When Eyes Touch

> 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, 2).

§1. Introduction

When I make eye contact with another, looking into their eyes as they look into mine, we experience a form of interconnectedness which plays a foundational role in human social life. It is there from the beginning. The attempt to engage a carer in face to face interaction is among the first things we do in early infancy. We engage in the reciprocal play of glances known by psychologists as 'protoconversations', enjoying the pleasures of human contact for its own sake, and feeling acute distress when our attempts to connect are unreciprocated.[1] Not only does this play an important role in the development of human communication, the urge to connect in these ways pervades human activity, enabling us to connect in ways which express love, affection and belonging. Almost everything we do, we seek to share with others, whether through joint attention or through conversation. And each of these activities typically, though not always, involves eye contact with the other; and those occasions which don't, such as conversation over telephone or webcam, are less rich as a result.

Understanding the phenomenological structure of eye contact, then, is essential to understanding the nature and significance of human sociality, as it is lived and experienced by human beings. And yet, in so much as raising this topic, we employ language which is, on reflection, fascinating. Though the experience itself is a visual one, there is a widespread and incorrigible tendency to describe it by employing the language of touch. Not only do we speak of eye contact, but of holding another's gaze, and in the *Scarlet Letter*, Hester Prynne is said to endure 'the heavy weight of a thousand unrelenting eyes, all fastened upon her.'[2] Gazes pierce, probe and penetrate. Eye contact like active physical contact is typically affectively charged, a matter of *feeling*, it embodies attraction or repulsion, bringing us together in love or pushing us apart in hate; it is the gaze we seek in pride, and avoid in shame, embarrassment and humiliation (see also Wyschogrod 1981, 40).

It is the guiding thought of this paper, that these metaphors must be taken seriously. [3] Metaphors play a powerful, often unacknowledged, role in our thought, and it is a guiding theme of this paper that this imagery

[1] See Trevarthen (1979), Tronick (1978a,b) and Reddy (2008)

[2] Hawthorne (2007, 47)

[3] In this respect I am indebted to Kalderon (2017). See p. 3 for complimentary remarks.

requires attention. One reason to pay attention to these metaphors is their power to mislead: metaphors of the mind as a theatre, for example, or of memory as a storehouse, for example, once they have us in their grip, arguably distort our thinking in a variety of was, especially when we forget that they are metaphors. But, in acknowledging this reason we must acknowledge another: that these metaphors come to have their power and appeal, often, because they are our best means of expressing a phenomenological truth.[4] A third reason is that there has been a tendency to understand phenomena, not merely perceptual phenomena, on the model of visual experience: this is what O'Callaghan (2007) calls 'the tyranny of the visual.' As we will see, this is unsurprising, since this tendency is often diagnosed by referring to the thought that we are visual creatures. This makes it all the more remarkable that one of the ways in which we are distinctively visual animals - the unique role the eyes play in human social life - is described in tactile, rather than exclusively visual terms.

In the following section, I suggest that reflection on the appeal of these tactile metaphors to describe eye contact gives us reason to accept what I call 'Sartre's Insight', according to which the experience of being looked at by another involves consciousness of oneself as being acted upon by another (§2). My aim in this paper is to argue that some form of Sartre's Insight must be acknowledged if we are to be able to do justice to the phenomenology of eye contact. However it's clear that Sartre's deployment of this insight must be rejected, since it is inextricably bound with the ontology of *Being and Nothingness*, and, so understood, it precludes the possibility of the reciprocal presence of two subjects to one another characteristic of eye contact (§3). However, the standard understanding of eye contact in the analytic literature, which is articulated in Peacocke's (2014) account of interpersonal self-consciousness, has went to the opposite extreme of failing to acknowledge, let alone reject, any version of Sartre's Insight whatsoever (§4). A consequence of this I argue, is that they are unable to capture the mutual presence or 'meeting of minds' characteristic of eye contact (§5). If this is correct, we can neither accept *Sartre's* articulation of his insight, nor reject the insight altogether. Then, in §6, I outline an account of eye contact which is able to acknowledge Sartre's insight independently of his ontology, and whilst avoiding the deficiencies of its competitors.

[4] For an account of the truth of the metaphor of the mind as a theatre, see Wollheim (1984, Lecture III)

§2. Sartre's Insight

Iris Murdoch (2001, 75) claimed that human consciousness is inseparably related to the use of metaphor. Whatever the merit of this, taken as an empirical claim, taken as a phenomenological claim, it is difficult to deny. Metaphors are indispensable to our understanding of ourselves and many of our most fundamental activities. Moreover, as Murdoch argued, we shouldn't expect to be able to omit these metaphors in our descriptions of ourselves without loss of substance.

If this is correct, one area we would expect such metaphors to occur is in the description of our relations to others of our kind. Here, as I suggested in the last section, the imagery is predominantly *tactile*. We speak of emotional bonds, of feeling and involvement, of tact and of people who are 'touchy' on certain topics. We speak of trying to make contact with others and to connect with them, of being close and distant, and, at the centre of this web, of eye *contact*.

Sartre recognised the centrality of this web of metaphors in human relations, and it plays a central, if seldom acknowledged, role in his account of intersubjectivity. He invites us to imagine, like his counterpart in de Beauvoir's *She Came to Stay,* that he is peeking through a keyhole trying to observe some illicit liaison.[5] He is aware of what he is doing, but in a way which is prior to reflection or, as Anscombe would say, 'without observation.'[6] This absorption in his activity is disrupted when he hears footsteps down the hall and realises that he, himself, is an object of observation, and is overcome with shameful self-consciousness. 'All of a sudden', Sartre writes, 'I am touched in my being…essential modifications appear within my structures' (Sartre 2018, 355-6).

