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

Edited by

Jean-Pierre Boulé and Benedict O’Donohoe
For Lya; and for Zoé—always

*J-PB*

To Tom and Ania and Lucas

*BPO’D*
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What does Sartrean existentialism look like in the twenty-first century? We are proposing a multi-faceted portrait which reflects Sartre’s mind and body, his words and deeds. We do so cognizant of the fact that these categories could be regarded as tautological. After all, Sartre himself insisted that language was also action, and that no human person was ever more or less than the sum of their deeds, “nothing but what one makes of oneself”. He also emphasised the inseparability of mind and body, the embodiment of consciousness, without which, famously, consciousness is nothingness.

Nevertheless, these are useful categories in critical method, the more so as Sartre discovered empirically that the conflation of the two elements of each binary pair was by no means a given. The enactment of language—the transition from the spoken or written word to the making of a real change in the world by deeds—became the mission and obsession of the “committed” post-war philosopher, whether writing epic or satirical theatre and fiction, abstruse dialectics and polemical essays, or visiting Castro in Cuba and the intelligentsia in Japan, or supporting student protest on the streets of Paris, implicitly daring De Gaulle to arrest this twentieth-century Voltaire. Even addressing the proletariat directly, outside the Renault factory at Boulogne-Billancourt in 1972, or visiting Andreas Baader in Stammheim prison in 1974, Sartre could never be confident that his millions of eloquent words had indeed achieved any real change in the world.

Moreover, although Sartre’s consciousness was of course embodied, it was rather less so than most. He stood about five feet tall (152 centimetres), tiny for a European male in the mid-twentieth century. If “not quite a dwarf”, as he ruefully observes in the autobiographical Les Mots (Words), he took after his father’s side of the family rather than his mother’s, to the manifest consternation of his lanky maternal grandfather. Sartre was customarily known to his circle of friends as le petit homme
(the little man), who also said of him ça pense tout le temps (he never stops thinking): a pocket-sized person with a brain the size of a planet, we might say in the modern vernacular. It is as if Sartre’s body and mind were in inverse proportion to each other, the condensed and pent-up energy of the former exploding in the hyper-activity of the latter, spilling ink promiscuously over a plethora of genres—and to such effect!

Uniquely in twentieth-century European literature, Sartre can claim masterpieces in philosophy, the novel, the short story, the drama and the polemical essay; to say nothing of literary criticism, biography and autobiography. He also wrote diaries, travelogues, art criticism, journalism, letters—thousands of letters—and, with somewhat less distinction, screen-plays for the cinema. When the Gallimard Pléiade edition of his Œuvres romanesques (Works of Prose Fiction) appeared in 1981, he accomplished the childhood dream he had dreamt in his grandfather’s library of becoming a name embossed in gold on the spine of a leather-bound book. However, he had also, with characteristically self-contestatory irony, disappeared himself the previous year.

In an attempt to honour Sartre’s astonishing polymathic range, we have divided this book into four sections: (i) Sartre and the Body, (ii) Sartre and Time, (iii) Sartre: Ideology and Politics, and (iv) Sartre in Japan. These divisions reflect the interests of scholars from the UK, the US, France, Ireland and Japan, who gave papers at Sartre Society conferences in Tokyo and London in 2009, some with the support of AHRC funding.1

“Sartre and the Body” reappraises Sartre’s work in dialogue with other philosophers, his predecessors, contemporaries and successors. “Sartre and Time” offers “philosophy in practice” accounts of how this unstoppable “book-making machine” (see Les Mots again) actually worked. “Sartre and Politics” uses Sartrean notions of intellectual engagement, political commitment and revolutionary praxis to address contemporary questions, including insights into world leaders, past and present—Castro, De Gaulle, Sarkozy, Obama: Sartre, the incorrigible intellectual who simply could not “mind his own business”, still has something to say about each of them today. Finally, an important but overlooked episode of Sartre’s life—his month-long visit to Japan in September–October 1966—is narrated from two contrasting perspectives: first, that of a young Japanese scholar who has made an exhaustive analysis of Sartre’s reception in the media; next, that of a very senior Japanese scholar who, as a young man, was actively involved in that reception both as participant and as interpreter at Sartre’s

1 The Editors duly acknowledge the financial assistance of the AHRC which facilitated, specifically, the participation of Boulé, Noudelmann and O’Donohoe in Tokyo, and that of Nao Sawada and Masamichi Suzuki in London.
various lectures and debates. This truly unique and precious first-hand testimony concludes the volume.

