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# The Disabled Body, the Able-bodied Form:

## A Feminist Exploration of Dialogue between Beauvoir and Fanon<sup>1)</sup>

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Keywords: physical disability / Simone de Beauvoir / Frantz Fanon / phenomenology /  
the Other

### Introduction: Encountering Otherness

When I was young, I heard a small girl whispering: “Mum, Look at her! She looks weird!” and her mother saying “Don’t look at her, my dear. If you are not behaving well, you will be like her!” The look was sharp, and I felt vulnerable. I started asking myself: “Is there something wrong with me?”<sup>2)</sup> My otherness is an able-bodied construction that is a consequence of the whisper of the mother and daughter. My body was the Other. The disabled Other is a key concept in this essay; it opposes the able-bodied Same. My otherness refers to that which is other than the initial concept being investigated. The Other of the able-bodied often signifies me as ‘Other than myself’; hence, the disabled Other is acknowledged as not-able-bodied (the Same); thus the letter ‘O’ is capitalised. For Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1998 [1945]), the body is not merely an object in space, rather the body inhabits space and through it one experiences the world and the Other.

In his book titled *The Body Silent: The Different World of the Disabled*, Robert Murphy (2001 [1987]) offers a personal account of his experience of becoming disabled as the result of a spinal tumor, as well as an ethnographic account of the world of a person with physical disability. As a Professor of anthropology at Columbia University, Murphy uses his skills at participant observation improved in the Amazon rainforest and describes his impact of physical disability on his status as a member of society. He states:

Not only are their bodies altered, but their ways of thinking about themselves and about the persons and objects of the external world have become profoundly transformed. They have experienced a revolution of consciousness. They have undergone a metamorphosis. (Murphy, 2001 [1987]: 87)

Like Franz Kafka's novel, *Metamorphosis* (2012 [1915]),<sup>3)</sup> Murphy's discussion of becoming disabled in regard to encountering otherness and the body itself describes in writing the experience of physical disability and the experience of the body-in-the-able-bodied-world. He demonstrates the ways in which disability deconstructs not only the experience of the body-in-the-able-bodied-world but also the experience of being represented. Unlike Murphy, I have never experienced the able-bodied embodiment and any metamorphosis from the able-bodied to the disabled. However, like Murphy, my disabled body unfolds the relational difference of lived experiences; the difference may be considered as the dimension of the flux which opens myself to otherness and sameness by a circular interplay of consciousness and unconsciousness.

Once I entered the able-bodied world and felt the weight of the able-bodied gaze, I experienced my otherness and became aware of pre-theoretical attitudes which, up to that point, had not existed for me. I recount my experience on a train of being fixed by an able-bodied other — an other who happened to be a child who had already been habituated to see the disabled as defined by the able-bodied imagination. As the young girl's refrain, "Look at her!, She looks weird!" came to a close with a fearful questioning of the 'disabled' next move, I not only experienced the gaze of the able-bodied, I also began to see myself through the able-bodied gaze. I have difficulties simply to form a coherent body schema, which a subjective concept of my bodily form based upon self-observation and the reactions of others. In this essay, I shall argue that a phenomenology of physical disability (the experience of my own embodiment and of being the disabled Other) can only be understood in the encounter with the able-bodied Same — the norm.

## Phenomenology of Otherness

Merleau-Ponty's body schema highlights some difficulties that I experience in the able-bodied world. The body schema is an organising formation contained in my body that provides me with a whole understanding of my body, which is experienced as a unified whole or 'Gestalt' (Weiss, 1999: 10-2). In his account, the mutual relation between the body and the world gives rise to the possibility of a reciprocal constructing and transforming of both. The body schema moreover provides me with a pre-reflective, instantaneous knowledge of the position of my body parts. For example, when I see a straphanger in a train, I may unthinkingly hold onto it with my hand. Guided by my body schema that knows that my hand can hold things, my hand automatically restricts and is guided to the strap. The body is not a mere object in space, but rather it is one's way of being in the lived world. Merleau-Ponty (1998 [1945]) does not consider physical disability at any great length. His concept of the body suggests undeveloped possibilities for articulating physical disability beyond the able-bodied/disabled dualism. For him, the body gives rise to some particular forms through a process of mutual divergence and encroachment. However, I do not have any mutual relationship between my disabled body and the able-bodied world.

