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Public egos: constructing a Sartrean theory of (inter)personal relations

Daniel O'Shiel[1]

Abstract Sartre's conception of "the look" creates an ontological conflict with no real resolution with regard to inter*subjective* relations. However, through turning to the pages of *The Transcendence of the Ego* (1936) one will be able to begin constructing a rich *public ego theory* that can outline a dynamic and fruitful notion with regard to inter*personal* relations. Such a dynamic plays itself out between the bad faith extremes of believing too much in an all-powerful look on the one hand, as well as believing too much in some deep "I" or persona on the other. Indeed: Through a rigorous analysis of Sartre's main principles regarding his conception of the ego, we will see that the latter is first and foremost a transcendent object *for* reflective consciousness; an object, moreover, that gets "magically" reversed into a subject-bearer of states, qualities, and the like, *only* in a secondary moment. This has the consequence that there is no deep, graspable "I"; but *precisely because of this* one's personality is there in the world, to be shared and displayed, discussed and challenged, at every turn. Thus a Sartrean notion of (inter)personality involves a matching up of external aspects of ourselves that others in fact know better (through the look), with our own interiorities that can nevertheless always be shared through a reflective language that always has the same structural core.

Keywords Sartre · The look · Ego · Reflection · Magic · (Inter)personality

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✉ Daniel O'Shiel
daniel.oshiel@hiw.kuleuven.be

1 Husserl Archives: Centre for Phenomenology and Continental Philosophy, and the Research Foundation, Flanders (FWO), Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Kardinaal Mercierplein 2, 3000 Leuven, Belgium

1 Introduction

The usual route for commenting on Sartre and inter*subjective* relations is to give a rather brief account of "the look" and then proceed with a critical engagement of Sartre's "concrete relations," as found in *Being and Nothingness*. Here there is usually a misunderstanding: Such a discourse is fallaciously taken from its ontological setting and is projected onto a more mundane plane, often with dire consequences.[1] Indeed, with reference to the look, for Sartre "subject" and "object" are absolute *ontological* terms that necessarily exclude one another: A "subject" "looks" and thereby transcends the other's subjectivity in the manner of "arrogance" (*l'orgueil*); and a subject becomes an "object" for an-other subject by being "looked-at" in a manner whereby one is transcend*ed* through an alienating feeling of "shame."[2] These are thus metaphysical principles that structure our ontological being-for-others at the two uttermost extremes in a kind of ontological 'seesaw'[3]—and there is no real middle ground except the bad faith structure of "pride" (*fierté*) or "vanity."[4]

Sartre's "concrete relations" section in *Being and Nothingness* then shows how these basic ontological structures can be manifested in certain "fundamental attitudes": either one tries to *assimilate* another subject's look in love, language, and masochism,[5] or one tries to *transcend* the other through one's own subjective attitudes of indifference, desire, hate, and sadism.[6] This is not to say, however, that all inter*personal* relations are like this. Indeed, I believe that Sartre's "concrete relations" in *Being and Nothingness* are merely there to highlight the "bipolar disorder" of the look; they are there to demonstrate, in certain concrete attitudes, how looking and subjectivity necessarily exclude—but also are always already pregnant with—being-looked-at and objectivity. It is thus an *ontological* subject-object "conflict" with no resolution, which does not however preclude the possibility of a more nuanced account on the level of more everyday inter*personal*[7] relations.

In short, Sartre was not concerned with psychology or anthropology in *Being and Nothingness*.[8] This has the consequence that not all love, hatred, etc., are as

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[1] cf. Van der Wielen (2014).

[2] cf. Sartre (2005/2012, pp. 314/330).

[3] Visker (1999, p. 334).

[4] cf. Sartre (2005/2012, pp. 314/330).

[5] cf. ibid., pp. 386–401/404–419.

[6] cf. ibid., pp. 385, 401–434/403, 419–453.

[7] In this sense, "intersubjectivity" here refers to Sartre's ontological plane, where one's *being*-for-another is ontologically constituted by the big, general "Other"—i.e. the a priori principle of intersubjectivity (or alterity) as such. Here one is *either* a subject "looking," *or* an object "being-looked-at." This "seesaw" can be manifested in many worldly phenomena, but it might not be as prevalent as many suppose. Considering this, I reserve the term "(inter)personality" for relations that play themselves out between and above these ontological extremes. Therefore: everyday physical looks, although made possible by *the* look, do not always imbue the latter, as we hope to make clear in the following. For more clarity on this distinction, again cf. Van der Wielen J. (2014).

[8] cf. Sartre (2005/2012, pp. 306/322).

Sartre describes in those pages; nor does it mean that there are not many other attitudes, emotions, and structures at work in everyday (inter)personal relations that have *no immediate reference* to the look and its ontology.[9] Indeed, if we turn to the pages of *The Transcendence of the Ego* we will see a rich theory that will show there was much more to Sartre's account of interpersonal relations than he is normally given credit for. Here, the *ego* is conceived as an object that reflective consciousness must necessarily create, plus one that *all* people can have similar access to. This means that no one knows himself with any special, deep privilege; everyone's ego is there in the world, to be expressed, seen, appraised, and shared.

Essential to this structure is also Sartre's notion of "magic," in which the ego keeps a "bastard spontaneity"[10] of consciousness that allows the former to reverse the original power of the latter, thereby resulting in personal opinions and assignations that we are wont to use in daily discourse ("I love you"; "I am a nervous person"; "Why are you so mean to me!"; "We are good together"; etc.). It will be necessary to show how and why this capacity is possible.

The look will still have its say however: reintroducing it as a principle that always conditions our being-for-others, 'the [me] comes to haunt [… irreflective] consciousness.'[11] First of all we will show how this means that the look still does contribute to the structure of the ego; and secondly, that such a power also allows aspects of our personalities to be *even better known* by the other than by ourselves. This is because the other can witness objective manifestations of our spontaneity that we ourselves can never immediately grasp.

On the other hand, the immediate intimacy of an individual consciousness with itself also produces (aspects of) a personality that can remain, in pre-reflection, reflection, and memory, more or less "just ours." Here being-for-itself's original upsurge does produce a more basic form of "personality" or "selfness"[12] that *can* become ego-like, but only through a secondary moment of reflection, which moreover need not necessarily be shared with others.

In this manner, (inter)personality takes place between aspects we know best ourselves ("selfness") and other aspects others in fact know better (through the look). These two extremes culminate in a *public ego theory* that would ultimately find its best fruition in a notion of friendship that seeks to avoid forever-threatening bad faith extremes. Thus the ego, as that essential reference-point between a pure spontaneity (looking) and a pure objectivity (being-looked-at) comes to be *the* great cornerstone for a Sartrean theory of (inter)personality—a theory, moreover, that would demand more insights into the nature of the emotions and the imaginary, too.

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[9] Again thanks to J. Van der Wielen.

[10] cf. Sartre (2004/2003, pp. 35/118–119).

[11] Sartre (2005/2012, pp. 284/299). Translation modified—«le moi vient hanter la conscience irréfléchie».

[12] cf. ibid., pp. 127/139.

2 Ego as object-pole of reflective consciousness

The look as a metaphysical principle that conditions our being-for-others is a constant ontological conflict between looking and being-looked-at; "arrogance" and "shame"; being a pure subject and being a pure object for an-other subject. These dichotomies are ontologically irresolvable, containing an endless oscillation wherein the inevitable failure of one extreme, always already pregnant with the other, necessarily leads back to this other one, and back again, in a continuous, nauseating 'circle.'[13] In other words, a for-itself (an individual consciousness) can experience no objectivity except through the other. Think of Sartre's man at the keyhole: In feelings of shame etc. he *is for an-other subject* without being able to grasp precisely what he is for this other.[14] The only way to counteract this experience[15] on such a level is through "arrogance," which transcends the other's look by freely re-affirming one's subjectivity in a manner that reduces everything and everyone else to mere objectivity once again.

