The Social Constitution of the Body: Bodily Alienation and Bodily Integrity

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The Social Constitution of the Body: Bodily Alienation and Bodily Integrity

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Department of Philosophy

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

Philosophy

Harvard University

Cambridge, Massachusetts

May 2016

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Abstract

My thesis offers an account of the phenomenon of *bodily alienation.* Bodily alienation marks the failure to realize oneself in one's bodily activities. I argue that realizing oneself in one's bodily activities requires the pursuit of bodily activities for their own sake—not for the appearance they produce, and the ability to deal skillfully with one's environment.

I characterize bodily alienation by examining three cases concerning gender and race: (i) the tendency, inflected by gender norms, to identify with certain fetishized body parts and to modify one's body accordingly, (ii) the physical incapacitation that the gaze of a member of a dominant group (e.g., a white person's gaze) can provoke in a member of an oppressed group (e.g., a person of color), and (iii) the personal transformations that members of non-oppressed groups achieve when they reform the bodily habits that alienate members of oppressed groups.

I vindicate the use of the concept of bodily alienation for ontologies of the body that aim to ground social criticism. I explain that the concept of bodily alienation can accomplish this task because it is descriptive and normative. Applying this concept both describes someone's relation to her body and judges that relation as defective. Describing social practices as alienating entails that things are not as they should be. And that raises the question of how they should be changed.

My use of the concept of bodily alienation for a critical project concerning gender, race, and the body sets this project apart from other forms of social critique, such as social constructionism. Social constructionists typically make descriptive claims about the relative naturalness of a state of affairs and then make the case for changing it. For example, feminist social constructionist critiques move from the claim that gender differences are not merely a matter of

biology and can be reformed, to arguments about why they *should* be reformed. My account avoids this two-step argumentative strategy. The concept of bodily alienation simultaneously uncovers and evaluates phenomena, while tying them to a conception of human flourishing as embodied.

For Ellen Kane

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Introduction

My thesis offers an account of the phenomenon of *bodily alienation.* To be alienated from one's body is to have a defective relation to one's body, and more specifically, a defective way of relating to one's bodily activities. One natural point of entry into this phenomenon is the topic of body image. Those who suffer from body image problems have distorted representations of their body's appearance (for example, its size), which affect their daily activities, from exercise and dietary habits to social relations. But bodily alienation encompasses other phenomena besides problems of body image. For instance, someone can feel alienated from her body in social situations where her body bears some social stigma. In fact, one of the phenomena I will explore in this thesis is the bodily experience of oppressed persons in the face of the gaze of a dominant other (for example, women faced by a male gaze, or persons of color faced by a white gaze). I will show that the oppressed suffer from a form of bodily alienation that affects their normal ways of performing physical activities.

Not only will I describe the phenomenon of bodily alienation, but I will vindicate the use of the concept of bodily alienation for developing a *social-critical ontology of the body*. In other words, I will defend the use of the concept of bodily alienation for ontologies of the body that aim to ground social criticism. As I will explain, the concept of bodily alienation can accomplish this task because it can be used both to describe a person's relation to his or her body, and to criticize the social conditions that cause this alienated relation.

Despite its promise, the concept of bodily alienation is an underutilized philosophical concept. While it is deployed by Simone de Beauvoir, most notably, in the sections of *The Second Sex* devoted to women's lived experience, for the most part, philosophers working on the

body have neglected it.[1] And this is true even of feminist philosophers working in the phenomenological tradition like Beauvoir. Indeed, the concept to which these philosophers have regularly appealed is that of the *lived body*, which they appropriate from Edmund Husserl's and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenologies. But for reasons that I will shortly come to, I believe that the concept of bodily alienation can better serve the goals of social criticism that motivate these philosophers's appeal the concept of the lived body.

In what follows, I will present the methodological commitments of this thesis. I will then discuss why the concept of bodily alienation is a more apt concept for social criticism than that of the lived body, before comparing my work to other projects of social critique predicated on the study of the body, gender, or race. To begin, though, let me say a little more by what I mean by bodily alienation.

Bodily alienation, I will argue, consists in a defective relationship to one's bodily activities. And I will couch this defect in the language of self-realization: bodily alienation marks the failure to realize oneself in one's bodily activities. How can we realize ourselves in our bodily activities? First, although we evidently pursue some bodily activities for the sake of others, that is, in an instrumental fashion, I contend that pursuing some physical activities for their own sake is important to having a non-alienated relationship to one's body. I will defend this position by looking at the bodily alienation some women suffer when they become overly focused on their appearance. I will argue that overcoming this fixation requires pursuing bodily activities not for the sake of the appearance they create, but for their own sake. Second, I will show that realizing oneself in one's bodily activities involves the aptitude to deal skillfully with

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[1] I will shortly mention two exceptions to this generalization: Kristana Arp's work on Beauvoir and Kristen Zeiler's use of the concept of bodily alienation.

one's environment. This aptitude, in turn, requires lying in a relationship to one's environment such that this environment can solicit movements from oneself. In defending this position, I will look at the breakdown in skillful activity members of oppressed group can suffer when they are confronted by members of dominant groups. What is salient about these breakdown cases is that the oppressed person loses touch with the world, such that his bodily movements come to have an uncoordinated character. I will use as an example of this phenomenon a case from Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* in which a black man is confronted by a hostile white presence on a train and loses the ability to find his seat. In reference to this and similar examples, I will explain that the oppressed person fails to realize himself in his body because of the wedge that the dominant person's gaze drives between him and the world. This interference prevents the world from soliciting movements and thus disrupts his skillful bodily activity.

As my reference to feminist phenomenology might suggest, I work in the phenomenological tradition, and my primary interlocutors will be Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, and Martin Heidegger. But in developing a vocabulary to make sense of bodily alienation, I have turned to Karl Marx's early writings, in particular the *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. There Marx argues that capitalist property relations are at the root of a form of alienation, whose central feature is our estrangement from our essence as self-conscious laboring beings. I have modeled my analysis of bodily alienation on some aspects of his fourfold account of alienation. Another major influence on my work is philosopher Rahel Jaeggi, whose recent monograph *Alienation* is a direct response to Marx's account of alienation. I will adopt some features of her analysis of alienation in formulating my view of the relationship between bodily alienation and the notion of a human essence. In the first chapter of this thesis, I will argue that we need to refer to the notion of a human essence in order to ground an account of alienation,

and I will agree with Jaeggi that we do not need to adopt as a substantive conception of the human essence as that espoused by Marx. However, as I will explain in Chapters Three and Four, Jaeggi and I disagree on what is essential to being human. Jaeggi and I both conceive of freedom as essential to being human. But whereas Jaeggi thinks that freedom consists in the ability to lead one's life according to one's own reasons and purposes, I conceive of freedom as the ability to lead one's life authentically, that is, with an understanding of oneself and of the world in which one finds oneself.

Now, what is phenomenology? According to Husserl, the phenomenologist's first task is to describe phenomena, that is, things as they appear in our experience of them. This task is accomplished by bracketing our commonsense, scientific, and philosophical assumptions about them. When we do this, what is left is the content and meaning of one's experience. For example, in bracketing questions about the existence of the natural world and attending to my experience of the natural world, I discover that consciousness is always consciousness of something; it is intentional.[2] Thus, part of the work of this thesis will consist in describing experiences of bodily alienation. However, this thesis also aims at offering a social critique founded on the very idea of that these experiences are experiences of *alienation*, and as such, it is aligned with other versions of alienation critique, like that developed in the *1844 Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*.

But how is it possible to combine a descriptive project with a normative project, and one with a social critical outlook? Why think that the concept of bodily alienation can bridge this gap?

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[2] Here I am indebted to David Woodruff Smith's article on phenomenology for the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2013).

What is distinctive of the concept of bodily alienation is that it not only has a descriptive component but also has a normative dimension. To describe a condition as alienated is also to claim that it is deficient. The concept of bodily alienation functions like the concept of sickness: when I say, "you look sick," I not only evaluate your state of health, but in my evaluation there is the implicit judgment that being sick is bad for you. I do not need to make an inference from my evaluation of your health to the conclusion that being sick is bad. As a result, the concept of bodily alienation's diagnostic function lays the ground for investigations into the causes of alienation. Accordingly, it can be used to develop critical phenomenologies, that is, projects which marry description and social critique, since using this concept within phenomenological investigations allows us to bridge the gap between the merely descriptive and the normative.

I have just suggested that the concept of bodily alienation would be an apt concept for a phenomenological project that has a social critical aim because it is a descriptive and normative concept. While the concept's descriptive component alone might justify calling it a *phenomenological* concept, more can be said to situate my work within the phenomenological tradition.

My project fits more specifically within the existential-phenomenological tradition. In order to understand the goals of this brand of phenomenology, let us have a look at Heidegger's *Being and Time*. On Heidegger's view, what is distinctive of us is that, unlike other entities, our being is an issue for us. This is to say that we are responsible for leading our own lives, or, to use Heidegger's shorthand, that we *exist*. (By contrast, a tree's being is not an issue for it; it is not conscious of itself and, as a result, does not have to lead its life.) Furthermore, Heidegger explains that phenomenology needs to begin by interpreting our mode of being. This is what is

meant by "existential phenomenology": a phenomenology guided by an understanding of our own being, which is existence.

My use of the concept of bodily alienation places my project in the existential phenomenological tradition for the following reason. Existential-phenomenology rests on an understanding of who we are as human beings. In Chapter One, I will argue that in order to formulate a social critique based on the concept of bodily alienation, we need to take a stand on who we are as human beings, that is, we need to refer to a human essence. And as said, I take this essence to lie in our freedom. In Chapter Four, I will show that this conception of freedom builds off of Heidegger's interpretation of what it means to exist. Therefore, my use of the concept bodily alienation belongs to the existential-phenomenological tradition because this concept grounds a descriptive project that is predicated on an understanding of existence. Note that the understanding of the human essence to which I appeal does not make reference to any distinctive types of human activities. So, unlike Marx, who focuses on labor as defining the human essence, I do not make any presuppositions about what activities are distinctly human, but look instead to the manner in which we perform activities.

Thus far, I have presented the methodological commitments of this thesis. What remains to be discussed are the relative merits of the concept of the lived body and that of bodily alienation, as well as the relation of my work to other projects of social critique that discuss gender, race, or the body.

Let me begin with the relative merits of the concept of bodily alienation and that of the lived body for the purpose of social critique. In *Ideas II*, Husserl distinguishes two perspectives for understanding the human body. On the one hand, there is the perspective of the natural

scientist.[3] Under the light of scientific knowledge, the human body is a living entity, subject to the same processes as other living beings, and studied in the same way as other living beings. The human body is a token of a particular type of organism. On the other hand, we can study the human body on the basis of what Husserl calls the "personalistic attitude."[4] In this attitude, we relate to bodies as we do when we respond to them in everyday experience; this attitude is the opposite of the detached attitude of the natural scientist. Phenomenology, the discipline of philosophy which Husserl founded, grounds its study of the human body on the personalistic attitude. From this perspective, the body is revealed to be our point of view on the world, that is, that through which the world is revealed to us, and through which we can act on the world.[5]

Feminist phenomenologists as Sara Heinämaa, Toril Moi, and Iris Young, have called for a return to the concept of the lived body for feminist philosophy.[6] For one thing, they claim that

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[3] In *Ideas II* §§35–42, we learn about the ontology of the body gained from the natural scientific perspective.

[4] In *Ideas II* §§48–49, Husserl distinguishes the natural scientific attitude from the personalistic attitude, and in §56 and §61, we learn about the body in the personalistic attitude.

[5] This is an idea expressed by Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. For example, he describes the body as one's "point of view upon the world" (2002, 81).

[6] Consider as evidence the following quotations from the works of Heinämaa, Moi, and Young:

> Beauvoir argues that causal explanations must give way to a phenomenological study of meanings and their constitution in actions and practices if we want to understand the sexual difference. In arguing for this new approach, Beauvoir refers repeatedly to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body. (Heinämaa 1997, 24)

> We can understand [the idea that woman "is not a fixed reality but a becoming"] only if we take seriously Beauvoir's commitment to the phenomenological understanding of the living body. As shown above, for Beauvoir, the body is not a thing but a way of relating to things, a way of acting on them and being affected by them. (Heinämaa 1999, 123)

> Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty do not deny that there is anything object-like about my body. It is quite possible to study it scientifically, to measure it, to predict how it will react to antibiotics, and so on. Both Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty are happy to accept scientific data in their analyses of the body. Yet, for them, scientific methodology cannot yield a valid philosophy of human existence. (Moi 1999, 63)

the concept of the lived body avoids the problematic nature/culture divide inherent in such social

constructionist distinctions as the sex/gender distinction. This is because, from the point of view

of social constructionism, the body is an object whose degree of naturalness is up for debate. But

from the point of view of phenomenology, the body is not an object, but the subject of perceptual

activity and the origin of our agency. Therefore, to inquire into its naturalness of the lived body

would be to commit a category mistake. Moreover, in appealing to the concept of the lived body,

feminist phenomenologists have privileged inquiry into the social significance of the body for

each individual. For example, the concept offers a framework for inquiring into how women

experience their bodies in light of social stigmas surrounding female body functions. Thus, the

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For Beauvoir, on the other hand, the body is a situation, and as such, a crucial part of lived experience. […] [T]he body as a situation is the concrete body experienced as meaningful, and socially and historically situated. It is *this* concept of the body that disappears entirely from Butler's account of sex and gender (Moi 1999, 74)

The idea of the lived body, moreover, refuses the distinction between nature and culture that grounds a distinction between sex and gender. The body as lived is always enculturated: by the phonemes a body learns to pronounce at a very early age, by the clothes the person wears that mark her nation, her age, her occupational status, and in what is culturally expected or required of women. The body is enculturated by habits of comportment distinctive to interactional settings of business or pleasure; often they are specific to locale or group. (Young 2005, 17)

The idea of the lived body thus does the work the category "gender" has done, but better and more. It does this work better because the category of the lived body allows description of the habits and interactions of men with women, women with women, and men with men in ways that can attend to the plural possibilities of comportment, without necessary reduction to the normative heterosexual binary of "masculine" and "feminine." It does more because it helps avoid a problem generated by use of ascriptive general categories such as "gender," "race," "nationality," "sexual orientation," to describe the constructed identities of individuals, namely the additive character that identities appear to have under this description. (Young 2005, 18)

concept of the lived body opens the way for looking into the interpersonal interactions and societal messages that shape the social significance of the body.

Yet Young herself worries that the concept of the lived body needs to be supplemented by a concept of gender as a social structure. In the essay of *On Female Body Experience* entitled "Lived Body vs. Gender," she argues that while the concept of the lived body sheds light on the interactions that constitute individuals as gendered, an understanding of gender as a social structure is necessary to account for the network of social practices that position individuals as subordinated or privileged.

While my aim in this thesis is not to defend a hybrid account of the sort Young proposes, I also worry that the concept of the lived body is insufficient to get a social critical project off the ground. This is because the concept of the lived body lacks a normative component. In applying the concept of the lived body, a philosopher can tell us about the body as it is experienced, but the concept of itself cannot be used to evaluate the experience as problematic (or not). To accomplish this, a diagnostic concept like that of bodily alienation would be needed. Instead, the concept of the lived body can be used to intervene in debates where what is at stake is how to define such things as the body or sexual difference. This is evident in the work of Sara Heinämaa, who takes the concept of the lived body to contribute to answering the question: What is a woman? According to Heinämaa, being a woman is not a matter of anatomy or psychology, but means embodying "a style of being" that is open to change (1997, 28). This is just another way of saying that that sexual difference lies in the different ways in which individuals experience their bodies in light of social norms, and that these experiences are open to change. But such a definition does not contribute to evaluating the experiences themselves.

That said, some feminist scholarship has homed in on the role of the concept of bodily alienation. For example, Kristana Arp's article "Beauvoir's Concept of Bodily Alienation" (1995) analyzes Beauvoir's descriptions of women's experiences of their body. More recently, Kristin Zeiler's "A Phenomenology of Excorporation, Bodily Alienation, and Resistance: Rethinking Sexed and Racialized Embodiment" (2013) discusses the deployment of the concept of bodily alienation in Beauvoir's and Fanon's phenomenologies. Building off of these articles, I will argue that the concept of bodily alienation holds the key to moving from descriptions of bodily experience to the evaluation of these experiences. So far from being a minor concept in Beauvoir's framework, the concept of bodily alienation deserves an important place in analyzing her argument in "Lived Experience," the volume of *The Second Sex* devoted to women's experiences.

All in all, the concept of bodily alienation is a better tool for social critique than the concept of the lived body. The concept of bodily alienation can drive an inquiry into social pathology, into the conditions that alienate us from our bodies, whereas the concept of the lived body is relevant for discussions of the metaphysics of the body or of sexual difference. Any phenomenology that aims to found a project of social critique will need to draw on concepts like that of bodily alienation.

The concept of bodily alienation, this thesis will show, offers rich resources for developing social criticism. And as I will argue in Chapter Five, it offers resources that other projects of social criticism concerned with gender, race, or the body do not. Let me here briefly sketch the differences between my project and two forms of social criticism: social constructionism and poststructuralist social critique.

Social constructionism refers to a range of views in the humanities and social sciences that call into question the naturalness of objects or of domains of knowledge. For instance, a social constructionist about gender might argue that, while there are natural differences between women and men (such as anatomical differences), the difference between men and women is to be located in the social significance of female and male bodies. For example, women are socially constructed objects, on such views, in the sense that they are defined in terms of social factors: their relative subordination to men, or socially acquired ways of behaving. Social constructionist projects are conducive to social critique because they call into question the claim that certain states of affairs or ways of carving up domains of knowledge are necessary. For example, feminist social constructionist critiques move from the claim that what it is to be a woman (or a man) is not defined by one's biology and can be reformed, to arguments about why the states of affairs that define women (and men) *should* be reformed.

My use of the concept of bodily alienation for a critical project concerning gender and race sets my project apart from other forms of social critique. My account avoids the social constructionist's two-step argumentative strategy, which consists in making descriptive claims about the relative naturalness of a state of affairs and then making the case for changing that state. As a diagnostic concept, the concept of bodily alienation simultaneously uncovers and evaluates phenomena. More than that, my use of the concept of bodily alienation allows us to make sense of lived experience in a way that social constructionist projects usually do not. As a result, my project can avoid some of the unintuitive results to which social constructionist projects are prone because they do not refer to actual experience. This is an issue to which I will return when I discuss Sally Haslanger's social constructionism.

Let us now turn to poststructuralist social critiques. These social critiques call into question the very distinction between the natural and the socially constructed at stake in social constructionist projects of the sort I have just sketched. For example, Judith Butler argues that, like gender, sex is the effect of social forces. Thus, she disputes the distinction between natural features (sex features) and socially constructed features (gender features) at the heart of social constructionist projects. Furthermore, Butler generalizes her criticisms about the sex/gender distinction to the question of the naturalness of the body, and challenges the very idea of the human body as a natural entity. What I worry about in projects like Butler's is not the criticism of social constructionism, but their underlying conception of the subject, which leads them to reject any appeal to lived experience. Poststructuralists are skeptical about appealing to lived experience because they think that a subject's experience will only be articulable in terms of the power structures within which that subject finds herself. Therefore, a subject's testimony cannot be taken at face value and used for social criticism. This skepticism leads poststructuralist authors, such as Butler, to formulate arguments on the basis of literary analyses or comparative arguments between literary or philosophical texts, instead of lived experience. In the end, their works appear detached from the lives of those whose experiences motivated their writings in the first place. This is a pitfall that my appeal to the concept of bodily alienation avoids since I draw on lived experience in characterizing a situation as alienating or not.

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Let me conclude by outlining the argument of this thesis. To begin, in Chapter One ("Alienation"), I will argue that the concept of bodily alienation needs to make some, even if minimal, reference to a human essence. In defending this claim, I will contrast two accounts of alienation: Karl Marx's and Rahel Jaeggi's. Whereas Marx holds a substantive understanding of

the human essence, Jaeggi eschews such an understanding. Nevertheless, I will argue that she needs to presuppose some understanding of who we are, and from her statements, it is clear that she takes freedom to constitute our essence. My own understanding of who we are as humans will emerge from the following three chapters, which cover the phenomenology of bodily alienation.

Chapter Two ("Anatomy of the Thigh Gap") describes the experience of women who are overinvested in their appearance, in particular, in the appearance of certain fetishized body parts. What is problematic in their relation to their bodies is the fact that they relate to their bodies as objects. This is the form of bodily alienation at stake in this chapter. In addition, I will argue that pursuing bodily activities for their own sake, as opposed to the appearance they shape, can provide an antidote to these women's alienated relation to their bodies.

Chapter Three ("Bodily Alienation and the Gaze") examines how being looked at by a member of a dominant group can provoke a sense of physical incapacitation in a member of an oppressed group. I describe the phenomenology of skillful movement and analyze the nature of the breakdown in skillful movement that the gaze of a dominant other can provoke. I explain that the form of bodily alienation at issue here consists in bodily activity that fails to connect with the world. Moreover, I discuss ways in which oppressed persons can undo their sense of alienation in the wake of the other's gaze.

Chapter Four ("Bodily Alienation and Domination") broaches the question of whether the members of dominant groups described in Chapter Three are also alienated from their bodies. I reply in the affirmative: they are unable to relate to the oppressed person in an authentic way. And this in itself constitutes a form of self-alienation. But I also argue that this self-alienation has a bodily facet. Furthermore, I describe the personal transformations that members of

dominant groups can effect when they undo the bodily habits that marginalize members of oppressed groups, and I focus on the practice of mindfulness as a component to these personal transformations.

Together, these three chapters support the claim that to be alienated from one's body involves a defective relationship to the social world. And in the fifth and final chapter ("The Social Constitution of the Body"), I take this claim to ground the thesis that the body is socially constituted. My argument thus culminates in the idea that the body only *realizes itself* in a social world. That is to say that one can live an unalienated relation to one's body only when integrated in the social world. In addition, I compare my view of the body to other projects of social criticism grounded in the study of gender, race, or the body.

The thesis as a whole not only defines the phenomenon of bodily alienation but also advances a conception of who we are as humans. One of the points I make is that freedom is essential to who we are. And I claim that freedom consists not in the capacity to be moved by one's own reasons and ends, but in living with an understanding of one's existence, that is, with an understanding of what it is to be in a world, and not just any world, but a world shared with others.

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Alienation

This chapter lays the ground for an analysis of bodily alienation by inquiring into the role played by the notion of a human essence in social critique founded the concept of alienation. As I will argue, bodily alienation involves a defective way of relating to one's bodily activities. What will be at stake in this and the following chapters is the nature of the defect inherent in bodily alienation: Does it involve the types of bodily activities pursued? Or does it concern the way in which bodily activities are pursued? Philosophers like Marx have emphasized the importance of certain types of activities in defining who we are as humans and in understanding what it is to be alienated from oneself, while others, such as Rahel Jaeggi, contend that alienation and human flourishing are to be located in the way in which we pursue activities. Marx's and Jaeggi's views correspond to two broad ways of understanding alienation: essentialist versus formalist conceptions. According to an essentialist conception of alienation, such as that espoused by Marx, alienation consists in a deviation from one's essence as a human being. In contrast, a formalist account like Jaeggi's purports to define alienation without reference to a human essence. Yet I think it is mistaken for Jaeggi to characterize her view as entirely anti-essentialist. As I will explain in this chapter, the conception of the human essence to which she covertly subscribes is, in fact, freedom.

The debate between essentialism and formalism is significant for my work because I will go on to develop a formalist conception of bodily alienation. And while I am sympathetic to Jaeggi's formalism, over the course of the subsequent chapters, I will develop a different

understanding of the human essence than she does. More specifically, I will argue that the human essence does not consist in freedom conceived of as autonomy, as she does, but in existence.

1.1 Karl Marx

Marx's *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* not only provide a paradigm for essentialist theories of alienation but are also the *locus classicus* of social critique founded on the concept of alienation. Jaeggi's account of alienation, like those of many later philosophers, takes its cues from Marx. For these reasons, I will devote a significant portion of this chapter to presenting these early writings. Marx argues that what makes us human beings is self-conscious, goal-directed, creative labor, and in so arguing, he breaks with a number of philosophical traditions which would locate our humanity in our capacity to reason. In a nutshell, his social critique rests on the claim that workers are alienated from their labor under capitalist property relations, and that this alienation is both the cause and the consequence of such relations (Marx 1978, 79). Alienated labor produces capitalist property relations, but at the same time these relations create the conditions that alienate workers from their labor.

1.1.1 Marx's Materialism

Before delving into his account of alienated labor, let me say a few words about Marx's general approach to the phenomenon. Marx's method is materialist, in that he studies, as Erich Fromm puts it, "the real economic and social life of man and the influence of man's actual way of life on this thinking and feeling" (2004, 9). This means that, for Marx, alienation is to be understood as historical phenomenon that is sustained by certain conditions of production. This stands in contrast to prior conceptions of alienation, such as Hegel's. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* Hegel describes alienation an essential stage in the progression of spirit towards self-

understanding. Hegel's is not a materialist account of alienation. As Marx himself explains in

The German Ideology:

> In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. (1978, 154)

In line with this methodology, Marx's account of alienation is based on an analysis of contemporaneous material conditions of production.

What are these conditions? Marx describes the "*contemporary* economic fact" on which his account of alienation is premised in these terms:

> The worker becomes poorer the more wealth he produces and the more his production increases in power and extent. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more goods he creates. With the *increasing in value* of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the *devaluation* of the world of men. Labour produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the worker as a *commodity*—and does so in the proportion in which it produces commodities generally. (1978, 71)

One of the main points to take from this passage is that the labor *under the conditions of private property* produces itself and the worker as a *commodity*. According to Marx, a commodity is "an object outside of us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another" (1978, 303).[1] A commodity has not only a use-value, namely, a value based on its ability to satisfy human needs, but also an exchange-value, a value based on that for which it can be traded (1978, 303-304). In saying that labor and the worker are produced as a commodity, Marx claims that these have a use-value and can be exchanged on a market. The transformation of labor and of the worker into commodities implies a departure from a certain form of life that is essential to

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[1] This quotation and the following reference are from Marx's later work, *Capital*.

human beings. To understand this departure, let us now turn to Marx's account of alienated labor.

1.1.2 Alienated Labor

There are several ways to interpret Marx's idea that we are alienated under capitalist property relations. For one thing, Marx sometimes formulates the idea of alienation in terms of the loss of a meaningful world: "So much does labour's realization appear as loss of reality that the worker loses reality to the point of starving to death" (1978, 72).[2] But this notion alone is somewhat vague. For our purposes, we will focus on another formulation of the idea of alienation, namely, as the failure to realize one's essence as a human being. In order to understand this claim, we will first need to delve into Marx's account of the human essence.[3]

To begin, Marx describes the human being as a "species being." As Allen Wood explains, this term can be applied to "the individual human being and to the common nature or essence which resides in every individual man or woman" as well as to the "entire human race" (2004, 17). In using this term in this way, Marx signals the fact that we are connected to each other in virtue of sharing an essence. Furthermore, in calling a human being a "species being," he highlights the fact we live in societies as an important facet of our being human. But beyond our

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[2] On this point and the following interpretive positions, I am indebted to Allen Wood's *Karl Marx* (2004).

[3] This chapter will not enter into the question of whether Marx came to deny that there is such a thing as human nature after the *1844 Manuscripts*. Norman Geras has devoted a short book, *Marx and Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend* (1983) to this question. Geras disputes interpretations of Marx as denying that there is a human nature; the issue rests, in part, on how to understand the sixth of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbarch*, written in 1845. There Marx writes: "the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual." Geras argues that this line (which is part of writings not intended for publication) does not deny that there is such a thing as a human nature. Rather, taken together with the surrounding lines, Marx's language suggests that humans might have *both* essential characteristics and relational ones, the latter formed through social intercourse.

social nature, he also has in mind the fact that we take the human species as our object in formulating goals and that we conceive of ourselves as part of a species: "Man is a species being, not only because in practice and in theory he adopts the species as his object […], but—and this is only another way of expressing it—but also because he treats himself as the actual, living species" (1978, 75). To take the human species as an object means to formulate goals in which we take the human condition *as such* into account, and not merely individual members of our species. Note that Marx does not think that the same applies to other animals. Whereas an animal might recognize another as belonging to its species, it lacks a concept of its own species and its behaviors do not take its species as such into account.[4]

Marx describes our species being in these terms:

> The life of the species, both in man and in animals, consists physically in the fact that man (like the animal) lives on inorganic nature […]. Man *lives* on nature—means that nature is his *body*, with which he must remain in continuous intercourse if he is not to die. (75)

In other terms, we maintain our bodies in existence through practical activity. Marx elaborates, saying that "in the first place labour, *life-activity, productive life* itself appears to man merely as a *means* of satisfying a need—the need to maintain his physical existence" (76). One feature of this life-activity is that it transforms the material world. This transformation is what Marx calls *objectification*.[5] But what is distinctive of human productive life as opposed to the productive life of other animals is that our life-activity is undertaken consciously: "Man makes his life-activity itself *the object of his will and of his consciousness*" (76, emphasis mine). He adds that human

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[4] Wood discusses these difference in our way of relating to our species and the way other animals relate to their species (2004, 18-19).
[5] As Amy Wendling explains in *Karl Marx on Technology and Alienation*, objectification is "the mixing of human force with passive matter, with human force and passive matter conceived as absolutely differing in kind" (2009, 14).

beings, unlike other animals, produce "freely"—not under the compulsion of need—and that they can do so in accordance with standards, including "the laws of beauty" (76). In sum, our essence consists in a particular type of productive activity, that is, free and conscious production: "In creating an *objective world* by his practical activity, in *working-up* inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species being, i.e., as a being that treats itself as a species being" (76).

Alienation from one's species-being is an important facet of alienated labor. According to Marx, alienation from one's species-being means that "the life of the species*"* becomes "a means of individual life" (1978, 75). In other words, practical activity is no longer put in the service of physical existence, but is mediated by the capitalist wage system: the worker's activity serves to gain wages, which are in turn used to "maintain his physical existence" (1978, 76). As Fromm notes, Marx's thought "touches here on the Kantian principle that man must always be an end in himself and never a means to an end" (2004, 43). By analogy, Marx maintains that, under capitalist property relations, the human essence is put into service for individual existence (2004, 43). This constitutes a form of alienation.

Before we enter into the three other facets of alienated labor, let me elaborate the connection between the species-being and self-realization. At several points in his discussion of alienated labor, Marx speaks of the fact that man "proves himself to be a *species being*" through his labor (76). What exactly does each human prove? Since each human is a species-being, self-actualizing consists in actualizing his or her species-being. Thus self-actualization will be tied to actualizing the self of others. It means simultaneously actualizing one's good as well as that of other humans. In other words, as Wood explains, the actualization of one's good *immediately* implies the actualization of the good of others (2004, 22). This implies that self-actualization does not affect the good of others only incidentally. Accordingly, fulfilling (that is, self-

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actualizing), labor contributes to the self-actualization of others. And this is something that

capitalist property relations preclude.

Besides alienation from one's species-being, how else does capitalism alienate us? First,

workers are alienated from the object of their labor under private property:

> The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an
> object, an external existence, but that it *exists outside him*, independently, as something
> alien to him, and that it becomes a power of its own confronting him; it means that the
> life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien.
> (1978, 72)

The object of labor is not merely as an externalization of one's activity, where by

"externalization" Marx means the fact that labor produces something separate, an "external

existence." Rather, there is a *gulf* between the worker and the product of his labor.[6] Why is this

the case? Marx explains that "the worker becomes a slave of his object" (73); this is because he

"receives an *object of work*," instead of actively creating one, and because the object of labor

becomes a "means of subsistence" (73). In other words, this enslavement means that the worker

"continues to maintain himself as a *physical* subject, and that it is only as a *physical subject* that

he is a worker" (73). As an illustration, think of the difference between creating pottery for

pleasure and being part of an assembly line to produce a computer, where the factory worker's

end is procuring wages for subsistence. In both cases, labor produces external objects: the pottery

and the computer. However, in the case of the pottery, the craftsperson does not depend on the

object of labor as a means for his subsistence, whereas the factory worker does. The dependence

relation the factory worker has to the object of labor amounts to an enslavement to the object. It

entails a form of alienation in that the factory worker has given himself over to the object on

which he depends.

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[6] In this section, I will follow Marx in his use of masculine personal pronouns to facilitate legibility.

Second, workers are alienated from their labor itself. Marx writes:

> First, the fact that labor is *external* the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labor is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labor. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labor is shunned like the plague. (74)

The forced character of labor renders labor alien to the worker; he does not undertake it willingly, and when he can, he readily avoids it. Moreover, the fact that labor is undertaken for someone else implies that "[the worker] belongs, not to himself, but to another" (74). In short, labor is alienated under private property insofar as the worker does not fulfill himself in his work, but gives his activity over to another person.

Third, alienated labor entails the worker's alienation from his fellow human beings. In Marx's words:

> …through estranged labor man not only engenders his relationship to the object and to the act of production as to powers that are alien and hostile to him; he also engenders the estranged relationship in which other men stand to his production and to his product, and the relationship in which he stands to these other men. (78)

Marx's idea that labor estranges the worker from others is important. Under capitalism, humans relate to each other according to the hierarchies imposed by standards of labor. These standards prevent human relations from fully developing. In a similar manner, I will argue later that gender- and race-based oppressions entail not only an alienation of the oppressed person from his or her body, but also from other human beings.

Following Jaeggi's interpretation of Marx, I would now like to focus on two dimensions of alienation in the self-world relations described in the *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*: the "failure to identify with what one does and with whom one does it" and "the inability

to exert *control* over what one does" (Jaeggi 2014, 12). The first dimension highlights the fact that the object of labor does not belong to the worker: "Her product is exchanged on a market she does not control and under conditions she does not control" (12). Hence the worker's sense of distance from the object of labor. Likewise, the fact that the process through which an object is produced is often fragmented, with different workers involved in each stage of its production, makes it difficult for the worker to identify with the finished product as a whole (12). With regard to the second dimension, Jaeggi draws attention to the fact that the worker's labor is "unfree activity, labor *in which* and *into which* one is forced" (13). Consider the worker sitting at her workstation supervised by another, prevented from taking breaks as she wishes to, compelled to work long hours. These two dimensions of alienated labor find their counterparts in the worker's relation to others: her relation to other workers is fragmented due to divisions in labor, and she has no control over those with whom she works (13). These two dimensions of alienated labor will prove important for understanding the condition of bodily alienation. As we will see in the following chapters, bodily alienation involves the inability to relate to others, and can entail a particular lack of control over one's body.

Now, what would constitute an unalienated relation to one's labor? In "Excerpts from James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*," Marx briefly alludes to the characteristics of unalienated labor: "Labour would be the free expression and hence the enjoyment of life" (1992, 278). This remark suggests that unalienated labor has the following features: 1) it is not coerced; 2) it is an expression of the worker's life pursuits; 3) it affords a certain pleasure. We will need to keep this remark in mind as I begin to reconstruct the nature of an unalienated relation to one's body.

