Perception, Communication, and Body Language in *The White Peacock* and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*

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Commenting on Lawrence and his weekend in Cambridge in March 1915, Bertrand Russell wrote to Ottoline Morrell gasping at his “intuitive perceptiveness” but remarking at the oddity of his thinking being “coloured by Self”. Lawrence’s opinion of Russell, also expressed in a letter to Ottoline, was that he was “vitally, emotionally, much too inexperienced in personal contact and conflict”. Given the difference between the two, surprisingly it was politics rather than personality that ended their brief and fraught companionship. At risk of trivialising both men, their difference is characterised in a passage from “A Propos of Lady Chatterley’s Lover” (1930) concerning “the two great ways of knowing for man”, which are given by Lawrence as “knowing in terms of apartness, which is mental, rational, scientific” and “knowing in terms of togetherness, which is religious and poetic”. Russell the logician, Lawrence the mystic. The quarrel must have reminded Russell of a similar one he had had with Ludwig Wittgenstein eighteen months earlier. Wittgenstein hoped that Russell’s lectures at Harvard would allow him to “tell them [his] thoughts and not just cut and dried results. THAT is what would be of the greatest imaginable value for your audience – to get to know the value of thought and not that of the cut and dried result”. This paper will compare the type of thinking shared by Lawrence and Wittgenstein in their conception of how human beings perceive and communicate with one another. Drawing on Wittgenstein’s Blue Book and Philosophical Investigations I will explore the integrity of the self in The White Peacock (1911) and Lady Chatterley’s Lover (1928) and in so doing challenge Russell’s conception of love in Lawrence’s fiction (“a battle, in which each is attempting to destroy the other by breaking through the protecting walls of his or
her ego”) by placing it within Lawrence’s larger concern for individuals to establish communicative relationships. Furthermore, the paper will engage with how Lawrence represented the “knowing in terms of togetherness” in these novels, which mark the intellectual bookends of his career. Given that this knowledge arises from and is dependent upon bodies being in touch, Lawrence’s thinking on the body itself will also be considered. In “A Propos of Lady Chatterley’s Lover” he writes that “All the emotions belong to the body, and are only recognised by the mind”. It is a statement that has much affinity with Antonio Damasio’s definition of the essence of emotion as “the collection of changes in body state that are induced in myriad organs by nerve cell terminals, under the control of a dedicated brain system, which is responding to the content of thoughts relative to a particular entity or event”. A final aim of the paper is therefore to show how Lawrence’s thinking on the body is precursory to later thinking on the body in both philosophy and neuroscience.

The arbitrariness of “language-games” and the perception, interpretation, and naming of objects are central concerns of the Philosophical Investigations. Wittgenstein was aware that the object-as-a-whole corresponded to its signifier but that its significance was more than the sum of its parts. David Cockburn, in An Introduction to the Philosophy of the Mind, draws on Wittgenstein in arguing that as human beings we too are more than the sum of a mind and a body and that the being-as-a-whole signifies itself. Lawrence’s criticism of those who would isolate themselves allies him with both Wittgenstein and Cockburn. However, Wittgenstein’s argument that one’s “meaning” is supplied in the act of another’s understanding, whilst perhaps part of the gulf in human relations detected by Lawrence, is not completely shared. Whereas Wittgenstein wrote that “If I give anyone an order I feel it to be quite enough to give him signs. And I should never say: this is only words, and I have got to get behind the words”, Connie Chatterley wants to get behind the words and hates them for “always coming between her and life!” Therefore, the paper will initially give a close reading of a passage in “Love Among the Haystacks” (1930), to demonstrate how
body language can supplement a Wittgensteinian language-game, before discussing instances of human signification and the effect of meaning-for-another and meaning-for-one-self upon characters’ “body image”. Throughout, this term shares its sense with Damasio’s definition of it as “an idea of what our bodies tend to be like” [12] for ourselves, but is primarily used to express the idea of how we perceive our own bodies and how that is then projected and perceived by others.

Connie Chatterley’s problem with language is two-fold: not only does she recognise the sign-object gulf, she is frustrated by men who misguidedly use poetic language in an attempt to embody reality through (rather than encase it in) metaphor. Similarly, Paula’s failure to master grammar in “Love Among the Haystacks” seems to invalidate her account of the scene of Maurice and Geoffrey’s struggle. In Wittgensteinian terms:

“What I really see must be what is produced in me by the influence of the object” – Then what is produced in me is a sort of copy, something that in its turn can be looked at, can be before one; almost something like a materialization.

And this materialization is something spatial and it must be possible to describe it in purely spatial terms. For instance (if it is a face) it can smile; the concept of friendliness, however, has no place in an account of it, but is foreign to such an account (even though it may subserve it). [13]

Paula succeeds in describing the scene in purely spatial terms but the men reconstruct a picture of the event through a contradictory narrative. The grammar with which she describes her picture of the event (which no one else has seen) situates her outside the discourse chronologically, as if she were looking inwards at the copy before herself rather than out at “reality” which the males believe they can (re)capture through language:

“What were you doing?” asked the cold, ironic voice of Henry. Geoffrey turned his head away: he had not yet raised his face.
“Nowt as I know on,” he muttered in a surly tone.


“Nay lass, niver,” smiled the wan Maurice. “He was fur enough away from me when I slipped.”

“Oh, ah!” cried the Fräulein, not understanding.

“Yi,” smiled Maurice indulgently.

“I think you’re mistaken,” said the father, rather pathetically, smiling at the girl as if she were “wanting”.

“Oh no,” she cried. “I see him.”

