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Dan Zahavi
Danish Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities

Intersubjectivity in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*

Sartre's analysis of intersubjectivity in the third part of *Being and Nothingness* is guided by two main motives¹. First of all, Sartre is simply expanding his ontological investigation of the essential structure of and relation between the for-itself (*pour-soi*) and the in-itself (*en-soi*). For as he points out, I need the Other in order fully to understand the structure of my own being, since the for-itself refers to the for-others (EN 267/303, 260/298); moreover, as he later adds, a treatment of the relation to the in-itself must necessarily include an analysis of the Other precisely because this relation is played out in the presence of the Other (EN 410/472). Secondly, Sartre wants to supply a concrete solution to the problem of solipsism (EN 289/329, 296/337). This problem was already preoccupying him in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, but at that time, Sartre argued that solipsism could be avoided by means of a non-egological theory of consciousness, since such a theory—which sees the transcendental field of consciousness as non-personal and the I as a product of reflection (TE 36/52-53, 63/80-81)—would no longer confer a privileged status to the I vis-à-vis the Other (TE 85/104). In *Being and Nothingness*, however, Sartre concedes that this renunciation of the transcendental I has in fact been of no help in overcoming solipsism (EN 280/318). The problem remains and has to be solved. As he is quick to add, however, a proper solution will not involve any proof of the existence of Others; rather, it will be a question of revealing the foundation of our “pre-ontological” certainty with regard to the existence of the Other (EN 297/338).

Sartre begins his investigation by surveying some previous accounts, notably Hegel's, Husserl's and Heidegger's. A brief summary of his evaluation of Heidegger's contribution will facilitate the transition to Sartre's own theory.

1. Sartre's criticism of Heidegger

At first, Sartre seems to accept Heidegger's observations concerning the social character of equipment, for as he writes (with an emphasis that at the same time indicates a characteristic lacuna in Heidegger's own account), it is undeniable that tools and artifacts contain references to a plurality of *embodied* Others by whom the utensil has been manufactured and/or by whom it is used (EN 278/316, 389/446, 391/448). Just as Heidegger, Sartre consequently argues that our daily activities are intrinsically social and reveal our participation in a community of subjects, even in the absence of an encounter with concrete Others:

To live in a world haunted by my fellowmen is not only to be able to encounter the Other at every turn of the road; it is also to find myself engaged in a world in which instrumental-complexes can have a meaning which my free project has not first given to them (EN 567/654).

Hence the existence of objects of use in the world indicates our membership in a community of subjects. In my commerce with the equipment or instruments I am using, my most immediate goals are those of the *they*: I grasp myself as interchangeable with any of my neighbors, and do not distinguish myself from them. Ultimately, whenever I make use of an instrument that was manufactured by Others for an anonymous consumer, i.e., for

a sheer “someone,” I forfeit my proper identity. Thus whenever I try on a pair of shoes, or uncork a bottle, or step into an elevator, or laugh in a theatre, I am making myself into “anyone.” Certain particular circumstances, arising from the world, can therefore give me the impression of being a part of a *we* (EN 475-77/548-51). Where Heidegger would speak of a they-self (*Man-selbst*), Sartre consequently speaks of a *we-subject*.

Although Sartre does take over an important part of Heidegger’s reflections—and praises him for interpreting the relationship to the Other as a relationship of being (and not as a mere relationship of knowing)—Sartre’s presentation eventually turns into a pointed critique. According to Sartre, Heidegger’s concept of being-with (*Mitsein*) completely fails to capture our original and fundamental relation to Others.

There are several different steps to Sartre’s criticism. At first he simply points out that it would never occur to me to distinguish between a manufactured piece of equipment and a natural object unless I already had a prior experience of an Other. It is exactly in and through my interaction with Others that I learn to handle an object as a manufactured tool, as something that is designed for a specific purpose, as something that *one* uses in a particular manner. For this very reason, the reference to Others contained in tool-use is a *derived* reference. More generally, being-with understood as a ‘lateral’ relation to Others is not the most fundamental type of intersubjectivity; on the contrary it presupposes a more original and quite concrete encounter with Others (EN 478-79/551-53). As Sartre writes:

The ‘we’ is a certain particular experience which is produced in special cases on the foundation of being-for-others in general. The being-for-others precedes and founds the being-with-others (EN 465/536-537).

Thus, in Sartre’s view, Heidegger made the mistake of interpreting our original relation to Others as an ‘oblique interdependence’ rather than as a ‘frontal confrontation’.

The empirical image which may best symbolize Heidegger’s intuition is not that of a conflict but rather a crew. The original relation of the Other and my consciousness is not the you and me; it is the we. Heidegger’s being-with is not the clear and distinct position of an individual confronting another individual; it is not knowledge. It is the mute existence in common of one member of the crew with his fellows, that existence which the rhythm of the oars or the regular movement of the coxswain will render sensible to the rowers and which will be made manifest to them by the common goal to be attained, the boat or the yacht to be overtaken, and the entire world (spectators, performance, etc.) which is profiled on the horizon (EN 292/332).

