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THE LOOK, THE BODY AND THE OTHER

INTRODUCTION

Sartre is the contemporary philosopher who has most explicitely interrelated the problem of the look, the body and the other. In *Being and Nothingness*, he devotes one-fourth of his seven hundred and twenty pages to the problem of the body and the other,[1] and of that he devotes a total of nearly sixty pages to the function of the look.

The crucial contribution by Sartre is acknowledged by an important historian of contemporary continental philosophy, A. De Waelhens, in his introduction to Merleau-Ponty's book, *La structure du comportement*. After underlining Sartre's contribution De Waelhens draws attention to the fact that Sartre's position concerning the body is contradictory. His metaphysical position cannot be reconciled with his phenomenological descriptions.[2] We also prefer Sartre's phenomenology to his metaphysics. The passage on the "Look" is a phenomenological description.

We will first present Sartre's position. In part two we will make an excursion in child development. In part three we will build a theory for explaining the crucial events described in part two. This theory will supplement and contradict the Sartrian vision of the relation between the look, the body and the other. In part four we will elaborate and draw some explicit philosophical conclusions from our study.

1. Sartre, E. N. Part III, p. 275–503. B.N. p. 271–526.
2. A. De Waelhens, *o.c.*, pp. vi–ix.

I. Sartre

With his analysis of the look, Sartre wants to clarify two problems: that of the other as a subject and that of one's own body. The two problems are studied together through the now classic definition of man as a being-for-the-other. These two problems are presented in a way which makes many feel uneasy. In order to discover the reasons for this uneasiness we will first study how Sartre attempts to solve the problem.

Sartre starts his analysis of the look by opposing two kinds of perception: the perception of an object and the perception of a person.[3] The perception of a new object creates no special problems, because the new object can just be added to the other objects of my world. Matters are different when I perceive a person. I cannot simply add up that person with the other objects of my world, because that person creates his own relations with the objects of my world. Perceiving another person is therefore almost like watching the upsurge in my world of an organization center, which is not my own but which uses the same objects.[4]

The threatening dimension of the experience can be diminished by making the other person an object; by seeing him as "the one reading his book," "the one who walks on the grass."[5] But even this classification of the other as a quasi-object does not free me totally from the threat of the other. At each moment the other may surprise me and do the unexpected. In the field of my perception, the other person remains an anomaly.

The description of the experience of the other is for Sartre but a first approach, because in this experience, the other is given to me only as an object that is probably a subject. Sartre's problem

3. Sartre, E. N. p. 311–312. B.N. p. 311–312.
4. *id.*, E.N. p. 312–313. B.N. p. 313.
5. *id.*, E.N. p. 313. B.N. p. 314.

is now to discover the other as subject and to affirm the discovery with certainty. The crucial step is set by the following reasoning. When I look at the other, I act as a subject but I integrate the other as an object. Therefore, the other must be experienced by me as a subject when I am looked at by him.[6] But the same look which makes the other for me a subject, makes me an object. Furthermore seeing provides no certainty: what I think I see, I am never certain that I see it. I can therefore never identify the other with certainty in the act of looking at me. Knowledge of the subjectivity of the other is not available.

I have nevertheless access to the subjectivity in principle of the other, in the experience I make of my own objectivity before the eyes of the other. This happens in the moments of shame, pride, vanity, anger, etc.

In shame I experience myself as something determinate, that I don't control, that I don't wish to be, but that I am before the eyes of the other. Without the existence of the other shame makes no sense. But without being something I don't wish to be, shame would make no sense either. Therefore, it is in the same experience that I am given to the other, and that I experience my determinate being or my body.[7]

Sartre is willing to accept that I can be mistaken in my interpretation of the thing in the world for which I am ashamed, and that I really did not need to be ashamed. But shame, says Sartre, reveals to me at least one thing: I can have reasons for being ashamed.