“Nay, lass,” smiled Maurice quietly. [14]

Paula is further removed from the language-game as she communicates in her second language (English rather than Polish) and does not know the men’s “private” dialectal substitutions. Her description (“I see him”) is further problematized by its phrasing (“I see him – knock him over!”) which simultaneously shows the relation of her language to her pictorial “materialization”, by foregrounding the distinct identities of the objects in her sentence, and the disjunction between the “I see” and the action seen (“knock him over”) in perception. [15] Moreover, the men’s sceptical smiles not only question whether she can describe what she thinks she saw and what the meaning is of what she describes but also whether she saw what she saw. But to what do all the smiles refer? The “implausibility” of Paula’s story or something more? And is it a language-game from which Paula is excluded? Henry’s curling of his moustache metaphorically replaces his smile or describes an attempt to hide one directly after Paula’s “fierce gesture with her elbow”. In using body language to describe her “materialization”, Paula’s body is momentarily conflated with Geoffrey’s, an
image that stimulates Henry’s amused (and perhaps unsettled) bodily response. Maurice’s smiles signify his recognition of Henry’s “private” joke, that he knows Paula’s picture of the scene corresponds with what really happened to him, and his reassurance and plea to her to censor this picture in order to protect his brother. This complex language-game between Maurice and Paula is written by Lawrence’s substitution of the bodily “smiled” for “said” in the dialogue, so that Maurice communicates these opposing meanings to different “audiences” in a single sign. Just as Paula is excluded from the joking aspect of the men’s smiles, the father is excluded from Maurice and Paula’s private language-game, and his own ironic smile, as if she is “‘wanting’”, ironised and found wanting itself. So, whilst the general expressions (smiles) of the men at first seem to unequivocally exclude the woman, Lawrence, like Wittgenstein, shows that “in many cases some direction of the attention will correspond to your meaning one thing or another.”

By interpreting each individual’s smile within the context in which it arises, the multiple language-games in this short passage can be seen more clearly and the sexual politics less reductively. Lawrence’s female more than his male characters seem to realise the value and accuracy of inward pictures over a reconstruction of reality through words. However, only by communicating with another who has had a similar experience and who shares a vocabulary or “private language” (be it bodily or verbal) to express this can a picture “like” it be reconstructed.

In the context of the above scene, and much of his work, Lawrence shares his conception of the human body with Maurice Merleau-Ponty: “There is a human body when, between the seeing and the seen, between touching and the touched, between one eye and the other, between hand and hand, a blending of some sort takes place – when a spark is lit between sensing and sensible.” Even Lawrence’s metaphor is the same: “The light shines only when the circuit is completed. The light does not shine with one half of the current. Every light is some sort of completed circuit. And so is every life, if it is going to be a life … It is in the living touch between us and other people, other lives, other phenomena
that we move and have our being.”[119] However, Lawrence also looks at the implications for human bodies that are unaware of their being observed and how then the body is perceived and interpreted. In *The White Peacock*, the narrator, Cyril, watches George, whose back is to him and who has “not noticed us”, mowing the corn: “Firmly planted, he swung with a beautiful rhythm from the waist … the muscles of his back playing like lights upon the white sand of a brook. There was something exceedingly attractive in the rhythmic body.”[20] Cyril’s observations are not given in spatial but aesthetic terms, similar to Roger Fry’s analysis of a line’s “decorative rhythm.”[21] Whereas Paula’s body language conflated her with Geoffrey in “Love Among the Haystacks”, Lettie’s description of George as “picturesque” and “Quite fit for an Idyll”[22] draws an equivalence between his body and that of the male lover in Maurice Griffinhagen’s painting, *Idyll*, which the two have looked at previously. Leslie, on the other hand, is not doubted and he does not make “the same crisp crunching music”[23] when mowing. Since, in Fry’s terms, our sense of sight is “constructed like our sense of sound, so that certain relations … are pleasing, and others discordant”,[24] this aural perception of Leslie mowing implicitly describes his body in relation to the aesthetic ideal of George’s body. Through George, Lawrence’s precedes Wittgenstein in exploring the difference between the “seen” and the (aesthetically) “interpreted” (or perceived) object.[25] The simile describing George’s muscles is a reworking of Cyril’s perception at the opening, “The stepping-stones were white in the sun, and the water slid sleepily among them”,[26] which is alluded to as Lettie stands “poised a moment on a large stone, the fresh spring brook … sidling round her”. The ambivalent pronoun in her dialogue, “‘Ah, yes – it’s full of music’”,[27] demonstrates their shared interpretation of George in terms of the stone by her allusion to the “music” of his mowing whilst in this location. The statue as a symbol is particularly apt as not only does it represent the process of Lettie and Cyril’s interpretative perception of George – their repeated application (or superimposition) of imagined (or remembered) images of objects (on)to George both as subject and object – but also the result of this upon George, the human being constrained by a given
definition of his body. The interpretation is further complicated as George is, in a sense, a statue modelled on him as Griffinhagen’s Idyllic lover.[28] Lawrence critiques this interpretative perception in the story of Annable, whose wife draws “Greek statues of [him] – her Croton, her Hercules!”[29] The wife destroys his image in their break up by writing an obituary of him to a woman’s paper. However, Annable is still limited by the body image given to him by her and, after telling his story to Cyril, he dies in a rock fall at the quarry: the image, like a statue’s, broken with his body. When Lawrence reworks the mowing scene, George, again, is approached from behind. However, when he sees his big, coarse hand clasping Agnes D’Arcy’s as they are introduced, and hears her comment, “Oh, you don’t know what a classical pastoral person you are’’, [30] he becomes self-consciousness of his body image and realises how he is limited by how he is perceived. His imperative, “look at me!”,[31] as he holds out his inflamed hands to Lettie, works both as a reaction against and confirmation of their “interpretation” (Lettie’s immediate perception doubled in Cyril’s general perception as narrator). George then turns from the drink Lettie offers him: “he lay down flat, put his mouth to the water, and drank deeply. She stood and watched the motion of his drinking, and of his heavy breathing afterwards”. [32] With George’s back to her, Lettie’s perception is implicitly focussed again upon the movement of his back muscles, just as when he was mowing. The allusion to the brook scenes, with the water trough as its replacement, eases the substitution of flesh for stone and her re-objectification of him as a statue. Likewise, as Cyril watches George whilst he is sleeping, at the close of the novel, he perceives: “His face looked inert like a mask. The pallid, uninspired clay of his features seemed to have sunk a little out of shape, so that he appeared rather haggard, rather ugly, with grooves of ineffectual misery along his cheeks”. [33] The perception is similar to Ursula Brangwen’s perception of Anton Skrebensky in The Rainbow (1915): “his face twisted like a mask, contorted and the tears running down the amazing grooves in his cheeks”. [34] For Lawrence, like Merleau-Ponty, a body cannot certainly have more than the form of a human or distinguish itself from other objects with human form if there is no spark lit between the sensing and the sensible. Since a human
body must be both a sensible object and a sensing subject, a body, like George’s, that is unconscious or with its back to the sensor, or, like Anton’s, that is under control of neither his will nor knowledge and can pay no attention to the sensor, cannot certainly be human. Furthermore, Wittgenstein’s “criterion for the sameness of two images” (when the image is not “for oneself” but when it is also “someone else’s image”) [35]—read alongside Merleau-Ponty’s criterion for the human body, illuminates the way in which George is given a body image at odds with his conception of it. Just as Clifford Chatterley is excluded from Connie and Mellors’ silent language-game – wherein they mutually recognise each other as human whilst Clifford is reduced to an image like his bust – as the lovers push his broken chair through the wood, [36] George is outside of the language-game that shapes his image.