In contrast, as we will see in a moment, Sartre himself takes intersubjectivity to be first and foremost a question of conflict and confrontation rather than of peaceful co-existence (EN 481/555).

In the second step of his criticism, Sartre takes issue with Heidegger’s well-known attempt to understand being-with as an essential, intrinsic, and a priori determination of Dasein, rather than as a contingent and factual feature that only shows up in and through concrete encounters with Others. According to Sartre, such a conception ignores what is most crucial in intersubjectivity, the relation to radical *otherness*. As Sartre points out, any ‘theory of intersubjectivity’ which attempts to bridge the gap between the self and the Other by emphasizing their similarity, undifferentiatedness, and a priori interconnectedness is not only in constant danger of relapsing into a monism that in the end would be indistinguishable from solipsism, it is also losing sight of the real issue: our concrete encounter with this or that *transcendent* Other. Sartre consequently argues that if solipsism is truly to be overcome, it will not do to neutralize the otherness of the Other by positing intersubjectivity as a necessary feature of our being, as something that can be deduced a priori from the for-itself. On the contrary, the existence of Others is a *contingent* fact, and our being-for-others must be understood as an existential dimension which only arises in and through the concrete encounter with factual Others (EN

293-295/333-335, 412/474)².

It is against this background that Sartre denies that the experience of myself as part of a we-subject is of any ontological relevance: that is to say, correctly seen, there is no intersubjective consciousness, i.e., no collective consciousness that would surpass the individual elements and subsume them into a synthetic whole. The experience of the we-subject is a purely psychological and subjective process within an individual consciousness; it does not establish any ontological connection with the Other and does not realize any true being-with (EN 465/536, 477/550). Of course, with this Sartre is equating “intersubjective” consciousness with a “collective” consciousness—and it is by no means obvious that this identification is valid.

However, Sartre seems to be onto something important when he insists that one should distinguish between the *being-with* and the *being-for*, that is, when he insists that there are several different modalities of intersubjectivity, each of which has to be investigated (EN 293/334). Whether Sartre is justified in categorically denying any apriorism is, as we will see in a moment, another question.

2. The Other-as-subject and the Other-as-object

Let me now turn to Sartre's own position. Sartre is convinced that being-with-one-another cannot be observed and described from the external perspective of a third party; rather, it must be elucidated through a penetrating self-investigation. For this reason, Sartre explicitly takes the *cogito* as his point of departure (EN 289/329, 314/358). That is to say, modes of consciousness that intrinsically refer to my being-for-others can be disclosed without leaving the terrain of reflective description (EN 265/301). Thus it is precisely radical *cogito*-reflection that can bring our (contingent) ontological relationship with Others to light:

Just as my consciousness apprehended by the cogito bears indubitable witness of itself and of its own existence, so certain particular consciousnesses—for example, “shame-consciousness”—bear indubitable witness to the cogito both of themselves and of the existence of the Other (EN 319/364-65).

The attempt to analyze concrete experiences in order to expose a reference to the Other within their intentional structure had already been undertaken earlier by Scheler. Thus, Scheler claimed that we from the intentional analyses of a number of our emotions could learn that we are related to Others with a priori essential necessity even prior to, and independent of, any concrete experience of Others³.

However, the decisive difference between Sartre and Scheler is precisely that Sartre rejects this *a priori* relatedness of subjects to one another. According to Sartre, the said experiences are in each case only made possible *in and by means of* concrete encounter with the Other. The *cogito* does indeed cast me toward the Other, as it were. However, this is not because the *cogito* discloses an a priori structure within me, myself, that would be directed toward an equally a priori Other; rather, it is because what the *cogito* reveals to me is the concrete and indubitable presence of *this* or *that* concrete Other (EN 297/338):

What the cogito reveals to us here is just factual necessity: it is found—and this is indisputable—that our being along with its being-for-itself is also for-others; the being which is revealed to the reflective consciousness is for-itself-for-others. The Cartesian cogito only makes an affirmation of the absolute truth of a fact—that of my existence. In the same way the cogito, a little expanded as we are using it here, reveals to us as a fact the existence of the Other and my existence for the Other (EN 329/376).

