



Bodies Will Be Bodies? A Case for Legitimate Body *Objectiveness*

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A Case for Legitimate Body *Objectiveness*

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Abstract

Confined in spatiotemporal structures and relations, the body is caught in the linearity of economic production and the rigidity of ideological imperatives. In this setup, the objectiveness of the body is suspected of putting a person to a limit. This further interrogates and accuses the body of facilitating its own objectification. Here, I challenge prominent objections to the *objectiveness* of the body, particularly those coming from Marcel and the early/material feminist traditions. I then presented a case in which the active-operative instrumentalization of the body is legitimized, without discounting the body as an addendum or mere physical extension. Further, I qualify the ‘use’ of the body as a corporealized medium and embodied instrument that activates a profound encounter and sharing of the world with other bodies.

Keywords: *embodiment, instrumentality, objectification, objectiveness, material feminism*

INTRODUCTION

The persistent problem of objectification places the materiality of the body under investigation. Consequently, its *objectiveness*—a term I used to refer to the body as an object—is interrogated and immediately taken as the central issue confronting the modern body. With this, any positive (re)appraisal of the body as an object is held inconceivable since its very *objectiveness* is further accused of facilitating the objectification of the individual. This has garnered more attention in recent times as the body becomes a site of intersectionality between production, possession, and instrumentalization. This trajectory turns the body into a source of contradictions since the prototypical view of “the body serving the individual” is confronted with the prevailing ethic of “enabling

the individual to serve his/her own body.”¹ I argue that this condition can be critically engaged from the lens of Marcel. I arrived at this argument since:

1. While the Husserlian phenomenological position and its reiteration in the ideas of Levinas and Merleau-Ponty were convinced of the integral link of the *leib* and *körper*, their distinction is faded and is turned “ambiguous even in Husserl, who recognizes that when the body perceives itself, its two aspects are confused.”²

2. While placed in the margins of the phenomenological tradition and regarded by Jean Hering³ as “an independent phenomenologist,”⁴ Marcel offered a careful appraisal of the body as an object. This locus allows him to propose a view that is unconstrained from operating within the labels and definitions of dominant phenomenologists. In doing this, Marcel brought to the surface the critical tension between *being* a body (subjectiveness) and *having* a body (*objectiveness*) and engaged with this beyond the descriptive approach of consciousness and into the existential. Nonetheless, this further underpins Hering’s remarks that Marcel is a phenomenologist since even if German phenomenology has remained unknown in France, “a phenomenology would

1 Duoyi Fei, From ‘the Mind Isolated with the Body’ to ‘the Mind Being Embodied’: Contemporary Approaches to the Philosophy of the Body,” *Cultures of Science* 3, no. 3 (2020): 207.

2 Although Merleau-Ponty’s later thoughts were attentive to this ambiguity by introducing the term *chair* or “flesh,” the distinction between *leib* and *körper* is still there, some ambiguity notwithstanding. See Floriana Ferro, (2019) “Object-oriented Ontology’s View of Relations: A Phenomenological Critique,” *Open Philosophy* 2, no. 1 (2019): 571.

3 Jean Hering is a great influence on Levinas. As Husserl’s student and one of those most acquainted with his phenomenology in the Strasbourg community, Hering has undeniably induced Husserl’s ideas into the theme of Levinas’ thesis. See Christian Y. Dupont, “Jean Hering and the Introduction of Husserl’s Phenomenology to France,” *Studia Phaenomenologica* 15 (2015), 133. It is even claimed that Hering advised Levinas to go to Freiburg to study phenomenology with Husserl. See John E. Drabinski, *Sensibility and Singularity: The Problem of Phenomenology in Levinas* (New York: SUNY Press, 2001), 1-2. Interestingly, one of those who attended Husserl’s Sorbonne lectures together with Hering, Levinas and the others was Marcel. See Dupont, “Jean Hering and the Introduction of Husserl’s.”

4 Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction*. (The Hague: Springer, 1971), 421. Spiegelberg further argues that while Marcel made no such claim, he engaged the ideas of phenomenology to new perspectives which have influenced the leading French phenomenologists of his time such as Ricoeur and even Merleau-Ponty who he might have inspired in his selection of topics.

have been constituted there; and this, to a large extent, would be due to the influence of Gabriel Marcel.”⁵

However, I argue in subsequent expositions that while Marcel’s critique of the body as an object has productively arrived at an original consideration, this bids for the minimization of the body’s instrumental act. For one, Marcel rejected the claim that the body has instrumental value. He warns of the rigidity of idealism and the remnants of the Cartesian thinking ego. He particularly insists that the declaration ‘*I am my body*’ is a recognition that the body cannot be brought down to the level of being an object, as something, or other.⁶ He believed that this approach would lead to a network of abstractions and ultimately result in the reduction of existence, as existence arises from a relationship that perceives the body as a subject.⁷ Objectification, then, eliminates the particularity and nuances of the existent-subject. Put another way, it separates the subject from its very existence. The *objectiveness* of the body, on the other hand, is a component of existence since it intersects with the subjectiveness of the individual. Yet this view is lost in the misplaced claim that this *objectiveness* is concurrent with the objectification of the body. This erodes the value of body *objectiveness* and proceeds in its problematic considerations. Particularly, this points to the accusatory claim that any instrumentalizing use of the body is inherently detrimental to the existent-subject and produces the dichotomizing either/or condition: either one is acting as *being* one’s body or *having* one’s body.