Although these two extremes must necessarily be presupposed for our being-for-others to be possible as such, I intend to show that such experiences are by no means the most predominant in our daily inter*personal* lives.

In *Being and Nothingness*, being-for-itself (i.e. consciousness) has "personality" through the mere fact that it is a nihilating and original upsurge that makes it a *presence to self*.[16] Such "presence to self" becomes even more pronounced in «[l]'ipséité» or "selfness,"[17] which is constantly generated through consciousness's automatic and ceaseless engagement with the world and its beings. In this manner, the world in which one is always possesses an implicit taste of selfness, *and* vice versa: 'Without the world there is no selfness, no person; without selfness, without the person, there is no world.'[18]

On this pre-reflective level such "selfness" is never explicit: 'this ["mineness" of] the world is a fugitive [and always present] structure [that] I *live*. The world (*is*) mine because it is haunted by possibles […] which *I am* [and] it is these possibles as such which give the world its unity and its meaning as world.'[19] In other words, the world is always transcended towards by the for-itself as a numberless realm of possibilities in which this individual self can play out its most basic existence as choice, thereby also making such an environment and such choices implicitly "mine."

Thus a constant dynamic between pre-reflective consciousness and the world is an automatic one wherein an implicit notion of self, and not a full-blown "ego,"

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[13] ibid., pp. 385/403.

[14] cf. ibid., pp. 282–284/298–299.

[15] Discounting the bad faith hybrid of "pride" or "vanity"—cf. ibid., pp. 314/330.

[16] cf. ibid., pp. 97–103/109–115.

[17] Sartre (2005/2012, pp. 127/139).

[18] Sartre (2005/2012, pp. 128/141).

[19] ibid. Translation modified—«cette «moiïté» du monde est une structure fugitive et toujours présente que je *vis*. Le monde (*est*) mien parce qu'il est hanté par des possibles […] que *je suis* et ce sont ces possibles en tant que tels qui lui donnent son unité et son sens de monde.».

dominates.[20] This is possible by the mere fact that consciousness is always conscious of things in the world it is not, which at the same time makes it consciousness (of)[21] self as engaging in this very same world.

What about a more explicit "me" or "I," then? Here, although the seeds of selfness are already present in our original, pre-reflective engagement with the world, it is only through *reflective* consciousness that a more explicit "I" or "me" appears.

This appearance is best explicated in Sartre's *The Transcendence of the Ego*. Going against much of the philosophical tradition Sartre shows that there is no transcendental "I"; it is neither necessary nor desirable.[22] It is not necessary because the very nature of irreflective consciousness guarantees its synthetic unity without reference to an "I": 'It [consciousness …] constitutes a synthetic, individual totality, completely isolated from other totalities of the same kind, and the *I* can, clearly, be [only] an *expression* (and not a condition) of this incommunicability and this [interiority] of consciousnesses.'[23] In short, there is a basic coherence to the activity of the for-itself, which means, thanks to the latter's "presence (to) self" and its "circuit (of) selfness," '[t]he transcendental *I* […] has no *raison d'être*.'[24]

In fact, positing such a "transcendental I" does great *damage* to any theory of consciousness: 'this superfluous *I* is actually a hindrance. If it existed, it would violently separate consciousness from itself, it would divide it, slicing through each consciousness like an opaque blade. The transcendental *I* is the death of consciousness'[25] in the sense that consciousness in its most basic activity must be completely translucent, where there is *nothing* "inside" of it. Such "nothingness" allows consciousness to be *the* condition by and through which all else is perceivable, imaginable, thinkable, etc. To posit a kind of fundamental "I" as being "in" or lying "behind" such a transparent activity would be to introduce 'a centre of

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[20] Thus I do not share the same problem that a recent article by Renaudie (2013, particularly pp. 105–106) seems to, namely the ambiguous relation between the "self" on the irreflective level and the "ego" on the reflective. To summarize my understanding: on the ir- or pre-reflective level consciousness is always consciousness *of* something (chair, image, ego, truth) while at the same time only ever having a completely immediate and immanent—in short an utterly *implicit*—form of "self-consciousness." This latter *conscience (de) soi* is *always* coupled with the former *conscience de…*, namely consciousness of something I am not (chair, image, etc.) In fact, this is the precise dynamic that allows consciousness to forever be conscious *of* things it is not, while also *not* (exception: pure reflection) being conscious *of* what it actually is (pure spontaneity, nothingness, translucency). Such immanent selfness remains completely unthematized *until* reflection comes about, which is precisely the act of consciousness that transforms—and if impure, "degrades"—this pure unthematizable self into an object *for* reflective consciousness, namely an "I" or "me"—in short the *ego*. These points should become even clearer as we proceed.

[21] The "of" is bracketed by Sartre (in *Being and* Nothingness) because although he wants to adhere to the rules of grammar, "consciousness (of) self" is *not* intentional, in that such awareness is absolutely immediate and immanent—is not "posited" or "thematized."

[22] cf. Sartre (2004/2003, pp. 7/98).

[23] ibid., pp. 7/97. Translation modified—«Elle constitue […] une totalité synthétique et individuelle entièrement isolée des autres totalités de même type et le Je ne peut être évidemment qu'une *expression* (et non une condition) de cette incommunicabilité et de cette intériorité des consciences».

[24] ibid.

[25] ibid., pp. 7/98.

opacity'[26] that weighs down the purely spontaneous and transparent nature of the basic for-itself.

Indeed, on the pre- or irreflective level there is no "I" because everything is *for* consciousness in such an immediate manner that there is simply no time or space for thoughts of "I":

> When I run after a tram, when I look at the time, when I become absorbed in the contemplation of a portrait, there is no *I*. There is a consciousness of the *tram-needing-to-be-caught*, etc., and a non-positional consciousness of consciousness. In fact, I am then plunged into the world of objects[. … T]his is not the result of some chance, some momentary failure of attention: it stems from the very structure of consciousness.[27]

So how does an "I" come about? In a word, through reflection. Reflection, being 'the for-itself conscious *of* itself'[28] is when consciousness makes *itself* an *object*. This is a second level or moment of consciousness: first there is always an irreflective engagement in the world that needs no reflection whatsoever in order to be[29]; the reflective level, however, always takes up aspects we have experienced and makes them its own subject-matter. By doing this, the nascent selfness of the irreflective *pour-soi* gives rise to a more explicit "I" that is nonetheless never directly cognized:

> The *I* only ever appears on the occasion of a reflective act. In this case, the complex structure of consciousness is as follows: there is an unreflected act of reflection without *I* which is aimed at a reflected consciousness. This reflected consciousness becomes the object of the reflecting consciousness, without, however, ceasing to affirm its own object (a chair, a mathematical truth, etc.). At the same time a new object appears which is the occasion for an affirmation of the reflective consciousness and is in consequence neither on the same level as unreflected consciousness […] nor on the same level as the object of the unreflected consciousness (chair, etc.). This transcendent object of the reflective act is the *I*.[30]

In this manner consciousness 'gives itself *through* reflected consciousness'[31] as an objective pole constituted in and through every reflective act. These "acts" are always initiated by—and always take information (perceptions, memories, feelings, etc.) from—the more spontaneous and irreflective plane.

The ego is very much real however. It may not be of the same reality as a chair, or even a mathematical truth, but it is a concrete transcendent '*existent*'[32] that

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[26] ibid., pp. 8/98.

[27] ibid., pp. 13/102.

[28] Sartre (2005/2012, pp. 173/186).

[29] Imagine a more basic animal that is more glued to its desires and appetites, and has little other forms of consciousness other than sensuous perception—here it is possible to conceive of a consciousness with little or no reflection.

[30] Sartre (2004/2003, pp. 16/104).

