

Sartre's 'Secret Face' as Factual Imago: A Lacanian-Existentialist Conception of Death
Drive Desire

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By

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DEDICATION

To posterity, Groucho Marx notwithstanding.

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An infinite echo of 'Thank You's, those absurdly inadequate significations of gratitude, is not enough to express the depth of my appreciation of and indebtedness to Debra, without whom none of this would be possible.

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ABSTRACT

SARTRE'S 'SECRET FACE' AS FACTICAL IMAGO: A LACANIAN-EXISTENTIALIST CONCEPTION OF DEATH DRIVE DESIRE

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Sartre's and Lacan's bitter philosophical feud notwithstanding, these two French contemporaries had more in common than they'd care to admit. In this thesis, I identify that the function of Sartre's 'Look' and Lacan's 'mirror stage' is the same; viz., to reveal to the subject its inherent splitness. Both Lacan and Sartre ascribe to a theory of split subjectivity, in which the human being is split between its subjectivity and its objectivity—for Lacan, the *innenwelt* and the *umwelt*, and for Sartre, the *for-itself* and factual being *in-itself* and *for-others*. Hence, in both existentialism and psychoanalytic theory, I am other to myself, and my in-the-world ego is 'not-me.'

But whereas Lacan describes the ideal-ego—the *imago*—as an imaginary construct, from the perspective of the (m)Other, my imago is not an impossible ideal-ego; on the contrary, it *is me*. Something is missing from Lacan—something which Lacan leaves out, and only Sartre affirms: namely, the imago is not merely 'imaginary,' but

factual. This ‘me’ is real; it is *in-the-world*. Thus, I on principle can never reach a one-to-one self-identification with my imago, yet in an important and true sense, I nevertheless *am* it. This ‘me’ that I cannot experience and yet nevertheless am, Sartre calls the ‘secret face.’ The secret face is my factual self—my being-in-the-world-for-Others—the ‘out there’ness of my *umwelt*, that on principle escapes me.

In this thesis, I view Sartre’s look as analogous to the mirror stage, in which the imago that I apprehend in the eyes of the Other is my ‘secret face.’ By making this analogy between Lacan’s *imago* and Sartre’s *secret face*, I want to show the connection between the imago I desire and facticity (more specifically, my own purely factual being, devoid of subjectivity), which describes the death drive, the desire for the dissolution of subjectivity. And by viewing the imago not as some imaginary construct, but as an actual thing in-the-world, we see desire (of the imago) as more directly linked to death (the dissolution of subjectivity), where ‘death’ describes becoming my immanent, purely factual being, both *ontologically*, as my secret face which is ‘me’ devoid of my ‘selfness,’ or subjectivity, and *literally*, as my dead corpse. In this way, Sartrean Existentialism and Lacanian Psychoanalytic theory work together to generate a more comprehensive and sophisticated account of the imago and of death drive desire, categories which describe the tragic drama of human split-subjectivity.

Introduction

Jacques Lacan and Jean-Paul Sartre famously had nothing to say to each other, save for bitter barbs and jeers of disagreement. One almost gets the feeling they pitied each other their unfortunate misunderstandings. But like any feud, this philosophical rivalry presents itself as exaggerated. Though Sartre and Lacan may have differed on some points of relative importance, I cannot help but be struck by the stark similarities of their respective views. Of course the most obvious commonality is the theme of angst, anxiety, aggression. Why do both fundamentally characterize the human experience in such negative terms?

It is important to note that our approach to a comparison and intermingling of these two philosophers cannot help but be shaped by their differences in methodology. Whereas Sartre's philosophy is systematically and clearly expounded, Lacan's appears labyrinthine and torturously intricate—even confounding. At first, making sense of Lacan is a task in and of itself; he offers multifarious threads—loose ends that do not seem to tie up. How, then, do we begin a juxtaposition of these two systems?

In fact, I want to contend, it is only in mingling Sartre with Lacan that these loose threads begin to tie up, and Lacan's philosophical system gains a robust and comprehensive cohesiveness. In other words, though Lacan is prolific in developing

creative and striking psychoanalytic concepts, the significance of these concepts with respect to the philosophical context of subjectivity remains malleable and undefined. One must therefore not be put-off by the sophisticated intricacies of either system which seem to address markedly different concerns, but rather appreciate the broader, more general similarities between Lacan and Sartre; it is only in probing these similarities that the ‘sophisticated intricacies’ of each separate system begins to speak to each other, as Lacan’s *mise en oeuvre* takes shape.