I argue that this misplaced view eliminates the acts done from the domain of bodily instrumentalization and immediately dismisses them as objectification. Although I find it important to note that I do not intend to salvage the body from its materiality nor endorse a sharp analytical division between the body’s *objectiveness* and subjectiveness. Instead, this further affirms that one’s body is a thing (i.e., an object) in the world that bears the conditions and context in which the relation to other objects is recognized.⁸ Hence, the aim here is to offer a critical reworking of the notion of body *objectiveness* and arrive at a legitimate case for instrumentalizing the body. What this portends is: (1) a body that is not a static *corpus* captured in its assumed role but a corporealized medium that enmeshes the self with other bodies; (2) a body that is not glorified into a docile vessel of the soul but an embodied instrumentality that intuits a space where a non-objectifying use of the body can be reclaimed.

5 Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement*, 448.

6 Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being, I*. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1950), 124.

7 Guillermine de Lacoste, (1995) “Gabriel Marcel’s Body-as-a-Subject: A Preeminently Postmodern Notion,” *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 7, no. 1-2 (1995): 80.

8 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception* (London: Routledge, 2004), 86.

Thus, while the *objectiveness* of the body discloses the self to the exponential influence of neoliberal instrumentalization aggravated by the material conditions of the capitalist and patriarchal systems, such *objectiveness* is found to be laden with active-operative value and embodied significance.

Am I My Body?: Objections on the Objectiveness of the Body

The boundaries between claims that appraise the body in its *objectiveness* and those that promote it as a subjective expression have become prominent in the growing influence of postmodernity. However, the inauguration of the body as an object and the promotion of its instrumental value are not solely the product of postmodernism. Early on, Nietzsche already insisted on the value of the body *vis-à-vis* instrumentality. While it remains contentious whether Nietzsche is endorsing a revaluation of body *objectiveness*, his notion of the body corresponds to such a proposition. As he reiterated in *Of the Despisers of the Body*:

But the awakened, the enlightened man says: I am body entirely, and nothing beside; and soul is only a word for something in the body. The body is a great intelligence, a multiplicity with one sense, a war and a peace, a herd and a herdsman. Your little intelligence, my brother, which you call “spirit,” is also an instrument of your body, a little instrument and toy of your great intelligence. You say “I” and you are proud of this word. But greater than this – although you will not believe in it – is your body and its great intelligence, which does not say “I” but performs “I”.⁹

Based on this Nietzschean proclamation, the self is a bodily activity. It cannot remain sedentary, static, or pure essential, that is, an entity devoid of any materiality. Rather, it can operate instrumentally. Here, the active–operative value of the body is made prominent. For Grosz, this explains why Nietzsche insisted on a novel type of philosophy or knowledge that allies the arts and movements. For him, these endowed the body with dynamizing and enhancing life as “philosophy, truth, are capable of affirming active power when they, in their turn, return power and force to the body from which they derive.”¹⁰ If this declaration of Nietzsche is to be taken *prima facie*, one is led to ask: Does this justify the prominence of the material body? If the “spirit” (i.e., the mind) is an instrument of the body, will this lead to the collapse of the spiritual (i.e., non-body) in the burgeoning influence of the bodily? Foremost objections

9 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961), 61-62.

10 Elizabeth Grosz, “Nietzsche and the Stomach for Knowledge,” in Patton, Paul (ed) *Nietzsche, Feminism and Political Theory*, ed. Paul Patton (New York: Routledge, 2002), 60.

are produced from these queries. The first comes from the phenomenological perspective, which attempts to either demarcate or interlink the subject-object component of the body. The second are from the early feminists and material feminists' objections, which pinpoint material conditions, such as economic relations and social structures, as that which trapped the materiality of the body in its objectification. In this sense, instrumentalization of the body is not simply a physiological or phenomenological problem, but foremost an economic-political and patriarchal condition. These are discussed as follows.

Phenomenological Objections from Marcel: Being or Having a Body?

The phenomenological sense of the self that is grounded in the assertion of '*my body*' signifies a two-fold direction: first, that I *have* a body; second, that I *am* my body. When one's relationship with the body is motivated by the former, its instrumental value is assumed at first instance. Their ontological-relational standing is contingent on their *having* a body. In pursuing this relationship, the existent-subject creates a lacuna between their *being* and the body. One notable, yet least consulted, assertion coming from this perspective is that of Marcel.

Foregrounding Marcel's strong reaction against Cartesian rationalism, he succeeded in articulating the growing distinction between existence and object.¹¹ Along this line, he considers the body not as a mere mediator between the subject and the world, nor is it to be seen as distant or separate from existence. Viewed this way, it is '*my body*' that unites existence and the existent. Yet this does not necessarily distinguish the existent from other beings as a body. While it relates to others as a body, it should not be identified merely as such. To identify or distinguish the body is to see it as an object, since these acts operate only in the realm of objects. Instead, "of this body, I can neither say that it is I, nor that it is not I, nor that it is for me."¹² In this instance, the subject-object opposition, at least for Marcel, is evident from the outset.

Reading Marcel's later writing in *Mystery of Being*, de Lacoste noted how Marcel used the term 'body-as-a-subject' to reiterate the claim of '*I am my body*.' In asserting this, "reality ceases to be a collection of objects outside a person and becomes a presence."¹³ This is stated, obviously, in contrast to the claim of "*I have a body*," that is, the 'body-as-an-object.' The declarative "*I have*" only endorses

11 de Lacoste, "Gabriel Marcel's Body-as-a-Subject," 71.

12 Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 12.