[31] ibid., pp. 15/103.

[32] ibid., pp. 15/104.

always accompanies acts of reflection. Nevertheless, such "reality" is only brought about in a secondary moment. Indeed, it is a grand reproach of Sartre that the "moralizers of self-love"[33] always "superimpose" 'a reflective structure […] that is thoughtlessly claimed to be unconscious'[34] onto—or even "beneath"—the spontaneous, irreflective level. This, Sartre says, is a completely unwarranted move when one looks to basic (phenomenological) experience, wherein there are always spontaneous, emotive actions, which can *then*, in a second moment—and in a second moment *only*—be reflected upon and moralized over.

Sartre's own example is how one experiences the spontaneous desire to aid a friend. In such instances 'I feel pity for Peter and I come to his aid. For my consciousness, one thing alone exists at that moment: Peter-having-to-be-aided. This quality of 'having-to-be-aided' is to be found in Peter. It acts on me like a force.'[35] Here, therefore, there exists a spontaneous, 'centrifugal'[36] desire that 'transcends itself'[37] in a non-ego-like manner: '[T]here is no *me*: I am faced with the pain of Peter in the same way I am faced with the colour of this inkwell.'[38] At this level, then, there is an 'intuitive grasp of a disagreeable quality of an object,'[39] which means the whys and wherefores only come *after* such spontaneous feelings and desires. This means positing an ego underlying such autonomous and spontaneous behaviour is to pay ill-attention to how we actually feel, act, and exist on the immediate pre-reflective level.

This is not to say, however, that reflection cannot, at least to some extent, influence one's spontaneous emotions and desires; it is just important to note that these latter always arise first and are *then* made subjects of reflection. If reflection does influence the spontaneous level, then Sartre's terminology is that reflection 'poisons'[40] pure desires in the manner whereby one takes one's spontaneous feelings and emotions and regards *them*—and no longer Pierre—as a third person would: '[I]f my state is suddenly transformed into a reflected state, then I am watching myself acting, in the same sense that we say of someone that he is listening to himself talking. It is no longer Peter who attracts me, it is *my* helpful consciousness that appears to me as having to be perpetuated.'[41] In this manner reflection can put desires and emotions *themselves* under scrutiny, and it can even will to change those one does not like. This, however, is all on a reflective level that is always preceded by more spontaneous feelings and processes.

In short, the "I" and the "me" appear only when one reflects upon one's acts and feelings. They are, in fact, two sides of one and the same object-pole—the ego—with the "I" being those aspects that involve *actions*; and the "me" involving *states*

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[33] cf. ibid., pp. 17/104.

[34] ibid., pp. 18/105.

[35] ibid.

[36] ibid.

[37] ibid.

[38] ibid.

[39] ibid., pp. 18/106.

[40] ibid., pp. 20/107.

[41] ibid.

and *qualities* of ourselves.[42] Just what Sartre means by these three terms is the next main step in his theory.

3 States, actions, and qualities of the ego

States, actions, and qualities make up the three transcendent sub-categories that are all ultimately unified in the concept of the ego.[43] States and qualities constitute the "me"-aspects of the ego; actions the "I"-aspects.

States, just like the ego, are transcendent objects that 'appear[…] to reflective consciousness.'[44] They are real in the sense that one can *partake* in them *through* undergoing certain emotional experiences. Sartre's example is the state of hatred, wherein spontaneous feelings of anger, disgust, repulsion, etc. towards Pierre make me, upon reflection, state that I hate him, have for a long time, and will even continue to do so for all eternity:

> I see Peter, I feel a kind of profound upheaval of revulsion and anger on seeing him (I am already on the reflective level); this upheaval is consciousness. I cannot be in error when I say: I feel at this moment a violent revulsion towards Peter. But is this experience of revulsion hatred? Obviously not. […] After all, I have hated Peter for a long time and I think I always will hate him. So an instantaneous consciousness of revulsion cannot be my hatred. Even if I limit it to what it is, to an instantaneous moment, I will not be able to continue talking of hatred. I would say: 'I feel revulsion for Peter *at this moment*', and in this way I will not implicate the future. But precisely because of this refusal to implicate the future, I would cease to hate.[45]

At work here is an important distinction between "pure" and "impure" reflection. Pure reflection simply witnesses what one is feeling in any given moment and does not go beyond it; impure reflection takes such feelings and transcends towards objective states or thoughts (in this case hatred) that claim more than is found in the original feelings. In Sartre's words, pure reflection 'stays with the given without making any claims about the future,'[46] which means it 'disarms unreflected consciousness by giving it back its instantaneous character.'[47] Impure reflection, although it works with the same "givens," also goes beyond them by carrying 'out an infinitization of the field'[48] through creating a transcendent object (in this case a state) which serves as 'a letter of credit for an infinity of angry or revulsed consciousnesses, in the past and the future.'[49]

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[42] cf. ibid.

[43] cf. ibid., pp. 21/108.

[44] ibid.

[45] ibid., pp. 22/108–109.

[46] ibid., pp. 23/110.

[47] ibid., pp. 24/110.

[48] ibid., pp. 23/110.

[49] ibid., pp. 23/109.

Consciousness is always feeling and engaging with the world and its people; our spontaneous being is emotive *par excellence*. However, our being is also inherently transcendent, meaning we all have an equally strong tendency to always go beyond what is immediately given. If one had only pure reflection, one would never have states. Such transcendence hereby states more than any one instance can actually ever claim, precisely because the latter is an instance. For example: I may have been annoyed by a certain person three, a hundred, even thousands of times—and yet no matter the amount of individual instances, it is *always* a leap to state "I hate so and so" in such a blanket manner. This is because states, by definition, do not allow for any subtlety. If I remain on a "purer" level then the discourse would always be "you annoyed me *then* because you" etc. However: To make the blanket claim of hating someone *tout court* is to transcend towards the state *of* hatred, which is always accessible to emotive consciousness.

In this way states always state too much, and yet they are very real objects towards which we constantly transcend in our everyday emotive and (inter)personal lives. An important consequence is that states are "passive." Here one could perhaps object that hating can have real force and influence, and therefore be "active" in some manner.[50] Of course an instantaneous *hating-this-person-right-now* is just such a case; but as soon as one reflects upon one's feelings one necessarily makes them objects *for* reflecting consciousness; and if this is done "impurely"—i.e. in a manner that goes beyond the immediate sensuous and emotive data—then one is dealing with states, in which one's emotions now *partake* (like in the expression "a feeling *of* hatred")—and by doing so they in fact transcend themselves. In this manner, all states are "passive" and "inert" because they are always *relative* to the 'monstrous spontaneity [i.e. activity]'[51] of primal, irreflective consciousness. To talk of such states as "forces" does nothing to change this objective, passive character, but on the contrary reinforces it:

> The passivity of a spatio-temporal thing is constituted on the basis of its existential relativity. A relative existence can only be passive, since the least activity would free it from its relative status and would constitute it as absolute. Likewise hatred, as an existence relative to the reflective consciousness, is *inert*. And, of course, in talking of the inertia of hatred, we do not mean anything other than that it *appears* that way to consciousness. Do we not say, after all, 'My hatred was reawakened…', 'His hatred was countered by the violent desire to…', etc.? Are not the struggles of hatred against morality, censorship, etc., imagined as conflicts between *physical* forces, to the extent that Balzac and most novelists (sometimes even Proust) apply to states the principle of the independence of forces? The entire psychology of states (and non-phenomenological psychology in general) is a psychology of the inert.[52]

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[50] cf. ibid., pp. 24–25/110–111.

[51] ibid., pp. 47/128.

[52] ibid., pp. 25/110–111.

