

**“Pride and Prejudice:
Ambiguous Racial, Religious, and Ethnic Identities of Jewish Bodies”**

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In the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that depth is much more than a merely spatial or perceptual phenomenon. Indeed, there are not one, but many different kinds of depth that are revealed and demand to be thought anew through his work. In this essay, I will argue that Merleau-Ponty’s account of the ambiguity of meaning can be productively brought into dialogue with Freud’s concept of overdetermination to counter reductive understandings of the Other that seek to reduce another person’s psychophysical depth to a singular, fixed meaning. More specifically, my claim is that Merleau-Ponty and Freud, using different vocabulary and different methodologies, together offer us valuable resources for understanding the depths that are present, though often denied, in our encounters with other people and why these encounters, when they are enabling rather than oppressive, have the potential to be rich and productive sites for the proliferation of meaning.

My own “case study” involves the often conflicting perceptions and conceptions of Jewish bodies promulgated throughout the centuries by Anti-Semites and non-Jews as well as Jews themselves. I begin with the following quotes by three well-known authors, each of whom offers important but also troubling insights that I will draw upon to explain how and why the “Jewishness” of some human bodies, even when it is explicitly acknowledged and uncontested, is always a matter of ambiguity and overdetermination, and therefore a source of depth^{1,i}

¹ This is not to say that ambiguity and overdetermination are synonymous terms. As I will go on to show, if a given phenomenon is overdetermined for Freud, this means that it has multiple meanings, not just a singular meaning, and that therefore the phenomenon can be understood in a Merleau-Pontian sense, as ambiguous. However, it is also

“Where and how a society defines the body reflects how those in society define themselves.” Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body*: 170

“We must therefore envisage the hereditary and somatic characteristics of the Jew as one factor among others in his situation, not as a condition determining his nature.” Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*: 64

“All the same, the Jew can be unknown in his Jewishness. He is not wholly what he is. One hopes, one waits. His actions, his behavior are the final determinant. He is a white man, and, apart from some rather debatable characteristics, he can sometimes go unnoticed.” Franz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*: 115

Though Sander Gilman, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Frantz Fanon all acknowledge that the negative stereotypes held by anti-Semites (stereotypes that have been both publicly and privately promulgated for centuries, across a variety of countries and cultures), are internalized by Jewish people, producing a Jewish inferiority complex that can be almost impossible to overcome, they offer strikingly different analyses of “the problem” and of its solution. More specifically, these statements by Gilman, Sartre, and Fanon express different ways of understanding what I would call the *intercorporeal* dimensions of Jewish experience. With the term intercorporeality, I am invoking Merleau-Ponty's notion that my bodily experience is shaped (and continuously re-shaped) by the innumerable and ever-changing relationships I sustain with other bodies, human

possible for ambiguity to be present without the overdetermination that Freud claims arises through processes of free association, though this essay will not be addressing these latter cases.

as well as non-human, animate and inanimate, throughout my life. Gilman, like Merleau-Ponty, foregrounds the centrality of the body in all aspects of our experience in the passage above, when he asserts that a person's self-definition arises out of how her or his body is viewed by the society in which she or he lives. While Merleau-Ponty, like Husserl before him, tends to portray intersubjective encounters in very positive terms, most often depicting my own spatial and temporal horizons as not only expanded but immeasurably enriched by my encounters with other people, it is also clear that the internalization of racial, sexual, religious, ethnic, class, able-bodied, and other types of prejudices prevents our encountering other bodies in the genuine spirit of open exchange that Merleau-Ponty poetically describes in the following passage from his late work, *The Visible and the Invisible*:

...for the first time, through the other body, I see that, in its coupling with the flesh of the world, the body contributes more than it receives, adding to the world that I see the treasure necessary for what the body sees. For the first time, the body no longer couples itself up with the world, it clasps another body, applying [itself to it] carefully with its whole extension....fascinated by the unique occupation of floating in Being with another life. Of making itself the outside of its inside and the inside of its outside. (Merleau-Ponty: 144)

