



Living and Learning as Responsive Authoring: Reflections on the Feminist Critiques of Merleau-Ponty's Anonymous Body

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Abstract

Merleau-Ponty's idea of lived body has played a significant role in understanding self-construction and has raised issues about the relationships between the private sense and the public world. Merleau-Ponty argues that the lived body and the world are constructed reciprocally. This notion is acknowledged to be a rich source for feminist thought. Yet there is as much criticism as support of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy from feminists such as Grosz (1994, 1995), Sullivan (1997, 2000, 2001, 2002) and Young (1989). Shannon Sullivan vigorously criticises Merleau-Ponty's lived body as an anonymous body which erases particularities and results in domination. This paper defends Merleau-Ponty's notion by clarifying the meaning of anonymity in terms of the understanding of Merleau-Ponty's lived body as an "author", and as such as incorporating the capacity to resist anonymity, and sustain particularity and difference, through an ongoing process of authoring his/her own lived experience. Ken Plummer's notion of sexual story-telling is used to elaborate the elucidation. In conclusion, the educational implications of resisting anonymity are considered and envisaged in terms of promoting tolerance of difference and assertion of particularity by encouraging and developing the capacity to construct the self through an ongoing process of both responsive and responsible self-authoring.

Introduction

Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system. (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2003, p. 235)

Merleau-Ponty's philosophy has been acknowledged to be helpful for the construction of a self who is embodied and contextualised with concreteness. Many feminist theories are inspired by the Merleau-Pontian notion of lived body. While acknowledging Merleau-Ponty's contribution to feminism, Shannon Sullivan nevertheless, in her "Domination and

Dialogue in Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception" (1997) and *Living Across and Through Skins* (2001), criticises Merleau-Ponty's lived body as an anonymous body, pointing to the notion as a falsely universalising individual. In contrast, Stoller (2000) and Weiss (2002) defend Merleau-Ponty's idea of anonymity as entailing positive meaning for the construction of a unique individuality and an intersubjective society. In my view, Merleau-Ponty's idea of lived body can be seen as a process of self-authoring, as such implying potential for countering anonymity. In this sense, Weiss correctly demonstrates that Sullivan's criticism attacks the wrong target from an incorrect approach. Merleau-Ponty's idea of body implies richer meanings for constructing intersubjectivity between different

bodies than Sullivan assumes. In support of the argument for Merleau-Ponty's view of body as an author, Ken Plummer's (1995) notions of sexual story-telling and intimate citizenship will furthermore be used to show how the body counters social anonymity through authoring itself as a unique being.

Encountering Merleau-Ponty's "Body"

In his *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945/2003), Merleau-Ponty argues that body is the primordial existence of natural life. How does a body relate itself to other bodies, other people and this human world? How do bodies construct culture, civilisation, society and history? How is intersubjectivity and cultural life possible? In the section titled "Other Selves and the Human World", Merleau-Ponty attempts to formulate an answer to these questions. In brief, body is fundamental for communication and understanding others.

According to Merleau-Ponty (1945/2003), the living process of a body is not only a process of interacting with the world and others, but also a process of establishing one's own selfhood. This process of construction of selfhood through various bodily movements could be understood as a process of increasing and constructing more and richer self-knowledge, and as such can thus be understood as a development from an anonymous state to a personal one. As Merleau-Ponty (1945/2003) states, "[I]n pre-natal existence, nothing was perceived, and therefore there is nothing to recall. There was nothing but the raw material and adumbration of a natural self and a natural time. This anonymous life is merely the extreme form of that temporal dispersal ..." (p. 404). Once one is born, the activities of one's growth, development, perceiving and learning take place in this world and during interaction with this world – or, in Merleau-Ponty's terms, at least two, albeit it not completely separated, worlds: the natural and cultural worlds.

In Merleau-Ponty's view, there are different people and objects in this world which are destined to be interacted with and thereby have influence on a body. The interaction with the world and with others is the ground for developing intersubjectivity. As Merleau-Ponty (1945/2003) states, "Not only do I have a physical world, not only do I live in the midst of earth, air, water, [but] I have around me roads, plantations, villages, streets, churches, implements, a bell, spoon, a pipe. Each of these objects is moulded to the human action which it serves. Each one spreads round it an atmosphere of humanity ..." (p. 438). Consequently, everyone constructs his/her own lived experience through multifarious interactions with the objects

surrounding him/her, whether they be natural, artificial or cultural objects. These objects are loaded and overlaid with meanings which have been stipulated – created by us. Through this process, each of us grows in and has experiences within an environment which brings cultural meanings to consciousness. Each of us thereby develops into a body incorporating contextual understanding and meaning.

