



The Lived Body in Orbit: A Phenomenological Reading of Embodied Consciousness and the Overview Effect in Samantha Harvey's Orbital".

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Abstract

Orbital, a Booker Prize-winning novel by Samantha Harvey, is a rich human experience set against the setting of the International Space Station (ISS). This paper aims at a phenomenological reading of the novel and examining how it depicts the peculiar states of mind and body that astronauts feel during their time in space. The main aim is to explore how the Orbital textually describes the changed perceptions and experiences the characters go through living in the microgravity environment. In particular, this paper will analyze how the novel (1) portrays embodiment transformed and spatial consciousness, (2) the essence of both isolated and confined consciousness, (3) the appearance of the overview effect, or cognitive conversion of seeing the earth in space. This study relies on the concepts of phenomenology and specially those theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty on embodied perception and the lived body (le corps vécu) to shed the subjective aspects of the experiences of the astronauts. It also has interdisciplinary value and has connected the study of literature with the study of philosophy of mind, and the view of space studies to understand the human accommodation to extreme environments that are technologically mediated. It is likely that the study will show how Harvey uses particular narrative strategies and stylistic decisions in expressing the radical transformations in embodiment and consciousness of life in the orbit. The research results will be used to understand the novel in terms of its interaction with the primary issues of human existence, perception, and human relations to the planet.

Keywords: Samantha Harvey, Orbital, Phenomenology, Embodiment, Overview Effect.

الجسم المعيش في المدار : قراءه ظاهراتيه للوعي المتجسد وتأثير المشهد الكلي في رواية سامانثا هارفي "المدار"

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الملخص

"المدار" رواية فائزة بجائزة بوكر من تأليف سامانثا هارفي، هي تجربة انسانية غنية تدور أحداثها في سياق محطة الفضاء الدولية (ISS). تهدف هذه الورقة الى قراءه ظاهراتيه للرواية وفحص كيف تصور الحالات الغربيه للعقل والجسد التي يشعر بها رواد الفضاء خلال وقتهم في الفضاء. الهدف الرئيسي هو استكشاف كيف تصف رواية "أوريبتال" نصياً الإدراكات المتغيره والتجارب التي تمر بها الشخصيات أثناء عيشهم في بيئة انعدام الجاذبيه. على وجه الخصوص، ستُحلل



هذه الورقة كيف (١) تصور الرواية تجسداً متحولاً ووعياً مكانياً، (٢) جوهر كل من الوعي المعزول والمحصور، (٣) ظهور تأثير المشهد الكلي، أو الحول الإدراكي الناتج عن رؤية الأرض من الفضاء. تهتم هذه الدراسة على مفاهيم الظاهراتيه وخاصةً نظريات موريس ميرلو-بونتي حول الإدراك المتجسد والجسد المعيش (le corps vecu) لتسليط الضوء على الجوانب الذاتية لرواد الفضاء. ولها أيضاً قيمة متعددة التخصصات إذ تربط بين دراسة الأدب ودراسة فلسفة العقل، ورؤية دراسات الفضاء لفهم تكيف الإنسان مع البيئات القاسية التي تتم عبر الوساطة التكنولوجية. ومن المرجح أن تظهر الدراسة كيف تستخدم هارفي استراتيجيات سرديّة محددة وقرارات أسلوبية في التعبير عن التحولات الجذرية في التجسد والوعي للحياة في المدار، وستستخدم نتائج البحث لفهم الرواية من حيث تفاعلها مع القضايا الأساسية للوجود الإنساني، والإدراك وعلاقة الإنسان بالكوكب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: سامانثا هارفي، أوربيتال، الظاهراتيه، التجسد، تأثير المشهد الكلي.

Chapter 1: Introduction Criticism A critically acclaimed novel *Orbital*, which won the coveted booker prize, was published by Samantha Harvey in Feridun of a merciless novel in the artificially created world of the International Space Station (ISS). The novel is thorough with an expanded view of the human condition that gives an attitude not only of the ground being looked down upon, but also of what the life of consciousness and physical existence is like when torn apart due to pressure and limitations of Earthly living.