So states can indeed be compared to "forces," but this doesn't make them any less passive precisely because for Sartre *all* phenomena, whether physical or psychical, are relative to the absolutely spontaneous nature of consciousness. In other words, consciousness lives its own spontaneity and even though everything else in the world can be seen as "active" in the sense that "there is stuff happening," it is precisely because such "actions" are law-governed and thereby non-spontaneous that the causal nexus of things and forces remains "inert" *with reference to* the absolutely active and transcendent nature of consciousness. In this manner, reflective consciousness based upon spontaneous emotion builds a web of psychical states much like reflective consciousness based upon perception builds constellations of physical and natural laws.[53]

From the perspective of the body, the relation between it and states 'is openly and obviously causal'[54]; the body makes certain gestures etc. *because* it is in a certain state. For Sartre, however, the immediate plane of consciousness is experientially more original and first-person, meaning to talk about the "states" of the body is to take a third-person perspective that views the body as an in-itself (shaking limbs, flushed face, etc.) and *not* a for-itself. Nevertheless, much of our speech about our emotions also appears to be from a third-person perspective—but here is precisely when one is talking about states, and not the spontaneous feeling(s) one has (had).

Sartre does however admit that it is *as if* our irreflective emotions "emanate" from more "primary" states that somehow "lie behind" the former and indeed make them possible. This would strip the spontaneity of consciousness, and indeed it is why psychology normally says such feelings are not really spontaneous at all but are determined precisely by such underlying "psychological states." In this manner, the psyche is just as determined as forces of nature.

Such theories are possible precisely because they have *missed* the phenomenological observation that Sartre has been making: States are first and foremost objects *for* consciousness that moreover only arise on the impure reflective level. In other words, spontaneous emotive engagements with the world always come first—these are then, through impure reflections, linked up with transcendent objects such as states. Finally, the order can then be reversed through "magic." In real time, of course, this can all happen "in the blink of an eye." However, upon a closer, slow-motion inspection, we can uncover Sartre's crucial conception of "magic," which is key if one wishes to anticipate the objection that we often think our feelings "come from" our states.

Sartre even goes as far to say that 'it is in exclusively magical terms that we have to describe the relations between the *me* and consciousness.'[55] This means the problem with normal psychologies is that they miss the more basic phenomenological analysis that shows magic to be a reality. In short: Psychology, like most science, denies the existence of magic.

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[53] Such laws, moreover, are triggered by the immediate capacity for perceiving; but they also always go beyond perception by stating more than was actually witnessed. Note, therefore, how Sartrean theory also can account for Hume's "problem of induction"—cf. Hume (2001, particularly Book I Part 3; as well as 2007, particularly sections 4, 5, and 7).

[54] Sartre (2004/2003, pp. 25/111).

[55] ibid., pp. 26/112.

Nevertheless, what is "magic"? In these passages it is opposed to logical relations. Logical relations can be studied only from a third-person perspective that necessarily takes its objects in an in-itself (i.e. "is what it is") manner. Consciousness, on the contrary, is a spontaneous and irreflective engagement with the world that is anything but "third person" or in-itself—it is *for-itself*. This means these two perspectives are opposed to each other and often exclude each other. With *magic*, however, this distinction becomes merged or even confused, where in-itself aspects such as states are projected onto the spontaneous for-itself so much that all spontaneity is covered over to the extent that this latter can even be denied completely. Magic thus makes original passivities like states into the "real" originating activities of all emotion; it allows one to go from phenomenological observations like "I feel anger and therefore am partaking in hatred," to more psychological reflections, such as "I am angry because I am in a state of hatred." In this manner, original passivities are made pseudo-activities; states become conceived as the underlying origin of the actual, original, actions, which are now considered only as conditioned "effects." Magic reverses the real order of things. This has the consequence that although psychology does not believe in magic, it is precisely because of this fact that it falls victim to it very often.

Sartre's theory is thus quite subtle: The first level of consciousness is always spontaneous feeling (being-angry-at-Pierre); then, upon reflection the ego can be introduced in a manner that can be either "pure" ("*I am angry at you in this moment*") or "impure" ("I am angry at you *because I hate you*"). If one transitions from pre-reflection to pure reflection then no state appears; but if the transition is impure then states always appear. In *both* transitions, however, there are elements of "magic": In pure reflection the "I" is introduced as the *bearer* of the emotion, thereby making the "I" cease to appear as the transcendent object *of* the emotion; and in impure reflection a state (in this example: hatred) is also introduced in addition to this "I." In this manner, transitions from the first (pre-reflective) to the second (reflective) level always involve some magic, turning transcendent objects into subjective bearers of the original emotion.

The second sub-category of the ego is that of *actions*. Here Sartre states that 'concerted action is before all else […] a transcendent factor.'[56] This is because action is 'not merely the noematic unity of a stream of consciousness; it is also a concrete realization.'[57] This includes actions played out in 'the world of things'[58] (e.g. 'playing the piano'[59]), but also 'purely psychical actions, such as doubting, reasoning,'[60] etc. Action of necessity 'requires time in which to be carried out,'[61] meaning in the moments of any given action 'there correspond active, concrete consciousnesses'[62] that are, as usual, quite instantaneous and irreflective. Reflection,

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[56] ibid., pp. 26/112.

[57] ibid.

[58] ibid.

[59] ibid.

[60] ibid.

[61] ibid.

[62] ibid., pp. 26–27/112.

however, can 'apprehend[…] the total action in an intuition which displays it as the transcendent unity of active consciousness.'[63] In this manner, a 'spontaneous doubt'[64] regarding an unclear object in the dark is an instantaneous *consciousness*[65]; but a 'methodical doubt'[66] that makes a concerted effort to reflect upon something dubious is an *action* in the transcendent and reflective sense of the term. In other words there are always spontaneous consciousnesses (cycling; writing; etc.) that in their realization can become cognized as total, completed actions (went cycling; wrote a paper; etc.). These latter are all transcendent objects belonging to the ego, which, as usual, reverses the process and says "*I* went cycling," "*I* was writing," etc.

Equally succinct are Sartre's comments on *qualities*. These can form a kind of intermediary object between the ego on the one hand, and states and actions on the other.[67] When, for instance, we have been angry at many people or have been angry a great many times, then we tend to 'unify these various manifestations by intending a psychical disposition to produce them,'[68] such as in the statements "I am an angry person" or "I have an angry disposition." Such qualities are not cumulative sums of all our angers but are once again transcendent objects that we can relate to *as* an angry person or *with* an angry disposition. In this manner qualities represent 'the substratum of states just as states represent the substratum of *Erlebnisse* [i.e. spontaneities].'[69] In other words, a state is 'the noematic unity of spontaneities'[70] and a quality is 'the unity of objective passivities,'[71] with "objective passivities" being either states ("I am a person who is full of hatred"); actions ("I have been hating you for a long time now"); or both ("I have been having feelings of hatred towards you for a long time now"). In this manner, qualities are one conceptual step closer to the ego itself, although states and actions can bypass such qualities in unifying with the ego directly (e.g. "I hate you").[72]

Think of someone with an angry disposition. Over the course of years there have been many events that have sparked spontaneous bouts of anger. These spontaneities always transcend towards the state of anger itself, as well as manifesting themselves to reflective consciousness as complete(d) actions ("I was in such a rage that day"). Over time reflection can also form the idea that one has the "quality"—i.e. disposition—to "being an angry person," which is the final culmination of spontaneities that have travelled through states and actions to attach a quality to one's very *I*. So even though qualities are transcendent objects of reflective consciousness that actually come *after* spontaneities, states, and actions, one can come to believe that one *is*, in one's very "being," an "angry individual." Nowadays the recourse is to genes, biology, personal

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[63] ibid., pp. 27/112.

[64] ibid.

[65] cf. ibid.

[66] ibid.

[67] cf. Sartre (2004/2003, pp. 27/112–113).

[68] Sartre (2004/2003, pp. 27/113).

