When Eyes Touch

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> If two gazes come into contact, the one with the other, the question will always be whether they are stroking or striking each other — and where the difference would lie (Derrida 2005, p. 2)

§1. Introduction

1.1. The significance of eye contact.

When we make eye contact, we experience a form of interpersonal connection that plays a central role in human social life, communication and interpersonal understanding. From the earliest days of infancy, human infants are sensitive to the eyes of others, preferring to look at faces over other kinds of stimuli, and faces that return their gaze most of all (Farroni et al 2002). By around six weeks of age, they become capable of holding eye contact with their caregiver and, as Stern (1977, p. 46) puts it, the caregiver 'experiences for the very first time the very certain impression that the infant is really looking at her, even more, into her eyes…that she and the baby are finally 'connected'. Later this connection takes a communicative form in the play of expression and response psychologists call 'protoconversation' and, by around nine to twelve months of age, in the initiation and maintenance of joint attention.[1] The motivation to engage in this form of interpersonal connection for its own sake is thought by many to be a distinctive feature of human social life, and to have played a role in the evolution of human language and thought (Tomasello 2019). This is arguably reflected in the peculiar morphology of the human eye, which is relatively elongated and has a greater amount of

[1] See Stern (1977), Trevarthen (1979), Tronick et al (1979), Bruner (1983), and Reddy (2008, Ch. 5-6).

visible white sclera, thereby facilitating eye contact and gaze following (Kobayashi and Koshima 2001).[2]

The eyes and face have a special place in our communicative repertoire. Not only are they the most expressive parts of the human body, but it is 'to them' that others address us, and 'from them' that we address others in turn. These points, paired with the fact that the appearance of our face and its manner of expression are typically the features most distinctive of our individual appearance, contribute to common tendency of thinking of ourselves as, in some sense, located in our eyes and face (for further discussion of these points see Cockburn 1985 and Moran 2017).

Eye contact therefore constitutes a fundamental form of interpersonal contact. Where there is no possibility of eye contact, as during phone calls or online videocalls, we feel distant or detached from one another. This is a curious omission from Setiya's (2020) observation that, during videocalls, 'there is a void between us. We cannot feel each others' breaths or movements; we cannot look at the same object in our surroundings; we cannot sense each others' warmth or stand together or apart; we cannot touch.' After all, being able to make eye contact is a typical feature of most face to face interactions, whereas many of the things on Setiya's list are generally reserved for only our most intimate relationships.

Eye contact also seems to play a significant role in our pre-reflective understanding of ethical life. Feinberg (1970, p. 252), for one, writes that 'having rights enables us to… look others in the eye, and to feel in some fundamental way the equal of anyone', and Darwall (2005, p. 43) observes that the etymological root of respect, the latin '*respicere*', means 'to look back' at another, which he suggests is related to the idea of meeting another's gaze as a way of reciprocating another's act of second personal address.

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[2] This is not is to imply that all humans are oriented to eye contact in the same way. Children on the autism spectrum engage in eye contact much less frequently than other children and tend to find it much more unpleasant when they do (for discussion, see Hobson 2002 and Hobson & Hobson 2011). I also do not mean to imply that this form of connection (or some similar form of connection), can be established through mutual touch, conversation or joint speech.

Finally, eye contact plays an important role in human emotional life. The interaction between an infant and a caregiver is a prolonged, enjoyable one, but most forms of eye contact between adults involve a feeling of exposure, a feeling which renders uninvited or excessive attempts to make eye contact invasive and which makes prolonged episodes of eye contact uncomfortable, even among friends. Striking the right balance of eye contact is a delicate task, one which can generate feelings of self-consciousness and social anxiety. Prolonged episodes of eye contact usually occur during episodes of heightened emotional and physical arousal, especially during episodes of mutual intimacy or aggression. The avoidance of eye contact, moreover, plays a salient role in the phenomenology of shame, guilt and humiliation. In King *Lear*, Cornwall blinds Gloucester in order to avoid his shame-inducing gaze (see Cavell 1969b). Sophocles's Oedipus, in contrast, blinds himself, and does so out of a desire to severe all contact with the interpersonal realm:

> Thus branded as a felon by myself,
> How had I dared to look you in the face?
> Nay, had I known a way to choke the springs
> Of hearing, I had never shrunk to make
> A dungeon of this miserable frame,
> Cut off from sight and hearing; for 'tis bliss
> To bide in regions sorrow cannot reach.
>
> (*Oedipus the King*, p. 127)

1.2 Eye 'contact'

Despite its significance, eye contact has received little in the way of dedicated philosophical exploration. Yet in so much as raising the topic, we employ language which is, on reflection, fascinating. We display a deep and pervasive tendency to describe eye contact on the model of touch. We speak of eye *contact*, of *catching* another's eye and of

holding another's gaze. And in doing so, we make *contact* and *connect* with them — thus, in the literature on 'joint' attention, eye contact is often called 'contact attention'. More generally, the eyes are described as being able to *pierce*, *probe* and *penetrate*. A guiding thought of this chapter is that these metaphors deserve attention.[3] They play a powerful, often unacknowledged, role in our thought, and they are so familiar that we often use them without realising that we are deploying metaphors. I will now offer three reasons to take these metaphors seriously.

First, they have the power to mislead us, especially when we forget they are informing our thought. This is sometimes said of the metaphor of the mind as an inner 'theatre' (eg. Kenny 1971) or the memory as a 'storehouse' (eg. Margalit 2002). O'Shaughnessy (2003, p. 183) warns against over-interpreting the notion of perceptual contact as a kind of 'concrete contact of the mind with its object…a palpable connection of some kind, rather as if the gaze literally reached out and touched it.' Later, I will suggest that there is a risk of being misled in our thought about eye contact by certain visual and communicative metaphors (of the eyes as a 'window' to the soul and of the face as making a 'claim' on us).

