la chasse, les rapports avec les civilisés, soient possibles."[161] Insofar as the agency of 'others' is here predicated upon that of the philosopher, it is severely restricted, if not inexistent. Taken alongside the passivity ascribed to those outside of the norm, this dynamic reveals the reproduction of the Western epistemic dichotomy of norm as subject and 'other' as object in *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception*.

This process is furthered where the experience of 'others' is discounted in favour of an interpretation of that experience put forward by a normative actor. Throughout their work, both consistently reject or disregard the testimony of 'others', and thus their validity as subjects, in favour of accounts formulated by those speaking from within the norm: doctors talking about ill and disabled people, men about women, and white people about people of colour. Of the limited references to people of colour in *L'Être et le néant*, two of the most detailed are based on books by white men. Sartre lauds William Faulkner's portrait of a Black man's suffering: "Personne n'a mieux rendu la puissance du regard de la victime sur ses bourreaux que Faulkner …" He goes on to uncritically take up André Malraux's description of Asian responses to European culture, wherein we find the reproduction of Eurocentric epistemic dynamics: "… [il] montre que la culture européenne, en donnant à certains Asiatiques le sens de leur mort, les pénètre soudain de cette vérité désespérante et enivrante que « la vie est unique »."[162] Elsewhere, he brings in authors who are men, Marcel Proust and Stendhal, in an apparently general reflection on love that turns out to be framed by his own masculine heterosexuality: "… n'ont-ils pas montré que l'amour, la jalousie ne sauraient se réduire au strict désir de posséder *une* femme, mais qu'ils visent à s'emparer, à travers la femme, du monde tout entier

[161] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 338.
[162] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, pp. 446, 557.

…"[163] Merleau-Ponty, too, cites Proust in a discussion of love, wherein the emphasis placed on possession, competition and jealousy point once again to the centring of his own experience as a heterosexual, cisgender man.[164] Most of the academic and scientific sources in these texts are men, even where the discussion is about women. Both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty defer to psychoanalyst Wilhelm Stekel's theories on women's sexuality, as laid out in his *La Femme frigide*, granting his analysis primacy over the experience of women themselves. Taking up Stekel's notion of "la frigidité", itself bound up in the domination of heterosexual men over women, Merleau-Ponty explains without citing a single woman that it "traduit le plus souvent le refus de l'orgasme, de la condition féminine ou de la condition d'être sexué".[165]

Where Sartre uses Stekel, his tendency to attend to men's voices, and to disregard women's, is particularly flagrant. He rejects a woman's account of her own sexual experience in favour of one put forward by a cabal of three men, namely, Stekel, the woman's husband, and Sartre himself: "… fréquemment, en effet, le mari révèle à Stekel que sa femme a donné des signes objectifs de plaisir et ce sont ces signes que la femme, interrogée, s'applique farouchement à nier."[166] Le Dœuff's acerbic critique of this passage, which she opens by asking of Sartre, "Comment peut-on être aussi ballot?", gestures towards the fallacy in his approach:

> Le récit du mari et celui de la femme (pardon, « sa » femme) étant contradictoires, Sartre considère que le témoignage du mari est une vérité adamantine, sans même se demander si ce mari-là n'a pas tout intérêt à prétendre ce qu'il prétend, par banal amour-propre. Et non seulement il ne croit pas sur parole la personne qui dit souffrir, mais il la met en double accusation : elle a menti en se prétendant frigide, et elle re-ment quand, « interrogée », elle nie « farouchement » les preuves apportées par la partie adverse.[167]

[163] Ibid., p. 608. That some people now consider Proust to be queer does not detract from this claim, nor from the one made in the following sentence, to the extent that, in both instances, a man who wrote about relationships between men and women is cited in discussions of love that bear all the hallmarks of masculine heterosexuality.
[164] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 486.
[165] Ibid., p. 184.
[166] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 88.
[167] Le Dœuff, *L'Étude et le Rouet*, p. 79.

This passage brings two of the principal axes of normativity in Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's thought sharply into focus: their investment in normative gender roles and patterns of sexuality, and their silencing of 'others' with the voices of those within the norm. Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young's critique of French thought holds true here: "… discussion of women by modern French male philosophers tends to function as a discussion between men on men's views of women and the relation of women to male-defined thought."[168] The same might well be said of ill and disabled people, whose lived experience is often cast aside in favour of the practitioner's diagnostic. This is a central component of Merleau-Ponty's method: all of his references to ill and disabled people come from descriptions provided by doctors and psychologists. Crucial, then, is the fact that such descriptions tend to reproduce normative assumptions about 'others', and attribute negative values to their bodies, desires, and acts. Herein, 'others' are consistently infantilised, bestialised and dehumanised, in ways taken up by the philosophers themselves. Evidence of this has already been presented in the parallel Merleau-Ponty draws between illness, childhood, and "primitif" states and people. Elsewhere, he compares ill people to insects, in a description whose banality belies broader dynamics of dehumanisation: "Le malade se sépare de sa voix comme certains insectes tranchent leur propre patte."[169] And he draws an analogy between non-Europeans and animals: "Je ne « comprends » pas la mimique sexuelle du chien, encore moins celle du hanneton ou de la mante religieuse. Je ne comprends pas même l'expression des émotions chez les primitifs …"[170] The dehumanisation of 'others' thus turns out to be the final moment in a series of processes that serve to secure the subjectivity of those within the norm, and to refuse that of 'others', positioning them instead as objects for a normative subject.

[168] Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young, 'Introduction', in *The Thinking Muse: Feminism and Modern French Philosophy,* ed. by Jeffner Allen and Iris Marion Young (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 1-17 (p. 11).
[169] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 190.
[170] Ibid., p. 215.

The 'universal-normative'

It thus becomes clear that the presence of 'others' in *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception* does not foreground an account of their experiences, and thus of bodily otherness. Instead, we are faced with interpretations of those experiences from those within the norm, often predicated on the silencing of 'others'. This inability to effectively engage with bodily otherness is not incidental: it points to a basic flaw in the premise of their philosophies. As we have seen, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty conceive of variations in bodies, and thus for the categories of norms and 'others', in terms of contingency. Both understand sex, gender, and desire in this optic, as is manifest in their discussions of sexual difference and sexuality, as they do illness and disability, regarded as contingent physical states. The same can be said of race, which Sartre locates as one of as an aspect of the contingency of the body.[171] More specifically, he understands race as "indiquée par l'attitude d'autrui vis-à-vis de moi", insofar as others "se révèlent comme méprisants ou admiratifs, comme en confiance ou en défiance …"[172] This definition sheds some light on the implications of understanding race, or indeed any feature through which people are grouped into norms and 'others', in terms of contingency. If Sartre recognises that race determines people's attitudes and responses, he does so without any reference to the normative hierarchies that subtend those attitudes and responses, wherein white people are far more likely to encounter positive reactions, and people of colour negative ones. Race, here, is an abstract category whose terms are interchangeable: it is the same to be within the norm – white – as to be outside of it. In a word, he acknowledges the variations in race, but not the power relations that subtend them, leading him to posit the equivalence of those within and without the norm: "Me voici, en effet, Juif ou Aryen, beau ou laid, manchot, etc."[173] The

[171] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 368.
[172] Ibid., pp. 367-368.
[173] Ibid., p. 568.

similarities between this phrase and one formulated by Merleau-Ponty are striking: "Tout ce que je « suis » par le fait de la nature ou de l'histoire, – bossu, beau ou Juif …"[174] Further, both apply this framework of equivalence to health and illness, and to able-bodiedness and disability: they recognise that bodies vary in somatic state and capacity, but not that these variations map onto normative categories and hierarchies. Hence pain and pleasure figure as interchangeable throughout their works, divorced of the bodily and societal context of illness and disability. This occurs frequently in *L'Être et le néant* – "Le plaisir, en effet – comme une douleur trop vive …" – and in the *Phénoménologie de la perception*: "Je peux fermer les yeux, … me fondre dans un plaisir ou une douleur …"[175] Sartre's inability to account for bodily otherness is particularly notable where he comes closest to appreciating normalisation and othering, as in the above definition of race. It is even more so in a reflection on discrimination, wherein he establishes an equivalence between the treatment of Jewish people – "« Défense aux Juifs de pénétrer ici »" – and that of non-Jewish people – "« Restaurant juif, défense aux Aryens d'entrer »" – that obfuscates the unilateral nature of anti-semitism.[176]

All of these instances point to the basic incapacity of a phenomenological framework that understands variations in bodies solely in terms of contingency to properly account for bodily otherness. To consider race, illness, disability, gender or sexuality in such terms – and such terms alone – is inevitably to regard norms and 'others' as interchangeable, and thus to preclude an appreciation of normative hierarchies and the social structures. To the extent that contingency is integral to their universal-singular framework, we might question the utility and productivity of that framework. More plainly, if contingency is the hinge upon which the particular subject claims to attain universal structures, then the universality of their theories, and notably their capacity to account for bodily otherness, must be called into question. Indeed,

[174] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 497.
[175] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 437.; Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 192.
[176] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 569.

an in-depth study of their thought makes plain that their commitment to universality ultimately falls back into particularity, or, more precisely, normativity. Once again, their linguistic choices provide some evidence of this claim, notably where ostensibly general terms turn out to have a particular, normative meaning. The word "l'homme" is one such term. It is used throughout in the abstract – non-gendered – sense of "person", as with the English "man", reflecting their humanistic outlooks. On the very first page of the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Merleau-Ponty employs the term in this sense in his definition of phenomenology: "… c'est aussi une philosophie qui […] ne pense pas qu'on puisse comprendre l'homme et le monde autrement qu'à partir de leur « facticité »."[177] We find a similar usage early in *L'Être et le néant*: "Mais chacune des conduites humaines, étant conduite de l'homme dans le monde, peut nous livrer à la fois l'homme, le monde et le rapport qui les unit …"[178] And yet, elsewhere, "l'homme" is deployed in the gendered sense, to mean 'man', as opposed to 'woman': "… l'homme qui va dans les maisons publiques pour se débarrasser de son désir sexuel."[179] This is nowhere more evident than in the section on *mauvaise foi*, where "l'homme" is marked by a semantic slippage between the general meaning and the particular, normative one. Ending one paragraph with the abstract sense – "Que doit être l'homme en son être, s'il doit pouvoir être de mauvaise foi ?" – he begins the next with the concrete, gendered one, evoking "un premier rendez-vous" between "une femme" and "[un] homme".[180] While less overt, this same slippage runs through Merleau-Ponty's writing, and in his references, where the general sense of "homme" often gives way to the particular, normative one.[181] The pronoun "il", too, is deployed abstractly at times, and concretely at others, to mean 'he' instead of 'she'. Both refer to the ostensibly general subject of their philosophy with "il", and then redeploy that pronoun to mean 'he' elsewhere. We find

[177] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. i.
[178] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 38.
[179] Ibid., p. 138.
[180] Ibid., p. 89.
[181] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 19 (Footnote). "L'homme, mieux que l'animal, approche d'images idéales et exactes, l'adulte mieux que l'enfant, les hommes mieux que les femmes …"

this manifest in Sartre's discussion of desire – "Aussi l'homme moyen ne peut-*il* […] concevoir d'autre fin à son désir que l'éjaculation." – as in Merleau-Ponty's: "Ce qui concernait sa femme n'existait plus pour *lui*, *il* l'avait barré de sa vie …"[182]

The semantic slippage between the general and the particular – normative – subject recalls Colette Guillaumin's discussion of the "Masculin banal/Masculin général". Citing the *Petit Robert* dictionary, she points to "un paradoxe sur l'emploi de « masculin »", namely the fact that it "s'applique aux êtres mâles, mais *le plus souvent (en français) à des êtres ou à des choses sans aucun rapport avec l'un ou l'autre sexe*."[183] Crucially, she insists that the general function of the masculine sets it up as "non seulement « bien » […] mais carrément « mieux »" than the feminine.[184] What is more, the slippage between the general and normative senses of masculine nouns and pronouns undercuts the first sense, certainly when considered in light of the reality, established above, that subjectivity is only granted to those within the norm. Collins and Pierce charge Sartre's philosophy with this offence: "The human being is free, and need only exercise his freedom in order to be whatever he likes. The difficulty with this proposition rests precisely in the use of the pronoun he …"[185] Accordingly, "freedom and its accompanying consciousness are restricted to male characters."[186] For Haraway, grammatical idiosyncrasies of this kind are far from anodyne: "The pronouns embedded in sentences about contestations for what may count as nature are themselves political tools, expressing hopes, fears, and contradictory histories. Grammar is politics by other means."[187] The grammar of *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception* lays bare the flaws in their universal-singular frameworks, unveiling their apparently abstract subject as a normative one. This is confirmed in their use of other ostensibly general pronouns – "nous" and "on" –, which are often explicitly

[182] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 425.; Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 189. [my italics]
[183] Guillaumin, p. 112.
[184] Ibid., p. 107.
[185] Collins and Pierce, p. 120.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Haraway, p. 3.

opposed to 'others'. Merleau-Ponty sets his philosophical subject, "nous", against womanhood: "Une femme maintient sans calcul un intervalle de sécurité entre la plume de son chapeau et les objets qui pourraient la briser, elle sent où est la plume comme nous sentons où est notre main."[188] As does Sartre: "Toute théorie subjectiviste et immanentiste échouera à expliquer que nous désirions *une* femme et non simplement notre assouvissement."[189] Here, Le Dœuff's analysis of his thought is compelling, and might productively be expanded to Merleau-Ponty's: "Le propos de Sartre apparaît dès lors comme un *discours de club*. Il suppose un cercle de témoins étroitement délimité, qui constitue le « nous » de l'œuvre considérée."[190]

Perhaps most significant in Le Dœuff's reflection is her assertion that the "nous" of *L'Être et le néant* is not only normative, but exclusionary: "Il est normal que *je* remarque d'abord que *je* n'y suis pas."[191] The ostensibly neutral subject of existential phenomenology, in her view, is marked by the very particularity that it purports to overcome: "Ce qui fait non-sens, c'est de poser du neutre, donc mettre du jeu dans le je, et de bloquer ce jeu en ne lâchant pas la référence à l'homme spécifique et en maintenant, au nom de neutre, l'exclusion de quelqu'un."[192] That "quelqu'un", in Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's works, is sometimes a woman, sometimes a queer person, sometimes an ill or disabled person, and sometimes a person of colour. The exclusion of these 'others' discloses the true nature of their phenomenological subject: not universal-singular, but universal-normative. In a word, the subject of *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception* is not abstract or universal: it, or more precisely *he*, is a cisgender, heterosexual man who is in good health, able-bodied, white and European. Scholars of bodily otherness have long held this view of the existential subject. Gayle Salamon points to the "presumptive masculinity of the ostensibly universal subject", and Young argues

[188] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 167.
[189] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 425.
[190] Le Dœuff, *L'Étude et le Rouet*, p. 88.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Le Dœuff, *Le Sexe du savoir*, p. 289.

that "the neutrally human subject" in Sartre and Merleau-Ponty "carries male experience as the norm".[193] Sandra Lee Bartky, for her part, has decried the "phallocentrism" of the philosophical tradition, declaring war on "the principal personage of traditional philosophy, that abstract subject who masquerades as everyone and anyone, but is really a male subject in disguise."[194] And Zoe Belinsky has problematised the subject of Merleau-Ponty's thought to the extent that it "assumes an *already capacitated, able-bodied, and adult male subject* who can impose his will on the world with confidence."[195] As Belinsky here reveals, this normativity typifies not only the existential subject, but all of its constituent features, the most significant of which for the present study is the body. Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's use of the singular definite article – "le corps" – communicates a universality that does not hold up to scrutiny. To take up Alison Kafer: "… there is no mention of 'the' body that is not a further articulation of a very particular body."[196] This contention gains weight when we note, in light of the revelation that "nous" here is both normative, and exclusionary, that "le corps" is used interchangeably with "notre corps".

Further still, when we scrutinise their accounts of sexuality and desire, "le corps" turns out to be the body of a cisgender, heterosexual man. Herein, "le sexe" is posited as general, but ultimately turns out to be a penis situated in a heterosexual schema of desire and intercourse. This comes through in one passage from Sartre's chapter on sexuality, where the two terms are synonymous with one another: "… c'est le corps […] qui *porte* le sexe en avant ou qui le retire ; ce sont les mains qui aident à l'intromission du pénis …"[197] There is no ambiguity here: if, later in the phrase, he refers to "la lubrification du vagin", it figures as an afterthought, as indicated by "pareillement", and implicitly opposed to "le sexe", "le pénis": "… et pareillement

[193] Salamon, p. 48.; Iris Marion Young, *Throwing like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 14-15.
[194] Bartky, p. 6.
[195] Belinsky, p. 188.
[196] Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), p. 7.
[197] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 437.

l'ouverture et la lubrification du vagin ne peuvent être obtenues volontairement …"[198] The normativity of the subject is thus extended and confirmed in the normativity of its body, desires, and acts. Indeed, the subject of existential phenomenology is explicitly "normal". This rings particularly true of the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, where we find multiple references to the "sujet normal" and the "homme normal", who is even at points simply called "le normal".[199] Throughout, this "normal" subject is opposed to 'others', most notably "le malade".[200] It – or more precisely, he – is also set against non-normative forms of sexuality, desire, and sexual practice, themselves codified as "malade", which are those that deviate from the masculine, cisgender, heterosexual norm. This is evident in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of desire, where "normal" sexuality is opposed to "pathologie":

> Chez le normal, un corps n'est pas seulement perçu comme un objet quelconque, cette perception objective est habitée par une perception plus secrète : le corps visible est sous-tendu par un schéma sexuel, strictement individuel, qui accentue les zones érogènes, dessine une physionomie sexuelle et appelle les gestes du corps masculin lui-même intégré à cette totalité affective.[201]

Sartre's treatment of desire also speaks to a "normal" sexuality: "A vrai dire, il est normal que l'engluement de la conscience dans le corps ait son aboutissement …"[202] Notable here are "la conscience" and "le corps": the normativity of desire confirms the normativity of the subject itself. This is reinforced elsewhere in *L'Être et le néant* where Sartre evokes "des consciences parfaitement normales", bringing the underlying normativity of his philosophy and its subject sharply into focus.[203] Likewise, the multiple references Merleau-Ponty makes to "perception

[198] Ibid.
[199] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*. For examples of "le sujet normal", see pp. 96, 126, 138, 154; for "l'homme normal", see p. 121; for examples of "le normal", see pp. 125-128, 135-138, 394.
[200] Ibid. For opposition to "malade" and related terms – "pathologique", "aveugle", etc. – see footnotes 131 and 132 above. For opposition to people with schizophrenia, see p. 394.
[201] Ibid., p. 182.
[202] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 437.
[203] Ibid., p. 455.

normale" betray the normativity of his thought and its protagonist: in both works, we find that the central concepts – consciousness and perception – are unequivocally "normal".[204]

Perhaps most significant for the present study, the normativity of the subject extends to its others – *autrui* or *l'autre* – in these texts. The inherent masculinity of other subjects, itself inextricable from cissexuality and heterosexuality, comes to the fore where Merleau-Ponty describes autrui as a "frère mineur": "Sans doute autrui n'existera jamais pour nous comme nous-même, il est toujours un frère mineur …"[205] It is further substantiated by his use of "autres hommes" as synonymous with "les autres" throughout the *Phénoménologie de la perception*.[206] Sartre, too, views them as interchangeable, as is clear in the emphasis on totality – "*tous*" – here: "L'épreuve de ma condition d'homme, objet pour *tous* les autres hommes vivants …"[207] In this optic, Salamon considers the masculinity of Merleau-Ponty's subject, which we might expand to include Sartre's, to be "mimetic": "… it is citing, perhaps even soliciting, an other masculine body, a body located in some remote elsewhere yet proximate enough to function as a structuring ideal."[208] Luce Irigaray's critique of philosophy written by men provides us with a compelling framework to think through the normativity of *autrui*, primarily in her claim that it works to "*réduire tout autre dans l'économie du Même*."[209] In a word, these philosophies turn on "un projet de détournement, de dévoiement, de réduction, de l'autre dans le Même."[210] More precisely, she conceptualises this project as one of an "*effacement de la différence des sexes* dans les systèmes auto-représentatifs d'un « sujet masculin »."[211] Her analysis resonates with that laid out by Simone de Beauvoir in *Le Deuxième Sexe*. In effect, in her discussion of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's thought – of particular note given her proximity to both – Beauvoir

[204] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, pp. 153, 282, 305, 308.
[205] Ibid., p. 495.
[206] Ibid.. For examples, see pp. 400, 511.
[207] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 320.
[208] Salamon, p. 48.
[209] Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977), p. 72.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Ibid.

asserts the selfsameness of *autrui*: "Le semblable, l'autre, qui est aussi le même, avec qui s'établissent des relations réciproques, c'est toujours pour le mâle un individu mâle."[212]

In an ironic twist, then, that which is ostensibly 'other' – *autrui* – in *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception* turns out to be the same. And that which is ostensibly the same – women, queer people, ill and disabled people, people of colour, etc. – turn out to be irretrievably 'other'. French existential thought thus hinges on two registers of 'other': one granted subjectivity, the other denied it. In fact, against a normative *autrui* or *autre*, we find what Beauvoir terms "l'Autre absolu" – the "inessentiel" against the selfsame subject and its other –, which is the position that women are condemned to occupy in these texts.[213] Implicit in their relegation of "la femme" to absolute otherness is their refusal to ascribe subjectivity to women: "… il est précisément impossible de la regarder comme un autre sujet."[214] Beauvoir's ontological account of this absolute otherness, itself deeply reminiscent of Sartre, invites us to turn the lens of her analysis to existential phenomenology: "Apparaissant comme l'Autre, la femme apparaît du même coup comme une plénitude d'être par opposition à cette existence dont l'homme éprouve en soi le néant …"[215] Perhaps most striking here is the interdependence of "l'Autre absolu" and the normative subject: "Dans la femme s'incarne positivement le manque que l'existant porte en son cœur, et c'est en cherchant à se rejoindre à travers elle que l'homme espère se réaliser."[216] Beauvoir's ontology of the relation between those within the norm – men – and those without it – women – reveals the sameness of *autrui* and the otherness of 'others' to be two sides of the same coin: the normative subject position is secured in and through the exile of 'others' to absolute otherness, to a lack of subjectivity, and, ultimately, to objectivity. She extends this analysis beyond womanhood to different 'others', including some

[212] Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe*, p. 99.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid., p. 189.
[216] Ibid.

people of colour who, like women, "sont considérés absolument comme l'Autre inessentiel."[217] Building upon her critique, we might contend that the *universal-singular* subject of French existential phenomenology is in fact always and necessarily a *universal-normative* one, as are its body, desires, acts, ways of being in the world, and, critically, those it recognises as *autrui*. And that the supremacy of this universal-normative subject both guarantees and mandates the refusal of the subjectivity of those outside of the norm, realised in their positioning as "l'Autre absolu" or "l'Autre inessentiel" for and against that universal-normative subject.