So can it be said that the extent to which Connie Chatterley’s body image is constructed by or for her is related to the extent to which she is excluded from or included in the book’s competing language-games? Moreover, is there a difference between the myopic Cyril’s first-person narration of The White Peacock, from which it might be inferred that the image of George as a statue is produced by his form being abstracted when he is observed at too great a distance, [37] and the “objective” third-person narrator of Lady Chatterley’s Lover in their imaging of the body? From the first, body shape and physical experience are correlated by the narrator of Lady Chatterley’s Lover, just as Cyril, likewise, records George coupling the two. Another early, and telling, image of Connie’s body is that which the villagers have, whom Connie walks past “without looking at them, and they stared as if she were a walking wax figure”. [38] The narrator’s “uncanny” [39]—image of Connie describes the psychological effect in the villagers’ minds produced by the conflict between her being “seen”, in the Wittgensteinian sense, and their objectified image of her; a reading applicable to the perception of George and Anton’s bodies above, and Robert’s perception of Pauline at the denouement of “The Lovely Lady” (1927). Although Connie is not party to the perception of her body image it is reflected in the way in which she in turn
perceives herself “like simulacrum of reality”. [40] Her awareness of Michaelis’ detachment during their lovemaking, creates a complex narrative moment in which Connie’s perspective reflects Michaelis’, which is then in turn voiced by the third-person narrator. An image of neither body is present, whilst the description of Connie’s lying “dazed” [41] creates a statuesque “simulacrum” (like the “dazed images” that Lettie and George become in the moment at which their bodies assume their doubles from Griffinhagen’s Idyll) through which a body is implied.

A “simulacrum of [the] tactile body” is how Merleau-Ponty describes the observation of the body in the mirror, “since it imitates the body’s actions instead of responding to them by a free unfolding of perspectives.” [42] When Connie sees Mellors washing himself, [43] the narrative deftly illustrates – in the language’s circling around the body-as-sculpture and body-as-human tropes that coalesce in “a body!” – the mediation of her mind’s perception of him in explicitly statuesque terms by a bodily “shock of vision in her womb” [44], which provokes her to reflect upon the image of her own naked body in the mirror:

She was supposed to have a good figure, but now she was out of fashion: a little too female, not enough like an adolescent boy … her body should have had a full, downward-slipping richness. But it lacked something.

Instead of ripening its firm, down-running curves, her body was flattening and going a little harsh.

…

She looked in the other mirror’s reflection at her back, her waist, her loins … The crumple of her waist at the back, as she bent back to look, was a little weary: and it used to be so gay-looking. And the longish slope of her haunches and her buttocks had lost its gleam and its sense of richness.

…
Still she thought the most beautiful part of her was the long-sloping fall of the haunches, from the socket of the back, and the slumberous round stillness of the buttocks. Like the hillocks of sand, the Arabs say, soft and downward-slipping with a long slope. Here the life still lingered, hoping.—But here too she was thinner, and going unripe, astringent.[45]

The reflected image and Connie’s perception of it demonstrates the complicity of the narrative voice with other voices that would image her body; however, in its description of her response to it (“Still she thought the most beautiful part of her was …”), Connie opens up a space in which she values her body according to her own aesthetic. Consequently, the ambiguity of the voice which delivers the line, “Like the hillocks of sand, the Arabs say”, means that it can be read both as Connie’s continued rejection of metaphorical language’s attempt to define and constrain matter, and as an assertion of her (aesthetic) ownership of her body by assigning to it a private language. Whereas “A Cartesian does not see himself in the mirror; he sees a dummy, an ‘outside,’ which, he has every reason to believe, other people see in the very same way but which, no more for himself than for others, is not a body in the flesh”[46], Connie becomes a being for whom “human sensuality”[47] is the ideal, and one who is conscious that people do not see bodies in the same way and have different languages to talk about different bodies. It is vital that the private language in which Connie describes her body image is predicated on dialogue (“Like hillocks of sand, the Arabs say”) as in this way it becomes exclusively a body’s language that defines itself against the men’s written language (which transfers experience into objects (books) outside of the body) and depends upon one being “in touch”. The difference of Connie’s private language also reflects the phenomenal difference between vision and touch, particularly that of touch’s inherent reciprocity noted by Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception*: “both hands can alternate the roles of ‘touching’ and being ‘touched’”.[48]. The language of touch will be discussed later, what is important here is the relationship between perspective, body, and speech.