Nevertheless, it is plausible that these metaphors have the power to mislead us only insofar as they have some intuitive appeal, insofar as pick up on some genuine feature of what it is like to make eye contact. This is the second reason: reflecting on what makes these metaphors apt can reveal something abut our experience which might otherwise evade our notice. I think these metaphors draw attention to two intuitions in particular.

One intuition is that eye contact is a form of *intersubjective contact*, just as touching someone is a form of physical contact. Heron (1970, p. 243) observes that, '[i]n mutual touching as in mutual gazing, each person both gives and receives in the same act and receives moreover what the other person is giving.' Eye contact is a relation within which two subjects stand together, each being immediately present to the other in a way they would not be if they were not both present to each other in this way, in a single relation.

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[3] In this respect I have been influenced by Kalderon (2018)

The second intuition is that eye contact is an *engaged practical relation*. Unlike vision, which enables us to survey our environment without interacting with it, to touch something is typically to act upon it, to press against it and move it from hand to hand: the object checks my activity, maintaining its shape against my grip, weighing me down as I try to lift it up (MacMurray 1957, p. 107). Eye contact is analogous to touch in this respect: when we make eye contact, we are not merely related as spectator's of one another's mental lives; we have to catch another's eye and hold their gaze, often with effort, and, when we do, we thereby interact with one another.

This brings us to the third and final reason to attend to these metaphors. Doing so serves as a corrective against two widespread tendencies in modern philosophy: visuocentricism and contemplativism. Visuocentricism is, as MacMurray (1957, p. 104) remarks, the tendency to treat, 'vision as the model of all sensory experience' and to 'proceed as though it were certain that a theory of visual perception will apply, mutatis mutandis, to all other modes of sense-perception'. Though this revolt against visuocentricism is a rallying crying of recent discussions in the philosophy of perception (eg. O'Callaghan 2007, p. 3-4), MacMurray's early statement of the tendency is interesting insofar as he associates it with something more general: the tendency of treating knowledge and experience on the model of visual contemplation. It's this tendency Anscombe (2000, §32, p. 57) describes when she complains that modern philosophers have an 'incorrigibly contemplative conception of knowledge.' This has as a consequence the assimilation of practical knowledge to the model of theoretical knowledge, and the resulting picture presents practical knowledge 'as if there were a very queer and special sort of seeing eye in the middle of the acting.' Surprisingly perhaps, I think a similar tendency is at work in philosophical thought about eye contact, insofar as visual metaphors of 'seeing oneself reflected through the eyes of another' are often privileged over the tactile metaphors that are used more commonly in ordinary contexts to describe eye contact.

1.3. Outline

I have three aims in this paper. First, I will argue that the standard ways of thinking about eye contact in the philosophical literature are unsatisfactory. In doing so, I make a case for thinking that the source of this dissatisfaction and the path forward can be identified by reflecting on our tendency to describe eye contact on the model of touch. Finally, I will outline a neglected account of eye contact, one which is able to avoid the difficulties faced by its competitors.

I begin by identifying three ways in which the eyes and face figure in communication: by revelation, illocution and transaction (§2). Each account of eye contact I consider privileges one of these forms of 'facial communication'. In §3, I consider Peacocke's (2014) reductive account of eye contact and argue that it is committed to viewing eye contact as a fundamentally contemplative relation and fails to offer a satisfying explanation of the intuition that eye contact is a form of intersubjective contact. In §4 consider the main alternative to this account, according to which eye contact should be thought of as involving a primitive second person relation (eg. Eilan 2016, Forthcoming). However, this is found to be implausible as a general account of eye contact. Rather than thinking eye contact is constituted by a second person relation, there is good reason to think of it as a more fundamental form of relation which makes second person relations possible. Reflection on the analogies between eye contact and mutual touch leads to the recognition of a neglected account of eye contact, which takes transactional looks to be central. According to this view, when two subjects make eye contact, they are related as two agents acting and being acted upon by one another in a single, primitive transaction (§5).

§2. Three forms of 'facial communication'

The eyes and face figure in communicative interaction in a variety of different ways. We can distinguish at least ways in which one's gaze, or a 'look', can can figure in human communication.

(i) *Revelatory Looks*. First, the eyes and face are 'windows to the soul' which reveal our mental states. They can therefore be said to 'communicate' in a broad sense, insofar as they reveal or manifest our mental states: as, for example, when Hume writes of 'a communication of sentiments' (*Treatise of Human Nature*, 2.1.11.19). As Wittgenstein observes:

> Look into someone else's face, and see the consciousness in it, and a particular shade of consciousness. You see on it, in it, joy, indifference, interest, excitement, torpor and so on. (Wittgenstein 1967, §220)

Though intentional actions might manifest, and in this sense 'communicate', one's state of mind, they are not necessarily done with the intention of communicating one's state of mind to another; and they do not generally aim at recognition from another. Nevertheless, there are some revelatory looks which can take the form of intentional communicative acts. For example, though my expression of fear at the sound of an explosion is not voluntary, I might voluntarily forbear from giving in to my inclination to hide or suppress my reaction with the intention that others see how I feel. In doing so, I might voluntarily turn towards them, so as to make my facial expressions visible to them (compare Campbell 2017, p. 123)