Such reasons cannot be found in my pure consciousness, such reasons can only be found in my being a body. The body is therefore my access to the other, and the other is the occasion for my becoming aware of my body.[8]

In this analysis, there is no place for the meeting of two ob-

6. *id.*, E.N. p. 314. B.N. p. 314.
7. *id.*, E.N. p. 349–351. B.N. p. 354, 356.
8. *id.*, E.N. p. 337, 329. B.N. p. 340, 331.

jects. One of the two is always reduced to an object.[9] This position is contrary to the one that Hegel holds in his analysis of self-consciousness.[10] The precondition for self-consciousness is the encounter of another self-consciousness, recognized as such. It is precisely because the master objectifies the slave that Hegel considers the road of the master a dead-end.

One of the crucial differences between Sartre and Hegel is that the problem of intersubjectivity in Sartre is analyzed in terms of the concept of the look, whereas in Hegel it is analyzed in terms of the concept of desire. Once emotional life is introduced, one can see the possibility of an encounter of two subjects, because human desires are not fulfilled by objects, they long for recognition.[11]

It is worthwhile to notice that Sartre is forced to bring in the analysis of the emotions to prove what he first tried to prove with the analysis of the look alone. Sartre concedes that the other as a subject is not available to me through the look but only in the emotional experience of my-being-looked-at.[12] At different places Sartre names the following emotional experiences: shame, rage, pride, vanity, anxiety or modesty. Sartre chooses fear or shame as the primordial emotional experience of myself in relation to the other.[13] It is this choice which allows him to underline further the basic incompatability of subjects living together as subjects.

The one-sidedness of Sartre's analysis is manifested in his attempt to reduce modesty and pride to shame.[14] Contrary to what Sartre says, modesty is not just fear for being surprised in a state of nudity, and pride is not just vanity. Both modesty and pride are the expression of a free attitude towards my own

9. *id.*, E.N. p. 327. B.N. p. 329.
10. Hegel, *o.c.*, p. 215–267, particularly p. 217–227.
11. *ibid.*, p. 231.
12. Sartre, E.N. p. 319. B.N. p. 320.
13. *id.*, E.N. p. 319, 323, 326, 348, 349, 351, 352. B.N. p. 320, 325, 328, 353, 354, 356, 357.
14. *id.*, E.N. p. 349, 351. B.N. p. 354, 356.

bodiliness in the face of another subject, whose free consent for my attitude towards my body I hope for.

Sartre sees very correctly that shame presupposes that I have appropriated my body, that I have identified with my body. But Sartre wrongly supposes that the only possible attitude towards having and being a body is shame and that the moment of appropriation of one's body should be described as "the original fall."[15] We will contest the Sartrian interpretation of the experience of my body as shame, of the other as primarily an enemy and of the look as purely objectifying, by collecting material to the contrary from developmental child psychology. We will use psychoanalytic theory to interprete that material, and then present a philosophical theory of the function of the other in the appropriation of one's body. In that theory we will discover a moment of alienation in the process of appropriating the body. We will therefore have to concede that Sartre has described an original moment of the relation with the body. But we will at the same time show that the alienation experience is not the primal experience of one's body.

II. Excursus in Child-Development

As a key reference for the description of the development of the child, we will use René A. Spitz. Spitz is a physician with psychoanalytic training who devoted his career to the observation and the interpretation of the development of the child during its first years.

We checked and complemented the information found in Spitz with standard works in developmental psychology, such as H. Remplein, *Die seelische Entwicklung des Menschen im Kindes- und Jugendalter.*

We will describe four moments in the development of the child:

15. *id.*, E.N. p. 349. B.N. p. 354.

1. The smile of the child around two months in reaction to the human face.
2. The exuberance of the child around six months when it sees himself in the mirror or when it is approached by somebody.
3. The anxiety of the child at eight months, when it sees strangers.
4. The period of negativism or no-saying around 1½ years.

Let us describe first these different moments in the development of the child.

1. The smile of the child in reaction to the human face

From the second month on, the child makes the human face a privileged visual object.[16] From the third month on, most babies will smile when they perceive a human face directly and when the face is moving. It does not matter whether the head is nodding or whether movements are made by the mouth.

Through a series of observations and experiments, Spitz learned that the essential elements for provoking a smile were the following:

a) The face must be presented directly not in profile.
b) Some form of movement must be made.
c) The human face can be replaced by a mask, parts of which can be hidden. It was enough to have the upper part of the face with the two eyes and the mask could provoke the smiling response.
d) Even the movement of the face was not strictly necessary if the mask had an extremely widened mouth.