“Sartre and the Body” opens with Dermot Moran who revisits the crucial philosophical problem of embodiment to argue that Sartre’s *L’Être et le néant* (*Being and Nothingness*) advances a ground-breaking, but neglected, phenomenology of embodiment. Sartre’s account strongly influenced Merleau-Ponty’s, but differs from his in important respects. Moran returns to Sartre’s original account, discusses his debt to Husserl, and in particular re-examines his analysis of the flesh, the touch, and his critique of the “double sensation” (the experience of one hand touching the other). In “Living and Knowing Pain: Sartre’s Engagement with Maine de Biran”, Michael Gillan Peckitt explores and challenges Sartre’s view of the role of sensation in the body as it pertains to pain. Using the work of the phenomenologist Michel Henry, Peckitt argues that Sartre’s “anti-Biranism” needs to be modified—in particular, his notions of *lived* and *known* in application to the body—to accommodate certain quasi-Biranian notions, if he is to produce an accurate phenomenology of pain. Peckitt argues a third way of experiencing the body which is *between* the *lived* and the *known*.

Naomi Segal’s object of study is the psychic skin, leaning on the work of Didier Anzieu and using his most important theory, that of the *moi-peau* (skin-ego). Segal argues that desire is a component, but not the only component, of love: the wish to be held, in Anzieu’s sense, is central. Segal compares elements of the theories of Sartre and Anzieu, revealing some possibly surprising similarities in their theories of love. In the last chapter of this section—“The Childhood of a Leader’ Revisited: *Salauds* and Moustaches”—Gary Cox teases out the range of complex philosophical ideas in Sartre’s longest short story, “L’Enfance d’un chef”. Primarily, this details one person’s slide into the kind of chronic, cowardly and morally repugnant “bad faith” which, for Sartre, characterises the bourgeoisie, whom he denounced *en masse* in his earlier novel, *La Nausée* (*Nausea*), as *salauds* (shits, bastards). Posturing—being a *poseur*—is essential for and to the *salaud*. Cox brings a novel dimension to thinking of Sartre and the body by concentrating upon the moustache as emblematic of the serious-minded, complacent bourgeois: Lucien, the protagonist in “Childhood”, completes the construction of his false object-self by growing a moustache.

In the next section, “Sartre and Time”, François Noudelmann studies Sartre’s time(table) and illustrates how he used his body and his mind. Taking as an example Sartre’s work on Flaubert, Noudelmann underpins his own study by explaining that Sartre presupposed that everything makes
sense in an existence in order to constitute a life, even what seems to lie outside the individual’s intentions. This totalising approach articulates two contiguous and complex notions: life and existence, which Noudelmann then applies to Sartre himself, unmasking his secret temporalities, such as playing the piano, in a detotalising manoeuvre which, through its segmentation(s), (re-)composes the tempos of life. Noudelmann also evokes Sartre’s and Beauvoir’s seemingly “transparent relationship”, and this is the focus of Michel Contat’s chapter. Specifically, Contat examines the famous couple’s politics of “common time” and how they “worked together”. He tracks their partnership in their respective works and concentrates on their one thoroughgoing collaboration, namely a dialogue published by Simone de Beauvoir in 1981, as the second part of her memoir, *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre*. This dialogue is composed thematically, like Beauvoir’s memoir *Tout compte fait (All Said and Done)*, and Contat’s intertextual method brings out the parallels between the two. Working through analyses of themes including “the body” and “music”, this dialogue culminates in a reaffirmation of Sartre’s atheism as constitutive of his philosophy of freedom.