(ii) *Illocutionary Looks*. Suppose we are sitting together in a train compartment when the smell of petrol fills the carriage. I look over to you and say "Yuck, that smells nasty". In uttering these words, I perform the speech act of telling you that it's nasty (or perhaps of acknowledging its nastiness to you). Perhaps it's possible to perform the same illocutionary act non-verbally by looking up to you, blocking my nose, and making the kind of "yucky face" which is all but impossible to describe, and yet which is all too easy

to recognise (see Gilbert 2014, p. 328). In other circumstances you might perform the act of disagreeing with me by saying: 'No p is false' by shaking your head and making an 'incredulous' face. In performing illocutionary looks one's facial configuration will undoubtedly be related in interesting ways to our instinctive revelatory expressions, but they will also be permeated by local conventions. As with illocutionary speech acts, illocutionary looks are necessarily intentional: the subject's understanding of what they are doing in expressing themselves in this way is an essential feature of these speech acts (Moran 2018, p.149). Moreover, these acts are overtly directed towards another, from whom they aim at receiving a certain kind of uptake, without which they will be 'unhappy', unsuccessful, or incomplete (Austin 1962, pp. 115-6). What this uptake amounts to will vary with the specific speech act, but in general it requires that the other recognises that one trying to perform the relevant speech act towards them and entertains a specific first person thought. Typically, my recognition that you are trying to tell me something is sufficient for you to have succeeded in telling me something (Hornsby 1994; Moran 2018).

By and large, philosophers have tended to focus on the revelatory and illocutionary aspects of looks, but this is to neglected a third form of facial communication which I will call 'transactional looks'.

(iii) *Transactional Looks*. Unlike mere revelatory looks, transactional looks are often intentional acts, but unlike illocutionary looks they do not necessarily seek to achieve their purpose via the recognition of a communicative intention, nor is the other person's recognition of the intention with which they are done sufficient for their success. Transactional looks involve one subject acting upon another, exerting a force upon them, as when one stares at another to make them feel self-conscious, 'looks daggers' at them to intimidate them or pulls a funny face to make them laugh.

Each of these forms of 'facial communication' can be instantiated by a single facial expression. When I shout at someone, for example, I might reveal my frustration with them, bark an order at them and induce a feeling of shame in them.

My purpose in drawing attention to these different forms of 'facial communication' is to identify the motivations behind two common ways of thinking about eye contact, and to identify a third, less commonly acknowledged, understanding of eye contact. Each account takes its cue from one of these forms of facial communication: The Reductive Approach privileges revelatory looks; The Second Person Approach privileges illocutionary looks. And, just as transactional looks tend to be neglected by philosophers, so too does the account of eye contact which takes them to be fundamental — The Transactional Approach. This is unfortunate because it is the most promising account of them all. Or so I will argue.

§3. Eye Contact as Reciprocal Revelation

3.1. The Reductive Approach

When we make eye contact, I attend to you as you attend to me and that we are so comported to one another is mutually manifest to each of us. How are we to understand the metaphors of 'interpersonal contact' and 'mutual openness'? As Peacocke (2005, 298) asks: can we characterise what is going on between us without employing these metaphors?

A common approach to this question seeks provide a reductive account of the kind of interpersonal relation these metaphors describe. According to 'The Reductive Approach', these relations can be understood in terms of the kind of acts and states of each individual that are themselves ontologically prior to the relation of eye contact. The parsimony of this account has wide appeal: it promises to explain what might appear to be a *sui generis* relation in terms of the acts and states of individuals which are arguably better understood and which are in any case required, to understand their representation of the world in general.

Peacocke (2014) articulates an account with this general structure (see also Nagel 1969). His account of eye contact is follows.[4] We have two subjects, *x* and *y*:

(1) *x* sees *y*.

(2) y sees *x*.[5]

This is consistent with each subject thinking that the other isn't aware of them. We require, therefore, an embedding of mental states:

(3) *x* sees that *y* sees *x* (and *x* recognises that *x**=*x*).

(4) *y* sees that *x* sees *y* (and y recognises that *y**=*y*).

The parenthesised section is meant to capture the way in which *x* sees, not merely that *y* sees some *x*, but that y sees he *himself* (thus 'x*' and 'y*' in Casteñeda's 1966 notation). '*x**' and '**y*' may therefore be read as symbolising the non-conceptual parents of *x* and *y*'s respective I-thoughts — what Peacocke calls Degree 1 Self-Representation. This therefore describes the kind of non-conceptual experience that a being with concepts might express by saying 'They see me'.

(3) and (4) are consistent with each thinking that the other is an inanimate object. Therefore, we need an additional layer embedded content:

(5) *x* is aware that (4).

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[4] Since my aim is not to pursue The Reductive Approach but to identify the problems that any such approach faces, I will stay close to Peacocke's formulation. For the sake of simplicity, I will therefore pass over several difficulties concerning the formulation of this account.

[5] Or: (1*) x sees y's eyes & (2*) y sees x's eyes, to exclude the case where each is looking at the other's feet. This is open to additional objections, it doesn't distinguish between genuine eye contact and each person looking at another's eyes over a videocall for example. I put these difficulties to one side, conceding that they might be avoided in a more systematic formulation.

(6) *y* is aware that (3).[6]

However this is compatible with each subject not recognising the other as capable of self-ascribing I-Thoughts (or Degree 2 Self-Representation). This comes with a further level of embedding, which Peacocke formulates as follows:

(7) *x* is aware that *y* is aware that *x* is in a state in which *x* would sincerely say 'He sees me'.

And likewise, for y:

(8) *y* is aware that *x* is aware that *y* is in a state in which *y* would sincerely say 'He sees me'.

Peacocke claims that we must stipulate that 'he sees me' is in each suitably based on the individual's visual experience (ibid, p. 241).

There are two grounds for dissatisfaction with this account, each related to our tendency to describe eye contact on the model of touch.