Sartre's approach to the problem of intersubjectivity is characterized by an ingenious reversal of the traditional

direction of inquiry. Usually the pertinent problem has been: How can I experience (objectify) the Other in a way that preserves her subjectivity. But Sartre takes this approach to be misguided. What the radicalized analysis of the *cogito* reveals is exactly the existence of a quite different type of relation between me and the Other. What is truly peculiar and exceptional about the Other is not that I am experiencing a *cogitatum cogitans* (cf. EN 299/340), but that I am encountering somebody who is able to perceive and objectify me (EN 273/310). That is to say, the Other is exactly the being for whom I appear as an object. Sartre therefore distinguishes between two types of relation to Others, i.e., he holds that it is crucial to distinguish between the Other whom I perceive and the Other who perceives me, between the Other-as-object and the Other-as-subject. Instead of asking how I can grasp the Other as an intentional object—which would lead precisely to a loss of foreign *subjectivity*—Sartre argues that foreign subjectivity is revealed to me through my awareness of myself qua being-an-object for another. It is when I experience my own objectivity (for and before a foreign subject), that I have experiential evidence for the presence of an Other-as-subject (EN 302-303/344-345, 317/361):

. . . if the Other-as-object is defined in connection with the world as the object which sees what I see, then my fundamental connection with the Other-as-subject must be able to be referred back to my permanent possibility of being seen by the Other. It is in and through the revelation of my being-as-object for the Other that I must be able to apprehend the presence of his being-as-subject (302/344B45).

Sartre now attempts to use the differentiation between the Other-as-object and the Other-as-subject as a means to overcome the problem of solipsism. He claims that it would be impossible to explain my everyday (pre-ontological) certainty about the existence of Others if my *original* relationship to the Other were an experience of the Other-as-object. That is to say, like every experience of an object, my experience of the Other-as-object is presumptive, referring me to sheer probability; for this reason, if the relationship to the Other-as-object were the fundamental relationship to the Other, then any claim concerning the existence of Others would be purely presumptive as well (EN 297-98/338-39). On the contrary, what my experience of being looked at gives me is precisely an *apodictic evidence* for the presence of the Other-as-subject.

Sartre now stresses that it is impossible to transfer my certainty with regard to the presence of the Other-as-subject to my experience of the Other-as-object, since the experience of being looked at does not depend upon the object that is doing the looking. Thus the look that is directed toward me is not linked with any particular shape or form (EN 303/346). It is not a property of certain eye-shaped objects, and if certain objects enter the field of my experience—and in particular, if I am facing the eyes of another—this must merely be seen as a sheer occasion that realizes my being looked at (EN 323/369). Ultimately, what the look of the Other implies is precisely the “disappearance” of the Other’s eyes considered as objects that manifest the look (EN 315/359)—an observation that recalls that of Levinas⁴.

These reflections now gradually push Sartre toward a certain contradiction. I grasp my being seen—which refers me to the real existence of the Other—by means of certain appearances in the world that seem to make the gaze known to me. But I can be mistaken about my experience of being seen: I am bending over the keyhole, and suddenly I hear steps. Someone has seen me. I am ashamed and I get up, scour the corridor with my eyes, and realize that it was a false alarm. In reality, there is nobody there at all (EN 324/369B70). Sartre now comes to the conclusion that the false alarm in no way turns the presence of the Other-as-subject into an illusion. Rather, what is revealed as illusion is merely the Other’s *facticity*, i.e., what falls away is the “contingent connection” between the Other and an “object-being,” so that what is doubtful is not the Other himself, but the Other’s actually being-there, i.e., what is in doubt is “that concrete, historical event which we can express by the words, ‘There is someone in this room’” (EN 324/370).

We are able now to apprehend the nature of the look. In every look there is the appearance of

an Other-as-object as a concrete and probable presence in my perceptive field; on the occasion of certain attitudes of that Other I determine myself to apprehend—through shame, anguish, etc.—my being-looked-at. This “being-looked-at” is presented as the pure probability that I am at present this concrete this—a probability which can derive its meaning and its very nature as probable, only from a fundamental certainty that the Other is always present to me inasmuch as I am always for-others (EN 327-28/374, emphasis altered).

When Sartre advances the claims that the look is merely the concrete manifestation of my original being-for-others (EN 471/543); that the Other is present everywhere as that through which I become an object; and that this fundamental relation to the Other is the condition of possibility for my particular experience of the concrete Other (which is why the concrete encounter with a particular Other is described as a mere empirical variation of my fundamental being-for-others [EN 327/373]), then it is difficult not to reproach him for advocating the very kind of apriorism that he was earlier criticizing⁵. The concrete and factually present Other is the Other belonging to the realm of facticity, while the indubitable Other-as-subject forfeits its non-repeatability and individuality. That this critique is warranted is further confirmed when we note that Sartre even makes the following claim: namely, that what our experience of being looked at indicates to us is the presence of a *pre-numerical* Other-as-subject that Sartre equates directly with the undifferentiated *they* (*on*). Thus the Other is individuated (and concretized) for the first time in and through our objectification of the Other (EN 328-29/375-76).