Based on the above, Merleau-Ponty's concept of "body" turns into a historical and social being, from a "pre-personal" body to a "personal" one. On this point, some feminists (Grosz, 1994, 1995; Sullivan, 1997, 2000, 2001, 2002; Young, 1989) criticise Merleau-Ponty's concept of body as neutral, foundational, universal and dominant. I may not entirely agree with these feminist accusations; yet the criticisms reveal the significance of the social, historical and ethical dimensions of body. Which leads to the ultimate question this paper intends to confront: How can an education for tolerance of differences be developed on the basis of the idea of lived body? A more detailed discussion of this debate in the following section may clarify the social meaning of body and help us to explore the educational implications.

Revisiting the Feminist Debate on Merleau-Ponty's Body

One of the most ferocious criticisms of Merleau-Ponty's idea of lived body may be that of Shannon Sullivan, despite her acknowledgement of Merleau-Ponty's contribution to feminism. The thrust of her critique is that Merleau-Ponty's idea of the lived body is an anonymous, impersonal and solipsistic body. According to Sullivan, this anonymity results in the ignoring of particularities and differences in various aspects, such as gender, class and nation. Moreover, there is no hope of amendment due to the inability of communication for a solipsistic body. Therefore, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy could result in various forms of domination. In my view, Sullivan's critiques are dubious, since she ignores one very important feature of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, namely its view of the living body as a dialectical, dynamic and becoming process. Let us thus look at the details of Sullivan's critiques. Two main points can be found: one is related to the understanding of anonymity and the other to communication. These two points are interrelated.

Firstly, according to Sullivan, the Merleau-Pontian body is an anonymous, impotent, unable and solipsistic subject. Sullivan (1997) points out that "my existence is impersonal because the 'other's

living body has the same structure as mine' (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/1962, p. 353 [1945/2003, p. 412]). I am like you and you are like me on some fundamental level. As the word 'anonymous' indicates, my bodily identity is unknown in that it is not uniquely mine; in some sense it is that of anyone and thus of everyone." Accordingly, "the trace of anonymous existence that appears in both of our bodies referred to by Merleau-Ponty is found in their similarity ..." (p. 5). Based on the above, Sullivan's accusation is that "Merleau-Ponty's anonymous body imposes a commonality upon different bodies and, in doing so, impedes the very dialogue between embodied subjects that his account seeks to make possible" (Sullivan, 1997, p. 8). The particularities which have been effaced include culture, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, race, upbringing, and positions of authority that the body is in. Sullivan (2001) argues that these differences are the hallmarks for locating the marginalised circles. If the anonymous body is taken as primordial existence, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, an assumption is implied of "pre-gender or pre-upbringing similarity of the meaning of bodily behaviour" (Sullivan, 1997, p. 6). The differences and particularities will thus be ignored and even ruled out of the sphere of public life. The Merleau-Pontian view thus leads to a dominant view of society.

With regard to this aspect, various authors, including Weiss (2002) and Stoller (2000), point out that Sullivan misunderstands the ideas of anonymity and anonymous body in Merleau-Ponty's thought. According to Weiss (2002, p. 194), Sullivan confuses the concept of anonymous body with that of universal or trans-historical body. Stoller (2000, p. 176) is similarly of the opinion that Sullivan "confuses anonymity with neutrality". Sullivan's (2002) response to Stoller and Weiss is to distinguish between anonymity and generality, or bad and good anonymity. Generality, from Sullivan's perspective, will not erase particularities of bodies. There are both general and particular aspects of persons.

While the ambiguity of Merleau-Ponty's reference to anonymous body or pre-personal body is acknowledged, this does not mean that Merleau-Ponty's anonymous body is equivalent to Sullivan's (bad) anonymity. If this idea is considered against the background of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, we may find that the notion of anonymity which Sullivan criticises is not the one inferred by Merleau-Ponty.

