The Non-Mysterious Flesh:
Embodied Intersubjectivity at Work

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ABSTRACT

Working one's fingers to the bone, having one's nose to the grindstone, *Knochenarbeit...* the metaphors we use for hard physical work are often applied equally to serious intellectual feats or exhaustive non-physical investigation or processing. In the phenomenological experience of work, what is the qualitative difference between physical and non-physical work? Hegel was the first to suggest a strong connection between work and sense of self-as-subject as among other selves, and his account in the master/slave dialectic and subsequent influential interpretations such as that of Kojève are focused on the physical process of 'negating' objects. Recent work on joint interests and joint attention focuses on goal-directed action that is paradigmatically non-physical, or where the physical aspect is incidental. In this paper, I investigate the role played by physical work in self-perception and in intersubjective relationships, specifically in a model of empathetic relationships. I also investigate the question of whether embodiment or shared goals and intentions are more important to a full account of intersubjectivity and empathy. As well as contributing to current debates about models of empathy, this discussion is also relevant to conceptions of solidarity and theories of the self in general, particularly as regards self-world relations.

INTRODUCTION – THE PERSONAL AND THE PROFESSIONAL

In this paper, I begin by examining briefly two accounts of more or less successful intersubjectivity and empathy in the work of Hegel and Husserl. The role played by the phenomenon of personal love between partners in these accounts has, in recent examinations, been seen as central to the extent to which they can be regarded as paradigms of successful and meaningful human

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interaction.[1] At the same time, the Hegelian and Husserlian accounts of human interaction which form the starting-point of my paper also have as an important element a framework of work as involving suppression of some type of desire and of community on the micro-level. My paper shifts the focus of the debate onto this phenomenon of work, asking whether group work, which I define more specifically in the next section, could in fact function as the arena wherein intersubjectivity and empathy can function ideally. My reasons for choosing to focus on work rather than love in this paper are threefold. Firstly, work is more easily examined on an everyday level as something which figures in the lives of all of us, certainly when the term "work" is broadly defined, as in my paper. Personal love is regarded, perhaps accurately, as a kind of mystical phenomenon which in many ways defies sober phenomenological analysis and is far distinct from typical concepts of reason. Secondly, personal love typically involves a very small community in each instance: paradigmatically, it involves a community of two.[2] Communities of workers, however, can be of any size. Focusing on work rather than love allows one to explore how intersubjectivity and empathy can and do function in wider communities. Thirdly, in work, it is much easier to isolate the physical aspect from the non-physical aspect and examine what role the nature of embodiment, and our understanding and experience of others' embodiment, can play in intersubjectivity and empathy. By "embodiment", I refer not only to the simple fact of a self being associated with a physical object, but the way the self experiences that body and other bodies.

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[1] For examples of such examinations – not all of whom agree that Hegel or Husserl succeed in providing an account of successful human interaction – see e.g., Ormiston 2004, Williams 2000 and Hadreas 2007.

[2] I specifically use the term "personal love", rather than love in general, to exclude a variety of other phenomena we describe as "love" – love for art, cooking or a particular geographical landscape, love for my country or compatriots, and other types of love that cannot be described as having a particular object with which the one who loves has a direct and potentially reciprocal relationship. My love for the paintings produced by the Dutch Masters or Verdi's operas is not personal love in this sense because, as inanimate objects, they cannot respond to me. Equally, my love of an abstract concept such as a country – for it is surely some set of values, atmosphere or something else intangible that is the object of my love, not a tract of land between borders – can never be a relationship of personal love, since there exists no candidate for reciprocal action, leaving aside even the theoretical possibility of such action were such a candidate to be present. Love for compatriots is a case closer to the borderline, since I do at least want to leave open the possibility of altruistic love for one's fellow human being as a category of personal love. Nevertheless, love for compatriots in general is likely to have the same kind of very abstract character as love for one's country, and is not likely to focus on one specific individual who might reciprocate in a relationship of personal love.

After the discussion of Hegel and Husserl, I proceed with some definitions about the nature of work, and a more detailed discussion of how work might be the ideal arena for successful intersubjectivity and empathy. For reasons of space and scope, it is not possible to provide here a full examination and justification of a particular definition and understanding of what might count as "successful" empathy and intersubjectivity, so I will offer just some brief thoughts. First of all, to define the terms themselves, I define intersubjectivity in the following way; as that quality of the external world and/or human minds that allows us to see other minds and their attendant bodies and subjects and objects in the fact of our own subjectivity and objectivity, as willing, perceiving and acting subjects like ourselves inhabiting the same world.[3] Empathy is, as the original German term "*Einfühlung*" (feeling-in or -into) suggests, more closely connected with our ability to access and understand the motivational, emotional and affective states of those who also inhabit our world. Degrees of "success", in the first instance, are therefore concerned with the degree and complexity of understanding of these types that is achieved. On this analysis, neither intersubjectivity nor empathy is a binary quality in the sense of either being achieved or not being achieved, but allows for a wide range of degrees. There is certainly also an ethical dimension concerned with what obligations there might be on us to achieve successful intersubjectivity and empathy, or whether, to argue from a different angle, the fact that intersubjectivity and empathy are possible entails certain ethical demands. These extremely useful and pertinent questions are not my concern here, but would certainly form an interesting basis for a discussion.