[69] ibid.

[70] Sartre (2004/2003, pp. 28/113).

[71] ibid.

[72] cf. ibid.

histories and other *in-themself* mechanisms that allow one to claim that that is "just how I am, how I was made, formed," meaning one is capable of thinking that there is often very little, or even nothing, "to do about it." On the other hand, one can try to manage such dispositions (e.g. "anger management" courses) by reflecting on one's emotions in a manner that tries to thwart the more spontaneous feelings (always a difficult task, the feelings being pre-reflective and spontaneous, and therefore more primary). Either way, qualities have real force in our (inter)personal lives because '[t]o this type naturally belong failings, virtues, tastes, talents, tendencies, instincts, etc. These unifications are always possible. The influence of preconceived ideas and social factors is preponderant here.'[73] Thus it is precisely the magic of the ego and its sub-categories that leads much ego-talk to be of "bad faith" for Sartre, as we shall see presently.

4 The ego's magic

'The Ego is to psychical objects what the World is to things'[74]—it is the ultimate unifying principle of all our psychical states, actions, and qualities.[75] The ego does not actually add anything to these concrete aspects, however; its relation to its aspects is one of 'creation.'[76] "Creation" here means all states and actions can ultimately be 'attached directly (or indirectly, through quality) to the Ego as to its origin.'[77] Thus the ego, precisely because it adds nothing to such states, can contain everything. In this manner, the ego is analogous to a physical object, which is also totally "opaque,"[78] but is at the same time the unifying principle for all the possible *Abschattungen* that that object can display—*without ever being accessible itself*. In this manner, because '[t]he Ego is the creator of its states and sustains its qualities in existence by a sort of conserving spontaneity,'[79] it remains the persistent fact throughout all forms of consciousness ('pre-logical, infantile, schizophrenic, logical, etc.'[80]).

We have seen that consciousness is absolute spontaneity, so what is the difference between this and the "conserving spontaneity" of the ego? First of all, because the ego is necessarily *passive* (i.e. objective) at its core, such "spontaneity" can only be a pseudo-one[81]: 'Real spontaneity must be perfectly clear: it *is* what it

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[73] ibid.

[74] ibid., pp. 30/115.

[75] This conception of the ego is always primary for Sartre, and can therefore stand alone, although it can also lead to a 'synthetic enrichment' (ibid., pp. 28/114), which is apparent in a 'psycho-physical *me*' (ibid.).

[76] ibid., pp. 32/116.

[77] ibid.

[78] cf. ibid., pp. 33/117. Therefore, the ego is totally opaque and can only be grasped through actions, states, and qualities. Basic selfness, on the contrary, is totally *translucent* and can only be grasped through pure, momentary reflection.

[79] ibid.

[80] ibid.

[81] cf. ibid., pp. 33/118.

produces and cannot be anything other'[82]; the ego, on the other hand, has only a *borrowed* spontaneity. Borrowed from where? Consciousness. The ego, as *the* creation of spontaneous reflective consciousness, is always an object *for* this consciousness. However, this relation gets magically reversed, wherein the original transcendence of the ego is hypostatized, thereby allowing it to be a "subject-bearer" of the more original feelings. In other words, consciousness spontaneously creates an object that it itself instills with the power to act as if this latter had such a power all of its own. If one is aware of this then one can (try to) treat the ego rationally—i.e. as an object *for* consciousness; and yet the automatic tendency to reverse the trend is so ingrained in the activity of consciousness that this latter can—and often does—become *bewitched* by its own creation. This means the ego involves, '[m]ost of the time, […] a magical procession'[83] where it is conceived as the actual root of so many qualities, states, and actions of our personae. Such a reversal is precisely what allows us to talk about ourselves as "I-subjects," conceiving ourselves with "underlying" personae that we can believe to be the real root and structure of things, *even though* the *I* is actually only ever an object *for* reflective consciousness.

Such creation thus allows consciousness to believe in a solid form of personality that in turn can allow the former to escape (to a certain extent at least) its own "monstrous" spontaneity, which is often too hard to bear:

> [T]he Ego is an object apprehended but also *constituted* by reflective [consciousness]. It is a virtual [foyer] of unity, and consciousness constitutes it as going in *completely the reverse direction* from that followed by real production; what is *really* first is consciousnesses, through which are constituted states, then, through these, the Ego. But, as the order is reversed by a consciousness that imprisons itself in the World in order to flee from itself, consciousnesses are given as emanating from states, and states as produced by the Ego. As a consequence, consciousness projects its own spontaneity into the object Ego so as to confer on it the creative power that is absolutely necessary to it. However, this spontaneity, *represented* [and] *hypostatized* in an object, becomes a bastard [and degraded] spontaneity, which magically preserves is creative potentiality while becoming passive. Hence the profound irrationality of the notion of Ego.[84]

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[82] ibid., pp. 33–34/118.

[83] ibid., pp. 33/117.

[84] ibid., pp. 34–35/118–119. Translation modified—«l'Ego est un objet appréhendé mais aussi *constitué* par la conscience réflexive. C'est un foyer virtuel d'unité, et la conscience le constitue en *sens inverse* de celui que suit la production réelle: ce qui est premier *réellement,* ce sont les consciences, à travers lesquelles se constituent les états, puis, à travers ceux-ci, l'Ego. Mais, comme l'ordre est renversé par une conscience qui s'emprisonne dans le Monde pour se fuir, les consciences sont données comme émanant des états et les états comme produits par l'Ego. Il s'ensuit que la conscience projette sa propre spontanéité dans l'objet Ego pour lui conférer le pouvoir créateur qui lui est absolument nécessaire. Seulement cette spontanéité, *représentée* et *hypostasiée* dans un objet, devient une spontanéité bâtarde et dégradée, qui conserve magiquement sa puissance créatrice tout en devenant passive. D'où l'irrationalité profonde de la notion d'Ego».

Consciousness thus instills its own creation with a pseudo-power that allows consciousness to bewitch, escape, and even suppress (aspects of) itself. This magical mixture of passivity and activity of the ego is the reason for the ego's "irrationality," as well as its "unintelligibility": the ego, as the origin of our actual spontaneities, does not make phenomenological sense—and yet it is often conceived as so, rife throughout our daily reflections and words.

Because reflective consciousness is a massive aspect of human reality; and because the ego is a transcendent—i.e. *external*—object that each and all have access to and can each and all transform in a magical manner, this leads Sartre to conclude that we are always 'sorcerers for ourselves,'[85] as well as for each other.[86] In this manner we are always 'surrounded by magical objects which retain, as it were, a memory of the spontaneity of consciousness, while still being objects of the world.'[87] This 'irrational synthesis'[88] of activity (consciousness) and passivity (ego) produces a '[phantom] spontaneity'[89] that allows the ego to *be affected* (i.e. to be passive)[90] *as well as* be the supposed *cause* (i.e. activity) of the *actual* causes (spontaneities; consciousnesses). This means these latter spontaneities are often inverted onto the objective (i.e. passive) side. Such a dynamic is never logical because activity and passivity, cause and effect, for-itself and in-itself, are swapped or conflated, resulting in the magical relation that consciousness has to its own ego.

5 A being-for-others without shame?

The ego, as the child of reflective consciousness, is 'radically cut off from the world.'[91] However, because reflection is always *upon* pre-reflective worldly events that act as the 'occasion[s] of states or action,'[92] the ego can still have a massive influence on our worldly (inter)personal relations. Engagement with the world necessarily involves engagement with others, who can actually know aspects of ourselves better than we do. Running counter to this is the commonplace opinion that we somehow "know ourselves" better than others can or do. To untangle this apparent paradox one will need to understand that the first aspect (others knowing us better) is thanks to the look; and we can know ourselves in other aspects better thanks to the *somewhat* privileged access we have to our own consciousness.