At the central turning point of Sartre's discussion of intersubjectivity, he describes the feeling of being looked at as akin to being touched. Moreover, far from this being an incidental use of words, Sartre repeatedly draws attention to the web of tactile language we use to describe our relations with others. For example, in explaining why the experience is to be understood merely as the awareness of an image of oneself in the mind of another, Sartre claims:

> Such an image could, in effect, be entirely imputed to the Other, and it could not 'touch me…it would not be able to reach me at my core. (308)

Whereas, Sartre's voyeur experiences being looked at as 'an immediate shudder' that runs through him 'from head to toe' (ibid).

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[5] de Beauvoir (2006, 304-8)

[6] See Anscombe (2000, §8)

Sartre's understanding of the appeal of these tactile metaphors is evidence of an insight, the articulation of a phenomenological truth, which is meant to support his account of 'the look'. Therefore, it is fair to step back from the details and commitments of Sartre's explanation of this and to reflect further on what this tactile imagery suggests about he phenomenology of the look and of eye contact. There are at least four features of the analogy which are worthy of comment.

First, and most important for understanding Sartre, is that active touch, unlike active looking, involves not merely directing attention towards some object, as we do when we look at an inanimate object, but also *acting upon it*. To be touched is to be pressed against, handled or moved from hand to hand; the object, in being hard, or heavy, resists this activity, weighing me down or resisting my efforts to move it, maintaining its shape against the force of my grip. If it didn't, it would be modified by my action: smashed, squashed or otherwise misshapen. As Gardner observes, for Sartre the meaning of the look is that of an act, and we ought to think of it on analogy with the application of a physical force (Gardner 2005, 330-1). Attention to the sense of touch reflects the fact we are not just spectators of the world, but agents acting and being acted upon by it; and like the experience of being touched or shaking another's hand, the experience of being looked at or of engaging in eye contact, does not merely involve a contemplative view of another and our relation to them, but is itself already a mode of interaction with them.

This brings us to our second and third points, that the experience of being looked at, like the experience of being actively touched by another, is of immediate practical and emotional significance respectively.

If someone actively touches me, my activity and possibilities for activity are arrested by the other. I can either give in or resist, but I cannot simply not respond. Even remaining limp in their grip is something which is typically something done with active effort, resisting the instinctual urge to wrench oneself away, so too when I'm caressed or feel someone tap my shoulder. Similarly, when I become aware that someone is staring at me, my practical situation is modified in that all of the actions open to me are, in a sense, conditioned on the other's look. I can either acknowledge them, looking over and smiling, I can ask them what they're staring at, or I can actively avoid their gaze, but, again, if I pretend not to notice that they're watching me, this will typically involve some amount of effort. This aspect of our tactile imagery is exploited to great effect in Sartre's dramatic works. In *In Camera*, he likens the relationship between the three antagonists to a cobweb. 'If you make a movement, raise your hand to fan yourself', one character tells another, 'Estelle and I feel a little tug…we're linked together inextricably.' (Sartre 1946, 143).

Being actively touched by another is also of immediate emotional significance. Derrida (2005, 2), in the passage give in my epigraph, notes

that when another actively touches me, their touch is felt as either stroking or striking me and, elsewhere, that the philosophy of touch must leave room for blows and caresses (Derrida 2005, ch. 4; Kalderon 2017, 52). This is in contrast with being passively touched by another. I needn't feel anything when someone is passively pressing against me on the tube; but if I feel like they are actively touching me, then I will feel either attracted or, more likely, repulsed.[7] Similarly, it's rare to notice that another is looking at you without feeling awkward or embarrassed, comforted or afraid. For Sartre, I apprehend the look through pride, shame or fear, though shame for various reasons is held to have a special priority. Just as touch reflects our nature as embodied animals that are physically vulnerable, to appeal to touch at this point reflects the way I am a social being psychically vulnerable to others of my kind: a look alone can make me embarrassed, ashamed or humiliated.

Finally, my awareness of the other as looking at me is phenomenologically interdependent with my awareness of myself as touched, just as my exteroceptive awareness of the thing touching me is interdependent with my interoceptive awareness of my body as touched. Though I can attend to the object, to some extent, with my awareness of its impingement on my body in the background, and vice-versa, I can never do so fully. Rather than seeming to have two states of mind here, we seem to have two aspects of a single state of awareness, attended to in different ways (Martin 1992, 204). Similarly, my inner awareness of my haptic activity when I'm handling an object is interdependent with my awareness of that object as resisting my activity (Kalderon 2017, ch.2).

Intriguingly, something similar seems to be true of the experience of being looked at. Suppose I'm sat in the library absorbed in the paper I'm trying to write, when I realise that someone is watching me. This experience, which might take the form of my feeling self-conscious, is inseparably involves my awareness of the other's activity, which is directed at me, and of myself, being the object of this activity. My awareness of the other's activity, and my awareness of myself at the end of their look, are phenomenologically interdependent. Sartre seems to have this in mind, and expresses it explicitly when he observes that 'shame is shame of *myself before the Other*, these two structures are inseparable' (Sartre 2018, 309).

Tying these features together, the appeal of tactile imagery to describe our relations with others suggests that being looked at involves being acted upon by another, in such a way that this is of immediate practical and emotional significance, and where our awareness of ourselves as so acted upon is intertwined with our awareness of the other as acting upon us. It is the conjunction of these four claims which I call 'Sartre's Insight'

[7] Similarly, if I'm conscious of myself as passively *seen* by another, without being looked at, there needn't be any immediate emotional or practical response whatsoever.