Although Connie has constructed her own private language for her body, her
physical resistance to Mellors’ dialect conditions her perception of him as an object and her experience of sex with him in the “third-person”: “her spirit seemed to look on from the top of her head, and the butting of his haunches seemed ridiculous to her”. Her focus upon his “haunches”, the body part for which she has a private language to which Mellors does not have access, puts his body at a further remove, and it is not until she immerses herself in a “first-person” experience of sex that she perceives her body as she has Mellors’. Again, the narrative circles the body-as-human and body-as-other tropes before culminating in an identically phrased sentence. A comparison of the paragraph in which she first sees Mellors naked (see n43 above) with the following paragraph illustrates how the change in her perception is written in physically in the reordering of their shared diction:

How beautiful he felt, how pure in tissue! How lovely, how lovely, strong, and yet pure and delicate, such stillness of the sensitive body! Such utter stillness of potency and delicate flesh! How beautiful, how beautiful. Her hands came timorously down his back, to the soft, smallish globes of the buttocks. Beauty! what beauty! a sudden little flame of new awareness went through her … The unspeakable beauty to the touch, of the warm, living buttocks.\(^{50}\)

Connie’s experience of Mellors’ decidedly humanised body (which itself is a reworking of her perception of “the other mirror’s reflection at her back, her waist, her loins”) is tactile not visual, and her “sense” of his body replaced by its sensitivity to her touch, which, like the mode of her private language, is predicated on their bodies being “in touch”. Mellors, in turn, teaches her his dialect, and the narrator images Connie’s “naïve haunches” as she looks like “another creature”\(^{51}\), coming in from the rain. The narrator’s diction indicates its exclusion from Connie’s private language, therefore allying any image of her haunches given by him with the public voices that falsely image her body:
“creature” alludes to and places him within the now superseded world of Connie’s visual perception;[52] likewise, “naïve” suggests the manner in which Clifford and Michaelis perceive her, both of whom are excluded from the private language. The effect of the diction is also to show Mellors’ inclusion in and learning of Connie’s language. His perception of her haunches is womanly rather than girlish:

He watched the beautiful, curving drop of her haunches. That fascinated him today. How it sloped with a rich down-slope, to the heavy roundness of her buttocks! …

He stroked her tail with his hand, long and subtly taking in the curves and the globe-fulness.

…

All the while he spoke he exquisitely stroked the rounded tail, till it seemed as if a slippery sort of fire came from it into his hand. And his finger-tips touched the two secret openings to her body, time after time, with a soft little brush of fire.[53]

Here, the phrases, reworked from Connie’s image of herself, in Mellors’ perception (his “curving drop of her haunches” replacing her “long-sloping fall of the haunches”; his “heavy roundness of her buttocks” for her “round stillness of the buttocks”; and his “a rich down-slope” for her “downward-slipping richness”), largely relate to the paragraph in which Connie rejects external body images and assigns her private language, signifying Mellors’ admission into the language-game through his experience of her body; whereas those which compose Mellors’ touching her “curves and the globe-fulness” allude to Connie’s tactile experience of the “smallish globes of [his] buttocks”. The shift from Mellors’ touch to Connie’s experience of the touch, executed through his monologue, explores further the relationship between experience and allusion. The fiery sensation caused by his touch, alludes to both her “little flame of new awareness” (her tactile experience of Mellors’s body) and to “the warm white flame of a single life … that one might touch” (her visual experience of him). The difference
between present, first-person experience (of being touched) and past, third-person experience (of touching) is shown in the grammatical relationship between “fire” (the object-in-itself) and “flame” (an image of the object). Language’s indispensable, yet often slippery, role in showing the relationship between experiences in time is also illustrated in the ambiguity of the pronoun in the paragraph’s first sentence: is the sensation (“fire”) Connie’s and therefore caused by his hand stroking her? Or is the sensation Mellors’ and therefore the result of him experiencing the contact of her skin? Or is there a more complex relationship between his speech and touch and their experience of them? As the sensible site of these language-games, I have attempted to demonstrate how the construction of Connie’s body image is predominantly her own and that through her bodily, not verbal, responses to Mellors’ use of her private language, such as her ambiguous “sudden snirt of astonished laughter”, she signifies her capacity to incorporate or exclude bodily images (of herself). As Merleau-Ponty writes: “My body can assume segments derived from the body of another, just as my substance passes into them; man is a mirror for man. The mirror itself is the instrument of universal magic that changes things into a spectacle, spectacles into things, myself into another, and another into myself.” Whilst the narrator’s perception often blends with Connie’s, the distance she achieves from it at the points at which she images her own body, via her private language predicated on being “in touch”, allows her to situate meaning on as well as in the body. The third-person narrator is therefore doubly removed as, unlike the first-person narrator, it cannot touch the body, nor feel. Since Mellors is embodied he may access Connie’s private language through first-hand experience of her body. Likewise, through Connie’s experience of Mellors’ touch meaning is given to his body language. By reinterpreting Russell’s idea of the characters’ battles, “in which each is attempting to destroy the other by breaking through the protecting walls of his or her ego”, as the sites at which each is attempting to know the other by breaking through the protecting walls of his or her private language in order to uncover his or her meanings and experiences, in the context of Lawrence’s awareness of the strain placed on language as the communicative tool of human beings, any
violence can be seen as that of language manifest in the process of human cognition. Body language, and a shared tactile rather than visual experience, in writing human relationships, offers a way out of solipsism by overcoming the problem of sharing perception.