Universalisations, obfuscations

The revelation of the normativity of the universal leads us to the final and perhaps most critical moment in the normativity that structures *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception*: the obfuscation of that normativity. As we have seen, these works are grounded in a rejection of an abstract universalism in favour of a concrete one: the universal-singular. In theory, at least, the universal-singular begins with a recognition of the variations in bodies and situations, and of the particularities of the philosopher's perspective. In practice, however, the universal-singular turns out to be universal-normative subject. Crucially, though, if Sartre and Merleau-Ponty renege on their explicit commitments to taking stock of difference, at no point is this acknowledged, or made visible. Hence, they posit the normative as the universal, and in the same gesture conceal that positioning behind their aspirations to a concrete universality. We might, at this juncture, be struck by something Butler says of universality, in a reflection on Jewishness, anti-semitism, and racism: "If the process of universalization becomes one of assimilating particular discourses into an established regime, then the particularism of the regime is elevated to the status of the universal and its own hegemonic power is effectively

[217] Ibid., p. 313.

concealed."[218] This strikes a chord with Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies, themselves both indebted to and invested in the Western epistemic regime and its reproduction of norms, 'others', and normative hierarchies. In this sense, French existential phenomenology advances through misdirection. Framing their work with a critique of universalisms whose ostensible generality belies a particularity, they cloud our critical vision, at once preventing their readers from realising that they commit this very same offence, and disarming accusations of their guilt on this count before we have even begun to formulate them.

Mechanisms of this kind, through which normativity is simultaneously guaranteed and obfuscated through misdirection, are not limited to the universal-singular in their work. Indeed, shifting our analysis to those elements of existential phenomenology that, as set out in the first pages of this chapter, theoretically lay the groundwork for an account of bodily otherness – the eidetic reduction, the rejection of human nature, the critique of science, etc. – it becomes clear that they too function to reproduce and dissimulate the very normativity that, in principle, they cannot abide. Merleau-Ponty's reduction, or more precisely his failure to operate the reduction, serves as a particularly salient example. As we have seen, this reduction functions through the "[mise] en suspens" of what he calls the "attitude naturelle". In theory, at least, the natural attitude comprises everything that we take for granted in our everyday lives, which logically should extend to normative assumptions about 'others', and their bodies. His reproduction time and again of normative assumptions in the *Phénoménologie de la perception* thus points to his failure to operate the reduction in the terms that he himself lays out. And yet, at the same time, his explicit commitment to suspending the natural attitude works to obfuscate this failure. In fact, it shores up normativity in two complementary ways. In the first, as with the universal-singular, it inhibits his reader from picking up on the failure of his reduction, and its role in

[218] Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 23.

reproducing normative ideologies. In the second, it presents the normative conceptions of bodies in his work as fundamental and natural, to the extent that they are what is left behind after a reduction that is presumed complete. We might make a similar claim about Sartre's critique of human nature, and his commitment to an existential framework wherein "l'existence précède l'essence". Where we find normative assumptions in *L'Être et le néant*, they signal an inability to fully disengage from the notion of human nature, constituting an "essence" that, if it were to exist, would necessarily precede "existence". Once again, the work is primed for misdirection: by framing his work in terms of a rejection of human nature, he obscures those moments where he invests in that very concept so as to secure a normative worldview. Further, many of these normative assumptions – the reality of sexual dimorphism, the supremacy of heterosexuality, the conception of illness and disability in terms of lack or loss – also betray a tacit acceptance of the scientific or realist view of bodies that both philosophers problematise on multiple occasions. This is further evidenced where they invoke the authority of medical professionals to add weight to their arguments, and most notably where they favour the testimony of doctors and psychologists over the lived experience of 'others'. The effect here recalls the failure of Merleau-Ponty's reduction: their open commitment to critiquing scientific objectivity conceals their implicit investment in the realist view, and presents the particular reading of bodies put forward by contemporary Western science as a universal one.

Given the proximity of French existential phenomenology to the human sciences, itself underscored by Merleau-Ponty throughout his life, a return to Foucault's reflection upon "les sciences de l'homme", cited in our first chapter, may prove informative. If the human sciences are "*biologiquement*" and "*médicalement*" "sous-tendues", and if, therefore, they "ont utilisé des concepts formés par les biologistes" in such a way as to give themselves "un champ partagé selon le principe du normal et du pathologique", then we might begin to make sense of such

flagrant inconsistencies in Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's work.[219] In other words, taking Foucault seriously, their respective incapacities to realise the reduction, to strip back human nature, and to refuse the biomedical view of bodies turn out to be symptomatic of a basic failure to identify and critique the realist – normative – assumptions that undergird their thought, as well as many of their sources, such as psychologists and anthropologists. This feeds into a wider critique of their philosophy, namely their inability to take stock of their own normative biases, as well as those that structure the philosophical and academic canons upon which their thought rests. Le Dœuff laments precisely this in a broader discussion of philosophy written by men, pinpointing "l'incapacité d'une communauté traditionnellement masculine à voir que le travail repose sur une induction mal faite."[220] She contends that, so deep-rooted are such normative biases and blind spots that, often, philosophers who are men will abandon their most basic philosophical principles if and when they come into conflict with normative assumptions: "Mais, quand un point de vue philosophique et ces intérêts entrent en discordance, c'est le philosophique qui cède et se voit reléguer dans des notes, le souci de maintenir une domination de sexe l'emportant sur tout penchant spéculatif se disant en pleine page."[221] She accuses Sartre of this very offence, pointing out that where he invokes "des signes objectifs de plaisir" to discount a woman's testimony – her claim that she did not experience sexual pleasure – he goes against one of his most fundamental philosophical tenets in order to secure the masculine, heterosexual reading of her sexuality: "… la thèse de Sartre reste implaidable dans l'optique sartrienne. Car, selon lui, il n'y a pas d'état corporel ou neurologique qui soit contraignant pour la conscience, laquelle reste libre transcendance et choix, même face à une migraine."[222]

Le Dœuff is not alone in such a critique. Collins and Pierce make a similar claim about Sartre's thought, arguing that he "associates essence and roles with women", and in so doing

[219] Foucault, *Naissance de la clinique*, p. 36.
[220] Le Dœuff, *Le Sexe du savoir*, p. 148.
[221] Ibid., p. 287.
[222] Le Dœuff, *L'Étude et le Rouet*, p. 83.

"violates his theory", namely that existence precedes essence.[223] Merleau-Ponty, too, has been accused of the same, perhaps most notably by Butler. In his discussion of sexuality, they assert, he sacrifices his philosophical principles to secure a normative view of bodies: "In accounting for the genesis of sexual desire, Merleau-Ponty once again reverts to a naturalistic account which seems to contradict his own phenomenological procedure."[224] Hence, if he sets out to render concrete the abstract of his philosophical forebears, he ultimately "commits the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, giving life to abstractions, and draining life from existing individuals in concrete contexts."[225] This is not, in their view, fortuitous, but reveals a fault line running through his phenomenology that can be traced back to its very core: "The ideological character of *The Phenomenology of Perception* is produced by the impossible project of maintaining an abstract subject even while describing concrete, lived experience."[226] In other words, the universal-singular framework was condemned to failure: "Although Merleau-Ponty intends to describe the universal structures of bodily existence, the concrete examples he provides reveal the impossibility of that project."[227] Crucially, they argue that the abstractions that he realises are not anodyne, but normative, and indeed that his normativity is the driving force behind the failure of his philosophical project: "… Merleau-Ponty wants sexuality to be intentional, in-the-world, referential, expressive of a concrete, existential situation, and yet he offers a description of bodily experience clearly abstracted from the concrete diversity that exists."[228] Against his explicit aspirations to universality, then, his work actually functions "to codify and sanction one particular organization of sexuality as legitimate."[229] The same might well be said of Sartre, who, as we have seen, shares both those aspirations to universality and

[223] Collins and Pierce, p. 125.
[224] Butler, 'Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description', p. 91.
[225] Ibid., p. 98.
[226] Ibid., p. 95.
[227] Ibid.
[228] Ibid.
[229] Ibid.

a tendency to operate normative abstractions. Striking here is the contention that an account of bodily otherness is inarticulable in the terms of their phenomenological method, notably given that we began the present chapter with an appraisal of the elements of that method that should in theory enable, if not secure, such an account. And yet, Butler's claim is echoed by many others. Elizabeth Grosz, for one, goes as far as to dispute the very possibility of discussing non-normative bodies and experiences in the terms of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy: "The question of what other types of human experience, what other modalities of perception, what other relations, subjects may have with objects is not, cannot be, raised in the terms he develops."[230]

A warning, and an appeal

Rather than a philosophy that offers the possibility of accounting for bodily otherness, French existential phenomenology thus turns out to be uniquely dispossessed in terms of both refusing normative assumptions, and engaging with the lived experience of 'others'. As such, the obfuscation of normativity in their work is not piecemeal – operating only at the level of the specific features cited above – but holistic: their philosophical project articulates itself out of a refusal of the very normative ways of thinking that it reproduces, and thus precludes the very critiques that it should be subject to. Taking up Grosz's challenge, we might therefore ask not only *how* we might produce an existential phenomenology of bodily otherness, but *whether* this is even possible. Critically, where scholars have refused to take stock of the nature and extent of the normativity in Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's thought, they have tended to fall into the same pitfalls, articulating normative theories in spite of themselves. Hazel Barnes's defence of Sartre against charges of sexism is one such instance, and may serve as a cautionary tale of the dangers of failing to properly take stock of their normative biases. While she acknowledges

[230] Grosz, p. 110.

Sartre's "aggressive masculinity", and "the sexist language of certain rhetorical images" in his 1943 text, conceding that they are "sufficient to render suspect" his commitment to "women's liberation", she fervently rejects the claim that masculinity is fundamental to his thought:

> What I cannot accept is […] that Sartre's entire philosophy is so irremediably male that it excludes women. Nor the view that it is based on the notion of a purely male consciousness, presented as an all but disembodied, hostile stare. Nor the charge that Sartre's concept of human freedom is so abstract as to be virtually unrelated to the real world.[231]

Barnes's defence of Sartre against charges of sexism is of note because it leads her to reproduce normative assumptions of her own, namely cissexism and transphobia. Following Sartre, she cites trans people as a counter-example whose utility lies in the light that may shed upon an apparently universal experience, which is in fact that of those within the norm of cissexuality: "It may be interesting, though admittedly not of any practical utility, to wonder what Sartre might think of the growing numbers of transsexuals on the contemporary scene."[232] Like him, she refuses the testimony of 'others' – trans people –, citing only an abstract trans voice, and doing so solely to prove her point: "On closer examination, however, the reason so often quoted for the transsexual choice, 'I was born male in a female body' (or the opposite), points to an assumed biological and psychological determinism that is quite foreign to existentialism."[233] She too shows herself to be woefully ignorant of the very experiences she is citing, which relate primarily to gender, and not to "one's unique sexuality", as she claims.[234] In sum, her failure to take stock of Sartre's normativity foregrounds the reproduction of many of the dynamics

[231] Hazel E. Barnes, 'Sartre and Feminism: Aside from *The Second Sex* and All That', in *Feminist Interpretations of Jean-Paul Sartre,* ed. by Julien S. Murphy (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pp. 22-44 (p. 23).
[232] Ibid., p. 41.
[233] Ibid.
[234] Ibid.

found in his work: the uptake of normative categories and values, the refusal of the subjectivity of 'others', and their positioning as objects for a subject within the norm, to name just a few.

Barnes's oversight here should serve as a warning of the perils of misrecognising the myriad ways in which normativity structures French existential phenomenology. For scholars of bodily otherness to do so is to run the risk of reproducing normative ideologies and views of bodies, and thus of reinforcing the very norms and 'others' that we are seeking to go beyond. Rather, following Butler, any such study must start with "a deconstruction of these obfuscating and reifying structures to their concrete cultural origins". [235] They advocate "an analysis of the ways in which Merleau-Ponty's text legitimates and universalizes structures of sexual oppression", one that we might expand to Sartre's thought, and to all of the forms of oppression evoked in this thesis. Against a generous reading that would regard moments of normativity as superficial or incidental, then, we must begin with a recognition of their ubiquity and centrality to their respective philosophies, as well as of the processes of obfuscation that work to preclude such recognition. We might thus look to what Lisa Guenther terms a "critical phenomenology". Phenomenology, in her view, has been far too often limited by its "failing to give an equally rigorous account of how contingent historical and social structures also shape our experience, not just in an empirical or piecemeal way, but in what we might call a quasi-transcendental way."[236] In light of this, she advocates for a "critical phenomenology", which is at once a "philosophical" practice, and a "political" one. In the first instance, it "suspends commonsense accounts of reality in order to map and describe the structures that make these accounts possible [and] to analyze the way they function".[237] In the second, it "is a struggle for liberation from the structures that privilege, naturalize, and normalize certain experiences of the world while

[235] Butler, 'Sexual Ideology and Phenomenological Description', p. 98.
[236] Lisa Guenther, 'Critical Phenomenology', in *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology,* ed. by Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2020), pp. 11-16 (p. 12).
[237] Ibid., p. 15.

marginalizing, pathologizing, and discrediting others."[238] Crucially, critical phenomenology, for Salamon, taking up Guenther's description, necessarily "reflects on the structural conditions of its own emergence", inviting us to locate and interrogate normativity in Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's thought.[239] In this sense, critical phenomenology might be seen less as a departure from their projects and more as a continuation thereof, one concerned with realising the aspirations that their normative bias led them to betray. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty anticipates and endorses such a practice: "A la phénoménologie entendue comme description directe doit s'ajouter une phénoménologie de la phénoménologie."[240] Or, returning to Salamon, "what is critical about critical phenomenology turns out to have been there all along."[241] It is only by turning the critical, conceptual lens of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy back on itself that we might parse its normativity, and, in so doing, foreground a phenomenology of bodily otherness, one that is existential precisely and only insofar as it is critical, and *vice versa*.

[238] Ibid.
[239] Gayle Salamon, 'What's Critical about Critical Phenomenology?', *Puncta: Journal of Critical Phenomenology,* 1 (2018), 12.
[240] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 419.
[241] Salamon, 'What's Critical about Critical Phenomenology?', p. 12.

Témoignage

While I am writing this chapter, I go for dinner with some friends in the a quartier just north of the centre of Lyon. A little before midnight, I catch a metro home. It is fairly busy, and well-lit. I sit down, and feel eyes on me. A man – young-ish, cocksure – slides across the wagon into the seat opposite mine. I look away, out of the window, anxious to avoid a conflict I can sense from afar. Like many people who move through the world as gender non-conforming, I know by now that to be a question mark is to be a target. He is staring at me. He starts pretending to throw things – a bottle cap, the bottle, punches. He wants to see me flinch. He is not making contact: he is letting me know that he could. I do nothing, hoping he will grow bored. But he is becoming agitated. His friends slide across, take up the places between me and the aisle. I am surrounded on all sides, trapped. He is talking now, there is anger in his voice. He wants to know whether I am a man or a woman. T'es un homme ou une femme ? *His posture has changed, his voice getting louder, and harder. I do not reply. He leans in, demanding that I answer. I still do not reply: there are no right answers, and there are many wrong ones. My body is tight, taught, drawn back as far away from them as possible. I am ready to run. I weigh up my options, manage a weak* Non*, hoping that saying something is better than saying nothing. It isn't. His friend, to my right, joins in. He wants to know what's in my trousers*. T'as une bite ou une chatte ? *There are no right answers, so I stay silent. A station draws close, but it is poorly-lit, and deserted. They could follow me. It is safer to stay put. The doors flash open, closed. We move off once again. He asks again. He won't take my silence for an answer. I want to diffuse the tension. I tell him I'm like Barbie or Ken. I am trying to buy time. The one to my right thinks that I am a man. The one opposite thinks that I am a woman. I know because he says that it's the only reason he won't hit me.* Non mec, c'est une femme, je frappe pas des femmes moi. *He is not sure, but he can't risk it. My stop is next. Two minutes. How long before*

he changes his mind? More, or less, than two minutes? I do not know how to be. How to hold myself, how to move, how to speak. I play dead. We draw into the terminus. They pull in close around me as I alight, still demanding, jeering. I make a break for it, bury myself in the crowds at the end of the platform. I make it home. I am shaken, but unhurt. This time, at least.

. . .

I share this brief account as a preface to the chapter that follows, to make concrete what can so easily appear abstract. This is not the first time that I have been threatened in public, and it will not be the last. My experience echoes that of many 'others': I hope it might serve to impress the necessity and urgency of formulating philosophical accounts of bodily otherness as lived.

Chapter IV: Towards a critical phenomenology of bodily otherness

Thus far, we have explored the nature of bodily otherness, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's theories of the body and of *autrui*, and the normativity at the heart of French existential phenomenology. We have established that *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception* neither take sufficient stock of, nor seek to shed light on, lived experiences of bodily otherness. Further, we have argued that these failures are not merely incidental, but woven into the very fabric of existential phenomenology, whose project is a fundamentally normative one. We are now well-placed to begin to formulate an existential – critical – phenomenology of bodily otherness, one grounded in the theories set out by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Such an endeavour may appear, at first glance, at odds with our claim that the project of existential phenomenology is inherently normative, and as such precludes an account of bodily otherness. Certainly, it would be futile to take up that project as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty both did. And yet, the efforts of scholars in a range of theoretical and critical traditions to use their theories to interrogate and illuminate the lived experiences of a range of 'others' indicates that this is not so much an impasse, as an opportunity. They suggest that the normative bind of existential phenomenology lies not in its aims or methods *per se*, but in the ways in which these aims and methods are pursued and put into practice. Indeed, some of its central elements are not merely useful, but uniquely valuable for interrogating bodily otherness. The starting point of phenomenological reflection, the first-person perspective, is one such element: speaking from the perspective of otherness is surely paramount to conceptualising the lived experiences of 'others'. The problem, then, lies not in the method itself – building from the first-person perspective – but in its deployment: restricting that perspective to a singular, normative one, as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty do. If, instead, we begin from a multitude of first-person perspectives, both those within and those without various norms, then we might properly take stock of experiences beyond our own, and avoid conflating

the singular – and, crucially, the normative – with the universal. Indeed, phenomenology from the margins can advance through a constructive dialectic between a philosophy that might serve to enlighten experiences it has traditionally disregarded, on the one hand, and experiences that might find expression in a philosophy whose shortcomings they reveal, on the other. In a word, read in conjunction, French existential phenomenology and experiences of bodily otherness might operate symbiotically to illuminate and inform one another.

Taking up this ethical and methodological approach, we might explore some elements of a critical – existential – phenomenology of bodily otherness. Our attempt to do so, in the pages that follow, should be considered neither definitive nor comprehensive: the form and constraints of the present thesis necessarily delimit the scope of our enquiry. Rather, it should be regarded as a preliminary investigation into the value that *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception* might hold for reflections on and about bodily otherness. More precisely, our study will centre upon Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's accounts of *autrui*, which, as we have seen, are grounded respectively in the *regard* and the *corps-sujet*. In effect, scholars of otherness have long since remarked on the unique opportunity presented by these accounts of relations with and between subjects for conceptualising the lived experiences of those outside of the norm. Scholarship of this kind has tended to focus upon Sartre or Merleau-Ponty in isolation, instead of reading them together. Our reflection marks a departure from this tendency: insofar as they explore distinct ways of relating to other subjects, and underscore distinct aspects of that relation, they have the potential to be mutually enlightening. The chapter that follows will thus set out from Merleau-Ponty's account, and notably his *corps-sujet*, before moving through to Sartre's *regard*, and back again, with the conviction that they might be most productively deployed in concert, to inform one another. Taking up the legacy of many scholars of otherness, we will weave together Merleau-Ponty and Sartre's theories of *autrui*, various threads of critical thought, and testimonies from 'others', with a view to better conceptualising

experiences of otherness and othering. In so doing, we hope to establish that, deployed in certain ways, their theories might yet serve as productive frameworks for articulating and making sense of the manifold ways in which otherness shapes experiences in and of the world.