13 de Lacoste, "Gabriel Marcel's Body-as-a-Subject," 72.

the possessive view that impels the body to various modes of use. For Marcel, this especially points to ideas that see the body as “an instrument for receiving messages from the world,” which stands in contrast to being a subject where the indecomposable or felt unity formed by the self and the body is reified.¹⁴ He adds that this entails the characteristics of the body in which the self plays no part whatsoever; thus, it “does not take me [self] into account, that which has nothing to do with me.”¹⁵ It is apparent that for Marcel, this *objectiveness* distances the self from the body, the world, and one’s very existence.¹⁶ In this mode of *having* a body, its instrumentalizing ability is questioned. Thus, for Marcel, the ‘body-as-an-object’ is unthinkable since “thought separates the subject from the object of thought, if I think my body, it becomes an object and ceases to exist as such.”¹⁷ This brings us to body objectification, which finds great opposition from the early feminist and material feminist perspectives.

The Early and Material Feminists: Women’s Corporeal Entanglement

When objectification is taken in terms of its implications for women, it is usually approached from the standpoint of sexual objectification as its reference. For Bartky, sexual objectification focuses on utilizing the person’s sexual functions or body parts as mere instruments and, to a greater extent, as a representative of the whole person.¹⁸ Another feminist who offers a strong contention against body instrumentalization is Firestone. For her, the biological and reproductive capacities of women’s bodies are turned into instruments. Oppression is even more perpetuated by this instrumentalizing use of the body. As such, for Firestone, “pregnancy is barbaric” and a “temporary deformation of the body of the individual for the sake of the species.”¹⁹ While for Guillaumin, the body of women has fallen into what she calls *sexage*. This pertains to the systemic appropriation of their bodies into a kind of natural resource. The object of this relationship is “the physical material individuality,” which necessitates the belief that “a corporeal substratum motivates, and in some way ‘causes’

14 Marcel, *Being and Having*.

15 Gabriel Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), 332.

16 de Lacoste, “Gabriel Marcel’s Body-as-a-Subject.”

17 Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, 275.

18 Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

19 Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London: Paladin, 1972), 188-9.

this relationship, which is itself a material-corporeal relationship.”²⁰ In this perpetuation and appropriation of oppression, the instrumentalization of body objectiveness takes center stage. Later, Nussbaum identifies instrumentalization as “the most morally exigent notion”²¹ involved in the act of objectification since it denies others “what is fundamental to them as human beings, namely the status of beings ends in themselves.”²² Eventually, this leaves them “ripe for other abuses—the refusal of imagination involved in the denial of subjectivity, the denial of individuality involved in fungibility.”²³ This, as argued by early feminists and later by material feminists, is most evidently felt by women in a patriarchal and capitalistic society.

Their objection is primarily informed by the claim that women are objectified, while men objectify to create and maintain patriarchy.²⁴ They are inherently seen as objects through their material body. Thus, in this setting, the course of action is to salvage women from their body *objectiveness*. That is, to disassociate them from their ‘*having a body*’ since it is thought to permit their instrumentalization. In a way, women are regarded as entangled with and colonized by their bodily conditions. Such disposition accuses capitalism and patriarchy since: (1) in a capitalist society, the body of women is captured within the existing economic and political framing; out of this, the commodified body is produced; (2) in a patriarchal society, the porosity of women’s gender is arrested by a specific role that their body is expected to play; out of this, the gendered body is created.

For the first reason, the emphasis rests on the assertion that the commodified body of women is *produced*. This may elicit opposition from those who maintain that humans are forced to be born into capitalist societies. While there is truth to it, my argument is against those claims that since women are born into the system, they are *naturally* disposed to conform to it. Such would mean that any treatment to address the commodified body of women is a mere stopgap, if not a stunted solution to their already pre-determined condition. This requires revisiting the most basic social relations that women are born into, namely, the household. Fundamentally, it is here that women inherited their roles as reproduced workers where “the exchange value of their work is nothing at

20 Colette Guillaumin, “The Practice of Power and Belief in Nature. Part II. The Naturalist Discourse,” *Feminist Issues* 1, no. 3 (1981): 88. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02685567>.

21 Martha Nussbaum, “Objectification,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 24, no. 4 (1995): 261.

22 Nussbaum, “Objectification,” 265.

23 Nussbaum, “Objectification,” 265.

24 Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*.

all.”²⁵ It is also here that the body of women is initiated into labor: primarily, as fit for household chores; later, the kind of labor associated with childbearing. Both Marx and Engels reiterated that the production of life, both of one’s own in labor and new life in procreation, eventually falls into a double relationship: the second is that which is natural, and the first is a social relationship with the other.²⁶ As such, women who performed this labor were naturalized as biological beings deemed inept of effecting change in the social order. In effect, the body of a woman is entrenched in her familiar image as fit only for domestic work and bed performance. For a woman to negotiate a place in the social order, she is forced to assign a certain premium to her body and sell its value by assuming the masculine model of labor. Here, the body of women assumes a surplus value that is disposable and negotiable. All of these culminate in the debased body of women, likened to the capitalists’ very own commodities: depleted, overconsumed, and reproduced.