§3. Medusa's Gaze

3.1. The four points that make up Sartre's Insight, though intuitive, call for elaboration. In particular, we might wonder how being looked at could possibly be a way of being acted upon, since looking is the act of a *distal* sense, involving in and of itself, no physical contact with the thing looked at. When I watch a seagull perched outside of the library window, I direct attention toward it and am active towards it, but the seagull itself isn't acted upon and, at least as far as the seagull is concerned, this is for the best. It's true that the Seagull becomes the intentional object of some of my mental states, but this isn't for the seagull to undergo any *genuine* change, just as writing a paper on Sartre isn't for Sartre to be changed.[8]

Sartre has an answer to this, which draws heavily on the ontology of *Being and Nothingness*. Arthur Danto (1975, 51) said that it is the burden of Sartre expositors to have to say somehow at once. But since my intention ere is not with Sartre exegesis, I will be content to offer a brief, inevitably oversimplified, reading of Sartre, which I hope captures the essential attractions and limitations of his account, and to refer the reader to more dedicated studies should they desire a more detailed presentation.[9]

According to Sartre, when another looks at me they constitute me in a new type of being, 'obliging me to support new qualifications' and where 'essential modifications appear within my structures' (Sartre 2018, 308). In particular, though I exist primarily as a being-for-itself, I take up into my being aspects of being-in-itself.

In this scheme, Being-in-Itself is primary and is the kind of being possessed by ordinary inanimate objects. These objects exist independently of my consciousness of them, occupy a determinate spatiotemporal location and have a positive mode of existence: they are things, identical with themselves, and can be given to my perception (see Sartre 2018, Introduction)

Being-for-Itself, by contrast, the being of consciousness, is dependent for its existence on its own consciousness of itself and therefore it is necessarily self-conscious. Unlike Being-in-itself, consciousness exists by nihilating, that is, distancing it from its facticity, the objects given to it in its environment and its past as given to it in memory. As such, it exists as a transcendence, existing not only beyond what is given to in perception but also its past, and it is striving towards its possibilities, which are themselves understood as the product of the fact that being-for-itself exists as as lack:

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[8] See Langton (2009, 134 n. 12)

[9] The readings I favour are those that recognise the importance of what I call 'Sartre's Insight', particularly Gardner (2005) & (2009). See also Theunissen (1984) and Jay (1993).

'The possible is an absence that constitutes consciousness, in so far as it makes itself' (Sartre 2018, 157). This means that where being-in-itself is characterised by self-coincidence, being-for-itself is characterised by internal difference. Sartre often writes that it is not what it is and is what it is not. At each moment of its existence it is creating itself anew, transcending what it was (i.e. making itself not what it is, insofar as this is a given aspect of its nature), towards the possibilities which it is 'not-yet.'

Therefore, when Sartre says that the other's look transforms be into an object, he means that it makes me into a self-coincident, fixed object, rather than a pure subject: 'the Other's look models my body in its nudity, gives birth to it, sculpts it, produces it as it *is*' (Sartre 2018, 483). This transforms my consciousness of my activity, I become aware of myself as an object with the transformation and solidification of my free possibilities into probabilities that can be predicted by another. But this isn't to say that the other doesn't perceive me as a subject. Rather, they see me as a subjectivity, but in a degraded sense: my consciousness exists, for them, as a property of a worldly object, rather than as pure-subjectivity: "the meaning of a face is, first of all, that of the consciousness (not a sign of consciousness) but of a consciousness that is altered, degraded -- which precisely is passivity" (Sartre 2001, 56). Moreover, this is a genuine change rather than the realisation that I have become a mere *intentional* object: 'it really is a question of my being, and not my being's image.' (Sartre 2018, 358-9)

3.2. Sartre's Insight, then, is understood in a way that is inextricable from its place in the wider ontology of *Being and Nothingness*. This alone is sufficient to explain its lack of defence in the analytic tradition, the temperament of which has been, on the whole, anti-systematic and anti-obscurantist. Sartre's ontology, with its frequent and self-conscious subversion of common-sense, and Sartre's tendency to describe the being of consciousness in a way which rejects application of the law of identity, go against the grain of the practice of most twentieth century analytic philosophy. At the very least, Sartre's ontology ought to be considered too great a commitment to incur solely on the basis of a piecemeal treatment of eye-contact. And since Sartre's Insight is elaborated on the basis of this ontology, it too is rejected or ignored.

These points concern the practice of philosophy, but we have good reason to reject Sartre's account solely by a consideration of the phenomena. Since Being-for-Itself, the being of a pure subject, exists as a lack, I can only experience the existence of another pure subject when I'm conscious of myself as their object. If I turn towards them and look at them, then they become an object and I am conscious of myself as a pure subject once more (Sartre 2018, 384).

A consequence of this is that 'being-looked-at cannot therefore *depend* on the object which manifests the look' (p. 354). But then I cannot, in principle, look at another and see that they are looking at me:

> rather than perceiving the look '*in* the objects that are manifesting it, my apprehension of a look that is directed against me appears against a background destruction of the eyes that 'are looking at me'. If I apprehend the look, I cease to perceive the eyes…they remain within my perceptual field as pure *presentations,* but I do not make use of them. (Sartre 2018, 354)

It's true that I can attend to the physical features of someone's face without attending to their act of *looking at me*, just as I could, in principle, attend to the sound of someone's voice and thereby be distracted by what they're saying, but it's not plausible that I cannot experience the look as emanating from an object in my environment. This happens when I feel self-conscious and avoid another's eye contact, but also in cases where I confidently make eye contact with the other. In such cases, I'm conscious of a particular person in my perceptual field as looking at me, and to be doing so as I look at them.

Sartre's account, by contrast, leads him into thinking that if you're an object, I must be a subject or vice-versa. A looked-at-look, therefore, is 'frozen' and 'stripped of its transcendence' (Sartre 2018, 364) Genuine human mutuality and communication is, therefore, in principle ruled out, leading directed to the pessimistic view of human social life outline in the passages on 'Concrete Relations with the Other', since one or other of the subjects must find themselves in the objectified state for the other (See Bauer 2001, Ch. 4; Gardner 2005).

These claims are extreme and, by Sartre's own lights, revisionary, and therefore should only be accepted on the basis of a strong argument. But since this argument follows only if we accept his ontology, then we have an additional reason to reject his ontology: it renders the reciprocal presence of subjects in eye contact impossible, and therefore ought to be rejected and Sartre's Insight along with it.[10]

[10] There are alternative readings of Sartre, which either aim (e.g. Aquila (1998)) or have as a consequence that the entailment between Sartre's account of the look and concrete human relations is weakened (e.g. Danto 1975) but importantly each of these readings achieves this by neglecting Sartre's Insight.