Merleau-Ponty's *autre*, and his '*autres*'

Merleau-Ponty's account of our relation to other subjects centres squarely on the body, which he places at the heart of existence with his theory of the *corps-sujet*. Herein, as we have seen, the body figures as a preconscious and prepersonal moment in subjectivity through which we perceive and situate ourselves in the world in light of possibilities for action. By locating our awareness of *autrui* at this level, he overcomes what he perceives as the impossibility of idealist and realist philosophies to account for the existence of other subjects: "Mais si je trouve en moi-même par réflexion, avec le sujet percevant, un sujet prépersonnel, donné à lui-même […] alors tout ce qui apparaît dans le monde n'est pas aussitôt étalé devant moi et le comportement d'autrui peut y figurer."[1] Here, we find the pivotal moment in Merleau-Ponty's account of *autrui*, namely that other subjects figure, at the level of the *corps-sujet*, as a *comportement*, a way of interacting with the world and with other subjects that reflects our own intentional engagement in the world: "En tant que je suis né, que j'ai un corps et un monde naturel, je peux trouver dans ce monde d'autres comportements avec lesquels le mien s'entrelace …"[2] In a word, for Merleau-Ponty, our knowledge of the existence of other subjects is given in and through their intentional engagement with the world, which mirrors our own:

> J'éprouve mon corps comme puissance de certaines conduites et d'un certain monde, je ne suis donné à moi-même que comme une certaine prise sur le monde; or, c'est justement mon corps qui perçoit le corps d'autrui et il y trouve comme un

[1] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 405.
[2] Ibid., p. 410.

> prolongement miraculeux de ses propres intentions, une manière familière de traiter le monde …[3]

Other subjects are known to be other subjects because they use their bodies in the same ways as we do, to interact with the world as we do. Hence one of the foundational instances of our recognition of other subjects is their use of the same objects that we use, in the same or similar ways: "Quelqu'un se sert de mes objets familiers. Mais qui ? Je dis que c'est un autre, un second moi-même et je le sais d'abord parce que ce corps vivant a même structure que le mien."[4] Crucial, here, is the symmetry between my body and the bodies of other subjects, whose intentional engagement in the world in ways that I recognise, to the extent that they mirror my own, hinges upon an equivalence of our bodies, as postures in light of actual or potential action. This equivalence of bodies, which, in Merleau-Ponty's account, are not only postures in light of action, but also centres of meaning, ensures our recognition of other subjects through another form of *comportement*: gesture, and notably the expression of emotion.[5]

Implicit in Merleau-Ponty's theory is a shared intentionality, a shared way of acting and interacting with the world and others. We inherit this shared intentionality, when we come into the world, from other subjects, who already use certain objects in certain ways. When a child comes into the world, he says, they encounter unfamiliar objects: "Il en prend possession, il apprend à s'en servir comme les autres s'en servent, parce que le schéma corporel assure la correspondance immédiate de ce qu'il voit faire et de ce qu'il fait …"[6] These objects are not neutral, but determined by the purposes for which they have been made, and are tendentially used, and thus carry the trace of this shared intentionality: "Dans l'objet culturel, j'éprouve la présence prochaine d'autrui sous un voile d'anonymat. *On* se sert de la pipe pour fumer, de la

[3] Ibid., p. 406.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., p. 409.
[6] Ibid., p. 407.

cuiller pour manger, de la sonnette pour appeler …"[7] Language is one such *objet culturel*, whose significance for relations to *autrui* is underscored: "Il y a, en particulier, un objet culturel qui va jouer un rôle essentiel dans la perception d'autrui : c'est le langage."[8] Our capacity to inherit this shared intentionality – to use objects, to communicate with language – rests upon the presumption that all bodies share the same possibilities for action, and thus the same bodily capacities for movement and gesture. Merleau-Ponty cites the example of a baby, who opens its mouth when he pretends to bite one of its fingers, replicating the bite: "La « morsure » a immédiatement pour lui une signification intersubjective. Il perçoit ses intentions dans son corps, mon corps avec le sien, et par là mes intentions dans son corps."[9] Over time, he argues, these ways of interacting with the world and others become sedimented in the body, which incarnates "ce savoir habituel du monde, cette science implicite ou sédimentée".[10] They thus become habitual: certain actions and gestures are integrated into the *schéma corporel*, the body as *puissances* of action and expression, constituting "un savoir qui est dans les mains", through which we are positioned as both more able and more likely to perform them.[11] What is habitual is shaped by both personal and collective histories: the shared horizons that we inherit, on the one hand, and what we have experienced within those horizons, on the other. Critically, these habits, which are none other than ways of being in the world, including actions, and emotional states, determine what we are likely to do, and, by implication, what we are unlikely to do: "… une attitude envers le monde, lorsqu'elle a été souvent confirmée, est pour nous privilégiée."[12]

In Merleau-Ponty's account, then, the shared intentionality that ensures our recognition of other subjects, itself predicated on an equivalence of bodies and their capacities for action and expression, is inherited as much as it is habitual: we learn certain ways of being from the

[7] Ibid., p. 400.
[8] Ibid., p. 407.
[9] Ibid., p. 404.
[10] Ibid., p. 275.
[11] Ibid., p. 168.
[12] Ibid., p. 504.

way those around us interact with the world, and, in taking them up ourselves, integrate them into our bodies as habits. This has implications not only for our experience of our bodies, but also for our experience of the world. In effect, he draws a distinction between objective space and lived, or phenomenal, space. The latter is given in light of our possibilities for action: "Les lieux de l'espace ne se définissent pas comme des positions objectives par rapport à la position objective de notre corps, mais ils inscrivent autour de nous la portée variable de nos visées ou de nos gestes."[13] Depth, distance, and orientation are all predicated on our possibilities for action, or, more precisely, upon what is within reach, in relation to the body as a "système d'actions possibles" whose "« lieu » phénoménal est défini par sa tâche et par sa situation".[14] Accordingly, the shared ways of being in the world that we inherit, and which, in Merleau-Ponty's model, become habitual, come to shape our experience of the world in turn. Indeed, he claims that, as the correlate of actions, the world too can become habitual. Certain spaces, such as our homes, are testament to this: "Quand je me déplace dans ma maison, je sais d'emblée et sans aucun discours que marcher vers la salle de bains signifie passer près de la chambre, que regarder la fenêtre signifie avoir la cheminée à ma gauche …"[15] Beyond the home, the cultural world we inherit is familiar: we inherit not only shared ways of being in the world, but a world shaped by those shared ways of being, as Merleau-Ponty's examples of "la pipe", "la cuiller" and "la sonnette" testify. We might therefore, with Sara Ahmed, characterise the experience of his subject, whose world figures as the exact correlates of his inherited, habitual actions, as one of comfort: "To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins."[16] Here, the body is lived as "a body-at-home in its world".[17] Indeed, for Ahmed, Merleau-Ponty's *schéma corporel* is precisely the

[13] Ibid., p. 168.
[14] Ibid., pp. 289, 302-303, 308.
[15] Ibid., pp. 150-151.
[16] Ahmed, p. 134.
[17] Ibid., p. 111.

experience of a "body at home".[18] And, insofar as the sense of being "at home" relates to the "infinité" of orientations that the *schéma corporel* makes possible, this experience of being "at home" implies a freedom of movement, and action.[19] His subject thus embodies competence: he is situated in light of positive action, the body being "là où il a quelque chose à faire", and consciousness is understood to be not a "je pense", but a "je peux".[20] In a word, the Merleau-Pontian subject, who has inherited and integrated shared ways of being in the world, and who is situated in that world, is characterised by comfort, freedom, and competence.

If Ahmed describes his subject in such terms, she does so critically, arguing that such experience – of the "body at home", and the freedom and competence that this grounds – is not universal, but normative. She makes this claim of whiteness: "White bodies are comfortable *as they inhabit spaces that extend their shape.*"[21] Further, she points to the whiteness inherent in the shared intentionality that Merleau-Ponty's subject inherits, and the world to which those ways of acting and interacting correspond: "This is the familiar world, the world of whiteness, as a world we know implicitly […] a world 'ready' for certain kinds of bodies, as a world that puts certain objects within their reach."[22] Indeed, taking up our earlier conviction that the "on" of French existential phenomenology refers only to those within the norm, the fact that cultural objects are made for normative bodies is already implicit in Merleau-Ponty's account: "*On* se sert de la pipe pour fumer, de la cuiller pour manger, de la sonnette pour appeler …"[23] He himself notes that such cultural objects, as well as the shared intentionality of which they are the correlates, speak to a particular social, cultural and historical context: "S'il s'agit d'une civilisation inconnue ou étrangère, sur les ruines, sur les instruments brisés que je retrouve ou

[18] Ibid.
[19] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 165.
[20] Ibid., pp. 289, 160.
[21] Ahmed, p. 134.
[22] Ibid., p. 111.
[23] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 400.

sur le paysage que je parcours, plusieurs manières d'être où de vivre peuvent se poser."[24] Similarly, he notes that the expression of emotion is not given, but contingent on such a context, explicitly conceding his incapacity to understand people in cultures different from his own: "Je ne comprends pas même l'expression des émotions chez les primitifs ou dans des milieux trop différents du mien."[25] He stresses that the bodily gestures through which we convey emotion are culture-bound, citing differences in the ways people in Western Europe and people in Japan convey anger, and love.[26] Significantly, he acknowledges that even an equivalence of bodies with the same capacities for gesture does not produce a symmetry of emotional expression: "Il ne suffit pas que deux sujets conscients aient les mêmes organes et le même système nerveux pour que les mêmes émotions se donnent chez tous deux les mêmes signes."[27]

Merleau-Ponty thus unequivocally acknowledges that the intentional engagement that we inherit and integrate as habitual ways of being in the world is not given, but contingent on a particular societal, cultural and historical situation. Moreover, implicit in his account is a recognition that, even within shared cultural horizons, not everybody does or can interact with the world and with other people in the ways prescribed by those around them, and the objects in the world. He gives several examples, all of which are presented as anomalies, and often set against a "normal" subject, wherein a person is unable to take up these shared ways of being. In his discussion of phantom limbs, he notes that some people who become disabled are simply no longer able to engage with the world in these ways: "Au moment même où mon monde coutumier fait lever en moi des intentions habituelles, je ne puis plus, si je suis amputé, me joindre effectivement à lui, les objets maniables, justement en tant qu'ils se présentent comme maniables, interrogent une main que je n'ai plus."[28] Later, in his discussion of sexuality, one

[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., p. 215.
[26] Ibid., p. 220.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid., p. 97.

dimension of our intentional engagement with the world, and thus a *comportement*, he points to a subject who diverges from the "normal" ways of situating oneself in light of sexual desire and possibilities for action: "… le malade a cessé d'adresser à l'entourage cette question muette et permanente qu'est la sexualité normale."[29] Elsewhere, he points to people who are unable to speak or communicate as other people in Western society do, citing the case of a girl who loses the capacity to speak.[30] In all of these manifold instances, the *Phénoménologie de la perception* presents us with subjects whose capacities to take up the ways of being in the world that they inherit is foreclosed by corporeal or social realities. Their presence allows us to begin to parse a truth central to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, one that might anticipate and ground the present reflection: that the intentionality so foundational to his account of consciousness, as worldly and embodied, and of *autrui*, whose recognition is predicated thereupon, is not an existential given, as he takes for granted, but rather contingent: the privilege of a select few. Perhaps most significant, here, is that many of these subjects are 'others': ill and disabled people, and women. We might thus speculate that, to the extent that it involves the capacity to inherit and integrate certain ways of being, intentionality in his account is not only contingent, but normative. Such a claim has potentially far-reaching implications for Merleau-Ponty's theory of *autrui*: if our recognition of other subjects hinges upon their capacity for normative intentionality, and some subjects lack that capacity, then the extent to which those latter subjects can be recognised *as subjects* might be called into question. If, then, we can establish that a range of 'others' sometimes, or even regularly, deviate from normative ways of being in the world, we might open up a space for thinking through and about dynamics of recognition, misrecognition, and erasure of the subjectivity of those outside of the norm.

[29] Ibid., pp. 182-183.
[30] Ibid., p. 187.

Failed orientations and bodily limitations

One of the most salient instances of 'others' diverging from normative ways of interacting with the world and others is that of sexuality. In effect, for Merleau-Ponty, sexuality figures as "une intentionnalité originale", and is underwritten by the same "arc intentionnel" that structures our experience of the world.[31] Sexuality is not distinct from, but rather bound up with the rest of our intentional existence, so much so that it is impossible to separate the sexual from the non-sexual: "… il est impossible d'assigner, pour une décision ou une action donnée, la part de la motivation sexuelle et celle des autres motivations, impossible de caractériser une décision ou un acte comme « sexuel » ou « non sexuel »."[32] It is noteworthy, then, that he concedes the possibility of deviating from "normal" intentionality in sexual experience, asserting that the "arc intentionnel" that underpins sexuality "fléchit" in the experience of some ill and disabled people.[33] Further, as we established earlier in the thesis, the account he gives of sexuality is fundamentally normative: that of a cisgender, heterosexual man. Hence, queerness implies and constitutes a departure from normative intentionality, one which takes place at several points along the "arc intentionnel". Perhaps the most evident of these is the departure from normative objects of desire. This is the starting point of Ahmed's phenomenology of queerness, wherein she argues that queer desire "moves toward an object that is 'normally outside the sphere' of that desire" and, in so doing, "reaches objects that are not continuous with the line of normal sexual subjectivity."[34] Further, taking seriously Merleau-Ponty's claim that sexuality saturates our entire existence, she asserts that the queer orientation toward a non-normative sexual object has implications for our being in the world more widely: "… orientations toward sexual objects affect other things that we do, such that different orientations, different ways of directing one's

[31] Ibid., p. 184.
[32] Ibid., p. 197.
[33] Ibid., p. 184.
[34] Ahmed, p. 71.

desires, means inhabiting different worlds."[35] She goes on to locate this in lesbian experience: "To be orientated sexually toward women as women affects other things that we do."[36] Queer desire thus shapes not only the choice of intentional object, but also the ways in which queer subjects move through the world: "… the differences between how we are orientated sexually are not only a matter of 'which' objects we are orientated toward, but also how we extend through our bodies into the world."[37] Put plainly, in queerness, the departure from normative sexual objects prefigures a more holistic departure from normative intentionality, and thus from ways of being in the world outside of the sphere of explicitly sexual experience.

In Ahmed's account, queerness figures as unequivocally structured by a non-normative intentionality. It is a "failed orientation": a failure to take up the shared – heterosexual – ways of desiring that all subjects inherit.[38] Significant, here, is the conceptualisation of normative ways of being as an ideal and an imperative, as in the case of "compulsory heterosexuality", whose very existence confirms the possibility of such a "failed orientation".[39] Ahmed's view of normative intentionality as ideal and imperative resonates strongly with what Susan Wendell terms the "disciplines of normality".[40] In fact, taking up Wendell's discussion, Robert McRuer regards these disciplines as "a system of compulsory able-bodiedness".[41] Like heterosexuality, these "disciplines of normality" are "standards" or "ideals" of intentional engagement in the world.[42] If heterosexuality prescribes a normative intentional object, namely, the opposite sex, as well as normative sexual acts that derive from that object-choice, these disciplines prescribe normative ways of being in one's body, and interacting with the world. Herein, normative intentionality both implies and requires the maintenance of "control" over one's body, gestures,

[35] Ibid., p. 68.
[36] Ibid., p. 103.
[37] Ibid., p. 68.
[38] Ibid., pp. 91-92.
[39] Ibid., pp. 84-85.
[40] Wendell, pp. 87-92.
[41] McRuer, p. 8.
[42] Wendell, pp. 88, 91.

and movements.[43] And yet, this control is no more given in all consciousness than is the same-sex object of desire: the experiences of many ill and disabled people, whose capacity to control their bodies is compromised, or inhibited, makes this plain. In effect, illness and disability are often characterised by what disabled, genderqueer writer Eli Clare calls "bodily limitation". He recounts how such limitation shapes his ability to climb a mountain: "I lurch along from one rock to the next, catching myself repeatedly as I start to fall, quads quickly sore from exertion, tension, lack of momentum."[44] Notable, here, is that his understanding of his bodily experience as one of limitation emerges through comparison with that of his able-bodied hiking companion: "I know that she's breathing hard, that this is no easy climb, but also that each step isn't a strategic game for her."[45] Clare's view of disability as "bodily limitation" thus implies a departure from the ideal or imperative of bodily control, as well as the freedom of movement and competence made possible by such control, that exemplify normative intentionality. This is further evidenced in his descriptions of everyday life, where his possibilities for action are articulated in terms of incapacity, or impossibility, and thus implicitly measured against the control, freedom, and competence taken for granted in able-bodied – normative – experience: "I can't play a piano, place my hands gently on a keyboard, or type even fifteen words a minute. […] I have trouble picking up small objects, putting them down."[46]

As these examples make clear, "bodily limitation" is not given in bodies, but relates to the particular environment and the kinds of movements or actions that it mandates: playing a piano, or using a keyboard. In other words, "bodily limitation" should be understood in much the same way that Wendell and Garland-Thomson conceptualise disability, as cited in our first chapter: as produced by a particular environment, and its ideals and imperatives of physicality.

[43] Ibid., p. 88.
[44] Eli Clare, *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation*, (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 7-8.
[45] Ibid., p. 5.
[46] Ibid., p. 6.

Hence, our discussion of "bodily limitations" might prove informative, but only insofar as we ward against what Belinsky terms the "ableist and naturalising error" of seeing disabled bodies as having "fewer 'natural' capacities than abled bodies".[47] This is perhaps especially critical when we turn to people who are not born, but become ill or disabled, and who often conceive of "bodily limitation" in terms of loss, in light of their experiences prior to the onset of illness or disability. In her phenomenological study of illness, S. Kay Toombs understands it in terms of a "bodily impairment", one grounded in five corporeal losses, two of which are freedom and control, the others being familiarity, certainty, and wholeness.[48] Her account recalls Drew Leder's description of the body in illness: "It can no longer do what once it could. Certain possibilities of sensation and action, certain resources of energy, are simply 'missing.'"[49] For others, including Havi Carel, illness is experienced less as a loss of specific physical capacities, than as a limitation that itself constitutes a loss of freedom and control: "In respiratory illness, the limitation is felt continuously. There is no respite from the exertion and breathlessness that accompany almost everything I do."[50] This limitation effectively proscribes her possibilities for action: "Movements are censored; activities struck off the list of possible ones."[51] Further, as Claire Marin's autobiographical account makes plain, localised losses or limitations of specific capacities can have implications for the ill person's generalised mode of embodiment: "La maladie s'est inscrite dans chacun des mouvements."[52] In such cases, the onset of illness or disability thus brings about a frustration or loss of habitual actions, which, for Leder, become "more difficult".[53] Indeed, this is precisely how Toni Jeffreys first noticed that she was falling ill with chronic fatigue: "Eating, drinking, and talking were difficult."[54]

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[47] Belinsky, p. 190.
[48] S. Kay Toombs, *The Meaning of Illness: A Phenomenological Account of the Different Perspectives of Physician and Patient*, (Dordrecht: Springer Science+Business Media, 1992), p. 90.
[49] Drew Leder, *The Absent Body*, (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 84.
[50] Havi Carel, *Phenomenology of Illness*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 71.
[51] Ibid., p. 72.
[52] Claire Marin, *Hors de moi*, (Paris: Éditions Allia, 2008), p. 49.
[53] Leder, *The Absent Body*, p. 82.
[54] Toni Jeffreys, *The Mile-High Staircase*, (Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), p. 20.