For the second reason, the contention is that the gendered body is created persuasively by the dominant power. No one is born to it. Some of the implications of gendering women’s bodies are evident in the varied interlocutors of gender discourses. For instance, one of the characteristics of the body used to differentiate a woman from a heterosexual man is her fluidity. Interestingly, their ‘leaky bodies’ provide a concrete image of a gendered femininity. Analogous to Irigaray’s claim, in portraying the body of women as leaking with liquid, such as during menstruation, orgasm, or placental abruption, what is conversely purported is the image of a man that is solid and firm.²⁷ This portends that the properties of fluid arrogated to the body of women—its formlessness, excessiveness, and unstableness—are far from compatible with the rigid mechanics of the ruling phallic symbol.²⁸ The dominant regime of the male perspective celebrates the body that is firm, decisive, and solid. It champions the archetypal model of brute force to be reckoned with.

These conditions conspicuously led early feminists and the later material feminist movement to be suspicious of their bodily features and confront their *objectiveness*. This suspicion remains crucial in the feminist movement at various

25 Elisabeth Armstrong, “Marxist and Socialist Feminism,” in *Companion to Feminist Studies*, ed. Nancy Naples (Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), 35.

26 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (Moscow: Progress Publisher, 1964), 41.

27 Luce Irigaray, *The Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

28 Elana Gomel, “Hard and Wet: Luce Irigaray and the Fascist Body,” *Textual Practice* 12, no. 2 (1998).

times. In the eighteenth century, the body was seen as a source of vulnerability, such that Wollstonecraft argues that these “false descriptions of sensibility have been early entangled with a woman’s motives of action.”²⁹ Even forms of “the celebration of the female body as a source of sensual pleasure was constrained by a risk of pregnancy.”³⁰ Exacerbated by the campaign for women’s suffrage in the West, the nineteenth and early twentieth-century feminist activities drew attention to the body as a marker of race and class differences and impugned it in perpetuating both racial and sexual oppression.³¹ Lennon further argues that even in the contemporary period, as the campaign for sexual equality, rights to reproduction, abortion, and motherhood came to the fore in both extreme poles of social discourses, the body is still seen as something owned.³² This led women to distance themselves from any positive consideration of their bodily condition. From these, the material body remains to be seen as a shell that exaggerates their seeming dual position: while the body shields them from the dictations of dominant powers, it also constrains them to disentangle themselves from such strictures.

Eventually, it was the Freudian model of bodily relationship that offered one of the preliminary considerations of what I termed body *objectiveness*. In Freud’s effort to identify a conscious sense of self, he argues that such a self is ‘bodily.’ This means, “the *ego* is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity.”³³ As such, the sense of self is aware of its sense of a body, one not simply dictated by anatomy, but that which is conscious of its having shape or form. This *having* a body is influenced by the affective and sensory significance with which its different parts are invested.³⁴ This later gives way to a more compelling positive reconsideration of the body outside the material feminist perspective, such as that of Irigaray (who criticizes Freud’s phallogocentric model). Rather than fixated with the purported lack of the women’s body, she sees its physicality as a site for creative potentials; as such, the plurality of female sexuality and expression.³⁵ What Irigaray offers is not merely a rehearsal

29 Mary Wollstonecraft, “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,” in *The Feminist Papers: From Adams to Beauvoir*, ed. Alice S. Rossi (Boston: North Eastern University Press, 1988), 55.

30 Kathleen Lennon, (2010) “Feminist Perspectives on the Body,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, June 28, 2010, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/feminist-body/>.

31 Lennon, “Feminist Perspectives on the Body.”

32 Lennon, “Feminist Perspectives on the Body.”

33 Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1923), 26.

34 Freud, *The Ego and the Id*.

35 Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

of a possible reorientation of the ideal body but one that recasts women's bodily relationship towards both their own material body and the other bodies around them.

Qualifying Legitimate Body Objectiveness Apropos to Objectification

Inarguably, any argument that qualifies the body's *objectiveness* cannot commence from the denial of its state of being objectified. Echoing McNay, the objectified body is a "concrete phenomenon" and "the main place where power is concentrated in modern society in the exercise of social control."³⁶ It is reduced through forms of discipline and reinforced as a tool of the state. The body is transformed into both a latent and overt recipient of the varied regulations imposed by the institutions of control. These are more than sufficient to ground the reality of the objectification of the body. Thus, my counterargument is not directed against this. Rather, it is toward those claims that reduce objectification as an act inherently caused by the body's *objectiveness*. In a way, the *objectiveness* of the body is deemed to have fallen short in articulating any value to the selfhood of the existent-subject. Consequently, it demotes the body into an accidental—and, thus, nonessential—component of their existential features. To move away from this, I proceed in qualifying the legitimacy of the 'use' of body *objectiveness*.

Grounded on various studies, the act of objectification occurs when these foremost criteria are present: (1) one's bodily parts and functions are regarded as separate from one's being, or; (2) such bodily parts and functions are deemed capable of representing the entire person, and; (3) that which generates a relationship towards the body that reduces it to the status of instruments.³⁷ Criterion three is consistent with Marcel's definition of object-body. On the other hand, I share the agreement that any relationship with the body that emanates from the first two criteria finds its basis in Cartesian dualism and is, therefore, problematic. However, the proposal is far from sanctioning an existential valuation of the body *objectiveness* that isolates the body from its embodiment. The last criterion demonstrates such disassociating and isolating tendencies. As such, the claim that dismisses the instrumentality of the body tends to view the self as a being "locked up in the privacy of its own

36 Lois McNay, *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 17.

37 See Barbara L. Fredrickson, and Tomi-Ann Roberts, "Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (1997); Nussbaum, "Objectification;" Bartky, *Femininity and Domination*.

consciousness, as the Cartesian picture assumes.”³⁸ This fosters the misplaced belief that instrumentalizing the body will instinctively lead to its subsumption into the modes of production-consumption. To put forward my contention towards criterion three, I raise these thought processes (TP):

Thought Process 1: In a phenomenological sense, embodiment pertains to the interrelatedness of the lived body (i.e., I *am* my body) and the material body (i.e., I *have* a body), which allows the self to relate to the objects and other bodies outside it. As such, in the exercise of relating to others, the ability to extend and instrumentalize *objectiveness* takes the body as an active project. Is it then that embodiment can proceed to objectification?