1. WORK, DESIRE AND PURPOSE – SOME DEFINITIONS

What is the central and essential phenomenological quality of work? Certainly, we use the same kinds of metaphors involving physicality (working one's fingers to the bone, *Knochenarbeit* in German) or even animals (working like a dog, donkey-work) to describe this experience or the observation of someone else's work. However, the terms we use to describe our own work or, generally approvingly, the effort of other people, do not mean that the experience we have of our own or of others' work does not vary greatly depending on whether

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[3] Note that this general analysis is agnostic about whether intersubjectivity and empathy are made possible by some biological or even ontological feature of the world or human subjects.

this work entails physical effort. Equally, whilst the colloquial terms above paradigmatically conjure up the image of lone, heroic toil, this does not necessarily contribute anything to the question of whether there is a phenomenological difference in undertaking work alone or in a group and, if so, how this difference can be characterised. The first part of this paper will suggest some differences in terms of phenomenological experience of physical and non-physical work, both undertaken alone and as part of a group. In this analysis, my aim is to discover what, if any, part is played in the phenomenological experience of sole or group work by embodiment.

Any analysis of the phenomenon of work needs to volunteer at least a provisional definition of the boundaries of that phenomenon. Certainly, it would be unwarranted to assume from the outset that the definition of "work" which will be important for this particular analysis is co-extensive with the definition of "work" from a socio-economic point of view. Indeed, the provisional definition with which I am working is broader than that. The economic definition of work as a sustained task undertaken in order to earn money will not be sufficient for this analysis, or at the very least the financial benefits of work will not be seen as the most phenomenologically pertinent feature of the phenomenon.

Many critics of, and commentators on, Hegel and the subsequent idea of work, alienation and freedom have emphasized one particular feature, that is, the extent to which work is a suppression of one's natural desires. A fairly neat analysis can be made with the help of Harry Frankfurt's first- and second-order desires, where "natural desire" is understood to be roughly equivalent to first-order desires.[4] A first-order or natural desire is a straightforward, immediate desire, formed with minimal, if any, cognitive involvement – the desire for rest, shelter, food or drink. A second-order desire, on the other hand, is a desire for a desire and thus not a simple natural desire. For example, one might desire fame or fortune, but this is likely to require the suppression of natural desires such as that for rest. One might desire, then, that one does not desire rest. That is to say, the first-order desire is held in check in order that the second-order desire can take precedence. Work involves, but is of course not limited to, holding one's natural desires in check in favor of some purpose that extends beyond these natural desires.

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[4] Cf. Frankfurt 1988.

1.1. BASIC AND HIGHER PURPOSES

This desire criterion concerns partly what work is *not*, in terms of purpose. It is at the same time important to point out that work is for some purpose, and must be understood by the worker as being for some purpose. This can be understood as a two-fold requirement. First of all, a particular task of work should be understood as purposive by the worker – that is, if I am standing at the front of a room making some comment about Kant, I should understand that the purpose of this task is to teach my students about Kant, perhaps so that they can pass their exams. Equally, in the case of physical work, I should understand that my polishing of a window is for the purpose of cleaning that window, perhaps to improve the appearance of a building. The work should have what I will call basic purposiveness (the basic purposiveness criterion). I will examine whether, for joint or collaborative work, it is important for work that is relevant from the point of view of my analysis of empathy and intersubjectivity that each participant has the same broad idea of the basic purposiveness of the work. As well as basic purposivenss, there is the question of higher purposiveness (the higher purposiveness criterion). This is rather more difficult to define, and it will be a major task of my paper to examine what this consists in and to what extent it is important to the phenomenon of work as key to an understanding of empathy and intersubjectivity. Higher purposiveness as I am defining it concerns the perceived overall purpose of the task as it contributes to the person's job or profession, or wider significance of a task that does not fit into the framework of employment, for example, a small task that is part of the wider purpose e.g., of renovating one's home.

In the simplest possible terms, I understand a "worker" as being someone engaging in a task which involves action other than as a function of one's natural desires (the desire criterion) which also involves some kind of basic purpose (the basic purposiveness criterion). For individual work, I initially leave open the possibility or necessity of a higher purpose to the task at hand. This is a fairly minimal description of work, which would certainly extend to running errands or performing basic household tasks, as well as, importantly, caring for another person or performing fairly simple acts of kindness (holding open a door, for example). For group work, I initially work with the following definition – the definition of individual work, but with another individual worker that assists one in fulfilling either a basic purpose (e.g., preparing a meal for one's family) or a higher one (providing the family with a nutritious and pleasant-tasting diet). Additionally, for the purposes of the

phenomenological analysis of joint experience, I will stipulate for joint or group work that there must be some kind of sustained communication between workers in a group work situation, leaving aside for the moment the question of whether the workers have to have physically met at some point.[5]