Sartre is certainly right in emphasizing the importance of taking the transcendence of the Other into consideration. And his warning that a theory of intersubjectivity is exposed to the danger of monism if it focuses on undifferentiatedness rather than on alterity is also to be heeded. But in my view, his critique of apriorism is mistaken, since an embedding of the Other (i.e., an embedding of an openness toward the Other) in the ontological structure of the for-itself does not at all have to imply that the Other is neutralized or rendered harmless. Rather, to insist that the openness towards the Other is an integral and indispensable part of our being-in-the-world is just to acknowledge the decisive transcendental impact of the alterity of the Other⁶.

3. The constitutive implications

What are, according to Sartre, the constitutive implications of our encounter with the Other? The answer to this question branches out in two directions. For one aspect of the answer, self-experience serves as the point of reference, and world-experience is the point of reference for the other.

A. Self and body

As just indicated, Sartre argues that I gain my objectivity through the Other (EN 317/361). Thus, the experience of my own objecthood constitutes the original relation to the Other. As he says, with the emergence of the Other, the for-itself is seen as a being-in-itself-in-the-midst-of-the-world, like a thing among things (EN 481/555). In short, for Sartre, my encounter with the Other endows me with a new ontological dimension⁷.

I have already mentioned that the certainty of the presence of foreign subjectivity does not imply an objectivation of this subject. Thus I can never truly grasp the Other-as-subject (i.e., grasp this subject-Other as an object), and the fundamental distinction between the Other-as-subject (i.e., the Other as she is for herself) and the Other-as-object consists precisely in the fact that the Other-as-subject “can in no way be known nor even conceived as such” (EN 340/389-90). This fundamental transcendence of the Other—which indicates, according to Sartre, the Other’s being “beyond the world,” the Other’s “trans-mundaneity”—also means that one cannot find the Other within the world. That is to say, the Other is not separated from me by any physical distance, but rather only through her transcendence (EN 316/361). But although my original relation to the

Other is an extra-mundane one, it nevertheless brings about my own mundanization. Sartre's well-known analysis of shame can illustrate this process, for the experience of shame does not only imply the presence of the Other-as-subject, but also expresses a modification of my own being.

According to Sartre, shame is not a feeling which I could elicit on my own. It presupposes the intervention of the Other, and not merely because the Other is the one before whom I feel ashamed, but also and more significantly because the Other is the one that constitutes that of which I am ashamed. I am ashamed not of myself qua being-for-itself, but of myself as I appear to the Other. I am existing not only for myself but also for Others, and this is what the shame undeniably reveals to me (EN 266/302). As Theunissen puts it:

Solange ich allein bin, kommt keine Scham in mir auf, weil da nicht nur der fehlt, vor dem ich mich schäme, sondern auch der, über den ich mich schämen kann. Ich muß vom Anderen gesehen werden, damit ich Scham empfinde, d.h. Scham über den, den der Andere sieht. Dies nämlich ist das Eigentümliche des Phänomens: daß der Gegenstand meiner Scham nicht ich als für mich Seiender bin, sondern ich, sofern ich für den Anderen bin, also von ihm konstituiert werde. Der Andere 'konstituiert mich auf einem neuen Seinstyp', er bedingt mich in dem Sein, das er offenbart. Indem er mich dergestalt zu einem meinem früheren Sein gegenüber Anderen macht, wird das Schamerlebnis drittens aber auch zum Beleg für die absolute Evidenz der fremdpersonalen Gegenwart⁸.

To feel shame is to confess instantaneously. It is to accept the Other's judgment, and to acknowledge that I am what the Other takes me to be. But although the shame confronts me with a dimension of being that I must acknowledge as mine, this acknowledgment is of a rather peculiar and indirect nature. When I feel ashamed, a modification of my prereflective self-awareness has taken place since I am *prereflectively* aware of being an *object*. But it is not for myself that I am an object, it is for the Other. It is for the Other, and not for myself that I appear in my being-for-others, and although I experience the fact that I am taken as an object, the exact nature of this object will always elude my grasp.

Thus originally the bond between my unreflective consciousness and my Ego, which is being looked at, is a bond not of knowing but of being. Beyond any knowledge which I can have, I am this self which another knows (EN 307/350)⁹.

This incapacity is not only due to the freedom of the Other (I can never determine exactly what the Other apprehends me as), but also because I am fundamentally incapable of sharing his view. Always remaining prereflectively self-aware, I cannot objectify myself as merciless as the Other does, since I lack the sufficient distance. I can *signitively* experience that the Other provides me with an outside, but I cannot face it, I cannot have an intuition of it. Thus, it is no wonder that Sartre claims that I experience the Other's gaze as an alienation, and that he calls my being-for-Others an *ekstatic* and *external* dimension of being (EN 314/359, 334/381, 582/672).