In the course of this thesis, I will draw on certain elements of Marx's account of alienation while leaving others to the side. To begin, I will argue that bodily alienation consists in a certain defective way of undertaking bodily activities and entails an estrangement from the social world. In that regard, my account of bodily alienation will parallel Marx's discussion of alienated labor as involving alienation from one's activities and from others. On the flip side, there is nothing that corresponds to the idea of alienation from the object of one's labor in an account of bodily alienation. There are no two entities—the laborer and the object of labor—at stake in having a problematic relation to one's body. As concerns the idea of alienation from a species-being, or in other terms, from a human essence, I will try to avoid an overly substantive conception of who we are as humans. I will appeal to the notion of bodily activity, but a very broad one—everything from laboring activity to the subtle movements that go into sense perception (such as eye movements). I subscribe to an inclusive conception of bodily activity because I want to make sense of the possibility of alienation for a wide variety of embodiments. An able-bodied person capable of the type of productive activity Marx has in mind can be alienated from her body when she overwhelmingly focuses on her appearance, which is the subject of the second chapter of this thesis. Conversely, someone who is unable to engage in productive labor may have an unalienated relation to her body. What is at stake in claiming that someone is alienated (or not) from her body is the *quality* of her relation to her body—not the types of bodily activities she may engage in. In this regard, my conception of bodily alienation resembles Jaeggi's formalist account of self-alienation more than Marx's essentialist account.

1.2 Rahel Jaeggi

Rahel Jaeggi's *Alienation,* published in German and 2007 and translated into English in 2014, is the most significant work in recent years devoted to the concept of alienation. Her book "aims at

resurrecting alienation as a foundational concept for social philosophy" (2014, xx). This statement raises a number of questions: What is alienation according to her? Why is the concept of alienation important for social philosophy? And why does it need to be resurrected? Here are, in brief, Jaeggi's answers. First, the concept of alienation is a diagnostic concept that characterizes a defective way of relating to oneself and the world; more specifically, it is a defect in what Jaeggi calls *appropriating* oneself and the world (we will return to the notion of appropriation in due course). Second, the concept of alienation is important for social philosophy, because one of the aims of social philosophy is to identify social pathologies, and so the concept of alienation, since it describes and judges someone's relation to herself, can accomplish this aim. Third, the concept of alienation has been discredited because of its association with essentialist definitions of human being; here Jaeggi's main target is Marx's account of alienation.

1.2.1 Jaeggi's Criticisms of Marxian Philosophy

In order to reconstruct Jaeggi's understanding of alienation, let me begin with her criticisms of Marx. Marx, we have seen, conceives of alienation as estrangement from our "species-being." An essential part of what it is to be human is to objectify ourselves in laboring activities. What is pernicious about capitalism is the way it transforms the conditions under which we labor. Thus, in the background of Marx's account of alienated labor, there is a substantive view of what it is to be human. As we saw, "labor—unalienated labor—counts for Marx as the human being's essential characteristic" (Jaeggi 2014, 14). In this regard, Marx's account of human being is Aristotelian in spirit: in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle asserts that the human good consists in "activity of the soul exhibiting virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete" (1098a15-18). For Marx, what is essential to human being is not

activity of the soul, but labor. Marx's essentialism is the sticking point for Jaeggi. Alluding to

Louis Althusser's criticisms of Marx's "humanism," Jaeggi asserts that "the critique of

essentialism has become part of philosophical 'common sense'" (28). Hence her rejection of

Marx's account of alienation. This being said, she does not offer much of an argument for

rejecting Marx's essentialism. Therefore, let us pause to inquire into this "philosophical

'common sense'" to which Jaeggi alludes.

In *For Marx* (French edition published in 1965; English translation first published in

1969), Althusser argues that the transition from Marx's pre- and post-1845 writings consists in

an "epistemological break": his later writings break with the earlier ones in that they come to

constitute a *science* (2005, 227ff). This break, Althusser contends, entails a rejection of

humanism, that is, any reference to the idea of a human essence or "concept of man."[7] This is

because the idea of a human essence is *useless* for a science predicated on understanding social

relations:

> [The inadequacy of the concept of man] means that to find the reality alluded to by
> seeking abstract man no longer but real man instead, it is necessary to *turn to society*, and
> to undertake an analysis of the ensemble of the social relations. […] [O]nce this
> displacement has been put into effect, once the scientific analysis of this real object has
> been undertaken, we discover that a knowledge of concrete (real) men, that is, a
> knowledge of the ensemble of social relations is only possible on condition that we do
> completely without the *theoretical services* of the concept of man. […] In fact, this
> concept seems to be useless from a scientific viewpoint, not because it is abstract! —but
> because it is not scientific. (243)

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[7] It is worth noting the difference between the way in which Althusser uses "humanism" and the
way in which the likes of Sartre and Heidegger use the word. For one thing, Sartre labels his
anti-essentialist understanding of human being a form of humanism, a view he expresses in his
lecture *Existentialism Is a Humanism.* Likewise, Heidegger's understanding of us is anti-
essentialist; yet in his "Letter on Humanism," he embraces a form of humanism, while he rejects
Sartre's existentialist humanism (1977, 232). Thus, Althusser's equation of humanism with
essentialism lies at odds with Sartre's and Heidegger's usage.

In other terms: the concept of man is an inadequate foundation for Marx's science because it does not help make sense of the network of social relations that constitute man in his concreteness. (Althusser's mention of "theoretical services" of the concept of man alludes to his argument that humanism can also serve as an *ideology*, one which has enabled certain groups to make sense of their past.) But why exactly does the concept of man fail to shed light on "real man"? Marx's new science is founded on concepts such as "forces of production, relations of production" and on "a theory of the specific *levels of human practice* (economic practice, political practice, ideological practice, scientific practice)" (229). As such, it studies humans in their historical specificity, and so a conception of humans that is cross-cultural and ahistorical would conflict with the theoretical orientation of this new science.

This summarizes Althusser's interpretation of Marx. But where does it leave us with regard to essentialism as such? Even if we grant that this is a correct interpretation of Marx, how does it bear on the truth of essentialism as philosophical position? In the footnote referencing her allusion to Althusser, Jaeggi mentions his theory of the *epistemological break*. From this, we could reconstruct her view in several ways. To begin, she might hold the following view: (1) human beings are the product of their social relations; (2) if human beings are the product of social relations, then there is no need to make reference to the notion of a human essence in order to account for who we are; therefore, (3) there is no need to make reference to the notion of a human essence in order to account for who we are. Or Jaeggi might be said to be arguing that: (1') we take sciences such as economy and sociology as models of scientific knowledge; (2') if we take sciences such as economy and sociology as models of scientific knowledge, then (for Althusserian reasons) we need to reject any reference to a human essence; therefore, (3') we need to reject any reference to a human essence. It is far from clear that these are sound

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arguments. For our purposes, let us grant (1) and (1'). Still, (2) and (2') are not evidently true. As

Norman Geras argues in *Marx and Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend,* it might be the case

that there are constants about human beings that constitute a human essence, although we can

acknowledge that we are shaped by social relations that are culturally variable. As a result, it is

overly hasty to discredit the idea of a human essence entirely. So if Geras is right, then

essentialism would be compatible with the idea that we are to some degree social constructions

or with the status we accord to the social sciences. Consequently, if either of these is the type of

argument Jaeggi has in mind when she rejects essentialism, then her case does not stand. More to

the point, however, is the argument that Jaeggi implicitly references a notion of a human essence

in her account of alienation. We will come to this interpretive claim shortly. But first let me

describe her positive view.

1.2.2 Alienation as a "Relation of Relationlessness"

Jaeggi defines alienation as a "relation of relationlessness" (1). Alienation is, then, a defective

relation, and it is a defective relation to oneself and to the world. More specifically, alienation

marks the failure to *appropriate* oneself or one's world. She presents the connection between

alienation and appropriation in these terms:

> The conception of appropriation refers to a way of establishing relations to oneself and to
> the world, a way of dealing with oneself and the world and of having oneself and the
> world at one's command. Alienation, as a disturbance in this relation, concerns the way
> these acts of relating to self and world are carried out, that is, whether processes of
> appropriation fail or are impeded. (36)

How do these disturbances in one's relations to self and world manifest themselves? Jaeggi

elaborates: "instances of alienation can be understood as obstructions of volition and thereby—

formulated more generally—as obstructions in the relations individuals have to themselves and

the world" (34). This definition implies that alienation does not consist in a deviation of one's

being from an essence of human being. Rather, the deviation involved in alienation is situated at the level of action, in the way in which one wills. To borrow an example given by Ernst Tugendhat, someone who wills in a compulsive manner would be said to will in a defective way.[8] Now, Jaeggi claims that defective willing amounts to a deprivation of freedom: "My thesis is that alienation can be understood as a particular form of the loss of freedom, as an obstruction of what could be called, following Isaiah Berlin, positive freedom" (35).[9] For Jaeggi, positive freedom "refers not (merely negatively) to the absence of external coercion but (positively) to the capacity to realize valuable ends" (35). On her account, an unalienated life is a life of self-realization. Given her anti-essentialism, Jaeggi conceives of self-realization not in terms of the realization of "specific substantial values" but in the "manner" in which one's life is lived (6). What is the appropriate manner in which one should live one's life? For her, a sense of ownership over one's life, over one's projects and interpersonal ties, lies at the heart of an unalienated existence.

It is worth pausing here to compare Jaeggi's account of alienation and Hegel's, for, as Frederick Neuhouser highlights, there are significant similarities, and these will help sharpen the contrast between Jaeggi's and Marx's views.[10] And this contrast, I should reiterate, is important for providing the right conceptual framework for understanding bodily alienation. As we just saw, one of the cornerstones of Jaeggi's account is the notion of appropriation. This is the major affinity between her view Hegel's philosophy. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel introduces the concept of alienation in order to make sense of the development of consciousness towards full self-

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[8] Tugendhat's example is described by Jaeggi (2014, 33).
[9] I will discuss Berlin's conception of freedom in further detail in Chapter Four.
[10] See Frederick Neuhouser's review of Jaeggi's' *Alienation* in the *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* (July 2, 2007).

understanding. The *Phenomenology* describes the experiences of consciousness as it progresses through a series of conceptions of the world. Consciousness, for Hegel, has two aspects: it relates to an object (intentionality) and it relates to itself. Importantly, as Gavin Rae explains, "Hegel holds that, because consciousness's existence depends on its intentional relation to an independent object, its independent, intentional object, is an aspect of its *ontological* structure" (2012, 25). Consciousness is at first alienated in that it "does not, initially, realize that its independent, intentional object is, in actuality, an aspect of its ontological structure" (25). Thus, alienation for Hegel means that consciousness does not at first fully understand itself. The experience of alienation, however, provides consciousness with the impetus to "adopt a new shape of itself that it hopes will allow it to fully understand itself" (28). Hegel distinguishes between alienation as estrangement and alienation as externalization in order to make sense of the development of consciousness. In fact, "'alienation' translates two German words: *Entfremdung* and *Entaüsserung*: *Entfremdung* is used to refer to the state in which consciousness does not fully understand itself, and can be translated as "estrangement." Rae notes that *Entaüsserung*, or "externalization," describes "the process whereby consciousness externalizes itself in objective form and, through this self-objectification, develops a better understanding of itself" (35). Thus, externalization "is the means through which consciousness objectifies itself and learns that it is not simply a pure subject, but that its ontological structure always incorporates a relation to objectivity" (36). Externalization is required to overcome the state in which consciousness does not fully understand itself, namely, alienation as estrangement. This activity in which the subject returns to himself is an activity of *appropriation*, of making something *one's own. And in that regard, Hegel's and Jaeggi's views converge. However, and this is the key difference, Jaeggi does not conceive of appropriation as a *reappropriation* of one's essence, as Hegel does. Therefore,

insofar as they make reference to the notion of a human essence, Hegel's and Marx's views resemble each other. To summarize, what unites Hegel and Jaeggi is their emphasis on appropriation in order to overcome alienation, but what separates them is Hegel's reference to an essence of human consciousness and Jaeggi's purported refusal of any essentialism.

Jaeggi develops her account of alienation by examining four cases in moral psychology. The first concerns a person who no longer recognizes himself as the author of his actions because certain past decisions have come to determine the course of his life. He finds himself disconnected from the life he now leads. The case is not one of external coercion; yet he does not feel himself to be a "'master' of his own life" (53). In the second case, Jaeggi presents someone who does not identify with the roles he plays. The third case deals with a feminist who is divided between her feminist commitments and certain coquettish behaviors that lie at odds with these commitments. And the fourth case examines a person who is indifferent to the world around him; in this instance, Jaeggi focuses on the connection between self-alienation and alienation from the world. In order to better appreciate her phenomenology of alienation, let us delve into one of these cases. The fourth case is most apt since features of her analysis will be relevant to my account of bodily alienation, which lays the ground for the claim that the body is socially constituted.

Jaeggi adopts as her example of an indifferent person the character of Perlmann in Pascal Mercier's novel *Perlmann's Silence.* Without any apparent reason, Perlmann, who is an academic, finds himself indifferent to his work—to the positions he has held, to the criticisms he receives, to his discipline as a whole. As Jaeggi describes him, it is as though Perlmann is under a "local anesthetic" (132). Jaeggi argues that Perlmann's indifference to the world is both a form of alienation from the world and a form of self-alienation. Her argument rests on the claim that

"the self must *realize* itself *in the world* in order to become real" (141). Thus, Perlmann, insofar as he does not realize himself in the world, does not realize himself. But why think that the self must realize itself in the world to become real? In order to support this claim, Jaeggi introduces two closely connected forms of indifference: the loss of relations and the loss of identification (134-141). Not only does Perlmann lose his ties to the world, but in so doing he fails to identify with his projects and with others (for example, his work as an academic). This failure to identify with projects or other persons implies that he loses a connection to himself, since, as Jaeggi puts it, "my own fate is interwoven with that thing (or person)" (139). These considerations suggest that alienation from the world entails alienation from oneself.

Now, does Jaeggi's account succeed in offering an account of alienation without reference to a notion of human nature? In the following section, I will weigh in on whether an entirely formalist account of alienation is coherent. This will anticipate my own view of bodily alienation: like Marx, I think that we need to make reference to the notion of a human essence in defining alienation; at the same time, I believe that Jaeggi herself covertly endorses a conception of a human essence.

1.3 Alienation: Essentialism vs. Formalism

Alienation, for both Marx and Jaeggi, tracks the degree to which an individual realizes herself. Whereas Marx aligns self-realization with the realization of an essence, Jaeggi locates self-realization in the manner in which one appropriates oneself and one's world. By what standards does appropriation succeed on Jaeggi's account? Can success be measured without reference to a human essence? Jaeggi asserts:

> I need not will anything in particular; rather, I must be able to will what I will in a *free or self-determined manner*. It is not necessary, then, to identify a 'true object of willing," but

only a certain way of relating, in one's willing, to oneself and to what one wills" (34, emphasis mine).

So the standard to which Jaeggi appeals is freedom or self-determination. Stepping aside from self-realization, let us think of what it means to realize a project. Let us say that my assignment is to paint a self-portrait. There are many ways in which I could fail: I could draw a self-portrait; or I can chuck all my paintings out of frustration with their quality; or I could think that my portrait resembles me but no one else agrees because it is so poorly executed; or I could ask my sister to paint the portrait because she is a better painter. What counts as a successful realization of this project will involve such criteria as: my having carried out the painting, the use of the correct medium, the degree to which the portrait resembles me. More generally, there are two main ways in which I could fail to realize this project: either *I* do not carry out the project or my project does not meet the standards for success for that project. Likewise, reflecting now on self-realization, there are two main ways in which I could fail to realize myself: either *I* do not undertake the actions that would aim towards my self-realization, or I undertake the wrong actions. Jaeggi emphasizes the first point: the fact that I need to be the one to perform any activity that would contribute to my self-realization. In contrast, I would fail to realize myself in actions that I do not freely undertake.

Does Jaeggi's appeal to freedom imply a reference to a human essence? Yes, and no. On the one hand, one could argue that Jaeggi is importing an understanding of what it is to be a human being, namely, that it is to be a free being, who determines her ends for herself. Here the reader will be reminded of Heidegger's and Sartre's definitions of us: both philosophers define us as lacking an essence, or better yet, claim that our essence lies in our existence, that is, our capacity to take a stand on our lives. In this sense, one could say that Jaeggi espouses a type of essentialism,

where, for her, freedom would be our essential feature.[11] On the other hand, one could argue that Jaeggi does not make any reference to a human essence, in the sense that she does not discuss any particular types of activities we should aim for, *what* we should be willing. If, for example, I freely choose a life of hedonism for myself, then hedonism is a *prima facie* candidate for a fulfilling life by her lights. By contrast, for someone like Aristotle or Marx, it would be a mistake to identify the good, or happiness, with pleasure; it would mark a misunderstanding of who we are as humans. Jaeggi is sensitive to this difference; one of her motivations in adopting what she calls a formalist account is to avoid the "paternalism of a more substantial ethical theory" (34).

All of this said, I think it is important to construe Jaeggi as adopting a minimal conception of human essence, because we would fail to make sense of the aims of *social critique* founded on the concept of alienation were we not to make reference to any human essence. Alienation-based social critique does not target this or that individual's relation to herself, but aims to account for the ills that interfere with the self-realization of the members of a society as a whole. Therefore, there needs to be a common denominator across the members of that social group, a standard according to which we can say that those members fail to live fulfilling lives. To take freedom as the standard for self-realizing actions is to take a stand on who we are as human beings. Surely Jaeggi would not adopt the same criterion if she were discussing other forms of life, let's say, the self-realization of non-human animals. For these reasons, Jaeggi's own contrast between her view and Marx's is slightly misleading: hers is also an essentialist view, but it does not locate our essence in the types of activities we pursue but in how we pursue them. So while I will continue

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[11] I should note that in Chapter Four I will further discuss Jaeggi's conception of freedom and contrast it with my own. I will leave the details of her conception of freedom for that chapter. The point I wish to make here is that Jaeggi needs to appeal to some conception of the human essence in order to get her project off the ground and that this essence, for her, is freedom.

to use the distinction between *formalism* and *essentialism*, we need to keep in mind that a formalist

view like Jaeggi's is still in some regard essentialist.

1.4 Critical Phenomenologies

How does the concept of alienation contribute to social critique? The answer to this question lies

in the fact that the concept of alienation is both descriptive and normative. As Jaeggi puts it, the

concept of alienation is a *diagnostic* concept (26). Applying the concept of alienation serves both

to describe a state of affairs and to judge that state of affairs (as either good or bad). To borrow

one of her examples, if I say, "you look sick," I not only evaluate your state of health, but in my

evaluation there is the implicit belief that being sick is bad for you. I do not need to make an

inference from my evaluation of your health to the conclusion that being sick is bad. In contrast,

if I were to say, "your hair looks wet," there is no implicit belief about the goodness or badness of

of one's hair looking wet.

Because the concept of alienation combines description and evaluation, it can be used to

develop *critical phenomenologies*. Using first-person testimony, one can evaluate a state of affairs

as alienating or not, and, given such an evaluation, this state can be judged to be good or bad.

These two evaluations are related because the evaluation of a state of affairs as alienating is

simultaneously an evaluation of that state as bad. For example, Beauvoir's descriptions of

women's experiences of their bodies in light of social taboos allow us to apply the concept of

alienation to the practices that give rise to these taboos, and implicit in the application of this

concept is the judgment that these practices are bad.[12] *The deployment of the concept of alienation*

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[12] Beauvoir first delves into the alienating character of social taboos about women's bodies in the chapter of *The Second Sex* entitled "Biological Data." In this chapter, she states: "woman *is* her body as man *is* his, but her body is something other than her" (2011, 41). By this, she means that women have a more difficult relationship to their bodies than men do, not only because the experiences of menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause bring physiological burdens with them,

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within phenomenological investigations allows us to bridge the gap between the merely descriptive and the normative. Moreover, switching to the terrain of social critique as Marx does, describing a *large-scale situation* as alienating opens up the possibility of challenging it. Should we change the alienating situation? How so? In other words, alienation can function as diagnostic concept on a small scale (for example, to evaluate a person's relation to her body) or on a large scale (for example, to evaluate the racialization of social spaces). Chapter Five will develop the idea of a phenomenological social critique grounded in the use of the concept of alienation, and this idea will be contrasted with two other forms of social critique: social constructionism and poststructuralist social critique.

1.5 Towards an Account of Bodily Alienation

The account of bodily alienation I will defend in this thesis will be formalist in the sense in which Jaeggi's account of self-alienation is formalist. Although I will argue that bodily alienation involves a defective way of undertaking bodily activities, I do not further define bodily activities. In this regard, my account differs from Marx's, given his emphasis on self-realization through labor, that is, activity that objectifies parts of the natural world. Moreover, drawing on Jaeggi's work, I will argue that *bodily alienation amounts to a failure to appropriate oneself and one's world through bodily activity*. Unlike Jaeggi, though, I am explicitly interested in how we relate to the world at a bodily level and how certain bodily identities, gender and race, affect our ability to relate to world. Therefore, the cases that will be of interest to me will differ from those discussed by Jaeggi. While Jaeggi's phenomenological interpretations of alienation

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but primarily because these experiences are surrounded with taboos and because societies do not make accommodations for women during these times.

focus on cases in moral psychology, my phenomenology discusses embodiment in the context of gender- and race-based oppressions.

Why adopt formalism? Phenomenologists working on the body have focused on different features of embodiment: for example, the nature of sense perception, the nature of interpersonal relations as embodied beings. While some of these localized areas of inquiry might lend themselves to essentialist characterizations (to define the essence of perception, for instance), I am skeptical that phenomenology can define an essence of what it is to be embodied *tout court*. The scientist, looking at the human body from without, might be able to enumerate the properties of or the basic functions of the human body. But can such definitions be given when we cease to think of the body as an object? Appealing to Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Heidegger, Beauvoir asserts that the body is a "situation," where this means that the body is a field of possibilities that one can take up, and that it is not a thing (2011, 46). In defining the body as a situation, she wishes to forestall biological determinism about gender: while there may be anatomical differences between women and men, these do not define what women and men are. Rather, in understanding what women and men are, one needs to take into account both the social significance given to different bodies as well as an individual's response to this social significance. Beauvoir's conception of the body drives home the idea that in a phenomenological context we should think of the body as lacking an essence, a stable defining property or set of properties, and that, as a result, a formalist approach to bodily alienation will be most apt. Accordingly, the forthcoming chapters on bodily alienation will inquire into the structure of bodily activities, without privileging any type of bodily activity over another.

1.6 An Alienation Lexicon

Let me conclude by outlining five concepts related to alienation which I will appeal to when constructing an account of bodily alienation: structural heteronomy and powerlessness, dispossession, reification, and the loss of a meaningful world.

1.6.1 Structural Heteronomy and Powerlessness

Heteronomy means that one's will is literally determined by another, whereas structural heteronomy means that the ways in which activities are structured deprives one of agency in carrying them out. It is a form of compulsion that stems from social structures rather than the power of one person over another. As we saw in Marx's case, the worker's activity is not heteronomous in the sense that another agent has taken it over. Yet there is a sense in which the worker's actions are determined in the laboring process, because her mode of labor offers her no choices concerning the manner in which she accomplishes her labor.

Structural heteronomy can breed powerlessness in those who are oppressed by a given social structure. Powerlessness is an effect of structural heteronomy; it is the state of having lost control over one's labor. The notion of powerlessness will be of interest to us later on, as I will explain that bodily alienation can entail a loss in one's ability to deal skillfully with the world. Chapter Three will describe how the gaze of a dominant other under gender and racial oppressions can disrupt an oppressed person's ability to navigate social spaces. It will illuminate the connection between powerlessness and the structures of interpersonal interactions between members of dominant and oppressed social groups.

1.6.2 Dispossession

We saw that, for Marx, part of the worker's alienation consisted in being alienated from the object of his labor. Conversely, we could say that, under private property, the worker is

dispossessed of the fruits of his laboring activity. The object of labor is no longer one's own. Instead, it has a "power of its own." On Jaeggi's formalist account, dispossession is simply another way of spelling out the notion of alienation as a failure to appropriate oneself. The failure to appropriate oneself means that one does not fully have oneself at one's command, and this defect consists in being dispossessed of oneself. So, the difference between Marx and Jaeggi consists in this: for Marx, dispossession is a deprivation of something external, such as the object of one's labor, whereas for Jaeggi, dispossession is a deprivation of oneself, or, to put the point more intuitively, of one's activities. Chapter Three will portray the form of dispossession that arises in certain cases where an oppressed person is faced with the gaze of dominant other; here we will witness the oppressed person being deprived of her practical relations to the world.

1.6.3 Reification

Jaeggi makes the following connection between alienation and the phenomenon of reification. She describes situations in which "institutions appear as all-powerful or where systemic constraints appear to provide no place for free action," such that "alienation or reification refers to a condition in which relations take on an independent existence (*Verselbständigung*) that stand over and against those who constitute them" (2014, 5). And she cites a "dead marriage" as one such situation presumably because such a marriage affords no space for the couple to grow together. Jaeggi's description of reification is echoed in Axel Honneth's interpretation of Georg Lukács in *Reification*. There Honneth describes Lukács's conception of reification as a "habit…in which one's natural surroundings, social environment, and personal characteristics come to be apprehended in a detached and emotionless manner—in short, as things" (2008, 25). This habit, according to Lukács is the result of social relations in which subjects are "urged (a) to perceive given objects solely as 'things' that one can potentially make a profit on, (b) to regard

each other solely as 'object' of profitable transaction, and finally (c) to regard their own abilities as nothing but supplemental 'resources' in the calculation of profit opportunities" (22). Like the concept of alienation, the concept of reification is normative. Honneth explains that "[t]he normative precepts reinforcing Lukács' analysis do not consist in a sum of morally legitimate principles, but in a notion of proper human praxis" (26). In other words, the concept of reification both serves to describe and judge a condition of human action as defective.

The concepts of alienation and reification are both normative. But what exactly is the connection between the condition of alienation and that of reification? As I will explain at length in Chapter Four, a person who apprehends herself and the world in a reifying manner is at the same time alienated from herself, in that she fails to relate to herself in the proper way: instead of relating to herself as as integrated with the world, she apprehends herself as detached from it. Jaeggi elaborates on the connection between reification and alienation in her discussion of Heidegger's *Being and Time*. According to Jaeggi's interpretation of Heidegger, when we apprehend the world as a mere collection of things rather than as a complex of tools with which are involved, we misapprehend the "practical character of the world" (2014, 17). And in this reifying relation to the world, we also misapprehend ourselves. In reifying the world, one understands oneself as a "naked subject," which is "detached from the world" (18). Such an understanding fails to give due to what Jaeggi calls our "entanglement" in the world (18). Heidegger defends this idea of entanglement, or what he calls the equiprimordiality of us and the world in Chapter Three of Division I, but it would be beyond the scope of this chapter to examine his argument. The moral, though, is that the failure to understand this entanglement is a form of alienation.

The concept of reification is important for our purposes because I will argue that being reified breeds one form of bodily alienation and that embodying a reifying stance is itself another form of alienation. In Chapter Three, I will describe situations in which an oppressed person is confronted by the gaze of a dominant other, and I will interpret the dominant other's apprehension of the oppressed person as *reifying* and the oppressed person's being as *reified*. In being reified, the oppressed person comes to be alienated from her body. And in Chapter Four, I will discuss why the dominant other's reifying stance consists in a different form of alienation.

1.6.4 The Loss of a Meaningful World

Although I indicated that the loss of a meaningful world is not sufficiently precise to get a grip on Marx's conception of alienation, it is nevertheless a useful concept when used in concert with other concepts. Above I sketched Jaeggi's argument for the connection between self-alienation and world-alienation in the context of her analysis of Perlmann's character. Moreover, the account I just offered of the relationship between reification and alienation also suggests that there is a connection between self-alienation and world-alienation. Through the phenomenological descriptions that I will develop over the next three chapters, I will argue that bodily alienation and alienation from the world are tightly connected as well.[13] These three chapters will, thus, set the stage for my argument for the social constitution of the body, where I will proceed from the observation one only realizes oneself in bodily activities in a social world to the conclusion that the body is socially constituted (Chapter Five). My argument will thus parallel Jaeggi's move from the connection between self- and world-alienation to her view concerning the "sociality of the self" (2014, 216). And, in this regard, my argument will differ

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[13] I will make a slightly different claim in interpreting self-world relations in Chapter Three. I will not argue that the world is meaningless, but that it loses its habitual meaning.

from social constructionist accounts of the body, which concern the relative naturalness of the body, the extent to which the body is modified by social forces.

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My aim in this chapter has been to defend the importance of the notion of a human essence for any account of alienation, and by extension, of bodily alienation. I have argued that we need to make some reference to the notion of a human essence in offering an account of alienation. The issue turns on whether alienation can be defined exclusively with reference to the manner in which one pursues activities or whether we need to take into account the content of activities. In the subsequent account of bodily alienation, I will emphasize the manner in which bodily activities are pursued. Yet I also presuppose some understanding of what it is to be human in accounting for the difference between bodily alienation and bodily self-realization. I have also presented the repertoire of concepts I will draw on in developing a phenomenology of bodily alienation. The following three chapters will offer such a phenomenology in the context of gender- and race-based oppressions.

2

Anatomy of the Thigh Gap

This chapter launches the project of describing the phenomenon of bodily alienation. It discusses a particular form of bodily alienation: the relation we bear to our bodies when we pursue bodily activities for the sake of the appearance they will produce, and not for their own sake. What is at stake in this chapter is the task of identifying one of the two main facets of bodily alienation: the pursuit of bodily activities for the sake of social recognition. Although I acknowledge that we might reasonably pursue activities for instrumental reasons, I worry about a relationship to one's body that is overwhelmingly predicated on the pursuit of a certain appearance. And I will argue that the alienation inherent in living in such a relation to one's body can be overcome when we pursue bodily activities for their own sake.

My argument about bodily alienation and realization in this chapter mirrors Jaeggi's position on alienation and self-realization. Jaeggi herself emphasizes the pursuit of activities for their own sake as an important component to living an unalienated existence (2014, 207). By contrast, in the following chapter, I will not endorse the second criterion Jaeggi identifies as essential to an unalienated existence, the pursuit of *self-determined* activities.

I will proceed as follows. I will take as an example of bodily alienation the relation women have to their bodies when they strive for ideals of extreme thinness like the thigh gap.[1]

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[1] For the uninitiated, a thigh gap is the space some women have between their legs when they stand with their feet together. The thigh gap is a "thing" for a not insignificant portion of American women. It is flaunted on "thinspo" websites, which compile diet and exercise tips, and display pictures of fashion models and "real women" in their efforts to inspire women to become thinner. Hence the label "thinspo," which is short for "thinspiration."

First, I will describe the genesis of the thigh gap obsession. Second, I will explain why I think

that the relation women in the grip of this obsession have to their bodies is an instance of *bodily*

alienation. Third, I will canvas some responses that have been given to obsessions like the thigh

gap obsession. And, fourth, I will argue that the best response to these obsessions lies not in

broadening our beauty standards, but in pursuing bodily activities for their own sake. I call the

view I articulate in this section "sensualism." As an illustration of the use of the concept of

bodily alienation for social critique, I will conclude by discussing the role standards of beauty

play in perpetuating the oppression of women.

2.1 The Genesis of the Thigh Gap

The thigh gap arises at the intersection of two currents: feminine narcissism, which is itself a

result of gender norms, and the current association of feminine beauty and extreme thinness. This

section describes these currents, with a special emphasis on Simone de Beauvoir's ontology of

human being, since it explains how we can be led to invest ourselves in our appearance; it will

illuminate the dangers of an overwhelming focus on one's appearance.

2.1.1 Feminine Narcissism

The starting point of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947), one of Beauvoir's early works, is the

recognition that we humans are ambiguous beings. Our ambiguity is multifaceted, and includes

our subjectivity and objectivity (that is, our existence for others) (Beauvoir 1976, 7).[2] For

Beauvoir, being a subject means being self-conscious and capable of acting on the world, while

being an object means being perceivable by and open to the judgment of others. Note that

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[2] The term "ambiguity" is meant to capture the fact that we have one foot in each realm—one in
the realm of subjectivity, the other in the realm of objectivity.

Beauvoir's claim is phenomenological; she is concerned with our *experience* of ourselves as both subjects and objects, and not with defending any particular ontological dualism.[3] What is crucial about Beauvoir's conception of ambiguity is that we not only experience ourselves as both subjects and objects, but that these experiences can be at odds with one another. My choices affect others and are judged by others, and this might affect the projects I undertake.

With the ambiguity of our condition comes the temptation to *alienate* oneself. That is, as a way of coping with our ambiguity, we can either deny the existence of others and conceive of ourselves as "pure subjects," or let the presence of others determine the course of our actions and conceive of ourselves as "pure objects." But these are not the only alternatives according to Beauvoir, who believes that we can live out the tension between our subjectivity and our being-for-others without falling into bad faith.[4] In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir sees the erotic as a situation within which we can assume the ambiguity of our condition:

> The erotic experience is one that most poignantly reveals to human beings their ambiguous condition; they experience it as flesh and as spirit, as the other and as subject. Woman experiences this conflict at its most dramatic because she assumes herself first as object and does not immediately find a confident autonomy in pleasure; she has to reconquer her dignity as transcendent and free subject while assuming her carnal condition: this is a delicate and risky enterprise that often fails. (2011, 416)

There are two conclusions to draw from this passage. First, according to Beauvoir, the erotic constitutes a domain within which one can live one's ambiguity. Second, Beauvoir suggests that women are more tempted than men to identify with their "objecthood." This temptation is brought to the fore in Beauvoir's analysis of feminine narcissism.

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[3] Nancy Bauer makes this point in the chapter of *How to Do Things with Pornography* entitled "Beauvoir on the Allure of Self-Objectification" (2015, 48).

[4] As Bauer points out, Beauvoir differs from Jean-Paul Sartre in that, unlike Sartre, Beauvoir believes we are not condemned to bad faith but can embrace the ambiguity of our condition. See *How to Do Things with Pornography* (50).