By way of beginning to consider the ways in which the body can affect its effect on other bodies (i.e. in the type of touch and the tone of voice) I would like to look at the implications of Jeffrey Meyers’ suggestion that the body language of Leslie’s “fetishistic moment” where he “kneels down to rub her [Lettie’s] cold feet” in The White Peacock is “the reverse of An Idyll”. As discussed above, Lettie’s objectification of George’s body as a statue is a corollary of their bodies doubling the characters in the Idyll, whilst Leslie has no aesthetic counterpart. Although Leslie is excluded from George and Lettie’s language-games because of this, his posture is not only “the reverse of An Idyll” but also demonstrates the extent to which he tries to engage with their language-game and perception of the body. Applying Kenneth Gross’s theory that “the humanizing of a nonliving thing can entail, almost as a compensation, a simultaneous objectification of the human,” Leslie’s pygmalionist posture can be read as both an attempt to remove Lettie from her language-game with George, by decontextualising their bodies from the Idyll’s doubles, and as an implicit deployment of the language-game in which he and Lettie objectify George. A similar dynamic can be seen in “Love Among the Haystacks” as Geoffrey warms Lydia’s feet. Just as Leslie takes Lettie’s foot “between his hands”, acknowledging it as “‘quite cold’”, before Lettie “bend[s] forward and touch[es] his cheek,” George’s “large hands” clasp “over her instep”, he exclaims “‘They’re like ice!’”, before Lydia “Leaning forward” touches “his hair delicately with her fingers.” But, whereas Leslie is nonetheless excluded from George and Lettie’s conversation, in the disembodying darkness, paradoxically, sensitivity and sensation become Lydia and Geoffrey’s communicative currency and he manages to convince her to leave her husband. Geoffrey’s perception of Lydia’s face the day before as “childish in its contours, contrasting strangely with her expression,” like Connie’s perception of Mellors’
“life revealing itself in contours,”[61] demonstrates the complexity of perception: that it is the shape (body) as well as the way in which it is shaped (behaviour) that constitutes a perceived human being; and that to perceive but one of its “aspects”[62] is to perceive less than the whole. The morning after, Geoffrey perceives her face similarly: “the tight shutting of her mouth, as if in resolution to bear what was very hard to bear, contrasted so pitifully with the small mould of her features.”[63] The “resolution” he reads in her expression whilst she is asleep, and his subsequent “press[ing] her to his bosom” with the belief that “With her to complete him, to form the core of him, he [is] firm and whole,”[64] illustrates the possibility for others to construct one’s personality physiognomically through one’s body image; and the possibility of using others’ body images to supplement one’s own body image (highlighting the malleability of body image as a construction). It is interesting, in the latter case, that the language in which Geoffrey imagines himself is the language of the body-as-statue. A similar instance of this kind of perception forming the artificial “core” of a self is seen in The Rainbow where Ursula, by withholding her regard for Anton destroys him and then self-consciously uses her touch to restore “the whole shell of him. She restored the whole form and figure of him … His pride was bolstered up … but there was no core to him.”[65] Without a picture of his body image independent of those constructed in relation to women, Lawrence shows that Geoffrey’s self (like that of Annable, Clifford Chatterley, and Anton) can be negated without the object to which it is attached, just as Damasio suggests would happen without the presence of “background feeling”: “The background feeling is our image of the body landscape when it is not shaken by emotion. The concept of “mood,” though related to that if background feeling, does not exactly capture it … I submit that without them the very core of your representation of self would be broken.”[66]

A comparison of Geoffrey’s perception of Lydia the morning after with the exploration of their bodies in the dark is a study in these competing sources of body image and their resultant implications for those perceived. Wittgenstein’s
questions considering “pain-behaviour”, particularly that in which he asks, “how do I know, if I shut my eyes, whether I have not turned to stone?”, considering the discussion of the body-as-statue above, become particularly pertinent when looked at alongside the exchange between Geoffrey and Lydia in the darkness:

He put out his big fingers cautiously on her eyes, into two little pools of tears.

“What’s a matter?” he asked in a low, choked voice.

She leaned down to him and gripped him tightly round the neck, pressing him to her bosom in a little frenzy of pain.

Whilst it is not necessary for there to be pain-behaviour for pain to exist, the evidence of pain-behaviour means either that the pain exists presently, or that it is simulated or remembered. Likewise, George does not know that he puts his fingers on her eyes but that this assertion is related to the tears that he finds there. This reciprocation between sensor and sensed is given in the “choked voice” in which Geoffrey questions her and the answer which is inferred by Geoffrey in her body’s embrace. Geoffrey’s pity, according to Wittgenstein, would lead him to comfort the sufferer, not the body part, in pain. With emotional pain there is no place on the body to give comfort to and, paradoxically, in the dark, the subject is both the utter absence and presence of body, so neither is there a sufferer into whose face he can look. Moreover, just as a parent would comfort their child and “kiss better” the body part in pain, the act of comforting is one of both bodily contact and human empathy. Geoffrey’s touching her eyes, then, is a questioning and a comforting of her pain. The pain that Clara detects in Paul’s eyes in Sons and Lovers (1913), “as if her beauty and his taking it hurt him”, precedes her kissing him “fervently on the eyes” before the two stand “clasped rigid together, mouth to mouth, like a statue in one block.” The use that Lawrence makes of kisses on the eyes, as with Geoffrey’s touching of Lydia’s eyes before the imaging of his body as a statue, is bound up with a disruption of the meaning ascribed to and by one in the perception of one another’s bodies. Thus the
“transformation” that Geoffrey feels in the paragraph following his self-imaging, as a result of Lydia’s “open-eyed” watching of him and his subsequent return of her gaze, describes the effect on his body of being perceived and the humanising quality of visual intercommunication; whilst the “kiss” that he then gives her, which places his body outside of her visual perception but still within her experience of him, as in the darkness of the previous night, shows both George’s desire to image himself in relation to another rather than be imaged by another and Lawrence’s suggestion that when people engage in reciprocally tactile (sexual) experience its humanising connection makes their self-conscious body images of secondary importance.