This is because of the fact that by means of the upsurge of the Other there appear certain determinations which I am without having chosen them. Here I am--Jew, or Aryan, handsome or ugly, one-armed, etc. All this I am for the Other with no hope of apprehending this meaning which I have outside and, still more important, with no hope of changing it. Speech alone will inform me of what I am; again this will never be except as the object of an empty intention, any intuition of it is forever denied me (EN 581/671).

Ultimately, my objectivation entails an *existential alienation* (EN 321/367). This alienation is for instance

manifest in my attempt to grasp my own being by way of what can be revealed in language, i.e., once more attempting to grasp myself through the eyes of the Other. That is to say, language is not just something added on to my being-for-others, but expresses my being-for-others in an original way, because it confers a significance upon me that Others have already found words for (EN 404/463-64, 422B23/485-87). At the same time, however, Sartre also describes the Other's objectivation of me in terms of an *original fall* (EN 309/352, 336/384, 481/555)¹⁰. Sartre writes that the gaze of the Other paralyzes my transcendence and reduces me to that which I am (I am what the Other takes me to be). The Other's look thrusts me into the world, since to apprehend myself as seen, is to apprehend myself as seen in the midst of the world, as a thing among things (EN 309/353). And by objectifying and reifying me—i.e., by forcing a mundane self-apperception upon me—the Other simultaneously spatializes and temporalizes me (EN 313/357). That is to say, the petrifying gaze of the Other provokes a *mundanization* of my self-apprehension and throws me into worldly space and time (EN 313/357, 317/362). I am no longer given to myself as the temporal and spatial center of the world. I am no longer simply 'here', but next to the door, or on the couch. And I am no longer simply 'now', but too late for the appointment.

Sartre now also come to speak of the *body*, since the two ontological modalities, "being-an-object-for-others" and "being-a-body," are equivalent expressions for the for-itself's being-for-others (EN 396/454). Sartre consequently claims that knowledge of the nature of the body is indispensable in getting to the bottom of the particular connections between my being and that of the Other (EN 410/471). It would lead too far to pursue Sartre's extensive analysis of the various ontological dimensions of the body in any detail, but two aspects need to be mentioned.

According to Sartre, our ability to be aware of transcendent objects is rooted in our embodiment. A coffee mill is obviously not of much use to a disincarnated spirit, and to listen to a string quartet by Schubert, is to enjoy it from a certain perspective and standpoint. But as Sartre points out, an object cannot appear perspectival unless the perceiver is situated in the perceptual field as well, be it on the first row or in the gallery:

[T]he perceptive field refers to a center objectively defined by that reference and located in the very field which is oriented around it. Only we do not see this center as the structure of the perceptive field considered; we are the center.[...] Thus my being-in-the-world, by the sole fact that it realizes a world, causes itself to be indicated to itself as a being-in-the-midst-of-the-world by the world which it realizes. The case could not be otherwise, for my being has no other way of entering into contact with the world except to be in the world. It would be impossible for me to realize a world in which I was not and which would be for me a pure object of a surveying contemplation. But on the contrary it is necessary that I lose myself in the world in order for the world to exist and for me to be able to transcend it. Thus to say that I have entered into the world, 'come to the world,' or that there is a world, or that I have a body is one and the same thing (EN 365-366/419)¹¹.

Thus, Sartre claims that my body far from being a mere contingent appendage is to be regarded as a permanent structure of my being, as a condition of possibility for consciousness to be what it is: consciousness of the world. Sartre shrinks however from straightforward identifying consciousness and body, since my body is that which I am continually surpassing. Not only in the sense that I am transcending it in order to be present to that which I am not, the intentional object, but also because I am constantly surpassing the facticity that it represents (EN 376/431, 378/434).

Insofar as the body is this zero-point that permits a perceptual view on the world, this ultimate reference around which the *hodological* space is organized, the body itself is not perceived. On the level of prereflective consciousness, there is no consciousness of the body. When I am fighting with a rapier, my hand disappears as a perceptual object. I am not perceiving it, I am it (EN 355/407, 370-371/426, 376/431). Obviously this is not the

only way the body can appear, however. I can not only be or live my body, I can also perceive or know it. In the latter case I am apprehending myself from the perspective of the Other, be it quite literally, as when gazing detached on my sprained ankle, or in a figurative sense, when describing it through concepts acquired from Others. It is consequently necessary to distinguish the way in which I prereflectively exist my own lived body, on the one hand, and the alienating apprehension of my own body as a physical organism on the other, an apprehension that arises when I attempt to seize my own body as an object by assuming the point of view of the Other (EN 352/403, 401-409/460-70). Thus once again Sartre calls attention to the way in which our self-apprehension is modified and transformed through our encounter with Others.