The idea of anonymity can be understood in at least two ways. One is subjective or ontological anonymity, which denotes a pre-reflective consciousness as underpinning one's own lived experience. The other is objective or social anonymity, which denotes an

impersonal state of existence immersed in collectivity. The former type is what Merleau-Ponty emphasises in his *Phenomenology of Perception*. It is anonymity in respect of a private self. For example, Merleau-Ponty writes that,

At the very moment when I live in the world, when I am given over to my plans, my occupations, my friends, my memories, I can close my ears, lose my self in some pleasure or pain, and shut myself up in the anonymous life which subtends my personal one. (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2003, p. 191)

This anonymous body denotes the primordial and embryonic aspect of the lived body. This body, like an embryo, keeps developing during the process of interaction with other bodies and society. During this process, one's own selfhood or personhood is gradually constructed. Thus it can be understood as anonymous or pre-personal. This body in this respect is naming itself through self-construction, and this process never ends. Since a fixed identity can never be completely achieved, this body is in a dialectic of anonymising and naming. The commonality here denotes only the process and not the end. Every body has the potential and ability to become a unique individual through the process of interaction with the world and other bodies. This does not imply that the development of the body will be limited and regulated by a particular substantial condition.

The latter type of anonymity is understood in respect of public self. It can be understood in terms of the sociological perspective of Schütz and Natanson (Weiss, 2002). According to Schütz (1962) and Natanson (1973), most social interactions are anonymous. For example, "the postal clerk", "the poker player" and "the miser" are used to describe people encountered in everyday life. These roles – or, in the terms of Schütz (1962) and Natanson (1973), social types – are certain general bodies, impersonal and anonymous. In this view, individuals are thus understood as certain social types. As Natanson (1973, pp. 16-17) explains, "Typification is the blood of my daily life. Alfred Schütz writes: 'The factual world of our experience ... is experienced from the outset as a typical one ... what has been experienced in the actual perception of one object is apperceptively transferred to any similar object, perceived merely as to its type.' The social dimension of daily existence – its 'we' character – amounts to a sharing of typified constructs and interpretations." The concept of anonymity in Schütz and Natanson's philosophy thus describes the anonymous state of individuals known in the eyes of sociologists by their social roles rather than their personal or private characteristics.

Sullivan misunderstands Merleau-Ponty's anonymous body in the terms of Schütz and Natanson. Although Sullivan defends herself by distinguishing generality and anonymity, the discussion still remains on the level of society and collectivity rather than on the ontological level. For example, Sullivan argues that it is important to generalise about women and breast cancer as distinct from men's health. It could be beneficial to separate men from women with respect to health; however, what is important is that the benefits cannot be traded for the fact that men and women are to some extent anonymised. Although Sullivan's further explanation that "the problem with the concept of anonymity is that it takes generality to such a high level of abstraction that it tends to become perniciously divorced from concrete, lived experience" (2002, p. 206) makes a clear distinction between generality and anonymity, neither concept is Merleau-Pontian. In this sense, it is thus unfair to ask Merleau-Ponty to be responsible for a problem which he does not create.

Secondly, Sullivan (1997, 2000, 2001) criticises Merleau-Ponty's idea of body as impeding communication between subjects because of an implied ethical solipsism. As mentioned earlier, Merleau-Ponty proposes the body as a "common" ground for intersubjective communication:

I experience my own body as the power of adopting certain forms of behaviours and a certain world, and I am given to myself merely as a certain hold upon the world; now, it is precisely my body which perceives the body of another, and discovers in that other body a miraculous prolongation of my own intentions, a familiar way of dealing with the world. Henceforth, as the parts of my body together comprise a system, so my body and the other's are one whole (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2003, p. 412)

In Sullivan's (1997, 2000, 2001, 2002) reading of the above paragraph, the prolongation of one's body and intention of dealing with other intentions and bodies implies an erasure of individual differences and imposition of one's will upon the other. Therefore, the communication between different bodies has been destroyed and the possibility of establishing intersubjectivity seems to be nullified.

My response to the above critique is that Sullivan ignores a crucial feature of Merleau-Ponty's body as a process of dynamic interaction between subject and object. Following on from the above quotation, Merleau-Ponty (1945/2003) writes that "my body and

the other's are one whole, two sides of one and the same phenomenon, and the anonymous existence of which my body is the ever-renewed trace henceforth inhabits both bodies simultaneously" (p. 412). This paragraph reveals the significance of the other as a part of my body. In other words, my body is not a solipsistic ego in this world; it is constituted in the interaction with and incorporation of many other bodies. That is why Merleau-Ponty describes a body as a "dual being" (1945/2003, p. 413). In addition, this incorporation of the other does not imply ruling out differences, as Merleau-Ponty (1945/2003) points out that "our situation cannot be superimposed on each other ... we undertake some project in common, this common project is not one single project, it does not appear in the selfsame light to both of us, we are not both equally enthusiastic about it, or at any rate not in quite the same way ..." (p. 415). It can be seen that the Merleau-Pontian body denotes an individual who is constructed through a process of ongoing interaction with other bodies. The other, in some sense, is an alien external to me, and, in another sense, is an internal part of my life. The living process is open to various forms of differentiation, integration and communication. Sullivan's interpretation of Merleau-Ponty is thus not fully convincing.