§4. The Window Model

4.1. The standard view of eye contact in the analytic literature is to understand it the relation it involves as reducible to the psychological states of each individual. Particularly, each individual is in a psychological state which involves a series of recursive contents, which involve awareness of themselves, as they are represented by another.

Peacocke (2014) offers a systematic presentation of this widespread view, which is is intended to articulate the structure of our self-conscious relations to others in general.

Like Sartre, Peacocke begins with the asymmetrical case, where I'm aware that another is aware of me, without their being aware that I'm aware of them. In a military variant on Sartre's voyeur case, a soldier on patrol in in Afghanistan suddenly becomes aware that they are a target for someone when they hear the click of a rifle. In this example, the solider is in a psychological state which represents another, on the basis of some descriptive-demonstrative hybrid, such as 'the person who made that sound', and moreover, the soldier represents the other as being aware of her from the first person point of view, and representing her as a self-conscious subject, where this involves making reference to the other's concept of her own first person concept - a third level in the Fregean hierarchy of sense.

This example is given for its vividly, but Peacocke explains that the same account holds for most ordinary instances of interpersonal self-consciousness, the main differences that, typically, interpersonal self-consciousness is symmetrical, and each participant is given in perception. These however, are differences in detail rather than in the structure of the account. The experience of eye contact, therefore, is to be understood as involving the same structure.

Suppose, for example, that I become aware that I'm being watched by another, then I will be in a state where I see that the stranger sees me. The stranger, in turn, might come to see that I see him; and, furthermore, I may then come to see that he sees that I see him. He may come to see this too, so that I see that he sees that I see him, and he may come to see that I sees that he sees me (Peacocke 2014, 240-3). Peacocke doesn't explicitly say that this suffices to capture the experience of eye contact, but presumably this is the minimal level of iteration which would be required to plausibly be thought to do so. Since the chapter is programmatic, we might assume that the experience of eye contact will involve some arbitrarily high level of symmetrical interpersonal self-consciousness, depending on our cognitive capacities.[11]

[11] Another example of this general outlook is Nagel's (1969) account of the play of glances involved in reciprocal sexual desire.

To be clear, this is something of an oversimplification. For ease of exposition, I have described everything from my position. But it would be more accurate, to report the the other's awareness, not from the first person point of view, as their being aware of me, but as their being aware of that person, identified demonstratively. In this case, in order for me to think this thought and express it with the other person sees that I see him, I will have to presume that I am identical with the person they refer to, in thought, as that person. And they will have to make this presumption for me.

4.2. On this view, then, when I actively look at another who is looking at me, the fundamental doesn't involve either of us being acted upon by the other. Rather it consists in our each being in a psychological state which represents the other as represent ourselves in a particular light. The act of *looking*, then, does not involve *acting upon* the other, rather, it reveals the other's psychological state, and that we figure as its object. Where the paradigm for Sartre's model, then, is touch, the paradigm for Peacocke is vision. The eyes, it is often said, are the window to the soul. And, like a window, I can often also see my reflection in it. When I look into the eyes of another, I might see that they see me, and, their facial expression might reveal that they bear certain attitudes towards me: love, say, or anger. In the Platonic text, the *Alciabides*, the other's eyes function, literally as a kind of mirror, enabling me to see, and therefore, to know, myself; and yet to do so in a way that is refracted by their beliefs and evaluative standards — I see myself 'by their lights', something that Estelle learns to her horror when Inez offers to be her mirror in Sartre's *In Camera*.

The title of Peacocke's book, *The Mirror of the World*, is apt.[12] This is Schopenhauer's name for the pure subject of aesthetic experience, who engages in disinterested contemplation of the world, like the transcendental phenomenologist of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*, bracketing the practical significance of objects and contemplating their essences - it is 'a pure, cognising being, as an untarnished mirror of the world' (Schopenhauer 1969, 417). Unlike Schopenhauer's mirror of the world, however Peacocke's subject is not disinterested. After all, they are conscious of themselves as being evaluated by the other, and, as we know, we have an emotional investment in how we are seen by others. But the relation is, at the fundamental level, a passive one: when *a* and *b* are making eye contact, they are related insofar as *a* is in a receptive state which represents *b*'s awareness of her, and insofar as *b* is in a respective state which represents *a*'s awareness of him.

If this is right, then the form of interconnectedness characteristic of eye contact is a fundamentally contemplative one. Since it isn't itself a mode of interaction, its practical and emotional significance must be understood

[12] See Peacocke (2014, v)

on the basis with its conjunction with a desire to figure in the minds of others in a particular kind of way. This isn't, in itself, an objection to Peacocke's account, but it imposes an explanatory constraint on its adequacy: it must be able to explain the appeal of tactile metaphors, and to explain away the appeal of what I've called 'Sartre's Insight.' In the next section, I will offer a reason to think this cannot be done.

§5. Eye Contact as Contact

While these visual metaphors have their proper place, understanding eye contact on their model, as involving two essentially passive subjects that mirroring one another, is unable to capture the way in which eye contact involves the mutual presence of two subjects.

A common objection to The Mirror Model, as it is applied in a variety of domains, such as with relation to speech acts and the representation of another's first person, is that it's unable to capture the special form of mutuality that holds between two subjects. I will consider this objection as applied to eye contact, which, in being the developmental foundation of these other forms of communication and connection, has a claim to being fundamental. The source of the difficulty is rooted in the fact that Peacocke understands this relation is *reducible*. It is reducible to the separate psychological states of each individual with distinct contents, where *a* represents *b* from the third person point of view, and herself, as represented by *b*, from the third person point of view, and *mutatis mutandis* for *b*'s interpersonal self-consciousness with respect to *a*.