Though it certainly would be wonderful if all, or even most of our experiences of perceiving and being perceived by others, provoked and even increased our sense of fascination and profound respect for the mysterious alterity (otherness) of the other, thereby creating invaluable opportunities for learning from our similarities and our differences, the long, insidious histories of anti-Semitism, anti-Black racism, and homophobia (to name but a few) offer much more sinister accounts of how other people's views of one's body as an object of disgust, pity, or

horror, as diseased, as innately and therefore irremediably inferior to the bodies of others, mediates an individual's view of herself as well as others. While these histories are themselves full of ambiguity concerning exactly which qualities separate these stigmatized bodies from other bodies (e.g. physiological, psychological, or, most often, a mixture of the two), what seems to be quite unambiguous is the persistence and vehemence of the persecution itself and its pernicious effects on those who are its targets. And yet, I would argue, these effects themselves must also be seen as ambiguous insofar as prejudice can produce pride (as one of its most perverse, unintended effects) as readily as shame.² Indeed, the very expression, "the Chosen people," a term used most often (but not only) by religious Jews to describe their positive sense of belonging to a group that has historically been mistreated by others, not only emphasizes but even seeks to increase the chasm that the anti-Semite believes divides Jewish bodies from non-Jewish bodies. However, as Chaim Potok's novel *The Chosen* amply illustrates, this is itself far too simplistic a picture, for when the term "the Chosen people" is invoked by very observant Jews, it is also frequently used to demarcate "proper" or *authentically* Jewish bodies from allegedly "improper" or inauthentic Jewish bodies who have "failed" to live up to their Jewish heritage and the religious responsibilities that are deemed to be inseparable from it.³

² This should not be at all surprising from a Foucaultian perspective, given Foucault's analysis of how even the most repressive exercise of power generates unanticipated, and for that very reason, often highly efficacious resistances.

³ For instance, one day when the orthodox teenager, Reuven Malter, is at the home of his Hasidic friend, Danny Saunders studying the Talmud with Danny and his father, Reb Saunders, Reb Saunders waits until he and Reuven are alone and says, "Reuven, you and your father will be a good influence on my son, yes?" Before Reuven can respond, he anxiously demands: "You will not make a goy out of my son?" (Potok: 167) A few years later, when Danny and Reuven are students at the same University/Yeshiva (both enrolled in a joint program to receive rabbinic degrees along with their bachelor's degrees), to express his outrage at Reuven's suggestion that the creation of a Jewish state in British-occupied Palestine might be an important refuge for Jews fleeing the anti-Semitism that outlived the Holocaust, Reb Saunders refers to the leaders of the Zionist movement as *Jewish goys* (Jewish non-Jews) and yells at Reuven: "The land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob should be built by Jewish goyim, by contaminated men? . . . Why do you think I brought my people from Russia to America and not to Eretz Yisroel? Because it is better to live in a land of true goyim than in a land of Jewish goyim!" Chaim Potok, *The Chosen*: 198 Not long afterwards, Reuven's father's Zionist activism leads Reb Saunders to ban his son Danny from any contact with his best friend for two full years, so powerful is his fear that his own son will be *contaminated* by contact with an

Even if one was to agree with Sartre that, “It is society, not the decree of God, that has made him a Jew and brought the Jewish problem into being,” not surprisingly, it is Jews who must deal with the “Jewish problem,” Blacks who must deal with the “Black problem,” and homosexuals who must deal with the “homosexual problem.” (Sartre: 134) Despite his best efforts to place the Jew on an equal footing with the rest of humanity, thereby dissolving the abyss that the anti-Semite posits between them, what is especially striking about Sartre’s statement, “[i]t is society, not the decree of God, that has made him a Jew and brought the Jewish problem into being,” is how effortlessly Sartre moves from the Jew to the “Jewish problem,” that is, how the experience of being Jewish is so quickly conflated with the experience of anti-Semitism. Indeed, a similar claim can be made about the common tendency to equate Black experiences with the experience of anti-Black racism, and homosexual experiences with the experience of homophobia.⁴ In fact, Sartre goes so far as to proclaim that “it is not the Jewish character that provokes anti-Semitism but, rather...it is the anti-Semite who *creates the Jew*.” (Sartre 1965: 143, my emphasis)

While it is almost unfathomable to conceive how one can be Jewish, Black or homosexual in the West without becoming aware of the discrimination that has been directed at each group, it is nonetheless extremely problematic to identify too closely the depth and diversity of Jewish, Black and/or homosexual experiences with the history of their discrimination. Crediting the other with the ability to define one’s identity (and in such overwhelmingly negative terms!), not only eviscerates the agency of those who are oppressed by the other’s essentializing descriptions, but also forecloses some of the inherent ambiguity that, I am claiming, always attends each of these identities, giving too much power to the hostile other to define the

aspiring orthodox Rabbi whose very Jewishness has, in Reb Saunders’ eyes, been completely compromised by his support for “Jewish goys.”

⁴ This is by no means intended to be an exhaustive list!

parameters of one's embodied existence, thereby denying the spontaneous, unpredictable, and life-affirming dimensions of these experiences even when they are also attended with great suffering.