Thought Process 2: Considering TP 1 in the affirmative, in acknowledging the bodily materiality, the existent-subject instrumentalizes the body to serve its purpose, such as in instances identified by Fairchild and Rudman, where one confronts those who objectify them by exercising their bodily agency.³⁹ Or even the use of one’s body to enhance the self—such as through fashion, exercise, or aesthetic surgeries—to “feel good about how our bodies appear to ourselves and to others.”⁴⁰ Is it objectification when the instrumentalizing act is engaged toward a particular objective or good of the self?

Thought Process 3: Considering TP 2 in the affirmative, as the self is turned into the doer of objectification by using its body, does it fall into double objectification, that is, the self-objectifying objectification? If instrumentalizing the body turns the self into an object, can that object (the receiver of the act) objectify itself if objectification is taken to be an active act of an active doer?

The point of these thought processes is not to arrive at a definitive condition that sees one’s relation with the body as purely instrumental, especially one that indexes it among the technical and mere medium. As such, the instrumentalizing act pertained here is not necessarily the kind that is motivated by the body’s evolutionary functions, such as the use of the eyes to detect light or the use of the nose to identify a smell. More exactly, this points to the *objectiveness* that allows the body to be instrumentalized in promoting the good of the self. For instance, those who push their bodies to take on two jobs to sustain their needs, or a working student who subjects their body to extreme work to finance their

38 Dermot Moran, “Heidegger’s Critique of Husserl’s and Brentano’s Accounts of Intentionality,” *Inquiry* 43, no. 1 (2000): 44.

39 Kimberly Fairchild and Laurie Rudman, “Everyday Stranger Harassment and Women’s Objectification,” *Social Justice Research* 21, no. 3 (2008): 353.

40 Chris Shilling, “The Body and Difference,” in *Identity and Difference*, ed. Kathryn Woodward (London: Sage, 1997), 70.

studies. While this is consistent with embodiment, it also refers to the use of the body even in the absence of the necessary intersubjective intention to relate with other bodies. These acts cannot qualify as a mode of interrelation since they are conducted for a personal function. Although in these instances, the bodies are taken as means to achieve certain positive goals that promote the self's well-being. To further develop this argument, I provided responses to the various objections identified in the previous pages.

Response to the Phenomenological Objections from Marcel

From a phenomenological premise, *being* a body takes primary consideration since “before one can perceive or attend to one’s body as an object, one has to be a living body that experiences and perceives.”⁴¹ There is this integrative oneness with *my* body that, for Marcel, when idealism or rationalism abstracts meaning from it, would eventually tear apart existence itself. Its recovery lies in the need to reintegrate with *my* body.⁴² The emphasis is put on the declarative ‘*I am my body*,’ which is counter to the claim that “gives us only the thought about the body as an idea, and not the experience of the body in reality.”⁴³ This brings us back to the Cartesian duality. While Marcel criticizes the dichotomized body-mind relationship proposed by Descartes, he sees it as a chance to reiterate the place of the body in this relationship.⁴⁴ Two considerations arise from here.

The first is a bid to transcend the persistent mind-body dualism by arguing, from Merleau-Ponty, that a distinction between the subjectiveness and *objectiveness* of the *corps propre* (or the body as a lived experience) is never really found, since the two are *entrelacs* or intertwined as the *flesh* of the world.⁴⁵ This makes it inconceivable to claim one as the mind and the other as

41 Maren Wehrle, “Being a Body and Having a Body. The Twofold Temporality of Embodied Intentionality,” *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 19, no. 3 (2020): 503.

42 de Lacoste, “Gabriel Marcel’s Body-as-a-Subject,” 82.

43 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (New York: Routledge, 1962), 231.

44 Peter A. Bertocci, “Descartes and Marcel on the Person and his Body: A Critique,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 68, no. 1 (1968): 216.

45 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 183. In these notes, Merleau-Ponty criticizes the notion of *corps propre* as the seat of all human relations, as he thought he retained the philosophy of ‘consciousness’ and put such notion into a limit.

material substance, as there is a “coiling over of the visible upon the visible.”⁴⁶ On the opposite pole is the growing perspective that sees body *objectiveness* as that which permits the outsider to “peer at, leer at, admire, criticize, probe, investigate and dissect another’s body.”⁴⁷ Yet, what is substantiated from these opposing claims is that as we found ourselves living with and among other object-bodies, it is also through this *objectiveness* that the act of relating with them, at least from the first contact, is established.

In a way, central to the statement ‘*I am my body*’ is the exposition of the *I*-activities since it is the ‘I’ that experiences the body and, through that body, the objects outside it. As such, the body is not a mere addendum-extension but an exposition of the intrinsic unity in both the within and the without of the ‘I’. Here, I argue that while the body is *within* the particularities of the ‘I,’ it is at the same time its network of meeting points in the *without*. It is through body *objectiveness* that the ‘I’ establishes its relationship with the outside objects. In using the body to determine a relationship with the outside, the intrinsic unity of the ‘I’ and the body is emphasized. This articulates the dynamics of *being* and *having* a body, where the ‘I’ intends the course of the ‘*my*’ in accordance with certain objectives and uses. From here, the obvious fact is that existent-subjects ‘use’ their bodies through their functions in accomplishing certain tasks. Yet, while it is the body that performs the objectives or the activities of the ‘I,’ it should never be reduced to a separate or extended entity. The reduction, then, of the body into a mere non-essential object or its dismissal into an extension is what enthused the objectification of the body.