The current paper is a phenomenological inquiry into the case of *Orbital* that aims to unravel its representation of the various ways of being conscious and embodied in the extreme conditions of the outer space an astronaut is put into. The principle goal is to address the way, in which Harvey textualizes of the altered perceptions and lived in the microgravity experience of her characters. It will be analyzed in relation to experience of changed body perceptions and spatial orientation, the impacts of confinement and isolation on consciousness, and such phenomenon as the overviews effect. This mental phenomenon, which can be referred to as an emotional twist experienced by certain astronauts when they look at our planet through space lenses (Wiki, 2024, p. 1), is a dramatic twist of thinking which is driven by the perspective-altering experience of looking at our planet through the space lenses.

The researchers in this study will apply phenomenological methods in an attempt to highlight the personal and highly subjective experiences of the astronauts as depicted by Harvey in the manner he writes. Particular attention will be paid to the philosophical system of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose theory is of essential importance in the understanding of embodied perception and the so called lived body (le corps vecu). Although I do not wish to introduce structuralism, it may be well to mention that according to the entry on Merleau-Ponty in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, during most of his career, Merleau-Ponty was interested in fact in the issues of perception and incarnation as the starting point to explain the relationship between mind and body, between



the objective and the experienced world. (Toadvine, 2023, p. 2). This is where his theories give powerful means of comprehending the changes in perception that Orbital makes to characters as they begin to regard themselves, their bodies and environment in the technological mediation of the exalted environment of the ISS.

This analysis aims to provide a novel input to the current literature research and to the critical perception of the works of Harvey. It is also interdisciplinary, between the analysis of literature, philosophy of mind, and concepts in space research and psychology about how humans adapt to environments which are entirely unrelated in any way to our evolutionary history. Rather, the analysis seeks to demonstrate how Harvey exploits some of the narrative techniques and stylistic devices-strategies and devices that may represent the loss of place and the recovery of place of the same--to render that which, according to Harvey is the radical changes in embodiment and consciousness that define the life in orbit. Ultimately, the conclusions aim to advance our comprehension of the novel in exploring the ancient issues of the human condition, illusion of perception, our own place with the material universe, and our loyalties to the Earth as our planetary home, of which I put a particular emphases in the wake of the metamorphosis of the overview effect.

Chapter 2: Literature Review This paper critically examines theoretical frameworks that are central to the analysis of the novel Orbital by Samantha Harvey in terms of phenomenology, embodiment as well as the psychological phenomenon that astronauts have reported experiencing specifically the overview effect. These are significant prisms in which we can analyze how the novel portrays the astronaut experience and such characteristics of changed states of mind, and changed body experience, which a space environment can create. The Phenomenology and the Body: Merleau-Ponty and the Self and the Other. Phenomenology and specifically that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty offers a significant and critical alternative to the analysis of subjective experience, which does not use sterile dualisms of mind and body, subject and object.

To Merleau-Ponty, the essential purpose of his work is finding an escape out of intellectualism or idealism and empiricism or realism without assuming the common presence of the world of ready-made as being antithetical to the consideration of the historical and embodiment of experience (Toadvine, 2023, p. 2). The core of his philosophy, therefore, is a variant on the primacy of perception and the idea of the lived body (*le corps vécu*) that, it is not abstract thought that first makes us deal with the world, but our own physical bodies being-in-the-



world. It is this point of view which is so much central to Orbital itself that the astronauts' connection to their surroundings, and even their own bodies is changed completely with the experience of micro-gravity and the visual image of life back on the planet. Merleau-Ponty rejects a dichotomy of body movements and thought as complacent.

Patricia Moya (2014) claims that to Merleau-Ponty, there is no rigid distinction between bodily and intelligent movement, yet there is one movement of behavior expressing its intentionality and, in its turn, its meaning (Embodied consciousness section, para. 1). One of the aspects where this unity is particularly evident is in the concept of habit. In the case of Merleau-Ponty the habits are not mechanical repetitions, but ways of bodily understanding (ways of coping with the world) in which the body adapts itself to the external world. Section of embodied consciousness Since the astronauts in the Orbital adapt to the intended meaning, they give themselves a diversity of embodied consciousness (Moya, 2014, p.1).