In the initial quote from *Anti-Semite and Jew* with which I began, Sartre offers one important consolation to the Jew for the devastating, totalizing judgment of inferiority that is conferred upon him in one fell swoop by the anti-Semite, whether in their actual or hypothetical encounters.⁵ The Jew's "hereditary and somatic characteristics," Sartre informs us, are merely "one factor among others in his situation," not in any way to be considered "as a condition determining his nature." (Sartre 1965: 64) Sartre's well-meaning defense of the Jew against the anti-Semite, emphasizes that the anti-Semite's view of the Jew is entirely socially constructed; he argues that Jewish people lack the *Jewish essence* attributed to them by the anti-Semite. Like all other human beings ("beings-for-themselves" as Sartre calls them in *Being and Nothingness*), Jews too, "are what they are not, and are not what they are."¹

While we might reproach Merleau-Ponty for offering an overly idealistic account of intercorporeal encounters between human beings (and it is significant that his most eloquent and even erotic accounts of these encounters in *The Visible and the Invisible*, occur between two bodies, a duo already open to being transformed, in new and interesting ways, by one another), Sartre's assertion that inherited and bodily characteristics, while undoubtedly part of our facticity, make only a small contribution to the total situation in which we find ourselves, is also problematic insofar as it suggests that the reality of how our bodies are responded to by others is something that can and should be transcended in favor of the broader perspective provided by

⁵ That this unfortunate Jew is almost always depicted as a man is not meant to suggest that Jewish women escape his "fate" though clearly the corporeal effects of anti-Semitism are registered differently by men and women. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to address the specific gender presuppositions that are both implicitly and explicitly invoked in anti-Semitic diatribes, including the all-too-frequent feminization of Jewish male bodies, their very presence undercuts simplistic analyses of the different bodies allegedly possessed by Jews and non-Jews.

considering our “total situation.” Whether one adopts the Merleau-Pontian approach, focusing on the positive possibilities for self-discovery through intimate encounters with the embodied other to the exclusion of the destructive ways in which individuals often regard and treat one another, or whether one affirms Sartre’s view that one’s “somatic and hereditary characteristics,” even if misconstrued and viewed negatively by others shouldn’t ultimately be attributed with too much significance because they do not capture the entirety of an individual’s situation, neither strategy seems overly helpful to an individual or group who has been infected with a “contaminated identity” because of the alleged presence or absence of specific bodily characteristics that are seen as marking the irremediable inferiority of one’s very way of being-in-the-world. Given the un-viability of either of these strategies, and yet keeping in mind Gilman’s trenchant observation that “all aspects of the Jew, whether real or invented, are the locus of difference,” let us examine the option proffered by Fanon, one that I believe is equally problematic but that has a specific history of its own. (Gilman 1991: 2)

The Overdetermination of Jewish Bodies

Before addressing Fanon’s view of the options available to the Jew for responding to what he, following Sartre (using explicitly Freudian language) refers to as the Jew’s “overdetermination,” it is important to stress that, despite significant differences in their respective understandings of “the problem of the Jew,” my opening quotes by Gilman, Sartre, and Fanon, like many other claims about Jews, begin with reference to his (and, much more rarely *her*), “Jewish body.” The presumption is that “we all know” what such a body is, or at least should be, and yet, I would argue, it is this very appeal to the concreteness of embodied experience that, paradoxically, supports the ambiguity or indefinability of Jewishness.⁶ Where

⁶ Ironically, even the anti-Semite who has perhaps most vociferously proclaimed that one’s “Jewish essence” is marked on one’s body, has had difficulty, historically, in determining who exactly has such a body and who does not.

does this Jewishness or “Jewish essence” reside exactly? For, even when the anti-Semite seems closest to “pinning it down,” for example through the possession of a specific type of nose, hair texture, complexion, or even penis, there are always non-Jews who turn out also to possess these features and Jews who do not.⁷ Moreover, the identification of who is Jewish and who is not is complicated by the sheer variety of ways in which individuals may identify as Jews, including religiously, ethnically, and/or racially. Rather than viewing this indeterminacy that frustrates attempts to define Jewishness negatively, the ambiguities that accompany any and all attempts to “pin down” or “fix” Jewish identity once and for all, I am suggesting, can and should be seen as productive possibilities, expanding the range of potential ways one can access, engage, and ultimately transform Jewish experience.