Because it is possible to describe in detail the circumstances which provoke the smiling reaction, Spitz describes, the phenomenon as a Gestalt triggering an innate response.[17]

The description and explanation by Spitz nevertheless leave some problems. To a nodding and smiling face the baby reacts not only with a smile but also, as Spitz himself says, by becoming

16. Spitz & Cobliner, *o.c.*, p. 86 ff.
17. *ibid.*, p. 95.

active and by wiggling.[18] And as Spitz states suddenly after his description of the smiling response a mechanical doll, fitted with the appropriate Gestalt, will not be able to rear the children. Spitz says: "The vital spark has to be conferred on the equipment (of the child) through exchanges with another human being, with a partner, with the mother. Nothing less than a reciprocal relation will do."[19]

After having described the smiling response as an almost automatic mechanism, Spitz suddenly claims that the innate mechanism must be given a vital spark through the interaction with another human being: the mother.

Furthermore Spitz does not analyze the activity and the wiggling of the baby that accompany the smiling response. Spitz has therefore in our opinion not fully unearthed the meaning of the smiling-response even if he suspects and says himself in a vague way that there is more to it then he himself has analyzed.

2. Exuberance of the child when approached by anybody

What Spitz only mentioned, Lacan takes as a crucial event, i.e., that the child when it is approached by somebody starts making exuberant gestures. Lacan finds it even more important that the child is producing the same kind of exuberance when it perceives itself in the mirror, from six months on.[20] Lacan will use this phenomenon to build a theory of child development. He does not give new descriptions. Therefore, we will make use of Lacan only in the theoretical part (III).

If we find, in Spitz, no description of the exuberance, we do have a description of two abnormal developments such as anaclytic depression or hospitalism where the exuberance of the child is absent. We can therefore nevertheless find in Spitz indirect material to study the conditions for the exuberance of the child.

Let us first describe the two abnormal developments. Anaclytic

18. *ibid.*, p. 89.
19. *ibid.*, p. 95.
20. Lacan, *o.c.*, p. 93, 185.

depression was observed with children in a nursery.[21] The children had received good care from their mothers until six months. Between six and eight months the children were for administrative reasons deprived of their mothers. The children started to weep, began to withdraw into themselves. Some lost weight and suffered from insomnia. They also showed greater susceptibility to colds and showed a retardation of personality growth which even turned to a decline of the personality structures. When the children were re-united prior to a separation of three months, they recovered very fast.[22] If the separation was more than three months, the recovery was slower or non-existent.

The second syndrome is that of hospitalism. Spitz observed that syndrome in a Foundling Home.[23] For the first three months of their lives the children had had close contact with their own or with a substitute mother. They had even been breast fed. The separation from the mother started after the third month. During the first three months of separation the symptoms were very similar to those of anaclytic depression. After the third month, the children showed excessive motoric retardation. They became completely passive, lying on their backs without being able to turn themselves into the prone position. Their faces had an imbecilic expression, eye coordination was defective, fingers showed bizarre movements and the children were sometimes subjected to "spasmus nutans." At the end of their second year, these children had on the average a development which would classify them as idiots. And finally, whereas in other circumstances of 93 children only 4 died in the first year, of the children having the syndrome of hospitalism 29.6% died in the first year and an additional 7.7% died in the second year.[24]

From these descriptions it is clear that the absence of the

21. Spitz & Cobliner, *o.c.*, p. 269 ff.
22. *ibid.*, p. 274.
23. *ibid.*, p. 277 ff.
24. *ibid.*, p. 278, 280.

mother from the third month on has very negative effects for the appropriation of the body by the child. And when such children are approached by strangers they don't show exuberance. They produce what is technically called "negative cyphalogyric notions." These are head shakings, when lying on the back, combined with expressions and concomitant vocalizations indicating unpleasure.[25]

The exuberance and the smiling response to other people clearly require the presence of the mother. The look therefore produces a totally different effect depending on the emotional environment in which the child is living.