We say "somewhat" because any reflection must necessarily make consciousness an object. Moreover, because we intend to show that the ego is an object that *all* human beings have equal access to, this means the supposed privileged access we have to ourselves is only partially true. On the other extreme, the power of a

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[85] ibid., pp. 35/119.

[86] cf. ibid.

[87] ibid.

[88] ibid., pp. 36/119.

[89] ibid. Translation modified – « spontanéité fantomale ».

[90] cf. ibid., pp. 35/119.

[91] ibid., pp. 36/119.

[92] ibid.

totally alienating look is by no means as common as many suppose. In fact, the look can find rather positive and beneficial manifestations on the more mundane level. In this manner, by playing down both the commonness of an alienating look, as well as some privileged personal access, the ultimate result is a *public ego theory* that can start to show how our (inter)personal lives are constantly operating *between* the two extremes of absolute objectivity (the look) and absolute interiority (private thoughts). Indeed, we may ultimately say that a public ego conception which adopts a responsibility thereto[93] is of vital importance if one wishes to avoid the bad faith extremes of believing too much in the power of the other and the external pressures of the world—*as well as* believing too much in the power of some kind of completely private, deep persona. In a word, our personalities are public, there to be seen, shared, and matured through a dynamic with one's own reflective self-appraisals that can—and even should—go hand in hand with constructive input from others.

Going from *The Transcendence of the Ego* to *Being and Nothingness* reveals a problem, however.[94] In the former work we have seen that there can be no "me" on the irreflective level; yet the latter work states that the "the me" comes 'to haunt […] unreflective consciousness.'[95] How is this possible? In a word, through the look. There is, however, a pre-history to this assertion that can be found in *The Transcendence of the Ego* itself:

> It is however certain that the *I* appears on the unreflected level. If I am asked, 'What are you doing? and I reply, preoccupied as I am, "I am trying to hang up this picture', or, 'I am repairing the rear tyre', these phrases do not transport us on to the level of reflection, I utter them without ceasing to work, without ceasing to envisage just the actions, insofar as they have been done or are still to be done – not insofar as I am doing them. But this 'I' that I am dealing with here is not, however, a simple syntactic form. It has a meaning; it is quite simply an empty concept, destined to remain empty. Just as I can think of a chair in the absence of any chair and by virtue of a mere concept, in the same way I can think of the *I* in the absence of the *I*.[96]

Here we have a pure, empty "I" on the irreflective level, allowing one to simply state that "I am doing such and such." Here the *I* is "empty" because there are no transcendent qualities; no states; and no reflected-upon actions. Such an *I* thus loses its intimacy[97] and is therefore used *generally*, merely showing that there is engagement in the world, which "I" am incidentally doing.

Such a passage seems to be the seed for Sartre's more full-blown theory of the afore-described phenomena of "presence to self" and the "circuit of selfness." The structure is indeed the same: My irreflective engagement in the world is carried out by a self that, through such a dynamic, automatically and implicitly recognizes its

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[93] cf. ibid., pp. 33/117.

[94] My attention has been drawn to this problem through comments made by R. Visker.

[95] Sartre (2005/2012, pp. 284/299).

[96] Sartre (2004/2003, pp. 40/122–123).

[97] cf. ibid., pp. 40/123.

activities in the world as its own. This means an empty, almost personless self is already present in our automatic engagements with the world and its objects, especially with reference to the irreflective *actions* (i.e. the "I"-aspects) of such an implicit self. This passage is thus the seed for Sartre's more detailed discourse (in *Being and Nothingness*) on the "circuit of selfness," where there is no self (i.e. nascent "I") without a world, and no world without a self.

Now it may be asked: Are there not irreflective engagements with the world that involve an implicit notion of the other just as there are engagements that involve an implicit "I"? I believe there are. Take, for example, getting dressed in the morning. Of course one can get dressed in a manner that explicitly imagines particular looks (friends, colleagues, etc.). However, there are also many times we get dressed when such considerations are not present at all—and yet, the very act of dressing (leaving aside environmental factors such as the weather etc.) is a decidedly other-directed action that can—and even must—remain on the irreflective plane.

More generally, the "me" "haunts irreflective consciousness" because the other as the look, felt through shame, gives me an objective aspect of *my* being that I nevertheless cannot grasp—precisely because I am alienated through the look as shame. Here I *cannot* reflect because shame is an immediate recognition *of* an-other's look that strips me of my subjectivity and hence my ability to reflect.[98] I can reflect *after*, but this original ontological shame is always first. Nevertheless, when I get dressed it is not normally because of some ontological, completely alienating "shame"; and yet the action seems to implicitly acknowledge the existence of others—it is an activity that has an element of the social ingrained within its very core.[99] Therefore, can there be a form of being-for-others *without shame*, namely without any *explicit* recognition of the look?

Here, then, I intend to suggest that "haunting" may *also* signify immanent remnants of our being-for-others, originally instilled in us by shame and the look, but precisely because they have become so common and habitual—precisely because they have become *interiorized*—they have lost their transcendent and alienating character. In order words: "I" get dressed in the morning *because there are others*—it is a fact that there are other-objects in the world, which are all, by definition,[100] possible instantiations of the more original look. However, none of this is explicit in this case, which suggests that there is an immanent form of being-for-others that has *lost* the tonality of shame. Originally, the look as experienced through shame wrenches consciousness's subjectivity away from itself by turning it into an object-for-the-other that it cannot grasp. Such an instance must occur first for our being-for-others to come into existence (think of infants who have no consideration for their nakedness—no ontological shame). However, once this absolute being-for-others is experienced there can, I contend, be traces that seep, so to speak, into irreflective activities that have lost any explicit tonality of shame. These traces, over time and habituation, can come to "haunt" such automatic activities, which take the other (or even particular others (my wife; my friend; etc.))

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[98] cf. Sartre (2005/2012, pp. 284/299–300).

[99] This addition is thanks to one of the anonymous referees.

[100] cf. Sartre (2005/2012, pp. 281/297).

into account, but *only* in an implicit—i.e. non-intentional—way. Therefore, in our example, if one is asked what one is doing then the response might be an instantaneous "getting dressed"—but, if actually pressed on *why* you are carrying out the activity then one might, with surprise or even consternation, exclaim: "What do you mean?! *Everyone* gets dressed in the morning!" Such an exclamation is indeed reflective—but it *points to* an irreflective activity that is already implicitly conditioned by the other.

Therefore, just as there are phenomena (« *négatités* »—e.g. destruction)[101] that have an inbuilt negativity within them, I contend that there can equally be irreflective engagements that have inbuilt considerations of the other within them too. I say "inbuilt" because the negativity or otherness here is so *immanent* that these phenomena lack the transcendence (i.e. the intentionality) to make those aspects appear in an explicit manner, which in the case of our being-for-others is the look recognized through shame. Indeed, shame 'is a shameful apprehension *of* something and this something is *me*'[102]; it is transcendent and therefore explicit, although it is also self-referential ("I am ashamed *of myself*"). With irreflective getting-dressed, however, although there are indeed transcendent objects (this shirt, these pair of trousers, etc.), there is no explicit recognition of the look and therefore no shame is felt—and yet my actions are nonetheless conditioned ("haunted") by my being-for-others. In short, getting dressed implicitly acknowledges an objectivity I am—an objectivity, moreover, that cannot be given to me by anyone but the other; however, such objectivity has become so ingrained here that I have no explicit experience thereof. Such implicitness exists because this being-for-others is without its normal content of shame, just like the empty "I" when hanging a picture is without its transcendent content as action, state, and the like.

Therefore "haunting" can mean objectivity I cannot grasp due to the look (alienation); but it can *also* refer to instantiations of the other that seep into irreflective actions and thereby become immanent.