While Gilman suggests that Jewish people’s identities in the Western world are inevitably mediated by the dominant historical view of their bodies as corporeal signifiers of physical, psychological, material, and spiritual inferiority, a claim with which Sartre agrees, at the same time, Sartre is quick to emphasize, as we have seen, that “the hereditary and somatic characteristics of the Jew” are together only “one factor among others in his situation, not... a condition determining his nature.” (Sartre: 64). It is striking that even though Sartre, like Gilman, denies that the Jew’s body is an unambiguous marker of his or her Jewishness, much less his or her inferiority, Sartre nonetheless feels compelled to minimize the significance of corporeality in the assumption (or even the rejection) of a Jewish identity. Such a claim affirms a central insight of *Being and Nothingness*, namely that the inherited and bodily characteristics that help to

As Gilman (1991) observes, it was due to this fundamental undecidability that the Nazis required that those they identified as Jews wear yellow stars in order to make visible the Jewish essence the former viewed as always already corporeally present, even if invisible to the naked eye.

⁷ Indeed, this is precisely what saved many blonde and blue-eyed Jews’ lives during the Holocaust, including that of my cousin, Lala Fisher, who survived World War II in Poland by “passing” as a Polish Catholic while her more traditionally Jewish-looking mother and sister, who were not good candidates for passing, ended up being captured and killed by the Nazis.

constitute our facticity, our concrete presence in the world, are never sufficient to define us. For the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness*, it is not our facticity but the *choices* we make in light of our *entire* situation, a situation that includes not only our past and present, but also the open-ended future, that alone can provide definition to the indefinable beings that we are. He describes these choices as expressing our human transcendence, and claims that this transcendence is exactly what makes it possible to redefine oneself even and precisely when the other is trying to “pin you down” in your facticity.

Despite the consistency of this message in *Being and Nothingness*, and the multiple arguments and examples Sartre appeals to throughout the text to explain and support it, it is not very surprising that, just a few years later, in his 1946 postwar publication of *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Sartre feels an even more urgent need to argue that an individual’s “nature” cannot be reduced to physical or even psychical characteristics. For, in the three year gap between these two texts, the depth of the Nazis’ anti-Semitism, and their twentieth-century “final solution” to the “Jewish problem” was horrifyingly revealed through the remarkable success with which they undertook the mass extermination and physical elimination of Jewish bodies.⁸ Sartre implies, though never states outright, that this “solution” was only capable of being carried out not only on six million Jews but also on millions of other people (e.g. disabled individuals, homosexuals, gypsies, etc.) who were similarly stigmatized for their alleged corporeal deficiencies because of what he calls the “involuntary complicity” of millions of non-Jews who tacitly acquiesced to the egregious injustices taking place before their eyes (Sartre: 151). And, one of the most serious injustices committed by the anti-Semite, in Sartre’s view, is to ascribe a fixed nature to the Jew

⁸ For clearly killing Jews was not enough; their corpses had to be cremated so that all traces of their contaminating physical existence (intensified all the more by their deathly and deadly putrefaction) could be eliminated.

that depends exclusively upon “inferior” corporeal attributes that are allegedly possessed by Jews alone.⁹

Fanon, in my opening quote, complicates this picture by re-activating the notion of choice or agency that is seemingly in danger of evaporating as a result of the anti-Semite’s view that all Jews share the same essence or “nature.” Specifically, Fanon claims that it is possible for these “hereditary and somatic characteristics” that allegedly define one’s “Jewishness,” to remain invisible to others and that therefore, the Jew, unlike a person of color, can elect to “hide” (or at least *attempt* to hide) her stigmatized identity from a hostile world. While Sartre suggests that our bodily facticity does not and should not have overarching significance in our lives because it is only one component of our entire situation, Fanon states that the Jew (unlike the Black man or woman) can always engage in dissimulation, disguising the facticity of her/his Jewishness altogether because s/he shares the skin color of the dominant, non-Jewish majority.

Though we might reproach Fanon for the false assumption that all Jews are white, even if he had acknowledged the existence of black Jews, he would have undoubtedly affirmed that in their case, too, skin color “trumps” (and therefore can easily hide) one’s Jewish identity. The fact that Fanon overlooks (or perhaps may well have been unaware of) the existence of Jews of color, is not as striking, I would argue, as is his failing to acknowledge the very visible bodily markings (e.g. religious garments, hair styles, etc.) that have historically signified Jewish identity as readily as skin color has done for Black men and women. Of course, Fanon might have quickly (and rightly) pointed out the important difference between what Colette Guillaumin refers to as “voluntary markings” such as clothing and hair styles that can fairly easily be altered

⁹ Although it is clear that by referring to “somatic and hereditary” attributes, Sartre is including psychological as well as physical characteristics that are claimed to mark the Jew as a Jew, to the extent that these are seen as capable of being “read off” the Jew’s body, they seem to be equally inseparable from the Jew’s corporeality.

versus “involuntary markings” such as skin color which are more permanent, but, I would argue, this distinction itself starts to break down once one realizes that “voluntary markings” are rarely a purely individual choice but are frequently chosen for one by one’s parents, peers, and one’s larger community and hence may not be so voluntary after all, and even “involuntary markings” do not have static meanings across time and space but rather take on different meanings in different social, political, historical, and cultural contexts. Indeed, it is the very multiplicity of the (sometimes conflicting) meanings produced through these “voluntary” and “involuntary” markings, I would suggest, that enable us to understand Jewish bodies as ambiguous in a Merleau-Pontian sense and overdetermined in a Freudian sense.