In the chapter of *The Second Sex* entitled "The Narcissist," Beauvoir characterizes

feminine narcissism as one manifestation among several of women's tendency to identify

themselves with their "objecthood":

> If she can put *herself* forward in her own desires, it is because since childhood she has
> seen herself as an object. Her education has encouraged her to *alienate* herself wholly in
> her body, puberty having revealed this body as passive and desirable […]. (2011, 667-
> 668, second emphasis mine)

According to Beauvoir, "narcissism is a well-defined process of *alienation*: the self is posited as

an absolute end, and the subject escapes in it" (667, emphasis mine).[5] As she goes on to explain,

the narcissist has trouble undertaking creative projects that do not ultimately bottom out in a

celebration of her self: "many women try at such work [painting, sculpture, and literature] but

quickly abandon if they are not driven by a positive desire to create" (677). The narcissist dreams

of the glory she might achieve through a work of art, and this might spur some creative work

(677). But she would have to be intrinsically motivated by her creative project to carry it out to

completion. Beauvoir's claim that girls are taught to "alienate" themselves in their bodies

highlights the fact that feminine narcissism typically takes the form of an over-investment in

one's appearance. Over the course of the chapter on feminine narcissism, Beauvoir covers a

range of autobiographical pieces by women and discusses their repeated references to the effects

of seeing themselves in a mirror. Despite the prevalence of feminine narcissism, Beauvoir's

position on the origins of narcissism is clear: narcissism is not an essential trait of women's

psychology; instead, certain social circumstances lead women down this path. She discusses the

role dolls play in setting the stage for narcissism and in instilling in women the idea that their

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[5] Narcissism is a process of alienation on Beauvoir's view because, by positing herself as an
absolute end, the narcissist transforms herself into an idol and thereby into an object. As a result,
she fails to cope with her ambiguity.

appearance is paramount. Responding to the claim that "narcissism is the fundamental attitude of all women," she writes, "[w]hat is true is that circumstances invite woman more than man to turn toward self and to dedicate her love to herself" (667).

Let us now return to the thigh gap as a manifestation of feminine narcissism. The investment women who visit thinspo websites have in images of extremely thin women is narcissistic in Beauvoir's sense. To achieve the state portrayed in these images, including the thigh gap, requires a fixation on one's appearance. What is of concern is *not* how the thighs are experienced from within, whether they feel strong or sore when performing activities, or whether they are a source of pleasure. Instead, the *contours* of the thighs are paramount to the woman invested in her thigh gap. She matches her visual representation of her thighs with the images she browses online, almost as if she were comparing an object separate from her body with other similar items. Furthermore, the narcissistic character of the thigh gap obsession is evidenced by the place that this obsession comes to occupy in some women's lives. Cultivating the thigh gap becomes a central occupation, one that trumps other pursuits. Consider the place that it must occupy in the lives of the women who take the time to create thinspo websites or Tumblr accounts, who respond to other online viewers with dieting and exercising advice, or of the women who spend time in front of the mirror judging the space between their thighs.

In addition to referencing Beauvoir's ontology, we can appeal to Sandra Bartky's idea of "repressive narcissism" to characterize the thigh gap obsession. Bartky—who wrote much of the relevant material in 1980s—remains one of the feminist philosophers who has thought most carefully about the idea of bodily alienation. In "Narcissism, Femininity and Alienation" (1982), she calls the network of corporations that function to regulate bodily aesthetics the *fashion-beauty complex*. These corporations, whether they manufacture or market products, serve to

regulate femininity; they communicate the message that the female body is a "task, an object in need of transformation" (135). According to Bartky, women's efforts to live up to the ever-changing aesthetic norms of the complex result in alienation:

> The fashion-beauty complex produces in woman an estrangement from her bodily being. On the one hand, I *am* it and am scarcely allowed to be anything else; on the other hand, I must exist perpetually at a distance from my physical self, fixed at this distance in a permanent posture of disapproval. (135)

Fashion magazines and television shows, for example, communicate this sense of disapproval and a future-directed relation to our bodies: we can truly be fulfilled only once our bodies are transformed. Think of the ever-present theme of the makeover. The makeover promises a "new you." That is, it promises an improved version of the self through diet and exercise, makeup and clothing, and so on. Commenting on the images we receive every day, Bartky says that they "remind us constantly that we fail to measure up" (135). The effort to cultivate the right body, she elaborates, is both *narcissistic* and *repressive*: it is narcissistic because it involves an over-investment in the body's appearance, and it is repressive because the body is always experienced as in need of disciplining. She goes on to caution that "[r]epressive narcissistic satisfactions stand in the way of the emergence of an authentic delight in the body" (139).

The thigh gap obsession is of course one manifestation of feminine narcissism. Developing or maintaining one's thigh gap, at least at first, appears no different from achieving or maintaining silky hair, or smooth skin, or the perfect nails. All these "maintenance activities" require observing and correcting the body—policing it. That said, the thigh gap seems to be one of those particularly pernicious feminine pursuits insofar as it can severely threaten physical and mental wellbeing. In this context, let me comment on the ideal of extreme feminine thinness that underwrites the phenomenon.

<u>2.1.2 The "Tyranny of Slenderness"</u>

Analyses of anorexia, such as Susan Bordo's, largely apply to the thigh gap phenomenon. In

Unbearable Weight (1993), Bordo interprets anorexia and everyday preoccupations with thinness

as continuous with one another. For instance, Bordo identifies the "control axis" as a hallmark of

anorexia and a feature of everyday preoccupations with thinness. As an illustration of this axis,

Bordo cites the anorexic's extreme attempts to control her hunger (144–148). The anorexic's

obsession with hunger manifests an antagonistic relation between mind and body: mind and body

are separate, and the body must be subdued. Similarly, the need to control the body marks the

culture of thinspo: a web search of the words "thigh gap" will reveal slogans such as "do it for

the thigh gap" or "mind the thigh gap." These slogans reveal the importance of dominating the

body in thinspo culture: the thigh gap is an achievement. And the effort to achieve a thigh gap

demands strict dieting and exercise. For example, some images of the thigh gap bear instructions

on how to achieve the look (for example, "skip dinner, wake up thinner"). Thus, the thigh gap

phenomenon exemplifies the tendency to alienate oneself in one's appearance and the current

pressure to achieve the aesthetic ideal of extreme feminine thinness.

2.2 The Thigh Gap and Bodily Alienation

The body sculpting aimed at achieving the thigh gap aesthetic is worrisome for several reasons.

First, one could object to the thigh gap obsession because of its genealogical origins in

patriarchy. As Bordo explains in her treatment of anorexia, the ideal of thinness is motivated by

anxieties about women's role in society and "archetypal associations" between femininity and

insatiable appetites.[6] The thigh gap ideal fits within these traditional anxieties and associations, as the rhetoric of some thinspo websites highlights. Second, one could object to the thigh gap obsession because it is a creation of the fashion-beauty complex and not an autonomous ideal, that is, an ideal crafted by those targeted by this complex. Third, one could object to the thigh gap obsession simply because women put too much time and effort into achieving the thigh gap to the exclusion of other pursuits.

My view is that the thigh gap is objectionable for all three reasons. I wish, however, to bring out a fourth reason for which the thigh gap is objectionable. I am concerned about the thigh gap obsession because it is an instance of what I call *bodily alienation*. À la Beauvoir, I think we can experience our *bodies* both as objects and as subjects.[7] On the one hand, when we experience our bodies as objects, we tend to appreciate our bodies as things and compare them to other things; most often we compare our bodies to other human bodies. This is the type of appreciation of the body that is evidenced in the thigh gap phenomenon. On the other hand, when we experience our bodies as subjects, the body tends to disappear from the center of our awareness. Consider the example of a blind person who learns how to use a cane to guide her movements.

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[6] Bordo attributes gender associations between women and anorexia to two factors: first, the "fear and disdain for traditional female roles and social institutions"; second, "a deep fear of 'the Female,' with all its more nightmarish and archetypal association of voracious hungers and sexual insatiability" (1993, 155). As an illustration of the first factor, she highlights some anorexic adolescents's disgust before the female body: they express disdain for "womanly" bodies, and some go so far as to avow the desire to remain children forever (Bordo 1993, 155-156).

[7] The distinction I introduce here between our experience of our bodies as objects and our experience of our bodies as subjects mirrors Husserl's distinction between the human body as a material thing (*Körper*) and the human body as it is lived in everyday experience (*Leib*). To review several points from the Introduction, the body is conceived as a material thing under the *natural scientific attitude*. This is the attitude my doctor adopts when she examines my body. The human body as we respond to it in everyday dealings, though, is apprehended in the *personalistic attitude*. In the context of this discussion, I wish to focus on our capacity to shift perspectives on our bodies, and to experience it more or less as an object.

She focuses on the cane in order to understand how to manipulate it and how it can guide her. With time, though, the cane becomes integrated into her body such that it feels like an extension of her arm. There is also the dancer who learns a new set of choreographed dance moves. He puts effort into learning them first by slowly focusing on and executing each move. But with time they become seamlessly integrated in his repertoire of dance moves; they become second nature. It is important to note that in order for the object or skill to become incorporated it eventually needs to recede from the subject's attention. Commenting on the case of the phenomenology of skillful activity, Kristin Zeiler explains that the cane needs to recede from the blind person's focus in order to serve as that from which she perceives the world (2013, 72-73).[8] In other words, if the cane does not recede from reflective awareness then it cannot serve to point to other objects. So too, the dancer will not perform his dance with the same grace and mastery if his awareness remains focused on the details of how to execute each move.

The aspect of the thigh gap obsession I am concerned with is the excessive focus on *the body as an object*. Women in the grip of this obsession overwhelmingly live their bodies from the outside, and this is evident from the place that mirrors and photographs occupy in sustaining the phenomenon. This excessive outward focus is a form of bodily alienation, which mirrors the (existential) alienation Beauvoir identifies in those who try to live as though they were objects and abjure their agency. To remind the reader, I consider the concept of bodily alienation to be a *diagnostic* concept. Thus, in applying the concept of bodily alienation to the thigh gap phenomenon, I am claiming that this obsession is problematic. How, then, can we undo the

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[8] Zeiler develops these points about the phenomenology of skillful activity in her article "A Phenomenology of Excorporation, Bodily Alienation, and Resistance: Rethinking Sexed and Racialized Embodiment." We will return to them in Chapter Three.

alienation inherent in the phenomenon? The next section explores Bartky's solution and similar

positions in the current body positivity movement.

2.3 Responses to Bodily Alienation

At the end of "Narcissism, Feminism, and Alienation," Bartky advocates a "non-repressive

narcissism" (139). She claims that feminist efforts to attack sexual objectification have divided

theorists into factions that have either failed to address the psychological hold that "conventional

standards of dress and appearance" have on women or have advocated a form of asceticism

where "both body display and the need to be admired are taboo" (139–140).[9] Bartky, however,

worries about the latter strategy: "But if there are legitimate narcissistic needs, such asceticism

ignores them" (140). Because of this worry, she argues that we need to develop a feminist

"practice" in which "our ideas of the beautiful will have to be expanded and so altered that we

will perceive ourselves and one another very differently than we do now" (140). Bartky

concludes that we can embrace a form of narcissism in which "our capacity to apprehend the

beautiful" can be released from "the narrow limits within which it is now confined" (140). In

sum, what would make this feminist narcissism non-repressive is the expansion of ideals of

beauty.

Some voices in the current body positivity movement have also been drawn to the idea of

a "non-repressive narcissism."[10] Put simply, the aim of this movement is to "reclaim" the body

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[9] When Bartky speaks of asceticism, I take her to refer to a lifestyle that eschews any celebration of physical appearance. Such a lifestyle might involve wearing plain clothes or not wearing makeup.

[10] As the bloggers for the "Ellipses Project" write, the body positivity movement contests a culture that "recognizes only white, able-bodied, heterosexual, and thin bodies as worthy and beautiful."

from a culture that only values certain bodies as "worthy and beautiful."[11] The movement encourages those whose bodies do not fit dominant norms to embrace their bodies. The issue, then, is how to define the reasons for embracing one's body. For some body positive activists, we should be body positive because "all bodies are beautiful."[12] A message like this resembles Bartky's positive recommendation since it promotes an appreciation of the body as an aesthetic object—regardless of dominant ideals. "All bodies are beautiful" can be thought of as a non-repressive, yet narcissistic, message.

While suggestions like Bartky's non-repressive narcissism have found support within this movement, others within the same movement have questioned them. For example, in the case of the thigh gap, we are faced with responses such as "real women like curves." Such responses shift the aesthetic norm from thinness to curvaceousness. Women who do not meet the thinspo ideal can feel beautiful, now that their bodies are accepted. But some directly challenge the imperative that women should *be* and *feel* beautiful. They object to the demand that women *should* feel beautiful. As Kaila Prins explains in "3 Reasons Why Body-Positive Ad Campaigns Are Less Empowering Than You Think," the barrage of advertisements featuring "real beauty," such as those in Dove's recent campaign, reinforces the sense that beauty is paramount for women.[13] The advertisements imply that we should broaden the norms for feminine beauty, since we women must first and foremost feel beautiful. I too worry about such campaigns since they do not challenge the longstanding imperative to be beautiful that has dominated women's lives.

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[11] These quotes are also drawn from the above-mentioned presentation of body positivity.

[12] This is the ethos embraced by the "The Nu Project," which encourages women to upload pictures of their bodies and then download them back onto their computers with the banner "this body is beautiful" overlaid on their pictures.

[13] This article appeared in the online journal *Everyday Feminism* on May 5, 2015.

The question still remains of how we should relate to our bodies. In "3 Ways the Body-Positivity Movement Could Be More Body-Positive," Prins not only discourages us from defining ourselves in terms of beauty, but also advises us to focus on our lives as a whole.[14] For instance, we should focus less on our bodies and more on pursuits like volunteer work or intellectual achievements. This call from body-focus to life-focus brings us back to Beauvoir's concept of existential ambiguity. Recall that, for Beauvoir, in focusing on our lives, on personal projects or social causes, we can negotiate our ambiguity and move from self-objectification toward transcendence.

Although Bartky does not argue that a non-repressive narcissism will be the only solution to the problem of the culture of repressive narcissism women live in, I am concerned that this idea has limited potential. It invites too much of a focus on appearance: let's *broaden* standards of beauty, but keep beauty as an ideal. She presents non-repressive narcissism as the solution to avoiding an uncritical allegiance to conventional standards of beauty or embracing asceticism. However, I believe that we can cultivate a way of being towards our bodies that avoids both alternatives and that does not run the risk of reinforcing women's tendency to seek validation through their appearance. In other words, Bartky's idea is attractive, but there is a better solution than hers to the repressive narcissism at the heart of phenomena like the thigh gap. The following section presents my own solution, which I call "sensualism."

2.4 Sensualism

As we learned in the preceding chapter, in "Excerpts from James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*," Marx indicates that unalienated labor would be "the free expression and hence the

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[14] This article appeared in *Everyday Feminism* on January 14, 2015.

enjoyment of life."[15] In this spirit, I will argue that conceiving of bodily activity as an

"expression of one's life" holds the key to responding to the thigh gap phenomenon.[16]

2.4.1 Expressive vs. Commodifying Relations

What does it mean to conceive of bodily activity as an expression of one's life? The contrast I

have in mind is between a commodifying relation to one's bodily activity and an expressive one.

Commodification means that something that would not ordinarily be a commodity becomes one,

and something becomes a commodity when it acquires a value that goes beyond its ability to

meet human needs; it acquires an exchange value, which is its value in relation to other

commodities.[17] The commodification at stake in the thigh gap phenomenon involves pursuing

bodily activities for the sake of social valorization. Bodily activity is put to use not merely for

realizing personal ends, but in exchange for social worth. Note that commodification differs from

an instrumental relation: an activity or object can be put in the service of any end in the case of

an instrumental relation, but in the case of commodification, the end is exchange.[18] The

commodifying relation in the thigh gap phenomenon, then, consists in pursuing bodily activities

to transform the body into a socially valorized object. The thigh gap itself, like a commodity, is

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[15] See Marx's "Excerpts from James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*" (1992, 278).

[16] My understanding of bodily activities is very broad. It includes everything from activities that move the body (for example, running) to activities performed while not moving the body as a whole (for example, breathing or eye training exercises). Moreover, my account does not privilege any type of activity over another. All bodily activities are candidates for being expressions of one's life.

[17] See the first chapter of Volume I, Book I, Part One of *Capital*: "The commodity is, first of all, an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind. […] The usefulness of a thing makes it a use-value. […] Exchange-value appears first of all as the quantitative relation, the proportion, in which use-values of one kind exchange for use-values of another kind" (Marx 1990, 125–126).

[18] My point is not that instrumental uses of the body are problematic. At times, such as physical rehabilitation, we might relate to our bodily activity as a means towards an end (such as, reestablishing physical ability). Rather, my point is that treating the body as a *commodity* is problematic. Trouble arises when physical activity is put in the service of social valorization.

traded—for a certain social cachet.[19] Take, for example, cases of celebrities who have their thighs photoshopped in order to achieve a thigh gap. It seems that such celebrities are motivated to achieve the look in order to be admired for their physique. One's thigh gap becomes an asset in a culture focused on feminine slenderness.

How does an expressive relation to one's bodily activity differ from a commodifying relation? Consider the following analogy. Take the case of someone's facial expression (her smile) as conveying something about her mental life (her joy). Of course, smiling can be used as means toward an end (such as coaxing someone into doing something). However, the expressive relation between the smile and joy lies in the smile deriving from the emotional state. By analogy, to say that a bodily activity is an expression of one's life would be to say that it is undertaken for the sake of a life pursuit and not for any other reason. So, if I am a mountaineer, I perform the physical activities required for climbing a mountain; if I am a dancer, I perform the physical activities that are part of my choreography, and so on. In one regard, the woman who pursues a thigh gap could be said to undertake physical activities, such as dieting and exercising, for the sake of a certain life pursuit—to be as thin as possible. But this life pursuit is undertaken for the sake of achieving social capital. Therefore, in the end, the bodily activities tied to the thigh gap are put in the service of social worth.

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[19] Here the reader might be reminded of Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *social capital,* which corresponds to one's "relational power," a form of power that depends on the number and strength of useful social relations. In "The Forms of Capital," Bourdieu defines social capital in these terms: "Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (1986, 51).

2.4.2 Pursuing Bodily Activities for Their Own Sake

Building on the distinction between expressive and commodifying relations, my response to the thigh gap phenomenon and other obsessions is to encourage those under the grip of them to cultivate *physical activities* undertaken for the sake of life pursuits—not for the sake of achieving a certain appearance. Pursuing bodily activities for their own sake means not pursuing these activities for the appearance they produce, even though the pursuit of activities for their own sake might result in changes in one's appearance. This is to say that we should cultivate an expressive rather than a commodifying relationship to our bodies. My version of body positivity does not require that we focus less on our bodies, but that we reconsider what it means to focus on the body.

Here let me note that my view concerning the pursuit of activities for their own sake resembles Jaeggi's. I have contrasted activities pursued for instrumental reasons *simpliciter* from activities pursued for the sake of social valorization, and these from activities pursued for their own sake. Although Jaeggi herself does not make this threefold distinction, our views converge. Here's why.

Jaeggi privileges activities pursued for their own sake for the following reasons. While she acknowledges "[i]t is never impossible to avoid action grounded in means-end reasoning," she nevertheless maintains that a life led where each action is a means to the end of another action cannot be one in which one realizes oneself. Take the following example: consider a person who pursues a college degree for the sake of getting a foot into a business sector, where one's foot in that door is for the sake of getting a higher paying job, where getting the higher paying job is pursued for the sake of the next higher paying job, and so on. This seems to be the type of life Jaeggi has in mind—a life exclusively composed of a series instrumentally valuable

actions—when she defends the necessity of pursuing some activities for their own sake. While such a life might not intuitively seem meaningful, let us dig a little deeper to see why Jaeggi argues for the necessity of pursuing activities for their own sake. At one point in her reasoning, Jaeggi introduces the idea that an action that is the means to an end can be substituted for another action that can achieve the same end; this means that each of these instrumentally valuable actions is only extrinsically valuable, valuable only insofar as it can achieve the end. Stepping back and looking at the scale of an entire life, a series of actions pursued only for the sake of the next action would be seem to a life of substitutable acts. Then one could argue such a life would not properly be *my own*. If this is what Jaeggi has in mind, then it seems that *identifying with an activity* is a component of *realizing oneself* in that activity. And this interpretation is in line with the emphasis on identifying with one's activities we encounter throughout *Alienation*.

My view and Jaeggi's converge on the importance of pursuing activities for their own sake, but for different reasons. For one thing, I do not believe that the thigh gap phenomenon exactly fits Jaeggi's model, because those who strive for the thigh gap ideal might identify with the activities related to the pursuit of extreme thinness. Instead, I believe that one of the problems with the pursuit of bodily activities for the sake of social capital is that this pursuit can conflict with other aspects of one's identity—for two reasons. First, the pursuit of extreme thinness might conflict with one's other values. Second, this pursuit might conflict with one's pursuit of other activities, simply because of the physical and psychological harm excessive dieting and exercising can cause. So let's take each of these conflicts in turn.

As an example of the first type of conflict, let me take my own case. My preoccupation with thinness began at an early age, because I was encouraged to model starting at puberty. However, throughout my adolescence I preferred my intellectual and musical pursuits over the

idea of modeling, and I continued to prefer these pursuits past the age of runway modeling. Yet, there was always a part of me that wished to conform to the model appearance, and in particular the thigh gap ideal, since part of the conception of myself that I borrowed from others was that I was "model material." Moreover, this preoccupation came to conflict with my identity as a feminist because I think that the fashion industry's norms have a particularly pernicious effect on women's lives. Relatedly, I do not imagine that a similarly intellectually or musically talented male adolescent would have felt the same pressure to model. There was a bias because of my gender. I gradually became aware that the particular bodily norms that had been instilled in me, as well as a certain understanding of femininity, were the projections of my milieu. They were not my own ideals. I could reject them.[20]

Second, the pursuit of the thinspo ideal can easily conflict with one's chosen life pursuits, simply because excessive dieting naturally interferes with physical and psychological functioning. This is a point that Naomi Wolf emphasizes in *The Beauty Myth* (2002), which devotes a chapter to the topic of hunger. It covers a range of phenomena, from the fatalities associated with eating disorders to the psychological effects of living in a semi-starved state. Commenting on the cult of the fear of fat in an earlier chapter, Wolf writes, "[This new religion] prevents women from fully inhabiting the body, keeping us waiting for an apotheosis that will never arrive" (129). This statement encapsulates the nature of the alienation explored in this chapter.

At this point, the reader might object that the pursuit of a certain appearance might not conflict with other life pursuits. Let us imagine someone who has given herself over so

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[20] This example of conflicts of values resembles Jaeggi's example of the feminist who is divided between her feminist identity and the self that emerges from her coquettish behavior. See Chapter 7 of *Alienation*: "'She but Not Herself': Self-Alienation as Internal Division."

completely to her appearance that the pursuit of a certain physique does not create any conflicts. Consider, for example, a model whose sole aim in life is to perfect her appearance. She focuses exclusively on dieting and exercising, and this pursuit does not conflict with others. One could say that this is a problematic case, simply because we think that having a single life pursuit—whether related to physical appearance or not—is worrisome. More to the point, though, I worry about this case simply because of the reifying character of the model's relation to her body. She treats her body as something to be controlled, and in so doing misapprehends the being of her body, namely, precisely that it is *not* a thing.[21] As I noted in the Introduction, the body is considered to be a thing from the perspective of scientific inquiry. However, from the point of view of our own experience, the body is the medium through which we perceive and act in and on the world. In effect, the model is alienated from her body because her relation to her body rests on an ontological mistake.

On a separate note, one might worry that the pursuit of activities for their own sake could itself lead to an intuitively problematic relation to one's body. Consider an athlete who does not pursue bodily activities for the sake of her appearance, but for their own sake: let's say that she thrives in her activities as a tennis player. Yet this athlete takes performance-enhancing drugs to perfect her game. I worry about this case for three reasons. First, I am concerned about the potential health problems this athlete might encounter. Second, there are of course concerns about fairness between her and her competitors. These could be viewed as conflicts of values—either for the athlete or for her sport: the value of health, the value of fairness. Third, one might argue that there is a form of deprivation involved in the use of performance-enhancing drugs,

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[21] The model's attitude toward her body is akin to the reifying stance embodied by the dominant persons I will portray in Chapter Four. Whereas the model reifies her own body, dominant persons reify others. In both cases, though, their reifying stances are modes of bodily alienation.

namely, the loss of the experience of physical recovery. As a result, here, too, there is a

problematic way of relating to one's body: one robs oneself of a certain part of the experience of

being physically active. [22]

2.4.3 Sensualism

According to sensualism, we can overcome bodily alienation by pursuing physical activities for

their own sake. But what activities could promote an unalienated relation to one's body? My

response is that any bodily activity that is enjoyed for its own sake and not as a means to shaping

physical appearance counts: breathing exercises, yoga, sports, sex, and so on. In the case of the

thigh gap, cultivating an unalienated relation to one's body can be achieved by shifting one's

focus to activities that are pursued for their own sake. Simply put, one can develop a positive

relation to one's body *at a bodily level*. Body positivity can encourage us to reject the imperative

to feel beautiful and to refocus our energy on our whole selves. And we can do this *through our

bodies*. This brings us again back to Beauvoir, for whom the erotic could allow us to negotiate

our existential ambiguity. She asserts that the willingness to be vulnerable during sex might

allow us to assume our being-for-others, without falling into a narcissistic fixation on our

appearance. In other words, according to her, we can be objects in some regard during sex, but

we can simultaneously resist the temptation to objectify ourselves.

The possibility that bodily activity could become an expression of one's life pursuits has

several implications, two of which I will lay out here. First, it opens up the possibility of a more

pleasurable relation to one's body in the following sense: instead of being an object that needs to

be subdued, the body becomes a potential site of pleasure. This is not to say that shedding norms

like the thigh gap will guarantee states of bodily pleasure; we are vulnerable to physical

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[22] I owe this point to Charles More.

suffering. Rather, shedding such norms means letting go of the need to dominate the body, which, in turn, could lay the ground for a less unpleasant experience of one's body.[23] Second, it opens up the possibility for broader interpersonal connections. As we saw in the previous chapter, Marx argues that the alienation workers experience from their laboring activity also comes with an alienation from others. Think of the woman invested in her thigh gap, who spends time online on thinspo websites or alone in her room checking her body, and of her isolation. Embracing the sensualism I defend here might lead to more robust interpersonal connections. Many bodily activities are performed together, and even those that are not are typically integrated in a larger social world. Consider, for example, a professional pianist who practices in private; although she plays in solitude, she is preparing to play for others.

Against Bartky's invitation to cultivate a non-repressive narcissism, I believe we should cultivate a certain sensualism. The better antidote to the thigh gap is not an inclusive, non-repressive, narcissism, but an appreciation of the body in its sensual character. This sensualism is compatible with asceticism in appearance, but it removes the sting from this asceticism, the very sting that motivated Bartky's move towards the idea of non-repressive narcissism. My view does not imply that we should never seek recognition for our appearance, but it introduces a response to the thigh gap and its ilk that shifts our attention from the need to be recognized for

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[23] I do not mean to imply that control cannot play a role in an unalienated relation to one's body. For example, control is part of some physical activities—maintaining balance in gymnastics or pacing oneself in an endurance event. Rather, I wish to distinguish between trying to dominate the body (as we do when we internalize hard to attain aesthetic ideals) and controlling the body (as we do when we master a physical exercise). The difference between control and domination rests on the aim with which an activity is undertaken. Controlling the body is aimed at accomplishing a skillful activity, while dominating the body is aimed at achieving a certain bodily shape.

our appearance. In short, my response operates on a different level than the confrontation between repressive versus non-repressive narcissism.

2.5 Women's Oppression and Standards of Beauty

Let me close by situating the role of beauty standards in sustaining women's oppression. This discussion is important because this dissertation aims to defend the use of the concept of bodily alienation for the purposes of social critique. This section illustrates how the concept of bodily alienation can advance a critical project.

In the previous chapter, I explained that Marx regards alienated labor to be both the cause and the result of private property. I believe that the same holds of the alienation that originates in beauty standards and women's oppression. Adherence to thinspo and other standards of beauty contributes to women's oppression because the work that goes into conforming to these standards is a form of *exploitation*.[24] In order to support this claim, let me introduce the concept of *beauty work*.[25] In *The Beauty Myth*, Wolf argues that beauty work constitutes a "third shift" of labor that women have to do besides the traditional "second shift" of domestic and caring work (2002, 25). This work consists in the time and money women invest in order to perfect and maintain their appearance and to conform to feminine aesthetic norms. Personal beauty promises

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[24] In "Five Faces of Oppression" (1990), Iris Young argues that oppression is a multifaceted phenomenon in which social structures affect a social group in one or more of the following ways: 1) disempowerment; 2) exploitation; 3) marginalization; 4) cultural imperialism; 5) violence. Oppression, more generally, involves the subordination of members of a social group merely in virtue of their membership in that group; it does not entail that another social group intentionally target members of the subordinate group.

[25] Here I would like to acknowledge my debt to Hilkje Haenel's comments on an earlier draft of this chapter, which pointed me in the direction of Wolf's notion of beauty work.

social status, better employment prospects, and often the security of finding a partner.[26] But why think of beauty work as exploitative? As Iris Young puts it, "[t]he central insight expressed in the concept of exploitation […] is that this oppression occurs through a steady transfer of the results of the labor of one social group to benefit another" (1990, 49). So, if beauty work is a form of exploitation, which social group is the beneficiary? To return to Bartky's work, the beneficiary is the fashion-beauty complex. The complex benefits through the profits reaped by selling beauty products and glamorizing certain lifestyles. Women benefit, in some sense, from their exploitation in that their value as romantic partners and professionals is enhanced by living up to the standards of this complex. But, overall, since the game is organized so that women always fail to live up to ever-changing standards, they are always at the mercy of the complex, and their beauty work ultimately benefits this complex. My view, then, is that beauty work is a form of exploitation, and to that extent, a form of oppression. The beauty work that goes into thinspo is no exception to this: cultivating a thigh gap could involve purchasing dieting products and gym memberships as well as buying the clothing that will best showcase a thin physique. And the cult many thinspo adepts pay to fashion models underscores the connection between certain lifestyles and consumer products, and the pursuit of thinness.[27]

In keeping with this analysis, it is worth noting that beauty work could also be interpreted as a form of what Pierre Bourdieu calls "symbolic violence." Symbolic violence differs from "overt violence" in that this form of violence presupposes of those subjected to it a "complicity which is neither a passive submission to an external constraint nor a free adherence to values"

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[26] For further details, see sociologist Catherine Hakim's work on women's issues, and in particular, women's employment, in her 2010 article "Erotic Capital."
[27] As an example, consider the blog "Skinny Gossip," which mainly comments on the bodies of models.

(Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 168). In *The Logic of Practice*, Bourdieu says it is a form of violence that is "disguised, transfigured, in a word, euphemized" (1990a, 126). And in "La domination masculine," Bourdieu regards sexual oppression in the West to be, at least in part, an effect of symbolic violence (1990b, 5). The case of beauty standards fits the analysis of sexual oppression in terms of symbolic violence. Women subscribe to these standards neither because they are physically coerced, nor because they freely choose them. They are caught in an intermediate position in that they adhere to standards because they are socialized to do so and because the penalties for not conforming to them are high. (Think of the stigma women in the West face when they do not conform to standards for female body hair.) Thinspo is a form of symbolic violence. It is an ideal that young women believe they freely embrace, but are in fact seduced into adopting in a culture that is predicated on preventing them from living fully liberated lives. In fact, Wolf's analysis of beauty standards highlights the role they play in keeping women "in their place." She argues that, in the wake of the progress achieved by the second wave of feminism, the expectation that middle-class Western women be beautiful increased as a way of curtailing their newfound freedom:

> Since middle-class Western women can best be weakened psychologically now that we are stronger materially, the beauty myth, as it has resurfaced in the last generation, has had to draw on more technological sophistication and reactionary fervor than ever before. The modern arsenal of the myth is a dissemination of millions of images of the current ideal […]. It is summoned out of political fear on the part of male-dominated institutions threatened by women's freedom, and it exploits female guilt and apprehension about our own liberation […]. (2002,16)

The images of thinspo are no exception. In keeping with Wolf's argument, I would add that the mindset of thinspo is an effort to *master* the social forces whose aim are to force women into submission. Commenting on the psychology of eating disorders, Wolf herself writes:

> anorexia, bulimia, even compulsive eating, symbolically understood, are not actual diseases. They begin, as Susie Orbach notes, as sane and mentally healthy responses to an

insane social reality: that most women can feel good about themselves only in a state of permanent semistarvation. The anorexic refuses to let the official cycle master her: By starving, she masters it. (2002, 198)

Likewise, the pursuit of thinness, as it is manifested in present-day thinspo, is an effort to master the demands that aim to master women.

My point in invoking Young, Wolf, and Bourdieu is to draw attention to the roles ideals of beauty play in women's oppression. The issue at stake is not overt violence, but a disguised violence that robs women of their psychological wellbeing.

To return to the question of the causal relations between alienation and oppression, I believe that women's oppression is both a cause of bodily alienation and that this alienation subtends this oppression. This is because women appear to be locked in a cycle in which they are incentivized to cultivate a certain appearance, while, at the same time, cultivating this appearance maintains this appearance as a norm. Thus, the exploitation of women through beauty work is a self-sustaining phenomenon. The problem this chapter has sought to address is how to break out of this vicious cycle, and I have argued that sensualism offers a way out of the demands of beauty work. But what incentive do women have to break out of the circle? Why adopt sensualism?

The incentive, I have suggested, lies in having a more pleasurable relation to one's body. But does this incentive trump those promised by beauty work? And if not, can this situation be changed? The possibility for personal change can be strengthened by being part of a smaller community, a community of resistance. To defend this point, let me draw on one of the essays collected in the volume *Embodied Resistance: Challenging the Norms, Breaking the Rules* (2011). The volume, edited by Chris Bobel and Samantha Kwan, investigates the activism of *communities* whose bodily practices or aesthetic preferences are marginalized. And the essay,

entitled "The Specter of Excess: Race, Class, and Gender in Women's Body Hair Narratives,"
analyzes an experiment in which participants, college-age women from a course on women and
health, were asked not to shave and to record their feelings about their bodies. The authors of the
experiment, Breanne Fahs and Denise Delgado, found that "[a]lthough the original intent of the
experiment was to challenge social norms and subvert compulsory shaving demands, the
assignment ultimately created a new social norm within the classroom" (2011, 23). In fact, the
students who had originally decided to opt out of the experiment eventually decided to join the
other women who were not shaving, since they felt left out. In other words, not shaving became
the social norm within this community. Not only that, but the experiment encouraged some of
the women to continue not shaving after it was over (23). And regardless of whether they
returned to shaving or not, the women's responses to the surveys post-experiment "indicate that
even temporary and purposeful breaks from social norms can powerfully socialize women into
an altered understanding of how much they 'choose' to do things such as shave, wear makeup, or
conform to standard presentations of femininity" (21). The experiment served to raise awareness
of the norms that the women subscribed to for the most part without thinking. In the same vein,
Wolf stresses the role women's communities can play in challenging the imperative that women
be beautiful. She analyzes both the competitive mindset that women fall into in light of beauty
norms and the promise overcoming this attitude holds for overturning the beauty myth. In her
concluding remarks, she calls on women to collaborate across generations (2002, 283–284) and
to reinterpret beauty in a way that is "noncompetitive" and "nonhierarchical" (286).