As a way into the difficulty, consider the following example. Suppose *a* is an ambassador attending a party at the embassy of a rival, *b,* when she notices that she is being watched by *b*. In this instance, *a* sees that *b* is watching her, and therefore is in a state of ascriptive interpersonal self-consciousness, as described by Peacocke. Suppose, then, that rather than looking away *a* begins covertly watching *b* watch *her* and *b*, being a worthy rival, becomes aware of this in turn. In this case, b has covert awareness that *a* is aware that *b* is aware of her (i.e. *a*). There is no reason not to allow that *a* could become aware of this, so that *a* is covertly aware that *b* is aware that *a* is aware that *b* is aware of *a*.

The only limit on further iterations of covert awareness is the subject's cognitive abilities, and yet, intuitively, we can continue adding levels of iterated awareness, and it would still seem as if something would be missing in the case of covert attention which is present in the experience of eye contact. Since the difference doesn't seem to be one which can be fixed by adding additional levels of reciprocal representation, it seems that the difference between eye contact and reciprocal covert awareness is structural.

Each subject has their own perspective on the other's perspective on them, so in this respect the situation is reciprocal, but they lack mutual awareness of one another: we have two subjects and two sets of content which do not make *contact.*

But what, exactly, does this amount to? Eilan (2016) suggests that the intuition here is that

> the other's first person perspective is in some way immediately present to us, in a way that is not captured by appeal to a combination of first person ways of thinking of oneself and third person ways of thinking of the other. (Eilan 2016, 322).

Rather, she suggests that *a*'s perspective on *b* is interdependent with *b's* perspective on *a.* In particular, *a* can only have this primitive form of 'you' awareness when *b* likewise has it towards *a.*

This is intended to be understood on analogy with illocution. Just as some illocutionary acts arguably constitutively depend upon uptake by another, for example, for *a* to order *b* to do something, then there must be some kind of first person uptake by *b*, so for *a* to be conscious of *b* as 'you' requires uptake from *b* - in this instance, it requires *b* to also be aware of *a* as 'you'. [13]

This gives us the structure of the account, but more needs to be said to understand the nature of this relation, and in particular, what is missing in Peacocke's account. Eilan's (ms) suggestion is that this primitive second personal relation is a 'communicative relation', where each subject takes up an attitude of address to the other. There are a number of ways to understand this idea, each of which understands the nature of eye contact by taking the illocutionary look as paradigm. Levinas (1999, 197-8), for example, claims that 'the face speaks to me', and, elsewhere, that

> The first word of the face is "Thou shalt not kill." It is an order. There 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, 89)

If we put to side exegetical questions to one side and focus on this as a claim about the experience of eye contact it is not immediately compelling. On the face of it, it doesn't seem that another, solely by making eye contact with me, is doing anything analogous to addressing or commanding me; nor do I seem to be doing so to them. I might nevertheless, upon making eye contact experience them as the kind of thing that is in a position to perform

[13] This is to assume that uptake is necessary for the recognition of an illocutionary act. This is controversial. See, for example, Heal (2013) and Hesni (2018).

these illocutionary acts of commanding and making claims on me, it's just that the relation these acts would institute doesn't seem to characterise the fundamental relationship we have toward one another in eye contact.

Similar remarks apply to Eilan's suggestion that the mutual presence of two subjects is understood as teaching taking an 'attitude of address' to the other. This is said to involve *a* experiencing *b* as adopting an attitude of address towards her, where this involve an immediately recognised expression or gesture, whether a smile, wave, touch or glance,, where this expression of address is experienced, within the framework of communicative exchange, as 'an invitation, directed at oneself, to respond in kind.'

Eilan's primary concern is to undermine Peacocke's account of joint attention - in this respect, I find her account persuasive and her alternative model of joint attention plausible. But though it is plausible that joint attention necessarily involves gestures that are, in essence, illocutionary acts, which either constitutively depend upon, or at least aim at, recognition by another, this is not true of eye contact. Though eye contact affords the opportunity to take an attitude of address to another, it does not, itself, consist in such an attitude, and therefore, in understanding what is missing from Peacocke's account of eye contact, must be something more general than the fact each subject is not taking an attitude of address to one another.

A way forward is suggested by inspecting the language used by Eilan when outlining her second personal account of eye contact. The notion of communication Eilan seeks to develop is the notion of 'communication-as-contact', where this involves seeking to be 'in touch, to connect, or commune' (Eilan, ms, 13). The authors she appeals to also describe the relevant form of relation in tactile terms. For example, she appeals to Tronick, who writes of a fundamental urge to 'connect' and of the painful 'feeling of disconnectedness' (Tronick 2004), and to to Buber, who writes that 'Relation is reciprocity. My you acts on me as I act on it' (Buber 1970, 67).[14]

This suggests that what is missing from Peacocke's account is actually the idea that eye contact involves *contact*, that it involves acting on the other and being acted upon by them, and therefore *interaction*. . If it is communicative, it is not communicative in the manner of addressing, commanding, promising or telling, but rather, in the manner of a handshake. What we have is not two subjects passively representing one another, as on Peacocke's model, but two subjects acting upon one another. Thus, Heron (1970) writes that,

[14] Tactile language is frequently appealed to describe second person relations. Haase (2014, 6), for example, describes it as 'a form of relation that holds us apart while connecting us with each other.' (See also Rodl 2014).

> in 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' (Heron 1970, 243)

If this is right, then the root of the problem with Peacocke's account is its rejection of Sartre's Insight and the idea that eye contact is *eo ipso* a form of interaction.

Of course, everything I have said so far remains at the level of metaphor. If we have rejected Sartre's ontological explanation of his own insight, then we need an explanation of the way we act upon another by looking at them if we are to have a genuine alternative account of the phenomenology of eye contact. It is to this task that I will now turn.