In the chapter, “The Charge of Anti-Semitism: Jews, Israel, and the Risks of Public Critique,” in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Judith Butler depicts this overdetermination as a form of excess that resists any and all attempts at precise definition. Rejecting reductions of Jewishness to Zionism on the one hand, or the shared experience of anti-Semitism on the other, Butler claims:

The ‘Jew’ is no more defined by Israel than by anti-Semitic diatribe. The ‘Jew’ exceeds both determinations, and is to be found, substantively, as this diasporic excess, a historically and culturally changing identity that takes no single form and has no single telos. (Butler 2004: 126)

In *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, Emmanuel Levinas articulates what Butler is calling the Jew’s “diasporic excess,” as follows:

For millions of Israelites who have been assimilated into the civilization around them, Judaism, cannot even be called a culture: it is a vague sensibility made up of various ideas, memories, customs and emotions, together with a feeling of

solidarity towards those Jews who were persecuted for being Jews. (Levinas 1990: 24)

It is not incidental, I think, that Butler and Levinas, both of whom are Jewish, emphasize the dynamic, indeterminate qualities of Jewish experience to counter essentialist understandings of Jews (and, in Levinas' case, of Judaism), while Sartre and Fanon, neither of whom are Jewish, appeal to the Jew's ability to transcend or even "hide" his or her Jewishness as potential strategies for dealing with anti-Semitism. That is, while Butler and Levinas turn to the rich ambiguities of Jewish experience to "deconstruct" fixed understandings of both Jews and the "Jewish problem," Sartre and Fanon invoke a universal quality they claim is shared by Jews and non-Jews, namely our capacity for transcendence, or, our ability "not to be what we are." Through the exercise of human transcendence, on this Sartrean account, Jewishness can be recognized as merely one aspect of an individual's entire situation (and Fanon reminds us, one can even choose to hide it altogether), and therefore it cannot be seen as its determining factor. Thus, de-emphasizing the Jew's Jewishness and affirming her humanity becomes the antidote to anti-Semitism that will finally enable Jews to take their place as equals (and therefore no longer as Jews!) in the larger social world.

Although the concept of overdetermination seems particularly apt to address the many different kinds of meanings, both positive and negative, that have been ascribed to Jewish bodies within and across cultures throughout the centuries, there are significant differences between how Freud deploys this concept, and how it is subsequently taken up and transformed first by Sartre, and then by Fanon. Unlike Sartre and Fanon, who posit the Jew's "overdetermination from within," an expression that requires careful unpacking of its own, Freud uses the term, "overdetermination" primarily in reference to specific experiences (and, on occasion, objects),

rather than people. Thus, in his famous case study of “Dora,” “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria,” Freud argues that Dora’s experience of “wandering about in a strange town” in one of her dreams “was overdetermined.” (Freud 1989: 222) The first explanation he provides for this overdetermination is that Dora’s experience extends beyond her dream to an event that actually happened in her life, namely, her first visit to Dresden, when she had the opportunity to tour the city with a cousin but “*she declined and went alone.*” (Freud 1989: 222) The connection between Dora wandering on her own in an unknown environment in her dream and her recollection of actually visiting an unknown city by herself is not initially made by Dora or by Freud, but is itself established only after Dora recounts her more immediate memory of being asked the day before to take an out of town cousin, who was staying with Dora’s family for the holidays, and who had presumably never before seen or at least who was ill-acquainted with the city, sightseeing in Vienna.