I thus begin my study with a working knowledge of Lacan’s mirror stage, his account of desire and of the death drive, and his portrayal of the symbolic order, trusting that these abstruse and seemingly disparate concepts will be illuminated in due course. With knowledge of Lacan under one’s belt, it only suffices to skim through a few pages of Sartre’s essential ‘The Look’ section of his magnum opus, *Being and Nothingness*, before the precious link is found: the function of the look is, like that of Lacan’s mirror stage, to reveal to the subject its splitness. Both Lacan and Sartre ascribe to a theory of split subjectivity, in which the human being is split between its subjectivity and its objectivity—for Lacan, the *innenwelt* and the *umwelt*, and for Sartre, the *for-itself* and factual being *in-itself* and *for-others*.

The apprehension of one’s splitness occasions insufferable angst, at the root of which is *alienation*. In both existentialism and psychoanalytic theory, I am other to myself. For Lacan, my *umwelt* as revealed in my specular image is not ‘me.’ Indeed, my ego is wholly alien, constructed of foreign, pre-fabricated facticity. I am therefore wholly alien to myself. Likewise, for Sartre, through the activity of negation, I realize

that ‘I’ am *not-that*; I as my subjective for-itself am alienated from my being for-others, and from my body and ego in-the-world—in sum, the objective parts of me. And because the for-itself is precisely *nothing*, I as an objective thing am wholly alien to myself.

That I am other to myself, that I always experience the alienating discrepancy that is consciousness—the subjective apprehension of objectivity—hurls me into perpetual angst. Presence and being seems to mock and taunt the absence and nothingness that I am, teasing, “You can never be this—you are relegated to watching, and to the horror of perceiving! You are eternal deficiency, forever lacking, forever negativity!”

If I may for a moment render myself guilty of oversimplifying Sartre (in other words, although I do recognize that Sartre affirms the necessity of being-for-others), I’d characterize him as bogged down in angst, nausea, and a general aggressive disgust of facticity. In this sense, and to the extent that he romanticizes and privileges the nothingness of the for-itself, Sartre can be considered suicidal. Here, I think Sartre diverges from Lacan: Lacan is also suicidal, but to a decidedly different end. Yes, the alienation endemic to split-subjectivity is torturous, but not because facticity is disgusting, but because I can never coincide with facticity; I can never become my desired specular image. It is consciousness—the symbolic, as Lacan terms it—that is the crux of my agony. Hence, whereas Sartre would completely coincide with his subjective for-itself, thus annihilating split subjectivity, Lacan would completely coincide with his objective being, thus annihilating split-subjectivity. Clearly, both desire death, though in different ways and to different ends.

The main interest of this thesis is the psychoanalytic death drive. By linking the death drive to the narcissistic-suicidal aggressivity/eroticism of the mirror stage (in which the subject at once desires to coincide with her specular image, and detests it because she cannot), Lacan elevates the death drive to the status of a fundamental condition endemic to split-subjectivity. But as important as the death drive is to Lacan, it remains relatively undeveloped and imprecise. In what manner, exactly, do I desire my death? Do I desire death insofar as I hate myself due to my insufferable splitness? Or do I desire death insofar as I love my specular image and wish to ‘unsplit’ myself by becoming wholly objectivity? Is there a distinction between the death drive and the drive of eros, effecting two competing drives, as it appears Freud has suggested? Or is my desire of death *erotic*, so that the two drives are one in the same thing? As obfuscating and impenetrable as Lacan’s *mise en oeuvre* may appear, his ideas *are* coherent, and these seeming ‘loose ends’ tie and link up together beautifully, but only with the help of Sartre.

That Lacan needs Sartre to gain ‘completeness’ evidences that he his missing something; Lacan’s ideas as they are do not perfectly connect to each other because there is a missing link—a missing piece. In this thesis, I raise criticisms of Lacan’s mirror stage which charge that, as comprehensive and prolific as Lacan’s theory is, it suffers a blind spot—a gap that only Sartre can fill (as we will see later, by suggesting that the ideal which I desire is *factual* [the secret face] rather than merely imaginary, thus consolidating the congruency between my death-desire and my erotic-desire).

While Sartre completes Lacan, Lacan likewise illuminates Sartre. Sartre’s suicidal desire for factual annihilation at first appears aggressive; but through a Lacanian re-

reading, we can re-evaluate this death drive as something other than fundamentally aggressive, identifying in it a suppressed 'Lacanian' yearning for the fulfillment of my erotic 'true' desire—self-coincidence with my objective self. In Sartre, it can be discovered, this desire is suppressed because it is apprehended as impossible; instead of playing at it through fantasy (as I argue Lacan and Beauvoir do), Sartre altogether shuns this desire. This, I term the 'Sartre Complex.'