Given his radical criticism of apriorism, however, Sartre is forced to deny that my bodily existence contains a dimension of exteriority and alterity from the very start. On the contrary, it is only when the Other's apprehension of my body influences the way in which I live it that it becomes alien. It is the Other that teaches me to adopt an alienating attitude toward my own body. Thus, Sartre claims that the appearance of the body as an object is a relatively late occurrence. It presupposes a prior consciousness of the lived body, a consciousness of the world as a complex of instrumentality, and most significantly a perception of the body of the Other. The child has used her body to explore the world and examine the Other before she starts looking at her body, and discovers its exteriority (EN 408-409/468-469).¹² It should be stressed, though, that Sartre believes it to be a decisive mistake to think that my original encounter with the body of the Other is an encounter with the kind of body described by physiology. Even when the body of the Other is given as an object it remains radically unlike other objects. This is so not only because the foreign body always appears in a *situation*, that is, in a meaningful context supported by that very body, but also because the body is perceived first as a unity, and only subsequently as a complex of externally juxtaposed bodily parts (EN 395/453).

B. The world

Let me now turn to world-experience. Sartre once again uses his distinction between the Other-as-object and the Other-as-subject in his description of the constitutive implications of our experience of Others. When I have an experience of an Other-as-object who is observing the objects in my world, my relationship to these very objects undergoes a change. That is to say, Sartre claims that the object "flees from me" when it is observed by an Other, for the object is then no longer exhausted in its being-an-object-for-me (EN 300/341B42). This transcendence of the object is manifested not only by the object's being disclosed to the Other in a way that is inaccessible to me (at the moment), but also by its being endowed with a significance that was not initially conferred upon it by *my* own free project. As soon as the Other appears as an Other-as-object, the world appears to me as alienated, for it is given to me as already looked at—indeed, as "furrowed, explored, worked over" on all fronts. In this way the presence of the Other as an Other-as-object has the function of revealing complexes of sense that are already "*given*" (EN 577-78/666-67). But at the same time, when the world centered on me is experienced by an Other, it is decentered as well, since the Other lends the instrumental things of my world an order that points back to the Other as a new center of reference (EN 301/342-43, 388-89/446):

Thus suddenly an object has appeared which has stolen the world from me. Everything is in place; everything still exists for me; but everything is traversed by an invisible flight and fixed in the direction of a new object. The appearance of the Other in the world corresponds therefore to a fixed sliding of the whole universe, to a decentralization of the world which undermines the centralization which I am simultaneously effecting (EN 301/343).

While my world is eroded and alienated by the Other-as-object, the consequences of the presence of the

Other-as-subject are much more radical. That is to say, according to Sartre, we cannot simultaneously perceive the world and apprehend a look that is fastened upon us (EN 304/347). Hence the alienation from myself brought about by being looked at also simultaneously includes “the alienation of the world which I organize” (EN 309/355). When I am posited and mundanized as an object, I can no longer constitute and maintain a world. Under the look of the Other, the situation retreats from my grasp (EN 311/355).

Sartre’s reflections stand in an illuminating contrast to Husserl’s. According to Husserl, the objectivity of the world is constituted intersubjectively, and he therefore argues that a clarification of this constitution calls for an examination of my experience of the Other. But why is the Other a necessary condition of possibility for my experience of an objective world? Husserl’s thesis is that my experience of objective validity is mediated and made possible by my encounter with a transcendent Other, and that this transcendence, which Husserl designates as the first real otherness and as the source of all kinds of real transcendence, endows the world with objective validity¹³.

Here we have the only transcendence which is really worth its name, and anything else that is also called transcendent, such as the objective world, depends upon the transcendence of foreign subjectivity¹⁴.

When I discover that the worldly object I am currently experiencing is also perceived by an Other, my relationship to the object is changed. Only insofar as I experience that Others experience the same objects as myself, do I really experience these objects as objective and real. The intersubjective experienceability of the object testifies to its real transcendence. Thus, just like Sartre, Husserl also argues that the world is severed from me, when it is experienced by an Other. But whereas Husserl takes this to be a natural part of the constitution of the objective world, Sartre claims that the Other-as-subject *deprives me of the world*. The presence of the Other in his looking look does not contribute to reinforcing the worldliness of the world, but rather *undoes* the world and makes it escape me (EN 318-19/363-64):

First the Other’s look as the necessary condition of my objectivity is the destruction of all objectivity for me. The Other’s look touches me across the world and is not only a transformation of myself but a total metamorphosis of the world (EN 316/360).

Sartre does indeed concede that the ontological structure of my world also includes its worldliness for the Other. But he emphasizes that what is at stake here is an empty, formal, and derived concept of the (intramundane) Other that does not at all take into consideration, phenomenologically, the actual consequence of my encounter with the Other. To hold, with Husserl, the view that the objectivity of the world is co-constituted by the transcendence of the Other is for Sartre to misunderstand the nature of the encounter with the Other completely.