The inside out knowing of the body is brought about by the body encountering an experienced space. As " (Moya ,2014) goes on further, the human body has to the lived environment, which constitutes itself lived space, the role of defining existence by itself. " (p. 140-141) "Merleau-Ponty says: The body that I hear is a positive center and space around me that grasped them \... the calling of Human Space is broken to describe it with this face of existence where the space must be called there and as space of my body. In that sense, habit is preconditioned with some sort of understanding that body has to the world in which it acts\" (Habit and understanding of the world section, p. 1). This communication has been referred to as operant intentionality(fungierende intentionalit).

It is within the frame of the ISS as a scenario, though, that this article views Orbital as a mediating factor in understanding how the environment in the ISS particularly influences the perceptions of the astronauts regarding the body and the activities they engage in as a result of these perceptions, beyond the physiological reactions. Psychology and Space: The Behavioral and Clinical Spaceflight. In addition to the philosophical aspect of body problem, there are psychological requirements of extended space travel, which are not a light matter. Astronauts have to work in confined and secluded facilities in alienation and in dangerous conditions that lead to certain psychological effects. The other research identifies the influence of staying a long time in a risky, remote and compensatory habitat, where the triggering of the sensation turns in a manner that



deprivation might become the standard as the body starts to adjust to the microgravity (Liu, 2022, p. 5). After that, the alterations in the sequences of day and night can certainly interfere with the sense of time, and even such problem can cause issues as social deprivation: not seeing your culture and family for a long time when rolling back to earth (Liu, 2022, p. 5).

These facts contribute to establishing the atmosphere of the characters in Orbital to pass the psychologically through the world. Among the numerous events that are often described and influential is earth gazing mentalities which often lead to a characterization of the overview effect. It is not just the physical experience of sight; but of a deeper emotional and intellectual feeling. Nezami (in Liu, 2022) documents three fundamental categories of response in his interviews with astronauts, namely: A deep impact on awareness associated with Earth, Magnitude of surprise emotion, and a Space odyssey [relationship of self to world] (p. 6). Astronauts tend to refer to the Earth as an awesomely beautiful, yet extremely fragile, blue marble, which relies on the natural phenomena to value the direct human traces and underline them (Liu, 2022, p. 6). Such an image contact can instill a greater sense of the duty of the entire planet to take care of the planet and the latter make it personally experience the danger and unrealness of such ecological harm (Liu, 2022, p. 6).

The feeling of this emotional state has been characterized in many ways based on the experience, which includes the following: an experience of interbeing, belonging, awe, reverence, humility, gratitude, significance, and awe (Liu, 2022, p. 7). It is an absence-based suspension of disbelief that makes the Earth devoid of divinity yet even stronger, more godlike, a living entity (Liu, 2022, p. 7). Such change can lead to a conceptual change that creates an image of the dependence and interdependence of all life, the closer relatedness of people to the natural and human world, the heightened human responsibility towards the outside world (Liu, 2022, p. 7). The authors Yaden et al. (2017) also conceptualize the overview effect as a form of overbearing feeling and a strong human attachment (p. 1.), linking it to such psychological processes like awe and self - transcendence (Abstract). This is a transformative potential, which is provoked by the perspective of the orbit, which is essential in terms of contextualizing the psychological tracks revealed in Orbital.

To sum up, the phenomenological philosophy of Merleau-Ponty and the psychological research of, the difficulties, of spaceflight (isolation, confinement) and the transformational possibilities of earth gazing (the overview) effect offer a conceptually rich approach to the analysis of Orbital by Samantha Harvey. It is



based on these vantages that an inquiry is made into how the novel cries the multiple interface of the space habitat, how corporeal register is changed and how profoundly the consciousness of its human circling protagonists is altered. Chapter 3: Discussion and Results. In this chapter, possible impacts and outcomes are taken into account in the application of such a phenomenological model based on theories of Merleau-Ponty Iana of embodiment and its relation to psychology perception of the overview effect with the help of the novel *Orbital* by Samantha Harvey. This is demonstrated by the readings of how the novel addresses the metamorphosed embodiment, modified consciousness, and the overview effect of astronauts on the ISS, as exhibited in the introduction.