3.2. Eye Contact as an Engaged Relation

First, this account sits uneasily with the intuition that eye contact is an engaged relation (as described in §1.2). It envisages eye contact as grounded in revelatory looks: *x*

[6] Peacocke formulates (3) and (4) as follows:

(3*) x sees that y sees x
(4*)y sees that x sees y

The problem is that (5*) then comes out as '*x* is aware that (4*)'. But this is compatible with *x* not knowing that it is he, himself, who is the object of y's awareness, or perhaps losing track of which of them, *x* or *y,* he is. (see Martin 2014, p. 37). In this respect, my formulation is closer to O'Brien (2011). (3) & (4) are not themselves without difficulty (see Rödl 2007, 189).

encounters *y* and *y*'s facial expression and comportment towards *x* reveals *y*'s psychological state, which represents *x* as being a particular kind of way. This prioritises the metaphor of the eyes as 'windows to the soul' which reveal one's mental states. *x*'s awareness of *y*'s awareness is also revealed to *y* through their facial expression and comportment to *y*, enabling *y* to see themselves 'reflected in *x*'s eyes', refracted through their beliefs, values and ideals. When they make eye contact, therefore, they are like two mirrors reflecting one another *ad infinitum*.

Just as mirrors reflect passively, so this reciprocal revelation is fundamentally a passive, spectatorial one. The title of Peacocke's book, *The Mirror of the World* is revealing in this respect. It alludes to Schopenhauer's name for the pure subject of aesthetic experience which engages in disinterested contemplation of the world, bracketing the practical significance of objects and contemplating their essences — 'a pure, cognising being, as an untarnished mirror of the world' (Schopenhauer 1969. p. 417; Peacocke 2014, p. v).[7] Eye contact, however, seems to be an engaged relation; something we must engage in and actively maintain, often with effort. The other's gaze has impact on our activity and emotional life, often making us act and feel self-conscious. Peacocke's account therefore incurs the burden of explaining this intuition on the basis of his view that, at the fundamental level, the form of interpersonal awareness involved in eye contact is one of two spectators of one another's mental lives.

It is open to a reductive theorist to insist that my state of interpersonal self-conscious with respect to another — conscious that they are a self-conscious subject who is conscious of me — inherently involves an emotional response, which in turn will motivate certain forms of action. Nagel (1969, p. 11), for example, uses the phrase 'x senses y' to describe a form of perceptual awareness of another's arousal which *eo ipso* involves being affected with arousal and desire. Perhaps this point could be made more generally.

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[7] The revelatory aspect, for example, is arguably present in Grice's (1957) reductive account of communication (for discussion on this point, see Moran 2018, especially Ch.4 §1 'Grice: The Production of Belief (in Others) through the Revelation of (One's Own) Belief.'

In order for this approach to succeed, however it must be able to aptly characterise the way in which I am affected by another's gaze when I'm making eye contact with them, and in particular, the way in which I feel 'exposed' to their gaze: this, after all, is essential to the way in which eye contact can be anxiety inducing, intimate or invasive. This, in turn, suggests that the intuition that eye contact is a form of engaged relation cannot be separated from the intuition that eye contact is a form of interpersonal contact.

3.3. Eye contact as interpersonal contact

The Reductive Approach faces a serious difficulty in explaining the intuition that eye contact is a form of interpersonal contact. Consider a version of Nagel's (1969) example of Romeo and Juliet. Sat at opposite ends of a bar, each is carefully and covertly watching the other through nervous sidelong glances, without making eye contact. After a while, Romeo becomes aware that Juliet is watching him and begins covertly watching her watching him. Romeo is therefore interpersonally self-conscious with respect to Juliet. Juliet, in turn, might become aware that she is being watched by Romeo, and on this basis become interpersonally self-conscious with respect to Romeo. In this case, each is conscious of the other as a self-conscious subject, but they do not connect in the way characteristic of eye contact. That they are both interpersonally self-conscious with respect to one another is not 'out in the open' between them, since they are both covertly attending to one another. Nor would it be sufficient to characterise eye contact to say that Juliet becomes aware that Romeo is interpersonally self-conscious with respect to her and that Romeo becomes aware that Juliet is interpersonally self-conscious with respect to him. After all, they might also each become aware of this through covert attention. This constitutes a situation of symmetrical interpersonal self-consciousness as described by Peacocke in conditions (1)-(8), but because *ex hypothesi*, each is covertly attending to the other, it does not capture the mutual openness or connection characteristic of eye contact.

The reductive theorist is likely to respond to this by appealing to yet further layers of iterated content. The more complex these intentional contents, the more difficult they become to state, let alone to refute by counterexample. Nevertheless, these considerations are sufficient to reveal a problem with The Reductive Approach. The problem is that Peacocke treats the form of awareness each has of the other in eye contact as being of the same form as Romeo awareness of Juliet when they are covertly attending to one another. Romeo's interpersonal self-consciousness of Juliet as a self-conscious subject who is conscious of him, in this case, is compatible with Juliet not being interpersonally self-conscious with respect to him. This is what generates the need to appeal to her awareness of Romeo's awareness of her, his interpersonal self-consciousness with respect to her, Romeo's awareness of Juliet's awareness of this and so on, potentially *ad infinitum*. But no matter how many further layers of embedded content the reductivist appeals to, they won't capture what is shared between two subjects in eye contact, the way they make contact. At each level of embedding we are left with two subjects, who are in constitutively independent psychological states and whose psychological states have no intentional contents in common. As Carpenter and Liebel (2011, p. 166) put it, this account leaves us with 'two individual perspectives that never meet in the middle'. The problem here is not that there are two perspectives, two 'sides' to the relation — this much is undeniable. It is rather that each subjects awareness does not 'reach out' to the other and, as a result, there is a 'gap' between them: they do not make *contact*.[8]

The Reductive Approach therefore fails to explain the form of interpersonal contact characteristic of eye contact. There are two aspects to this intuition. First, eye contact seems to be a basic form of shared experience, a 'meeting of minds'. Second, when two subjects make eye contact, each is conscious of the other in a way which constitutively depends on the other being aware of them in that selfsame way. Just as I cannot shake

[8] This parallels intuitions about perceptual contact. See, for example, Putnam (1994, p. 453).

hands with another if they aren't also shaking hands with me, so I cannot make eye contact with another if they aren't actively looking into my eyes as I look into theirs.