It is precisely because our memories are not self-contained, insofar as one memory has the power to immediately produce another memory- the power of “free association” as Freud suggests- that we can understand Dora’s experience of “wandering about in a strange town” as overdetermined. Freud reveals, moreover, that the overdetermined quality of this experience is due to much more than its repetition in two different landscapes (the landscape of the dream and the city of Dresden respectively) when he quickly changes the focus of his questioning of Dora from these experiences of wandering themselves to the destinations sought through that wandering: in the case of Dresden, pictures in an art gallery (and a picture of a Madonna in particular), and in the case of the dream, a train station. Through a very rapid and not entirely convincing series of associations, Freud concludes that these destinations turn out to have overlapping meanings: station, he tells us, actually signifies “box” and the picture of the

Madonna in Dresden signifies “woman” and, despite these less than obvious connections, he states that now “the notions begin to agree better.” (Freud 1989: 222) The agreement he has not yet adequately established (since it is not evident at this point exactly how and why “box” and “woman” are so closely linked) is procured through a missing “key,” namely the key to the box.¹⁰ The question, “Where is the *key*?,” Freud suggests, can be understood as “the masculine counterpart to the question, ‘Where is the *box*’” and, he tells us, both are “therefore questions referring to- the genitals.” (Freud 1989: 223)

While Freud’s readers have had a field day discussing the significance of the less than obvious equivalences he establishes between such disparate images/objects, namely, station=box=virgin mother= woman= key=[access to] female genitals, with some of the more skeptical critics seeing these latter as more revelatory of his own sexual desires and experiences rather than Dora’s, and while many of his commentators have pointed out that it is no surprise that Dora herself was resistant to his interpretations of her experiences, and that even Freud himself acknowledged this to be a failed case study, it is nonetheless instructive to see how Freud explains the concept of overdetermination by means of what I would call his “cross-fertilization” (pun intended!) of meaning. More specifically, through a wide variety of associations/connections/substitutions that he establishes (via his patient’s recollections) between one of the analysand’s experiences and several of her other experiences, Freud demonstrates that the significance of any given experience can never be understood in isolation from the rest of our experiences. The larger lesson “Dora” teaches us, I would argue, whether or not we “buy” Freud’s questionable interpretation of the etiology of her hysteria, is that any and every human experience can be overdetermined or, in Merleau-Pontian language, rendered ambiguous, to the

¹⁰ Freud justifies the substitution of the key for the box through Dora’s recollection of seeking the key to the liquor cabinet the previous evening in response to her father’s request for brandy.

extent that the capacity for free association that establishes the links among even very diverse experiences (occurring across space and time and even across the divide between dreams and waking life), is actually being concretely enacted by oneself and/or others. Moreover, Merleau-Ponty's own emphasis upon the intercorporeal dimensions of our encounters with others can help us to counter an understanding of free association as purely a psychic phenomenon; instead, a Merleau-Pontian interpretation of free association could, I think, be better described as a spontaneous production of concatenated intercorporeal experiences that are themselves inscribed within and worked out through our everyday interactions in the world.

Turning now to Sartre's reference in *Anti-Semite and Jew* to the Jew's alleged "overdetermination from within" and Fanon's extension of this concept in *Black Skin White Masks* to Black men's and women's alleged "overdetermination from without," it is evident that they are both using overdetermination quite differently than Freud. This is not only because they apply the concept to people (e.g. Jews and Black men and women) rather than events and/or objects, but also because both Sartre and Fanon are referring to ways in which the significance attributed to one's own or another's action, is reduced from a potential multiplicity of meanings to a purely negative construction or singular interpretation that is demeaning and therefore oppressive.

Sartre offers several different descriptions of the Jew's experience of being "overdetermined from within" throughout *Anti-Semite and Jew*. It is notable that he never once provides us with a Jewish persons' own description of this subjective experience but presupposes that his own anti-anti-Semitism, as Jonathan Judaken calls it, is what enables him to give us a direct account of the experience. In one such description, Sartre informs us that the Jew,

is haunted by that impalpable and humiliating image which the hostile mob has of him. . . . Ill at ease even inside his own skin, the unreconciled enemy of his own body, following the impossible drama of an assimilation that constantly recedes, he can never have the security of the 'Aryan,' firmly established on his land and so certain of his property that he can even forget that he is a proprietor and see the bond that unites him to his country as *natural*." (Sartre 1965: 132-133)

Overdetermination from within, as Sartre depicts it, is indeed like a "haunting," insofar as it forces the Jew to reckon continuously with the "humiliating image which the hostile mob has of him." More concretely, Sartre argues that the Jew internalizes negative anti-Semitic stereotypes about the alleged motives for his actions (e.g. stinginess, greediness, acquisitiveness, etc.), and suggests that this "infects" his very way of being-in-the-world, producing, often against his will, a reactive response (even before he has in fact acted) to the anti-Semite's construction of his "essential" Jewishness.