2.   HEGEL AND HUSSERL – WORK AND LOVE

Before I begin the analysis of physical and non-physical work using the phenomenological method, I will briefly sketch out the historical background to this question. Perhaps the most famous example of a phenomenological analysis of physical work is provided by Kojève's reading of Hegel's master/slave dialectic in paragraphs 178-196 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (Kojève 1969) Kojève offers us an analysis of work as a process that limits the slave's freedom still further by holding him in fear of death, but in fact proves his salvation as the interaction with the external world distinguishes him from animals and humanizes him. For this type of work, as I will explain, the physical aspect of work is central to Kojève's narrative of liberation which can in turn be casts as a comment on the objectivity and subjectivity of the human self. At the same time, if we are to take the core of Kojève's analysis seriously, what he says about the liberating and humanizing power of work is even more convincing if we are considering physical work in a group rather than lone work. The other central historical figure important for the purposes of this paper is Edmund Husserl. Husserl, in his *On the Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity* (Husserl 1973), develops an account of communal striving (*streben*) that forms the basis of personal love, but which can potentially be widened out to form a kind of ideal model of positive ethical intersubjectivity. However, although embodiment is certainly a concern for Husserl in the *Cartesian Meditations* (Husserl 1950), the *Ideen* II (Husserl 1991), the Krisis writings (Husserl 1976) and Husserl 1973, his account of intersubjectivity and empathy does not fully account for the special role played by one's own experience of one's own body as an *object* in the lifeworld as well as a subject that is the geographical centre (the "absolute

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[5] A full examination of the phenomenological experience of modern workplaces with electronic communication, video-conferencing and the like as opposed to traditional workplaces where colleagues are physically together for the majority of the time is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper, but this would certainly be a worthwhile candidate for a fuller study.

here" of e.g., Husserl 1950, p. 146) of self-government.[6] To explain what role embodiment needs to play in the analysis of work, I refer later to the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Hegel and Husserl provide us with two accounts of working together, understood in the broadest possible terms. Their two accounts will therefore form the starting-point of my enquiry. Choosing these two accounts in particular requires an engagement with the general question of intersubjectivity and monistic ontology to which I shall return at various points in the paper. Both Hegel and, less directly, Husserl, are accused of subsuming true intersubjectivity into the monistic unity of subject and object. The criticism of the former is lead by Michael Theunissen, and of the latter, Max Scheler.[7] Both Hegel and Husserl's accounts of intersubjectivity appear to treat the unity of marriage partners or lovers as a kind of paradigmatic example of effective realisation of that phenomenon. Despite the lack of obvious similarity between work and love, in fact these examples both depict a unity with some kind of shared intentions that is grounded on a deeper unity of consciousness, which may or may not imply or require a deeper ontological union.

For Hegel, married couples form the smallest unit in a civil society shaped by an intersubjectivity of reason and action. Some recent scholars have suggested that it is in a loving relationship that Hegelian intersubjectivity has its most positive and well-functioning expression as perfect mutual recognition (in the technical sense of *Anerkennung*) of the other partner's ontological status. Briefly stated, recognition in Hegelian terms is specifically the recognition of the Other as having a particular ontological status that is the same as one's own, and, crucially for Hegel's account, it must be mutual. One cannot recognize without being recognized, and vice versa. Recognition, for Hegel, is a necessary part of the development of self-consciousness.[8] Whilst

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[6] The prolific nature of Husserl as a writer as well as the specific historical challenges of tracing his shifting views render many accounts of a particular concept or view of his open to challenge from an earlier or later work. Whilst I do not claim that Husserl has one constant view of intersubjectivity, I do assert that the elements of his concept that are particularly relevant to the concerns of this paper remain sufficiently constant for this not to constitute a serious objection from other works.

[7] See Theunissen 1991 in general and Scheler 1970, p. 75.

[8] This is not an uncontroversial account of Hegelian recognition or the development of self-consciousness. John McDowell has recently followed Joseph Flay (Flay 1984, p. 86) and George Armstrong Kelly (Kelly 1984) in advancing a view of the master/slave dialectic as an internal process

the master/slave dialectic describes a failure of mutuality and therefore a failure of recognition, the loving relationship describes a relationship where the two partners live in recognition and harmony. Others have suggested that the ascription of a unity of consciousness to the loving couple, as well as Hegel's monistic ontology in general, involves a subsuming of genuine intersubjectivity into one monistic substance, thereby rendering the idea of a social construction of reality incoherent or impossible. Indeed, the famous quotation from the Philosophy of Right initially seems to lend some weight to the assertion that individual consciousness is subsumed:

Love means in general terms the consciousness of my unity with another, so that I am not in selfish isolation but win my self-consciousness only as the renunciation of my independence and through knowing myself as the unity of myself with another and of the other with me.[9]

Both in German Idealism and in the work of Husserl, intersubjectivity is not simply, as Allen Wood describes it, «our conception of the mentality of others and our awareness of it», but accords much more closely to the definition given in the first part of this paper (Wood 2006, p. 66). Hegel's and Husserl's accounts of recognition and empathy both clearly require that the subject is in some way an actor in a community, and it is precisely in this sense that it can be useful to use close relationships between two people as a model for human interaction in general. What does seem clear from the *Philosophy of Right* is that recognition is a process with three clear steps, and not a case of simple desire for mastery or subjectivity as in, for example, a Sartrean account. In fact, the first desire is that for objectivity, to disappear into the other person, which is then replaced by a desire for subjectivity and then an achievement of both objectivity and subjectivity in the eyes of oneself and the other. The lover is not subsumed, but recognized, and the simple desire becomes a complex one. The simple desires for objectivity and then subjectivity must be held in check and suppressed in order for the more complex desire for recognition to emerge. This notion of desire held in check is one that can be observed on the simple empirical level of any close relationship between two individuals where each individual wants something for the other individual as well as for herself.