Implicit in the loss of habitual actions is a loss of both the habitual body and the habitual world: objects once given as correlates of habitual actions no longer figure as such. Marin thus recalls returning to her childhood home: "La maison d'enfance regorge de ces témoins gênants d'un passé révolu. Les raquettes de tennis, vestiges d'une autre époque. Le piano. L'idée même d'avoir pu jouer un jour paraît si étrange."[55] Ill and disabled people's experience of even the most familiar spaces shifts dramatically in line with changes in their bodies, and capacities for action, as Robert F. Murphy's account of developing a spinal tumour reveals: "Our house had not changed in any way […] But my body had changed radically, altering completely the ecology of the house and household."[56] Not just familiar places, but lived or phenomenal space, to take up Merleau-Ponty's language, is radically altered through the transformation or loss of capacities for movement, and action. Returning to Leder: "Space loses its normal directionality as the world ceases to be the locus of purposeful action."[57] Distance, too, is distorted, as certain things grow harder, even impossible, to reach. Carel gestures towards this, and its implications for her wider relation to space: "In illness things grow heavier and further away […] My world, and the world of those who are close to me, has shrunk."[58] Her account chimes with Murphy's, for whom a loss of motility translates to a contraction of space, and the experiential world it grounds: "As my body closes in upon me, so does the world. My space is shrinking steadily, my mobility lessened to a vegetal state."[59] Hence, for Leder, to the extent that illness constitutes a "physiological transformation", it entails "a transformation of one's experiential world".[60] If the bodily freedom and control that typically characterise good health, and able-bodiedness, ground an "experience of the world-as-opportunity", then this is precisely what is "[called] into

[55] Marin, p. 116.
[56] Murphy, *The Body Silent*, p. 59.
[57] Leder, *The Absent Body*, p. 75.
[58] Carel, p. 71.
[59] Murphy, *The Body Silent*, p. 193.
[60] Drew Leder, *The Distressed Body: Rethinking Illness, Imprisonment, and Healing*, (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), p. 14.

question" when such freedom and control are lost, as so often occurs with the advent of illness and disability.[61] In other words, departures from normative intentionality are not localised to particular "bodily limitations", but, insofar as these limitations engender a transformation of one's experiential world, occur at every level of the lived experience of ill and disabled people. Further, in time, these divergences from normative ways of being in the world become habitual, as Marin indicates: "Comme on s'habitue à boire ou à fumer, on s'habitue à avoir un peu mal."[62] Therefore, in illness and disability, "bodily limitations" ultimately give rise to an *être-au-monde*, with its own habitual actions and orientations, on which grounds deviations from the normative ways interacting with the world that Merleau-Ponty takes for granted.

What is more, such bodily limitations are not the only feature of illness and disability that frustrates intentional engagements in the world. In effect, returning once again to Merleau-Ponty's account of consciousness, these engagements are grounded in the body as the invisible context of our actions. For us to be fully engaged in a given activity, he claims, the body must not be thematically present, but trail behind us. He gives the example of standing at a desk: "Si je me tiens debout devant mon bureau et que je m'y appuie des deux mains, seules mes mains sont accentuées et tout mon corps traîne derrière elles comme une queue de comète."[63] This, returning to Ahmed, is a function of the habitual body, whose familiarity with the task at hand allows it to remain in the background: "… it does not pose 'a problem' or an obstacle to the action, or it is not 'stressed' by 'what' the action encounters."[64] Testimonies of illness and disability are, as we have seen, often characterised by limitations, and unfamiliar or unpleasant sensations, most notably pain. Herein, the body ceases to "trail behind", and instead emerges at the forefront of lived experience. Murphy provides one such testimony:

[61] Leder, *The Absent Body*, p. 81.
[62] Marin, p. 59.
[63] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 116.
[64] Ahmed, p. 130.

> … illness negates this lack of awareness of the body in guiding our thoughts and actions. The body can no longer be taken for granted, implicit and axiomatic, for it has become a problem. It no longer is the subject of unconscious assumption, but the object of conscious thought.[65]

Pain constitutes perhaps the most urgent sense that the body has "become a problem". In pain, as Ahmed notes, the body surfaces as thematic: "… pain sensations demand that I *attend* to my embodied experience …"[66] No event, Leder states, "more radically or inescapably reminds us of our bodily presence": "The sensory existence of pain draws the corporeal out of self-concealment, rendering it thematic."[67] In his account, pain figures as a primary instance of what he terms "*dys-appearance*", wherein "the body *appears* as a thematic focus, but precisely as in a *dys* state–*dys* is from the Greek prefix signifying 'bad,' 'hard,' or 'ill'".[68] To the degree that, in *dys-appearance*, "the body is thematized at times of dysfunction or problematic operation", it is often brought about in illness, both through pain, and bodily limitation.[69]

Dys-appearance compounds the departures from normative intentionality that we have located in experiences of illness and disability by disrupting the structures of consciousness as engaged in actions in the world. Rather than "trailing behind" actions, the body in pain or the body that comes up against physical limitations "surfaces thematically", so that "its transitive use is disrupted". Leder writes of pain: "No longer simply a 'from' structure, the painful body becomes that *to* which he attends."[70] While he does note that *dys-appearance* is a feature of all subjective existence – "We remember the body at times of hunger, thirst, strong excretory needs, and the like." – it tends, as such examples show, to be transient, and exceptional.[71] And yet, in illness, and disability, *dys-appearance* is often mundane, and sustained, as Carel reveals:

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[65] Murphy, *The Body Silent*, p. 12.
[66] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (New York; London: Routledge, 2012), p. 27.
[67] Leder, *The Absent Body*, p. 76.
[68] Ibid., p. 84.
[69] Ibid., p. 85.
[70] Ibid., p. 74.
[71] Ibid., p. 84.

"Every step and every breath fill my consciousness, control my mind, leave no space for anything else."[72] Here, we find a central moment in Leder's account of *dys-appearance*, the experience of what he terms "*intentional disruption*".[73] In rendering the body thematic, pain and bodily limitation "disrupt" the intentionality that grounds the Merleau-Pontian subject's engagement in the world. This, in turn, has implications for our experience of the world, which shifts in *dys-appearance* through what Leder calls "*spatiotemporal constriction*". We see this clearly in the case of pain: "… the new world into which we are thrust by pain has a constricted aspect […] We are no longer dispersed out *there* in the world, but suddenly congeal right *here*."[74] What is lost, therefore, in *dys-appearance*, through both *intentional disruption* and *spatiotemporal constriction*, are the very traits typical of Merleau-Ponty's normative subject, and its intentional relation to the world: the sense of comfort, or being-at-home, as well as the freedom to act, and move, through which the world is given as opportunity. As such, illness and disability, to the extent that they often bring about frequent or lasting experiences of *dys-appearance*, bring about and indeed prescribe non-normative intentional engagements with the world. And, if we turn to what Leder terms *social dys-appearance*, as well as its parallels with Sartre's account of *autrui*, we might begin to parse that ill and disabled people are far from the only 'others' for whom this is the case.

Social dys-appearance **and Sartre's** ***regard***

Leder notes that *dys-appearance* is not solely brought about by physiological phenomena, but by any event where the subject is forced into an awareness of their body as an object. Crucially, he considers Sartre's *regard*, the foundation of our relation to *autrui*, in *L'Être et le néant*, one

[72] Carel, p. 72.
[73] Leder, *The Absent Body*, p. 73.
[74] Ibid., p. 75.

such event. The *regard*, Leder states, relates to "a certain sort of encounter", which is "precisely one marked by *dys-appearance*".[75] Accordingly, it figures as a primary instance of *social dys-appearance*, which is none other than an experience of *dys-appearance* brought about by an encounter with *autrui*: "We have seen that dys-appearance results when the body is somehow away, apart, asunder, from itself, as in spatio-functional or temporal terms. In social dys-appearance, this split is effected by the incorporated gaze of the Other."[76] If, then, we shift our attention to the *regard*, we might find that Sartre's account of our relation to other subjects illuminates Merleau-Ponty's. As we have seen, the *regard* grounds our basic relation to *autrui*: "… ma liaison fondamentale avec autrui-sujet doit pouvoir se ramener à ma possibilité permanente d'*être vu* par autrui."[77] Indeed, at the elementary level, other subjects are given to us in the *regard*: "… autrui est, par principe, *celui qui me regarde* …"[78] When we encounter other subjects, in Sartre's view, we have two possibilities: either we are the *regard*, and *autrui* is an object for us, or *autrui* is the *regard*, and we are an object for them. This, we have seen, is the claim that configures the relations between subjects as one of conflict, to the extent that each subject seeks to occupy the position of transcendence – *regard*, or *regardant* – rather than that of immanence – *regardé* –, object for the *regard*. Hence, Sartre conceptualises the relations between subjects as circular, with each subject figuring variously as the *regard* and *regardé*.[79] Herein, as we found with Merleau-Ponty's theory of *autrui*, there is a presumption of a parity and equivalence of subjects and their bodies: for Sartre, all subjects are theoretically equally source of and subject to the *regard*. They only experience the *regard*, and its manifold effects, on the relatively infrequent occasions of not only encountering another subject, but of doing so

[75] Ibid., pp. 93-94.
[76] Ibid., p. 96.
[77] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 296.
[78] Ibid., p. 297.
[79] Ibid., p. 403.

in the particular mode of being *regardé*. In short, following Sartre, our experience of being *regardé*, and thus of *social dys-appearance*, is both sporadic, and transient.

As we found with *dys-appearance* brought on by physiological phenomena, however, when we turn to the experience of 'others', it becomes clear that *social dys-appearance* is far from infrequent. Indeed, this is precisely why the *regard* has proven such a productive tool for interrogating bodily otherness, as phenomenologists in the feminist tradition have long shown. Hence Lisa Folkmarson Käll claims that Sartre's descriptions "provide us with excellent tools for understanding conditions of being marked by, for instance, skin color, sex, sexuality, [or] disability", while, for Julien S. Murphy, the *regard* "is integral to a feminist phenomenological analysis of oppression and liberation".[80] Crucially, Murphy argues that the value of the *regard* for feminist scholars lies not in the account itself, but in the ways in which it illuminates the experiences of 'others' in spite of Sartre's universal intentions: "Without intending to, Sartre has provided us with a particularly useful description of women's experience of devaluation in a world where men are dominant."[81] In effect, to take up Sartre's account as he intends – that is to say, taking for granted the equivalence of subjects and their subjection to the *regard* – would preclude an appreciation of the societal dynamics that underpin seeing, and being seen. If, however, we refract his descriptions through the prisms of bodily otherness, we might both illuminate the experiences of 'others', and rework Sartre's account in light of them. Further, we might explore the implications of the *regard*, and of *social dys-appearance*, for subjects outside of the norm, and thus nourish our discussion of Merleau-Ponty's theory of *autrui*. In effect, insofar as it reflects the experience of a subject who we have established to be normative, the description of the *regard* in *L'Être et le néant*, and the account of *autrui* that it foregrounds, is not universal, but typical of subjects within the norm. This is Frantz Fanon's challenge to

[80] Lisa Folkmarson Käll, 'Fashioned in nakedness, sculptured, and caused to be born: Bodies in light of the Sartrean gaze', *Continental Philosophy Review,* 43 (2010), 65.; Murphy, 'The Look in Sartre and Rich', p. 113.
[81] Murphy, 'The Look in Sartre and Rich', p. 113.

Sartre: "Si les études de Sartre sur l'existence d'autrui demeurent exactes (dans la mesure […] ou *l'Être et le néant* décrit une conscience aliénée), leur application à une conscience nègre se révèle fausse."[82] The problem, for Fanon, is that Sartre fails to account for how one's position within or without the norm – here, of whiteness – generates existential disparities that reflect differential distributions of social power: "… le Blanc n'est pas seulement l'Autre, mais le maître, réel ou imaginaire d'ailleurs."[83] It follows, then, that should we establish the existence and nature of such disparities, we might be well placed to rehabilitate Sartre's *regard*, and his theory of *autrui*, to shed light on the experiences of 'others'.

In order to interrogate the potential ramifications of the *regard* for bodily otherness, we must first turn to the theory itself, and, in particular, the existential implications of being subject to the *regard*. As we have seen, in the *regard*, we experience the third ontological dimension of consciousness: the *être-pour-autrui*. Herein, we become aware of ourselves as objects – both as selves, or *ego*, and as bodies – for other subjects: "S'il y a un autre, quel qu'il soit, où qu'il soit, quels que soient ses rapports avec moi, sans même qu'il agisse autrement sur moi que par le pur surgissement de son être, j'ai un dehors, j'ai une *nature* …"[84] Insofar as we figure as objects for others, we are aware of ourselves as objects of judgements, and notably of value judgements, that we cannot know, because we cannot see into other people's minds: "… être regardé, c'est se saisir comme objet inconnu d'appréciations inconnaissables, en particulier d'appréciations de valeur."[85] Hence the *regard*, and the *être-pour-autrui* that it inaugurates, are the prism through which we conceptualise ourselves, in light of other subjects: "Ainsi, le regard est d'abord un intermédiaire qui renvoie de moi à moi-même."[86] Indeed, anything we think or feel about ourselves necessarily implicates the *regard*, as that through which we exist for *autrui*

[82] Fanon, p. 112.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 302.
[85] Ibid., p. 306.
[86] Ibid., p. 298.

as an object of judgements: "Ainsi ne saurais-je me conférer aucune qualité sans la médiation d'un pouvoir objectivant qui n'est pas mon propre pouvoir et que je ne puis feindre ni forger. [… On] a dit depuis longtemps qu'autrui m'apprenait qui je suis."[87] What is more, as Leder's discussion highlights, the existential implications of the *regard* extend well beyond the sphere of self-image and conception. In effect, to the extent that to be seen is to become aware of one's body as an object, it also implies a transformation of consciousness, as is indicated in the shift from *être-pour-soi* to *être-pour-autrui* in Sartre's account. He illustrates this with the example of listening at a door, and looking through a keyhole. Prior to the *regard*, the subject at the door exists as "conscience non-thétique (de) [soi]", as "pure conscience *des* choses", which are given as correlates of actual and possible actions in the world.[88] Since "[son] attitude […] n'a aucun dehors", the subject "[se perd] dans le monde" in ways that ground a freedom of action: "… je fais ce que j'ai à faire …"[89] In other words, the subject is absorbed in the tasks at hand – listening at the door, looking through a keyhole – and not paying explicit attention to the state of his body, or things in the world outside of the scope of that task.

With the perception of being seen – "… on me *regarde* …" – the subject undergoes an ontological upheaval.[90] Where the "conscience irréfléchie" had made possible the subject's total investment in the present action, it now comes to be occupied by an awareness of self as object for *autrui*, which necessarily diverts the subject's attention away from the task at hand: in Sartre's example, the subject is no longer engrossed in listening, or looking, but focused on the object – the *ego*, and the body – that he is for other subjects.[91] It is precisely this experience, which Sartre understands as a shift from a *non-thétique* to a *thétique* consciousness of one's body, that typifies *dys-appearance* in Leder's account. Herein, the body surfaces thematically

[87] Ibid., p. 313.
[88] Ibid., p. 298.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid., p. 299.
[91] Ibid., pp. 299-300

as an object, displacing the experience of the body-as-lived, which figures henceforth "en tant qu'aliéné".[92] The alienation of the lived body further brings about a further alienation, namely that of the subject's possibilities for action, as predicated upon that body: "… lorsque je saisis le regard d'autrui […] je vis une aliénation subtile de toutes mes possibilités qui sont agencées loin de moi, au milieu du monde, avec les objets du monde."[93] This, in turn, distances the subject from the world that figures in light of these possibilities: "… l'aliénation de moi qu'est *l'être-regardé* implique l'aliénation du monde que j'organise."[94] As such, to be seen affects our relation to objects – "… mon rapport à l'objet ou potentialité de l'objet se décompose sous le regard d'autrui …" – and to space: "En tant que je suis regardé, je ne déplie pas la distance, je me borne à la *franchir*. Le regard d'autrui me confère la spatialité."[95] The experience of the *regard*, then, carries all the hallmarks of *dys-appearance*, perhaps most notably *intentional disruption*, and *spatiotemporal constriction*. We find both realities in Sartre's example, where the subject's sense of being seen interrupts his intentional engagement in the world – listening at the door, looking through the keyhole – and constrains spatiality in light of the presence of *autrui*: the world ceases to be given as the locus of limitless possibilities for action, but confined to the immediate space of the hallway, from which the subject ultimately seeks to escape.[96]

Objectification, alienation, dissociation

Sartre's description of the subject at the door thus provides a compelling account of the *regard* as an experience of *dys-appearance*. And yet, for us, what is most noteworthy is perhaps not the account itself, but the particular choice of example. In effect, in order to explore the

[92] Ibid., p. 293.
[93] Ibid., p. 304.
[94] Ibid., pp. 302-303.
[95] Ibid., pp. 303, 305-306.
[96] Ibid., p. 303.

experience of being seen, Sartre has to fabricate an uncommon scenario. More than this, in his construction of this scenario, the acts of listening and looking are framed, through emotional markers, as one of wrongdoing: "Imaginons que j'en sois venu, par jalousie, par intérêt, par vice, à coller mon oreille contre une porte, à regarder par le trou d'une serrure."[97] For Sartre and his imagined reader, then, both of whom, we have asserted above, are normative subjects, an elaborate scene, wherein the subject is at fault, was necessary to convey the experience of the *regard*. Striking, here, is how often testimony from 'others' evokes this same experience in contexts remarkable by their mundanity: where Sartre is forced to concoct a highly specific, fictional scenario, those outside of the norm can simply turn to their everyday experiences. Consider the parallels between his description, and Sandra Lee Bartky's account of catcalling:

> … with an utter lack of self-consciousness, I am bouncing down the street. Suddenly I hear men's voices. Catcalls and whistles fill the air. […] I freeze. […] My face flushes and my motions become stiff and self-conscious. The body which only a moment before I inhabited with such ease now floods my consciousness. I have been made into an object.[98]

Indeed, Bartky herself reads her experience through the *regard*: "As Sartre would say, I have been petrified by the gaze of the Other."[99] Sociologist Sonny Nordmarken provides a similar account of trans experience:

> On the bus, I sit, reading. On my way to work. The fascinating, densely written book requires my full attention. My eyes trace lines of a paragraph. The words enter and exit my head, leaving no remnants. I am distracted, thinking about the deadlines I have to meet soon. In the next moment, I become aware of some other kind of discomfort. I feel energy reaching out to me. Eyes boring into me. The unease of being watched.[100]

[97] Ibid., p. 298.
[98] Bartky, p. 27.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Sonny Nordmarken, 'Becoming Ever More Monstrous: Feeling Transgender In-Betweenness', *Qualitative Inquiry,* 20 (2014), 41.

Likewise, phenomenologist George Yancy evokes his experience of entering an elevator as a Black man, and encountering a white woman:

> It is through her gaze that I become hypervigilant of my own embodied spatiality. On previous occasions, particularly when alone, I have moved my body within the space of the elevator in a noncalculative fashion, paying no particular attention to my bodily comportment, the movement of my hands, my eyes, the position of my feet.[101]

Against Sartre's highly contrived and improbable scenario, then, 'others' provide analogous descriptions of the *regard* by simply recounting their everyday lives. This intimates that those outside of the norm are more subject to the *regard*, and its manifold existential ramifications, than those within it. Certainly, Leder's account makes space for such a claim. He cites three examples of *social dys-appearance* – a Black man walking in a white neighbourhood, a person being sexualised, and an ill person being subject to a medical examination – all of which hint at the mundanity, and thus the frequency, of the *regard* for 'others'.[102]

Here, Leder's examples expose a dynamic that structures and determines the nature of the *regard*, and who is subject to it: objectification. In effect, we might, following Iris Marion Young, consider Sartre's account as one of objectification, which she describes as "a function of the look of the other".[103] Objectification, here, is not neutral, but gendered: writing from the perspective of women, the *regard* therefore figures as "the male gaze that judges and dominates from afar."[104] Likewise, in the above discussion, Leder goes on to cite women's experience of the normative, masculine *regard*, wherein "the gaze, the projects of men that are culturally definitive", as one of objectification that engenders *dys-appearance*. Herein, he argues, women

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[101] George Yancy, 'White Gazes: What It Feels Like to Be an Essence', in *Living Alterities: Phenomenology, Embodiment, and Race,* ed. by Emily S. Lee (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2014), pp. 43-66 (p. 56).
[102] Leder, *The Absent Body*, pp. 97-98.
[103] Iris Marion Young, 'Breasted Experience: The Look and the Feeling', in *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 75-96 (p. 77).
[104] Ibid., p. 77.

"[incorporate] an alien gaze, away, apart, asunder, from [their] own, which provokes an explicit thematization of the body."[105] Their experiences make plain that objectification, as a primary function of the *regard*, is not random or impartial, but rather normative, and systematic: it tends to affect those outside of the norm more than those within it. We might further clarify this claim by turning to the particular modalities of objectification common to Western society. Women's experience highlights one such modality – sexual objectification, or sexualisation – that might anticipate an appreciation of others, such as vilification, and pathologisation. For Bartky, sexual objectification implies "[a person's] sexual parts or functions [being] separated out from the rest of [their] personality and reduced to the status of mere instruments".[106] "Compulsive sexualization", wherein a person is "routinely perceived by others in a sexual light on occasions when such a perception is inappropriate", is not a random event, but "the traditional lot of both white women and black men and women of color generally".[107] And beyond white, cisgender womanhood, sexualisation is bound up with other forms of objectification. Trans writer Julia Serano highlights this for trans women, who are for the most part sexualised like cis women as "prey", but from time to time in a very different way, as "predator".[108] Predator, here, must be viewed through the prism of transmisogyny: "… trans women do not 'prey' on men so much as [they] 'lure' them, by turning [themselves] into sexual objects that no red-blooded man can resist."[109] And "this predator/prey dichotomy", she goes on, is paramount to comprehending "the way transsexual women are sexualized in our society".[110] The experiences of trans women, subject to sexualisation through the bifocal lens of transmisogyny, thus reveals the ubiquity of vilification as a mode of objectification to which 'others' are regularly exposed.