What is given in experience, the lived world as experienced, is the world that one finds after one has linked one's assumptions. One is always already living in the world, and it provides the ground for one understanding one's self within the world. A description can transform the way we see the world, or the way in which we are in a given condition. It is an image of the world, and as such, it can change perceptions of the world. The impact of description is also seen in such thinkers as Simone de Beauvoir (2011 [1949]) and Frantz Fanon (2008 [1952])<sup>4)</sup> who thought of otherness within the self. They wrote about what was given in their embodied experiences, and in doing so transformed the way their readers think and act concerning the readers whose experience encompass theirs. In this essay, the description I shall put forward will not offer a radical transformation from Fanon and Beauvoir, but it shall develop them to help my readers understand my own lived experience.

## Thinking of the Other

In *the Second Sex*, Beauvoir (2011 [1949]) describes how men are regarded as the norm and women as the Other. She states:

Man thinks himself without woman. Woman does not think herself without man. And she is nothing other than what man decides; she is thus called “the sex,” meaning that the male sees her essentially as a sexed being; for him she is sex, so she is it in the absolute. She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute, she is the Other. (Beauvoir, 2011 [1949]: 6)

Thus, in Beauvoir, women are described as lacking, or a deviation from the norm. From this quote, we understand that there is an inequality between man and woman. The definition of woman is given in terms of this inequality. Man is the absolute human form. Woman is known only as she relates to what is taken to be the absolute. Thus, woman is defined by her absence of male qualities. Beauvoir (2011 [1949]: 6) writes: “The category of *Other* is as original as consciousness itself. The duality between Self and Other can be found in the most primitive societies...” Establishing otherness, for her, is automatic. Applying Sartre’s thoughts on the existence of the Other to her definition of woman, Beauvoir (2011[1949]: 6-9) rejects the idea of human society as a ‘*Mitsein*’ (being-with) and understands in consciousness what Hegel (1977 [1807]) acknowledged as a fundamental hostility. “The subject posits itself only in opposition; it asserts itself as the essential and sets up the other as inessential as the object” (Beauvoir, 2011 [1949]: 7). Here, Beauvoir enables us to understand how otherness is formed. However, in Fanon, the application of Beauvoir’s Otherness to his black identity is problematic.

In a chapter in *Black Skin, White Masks* called “The lived experience of the Black man”, Fanon (2008 [1952]) condemns Sartre in a footnote:

Though Sartre’s speculations on the existence of “The Other” remain correct (insofar as, we may recall remember, *Being and Nothingness* describes

an alienated consciousness), their application to a black consciousness proves fallacious because the white man is not only “the Other,” but also the master, whether real or imaginary. (Fanon, 2008 [1952]:117)

I can explain Fanon’s question: How can he, as a black man, be free from the white man’s world if his hostility towards the white man is never that of the dominant over the Other. In short, why is it significant that the white man is the dominant as well as the Other? How does the black man’s dilemma compare to that of a woman as described by Beauvoir?

For Beauvoir, the world is controlled by a white patriarchy, and any definition of women must be in terms of, or a response to, the definition of what man is. Women must be the negative, because men are both the positive and the normative neutral. But her claim makes sense only for white women; black men cannot be placed on the negative scale along with white women. Black men will certainly not fit there, for they are not a negation of white men. They are certainly neither positive nor neutral. For black men, the world is dominated by white patriarchy. However, white women are already in the negative slot. What is the black man’s place in this hierarchy? Just how inferior is he? Fanon asks the question and offers an answer:

A feeling of inferiority? No, a feeling of not existing. Sin is black as virtue is white. All those white men, fingering their guns, can’t be wrong. I am guilty. I do not know what of, but I know I’m a wretch. (Fanon, 2008 [1952]: 118)

Here, Fanon feels that he is rejected in white society. He suggests that colonised people (Fanon himself) are made to feel inferior and alienated from their own culture because the history, culture, language, customs and beliefs of the colonisers are promoted as universal, normative and superior. Paradoxically, this leads to colonised people adopting these cultures and beliefs in an attempt to make themselves feel less inferior.