6 (Inter)personal relations

This means ontological structures can be absorbed into worldly activities and ways of being that have lost their explicit, transcendent references and contents. The difference with the ego is that there was already an immanent form of *selfness* on the irreflective level that the "empty I" seems to bond with. With immanent otherness there is no such luck, for the for-itself has no otherness except after being transfigured into for-others through the look and shame. However, certain concrete examples nevertheless inform us that even though there is nothing more original to "bond with," there is nevertheless, in both instances, a process going from transcendent forms of experience (*I* as reflection; the look as shame) *back* to inbuilt conditions of irreflective actions and habits (hanging a picture; getting dressed).

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[101] cf. ibid., pp. 32, 45/42, 56–57.

[102] ibid., pp. 245/259.

What about, however, when the other is not empty but a specific one—namely a concrete other in the world, or in Sartre's terminology *un objet-autrui*? We have already seen that the other gives us and sees an objective aspect of our being that we ourselves cannot directly see. Think of close friends and why you may love them. Here a load of pleasant images may spring to mind of how exactly they manifest their spontaneity—how they are to you and to the world at large. Indeed, from the side of that person there are so many spontaneities; but you, as viewing them as an *objet-autrui*, see their spontaneity manifest in a way that they will never have immediate access to themselves. This is precisely the structure of the look, but it no longer harbors the absolute subject-object dichotomy as found on the ontological level. Here, on the contrary, there are aspects of a person (e.g. a smile) that they can certainly enact spontaneously *qua* consciousness—and yet you see only the *manifestation* of such spontaneity (my-friend-smiling) in a manner that they—in their own turn—can only see through artificial media (a mirror, a video-camera, etc.).[103] Such little instances can build up to the extent that the "outside" or second-person perspective can actually see aspects or whole character-traits that the person themselves might even be quite oblivious to. Hereby, thanks to such physical, non-ontological looks, one is aware of manifestations that the first-person perspective can never have; manifestations, moreover, that can tell one a lot about the person's way of being without however ever capturing their "interiority" *as* interiority. On such a level, therefore, these more mundane, physical looks need not be alienating at all but can actually inform you of how you "come across" to others in your daily life.[104] Thus in personal conversations the other can provide information about you that you can never immediately grasp yourself; and you can provide the other side, namely interior thoughts and processes when such manifestations were taking place. Such a "matching up" of spontaneity with how such spontaneity manifests itself is hereby a crucial dynamic of interpersonal relations.

However, perhaps everything is "other" for Sartre because, even when one is alone and wants to reflect upon one's own personality, one must of necessity make one's spontaneity an object and therefore *try* to view it as another would, even though we cannot view our own consciousness as we can view another person in the world. Indeed, although when we view ourselves we have to *objectify* our own consciousness, we are nevertheless never *completely* separated from ourselves. *This* is what Sartre must mean by the borrowed statement of Rimbaud, ''I is *an other*''[105]: The very structure of reflective consciousness makes itself an object *for* such consciousness. This means the ego cannot be viewed as anything but a transcendent object, as "an-other"—although *not* in the same manner as we view other people, who are totally external.[106]

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[103] Such "media" always distort such spontaneity—or even its manifestation—to the point of it being unrecognizable. Think of how one's face is reversed in a mirror image; or how one's voice "sounds weird" on an answering machine; etc.

[104] «–Mais, monsieur, en admettant qu'il paraisse ce que vous dites, comment pouvez-vous juger cet homme sur sa mine ? Un visage, monsieur, ne dit rien quand il est au repos.

Aveugles humanistes ! Ce visage est si *parlant*, si net–mais jamais leur âme tendre et abstraite ne s'est laissé toucher par le sens d'un visage.»—Sartre (2011, p. 172).

[105] Sartre (2004/2003, pp. 46/127).

[106] These comments are thanks to R. Breeur.

Of course the "magic" of the ego can make such objects *seem* subjective, but this does not change the fact that they ultimately are and remain objects. In this manner, although such a process of magic is evident in all speeches and impure reflections; and although many can and do talk purely in magical terms, a person informed of the principles here being outlined would be able to struggle against the dangers of magic that actually make one enter into bad faith relations with regard to oneself and others. "Bad faith" generally means when one either tries to deny one's freedom by living as a brute, intransigent fact (the famous waiter example)[107]; or when one tries to ignore the factual situation through transcendent, frivolous flights of freedom (the woman on the date).[108] On the level of the ego, bad faith has a similar structure: Spontaneity is either transformed into so many in-themself aspects that make consciousness *qua* personality simply "be what it is"; or, on the other extreme, consciousness claims that it is never anything in particular ("I'm nothing"). Neither of these are *actually* the case; indeed, the truistic expression "I am who I am" shows that the ego is indeed an in-itself object, but it is always one *for* consciousness—and this latter point holds for the other extreme, too ("I'm nothing").

Nevertheless, through magic there is always the danger of taking such truisms and using them to give one's "I" a privileged position at the heart of a "deep" personality that is no longer an object but a kind of profound subjectivity that no one can know except you. The other, less common extreme is to take the nihilistic stance ("I'm nothing") and thereby equally flee the responsibility of relating to one's personality—one's ego—in a more dynamic way. Such flights are evident in comments such as "only I know who I really am"; "you cannot possibly know what I'm about"; "I don't matter in the slightest"; etc. If the *I* is magically hypostatized in such a manner, then the individual enters a bad faith relation with regard to themselves and others, creating a "I" that is supposedly inaccessible to others ("only I know who I am"), or is even pretended to be non-existent ("I'm nothing at all").[109] Both have the consequence of covering over the dynamic relation *between* consciousness and the ego. Indeed, if one recognizes this dynamic then one may start to struggle against the extremes through a responsibility that tries to avoid being too bewitched by such blanket-claims. For instance, if questioning what or who one "really is," then any answers, if they are to go beyond the banality of "I am who I am" etc., will *have* to start talking again of states, qualities, etc. Now although these must be talked about in the their magical, hypostatized forms, they are nevertheless much more specific and, as a consequence, always ultimately betray their true objective origin. Indeed, precisely because the *I* is absolutely opaque, if one wishes to describe it in personal terms then one must talk in terms of states, actions, and qualities. Such a discourse necessarily blends the objective origins of personality with the magical transformations that the borrowed

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[107] cf. Sartre (2005/2012, pp. 82–83/94–95).

[108] cf. ibid., pp. 78–79/89–91.

[109] I have a suspicion that such bad faith extremes, merged with fantastical flights and moods of the imaginary, as well as an over- or under-preponderance of the look, would be three of the chief factors to consider when evaluating the personalities of many neurotics and psychotics.

spontaneity of the ego utilizes. Moreover, and very importantly: Such statements, although always imperfect because of their objectivity and their magic, are, in theory, *just as accessible to the listener as to the speaker*[110] precisely because they indicate a universal structure of reflective consciousness, which can, moreover, always be expressed through language (albeit never perfectly and with great variation).[111] This means if one reflects more honestly then the "deep" I is realized as magical illusion that needs to be struggled against if one is to have more open and honest relationships. These relationships should also recognize that thoughts and words are not alone sufficient.

In this manner, the other of course does not have any access to our "deep" I—*but neither do we, because there isn't one*. Indeed, it is a crucial Sartrean claim that we are *always* obliged to talk about ourselves from an-other-person perspective, *even if* we use "I." The intuition may still remain, however: Are there not at least *some* aspects of our personalities that the other does not have as much access to as we do ourselves? Perhaps.