[105] Leder, *The Absent Body*, p. 99.
[106] Bartky, p. 26.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, 2nd edn (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2016), pp. 255-257.
[109] Ibid., p. 258.
[110] Ibid., pp. 255-256.

This, in turn, foregrounds a discussion of the experiences of men and women of colour, and notably of Black men and women. This is, perhaps, unsurprising: we have established the extent to which gender normativity is a function of whiteness, and vice versa. Hence, like trans women, although in importantly distinct ways, Black women are simultaneously sexualised as both "predator" and "prey". Black lesbian activist and philosopher Angela Davis points to the particular sexualisation of Black women as "chronically promiscuous", and, in particular, as "[welcoming] the sexual attentions of white men".[111] Through these particular modes of sexual objectification, Black women figure as "prey" for white men's desire. Taking up Patricia Hill Collins, these modes are one articulation of the "sexual deviancy" through which Black men and women alike are reified as incarnations of a "wild, out-of-control hyperheterosexuality of excessive sexual appetite".[112] To the extent that Black women are objectified as lascivious and promiscuous, they are sexualised not only as "prey", but as "predators". In the case of Black men, the leitmotifs of sexual deviancy and hypersexuality ground the primary mode of sexual objectification that they experience: namely, as both Collins and Davis point out, as "rapist".[113] Herein, "Black men have their eyes on white women as sexual objects".[114] Yancy's encounter with white women bears witness to this: "I have somehow become this 'predator-stereotype' from which it appears hopeless to escape."[115] Sexualisation, then, for Black and trans people, and even more so for people who are both Black and trans, is bound up with other forms of objectification – primarily, vilification – that typify their experience of the *regard*.

If sexualisation is a mode of objectification to which many women, trans people, and people of colour, are systematically subjected, this is often in stark contrast with the experience of ill and disabled people, who regularly find themselves objectified in what the opposite sense,

[111] Angela Davis, *Women, Race & Class*, (London: The Women's Press, 1991), p. 25.
[112] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd edn (New York; London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 129-130.
[113] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, p. 129.; Davis, p. 173.
[114] Davis, p. 182.
[115] Yancy, p. 58.

as desexualised, most notably in the clinical encounter. Returning to Marin: "La majorité de ceux qui ont vu mon corps nu l'ont touché sans le moindre désir."[116] Here, she gestures towards a further mode of objectification, one to which ill and disabled people are commonly exposed, both within and without the medical context, namely pathologisation. In plainly Sartrean terms, Toombs describes the objectification about which the "clinical encounter" turns: "… the body is objectified not only as a material, physical entity but as a being-for-the-Other. Under the 'gaze' of the physician, the patient perceives his or her body to be an object of scientific investigation."[117] Her analysis prefigures Marin's account of interactions with doctors: "… on les a vus nous observer comme un animal, nous ausculter sans égard, comme une chose, comme de la viande …"[118] In the medical gaze, ill and disabled people, along with 'others' who remain heavily pathologised, such as trans people, are objectified as "enigma", as objects of curiosity for a normative *regard*. This extends well beyond the clinical encounter: disabled people often talk of being stared at, where they find themselves objectified through the curiosity of others. The *regard*, here, functions as a question, through which disabled people are made into things for a normative subject to know about: for Eli Clare, "What-Is-It?", and for Rosamarie Garland-Thomson, "What happened to you?"[119] These experiences find echo in those of trans people, such as Nordmarken: "Glancing up, I confront eyes querying me. Eyes wondering. Boy or girl? Man or woman?"[120] This is common to trans people of all genders: both he and Serano describe parallel experiences of being objectified as sites of curiosity through a *regard* that "[searches] for clues" of their gender.[121] And, as my own brief account makes plain, such readings of the *regard* are not mere fantasy or paranoia: they are grounded in a concrete experience of having

[116] Marin, p. 7. 7
[117] Toombs, p. 74.
[118] Marin, p. 55.
[119] Clare, p. 258.; Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, 'Staring Back: Self-Representations of Disabled Performance Artists', *American Quarterly,* 52 (2000), 334.
[120] Nordmarken, p. 40.
[121] Nordmarken, p. 45.; Serano, p. 172.

such questions – *T'es un homme ou une femme ?* – articulated openly, one which betrays the meaning of the curious but silent *regard*. Objectification, then, in all of the modalities discussed above, tends to target those without the norm more so than those within it: they figure as objects – to be known, in some cases, to be desired or feared, in others – for a normative subject.

If objectification constitutes an experience of the *regard*, and 'others' are systematically objectified, then we might begin to formulate a challenge to Sartre's presumption that the *être-pour-autrui* constitutes a transient mode of existence. Certainly, returning to the testimonies of 'others', we find that objectification triggers the ontologico-existential shift central to Sartre's account of the *regard*, which in turn has implications for their capacity to engage normatively in and with the world. In the first place, objectification entails an alienation from one's lived body. This is clear in pathologisation, where ill people often come to adopt the medical gaze of their bodies. Frank writes: "… *my* body, my ongoing experience of being alive, becomes *the* body, an object to be measured …"[122] This sense of detachment can lead ill people to undergo a form of existential amputation from the lived body: "Quand ils auront tout vu, tout exploré, il ne m'appartiendra plus. Il sera détaché de moi, définitivement converti en objet extérieur."[123] Frank also notes how this sense of detachment is compounded through the medical tendency to focus on body parts in isolation.[124] And Robert F. Murphy relates how he became "rather emotionally detached from [his] body, often referring to one of [his] limbs as *the* leg or *the* arm."[125] Striking here are the parallels with sexualisation, wherein the focus upon eroticised zones heightens the experience of objectification, and alienation from one's body. Young contends that "few women in our society escape [the] objectifying regard of the Other on her breasts", while trans activist Riki Anne Wilchins cites a friend who says that, since

[122] Arthur W. Frank, *At the Will of the Body: Reflections on Illness*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991), p. 12.
[123] Marin, p. 53.
[124] Frank, p. 12.
[125] Murphy, *The Body Silent*, p. 100.

transitioning, people "no longer make eye contact—they make crotch contact."[126] Nordmarken points to the existential implications of these forms of objectification: "As I speak, he attends to my chest, as if it is speaking. I feel distinctly uncomfortable. My head feels dull and thick. I slow down. I feel like I am not who I am."[127] Objectification thus entails alienation not only from the lived body, but from lived experience, which we might understand, with Nordmarken, in terms of a "dissociation": "An odd feeling of being displaced out of my body".[128] Wilchins corroborates this account of trans experience, arguing that, through such objectification, trans people "may find [themselves] growing further and further from direct sensation".[129]

In effect, as Yancy's description of the white gaze renders salient, awareness of one's body as object engendered in objectification precludes experience of one's body as lived: when subject to this gaze, he can no longer "leave [his] body behind", as would be necessary for him to be able to "live [his] life as an abstract thinking substance".[130] His experience might thus be grasped in terms of *dys-appearance*: we find an *intentional disruption* that occurs through the thematization of the body, and frustrates his seamless intentional engagements in the world. Indeed, if objectification is a function of the *regard*, which Leder considers as typical of *social dys-appearance*, then we would expect to find *dys-appearance* in the experiences of those most often objectified. Further, under this same white gaze, Yancy evokes a sense of confinement – "I feel trapped. I no longer feel bodily expansiveness within the elevator, but constrained." – that surely reflects the *spatiotemporal constriction* central to Leder's theory.[131] Such feelings of captivity appear regularly where 'others' relate experiences of objectification. Hence Fanon describes how, through the gaze, "le Blanc [… l]'emprisonnait": "… je me portai loin de mon

[126] Young, 'Breasted Experience', p. 78.; Riki Anne Wilchins, 'What Does It Cost to Tell the Truth?', in *The Transgender Studies Reader,* ed. by Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York; London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 547-551 (p. 548).
[127] Nordmarken, p. 44.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Wilchins, p. 549.
[130] Yancy, p. 57.
[131] Ibid., p. 56.

être-là, très loin, me constituant objet."[132] These accounts of Black men's experience resonate with Nordmarken's discussion of trans experience – "The eyes are still staring. The energy is smothering. Suffocating. I feel cornered." – and with my own.[133] In such instances, the capacity of those outside of the norm for normative intentional engagement in the world is manifestly, and radically, compromised. And this is compounded by a further effect of objectification: the disruption of the *schéma corporel*. For Merleau-Ponty, as we have seen, the *schéma corporel* grounds our possibilities for action, and thus our experience of the world as correlates of that action. In this light, Fanon's contention that, in the white gaze, "l'homme de couleur rencontre des difficultés dans l'élaboration de son schéma corporel", could not be more significant.[134] He explicitly locates these difficulties in experiences of objectification, through which Black men come to know and be aware of their bodies in the third person.[135] Taking care not to erase the racial specificities of Fanon's account, we might never the less seek to expand his analysis to account for the experiences of different 'others'. Consider the parallels between his account of the violence of the white gaze, as disruption of the *schéma corporel* – "… un arrachement, une hémorragie qui caillait du sang noir sur tout mon corps …" – and Clare's description of being objectified as a disabled person, and its implications for embodiment: "… a pair of eyes caught me […] tore skin from muscle, muscle from bone."[136] Objectification, then, is a double-edged sword. Therein, 'others' are not only seen – *regardé* – more often, and therefore have a regular or enduring experience *dys-appearance*, but, critically, are seen *in particular ways* that inhibit or even foreclose an experience of the world in terms of the comfort, freedom, and competence that characterise Merleau-Ponty's normative intentionality.

[132] Fanon, p. 91.
[133] Nordmarken, p. 41.
[134] Fanon, p. 89.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Fanon, p. 91.; Eli Clare, 'Gawking, Gaping, Staring', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies,* 9 (2003), 258.

Seeing 'others', seeing otherwise

Sartre considers the *être-pour-autrui*, and thus the awareness of self as object for others, to be a permanent ontological possibility for his subject: "Dans la mesure où l'omniprésence d'autrui est le fait fondamental, l'objectivité de mon être-là est une dimension constante de ma facticité …"[137] Indeed, in a sense, he regards it as a permanent feature of consciousness: "… à chaque instant autrui *me regarde* …"[138] And yet, because his subject is always able to return the *regard* – to shift from immanence to transcendence – the omnipresence of *autrui* does not translate to the kinds of systematic or lasting experiences of self as object found in testimony from 'others'. Never the less, his conception of *autrui* as omnipresent possibility of the *regard* might prove useful for interrogating bodily otherness. In effect, the *être-pour-autrui* not only surfaces in the direct experience of being looked at, but in response to events in the world that manifest the possibility of *autrui* as spectator:

> Sans doute, ce qui manifeste le plus souvent un regard, c'est la convergence vers moi de deux globes oculaires. Mais il se donnera tout aussi bien à l'occasion d'un froissement de branches, d'un bruit de pas suivi du silence, de l'entrebâillement d'un volet, d'un léger mouvement d'un rideau.[139]

What is particularly notable in these examples, which he terms *monitions*, is their anchorage in personal and social histories that Sartre's account implies, but never addresses: for "un léger mouvement d'un rideau" or "l'entrebâillement d'un volet" to figure as une "occasion […] de réaliser mon *être-regardé*", the subject must already be situated, presently and historically, in a society with contingent objects, and ways of engaging with them.[140] In a word, if perception of particular events as *monitions* is contingent on personal and collective histories, then we

[137] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 392.
[138] Ibid., p. 296.
[139] Ibid., p. 297.
[140] Ibid., p. 316.

might speculate that objectification, as systematic exposure to the *regard*, preconditions those without the norm to perceive *monitions* where those within it would not. What is more, Sartre claims that the presence of *autrui* is immaterial to our experience of *monitions* as triggering the *être-pour-autrui*.[141] Returning to his example of the subject listening at a door, he remarks how the realisation that a *monition* – "… j'entends des pas […] quelqu'un m'a vu …" – was a "fausse alerte" does not negate the experience of the *être-regardé*. Indeed, he notes how, here, the mere possibility of being seen shifts the subject into the *être-pour-autrui*: "… [autrui] est partout à présent, en dessous de moi, au-dessus de moi, dans les chambres voisines […] je ne cesse plus d'*éprouver* mon être-pour-autrui …"[142] Perhaps most crucial for our account, he also observes how the endurance of the *être-regardé* significantly curtails his subject's freedom of action: "L'existence d'autrui est si loin d'être mise en doute que cette fausse alerte peut très bien avoir pour conséquence de me faire renoncer à mon entreprise."[143]

In effect, turning to testimony from 'others', we find that they experience certain events as *monitions* that most subjects would not, precisely because their exposure to objectification has conditioned them to do so. Moving through public space as a Black man, Yancy encounters one such *monition* in the "the sudden sound of car doors locking—click, click, click."[144] These "*clicks*" function to articulate the *regard*, both indicating and replacing the direct stare of white people: "The *clicking* sounds are always already accompanied by white nervous gestures, and eyes that want to look, but are hesitant to do so."[145] Indeed, he understands them as extensions of the same *regard* that operates in direct vision, drawing parallels between these "clicks", "white women [crossing] to the other side of the street once they have seen [him]", and "white

[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.
[144] George Yancy, 'Confiscated Bodies', in *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology,* ed. by Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2020), pp. 69-76 (p. 73).
[145] Yancy, 'White Gazes', p. 48.

men [looking] several times over their shoulders as [he walks] behind them".[146] His experience turns out to be emblematic of many 'others' whose existence is marked by events that figure as *monitions* through their wider experiences of objectification. Gordon and Riger point to the "whistles, unwanted hugs and pinches" that punctuate women's movement through public space, while Stanko and Curry evoke "name-calling, spitting and intrusive comments" as commonplace for queer people.[147] Conditioned to recognise such events as *monitions*, and exposed to them far more often than those within the norm, 'others' thus experience the *regard*, and the *être-pour-autrui*, far more often than those within the norm. What is more, in line with Sartre's account of the "fausse alerte", we find that the *être-pour-autrui* – when brought on by a *regard*, or a *monition* – is not transient, but lasting. Nordmarken gestures towards this in trans experience: "The eyes to my right look away, then. But their energy has not moved; it remains in my space. I still feel their attunement to my movements, their awareness of me."[148] Indeed, Yancy directly address the possibility of being wrong about the presence, or nature, of a *regard*: "… what if I'm mistaken […] What difference does this make *for me*? […] being epistemologically mistaken does not make a difference in terms of [my] *lived* experience …"[149] Further, Robert F. Murphy suggests that, in disability, objectification preconditions disabled people to expect the *regard* so much so that they sometimes "imagine" it.[150] Taken together, these accounts intimate that, for 'others', the *regard*, and the *être-pour-autrui*, are not only a permanent possibility, as for Sartre, but a permanent probability, if not an inevitability.

Bodily otherness thus involves a sustained, systematic exposure to the *regard* through various modalities of objectification and a corresponding anticipation thereof, which, in

[146] Ibid.
[147] Margaret T. Gordon and Stephanie Riger, *The Female Fear: The Social Cost of Rape*, (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p. 6.; Elizabeth A. Stanko and Paul Curry, 'Homophobic Violence and the Self 'At Risk': Interrogating the Boundaries', *Social & Legal Studies,* 6 (1997), 518.
[148] Nordmarken, p. 41.
[149] Yancy, 'White Gazes', p. 60.
[150] Murphy, *The Body Silent*, p. 107.

existential terms, translates into a hyperawareness of self as object for others. This is rendered particularly salient in trans experience. Wilchins notes how, through transition, trans bodies "become an armed camp [to be] surveyed". Nordmarken evokes "a feeling of surveillance" grounded in "the cumulative experience of strangers' attention".[151] Bartky portrays this same reality for women in Foucauldian terms. There is, she claims, "a panoptical male connoisseur […] within the consciousness of most women": "They stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other."[152] Crucially, it is here, in the constant awareness as one's body as an object for a normative subject, that Iris Marion Young grounds her account of "female body experience". Taking up Merleau-Ponty, Young's basic claim is that women experience and use their bodies differently to men: "… there is a particular style of bodily comportment that is typical of feminine existence, and this style consists of particular *modalities* of the structures and conditions of the body's existence in the world."[153] These "modalities", she states, derive in part from "the fact that the woman lives her body as *object* as well as subject".[154] Hence, women's bodily comportment is often characterised by "a failure to make full use of the body's spatial and lateral potentialities", a relative lack of "ease and naturalness" and of "fluid and directed motion", and a tendency "not to reach, extend, lean, stretch, and follow through in the direction of her intention".[155] Women, she remarks, tend to approach "physical engagements" with "timidity, uncertainty, and hesitancy", which reflects a "lack [of] trust in [their] bodies".[156] In other words, women's experiences of the *regard* give rise to ways of being in and using their

[151] Wilchins, p. 548.; Nordmarken, p. 41.
[152] Bartky, p. 72.
[153] Young, 'Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality', p. 31.
[154] Ibid., p. 44.
[155] Ibid., pp. 32, 33.
[156] Ibid., p. 34.

bodies that are characterised by a lack of the comfort, freedom and competence that Merleau-Ponty takes for granted in his theory of the subject.

Against his normative description of embodiment, wherein the body figures as the silent context grounding our actions in the world, she articulates a phenomenological description of these "modalities of feminine motility" in terms of "an *ambiguous transcendence*, an *inhibited intentionality*, and a *discontinuous unity*".[157] There are clear parallels between these concepts, and those that typify *dys-appearance*: *intentional disruption*, and *spatiotemporal constriction*: if Leder speculates as to whether sustained experiences of *dys-appearance* may have existential implications for women, Young confirms that suspicion, demonstrating that the *regard*, and its internalisation, inhibits them from experiencing their bodies in terms of comfort, freedom, or competence. Elsewhere, in a discussion of transphobia, Gayle Salamon ventures that we might expand Young's analysis to think about a range of 'others': people of colour, gay people, and trans people.[158] Black scholars, and scholars of colour, provide compelling impetus for such an enterprise. If women's experience in the patriarchal *regard* is one of a permanent awareness of self as object, then we might, taking up Ahmed, understand the experiences of people of colour similarly: "To be black or not white in 'the white world' is to turn back toward oneself, to become an object …"[159] Herein, returning to Yancy, *dys-appearance* is sustained: "My lived-body comes back to me like something ontologically *occurrent*, something merely *there* in its facticity."[160] Evoking the experiences of another Black scholar, Cornel West, he describes how the body "undergoes a process of thematization" through which it comes to "[stand] out as an impediment".[161] Critically, as the term "impediment" indicates, he argues that objectification, as a source of *dys-appearance*, impinges upon the Black subject's capacity for action: in "being

[157] Ibid., p. 35.
[158] Gayle Salamon, *The Life and Death of Latisha King: A Critical Phenomenology of Transphobia*, (New York: NYU Press, 2018), p. 50.
[159] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 139.
[160] Yancy, 'White Gazes', p. 56.
[161] Yancy, 'Confiscated Bodies', p. 71.

reoriented toward his body as a suddenly distorted *object* […] his embodied motility and aspirations [are] arrested".[162] In effect, returning to Ahmed, insofar as this subject internalises the objectifying *regard* – "… the black gaze returns to the black body [… following] the line of the hostile white gaze …" – they undergo a "disorientation", which "diminishes capacities for action".[163] If, in other words, the objectification of women prescribes certain "modalities" of embodiment and motility wherein comfort, freedom, and competence are compromised, then the objectification of 'others' more widely might be seen to function in analogous ways, as the work of these scholars of colour makes plain.

Être-autre-pour-autrui

Yancy's discussion introduces a further dimension of the *regard* – as systematic, and sustained – that frustrates normative intentional engagement in the world, namely the particular object that 'others' are in a normative gaze. Under the white gaze, he becomes aware of his body not as mere object, but as "an extraneous *thing*, something *foreign*."[164] Put simply, for 'others', the *regard* triggers an awareness not simply of one's body as object, but of one's body as *foreign object*, for a normative observer. This may not, at first glance, appear to be at odds with Sartre's account. Therein, as we have seen, the *être-pour-autrui* inaugurates an awareness of self, and body, as an object whose nature – as determined in subjectivities other than are own, which are necessarily beyond our reach – remains elusive: this object figures for us as an "étranger" that we take up "sans qu'il cesse d'être un étranger".[165] At the same time, he also notes that we can develop an approximation of the object that we are for others through their actions and gestures, such as speech: " … le langage [me révèle] qu'autrui me tient pour méchant ou pour jaloux

[162] Ibid., p. 74.
[163] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 111.
[164] Yancy, 'White Gazes', p. 57.
[165] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 314.