The point of the essays collected in *Embodied Resistance* is to demonstrate that
countercultures, small communities that resist social norms, can support those who challenge
them. As a result, I think that the incentive to embrace sensualism will be bolstered when women

can come together to resist alienating standards of beauty. Or, to put this point negatively, the promise of a sensual relation to their bodies might, alone, be insufficient to motivate some women to give up the prizes they win from conforming to standards of beauty. Whereas the rhetoric of thinspo websites exemplifies the competitiveness of the beauty arena, as women comment on which models are thinner than others and on those who have "lapsed" by gaining weight, my philosophy of sensualism is entirely non-competitive. It focuses on each person's experience of her own body. This philosophy may take hold when we create environments that foster a sensual relation to our bodies. Our task should not be to elevate any particular physique as an ideal, but to enshrine sensualism as a social norm.

3

Bodily Alienation and the Gaze

This chapter carries on the project of characterizing the phenomenon of bodily alienation. I will explore cases where, in the context of gender- and race-based oppressions, being looked at by a member of a dominant group disturbs the skillful activity of a member of an oppressed group. Moreover, I will consider ways in which oppressed persons can respond to this gaze. My primary aim here is to define the second of the two main facets of bodily alienation: what I will call *deworlded activity*. This term is meant to capture the fact that the skillful activity of the person being looked at does not establish any connections with the world. She or he becomes divorced from the world in the wake of the dominant person's gaze. On the flip side, I will claim that bodily self-realization requires the pursuit of what I call *worldly activity*, that is, activity that opens up possibilities for being in the world. This chapter thus contributes to establishing the connection between bodily alienation and alienation from the social world, which will be the focus of Chapter Five.

Whereas in the previous chapter I agreed with Jaeggi that the pursuit of (bodily) activities for their own sake is an important aspect of (bodily) self-realization, here I will part ways with her regarding her second criterion for self-realization, which is the pursuit of self-determined activities. This is because I do not believe that the concept of self-determination is useful for discussing the phenomenology of skillful activity. Instead, I will propose that we should understand bodily realization in terms of the pursuit of activities performed in such a way that it is appropriate to call them partly self-determined and partly motivated by an external source.

I will begin with four cases concerning gender and race that illustrate the connection

between bodily alienation and the gaze of a dominant other. I will then discuss the genesis of this

form of bodily alienation before turning to the issue of deworlded activity. Next, I will argue that

bodily alienation entails an alienation from the social world and that, conversely, bodily self-

realization involves reintegrating the social world. I will close by examining some disanalogies

between the cases dealing with gender and those dealing with race.

3.1 The Phenomenon of Bodily Alienation: Four Cases

Passage 1: The White Gaze

> And then we were given the occasion to confront the white gaze. An unusual weight
> descended on us. The real world robbed us of our share. In the white world, the man of
> color encounters difficulties in elaborating his body schema. […] As a result, the body
> schema, attacked in several places, collapsed, giving way to an epidermal racial schema.
> In the train, it was a question of being aware of my body, no longer in the third person
> but in triple. In the train, instead of one seat, they left me two or three. I was longer
> enjoying myself. I was unable to discover the feverish coordinates of the world. I
> existed in triple: I was taking up room. I approached the Other…and the Other, evasive,
> hostile, but not opaque, transparent and absent, vanished. Nausea. (Fanon 2008, 90-92)

Passage 2: Responding to the White Gaze

> Despite what I think about myself, how I am for-myself, her perspective, her third-person
> account, seeps into my consciousness. I catch a glimpse of myself through her eyes and
> just for that moment I experience some form of double consciousness, but what I see does
> not shatter my identity or unglue my sense of moral decency. Despite how my harmless
> actions might be constructed within her white racialized framework of seeing the world, I
> remain capable of resisting the white gaze's entry into my own self-vision. I am angered.
> Indeed, I find her gaze disconcerting and despicable. As I undergo this double
> consciousness, my agency remains intact. My sense of who I am and how I am capable of
> being – that is, the various ways in which I am able to deploy an oppositional form of
> self-representation – has not been eradicated. I know that I am not a criminal or a rapist.
> At no point do I either desire to be white or begin to hate my dark skin. And while I
> recognize the historical power of the white gaze, a perspective that carries the weight of
> white racist history and everyday encounters of spoken and unspoken anti-Black racism, I
> do not seek *white* recognition, that is, the white woman's recognition. Though I would
> prefer that she does not see me through the distorting Black imago, I am not *dependent*

upon her recognition. For me to seek white recognition as a stimulus to a healthy sense of self-understanding is a form of pathology. (Yancy 2008, 847-848)

Passage 3: The Male Gaze

"At thirteen, I walked around bare legged, in a short dress," another woman told me. "A man, sniggering, made a comment about my fat calves. The next day, my mother made me wear stockings and lengthen my skirt, but I will never forget the shock I suddenly felt in seeing myself *seen.*" The little girl feels as though her body is escaping her, that it is no longer the clear expression of her individuality; it becomes foreign to her; and at the same moment, she is grasped by others as a thing; in the street, eyes follow her; her body is subject to comments; she would like to become invisible; she is afraid of her flesh and afraid to show her flesh. (Beauvoir 2011, 321)

Passage 4: Responding to the Male Gaze

"See yourself in wool." Yes, I would like that. I see myself in that wool, heavy, thick, warm, swinging around my legs in rippling caresses. And who might I be? An artist, perhaps, somewhat well established, thinking of my next series. Or maybe I will be a lecturer coming off the airplane, greeted by my colleagues, who will host me at a five-star restaurant. Or perhaps I'm off to meet my new lover, who will greet me face to face and stroke my wool.
But who's this coming up behind me? Bringing me down to his size? Don't look back, I can't look back, his gaze is unidirectional, he sees me but I can't see him. But no—I am seeing myself in wool seeing him see me. Is it that I cannot see myself without seeing myself being seen? So I need him there to unite me and my image of myself? Who does he think I am?
So I am split. I see myself, and I see myself being seen. Might such a split express a woman's relation to clothes, to images of clothes, to images of herself in clothes, whoever she imagines herself to be? Can we separate the panels? I wonder if there's a way we can get him out of the picture. (Young 2005, 63)

3.1.1 Preliminary Characterization of the Phenomenon

In each of these passages, the narrator sees or imagines him- or herself seen by another. And not just by any other. The other who is or would be looking at the narrator lies in a position of power with respect him or her. The other is a man looking at a woman, or a white person looking at a black person. This is the first element that will be of interest to us: *social relations of power affect the oppressed other's response to the dominant other's gaze.* And, as a corollary, we can note that the passages portray the gaze as *unidirectional*: the oppressed other is faced with the

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gaze of the dominant other, but does not look back at him or her. Furthermore, and this is the second element that will be of interest, *Passages 1* and *3* convey the sense that the oppressed other is deeply disturbed, or, as I will argue, alienated from his or her body in the face of the dominant other's gaze. The girl at puberty is "shocked" by the male gaze and is afraid of her body being seen. The black man in Fanon's description feels an "unusual weight" descend upon him. Third, *Passages 2* and *4* begin to sketch a response to this unsettling phenomenon. In *Passage 2*, Yancy cautions against trying to seek the white person's recognition. Similarly, in *Passage 4*, Young raises the question of whether there is a way of getting "him," that is, the male viewer, "out of the picture." In both cases, then, it seems as though the solution to the problem will not be to look back at the dominant other, but to dismantle the hold this other has on one's psyche.

This preliminary characterization directs us to two problems. First, we need account for the "trouble" created by the gaze of the dominant other. Second, we need to investigate the options available to the oppressed other. The next section tackles the first of these problems.

3.2 Genesis: The Dominant Gaze

This section aims to explain the genesis of bodily alienation. This discussion is important because it will direct us to the conceptual framework for understanding the phenomenon of bodily alienation itself. While the bulk of the discussion will focus on Fanon's case (*Passage 1*), in the first subsection I will explain why Beauvoir's example (*Passage 3*) can be subsumed under this analysis.

3.2.1 Disturbances in Skillful Activity

In Fanon's example, the black man is disoriented in the face of the white gaze. There are three elements of this example that best capture this disorientation. First, Fanon says that "[i]n the

train, it was a question of being aware of my body, no longer in third person, but in triple" (92). So, rather than having a first-personal relationship to his body, the black man has a third-personal one, and rather than merely apprehending his body from the third-person perspective, he apprehends it in a multiplied way. Second, the black man is said to be "unable to discover the feverish coordinates of the world" (92). Clearly, he can no longer perform a habitual action, like finding a seat on a train; furthermore, the description of the coordinates as "feverish" adds to the sense that the black man is radically disoriented in this situation. Third, Fanon speaks of "nausea" (92). We can take this term both as a reference to a sickness the black man feels in these situations, but also perhaps as an allusion to Sartre's *Nausea*. Roquentin, the novel's protagonist, experiences nausea as he becomes detached from other things. In her *Introduction to Twentieth-Century French Literature*, Victoria Best comments on the genesis of Roquentin's nausea in these terms: "the fact of his *alienation* from others is important; as his own work ceases to entertain and to occupy him, Roquentin has nothing that could distract him from the business of existing in its simplest forms" (2002, 61, emphasis mine). Like Roquentin, the black man becomes distanced from things. This third element highlights the connection between being distanced from one's body and being detached from other things. This connection will play an important role as we broach the relationship between bodily alienation and alienation from the social world.

Let us turn now to *Passage 3*. The body, on Beauvoir's view, is alien to the girl in two regards: the very changes that occur at puberty alter the girl's relation to her body; at the same time, the girl's body becomes alien because her relation to it becomes infiltrated by the male gaze. While disturbances in skillful activity are not described in the passage itself, Beauvoir goes on to enumerate behaviors girls adopt and the traits they develop in the face of these experiences

of being looked at, such attempts to lose weight, excessive shyness (to point of not leaving home), and excessive blushing. In addition, she notes many girls at this stage succumb to "psychoses" (321) and become "pathologically shy" (323). The most telling passage is this: "This shame [at] her physical appearance makes the girl act *awkwardly*" (323, emphasis mine). These traits and this awkwardness betray a growing distance from one's body—either in an explicit refusal of one's body in the form of dieting or in unintentional manifestations, as in the case of blushing and awkward movements. In addition, and we will return to this point, the girl loses touch with her social world in this process. Given the details that surface in the paragraphs immediately following *Passage 3*, we can image the young girl to be flustered by her environment in a way that resembles the black man's.

The main point to take from *Passages 1* and *3* is that the agent fails (or could be imagined to fail) to deal skillfully with her environment, and as result, loses her (or would lose) connection to other persons and things. That is the phenomenon at stake. But what does this description tell us about the genesis of bodily alienation? To answer this question, it will be useful to contrast the phenomenology of disturbed activity with the phenomenology of skillful activity.

3.2.2 The Phenomenology of Skillful vs. Unskillful Activity

A fruitful point of entry into understanding the difference between skillful and unskillful activity is Fanon's appropriation of Merleau-Ponty's notion of the body schema. In and surrounding *Passage 1,* Fanon speaks both of a body schema *tout court* and of an "epidermal racial schema" or "historical-racial schema." What is the body schema in general? And what does the notion of a racial schema tell us about the difference between skillful and unskillful activity?

Merleau-Ponty introduces the notion of the body schema in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. According to him, the body schema allows us to anticipate future actions in

response to changes in one's environment. As Gail Weiss puts it in *Body Images*, the schema offers "a global, practical, and implicit notion of the relation between our body and things, of our hold on them" (1999, 9). To give a sense of the workings of the body schema, consider Fanon's example of reaching for a pack of cigarettes:

> I know that if I want to smoke, I shall have to stretch out my right arm and grab the pack of cigarettes lying at the other end of the table. As for the matches, they are in the left drawer, and I shall have to move back a little. And I make all these moves, not out of habit, but by implicit knowledge. A slow construction of my self as a body in a spatial and temporal world—such seems to be the schema. (2008, 91)

When Fanon says that we find our bearings "not out of habit," he means that we do not reflexively perform the movements necessary to accomplish a task because we have been conditioned to perform them through repetition. Rather, we have an implicit understanding of the relations between objects in the world and the parts of our bodies. With my perception of the pack of cigarettes comes an understanding of the position of my right hand, which is aiming to grasp it, as well as the relative positions of my other body parts. If the pack of cigarettes is close to my right hand, I know to grab it without getting out of my seat. But if I perceive the pack of cigarettes to be out of reach, I know to get out of my seat to get it. Each of these pieces of knowledge originates in the body schema—not from sets of conditioned reflexes. As an example of the workings of the schema in a pathological case, consider the phantom limb phenomenon, which Merleau-Ponty discusses at length in the chapter of the *Phenomenology* entitled "The Body as Object and Mechanistic Physiology." The person who suffers from a phantom limb experiences a distortion of her body schema: her schema reflects bodily abilities she no longer has as a result of the loss of her limb, and guides her body's movements as though she were capable to reckon with objects in the way she could before this loss.

The idea of a schema may remind those familiar with Kant's theoretical philosophy of his

account of the schematism. Kant discusses the idea of a schematism of pure concepts following

his working out of the Transcendental Deduction.[1] The Deduction aims to prove that the pure

concepts of the understanding, that is, the categories by which we organize our thinking, such as

the categories of substance and accident, of cause and effect, and of possibility, need to be

applied to objects given in intuition (that is, via our senses) for cognition to arise. Kant worries

that, as his account stands, there will not be any homogeneity between the object of intuition

subsumed under a category and the category itself. As a solution, he introduces a mediating

element that would connect the categories with objects given in intuition: this "mediating

representation must be pure (without anything empirical) on the one hand and sensible on the

other" (A138/B178). Such mediating representations are *transcendental schemata*. For example,

to the category of substance and accident, there corresponds the schema of "persistence of the

real in time," which is "the representation of the real as a substratum," which "endures while

everything changes" (A143/B183). As Taylor Carman explains in *Merleau-Ponty*, the schemata

differ from images in that images are concrete particulars, while "schemata must anticipate in

advance an indefinitely wide range of possible applications of the concept" (2008, 106). And the

schemata can do this because they originate in the imagination—not the intellect. Likewise,

Merleau-Ponty's body schema is not a representation of the body, but is meant to "structure our

awareness of objects" by carving out a space of possible modes of interacting with the

environment (106). As such, it mediates the body's movements and the world. While Merleau-

Ponty's idea is inspired by Kant, the body schema differs from a Kantian schema because it is

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[1] In the following presentation of the Doctrine of the Schematism, I am indebted to Sebastian
Gardner's explanations in *Kant and the* Critique of Pure Reason.

not *a priori*, in the sense of being devoid of anything empirical. The body schema is updated by

sensory-motor feedback, and as such is not "pure" in the Kantian sense.[2]

Another important Merleau-Pontyian concept for understanding skillful movement is that

of the habit-body. The habit-body comprises "the habitual postures which we immediately 'fall

into' when driving a car, sitting at a typewriter or computer keyboard, walking, etc." (Weiss

1999, 19). The concept of the body schema and of the habit-body are related in that the body

schema plays a role in the genesis of the postures of the habit-body: in order for the habit-body to

be consolidated, the body schema needs to be organized according to the sensory-motor feedback

a person receives as she learns to perform an activity. In fact, Carman notes that Merleau-Ponty

sometimes simply uses the word "habit" to name the body schema's "ability to anticipate and

(literally) incorporate the world" (2008, 106).

The phenomenology of habit formation tells us something very interesting about skillful

activity, namely, that that awareness we have of our bodies when we are dealing skillfully with

our environment is *practical* as opposed to *thematic*. According to Merleau-Ponty, forming

habits requires that learned movements recede from awareness (2002, 176). When one forms

new bodily habits, either as they relate to movements or the use of a tool, at first one focuses on

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[2] The difference between Kant's schemata and Merleau-Ponty's body schema highlights an important aspect of hermeneutic phenomenology, which is the phenomenological tradition to which Merleau-Ponty's work belongs, namely, that hermeneutic phenomenology does not philosophize from a god's eye point of view, but interprets phenomena from one's perspective within the world. The Kantian idea of a pure schema that could nevertheless connect up with the deliverances of intuition reflects a conception of us as subjects separate from the world. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty theorizes about perception from his point of view as an embodied philosopher situated in the world. For more on the contrast between Kant's and Merleau-Ponty's approaches to perception, see the chapter of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology* entitled "Sense Experience."

the movements or the tool in order to perform the task at hand.[3] With time, though, this focus on movements or the tool recedes. Focal disappearance is the phenomenon wherein movements or tools recede from focal awareness. Indeed, focal disappearance is a condition of truly skillful movement. Without the disappearance of tools or movements from awareness, one could never manipulate these tools or execute these movements with ease. In disappearing, tools and movements become *incorporated* and come to form a part of the body schema. This is to say that they can now serve to coordinate other bodily movements. Likewise, using the concept of the habit-body, one would say that incorporation involves the integration of movements or tools into the habit-body. Thus, the focal disappearance of a tool or a movement is a condition on that tool or movement becoming incorporated. This point about the phenomenology of incorporation will remind those familiar with Heidegger's *Being and Time* of the claim that "equipment" is most itself when it withdraws (¶15). The parallel claim here is that incorporated tools and skills bring out bodily movements most authentically when these tools and skills recede from awareness.

The notion of focal disappearance bears on the difference between skillful and unskillful activity for the following reason. I have just suggested that when our bodies's movements recede from awareness, we are able to perform activities most skillfully. And yet it is not as though we are totally *unaware* of our bodies when performing skillfully. For instance, if you were to ask me how to play a musical instrument, I might be able to give you general instructions, by showing you how to place your fingers on the strings, how hard to pluck, and so on. The instructions I might give you might be incomplete, since there are certain elements of playing that are hard to articulate: How hard exactly to pluck to play a note *forte*? Is there a well-defined strength?

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[3] My interpretation of Merleau-Ponty here draws on Zeiler's "A Phenomenology of Excorporation, Bodily Alienation, and Resistance: Rethinking Sexed and Racialized Embodiment."

Surely, it would be easier to figure out by playing. So there is some awareness of one's body involved in a skillful activity, especially when learning a new way of using one's body. But what happens exactly when I become skilled at some activity? My answer is this: I do not have a *thematic awareness of my body*, that is, an awareness of my body as an object, but rather a *practical awareness of my body*.[4] In fact, Merleau-Ponty would argue that to the extent to which my awareness of my body is thematic, my ability to skillfully deal with the environment will be compromised. It is also worth noting that Fanon himself refers to thematization shortly after the *Passage 1*: "Yet this reconsideration of myself, this thematization, was not my idea" (2008, 92). I should note, though, that the French reads: *je ne voulais pas cette reconsidération, cette thématisation* (1952, 91). Given that we are in the midst of a paragraph on the body, I would say that the thematization should be interpreted as a *thematization of the body* as opposed to the self, more generally. As a result, Fanon's language could be said to illustrate the general point that a thematic awareness of the body interferes with skillful activity.

So much for the theory of the body and its relation to skillful activity. But what of the "racial epidermal schema" Fanon mentions? The "racial epidermal schema" or "historical-racial schema" is said to lie "beneath the body schema," where it is not constituted by "remnants of feelings and notions of the tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, or visual nature" but by "the Other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes" (91). So, this second body schema has a different constitution than that of the normal schema. Furthermore, Fanon's language suggests that the black man, unlike the white man, has two schemas: a "regular" body schema and a "historical-racial schema." This doubling of the body schema matters because, a

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[4] Here the reader will be reminded of the contrast I drew in the previous chapter between relating to one's body as an object, as the woman obsessed with her body's appearance might, and relating to one's body sensually, as someone who enjoys a bodily activity for its own sake might.

paragraph later, when he is confronted with the white gaze on the train, Fanon describes the

regular body schema as "attacked" and "collapsed," such that it "[gives] way to an epidermal

racial schema" (92). Thus, in the wake of the white gaze, the black man is no longer guided by

the regular body schema, but only by the epidermal racial schema. Given that the regular body

schema is the one constituted by sensory and motor feedback, its collapse explains the black

man's inability to navigate the train. The schema left over cannot guide the black man because it

is not constituted by sensory-motor feedback.

But why invoke a second schema? Why not simply insist that the black man is left

without a schema? I think this is because Fanon wants to emphasize that the disruption caused by

the white gaze is predicated on the black man's coming to understand himself *as black*. Whereas

in his homeland his blackness is not salient to him, in the white world it comes to the forefront of

his awareness. To speak of a second schema is to speak of a different set of data about the black

man, the meaning of his body for whites.[5] For it is not simply that the black man is confronted

with a hostile gaze; after all he may be confronted by such a gaze on his own turf, outside of

white spaces. Rather it is that the gaze is understood to communicate a certain prejudice. Indeed,

Fanon interweaves the description of the gaze and the language whites use concerning blacks.

The chapter in which the description of the white gaze is embedded famously begins with the

sentence: "'Dirty nigger!' or simply 'Look! A Negro!'" (89). These snippets shape the fabric of

the second, the epidermal racial, schema. On a related note, it would not make much sense to

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[5] Conversely, we can say that in their homeland, blacks do not have an epidermal racial schema.
Their blackness is not salient to them; it does not affect their engagement with the world.
Something similar could be said of gender. There are certain settings where one's gender comes
to the front of one's awareness, and where we might witness similar disturbances in skillful
activity. As an example, consider the discomfort female students might experience in classroom
settings in disciplines where women are traditionally underrepresented. I owe this point to Nancy
Bauer.

speak of an epidermal racial schema for whites when they are in white spaces, since their bodies

are not taken to have a particular significance; there is no tension between their physical ability

to navigate space and the realities of another's presence.[6]

The upshot of this discussion of the body schema and the habit-body is that the difference

between unskillful and skillful activity rests on whether one is aware of one's body thematically

as opposed to practically. *Passages 1* and *3* reveal that bodily alienation can take the form of a

failure in the moment to have a practical relation to one's body. Here the reader might be

reminded of the narcissistic focus on the body as an object discussed in the previous chapter.

What is different is that Chapter Two examines our relationship to our bodies when we

intentionally adopt activities that lead us to relate to our bodies as objects, whereas this chapter

explores our relationship to our bodies when, in the midst of skillful activity, we are led to relate

to our bodies as objects.

3.2.3 Internalizing the Dominant Other's Gaze

Thus far, I have contrasted the phenomenology of breakdown cases and that of skillful activity.

Now I will turn to the source of the breakdown cases: internalizing the dominant other's gaze.

What accounts for bodily alienation in Beauvoir's and Fanon's example is the internalization of

the dominant other's gaze, or so I will argue here. When the other's gaze is internalized, the

world ceases to solicit activity from the oppressed person. This is to say that skillful movements

become interrupted when the oppressed person becomes aware of the dominant other's presence.

It is not to say that the presence of a dominant person cannot ever elicit an action (for example,

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[6] Here I should mention the interpretation of the historical racial schema given in "A
Phenomenology of Excorporation, Bodily Alienation, and Resistance." There Zeiler argues that
we should not think of this schema as lying beneath the body schema, but as breaking the body
schema itself. I do not think much hangs on this twist, since in any case the body schema can no
longer perform its function in the scenario described by Fanon.

to exit a white space). As I interpret these cases, the oppressed person is locked into her mental life, with the result that her skillful bodily activity is disrupted. It is as though the world no longer exists for the oppressed person, and this disappearance entails the loss of skillful movement. In order to better grasp the phenomenology of alienation provoked by the gaze, think of the experience of listening to one's voice as one speaks: instead of hearing it in a dim, receding fashion, one's voice comes to the focus of one's awareness, as if one had adopted the point of view of others; in such cases, speech typically loses its fluidity; the normal process through which it is elaborated is disrupted by the intrusion of an external perspective into one's awareness. In this analogy, the dominant other's gaze is to the external point of view, as seamless movement is to fluid speech; what wreaks havoc in both cases is the internalization of another perspective.

I have just asserted that the connection between bodily alienation and the gaze turns on the internalization of the dominant other's gaze. But what accounts for this internalization? After all, not all gazes provoke bodily alienation. My answer is this: the oppressed person is most vulnerable to bodily alienation because the dominant other's gaze has an *authority* that other points of view might not have.[7] In other words, the narratives embraced by the dominant other about the oppressed person have a special claim to truth and resist being challenged. Fanon captures this well when he discusses the genesis of the "historical racial schema," which as we saw is constituted by "the Other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories" (91). Notice how the black man becomes one of the white man's constructions: the black man is said to be "woven" out of the white man's narratives about

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[7] This is true of the white gaze in Fanon's example, and of the male gaze in Beauvoir's example. However, we might also envisage situations where the perceived physical strength of a dominant other provokes a sense of vulnerability. I thank Nancy Bauer for this point.

blacks. The uneven relationship between the authoritativeness of the blacks's perspective on

whites and that of whites vis-à-vis blacks explains the particular hold the white gaze, or more

generally the presence of whites, has on blacks. In summary: the authority of the dominant other

explains the fact that the dominant other's gaze is internalized, and by the same token, the

genesis of bodily alienation.

3.3 Bodily Alienation and Deworlded Activity

From our discussion of the phenomenology of disturbed and skillful activity, we learned that the

type of awareness one has of one's body influences the extent to which one deals skillfully with

one's environment. This section delves deeper into the differences between unskillful and skillful

activity in order to define bodily alienation itself. What is at stake here is the difference in how

one relates to the world, depending on whether one is dealing skillfully with the environment or

not.

3.3.1 Passivity and Activity in Disturbed Activity

In order to understand body and world relations, I would first like to introduce the question of

whether skillful and unskillful movements are active or not. This question matters because one

might think of skillful movement as exhibiting a certain activity that unskillful movement lacks.

Unskillful movements, as they are described in *Passage 1*, appear to have an unusually passive

character.

But to address this question, we first need to revisit four of the concepts relating to

alienation described in Chapter One: powerlessness, dispossession, reification, and the loss of a

meaningful world. First, let us take powerlessness and the loss of a meaningful world together.

Earlier we learned that alienation is closely associated with a sense of powerlessness. As Jaeggi

puts it, "alienated relations are those in which we are disempowered as subjects" (2014, 23). The same can be said of the form of bodily alienation at stake in *Passages 1* and *3*: the inability to deal skillfully with the world which the black man and the girl experience could be viewed as a form of disempowerment. Whatever power they had over their activities has vanished in the wake of the gaze. Furthermore, we should note that Jaeggi views the loss of power and the loss of a meaningful world as intertwined (22–23). According to her, this is because the world needs to have meaning for me if I am to make it my own and, by the same token, determine my own actions. Recall that appropriating oneself and one's world go hand in hand. Therefore, the condition of the world having meaning for oneself makes possible one's appropriation of the world *and* of oneself. And this ability to appropriate oneself, Jaeggi believes, is a form of power. Likewise, in our cases, the oppressed person fails to deal skillfully with the world to the extent that the world loses its usual meaning for him or her. Familiar reference points, like the seat of the train, no longer have a motor significance for the alienated person. When speaking of self-world relations, Jaeggi claims that the world cannot be appropriated because it appears meaningless, and this impossibility amounts to a form of disempowerment. We might say something similar here: the world is deprived of its usual meaning, and as a result, the oppressed person is disempowered. Second, bodily alienation in the examples at issue here might be called a *dispossession* of one's bodily activity. I say this because the phenomenology of these cases suggests that the oppressed other loses motor skills she or he had before their confrontation with the gaze. Indeed, as Fanon puts it, in the face of the white gaze, "the real world *robbed* us of our share" (2008, 90, emphasis mine). Third, *Passages 1* and *3* portray the alienated person as reified. Beauvoir says of the girl: "she is grasped by others as a thing." And in a passage that immediately precedes *Passage 1,* Fanon says of the black man: "Locked in this suffocating

reification, I appealed to the Other so that his liberating gaze, gliding over my body suddenly smoothed of rough edges, would give me back the lightness of being I thought I had lost" (2008, 89, emphasis mine). Reification, we saw, describes "a condition in which relations take on an independent existence that stand over and against those who constitute them," thus depriving a person of "free action" (Jaeggi 2014, 5). This analysis holds true in both cases: the girl and the black man, locked in the gaze of the dominant other, are deprived of a certain freedom. As will become clear in Chapter Four, Jaeggi and I understand freedom differently. Jaeggi aligns freedom with our ability to determine our own actions: that is, she considers heteronomy and freedom to be opposites. In contrast, I think of freedom as related to the possibility of being involved with things and other persons. Thus, to say that the girl and the black man are deprived of a certain form of freedom is to say that they are cut off from the possibility of being involved with things and other persons—not that they cannot determine their own actions.

The idea that the body is dispossessed of its activity and the agent reified by the gaze of the dominant other might incline us to analyze this type of activity in terms of the notion of *heteronomy*. Although *Passage 1* is not a case of literal coercion, there is a sense in which bodily activities are performed in a passive way, as though they are not entirely self-determined. Here the reader might be reminded of Young's discussion of *ambiguous transcendence* in "Throwing Like a Girl," where she explains that feminine motility is "a transcendence that is at the same time laden with immanence" (2005, 36). She employs this term to characterize the lack of fluidity that feminine movement has; women move hesitantly, in a cramped manner, as though their movements were constrained by an external force. As an example of this phenomenon, one might also think of hesitant movements performed while injured; although I may intend to run at a brisk pace, the pain in my foot means that I move cautiously and cannot fully exert myself. The

idea of an ambiguous transcendence also helps us make sense of the movements of the black man in *Passage 1*, since the black man moves hesitantly. Relatedly, Young contends that feminine motility is marked by an *inhibited intentionality*, which "simultaneously reaches toward a projected end with an 'I can' and withholds its full bodily commitment to that end in a self-imposed 'I cannot'" (36). Movements are performed, as though one were holding oneself back. And we witness something similar in the case of the black man's movements: they simultaneously aim at accomplishing ends in the world (such as finding a seat), while being held back.

"Heteronomy" might appear to be an intuitive concept for characterizing bodily alienation, since there is a certain passivity inherent in the activity at stake. Yet I would object that the language of heteronomy as opposed to self-determination, of passivity as opposed to activity, is not the most apt for discussing the phenomenology of skillful movement. Instead, I propose that we introduce the language of *deworlded* and *worldly* activity, since what is at issue in *Passages 1* and *3* is a disturbed relation between the oppressed person's body and the world. In order to make this point, I will now explore the relationship between body and world during skillful activity.

3.3.2 Body-World Relations in Skillful Activity

Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Kelly's *All Things Shining* (2011) provides an excellent starting point for discussing the phenomenology of skillful activity and body-world relations, because of their detailed attention to a variety of examples of skillful activity, ranging from the actions of Homeric Greeks to the heroic example of Wesley Autrey, who jumped from the platform of a New York subway to save the life of a man who fell onto the tracks as a train approached. For our purposes, the main thesis to focus on in Dreyfus and Kelly's argument is that sometimes we

experience ourselves not as the source of our actions, but instead "the situation itself seems to call the action out of [us]" (3). In the case of Autrey, they base this claim on the unhesitant character of his actions and on Autrey's own account of his actions: as he put it, "I just saw someone who needed help" (3). Autrey's actions have a certain spontaneity; they do not appear to be based on deliberation about the situation. The fact that Autrey emphasizes his perception of the situation as the source of his actions supports Dreyfus and Kelly's interpretation. In the case of the Homeric Greeks, Dreyfus and Kelly emphasize the idea that overthinking interferes with our most skillfully performed activities. Drawing on the ways in which Homer describes sleep, they assert that "[s]leep is a canonical human event in Homer because it is the paradigm of an activity at which one cannot succeed at trying harder" (75). One can prepare oneself for sleep, but trying hard to sleep is bound to fail. The discussion of sleep bears on Dreyfus and Kelly's thesis because if sleep is a paradigm for excellence in performing activities, then there is a sense in which such activities partly originate in something external to the agent. Dreyfus and Kelly sum up Homer's insight in these terms: "we act at our best when we open ourselves to the world, allowing ourselves to be drawn from without" (79).

While I will not weigh in on Dreyfus and Kelly's interpretation of the relevance of this insight to what they call our "contemporary nihilism," I think we can learn from this interpretation in order to understand the phenomenology of skillful movement. To begin, I find this interpretation makes sense of my own experience. As a former musician, I recall that there was a certain depersonalization involved in playing at concerts: it felt as though I was not consciously directing my playing. Instead there was playing, but neither I, nor some other person was playing. But beyond such an intuitive understanding of my experience, why think of skillful activity as drawn from without? In order to answer this question, we need to weigh in on the

merits of intellectualism versus the position espoused by Merleau-Ponty, Dreyfus, and Kelly on skillful movement.[8] And by intellectualism, I have in mind rationalist or idealist, as opposed to empiricist, positions. The main tenet of intellectualism is the idea that judgment is a component of all experience. As we will see, one representative of intellectualism that Dreyfus targets is Husserl. So we need to be careful not to assimilate all phenomenological accounts of skillful movement.

Let us begin with one of the most discussed examples in the *Phenomenology of Perception,* the case of Schneider. Schneider was First World War veteran, who sustained injuries to his brain that impacted his ability to perform actions in peculiar ways. For example, Schneider could not point to places on his body when asked to, but could scratch a mosquito bite with accuracy (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 118). More generally, he was able to perform concrete movements, that is, movements related to a task, but not abstract movements, that is, movements he was told to execute outside of the context of an activity. One might explain Schneider's difficulties in the following way: his injuries impaired the performance of movements that require conscious control, and he could perform concrete movements only because these are the outcome of conditioned reflexes. This is the intellectualist position. According to Merleau-Ponty, intellectualists speak of a "collapse of consciousness" to explain his failure to perform abstract movements and a "freeing of automatism" to explain his ability to perform concrete movements (143).

The intellectualist interpretation runs afoul because it fails to make sense of the nature of *skills* Schneider had, such as performing a military salute or sewing a purse. First, as Komarine

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[8] I use the term "intellectualism" to designate the view that Merleau-Ponty opposes since this is the term he and other philosophers working in the phenomenological tradition adopt it. See Alva Noë's "Against intellectualism" for another phenomenological response to intellectualism.

Romdenh-Romluc explains, the idea of a conditioned reflex presupposes that "identical causes will always bring about identical effects" (2011, 80).[9] But this would not make sense of the fact that we are able to manipulate complex instruments based on prior skills—without having to acquire a whole new set of conditioned reflexes. Consider Merleau-Ponty's example of the organist who can learn how to play on a new instrument with different arrangements of pedals and stops within an hour (2002, 168). Does it make sense to say that the musician has acquired a complex set of conditioned reflexes in such a short amount of time? Instead, we should think of the organist as relying on her skill at playing the organ, which she has acquired through practice. This skill relies on a schematic, and hence transposable, understanding of the instrument. If Schneider could only act on the basis of conditioned reflexes, then the intellectualist would have to say that his skills were merely conditioned reflexes. But this, in turn, would fail to give due to the complex and flexible nature of the movements Schneider could perform. Thus, intellectualism runs into problems if it construes Schneider's abilities in terms of the opposition between consciously controlled actions and conditioned reflexes.

But what of non-pathological cases? Could we argue that these are guided by intentions to act? In order to see why intellectualism also fails to make sense of non-pathological cases, let us turn to Dreyfus's criticisms of Husserl and John Searle in "A Merleau-Pontyian Critique of Husserl's and Searle's Representationalist Accounts of Action" (2000).[10] Dreyfus's target in this article is the view that "in all comportment the agent's movements must be governed by what the agent (consciously or unconsciously) is trying to achieve" (293). Dreyfus, following Merleau-Ponty, advances an alternative position, namely, that we do not aim to achieve success in skillful

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[9] I should note my debt to Romdenh-Romluc's interpretation of the Schneider case in this paragraph.