Moreover, Sullivan's thought, in my view, implies a tendency towards reification and substantiation of "differences", such as gender, class, culture and nationality. Sullivan asserts that these differences are prior to commonalities: "... a common ground is something for which we must strive, not a starting point from which we depart. Our similarities are something which must be created so that we can co-exist as subjects ..." (Sullivan, 1997, p. 8). In her view, similarities are built by the anonymous body on the ground of "differences". These differences, such as gender, class and culture, are unchangeable foundations of one's life. However, in my opinion, Sullivan's understanding of "difference" and "similarity" (or "commonality") is not on Merleau-Ponty's path. The Sullivanian differences are constructed and posterior to Merleau-Ponty's (not Sullivan's) anonymous body. Sullivan's differences are actually commonalities which are constituted in a group of bodies through collective action, whether intersubjectively or not. They are social categories (or typifications) which are constructed by many. The most important point is that, in Merleau-Ponty's view, these social categories are not absolute, but contingent limitations for every individual, because they can be adjusted, reconstructed and reworked. Following Merleau-Ponty, either differences or similarities are open to change, because both are constructed by bodies in the natural and social worlds.

In contrast, Sullivan's social categories are enclosures imposing on and defining people. There are twofold misunderstandings in Sullivan's assertions in this regard. As she states, "Only if we get rid of Merleau-Ponty's anonymous body, do we create a genuine option of breaking out of the solipsistic subjectivity In attending to bodies as woven with a variety of different, particular strands, dialogue with another becomes possible ..." (Sullivan, 1997, p. 8); moreover, "[W]e start with our differences, that differences need not be seen as equivalent as the end of community, and that similarity is a construction, not a given starting-point" (Sullivan, 1997, p. 17, n. 4). Firstly, Merleau-Ponty's anonymous body is (mis)understood in terms of social roles; secondly, the differences are (mis)conceived as unchangeable and essential social categories. Sullivan thus uses a flawed arrow to aim at a target which does not exist.

Overall, the discussion of feminist criticism helps to raise some important questions related to the Merleau-Pontian anonymous body and education. Even though Sullivan misunderstands Merleau-Ponty to some extent, she illuminates the perplexity of the lived body in society: is this lived body an enabling, constituting and choosing agent or an object of constitutive acts (Butler, 1988)? How does Merleau-Ponty's "body", as an ontologically anonymous body, become socialised? What is the relationship between the individual and the social world? How does a lived, pre-reflected body become a reflected citizen, possessing a certain common membership with others, and at the same time sustain its own particular individuality? How can this body develop into a unique person through sharing and assimilating commonalities? In other words, how does this lived body retain its own uniqueness during the process of social anonymisation? For example, how is a body gendered without being reduced to a mere type in the form of man or woman? How does such education take place? These questions converge on the public/private split. One crucial feature implied in this lived body, which can be helpful to answering this question, would seem to be the ability of authoring. This will be illustrated in the following sections.

Authoring Through Body: Sexual Story-Telling

The feminist challenge to the Merleau-Pontian body reveals the significance of a more detailed exploration of how the lived body constitutes itself and is constituted as an object and subject in society. The Merleau-Pontian body is taken by many as providing a basis for connecting the pre-conscious and conscious life (Butt & Langdridge, 2003). Among many aspects of the lived body, the act of authoring could be taken as crucial for understanding this

interrelationship between self and group, between a single pre-reflected anonymous body and the collective anonymous society.

