

Article/Essay Title: *Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality*

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Readability: Moderate/Difficult

Thesis:

“This paper...traces in a provisional way some of the basic modalities of feminine body comportment, manner of moving, and relation in space. It brings intelligibility and significance to certain observable and rather ordinary ways in which women in our society typically comport themselves and move differently from the ways that men do.”

Key Definitions:

immanence the experience of the body as (to some extent) limited, an object being acted upon by the world; the experience of the self as passive and static

transcendence the experience of the world as something to act on, move, use, manipulate and change according to our will; the experience of the self as active, creative, productive

ambiguous transcendence a transcendence which is at the same time laden with immanence

inhibited intentionality an intentional stance that simultaneously reaches toward a projected end with an "I can" and withholds its full bodily commitment to that end in a self-imposed "I cannot."

discontinuous unity a lack of unity both in the self and between the self and its surroundings

Brief Summary:

Young identifies some general, observable differences in the bodily comportment of men and women. While she recognizes a real “feminine” style of bodily comportment (i.e. that there are “real differences in the behavior and experiences of men and women”), she rejects the notion of a “mysterious feminine essence”:

Every human existence is defined by its situation; the particular existence of the female person is no less defined by the historical, cultural, social, and economic limits of her situation. We reduce women's condition simply to unintelligibility if we "explain" it by appeal to some natural and ahistorical feminine essence.

Her concern here is to:

1. Identify and specify a feminine modality of bodily experience and comportment
2. Analyze this phenomena using de Beauvoir's framework of tension between immanence and transcendence

Note: Young is not making universal claims about how all men and women experience and act in the world, but what is typical of women in a tightly defined historical and cultural situation.

SECTION I – The Raw Phenomena

Characterization of 'Typical' Feminine Comportment (The Highlights)

- failure to make full use of the body's spatial and lateral potentialities
- proportionally less open with their bodies in gait and stride
- sit with legs relatively close together and arms across bodies (tend to keep hands and arms touching or shielding bodies)
- do not perceive themselves as capable of lifting and carrying heavy things, pushing and shoving with significant force, pulling, squeezing, grasping, or twisting with force
- tend not to put their whole bodies into engagement in a physical task with the same ease and naturalness as men
- tend to concentrate effort on those parts of the body most immediately connected to the task; the whole body is not put into fluid and directed motion
- tend not to focus intentions and goals (“Rather than aiming at a certain place where we wish to hit a ball, for example, we tend to hit it in a ‘general’ direction.”)
- approaches physical engagement with timidity, uncertainty, and hesitancy; lacks trust in their bodies and confidence in their capacity to do what must be done
- experiences the body as a fragile encumbrance, rather than the media for the enactment of aims

“All the above factors operate to produce in many women a greater or lesser feeling of incapacity, frustration, and self-consciousness. We have more of a tendency than men to greatly underestimate our bodily capacity...We decide beforehand usually mistakenly that the task is beyond us, and thus give it less than our full effort. At such a half-hearted level, of course, we cannot perform the tasks, become frustrated, and fulfill our own prophecy.”

SECTION II – An Analysis of the Phenomena (Feminine Bodily Comportment and Motility)

The three contradictory modalities of feminine bodily are rooted in the fact that the body is both subject and object for itself *at the same time and in reference to the same act.*

Ambiguous Transcendence: a transcendence which is at the same time laden with immanence

All bodily transcendence 'begins' in immanence, "because the body as natural and material is immanence". However, the "transcendence of the lived body...moves out from the body in its immanence in an open and unbroken directedness upon the world in action...the continuous calling forth of capacities, which are applied to the world." Feminine bodily existence does not just begin in immanence, it is continuously 'overlaid' with immanence. Ambiguous transcendence is the experience of the body as both immanent and transcendent *at the same time*.

Ambiguous Transcendence is observed in:

- the concentration of motion in one part of the body

"Only a part of the body, that is, moves out toward a task while the rest remains rooted in immanence."

- lack of trust in the capacity of the body

A woman "often lives her body as a burden, which must be dragged and prodded along, and at the same time protected."

Inhibited Intentionality simultaneously reaches toward a projected end with an "I can" and withholds its full bodily commitment to that end in a self-imposed "I cannot."

"...uninhibited intentionality projects the aim to be accomplished and connects the body's motion toward that end in an unbroken directedness which organizes and unifies the body's activity. Feminine motion often severs this mutually conditioning relation between aim and enactment."

Inhibited Intentionality is observed in:

- the tendency to posit a relatively easy task as beyond their capacities
- an underestimation of real capacity
- contradictory and awkward movement

"Their bodies project an aim to be enacted, but at the same time stiffen against the performance of the task."

- a marked hesitancy in action

"To the extent that feminine bodily existence is an inhibited intentionality, however, the same set of possibilities which appears correlative to its intentions also appears as a system of frustrations correlative to its hesitancies....By repressing or withholding its own motile energy, feminine bodily existence frequently projects an 'I can' and an 'I cannot' with respect to the very same end."

Discontinuous Unity

In projecting an aim, the body brings unity to itself and also unites itself with its surroundings. The body becomes organized around a goal and the “body's movement and orientation organizes the surrounding space as a continuous extension of its own being.” Feminine bodily comportment lacks both types of unity.