[10] I do not take a position here on whether this is an accurate interpretation of Searle or Husserl.

action but have a "sense of *being drawn toward an equilibrium*" (293). And Dreyfus makes the case for this alternative by delving into the phenomenology of skillful movement and neurological findings on learning. For our purposes, I will stick with phenomenology. Consider the difference between accidentally succeeding at something and skillfully achieving the same result. To return to the example of music, I can successfully play a passage *forte* if I throw myself into playing the piece haphazardly and achieve a result that is satisfies my teacher. But I couldn't properly be said to be skilled at playing that passage *forte* until I have played it repeatedly and developed my own sense of the right force with which to pluck the strings of my instrument. Without practice, I wouldn't be able to reproduce the result or transfer my know-how to other pieces. Nor would I develop the knowledge of how to play the passage *forte* depending on my context: I might need to increase the habitual pressure if I am playing the passage as part of concert with other instruments, or I might need decrease it if I am playing the passage in a church chapel. The phenomenology of this experience suggests that the knowledge of how to play the passage *forte* depends on a bodily sense that is acquired by practicing with a range of pressures and homing in on an appropriate one. In contrast, intellectualism has to say that I am skilled at playing the passage *forte* if I happen hit on the right pressure each time I play. But this covers up the special knowledge that is necessary for habitually playing in the right way.

Intellectualism is caught between the alternative of conceiving of movements as reflexes (as it does in Schneider's case), or as guided by judgments (as it does when it describes intentional action in non-pathological cases). Intellectualism fails to think beyond these alternatives; it fails to conceive of a "third type of being," which Merleau-Ponty calls "motor intentionality" (*intentionalité motrice*). As Dreyfus puts it, motor intentionality differs from "meaningless bodily movement" and "minds containing intentional content" (2000, 302). Motor

intentionality integrates the environment with our movements.[11] The idea of motor intentionality is thus closely connected to that of a body schema. The body schema should be considered to be the condition on the possibility of motor intentionality, since the body schema sketches the range of possible movements we can adopt in order to deal skillfully with the world.

These considerations on the nature of skills bear on the question of body-world relations and skillful activity for the following reason. The notion of motor intentionality indicates that skillful movements are neither representationally guided processes nor reflexes. So first, skillful movements do not originate in mental states. The alternative is that they originate in the world itself. The world on such a view is to be conceived not as sum of objects, which act on the body and cause its movements, but as a complex of tools that has a meaning for oneself. This is to say that the world solicits movements only insofar as it has what Merleau-Ponty calls a "motor significance" for oneself.[12] Indeed, for Schneider, the orders that psychologists gave him, let's say to touch his arm, only had an intellectual significance, whereas situations such as having to sew a purse had a motor significance for him. But in non-pathological cases, such orders can have both an intellectual and motor significance.

If Dreyfus, Kelly, and Merleau-Ponty are right, and I think that they are, then the claim that the Fanon example reads as though the activities are not self-determined misses the point, since skillful activity is not fully self-determined in the first place: it depends on acquired skills and on the world. It is not that the black man cannot determine his actions, but that the world can no longer draw skillful activity out of him. The gaze of the dominant other has taken up the place that the world occupied in the origination of skillful movement. The criterion of self-

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[11] Taylor Carman makes a similar point in *Merleau-Ponty* (2008, 117).
[12] See Merleau-Ponty's explanation of the Schneider case (2002, 126–127).

determination is too demanding and, as such, useless for understanding the breakdown cases. But

what vocabulary can we use instead of the language of self-determination?

The best way to cash out the difference between the normal and breakdown cases is this:

skillful activity gives one a grip on the world, while unskillful activity does not. And when I say

that one has a grip on the world through skillful activity, I do not mean that an action

successfully accomplishes some intended result in the world. For, after all, I may miss a note as I

play my instrument, while continuing to deal skillfully with the world. Having a grip on the

world requires being able to be drawn in by a situation, even if there is some error in the

execution of a movement. What happens in the cases at stake here is that the one is closed to the

world because one has internalized the gaze of the other, and so is unable to be drawn in by a

situation. This comes across in Fanon's language: the black man is "unable to discover the

feverish coordinates of the world." So it is not that he fails to discover the *right* coordinates, but

that there is an inability to find any coordinates at all.

In light of this discussion, I think the difference between normal and breakdown cases

can be articulated in terms of the difference between *deworlded* and *worldly* activity.[13]

Deworlded activity is a useful term to describe bodily alienation, because what is at issue here is

the loss of the world's everyday meaning for the oppressed person. Whereas a chair might solicit

one to take a seat in it, in the breakdown cases, it no longer affords this type of action. The

unfamiliar character of the world is both the cause and the consequence of one's failure to deal

with it skillfully. Thus, there is a mutually reinforcing phenomenon: the more the world ceases to

draw the oppressed person in, the more the oppressed person is withdrawn from the world, and

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[13] I thank Sean Kelly for suggesting the expression "deworlded activity" to describe the
breakdown cases.

the more she is unable to be drawn in. The originating cause of this cycle is, as I have said, the internalization of the dominant other's gaze. By contrast, unalienated activity is open onto the world in the sense that situations in the world can immediately solicit the person to act; such bodily activity is what I call *worldly activity*.

3.4 Bodily Alienation and Alienation from the Social World

One of our aims, you will recall, is to establish the connection between bodily alienation and alienation from the social world. What do our examples tell us about this connection? In this section, I will continue to draw on *Passages 1* and *3*; the connection between bodily realization and the social world, based on *Passages 2* and *4*, will be discussed in the next section.

First, *Passage 1*. One of the most salient features of this description is the fact that the world loses its usual meaning for the oppressed person. This loss of meaning is apparent from the fact that the world no longer solicits skillful activity from the oppressed person. But what exactly does this loss say about our relation to the *social* world? Fanon goes on to describe his inability to respond to the white man: he is "[d]isoriented, incapable of confronting the Other, the white man," and he tells us that he "would have liked to enter our world young and sleek, a world we could build together" (2008, 92). These quotations reveal two things. First, because of his alienation, the black man is unable to properly deal with the interpersonal situation at the root of this alienation, that is to say, he is unable to confront the white man. He is cut off from a certain interpersonal response: confrontation. Second, Fanon indicates that the black man and the white man cannot together build a world. The impossibility of solidarity is a consequence of white prejudice and a constituent of the black man's alienation. In brief: with bodily alienation comes an alienation from the social world. Relatedly, and this is a point I will return to, we

should note that the experience of social space differs between the black man and whites. The black man is alienated from the space of the train, since the space is coded as white.

Moving on to *Passage* 3. In order to understand why this passage illustrates the connection between bodily alienation and alienation from the social world, we need to review what follows this passage. We learned that, following our passage, Beauvoir articulates the coping mechanism girls use to cope with the male gaze, such as their shyness and physical awkwardness. Beauvoir explains that many girls become ashamed of their bodies as puberty progresses, whereas towards the beginning of puberty, especially before the arrival of their first period, some girls are proud of their changing bodies. What happens is that the social significance of their bodies dawns on them, and because of that, their initial pride is dampened (323-327). In general, girls's shyness and shame mark a certain withdrawal from the social world. Girls bristle at the comments of family members or strangers about their bodies. Either they actually hide themselves from others or wish they could, and in any case, they are not fully engaged with the social world.

3.5 Responding to the Gaze of the Other

Thus far, I have focused on *Passages 1* and *3*, which portray a black man and a girl being confronted by the gaze of a dominant other. In what follows, I turn to *Passages 2* and *4,* which shed light on how an oppressed person can reckon with such a gaze. The upshot of this discussion will be this: bodily realization requires a certain integration in the social world.

I have argued that bodily alienation in the face of the gaze can be explained by the internalization of the dominant other's presence. Thus, it would follow that responding to the threat of the other's gaze would require resisting this internalization. This is precisely what *Passages 2* and *4* suggest. Yancy asserts, "while I recognize the historical power of the white

gaze… I do not seek *white* recognition, that is, the white woman's recognition […]. For me to seek white recognition as a stimulus to a healthy sense of self-understanding is a form of pathology." (2008, 848). And Young wonders whether "there's a way we can get him out of the picture" (2005, 63). Like Young, I wonder how we can get the man (or the white woman) out of the picture. How can the black man resist seeking the white woman's recognition? How can the woman separate her relation to her clothes from her imagined perception of how a man will view her in them?

Resisting internalization, I submit, requires finding a different point of focus, and not just any, but a point of focus in the world. The oppressed other, in order for her movements to regain their skillful quality, needs an external anchor. Recall that for movements to be fluid, they need to recede from awareness, and this requires that things emerge instead as the end of our movements. This is close to the point that Young makes in the opening sentence of *Passage 4*: "See yourself in wool." What follows this passage is an imaginative exercise where the woman imagines herself in various scenarios—as an academic or as an artist. But notice that sandwiched between this opening sentence and the imaginative exercise is the following passage: "I see myself in that wool, heavy, thick, warm, swinging around my legs in rippling caresses." It is almost as though the woman does not simply *see* herself in wool, but that she comes to *feel* herself in wool. Indeed, Young goes on to focus on the nature of touch as an antidote to women's relation to their clothes. Drawing on Luce Irigaray's work, Young says that feminine desire "moves through the medium of touch more than sight" (2005, 69). This suggests that part of women's recovery of their clothes will involve attending to the textures of clothing, that is, reconnecting with what Young considers to be a specifically feminine way of desiring clothes. Thus touching one's clothes can create a connection to them that is not possible through sight.

Therefore, we need to read *Passage 4* within the context of Young's argument as a whole. A simple imaginative exercise of the sort sketched in *Passage 4*, where the woman visually imagines herself in various scenarios in her clothing, seems to me insufficient to create the break that is necessary to cultivate a different relation to one's clothes, and, by extension, to the male gaze. What is needed is a radically different relationship to clothing, one that can be mediated by touch. In addition, Young draws attention to the bonding she thinks women cultivate by sharing each other's clothes, which rests on touch. To summarize: the shift from a visual to a tactile relationship could anchor the woman caught up in imagining herself being seen by another man.

What of Yancy's reflections on his response to the white gaze? *Passage 2* suggests that holding on to one's own sense of self can fortify oneself against the white gaze:

> I am angered. Indeed, I find her gaze disconcerting and despicable. As I undergo this double consciousness, my agency remains intact. My sense of who I am and how I am capable of being – that is, the various ways in which I am able to deploy an oppositional form of self-representation – has not been eradicated. I know that I am not a criminal or a rapist. At no point do I either desire to be white or begin to hate my dark skin. (2008, 847–848)

At first blush, resisting internalization seems to rest on affirming one's own narrative, and not adopting that of the dominant other. The notion of an "oppositional form of self-representation" refers to a narrative about oneself, a "self-representation," which runs counter to that of the dominant other (hence the label "oppositional"). But is this a sufficient explanation? Could an intellectual act really help the black man recover from his bodily disorientation? I doubt it. This is why I would like to point out that the first sentence of this quotation: "I am angered." My view is that the black man's anger accounts for his ability to resist internalization. Anger motivates action. But before discussing anger, it worth noting perhaps unsurprisingly, given the Fanonian influences on Yancy's article, that anger plays the same role in the black man's reintegration in the social world in Fanon. In the first of the passages to mark this reintegration, Fanon writes:

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> Where should I put myself from now on? I can feel the familiar rush of blood surge up from the numerous dispersions of my being. I am about to lose my temper. The fire had died a long time ago, and once again the Negro is trembling.
> "Look how handsome that Negro is!"
> "The handsome Negro says, 'Fuck you,' madame." (2008, 94)[14]

Here we witness not only anger, but a response, a rejoinder to the white gaze.[15] Yancy envisions the same type of response later on in his article; he imagines himself saying to the white woman in the elevator: "Miss, I assure you that I am not interested in your trashy possessions and I especially have no desire to humiliate you through the violence of rape nor are my sexual desires outside my control" (2008, 860).

Why exactly does anger play the role that it does in Yancy (and Fanon)? What is anger? While it would be beyond the scope of this chapter to review conceptions of emotions or anger, let me say a few words about anger that will connect with the discussion of the phenomenology of skilled movement. For this purpose, I would like to draw on Heidegger's notion of a mood. Although he rejects the idea that moods are subjective psychological states (BT 172/SZ 34),[16] there is something in his analysis of moods that sheds light on the anger at issue here. Moods, according to Heidegger, disclose one's world, or better yet, one's situation in the world in particular ways (see BT ¶29). Of fear, Heidegger says: "Fearing discloses [Dasein] as endangered and abandoned to itself" (BT 180/SZ 141).[17] And thse world that is disclosed in a

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[14] We should not assume that the black man responds to the white woman out loud. The passage illustrates that anger allows the black man to begin articulating a response, even if he keeps it to himself.

[15] The reference to trembling echoes an earlier passage in the same chapter ("The Lived Experience of the Black Man"), in which the black man is described as trembling during his encounter with whites (2008, 93–94). But instead of trembling from the cold and from being in the presence of whites, here the black man appears to be trembling with rage.

[16] Here I have included both the pagination in the Macquarrie and Robinson translation of *Being and Time* (BT) and the German pagination (SZ).

[17] "Dasein" is a term that Heidegger uses to designate us. I will explain his reasons for adopting this term in Chapter Four.

particular way leads me to act accordingly (¶29). Speaking of "bad moods," Heidegger explains that in such moods the "circumspection of concern gets led astray" (BT 175/SZ 136). In other words, we cease to deal with the world in a skillful way. Similarly, anger reveals the world in a certain way. Being angry moves me to act, even if I act on something that is not the cause of my anger. Let's say I throw an inanimate object at a wall out of rage, even though the source of my anger is my partner, with whom I have had an argument. In general, the actions that are motivated differ according to one's mood: if I am bored, my mother's caustic remarks will not motivate any response, but if I am already angry, the same remark will elicit a quite different response. As a result, we should think of the black man's anger driving his inner verbal responses to the white gaze. It is a force that helps him reintegrate the social world.

The Young and Yancy passages differ in the ways in which the person responds to the gaze. On the one hand, the tactile character of the clothes captures the woman's attention. On the other hand, anger spurs action. In both cases, however, these responses require engaging with the world. More than that, they require engaging with others—either to verbally challenge the dominant other's authority, as with the cases dealing with race, or to forge bonds with others, as in Young's example of women bonding over the feel of their clothes. This engagement with others reflects the idea that realizing oneself in one's body requires integrating a social world. Given that there are further points of comparison between the Young and Yancy passages, as well as the Beauvoir and Fanon passages, let me close by saying a few words about the differences between the cases between the phenomenologies of gender and race treated here.

3.6 Coda: Disanalogies Between Gender and Race

To begin with, what is salient in Fanon's case is the spatial dimension of the situation described: the black man enters the white world, and finds himself confronted by the white gaze there. As Fanon explains, "[a]s long as the black man remains on his home territory, except for petty internal quarrels, he will not have to experience his being for others" (2008, 89). In contrast, in the examples of gendered experience discussed here, the demarcation between male and female spaces does not span large swaths of geographical space. That said, one could draw a certain analogy between Beauvoir's example of the girl and Fanon's: before puberty, the girl lives in a space in which she is by and large unaffected by the male gaze; however, at puberty, the girl enters a sphere in which she is subject to the gaze and remarks of men, almost as if she were entering into new physical space. In Young's case, one could argue that the reverse is happening: a masculine presence comes to infiltrate the female space of the dressing room as the woman begins to imagine herself seen by a man. Now, what of Yancy's example? The setting of the elevator appears to be neither a white nor a black space. Yet, the woman's fear could be read as signifying that the black man has entered what is, in reality, a white space. Thus, the black man is an "intruder," and this provokes the woman's reaction.

What are we to make of these differences in the spatial and temporal organization of the situations described? First, Fanon's and Yancy's examples underscore the racialized nature of public spaces in societies where the majority of the population is white: the black man is vulnerable in these spaces, because he is not presumed to belong in them. Indeed, Charles Mills explains that the "Racial Contract", which is the social contract that sets whites above nonwhites, "norms (and races) spaces" (1997, 41). This contract sets civil (that is, white) spaces and wild (that is, nonwhite) spaces apart, and codifies the ways in which nonwhites can penetrate into white spaces (e.g., the

appropriate body language) (52). The spatial organization of the Young and Beauvoir cases is different from that of the cases dealing with race, because, on the one hand, in Beauvoir's example, there is no clear demarcation between male and female physical spaces, and no transgression on the part of the girl, and only a minor separation in Young's example. Indeed, the female space of the dressing room is a very circumscribed location—it exists within a store, whereas the racialization of spaces is a much broader phenomenon. These differences highlight a central difference between gender and race, namely, that women and men have mostly always lived in the same physical spaces. As Beauvoir herself observes, "[women] even lack their own spaces that makes communities of American blacks, the Jews in the ghettos, or the workers in Saint-Denis or Renault factories" (2011, 8). This fact, Beauvoir adds, makes women's mobilization especially difficult; women are more likely to be in solidarity with men of their own class or race, rather than with other women (8). And these differences in the spatial organization of the cases dealing with gender and those dealing with race speak to the temporal differences between phenomena relating to gender and race. Whereas men and women have always mostly lived together, social groups come to be racialized in different ways as a result of historical events, such as conquest and slavery.

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This chapter has presented one facet of bodily alienation, *deworlded* bodily activity. In defining deworlded activity, I have argued that what is important about who we are as human beings is that we can be drawn in by situations and respond to them accordingly. Therefore, unlike Jaeggi, what I think is essential to who we are is not our capacity to determine ourselves, but our capacity to deal skillfully with the world. This is not to say that I deny that we determine actions for ourselves, but it it is to say that the capacity to determine oneself is predicated on a more

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basic capacity to be in the world. As I indicated in Chapter One, what unites Jaeggi and me is our

insistence on the fact that the manner in which an activity is performed determines whether one

is alienated or not, but what divides us is our understanding of what it is to be human. And, as

the next chapter will reveal, this difference extends to our respective conceptions of freedom.

4

Bodily Alienation and Domination

The two previous chapters have analyzed some of the forms of bodily alienation members of

oppressed gender and racial groups endure. The reader may now be wondering about the bodily

experience of members of dominant groups: Could they also be alienated from their bodies? This

chapter takes a look at the bodily experience of those who alienate the oppressed through their

gazes. In other words, I approach the Chapter Three situations from the point of view of the

dominant person. I call the stance the dominant person embodies the "reifying stance" since he

reifies the oppressed other in each situation; that is, he relates to the oppressed other as though

she were a thing.[1] I will argue that there is a form of bodily alienation associated with the

reifying stance. Not only will I elucidate this form of alienation, but I will also explain how I

think it can be overcome. In addition, I will show that the reifying stance is associated with an

alienation from the social world, and that changing this stance means becoming open to this

world as a whole. Thus, like the previous chapters, this chapter connects bodily alienation with

alienation from the social world.

This chapter begins by offering an interpretation of four passages that portray the reifying

stance and its opposite, what I will call the "stance of openness." These passages will contribute

to establishing the connection between bodily alienation and the reifying stance. I will then go on

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[1] Fanon is explicit about the reifying character of the white gaze: "Locked in this suffocating *reification*, I appealed to the Other so that his liberating gaze […] would give me back the lightness of being I thought I had lost, and taking me out of the world put me back in the world" (2008, 89, emphasis mine).

to explore one intervention that might transform a person's stance towards others: the practice of mindfulness.

4.1 Bodily Alienation and Domination: Four Cases

The following four passages depict two modes of living: in a reifying way towards others and in openness to others. The first two passages deal with race: they pick up on the case studied in the previous chapter of a white woman in an elevator with a black man and capture the transition in the woman's bodily experience as she lets go of her fear of the man. The second two deal with gender, and describe the difference between men who dominate women in sexual relations and those who have a more giving attitude

Passage 1: The White Woman: Fear of the Other

> Her body shifts nervously and her heart beats more quickly as she clutches her purse more closely to her. She feels anxiety in the pit of her stomach. Her perception of time in the elevator may feel like an eternity. […] Like choking black smoke, my Blackness permeates the enclosed space of the elevator. Her palms become clammy. She feels herself on the precipice of taking flight, the desperation to flee. There is panic, there is difficulty swallowing, and there is a slight trembling of her white torso, dry mouth, nausea. (Yancy 2008, 847)

Passage 2: The White Woman: Responding to the Other

> The self-certainty that she possessed regarding the Black body's 'criminality' begins to fissure. The white woman begins to experience her identity as less bounded. She begins to experience a sense of liminality and ambiguity. She undergoes a level of *openness and expansiveness* previously not experienced vis-à-vis the Black body. […] Unlike Odysseus who tied himself to the mast of a ship so as to hear the Sirens but not to respond to them, the white woman begins to risk, moving toward the call of the other, accepting 'the invitation that otherness constantly provides'. (Yancy 2008, 867–868, emphasis mine)[2]

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[2] Yancy is quoting Drucilla Cornel's *Transformations: Recollective Imagination and Sexual Difference*.

Passage 3: Masculine Domination

> The "wife of Gilles," whose story Madeleine Bourdouxhe told, pulls back when her husband asks her: "Did you come?" She puts her hand on his mouth; many women hate this word because it reduces the pleasure to an immanent and separated sensation. "Is it enough? Do you want more? Was it good?" The very fact of asking the question points out the separation and changes the love act into a mechanical operation assumed and controlled by the male. And this is precisely the reason he asks it. Much more than fusion and reciprocity, he seeks *domination*; when the unity of the couple is undone, he becomes the sole subject […]. (Beauvoir 2011, 411, emphasis mine)

Passage 4: Sexual Intercourse and Corporeal Generosity[3]

> The asymmetry of male and female eroticism creates insoluble problems as long as there is a battle of the sexes; they can easily be settled when a woman feels both desire and respect in a man; if he covets her in her flesh while recognizing her freedom, she recovers her essentialness at the moment she becomes object, she remains free in the submission to which she consents. Thus, the lovers can experience pleasure in their own way; each partner feels pleasure as being his own while at the same time having its source in the other. […] Some women say they feel the masculine sex organ in themselves as part of their own body; some men think that they *are* the woman they penetrate; these expressions are obviously inaccurate; the dimension of the *other* remains; but the fact is that alterity no longer has hostile character. […] What is necessary for such harmony are not technical refinements but rather, on the basis of an immediate erotic attraction, a reciprocal *generosity of body and soul*. (Beauvoir 2011, 415, third emphasis mine)

4.1 1 Preliminary Characterization of the Phenomenon

Passage 1 is a natural starting point since it takes off from where we started in the previous chapter. It builds on the scenario envisioned by Yancy in Chapter Three, one in which a white woman is depicted as nervously clutching her purse and holding her breath while riding in an elevator with a black man. Although the woman does not intend to control the black man, her body language, I will suggest, indicates that she has lost control over a situation in which she would otherwise feel comfortable: the setting of the elevator. *Passage 3* also deals with the

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[3] Here I allude to Rosalyn Diprose's work on being open to others through our bodies. In *Corporeal Generosity,* Diprose defends a conception of generosity, according to which it is not a merely a virtue, but a foundational aspect of our existence in a social world.

dominant perspective: it portrays a man who seeks to dominate his partner during sexual intercourse. At the end of the passage, Beauvoir describes the man as becoming the "sole subject" once intercourse is over. The idea that the dominating person is a subject and the other merely an object to be controlled will serve an important role in my account of reification. By contrast, *Passages 2* and *4* describe a certain openness onto the other. While *Passage 1* describes the white woman's fear of the black man, *Passage 2* portrays two moments in her progression towards openness. First, she must undergo a certain "level of openness and expansiveness," in order to, second, respond and move towards the other. Thus, openness and expansiveness are preconditions for enacting a new set of body language vis-à-vis black persons. Turning now to the context of gender, in *Passage 4,* Beauvoir speaks of lovers as embodying "a generosity of body and soul." The passage reveals that this generosity does not simply mean offering something to other, as the man in *Passage 3* does when he makes his partner come, but being receptive to the other. In addition, I should note that in incarnating this attitude, the male lover needs to recognize the freedom of the woman. This will be an important element for the following discussion since the stance we can embody when we cease to reify others is precisely one which accepts the other's freedom.

This preliminary characterization identifies two moments in the personal transformations at stake in this chapter: 1) the reifying stance; 2) the stance of openness towards others.

4.2 The Reifying Stance and Bodily Alienation

The goal of this section is to establish the claim that the reifying stance entails a form of bodily alienation. In order to establish this claim, I will begin Heidegger's discussion of reification in *Being and Time*, which describes a certain form of reification, the stance one embodies when one

understands an instrument to be mere things. By analogy, I will argue that the dominant person's

reification of the oppressed other rests on a similar misunderstanding. Using Heidegger's

account of alienation, I will go on to explain how this reifying stance is a form of self-alienation.

Finally, I will argue, that this self-alienation is, more specifically, a form of *bodily* alienation.

4.2.1 Reification: Heidegger on Self-World Relations

I begin with Heidegger's account of the world in *Being and Time*, which describes a form of

reification that consists in understanding an instrument as a mere thing. In order to make sense of

Heidegger's position, we must first become acquainted with some of his terminology, without

which it would be impossible to comprehend his conception of reification: Dasein, being-in-the-

world, readiness-to-hand, and presence-at-hand.

Let us take these terms in order. First, Heidegger uses the German word "Dasein" to

designate us. It typically means existence. However, Heidegger uses it in an etymological sense:

Dasein, first and foremost, means "being there."[4] Heidegger adopts this term to designate us

because he wishes to draw our attention to the fact that there is always a "there" in which we find

ourselves, or in other words, that we are always in a world. Second, and relatedly, Heidegger

describes Dasein's "basic state" as being-in-the-world (BT 78/SZ 53).[5] This is just a way of

spelling out the idea that Dasein always finds itself in a world. But one thing that is interesting

about this formulation is that it introduces the concept of worldhood, to which Heidegger devotes

a chapter and to which we will soon turn. "Being-in-the-world" is what Heidegger calls a

"unitary phenomenon" (BT 78/SZ 53). In calling "being-in-the-world" a unitary phenomenon,

Heidegger means that we are inextricably part of the world. We are not in the world in the way in

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[4] "*Da*" means "there" in German, while "*sein*" means "being."
[5] As in the previous chapter, I have included both the pagination in the Macquarrie and Robinson translation of *Being and Time* (BT) and the pagination in the German edition (SZ).

which a book of mine is in my backpack; it is contingent whether my book is in my backpack. Rather, our being-in-the-world is essential to who we are. What, then, is the world in which we find ourselves? We are embedded in a world both of others like ourselves and of other things.

Third, in connection with the nature of other things, Heidegger distinguishes between what is ready-to-hand and present-at-hand. Readiness-to-hand is the being of things as apprehended with practical concern (BT 97/SZ 68). For example, it is the being the hammer has as I am using it. By contrast, presence-at-hand is the being of things as viewed in a disengaged manner, outside of everyday practical concerns; it is the being of things as I investigate them as a scientist (BT 104/SZ 74).

In interpreting of Dasein as being-in-the-world, Heidegger prioritizes our practical stance, over our theoretical stance with respect to the world. This is to say that the relationship we bear to things when handling them reveals what the world is, more than our disengaged intellectual inquiries into the nature of the world do. This practical stance is exemplified in the way in which we deal with things as ready-to-hand, while the theoretical relation is evidenced in the way we interact with them as present-at-hand. In effect, Heidegger turns a traditional way of thinking of our relation to the world on its head. His view entails that knowing, i.e., theoretical knowledge, is "founded" on our being-in-the-world (see ¶13, especially BT 88/SZ 61). This view comes out very clearly in his critique of Descartes's conception of the world as *res extensa.* Heidegger accuses Descartes of misunderstanding the being of the world, and also, in so doing, of misunderstanding our own being:

> The idea of Being as permanent presence-at-hand not only gives Descartes a motive for identifying entities within-the-world with the world in general, and for providing so extreme a definition of their Being; it also keeps him from bringing Dasein's ways of behaving into view in a manner which is ontologically appropriate. (BT 130/SZ 98)

Descartes mistakenly turns the world into a sum of substances, and in so doing obscures our essence (BT 131/SZ 98). He fails to account for Dasein's immersion in the world. To put this point in other terms: contrary to Cartesianism, we are not subjects divorced from a world conceived as a set of independent entities.

Returning now to the theme of reification, I will call the mistake a metaphysician such as Descartes makes when he conceives of the world as a sum of substances "reification," because it expresses the understanding of the world as a sum of things. The reifying stance depicted in the previous chapter reveals a similar misunderstanding; reifying others means regarding others, specifically of members of oppressed groups, as things. More precisely, the dominant person's stance is reifying since he treats the other person as lacking in freedom (in a sense that I will define in the following section).[6]

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[6] It is here useful to mention Martha Nussbaum's taxonomy of objectification in order to position my view on reification. In her article "Objectification," Nussbaum enumerates seven notions related to the idea of treating a thing as an object:

> 1. Instrumentality: The objectifer treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes.
> 2. Denial of autonomy: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.
> 3. Inertness: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.
> 4. Fungibility: The objectifier treats the object as interchangeable (a) with other objects of the same type, and/or (b) with objects of other types.
> 5. Violability: The objectifer treats the object as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that is permissible to break up, smash, break into.
> 6. Ownership: The objectifier treats the object as something that is owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc.
> 7. Denial of subjectivity: The objectifer treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account. (1995, 257)

My understanding of reification could be said to resemble the second notion, the denial of autonomy, if we think of freedom as synonymous with self-determination. But as I argued in Chapter Three, I do not take self-determination to be useful in understanding the cases at stake. So, in order to respect my view, we would need to invoke an eighth notion: the denial of freedom, where freedom signifies something other than the capacity to determine oneself.

To sum up, in our case, reification does not rest on a perverted understanding of the world, but on a perverted understanding of certain others. What does this perversion tell us about the dominant other's mode of being?

4.2.2 The Reifying Stance as a Form of Inauthenticity

In order to establish that the reifying stance is a form of bodily alienation, I first need to establish that this reifying stance is a form of self-alienation. In so doing, I will inquire into Heidegger's account of our being with others, since it sheds light on the connection between reifying others and inauthenticity, and ultimately between reifying others and self-alienation.

In Chapter Four of Division I, "Being-in-the-World as Being-With and Being-One's-Self. The 'They,'" Heidegger explains that being-with (*Mitsein*) is part of who we are. This does not signify merely that one is contingently not alone in the world, but furthermore that one is always amidst others. This is just a more specific version of the point made earlier, namely, that we do not just happen to be in the world, but that the world is essential to who we are. Here Heidegger means to claim that the social world is essential to who we are. He supports the claim that we are essentially in a social world by attending to the entities we encounter in the world: the field along whose edges I walk belongs to so and so; the gloves I see in a shop are designed for hands of such and such a size, and so on. Everywhere we find signs of our shared existence in the world (see ¶26).[7] Now, what are interpersonal relations like according to Heidegger? He distinguishes between various ways of relating to others, or what he calls "modes of solicitude." The negative mode is indifference to others. Aside from this mode, he describes two "positive modes":

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[7] Perhaps unsurprisingly, Merleau-Ponty adopts the same strategy for motivating the idea that we live in a shared world in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. See the beginning of the chapter entitled "Other Selves and the Human World."

leaping-in and leaping-ahead. The distinction between these two positive modes is crucial to understanding the reifying stance, so let's pause to consider them.

First, leaping-in. Leaping-in is a mode of solicitude that "takes over for the Other that with which he is to concern himself" (BT 158/SZ 122). This is the kind of solicitude one could say a teacher embodies when she deprives her students of the opportunity to uncover new knowledge and simply "feeds" them the information they need to learn. Heidegger connects this mode of solicitude with the domination: leaping-in signifies that "the Other can become one who is *dominated* and dependent, even if this domination is a tacit one and remains hidden from him" (BT 158/SZ 122, emphasis mine). By contrast, in leaping ahead of the Other, Dasein can disclose existential possibilities to the other. To return to the example of education, a teacher who gives her students the freedom to discover new knowledge and to make it their own might be said to embody a different mode of solicitude: "leaping-ahead." Heidegger describes leaping-ahead as working "not in order to take away [the Other's] 'care' but rather to give it back to him authentically" (BT 159/SZ 122). And Heidegger states that "[t]his kind of solicitude pertains essentially to authentic care—that is, to the existence of the Other, not to a '*what*' with which he is concerned"; instead it allows the Other to "become transparent to himself" and to be "*free*" for this care (BT 159/SZ 122). This statement is crucial, for it marks the difference between the reifying stance—relating to the other not as a "what," that is, as a thing—and its opposite, the stance of openness, which promotes the other's *freedom*. The echoes between this statement and Beauvoir's account of sexual relations in *Passage 4* are remarkable: the man is said to have the ability to either treat his sexual partner as a something to be controlled or as essentially free.

I have said that in leaping ahead one can promote another's freedom. But what exactly is the notion of freedom at stake here? Here it will be useful to draw on the connection Jaeggi

establishes between freedom and alienation. According to her, alienation consists in "a particular form of the loss of freedom," which is the loss of "positive freedom" (2014, 35). Jaeggi aligns her understanding of positive freedom with Isaiah Berlin's. In *Four Essays on Liberty*, Berlin writes: "The 'positive' sense of the word 'liberty' derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master" (1971, 131). This general wish includes the wishes (1) "to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes, which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside" and (2) "to be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing, active being" (131). While I agree with Jaeggi that alienation amounts to a loss of freedom, I disagree with the conception of freedom that she borrows from Berlin. In particular, I disagree with the conception of freedom that is expressed in wishes (1) and (2). I think they should be replaced with the following wish: (3) to be moved by what I will name, following Heidegger, the "call of conscience." In order to characterize the difference between my conception of freedom, on the one hand, and Jaeggi's and Berlin's, on the other hand, let me begin by introducing three characters, loosely inspired by a recent *New York Times* article on the college education and employment: "Will You Sprint, Stroll or Stumble Into a Career?"[8]

The first character is the Sprinter.[9] Sprinters choose their college majors early on, land regular internships during college, and have jobs lined up by the end of their senior year. Sprinters treat their education like a business. They forge ahead with these plans regardless of changes in their own intuitive sense of whether their education suits them. Now, departing slightly from the *New York Times* headline, let me introduce a second and a third character: the

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[8] The article, by Jeffrey J. Selingo, appeared in the *New York Times* on April 5, 2016.
[9] I should note that for the sake of this argument, I will assume that these characters are financially well off. I do not wish to argue that anyone who chooses a popular career path out of financial necessity is making a poor choice. This is an idealization.