The main difficulty with Hegel's account of recognition and intersubjectivity is the centrality of the master/slave dialectic which is open to

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involving not a distinct other, but rather the finding of oneself in one's formative activity and the move from theoretical cognition of life to a practical immersion in it. See McDowell 2009.
    [9] Hegel 1991, addition to paragraph 158.

such a wide range of empirical elucidations. Husserl's account of an intersubjectivity of action is far more empirically comprehensible. I will turn now to the issue of the role played by love in Husserl's account of intersubjectivity. Husserl's account of personal love proceeds from his general analysis of the concept of communal striving.[10] Whilst love is more than communal striving, this working together forms the basis of close interpersonal relationships. His general concept of empathy forms the basis for his discussions of communal striving and personal love. The key concept is *Nachverstehen* or, as Peter Hadreas translates it, understanding-following-after-another (Hadreas 2007, p. 20). *Nachverstehen* is a kind of empathetic understanding of one person following after another which makes the other person impossible to objectify. Part of the refusal to objectify the beloved is due to the appreciation of her particular subjectivity – an object could simply be replaced.

There are two particular features of this phenomenon that demonstrate the clear connection to Husserl's broader intersubjectivity and an account of ethical love in the community. Firstly, there is this impossibility of objectifying the beloved; as Peter Hadreas puts it, «The beloved person remains more than can be collated into an object» (Hadreas 2007, p. 20). This has clear parallels with the irreducible nature of the community. Secondly, there is the emphasis on communal striving and activity in the couple as well as in the wider community, as the person of the beloved is disclosed to the other part of the couple through sharing in his acts and following in his footsteps, either cognitively or literally. Working together for common goals is crucial:

> As one who loves I know that, whatever I think, feel, strive for, or do, all are necessarily 'in the interests' of my beloved, is right for the beloved, and is right for the beloved not only in the sense of my not being scolded by the beloved, but rather as something I strove for in the interests of my beloved's striving. (Husserl 1973, p. 173)[11]

The higher purposes of the beloved and the lover are completely at one with each other – all goals, whether or not they are basic or higher purposes, are at one, because the lover is in love with the unique beloved. The question remains whether this complete meshing of goals of action could persist with a weaker bond, for example, that of the workers. Leaving aside the question of whether

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[10] See e.g., Husserl 1973, p. 171.
[11] Adapted from a translation in Hadreas 2007, p. 37.

Husserl's account is simply too demanding, I will move on to examine an account that goes beyond Husserl's concept of the self and the body and places embodied self at the very centre of intersubjectivity and empathy.

3.   THE WORKER AS EMBODIED – MERLEAU-PONTY AND SKILL

What is the special relevance of embodiment to work? How does the fact that we are, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, "psycho-physical subjects" affect us as workers, and how does this relate in particular to work undertaken in a group? The following comment is key:

> In so far as I have hands, feet, a body, I sustain around me intentions *which are not dependent upon my decisions and which affect my surroundings in a way which I do not choose.* These intentions are general [...] they originate from other than myself, and I am not surprised to find them in all psycho-physical subjects organized as I am. (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p. 440, *my emphasis*)

Not only does the simple fact of my embodiment mean that I am not able to predict with certainty how my goal-directed action will translate into the desired result on even the most basic level, but due to my physicality, my *intentions* do not depend on my decisions because even those intentions have to be developed with regard to the physical environment of which I, *qua* physical being, am part. Merleau-Ponty's comment also touches on the concept of intersubjectivity of embodied objects, albeit in a fairly minimalistic sense – there is a simple reasoning that because I am limited in translating my decisions into concrete intentions (and therefore am not radically free in the sense that Sartre would insist I am), then others whom I identify, for whatever reason, as being crucially similar to myself, must also be limited by such circumstances.

Seen in the light of the current discussions of models of empathy, Merleau-Ponty's comments about intentions, decisions and the understanding that other psycho-physical objects are similarly limited in their goal-directed activities are particularly interesting, especially given his concept of skilful action. According to Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, there is a strong connection between the physical self and the world (the intentional arc) which means that when the active body acquires new skills, these are stored not as mental representations but as dispositions which allow one to respond to one's physical environment – what we would, in the common

vernacular, call "skills". Moreover, the "maximal grip" is the process which allows the active body to refine its skills and bring the physical situation closer to what it regards as the optimum – Merleau-Ponty uses the example of a painting which has an optimal distance from which it should be seen. The vital point about skill in the intentional arc and maximum grip is that the capacities developed there are not propositional knowledge. Can we equally have skills with regard to other psycho-physical objects, and, if so, do these capacities treat such psycho-physical objects simply as part of the external furniture, or do they respond at the same time to the non-physical aspects of the Other?[12]