The authentic response to this unpalatable situation in which the stereotypes of hostile others establish parameters for how one evaluates one's own most intimate desires, motives, and behaviors, is, Sartre implies, not to reject but actually to *acknowledge and take responsibility* not only for one's own Jewishness but, at the same time, for all other Jews as well.¹¹ Such a person recognizes, Sartre informs us, that: "To be a Jew is to be thrown into- to be *abandoned* to- the situation of a Jew; and at the same time it is to be responsible in and through one's own person for the destiny and the very nature of the Jewish people." (Sartre 1965: 89)

¹¹ It should be noted that this claim seems to be somewhat in tension with Sartre's earlier suggestion that the Jew needs to recognize that his Jewishness is just one part of his total situation.

In contrast to Sartre's position as a sympathetic bystander (who has a long, albeit mostly second-hand familiarity with anti-Semitism insofar as he is not its target), who assumes the authority to describe not only the attitudes, beliefs, and bad faith of the anti-Semite, but also the impact of the anti-Semite's behavior on the Jewish psyche (and he often invokes this psyche in universal language despite his distinction between authentic and inauthentic Jewish responses to anti-Semitism), and in contrast to Freud's "outsider" (neutral?) position as the analyst whose job it is to construct a coherent narrative that ties together the fragmented and often traumatic memories of the patient into a form that the patient can eventually accept as the *true meaning* of her own experience, Fanon describes a person of color's experience of being overdetermined from without from an insider's perspective. For this reason, his phenomenological account of this experience and his implicit critique of Sartre for failing to recognize that there are different ways a person can be overdetermined (i.e. from within and from without) is, I would argue, more powerful and ultimately more compelling, even though, as noted earlier, I think there are serious problems with his view of the Jew as easily able to "hide" his Jewishness from the anti-Semite (and I think at least part of the reason for these problems is that he, like Sartre, is rushing too quickly to psychoanalyze an experience he himself has not had).

Rather than dwelling further on the controversial assumptions about Jewish experience and the "Jewish psyche" that are implicit in both Sartre's and Fanon's accounts of how the Jew is overdetermined from within, let us turn our attention to a more productive line of inquiry, namely, Fanon's all too brief, but nonetheless extremely powerful account of how the black man (or woman) is overdetermined from without.¹² It is notable that Fanon develops the notion of

¹² It is important to acknowledge, despite my claim that both Sartre and Fanon make far too hasty, and therefore problematic, overgeneralizations about Jewish experience, that this does not mean that one can do justice to the rich diversity of Jewish experience if one ignores the broader anti-Semitic context in which it is most often expressed, as more recent books on Jewish experience such as Jon Stratton's *Coming Out Jewish*, Gilman's *Jewish Self-Hatred*:

being overdetermined from without by an explicit contrast with the Jew's (alleged) experience of being overdetermined from within. "The Jew," Fanon maintains in this well-known passage, "is disliked from the moment he is tracked down. But in my case everything takes on a *new* guise. I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance." (Fanon 1967: 115-116)

The Black man or woman is overdetermined from without, according to Fanon, because the very visibility of his or her dark skin color means that, unlike the Jew who is presumably free to remove any "voluntary markings" that designate his or her Jewishness (we will leave the questions of whether or not there are involuntary markings of Jewishness and whether these "voluntary markings" are as easy to eliminate as Fanon suggests, open for now), the man or woman of color cannot escape the stigma of being viewed as possessing a "contaminated identity" by the anti-Black racist. Thus, while some Jews at least, have successfully hidden their Jewishness, and, according to Fanon, merely had to contend internally with the negative judgments of the anti-Semite without the anti-Semite ever realizing in point of fact that he or she is actually encountering a Jew, Fanon maintains that the Black man or woman does not have this "luxury" because the involuntary marking of his or her skin color makes him or her the direct target of the anti-Black racist's prejudice and therefore makes any form of escape from it virtually impossible.¹³

Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews, and *The Jew's Body* all suggest. Cixous rhetorically presents the case as follows in her *Portrait of Jacques Derrida as a Young Jewish Saint*: "So with or without God how does one become Jewish? If not first of all by Jewsay." (Cixous 2004: 75) Or, in Sartre's words, "The Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew: that is the simple truth from which we must start." (Sartre, 1965: 69) My point is that this observation can only be a starting place for interpretation, not the place we end up if we are to avoid reducing Jewish experience to the experience of anti-Semitism.

¹³ Perhaps Fanon would tell a somewhat different story if he wasn't primarily referencing the experience of the natives of his own island of Martinique who tended to share a very dark skin color, but rather was including the experience of the millions of light-skinned African-Americans in the U.S (and African-Europeans more generally),.