Drifter and the Wanderer. What is distinctive of Drifters is that their choices during and after

college are entirely influenced by popular preferences. The Drifter chooses the most popular

major and pursues the careers her peers pursue. She rarely pauses to think of her own tastes and

talents. The Wanderer's choices are neither governed by popular demand, like the Drifter's, nor

inflexible, like the Sprinter's. The Wanderer makes decisions concerning her education by taking

her tastes and talents into consideration, while at the same time being open to the idea that these

tastes and talents are open to revision. Nothing is ever settled for the Wanderer.

I introduce these three characters to contrast my view of freedom with Jaeggi's and

Berlin's. The Sprinter embodies an extreme of self-possession that is compatible with positive

liberty on the Jaeggi and Berlin view. By contrast, the Drifter embodies its opposite, in that she is

moved by reasons that are not her own, but those of her peers. Finally, the Wanderer embodies

the notion of freedom I wish to advance, in that her educational projects evolve in response to

her situation; she does not inflexibly direct her life like the Sprinter does. The Sprinter and the

Wanderer are both masters of themselves, insofar as their choices are not governed by external

pressures. What distinguishes the Sprinter from the Wanderer is that the Sprinter's choices are

entirely governed by reasons and conscious purposes, whereas the Wanderer has a more open-

minded approach to her education.

In appealing to these characters, I do not wish to impugn anyone who would manage her

education as the Sprinter does. I do worry, however, about someone who treats her life as a

whole in this business-like manner. Like Heidegger, I am concerned about someone who treats

herself as "something that gets managed and reckoned up," and who thinks that "[l]ife is a

'business'" (BT 289/SZ 336). What seems problematic with the "business model" is that a

person who leads such a life misunderstands who she is as a human being. Such a person might

have a plan for her life as a whole, and plan her pursuits accordingly. But she fails to understand

that relating to her life as a whole does not consist in checking off the items on her life plan. And

I worry that the view of liberty that Jaeggi and Berlin advance is conducive to this managerial

approach to life. So long as one is governed by one's own reasons and purposes, then one is

living a free life in their sense of "freedom." However, such a free life obscures the question of

how to relate to life as a whole.

Heidegger's conception of a life that could respond to the call of conscience takes into

account this question of how to relate to one's life as a whole. Here is a sketch of his view. The

call of conscience is not called by any external entity, be it another person or a supernatural

entity, but "*from* me and yet *from beyond and over me*" (BT 320/SZ 275). This quotation reveals

that: 1) the call of conscience is not something that I can decide to initiate (BT 320/SZ 275); and

2) in hearing the call of conscience, I relate to myself in a particular way, that is, I am called

back to myself. The call calls me back from my socially prescribed way of living my life, which

is lost in the general ways of leading one's life; the call calls me back from my inauthentic way

of being. To return to the characters described above, the call aims at the Drifter, the person

caught up in the ways in which everyone behaves. But it also calls back the self-certain Sprinter,

who has concealed from herself the question of the meaning of life as a whole. Sprinters, to

borrow from Heidegger, have a view of life that is "too short-sighted" (BT 363/SZ 316). The

Sprinter lives in such a way as to conceal the question of how to relate to one's life as a whole;

the only difference between the original Drifters is that Sprinters appear to be masters of

themselves. In fact, the Sprinter is only master of the particulars in her life, but she "loses itself

in "those '*opportunities*' which are closest to [her]" (BT 346/SZ 300). The discourse that

Sprinters hear speaks about pursuing such and such opportunities; it says something determinate.

By contrast, the call of conscience is a silent call; it does not direct us to particular actions. But in hearing it, the Wanderer understands that she has to take responsibility for her life and come to grips with her death. This is just another way of saying that she comes to understand of the structure of her life as a whole.

In responding to the call of conscience, I am free not in the sense that I govern my life according to reasons that are my own. Instead I am "free from entertaining 'incidentals' […] from the events of the world" (BT 358/SZ 310). That is to say that I do not organize my life around particular opportunities in the world. Instead, responding to the call of conscience means that I can take over my life with an understanding of its existential structure. In the case of a college education, this might mean pursuing one's education with a sense of responsibility for one's education and with an awareness that the very institution of higher education is essentially fragile; it could come undone and its meaning is not settled. In fact, in taking one's education in hand, the Wanderer contributes to the very meaning of the institution of education, instead of merely maximizing the opportunities she is afforded. To live with an understanding of the structure of one's existence is not to say that one can take a god's eye point of view on one's life and intellectually grasp its existential structure.[10] Living with an understanding of one's existence shapes one's way of life.

To summarize, then, the freedom that I think one can promote in another in relating to him or her authentically is not the freedom of self-mastery in Jaeggi's and Berlin's sense, but the freedom of self-mastery in Heidegger's sense. It is the freedom to make life one's own in a sense

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[10] Relatedly, I should note that an understanding of one's existence is not something one can achieve once and for all: we are constantly vulnerable to drifting back into socially prescribed ways of leading one's life, and so listening to the call of conscience is a task ever to be renewed.

that rises beyond the capacity to govern the particulars of one's projects, and towards the capacity to live with an understanding of one's existence.

4.2.3 The Reifying Stance as a Form of Self-Alienation

If we take Heidegger's framework on board, we can see that the dominant person is not authentically *with* the oppressed person when he reifies her. He misapprehends the other's mode of being. Put simply, the reifying stance is inauthentic. But what of the dominant person's relation to himself? In order to address this question, we will first need to understand Heidegger's own statements concerning alienation.

The fifth chapter of Division I, "Being-in As Such," takes up the question of the "inhood" at stake in Dasein's "being-in-the-world" (BT 79/SZ 53). The discussion of alienation appears in the final section of this chapter (¶38). Heidegger draws a connection between what he calls "falling" and alienation. Falling designates our everyday way of being in the world (¶38). It is the way of being in the world in which one does as everyone does; it is an inauthentic way of being in the world. Falling is defined by socially prescribed ways of understanding and interpreting the world. For example, Heidegger says that in falling "one sees" as one is prescribed to see (BT 213/SZ 170). This remark is pertinent for our purposes because my overarching aim is to demonstrate how a member of a dominant group can adopt a different way of perceiving the oppressed other, a way of perceiving that diverges from the socially prescribed dominant perspective on the oppressed. Heidegger spells out the connection between falling and alienation in these terms:

> When Dasein, tranquillized, and 'understanding' everything, thus compares itself with everything, it drifts along towards an alienation [*Entfremdung*] in which its ownmost potentiality-for-Being is hidden from it. Falling Being-in-the-world is not only tempting and tranquilizing; it is at the same time *alienating*. (BT 222/SZ 178)

This alienation *closes off* from Dasein its authenticity and possibility, even if only the possibility of genuinely foundering. (BT 222/SZ 178)

The first passage follows upon Heidegger's discussion of a certain drive for "understanding the most alien cultures and 'synthetizing' them with one's own" (BT 222/SZ 178). He claims that such comparisons and synthesizing, instead of helping Dasein better understand itself, lead Dasein to be "torn away from itself," that is, alienated from itself (BT 222/SZ 178). Heidegger's point is that these activities of comparison and synthesizing obscure Dasein from itself, and as such foreclose authenticity. Taken more generally (that is, not only in the realm of cultural comparison), Heidegger seems to be making a familiar point about authenticity, namely, that authenticity does not emerge from comparing oneself to others, but to one's own possibilities.

How does this account of alienation bear on the issue at hand, the reifying stance? Heidegger, in the above quoted passages, draws a close connection between inauthenticity and alienation. Given this connection, we can say that being with others in a fallen manner is tantamount to being alienated from oneself. As a result, we can affirm that the dominant person is alienated from himself in that he relates to the oppressed other in the way prescribed by his milieu. Not only that, but the socially prescribed dominant way of relating to the oppressed person is inauthentic because it is an inauthentic form of solicitude, the form captured by Heidegger's expression "leaping-in." In brief: there are two forms of inauthenticity at stake in the dominant person's reifying stance: the inauthenticity that stems from living as one does as a member of a dominant group, and the inauthenticity that stems from the fact that living as one does as a member of a dominant group involves an inauthentic form of solicitude vis-à-vis the oppressed.

In light of this discussion, the dominant person's reifying stance is revealed to be a form of self-alienation. Thus, the reifying stance is alienating in two senses: it alienates others and it

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alienates oneself from oneself. The alienation the oppressed person and the dominant other endure are different, to be sure, but they are both forms of alienation nonetheless.

In the context of this discussion, I think it is worth pausing to consider Beauvoir's appropriation of Heidegger's ontology, in particular, her appropriation of the concept of *Mitsein*. This is because I think that Beauvoir and I are up to something similar in appealing to Heidegger's ontology for describing phenomena relating to gender (and race). In the Introduction to *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir writes that she will describe "the world from the woman's point of view such as it is offered to her" such that "we will see the difficulties women are up against just when, trying to escape the sphere they have been assigned until now, they seek to be part of the human *Mitsein*" (17). We learn from this quotation that something in women's condition creates an obstacle for them in becoming part of the human *Mitsein*. Does Beauvoir simply mean that women are prevented from belonging to humanity as a whole?[11] Following several Beauvoir scholars—most notably, Nancy Bauer—I would like to argue that there is something more subtle going on here.[12]

In "Beauvoir's Heideggerian Ontology," Bauer rejects the idea that Beauvoir wishes "to exalt some notion of human community" (2006, 67). Nonetheless, Bauer regards Beauvoir's appropriation of Heidegger's concept to "have broadly ethical ramifications" (67). As Bauer reads Heidegger, the notion of *Mitsein* is used to counteract the solipsistic idea that we are essentially alone in the world and that the presence of others is merely contingent. As I hope my exposition of Heidegger has indicated, I am in agreement with Bauer on this point. Bauer goes

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[11] This is what H.M. Parshley's translation suggests. Parshley renders Beauvoir's "*participer au Mitsein humain*" as "aspire to full membership in the human race" (Beauvoir 1989, xxxv).
[12] Bauer's article on Beauvoir and Heidegger engages with Debra Bergoffen's and Eva Gothlin's interpretations of Beauvoir. However, I will focus exclusively on Bauer's own interpretation here.

on to explain that once we have rejected the idea of solipsism, there arises the problem of how

"an individual is to find the courage to be herself, to distinguish herself in a world in which she is

inevitably *with*—even smothered by—others, and particularly by men" (77). In other words,

according to Bauer, beyond the problem of solipsism, there lies the issue of how to live

authentically with others, and this issue is particularly pressing for women given their

oppression. Relations between men and women are structured such that women are tempted to

objectify themselves and to shy away from embracing their freedom (85). And this situation

creates difficulties for women to distinguish themselves. Bauer concludes that aspiring to be part

of the human *Mitsein* does not mean aspiring to be part of a collective, but aspiring to participate

in a world where one can be genuinely recognized and genuinely recognize others (87). It is a

world in which self-objectification will have lost its appeal for women.[13]

In appealing to Heidegger's ontology in this chapter, I am looking at the problem of how

to live authentically in an oppressive world from the other end. The issue at stake here is the

possibility of overcoming the normalizing effects of one's (dominant) environment in order to be

authentically with oppressed persons. The reifying stance is the way in which dominant members

are socialized into relating to oppressed persons. Conversely, relinquishing this reifying stance,

by my lights, amounts to cultivating authentic relations to others. Both my view and Beauvoir's

presuppose that the current state of societies creates difficulties for living authentically in a

shared world.

Beauvoir uses the notion of *Mitsein* to make sense of authentic relations with others. This

appropriation raises a question over which much ink has been spilled, namely, whether

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[13] Conversely, it is a world where the temptation to identify solely with their subjectivity would no longer exist for men.

Heidegger's philosophy in *Being and Time* can lay the ground for an ethics. I think it can, not in

the sense of a system of morality (for example, one that could offer reasons for our various

duties), but in the sense of an art of living. This is because the use of the concept of authenticity

can diagnose certain deficient ways of interacting with others, such as reification, and illuminate

authentic ways of being with others. Yet one might hesitate to call these diagnoses as supporting

an ethics, given Heidegger's own reticence to make authenticity into a value. When he first

introduces authenticity in the first chapter of Division One, he asserts "the inauthenticity of

Dasein does not signify any 'less' Being or any 'lower' degree of Being" (BT 68/SZ 43). This

assertion suggests that authenticity is one mode of being of Dasein, but not a defective one. Even

so, Heidegger's discussions of authenticity leave the impression that authenticity is better way of

living. For example, think of the "unshakeable *joy*" that Dasein experiences in anticipatory

resoluteness, that is, in an authentic way of relating to its existential possibilities (BT 358/SZ

310). The language adopted here and in other discussions of authenticity appear intuitively to

signal that authenticity is something we might aspire to. Therefore, we might regard the ideal of

authenticity as laying the ground for an ethics.[14] Indeed, I am far from the first to have proposed

the idea of an ethics of authenticity. One of the most noteworthy attempts at articulating such an

ethics is Charles Taylor's *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1991).

4.2.4 The Reifying Stance as a Form of Bodily Alienation

I have argued thus far that the dominant person is alienated from him- or herself. But is the

dominant person's alienation a form of *bodily alienation*? After all, the Chapter Three cases

offered us a wealth of details about the *bodily experience* of the oppressed person in the face of

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[14] I will return to the difference between different understandings of the nature of ethics, and in particular to the difference between moral philosophy and ethics, at the end of this chapter.

the dominant other's gaze. What do we know of dominant individuals' bodily experience? Let us consider two examples: the first concerns race; the second, gender.

The first example is the one of the white woman in the elevator, and so I have reproduced *Passage 1* in its entirety. Yancy describes the following physical manifestations of her fear of the black man.

> Her body shifts nervously and her heart beats more quickly as she clutches her purse more closely to her. She feels anxiety in the pit of her stomach. Her perception of time in the elevator may feel like an eternity. […] Like choking black smoke, my Blackness permeates the enclosed space of the elevator. Her palms become clammy. She feels herself on the precipice of taking flight, the desperation to flee. There is panic, there is difficulty swallowing, and there is a slight trembling of her white torso, dry mouth, nausea. (2008, 847)

In total, there are nine bodily manifestations of her fear: 1) nervous shifting; 2) increased heart rate; 3) cramped and reflexive movements (clutching); 4) stomach "pain"; 5) clammy hands; 6) difficulty swallowing; 7) trembling; 8) dry mouth; 9) nausea.[15] In addition, there are two other components of her experience that might have bodily manifestations: her experience of time and her instinct to flee. One could imagine that the experience of time as slowed down is accompanied by the symptoms of anxiety or nervous shifting. And one could imagine the woman's desire to flee as translating into tension in her legs, as though she were going to run from the situation. Evidently, the white woman experiences her body in relation to the black man, and this in a distorted way. The man poses no threat to her, yet she has physical symptoms of fear. I would argue that the woman experiences herself as threatened because, according to her implicit understanding of the situation, she feels entitled to exclude black persons from the space

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[15] I wonder whether Yancy's reference to "nausea" in his description of the white woman's experience is meant to echo Fanon's description of the black man's experience: "I approached the Other…and the Other, evasive, hostile, but not opaque, transparent and absent, vanished. Nausea" (2008, 92).

immediately surrounding her. At some level, she assumes that she should have command over the space. Yancy's description suggests that the woman's alienation in this social space has a bodily component. That said, one might object that this woman's fear is different than the attitude embodied by whites in other circumstances, such as the white passengers on the train in the Fanon example from Chapter Three. Is there anything awry in their bodily experience? After all, they are not cowering in fear like the woman on the elevator. My response to this objection is simple: hostility is also experienced at a bodily level—perhaps not in as dramatic a fashion as fear—but in some way nonetheless. Think of the physical manifestations of anger: the tensing of one's muscles, a flushed feeling, and perhaps shakiness too. And think of the avoidant patterns of movement that some whites adopt as they navigate racialized spaces. Yancy, earlier on in the same article, speaks of a salesperson who avoids touching his hands when handing back change (2008, 844). This cramped way of navigating space (and others) creates not only barriers between oneself and the other, but also barriers in one's relation to space as a whole. One creates space between oneself and the other, thereby closing oneself to some part of the space itself. Movements are stilted, rather than open to responsive to the world as a whole. All in all, this description supports the idea that the dominant other's alienation from himself and the other is a form of bodily alienation.

The second example, which deals with gender, is one I draw from Beauvoir's corpus— but not from *The Second Sex*. Her late work *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre* (French edition 1981; translated into English in 1984) contains several hundred pages of interviews with Jean-Paul Sartre. In one of these interviews, Beauvoir asks Sartre about his relations to women and, in particular, his sexual relations to women. Sartre's account of himself in his early years matches Beauvoir's description of the dominant man's attitude in *The Second Sex*, thereby shedding light

on the dominant man's *bodily experience* during sexual intercourse. Given the wealth of details in these interviews, I think it will be worth pausing to consider Sartre's relation to his body during sex, as well as other facets of his bodily experience, which will together offer a rich picture of the dominant person's bodily alienation. It is also interesting material, since we rarely learn about philosophers's experiences of their bodies, and since Sartre's own relation is clearly inflected by his brand of existentialism.

Let us begin with Sartre's sex life. In response to a question about his relation to women in general, Sartre avows that he has always been "more or less the dominant partner with women" (*dominateur avec les femmes*), and several exchanges later, he adds that he was at first "more a masturbator of women, than a copulator" (*plutôt un masturbateur de femmes qu'un coïteur*) (1984, 299 and 302, respectively). He elaborates on this point and reveals that he derived little pleasure from the sexual act itself, and speaks of a "certain indifference" (302). Beauvoir then presses him concerning this "indifference" and couches it not merely in terms of a relationship to women, but also in terms of a "certain relation with your body" (*un certain rapport avec votre corps*) (302). Sartre evades the question for the rest of the interview, speaking instead of the various ways in which he desires women. But not for long. In the next interview, we return to Sartre's sexuality, which he describes in these terms:

> Beauvoir: You were never aware of yourself as a passive object.
> Sartre: Never. And never as the object of caresses either. So necessarily that in itself changed the relations between the two persons. There was a gap between what the other could take and give in relation to me, since that gap existed in me. So as I was reasonably well equipped sexually my erection was quick and easy, and I often made love, but without great pleasure. Just a little pleasure at the end, but pretty feeble. I preferred being in contact with the whole body, caressing the body—busy with my hands and my legs, touching the other—to the act of love strictly so called. (314)

The lesson we learn from Sartre's statements is that he never experienced himself as passive during sex, and, relatedly, never took pleasure in sexual intercourse as *intercourse*, in the

reciprocity of sex. He liked to feel himself an agent, and would have happily slept with women without having penetrative sex. Not only that but Sartre's attitude in sex created a certain "gap" (*coupure*) between himself and the women with whom he had sex. In addition, Sartre claims that he was never close to any "loss of consciousness" during orgasm or "in any other love play" (315). Together, these details reveal that Sartre embraced an active role during sex and disdained the pleasure that passivity might have bred, and this attitude entailed a distance between himself and his lover.

Sartre's refusal of passivity is manifested in other aspects of his bodily experience. First, he only ever allowed himself to feel passive during sickness, and resisted as long as possible before admitting his pain (320). Second, one of the few bodily activities that Sartre enjoyed, though not in its specifically bodily dimension, is unsurprisingly one where he could express his dominant side: boxing (322–323). Third, Sartre used drugs that allowed him to focus on his writing early in the day and for long periods of time, and he describes his relation to his body in light of this use in these terms: "There was something of a depraved pleasure [in feeling that I was going beyond my strength]. There was also the possibility of things turning lethal, but there was no telling when. I went very far" (319). Sartre's statement suggests that he enjoyed a certain form of self-abuse.[16]

Let me conclude this discussion of Sartre by comparing his relation to his body with his existentialism. Unlike Beauvoir, whose existential views we studied in Chapter Two, Sartre did not make the ambiguity of the human condition, our existence as flesh and as transcendence, into

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[16] In addition, Sartre claims to have never remembered his dreams past the age of thirty (330). We might speculate that his forgetfulness betrays his refusal to be passive. If anything dreams are passive phenomena, and as we saw in Chapter Three, they are the paradigm of human activity for those, like Homer, who refuse to think of us as purely self-determined beings.

a positive feature of our existence. Sartre repeatedly emphasizes our activity, our existence as transcendent beings. This comes out in his lecture "Existentialism Is a Humanism," where Sartre paints a picture of us as entirely self-making creatures: according to existentialism, we are to "invent" ourselves (2007, 33). And in the midst of his responses to Beauvoir about his body, he avows: "And in the end for me activity was the fact of being human. A man or a woman is an active being" (1984, 316). Sartre prizes human being as *activity* and this valuation fundamentally shaped his own relation to his body. All in all, he admits to Beauvoir that he has got along "not very well" with his body (311).

Sartre's account of his relation to his body speaks to the idea that the dominant person's relation to his own body is alienated. While one might object that Sartre did not treat the women with whom he had sexual encounters as mere things, his description of his own sexual activity is reminiscent of the man's relation to his partner in *Passage 2*. Both Sartre and the man portrayed are interested in producing pleasure in their partner and seem to experience little pleasure in their own bodies. We may thus take his testimony as informing our understanding of the dominant man's bodily experience in *Passage 2*. From them, we learn that the dominant man experiences little physical pleasure during sex. One might further suppose that if he experiences any pleasure, this pleasure would be more intellectual in character; it would be one associated with the power of dominating itself.

Together with Yancy's description of the white woman's bodily experience, Sartre's account reveals that the self-alienation embodied by the dominant person in the passages at stake is also a form of *bodily* alienation. This is to say that there is a physical side (either specific sensations or the absence of sensation) to the experience of dominating another.

4.3 Projects of Personal Transformation: Cultivating Openness to Others

I have argued that embodying a reifying stance is tantamount to being alienated from one's body. The problems that remain for us to address are the following: first, how the dominant person can cease to perceive the other as a thing, and, second, how he can embody new ways of engaging with others. These two points, I will explain, are intimately connected, and I will draw on Merleau-Ponty's work on the relationship between perception and action to establish this connection.

For the moment, though, I will argue that the key to transforming the reifying stance lies in reforming one's perception of others. In what follows, I will develop the relationship between one's perception of others and a certain transformative practice: mindfulness meditation. I will compare three anecdotes about transformations in one's perception of others in order to motivate the turn to mindfulness. Since the three concern race, this section will deal exclusively with personal transformations in the ways in which we view racialized others, but it is not meant to preclude the application of mindfulness to cases regarding gender and other dimensions of oppression. I should also note that I use perception in a thick sense. That is, I think of perception as inflected by our emotions. For example, I do not consider the woman in the elevator to merely see a black man and then have an emotion of fear, but that part of her experience of the black man is that he is fearsome.

4.3.1 Three Anecdotes

The first two anecdotes are Alia Al-Saji's and Sally Haslanger's discussions of personal transformations brought about by changes in family environments. In "A Phenomenology of Hesitation: Interrupting Racializing Habits of Seeing," Al-Saji offers an account of how racializing seeing can be transformed. Her target case is someone who reflexively perceives

women who wear a veil *as* "willfully incarnating religious dogmatism" (2014, 134). She claims that learning to *hesitate* in seeing can short-circuit the reflexive judgments that accompany our vision of members of certain ethnic or racial groups. She further argues that *affect* plays an important part in motivating hesitation. She motivates this claim through the example of her partner transformation of her partner, who is not Muslim; after joining a family in which some women wear a veil, he stops reflexively perceiving them as incarnating religious dogmatism. Similarly, in "You Mixed? Racial Identity Without Racial Biology" (2005), Sally Haslanger claims that her racial identity has in some way been transformed in virtue of being a mother in a transracial adoption. She explains that her imaginary body has been extended to include the bodies of her children (278-279). And in virtue of this extension, she engages with those of the race of her children in new ways. For example, she discusses the shift in the persons whom she first notices, with whom she first makes eye contact when entering a room, and next to whom she sits (280).

These cases share two features. First, a person becomes part of a mixed racial family—either by joining or founding it. Second, this change in his or her family situation precipitates perceptual changes. Now, given that many of us find ourselves in mixed racial settings on a daily basis, yet neither undergo transformations in our perceptions of persons of other races, nor in our modes of interacting with them, we might hypothesize that the family environment somehow played a role in these individuals' transformation. One thing that is special about the family environment, I would add, is that the *affective* ties bind family members to one another. When a person comes to be part of a family she forms an affective bond, that is a deeper tie, as opposed to a connection of mere acquaintance with members of the other race (for example, as a coworker or classmate, or as a counterpart in a business transaction).

The third intervention concerns the practice of mindfulness meditation. In a 2014 study, led by Adam Lueke and Bryan Gibson, test subjects exhibited less age bias and less racial bias on the Implicit Association Test after engaging in a guided mindfulness meditation session. The recording they listened to invited them to attend to their bodily sensations and breath. The Implicit Association Test is designed to measure implicit bias, which is the phenomenon wherein unconscious and conscious attitudes about a person or social group can diverge. For example, a person might hold a non-racist belief about a group, while expressing racist attitudes towards that group in her body language. The Implicit Association Test makes assumptions about the psychological mechanisms at work in implicit bias and uses them to detect implicit biases (Kelly and Roedder 2008, 524). For instance, the test for implicit racial bias requires subjects to pair words of either positive or negative connotations with images of African-Americans or whites. The idea behind the pairing exercises is that stronger associations between certain words and racialized features will lead to quicker sorting than weaker associations between certain words and racialized features. Therefore, small differences in the speed with which subjects perform these sorting tasks are taken to be evidence of implicit biases. The hypothesis Lueke and Gibson advance is that mindfulness meditation might affect implicit age and racial biases.

The first two anecdotes highlight the importance of affect in experiential transformations. Yet we might imagine that there are members of mixed race families who do not undergo these transformations. Indeed, Haslanger herself raises the possibility that some adoptive parents in transracial adoptions will not develop a "mixed" racial identity.[17] Such parents will not come to

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[17] Haslanger means a mixed racial identity in an embodied sense. As I will explain in greater detail in Chapter Five, she distinguishes between a notion of racial identity as a label (which describes the race one is ascribed along with the ways in which one identifies with that race) and racial identity as embodied in the ways in which we navigate racialized spaces and engage with

embody new ways of engaging with those of the race of their adoptive child (2005, 288). On the

flip side, the third anecdote suggests that individuals who do not belong to mixed race families

might undergo perceptual changes. Taken together, these findings indicate that affective

environment is neither a necessary nor a sufficient cause for experiential change and that one's

mindset could impact transformations in perception. With this in mind, I will devote the next

section to the changes brought about by mindfulness meditation.

4.3.2 Mindfulness and Perceptual Changes

According to William Edelglass, when the word "mindfulness" is used to identify a form of

meditation it is a translation of the Sanskrit term *smrti* (2009, 390). This term refers to our

capacity to "sustain focused attention," and it is closely allied to the term *samprajanya,* which

refers to an "awareness" that "attends to the quality of mindfulness that enables the mind to

refocus when distracted" (390). In fact, in *Engaging with Buddhism,* Jay Garfield explains that

we should take "mindfulness" to translate the union of *smrti* and *samprajanya* (2015, 304).

Generally speaking, mindfulness is a practice in which one cultivates a "moment-to-moment

awareness of one's own cognitive and emotional states" (305). This idea is echoed in the

teachings of the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, who describes mindfulness as

"the energy of being aware and awake to the present" (2009, ix). For example, practicing

mindful breathing means bringing attention to one's in-breath and out-breath, and this can be

achieved by attending to sensations such as the rise and fall of one's abdomen or the passage of

air through one's nostrils. Moreover, Jon Kabat-Zinn, a pioneer in the field of research on

mindfulness and stress-reduction, argues that the awareness cultivated in mindfulness practices is

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persons of different races. Haslanger claims to have a mixed racial identity in the second sense in
virtue of the personal transformation she has undergone as a mother in a transracial adoption.

meant to be *non-judgmental* (2005, 24). If my mind wanders off to my workday during my practice of mindful breathing, I am simply encouraged to return to the awareness of my breath without chiding myself for my mind's wanderings.

Mindfulness extends to a number of domains (for example, sitting meditation and mindful walking), including our being with others. Thich Nhat Hanh asserts that "[p]racticing mindfulness, we begin to see our connection to other people" (2009, 69). But in order to see why this is the case, let us focus on one of the classical articulations of the nature of mindfulness, Shantideva's *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life* (*Bodhicaryavatara*).

In the seventh and eighth century CE, Shantideva taught in a Buddhist university near present-day Patna, India. The *Bodhicaryavatara* "is said to have first been presented as a teaching by Shantideva to his fellow monks" (Edelglass 2009, 388). The text is a "study of the awakened—or awakening—mind" (388). Its aim is to save *all* beings from suffering; in this regard, it differs from earlier Buddhist teachings that focused on the "liberation of the self" (388). What is important for our purposes is that Shantideva held that one of the sources of our suffering is the mistaken belief that phenomena have "independent existences," or to couch this in Western philosophical terms, that they are *substances*.[18] According to Shantideva, we should aim to transform this understanding of the world. One of the ways in which we loosen our grip on this understanding of the world is through the cultivation of generosity. As Edelglass explains, "[g]enerosity is the first perfection because the bonds of attachment to *reifying* concepts of 'mine,' 'self,' 'other,' and 'object' are loosed when making a gift" (2009, 389, emphasis mine). Moreover, we should not conceive of this generosity as a particular

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[18] "Independent existences" is an expression used by Garfield in his commentary. I have introduced the notion of substance here.

achievement in the world but as a "quality of mind" (389). Or, in Shantideva's own terms: "The

perfection of generosity is interpreted simply as a state of mind due to the intention of giving

away everything, together with the fruits of that, to all people" (5:10).[19] Cultivating this

generosity rests in part on meditating on the "equality of self and other" and the "exchange of

self and other" (Edelglass 2009, 391). This meditation consists in an attention to "the fact that all

sentient beings experience happiness and suffering" (391). More than that, this meditation

attends to the fact that there is no difference between my suffering and the suffering of others.

Therefore, given that suffering is bad, I should aim to relieve both my own suffering and that of

others. So, put simply, it is not the *locus* of the suffering that motivates work to eliminate it, but

the very fact of suffering itself.[20] The following two verses mark the transition from the

observation of our equality in suffering to the claim that the fact of suffering alone matters for

spurring care:

> One should first earnestly meditate on the equality of oneself and others in this way: "All equally experience suffering and happiness, and I protect them as I do myself." (8:90)

> I should eliminate the suffering of others because it is suffering, just like my own suffering. I should take care of others because they are sentient beings, just as I am a sentient being. (8:94)

In summary: Shantideva's ethics takes the universality of suffering as the motive for alleviating

all suffering (not just my own), and cultivating generosity as a state of mind allows one to

recognize that we are interdependent, rather than separate entities.

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[19] This quote is from Vesna Wallace and B. Allan Wallace's translation of the *Bodhicaryavatara* (1997). I refer to this and all subsequent passages from the *Bodhicaryavatara* using the chapter and verse numbers, rather than the pagination in the English translation.

[20] Here I am indebted to Garfield's comments on the *Bodhicaryavatara* in making this point (see Chapter 9 of *Engaging with Buddhism*).

This excursion into Shantideva's teachings allows us to form a broader conception of mindfulness practice than some Western expositions might suggest. Mindfulness encompasses a wide variety of practices, which run the gamut from breathing exercises to meditations that express compassion for others. What unites these practices, though, is that the cultivation of awareness itself. This awareness, for example, allows us to notice and respond to situations that call for a moral response, and which we would not notice in our distracted, mindless states (Garfield 2015, 305). But in order to better appreciate the role this awareness can have in nurturing interpersonal relations, let us have a look at the way that mindfulness can change one's fear. I focus on fear because it is the emotion that is at stake in the scenario of the white woman in the elevator. Imagining the way this scenario could be transformed will allow us to construct a narrative about how this woman can cultivate an openness to others. I should emphasize that this narrative is different from that envisioned by Yancy, who imagines that the elevator breaks down and causes the woman to let her guard down (2008, 867). So, instead of a change in the *givens* of the situation, I would like to examine changes in the woman's quality of mind.

What is fear? Heidegger describes fear as a mood directed toward "something which we encounter in the world" (BT 179/SZ 140). So, for example, the woman in the elevator's fear is directed at someone: the black man. In this regard, fear differs from the mood of anxiety, which is directed at the world as such (BT 232/187). That said, while we might fear particular entities in the world, we do have more global fears: fears of death, fears of loss. And one of the more global fears that Buddhist thought identifies is a "fear of interdependence" (Garfield 2015, 302). This fear is connected to the fears of death and loss: in fearing death and loss, we fear our subjection to other causes, our dependence on other things and persons; that is to say, we fear our interdependence. Not only that but the "conviction that we are independent agents interacting

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with other independent agents" is a way of concealing our fear of interdependence (302). In other words, this conviction, this reifying stance, is a reaction to the fear of interdependence.

What happens, then, when we become *aware* of our fear? Becoming aware of our fear allows us to become aware of its "impact on our lives" (303). We develop a "moral sensibility" by becoming aware of the pervasiveness of fear (303). Summarizing the transformation that occurs when we become aware of our fear, Garfield writes:

> Moral development is hence, once again, revealed to be a transformation of moral *experience*; this time a transition from a life conditioned by terror and unreason—albeit perhaps *unconscious terror and unrecognized unreason*—to a life conditioned by confidence and clarity; from a life constituted by phenomenological self-deception to a life constituted by introspective awareness. (304, second emphasis mine)

So awareness of fear is not merely an awareness of the symptoms of one's fear—let's say clutching one's purse—but an awareness of significance of that fear. And this awareness of the significance of one's fear is not a mere intellectual understanding of the nature of fear, but an understanding that is applied, or better yet, embodied.

In light of this examination of mindfulness, I think we can envision a transformation of the woman's way of being towards the black man that does not involve such external incidents as the elevator breaking down. We might imagine the woman attending to her breath instead in order to free her body for an appropriate response to the man. But this suggestion should not give us the impression that anyone can just change their relations to others overnight by focusing on their breath. Rather, the quality of mindfulness is one that is instilled over time through repeated practice and across a range of practices. The woman on the elevator, if she is to reform her alienating bodily response, will need to cultivate a new state of mind, and this takes time.

What do our findings on perceptual change tell us about the possibility for the dominant person to *embody* new ways of being with others, of interacting with others? The next section

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explores the connection between perception and action with an eye towards elucidating the

connection between perceptual habits and motor habits. I am particularly interested in motor

habits since the patterns of interaction explored in this and the previous chapter are enacted in a

habitual manner.

4.3.3 Perception and Action

The connection between perception and action that I develop here is continuous with the account

of skillful movement given in Chapter Three. Accordingly, I will draw on the *Phenomenology of

Perception* for my analysis. There Merleau-Ponty claims that perception and action are two sides

of the same coin: our bodies *anticipate* perceptions, that is, perform the movements that will

allow us to perceive, while perception *motivates* certain movements (2002, 246). Rather than

think of perception and action as two separate systems that bear causal relations to one another,

we should think of perception and action as essentially unified. But why?