…"[166] So the sense of "étranger" in Sartre's account might be understood as *different from how I perceive myself, in ways that I can never fully know*. This is not, however, the meaning of "foreign" for Yancy. Indeed, it almost holds an opposite meaning: namely, *different from how I perceive myself, in ways that I know all too well*. This is manifest in testimony from 'others', for whom the predicament posed by the *regard* is rarely a lack of awareness of the particular object that they are for others, but instead a hyperawareness of that object, precisely because it is often negatively-coded in line with stereotypes about a given marginalised group. In effect, the *regard* is not only quantitatively normative – those outside of the norm are looked at more than those within it – but qualitatively so: it structures ways of seeing, even the limits of sight, within those differential distributions of who looks, and who is looked at. The *regard* is not neutral, but structured by a normative visual schema that determines what is perceived, and how. Linda Martín Alcoff evokes this in a reflection on race: "… there is no perception of the visible that is not already imbued with value."[167] Instead, the *regard* functions through a "visual registry […] that is socially constructed, historically evolving, and culturally variegated".[168] In a discussion of anti-black violence, Judith Butler argues that all perception in Western society occurs within "racially saturated field of visibility" wherein "racism pervades white perception, structuring what can and cannot appear".[169] Taking up this discussion, Gail Weiss develops this conception of normative visual schema as hermeneutic limitation: "… seeing always takes place within a particular cultural framework that helps to define the limits of perceptual intelligibility."[170] Put simply, the *regard* is not neutral, but operates through a culturally and historically contingent horizon that determines what can and cannot be seen, and how.

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[166] Ibid.
[167] Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 185.
[168] Ibid., p. 194.
[169] Judith Butler, 'Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia', in *Reading Rodney King, Reading Urban Uprising,* ed. by Robert Gooding-Williams (New York; London: Routledge, 1993), (pp. 15-16).
[170] Gail Weiss, *Refiguring the Ordinary*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008), p. 3.

It is precisely this conviction that grounds Yancy's awareness of himself as a "foreign": "… the white gaze […] is a *structured* way of 'seeing,' which is mediated by certain racist norms and values …"[171] His claim that, within this way of seeing, "the Black [is] that which is epistemologically and ontologically 'given'", recalls Fanon's description of being subject to the *regard*: "Et voilà, ce n'est pas moi qui me crée un sens, mais le sens qui était là, pré-existant, m'attendant."[172] Herein, he is "sur-déterminé de l'extérieur", prefiguring Yancy's assertion that Black people, and their bodies, are so often "overdetermined", and thus "constructed […] as a denigrated *thing*."[173] Crucially, this is not an approximation, or a speculation, of how they are seen: Black people are not "epistemologically skeptical" about such patterns of white – normative – vision, because they "always already share a familiar world, a shared integument, as it were, where white people and the ways of whiteness are *known*."[174] In a word, 'others' – here, Black people – are aware of how they are objectified within the normative gaze precisely because this gaze is an articulation of the social worlds and cultural horizons that they share with those within the norm. To the extent, then, that Sartre's *regard* gives rise to the *être-pour-autrui*, we might understand the experience of 'others' in the normative *regard* in similarly ontological terms as an *être-autre-pour-autrui*. Further, if, as we established in our study of objectification, 'others' come to internalise the awareness of their body as object, then it follows that they also integrate the awareness of their body as *foreign object*. In effect, for Sartre, our self-perception is always mediated through the *regard*: "L'être-pour-autrui est un fait constant de ma réalité humaine et je le saisis avec sa nécessité de fait dans la moindre pensée que je forme sur moi-même."[175] This is not to say that, in his account, we are always in the mode of the *être-pour-autrui*, but rather that it is a constant possibility, and, crucially, the

[171] Yancy, 'White Gazes', p. 51.
[172] Yancy, 'White Gazes', p. 51.; Fanon, p. 109.
[173] Fanon, p. 93. ; Yancy, 'White Gazes', p. 52.
[174] Yancy, 'White Gazes', p. 61.
[175] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 319.

implicit backdrop of any view we take upon ourselves. Accordingly, even if 'others' know that the object that they are for the normative *regard* is fallacious, or harmful, they never the less internalise that view of themselves. This comes through powerfully in Yancy's depiction of his encounter with a white woman: "Despite what I think about myself, how I am for-myself, her perspective, her third-person account, seeps into my consciousness."[176]

In spite of the incongruity between who he knows himself to be and who the white gaze constructs him to be, he is able to adopt her perspective: "I catch a glimpse of myself through her eyes and just for that moment I experience some form of double consciousness …"[177] Here, the reference to "double consciousness" conjures the work of Black scholar W. E. B. Du Bois, who first coined the term in a description of Black experience:

> … the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.[178]

Taking up Du Bois' account, we might speculate that it is not only the *regard* that is systematic, and sustained, for 'others', but also the ontological dimension that it engenders: the *être-autre-pour-autrui*, or the awareness of self as *foreign object*. In effect, such experiences of "double consciousness" are common to testimony from a range of 'others'. Latin American philosopher María Lugones describes herself as "an ambiguous being, a two-imaged self", whose ambiguity derives from her awareness of the "stereotypical construction" of "Latin-American" women.[179]

[176] Yancy, 'White Gazes', p. 55.
[177] Ibid.
[178] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 8.
[179] María Lugones, 'Playfulness, "World"-Travelling, and Loving Perception', *Hypatia,* 2 (1987), 13-14.

Such stereotypes motivate what Bartky terms "a depreciated alter ego" in women's experience, which is none other than "an alternate self, a truncated and inferior self".[180] Significant, here, is her claim that this "truncated self" resides within her consciousness: "… it is inside of me, a part of myself."[181] Disabled writers point to analogous experiences. Finn Carling relates how, growing up with cerebral palsy, his repeated exposures to the able-bodied gaze "forced [him] into a certain way of thinking" about himself.[182] Indeed, philosopher Paulo Freire regards what he terms an "existential duality", which is effectively Du Bois' "double consciousness", to be a constitutive structure of oppressed consciousness: the oppressed – 'others' – "are at the same time themselves and the oppressor whose image they have internalized".[183] Further, he claims that this duality inhibits a person's capacities and freedom to act.[184] His account thus resonates with Yancy's discussion of the ontologico-existential implications of "double consciousness": "The internalization of the white gaze creates a doubleness within the Black psyche, leading to a destructive process of superfluous self-surveillance, self-interrogation, and self-doubt."[185]

The particular *foreign object* that 'others' know themselves to be within the normative *regard* is bound up with the kinds of objectification to which they tend to be subjected. As we saw in our study of the various modalities of objectification, those outside of the norm are not just made object, but made object in specific ways, and notably, as "predator", or "prey". And, turning to the lived experiences of 'others', the significance of objectification – being made into *foreign object*, into "predator", or "prey" –, for intentional engagement in the world, is not limited to the obstructions brought about through *dys-appearance*. In fact, to be seen in certain ways, as certain objects, forecloses certain possibilities for action. Once again, Yancy provides

[180] Bartky, p. 24.
[181] Ibid., p. 25.
[182] Finn Carling, *And Yet We Are Human*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), p. 49.
[183] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th Anniversary edn (New York; London: Continuum, 2005), p. 61.
[184] Ibid., p. 48.
[185] George Yancy, 'Whiteness and the Return of the Black Body', *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy,* 19 (2005), 219.

compelling evidence for this claim. He thus describes the *foreign object* that he knows himself to be in the white *regard*: "… the black body is deemed 'dangerous,' 'defiled,' 'hypersexual,' 'evil,' 'uncivilized,' 'perverse,' and 'monstrous.'"[186] His awareness of himself as seen as a "dangerous beast, a phantom […] a dark savage" recollects Fanon's depiction of the "mythe du nègre" that structures white perception, wherein Black men figure as "des sauvages, des abrutis, des analphabètes".[187] As these accounts make salient, in the *regard*, Black people know themselves to figure as *foreign objects* that are none other than "*threatening objects*".[188] They are aware not only of how their bodies are constructed – as "predator", as "*threatening*" –, but of how these constructions predetermine how their actions and gestures will be interpreted. This is clear in Fanon's description of his encounter with a white child:

> Le nègre est une bête, le nègre est mauvais, le nègre est méchant, le nègre est laid ; tiens, un nègre, il fait froid, le nègre tremble, le nègre tremble parce qu'il a froid, le petit garçon tremble parce qu'il a peur du nègre, le nègre tremble de froid, ce froid qui vous tord les os, le beau petit garçon tremble parce qu'il croit que le nègre tremble de rage, le petit garçon blanc se jette dans les bras de sa mère : maman, le nègre va me manger.[189]

Here, he traces the normative perceptual schema through which his actions, even those beyond his control – "… le nègre tremble parce qu'il a froid …" – will inevitably be interpreted in line with his constitution as a *threatening object*. In other words, taking up Butler's analysis of this encounter, "the black body is circumscribed as dangerous, prior to any gesture" against and towards "helpless" white people, who implicitly figure as "in need of protection".[190]

The value of Butler's analysis, wherein they take Fanon's experience as a starting point for a discussion of police brutality against men of colour, lies in their claim that the construction

[186] Yancy, 'Confiscated Bodies', p. 70.
[187] Yancy, 'White Gazes', p. 48.; Fanon, p. 94.
[188] Yancy, 'Confiscated Bodies', p. 73.
[189] Fanon, pp. 91-92.
[190] Butler, 'Endangered/Endangering', p. 18.

of Black men as threat prefigures and rationalises violence against them: if the bodies of Black men figure as "the site and source of danger", they state, then any actions taken to "subdue this body, even if in advance, [are] justified regardless of the circumstances."[191] This is manifest in police violence against Black men, as is evident in the assault of Rodney King: "… he is hit in exchange for the blows he never delivered, but which he is, by virtue of his blackness, always about to deliver."[192] In light of Butler's reflection, Salamon draws a similar conclusion: "Black bodies are caricatured as dangerous and feared, a characterization that is then used to justify the violence against them."[193] Hence, as Yancy and Fanon's accounts communicate, for Black men, to be aware of oneself as *foreign – threatening* – object is to be aware of oneself as a site of potential violence. Further, it is to know that one's actions and movements will always be interpreted through the prism of *threatening object*, so that to act or move in certain ways will be taken as an invitation and rationalisation for white violence. This is nowhere more evident than in the police murders of Black men and boys such as Philando Castile, Stephon Clark and Tamir Rice, to name just three of many: non-violent movements – reaching for identification, using a mobile phone, etc. – are read as acts of aggression so as to justify violence, and murder. Thus, if Black men know that to act in certain ways – indeed, that to act *at all* – can bring about violence, then those ways of acting, and their basic freedom to act, are effectively proscribed. While a caveat must be placed on the singularity of Black men's experiences of white violence, we might tentatively expand this description to non-Black 'others' who, as noted above, figure as "predators", and thus *threatening objects*, in the *regard*. Indeed, Salamon evokes Rodney King to shed light upon the murder of Latisha King, a Black trans girl: "… in both instances […] violence directed at the vulnerable [is] made possible through a fantasy structure in which the perpetrators of that violence attribute an aggressivity to those vulnerable subjects."[194] She

[191] Ibid.
[192] Ibid., p. 19.
[193] Salamon, *The Life and Death of Latisha King*, p. 88.
[194] Ibid., p. 89.

points to “gay panic” and “trans panic” legal defences, wherein violence done to queer people is justified by their construction within the normative *regard* as “predators”, highlighting how transsexuality is seen “as itself a violent act of aggression”.[195] Therefore, like people of colour, queer and trans people are often aware of how their movement and gestures will likely be read – in terms of aggression – and this awareness circumscribes their capacity and freedom to act.

Salamon’s discussion of Latisha King’s murder also reveals a similar existential reality for those ‘others’ who are objectified as “prey”. In effect, as a trans girl, Latisha is constituted through the *regard* as both “predator” and as “prey”: she is “simultaneously [marked …] as aggressive and […] as the proper target of aggression.”[196] Put simply, not only does she figure as a *threatening object*, but also as what we might term, paraphrasing Yancy, as a “*threatened object*”. In effect, as testimony from the murder trial makes plain, Latisha’s movement through the world as a trans girl is regarded not just as a “*sexual act*”, and thus as an “act of aggression”, but as making herself a target: many of her teachers claimed to have been “concerned […] with Latisha’s ‘negative attention-seeking’, a pseudoclinical turn of phrase that might be translated here as *you are asking for it*.”[197] Here, the rhetoric recalls dialogue around sexual violence done to women, cis and trans alike. Catharine MacKinnon reflects on such violence: “Raped women are seen as *asking for it*: if a man wanted her, she must have wanted him.”[198] Indeed, like people of colour and queer people, women are often highly aware of how their actions tend to be read in ways that justify these kinds of violence. As with police brutality and transphobic violence, we find evidence of this in legal proceedings, where charges of rape and harassment are often “harmed by evidence of exercising sexual agency, or indeed by exhibiting any behaviour that

[195] Ibid., p. 5.
[196] Ibid., p. 158.
[197] Ibid., pp. 5, 120.
[198] Catherine A. MacKinnon, 'Sexuality, Pornography, and Method: "Pleasure under Patriarchy"', *Ethics,* 99 (1989), 330. [my italics]

is not traditionally feminine."[199] Similarly, as seen as recently as last year, with the murder of Sarah Everard, imperatives to not go out at night, or alone, render women highly cognisant of how their actions and movement are inevitably and always read through a normative *regard* wherein they are constituted as *threatened objects*, as sites of probable violence. Women can neither act nor move freely, for fear that such acts or movement will be read as invitations to enact violence, or misinterpreted as provocations for such violence *post factum*. For those made *threatening object* as for those made *threatened object*, then, acts are foreclosed through the possibility of violence. Indeed, in some sense, to be a *threatening object* is precisely to be a *threatened object*, because to know oneself to be objectified as aggressive is to know oneself to be a target for potential violence.

Anticipation, reorientation, sedimentation

To figure as *threatening object* or *threatened object* in the *regard* is thus to have one's freedom and possibilities for action radically curtailed through a fear of pain, violence, or death. Sartre's account of the *regard* does make space for conceptualising such experiences, notably insofar as it involves an experience of vulnerability: "Ce que je saisis immédiatement lorsque j'entends craquer les branches derrière moi, ce n'est pas qu'il y a quelqu'un, c'est que je suis vulnérable, que j'ai un corps qui peut être blessé …"[200] Herein, not only are we vulnerable, but also, "en danger".[201] More often than not, though, for Sartre, this is an existential or ontological "danger" – the risk of the self and its possibilities being made object by and for another subject – rather than the kinds of material danger that characterise the *être-autre-pour-autrui*, as the experience of 'others' in the *regard*. None the less, if, to be seen, in his view, engenders an awareness of

[199] Courtney Fraser, 'From "Ladies First" to "Asking for It": Benevolent Sexism in the Maintenance of Rape Culture', *California Law Review,* 103 (2015), 158.
[200] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 298.
[201] Ibid., p. 307.

one's body as "un corps qui peut être blessé", then the simple fact of sustained and systematic subjection to the *regard* logically translates to a lasting awareness of self as site of potential violence. For those 'others' further objectified as *threatening object* or *threatened object*, and thus as targets for normative violence, this sense of vulnerability is surely compounded. Hence, we might grasp the experience of the *regard* for those outside of the norm in terms of *fear*. In effect, following Ahmed: "Fear involves an *anticipation* of hurt or injury. Fear projects us from the present into a future."[202] Such an "anticipation" is surely what operates where 'others' know themselves to be perceived in ways that incite and justify normative violence. And, beyond the *regard*, it is a feature of the lives of certain ill and disabled people, for whom certain actions or movements can entail "hurt or injury". This is clear in Marin's account of chronic illness, wherein "[la] douleur a tellement redéfini les gestes autorisés": implicit in "autorisés", here, is a self-regulation of movement that functions through an anticipation of pain.[203] Fear, then, both within and without the *regard*, might be seen to characterise the lived experiences of 'others'.

At this juncture, Ahmed's reflection on fear might serve as a compelling framework for interrogating such experiences, and the ways in which normative intentionality is compromised therein. If fear, as anticipation, involves a projection into a hypothetical future, it remains none the less "an intense bodily experience in the present" with implications for our immediate being in the world.[204] Crucially, this "bodily experience" compounds the thematisation of the body brought about through *dys-appearance* – both that induced through pain and that induced in the *regard* – in ways that radically diminish freedom of action: "One sweats, one's heart races, one's whole body becomes a space of unpleasant intensity, an impression that overwhelms us and pushes us back with the force of its negation, which may sometimes involve taking flight, and other times may involve paralysis."[205] As impulsion to escape or stay still, fear functions

[202] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p. 65.
[203] Marin, p. 116.
[204] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p. 65.
[205] Ibid.

to inhibit our capacity to move freely: "… it restricts the body's mobility precisely insofar as it seems to prepare the body for flight."[206] This, in turn, dislocates our relation to the world, on two levels. In the first instance, insofar as the world is given as correlates of possibilities for action, the loss of those possibilities necessarily transforms our experience of the world. In the second, in fear of violence, our relation to the world is compromised through the apparition of a potential assailant in the world: "… the body shrinks back from the world in the desire to avoid the object of fear."[207] Central to Ahmed's account is an appreciation of how fear operates in the lives of those tendentially subject to violence even in the absence of a fearful object. In other words, to know oneself to be a target for violence, as many 'others' do, is to experience the world as fearful in ways that permanently delimit possibilities for action or movement:

> Fear of 'the world' as the scene of future injury works as a form of violence in the present, which shrinks bodies in a state of afraidness, a shrinking which may involve a refusal to leave the enclosed spaces of home, or a refusal to inhabit what is outside in ways that anticipate injury (walking alone, walking at night and so on).[208]

As such, the "feelings of vulnerability and fear" which she locates in women's experience, and that we have found elsewhere, "[shape] bodies, as well as how those bodies inhabit space."[209] Elsewhere, in a discussion of affect, Ahmed provides us with the tools to make sense of how the world might come to figure as fearful. Certain objects, both material and metaphysical, are objects of feeling: they inspire a particular affective response. She grasps our relation to such objects as mutually constituted in our affective encounter with them: "… the object of feeling both shapes and is shaped by emotions …"[210] Our affective responses to objects of feeling are thus contingent upon personal and social histories: "How the object impresses (upon) us may

[206] Ibid., p. 69.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Ibid., p. 70.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Ibid., p. 8.

depend on histories that remain alive insofar as they have already left their impressions."[211] In the affective encounter, objects become objects of certain feelings, one of which is fear: "… the attribution of feeling to an object (I feel afraid because you are fearsome) is an effect of the encounter …"[212] Encounters of this kind reorient us in the world: we move away from that which is fearful, just as we draw close to that which is safe, appealing, exciting, etc. And, if objects "may stand in for other objects [or] be proximate to other objects", then it follows that the encounter with a fearful object can ground an affective reorientation whereby similar or adjacent objects are also encountered as sources of fear.[213]

In a word, our experience of the world is predicated on affective reorientations through encounters with objects, whose affects are both productive of and determined by personal and social histories, which in turn shape our affective responses to other objects, even those that we are yet to encounter. We might, therefore, now begin to parse how, for 'others', experiences of violence and threat posit certain objects – and those proximate to them – as fearful, in ways that reorient them away from such objects, thus shaping their relation to the world, along with their freedom to move and to act therein. We might, with the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, conceptualise these orientations in terms of *sedimentation*: the anticipation of violence, and the limits it places upon capacities for action, become habitual ways of being in the world. Indeed, if Merleau-Ponty fails to account for bodily otherness, he none the less leaves us with a uniquely valuable conceptual framework for exploring the existential dimensions of fear and violence: the *corps-sujet*. As we have seen, at the level of the *corps-sujet*, the body situates us in the world, and in relation to objects therein, in light of our possibilities for action. While he does not discuss the *corps-sujet*, Sartre regards our experience of objects as contingent on our projects in the world: "Tel rocher, qui manifeste une résistance profonde si je veux le déplacer,

[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Ibid.

sera, au contraire, une aide précieuse si je veux l'escalader pour contempler le paysage."[214] Merleau-Ponty takes up Sartre's "rocher" to show how objects are given to us as correlates of our possibilities for action: "Un rocher infranchissable, un rocher grand ou petit, vertical ou oblique, cela n'a de sens que pour quelqu'un qui se propose de le franchir, pour un sujet dont les projets découpent ces déterminations dans la masse uniforme de l'en soi et font surgir un monde orienté, un sens des choses."[215] Herein, he reveals that the *corps-sujet* learns from the world: I experience the "rocher" as "infranchissable" because I have tried to climb it, or similar objects, or perhaps simply because I have tested my body's capacities in the world, and know their generalised potentials, and limitations. Sartre, too, concedes that we must learn from the world, albeit without explicitly locating such learning in the body: "… il demeure un *residuum* innommable et impensable qui appartient à l'en-soi considéré et qui fait que, dans un monde éclairé par notre liberté, tel rocher sera plus propice à l'escalade et tel autre non."[216] The world is thus given as the correlates and obstacles of possible actions in light of both lived experience and the cultural horizons we share with others: perhaps the "rocher" appears "infranchissable" to me because I have seen somebody else fail to climb it, or because I live in a society where that "rocher", or boulders more widely, are known to be difficult to climb. In the *corps-sujet*, then, we have a theory that might account for how experiences of violence, pain, and fear can radically transform our relation to the world, not just momentarily, but permanently.