The crucial function of the emotional environment for the development of the child and the ramifications for the body are once more underlined by Spitz when he gives a survey of the infant's diseases as they relate to the psychological attitudes of the mother towards the child.[26]

Etiological Classification of Psychogenic Diseases in Infancy According to Maternal Attitudes

	Etiological Factor Provided by Maternal Attitudes	Infant's Disease
Psychotoxic (Quality)	Overt Primal Rejection	Coma in Newborn (Ribble)
	Primary Anxious Over-permissiveness	Three-month Colic
	Hostility in the Guise of Anxiety	Infantile Eczema
	Oscillation between Pampering and Hostility	Hypermotility (rocking)
	Cyclical Mood Swings	Fecal Play
	Hostility Consiously Compensated	Aggressive Hyperthymic (Bowlby)
Deficiency (Quantity)	Partial Emotional Deprivation	Anaclitic Depression
	Complete Emotional Deprivation	Marasmus

25. Spitz, *No and Yes*, p. 12–22, particularly p. 12, 16.
26. Spitz & Cobliner, *o.c.*, p. 209.

When reading the works of Spitz, we do not find a full theory for the explanation of the above mentioned facts. Spitz says that the mother interacts with the child, or that absence of mothering equals emotional starvation.[27] It is clear that there is here room for theory-construction.

3. Eight-month's anxiety

Around eight months, the child will start reacting differently when people are approaching it. Before, the child reacted with a smile to anybody who approached it. Now the child discriminates between the mother, other people it is familiar with, and strangers. When the child is approached by a stranger, it will show signs of anxiety: it will become silent, will start to weep or to scream. It may also develop a series of defense mechanisms, such as covering its face with its shirt, covering its eyes with its hands, lowering its eyes "shyly," or throwing itself on the floor and hiding its face.[28] Spitz draws attention to the fact that the behaviour described above only happens when the mother is absent. It is sometimes enough that the mother is present and the child does not show so clearly its anxiety.[29]

Spitz' effort to explain that behaviour is as follows. The child has developed a capacity to recall. It remembers the face of its mother. Before it was six months, the child showed signs of distress whenever an adult was leaving it. Perceiving a stranger at eight months becomes for the child the occasion for expecting the reappearance of its mother. But by closer scrutiny, the child discovers that the stranger is not its mother. This discovery is for the child a great disappointment, and causes the anxiety.[30]

This explanation seems to us insufficient, because it explains disappointment, not anxiety. Furthermore, children start showing signs of anxiety for strangers as early as 4 months although

27. *ibid.*, p. 281.
28. *ibid.*, p. 150.
29. Spitz, *La première année*, p. 52.
30. Spitz & Cobliner, *o.c.*, p. 155.

the anxiety cannot be aroused at that age by the mere vision of a stranger. Holding the child or talking to it are required at that stage to produce anxiety.

4. The period of negativism

Around the fifteenth month of life the child has acquired the gesture of no-saying.[31] A couple of months later the child has also acquired the word "no" and can now use it. From 1½ years on, the children will use the "no" frequently, especially towards the mother.[32] Often the uses of the "no" are not logical. A concrete example will indicate the illogical character. A mother had before her a cake that was to be divided among her family and the guests. She started by asking her youngest son, between 2 and 3 years old, if he wanted a piece. After saying "no" to the surprised mother, the mother repeated the question two more times, with the same result. When the child said "no" for the third time, he took his mother's hand and kissed it. The mother then divided up the cake and some was left over. After most had finished their piece, the mother asked if anybody wanted another. Before anybody could answer, the child said: "I want a piece." Presumably, then, the "no" of the child does not mean that the child does not want the cake, because the child itself asks for it. The "no" seems to be used to say to the mother that the child does not want what the mother thinks it wants.[33] The kiss of reconciliation seems to indicate that the child felt some form of guilt for its no-saying against the mother. At that age children want to express that they want what they want and that they do not want what others think they want. The children want to make it clear that they decide autonomously what they want. This is clearly a breaking up of the mother-child dyad of the first year of life where the child was dependent on the correct guessing of its mother about its own needs. The no-saying period can therefore

31. Spitz, *No and Yes*, p. 38, 39, 46.
32. Remplein, *o.c.*, p. 261.
33. See example quoted in footnote by Remplein, p. 256.

be interpreted as the attempt by the child to break up its dependence upon the mother and to establish itself as an independent decision-center.