Sartre’s inseparable words and deeds are the focus of the third section, “Ideology and Politics”, where a dialogue is set up between Sartre and contemporary political figures. John Ireland analyses two series of articles by Sartre on Cuba, the first of which was published in the French daily, *France-Soir*, in the 1960s, the second of which has only recently come to light. Under the metaphorical title, “Ouragan sur le sucre” (“Hurricane in the Sugarcane”), Sartre anatomised the Cuban revolution, to the unmitigated advantage of Fidel Castro and the merciless detriment of Charles De Gaulle. Ireland argues that Sartre’s portrait of Castro as a revolutionary political leader is fashioned in direct opposition to his image of De Gaulle. He concludes that these articles opened up a confrontation between, on the one hand, Sartre’s high hopes for the Cuban revolution in practice and, on the other, the much more pessimistic prognoses of socio-political change formulated by the theorist of the *Critique de la raison dialectique* (*Critique of Dialectical Reason*), which was in press at the time of Sartre’s Cuban visit. Extending the political theme in his chapter, “What Can Philosophers Teach Politicians?”, Jean-Pierre Boulé subjects the discourse of French President Nicolas Sarkozy on “May 68” to a Sartrean analysis, revealing that—whilst denouncing the spirit of May 68—Sarkozy in fact appropriates left-wing rhetoric: Sarkozy’s aspiration to be a “new politician” is compared and contrasted with Sartre’s status as a “new intellectual”. Boulé gradually discloses the Gaullist heritage in
Sarkozy’s discourse, thereby demonstrating that philosophers can indeed teach politicians—about ethics.

In “Sartre’s Concept of Man: Existentialism and Feminism”, Nao Sawada confronts Sartre’s “word”, and the word is “man”. He analyses the different ways in which Sartre uses the term “man” in a number of contexts—including homosexuality, femininity and cowardice—concentrating on his major philosophical and literary works, *Being and Nothingness* and *The Roads to Freedom*. After an occasionally surprising itinerary through Sartrean euphemism, innuendo and implication, Sawada brings his argument back to the contemporary world—equally threatened by natural and man-made catastrophe, as recent events have shown all too starkly—and innovatively advocates a “feminine Sartrean existentialism”.

Steering the conversation towards Japan, Benedict O’Donohoe enquires: “What is an Intellectual?” He considers the credentials of Barack Obama (well-known as a convincing candidate—for the presidency, at least), Nicolas Sarkozy (recently converted to Sartre), and Haruki Murakami, whose hybrid work, *Underground: The Tokyo Gas Attack and the Japanese Psyche*, arguably satisfies the criteria set down by Sartre for the writer-qua-intellectual in his Japan lectures.

The fourth and final section of this book, “Sartre in Japan”, is also concerned with word and deed. First, Masamichi Suzuki’s forensic account of Sartre’s reception by the Japanese press in 1966 offers both the most thorough contextualisation and the most detailed analysis to date of Sartre’s Japan lectures, “Plaidoyer pour les intellectuels” (“Apologia for the Intellectual”, already touched upon by Boulé and O’Donohoe). Using press archives, Masamichi Suzuki analyses the Japanese media’s role in constructing the image of an “intellectual superstar”, before turning his attention to the role of intellectuals in Japan today, where he finds no “charismatic figures comparable to Sartre”.

Our volume then closes with a rare document indeed: Michihiko Suzuki—who met Sartre and Beauvoir when they came to Japan and remained in contact with them thereafter—is interviewed by Nao Sawada.

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2 To avoid confusion, we have, in this Introduction and in the list of Contributors, deployed the European convention of forename / surname, e.g. Haruki Murakami, Nao Sawada, Masamichi Suzuki, Michihiko Suzuki. Elsewhere, in the relevant chapters, we have respected the Japanese convention of surname / forename.

3 At the time of final editing (March 2011), we wish to pay tribute to our Japanese colleagues—and to at least one other contributor with family in Japan—who have continued to respond to our last-minute missives with characteristic courtesy and calm efficiency, despite the stresses that they and their compatriots have been placed under by the Sendai earthquake and its terrible aftermath.
In this fascinating eye-witness account of Sartre’s and Beauvoir’s visit—and their various lectures, debates, and round-table discussions—Professor Suzuki talks candidly, and often humorously, about his own, his contemporaries’ and his country’s relationships with Sartrean existentialism, over a span of half a century. *En route,* he underscores Sartre’s progressive thinking on colonialism, and his remarkable precognition of May 68 with the *Critique of Dialectical Reason.* Above all, thanks to Professor Suzuki’s compendious knowledge of Sartre’s thought and work, and to Nao Sawada’s perspicacious questioning and congenial encouragement, the reader is invited both to participate “virtually” in Sartre’s memorable Japanese excursion, and to perambulate through his entire intellectual itinerary. In short, Professor Suzuki demonstrates admirably the extraordinary range, originality and vitality of Jean-Paul Sartre in mind and body, word and deed: “A whole man, made up of all men, worth any one of them, and any one of them worth him.”