Sartre's answer comes with comments on interiority and intimacy. Here the nature of *consciousness* shows that there are certain aspects that remain "ours"—but almost none that remain absolutely so. One that certainly does is the utter spontaneity of consciousness, which by definition is individual; the very basic activity of consciousness shows that it is absolutely translucent (to) itself. In this manner consciousness has an absolute *interiority*, where 'to be and to know oneself are one and the same thing.'[112] This is to say consciousness as interior (i.e. as selfness) is *lived*.[113] However, the second one wishes to know in any objective sense, one enters the realm of "contemplation,"[114] which must be seen as another term for reflection. In this manner, if one wishes to capture interiority more explicitly then one has objectify it and necessarily make it other. Such interiority does then make it onto the reflective level, but in a modified, objectified form (saving rather rare occurrences of pure reflection).

An additional important aspect to note here is the *intimacy* of the ego: '[i]n relation to consciousness, the Ego is given as intimate. It is just as if the Ego were *part of consciousness*, with the sole and essential difference that it is opaque to consciousness. And this opacity is grasped as *lack of distinctness*.'[115] In this manner the ego is completely indistinct because of its I = I formula, because of its simple, in-itself opacity. Nevertheless, it is still always cognized as *mine*, as something

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[110] cf. Sartre (2004/2003, pp. 43–44/125–126).

[111] Indeed, for Sartre *language* is "sacred" for the agent and "magical" for the patient [cf. Sartre (2005/2012, pp. 396/414)]. "Sacred" means that when I speak or do something, what I say or do is picked up by others in a way that transcends my grasp; how the other may interpret my words, gestures, or movements; or what precise influence they might have on him or her is beyond me, at least in part. Someone else's language, on the other hand, is "magical" to me because I never can truly predict what will be said or done; the other is always completely free to surprise me in what they do or say (and I them). Thus language *as conversation* is precisely a matching up of such "sacredness" and "magic."

[112] Sartre (2004/2003, pp. 36/120).

[113] cf. ibid.

[114] cf. ibid.

[115] ibid., pp. 37/120.

I have immediate, close access to, as the noematic pole of all my reflective acts. In this manner it feels personal *even though* it is a completely opaque object that *all* spontaneous reflective consciousnesses have automatic access to. So although the ego always remains opaque on the reflective level it ultimately facilitates an '*ideal* unity of all states and actions'[116] whereby these latter can be filled in with more personal and specific information. Here experience and the memories thereof get linked to so many states, qualities, and actions that constitute one's personality as an intimate knowledge of one's "self" as past, states, dispositions, etc. This personality is necessarily reflective. When reflection is "impure" it partakes in transcendent objects that necessarily go beyond the pure, original spontaneities. This means pure reflection can only ever bear witness to particular instants of spontaneous consciousness, in that to add more is to necessarily enter a mental discourse of transcendent states, qualities, and so on.

Therefore, although it is difficult to "know oneself" based on Sartrean theory, I contend that a kind of conscientious reflection can still yield an open-minded conception of self. This is to say: If a Sartrean-informed reflection, adopting attitudes of responsibility and conscientiousness thereto, can stay conscious of the more serious pitfalls of magic, then one may have a flexible conception of personhood that is open to acts of pure reflection; conscientious acts of impure reflection; as well as to the opinions and judgments of others. Hereby the more blanket in-themselves claims about what "one actually is" or "is not" could be avoided. In Sartre's words, the "me" is unknowable, meaning one can only reach towards it through 'observation, approximation, waiting, experience.'[117] Sartre does add that ''to know oneself well' is inevitably to look at oneself from the point of view of someone else, in other words form a point of view that is necessarily false.'[118] "Necessarily false" because the very act of reflection makes an object of what is originally an absolute subject; as well as the fact that one can never view oneself as one views another person.[119] However, if the suggestion of a conscientious and responsible reflection is invoked, one may well admit that there is no real access to "who one really is," and yet through a studied reflection upon one's emotions, moods, experiences, actions, etc., always fuelled by personal memories and new experiences, one can at least approximate to a persona that is, by definition, always liable to change and always open to error and modifications.

And others, as friends, can greatly help, too; their input can provide us with observations that we ourselves can only experience as pure spontaneity. Therefore, although memories are of course originally personal phenomena, through language and the objective character of the ego, all is in theory just as accessible to another as it is to one's own self. In other words, because there are no profound personalities to be grasped, all is "up for grabs" on a more superficial—and precisely because of this—a more accessible level.

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[116] ibid., pp. 39/122.

[117] Sartre (2004/2003, pp. 38/121).

[118] ibid.

[119] Again thanks to R. Breeur.

7 Conclusion

Of course there are dangers with such discourses. For example, when a couple spends so much time together that they actually become the same persona, even to the extent that rigid self-appraisals are formed in a manner whereby the "I" disappears almost completely and is replaced with a "we"[120] ("We won't come because we're tired"; "We don't believe in eating meat"; etc.). Pushing this even further, the very real force of advertising, propaganda, and other social phenomena reinforces Sartre's point that the ego is a public phenomenon that can be greatly conditioned through the other *qua* external pressure. Nevertheless, with a notion of responsibility also comes a notion of a public ego that needs to be *challenged*, both by one's own reflections as well as those of others. In this manner any form of socio-personal magic that heads towards in-themself type claims that swallow up spontaneity on the one hand ("I cannot change"; "I am who I am"; "It's in my genes"; etc.); as well as overly-nihilistic claims on the other ("You couldn't possibly understand"; "I'm nothing"; etc.), are both extremes to be avoided. Also to be avoided, however, is a complete subjection to the look ("I cannot disobey her"; "That's not done here"; "Society dictates it"; etc.), as well as a complete denial thereof ("I can do whatever I want, whenever I want"; "No one is the boss of me"; etc.). Indeed, we finally see here that the bad faith extremes to be avoided actually come in *three* formulations: first was bad faith with reference to an individual for-itself in situation (freedom-facticity); second to one's own ego (spontaneity-reflection); and now, thirdly, with reference to the look (complete arrogance ("looking") and complete shame ("being-looked-at")).[121] Hereby, a conscientious ego is one that acts and reflects in a way that always endeavors to avoid overdoing the extremes of freedom-spontaneity-looking on the one hand; and facticity-reflection-being-looked-at on the other. In this way, one avoids too much magic and too many blanket claims through studied forms of reflection that seek challenges, compromises, and constructive (dis)agreements, based on engaging conversations and thoughts in a fertile social environment.

To summarize, then: One cannot really know one's "true self" precisely because of the flighty nature of spontaneous consciousness, which dictates that the "I" can only really be found on the reflective level, most often as a hypostatized subject-bearer. This "I," as completely "opaque," can never be captured itself, and there are pitfalls of magic that need to be struggled against if one is to avoid bad faith extremes of affirming too much, or too little. Such a "struggle," it has been suggested, could be done through a conscientious kind of reflection that tries to capture important elements of spontaneity on the one hand, and merge them with

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[120] This point was brought to my attention through a friend of mine, A. Rītups.

[121] Sartre calls these latter the 'two authentic attitudes' (2005/2012, pp. 314/330) *with regard to the look*. Here, "authentic" must not be taken in any moral or Heideggerian sense (cf. ibid., pp. 552/575); on the contrary it is "authentic" because the above passage concerns the only real possibilities in the ontological structure of the look, wherein subjectivity ("looking") and objectivity ("being-looked-at") necessarily exclude one another. This does *not* mean (as I have tried to show) that this is always the case on a more everyday, inter*personal* level, where, I suggest, these extremes are to be avoided when possible—cf. also ibid., pp. 81/92.

other people's observations on the other, thereby simultaneously teaching one what is important to one's self, as well as to others, culminating in an interactive notion of friendship.

A Sartrean account of (inter)personality thus finds its place between a monstrous spontaneity and an equally monstrous ontological look, wherein, precisely because of its middle, dynamic position, it can be used as a foundation for relations that are far from monstrous.[122]

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[122] To fill this out further, we would need to look more closely at what Sartre means by "emotion" (which has been a vital but unanalysed factor throughout); as well as at a not-so-obvious role for the imaginary.