III. Theoretical Explanation

In the work of Spitz we did not find a sufficient explanation of two crucial facts:

1. Why was it that the child became active and started wriggling when it was looked at by a face?
2. Why did the child show anxiety and not just disappointment when a stranger approached it at eight months?

In order to build an explanation we will make use of the mirror-stage theory of Lacan.[34] This theory begins with the acceptance that the child at birth does not experience itself as a body, but during the first months of its life experiences itself as a partial body. The body-part that the child experiences first is that of the mouth. This period is called in psychoanalytic theory the oral phase, and dominates the first year of life.

Developmental psychologists observe that the child during the first year of its life discovers its hands, its feet, etc.

The discovery, the active use and the appropriation of parts of the body is a gradual process. Crucial is the moment where the child discovers, accepts and appropriates the fact that it is not a partial but a total body.

Lacan holds that the child discovers and appropriates itself as a body around six months, when it is fascinated with seeing itself in the mirror. It makes wild gestures trying to distinguish between the inner proprioceptive experience and the outer movements.[35] The great discovery for the child is that the vague and confused inner experience is given a clear and visible outer

34. Lacan, *o.c.*, "Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je" p. 93–100. "Propos sur la causalité psychique" particularly p. 178–192.
35. *ibid.*, p. 93, 95, 96, 185.

form. The appropriation of that outer form, of itself as a body, transforms the child's experience of itself.

Before it experienced itself as a partial object, it had no experience of duration, because the partial body was as in the case of the mouth, experienced in moments of hunger and often together with the outer world, i.e. the bottle or the breast. That the appropriation of itself as a body has great significance for the child can be seen by the fact that the child does not only look at itself in the mirror, it also shows excessive signs of joy and exuberance.[36] The looking relation is therefore closely related to its emotions. The child makes its own body the object of its exuberance. The myth of Narcissus tells us already how the Greeks felt that a close relation existed between the look and emotions. Psychoanalysis borrowed from this myth the name it gives to the moment of self-admiration and calls it narcissism. Lacan holds that narcissism finds its crucial roots in the mirror stage.

The argument presented up to now can be divided into two problems: the problem of the look and the problem of the emotions.

To impress upon the readers the importance of the look, Lacan refers to the studies of Harrison Matthews on the pigeons and of Chauvin on the locust.[37]

The studies by Matthews show that the ovulation of the female pigeon changes depending upon whether she sees a male or a female pigeon, her own mirror image or sees no pigeons at all even if she hears and smells other pigeons. For the female pigeon the minimum required outer stimulus for ovulation is seeing her own body in the mirror.

Chauvin found that the locust can be a solitary or a gregarious animal. The minimal condition for becoming a gregarious locust

36. *Ibid.*, p. 93, 185.

37. *ibid.*, p. 189–191. The exact reference is L. Harrison Matthews, "Visual stimulation and ovulation in pigeons" in *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London.* Series B. Vol. 126, 1938–39, p. 557–560.

is to have seen or felt a locust of the same or of a neighboring species. The smelling or the hearing is not crucial. It is important to notice that there are morphological differences between the solitary and the gregarious animal.

These two examples from biological research indicate that indeed the look has a crucial function in the development of certain animals and that that function is precisely related to the seeing of the own body of the same species.

Although the look is crucial also for the child, we must underline that for it the experience of the look is related to its emotional life. Indeed the child does not only look at itself in the mirror or at an other person when it is approached, but it is also exuberant.

We have also the description of Spitz about anaclytic depression and about hospitalism, wherein the children are unable to react to the appearance of another human being, or show that they react negatively.

The question which now arises is that of the relations between the look and the emotional atmosphere in which the child is living. The work of Spitz shows us that the child needs a mother or a mother substitute and not just a nurse. If the mother figure is absent between 3 and 9 months for more than 3 months severe developmental retardation starts, retardation which might even end in the death of the child. Thus in order to appropriate its body the child needs a mother figure. When this condition is fulfilled the child is capable to respond to the look of the other with a smile and with exuberance. It is only later at 8 months that the look creates fear. We must therefore accept that the look is for the child in the first place a gratifying experience.