The significance of this question becomes clear when one considers the modern debate in the theory of empathy between theory-theorists and simulation theorists. Broadly speaking, the two views can be summarized in the following manner. The theory-theorist sees empathy as involving a theory of mind that is held by the empathiser which allows them to attribute intentional states to the person with whom they are empathising. In other words, for the theory-theorist, empathy involves propositional knowledge, unlike Merleau-Ponty's account of the intentional arc and of maximum grip. The simulation theorist, on the other hand, believes that by using our cognitive capacities, we put ourselves in the position of the other and simulate their mental states in ourselves. As one of the early proponents of this theory, Jane Heal, puts it, «we take the subject matter of that thought, whether we believe the same or not, and think directly about it» (Heal 1995, p. 35). In this sense, simulation theory does not involve propositional knowledge – in fact, the factual contents of our beliefs are, as she points out, irrelevant from the point of view of our empathising. Certainly at first glance, it seems that empathy, for the simulation theorist, is a kind of skill, even if it does not follow the precise path of skill-development traced out by Merleau-Ponty in the *Phenomenology of Perception*.

If it is the case that empathizing in general is a simulation process not involving propositional knowledge or a theory of mind, then one could argue that the skill of working with another person, two workers both limited by the fact of their being physical objects amongst physical objects, is rather like the example of a chess player developed by Hubert Dreyfus in a 2002 paper. Dreyfus describes the stages that a chess player learning to play to a very high

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[12] I follow a general convention used by a large number of writers on intersubjectivity of capitalising the word Other when it refers specifically to a candidate for intersubjective relationships.

standard goes through – first the simple memorisation of playing rules and possible move permutations, moving on to a stage where those rules work together with each other in a kind of interplay with a developing skill that does not require conscious reference to propositional knowledge, finally ending up at the following stage where expertise is used all the time and the body of knowledge is referred to only occasionally. This allows the immediate intuitive situational response that is characteristic of expertise (Dreyfus 2002, p. 372). If this analysis is applied to work in a framework influenced by Merleau-Ponty, we begin to get a general picture of skilled working with others that does not primarily require reference to a body of propositional knowledge. Whatever the degree to which the chess analysis, to which I return in the fourth section of this paper, can be applied to the world of work, the account of skill in general draws us closer to the conclusion, as Wringe 2003 puts it in the context of a simulation account of empathy, that «[o]ur beliefs do not constitute the sum or even, necessarily the most important part of our mental lives» (Wringe 2003, p. 354). Empathy is rather more than the attribution to others of mental states.

3.1. WORK AND INTERCORPOREITY

In the previous subsection, I suggested that Merleau-Ponty's account of skill presents a picture of the phenomenological experience of individual and group work that fits well with the simulation-theory view of empathetic relations. In this subsection, I will briefly examine Merleau-Ponty's own view of work and recognition in the master/slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology*. David Storey argues that, in terms of arguing for more fundamental structures of consciousness as an explanation of human experience, Merleau-Ponty is to Husserl what Hegel is to Kant (Storey 2009, p. 62). According to Storey, both Merleau-Ponty and Hegel are fundamentally concerned with restoring the great chain of being by re-imbuing what are often seen as non-philosophical objects with ontological significance and making clear the fundamental unity of self and object in a pre-conscious sense. In Hegel's case, of course, that is motivated by a commitment to monistic ontology in general. This of course brings forward the well-established question of whether Hegel's objections to Kant (and, by analogy, Merleau-Ponty's objections to Husserl) take as their primary ground the fact that Kant/Husserl's general framework provides an empirically or phenomenologically insufficient account of human experience, or the fact that the ontological presuppositions are faulty to begin with. Storey suggests that the difference between the two pairs of philosophers relates to

their general attitudes towards monistic and dualistic ontologies. One proposition, which I can explore only briefly in this paper, is whether effective intersubjectivity (or a fully descriptive account of intersubjectivity) in fact requires some kind of monistic ontology. In other words, it could be that the overcoming of the dualism which Storey characterizes as that of Spirit and Flesh will in fact require an overcoming of other dualisms, most fundamentally of all that of subject and object. I will put this question aside for the moment and return to it later.

The key concepts which differentiate Merleau-Ponty from Husserl are those of intercorporeity and skill. Whilst Husserl pre-figures Merleau-Ponty in terms of his concern with lived, bodily experience, his account of embodiment, certainly in the *Cartesian Meditations*, focuses on the Other's governing of one's own body as similar to my governing by own body rather than the body as a limitation on freedom which must constantly adapt to obstacles to performing a particular desired action as in Merleau-Ponty's account of skill.[13] Husserl's account of spatial subjectivity in Husserl 1973 in particular is full and detailed, but it demonstrates an important limitation which is crucial for the account of intersubjectivity and work, namely the inability to fully "objectivate", as Peter Reynaert puts it, my body as a whole (Reynaert 2001, e.g., p. 211). In order to experience my body as an object, I would have to step outside that body and assume different perspectives from the one I occupy.[14] This has important consequences for the self at work and for access to experience of the Other, which in Husserl's account of embodiment and Paarung seems rather theoretical in terms of comparing data.[15] Not only is it impossible for Husserl to develop an account of something like Merleau-Ponty's skill, he also cannot develop even a basic account of something like the later philosopher's concept of crisscrossing described below, as, for Husserl, we can objectivate parts of our bodies but not our bodies as a whole. Therefore, the methodological explanation breaks down.

