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You're grabbed on the way to the convenience store. You hear sexually-charged comments while riding on your bike at 15-years old. That hyperconsciousness you felt about your outfits at home lingers with you after you've moved out at 19. It shouldn't be a surprise to many of us to learn that the female-presenting body does not appear to belong entirely to its subject - at least not ontologically, which leaves its mental scarring and bleeds into the physiological experience regardless. Your individual identity is torn away, distorted and sexualized, and given back to you to wear as the Ideal Female - *Hint: she looks like an Instagram model* - until you have 'aged out' of it. This phenomenological notion of imposed signification on bodies is certainly not new and reminds us of Fanon's demonstration of his essence preceding his existence as a Black man, as well as Du Bois' description of the double-consciousness experienced by racialized people. Like a rushing tide, this imposed signification continues to infect today's developing minds through misogynistic, totalitarian-like ideologies that ground contingent gender roles in Nature or History (namely alt-right or 'incel' ideologies) to give them a higher form of legitimacy. As a result of this insidious education, the spatial environments of female-presenting bodies are constricted much like they were back in the time of those twentieth century philosophers. We see women become both the subject and the object, contrary to Merleau-Ponty's distinction - being able to perceive themselves not just from the peripheral, but from the third-person. Following from this, the expected behaviours of our given body and that of our own body may begin to converge, blurring the lines between authentic and inauthentic experience.

Overlaps between the 'logic' of misogyny and totalitarian ideologies

How did misogyny come to be, and how does it still operate today? While most of us are acquainted with how it operates, at least on the surface level, questions remain about where its roots are located and through what methods they stabilize its 'logic.' The word misogyny itself can be traced back to the 17th century, however the phenomenon of prejudice against women (usually by men) itself is clearly much more ancient and could probably be causally linked to the beginning of patriarchal societal structures. But this is not a historical essay, and asking the precise date for the origin of misogyny would be somewhat naïve and futile. What is not unreasonable to assert however, is that this prejudice against women must have followed from humanity's first realization of the physical differences distinguishing the sexes, to which contingent social roles were ascribed accordingly. This will be our point of departure for theorizing the origins and elements of misogynistic thinking.

What makes totalitarianism unique from other forms of law is its ability to transform humankind itself into the law, by allowing the movement of Nature and History to run through them uninhibited, rather than introduce stabilizing positive laws that serve as standards for right and wrong behaviour (Arendt 462). While of course it doesn't follow that every society with traces of misogyny must be absolutely totalitarian, the elements of ideological thinking that we see culminate in totalitarianism can be identified in many forms of prejudice. According to Arendt, there are 3 totalitarian elements present in all ideological thinking, which can also be evidenced in contemporary misogyny, the first being its promise to explain all historical events (Arendt 470). Even when ideologies can be reduced to a seemingly natural happening (i.e.

racism), they still assert the ability to logically explain the past, present, and future through pseudo-psychology and pseudo-science. Thus, ideologies are usually premised on Nature and History, and as such, inherently contingent things such as the traditional societal role of women as subservient creatures lacking rationality, morals, and prudence, is attributed to the level of a supernatural force. The use of something as primitive as Nature or History to be the premise of a logical deduction is clever, for we observe the “exchanging [of] the freedom in man’s capacity to think for the strait jacket of logic” (Arendt 470). Arendt describes logic as a ‘movement of thought,’ which is key to totalitarian reasoning for it requires no outside factors to initiate, is coercive, and turns simple ideas into premises from which everything can be explained. What follows is the second totalitarian element of ideological thinking, which is its detachment from experience. Naturally, if every necessary explanation can be found in our logical deduction from the premise, then why would experience teach us anything new? This marks the final principle of ideological thinking - the separation of thought from experience or reality. At this point, we may see the appeal of employing ideologies as weapons of war, or even on the internet.