This interpretation of the exuberance of the child of 6 months when seeing itself in the mirror or seeing others allows us to give a theoretical explanation of the eight month anxiety.

At six months, the child has dicovered itself as a body and has started the appropriation of and the identification with its body. Two months later the child must have discovered the dangerous dimension of having and being a body. If one is a body one has

duration, but one aspect of one's being is beyond one's control. The body is available to the other's look. He can see aspects of myself that I cannot see and yet that I am. Inasmuch as the child would realize that, it should show some form of uncertainty and anxiety. That is precisely what happens during the eight months anxiety. The description of Spitz makes it clear furthermore that it is the look of the others which causes the anxiety. And the child's reactions such as choosing or covering its eyes point in the same direction.

One thing remains to be clarified: the child has no anxiety for its mother. Inasmuch as the mother fulfills the needs of the child, the child relates directly through its emotions and desires to the mother. The strangers relate only to it through its body, and therefore remind the child of the alienating dimension of the body, whereas the mother relates to the child also through the child's needs. The mother can therefore at eight months serve as a reassuring agency when the child, through the look of a stranger, is reminded of the alienating dimension of the body. It is clear therefore that the child becomes at eight months even more dependent on the mother, inasmuch as the mother has now to reassure the child against itself, when it experiences its body as an alienating dimension of itself.

We believe that this role of the mother comes to an end when the period of negativism starts around 1½ years. At that time the child wants to say "no" to the mother for the sole reason of being able to affirm its own will, to affirm itself as an autonomous decision center. But to have such a will, supposes that the child has overcome the alienating experience of not being at home with itself. The period of negativism can therefore not only be interpreted as the moment of separation from the mother, but also as an indication that the child has fully appropriated its body and has learned to master the alienating dimension of it.

That the mother has an active role to play in overcoming the alienating experience of the eight month anxiety can be shown through the studies of Aulagnier and Mannoni on psychotic

children.[38] Both try to interpret the psychotic child through the relations it has with the mother.

The difference between a mother of a psychotic child and one with a normal child starts from the moment of conception.

A normal mother, even from the beginning of her conception, imagines herself having a baby. She starts even wondering about the sex of her infant. So at the moment when the baby is still only an embryo, the mother creates in imagination an autonomous being, with a fully developed body and destined to life a life of its own, independent of the mother.[39]

This imaginative labor on the part of the future mother will have two crucial consequences in the further mother-child relations.

1. The birth of the child will not be experienced solely by the mother as a physical loss of something that was a part of her body and is now gone. The birth will also psychologically be experienced as the event which allows the realisation of what she imagined as already existing: i.e. a fully developed and autonomous body. In this sense, the work of imagination makes mourning superfluous as a psychological mechanism for working through the experiences of loss by giving birth to a child.[40]
2. When the child at eight months discovers the alienating dimension of being and of appropriating its body, and turns to its mother for reassurance, the normal child encounters a mother who from the time of pregnancy has always imagined her child as an autonomous body. The normal child thus finds support with its mother for the task it has to perform in its relation with its body. This support is not an intellectually or emotionally neutral support. It involves the emotional

38. Of particular importance are P. Aulagnier, *o.c.*, M. Mannoni, *o.c.*

39. For an analysis of the psychological attitude of the mother during pregnancy, see Jessner Lucie: On becoming a mother. The author divides the pregnancy-period in three trimesters, and differentiates the problems of the pregnant mother over these trimesters.

40. Aulagnier, *o.c.*, p. 50.

life of the mother inasmuch as the mother projects a part of her own narcissistic desires onto the child.[41] The pride in a beautiful child, the grief for a misformed one, the projection of irrealistic potentialities in the own child, are all signs of the deep emotional involvement of parents, particularly mothers with their children.