The body language with which Geoffrey signals to Paula at the opening of “Love Among the Haystacks” is that of Mellors when Connie first lays eyes on him. Mellors’ ironic phrase “‘reared here—’”, in his dialogue with Connie, parodies Clifford’s use of it in his conversation with Connie prior to the gamekeeper’s appearance, implying his presence before he is seen. In her subsequent trips to the woods, “She [sees] nobody there—” until she is lead to her “visionary experience” of Mellors’ body by the “sounds from the back of the cottage”. Here, the message that Connie delivers to Mellors’s from Clifford is not given in reported speech but by more hyphens: “‘Sir Clifford wondered if you would — —’”. Just as the body was implied through touch above, these gaps in language allow bodies to be implied by the narrator and for bodies to imply (or negate) themselves (or others) through speech, and for the auditor or reader to gather “meaning” or “truth” from the tone in which the words are delivered, as, unlike words themselves, a tone of voice has a particular body as its referent. In The White Peacock, Cyril overhears Lettie demur Leslie’s “murmur[ed]” advances “in the little distance” before “away down in the yard George beg[ins] singing the old song, “‘I sowed the seeds of love’”; “This interrupted the flight of Leslie’s voice, and as the singing came nearer, the hum of low words ceased”. Lettie’s attraction to George’s tone is based on its opposition to Leslie’s (just as for her George’s mowing was “musical” and Leslie’s not) and by using song Lawrence
relates it to art and Lettie and George’s exclusion of Leslie through the *Idyll*. George’s voice also orientates Lettie physically and her sexual attraction towards him, and, in describing the distances of the voices, Cyril’s spatial perception of the bodies through sound. Likewise, in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, despite Mellors’ touch, he seems “lost” to Connie without sound:

his silence was fathomless. His hands held her like flowers, so still and strange. “Where are you?” she whispered to him. “Where are you? Speak to me! Say something to me!”

He kissed her softly, murmuring: “Ay, my lass!”

Just as Cyril cannot make out Leslie’s words, Connie does not know what Mellors means. Likewise, their shared “murmured” tone is more conventional than personal and consequently interrupts intercommunication leaving Connie and Lettie emotionally and physically distanced. If Connie cannot “feel” this intercommunication then Mellors cannot speak a meaning that Connie will understand. Lawrence uses Connie’s orgasms as a way of understanding the paradox of inarticulate expression and an expressive language of the body independent of the will. At their third consummation, Connie’s perception of her orgasm (“It was like bells, rippling up and up to a culmination”) is juxtaposed with an observation arguably from Mellors’ point of view (“She lay unconscious of the wild little cries she uttered at the last”). Those “inarticulate cries” in the present recur in her memory of the feeling “Inside herself … like the after-humming of deep bells”:

the dim, glad moan of spring, *moving* into bud. She could feel in the same world with her the *man*, the nameless *man*, *moving on beautiful* feet, *beautiful* in the phallic mystery. And *in herself, in all her veins*, she felt *him and his child, him and his child*. *His child*, *was in all her veins*, like a twilight.

The syntactic echoes enact the process of perception translating experience into images (memories) and the relationship and difference between the two, whilst
Connie’s “humming inaudibly”\[82\] describes how she “feels” (again) its effect on the body. Indeed, the interdependence between a remembered emotion (through the imagination) and its corresponding bodily response has been suggested by writers such as Darwin, Damasio, and Merleau-Ponty.\[83\] The interpretation of the body’s past sensations as at best solipsistic and at worst beyond understanding, such as Connie’s inarticulate cries becoming an inaudible humming, is offset by the presence of another as inseparable from the personal sensation and memory. In this sense, Mellors’ answer, “‘I don’t know’”, to Connie’s question, “‘Have you come-off like that with other women’”,\[84\] is not reticence, as she infers, but rather an admission that whilst their bodies are responsible for her sensations, and vice-versa, since he cannot feel what she felt and since both would have different meanings for the language describing it, a bodily interchange of sensation is not equivalent to a linguistic one, as is suggested by the character Charlie May. This “inarticulateness” signifies an involuntary response to an external body and the suggestion that sensations are the product of the body and its interaction with another (i.e. not utterly within oneself). The “kind of awe” with which Mellors hears Connie’s cries as “his life spr[ings] out into her”\[85\], is related to a bodily sympathy of sensation; that, whilst neither can describe their own sensations to the other, in experiencing their own orgasms, they can sympathise or imagine an equivalent, synchronous sensation and be complicit in the other’s experience. The intersubjectivity but ineffability of (sexual) sensation, and the body, rather than language, as its barometer, is encapsulated in the scene in which Mellors and Connie, as “John Thomas” and “Lady Jane”, marry.\[86\] The reduction of themselves to sexual pseudonyms is little more than the metaphoric language which Connie has critiqued earlier, and their floral adornment little more than an aestheticisation of the body analogous to the body-as-statue perception, both of which Mellors’ body reacts against in his sneezes. “‘[W]hat was I going to say?–’” he asks himself. As above, the hyphens (as with the “‘Maybe–’” preceding his sneeze) suggest his expression of their bodies’ potential outside of diction and grammar through the tenor his body gives to language.
The image of Pauline, at the close of the short story “The Lovely Lady”, after she has told Robert that his father was really an Italian priest, encapsulates many of the problems discussed above: “She was really a dreadful sight, like a piece of lovely Venetian glass that has been dropped, and gathered up again in horrible, sharp-edged fragments”. The effect of the aesthetic metaphor for biology on body image and perception is written in the ambivalence of the sentence’s perspective: whilst, on the surface, the image is that of Robert’s perception of Pauline’s body, the metaphor works against the grammar and it is arguably either an image (Pauline’s or Robert’s?) of Robert’s body as the biological product of Pauline and the Italian’s bodies, or an image of Pauline’s body (biology) as seen through Robert (his body image, as her biological product, reflected onto or by her body image). In a later letter to Ottoline, Russell criticised those with strong imaginations, including Lawrence, for “reading their own natures into other people, instead of getting at other people by impartial observation” and said that whilst Lawrence was just as furious a critic as Wittgenstein he thought “W. right and L. wrong”. Impartial vision may be possible in the state of “seeing” but “scientific” observation of others tends to be coloured by self. Ray Monk records Russell’s assertion that “‘What little I know about myself I owe to the observations of candid friends’”, adding, “One wonders here whether he would have included Lawrence and Wittgenstein among those ‘candid friends’”. Merleau-Ponty writes that “Scientific thinking, a thinking which looks on from above, and thinks of the object-in-general, must return to the ‘there is’ which underlies it; to the site, the soil of the sensible and opened world such as it is in our life and for our body – not that possible world which we may legitimately think of as an information machine but that actual body I call mine” and Damasio likewise that “We do not know, and it is improbable that we will ever know, what ‘absolute’ reality is like”. A parallel between a narrator’s and “scientific” observation can be seen but Lawrence’s characters subvert its insight by communicating in the spaces they create outside of its language and gaze. Lawrence is allied with these later thinkers in that his characters’ “objective” perceptions of one another demonstrate a change in the object perceived because
of the subject, rather than their impartial process of vision. When one is responding to responsive looks, what one perceives is not another human being but a human being responding to one as a human being. One, therefore, modifies the way one looks in relation to what one perceives; it is a reading of one’s own nature in rather than into other people. The self in Lawrence’s fiction re-evaluates its own image through its (communicative) contact with others, accepting and rejecting images of others and itself in the process. Such thought is reflected in contemporary theories of the self, such as those by Damasio who proposes the idea of a “metaself”. For Damasio, subjectivity emerges “when the brain is not just producing images of an object, not just images of organism responses to the object, but a third kind of image, that of an organism in the act of perceiving and responding to an object”. This metaself “is purely nonverbal”, with verbal narratives emerging out of nonverbal ones: “Language may not be the source of the self, but it is certainly the source of the ‘I’”. [92] Wittgenstein’s thought also points towards Damasio’s: “The kernel of our proposition that that which has pains or sees or thinks is of a mental nature is only, that the word “I” in “I have pains” does not denote a particular body, for we can’t substitute for “I” a description of a body.” [93] As I hope to have shown, Lawrence, too, writes metaselves who experience the world and communicate with it nonverbally, who (re)construct themselves through images, and whose verbal narratives show their correspondence with but dependence upon this bodily mode of being.