The example of a broken escalator may prove instructive here. Anyone who has stepped on to a broken escalator will likely have felt a strange sensation of disorientation, or vertigo.[217] Often, this feeling comes *in spite of* an awareness that the escalator is broken: at the level of

[214] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 526.
[215] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 498.
[216] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 527. 7
[217] It is pertinent to note the limitations of the example of the broken escalator: primarily, that the experience is contingent upon the physical and cultural possibilities of using an escalator. In other words, people who have not or cannot use escalators will likely not have had this experience. None the less, our intention here is to avoid the use of 'others' as exceptions who prove a rule, so common to Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, and instead use the experience of those within the – contemporary, Western, able-bodied – norm as an example.

conscious thought, we can tell ourselves that the escalator is broken, but this does not prevent the sensation of disorientation. In effect, we can make sense of this in terms of the *corps-sujet*. At this preconscious level, the body has learnt how escalators normally function, in ways that predispose us to interact with them: to mount them, and maintain our balance as we ascend. This explains both the sensation of disorientation, as the body adjusts to a novel modality of the known world, as well as the impotence of conscious awareness of the broken-ness of the escalator: the *corps-sujet* exists prior to consciousness, and thus beyond the scope of conscious thought. Crucially, the escalator is an unequivocally contingent, culture-bound object: it relates to a particular society and historical era. The escalator as example, then, provides compelling evidence that the *corps-sujet* learns from and situates us in relation not only to objects we might view as natural – such as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's "rocher" – but also to those contingent on particular social, cultural and historical contexts. If bodies learn how escalators work, and orient us in the world in light of that knowledge, surely they can and must do so for other culture-bound objects, such as the sites and sources of fear, and violence. Further, if contingent objects like escalators can become habitual, as correlates of our habitual bodies, then we might understand how these sites and sources of fear, pain, and violence, and our responses to them – such as avoidance, flight, paralysis – become sedimented in the body as habits, as a habitual way of being in the world. Taking up Merleau-Ponty and Butler, Ahmed points to this: "What bodies 'tend to do' are effects of histories rather than being originary."[218] Crucially, what we "tend to do" – our "field of positive action" – also defines what we tend not to do, "a field of inaction, of actions that are possible but that are not taken up, or even actions that are not possible because of what has been taken up": "… what we 'do do' affects what we 'can do.'"[219]

[218] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 56.
[219] Ibid., pp. 58-59.

If 'others' are forced – through the *regard*, and thus through *dys-appearance* and the anticipation of violence – to act in certain ways, then they will also *tend to act* in those ways, and, crucially, *tend not to act* in others. Objectification, pain and violence effectively function to impose certain possibilities of action, and foreclose others, not only within the particular encounter where they take place, but also beyond it. Ahmed understands gender, and thus the experience of women and trans people, in such terms: "… if gender shapes what we 'do do,' then it shapes what we can do."[220] Race, too, "[affects] what one 'can do,' or even where one can go".[221] In other words, bodily otherness – here, gendered and racial – prescribes habitual ways of being in the world. Alcoff ties this expressly to experiences of the world as source of the normative *regard*, and thus of fear and violence: "Racial self-awareness has its own habit-body …"[222] This habit body is the foundation of existence: such "self-awareness" ultimately "permeates our being in the world, our being-with-others, and our consciousness of our self as a being-for-others."[223] Ahmed, too, stresses that self-awareness can become habitual: "… we might also acquire a tendency to look behind us."[224] In so doing, she highlights how becoming habitually aware of oneself, and of one's body as object – as *foreign,* as *threatened* – translates to becoming habitually aware of one's world – as locus of *regard*, objectification, violence – in ways that Merleau-Ponty's subject is not.

Fear, *la facultad*, and *worldly dys-appearance*

We might, at this juncture, turn to chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of "*la facultad*": "*La facultad* is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities […]

[220] Ibid., p. 60.
[221] Ibid., p. 112.
[222] Alcoff, *Visible Identities*, p. 194.
[223] Ibid.
[224] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 142.

an instant 'sensing,' a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning."[225] Occurring at the level of preconscious perception – "… mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak …" – we might grasp *la facultad* in terms of the *corps-sujet*.[226] Crucially, *la facultad* originates in many of the experiences proper to bodily otherness that we have outlined above:

> Those who are pushed out of the tribe for being different are likely to become more sensitized (when not brutalized into insensitivity). Those who do not feel psychologically or physically safe in the world are more apt to develop this sense. Those who are pounced on the most have it the strongest-the females, the homosexuals of all races, the darkskinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign.[227]

Such experiences – of vulnerability, and aggression – thus radically transform our relation to the world. Subjection to violence hones *la facultad* in anticipation of future violence: "… we are forced to develop this faculty so that we'll know when the next person is going to slap us or lock us away. We'll sense the rapist when he's five blocks down the street."[228] Pain, too, "[hones] that radar": it "makes us acutely anxious to avoid more of it".[229] To live through violence, or pain, as so many 'others' do, is to learn to perceive the world in certain ways: less in light of potential actions, and more in light of potential hurt, or harm. In other words, the hyperawareness of one's body that we have seen to be characteristic of those outside the norm implies and is reflected in a corresponding hyperawareness of the world: "The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world."[230]

In the experience of *la facultad*, 'others' are acutely attuned to the objects and other subjects around them, in ways that entail a heightened attention to the spatiality of the world: "Often I sense the direction of and my distance from people or objects—in the dark, or with

[225] Anzaldúa, p. 38.
[226] Ibid.
[227] Ibid.
[228] Ibid., pp. 38-39.
[229] Ibid., p. 39.
[230] Ibid., p. 38.

my eyes closed, without looking."[231] Their being in the world is mediated by what Bartky calls "wariness", in a discussion of women's experiences, which is none other than an "apprehension of things, especially of direct or indirect communication with other people".[232] Like *la facultad*, of which we might understand it to be one iteration, *wariness* is "a mode of experience which anticipates experience in a certain way", and, notably, "an apprehension of the inherently threatening character of established society" that anticipates "the possibility of attack, of affront or insult, of disparagement, ridicule, or the hurting blindness of others".[233] Elsewhere, MacKinnon links such *wariness* to the lived experience of misogynistic violence. She cites the example of a woman subjected to such violence, asking: "Does her body ever really forget […] Does her vigilance ever really relax?"[234] Trans people, too, exhibit many of the hallmarks of *wariness*, and *la facultad*. Many "constantly evaluate the safety of their environment", part of which means being "sensitive to uncomfortable reactions to their presence".[235] This goes hand in hand with "constantly monitoring their [behaviour]": if an environment is perceived to be "threatening", trans people may "quickly adjust their gender presentation […] to avoid being identified as transgender".[236] Their hyperawareness of their bodies, and of their surroundings, both require and establish a way of being in the world grounded in the need to anticipate, and thus diminish, "the possibility of experiencing rejection or violence from others".[237]

As these experiences disclose, *la facultad* is antithetical to the experience of the world in terms of comfort, ease, freedom, and competence that we have seen to both characterise and foreground normative intentionality. Returning to Anzaldúa: "We lose something in this mode of initiation, something is taken from us: our innocence, our unknowing ways, our safe and

[231] Ibid., p. 39.
[232] Bartky, p. 18.
[233] Ibid., pp. 18-19.
[234] MacKinnon, p. 340.
[235] Heidi M. Levitt and Maria R. Ippolito, 'Being Transgender: Navigating Minority Stressors and Developing Authentic Self-Presentation', *Psychology of Women Quarterly,* 38 (2014), 52.
[236] Ibid., pp. 47, 52.
[237] Ibid., p. 52.

easy ignorance."[238] This "something" that is lost is precisely the world as implicit context and function of our possibilities for action that typifies Merleau-Ponty's account of consciousness, to the extent that the world is no longer implicit, but explicit. Indeed, if a hyperawareness of one's body as object frustrates our capacity and freedom to act, then a hyperawareness of the world might be seen to function analogously: the thematisation of the world is just as much of an intentional obstruction as the thematisation of the body. In plainer terms, it does not matter whether I stop writing because I feel a sharp pain in my hand, or because my pen breaks: in both cases, I explicitly thematise a moment in the implicit structure of intentional action and thus cease to be engaged in my task. In effect, the thematisation of the world, as brought about through *la facultad*, implies an *intentional disruption* and a *spatiotemporal construction*. We might therefore propose a third modality of *dys-appearance*, namely, *worldly dys-appearance*: the world, just like the body, is an implicit structure of our intentional actions, and can thus be made salient in ways that inhibit those actions. The case for such a reworking of Leder's theory becomes even stronger when we consider that he regards illness as *dys-appearance* precisely because it impedes "the experience of the world-as-opportunity": what is lost, with the explicit thematisation of the world, if not the "world-as-opportunity"?[239] Further, in such *worldly dys-appearance*, the impediment to normative intentionality not only derives from the subject no longer experiencing the "world-as-opportunity", but from them now experiencing the "world-as-threat". In other words, for 'others', the world is not only made salient, but made salient as source of potential violence or injury: their capacity and freedom to act is doubly compromised, first by *worldly dys-appearance*, and second by the "world-as-threat", to the extent that the anticipation of violence precludes certain possibilities for action and movement.

[238] Anzaldúa, p. 39.
[239] Leder, *The Absent Body*, p. 81.1

I can (because you cannot)

In *la facultad*, then, we find yet another departure from the normative intentionality proper to Merleau-Ponty's account of consciousness, an experience of one's body and the world in terms of comfort, freedom, and competence. As we have noted, for 'others', these departures operate at several key moments in the structure of intentional consciousness: in deviations from the normative body, as in queer desire and 'bodily limitations'; in divergences from the normative world, through the experience, and sedimentation, of pain and violence; and in the three forms of *dys-appearance*, bodily, social, and worldly, that occur in these deviations and divergences. In this light, we might return to Merleau-Ponty. As we have seen, he articulates his presumption of the universality of comfort, freedom, and competence as modalities of intentional existence in his conception of the subject as a "je peux".[240] As our reflection makes plain, this experience of the world as *je peux* is manifestly not universal, but rather contingent, and normative. Indeed, 'others' regularly experiences themselves not as *je peux*, but precisely as *je ne peux pas*. Illness, for Carel, "implies a shift from a usually spontaneous 'I can' to an unfamiliar 'I cannot'."[241] And, for Young, the "inhibited intentionality" that typifies women's motility is an experience of self as an "I cannot".[242] Building upon Fanon, Ahmed explicitly sets the embodiment of racial 'others' against Merleau-Ponty's *je peux*, as one far better understood "in terms of the despair of the utterance 'I cannot.'"[243] Zoe Belinsky conceives of disabled and trans people in these terms, emphasising the role of the environment in the shift from *je peux* to *je ne peux pas*: "The debilitating conditions faced by both disabled and transgender people brings the 'I cannot' to continually invade our phenomenological capacities …"[244] Indeed, her account of

[240] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 160.
[241] Havi Carel, 'Phenomenology as a Resource for Patients', *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy: A Forum for Bioethics and Philosophy of Medicine,* 37 (2012), 104.
[242] Young, 'Throwing Like a Girl', pp. 36-37.
[243] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 139.
[244] Belinsky, p. 190.

the "I cannot" as "the jarring, all-too-human awareness of our bodies and their limitations that we all encounter", of which pain is a salient example, functions to reveal how the *je ne peux pas* can surface in *bodily*, *social*, and *worldly dys-appearance*.[245]

Perhaps Belinsky's most compelling claim is that "Merleau-Ponty's 'I can' assumes an *already capacitated, able-bodied, and adult male* subject" and, as such, "does not reckon with a subject whose *in*capacities haunt the perceptual horizon through which they appraise their sense of their own bodily possibilities."[246] I want to suggest, both with and against her, that Merleau-Ponty actually *does* reckon with such a subject, not in his account of consciousness *per se*, but to the extent that the *je peux* of his normative subject foreshadows and is predicated upon the *je ne peux pas* of those outside of the norm. In effect, for Ahmed, the free and open motility of those within the norm is made possible by the restricted and disjointed motility of those outside of it: "Movement for some involves blocking movement for others."[247] Herein, the differential distribution of freedom of movement is made possible through the *regard*, and the ways in which it undermines the freedom of 'others' to move in its constitution of them as *threatening objects* or *threatened objects*: "Some bodies move precisely by our sealing others as objects of hate."[248] Fear, as anticipation of future violence or injury, secures the freedom of those within norms at the expense of those without them: "… fear works to restrict some bodies through the movement or expansion of others."[249] This, too, becomes sedimented, and habitual, so that the world that Merleau-Ponty takes for granted is in fact one made for subjects like him: "… the regulation of bodies in space through the uneven distribution of fear […] allows spaces to become territories, claimed as rights by some bodies and not others."[250] Ahmed explicitly cites the norms of heterosexuality and whiteness as grounding normative distributions of space

[245] Ibid., p. 180.
[246] Ibid., p. 188.
[247] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 141.
[248] Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p. 57.
[249] Ibid., p. 69.
[250] Ibid., p. 70.

and freedom, in what she refers to as the "heterosexualisation [and] racialisation of space".[251] Elsewhere, she makes space for a range of 'others': bodies are not only restricted by racism, but by "other technologies used to ensure that space is given to some rather than others" and, in so doing, place limits upon their freedom of movement so as to facilitate that of those within a given norm.[252] Ahmed thus illuminates the relation between normative intentionality and the non-normativity typical of 'others', which turns out to be inversely proportional. It is not just that some people deviate from normative ways of being in the world, but that, crucially, those normative ways of being are contingent upon such deviations. In a word, the normative intentionality that structures Merleau-Ponty's account of consciousness is not only contingent, but contingent on the very forms of non-normative intentionality that he fails to account for.

As we have seen, his normative intentionality is also necessarily a shared intentionality, one which we inherit from others, and integrate into our bodies, as centres of and capacities for habitual action. It becomes clear, however, that this shared intentionality is not shared by all subjects. In fact, we might state that it is *shared* by some precisely and only to the extent that it is *not shared* by others. This, in turn, has implications for Merleau-Ponty's account of *autrui*, wherein our recognition of other subjects *as subjects* is contingent upon their uptake of shared intentional engagements in and with the world. In effect, not only do 'others' regularly or even tendentially depart from these forms of intentional engagement, as we have established in this chapter, but further, that they necessarily do so, because those ways of being are shared only by a limited – normative – few. The question then becomes: if 'others' inevitably deviate from normative ways of being, to what extent do they, or indeed can they, be recognised *as subjects*, notably by those within the norm? Our intention here is not to contend that Merleau-Ponty fails to enlighten the lived experiences of bodily otherness, but rather that he does exactly that, albeit

[251] Ibid.
[252] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 136.

à son insu: he offers a compelling framework for thinking about how those outside of the norm might be misrecognised, or disregarded, as full, human subjects, in ways that ground violence against them. Put simply, if 'others' often deviate from shared – normative – ways of being, then they cannot, following Merleau-Ponty, be recognised as subjects, at least not all of the time. We might then explore how they *are* seen, and recognised: perhaps they are ascribed a diminished subjectivity, or perhaps they are simply not regarded as subjects, whether ignored or seen as objects. Here, our reworking of the *Phénoménologie de la perception* resonates with our revision of *L'Être et le néant*, and Sartre's own theory of *autrui*, wherein we established that those outside of the norm are subject to a sustained and systematic *regard*, and thus figure as objects for those within it far more often, if not all the time. In both instances, we find that their understandings of *autrui* provide us with productive conceptual tools for interrogating lived experiences of otherness, and othering, precisely in and through their normativity. In a sense, then, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty ultimately do account for bodily otherness, not in the lines of *L'Être et le néant* and the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, but between them.

Conclusion: On Empathy

> Ferai-je cette promesse ? Risquerai-je ma vie pour si peu ? Donnerai-je ma liberté pour sauver la liberté ? Il n'y a pas de réponse théorique à ces questions. Mais il y a ces choses qui se présentent, irrécusables, il y a cette personne aimée devant toi, il y a ces hommes qui existent esclaves autour de toi et ta liberté ne peut se vouloir sans sortir de sa singularité et sans vouloir la liberté. Qu'il s'agisse des choses ou des situations historiques, la philosophie n'a pas d'autre fonction que de nous rapprendre à les voir bien, et il est vrai de dire qu'elle se réalise en se détruisant comme philosophie séparée.
>
> — Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*[1]

On the final page of his 1945 work, Merleau-Ponty thus turns back one last time to face the question he asked at its outset: "Qu'est-ce que la phénoménologie ?" The answers he gave in his introduction relate primarily to the work of those who came before him. His answer here, in guise of a conclusion, surely reflects how he conceives of phenomenology when done on his terms: it gives us a clear sense of how he feels it should be undertaken, and what it may achieve should that be the case. Philosophy, he states unequivocally, has a singular function: "… nous rapprendre [à] voir bien …"[2] It thus requires us to interrogate what we know, and how. It asks us to recognise that seeing is never neutral, and that vision is always an imperfect source of knowledge, or truth. It demands an openness to our own imperfections – as knowers, and seers – and a refusal to take anything for granted, even and especially what appears common sense. It invites us to cast off our familiar ways of coming to truth, in favour of new and different epistemic paradigms. At the same time, philosophy should never be purely academic. It must actively guard against abstraction. Theory has its limits, certainly when divorced from the

[1] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 520.
[2] Ibid.

material conditions of its own emergence and of the existence it seeks to describe: "Il n'y a pas de réponse théorique à ces questions."[3] To go beyond those limits, to answer these questions, philosophy must come down from the clouds. It must begin with lived experience: with the material – "… ces *choses* …" –, which is also and always the social – "… cette personne aimée devant toi …" – and, crucially, the political: "… ces hommes qui existent esclaves autour de toi …"[4] Theory, in other words, is inseparable from praxis. Phenomenology is not conceptual, in the first place, and material, in the second: in its very realisation, it ceases to exist *à part*, as a "philosophie séparée."[5] The philosophical is political, and the political is personal. Existential philosophy, for Merleau-Ponty, is bound up with the material conditions of oppression and liberation, and each of our roles therein. To practise it on his terms is to confront our freedom, and our responsibility. It means acknowledging our complicity in violence that benefits us, and our capacity for individual and collective resistance against such violence. It is, in a word, to recognise the imperative of solidarity and resistance, however high the stakes may be.

In the ideal, then, phenomenology should situate itself along some of the most divisive and volatile fault lines in the bedrock of Western thought, and perhaps most notably those that have surfaced over the course of this thesis: theory and praxis, the concrete and the abstract, the natural and the cultural, the subjective and the objective, the individual and the social, the personal and the political. Thus poised at the rifts between various antagonisms – or, more precisely, various couplets seen to be antagonistic – it might draw its force and singularity from an embrace of contradiction as a source of productive tension. And in this embrace, which is also a refusal of discrete categories, it should figure as a challenge to the paradigms of thought hegemonic within the Western epistemic regime. For Merleau-Ponty, this is one of several challenges that phenomenology should seek to mount against dominant forms of knowledge

[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.

production and dissemination. If the prevailing epistemic order in western Europe and north America privileges objective, absolute truths, then the kind of philosophy that Merleau-Ponty is advocating for necessarily destabilises that order, on two counts. First, it must displace the primacy of objectivity in favour of subjectivity, with its focus on lived experience. Second, it must resolutely resist the closure and quiescence of absolute truth, and insist instead upon the need for a radical openness to original perspectives and critiques. Existential phenomenology should be an "inachèvement", and the existential philosopher "un commençant perpétuel".[6] Its aspirations to truth can only ever be provisional: "… la philosophie ne doit pas elle-même se tenir pour acquise dans ce qu'elle a pu dire de vrai …"[7] To take up phenomenology on Merleau-Ponty's terms is to treat everything with suspicion, even and perhaps especially common sense and conventional wisdom. It means acknowledging that philosophy is tied to the socio-historic and epistemic conditions of its emergence – "… elle est, elle aussi, dans l'histoire, elle use, elle aussi, du monde et de la raison constituée …" – and should be equally subject to suspicion, if not more so: "Il faudra donc qu'elle s'adresse à elle-même l'interrogation qu'elle adresse à toutes les connaissances …"[8] We must leave no stone unturned, even those that we have lain ourselves, because the ground beneath them is always shifting, and treacherous. There are no absolute truths, only approximations of truth to be constantly and endlessly refined. Existential phenomenology thus advances dialectically through introspection and critical encounters with other texts and perspectives: "… elle se redoublera donc indéfiniment […] elle sera […] un dialogue ou une méditation infinie …"[9]

In this sense, our will to read between the lines of the *Phénoménologie de la perception* is far from a radical departure from the Merleau-Pontian ideal of philosophy. Rather, to do so – to refuse complicity with the text, to scrutinise it for biases and unfounded assumptions, to

[6] Ibid., pp. xvi, ix.
[7] Ibid., p. ix.
[8] Ibid., p. xvi.
[9] Ibid.

dwell in and upon its imperfections – is to take that ideal seriously. Indeed, we have already insisted that existential phenomenology is and always has been a critical phenomenology, in theory if not always in practice. What is reading between the lines if not a "phénoménologie de la phénoménologie"?[10] Sartre, too, advocates for such an approach, even if he doesn't lay out his ideals of philosophy as plainly as Merleau-Ponty. Where he does grant us such insight, we find him to share his contemporary's scepticism for the dominant epistemic norms and philosophical tendencies, and their particular pretensions to truth. While he seeks to posit universal truths in the terms of his ontology, he none the less points to its shortcomings as a framework for conceptualising existence. His ontological reflections in *L'Être et le néant* lead us to further investigations that are necessarily beyond the scope of the question of being, and nothingness: "… l'enquête elle-même et ses résultats sont, par principe, tout à fait en dehors des possibilités d'une ontologie."[11] Indeed, the work closes with an admission of the limitations of ontology, and an appeal to ethics as offering a possibility of going beyond those limitations: "Toutes ces questions, qui nous renvoient à la réflexion pure et non complice, ne peuvent trouver leur réponse que sur le terrain moral."[12] The shift from ontological concerns to ethical ones reflects a conviction, echoing Merleau-Ponty, that existential philosophy must address the material, the social, and the political. Truth, for Sartre, is irreducibly "humain": "Sans espèce humaine, pas de vérité, cela est certain …"[13] Humanity is the condition of knowledge, meaning, and truth, because their emergence is contingent upon the implication of all subjects in a common project: "Si quelque chose comme une vérité existe, susceptible d'unifier les choix individuels, c'est l'espèce humaine qui peut nous la fournir."[14] This recalls Merleau-Ponty's view of rationality as produced and sustained at the juncture of diverse experiences: "… les

[10] Ibid., p. 419.
[11] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 614.
[12] Ibid., p. 676.
[13] Ibid., p. 564.
[14] Ibid.

perspectives se recoupent, les perceptions se confirment, un sens apparaît."[15] The "monde phénoménologique", for him as for Sartre, can be neither understood nor articulated in purely ontological terms, because its "sens […] transparaît à l'intersection de mes expériences et de celles d'autrui, par l'engrenage des unes sur les autres".[16] Philosophical meaning and truth emerge where, and only where, we open ourselves up to perspectives beyond our own, and listen out for the harmonies and dissonances with our own experiences.