3.4. Going forward

There are therefore serious obstacles to providing a reductive explanation of the 'mutual openness' of eye contact. And though these objections do not leave The Reductive Approach without any room for manoeuvre, they do call into question whether it provides the most natural way of thinking about eye contact.

In this respect, it appears more faithful to the phenomenology of eye contact to think of it as an ontologically basic relation, and to think of each subject's state of awareness of the other as specifiable only in terms of this basic relation which holds between them. This kind of anti-reductive approach need not deny the potential for the kind of recursive mental states emphasised by the reductive approach; it need only deny that the relation of eye contact reduces to recursive states of this sort. Rather, one might suggest the basic interpersonal contact in many cases constitutes the the basis for many forms of recursive thinking.[9]

Yet, if the anti-reductive approach simply insists that the 'mutual openness' of eye contact is to be understood is a *sui generis* feature of our psychological lives about which little further can be said in the way of analysis or explanation, then The Reductive Approach might continue to have some appeal, these phenomenological objections notwithstanding. The reason for this is that The Reductive Approach seeks to provide a positive explanation of the form of 'intersubjective contact' characteristic of eye contact in terms that are arguably better understood. This need for further explanation can seem particularly attractive insofar as we are in need of (a) an explanation of why this form of 'interpersonal contact' is established through eye contact but not through reciprocal

[9] Compare Campbell (2005) on joint attention.

covert attention; and (b) an explanation of the way in which eye contact is an inherently engaged practical relation.[10]

If this is right, a dialectical stalemate threatens to ensue. On the one hand, 'The Anti-Reductive Approach' seems to be truer to the phenomenology of eye contact and yet might seem to lack explanatory ambition; on the other, The Reductive Approach seeks to provide a positive explanation of the structure of eye contact, but faces serious difficulties in doing so. I will argue 'The Anti-Reductive Approach' can avoid this stalemate by denying that the most satisfying explanation of eye contact takes the form of a reductive analysis. With this aim in mind, I will consider two ways in which one might provide a non-reductive explanation of eye contact, one which understands it in terms of illocutionary looks (The Second Person Approach) (§4); another in terms of transactional looks (The Transactional Approach) (§5).

§4. Eye contact as mutual address

4.1. The Second Person Approach

In recent years, The Reductive Approach has been met with resistance by philosophers who think that when subjects engage in certain forms of face-to-face interaction, they thereby stand in an ontologically basic second personal relation and that each has, in virtue of doing so, a *sui generis* form of 'you-awareness' of the other. By and large, this approach has been advanced as an account of second personal thought (or 'I-Thou thought'). In recent years, however, Naomi Eilan has outlined an account which is intended to apply to non-conceptual modes of awareness including eye contact and joint attention.

To understand this account, we must first understand the view of second person thought it takes as its starting point. Suppose I say to you: "you've got spinach in your

[10] Carpenter & Liebel (2011, p. 167) and Eilan (Forthcoming, p. 5, 10, 15-16).

teeth". For me to succeed in telling you this, you must hear and understand what I've said and what I understand myself to be doing. This requires you to meet 'the first person pickup requirement': you must entertain the thought 'I've got spinach in my teeth' (Eilan 2016, p. 321). Many who think that there is a distinctive form of second person thought argue that the relation between my you-thought ('you've got spinach in your teeth' and your I-thought ('I've got spinach in my teeth') is one of identity: it is a single I-Thou thought with two subject-slots (Longworth 2013, 2014; Rödl 2007 Ch.6, 2014; Thompson 2012a, 2012b).

Eilan suggests that we can view the relation two subjects stand in during episodes of face to face interaction analogously:

> The radical line I think we need to take if the idea of primitive you-awareness is to so much as get off the ground is to say that the way A is aware of B in such cases constitutively depends on B meeting the first-person pickup requirement. (Eilan 2016, p. 322)

How should we understand this form of relation? Eilan's account consists of two claims.

The first is 'The Interdependence Claim' that A's awareness of B is constitutively dependent on B's awareness of A. This is a claim in common to all those who maintain that eye contact is a primitive experiential relation (Eilan Forthcoming, p. 8; Eilan 2016, p. 322)

The second claim, 'The Communication Claim' is a positive specification of what this structure amounts to, and therefore to provide an alternative explanation of the phenomenological structure of eye contact to undercut The Reductive Approach. The idea here is that eye contact, unlike symmetrical covert attention, is an essentially 'communicative relation' in which each subject takes up an 'attitude of address' towards the other, and meets some analogue of the first person pickup requirement with respect to the other's awareness of them (Eilan Forthcoming, p.5, p. 12; Eilan 2016, p. 319)

Eilan's account of this communicative relation can be understood in at least two ways, depending on how we understand the notion of 'communication' and 'address': either in terms of linguistic address and the performance of an illocutionary act, or in terms of a more fundamental, and more elusive, form of interpersonal communication.

4.2. Communication and illocution

The most straightforward way of understanding a case in which each subject takes up an 'attitude of address' to the other is to think of two parties in a conversation, each of whom, at different points, addresses the other with an illocutionary speech act and acknowledges the other's speech acts directed to them. This would therefore be to claim that the relation between two subjects making eye contact is the same kind of interpersonal relation which holds between two subjects who share an I-Thou thought on the views described above. Just as, on this view of I-Thou thought, when I tell you something and you recognise my telling, we share an I-Thou thought, so when we make eye contact, I in some sense address you with my gaze and, when you reciprocate my gaze, you thereby acknowledge my act of address (cp. Darwall 2005, p. 43). In doing so, so the thought goes, we thereby stand in a primitive I-Thou relation.