Endnotes


“A Propos of Lady Chatterley’s Lover” 311.


Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (1953; Oxford: Blackwell, 1958) 30: “True, the broom is taken to pieces when one separates broomstick and brush; but does it follow that the order to bring the broom also consists of the corresponding parts.”

D. H. Lawrence, “We Need One Another” in *Phoenix: The Posthumous Papers of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. and introd. Edward D. McDonald (1930; London: Heinemann, 1936) 189: “This grand isolation, this reducing of ourselves to our very elemental selves, is the greatest fraud of all. It is like plucking the peacock naked of all his feathers to try to get at the real bird. When you’ve plucked the peacock bare, what have you got? Not the peacock, but the naked corpse of a bird.”

*Philosophical Investigations* 139 [Wittgenstein’s italics].

*Lady Chatterley’s Lover* 93.

*Descartes’ Error* 152 [Damasio’s italics].

*Philosophical Investigations* 199 [Wittgenstein’s italics].

[15] Cf. “Love Among the Haystacks” 44. The same grammar and phrasing are used alongside a pun on “meaning” to emphasise the fragility of perceived images and language: “‘Are ter commin’ down?’ asked Maurice coldly.” “‘No – I will not come with you – mean, to tell me lies.’”. The hyphen again separates the object (‘meaning’) from the subject (“you”) which allows the “sentence” to signify a subjective quality (“you are mean”) and an intention of the subject (“you mean to tell me lies”) whilst remaining linguistically meaningless (“you – mean, to tell me lies”).


[19] “We Need One Another” 190.


[25] See Philosophical Investigations 212: “Do I really see something different each time, or do I only interpret what I see in a different way? I am inclined to say the former. But why? – To interpret is to think, to do something; seeing is a state”.

Lettie observes, “we’re gazing at each other like two dazed images” (White Peacock 72), directly before George’s exclamation at “Griffinhagen’s ‘Idyll’”. After George’s fight with Annable, Cyril “turn[s] him over” and narrates: “He opened his eyes, and looked at me, dazed … ‘Am I,’ he said, ‘covered with clay and stuff?’ ‘Not much,’ I replied troubled by the shame and confusion with which he spoke. ‘Get it off,’ he said, standing still to be cleaned. I did my best.” (White Peacock 110-1. My italics added for emphasis).

White Peacock 212.

White Peacock 301.

White Peacock 302.

White Peacock 302.

White Peacock 369 [my italics added for emphasis cf. n31].


Philosophical Investigations 117.

“All her soul suddenly swept towards him: he was so silent, and out of reach! And he felt his limbs revive. Shoving with his left hand, he laid his right on her round white wrist, softly enfolding her wrist, with caress. And the flamy sort of strength went down his back and his loins, reviving him. And she, panting, bent suddenly and kissed his hand. Meanwhile the back of Clifford’s head was held sleek and motionless, just in front of them” (Lady Chatterley’s Lover 192). Clifford’s “bust” is displayed in “one of the galleries” (Lady Chatterley’s Lover 50).

Lawrence draws attention to Cyril’s myopia at the start of the chapter “Pastorals and Peonies” by contrasting the narrator’s impressionistic descriptions
with George’s sharper characterisations in the dialogue. This chapter, as discussed above, is the one in which George becomes conscious of his body-image: “As we went round the field in the afternoon turning the hay, we were thinking apart, and did not talk. Every now and then – and at every corner – we stopped to look down towards the wood, to see if they were coming. ‘Here they are!’ George exclaimed suddenly, having spied the movement of white in the dark wood. We stood still and watched. Two girls, heliotrope and white, a man with two girls, pale green and white, and a man with a girl last. ‘Can you tell who they are?’ I asked. ‘That’s Marie Tempest, that first girl in white, and that’s him and Lettie at the back, I don’t know any more’” (White Peacock 297). The “‘light flash[ing] across [Cyril’s] spectacles’” is also referred to later in the book (White Peacock 399).