§6. Sartre's Insight Redux

At this point we might seem to face an aporia. On the one hand, Sartre's Insight, as expressed in Being and Nothingness, seems to preclude the possibility of reciprocal eye contact. And yet, the rejection of Sartre's Insight also seems to result in the inability to capture the mutual presence of two subject's who are making eye contact. But this dilemma is clearly a false one; what is needed is a fresh start. In this section, I will outline an account of eye contact, which enables us to appropriate Sartre's Insight independently of Sartre's ontology, and thereby avoid the unacceptable view of human social life which followed from it.

First, I will draw attention to a class of acts which can be performed by looking at another person, which I call 'transactional looks', and I will contrast this with the revelatory looks emphasised by Peacocke and the illocutionary form of looking emphasised by Eilan. After sketching what I take to be a natural understanding of this form of looking, taking as central the act of looking daggers at someone, (6.1.), I argue that we can understand eye contact as a reciprocal transaction analogous to a handshake, wherein the activity and passivity of each subject is intertwined, so that they are both agent and patient in one and the same transaction (6.2.). Then, in §6.3 I explain how, taking this relation as basic, we can explain the experience of being looked at, and how the experience of looking at another human is distinct from the experience of looking at an inanimate object. Then I end by summarising how this model measures up to its competitors (6.4.).

6.1. Each account of eye contact I have considered privileges one form of facial communication over others.

Peacocke's account emphasised what we might call 'revelatory looks.' This refers to the way one's facial configuration can reveal one's psychological states, enabling others to recognise or perhaps even see, our thoughts and psychological states. I tell you that there's milk in the fridge and my dour expression reveals my annoyance.

Levinas and Eilan, on the other hand, privilege what I call 'illocutionary looks.' These are, in all fundamental respects, no different than illocutionary speech acts, the central difference being that their vehicle is a form of facial, as opposed to linguistic, expression. Unlike revelatory looks, these are addressed to a particular person, and aim at being recognised for what they are, and receiving some form of uptake, by the addressee.[15] Imagine, for example, that we are on a train and someone is speaking on their mobile phone in the quiet carriage; I look to you and put my hand to my mouth as if it were a phone, making an annoyed 'nattering' face.[16]

Often, these modes of communication are held to be exhaustive. In Reid's division of social and solitary acts, social acts correspond to illocutionary speech acts, and all else is relegated to be the revelation of solitary acts of mind.[17] However, there is a form of facial communication, which, on the face of it, doesn't reduces neither revelatory nor illocutionary looks. These are what I call 'transactional looks.' These are looks which, contra revelatory looks, are intentionally performed, and yet, unlike illocutionary looks, but not by being acknowledged by the other in the manner of a speech act; rather, they seek to directly instil a change in another, bypassing deferral to the other's intentional agency.

Consider, as an example of the transactional look, the example of 'looking-daggers.' Dwelling on this phrase, Thoreau writes:

> It is a very true and expressive phrase, "He looked daggers at me," for the first pattern and prototype of all daggers must have been a glance of the eye…It is wonderful how we get about the streets without being wounded by these delicate and glancing weapons, a man can so nimbly whip out his rapier, or without being noticed carry it unsheathed. (Thoreau 1985, 52)

As the primordial dagger, the piercing look doesn't depend for the other's voluntary recognition to perform its characteristic labour. Nor, on the face of it, is it exhausted by its revelatory function. No doubt, as with illocution, the way these facial acts come to have their meaning or force is by playing,

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[15] Of course, the details of how they will be understood depend on how one views illocution more generally. For different views, see Austin (1962), Hornsby (1994), Searle (1969) and Heal (2013).

[16] For other examples, see Carpenter and Liebel (2011) and Salje (2018, 831-2)

[17] This applies equally to those who follow Reid, such as Moran (2018).

on the one hand, on our natural and involuntary modes of expression, and on other through a variety of culturally determined practices on which certain facial expressions have a certain meaning. When someone looks daggers at you, they don't merely reveal their anger with you, they direct it at you, following your glance over time, in an effort, to effect a transformation in you: to make you feel guilty or afraid.

'Sartre's Insight', suggests that eye contact ought to be understood on the model of a transactional look. In order to see what this might amount to, let's consider the phenomenology of looking daggers in greater depth.

Suppose I am looking daggers at you, how are we to describe my experience? First of all, I am intentionally seeking to establish some form of relationship with you, where this, at least in part is meant to reveal that I am angry with you or am aggressive towards you, but the act in't merely the revelation of my aggression, it is, itself, an act of aggression, which is intended to make you adopt a complimentary response, where this might be to respond to me with fear, deference or to look back aggressively. However, as with a handshake, my consciousness of my act is interdependent with my experience of your response. Just the feeling of moving your hand will feel different depending on whether the same movement is executed with or without your resistance, so the felt character of my relation to you when I'm looking daggers at you will vary depending on whether you respond with a countervailing force, looking daggers back at me, or else whether you succumb to the force of my gaze. This is just to repeat the phenomenological interdependence claim I suggested in §2.

This phenomenological interdependence suggests the ontological interdependence of what I do and what you suffer. That is, it suggests that my act of looking daggers at you, and your passion of fear or aggression are to be understood as two sides of an irreducible relation, where each can only be adequately understood as aspects of this prior unity.

However, this goes against the grain of the orthodox view in contemporary analytic action theory, that what an agent does and what a patient suffers are to be understood as a relation between two particulars, and where all I do, strictly speaking, is move by body, and where the rest is, as Davidson (1980, 58) says, 'up to nature.' If this is correct, then what I do, *strictly speaking,* and this can be understood independently of any actual relation to another, and if so, this will not leave us with a genuine alternative to Peacocke's model outlined in §4.