Like W. E. B. Du Bois’ (2000 [1903]) earlier analysis of black men’s double

consciousness and the effect of internalised dehumanisation, Fanon analyses the impact of a cultural inferiority complex on colonised individuals.<sup>5)</sup> He explains the relationship between the coloniser and himself, and aspects of psychosocial disavowal, self-loathing, rejection of homeland culture, and the adaptation of the coloniser's culture, which both reflected his lived experience as a student and a professional soldier in Martinique and France. He argues that in order to function normally in a racist society, he, as a black man, essentially puts on a white mask and mentally alienates himself from his dark skin. I have come to realise that double consciousness creates an element of conflict within me as I struggle (often unsuccessfully) to reconcile my identity as a person with physical disability and as a Japanese woman (often able-bodied).

### **The Disabled Body as the Other**

The Other is constructed from images, discourses, and representations of what the privileged and dominant group does not want to become or cannot attain. The Other is then projected onto groups of people. The process of 'othering', however, undermines the subjectivity of such people. The Other is seen as an object, a restricted subjectivity. I suggest that people with disability are formed as the Other of the able-bodied norm. Otherness is projected onto the disabled subject in the interests of the able-bodied such that he/she is constructed as less or abnormal. The disabled is all that the able-bodied is anxious to avoid, and all that the able-bodied may nevertheless become. As the Other, the disabled exists as he/she is perceived by the able-bodied, and the disabled person has no role in fixing the content or context of his/her categorisation. This leads to a split within the consciousness of those who are labelled 'disabled'. The disabled continually beholds his/herself; he/she is always accompanied by his/her own image of him/herself. From earliest childhood, he/she has been influenced and forced to assess him/herself repeatedly from the point of view of the able-bodied. Thus, the disabled becomes both the spectator and the spectacle within him/herself. The able-bodied looks at the disabled, and the disabled watches him/herself being looked at.

The concept of the able-bodied gaze has some similarities to Fanon's (2008

[1952]) concept of the white gaze. Confronted with the white gaze, Fanon cannot escape from the process of racial othering, as a result of the process, he literally becomes his skin, “overdetermined from the outside” (Fanon, 2008 [1952]). Similarly, Beauvoir (2011 [1949]) focuses on the impact of the male gaze. She argues that men have the active viewing position while women have the passive viewing position. Beauvoir sees that women, as objects of this male gaze, view themselves from a male perspective. Both Fanon and Beauvoir consider the viewer as a white man, and it forces women and black men to internalise the normative (white and male) gaze and to see themselves as the Other.

As I mentioned before, Murphy (2001 [1987]) describes the physical negotiation of his quadriplegia, and of fixed assumptions towards those who are the disabled Other. His work is also a personal narrative of his changing relationship with his wife, on whom he is gradually more dependent; of his relationships with colleagues, friends, and students; of his increasing isolation from his own body and the able-bodied world; of finding some purpose in his transformed condition. He states:

As Simone de Beauvoir wrote, anatomy may not be destiny, but it is indeed an unstated first assumption in all of our enterprises. Each person simply accepts the fact that he has two legs and can walk; he does not think about it or marvel at it any more than he would feel gratitude for the oxygen content of air. (Murphy, 2001 [1987]: 12)

Thus, he applies the metaphor of an ethnographic field trip to his own experience. Drawing not only on his own experience but also on research for which he received funding, Murphy instructs his audience in the metaphysics of his condition, and in the social as well as bodily challenges of disability.