4. Conclusion

If one wants to single out Sartre’s most important contribution to the development of a phenomenological theory of intersubjectivity, it undoubtedly lies in his radical emphasis upon the transcendence and alterity of the Other. Through his critique of undifferentiated intersubjectivity and through his analysis of the Other-as-subject (which in some respects anticipates Levinas’s position) Sartre opens up a new perspective upon some important aspects of the problem of intersubjectivity. This is not to say, however, that none of Sartre’s insights can be found in some form or another in any of his phenomenological predecessors, nor is it to say that Sartre’s

position is unproblematic. Let me by way of a conclusion briefly mention some of the criticism that Merleau-Ponty was subsequently to raise.

One of Merleau-Ponty's basic insights is that I can only have an experience of the Other if I am already a possible Other in my relation to myself, i.e., if I can appear to myself as an Other. If the other people who empirically exist are to be, for me, other people, I must have a means of recognizing them,¹⁵ and the structure of being-for-the-other must therefore already belong to the dimension of the being-for-oneself¹⁵. Thus the Other is not a mere fact, but a possibility of my own being. And in reality, "the mystery of the other is nothing but the mystery of myself," precisely since it is only possible to understand the experience of the Other—of the one who is foreign to me—when it is understood that I am foreign to myself¹⁶. Hence my encounter with the Other is pre delineated in my encounter with myself as an object, for then I am already an Other to myself. If I perceive a part of my own body in an objectifying way, then I am perceiving myself in my being-for-others—and it is within the horizon of this experience that the Other appears to me as well¹⁷. Moreover, not only am I able to experience myself, but I can also be experienced by the Other. To put it another way, in my corporeal existence I am intersubjective and social from the start; the concrete encounter with the Other is not experienced as an alienation, as Sartre claims, but only makes it clear that I was *always already open for this*. Thus the Other-as-object is merely an inauthentic modality of the Other, and my objectification by the look of the Other is only painful and unpleasant because it takes the place of a possible and more natural communication.

Thus instead of seeing the basis for my objectivation in the Other, as Sartre does, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes, first, that the look of the Other can only objectify me when I experience the Other, for which reason, my objectivation does not take place entirely without my help. Second, however, he also points out that the Other can only look at me because I am visible, i.e., because we are both inhabitants of the same world. Consequently, we are not at all two incompatible nihilations, but already find ourselves—prior to any deliberate adoption of a position—situated within an intersubjective world, and any struggle or conflict would be impossible and unthinkable if there were not already a common ground and a peaceful coexistence¹⁸. For Merleau-Ponty Sartre's mistake therefore lay in failing to pursue his analyses of being-for-the-other far enough to reveal the primordial intersubjectivity that makes alienation, conflict, and objectivation possible in the first place.

NOTES

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'être et le néant* (Paris: Tel Gallimard, 1976); in the following abbreviated as EN. English translation: *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992). Jean-Paul Sartre, *La transcendance de l'ego* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1978), in the following abbreviated as TE. English translation: *The Transcendence of the Ego*, trans. Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, The Noonday Press, 1957). All citations from Sartre will be supplied with French/English page numbers.

² As a curiosity it can be mentioned that Heidegger in a letter to Sartre of October 28, 1945, wrote as follows: "Avec votre critique de 'l'être-avec', et votre insistance sur l'être-pour-autrui, en partie aussi avec votre critique de mon explication de la mort, je suis d'accord" (Frédéric de Towarnicki, *À la rencontre de Heidegger: Souvenirs d'un messenger de la Forêt-Noire*. Paris: Gallimard, 1993, p.84).

³ One of Scheler's fundamental claims is that in addition to an apriorism of objective thought and cognition, one can also detect an a priori "order of the heart" or "logic of the heart." Thus the emotional elements of mental or spiritual life (feeling, preferring, loving, hating, willing, etc.) are characterized by an original, a priori content and are subject to original, a priori laws (Max Scheler, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*, Bern: Francke Verlag, 1966, p.63). In connection with his analysis of this emotional a priori, Scheler then points out that "all morally relevant acts, experiences, and states, in so far as they contain an intentional reference to other moral persons" (acts such as obligation, responsibility, love, promising, etc.) "refer, by the very nature of

the acts themselves, to other people," without implying that such Others must already have been previously encountered in concrete experience (Max Scheler, *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*, Frankfurt am Main: Verlag G. Schulte-Bulmke, 1948, p.225). Hence our relation to the Other is not some empirical fact; on the contrary, the concrete experience of Others presupposes an a priori relatedness to one another, and simply represents the unfolding of this possibility (*Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*, p. 71-72, *Der Formalismus in der Ethik*, p.557)

⁴ Cf. Emmanuel Lévinas, *Ethique et infini* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1982), p. 89-90.