Fortunately, this view of the relation between what I do and what the other suffers is neither mandatory nor, arguably, the common-sense one. Instead we should view these as transactions in Ford's (2014) sense, where what I do and what the patient suffers are two sides of a single, irreducible, transaction. As on the Aristotelian model of action and passion, what the agent, *a* is doing to a patient *b*, is one and the same relation, picked out in a

different way, from the relation of what *b* is suffering at the hand of an agent, *a*. What we have here, are not two events, the doing and the happening, but a single seamless occurrence in the world (Ford 2014, 14).[18]

If this is right, then the when *a* is looking at *b*, where this involves her acting on *b*, then according to the Aristotelian view, *a*'s activity is realised, not merely in *a*, but, rather, in *b:* because *a's* doing and *b*'s suffering are the same activity, which is located in *b*, this means that *a*'s activity is realised in *b* (Lear 2011, 64). If this is correct, then when *a* intentionally looks daggers at *b*, *a*'s activity is realised in the life *b*. A consequence of this is that we are not merely implicated in one another's lives by being the intentional objects of each other's representations.

If this account of agency is a viable one and it enables us to understand eye contact in a way which acknowledges Sartre's insight, then all else being equal this will be an acceptable commitment to incur given the advantages. Moreover, in addition to promising to offer the best theoretical articulation of the phenomenology of eye contact, it also has a claim to being the account that best fits with our pre-theoretical understanding of agency (for this argument, see Ford 2016). Davidson's, on the other hand, seems to acknowledge that his view might be met with 'a shock of surprise'(Davidson 1980, 59).

6.2. Once this is acknowledged, we are in a position to see that the relation of eye contact can likewise be viewed as a mutual transaction, or as I shall put it, an interaction.

When I look at another human being who is looking at me, we are not related as two detached contemplators of one another, rather, this encounter is already a form of contact and interaction between us, and it makes a clear practical difference, not only to my possibilities, but to character of my activity.

First, the other's presence is arresting in the sense that their presence absorbs my attention, and thereby restructures the pattern of my activity in such a way that it becomes oriented around them. If someone walks in the room and starts looking towards me, I have three general options: either I can do something such to acknowledge them, or something to actively ignore them, or else I can pretend I do not notice them, but even this instance, as I argued earlier, is a mode of activity. To adapt a line of de Beauvoir: 'every refusal is a choice, every silence has a voice. Our very passivity is willed' (De Beauvoir 2004, 126).

Secondly, my inner awareness of my present activity is transformed. When I'm writing a paper in an otherwise empty room, and then become aware that someone has entered the room and is watched me, then my

[18] See Aristotle, *Physics* 3.3. The link with the notions of action and passion is alluded to by Theunissen (1984, 241) and Merleau Ponty (1968), see n. 23 below.

activity is likely to undergo a transformation. Simone Weil (2005, 187) astutely observed that 'no one stands up, or moves about, or sits down again in quite the same fashion when he is alone in a room as when he has a visitor.' Just as standing up against the force of the wind is a different act, phenomenologically and physiologically, from maintaining one's posture on a clear day, even if, in all outward respects, it is the same, so maintaining one's posture, or the appearance of nonchalance in one's movements, even if it is the same in all outward respects, nevertheless feels different from the inside, and now is something I do and with active effort.

These two ways in which the other's presence immediately impacts upon the character reflect the fact that we are not aware of one another as two spectators, but rather, our fundamental form of relation is one of actively coping with one another, of interacting — what Heidegger (1962) called *Fürsorge*. Our activity is therefore inherently modified by the presence of others, and is a manifestation of our deep concern to live in relation to others in a certain kind of way. This desire, to be properly related to others of our kind, is not merely one desire among others. As I mentioned earlier, among the first things we do as infants is to 'connect' with our primary caregivers, and we feel severe distress when this connection is ignored or rejected (Trevarthen 1979; Tronick 2004). This concern to connect and live with others shows up, in one way or another, in most of the things we do: even those things we do or observe alone, even the smallest thing like seeing a fox on our commute, we have an urge to share it with those close to us; we seek to share our leisure time with others, watching films together, and rewatching films with others that we previously watched alone, revisiting places we previously visited alone.[19] In the first book of the *Politics*, Aristotle's gloss on our peculiar mode of being is that we are the animal that speaks, which puts us in a position to share an understanding of what is good and bad. This restructuring of our activity in the presence of others, then, is an exemplification of a general fact about our being, then, that we are concerned, in our activity, with being properly related to others, and that this isn't something we have resolved upon, it is something that belongs to us because of the kind of animal that we are.[20][21]

We are not in a position to understand the way in which eye contact, like a handshake, is fundamentally a mode of interaction. Since *a's* engaging *b* in eye contact is an intentional action, and since we are all implicitly aware that if we look someone in the eye, this will orient their activity around us in the way outlined above in §6.1., where their activity is modified and

[19] See also Julius (2014).

[20] See McCabe (2008, 55) for related points.

[21] I explore our stake in our relation to others of our kind in two other papers, 'The Harm of Humiliation' and 'Making Sense of Shame.'

transformed by our attention.[22] So when *a* looks at *b,* he intentionally brings about these changes insofar as he's implicitly aware of them as the foreseeable consequence of his action. However, the same is true when *b* looks at *a*. So when each subject looks at the other, they stand as agent and patient with respect to one another. But, this isn't to say there are two relations which hold between them, where *a* acts upon *b*, and where *b* acts upon *a*. This would be analogous to *a*'s touching *b*'s left hand with his right hand, and *b*'s touching *a*'s right hand with her left. Rather, like a handshake, *a*'s activity of looking at *b* acts upon b's activity of looking at a, which itself acts upon a's activity of looking at *a* — as in a handshake, where the character of each person's movement is conditioned on the other's, in such a way that we cannot describe what either of them is doing and suffering without describing what the other is doing and suffering.[23]

When this obtains, *a*'s activity is realised in the life of *b* and *b's* activity is realised in the life of *a,* and the form of interaction which obtains between them is a kind of experience-for-two, where the contribution of each cannot be understood antecedently to the whole interaction; rather, each must be understood as abstractions from irreducible unity that their interaction is. Just as in mutual touching, where my activity is assimilates to the activity of the other, so too in eye contact: each of us intentionally transforms the other's situation, oriented their activity around us and exerting a kind of pressure on their activity; I'm conscious of my look as being borne by the other, and of their look as to be borne by me, and my understanding of my own activity is interdependent with my consciousness of their activity on me, which results in the kind of intertwinement stressed in some of the later passages of Merleau-Ponty.