In the able-bodied gaze, people with disability refer to that which is understood as the binary opposite to the able-bodied. Like women and black men, people with disability are forced to internalise the normative gaze in order to see themselves as the Other. However, the able-bodied gaze has some differences from the male gaze. The female body is identified as an object for sexual desire



and the black body is seen as an object of observation and control, while the disabled body as an object of vulnerability and revulsion. In the case of the girl's gaze at me: "the stare sculpts the disabled subject into a grotesque spectacle. The stare is the gaze intensified, framing her body as an icon of deviance" (Garland Thompson 1997: 26). However, I argue that we often regard able-bodied people as active, supervising subjects, and treat people with disability as passive, pathological, and vulnerable objects of anxiety for able-bodied people.

### **The Internalised Gaze: towards a Phenomenological Dialogue between the Self and the Other**

The able-bodied gaze is also internalised within myself. I am looked upon with the able-bodied gaze, but I also look at myself through the able-bodied gaze. When I look at the reflection of my body in a mirror, I often feel like screaming at myself. I am always a spectacle, and ask myself 'What is wrong with me?' I continually stare at myself. I am continually accompanied by my own image. It is similar to Jacques Lacan's (1997 [1949]) concept of the mirror stage. For Lacan, the mirror stage forms the sense of self (ego) as dependent upon external objects, on others. I entered into social relations through language (the young girl's words: "Mum, Look at her! She looks weird!") and the gaze. The Other has been elaborated within social and linguistic frameworks that provide my subjectivity. Lacan (1997 [1949]) suggests that we (infants) pass through a stage in which an external image of the body (reflected in a mirror, or represented to the subject (infant) through the primary caregiver or others) constructs a psychic reaction that gives rise to the mental representation of the Self. Thus, I identified with the image, which served as a gestalt of the perception of myself, but since the image of my disabled body did not correspond with my own vulnerability, the image was constructed as an able bodied form toward which I have continuously struggled throughout my life.

The feature of Lacan's thought which concerns me here is the significance he affords both the gaze and the return of the gaze in a process of recognising the desire of the Other. I consider that Lacan develops a psychological theory of child development with Hegelian dialectic to establish his own models of the

mirror stage and of the dialectic of gaze and desire. Lacan then describes the function of the 'I', the impact it releases in any relation to the Other. The gaze is played by the desire of the Other in creating that desire which belongs to the subject, symbolised as an 'I'; the struggle in a process of becoming 'I' is released by the conflict between the self and the Other. Here, Lacan (1997 [1949]: 5) is interested not only in the development of the 'I' of the mirror stage, established on an illusory self-recognition (misrecognition), but also in the development of what he calls the "social I", whose own desires reflect the desires of others and, in so doing, put the subject into relationships with those others.

Beauvoir (2011 [1949]) also takes up the Lacanian idea of the gaze and applies it to the male gaze at woman. She argues that the concept of 'woman' is a male concept: woman is always the Other since the male is the voyeur. While man is the subject, woman is the object: the meaning of what it is to be a woman is constructed by men. Beauvoir argues that it is not the biological condition of women per se that constitutes a handicap: it is how a woman understands this condition which reduces it into the binary oppositions. Female experiences, for example, the development of the female body, menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and menopause, have no meaning in themselves. In the case of thinking about female experiences, women cannot see their bodies through their own gaze, since they internalise the male gaze.

Fanon (2008 [1952]), like Lacan and Beauvoir, considers the impact of the gaze to the function of 'I', and explains why the gaze is upsetting. This is because to perceive is to look at, and to understand a look is not to understand a look as an object in the world; it is to be conscious of being looked at. It is the one being looked at who is objectified and turned into the Other, while the look is the mediator of that objectification. I cannot see the look, but I can feel its force. Like Fanon, I come to consider the spectator and the spectacle within myself as the double, integral, but particular conditions of my identity as the Other. My experience engages these theories of the dominant gaze by providing me with images that remark on my position as an image of the Other, and as an internal viewer of this image. Fanon recognised the racialised distribution of the impacts of the gaze in his analysis of the experience of being looked at as

a 'black man'. Fanon highlights the non-mutuality of looks in colonial settings, observing that only white subjects can adopt the power that is positioned in the gaze where black subjects must constantly offer themselves to be looked at in a process that makes them vulnerable to psychosomatic damage. Although this is itself born of a misrecognition of Fanon himself by a white gaze, it is the one that is withdrawn from a black man under a colonial setting.