Take the issue of sex/gender as an example. Merleau-Ponty does not clearly distinguish sex from gender, but yet his idea inspires many feminists and phenomenologists to make this distinction. They argue against "naturalistic explanation of sex and sexuality which assumes that the meaning of women's social existence can be derived from some fact of their physiology" (Butler, 1988, p. 520). The point stressed by Merleau-Ponty is the body's ability, dynamics and activity. As he states: "[A]ll human 'functions' from sexuality to motility and intelligence, are rigorously unified in one synthesis" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2003, p. 197). Sexuality is one kind of bodily motility, one type of function among various living functions. In addition, Merleau-Ponty claims that "Man is a historical idea and not a natural species" (1945/2003, p. 198). Although he does not privilege sexuality as a basis for understanding human beings, this paragraph is inspiring for Butler. Butler (1988) accordingly suggests two points to understand the meanings of human as historical: firstly, body is not completely predetermined by any interior essence; secondly, the understanding of bodily expression in the world must be contextually, historically and specifically understood. Thus Merleau-Ponty provides a starting point for a feminist discussion of gender.

I do not mean that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy takes gender or sex as a particular necessity for a person to find "in" his/her physical body. Rather, gender is a historical category for a person to embody in his/her consciousness and, in turn, also an effect of this embodiment. That is why Merleau-Ponty does not privilege sexuality among various forms of bodily mobility – even though, for feminists, it could be the most crucial element for self-construction. However, that is not the focus of this paper. What interests me more is the issue related to gender and its manifestation from the private realm to the public sphere. It shows the bodily ability of authoring from the private realm to the public realm, with the authoring body thus becoming a fluid being alternating between these two fields. Ken Plummer's (1995) exploration of the documenting of "sexual stories" provides an appropriate illustration of the fluid authoring body.

According to Plummer (1995), sexual stories could be a genre as old as human history. Yet, in modern times, three kinds of sexual stories are given significant attention: rape survival stories, homosexual "coming out" stories, and "recovery" stories. These three kinds of sexual stories are what Plummer calls "modernist

tales” with clear structures: suffering, surviving and surpassing. Here the women’s stories concerning many feminists could be included, such as stories about abortion, pregnancy, maternity. Discussion of the details of these stories is not the aim of this paper. What I aim to explore from the phenomenon of telling sexual stories is, more particularly, the following question: In what sense and in what context does an individual tell his/her own life story to publicise his/her private lived experience? One interesting move implied in these modernist sexual stories may need to be noted: a move from suffering, secrecy and a sense of victimisation to therapy, survival, recovery or politics. A direction in this process can be discerned: it is moving from the private realm towards the public sphere.

Plummer (1995) proposes the idea of “intimate citizenship” to explain how these new stories and new claims around the body and sexuality arise or evolve, defining intimate citizenship as “concerned with all those matters linked to our most intimate desires, pleasures and ways of being in the world” (Plummer, 1995, p 151).

The concept of intimate citizenship denotes a realm comprising private and public spheres. A central site of concern for stories of intimate citizenship, according to Plummer and Merleau-Ponty, is “body”. The Merleau-Pontian body is a pivot for living in the world: “[S]ight, hearing, sexuality, the body, are not only the routes, instruments or manifestation of personal existence” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2003, p. 185). One crucial requirement for the subjects in these stories finally to recover from suffering is the activity of story-telling. In Merleau-Ponty’s terms, these bodies are involved in “a relationship of reciprocal expression” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2003, p. 185). “[O]f all bodily functions speech is the most intimately linked with communal existence, or, as we put it, co-existence” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2003, p. 186). Accordingly, story-telling, or speaking one’s lived experience, can be seen as a part of the bodily construction of self. This self is a private person as well as a public citizen. A body can be either private or public on different occasions, at different times, and in different contexts. Moreover, the boundary between the private and public is continuously shifting and evolving through time. Hence these modernist sexual stories, which could have been concealed in private space and handed down in secrecy in old times, can now be spoken, heard and studied openly in public. Whether it be in secrecy or in public, bodily expression is the key to defining the temporary boundary and constituting him/herself continuously. This process is what I call “authoring” (Hung, 2009), which could be embodied through

various forms of expression such as narrating, writing, drawing and photographing.

What is interesting and paradoxical is that, in order to become an author, this body needs to publicise his/her privacy in some respects: a body needs other bodies in order to be different from the others. Voicing, conversation or dialogue is one means of opening a body’s private realm.