Merleau-Ponty's concept of crisscrossing, where we experience embodied others and ourselves as both objects and subjects by shifting focus between our left hand touching our right hand and our right hand being touched by our left hand, is a prior stage of embodied intersubjectivity before that of full

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[13] See e.g., Husserl 1950, p. 128.
[14] Cf. Husserl 1973, p. 413.
[15] Cf. Husserl 1950, p. 147.

intercorporeity.[16] As mentioned, it is always going to be a further question *why* this should be the case. What is special about the other person's right hand that I should be able to apprehend it in a similar way to my own hand? Why don't I encounter it in the same way as a door handle or a hockey stick? If it is simply a matter of physical similarity, then intersubjectivity on many definitions has not been achieved at all, and certainly I am thinking about and empathizing with the Other very much on the level of the theory-theorist, basing my conclusions on a theory of mind and the ascription on the basis of physical similarity to the Other of propositional knowledge about her cognitive faculties. For a number of reasons mentioned above, this is deficient in terms of empathy, if not also in terms of intersubjectivity, and therefore deficient on both the phenomenological and the ontological levels.

Merleau-Ponty's concept of intercorporeity provides us with an account of intersubjective embodiment that attempts to explain without the use of theories of mind or propositional knowledge why it is that, as succintly puts it, «the flesh of another person is not an absolute mystery» (Brubaker 2000, p. 96). Merleau-Ponty's account of incorporeity is one which has experience, and not propositional knowledge, at its heart. He gives the example of the left and right hands as compared with the hand of another, and poses the following question: why «when touching the hand of another, would I not touch in it the same power to espouse the things that I have touched in my own?» (Merleau-Ponty 1964, p. 141). Merleau-Ponty links this to color perception or apprehension. When I think of my own experience of the color green, I recognise that this is somehow a private experience not transparent to the Other. At the same time, however, I recognise it on reflection as a pre-cognitive apprehension and not a judgement in the Kantian sense. As Brubaker puts it,

> by witnessing the sensuous flesh constitutive of our own *idios cosmos,* each of us may posit, by analogy, "another presumptive domain of the visible and the tangible" that cannot be expressed in the languages of physical bodies and intentional consciousness. (Brubaker, 2000, p. 96)

We come to this conclusion, or, to put it more accurately, we experience the Other in this way, because of the way we experience our own body as a perceiving body and because we can ascribe to another experience we recognise as being private.

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[16] See e.g., Merleau-Ponty 1964, p. 135.

If we accept Merleau-Ponty's account of intercorporeity, what kind of consequences does this have for the intersubjective experience of work? Does it demonstrate that intersubjectivity and empathy will somehow work better in physical group work than in non-physical group work? One thing to notice in particular about Merleau-Ponty's account of intersubjective embodiedness is that it does not primarily involve goal-directed action, but rather simple encounters with the physical Other. At the same time, however, if we also take into account Merleau-Ponty's comment that a crucial part of embodied is the experience of being frustrated in some way by one's physical environment purely in the sense that one is not, *pace* Sartre, radically free to realise one's intentions, we can begin to see how intercorporeity might be transferred to the work realm. What is crucial for incorporeity is some kind of realm, a cosmos in which one acts. A work environment is a specific example of such a cosmos. I witness that my physical experience of the workplace is private and opaque in some important way for the Other, but that they have a similar cosmos which they experience in some broadly similar way. Their physicality is not a complete mystery for me. How can I make it even less of a mystery? Presumably by physically standing in their cosmos and sharing physical experiences. Two workers performing similar physical tasks side-by-side will get as close as anyone can to each other's physical experience, but the importance of shared goals, crucial for Husserl, pales into insignificance on the Merleau-Pontian account. Indeed, the experience of incorporeity would be equally strong in the case of two exact competitors, for example, two runners competing would have a stronger bond of this nature than competitors in a relay team. This is not necessarily a deficiency in Merleau-Ponty's account – indeed, a strong moral dimension has been observed in his account which I shall discuss later in this paper. In many ways, it is Merleau-Ponty's account which might be seen as the one that would most easily account for the phenomenon of solidarity.

It is a further question, of course, whether this incorporeity points towards or even requires some kind of general ontological framework which enables us to extrapolate from our experience of our own physicality to that of others, and I will return once more to this question later in the paper. I will note here that the notion of intercorporeity seems to strongly support the simulation theory of empathy as expounded by Heal *et al.* whilst seeing only a minor role for goals and intentions. It is to the notion of shared intentions that I will now turn.