Fanon's explanation of the white gaze is based on Lacan's theory of the mirror stage. The black man's subjectivity is constructed by the recognition of himself through images reflected in a mirror, through the Other — on the way in which others see him. What I can recognise is not what I am, but the image of myself which is not simply formed by myself. If I accept Lacan's theory as the principle of the formation of the colonised subject as well as the disabled subject, it might be useful in explaining the mechanism of the internal process of inferiority of the colonised and disability.

My physical disability affects the way in which I experience modes of embodiment, such as walking, speaking and sitting still. For example, owing to my physical disability, I am not able to control my neck movements. When I have a haircut, I always feel nervous because I know that I cannot stop my neck flinching, and it is very difficult for my hairdresser to cut my hair. Although I like being dressed up and having a nice hairdo, I do not like sitting in a chair at the hairdressing salon. Moreover, I have to look at my own image in a mirror, casting my neck under a spell of immobility. I often imagine what I should do at the hairdresser's, and I am also very aware of my head moving involuntarily. Since I am not able to position my neck as expected in any of these ways, the nature of my experience of having a haircut is shaped differently from others. While others seem to enjoy their time at the salon, it is difficult for me to inhabit the same world that they do. Despite the fact that I was primarily uneasy about my inability to control my neck movement, I now accept it as a part of myself. My neck movement has naturally adjusted over time to reflect the hairdresser's skill. Most hairdressers have difficulties in attuning to my odd posture and involuntary movements, and some of them refuse me as a customer. It is very difficult for me to find a good hairdresser. While sitting in the chair and

seeing myself and my hairdresser in the mirror, I feel uneasy and sorry for the hairdresser who is giving me a haircut — then my body starts shivering. For me the look in the mirror always objectifies. I, as the looker, am active, aggressive, and the looked-at - the victim of the gaze. I like my current hairdresser because she does not care about my neck movement; she never makes me talk whilst giving me a haircut. She is aware of my embodied condition that if I speak, my neck will move a lot. To me, the hairdresser's salon has become the place where I have experienced my own vulnerability in much the same way as others may experience their vulnerabilities at a hospital where they cannot take control of their own bodies. In effect, the look prevented me from looking back into the eyes of the small girl who looked at me. Even though she is not present in the salon, I feel the same force by looking in the mirror which shows the gaze of my hairdresser and others in the salon.

My lived experience informs my awareness of the world around me. My awareness can only be understood by taking my body into account. The phenomenology of my disability has shown how my body is experienced in the able-bodied world and how taken for granted routines are disrupted invoking my own ways, revealing how embodiment and my subjective orientation reflexively interrelate with cultural imagery and discourse to transfigure myself. Further, the phenomenological study of my own experience has suggested that my emotion is best analysed as interpreted processes embedded within experiential contexts. The world and I are seen as tangled together: I actively engage in and with the world, and I am aware of myself and the world through my own embodied experience in it. Phenomenology places emphasis on subjective descriptions rather than on objective assumption or fundamental justifications.

My disabled body is constantly in a state of attunement, waiting for the day it will be fixed. I always feel that there is something wrong with my body. As I showed in the example of sitting in a chair at the hairdresser's salon, I always try to mimic the able-bodied female body. However, I am doomed to fail to adapt qualities of normative posture and behaviour. Internalisation of the able-bodied gaze involves apprehending that which belongs to the Other and incorporating it as my own. Thus, the processes of internalisation are not simple and predict-

able. The absorption process is deeper, implying a belief that the disabled body requires something that only able-bodied people have or can give them.