In a way, the problematic understanding of objectification lies not in acknowledging the body’s ability to make instrumentality possible, but in describing it as its identity. It is not our ‘having-a-body’ that leads us to objectify ourselves. Instead, it is such that enables us to be aware “of our bodies not only passively as material, changing and finite objects, but also actively, as possible bodies related to our future actions and plans.”⁴⁸ On this basis, body *objectiveness* is what allows the existent-subject to pre-reflectively engage with everyday activities and relate to other bodies. As such, *having* a body is what permits an individual to identify certain projects. Their possible and futural activities are accomplished through the instrumentalizing ability of body *objectiveness*.

46 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 140.

47 Linda Finlay, “The Body’s Disclosure in Phenomenological Research,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 1 (2006): 21.

48 Wehrle, “Being a Body and Having a Body,” 518.

Response to Early Feminists and Material Feminists' Objections

The objections of the early feminists and later material feminists do not stand without merit. Rightfully so, they were able to engage many thinkers and even policymakers in considering the material conditions of women *qua* objectification. I share my agreement that the body of women has been greatly demoted, largely gendered, and is deemed “passive while being active – being regulated externally while existing [...] which makes it a tool.”⁴⁹ If one is to reason based on this position alone, it is then easy to be apprehensive about the *objectiveness* of the body. However, this turns problematic as it bids to discredit the multifarious and complex aspects of body-concept construction.

In a way, falling into an inquiry of arbitrarily and exclusively faulting the material conditions of objectification brought by patriarchy and capitalism, and then assuming a correlation between them, only furthers the portentous maintenance of monologic discourse that is antagonistic and aversive. Muted in this claim are the varied definitions of being a ‘woman,’ which move beyond the notion of class and economic conditions, and intersect with the contexts of gender, sexuality, and race. Ultimately, this overlooks the interlocking intersectionality and strips women of their nuances. This is evident in the arguments of early feminists, as seen in the case of Wollstonecraft. She nullifies any positive consideration of the ‘feminine virtues’ and deems these as bogus ideals peddled to women, and a complete perversion of the true virtues.⁵⁰ In this sense, women are distanced and yet fettered to their bodily conditions, which daunts any assertion of their own freedom.

Even Butler’s *Gender Trouble* has sadly fallen into this tendency and was “heavily criticized for insufficiently attending to the materiality of the body.”⁵¹ Thus, for Delphy, Butler fails to “assume [...] a truly social constructionist view”⁵² on the anatomical differences of bodies. Delphy critically argues that “anatomical sex (and its physical implication) ... transforms an anatomical difference (which is in itself devoid of social implications) into a relevant distinction for social

49 McNay, *Foucault and Feminism*, 17.

50 Wollstonecraft, “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.”

51 Katherine Costello, “Christine Delphy, an anti-essentialist TERF: Materialist feminism and the affective legacies of the MLF,” *DiGeSt Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, 10, no. 2 (2023): 72. Although, Butler later offered her critical response on *Bodies That Matter* (1993).

52 Christine Delphy, “The Invention of ‘French Feminism’: An Essential Move,” *Yale French Studies*, 87 (1995): 205.

practice.”⁵³ Clearly, for Delphy, the biological differences of bodies, on their own, do not impose inherent social implications; these are simply physical facts. Instead, it is the ‘social practice,’ that is, how a society interprets the use of these biological (bodily) differences, that constructs and rationalizes the dominant structures. In other words, it is not the *objectiveness* of the body that is the culprit of its oppression, but the social meanings produced by socio-economic structures that sustain it. If the *objectiveness* of the body remains to be taken as cause for its objectification, it engenders the narrative that has been overplayed and even abused by a myopic agenda: the body of women is always the casualty, abject victim, and collateral damage. As such, it is supposed that the dismissal of these material conditions also warrants the abandonment of women’s bodily conditions.

In the same respect, Heinämaa and Jardine pointed out that as the body opens one to vulnerability, finitude, and mortality, it is then identified as highly unreliable; thus, others build varied psychological mechanisms to distance themselves from these bodily conditions.⁵⁴ I argue that what this has successfully produced is a kind of ‘fear of the body’ that has now been translated into the mitigation, if not the mastery, of bodily limitations. For instance, jobs that are perceived as too reliant on bodily performance (and are therefore deemed prone to emotional and behavioral disturbances) are being replaced by machines that can master human bodily functions. Another iteration of this is the troubling issue of gender policing in sports, particularly towards the bodies of women athletes.⁵⁵ In these cases, doubt and suspicion toward the self are induced through the *objectiveness* of the body. The more it is assumed as such, the more that it is reinforced into a weapon of control of the dominant system.

Surfacing from here is another problematic reclamation of the body of women, one that denigrates it as the antithesis to reason. This rejection of body *objectiveness* points to the dominant culture as the prominent venue where a dichotomist view of the self persists: the mind and reason are coded masculine, whereas the body and emotion are coded feminine.⁵⁶ Due to this, women are

53 Christine Delphy, *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women’s Oppression* (US: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1984): 144.