It is these results that one would want to get out of a literary reading, not some data. Carried in and conscious mean in *Orbital*? A cautious approach to the embodied sensation in the microgravity conditions is one of the desired findings of a phenomenological reading of *Orbital*. Such an exercise, in the footsteps of Merleau-Ponty, would most likely discover how Harvey is exemplifying the body not as an object of mere physical appearances before unknown forces but as an observation station and a place of action which is also in itself reorienting towards a radically new world. We can go beyond the physiological account by the phenomenological approach. Following Moya (2014) referring to Gallagher and Zahavi (2008), the concept of phenomenology enables to consider the new view on the body as subject, as one who experiences, as an agent, and simultaneously, we may comprehend how does the body organize our experience (Introduction section, para. 2). This could be explained in the story by Harvey, in relation to the mobility of the body, its orientation and the development of new knowledge and bodily habits, or perception of the world, which, according to Moya (2014), simply can not be reduced to entirely neurological events (Introduction section, para. 3).

This shift of a terrestrial dwelling to the orbital entity would be discussed through the textual means of the novel, with an alert to scenes of dislocation and acculturation discourses and how the novel would bring to be a new body-schema that would suit the ISS environment. The work will also be used to illuminate how Harvey depicts the mind in the scenarios of isolation and confinement, in the circumstances of the orbit in particular. The following description of the overview effect by Yaden et al. (2017) as 28 being a shift in consciousness (p. 1) and by Liu 29 (2022) when speaking of the emotive components (p. 7) to the phenomenon gives a certain structure to this phenomenon. The discussion would look at how *Orbital* (depicts) this change and whether the characters cross wonder



and transcend self in the same way that interconnected awe can do so. Is the novel an expression of the so-called positive psychological advantages which White (2021) argues are provided through the overview effect and which can partially solve the existing challenges of spaceflight, such as sensory and social deprivation that Liu (2022, p. 5) points to?

The analysis would also discuss the bigger implications that are involved in this altered state of consciousness. According to Yaden et al. (2017), such experience can often make astronauts lose their planet as a place where their life is founded, and make it somewhere beyond our blue-green planet, which may lead to an increased sense of being connected to humanity as a whole and an increased sense of responsibility to environment (p. 2), which are frequent themes in the synthesis of astronaut experiences by Liu (2022, p. 6-7). He added that the discussion would be based on how they can be incorporated into the narrative, as well as exploring the philosophical and existential attitudes of the astronauts\\'\\' healed view of the world. Study Implications and Contributions.

The findings of this phenomenological interpretation should not be restricted to Orbital as phenomenon. Using the concepts of Merleau-Ponty and the psychological understanding of space in accordance with a literary text of the modern period, the paper demonstrates that the theoretical instruments can still be re-legalized. According to Toadvine (2023), the writings by Merleau-Ponty have continued to have an impact on the works of modern researchers, namely, in the fields of... philosophy of mind and cognitive science, environmental philosophy... and phenomenological ontology (para. 3).

This paper belongs to that transdisciplinary debate, and in it the author shows that subjective elements of terrestrial human experience can be uncovered by phenomenological methods in ultra-extreme, technologically mediated spaces like the ISS. The discussion would revolve around how such a novel as Orbital, due to its narrative and stylistic peculiarities, would give a specific understanding of what embodied consciousness is and how human beings relate to technology and the planet. What I would like to discover, in the end, is that Orbital is a very fertile text to think about the issues of simple perception, living in a body and what it means to be human. These finding would then in turn embodiment and the overview effect to put Harvey\\'\\'s story in context and also to posit the potential possibility of using the singular setting of, in this instance space, not as a landscape, but as a crucible, wherein we are compelled to consider the very nature of human experience.



The phenomenological approach, which relies on the work of Merleau-Ponty and is later pursued by other scientists such as Yaden et al. (2017) and Liu (2022), provides the theoretical instruments to unravel the confusing description of the novel's account of the so-called weightless minds and bodies that have to face the harshness and the shock of life in orbit.

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