Phenomenological questions about my own experience of disability are often framed as what-is-it like questions: “What is it like to” have a particular form of cerebral palsy, to sit a chair at the hairdresser’s salon, and to give a talk. Such questions are sometimes requests for factual information about how I manage tasks with my disability - “how do I give a lecture, if my voice is too weak to be heard?” In other cases, they are requests for self-report about my lived experience of being in a particular condition — “what does it feel like to use text-to-speech software to teach?” When I write about “what it was like” to have my embodiment, the descriptions may vary considerably. The most obvious reason is that there are many variations in the physical and functional conditions of which I am capable. I have very different embodied experiences, not only different from most able-bodied people who can control their head movements and speak with ease, but also different from any disabled person who cannot walk, cannot see, cannot hear, or who cannot speak at all.

Trouble with communicating is a big issue for me. I have to move my facial muscles into the right position to speak. I understand what normative pronunciations in both English and Japanese languages should sound like; I also know that I do not pronounce them correctly. It is impossible for me to pronounce these words as speech language pathologists have advised me to do. I have many problems moving my mouth to form words correctly. When I hear background noises, I cannot focus on listening to what people are saying and therefore I cannot speak to them with ease. It is not helpful to fix the movements of my mouth and tongue as some have suggested in order to improve my speech, because I have already developed my own way of communicating and my facial muscles have adapted to certain ways according to my embodied subjectivity. For example, when speech language pathologists asked me to say words, to close my mouth, or to stick out my tongue, I found it very difficult because my whole body froze when I felt nervous. It may be helpful to make a social setting where I feel relaxed and comfortable to speak. However, in reality, society does not work for me. Computer technology, in particular the Internet, helps me a lot.

To help me communicate more effectively, it is not so important to fix or articulate my speech in a normative way, but it is vital to seek help for my needs.<sup>6)</sup>

Though able to speak, I have felt uneasy speaking in public spaces, such as in busy London, assuming that people will be shocked or panicked because they cannot understand what I am saying. It is easier to remain mute. I also have to consider what would happen if my speech was unintelligible: my body would freeze up. When I have tried to get attention, most people just ignored me before, eventually, someone has stopped to assist. I wondered if this was because, in the UK, I look East Asian and so could have been mistaken for a tourist. I also wondered if it would have been easier if I had been recognised as a disabled person, because then people might have treated me better and not have been shocked. My bodily disruptions appear first in the lips, tongue, and jaw, and quickly spread to other parts of my face, head and neck. Pain from contractions of my neck muscles, over which I have no control, adds to the irregular and jerky movements which block speech further. Tremors are the first to appear, and then my body freezes up. It often begins when I think my speech is not intelligible and acceptable to others, or when I try to regain control of my speech and to make it flow.

These arise as reactions to the fear of not-being-understood. My fears are heightened by the possibility of a negative response from any stranger and I try to avoid unintelligibility, often substituting words that are easier to pronounce for the ones I fear are too difficult to say. Sometimes, I avoid talking altogether. I attempt to cover up my condition; for instance a hand over the mouth while talking or writing notes. For me, cerebral palsy disrupts communication, not only because of its effects on my speech production and the limits this imposes on my use of language use and, indeed, thought, but also because my cerebral palsy cannot be separated from the experience of my own body and people's reactions to my embodied self.

### **Concluding Remarks:**

This essay seeks to illustrate the problematic approaches towards the in-

tersection of disability, femininity, and blackness that underpins a great deal of thought. It stresses that disability, like femininity for Beauvoir and blackness for Fanon, should be considered as the Other. Each experience of otherness may share some similarities, but they are also quite distinct. The essay highlights the complex connections between disability, femininity, and blackness in phenomenological dialogues of lived experiences. In my view, phenomenology of disability offers the opportunity to transcend the able-bodied gaze which sees the disabled body as a passive object and as the Other. The internalisation of the able-bodied gaze or norm helps explain my own oppression. I do not choose to think about my body and embodiment negatively; rather I am forced to do so as a result of being embedded in an able-bodied society.