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4 “Tout un homme, fait de tous les hommes, et qui les vaut tous et que vaut n’importe qui.” (Sartre, the last sentence of *Les Mots.*)
PART I:

SARTRE AND THE BODY
CHAPTER ONE

SARTRE’S TREATMENT OF THE BODY
IN BEING AND NOTHINGNESS:
THE “DOUBLE SENSATION”

DERMOT MORAN

Sartre’s innovative analysis of embodiment:
flesh and intercorporeity

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

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

2 Of course, one should not assume that everything Sartre says about the body is to be found in the chapter bearing that title. In fact, there are discussions of the body throughout Being and Nothingness. In particular, his discussion of hunger and desire, for instance, in the chapter on “Concrete Relations with Others”, continues the analysis of the experience of one’s own body and of the flesh of the other. For recent discussions of Sartre on embodiment, see Katherine J. Morris (ed.), Sartre on the Body.
appear in *Being and Nothingness*, nevertheless, the dynamic visual and tactual relations *between* the living bodies of conscious subjects has a central place. For Sartre, the flesh is presented as both the locus of contingency and also as the point of contact with the flesh of the other. Flesh is, as Sartre puts it, “the pure contingency of presence” (*BN*, 343; 410).³ It is our incarnation in the world in precisely this inescapable manner, our being “thrown” into the world. At the same time, my flesh “constitutes”—as Husserl would say; Sartre uses different expressions—the other’s flesh, especially in the acts of touching and caressing:

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

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

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

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

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

⁵ *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945, *Phenomenology of Perception*, henceforth *PP*, followed first by the page number of the English translation, then by that of the French edition).
published posthumously as *The Visible and the Invisible*, is heavily indebted to Sartre’s explorations. To name some of the themes which Sartre discusses a few years in advance of Merleau-Ponty, one can point to the discussion of the artificiality of the psychological (behaviourist) concept of sensation; the intrinsic temporality of experience; the Müller–Lyer illusion; the Gestalt figure-ground relation; the “double sensation” (one hand touching the other); and so on. Sartre’s overall account of the embodied subject, and of his or her encounters with other embodied subjects, is in many ways more far-reaching than Merleau-Ponty’s. It is certainly far more dramatic. It is therefore worthwhile revisiting Sartre’s discussion of the body in *Being and Nothingness*.

**Sartre’s three ontological conceptions of the body**

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

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


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

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

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

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

10 For an interesting survey of the role of the body in Scheler’s writings, see Daniela Vallega-Neu, “Driven Spirit”.
11 Before writing Being and Nothingness (while in the POW camp Stalag XIID at Trier), Sartre read Heidegger’s Sein und Zeit (1927) and his 1929 essay “What is Metaphysics?” as well as some of his later essays of the 1930s and early 1940s. Although, strictly speaking, the body hardly makes an appearance in Being and Time, Sartre interprets the facticity and contingency of Dasein’s “Being-in-the-world” as referring primarily to our embodiment.
12 See, for instance, Brunschwig, L’Expérience humaine et la causalité physique (1922), which is also criticized by Merleau-Ponty in PP (see 54-56; 67-69).
13 Maurice Pradines, a follower of Bergson, taught Levinas at Strasbourg. See his Philosophie de la Sensation, I: Le Problème de la sensation (1928), listed by Merleau-Ponty in his bibliography to PP (see also PP, 13n; 20n).
14 Gabriel Marcel, Être et avoir (1918–33, Being and Having).
the manifest. The body has different modes of manifestation. The body manifests itself within my experience in one way, and there is another quite different experience of the body given from the perspective of the other. Sartre distinguishes the body as it is “for me” or “for oneself” (pour-soi) and the body as it is “for others” or “for the other” (pour-autrui). These dimensions are, Sartre claims, “incommunicable” and “irreconcilable”. The first ontological dimension addresses the way that, as Sartre puts it, “I exist my body” (j’existe mon corps, BN, 351; 428), the body as non-thing, as medium for my experience of the world, but also as somehow surpassed or transcended towards the world. This is le corps-existé, the body as lived from the first-person perspective, as opposed to le corps-vu, the body as seen from the perspective of the other (BN, 358; 426), or of myself now in the position of an external observer of my body.