54 Sara Heinämaa and James Jardine, “Objectification, Inferiorization, and Projection in Phenomenological Research on Dehumanization,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Dehumanization*, ed. Maria Kronfeldner (UK: Routledge, 2021), 318.

55 See Annie Blazer, “Gender Policing in Girls’ and Women’s Sports,” *Religions* 12, no. 1054 (2023): 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14081054>.

56 Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 194. See also Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One* (NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

seen as “somehow more biological, more corporeal, and more natural than men.”⁵⁷ Conversely, the rational mind is elevated as a more fixed and reliable base in the project of redefining women *contra* the masculine parameters. For Lennon, this is glossed in some early feminists, and even later feminists’ insistence “to break any suggested deterministic link between the corporeal characteristics, mental faculties, and social role.”⁵⁸ Such aggrandizes a woman’s right to decide about her body, particularly in terms of how it should be used. This enthuses the conduct that sees the body of women “as something owned by, and thereby separate from, the self, something over which the self has rights.”⁵⁹ This misplaced reappraisal of the body of women is crucial as this points to the danger that Wehrle warned us about, where the body is grasped as “passively located, affected, moved or molded from the outside as if we were an indifferent object.”⁶⁰ In this state, the body remains the unreconciled projected image in the mirror that Jacques Lacan⁶¹ identifies: the fragmented and conflictual dual relationship of the ‘I’ and the body. As such, body *objectiveness* is turned into a rival of the imaginary ideal body. For Lennon, what remains here is implicit dualism.⁶²

In interrogating these conditions of the body of women, what is brought to the fore is the implication that, rather than arriving at a dualistic interpretation of the mind and body as dimensions that rescind each other, the self is rendered as a physical discourse. In this sense, the ability of the body to situate and relate with other objects is made tenable through its *objectiveness*. Here, body *objectiveness* reiterates the individual’s primary existential orientation: to understand one’s *being* a body is to reify one’s *having* a body. It is critical to restate that this contention does not sanction a purely objective conception of the body of women. Such an understanding would be inconsistent with the dynamics between the lived and the corporeal body. This neither lodges the feminine body in a privileged position *vis-à-vis* masculine supremacy nor identifies a novel non-patriarchal framework. Instead, this undertaking is close to Grosz’s intention to arrive at an agenda that “asks questions about male and female bodies in their irreducible specificities and provides displacement and

57 Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (London: Routledge, 1994), 14.

58 Lennon, “Feminist Perspectives on the Body.”

59 Lennon, “Feminist Perspectives on the Body.”

60 Wehrle, “Being a Body and Having a Body,” 100.

61 Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 92.

62 Lennon, “Feminist Perspectives on the Body.”

criticisms.”⁶³ In a way, a more explicit inquiry into the spatiotemporal experience of women can be genuinely understood if one returns to their experience of body *objectiveness*.

The persistent crisis of constructing the body of women based on the parameters of masculine rules and conventions cannot be fully remedied by simply accusing its materiality as the source of such a crisis. Instead, this primarily requires acknowledging the body of women as an object and the instrumental use of such *objectiveness* to activate positive engagement with the world. In this sense, body *objectiveness* cannot be entirely separated from the world. It is through this that the body, as constituted in its instrumentalizing ability, is also distinguished.

Qualifying the “Use” of the Body as an Embodied Instrument

The self is spatially positioned and temporally confined in the world that it inhabits. This becomes more plausible in the materiality of its body. As such, this materiality remains to be taken as a source of the body’s mere passive and static condition. This view is exaggerated by the misplaced instrumentalization foregrounded by the phenomenological objections identified in the previous pages. I argue that the failure to qualify for this instrumentality will even more alienate the self from its body. This eventually proceeds to its objectification since it reduces the corporeal body “as a mere field of sensation and thus thrown back on the materiality and vulnerability which is accompanied by it.”⁶⁴ Hence, the objectification of the body also points to those acts that forfeit the body’s ability to activate its instrumentalizing potential.

From here, it is apparent that this *objectiveness* actuates the body’s relational and instrumental standing with the world and with other bodies dwelling on it. This is consonant with the cogent view of Green that the body is an object since it is extended in space, it exists in time, and it justifies the embodiment of the existent-subject.⁶⁵ This is what is pertained to in the claim that the material body is the existent-subject’s corporealized medium or its embodied instrument in coming to terms with its spatiotemporal realities. This further offers a reflective insight that this *objectiveness* is not some kind of break from the spatiotemporal, but that which inherently mediates the self to experience its being a material body among other material bodies.

63 Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 89.

64 Wehrle, “Being a Body and Having a Body,” 517.

65 Leslie Green, “Pornographies,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (2000): 44.

If this is the case, how then can one qualify that its ‘use’ does not necessarily lead to its objectification? Clearly, when one pertains to that which is ‘used,’ it easily points to objects or things. Following this, when one claims, “*I used my body*,” will this imply that the body is anonymized and stripped of its particularities, like an everyday thing? Or can it even be labeled and categorized as accessible commodities? In this case, is the body used to extend and expand the power of the user, as any instrumentalized thing would easily fulfill? If one is to consult Marcel, these would most obviously point to the objectified body.⁶⁶ But to arrive at a critical response, one needs to clarify what is meant by “use” in this exposition. In considering the body as an embodied instrument, its active–operative agency is featured but without intuitively reducing it into a mere and static thing. As such, the seeming dual aspect of the body as a thing and a non–thing, as physicality and yet uncontained and non–limited by such physicality, is considered. As Grosz succinctly puts it:

The body is a most peculiar “thing,” for it is never quite reducible to being merely a thing; nor does it ever quite manage to rise above the status of thing. Thus, it is both a thing and a nonthing, an object, but an object which somehow contains or coexists with an interiority, an object able to take itself and others as subjects, a unique kind of object not reducible to other objects. Human bodies, [...] are objects necessarily different from other objects; they are materialities that are uncontainable in physicalist terms alone. If bodies are objects or things, they are like no others, for they are centers of perspective, insight, reflection, desire, agency.⁶⁷

This directs our attention toward the consideration of body *objectiveness* as not merely the default mode of ‘use’ but implies its explicit embodied corporeality. In this instance, the body is where perception and action coexist. In this assertion, Merleau-Ponty maintains that everyone finds themselves alone, and yet nobody can do without other people simply because they are useful to others.⁶⁸ By claiming this, it is made constitutive that in our dealings with the body, we also consider its ‘usefulness’ to us. To explain, people deal with other bodies instrumentally. They hire others to build a house for them, book a driver to bring them to their destination, or ask someone to cook for them. In all these, the others’ bodies are considered in their instrumental use, in their *objectiveness*.

66 See Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, 124; Marcel, *Being and Having*, 10.

67 Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, xi.

68 Merleau-Ponty, *The World of Perception*, 87.

As such, acknowledging this ‘use’ of the body is recognizing its ability to do something productive, which can spring from one’s good habits, talent, and skills. The body is understood in terms of the things it can perform. This is expounded upon in the study by Fitzsimons and Shah, where the participants found interpersonal relationships to be instrumental yet non-objectifying. In this study, the functionality of relating with others in terms of usefulness towards a goal—or what they termed as ‘goal instrumentality’—intensified the participants’ link with the ‘instrumental others.’⁶⁹ This is true in the sense that it establishes more genuine accessibility, and positive feelings and care towards the subjective states of their instrumental others.⁷⁰ This is what I pertained to in this paper as an act of sharing the world with others. While this act of sharing is relational in its intention, it primarily acknowledges other objects already there in the world. Simply put, it is through the ‘use’ of the body that, as it participates in everyday activities, the self’s perception of the world is made more attentively immersed; its relationship with others and, in the process, with itself, is also made profound.

Then again, I argue about the need to qualify the notion of instrumentality in relation to embodied instrumentality. Even Nussbaum admits to her concern that the objectification category might be too inclusive and that among the seven criteria she proposed, instrumentality is especially problematic.⁷¹ Equating ‘use’ with instrumentality does not automatically eliminate the possibility of objectification. In concurrence with LaCroix and Pratto, an instrumentalizing act that is mechanistic, disrespectful, and limiting one’s autonomy and subjective experiences only perceives and reduces the other as merely instrumental.⁷² The recent study by Heinämaa and Jardine refers to this as *thingly objectification*, in which “human beings are taken, in one or another practical context, as mere things or physical objects.”⁷³

I believe this reiteration finds its justification here: the body is objectified when, in the first attempt to relate to it, one immediately abandons its being an object and deems it incapable of realizing an end of its own. I argue that

69 Grainne M. Fitzsimons and James Y. Shah, “Confusing One Instrumental Other for Another: Goal Effects on Social Categorization.” *Psychological Science* 20, no. 12 (2009): 1469-70.

70 Fitzsimons and Shah, “Confusing One Instrumental Other for Another,” 1469-70.

71 Nussbaum, “Objectification,” 265.

72 Jessica M. LaCroix and Felicia Pratto, “Instrumentality and the Denial of Personhood: The Social Psychology of Objectifying Others,” *Revue Internationale de Psychologie Sociale* 28, no. 1 (2015): 200-201.

73 Heinämaa and Jardine, “Objectification, Inferiorization, and Projection,” 311.

this frames the body and its instrumentalizing ability as a meager, reactive, and reflexive response to a persistent problem or issue—the body is ‘used’ solely as a technical utility and nothing else. Alluding to Weil, the body is subjected to an all-consuming force that undermines one’s autonomy, ability to reciprocate, and equal standing with other embodied beings. For Weil, this force, “exercised to the limit, it turns man into a thing in the most literal sense. It makes a corpse out of him. Somebody was there and the next minute, there is nobody at all.”⁷⁴ Fundamentally, the notion of ‘use’ that instrumentalizes the body must be receptive to the *objectiveness* of other bodies. The words of Saliba appropriately ground this final point: “we are blind to the world if our first intention is one in which we ignore the basic hermeneutic for interpreting it, namely, our body.”⁷⁵

CONCLUSION

This paper successfully argues that body *objectiveness* does not necessarily certify the act of objectification, nor does objectification inherently flow from this *objectiveness*. Instead, this occurs when the body is reduced to a mere accidental, passive, and separate object. Further, the body is not innately put into limit by its instrumental value but is ascertained through its ‘use,’ which presupposes the formation of an embodied relational standing with oneself and other bodies. Largely, the *objectiveness* of the body opens a profound encounter with the others in their entirety, body and all.

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74 Simone Weil, *The Iliad or the Poem of Force* (Pennsylvania: Pendle Hill, 1956), 3.

75 Jacob Saliba, “Gabriel Marcel’s ‘Being and Having’: An Interpretation of Embodiment and Being,” *Epoché Magazine*, April 2021, <https://epochemagazine.org/39/gabriel-marcel-s-being-and-having-an-interpretation-of-embodiment-and-being/>.

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