[38] Lady Chatterley’s Lover 15.

[39] Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny” in Art and Literature: Jensen’s Gradiva, Leonardo Da Vinci and Other Works, ed. Albert Dickson, trans. James Strachey. The Penguin Freud Library vol. 14 (London: Penguin, 1990) 347: “Jentsch has taken as a very good instance ‘doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate’; and he refers in this connection to the impression made by waxwork figures, ingeniously constructed dolls and automata. To these he adds the uncanny effect of epileptic fits, and of manifestations of insanity, because these excite in the spectator the impression of automatic, mechanical processes at work behind the ordinary appearance of mental activity” [my italics added for emphasis].

[40] Lady Chatterley’s Lover 18.

[41] Lady Chatterley’s Lover 29.

Lady Chatterley’s Lover 66: “[I]t was a visionary experience: it had hit her in the middle of her body … the pure, delicate white loins, the bones showing a little, and the sense of aloneness, of a creature purely alone, overwhelmed her. Perfect, white solitary nudity of a creature that lives alone, and inwardly alone. And beyond that, a certain beauty of a pure creature. Not the stuff of beauty, not even the body of beauty, but a certain lambency, the warm white flame of a single life revealing itself in contours that one might touch: a body!”

Lady Chatterley’s Lover 66.

Lady Chatterley’s Lover 70-1.

“Eye and Mind” 302 [Merleau-Ponty’s italics].

Lady Chatterley’s Lover 71.

Phenomenology of Perception 106.

Lady Chatterley’s Lover 171.

Lady Chatterley’s Lover 174-5 [My italics added to emphasise the shared and reordered diction].

Lady Chatterley’s Lover 222.

Cf. n43.

Lady Chatterley’s Lover 222-3.

Lady Chatterley’s Lover 223.

“Eye and Mind” 300.


White Peacock 331.
Love Among the Haystacks 40.

Love Among the Haystacks 24.

Lady Chatterley’s Lover 66.

Philosophical Investigations 196: “The expression of a change of aspect is the expression of a new perception and at the same time of the perception’s being unchanged” [Wittgenstein’s italics].

Love Among the Haystacks 41.

Love Among the Haystacks 41.

Rainbow 323 [my italics added for emphasis].

Descartes’ Error 150-1.

Philosophical Investigations 97.

Love Among the Haystacks 40.

Cf. Philosophical Investigations 98: “What sort of issue is: Is it the body that feels pain?–How is it decided? What makes it plausible to say that it is not the body?–Well, something like this: if someone has a pain in his hand, then the hand does not say so (unless it writes it) and one does not comfort the hand, but the sufferer: one looks into his face” [Wittgenstein’s italics].

Cf. Philosophical Investigations 131: “The feeling is as if the negation of a proposition had to make it true in a certain sense, in order to negate it. (The assertion of the negative proposition contains the proposition which is negated, but not the assertion of it.)”


For further instances of this stylised body language, see: White Peacock 51; Women in Love 455; and Lady Chatterley’s Lover 127, 178.
Cf. *Love Among the Haystacks* 10-1 “He [Geoffrey] took off his hat, and held up his right hand in greeting to her [Paula] … He remained, arrested, in the same posture, his hat in his left hand, his right arm upraised, thinking” and *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* 46 “The man [Mellors] lifted his hat as he stood … and he changed his hat to his left hand, and made her a slight bow, like a gentleman; but he said nothing at all. He remained for a moment still with his hat in his hand”, and Tom Brangwen’s proposal to Lydia in *The Rainbow* 44: “he stood in the light, in his black clothes and his black stock, hat in one hand and yellow flowers in the other”.

*Cf.* Lady Chatterley’s Lover 46.

*Cf.* Lady Chatterley’s Lover 65-7.

*Cf. Philosophical Investigations* 146: “Can I not say: a cry, a laugh, are full of meaning? And that means, roughly: much can be gathered from them. When longing makes me cry: ‘Oh, if only he would come!’ the feeling gives the words ‘meaning’. But does it give the individual words their meanings? But here one could also say that the feeling gave the words *truth*. And from this you can see how the concepts merge here.” [Wittgenstein’s italics].

*Cf.* White Peacock 100.

*Cf.* Rainbow 330-1 and 339-40 for Ursula’s similar reorientations by Anton and Winifred Inger.

*Cf.* Lady Chatterley’s Lover 175.

*Cf.* Lady Chatterley’s Lover 133-4.

*Cf.* Lady Chatterley’s Lover 138 [my italics added to emphasise the internal rhymes].

*Cf.* Lady Chatterley’s Lover 138.

Lady Chatterley’s Lover 135.

Lady Chatterley’s Lover 134.

Lady Chatterley’s Lover 228: “‘This is John Thomas marryin’ Lady Jane,’ he said. ‘An’ we mun let Constance and’ Oliver go their ways. Maybe—’ He spread out his hand with a gesture, and then he sneezed, sneezing away the flowers from his nose and his navel. He sneezed again. ‘Maybe what?’ she said waiting for him to go on. He looked at her a little bewildered … He had forgotten. And it was one of the disappointments of her life, that he never finished.”

Love Among the Haystacks 67.

Selected Letters of Bertrand Russell 43.


“Eye and Mind” 292-3.

Descartes’ Error 97.

Descartes’ Error 240-3.


**Bibliography**


2000.


**First Response**

This is in many ways an original, imaginative and insightful discussion of Lawrence’s work in relation to Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty and more recent theorists such as Antonio Damasio. The essay is fluently written and coherently structured.