Merleau-Ponty develops his understanding of the unity of perception and action in his

discussion of the body's spatiality in the chapter of the *Phenomenology* entitled "The Spatiality

of One's Own Body and Motility." There he discusses an example that we have already

encountered, that of a blind person guiding herself with a cane. As we saw, the cane needs to

recede from the person's awareness so that she can navigate her surroundings. The cane

discloses the world to her, albeit in a different way than my eyes disclose the world to me as a

sighted person. As a result, we should think of the cane as a perceptual medium, as a sense

organ, for it is through this entity (in part) that she perceives the world. At the same time, the

blind person does not perceive the world merely in virtue of having a cane. She needs to *use* it, to

move it, in order to perceive. In other words, her use of her body together with that of the cane

discloses the world to her. More generally, Merleau-Ponty holds that sense perception is a certain

use of the body. To see colors, for example, demands that we use our body in certain ways. This is a point he emphasizes at the end of "The Synthesis of One's Own Body": "to learn to see colours is to acquire a certain style of seeing, a new use of one's own body" (2002, 177). [21] All of this is to say that there is a unity between perception and action in the sense that perceiving means using one's body in a certain way, and vice versa.

That there is a unity between perception and action implies that changes in one's perception of a thing or another person involve changes in one's motor responses to that thing or person. Accordingly, when the dominant person ceases to experience himself as a subject set against a world of objects but as interdependent with others, and to perceive others as things, he will necessarily embody new ways of being with others. So, to emphasize, it is not that perceptual transformations *cause* changes in behavior. Rather, perceptual changes are tantamount to changes in movements. The changes in movement could be very subtle, like a change in the length of time during which one makes eye contact with someone or more noticeable shifts, such as letting go of one's purse.

Since these ways of engaging with others are habitual, we might also wonder whether these observations regarding perceptual change and mindfulness bear on bodily habits. I think they do. We can see this when we look into the way Merleau-Ponty extends his analysis of action and perception to our bodily habits.

4.3.4 Perceptual Habits and Motor Habits

Merleau-Ponty writes:

> In fact every habit is both motor and perceptual, because it lies, as we have said, between explicit perception and actual movement, in the basic function which sets boundaries to

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[21] Merleau-Ponty says that seeing colors is not merely a way of using one's eyes, but of using the body as a whole, because he holds that all perception is at bottom synesthetic (see the "Sense Experience" chapter of the *Phenomenology of Perception*).

our field of vision and our field of action. Learning to find one's way among things with a stick, which we gave a little earlier as an example of motor habit, is equally an example of perceptual habit. (2002, 175)

Our motor habits lay down perceptual habits. The development of motor habits allows us to inhabit the world in a new way. So, when we acquire new perceptual habits, we acquire new motor habits. Merleau-Ponty expresses this thought in the following terms: "Sometimes a new cluster of meanings is formed; our former movements are integrated into a fresh motor entity, the first visual data into a fresh sensory entity, our natural powers suddenly come together in a richer meaning" (2002, 175). It follows from the unity of motor and perceptual habits that changes in bodily habits translate into changes in perceptual habits, and vice versa.

4.4 Postscript: On the Nature of Ethics

In *Engaging with Buddhism,* Garfield explains that Buddhist ethics is not primarily concerned with duties, the calculus of utility, or the cultivation of virtue. While it includes components of these three basic orientations in Western ethics, Buddhist ethics is concerned with our perceptions, or with what Garfield calls "moral phenomenology":

> Buddhist moral theory provides an alternative voice to those in contemporary debates, and a different view of the subject matter of ethics. Buddhist moral theorists see ethics as concerned not *primarily* with actions, their consequences, obligations, sentiments or human happiness, but rather with the nature of our *experience*. That is, as we will see, Buddhist ethics is a *moral phenomenology* concerned with the transformation of our experience of the world, and hence our overall comportment to it. (2015, 279)

In light of this characterization of Buddhist ethics, one could regard the argument of this chapter as offering an ethics in the Buddhist sense, that is, an account of a certain way of experiencing others and transforming such an experience of others. And as Garfield points out, just as our experience can impact our "comportment," so too this chapter has described a few ways that changes in experience alter our ways of interacting with others. Something similar could be said

of the personal transformation depicted in Chapter Two. When a woman begins to pursue bodily

activities for their own sake rather than for the sake of social valorization, she comes to

experience her body in new ways. She stops body checking, that is, focusing judgmental

attention to parts of her body, or viewing herself through the lens of her weight on the scale. She

also perceives other women differently—no longer as rivals to her thinness or as repugnant.[22]

Her personal transformation is a transformation in her experience of her own body and of the

bodies of other women.

Garfield contrasts Western ethical theories with Buddhist ethics on the ground that

Buddhism, unlike Western philosophy, is interested in moral phenomenology. Yet one might

rightly point out that some Western ethical perspectives are concerned with transformations in

our moral experience.[23] Consider as an example Aristotle's ethics, according to which the

development of moral virtues amounts to a transformation in the way that one experiences

certain objects or events. For example, in Book III of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues

that developing courage means learning to relate to the objects of fear in an appropriate way. In

fact, I think that the contrast Garfield wishes to draw does not apply to Aristotle, nor does it

apply to a vast majority of ancient Western philosophical schools. Indeed, some philosophers,

notably Michel Foucault and Pierre Hadot, have emphasized the distinction between ethics in

ancient Western philosophy and later Western moral theories. In the Introduction of *The Use of

Pleasure*, Foucault distinguishes between moral codes, the actual behaviors of moral agents with

respect to those codes, and ethics. What is ethics, then? Foucault explains that, in addition to

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[22] Here I am alluding to the phenomenon of "reverse thinspo," which is the use of images of
women who are not thin or of women eating large portions of food as a motivation to become
thinner. So, instead of using other thin women as "thinspiration," "reverse thinspo" uses other
women as a negative motive.

[23] I would like to thank Sean Kelly for raising this point.

morality, there is the "manner in which one ought to form oneself as an ethical subject acting in reference to the prescriptive elements that make up the [moral] code" (1985, 26). In other words, ethics concerns one's relationship to oneself in light of moral codes. Foucault develops this conception of ethics on the basis of his studies of ancient philosophical practices. In a similar vein, Pierre Hadot devotes the vast majority of his *oeuvre* to the idea that we should conceive of ancient philosophical schools as developing different arts of living, rather than systems of philosophy.[24] For him, the task of ancient philosophy is to develop spiritual exercises—practices that would transform one's beliefs, emotions, or perceptions. What might an ancient Western philosophical practice look like? Take, for example, the Stoic exercise of physical description, which Marcus Aurelius famously employs in his *Meditations* to describe sex as "the friction of a membrane and a spurt of mucus ejected" (6:13). This exercise is meant to help us disengage from our emotional attachments to things or activities in the world, and to see them for what they truly are. Drawing on Garfield's idea, this exercise could be called an exercise in moral phenomenology, a transformation in one's way of perceiving the world.

Buddhist ethical thought and Ancient Graeco-Roman philosophy thus converge on a different conception of ethics than our contemporary associations might conjure. And this is a conception to which I subscribe. The guiding concept of this thesis, the concept of bodily alienation, does not codify duties to oneself or to others, but it informs an understanding of how to inhabit our bodies.

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[24] See Hadot's *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* as well as *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, a collection that includes selections from several of his French works, and *The Inner Citadel*, an extensive study of Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*.

5

The Social Constitution of the Body

This chapter is devoted to the connection between the phenomenon of bodily alienation and the social-critical ambitions of this thesis. In order to draw this connection, I will argue that the body is socially constituted. The claim that the body is socially constituted implies that bodily alienation is a social phenomenon, or more precisely, that it necessarily originates in social conditions. Thus, to say that someone is alienated from her body is to claim that there is something amiss in that her society. Consequently, the diagnosis of bodily alienation can pave the way for criticizing social conditions.

The first part of this chapter is devoted to the claim that the body is socially constituted. My argument for the social constitution of the body proceeds as follows. From the previous chapters, we learned that bodily alienation involves an alienation from the social world and, conversely, that realizing oneself in one's body means integrating a social world. The argument I present here moves from the idea that the body only realizes itself in the social world to the claim that the body is socially constituted.

The claim that the body is socially constituted could be taken as a *social constructionist* thesis about the body. Indeed, the thesis that the body is socially constructed often crops up in feminist philosophy. It is usually taken to concern the transformations the body undergoes in virtue of its existence in a social world, and it is usually meant to challenge the conception of the body as an entirely natural object. Social constructionism has proved itself to be an important resource for feminist theory. For example, social constructionists about gender have argued that gender differences, far from merely being the matter of sex differences, are in fact a question of social

forces, which are open to being challenged. While I am sympathetic to this type of project, my view is not social constructionist in the sense that it contests the degree to which the body is natural. That is why I employ the term "social constitution" as opposed to "social construction." My point in using this expression is to show that the body, as it is lived, is lived in relation to others; first and foremost, I am concerned with the phenomenology of bodily experience—not with the makeup of the material objects that human bodies are.

The second part of this chapter treats the connection between the claim that the body is socially constituted and projects of social critique. I will first explain why the concept of bodily alienation is apt for social critiques concerning gender and race. I will go on to compare my account of the social constitution of the body to other projects of social criticism, either premised on the social character of gender and race (Sally Haslanger's social constructionism) or on the social character of sex, gender, and the body (Judith Butler's poststructuralism).[1] I engage with Haslanger and Butler with an eye towards sharpening the connection between my account of the social constitution of the body and the project of social criticism that governs this thesis. More

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[1] I have used the label "poststructuralism" to identify Butler's view, since I am interested in the continuity between her thought and Foucault's, and this is one of the labels that has been associated with both philosophers. For instance, this is the label Jaeggi uses in discussing Butler's and Foucault's skepticism about alienation critique in Chapter Three of *Alienation*. Likewise, one of Butler's critics, whom I will later mention, Toril Moi, identifies Butler as a poststructuralist. Poststructuralists, like structuralists, interpret human phenomena through the lens of a certain philosophy of language, but what sets them apart, in Butler's eyes, is that poststructuralists reject "the claims of totality and universality and the presumption of binary structural oppositions," which she regards as central to structuralist thought (1990, 54). What is at stake in this chapter is Butler's turn to interpretations of philosophical and literary texts to ground her theory of gender and the body—not the distinction between structuralism and poststructuralism.

specifically, I will argue that a critical phenomenology grounded in the concept of bodily alienation can carve a path between some of the unintuitive features of Haslanger's analysis of gender and race, in particular, her difficulty making sense of the positive value of oppressed social identities, and the "abstractness," for lack of a better term, of Butler's framework. What is at stake is in this comparison is the very character of social critique: How important is it to account for lived experience in projects of social criticism?

5.1 The Social Constitution of the Body

5.1.1 Rahel Jaeggi on the "Sociality" of the Self

My aim in this first part is to argue that the body is socially constituted, and I will accomplish this on the model of Jaeggi's argument concerning the social constitution of the self. Jaeggi's central claim is that *the self can only realize itself in a social world*, and it is in this sense that the body is socially constituted. Alluding to the phenomenological portions of her work, she writes, "[i]f the cases I have discussed have shown that self-alienation is also alienation in and from the social world, then the problem, understood as a disturbed relation to self and world, can be solved only in, and not beyond, the world of social practices" (2014, 217).

But what exactly does it mean to say that the self realizes itself? Jaeggi distinguishes between two forms of self-realization: first, our activities must be self-determined, and second, our activities must be pursued for their own sake. While the previous chapters have elaborated on the significance of each of these criteria, let us review Jaeggi's reasons for endorsing them.

First, self-determination. An activity is self-determined if the ends of the activity are ends that I set myself (2014, 206-207). This criterion excludes both activities that are the direct result of coercion and activities that are not carried out in a personally meaningful manner (207). First,

if an activity is coerced, then it is clearly not one whose ends I set myself. Second, if an activity is carried out for the sake of ends set by someone else, then this leaves open the possibility that they will not be personally meaningful. (If I carry out an activity whose ends are set by someone else and at the same time I share those ends, then it seems that I am in fact carrying out an activity whose ends are my own.) Second, Jaeggi contends that activities need to be pursued for their own sake to contribute to self-realization. Although she acknowledges that "[i]t is never impossible to avoid action grounded in means-end reasoning," she maintains that a life where each action is a means to the end of another action cannot be one in which one realizes oneself. Looking at the scale of an entire life, a series of actions pursued only for the sake of the next action would be seem to a life of substitutable acts. Then one could argue such a life would not properly be *my own*. If this is what Jaeggi has in mind, then it seems that *identifying with an activity* is a component of realizing *oneself* in that activity. This will remind the reader of the Marxian idea explored in Chapter One, namely, self-realization for humans means *self-conscious* laboring activity, that is, activity for which an end is *posited* and for which *standards* of success can be given. So Jaeggi must have the following claim in mind: for human beings, identification with one's activity is a precondition of realizing oneself in that activity.

Jaeggi defends the idea that self-realization can only be achieved in a social world, in part through her case studies and in part through her discussion of Richard Rorty's conception of self-realization. For example, in her case study of Perlmann, she explains that "identifying with projects" (which Perlmann fails to do) "always occurs in connection with a social world shared with others" (218). Projects involve others in the sense that the standards for a project's success depend on a shared understanding of projects of the same type. Jaeggi's criticisms of Rorty flesh out this idea. According to her interpretation, for Rorty, "realizing oneself as an individual means

making oneself into an 'original' that cannot be mistaken for others" (2014, 209). Self-realization

is thus closely tied to authenticity and originality. Furthermore, Rorty separates the public sphere

from the private sphere, which is the proper domain of authenticity: as Jaeggi explains, "the

perfectionist aspirations to individual self-realization belong in the realm of private life

experiments" (2014, 210). In *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, Rorty expresses this view when

he repudiates theoretical attempts to bridge self-creation and our duties to others:

> Metaphysicians like Plato and Marx thought they could show that once political theory had
> led us from appearance to reality we would be in a better position to be useful to our fellow
> human beings. They both hoped that the public-private split, the distinction between the
> duty to self and the duty to others, could be overcome. […] On my account of ironist
> culture, such opposites can be combined in one life but not synthesized in a theory. […]
> We should stop trying to combine self-creation and politics especially if we are liberals.
> (1989, 120)

Rorty's point is this: an individual can combine self-creation and politics—but only in her life.

The task of self-creation involves responding to the question of the point of a human life, while

the politics involves responding to the suffering of others (198). The first domain is the domain of

the ironist, the second of the liberal (198). In the realm of theory, however, there is no bridge

between theories of the self and political philosophy. This is precisely where Rorty and Jaeggi part

ways. Jaeggi is concerned with "the plausibility of the model of authenticity that underlies

[Rorty's] position" (211). She responds to Rorty by arguing that individual life experiments are

not private. For one thing, according to her, "we enter into [life-experiments] not for the sake of

experimentation itself but in order to solve problems […] that emerge from a particular way of

life" (214). So, for example, if I am bored with having a nine-to-five office job, then I might try

out being a freelancer who works from home. Such an experiment does not aim at originality, but

at resolving my boredom. In addition, such an experiment has standards: if I still find myself bored

after my job transition, then it is likely that the source of my boredom does not lie in the location

and schedule of my work; my experiment has failed. With the idea that experiments have standards comes the claim that they are open to criticism. Moreover, my reflections on my experiment, its success or its failure, depend on a background of shared ideas: what boredom feels like, common sources of boredom and solutions to these, and the very notion of a life-experiment. In light of these considerations, Jaeggi thinks of authenticity as essentially connected to our being with others. Concerning the aims of theory, Jaeggi would have to reply to Rorty by saying that any account of authenticity (or self-creation) is simultaneously an account of our relations to others. While such an account of authenticity might not have any specifically political ramifications, it does bear on our understanding of the social world. So, unlike Rorty, Jaeggi holds that there is a theoretical bridge between the domain of the self and the domain of our relations to others. And her version of alienation critique is an example of a theory that tries to bridge these two domains. Relatedly, I will later explain that Jaeggi's account and other versions of alienation critique belong to the field of social philosophy, which aims to describe and evaluation social conditions, and not to the field of political philosophy, which concerns itself with such standards as justice. So another way to put the dispute between Jaeggi and Rorty is this: Rorty's framework distinguishes between theories of the self and politics, but does not make room for a third type of theory: social philosophy. This is precisely the field at issue in Jaeggi's revival of the concept of alienation.

Jaeggi's criticisms of Rorty bear on the question of the sociality of the self for the following reason. According to Rorty, self-realization and authenticity go hand-in-hand; realizing oneself means becoming authentic, or making oneself into an "original"; his view is that authenticity is entirely a matter of self-invention. Jaeggi also advances a conception of the self, according to which self-realization and authenticity are closely connected, but where her understanding of authenticity differs sharply from Rorty's. According to her, authenticity can only be achieved in

relation to a social world. To claim that the self is social is to claim that the self can only realize itself in relation to others. This thesis concerning the sociality of the self, in turn, implies that repairing an alienated relation to oneself can only be achieved by being in a social world (2014, 217). So, authenticity and self-realization consist in a certain manner of living in relation to others. In fact, Jaeggi speaks of authenticity in terms of the idea that we can "make sociality our *own*" (219).

5.1.2 The Sociality of the Body

Here I will use Jaeggi's argument as a template for defending the idea that the body is socially constituted. As we saw, Jaeggi understands self-realization in terms of the pursuit of self-determined activities for their own sake. What can we adopt from this twofold definition of self-realization? And what can we learn from Jaeggi's argument concerning the sociality of the self?

To begin with, let us revisit the cases developed in Chapters Two, Three, and Four. In Chapter Two, I argued that the woman invested in her thigh gap bears a certain type of instrumental relationship to her body, which consists in its commodification. By Jaeggi's lights, she would not "realize her body" when she lies in such a relationship to it. According to Jaeggi, "we realize ourselves in an activity to the extent that we can do it for its own sake, that is, to the extent that it is not merely the means to another end" (2014, 207). And she adds that self-realization and alienation bear the following relationship to one another: "the distinction between self-realization and alienation can be described as a distinction between intrinsically and instrumentally valuable relationships or ways of life" (207). Thus, in the case of the thigh gap, the woman does not have an intrinsically valuable relationship to her body; her body is shaped in order to conform to a certain socially sanctioned aesthetic. By contrast, to realize herself in her body would mean for her to engage in activities enjoyed for their own sake. In short, bodily alienation here means lying in

an instrumental relationship to one's body. We saw that in Chapter Three that bodily alienation can take the form of deworlded activity. The ways in which spaces are racialized, for example, may challenge a person of color's ability to deal skillful with his environment and alter his world. These cases exemplify another form in which a person might not realize herself in her body. And returning to Chapter Four, we learned that the bodily alienation that the dominant person experiences also diminishes her capacity to engage with the world.

Bodily alienation, this discussion suggests, consists in engaging in bodily activities that are either pursued for the sake of social valorization or have a defective relation to the world. Conversely, bodily realization would consist in the pursuit of bodily activities that connect with the world and that are for their own sake. How does such a definition support the idea that the body is socially constituted? In her discussion of powerlessness, Jaeggi claims that "[the academic's] recovering the power to have his life at his command appears not as a turning away from what is shared with others but as a real appropriation of a form of life that is always shared with others" (2014, 217). Likewise, Chapters Two, Three, and Four, demonstrate that bodily alienation involves a divide between members of different social groups, and that overcoming such alienation requires bridging this divide.

The more general point to take from my account of bodily alienation is that bodily activities presuppose a social world. Jaeggi explains that "[b]eing involved in projects presupposes the existence of other human beings" (2014, 218). All projects are based on a background understanding of what that project consists in, and that is shared with others. To borrow from one of Jaeggi's own examples, "one could not understand what a competent father is…if there were no social institutions or roles defining parenthood" (218). So too, the bodily activities that we can engage in have a social significance, even if we transform it in turn. Being a dancer means having

learned from others—whether formally or informally—how to dance. Even if I then invent a new style of dancing, this invention will be a transformation of existing ways of dancing and will be built on a background understanding of what dancing is. Realizing oneself in bodily activities is only effected within a social world. Consequently, we should think of the body as socially constituted in the sense that one realizes oneself in bodily activities that originate in shared world.

Before turning to social critique premised on the notion of bodily alienation, let me say a few words about another attempt to demonstrate that the body is socially constituted in order to highlight what is distinctive of my approach. Consider, for example, Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the body in the chapter of the *Phenomenology of Perception* entitled "Other Selves and the Human World." This chapter engages with arguments concerning the problem of other minds (which is transformed into a problem about other selves). Over the course of this chapter, Merleau-Ponty argues that we cannot make sense of certain phenomena without invoking the idea that we first relate to each other at a pre-reflective level, in the form of a communication between body schemas. As we have seen, the schema offers us an implicit understanding of our bodies and their relation to other beings. Now, these beings need not be natural entities: they can be other selves. One example Merleau-Ponty takes as evidence for his view is the ability an infant has to mime the gestures of an adult, although she lacks a conceptual understanding of the relation between her body parts and of the body parts of the adult (2002, 410). He stresses the "immediacy" of her perception of the adult's actions, by which he means that her perception is not mediated by a representation of the other person's body. He also appeals to the notion of the body schema in order to make sense of the ability children have to learn how to use objects as others do: "[The child] appropriates [cultural objects] as others do, because the body schema ensures the immediate correspondence of what he sees done and what he himself does" (412). Merleau-Ponty concludes

the chapter by referring to the social world as well as the natural world as the "truly transcendental" (425). This remark suggest that the social world puts one "in communication with [forms of transcendence], and on this basis makes knowledge possible" (425). In other words, the social world is not an aggregate of individuals discoverable through perception, but we perceive other things on the background of the social world.

Although Merleau-Ponty does not explicitly use the expression "social constitution," his view resembles mine in that he thinks of the social world as necessary to who we are as embodied beings. However, our approaches to this topic differ. Whereas Merleau-Ponty investigates this topic by looking at cases of mimicking and learning, that is, cases of normal interpersonal interactions, I have adopted a different tack: I have analyzed the sociality of the body through breakdown cases, that is, cases of bodily alienation. Moreover, I have made social differences and conflict one of the themes of this thesis, while Merleau-Ponty only alludes to interpersonal strife (420-421). As a result, unlike Merleau-Ponty's account of the body, my account can offer a social-critical ontology of the body.

5.2 Bodily Alienation and Social Criticism

5.2.1 Gender and Race: The Role of Alienation Critique

One of the aims of this thesis has been to demonstrate the potential of the concept of bodily alienation for projects of social critique. As Marx's account of alienated labor demonstrates, the concept of alienation has been used as a tool for social critique. Likewise, I have tried to motivate the use of the concept of bodily alienation for social criticism concerning gender- and race-based oppressions. I would now like to explicitly focus on the connection between social critique concerning gender and race, and the idea that the body is socially constituted.

In Chapter One, I claimed that the concept of alienation is a diagnostic concept: it serves both to describe and evaluate a state of affairs. Diagnosing someone as alienated from herself or from her body, suggests that something is amiss. Now, since a subject only realizes herself in a social world, the diagnosis of alienation indicates that something goes wrong in the way in which such a person realizes herself in a social world. Thus, the diagnosis of bodily alienation is not only a diagnosis of a person's relation to her body, but also of the social conditions from which that relation springs.

But why deploy the concept of bodily alienation for understanding gender- and race-based oppressions? What are gender and race? Here it will be helpful to turn to the ontologies of gender and race Linda Martín Alcoff develops in *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*. Alcoff works in the phenomenological tradition, and so her ontologies of gender and race provide useful starting points. Gender and race are what she calls *visible identities*. This is to say that gender and race are visible to us; we interpret each other as being of different races and genders on the basis of perceivable bodily traits (2006, 126). But it is also to say that gender and race make things visible; one's gender and race offers a perspective on oneself, other people, and events (126). This second aspect of the visibility of race and gender can be understood at two levels: at a reflective level and a pre-reflective level. Consider the following two ways in which race makes things visible. At a reflective level, thinking about race might help someone make sense of her opportunities in life. At a pre-reflective level, though, race shapes our perception of others. As we saw in the previous chapter, one's race can inflect such perceptual habits as the frequency with which one makes eye contact with members of different races.

Let me briefly pause to situate Alcoff's view in the landscape of ontologies of gender and race, since this will help set up the contrast between my account of the body, gender, and race, on

the one hand, and Haslanger's social constructionist account of gender and race, on the other hand. In the chapter of *Visible Identities* entitled "The Phenomenology of Racial Embodiment," Alcoff distinguishes between three types of views of race: nominalism, essentialism, and contextualism. According to nominalism, races are not real, and our racial terms do not designate anything real. Essentialism about race, however, regards races to be real; according to Alcoff's characterization of this position, "[m]embers of racial groups share a set of characteristics, a set of political interests, and a historical destiny" (2006, 182). Contextualism is also a realist position, but it regards race as "socially constructed, historically malleable, culturally contextual, and reproduced through learned perceptual practices" (182).[2] Thus, one of the differences between essentialism and contextualism, as Alcoff portrays these positions, lies in the fact that essentialists think that racial groups are defined by stable properties, while contextualists think that racial groups are historically contingent. Within contextualism, Alcoff further distinguishes between objectivist and subjectivist approaches (182). As she explains, "[o]bjectivist approaches attempt a definition of race general enough to be applicable across a variety of contexts even while recognize that context will determine the specific content and political valence given to a racial concept" (182–183). Alcoff worries that such approaches "sometimes hinder an appreciation for the everydayness of racial experience" (183). This is because they do not attend to the daily practices that contribute to a person's racialization. In contrast, subjectivist approaches offer a promising alternative, since

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[2] Here the reader might be reminded of Haslanger's taxonomy of ontologies of race in her 2008 article "A Social Constructionist Analysis of Race." Haslanger distinguishes between: 1) race eliminativism, which corresponds to the position Alcoff calls "nominalism"; 2) race naturalism, which holds that races are biological kinds and real; and 3) race constructionism, according to which races are both real and socially constructed (2008, 57–60). The difference between race naturalism and race constructionism lies not in their realism, but in the types of kinds they take races to be. Race naturalism considers races to be natural kinds, whereas race constructionism considers races to be social kinds.

they "begin from the lived experience of racialization" and can thus "reveal how race is constitutive of bodily experience, subjectivity, judgment, and epistemic relations" (183). Alcoff's phenomenological ontology of race is a subjectivist contextualist approach to race, and the same can be said of her ontology of gemder. And as we will later see, Haslanger's social constructionism embodies an objectivist contextualist approach to gender. To preview, Haslanger defines men and women as privileged and subordinate classes, respectively, based on perceived or imagined anatomical features relating to biological reproduction. Likewise, she defines races as privileged and subordinate classes based on perceived or anatomical features relating to geographical ancestry. Alcoff claims that objectivist and subjectivist approaches are not "mutually exclusive," but adds that subjectivist approaches have been "underdeveloped in recent theoretical literature" (184). The phenomenology of bodily alienation developed in the three previous chapters is a contribution to a subjectivist contextualist theory of gender and race.

Now, if gender and race are both visible identities, what distinguishes gender and race? Let us first look at attributions of gender and race. Both gender and racial attributions operate on the basis of perceptual differences, but the salient features for each social category differ. Seeing someone as a woman means picking up on certain features, which are different from those that I pick up on when I see someone as black, for instance. The perceptual differences I home in on in the case of gender might include bodily features relating to sexual reproduction, or clothes that are typically associated with one gender and not another. By contrast, the perceptual differences related to race include skin color, hair texture, and certain facial features. This is not to say that we consciously attend to this or that feature and then make inferences to attribute a gender or race to another. Rather, we rely on background assumptions about what gender and racial differences

consist in, and these background assumptions may operate either at a conscious or subconscious level.

Let us turn now to the perspectives that gender and race offer, what they make visible. And for the sake of simplicity, let us focus on how these identities make different things visible at a reflective level. On the one hand, one's race can provide a lens for understanding one's ancestry. This is not to say that one's race necessarily sheds light on the details of one's ancestry; for example, for African-Americans, the very absence of extensive details can be significant in and of itself. In contrast, one's gender does not typically give any indication of one's ancestry. On the other hand, one's gender can provide a lens for understanding bodily changes over the course of one's life (such as those of puberty or menopause) or bodily functions as they relate to sexual activity and reproduction. It is worth noting one common factor in the perspectives that gender and race offer. Both race and gender can inform one's understanding one's relative position in society. For example, the knowledge that people can be biased against one's racial or gender group can itself have an impact on how evaluates their feedback. Thus, if I worry that people are biased against women in philosophy, I might reconsider the assessment philosophers give me about my performance in the field.[3]

An analysis of gendered and racialized experiences premised solely on the concept of *self-alienation* would illuminate many facets of these experiences, but it would miss out on the bodily experiences that stem from the fact that gender and race are visible identities. To put this point more generally, there are phenomena that are more or less suited to an analysis in terms of the concept of bodily alienation, and the degree to which they are suited to such an analysis depends on the degree to which the body is an important part of the phenomenon. Consider the contrast

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[3] I am indebted to Ronni Sadovsky for this example.

with one of Jaeggi's examples and the following case related to national identity. Recall the example of the academic who makes decisions such that he no longer recognizes himself. This example can be treated as a case of self-alienation *simpliciter*, since there is no distinctly bodily dimension associated with this form of alienation. By contrast, consider the case of someone who lives as an adult in a different country than the one in which she was born and who returns from time to time to her native country; she finds that she has difficulty speaking her mother tongue and struggles to find her words—they sound strange as they come out of her mouth. Here the phenomenology of the person's relationship to language would be conducive to an analysis in terms of the concept of bodily alienation.

The cases treated in this thesis support the idea that bodily alienation is a useful tool for understanding gender and race. There are bodily dimensions to being gendered and racialized, which make an analysis in terms of the concept of bodily alienation particularly apt. At the same time, I do not mean to imply that all forms of alienation associated with gender and race are forms of bodily alienation. Consider the following case of self-alienation in the context of race, which appears not to have a bodily component. As a biracial person who grew up in predominantly white environments and with white role models, I feel alienated from aspects of my black identity. This alienation involves a sense of distance black history and a certain disappointment at not having known the members of my mother's (black) family. Part of the alienation stems from the fact that I feel the expectation, based on the interpretations others have of my body, to better understand this aspect of my racial identity. Therefore, one could say that there is a component to the alienation that is related to the body—but not specifically to the ways that I use my body. Such a form of alienation would be best analyzed using the vocabulary of self-alienation and related concepts in moral psychology. For instance, Jaeggi's account of self-alienation as an internal division between

aspects of one's identity might be a fruitful avenue into this phenomenon. Yet one might challenge this interpretation on the ground that my alienation from my racial identity affects my relations to persons of different races. If, for example, I feel more comfortable with whites and navigating white spaces than being with blacks and navigating black spaces, does this not reveal a form of bodily alienation? This might motivate interpreting this case as an instance of bodily alienation, given the place I have accorded to interpersonal relations and social spaces in defining the phenomenon. In the end, I think that this example speaks to the fact that the boundary between self-alienation *simpliciter* and bodily alienation is not clear-cut. The general lesson to take, though, from this discussion is that the concept of bodily alienation is especially suited for understanding gendered and racialized experience.

5.2.2 Alternatives to Alienation Critique

In order to better understand what is distinctive of my project, let me compare my version of alienation critique with two other projects of social critique concerning gender and race: Sally Haslanger's social constructionism and Judith Butler's poststructuralism. Both Haslanger's and Butler's theories call into question the value of describing lived experience for the purposes of social critique, while I have emphasized its value. Here I aim to vindicate the importance I have attributed to lived experience.

Let us begin with Haslanger's view. In general, social constructionism refers to a constellation of positions in the humanities and social sciences, which seek to challenge our views about counts as natural. As Ian Hacking explains, social constructionist projects aim to argue that certain ideas or entities are socially constructed; they question our ideas about what entities are natural and whether our classifications track natural kinds. The targets of social constructionist theories appear determined by the natural order, but they emerge in fact from social conditions.

Thus, social constructionism about an object or domain X amounts to an argument against X's "inevitability" (2000, 6). Now, although this is a separate point, social constructionism lends itself to social critique. Hacking shows that once something is stripped of its air of inevitability, then it can be subject to criticism.

Sally Haslanger's social constructionism about gender and race fits this model of social constructionism. Not only does Haslanger argue that gender and race are socially constructed, but her definitions of gender and race make room for the argument that our current genders and races ought to be abolished or transformed. Consider, for example, her 2000 article "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?" This article begins by establishing distinctions between sex and gender, on the one hand, and color and race, on the other hand. Sex features are those related to sexual reproduction, while color refers to the features of the "geographically marked body," which include "skin color, hair type, eye shape, physique" (2000, 44). Gender and race are the "social meaning" of sex and color, respectively (37, 44). According to Haslanger, what it is to be a man is to be socially privileged on the basis of perceived or imagined sex features; conversely, what it is to be a woman is to be socially subordinated on the basis of perceived or imagined sex features. For example, Haslanger defines what it is to be a woman in these terms:

> S *is a woman* iff$_{df}$
>
> i) S is regularly and for the most part observed or imagined to have certain bodily features presumed to be evidence of a female's biological role in reproduction;
> ii) that S has these features marks S within the dominant ideology of S's society as someone who ought to occupy certain kinds of social position that are in fact subordinate (and so motivates and justifies S's occupying such a position); and
> iii) the fact that S satisfies (i) and (ii) plays a role in S's systematic subordination, that is, *along some dimension*, S's social position is oppressive, and S's satisfying (i) and (ii) plays a role in that dimension of subordination. (42)

Conversely, a man is someone who is privileged on the basis of his observed or imagined sex features. And likewise, racial groups are defined as follows:

> A group G is *racialized* relative to context C iff$_{df}$ members of G are (all and only) those:
>
> i) who are observed or imagined to have certain bodily features presumed in C to be evidence of ancestral links to a certain geographical region (or regions);
> ii) whose having (or being imagined to have) these features marks them within the context of the background ideology in C as appropriately occupying certain kinds of social position that are in fact either subordinate or privileged (and so motivates and justifies their occupying such a position); and
> iii) whose satisfying (i) and (ii) plays (or would play) a role in their systematic subordination or privilege in C, i.e., who are *along some dimension* systematically subordinated or privileged when in C, and satisfying (i) and (ii) plays (or would play) a role in that dimension of privilege or subordination.   (44)

Thus, a person is of color if she or he is subordinated on the basis of perceived or observed color features. In sum, these definitions make genders and races into social constructs based on sex and color, respectively.

Haslanger's definitions face difficulties, two of which she tackles in her article, namely, the commonality and the normativity problems. The commonality problem refers to the issue of whether there is "anything social" which all members of the same gender or race have in common. And the normativity problem refers to the issue of whether her definitions privilege or exclude members of a certain gender or race. In response to the commonality problem, Haslanger explains that while all members of a given gender, let us say women for the sake of this argument, may not have faced the same social conditions, they do share a certain *kind* of social condition, namely, that of being subordinated on the basis of their sex features. Thus, her account accommodates a large variability in social conditions across geographical space and across time. As concerns the normativity problem, Haslanger concedes that her definition will privilege certain experiences and, in particular, will exclude non-oppressed females from the gender woman. This normativity, however, is a taken to be a non-issue given the political motivations at

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the heart of her project: to combat oppressions. As she puts it, "[t]he important issue is not whether a particular account 'marginalizes' some individuals, but whether its doing so is in conflict with the feminist values that motivate the inquiry" (46). I should add that my approach is not vulnerable to the commonality and normativity problems raised by Haslanger. The phenomenological descriptions upon which my case for the social constitution of the body do not presuppose any shared experience across all members of a given gender or a given racial group. They are meant to be descriptions of gendered and racialized experience that illustrate the vulnerability to alienation that members of oppressed groups face (as well as the potential for undoing alienation that members of privileged groups can promote). Nor do my descriptions require excluding non-oppressed females from the category woman or non-oppressed persons of color from the category of the racially subordinate. And this is because my project is not concerned with providing objective accounts of gender and race; instead, it has aimed to delve into pockets of experience on the background assumptions that there are today men and women, whites and persons of color.