The epistemic ideal of existential phenomenology thus discloses a practical imperative, a way of doing philosophy that is both essential and exemplary. I want to propose, in closing, that this an imperative to empathy. Not, of course, in the sense of a quality innate to some or all people: if, in the existentialist view, existence precedes essence, then no such qualities are innate. Rather, empathy here would be an approach – an ethics, an attitude, a practice – that might ground existential phenomenology in the very same gesture that it propels it forward. To begin with empathy would be to take seriously the need to listen to other people, and to make space for voices and perspectives different from our own. It would mean adopting a posture of radical openness to other people's experiences of the world, even and especially when they challenge what we take for granted to be true, or universal. Indeed, it would involve being wary of those voices that reaffirm conventional wisdom, and placing the most trust in those that call it into question. Empathy, then, might secure the fragile promise of phenomenology to describe a plurality of perspectives from the standpoint of the singular. And yet, when we turn to Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's work, as we have done over the course of this thesis, we are often struck by a distinct lack of empathy. Rather than an openness to diverse points of view, we have found a tendency to dismiss experiences distinct from their own, notably where those experiences invite them to question what they take to be universally true. Take, for example, Sartre's refusal

[15] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. xv.
[16] Ibid.

to countenance a woman's account of her own sexual experience, cited above, in favour of her husband's interpretation, itself ratified by another man, the psychoanalyst Stekel. The woman, "interrogée" as to whether she experiences sexual pleasure, explicitly states that she does not: "… la femme […] s'applique farouchement à [le] nier …"[17] To no avail: Sartre rejects her claims in no uncertain terms. Women like her, he says, "parviennent à se masquer la jouissance que leur procure l'acte sexuel": they experience the very sexual pleasure they claim not to, *in spite of what they say*.[18] They are not just mistaken, or deceitful, but uniquely dispossessed of the means to apprehend and make sense of their own lived experiences. Where the voices of 'others' expose the limits of his normative worldview, then, Sartre neither listens to them, nor expands his worldview to incorporate them. Instead, he dismisses them as unreliable witnesses to their own lived experiences, and in so doing corrodes their epistemic credibility *tout court*.

His distrust of testimony from outside the norm is all the more striking when set against his uncritical acceptance of voices within it. Here, for example, his reluctance to countenance a woman – let alone believe her – contrasts sharply with his willingness to listen to other men, and take them at their word. This, even though the subject matter is that woman's own lived experience. Here, then, we find not only hypocrisy, but incongruity with his wider philosophy. In effect, as we have seen, Sartre claims in his account of *autrui* is that other consciousnesses are always and irremediably beyond our reach: we can never truly know what other people see, or think, or feel. In the terms of his philosophy, then, it would be incoherent to place more trust in an outside observer of a person's experience, than in that person's own testimony. And yet Sartre does exactly that, time and again. Against his own convictions, he systematically refuses to listen to the voices of 'others'. Where he does, he tends to discredit them, especially if they challenge anything he presumes to be a universal truth. In all of this, we find not empathy, but

[17] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 89.
[18] Ibid., p. 88.

a distinct lack thereof, a waiving of the imperative to radical openness. This is not to claim that Sartre never heeds that imperative, far from it. Indeed, in the very moments that disclose a breakdown of empathy for those outside the norm, we find an abundance of empathy for those within it. How else might he discuss the lived experience of 'others', as he so often does in *L'Être et le néant*, once he has thrown out their personal testimonies? In eroding the credibility of those outside the norm, he effectively solicits interventions from those within it, even though they cannot know, or at least can never be sure, about the matter at hand, namely, other people's conscious existence. In other words, those within the norm are believed when they should not be, while those outside of it are not believed when they should be. This is not an incidental feature of his methodology, but a constitutive one: the excess of credibility given to normative subjects is grounded in and legitimised by the lack of credibility that attributed to 'others'. The unreliability of women as witnesses to their own lived experience, for example, requisitions the interventions of men on that very matter. As such, examples such as the one above shouldn't be seen to point to an absence of empathy in Sartre's philosophy, but rather to its limits, which turn out to follow the boundary between norms and otherness. He is mindful of the imperative to openness, but only with certain subjects: those within the norm. He takes other perspectives seriously, so long as they reflect his own, and confirm his biases. Arguably, then, he advances not with empathy, but with sympathy: a receptivity to alternative points of view conditional upon their proximity and consonance with his own, or those that he could feasibly adopt.

The same may well be said of Merleau-Ponty's thought. His discussion of the testimony of "une malade", a subject whose otherness is doubly that of being a woman, and being ill, is particularly instructive. He opens with her version of events: "Une malade dit que quelqu'un, au marché, l'a regardée, elle a senti ce regard sur elle comme un coup sans pouvoir dire d'où il venait."[19] He immediately challenges this version of events, insisting that she does not mean

[19] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 394.

what she explicitly said: "Elle ne veut pas dire que …"[20] It is not only her speech that he casts doubt upon, but her interpretation of her own lived experience, and her grasp on reality: "Il ne s'agit pas pour elle de ce qui se passe dans le monde objectif …"[21] In effect, here, he displaces her understanding of what she perceived and felt to make space for his own by claiming that she was hallucinating. Hallucinations, in his philosophy, are explicitly opposed to the "réel", and excluded from the constitution of truth and meaning at the intersection of various subjects' perspectives on the world.[22] In classing her experience as a hallucination, he not only dismisses it as figmental, and thus immaterial to the elaboration of truth, and meaning. He also shatters her credibility, as a speaker and a knower: if she cannot distinguish between reality and fantasy, then her testimony cannot be trusted. Once again, we find a woman to be uniquely dispossessed of the means to apprehend, interpret, and articulate her own lived experience. And once again, this is set against a presumption of the credibility of those within the norm. In taking issue with her rejection of normative interpretations, he effectively discloses an uncritical acceptance of those interpretations: "… et c'est pourquoi les arguments que nous pouvons lui opposer glissent sur elle."[23] Crucially, as with Sartre, this position is inconsistent with his wider philosophy. If, as we have seen, perception takes place "en deçà du monde objectif", it is nonsensical for him to dismiss her perception as illusory because it does not coincide with the "monde objectif".[24] Further, as we have also seen, we can never access the "monde objectif". We might only approximate it by parsing diverse experiences, and locating moments of consonance therein, which is none other than the "monde phénoménologique". In staking the above claim, then, he confounds these two worlds, taking as objective what is inherently *not*, and thus betraying his

[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid., pp. 389-390.
[23] Ibid., p. 394.
[24] Ibid., p. 69.

own philosophical principles, so as to justify his rejection of an ill woman's account, and secure the normative worldview whose apparently universal truths that account begins to pick apart.

Here, as in Sartre's thought, sympathy operates in the place of empathy. Merleau-Ponty neither listens to 'others', nor takes them seriously when they cast doubt on the universality of what he takes for granted. Instead, we find a dismissal not only of their testimony, but of their basic capacity to testify to their own experience, one which both is justified by and justifies an endorsement of interventions from within the norm. We thus find ourselves before an impasse. If Sartre and Merleau-Ponty share an ideal of phenomenology wherein empathy is imperative, why do neither of them take up that imperative, at least not with all subjects? Returning to our final chapter, we might begin to speculate as to why this is the case. If, as we have put forward, 'others' are often not recognised as full subjects, then we have a framework through which we might explain why sympathy, rather than empathy, structures their philosophy. The problem is not that some subjects are treated with empathy, and others not: the problem is rather that some subjects are not recognised *as subjects*, and therefore not treated with empathy. What is more, if we take seriously our descriptions of the lived experiences of 'others' in that chapter, it becomes clear that this is not an accidental feature of their thought, but an inevitable one. In both of the examples above, we find traces of experiences proper to those outside of the norm. Merleau-Ponty's "malade" describes a hyperawareness of the *regard*, one which may occur even in the absence of a concrete observer. Sartre's "femme" articulates what we might now understand as sexual violence, while her husband and the psychoanalyst betray how those within the norm misread the actions of those outside of it, through a normative visual schema, in order to justify violence against them. The point is not to claim that either of these women had those exact experiences: to do so without their input would be to once again supplant their own self-understanding with an outside interpretation. It is instead to show how the deployment of sympathy in the place of empathy leads both philosophers to disregard the very possibility

of those experiences, which we know so many 'others' *do* have. What is more, in refusing to countenance such experiences, they necessarily exclude them from their account of existence, so that the only subject articulable in the terms of existential phenomenology is a normative one. Herein, we might begin to parse a cycle of sympathy and misrecognition, where each prefigures and secures the other. On the one hand, 'others' are not listened to because they are not recognised as subjects. On the other, 'others' are not recognised as subjects because they are not listened to. The breakdown of empathy in Sartre and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies is not merely inevitable, but self-perpetuating: they mistake sympathy for empathy because they conflate normativity with universality, and they conflate normativity with universality because they mistake sympathy for empathy. They don't simply fail to take up their own imperative to empathy: it is impossible to do so within the normative terms of their philosophy.

As we saw in our critique of their engagements with bodily otherness, or more exactly, their lack thereof, normativity functions to foreclose the possibility of attaining the very ideals of existential phenomenology that they themselves lay out. The particular interest of empathy lies in the insight it gives into how that normativity guarantees and reproduces itself, and its imperceptibility, namely, through a cycle of misrecognition and sympathy. Empathy is more than just one among many ideals that Sartre and Merleau-Ponty fail to live up to: it is the *péché originel*, the ideal whose abandon pushes the others definitively out of reach. There is a certain irony here: in their failure to take up empathy, they underscore its very imperative. It becomes clear that any hopes of realising the ideals of French existential phenomenology, against their inability to do so, rest squarely upon our capacity to take up and sustain that imperative. What might it look like to do so? What might it look like to ground our philosophical practice in empathy? What might it do, and what might it undo? And what – crucially – might it make possible? The answers to these questions, of course, will only emerge in time, and in practice. We might none the less put forward some hypotheses, and speculate as to what empathy might

mean, and make possible. In the first instance, if empathy is the cornerstone of the critical phenomenology that we have advocated for, then it would be both a philosophical and political practice. Indeed, it might well involve refusing to draw a distinction between the philosophical and the political. In the second, it would mean listening to perspectives beyond our own, even and perhaps especially those that cast doubt upon what we take for granted to be true. It may well require us to listen more carefully to the experiences that differ most from what we know, and to take them more seriously than those that mirror our own. As such, it will surely demand that we actively seek out the voices that we so rarely hear, which will more often than not be those of 'others'. And so it would mean resisting the tendency to disregard or discredit speakers who reveal the limits of our worldview, and instead expanding those limits to accommodate them. To philosophise with empathy would therefore involve trusting in the testimony the most at odds with our own, in particular when that testimony comes from outside the norm. It would invite us to place the most trust in those who have traditionally been afforded the least credibility. Conversely, it would ask us to be wary of those voices that confirm what we regard as common sense, and to remain the most suspicious of the interlocutors whom society tends to place beyond suspicion. Most critical of all, empathy requires that we constantly turn that same light of interrogation back upon our own thought, perhaps even more often, and more harshly, than upon anybody else's. It means setting out not with a presumption of our mastery, but a recognition of our imperfections, and of the very impossibility of perfection. Empathy means a willingness to displace our deepest-held beliefs and best-reasoned theories, and a pledge to take notice of any voice that does so, especially if it comes from outside of the norm.

The imperative to empathy is not solely a question of listening. It is also a question of speaking. It requires us to refuse complicity with the ways and means of speaking that we so often take for granted, and to think critically about who speaks, and who does not – or, more precisely, who is able to speak, and who is not. It means taking stock of the material conditions

that ground speech, and silence, – that make them possible, or unavoidable – as well as their practical and political effects. Perhaps most crucial, it mandates turning that lens back upon ourselves to think about our own speech, its conditions, and its potential or actual effects. The urgency of this latter task is made plain by the very project that empathy seeks to make possible – critical phenomenology – because to set out to describe a plurality of experiences from the standpoint of the singular is necessarily to speak both for and about other people. To adopt the imperative to empathy with a view to formulating such a phenomenology, then, means that we must begin by taking seriously what Alcoff refers to as "The Problem of Speaking for Others". She invites us to reflect upon the "authority" attributed to our voices by virtue of our position as philosophers, and to weigh up the stakes of "speaking for others" with that authority: "Is the discursive practice of speaking for others ever a valid practice, and, if so, what are the criteria for validity? In particular, is it ever valid to speak for others who are unlike me or who are less privileged than me?"[25] Alcoff's appeal to ask ourselves these questions is grounded in two related convictions. First, that our material and social positions shape not only what we can say, and when, but the very meaning of our words – "… where one speaks from affects the meaning and truth of what one says …" – and their credibility: "… a speaker's location (which I take here to refer to their *social* location, or social identity) has an epistemically significant impact on that's speaker's claims and can serve either to authorize or disauthorize one's speech."[26] This we have seen where Sartre and Merleau-Ponty believe those who they should distrust, and distrust those who they should believe. Second, that discourse has effects beyond and sometimes in spite of our best intentions, contingent upon the respective positions of its subjects and objects. To speak about those without the norm from within it can therefore be "discursively dangerous", because it runs the risk of reinforcing or aggravating violence against

[25] Linda Martín Alcoff, 'The Problem of Speaking for Others', *Cultural critique,* 20 (1991), 8.
[26] Ibid., pp. 6-7.

them: "… privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or reinforcing oppression of the group spoken for."[27] This, too, we see in Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, where discussions about 'others' shore up their exclusion from full subjectivity, which in turn debars them from those very discussions.

Alcoff is not advocating for those with the authority to speak to step abdicate it entirely, or all of the time. If discourse can consolidate oppression, it can also help resist it, and improve the material conditions of the oppressed. For those who have that authority, speaking for the discursively disenfranchised has its benefits: "There are numerous examples of the practice of speaking for that have been politically efficacious in advancing the needs of those spoken for …"[28] Indeed, to have that authority and *not* to speak for those who do not communicates a tacit acceptance of the prevailing socio-political order, and of normative violence therein: "Even a complete retreat from speech is of course not neutral since it allows the continued dominance of current discourses and acts by omission to reinforce their dominance."[29] Put simply, we have an obligation to speak when we can, but we must do so with care, or, in our terms, empathy: "I am not advocating a return to an un-self-conscious appropriation of the other, but rather that anyone who speaks for others should only do so out of a concrete analysis of the particular power relations and discursive effects involved."[30] Because we cannot *not* speak for others, and because speaking for others is fraught with danger, she proposes four lines of interrogation that we might follow to navigate that danger. First: "The impetus to speak must be carefully analyzed and, in many cases (certainly for academics!), fought against."[31] *Why do we want to speak for others? What do we hope to achieve?* Second: "We must […] interrogate the bearing of our location and context on what it is we are saying …"[32] *How does our position shape the*

[27] Ibid., p. 7.
[28] Ibid., pp. 17-18.
[29] Ibid., p. 20.
[30] Ibid., p. 24.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., p. 25.

meaning and credibility of our words? How are they also shaped by that of the people we are speaking for? Third: "Speaking should always carry with it an accountability and responsibility for what one says."[33] *What might be gained when we speak for others, and what might be lost? How might we remain answerable for such gains, or losses, and to who?* Fourth: "… we need to analyze the probable or actual effects of the words on the discursive and material context."[34] *What might our speech do to and for the people we are speaking for? How can we limit the risks, and amplify the benefits?* And once we have spoken, we must take stock of "where the speech goes and what it does there".[35] It will not be enough to follow these lines of interrogation in anticipation of speech: we must also do so in its wake, so as to account for the discursive and material effects of our speech, and our silence, as they shift in time.

Empathy, then, is as much a way of speaking as it is a way of listening. It means being radically open to what others – and, in particular, 'others' – have to say. But it also means being radically open to how what we say affects them. And so it means beginning with a recognition of the material, social, and political conditions of our philosophical practice, and of the people who we choose to listen to, and speak for, or about. Sartre and Merleau-Ponty make no attempt to do so, because they regard all situations as equivalent insofar as they are equally contingent. But to be equally contingent is precisely *not* to be equivalent, and in confounding the two they push the very ideals that they themselves articulate permanently out of reach. In insisting upon the need to account for situations – our own, and other people's – empathy places those ideals firmly back within our grasp. Existential phenomenology, as they understand it – as a properly critical phenomenology – becomes a possibility once more. "Le plus grand enseignement de la réduction est l'impossibilité d'une réduction complète."[36] In the reduction, something is always left behind. More often than not, we leave behind what we presume to be universal, or natural.

[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid., p. 26.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. viii.

Empathy brings us closer to the ideal of the reduction because it obliges us to countenance voices we might otherwise dismiss, and take them seriously where they reveal the contingency of what we took to be universal, or the artifice of what we saw as natural. It can thus facilitate the practice of unlearning so central to the phenomenological method, and lead us to a place of what Salamon describes as "unknowing": "… it must be my goal to unseat my *own* belief through the suspension of what I already think I know."[37] Phenomenology can take us to "a place of greater knowing", but also to "a loosening or an undoing of what we know."[38] As a radical openness to anything that destabilises what we take for granted, empathy facilitates this process, leading us to such loosenings and undoings. Unknowing is not just about questioning *what* we know, but *how*: "… to unknow is to revise or undo knowledge that I already have, perhaps to question the epistemological regime that brought that knowing about in the first place."[39] In fostering unknowing, then, empathy might also unsettle the dominant epistemic regime, and expose the limits of perception therein. Just as it might help us to unknow, it might help us to unsee, to distance ourselves from the normative visual schema that determines what we see, and what we don't. We might thus learn to see the world anew: to unsee the danger ascribed to 'others', for example, and to see instead the violence done to them on its account.

Empathy gives us the power to incohere the apparently self-evident, and to clarify the apparently unintelligible. In creating the conditions for normative violence to become visible, and legible, it makes space for us to acknowledge and conceptualise the lived experience of those outside of the norm. For those of us who find ourselves outside a given norm, or norms, this can serve to foster self-understanding: of violence we have been subjected to, for one, and of the material and social conditions of its emergence, for another. We might thus make sense of our lived experiences – of otherness, and othering – and begin to pick out the disparities and

[37] Salamon, *The Life and Death of Latisha King*, p. 159.
[38] Ibid., p. 149.
[39] Ibid.

injustices that mark them out from those that take place within the norm. This, in turn, can help to build community: it produces the analytic and hermeneutical resources through which people who are similarly marginalised might recognise their common condition, and come together. Those same resources might also serve to promote understanding and compassion beyond the bounds of that community: they become tools for those without the norm to more effectively convey their lived experiences to those within it. Empathy doesn't just make violence legible: it makes it real, and unavoidable. In doing so, it makes our complicity in the violences that we are exempt from equally real, and unavoidable. The imperative to empathy thus discloses a further, moral, imperative: to stand in solidarity with those subject to normative violence, and to struggle alongside them against it. Herein lies the unique promise of empathy as a practice that is philosophical insofar as it is political, and political insofar as it is philosophical: it might foster the discursive, moral and material conditions of solidarity both within communities, and between them. To take up that practice is not only to attempt an existential phenomenology on the terms that Sartre and Merleau-Ponty advance, but ultimately abandon. It is also to recognise what is at stake when we do so: where our ideas go, and what they do. This means taking stock not only of what is at risk – who might philosophy harm, and how? – and of what is at play: who might it bring together, and what might it make possible? To place empathy at the heart of existential phenomenology means asking ourselves the questions Merleau-Ponty invites us to – "Ferai-je cette promesse ? Risquerai-je ma vie pour si peu ? Donnerai-je ma liberté pour sauver la liberté ?" – and responding, always and endlessly, in the affirmative.

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