4. SHARED INTENTIONS

One good candidate for a view which opposes that of Merleau-Ponty in almost every respect is John Searle in his account of shared or collective intentionality. Searle's central claim relevant to this paper in his *The Construction of Social Reality* is that collective intentionality is not at all dependent on even the existence of a world outside the mind.[17] His argument goes broadly like this: collective intentions exist only in individual brains, but it is nevertheless possible for individuals to have a so-called we-intention because of a kind of "shared Background", capitalized because it is being used in a technical sense to mean conditions necessary for certain cognitive activities and, crucially, language. Whilst Searle's account might seem radically individualistic, in fact he argues that the having of a Background sense of relevantly similar others is, in fact, inborn and something we have in common with biologically similar species (Searle 1995, p. 414). This provides an interesting counterpart to the idea of some form of ontological unity, namely a kind of biological unity, or at the very least some kind of biologically-determined access to the Other at least in terms of their cognitive faculties. Whilst this would be likely to fall short in terms of empathy in as far as empathy involves some kind of shared emotion, it seems to be a good candidate for practical intersubjectivity. Certainly, to put it in Heideggerian or Sartrean terms, it is a form of pre-reflexive consciousness – there can be no reflection when recognizing the kind of cognitive capacities the Other has based on some biological consciousness. When making this particular point in a paper about the intersubjectivity of meaning, Carlos Cornejo makes the following point:

In natural circumstances I am not in front of others as they were objects being-present-at-hand. Instead, we usually are actively engaged with them in common activities, so that their behaviors seem us pristine and fullfledged of meaning. Within the minimal communicative situation, the other is from the start available, not present-at-hand (Cornejo 2008, p. 175).

Whilst it is not the fact that I am engaged with the Other(s) in some common activity that allows me to draw conclusions about their Background, the intersubjectivity of meaning is something that is meaningless without common activity. The most obvious illustration of this point is Searle's own example f money – money is only money (that is, only has monetary value)

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[17] See e.g., Searle 1995.

because of some tacit agreement that we will all accord it this meaning and accept it as such. So, whilst it is possible to have a we-intention as an individual even as a brain in a vat if that individual posits the existence of others who hold this intention, it is only when genuinely engaged in common activities that intersubjective meanings can actually come into existence. Meijers and others enforce this point with the objection that Searle does not take into account the extent to which collective intentions are rule-governed (Meijers 2003). Joint action is essentially normative. If we examine again Searle's own example of the football team who have some joint intention or joint goal, the forming of the intention to play football and perhaps beat the other team involves the forming and accepting of some kinds of rights and obligations which all of the players, at least in broad terms, understand. It is not in the least bit meaningful to speak of these norms if the person who has formed the we-intention is a brain in a vat. Whilst the kind of we-intention Searle describes might be sufficient for collective intentionality in the narrow sense in which he describes it, it is clearly not sufficient for intersubjectivity.

4.1. FOOTBALLERS AND CHESS PLAYERS – WORK, EMBODIMENT AND SHARED INTENTIONS

Is the physical dimension of the football game crucial to the players' experience of the normative nature of collective action, or could the essential facts of the situation be transferred to a non-physical sphere such as that of a quiz team? In all other respects, the situations are similar – the members of the quiz team and the football team are focused on a common goal, bound by established and accepted rules, and with each individual engaged in more or less the same activity, with some subtle variations in role (the difference between the attacker and the defender, and between the sports specialist and the history specialist). One essential difference between the two scenarios is that Merleau-Ponty's point about the external barriers placed on any physical activity applies only to the football and not the quiz scenario. There remains a physical element to the quiz example that could fall under the heading of Merleau-Ponty's concept of intercorporeity, which is facial expression and gesture. The quiz team whose members are familiar with each other's physicality will come to recognise the subtleties of expression and gesture to signal someone's confidence in a given action or decision, which, depending on the set-up of the particular quiz, could be seen as a skill to gain an advantage which is honed over time until the maximum grip is reached and the symbiosis of their actions reaches perfection.

The situation with the footballers is almost exactly the same. The physicality involved in the quiz players' action is not incidental to the intersubjective action.

At this point, it is worthwhile to ask whether perhaps the terms "intention" and "goal" need to be carefully distinguished, and refer back once more to the notion of basic and higher purposiveness. There is clearly a distinction in everyday speech, as an intention is generally a firm plan to perform a particular action – e.g., I intend to pick up my umbrella before I leave the house in order to serve my *goal* of remaining dry should it rain. Sometimes we use the term "intend" to refer to goals that are very near or achievable. The sentence "I intend to be the President of the United States" sounds somewhat odd unless uttered by someone about to take the oath of office in the next few weeks, or on the brink of being elected. The way Searle uses the term "intention", for example in his discussion of the group of friends rushing to get out of the rain, focuses on simple and straightforward activities that lead to a short-term goal and do not necessarily involve the suppression of one's natural or first-order desires. Indeed, action from this level of basic purposiveness might well be motivated solely by such natural desires, as in Searle's example (Searle 1990). Can we say, then, that sharing collective goals of basic purposiveness does not demonstrate full intersubjectivity and empathy?

Bratman, in Bratman 1993 and elsewhere, provides us with a suggestion using the vocabulary of subplans which have to mesh in particular ways. He uses the vocabulary of "shared" rather than "collective" intentions, which I have regarded as synonyms thus far in this analysis but can clearly be differentiated in an account of meshing subplans. "Shared" seems more appropriate for Bratman's analysis because the intentions or goals produced by meshing subplans results in an analysis which posits common content that directly concerns the social world. According to Bratman, we can share an intention that we wash the dishes if and only if:

1. (a) I intend that we wash the dishes and (b) you intend that we wash the dishes

2. I intend that we wash the dishes in accordance with and because of 1a and 1b, and meshing subplans of 1a and 1b; you intend the same.