All this is different in the relation between a psychotic child and its mother. The psychotogenic mother talks about the foetus during pregnancy as a part of her body. She does not create in imagination a child-to-be.[42]

The consequences of this lack of imaginative work are apparent at the birth of the child. Such a mother experiences the delivery as a loss of something that was previously an organic part of her own body.[43] The feeling that the child is a part of her body is so great that such mothers often refuse to give the child the name of its father.[44] Under such circumstances it is easy to understand that giving birth creates for these mothers a great psychological problem: they experience it as a loss, and they go through a period of mourning if not of depression.

Such mothers recuperate, by appropriating the child as an organic part of themselves.[45] They relate to the child as a mouth that has to be fed, as a body that has to be cleaned, etc. In this relation they regain for themselves a form of omnipotence towards the child. The great danger in this relation from the point of view of the psychology of the mother is that the child could show its independence, that it could show that it has desires and wishes. In order to prevent that, such mothers will often feed the baby before it can cry or as soon as it shows the slightest form of restlessness. The child in this circumstance is not allowed to experience itself as a body and to appropriate its body as a source

41. *ibid.*, p. 49, 51.
42. *ibid.*, p. 53–54.
43. *ibid.*, p. 55.
44. *ibid.*, p. 54–55.
45. *ibid.*, p. 55.

of desires.[46] The path to autonomy is therefore closed for such a child by its mother.

It is now precisely the support of the mother that the child needs for overcoming the eight month anxiety and the experience of alienation of its own body. When in this moment of anxiety the child turns to the psychotogenic mother, the child finds not only no support, it encounters even terror in its mother. She indeed can psychologically not tolerate that the child appropriates its own body and thereby creates the conditions for and a path towards autonomy. The child on the other hand experiences precisely at eight months the alienating dimension in the path to autonomy. It is the exploitation of this experience of alienation which allows the mother to foreclose for ever for the child the path to its autonomy. Such a child will not reach unbroken the moment of negativism.[47]

IV. Concluding Remarks

Our study allows for several conclusions.

1. The function of the other in relation to my body

Contrary to the impression given by Sartre's description the other is not just the one who reminds me of the alienating dimension of my body. Such a role is performed typically by strangers around 8 months. The description of Sartre can even be used as a theoretical description of the 8-month-anxiety, especially because the child-psychologists are unable to fully explain it.

We have nevertheless to underline that before 8 months the other performs a gratifying role for the child. Its exuberance and its joy, when looked at, are an indication that the look draws the

46. *ibid.*, p. 57.
47. It is worth mentioning that psychotics have even difficulty with the use of the peronal pronoms, which require the possibility of differentiating between I and You.

child out of itself, allows it to conquer its body and to direct itself to the world.

Furthermore the attitude of the child towards the mother at 8 months indicates that the child needs the active support and the permission of the mother to appropriate the own body and to overcome the feeling of alienation going together with the appropriation of the body.

Sartre has correctly seen that the fact of having and being a body can make me vulnerable to the look of the other. He overlooked the fact that in order to appropriate my body I need the active stimulation, the support and the permission of the other.

The studies of Erikson indicate that the quality of support I got as a child to appropriate my body, determines the relation I will have as an adult to my body, myself, the others and the world.[48]

The other is therefore not only, as Sartre says, the one who reminds me of the gap between my consciousness and my body, the other is also the one who has helped and promoted the appropriation of my body and has even codetermined the kind of relation I have been able to establish.

Inasmuch as the appropriation of the body is a precondition for being a subject we must again say that the look between two subjects does not necessarily have to be objectifying. The look can even help to promote one's subjectivity. What can be clearly described for the child-development can be vaguely pointed to in the relation between lovers, when the look of the other promotes the subjectivity of the other in as much as it helps the other to accept himself his body and his finitude.

2. *The look and its relation to emotional life*

In the previous section we have indicated that the look can remind a subject of his alienating condition but also that the look can help him overcome his self-alienation. The difference in

48. Erikson, *o.c.* For the general theory, see p. 72–109 and Ch. 7. For a particulary instructive example see his analysis of the Sioux Indians, p. 133–157.

result depends on the emotional relation between the looker and the one looked at.

In his analysis Sartre only takes account of the emotional reaction of the one who was looked at. He did not see that this emotional reaction is also dependent on the emotional reaction of the looker. The facts we have brought up indicate that Sartre is wrong here. The problem we now face is to find a theoretical way of explaining this influence.