6.3. This account is similar to Eilan's in that it takes eye contact to be an irreducible unity that cannot be decomposed into the antecedent contributions of each individual. Furthermore, the possibility of eye contact which is implicit in any encounter, transforms the nature of the act of looking when it is directed at a human being, and likewise, is an essential ingredient in understanding the feeling of being looked at as described by Sartre in 'The Look.'

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[22] The claim that eye contact is necessarily intentional presupposes that I'm aware that I'm aware of the other as a human being, and therefore it might not apply if I look into their eyes thinking that they are a statue.

[23] See Merleau Ponty's (1968, esp. 138-143) remarks on the chiasm. He writes: ""The handshake too is reversible; I can feel myself touched as well and at the same time as touching…Their landscapes interweave, their actions and their passions fit together exactly…For he first time, the body no longer couples itself up with the world, it clasps another body, applying itself to it carefully with its whole extension, forming tirelessly with its hands the strange statue which in its turn gives everything it receives" (p. 142-3)

When I intentionally look at another, knowing that it is a person I am looking at, I am conscious that they are the kind of thing which, if they become aware of my looking, will undergo a transformation in their activity as outlined in §6.1. But this means, that when I look at another, I either intend to bring about this change, then on Ford's (2016) account of the relationship between what I do and what the other undergoes, my activity extends to what the other suffers. Or, I look at them covertly, looking at them in such a way as to avoid attention, and which is structured around my anticipation of their returning my gaze. As such, it is always a looking which is always bracing itself to meet the returned gaze of the other. Either way, the nature of this looking is distinct in character from the way we look at mere objects. In these cases, then, Sartre was right to say that a person cannot look at me in the same way he looks at a rock, because it's either a bipolar transaction, in which case the look is transformed, or it anticipates the returned look of the other.

This means that it is necessarily exceptional that I am able to look at a human being in the same way that I can look at a rock. Perhaps this it what Marcel does when he famously watches Albertine sleep in The Prisoner. But even here, as Sartre observed, there is the possibility that this look could be shattered at any moment, if she wakes up. We rarely, if ever, look at another with the cool detachment of a spectator, it is always a form of concerned coping.

Similarly, when I become aware that someone is looking at me, my activity becomes oriented around the other's attention and transformed by the presence of the other's look. Though this needn't itself be something that the other intentionally does, as opposed to the unintentional consequence of their looking, it nevertheless cannot be adequately understood without reference to the possibility of the other's intentionally acting upon me and me upon them by our making eye contact. There is some truth in Eilan's suggestion that the other's look is experienced as an invitation to respond in kind, but this is an analogy; rather, my experience of the other's look affords the possibility of my responding in kind, or avoiding it, but either way, my activity is different in character, conditioned and transformed by the attention of the other.

6.4. My aim in this paper has been to illustrate Sartre's insight, extricating it from the problematic ontology which rendered it, inits Sartrean expression, unacceptable. n this section I have simply aimed to show that there is a view which can respect the insight and which, therefore, is true to the phenomenology in ways that the prevailing views are not. The insight survives in a modified form, applying primarily to the experience of eye contact and derivatively to the experience of being seen, contra Sartre.

I cannot, in a paper of this length, hope to give a completely satisfying account and defence of this structure. My aim has been

more modest: to argue that there is an account which isn't obviously problematic, and which enables us to take Sartre's Insight at face value, provided that we are prepared to take on certain commitments in the philosophy of action. This view has a number of advantages of its competitors, and it therefor deserves a more sustained hearing than it has currently received.

For example, unlike Peacocke, it takes the tactile metaphors we instinctually use to describe the experience of eye contact at face value, understanding the relation as itself a form of interaction, as opposed to the contemplative relation described by Peacocke. Furthermore, unlike Peacocke it is able to clearly explain the difference between the episodes of covert attention described in §5 and the mutual contact between two subjects who are engaging in eye contact.

Over the communicative view of eye contact suggested in different forms by Eilan and Levinas, it has the advantage of being truer to the phenomenology, since though engaging in eye contact *affords* the adoptation of an attitude of address, it isn't itself an attitude of address -- rather, it is the categorical basis for this possibility. But furthermore, insofar as the second personal relations Eilan appeals to themselves tend to acquire their appeal by being described in tactile language, then it is plausible to think that the special mode of presentation of another subject which second person thought and relations are held to involve, might itself be articulated on the basis of the kind of interactive account of eye contact outlined here. This idea, though plausible, requires greater discussion than can be given here.

§7. Conclusion

If the preceding is right, then in order to understand human intersubjectivity, we must attend to the tactile metaphors that we use to describe it. These metaphors suggest that rather than being a contemplative relation between two subjects, or a communicative attitude, the experience must be understood on the model of a handshake: where the activity of two subjects is mutually intertwined. I have outlined an account of this relation which has a good claim to taking these descriptions at face value, and therefore has certain advantages over the alternatives. Of course, other theoretical considerations may in that lead us to prefer the models of Peacocke, Eilan or Sartre, but my aim has not so much been to show that we must accept the account I have developed so much as to argue that it deserves a hearing.

Moreover, though I have been arguing that we should privilege the tactile metaphors in understanding human intersubjectivity, I by no means intend to deny the significance of the visual and auditory metaphors privileged by Peacocke and Eilan respectively. These metaphors also have their place, and a full account would consider their relations. Insofar as I have argued that the tactile metaphors are fundamental, and that what it is to engage in eye contact, and derivatively the experience of looking or being looked at another person must be understood on the tactile model. This means that the visual metaphors must be understood, not in terms of vision generally, but in terms of the special form of visual act which I have here characterised on the tactile model (and similar remarks apply to the second personal model).[24]

[24] Murdoch (2001, ch.1) offers a sophisticated treatment of the place of some visual metaphors in our ethical relations with other human beings.