Levinas seems to suggest something like this when he writes that 'the face speaks to me' (Levinas 1999, p. 197-8) and that '[t]here is a commandment in the appearance of the face, as if a master spoke to me…I am he who finds the resources to respond to the call' (Levinas 1985, p. 89). As Michael Morgan puts it, Levinas's claim here is that the other's face 'addresses me and makes a demand upon me' (Morgan 2010, p. 67).

Similarly, Eilan claims that there are two ingredients to any case where I experience another as taking an 'attitude of address' to me:

> First, the adoption of an attitude of address, in the form of an expression or gesture, is immediately recognized, in a smile, a wave, a touch or a glance and enters as such into the experience one has of one's co-attender. The second

> point is that the distinguishing feature of the capacity to experience an expression of address within the framework of a communicative exchange is that *its recognition entails experiencing it as an invitation, directed at oneself, to respond in kind.* (Eilan, Forthcoming, p. 13, emphasis added)

This account seems to offer an explanation of the intuitions that eye contact is a form of interpersonal contact and an engaged relation. It suggests that what is missing in situations of symmetrical covert attention is the way in which, in eye contact, each subject takes up an attitude of address towards the other.[11] And, since experiencing another's act of address seems to involve experiencing it as making a demand upon one to respond in kind, it would arguably capture the way in which eye contact is a practically engaged relation. In the last chapter I quoted Korsgaard's observation that, when someone addresses you this has an immediate impact upon your will. She says that '[n]ow you cannot proceed as you did before…if you walk on, you will be ignoring and slighting me. It will probably be difficult for you, and you will have to muster a certain active resistance, a sense of rebellion' (Korsgaard 1996, p. 140) Similarly when I see someone looking at me, I experience them in a way that calls for, demands, or invites, a response on my part. I am free to respond in this or that way, but I am not free simply not to respond at all.

However, the idea that I'm addressed by the other's gaze when we make eye contact is too strong. When I make eye contact with another, I do not thereby experience them as literally inviting me to respond to them. Infants of around nine to twelve months of age are able to establish this form of connection, though they are not able to perform the speech acts of inviting (nor those of commanding or demanding). In order to perform an illocutionary act of this sort, I must understand myself to be doing so and must therefore possess the concept of the relevant illocutionary act. These infants, however, fail to meet this condition because they have not yet developed a grasp of language or

[11] Compare Taylor (2016, p. 56).

the conventions that make speech acts possible. They cannot invite because they lack the concept of 'inviting'. Rather than understanding these descriptions of the other's gaze as 'demanding', 'inviting' or 'commanding' as performances of illocutionary acts, then, we should understand them as being used metaphorically, to describe some aspect of the experience of making eye contact with another person.

4.3. Communion

A more defensible version of 'The Communication Claim' would be to understand the relevant notion of communication as more general, of which the protoconversations of early infancy and the full-blooded linguistic conversations are instances, without assimilating the form of intentional interactions characteristic of the former to the exchange of speech acts characteristic of the latter. This is important since the form of connection established through eye contact which enables protoconversation and joint attention is itself a developmental precondition for the development of human linguistic capacities (see Reddy 2008; Tomasello 2019).

One strand in Eilan's discussion suggests a way forward. She suggests that the relevant notion of communication she is seeking to articulate is more fundamental than communication understood as the exchange of information. Rather, she identifies the notion of 'communication-as-connection'. On this conception, to communicate is 'to be in touch, to connect, or to "commune" with another' (Eilan Forthcoming, p. 13). A similar understanding of the basic form of interpersonal communication as a kind of connection in opposition to the understanding of communication as a form of exchange of information has been outlined by Taylor (2016). For each of these authors, the performance of illocutionary speech acts is an instance of this more general form of connection with another, insofar as our motive is not merely to convey some information — to tell someone something, for example — but also to share our awareness of something, to engage in a certain kind of connection (Taylor 2016, p. 56). This is why we tell each other stories, stories we have told one another countless times

before: not merely to remind one another, but to bring these events to mind with the aim of sharing our recollection of them. This kind of connection, however, is more general and more fundamental than the exchange of speech acts: it can be established through eye contact, through the mutual expression of emotion, by sharing jokes, by singing, dancing, or playing music together.

That eye contact can be understood as a form of communication in this sense is more plausible than the idea that in eye contact each subject takes up an attitude of 'address' in the sense discussed in §4.2. However, until more is said, this sense of communication doesn't provide explanation of the 'mutual openness' and 'connection' involved in eye contact but rather presupposes it. The motivation for understanding eye contact as a communicative relation is, in part, to provide a non-reductive explanation of its structure in such a way to explain why the relevant form of mutual openness is present in eye contact but not in covert attention. But even if this notion of interpersonal connection is a basic feature of our psychology, we need an explanation of why it is established through the forms of interaction described by Eilan (eg. conversing, singing, dancing, and sharing jokes) but not through reciprocal covert attention, which is also a form of interpersonal interaction. The most obvious thing the former have in common which covert attention lacks is that they all involve a form of 'mutual openness' or 'interpersonal contact' between subjects, but these are the very things we are trying to explain. In the next section, I provide an alternative explanation of these phenomena.

§5. Eye Contact as Mutual Transaction

5.1 The Transactional Approach

We can make progress in explaining the notions of 'interpersonal contact' and 'communication-as-connection' by reflecting on the aptness of these tactile metaphors. In particular, I will argue that they seem to suggest an account of eye contact grounded in transactional looks. Heron (1970, p. 243) astutely observed that eye contact is

analogous to mutual touch insofar as 'each person both gives and receives in the same act and receives moreover what the other person is giving'. When two individuals shake one another's hands, they are acting upon one another and being acted upon by one another in a single transaction.

This suggests an account of eye contact which is grounded in transactional looks. This view consists of the following two claims:

(i) When I experience myself as looked at by another, I am conscious of myself as being *acted upon* by them.