The best formulation we can find I believe is that of Hegel who underlines that the basic requirement of self-consciousness is that of mutual recognition.[49] Inasmuch as the other recognizes or helps me be a self-consciousness, to this extent the look of the other is not alienating. Contrary to Sartre, who defined man as "for-the-other," we have to say that I am not only for-the-other but also in need of mediation with myself, and that that mediation can only be given to me by the other.

Thus, we have to dispute directly certain expressions of Sartre such as: "My being for-others is a fall through absolute emptiness toward objectivity."[50] We have to say that having a body is not just a fact, it is a continous problem, a continous task, and in solving that problem, in mastering that task, we need the help of others. Inasmuch as having a body is a typical human task, it is absurd to call it a fall, unless one wants to revive the mythology that the body is a prison for the soul.

3. *The primacy of the look*

In Sartre's analysis there is no doubt about the primacy of the look as compared with the other senses. Even hearing the rustling of branches is interpreted by Sartre in terms of the look.[51]

The theoretical construction we used to explain the exuberance and the eight-months anxiety of the child relies on the mirror-stage theory of Lacan. The essence of that theory is that the child

49. Hegel, *o.c.*, p. 231.
50. Sartre, E.N. p. 334. B.N. p. 337.
51. *id.*, E.N. p. 315. B.N. p. 316.

needs to see itself in the mirror or needs to recognize itself in the Gestalt of an approaching human being in order to be able to identify and to appropriate its body. To make sure that the reader understands that the look has a crucial function in interrelating the psychological and the biological, Lacan refers in his writings to studies about pigeons and locusts.

But even if we are willing to give the look a crucial place in the process of appropriating the body we have to dispute the absolute primacy it seems to have with the authors discussed. The first reason for disputing the primacy of the look in the growth towards subjectivity is that children born blind are not suffering from anaclytic depression or from hospitalism. They also don't necessarily develop psychosis. Inasmuch as children born blind can develop a normal personality, and that they too must appropriate their body, we must postulate that other senses can be instrumental in promoting the discovery and the appropriation of the body.

The sense which seems best fit for replacing the sense of seeing in the above mentioned problem is hearing. It is well known that people have difficulty in recognizing their own recorded voices. This phenomenon would suggest the idea that man has an internal hearing system and an external hearing system. Recorded voices are heard only through the latter. The pronounced word is heard by both. Therefore the recorded voice gives to the speaker a different impression than his spoken word.

The existence of an internal and an external hearing system must allow the child to distinguish between the world outside himself and his own body. Hearing can therefore also pose the problem of the body, which is the problem of inside and outside. Perhaps a similar argument can be made for the sense of touch.

These hypotheses about the possibility that the look could be replaced by the sense of hearing or of touching finds confirmation in two unsystematic observations. When our boy was 3 months old, he smiled when he heard our voices. Only a week or so later were we able to provoke a smile when he saw us. Knowing the

importance of the look I tried during that one week repeatedly to elicit a smile by the look without success. The smile could only be provoked by our voices.

Even at a later age when our boy was not smiling while looking at our faces, because he was too tired, we sometimes could elicit a smile response by talking to him. We also noticed that soon after birth our two children tried to get in touch with our skin. An experienced nurse even said that the newborn needs skin-contact.

Even if the other senses can replace to a certain extent the look, there remains nevertheless a crucial difference between the look and the other senses. Only the look confronts the child with a unified body, the other senses present the child with experiences of a partial body. If that is the case one should be able to show that children born blind take a longer time than other children to appropriate their body.

Summarizing the most important conclusions of our study, we should like to say that the analysis of the look does not guarantee the conclusion of Sartre that real intersubjectivity is impossible. We have even to say with Hegel that real subjectivity is only possible within the context of intersubjectivity because I need the other to mediate with my own body. The other is therefore not the enemy of my subjectivity, he is the condition for my becoming a subject. We did agree with Sartre that the look plays a primary role in the mediation that takes place between me and my body with the help of the other. We had to add, nevertheless, that the function of the look could be taken over or supplemented by the touch and the hearing and that in any case the senses get their full meaning from the dialectic of the desires, as Hegel saw so well.

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