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

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

16 See Martin C. Dillon, “Sartre on the Phenomenal Body and Merleau-Ponty’s Critique”, in Stewart, especially page 126.
our “concrete relations with others”. Indeed, it is true to say that Sartre has explored the dialectics of this intersubjective co-constitution of my body more than any other phenomenologist (with the possible exception of Levinas). This third dimension of the body includes the manner in which I experience it under the gaze or “look” (le regard) of the other, as in the case of shame or embarrassment. I experience how the other sees me, even in the physical absence of the other: “With the appearance of the Other’s look I experience the revelation of my being-as-object, that is, of my transcendence as transcended” (BN, 351; 419).

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

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

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

17 “Le conflit est le sens original de l’être-pour-autrui” (BN, 364; 431).
of gender, for instance. Sartre’s account is deserving of much closer scrutiny in this regard. It is surprisingly subtle and sensitive to the complexities of the dynamics of these relations.

**The body as “psychic object”**

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

**The objectified body of others and the felt body**

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

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

¹⁹ “[…] le point de vue du dehors, de l’extériorité” (*BN*, 305; 367).
stomach is, where I think I can feel my liver, where I believe the heart is located, and so on. This folk-map can be more or less well informed by science, more or less accurate, but this scientific map, superimposed on the felt body, does not necessarily coincide with the body as felt. I can visualize my ulcerous stomach but I live its discomfort in a different way (BN, 355-56; 423).20 I feel my heart pounding when I run, but normally I do not apprehend it at all. There is an immediately intuited or felt body, Merleau-Ponty’s “phenomenal body”, le corps phénomé nal. He writes:

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

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

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

In this example, Sartre claims my disease is in fact objectified by others who can often apprehend it better than I can. However, most of the time, this felt body is non-objectified and experienced in a diffuse, amorphous and almost invisible manner (which is precisely its mode of appearing). It becomes obtrusive in certain forms of illness (such as when I become dizzy or nauseous), or failure (the stone is too heavy to lift), or disability (the anorexic experiences her body as too

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

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

Furthermore—and this is also Sartre’s original contribution—even when I see and touch my body, I am in these situations experiencing my body from without, from the point of view of another: “I am the other in relation to my eye”. I can see my eye as a sense organ but I cannot, pace Merleau-Ponty, “see the seeing” (*BN*, 304; 366). I see my hand, Sartre acknowledges, but only as an external thing. It is simply an object lying on the table like any other object. I cannot see the sensitivity of the hand or its mineness: “For my hand reveals to me the resistance of objects, their hardness or softness, but not itself. Thus I see this hand only in the way that I see this inkwell. I unfold a distance between it and me” (*BN*, 304; 366).