(ii) When two subjects engage in eye contact, each subject acts upon the other and is being acted upon by them in a single primitive transaction.

I elaborate each of these claims in the sections that follow.[12]

5.2 The Power of the Gaze

This account begins from the idea, familiar in the phenomenological tradition, that my awareness of the world isn't one of a mere disembodied spectator. Roughly, I am an embodied agent situated in a world that is given as having an immediate practical and affective significance for me, and is experienced as affording certain possibilities for action and passion. Importantly for present purposes, my awareness of myself, my body and my activity are interdependent with my awareness of the world so understood.[13]

As well as being embodied agents, we are also self-conscious social animals. We find ourselves in a world with others whose practical significance for us is not in question. When I apprehend another human being as such, they are not given as the kind of thing the presence of which I may or may not take an interest in, depending on whether I happen to form a desire either way. Rather, other people are given in a way that has an

[12] Rödl (2014) employs the notion of a transaction his account of I-thou thought. My appeal to transactions is more general than his in that I think eye contact is a form of interpersonal transaction more basic, ontologically and developmentally, than the notion of I-thou thought.
[13] See, for example, Heidegger (1962), Merleau Ponty (1962) and Ratcliffe (2015, Ch. 2).

immediate impact on my will and emotional comportment. And when I become conscious that I am the object of another's attention, I do not become conscious of this in a way that is practically neutral. Rather, the other is experienced as acting upon me through their gaze, transforming my practical situation, my consciousness of my body and my emotional component. I will now elaborate on each of these ways I can be affected by another's gaze.

First, I experience their gaze as restructuring my practical field, determining the situation from which I act, and doing so in such a way that their presence to me cannot be avoided. I must respond, because though I am free to choose among a variety of possibilities of response (to smile or frown at them, to ask 'what are you looking at?'), I'm not free to simply not to respond at all. Anything I do will constitute a response. Even if I studiously avoid their gaze or stare through them, this will constitute a response, a way of registering their presence which will involve sustained and self-conscious effort. As Korsgaard (1996, p. 140) puts it, I will have to muster a certain kind of active resistance to them. The possibilities that define my situation therefore determined by and oriented around the other who is watching me. It's in this sense that the face 'calls for' or 'demands' a response.

Second, this experience of a transformation of my practical situation is interdependent with a transformation of my awareness of my body. I am conscious of the other's gaze as necessitating a response from me, and since I care about the impression I make I become acutely aware of my body's natural expressiveness, its tendency to reveal aspects of my mental life that I want to keep hidden, such as my feeling of embarrassment or self-consciousness before them. When I experience another as looking at me, I therefore become aware of my body (particularly my face) as being exposed to their gaze, as being prone to thwart my will, presenting me in a way at odds with the impression I want to make on the other, and therefore as something to be controlled.

Third, the other's gaze can be experienced as transforming my emotional comportment. Because I typically want to make a certain kind of impression on others, when I experience the other's gaze as necessitating a response from me, I want to respond well. As a result, their attention is experienced as exerting a kind of pressure on me. A pressure, moreover, which is exacerbated by the fact the timing of my response matters as to the impression I make. If I am confident, I might be able to bear this pressure, but if I am not I will be overcome with self-consciousness. The other's gaze can have an emotional impact in other ways, for example being looked at can be intimidating and invasive, it can lead to attraction, annoyance and aggression. Even coldness, in this context, is a way of being emotionally comported towards another as opposed to an 'emotional blank' (Cavell 1969a, p. 264).

Each of these three points are aspects of the way in which I experience another as *acting upon me* through their gaze.[14] It is essential to the non-reductive account I am offering that what the other is *doing to me* and what I am thereby *undergoing* are not understood as two constitutively independent events. Instead, they are to be understood as two aspects of an ontologically basic interpersonal transaction. There is phenomenological motivation for this, we cannot fully describe these ways in which I am being *affected* by the other's gaze independently of my consciousness of the way the other's gaze is acting upon me. In this respect, the experience of being looked at is analogous to touch. When I'm touched by another my *exteroceptive* awareness of the their hand as *acting upon me*, pressing against me, and my *interoceptive* awareness of my body as being acted upon, pressed against, are, as Martin (1992) observes, two aspects of a single state of mind. This is not merely true of the *patient*, it is also true of the *agent*. We can adapt Anscombe's claim that 'I do what happens' to make this point. What the other is

[14] For a more elaborate discussion and defence of the claims of this section, see my manuscript 'Ordinary Self-Consciousness as a Philosophical Problem'.

doing to me and what is thereby *happening to me* are two aspects of a single, irreducible, practical relation (Ford 2014, p. 15).[15]

5.3. Mutual transaction

Eye contact is not simply to be understood in terms of each subject acting upon the other in the way described above. This can hold true of the case in which Romeo and Juliet covertly attend to one another. In such a case, Romeo will be affected by Juliet's gaze and Juliet by Romeo's gaze, but they will not experience the form of mutual awareness characteristic of eye contact. Indeed, this might be the very thing they are trying to avoid (if they feel self-conscious, for example).

(ii) explains what is in the covert attention case. In that case there are two transactions, one in which Romeo's gaze acts upon Juliet and another in which Juliet's gaze acts upon Romeo. This is analogous to a case in which Romeo grasps Juliet's (non-grasping) hand as Juliet uses her other hand to grasp Romeo's other (non-grasping) hand. Eye contact, however, is analogous to the case in which each grasps the hand which is, at the same time, grasping their hand. In this case, as Heron (1970, p. 243) points out, each subject gives and receives in the same act; each subject is both agent and patient in *one and the same transaction*. I will call this kind of transaction a 'mutual transaction'. What each subject is doing to the other and suffering at the hands of the other can only be fully understood as an abstraction from the ontologically basic interaction which unites them. So when Romeo and Juliet make eye contact, each is acting upon another who, at the same time, is acting upon them. What each is doing to the other and suffering at the other's hands, moreover, can only be understood as abstractions from an ontologically fundamental transaction. This has three aspects, corresponding to the three aspects of the transformation described in §5.2.