In the experience of dialogue, there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground; my thought and his are interwoven into a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutors are called forth by the state of discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator. We are here a dual being ... we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity. (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2003, p. 413)

Dialogue between two does not necessarily equate with publicising, but it implies the possibility of opening oneself to, and inviting participation of the other in, self-construction. Thus a dialogue is co-constituted by the interlocutors, but neither of them monopolises the authorship. Yet, from the perspective of the interlocutors, they are giving authorship of their own respective lifeworlds; they are giving expression from inside to out. Their works are their own living processes which incorporate traces of their dialogues with others. The numerous and varied dialogues and encounters in one’s life help one to become a unique author, however, no two persons’ “pick and mix” being the same. Moreover, there could be more than two persons participating in some of the dialogues and encounters, and this makes our own private and personal expression and ideas more (but never completely) public. As Plummer reveals, the publication of private experiences helps to achieve intimate citizenship. Welcoming and inviting more private stories may thus help to establish a more tolerant and caring common world within which every body could more freely become a unique author.

All in all, the above discussion reveals that, from Merleau-Ponty’s notion of lived body, it can be inferred that the body is an author and that the living process is an ongoing process of authoring the lifeworld of the body. We may conclude that, in Merleau-Ponty’s view, the lived body as an authoring agent is emerging from embryonic anonymity. This counters the social anonymity which could dissolve individual differences and particularities. The aim of the final section will be to explore how to envisage an education that would enable learners to become

authors of themselves and to confront collective anonymity.

Concluding Remarks: Education as Enabling One to Self-Author Responsively

The expression of one's lived experience helps to achieve an intimate citizenship which aims to provide a field including individual, different, idiosyncratic and incommensurable life stories. In this sense, the authoring body can be seen as a unique citizen through his/her own living experience. If we take a broader view, every body is authoring him/herself – as long as he/she lives and expresses as long as he/she lives. In this sense, it seems futile to discuss the meaning of education and self-construction as creating authorship, since one authors, unavoidably, as one lives. Nevertheless, if we are not aware of our own life with adequate responsiveness, sensitivity, perceptivity and criticality, we tend to be immersed in anonymous, or passive, more or less static states of being: we tend to see ourselves and others through the lens of collectivity; we tend to generalise people, type-cast and stereotype them, and thereby ignore or suppress individual particularities. This could be understood as a certain immersion in social anonymity. Thus an educational view that values individual differences and diversity might gain inspiration from the idea of authoring body. Following this, a narrower but more rigorous view might be more appropriate for understanding the idea of authoring body, which means that the educational authoring activities should be undertaken with greater responsiveness to difference, sensitivity, perceptivity and criticality. Then, how to raise our sensitivity and criticality becomes very important for the authoring view of education. Two thoughts are proposed here in this regard.

First of all, the more knowledge of and access to the means of communication and expression one acquires, the more opportunities one has for telling one's stories. Education concerning this should thus provide sufficient resources for students to learn about the various forms of expression, such as speaking, painting, writing, drama, acting and a multitude of other means.

Secondly, this process of self-construction takes place in the boundary between the body and the world, between the private and the public, between individual and community. This boundary is blurred, floating and changing all the time, since it is the territory within which these interactions occur. While it could set the limit to how and what we think, live and act, it can be challenged, transgressed and changed by our embodied action or actions. The dialectical and changing relationships between individual and society differ from person to person, from group to group, and thereby are always subject to transformation and change. Plummer's study of sexual stories shows that there are different kinds of stories and different definitions of the relationships between the public and the private in different periods of time. The boundary and the relationships could and should be changed if these human constructs do not promote, but instead impede, human freedom and bring suffering and hardship. This could be the most important point in education.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the anonymous body is the primordial and personal base for constructing and developing the self. It has been argued that this Merleau-Pontian anonymous body is misunderstood by feminists as an anonymous existence in Schütz's and Natanson's terms. However, while Sullivan's critique is misdirected, it is insightful in so far as it manifests the neutrality and abstractness of a socially anonymous existence. Yet this socially anonymous being is not what Merleau-Ponty wants to promote; on the contrary, his notion has the potential to inspire us to strive to overcome social anonymity, and, in the process, to envisage what education aimed at enabling students to be responsive and responsible authors of their own lives would entail. Every body is his/her own author within a co-existent world. Yet, it is important to recognize that the co-existence of and interdependence between human beings could in fact lead to over-reliance on and immersion in anonymous existence. If lacking reflection and responsiveness, we could lose the authorship of our own lives in the living situation. Education in this regard should thus remind us of the significance of living as responsive self-authoring agents and countering tendencies towards anonymity.

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