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

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

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

The invisible body in the primacy of the situation

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

It is because of our intentional directedness to the world that we have to overcome, surpass, transcend the body. The whole thrust of human subjectivity is to overcome or cancel itself, to negate or “nihilate” (néantiser) itself by intending towards the world. Intentionality is world-directed. The embodied consciousness has to “surpass” itself, go beyond itself toward the world: this is the thrust of the long Chapter Three on “Transcendence”, which tries to set out the manner in which the for-itself transcends. This “surpassing” (dépassement) constitutes the essence of intentionality understood as self-transcendence. This surpassing of the body, however, does not mean its elimination: “The body is necessary again as the obstacle to be surpassed in order to be in the world; that is, the obstacle which I am to myself” (BN, 326; 391). For Sartre, our transcendence towards the world is part of what he takes to be our original “upsurge in the world”: “But it is we ourselves who decide these very dimensions by our very upsurge [notre surgissement] into the world and it
is very necessary that we decide them, for otherwise they would not be at all" (BN, 308; 370).
Sartre frequently speaks of the “upsurge” of the pour-soi towards the world, of the “upsurge” of the other in my world, and so on. In a sense, this upsurge is the primal situation: consciousness and world emerging together in one blow. Merleau-Ponty also speaks of the “unmotivated upsurge of the world.” For Sartre, this upsurge has both a certain necessity and a certain contingency, this combination he calls “facticity”. For Sartre, paradoxically, while the body is that which necessarily introduces the notion of perspective and point of view, at the same time the body is a contingent viewpoint on the world. Our body exemplifies the very contingency of our being: it is a body in pain, or whatever. To apprehend this contingency, is to experience “nausea”: “A dull and inescapable nausea perpetually reveals my body to my consciousness” (BN, 338; 404). Being embodied brings ontological un-ease (dis-ease) or discomfort which is essential to the functioning of the for-itself. The for-itself can only function because it already is a body.
For Sartre, as for Husserl, consciousness requires incarnation, which situates and locates consciousness, gives it a point of view, and makes it possible as consciousness. Sartre writes: “[T]he very nature of the for-itself demands that it be body, that is, that its nihilating escape from being should be made in the form of an engagement in the world” (BN 309; 372). Moreover, the world in which we are embodied is a world that has been humanized by us: “the world is human” (BN, 218; 270): “The body is the totality of meaningful relationships to the world […]. The body in fact could not appear without sustaining meaningful relations with the totality of what is” (BN, 344: 411).
Sartre insists on the synthetic union between body and world. Merleau-Ponty also comments on the remarkable fit there is between my body and the world. The visible world has just that array of colours which my eyes are attuned to register. In The Visible and the Invisible, he writes: “[T]he seer and the visible reciprocate one another [se réciproquent] and we no longer know which sees and which is seen” (TVTI, 139; 181). Similarly, according to Merleau in “Eye and Mind”23: “The mirror appears because I am seeing-visible [voyant-visible], because there is a reflexivity of the sensible. […] My outside completes itself in and through the sensible” (EM, 168; 24). And in his “Working Notes” (May 1960), Merleau says that the flesh is a “mirror phenomenon” (TVTI, 255; 303). Sartre too sees

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22 “[…] le jaillissement immotivé du monde” (PP, xiv; viii).
23 L’Œil et l’esprit (cited as EM with English then French pagination).
the embodied subject as intertwined with the world. On the other hand, he rejects the deep significance that Husserl and Merleau-Ponty accord to the phenomenon of the “intertwining” (Verflechtung in German, l’interlacs in French) in the double sensation, to which we shall now turn.

Sartre on intertwining and the “double sensation”

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

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

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

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

26 Ding und Raum. Vorlesungen 1907 (Thing and Space: 1907 Lectures, cited DR with English then German pagination. This reference is DR § 47, 137; XVI, 162.)
In *Ideas II* § 36 Husserl is interested in the manner in which the lived-body (*Leib*) is constituted as a “bearer of localized sensations”. These localized sensations or “sensings” (*Empfindisse*, a Husserlian neologism) are not directly sensed but only indirectly by a “shift of apprehension”. The touching hand must make *movements* in order to feel the smoothness and softness texture of the touched hand. Husserl says that the “indicational sensations” of movement, and the “representational sensations” of smoothness to the touch, belong in fact to the touching right hand, but they are “objectivated” in the touched left hand. Husserl speaks of the sensation being “doubled” when one hand touches or pinches the other. Each hand experiences this double sensation. Furthermore, for Husserl, the double sensation belongs essentially to touch but does not characterize vision (*Ideas II* § 37); there are no comparable visual *sensings*. We see colours but there is no *sensing* colour: “I do not see myself, my body, the way I touch myself” (*Ideas II* § 37, 155; IV, 148). All Husserl allows is that the eye is a centre for touch sensations (the eyeball can be touched, we can feel the movement of the eye in the eye-socket through muscle sensations, and so on). Overall, in these discussions, Husserl employs the double sensation to distinguish touch from vision and to accord primacy to touch. For Husserl (following Aristotle), it is primarily touch that anchors us in the body. He writes:

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

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

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

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

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

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