Picture a young boy searching for Youtube videos. He comes across a viral video titled “BEN SHAPIRO DESTROYS FEMINISM.” “A montage of Daily Wire EIC Ben Shapiro systematically debunking every idiotic argument posited by 3rd wave feminists,” reads the caption. He can’t get enough of it - the witty comebacks, the posturing, the extensive ‘knowledge’ of contemporary politics and history - who is this man? Luckily for him, his Youtube feed is now filled with similar recommendations which he can absorb and regurgitate. In the twenty-first century, websites like Youtube have begun to funnel users, particularly young boys (evidenced by viewership statistics), into dangerous and repulsive ideologies through content

centered around political ‘commentators’ like Ben Shapiro, or Matt Walsh, or Jordan Peterson. It is not hard to see why these videos have millions of views; disregarding their warped views, these speakers bring an ‘ice cold reasoning’ and ‘merciless dialectics’ to the stage that is only emphasized by added sound effects, careful video clip selection, and dramatic music. The thin layering of misogyny to a great number of such alt-right content can be traced back to the premise from which many of these speakers operate: that the definition of contemporary feminism has changed for the worse, and that its function is obsolete as it is attempting to change societal factors (i.e. the wage gap) that *cannot be changed*. Why? They themselves do not specify, but this is the new wave of misogyny. What is not mentioned is the underlying belief that these societal factors are naturalized and historicized, however, in more extreme cases, that deceptively logical notion is brought further up to the surface. In darker corners of the internet, websites like 4Chan and Reddit have gained notoriety for being a breeding ground for the misogynistic rage of self-titled ‘incels’ (involuntarily celibate men). Frequenters of these chat forums utilize graphics and language to devalue women under the guise of irony and humour, as well as explain the conditions for their involuntary celibacy. According to psychologist Lauren Menzie, “incels blame feminism for disrupting a natural order whereby women and broader societal structures are organized around heterosexual, monogamous couplings” (Menzie 2020). The incel community has gone as far as to develop their own rhetoric: they employ terminology and symbolic actors who differ in socio-sexual capital, power, and agency. There are the ‘Stacys’ (attractive, popular women who do not allow sexual access), the Chads (the prototypical alpha male and counterpart to Stacy), the sigma males (the incels themselves), and the ‘femoids’ (women in general; intentionally dehumanizing) (Menzie 2020). From this premise of distinct and absolute social roles, incels have gone on to restore their own form of physiognomy, which

naturalizes these gendered actors by way of physical appearance - making their social status unchangeable, and explains the historical events that must inevitably proceed from them (totalitarian element 1). According to them, “Nature itself decided, not only who was to be eliminated, but also who was to be trained as an executioner” (Arendt 468). This sort of rhetoric is not unlike totalitarian rulers' method of injecting hidden meanings into everyday scenarios in order to separate ideological thinking from all experience (element 2). It provides incels with a “truer” reality and allows them to take comfort in the deceptive logicity of their rhetoric, for only they and other members of their community have access to a ‘sixth sense’ that allows them to detect secret intent behind everyday acts - particularly those which render them ‘involuntarily’ celibate (Arendt 471). The logically-derived conclusion to all this is that they are celibate not by choice, but by the actions of supranatural forces. This marks the emancipation of thought from experience (element 3). Ultimately, we see that the misogynistic ideologies of the alt-right and incels pretend to know natural and historical mysteries, but while their premises are simply axiomatically accepted pseudo-science, the logical setup of their belief systems ensures that “a whole line of thought could be initiated, and forced upon the mind” (Arendt 470).

Spatial outcomes of women’s objectification

As we have seen in the previous section, misogynistic thinking that leads to the objectification or sexualization of women will claim to obey the laws of Nature or of History, similarly to totalitarian laws. Let us begin by analyzing one of the most common excuses for female objectification (cat-calling, groping, sexual harassment, etc.): ‘it’s just in my nature as a man,’ or something having to do with women’s nature which requires the interference of a man. Once again there is the legitimacy that is attributed to the higher force of nature rather than

individual interest, which may then serve to explain historical happenings. Now picture the events which follow: a cat-call demands the attention of the female-presenting body, the mental registration of the comment enforces it, and her individual identity is torn away and replaced with a generalized one (that of the Ideal Woman). She is consistently self-optimizing, emotionless, and figuratively 1-dimensional. Most importantly, she doesn't reject the assumed patriarchal norms for femininity - she flourishes in them. As such, the spatial environment of the female-presenting body, once firmly set in the world, is now subjected to constriction. Merleau-Ponty describes this phenomenon as such: "the lived distance is at once too short and too wide: the majority of events cease to count for me, whereas the nearest ones consume me" (299). The lack of engagement with the surrounding environment limits opportunities for the female-presenting body to play and exhibit individual freedom, leaving her and other similar bodies in a state of exile. The state of exile becomes the norm for women; the significations that are imposed on their ambiguous perceptions by the perceiver ensures that women are excluded from real life, and left with no place in which they can settle into. The exclusion from real-life is intimately tied to the contraction of one's lived space, since one's experience of their space - whether they are able to take up any and how - bleeds into other forms of experience. The more that women's lived space is invaded by exterior forces, the more their bodily comportment and engagement with the world will recede - also because of their imposed social roles of subservience and complacency. Interestingly, female-presenting bodies may also undergo a mixing of their own sense experiences with the sense experiences that are expected of the projected body onto them via their 'essence,' wherein it becomes unclear what is the 'truer' self. As such, she may feel that 'she is no longer *in* her body and no longer *is* her body' (Ngo 63). This phenomenon is aptly termed 'double-consciousness' by Du Bois, and explained as the 'sense of