The impact of the gaze is that it allows the dominant (the able-bodied, the white, the male) to control the social spaces and social interactions of all other bodies. The Other is made visible and invisible at the same time under the gaze. For example, when I am looked at, it is often with a specific gaze that sees the 'weird', the 'vulnerable' or the 'abnormal'. Thus, I am seen and constrained by the able-bodied gaze that is intended to control my physical and social movements. The purpose of the gaze is that it should restrain those who receive it and make them wish to be invisible. In the latter part of this essay, I have opened up a space for myself to recuperate, as an embodied subject, my experiences previously blocked from the normative world. This simultaneously provides me with an opportunity to work out a strategy of dealing with the mirror as indicated by my own recovery from my disturbing past with the help of other people in the community.

[Notes]

- 1) This essay is based on a talk presented at both the 40th seminar of Exciting Leading-Edge Research Projects: the Future of the Human Beings in the Age of Biosciences ( "Phenomenology of Embodiment and Patient-based Research (Tojisha-Kenkyu)" which was held on 13th July 2013 in the Graduate School of Human Sciences at Osaka University and the 23rd World Philosophy Congress which was held from 4th August through 10th August 2013 at the University of Athens, Greece. I would like to thank the audience of both sessions, in particular, Professor Tetsuya Kono,

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- 2) I was born prematurely (six weeks early). I heard that a doctor who was present decided to put me into an incubator. Unfortunately, the decision was wrong for me because the incubator did not provide enough oxygen; I was anoxic. No one knew what was wrong with me at that time. My parents came to realise that there might be something wrong with me when I was six to eight months old, because my head was never steady; I always held it to one side. I was not good at suckling and then I would vomit up all the milk I drank. My mother took me to the hospital and finally, when I was about ten months old, I was diagnosed as being afflicted with cerebral palsy.
- 3) Metamorphosis is the story of a young man, Gregor Samsa, who transformed overnight into a giant beetle-like insect, becomes an object of disgust to his family, an outsider in his own home, and an alienated man. It describes feelings of helplessness, guilt, and isolation.
- 4) Frantz Fanon was a psychiatrist, born in the French colony of Martinique, who dedicated much of his life to the liberation of Algeria from France. Among other achievements, he wrote the influential books such as *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008 [1952]) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1990 [1961]). These texts exerted a great influence on what would later become the field of post-colonial theory and criticism.
- 5) Double consciousness is a concept that Du Bois first explores in 1903. Double consciousness describes the individual sensation of feeling as though one's identity is divided into several parts, making it impossible to have one unified identity. He spoke of this within the context of racism in the United State, and maintained that since black Americans have lived in a society that has historically repressed and devalued them that it has become difficult for them to unify their own identity with their American identity. Double consciousness forces blacks to not only see themselves from their own unique perspective, but to also view themselves as they might be perceived by the outside world. This is what Fanon develops his concept of the gaze from Du Bois - "the sense of looking at one's self through the eyes of others".
- 6) e.g. providing alternative technological devices, a quiet space, and other methodologies of making me feel relaxed.



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## SUMMARY

The Disabled Body, the Able-bodied Form:  
A Feminist Exploration of Dialogue between Beauvoir and Fanon

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This paper offers an account of my entry into the able-bodied world where the gravity of the 'able-bodied gaze' has disrupted me and made me feel vulnerable. In *Black Skins, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon develops his epidermal racial schemes as restoratives to Merleau-Ponty's overly inclusive body schema. Aware of the reality of his own embodied subjectivity, Fanon uses his schema to describe the establishment and maintenance of white-formed 'blackness'. Through a re-telling of his own experiences of racism, Fanon is able to show how a black person in a racialised framework eventually internalises the 'white gaze'. In this paper, I shall bring Fanon's understandings into dialogue with Simone de Beauvoir's discussion of femininity. Although the internalisation of the normative narrative creates a situation in which external constraints are no longer needed, I shall underline both the socio-cultural contingency of 'disability' and the ways in which the oppressed may reconstruct their subjectivities. Lastly, I shall explore my own experiences, once again engaging with Fanon and Beauvoir as partners for dialogue within phenomenological philosophy.