Discontinuous Unity is observed in:

- the tendency to locate motion in a part of the body only, creating disunity with that part and the rest of the body
- undirected and wasted motion

Note: The connection to inhibited intentionality. “The character of the inhibited intentionality whereby feminine motion severs the connection between aim and enactment, between possibility in the world and capacity in the body, itself produces this discontinuous unity.”

SECTION III – An Analysis of the Phenomena (Feminine Space)

Space as Enclosed/Confining is the experience of an “existential enclosure” between the self and the surrounding space; “the space which belongs to her and is available to her grasp and manipulation is constricted, and the space beyond is not available to her movement.”

Space as Enclosed/Confining is observed in:

- physically available space is much greater than the space used and inhabited

Double Spatiality is a severed continuity between the ‘here’ and the ‘yonder’. The ‘here’ is distinct from the space of the ‘yonder’, which is not available to one’s bodily possibilities.

Double Spatiality is observed in:

- the tentativeness and uncertainty which characterizes the inhibited intentionality

The Body as ‘Positioned’ is the experience of the body not as the subject that constitutes space, nor as passively constituted, but as “both spatially constituted and a constituting spatial subject”.

Insofar as the feminine body is experienced as transcendent and intentional actor, it lives as constituting.

Insofar as the feminine body is experienced as immanent and inhibited, it is experienced as constituted.

The Body as Positioned is observed in:

- the tendency of the feminine body to remain partly immobile in the performance of a task which requires the movement of the whole body (of feminine bodily existence is rooted in place)

- the reaction to motion (even their own motion) as if the body is the object of the motion
- the tendency for women to wait for an object to come within the immediate bodily field rather than move out toward it

“In its immanence and inhibition, feminine spatial existence is positioned by a system of coordinates which does not have its origin in her own intentional capacities.”

IV - Diagnosis

The source of feminine bodily comportment, motility, and spatiality have their source “in neither anatomy nor physiology, and certainly not in a mysterious feminine ‘essence.’ Rather, they have their source in the particular situation of women as conditioned by their sexist oppression in contemporary society.”

Privative

Withholding Opportunity

- to use their full bodily capacities in free and open engagement with the world
- to develop specific bodily skills
- to ‘tinker’, thus developing spatial skill
- to perform tasks demanding physical effort and strength

Positive

Enforcing

- the habits of feminine bodily comportment and movement
- walking like a girl, tilting the head like a girl, standing and sitting like a girl, gesturing like a girl....
- the conception of bodily fragility

Existential Root: Objectification in sexist patriarchal society forces the woman to live her body as object as well as subject

The Threat of the Gaze

“An essential part of the situation of being a woman is that of living the ever present possibility that one will be gazed upon as a mere body, as shape and flesh that presents itself as the potential object of another subject’s intentions and manipulations, rather than as a living manifestation of action and intention...the woman herself often actively takes up her body as a mere thing. She gazes at it in the mirror, worries about how it looks to others, prunes it, shapes it, molds and decorates it.”

Threat of Invasion

“The most extreme form of such spatial and bodily invasion is the threat of rape. But we are daily subject to the possibility of bodily invasion in many far

more subtle ways as well. It is acceptable, for example, for women to be touched in ways and under circumstances that it is not acceptable for men to be touched, and by persons (i.e. men) whom it is not acceptable for them to touch. I would suggest that the enclosed space which has been described as a modality of feminine spatiality is in part a defense against such invasion. Women tend to project an existential barrier enclosed around them and discontinuous with the 'over there' in order to keep the other at a distance. The woman lives her space as confined and enclosed around her at least in part as projecting some small area in which she can exist as a free subject."

Keep in Mind:

Young does not question (here):

gender is fundamentally binary

gender identity is static (you've got the same one from birth to death)

everyone feels more or less at home in their gender identity

Young takes the masculine bodily experience as the neutral case

(Why not ask about the specifically masculine ways of having a body and its origins?)

These are separable components that can be complicated: gender identity, gender expression, biological sex, sexual attraction, romantic attraction

Possible Applications:

- Metaphysics
 - Personal Identity
 - Mind/Body Dualism
- Philosophy of Mind
 - Embodied cognition
 - Male vs. female brains (Science Literacy)
- Philosophy of Language
 - Speech acts: catcalling
- Phenomenology
 - Corporeal Body vs. Lived Body
 - Embodied Perception

Complementary Texts/Resources:

- Videos:
 - #Like a girl (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XjJQBjWYDTs>)
 - Manspreading (many YouTube videos)
- Internet Resources:
 - Male Gaze Resource (<http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/powerpose/>)

- Books/Articles:
 - Hrdy's *Mothers & Others*
 - Bartky's "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power"

Possible Class Activities:

- Discussion:
 - How do the concepts in II connect with the concepts in III?
 - Comfort and Gender Norms
 - Can you wear makeup just for you?
 - Where do the desires come from?
 - Discussion of adapted preferences
- "Real-Life" Applications:
 - Gender-swapped photos (e.g. http://cdn2-b.examiner.com/sites/default/files/styles/image_content_width/has/h/4f/e2/4fe2ce2d4ed7341b499eef394c4358ed.jpg?itok=9hWdW2-4)
 - Power pose activities
 - Explain how posture can influence testosterone levels in body
 - Translate phenomenological insight into policy proposals
 - What is a female instrument/snack/etc.?

What traditional texts might this text replace?

- Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*