⁵ For a related criticism, cf. Klaus Hartmann, *Die Philosophie J.-P. Sartres* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1983), p. 102; and Michael Theunissen, *Der Andere* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1977), p. 228B229.

⁶ Cf. Dan Zahavi, *Husserl und die transzendente Intersubjektivität* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996); *Self-awareness and Alterity* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999); "Alterity in Self," *Arob@se* 4/1-2, 2000, p.125-142; "Beyond Empathy," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8/5-7, 2001, p.151-167.

⁷ It is interesting to notice, however, that there is no room for what might be called a "personalizing alter-ation"—i.e. the change in self-apprehension that makes me apprehend myself as one among Others—in Sartre's analysis of the immediate encounter with the Other. For such a personalization presupposes solidarity, not conflict (Theunissen, *Der Andere*, p.218-221). It is only when Sartre mentions the "Us-object" in connection with his analysis of the various forms of the experience of the "Us," and when he characterizes the "Us-object" in terms of a situation where both I and the Other are objectified by the look of a third party, that he deals with a situation in which I can experience myself as one among Others (EN 469/540-41).

⁸ Theunissen, *Der Andere*, p. 208.

⁹ By looking at me, the Other knows what I am and "holds the secret of my being"—a being that I can neither appropriate nor understand (EN 412/473). However, "I can attempt to deny that being which is conferred on me from outside" by turning back upon the Other "so as to make an object out of him in turn," since the Other's objectness for me destroys my objectness for the Other (EN 412/473). Thus although my own transcendence is paralyzed by being objectified by the Other, the possibility always remains for me in turn to objectify the Other (cf. EN 349/400). The objectivation of the Other is thereby a means of defense on the part of my own being—a means that is always at my disposal, freeing me from my being-for-others precisely by conferring a "being-for-me" upon the Other (EN 315/359).

¹⁰ R.D. Laing, incidentally, has provided a description of schizoid patterns of experience and comportment that has a striking similarity to Sartre's description of this "normal" intersubjective relation. Cf., e.g., Laing, *The Divided Self* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 46B49, 113.

¹¹ For an illuminating discussion of Sartre's analysis of the body cf. Philippe Cabestan "La constitution du corps selon l'ordre de ses apparitions," *Epokhè* 6, 1996, 279-298.

¹² Against this background, one can understand why Sartre attempts to belittle the significance of the so-called *double-sensation*. As he writes, it is a matter of empirical contingency that I can perceive myself and thereby adopt the Other's point of view on my own body, i.e., make my own body appear to me as the body of an Other. It is an anatomical peculiarity, and neither something that can be deduced from the fact that consciousness is necessarily embodied, nor something that can serve as the basis for a general theory of the body (EN 408/468).

The body's being-for-itself and the body's being-for-others are two radically distinct and incommunicable ontological dimensions of the body. Prior to my encounter with the Other my body is not given explicitly and thematically to me. However, even when I do start examining my perceptual organs I will not be able to grasp them as *experiencing*. I cannot apprehend my hand or my eye in its process of revealing an aspect of the world to me. The moment I perceive or touch my body I establish a distance between me and it. The body is present, but as a complex of objects, and not as myself. When I perceive my hand, the hand is by no means indicated as the invisible center of reference, as the indexical 'here', but as a worldly object in space. That which is touched belongs to the sphere of objects, that which touches does not. I cannot see the seeing eye, I cannot touch the

touching hand: “Either it is a thing among other things, or else it is that by which things are revealed to me. But it can not be both at the same time” (EN 351/402). “To touch and to be touched, to feel that one is touching and to feel that one is touched—these are two species of phenomena which it is useless to try to reunite by the term ‘double sensation.’ In fact they are radically distinct, and they exist on two incommunicable levels” (EN 351/402-403). This claim must be questioned, however, not only because it seems to replace the unbridgeable dualism between mind and body with an equally unbridgeable dualism between lived body and perceived body. Rather than dealing with different dimensions or manifestations of the same body, we seem to be left with different bodies. And this conclusion is unacceptable, not the least because Sartre’s position also makes it incomprehensible how we should be able to recognize other embodied subjects in the first place.

¹³ Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität II*, Husserliana XIV (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p. 277; Husserl, *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität III*, Husserliana XV (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p.560; Husserl, *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, Husserliana I (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), p.173.

¹⁴ Husserl, *Erste Philosophie II (1923-24)*, Husserliana VIII (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959), p.495.

¹⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1945), p. 511.

¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *La prose du monde* (Paris: Tel Gallimard, 1969), p. 188.

¹⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible* (Paris: Tel Gallimard, 1964), p. 278; Merleau-Ponty, *Prose du monde*, p.186.

¹⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 408; Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p. 114B115, 298. I am indebted to Elizabeth Behnke for her help in translating this piece.