always looking at one's self through the eyes of others' (Du Bois 8). Fanon elaborates on this phenomenon when describing himself in a theatre waiting for himself to appear on the screen, waiting for that essence of himself as a Black man that predates his existence, and that was given back to him via the Master gaze - the white gaze. For this reason, a woman who has been sexually assaulted may enter into a state of detachment from Being and begin to observe herself from the imagined perspective of her attacker in everyday life, modifying her behaviour to be more 'modest' accordingly. Another woman will suddenly imagine herself from the male perspective even as she sits alone in her bedroom, and suddenly readjust her posture. It is important to note here that intersecting identities, such as women of colour, results in one experiencing multiplicities of sense-mixing; that is the experiences of *being* your body and being *in front of* your body becoming intertwined as a result of bodily-based stresses. Because certain individuals are both female-presenting and racialized, they may not only feel 'responsible' for their sex, but also their race, and have epistemic privilege regarding both sex-based and race-based prejudice. Either way, we see female-presenting bodies become both the subject and the object of perception, contrary to Merleau-Ponty's distinction, creating a situation where they are hyper-aware of their conduct from the third-person at all times (even in solitude).

Ambiguous perceptions that are the spaces in which misogynistic thinking manifests by means of what Merleau-Ponty terms existential analysis (Merleau-Ponty 138). For the cat-caller, while the action is deliberate, the objectifying thoughts that spur it may not be, for according to Merleau-Ponty, "the subject's intentions are immediately reflected in the perceptual field: they polarize it, put their stamp on it" (Merleau-Ponty 133). Therefore, if the catcaller moves through the world with a misogynistic mindset, it will infect everything they perceive through an

'intentional arc,' even though they retain the capacity to intellectually or empirically analyze things. Our consciousness is at the heart of this arc - it is responsible for subconsciously developing given visuals beyond their own sense, and it relies on the information given to us by previously-constructed 'worlds of thought' (Merleau-Ponty 138). Each one of us has worlds of thought that are acquired from the primordial world around us by taking up the given senses of objects, but also reflecting back their senses, making space for secondary senses (Merleau-Ponty 131). This helps us rely on previously-developed judgements to make sense of the world around us - to generate so-called mental panoramas about the things in front of us, which are not stagnant but ever-changing. Therefore, female-presenting individuals don't just *experience* cases of gender-based prejudice, those practices become *inscribed* in our bodies (Ngo 64). Take the example of the catcaller; after having been subjected to a certain number of such interactions, the female body no longer identifies actions (ie. taking certain pathways, dressing modestly, avoiding large crowds of men) as 'abstract', deliberate movements (Merleau-Ponty 124). Instead, they become 'concrete' or habitual. Since misogyny is rooted in gender-based discrimination, women's structural worlds become eerily similar through repeated, shared experiences of sexual harassment that cause discomfort and fear.

All in all, cases of female objectification highlight the importance of applying a phenomenological method of analysis. Things like the development of misogynistic ideologies and their movement through society on the backs of supernatural forces are clearly impossible to ground in neurological firings within synaptic clefts, or to attribute to a single person. Likewise, the constriction of lived space that follows from ideologies of prejudice offers a more coherent explanation for one's change in bodily comportment that cannot simply be reduced to the

biological. As we have seen, misogyny runs rampant through certain camps of thought - particularly the alt-right and incels - and to different degrees, but that force that influences the development of their rhetoric is the same as the one that leads to real-life gender-based sexual harassment, and the same as the one that existed centuries ago. Through naturalization and historicization, misogynistic sentiments are clearly rooted in something much more primitive and abstract, similarly to totalitarian laws. Regardless, the spatial impacts of this singular logic on female-presenting bodies are apparent, and lead to mass oppression. By applying a phenomenological, context-based lens, and ridding ourselves of the search for the Absolutely Objective, we may begin to tackle misogyny with a more careful and conscientious approach to individuals' needs in the 'real' world.

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