I would now like to step back and consider Haslanger's political motivations. Her project is explicitly guided by antisexist and antiracist motives (2000, 36). Consequently, her definitions are meant to open the possibility for reimagining our current genders and races. For instance, a society where subordination and privilege on the basis of sex features was absent would be one in which women and men have been abolished, and where either there would be no genders or there would be new non-hierarchical ones (and likewise for a society where there was no subordination or privilege on the basis of color features). Haslanger herself is cautious in siding with either the abolition or reconstruction of genders: "Whether we, as feminists, ought to recommend the construction of (new) non-hierarchical genders or work to abolish gender

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entirely is a normative issue I leave for another occasion" (2000, 50). That said, the revisionary

potential of her account is clear.

My work is also revisionary because I take the diagnosis of bodily alienation to be an

impetus for examining the social conditions at the root of this form of alienation. The diagnosis

of bodily alienation is simultaneously a diagnosis of certain social ills. But it proceeds

differently. To begin with, it is not an argument concerning the naturalness of a social group. As

such, it does not rely on any distinctions between sex and gender, or color and race (or the

natural body and the socialized body). This has its advantages given the criticisms that the

sex/gender and parallel distinctions have faced. In order to explore these criticisms, I propose

that we now turn to Judith Butler's discussions of sex, gender, and the body.

Judith Butler criticizes the sex/gender distinction as it is usually understood on the

grounds that sex, like gender, is socially constructed. According to the argument of

"Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" (1988), the norm of heterosexuality, or what Butler

calls "compulsory heterosexuality," is at the root of the binary division of bodies into two sexes,

male and female:

> To guarantee the reproduction of a given culture, various requirements, well-established
> in the anthropological literature of kinship, have instated sexual reproduction within the
> confines of a heterosexually-based system of marriage which requires the reproduction of
> human beings in certain gendered modes which, in effect, guarantee the eventual
> reproduction of that kinship system. As Foucault and others have pointed out, the
> association of a natural sex with a discrete gender and with an ostensibly natural
> 'attraction' to the opposing sex/gender is an unnatural conjunction of cultural constructs
> in the service of reproductive interest. […] My point is simply that one way in which this
> system of compulsory heterosexuality is reproduced and concealed is through the
> cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes with 'natural' appearances and 'natural'
> heterosexual dispositions. (524)

To summarize, Butler contends that compulsive heterosexuality produces a binary division

between genders: the two genders are meant to complement each other, such that members of

one gender are supposed to have "natural desires" for members of the other gender. This binary

distinction between genders is taken to be the result of natural differences between bodies, that

is, the difference between the sexes. Bodies of one type naturally have desires for bodies of the

other type. But, in fact, the distinction between sexes is *invoked* to legitimate the distinction

between genders. So far from being the ground for the distinction between genders, the

distinction between sexes is the *effect* of the gender binary, which is itself the product of

compulsory heterosexuality. In effect, Butler turns the sex/gender distinction at the heart of

social constructionist projects like Haslanger's on its head. Gender is not the social meaning of

the sexed body; instead, both sex and gender are socially constructed. Indeed, in *Gender Trouble*

(1990), Butler asserts that "[t]he sex/gender distinction and the category of sex itself appear to

presuppose a generalization of 'the body' that preexists the acquisition of its sexed significance"

(175). This is precisely the conception of the body that Butler rejects.

In her later work, *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler responds to the concern that *Gender*

Trouble fails to make sense of the "materiality" of the body, that is, the limits set by "material

differences" on the way we embody different genders. She resists this criticism and develops an

ontology of the body that reinforces her move to turn the distinctions between the natural and the

socially constructed on their head. Her response deepens the criticism of social constructionism

advanced in *Gender Trouble,* rather than hedging the implication of her views for our

understanding of the body. She discusses the body and its materiality in these terms:

> What constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material,
> but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive
> effect. […] At stake in such a reformulation of the materiality of bodies will be the
> following: (1) the recasting of the matter of bodies as the effect of a dynamic of power,
> such that the matter of bodies will be indissociable from the regulatory norms that govern
> their materialization and the signification of those material effects; (2) the understanding
> of performativity not as the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names,

but, rather as that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains. (1993, 2)

On her view, then, the social construction of the body differs from a view of the body according to which its social construction consists in the transformation of prediscursive matter through social forces. The materiality of bodies, like sex, is the effect of social power, and performativity is not an isolated action initiated by an (isolated) subject, but stems from repeated acts, whose standards are set by one's society.

Butler's theory of sex, gender, and the body might attract those who worry about the traditional distinction of sex as natural and gender as a social construct. Think, for example, of Anne Fausto-Sterling's argument in *Sexing the Body* (2000). There Fausto-Sterling aims to reveal the assumptions about femininity and masculinity that underlie the decision to surgically alter the genitalia of intersex infants. She explains that, in the treatment of genetic male intersex infants, what is considered to be a "viable" penis is a phallus that can be used to urinate while standing and will grow into an organ that can penetrate a vagina during sexual intercourse (2000, 57).[4] These interventions suggest that the penis is, in some sense, a socially constructed object, because the criteria for what counts as a viable penis stem from socially shared assumptions about sex roles. And there are (at least) two assumptions at work in this case: first, that the infant will become a heterosexual adult; second, that heterosexual intercourse consists in penetrative intercourse. Fausto-Sterling's research supports the idea that we need to reconsider the boundaries between the natural and the socially constructed. In fact, she asserts that "medical approaches to intersexuals" illustrate Butler's claim that "bodies […] only live within the

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[4] As Fausto-Sterling explains, a genetic male intersex individual has XY chromosomes but presents anatomical features of intersexuality (52–57). She discusses the different chromosomal features and associated anatomical features of intersexuality in Chapter Three of *Sexing the Body*.

productive constraints of certain highly gendered regulatory schema" (Butler 1993, xi, quoted in Fausto-Sterling 2000). I am sympathetic to projects like Fausto-Sterling's insofar as they illuminate the history behind social categories we take for granted and challenge the ways that we think about human differences, and I see the affinities with Butler's project. However, I worry that Butler herself engages in a debate about the body that is not fruitful.

Butler's ontology responds to projects that presume a distinction between the natural and the socially constructed, but it is not clear what is at stake in the argument concerning the materiality of the body in *Bodies That Matter.* Let us grant the conclusions of Butler's earlier work (up until and including *Gender Trouble*): sex differences are the consequence of gender differences, themselves the consequence of compulsory heterosexuality. On such an account, at least part of the work in combating gender/sex-based oppressions will consist in challenging the norm of heterosexuality. And in this regard I find Butler's argument politically promising. But the worries her framework generate might also give us pause. *Bodies That Matter*, for the most part, operates at such a level of abstraction that it is unclear why the debate concerning the materiality of the body is relevant to Butler's initial project. The work is replete with interpretations of philosophical and literary texts, but makes scant reference concrete bodily experiences. Consider, the first chapter of *Bodies That Matter.* The goal of this chapter is to reconsider the notion of materiality in light of reinterpretations of Plato, Aristotle, Foucault, and Irigaray. Nowhere does Butler refer to testimony about bodily experience. Likewise, the second chapter treats the notion of a "lesbian phallus" by engaging with Freud and Lacan, while the third chapter discusses Foucault's views on sexuality—neither with any attention to lived experience. The closest Butler comes to discussing lived experience is in Chapter Four, which treats the film *Paris Is Burning*. There Butler quotes some of the performers in the drag balls

(1993, 130ff). But why so little about actual bodily experiences? Can't they tell us about the materiality of the body?

Here it will be helpful to turn to Jaeggi's own discussion of poststructuralism. She observes that Foucault is skeptical of alienation critique, because, as she describes him, he rejects the idea of a subject that exists in "an unalienated manner somewhere beyond the social powers that form and oppress it" (2014, 30–31). The distinction between an unalienated and alienated subject would rest on a mistaken conception of the self. Given the Foucaultian roots of Butler's work, this interpretation would account for the lack of first-person descriptions in her work. Nothing that a subject could say about him- or herself can be taken at face value given the formative role of power. For Butler, it would be a mistake to directly draw on lived experience in the way that Simone de Beauvoir or other phenomenological feminists do. Hence the appeal to intertextual analysis: Butler's own views emerge by pitting other theorists against each other, rather than interpreting lived experience itself. The result of Butler's approach, though, is that her work appears disconnected from the experiences of suffering that motivate it. To echo Toril Moi's criticisms in *What Is a Woman?* (1999): "Ultimately, Butler loses sight of the body that her work tries to account for: the concrete, historical body that loves, suffers, and dies" (49). Not only does the defense Butler feels the need to mount in *Bodies That Matter* raise worries about the theoretical framework of *Gender Trouble*, but it invites the larger question of the point of feminist and antiracist theories. Might we not achieve the aims of *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* by maintaining our focus on the lives of those who suffer from oppressions grounded in sexual differences? Why a theory concerning the materiality of the body? So, unlike Fausto-Sterling's work, which puts us face to face with the lives and the suffering of those whose

bodies have been altered to conform to social norms, *Bodies That Matter* largely fails to make sense of the experiences of the oppressed.

My wager is that the phenomenological approach I adopt, which neither presupposes nor attacks a distinction between the natural and the socially constructed, can help us better achieve feminist and antiracist goals than Butler's ontology. The proof of this claim lies in the descriptions I have developed and the normative claims I have defended in this thesis. I have not only revealed the experiences of those oppressed on the basis of their gender or race, but I have sought to explain how we can overcome some of these experiences. Sensualism is a response to the alienation that originates in standards of beauty. The idea that the oppressed person needs to anchor himself in the world to overcome his bodily alienation is the guiding idea of Chapter Three. And my appeal to mindfulness in Chapter Four describes one resource for overcoming dominant ways of behaving towards oppressed persons. I have used concrete descriptions and elaborated concrete recommendations. This is not to say that Butler completely fails to deliver on her goals as a critical theorist, but that a phenomenological framework is more promising.

To return to Haslanger's work, how does her social constructionism fare with respect to phenomenology? I have alluded to the idea that the sex/gender distinction at the heart of such a project has come under attack. One of the worries that has been raised concerns the idea that sex is natural, as opposed to being socially constructed. That said, one could argue such a worry does not affect Haslanger's project since hers could accommodate the idea that socially constructed gender differences are grounded in properties (sex differences) that are themselves socially constructed. The work that is accomplished by Haslanger's definitions of gender and race depends on the idea that there can be subordination and privilege on the basis of sex and color—not on the claim that sex and color cannot be themselves socially constructed. Another worry one

might raise about Haslanger's project, though, is that it fails to acknowledge that one's relation to one's body matters to one's gender and one's race. We saw that Haslanger defined men and women on the basis of objective criteria: men are those who are socially privileged on the basis of their perceived or imagined role in sexual reproduction, women are those who are socially subordinate on the basis of their perceived or imagined role in sexual reproduction. And likewise for being white or being a person of color. But what of one's own perspective on the interpretations given to one's body? Doesn't it bear on whether one is a man or a woman, white or non-white?

To draw on a challenge Haslanger has received, consider the case of trans persons, persons who do not identify with the gender that was assigned to them at birth. In her recent article "Amelioration and Inclusion: Gender Identity and the Concept of *Woman*" (2016), Katharine Jenkins criticizes Haslanger's view for excluding some trans women from her account of woman. According to Jenkins, this can happen on Haslanger's account in one of several ways: 1) "a trans woman does not publicly present as a woman and is perceived as a man by people around her"; 2) "a trans woman publicly presents as a woman, but her gender presentation is not respected" and "she is seen by those around her as a man 'pretending' to be a woman"; 3) "a trans woman publicly presents as a woman, and her gender presentation is respected" but "this is not because she is perceived as having bodily features associated with a female's role in biological reproduction" (2016, 399–400). The only scenario in which a trans woman would count as a woman would be one where "a trans woman publicly presents as a woman, and her gender presentation is respected by those around her," *and* where "her gender presentation is respected because she is perceived by those around her as having bodily features associated with a female's role in reproduction" (400). On the basis of these scenarios, Jenkins introduces a

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concept of gender identity according to which all trans women count as women. According to this concept, having a female gender identity does not mean internalizing norms of femininity, but *experiencing* those norms as applying to oneself. So, to draw on an example Jenkins provides, if I identify as a woman and I find myself in a place like the United States, where the norm for women is to remove leg hair, I experience this norm as applying to myself, whether or not I decide to conform to that norm. This definition accommodates the fact that both trans and cis women contest social norms for women. Relatedly, it avoids a form of the commonality problem, according to which women are those who have feminine ways of behaving. Jenkins concludes by arguing that both notions of gender, gender as a class (Haslanger's account) and gender as an identity, are required to accomplish Haslanger's feminist goals and avoid excluding certain women from the category woman.

Jenkins's criticisms of Haslanger bear on our discussion of identity and gender in the following way. If we take seriously the idea that the idea that gender concepts need to take into account an individual's understanding of her body, then we need to either adopt a pluralist approach like Jenkins or reject the idea of defining gender as a class. While I will not weigh in here on the merits of a two-pronged approach à la Jenkins, her challenge to Haslanger supports my defense of phenomenology, that is, of the appeal to lived experience, in offering an account of gender.

Note that my view not only applies to gender but also (hypothetically) to race. Indeed, it might be legitimate to invoke the category of transraciality in order account for certain experiences. Consider the recent controversy over Rachel Dolezal's claim that she is black,

despite having white parents.[5] Dolezal claims that living with black siblings at an early age

transformed her relation to her body, and that she went so far as to represent herself as black in

childhood drawings: "I was drawing self-portraits with the brown crayon instead of the peach

crayon and black curly hair."[6] If we take her at her word, then I do not see why it is wrong to call

her transracial. Dolezal would not have merely crafted a certain appearance because of her

affinities with African American culture, but would have a deeply rooted sense of her body as

black. That said, there are other details of her case that suggest that Dolezal's relation to

blackness is not primarily motivated by her relation to her body. For one thing, her lawsuit

against Howard University might lead one to believe that she desired to become black because

she perceived she was discriminated against as a white woman during her time there. Moreover,

her father contests her claim that she drew herself as black as a child.[7] So there are some reasons

to be skeptical about this particular case, while at the same time leaving open the possibility that

transraciality could be a real phenomenon. All of this said, this possibility raises a similar issue

for Haslanger's definition of race as the case of transgender persons raises for her definition of

gender. In light of these considerations, I think that a phenomenological approach can

accommodate cases of trans* identity while at the same time holding onto the aims of antisexist

and antiracist work.

Jenkins's challenge relates to another criticism that Haslanger has received and that also

motivates turning to phenomenology, namely, the criticism that Haslanger cannot make sense of

positive gender and racial identities on the part of members of subordinate groups. While Jenkins

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[5] The controversy over Rachel Dolezal's race erupted in June 2015. At the time, Dolezal was the president of the Spokane, Washington chapter of the NAACP.
[6] Rachel Dolezal, interview by Matt Lauer, The Today Show, June 16, 2016.
[7] Lawrence Dolezal, interview for TMZ, June 16, 2016.

sees the need to supplement Haslanger's account with a new notion of gender identity, other

feminists have questioned the implications of Haslanger's view on our everyday understandings

of gender and racial identity. In "Ontological Commitments, Sex and Gender" (2011), Mari

Mikkola faults Haslanger's abolitionism, which is the view that we should abolish women and

men, whites and persons of color, as they exist today, with being both unintuitive and

undesirable. Although I agree that abolitionism is unintuitive, I think that the more serious worry

concerns its desirability.[8] As Mikkola explains, Haslanger's view neglects the idea that one's

gender or race can be something of positive value; as a result, aiming to give up one's current

gender or race may seem like a hard pill to swallow for the sake of social justice (2011, 75). And

this circles back to the worry of defining social groups in terms of their subordination. If, for

example, being black only means being subordinated in some circumstances because of one's

physical features, as Haslanger's account would have it, then desiring not to be subordinate is

tantamount to not desiring to be black. But that does not seem to resonate with our actual

experience. Aren't members of subordinate groups proud of their cultures, their communities,

and the struggles they have fought? Doesn't blackness mean something more than being

subordinate? And is that something more something one would want to relinquish in the name of

social justice?

I should remark that the tension between Haslanger's abolitionism and the value of

positive subordinate identities is evident in her own work. In "Gender and Race: (What) Are

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[8] Haslanger's definitions of women and men, whites and persons of color, entail that, as antisexists and antiracists, we should aim to *abolish* our current genders and races. This is because, as antisexists and antiracists, we work to eliminate the privileges associated with maleness and whiteness and the subordination that comes with being female or of color. Such work amounts to abolishing men and women, whites and persons of color, as they exist today.

They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?" Haslanger criticizes the idea of positive social

identities:

> By offering these analyses of our ordinary terms, I call upon us to reject what seemed to
> be positive social identities. I'm suggesting that we should work to undermine those
> forces that make being a man, a woman, or a member of a racialized group possible; we
> should refuse to be gendered man or woman, refuse to be raced. (2000, 48)

Yet, in "You Mixed? Racial Identity without Racial Biology," Haslanger speaks of the racial

identity of her children, who are black, in these terms:

> A more pressing question, however, is whether they can, as our children, develop healthy
> Black identities. Living in a Black neighborhood, attending integrated schools and a
> Black church, having Black friends and extended family, I think it is almost certain that
> they will have resources for developing *strong and healthy Black identities*, that is, it will
> be able to construct maps that guide them in self-affirming and racial group-affirming
> ways. (2005, 286, emphasis mine)

In this paper, then, it seems that Haslanger views the development of a positive racial identity is

important for members of subordinate racial groups. What, then, are we to make of the

divergence in the views expressed in both papers? From the second quotation, it seems that

developing a healthy racial identity will help a person of color navigate the realities of racism.

But in developing such identity, don't I need to be raced? A solution can be found in the

argument of "You Mixed?" but it serves only to reinforce the value of phenomenology.

Haslanger raises the question concerning the racial identity of her children following her

discussion of two senses of racial identity: racial identity as a label and racial identity as a bodily

map. On the one hand, racial identity as a label, which is a notion that Haslanger draws from

Anthony Appiah's work, means being ascribed a racial label (for example, "white") and

identifying with that label, where such an identification shapes one's life projects (2005, 276).

On the other hand, the notion of racial identity as a bodily map encompasses the bodily skills that

guide oneself in racialized spaces and in interacting with racialized others (282–285).[9] It reflects

our bodily experience as racialized individuals. While Haslanger has a white racial identity in the

sense that she is regularly identified to be white and identifies with that ascription, she also

claims to have a mixed racial identity in virtue of being a mother in a transracial adoption (286).

Hers is a mixed racial identity in the sense of racial identity as a bodily map; she has a

"fragmented" map, which guides her in some contexts as a person of one race, and in others as a

person of a different race (293). In the end, Haslanger's view on positive racial identities might

come to this: developing a healthy racial identity means developing a resilient bodily map, a map

that will guide one in navigating potentially racist contexts, but refusing to identify with one's

racial identity as a label (where this would mean identifying with the negative stereotypes

associated with one's subordinate race).[10] If this is the correct interpretation of Haslanger's

position on positive racial identities, then, we are still confronted with the need of incorporating

the relation one has to the social significance of one's body in formulating a critical theory of

race (and gender). Another way to put the point is this: Haslanger's theory of racial identities as a

bodily map might be said to be just as important a contribution to formulating antiracist theories

as her hierarchical account of racialized groups.

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[9] More specifically, Haslanger lists the following six dimensions of racial identity as a bodily map:
- unconscious somatic (routine behaviors, skills, and "know-hows")
- unconscious imaginary (unconscious self-image/somatic image)
- tacit cognitive (tacit understandings, tacit evaluations)
- perceptual (perceptional selectivity, recognitional capacities)
- conscious cognitive (fear, apprehension, attraction, sense of community)
- normative (aesthetic judgments, judgments of suitability or appropriateness, internalized or not). (2012, 290)

[10] The same could be said of gender identity.

If we stop exclusively defining subordinate groups according to their place in a hierarchy, then we can make sense of the positive aspects of the identities associated with each gender and race. And this is something a phenomenological account is best positioned to do. As an example of the resources phenomenology offers, consider Alcoff's concept of positionality in *Visible Identities*:

> the concept of positionality includes two points: first, as already stated, that the concept of woman is a relational term identifiable only within a (constantly moving) context; but second, that the position that women find themselves in can be actively utilized (rather than transcended) as a location for the construction of meaning, a place from where meaning can be *discovered* (the meaning of being female). The concept of woman as positionality shows how women use their positional perspective as a place from which values are interpreted and constructed rather than as a locus of an already determined set of values. (2006, 148)

Alcoff's account suggests that one's gender offers a perspective on the world and has a positive value; it is a position from which can act and reinterpret the meaning of being a woman, for example. Therefore, the advancement of social justice does not require that one relinquish one's gender but that one contest the meaning of one's gender. And the same analysis can be applied to race and racial identity (147). In short, Alcoff's ontology of gender and race mirrors Haslanger's understanding of racial identity as a bodily map, and this convergence underscores the importance of lived experience for developing critical theories.

In keeping with Alcoff's phenomenological account, I have sought to depict genders and races as positions from which one can act. In Chapter Two, I discussed the possibility that women can live a new relation to their bodies. My account does not require that women abandon their gender but that they ascribe a new meaning to their bodies, one not predicated on the idea that they should be beautiful. In Chapter Three, my discussion of how to respond to the dominant other's gaze aimed to show how members of subordinate groups can develop a better relation to their bodies. And in Chapter Four, I sought to describe ways in which members of dominant

groups could challenge their privilege; the personal transformations I envisioned amount to giving new meaning to one's body *and* of using one's body to change the positions of others. In sum, I have understood gender and race as positions from which agents can act to transform their relation to their bodies and to others.

Before concluding, let me respond to a potential worry concerning my criticisms of Haslanger. I have objected to Haslanger's definitions of gender and race on the grounds that it does not make sense of the positive relation to their gender or race that members of subordinate groups might have. But what if we defined genders objectively, but not hierarchically? Would we run into the same worries? Let us take as an example versions of the sex/gender distinction that do not define men and women hierarchically but in relation to psychological or behavioral traits. Thus, women are those who possess feminine traits, men those who possess masculine traits. Such a definition runs into the following problem. It is unlikely that all women share the same set of psychological or behavioral traits; the same holds for men. In other words, these types of definitions face the *commonality problem* discussed above. And the commonality problem is also like to arise if we define men and women (or any races) in terms of the possession of shared experiences. That is why Haslanger's view is attractive: her descriptions do not require that women in the United States have similar traits or experiences to women in India, for example. All it requires is that these groups are both subordinate because of their sex features. Likewise, for being a man, or being of one race or another. By emptying our definitions of genders and races of any shared attributes beyond subordination or privilege, Haslanger avoids the worry of generalizing the traits or experiences of one group to members of other presumably similar groups. For example, it would be hard to accuse Haslanger of privileging the experiences of Western women in her account of what it is to be a woman, since she makes no

reference to Western practices in her definition of woman. Therefore, if one is to define genders and races in objective terms, Haslanger's theory appears to be a very promising alternative to other accounts. Yet, as I have argued, there are still concerns with this attractive position. Hence my defense of phenomenology.

What Haslanger's social constructionism, that is, the view she develops in "Gender and Race," and Butler's poststructuralism have in common is that they eschew descriptions of lived experience. And this is where I part ways with both projects. One of the overarching themes of this thesis has been the importance of combining description and evaluation for projects of social criticism. Hence the need for a descriptive-normative concept like that of bodily alienation. But why privilege description? Why does recounting lived experience matter? The issues I have identified with Haslanger's and Butler's views reveal why phenomenological description is important. On the one hand, Haslanger's social constructionism misses certain phenomena, like the relationship to one's body in making sense of trans* identities and the positive value of oppressed social identities, because it does not (officially) take into account lived experience. This second failure is particularly worrisome because social activism that stems from a positive valuation of one's oppressed identity has proved to be an important force in driving social justice movements. On the other hand, Butler's theories of gender and the body are caught in interpretive games that are disconnected from actual experience, and as a result they do not make concrete contributions to social criticism. With regard to Butler, I am reminded of a passage from *The German Ideology* quoted in Chapter One, where Marx faults German philosophy with a certain form of abstractness: German philosophy "descends from heaven to earth," whereas Marx wants to start with "real men". I share a similar worry about Butler's framework, and like, Marx have sought to found social critique on the lives of real women and men.

5.2.3 Alienation Critique and Social Philosophy

Where does my version of alienation critique fit in with respect to other critical projects? By founding my social critique on the concept of bodily alienation, my thesis belongs to a tradition of social philosophy extending as far back as to Rousseau. As Axel Honneth argues in "Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy," the first chapter of *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (2007), what distinguishes social philosophy from political philosophy is that social philosophy is premised on the idea of diagnosing *social pathology* (4). Whereas political philosophy appeals to such concepts as equality and justice, the concepts of alienation, anomie, and reification, lie at the heart of social philosophy. As Honneth elaborates, the general aim of critiques premised on these notions is to determine the social conditions that prevent human beings from realizing themselves (4).

What does my account of bodily alienation, along with the thesis that the body is socially constituted, contribute to social philosophy? By examining bodily alienation through the lens of gender and race, I have sought to make this transition between individual alienation to social pathology, to make sense of the general conditions that cause bodily alienation at an individual level. And although I have erred on the side of a formalist understanding of bodily alienation, rather than an essentialist one, there are affinities between my social philosophy and Marx's. Marx argues that alienated labor is both the cause and the product of private property. The parallel claim I have made is that bodily alienation is both a cause and a product of gender- and race-based oppressions. (Of course, this does not imply that there cannot be other forms of oppression that bodily alienation causes and from which it stems.) In Chapter Two, I argued that gender norms can alienate women from their bodies, both because women are more tempted than men to identify with their physical appearance and because of the particularly demanding aesthetic norms that are

placed on them. The alienation women experience from their bodies, we saw, is also a form of interpersonal alienation. This suggests that bodily alienation is the effect of women's oppression and at the root of a collective estrangement both between women and between men and women. In other words, bodily alienation in the form discussed there sustains a certain type of oppression. My argument for sensualism was meant to offer women a way of reclaiming their bodies under oppressive conditions. We saw in Chapter Three that the ways in which gendered and racialized spaces are created sets the stage for bodily alienation. Conversely, members of oppressed and privileged groups are alienated from one another when members of oppressed groups are alienated from their bodies, and so there is a looping effect between bodily alienation and interpersonal alienation. Indeed, the argument of Chapter Four is meant to address the ways in which this looping effect can be disrupted.

One of the lessons of this thesis has been that critical discourse concerning bodily alienation can unmask the social conditions at the root of this form of alienation. But I have also sought to accomplish more: namely, to suggest how we can overcome bodily alienation—either as members of oppressed groups or as members of privileged groups. More specifically, my aim has been to sketch how this overcoming can take place at a bodily level. What does it take to *embody* resistance to alienating social norms? The transition from the discussion of the genesis of alienation to the argument for sensualism illustrates this orientation, as do the arguments of Chapters Three and Four. These three chapters highlight a point Bourdieu makes in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* about the role of critical discourses. There he affirms that critical discourses cannot alone bring about social change; practical struggle is necessary (1977, 169). But this is not to say that critical discourses cannot contribute to practical struggles. This thesis has not only advanced a social critique founded on the concept of bodily alienation, but has also offered some

concrete suggestions for the practical struggles we need to undertake to better live in relation to

our bodies and to others.

Epilogue: Conceptual Personae and The Body of the Philosopher

In *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* (*What Is Philosophy?*), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue that philosophy is the "art of creating concepts" (1991, 10).[1] Unlike scientific activity, which formulates functions, and unlike art, which works with percepts and affects, philosophy operates via concepts. The task of the philosopher is to *create* concepts; concepts are not readymade, awaiting our discovery (11). By concepts, Deleuze and Guattari have in mind such things as Aristotle's concept of substance, Descartes's *cogito*, or the Leibnizian monad (13). How does a philosopher create a concept? Deleuze and Guattari respond to this question by introducing the idea of *conceptual personae,* figures who motivate the introduction of a philosophical concept (62–63). For example, Deleuze and Guattari claim that the "idiot" is the conceptual persona in the background of Descartes's philosophy (60–61). The idiot is not a learned person, but is capable of discovering truths through his own reasoning (60). He is the subject matter of the *cogito.* In addition, they cite the Zarathustra and Christ as examples of conceptual personae in Nietzsche's philosophy (63). The former is a "sympathetic" character, the latter an "antipathetic" character (63). Thus, a conceptual persona (like Christ for Nietzsche) might be a figure to whom a philosopher reacts in developing a philosophy. Stepping away from Deleuze and Guattari's work, one could say that "the unselfish, unselfconscious, unimaginative, decent, honest, dutiful person" whom Rorty identifies in *Contingency, irony, solidarity* as the paradigm of Kantian moral philosophy is the conceptual persona who gives the categorical imperative its *raison d'être* (1989, 34).

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[1] I use the pagination of the French edition. All translations are my own.

What of the conceptual personae of this thesis? Three emerge from its phenomenological

chapters: the narcissist (Chapter Two), the reified person (Chapter Three), and the reifying

person (Chapter Four). What unites the three characters is that they each embody one way or

another of coping with the existential ambiguity at the heart of Beauvoir's philosophy. Recall

that our existential ambiguity consists in, among other things, our subjectivity and our objectivity

(our being-for-others). The narcissist denies her existential ambiguity by trying to make herself

into an aesthetic object. The oppressed person from Chapter Three is treated as an object or a

thing.[2] In reifying the oppressed person, the dominant other from Chapter Four denies his own

existence for others; he refuses the reciprocity that comes with being embodied in a world of

others.

The narcissist, the reified person, and the reifying person are conceptual personae insofar

as they motivate the introduction of the concept of bodily alienation. They also put this concept

in conversation with other concepts, such as the concept of existential ambiguity: bodily

alienation reflects a deficient way of coping with one's existential ambiguity.

Deleuze and Guattari assert that it is the "fate of the philosopher to become his

conceptual persona or conceptual personae" (1991, 62). Their statement signifies that a

conceptual persona or a group of conceptual personae reveals a philosophy, which the

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[2] Not only is the black man regarded as a thing (or an object) in the example from *Black Skin, White Masks*, but Fanon claims that he constitutes himself as an object. Following his description of the black man's encounter with white passengers on a train, Fanon writes: "*je me portai loin de mon être-là, très loin me constituant objet*" (1952, 91). Philcox renders this as "I transported myself on that particular day far, very far, from my self, and gave myself up as an object" (2008, 92). But a more faithful translation would convey the idea the black man makes himself into or constitutes himself as an object. It is also worth mentioning that a more philosophically attuned translation would capture the reference to Heidegger's concept of "*Dasein*" (*être-là*). The contrast at issue here is between the black man's being as Dasein and the fact that he is compelled to make himself into something which Dasein is precisely not, namely, an object.

philosopher is fated to embody. This is true of my conceptual personae. Their evolutions within each chapter disclose a particular ontology of the body: the body is such that one can both be alienated from it and realize oneself in it. By pursuing bodily activities for their own sake, the narcissist can overcome the bodily alienation into which she has been lured by norms of femininity. The black man on the elevator can anchor himself in the world through his anger, while white woman who nervously clutches her purse in the same elevator can reform her alienating behavior through the practice of mindfulness. I learned from each of these personae as I created my ontology of the body. In so doing, my relationship to my own body evolved. I have strongly identified with the quest for physical perfection of the "thigh gap adept," but I have also been inspired by my writings to pursue physical activities for their own sake. In this dialogue between my philosophy and my life, I am reminded of Fanon's closing prayer in *Black Skin, White Masks*, which I cite (slightly modified):

O my body, always make me a woman who questions![3]

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[3] The original line reads: "O my body, always make me a man who questions" (Fanon 2008, 206).

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Acknowledgments

I wrote this dissertation over the last two years of my graduate studies at Harvard University. I am indebted to many in the Philosophy Department and beyond for their friendship and advising during this time.

I would like to thank my fellow graduate students: Byron Davies, who first mentioned Rahel Jaeggi's *Alienation* to me; Ernie Mitchell, for our discussions of Frantz Fanon, Pierre Hadot, and many other philosophers; Emily McWilliams, for her constant friendship; Olivia Bailey, Elizabeth Miller, Ronni Sadovsky, Wendy Salkin, Aleksy Tarasenko-Struc, and Kate Vredenburgh, for their friendship and care in proofreading my dissertation.

I am grateful to faculty in the Philosophy Department for their advising: Matt Boyle, for his feedback on Chapter One; Dick Moran, who advised me during the early stages of this project; Bernhard Nickel, who helped me become a better teacher; Mark Richard, for his comments on Chapter Four; Susanna Siegel, for her comments on drafts of Chapters Two and Four, and advice during my job search. I am especially indebted to Alison Simmons, who challenged me as a writer and as a teacher, and buoyed my spirits during difficult times.

The staff of the Philosophy Department deserve special recognition for their help: Nyasha Borde, for her thoughtful assistance; Ruth Kolodney, with whom I discussed mindfulness meditation; Emily Ware, without whose aid I could not have succeeded as a job market candidate; Eric Johnson-DeBaufre, who has infused so much energy into the social and intellectual life of the department.

I have regularly presented chapters of this thesis at Harvard's Metaphysics & Epistemology Workshop, and I am deeply appreciative of the feedback I received from members and leaders of the workshop. In addition, I thank audiences at Harvard's European Philosophy Workshop, the Diverse Lineages of Existentialism Conference, the MIT Feminist Ontology Workshop, Pennsylvania State University's Rock Ethics Institute, CUNY's Minorities and Philosophy Workshop, and my future intellectual home, Florida International University, for their feedback on earlier versions of Chapters Two, Three, and Four. I am especially grateful to Hilkje Haenel, who responded to an earlier version of Chapter Two at the MIT Feminist Ontology Workshop, and to Robert Bernasconi at Pennsylvania State University for his generosity and enthusiasm, and for our discussions of Fanon.

Charles More has not only offered extensive comments on my dissertation, but has encouraged me in my creative projects from the time we served as teachers for Philosophy 8. We share an uncommon vision for what philosophy can become. Every day I am inspired to work thanks to him.

I owe an incredible debt of gratitude to Ellen Kane. Our conversations not only laid the ground for the argument of Chapter Two, but helped me repair my relationship to my body.