3.   1 and 2 are common knowledge.[18]

On my description of basic and higher purposes, washing the dishes would count as a basic purpose subordinate to the higher purpose of, for example, maintaining a pleasant and hygienic living environment. On Bratman's account, subplans in 1a and 1b could be "washing the dishes with Brand A washing-up liquid" and "washing the dishes with Brand B washing-up liquid". Could subplans A and B also be basic purposes serving a higher purpose in the terms described above? What difference would it then make if the higher purpose was not shared? For example if we imagine the context of a newdesk of a newspaper, the higher purposes could be, for one person, to improve sales figures for the week, and, for another, to impress a particular government minister in order to gain an advisory position. The subplans on the level of basic goals could mesh but be serving different higher purposes – the subplans could both mesh in such a way that the basic goal is to write and publish a scandalous story on a political rival to the minister in the second worker's subplan. Depending on all kinds of facts about the particular situation, the shared intention could persist if there were complete common knowledge about everyone's higher purposes. Indeed, it would be perfectly possible for there to be a higher purpose on the part of the newspaper's proprietor that does not overlap, or is even antagonistic towards, the higher purposes of the workers (for example, her intention could be to discredit the government in general for some political purpose). Whilst subplans as they are described by Bratman provide an empirically convincing description on the micro-level, and could also fit in well with a Merleau-Pontian account of skill where close association allows subplans to be carefully balanced in order to achieve mutual satisfaction, they cannot explain why it should be necessary that higher goals and purposes should be shared on the macro-level. In itself this is not an objection to an account that makes use of the concept of subplans, but it directly contradicts what might be seen as Husserl's very promising account of mutual striving which focuses more obviously on complex, higher, long-term shared goals.

[18] See Bratman 1993, p. 106; Bacharach and Tollefsen 2008, p. 32.

CONCLUSION – THE WIDER ONTOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In this paper, I have attempted to demonstrate that the way in which joint commitments and goals fit into the general framework of our desires and our Background/idios cosmos is crucial for intersubjective action, and that, for this reason, the phenomenological experience of work is a paradigmatic example of effective intersubjectivity and human interaction. I have suggested, based on Husserl's account of communal striving, that work that is seen by its group workers to have a higher purpose involving the subordination of basic purposes to enable more effective intersubjectivity because of the skills that are developed as a result of such work, and that are used in such work. Perhaps somewhat counter-intuitively, my enquiries suggest that there is no special bonus for intersubjectivity when group workers agree on the higher purpose of their work, that is, what that higher purpose is. In the same vein, it makes no difference to intersubjectivity in working environments whether or not a group of workers is somehow deceived or mistaken about the higher purpose of their work. I have also observed that accounts of intersubjectivity that are relevant to the experience of work strongly tend to support a simulationist account of empathy, where the empathiser experiences the emotions of the Other rather than ascribing them to her on the basis of a theory of mind. I suggest, following Hegel and using an argument from Merleau-Ponty, that individual physical work (or, more specifically, goal-directed activity) can improve one's capacity for intersubjectivity by encouraging the worker to think of themselves as a subject and an object simultaneously, since physical activity brings with it the consciousness of the limits of one's freedom.

As for the comparison between physical and non-physical work, I have examined Merleau-Ponty's account of skill and suggested that it could apply equally to non-physical activities. I suggested also that his account of intercorporeity could function as a paradigm of the intersubjectivity of action, since this phenomenon is most acutely observed when two or more people are engaged in similar physical work together, although not necessarily for the same basic or higher purpose (as in the example of the footballers). I suggest that physical work is therefore more likely than non-physical work to foster solidarity, and that there is also an element in solidarity which concerns hardships experienced by oneself and the Other, making physical work more relevant to the phenomenon than non-physical work. At the same time, since all work by my definition involves the suppression of natural desires, hardship

on some level is always involved in work, despite the "rewards" in terms of higher purpose. In this sense, feelings of solidarity are likely to arise from any type of work.

In general, I found the difference between physical and non-physical group work in terms of fostering intersubjectivity and empathetic understanding to be one of degree rather than form, and maintain that the whole range of intersubjective relationships and empathetic reactions that arise from group work are equally possible in non-physical group work. At the same time, such relationships and reactions are particularly likely to develop in physical group work – indeed, there might also be a biological dimension in terms of mirror neurons, endorphins and lactic acid in the muscles. However, I do not believe that this biological dimension is necessary for the development of intersubjectivity and empathy.

One extremely important question that remains is that of whether these instances of intersubjectivity and empathy must have an ontological basis. I can make only the briefest remarks about what this paper adds to this particular debate here. What I mean by a "monistic ontology" is described in a concise manner by Rolf-Peter Horstmann in a 2006 paper:

> The entirety of actuality must [if we are to accept a monistic ontology] be seen as a single all-comprehending, self-developing rational entity, which achieves knowledge of itself in a spatio-temporal process of realizing its distinctive conceptual determinations. (Horstmann 2006, p. 109)

I can make only the briefest of comments on this topic here, namely that all of the aspects of promising theories of intersubjectivity and empathy as they apply to the world of work have in common a concern with a balance of experience between objectivity and subjectivity. This is certainly not enough in itself for an argument for a monistic ontology, but is perhaps the starting-point of an enquiry into the relationship between the phenomenology of intersubjectivity and the wider ontological framework.

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