Despite Fanon's relatively clear distinction between the Jew's overdetermination from within and the black man or woman's overdetermination from without, it is clear that the situation is much more complicated. For, if overdetermination from within occurs when a Jew internalizes negative stereotypes about Jews that offer a series of unflattering, essentializing descriptions of the character traits that supposedly mark one's racial identity, religious beliefs, and/or ethnicity (however one defines the essence of Jewishness), and overdetermination from without occurs when people of color are immediately assumed to be biologically inferior to other human beings before they have even uttered a word or performed any action, then it is evident that the experience of being black involves not only overdetermination from without (as if this was not enough in itself!) but also overdetermination from within as the black man or woman internalizes an anti-black person's view of him or her as a "phobogenic object, a stimulus to anxiety." Indeed, Fanon poignantly depicts his own overdetermination from within, his inability to escape the fear of conforming to racist stereotypes, in the following passage:

It was always the Negro teacher, the Negro doctor; brittle as I was becoming, I shivered at the slightest pretext. I knew, for instance, that if the physician made a mistake it would be the end of him and of all those who came after him. What could one expect, after all, from a Negro physician? As long as everything went well he was praised to the skies, but look out, no nonsense, under any conditions! The black physician can never be sure how close he is to disgrace. I tell you, *I was walled in*: No exception was made for my refined manners, or my knowledge of literature, or my understanding of the quantum theory. (Fanon 1967: 117, my emphasis)

quite a few of whom can pass as white just as he claims the Jew can pass as a non-Jew. Presumably, Fanon would view such light-skinned Blacks as overdetermined from within, like the Jew, and not overdetermined from without, like their darker-skinned brethren.

To be walled in, Fanon suggests, is to be trapped within the prison constituted by the racist other's judgment of who one "really" is, a form of psychic incarceration that is impossible to escape from the inside because the prisoner does not and never has possessed the key. If liberation is possible on this scenario, it seems that it will have to come from the outside; ultimately, for Fanon (though he doesn't develop the point in much depth), overcoming overdetermination from within must involve an affirmation of the black man's or woman's fundamental humanity by anti-racist others.

Even if one argues that anti-Semitism and anti-Black racism might, along with other forms of discrimination, share what David Theo Goldberg calls a "deep grammar," namely a "principle of differential exclusion," it is nonetheless evident that the stereotypes promulgated by anti-Semites and anti-Black racists respectively, differ in important ways, and that, as a result, they impact Jewish embodied experience and Black embodied experience differently. As Fanon observes, many of the insulting accusations hurled at Jews by anti-Semites (such as the all-too-common stereotype of the cunning Jew who seeks to "take over the world") paradoxically credits the Jewish man with above-average intelligence. This is hardly the case, Fanon reminds us, for the Black man whose overdetermination by the anti-Black racist takes the form of reducing him not only to his "animal-like" body, but quite frequently to a particular body part, namely, his penis. Or, in the shorthand that characterizes what Fanon identifies as the "myth of the Negro..." "Negroes are savages, brutes, illiterates." (Fanon 1967: 117)

It is not only dangerous, but ultimately, I would argue, divisive and self-defeating to enter into comparisons of which types of prejudice are worse than other types of prejudice. Such an attempt only does the oppressor's work for him because it turns groups that are targets of oppression into enemies who attack each other instead of joining to attack the cycle of

discrimination at its source. All forms of prejudice are evil, even if we acknowledge, as we must, that they harm each of us in different ways, and therefore leave different types of marks upon their victims.

In *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy*, Iris Young argues that “A condition of our communication is that we acknowledge the difference, interval, that others drag behind them shadows and histories, scars and traces that do not become present in our communication.” (Young 1997: 53) While some of these shadows, histories, scars and traces, are undoubtedly due to ways in which we have been overdetermined in the Sartrean sense, that is, the ways in which the possibilities for giving a variety of interpretations of our thoughts, our bodies, and our actions have been foreclosed in advance by others, Young also points to the ongoing possibility of beginning again by committing ourselves to communicating differently. By attending to “the difference, the interval” that separates my experiences and my expectations from those of others, and by returning, as Merleau-Ponty invites us to do, to the inexhaustible possibilities for creating new meaning and new depths to our experiences that challenge and transform the fixed interpretations of others, perhaps it will be possible to realize the more positive sense of overdetermination that is implicit in Freud’s account of the power of free association, even though Freud himself fails to enact it in his very restrictive interpretation of the “hidden” meaning of Dora’s experiences. The overdetermination of one’s experiences, I am suggesting, arises out of the fundamental ambiguity of those experiences, and this can and should become a source of mutual respect and pride, rather than resulting in an attempt to eliminate the ambiguity through the creation of discrete and fixed identity categories to which each of us is supposed to belong, and whose rigidity and lack of depth is itself the product of hatred, suspicion, and prejudice.

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