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[15] This is akin to Aristotle's thought that one and the same act is the active capacity of one thing (the sound source's 'sounding') and the passive capacity of another (the hearer's 'hearkening'). This 'acting-and-being-acted-upon' is, Aristotle claims, 'one actuality' (*On the Soul,* 3.2).

First, just as the other's gaze re-orients my practical situation and necessitates a response from me, so when we make eye contact, it is not as if we each determine the practical situation of the other while remaining in our own separate practical situation. Rather, we are now 'in it together'. We are in a single mutually determined practical situation, openly and self-consciously 'attuned' to one another, in a way that involves the mutual assimilation of our practical fields. This connection necessitates a form of communicative interaction, whether it be the peekaboos of infant protoconversation or the speech acts (or illocutionary looks) characteristic of mature adult communication. We might express emotion and thereby seek to make an impression onto the other, by making faces or telling jokes. We can respond in any way we choose, but, as before, we cannot choose not to respond; we must do something. Think of how difficult it is to look into someone's eyes without responding to their efforts at communication. Just as a coldness is not itself an emotional blank, so maintaining an appearance of non-responsiveness while looking into another's eyes itself requires a great degree of effort, and must itself be understood as a kind of communicative response; one which involves intentionally and effortfully comporting oneself towards the other in response to their gaze, something which itself will necessitate a response on their part

Whatever form this interaction takes, when we are making eye contact the fact we are doing so will be 'out in the open' between us: we are each looking into the eyes of the other, and holding their gaze over an intentional (however short) in a way that is both visible and visibly intentional. Any communicative act (in the sense of the preceding paragraph) that is performed within this mutual practical situation will be out in the open in the sense that whoever performs it cannot deny that they performed it. If I look you in the eye and say *p*, then our mutual situation will leave no room for the possibility of straightforwardly looking you in the eye and outright denying that I said *p*. This 'mutual openness' is a ontologically basic phenomenon, and is therefore not reducible to our respective psychological states.

This brings us to the second aspect of the mutual transaction constitutive of eye contact. Since what occurs between us in this mutual situation is 'out in the open' between us, eye contact involves a kind of 'mutual exposure'. I noted earlier than another's gaze can transform my experience of my body, making me acutely aware of its propensity to reveal aspects of my experience that I would like to keep hidden from view. This is especially true of the eyes and the face. These are, after all, the most expressive parts of the human body; they are the means by which we make contact with the other and the place at which our reaction to the other is most visible.[16] As such, the impact the other's gaze has upon me — whether it makes me excited, self-conscious or intimidated — is often itself revealed in my face and can thereby modify the way in which I act upon the other through my gaze. Romeo is affected by Juliet's gaze when she is visibly self-conscious in response to his gaze in a way very different to the way he is affected by her gaze when she meets his gaze confidently. We can put this by saying that, during eye contact, my visible facial *expression* of my reaction to the other's gaze *eo ipso* modifies the *impression* my gaze makes upon them. This is the insight behind the metaphor of the eyes as a 'window to the soul'.

The other *acts upon me* through their gaze, transforming my situation, but as with many acts the manner in which it is done is altered by the emotion that it expresses. We apprehend another's gaze in a way that is affectively-laden: it might be aggressive, as when someone 'looks daggers' at me, it might be confident or self-conscious, or it might express sexual interest and arousal. This, in turn, will affect the way in which we are affected by their gaze: a self-conscious gaze might induce self-consciousness, a feeling of warmth and sympathy, or a feeling of contempt depending on one's character (and particularly, whether one is shy, confident or excessively arrogant).

This brings us to the third feature of eye contact understood as a primitive interpersonal transaction: it involves a kind of emotional attunement between each subject. When Romeo experiences Juliet's arousing gaze, for example, his aroused

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[16] See Moran (2017, p. 95).

reaction to her gaze might be manifest in his facial reaction. When it is, Juliet will be able to see the impact of her gaze on Romeo in his expression, and when they are making eye contact, this will modify the manner in which Romeo's facial affects her emotional comportment towards Romeo. In eye contact, therefore, we can say that each subject's emotional comportment towards the other is interdependent with the other's emotional comportment towards them: the way each affects and is affected by the other is constitutively dependent on the way the other affects and is affected by them. Moreover, the emotional reaction of each will be 'out in the open' between them insofar as it is perceptible. It is this mutual emotional exposure which makes eye contact so intimate, often so invasive, and therefore something that it can take great effort to maintain.

This form of emotional attunement is most apparent when the emotional expressions of each subject are at their most visible and intense, as when two individuals are intimately staring into one another's eyes or aggressively staring one another down over a relatively prolonged interval. These cases draw attention to a form of attunement which can arise even in the more fleeting episodes of eye contact in which each subject's emotional reaction is not as perceptible or as clearly defined. Such cases serve to initiate episodes of face to face interaction, as well as constituting the glue by which they are held together; these episodes of eye contact will result in the manifestation of a certain kind of attunement between these subjects, whether it be one of friendly rapport or mutual awkwardness.

§6. Conclusion

There is a deep and pervasive tendency to describe eye contact on the model of touch, through tactile metaphors and analogies. If the arguments of this paper are sound, reflecting on the aptness of these metaphors enables a non-reductive explanation of the phenomenological structure of eye contact — 'The Transactional Approach'. As with Peacocke's Reductive Approach and Eilan's Second Personal Approach, this has been

presented in outline only, and there is much work to be done to elaborate the notion of a mutual transaction and its place in human life. My aim here has been to show that this approach is an attractive one, and that this work would therefore be worthwhile.[17]

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