Through this framework, the surface disparities between Sartre and Lacan can be understood as paranoiac symptoms manifesting a stark *resentement*, a bitter and jealous hatred of something apparent in others that I secretly affirm, yet remain incapable of assimilating in myself. Sartre's criticism of the psychoanalytic 'unconscious,' for example, may therefore be viewed as the *resentement* of a notion in which Sartre recognizes an unwelcome and disturbing truth that he can never successfully denounce as illegitimate, and therefore paranoiacally condemns in others, viz., Lacan. As will later become clear, the unconscious greatly resembles the impersonal (pre-ego) free spontaneity at the core of consciousness that Sartre elucidates in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, and from which he later distances himself. The 'Sartre Complex' thus not only characterizes the enlightenment-informed desire for mastery—for a 'transcendental I'—but it describes the suppression of a perverted desire, and its re-emergence in paranoiac (self-)denigration. The genealogy of Sartre's own complex follows his affirmation of vertiginous freedom in *The Transcendence of the Ego* to his gradual divergence from—or rather *de-emphasis* of—it in *Being and Nothingness*, a de-emphasis which steadily increases as Sartre's philosophy develops through progressing years.

However helpful, a Lacanian analysis of Sartre only takes us so far. Necessary for an advanced understanding of Sartre is Beauvoir, whose unique feminist perspective provides both a probing critique and momentous development of Sartrean Existentialism. Beauvoir acts as an essential corrective to Sartre, who seems to fail to overcome his unexamined fear and hatred of alterity. He needs her to show him that the Other can evoke love rather than hatred when recognized as the possibility of my desired factual face, and further, as a channel through which I enjoy this desired face. Moreover, reading apropos of Sartre the ‘Beauvoirian death drive,’ in which woman seeks the unity of erotic ecstasis with man, we begin to uncover in Existentialism a universally suppressed desire (i.e., by both Sartre and Beauvoir) for the ‘bad faith’ of courting facticity—a desire that can only be sufficiently explained (and legitimated) by Lacan.

Though methodologically I begin with Lacan, it remains impossible to reduce this mutual intermingling between Lacan, Sartre, and Beauvoir to one privileged fulcrum; all three are equally essential in this project. In injecting Sartre into Lacan, we perfect his oeuvre. In undertaking a radical Lacanian and Beauvoirian re-reading of Sartre, we seep through the superficial surface, uncovering the hidden, subliminal depths of this sophisticated and multi-layered philosophical system. In rethinking Beauvoir from both a Lacanian and a characteristically technical Sartrean point of view, we discover rich philosophical possibilities that remain otherwise hidden. In sooth, it is only when these three French contemporaries (who so often either bickered amongst themselves or refused to have anything to do with each other) work together and form a philosophical

synthesis that our picture of the human experience enhances, and we glean a more comprehensive and cohesive theory of split-subjectivity—in particular, a theory of the ideal-image of myself which I desire, and its relation to the death drive.

Lacan's Mirror Stage

In Lacan's mirror stage, the infant is fascinated by his image in a mirror—an image of what appears to be a whole, complete being. But the infant, who is born premature, with underdeveloped motor skills and coordination, experiences itself as incompetent and fragmented, in comparison to this apparently whole and powerful *imago* (imaginary ideal of oneself as whole, complete). According to Lacan, the infant both (mis)recognizes itself as the imago (it determines that it is, or rather *can become* that person), and apprehends its eternal alienation from the imago (it realizes that it is *not* the imago—that there is a gap between how it experiences itself, and how it is seen)

This gap describes the *split-subject*. The subject is 'split' because it is both 'inside' and 'outside,' and the subject apprehends the discrepancy between these two in the mirror stage:

The function of the mirror stage thus turns out, in my view, to be a particular case of the function of the imagos, which is to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality—or, as they say, between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt* (Lacan 2006, 78).

Since the infant is both subjective and objective, it apprehends a gap between how it experiences itself, and how it is seen by others. That I see myself (in the mirror) reveals my specular image to be other to myself. My facticity (my body, my ego) is alien to me.

I am subjectivity as ‘nothing’ (as the nothingness of consciousness); I am objectivity as ‘being.’ Thus, I *am* as my facticity, whereas I *am-not* (i.e., ~~I-exist~~ as the negation of consciousness) as my subjectivity. In other words, my facticity is all that I *am*; I am therefore wholly alien to myself, in the sense that *I am*. Only the form of consciousness is ‘mine’—but that is precisely *nothing*; the content of consciousness is alien. This is what Lacan means when he says ‘language is the big Other’: it is not the case that I come first, then comes language which I use, but rather, language comes first, and I am created *within* language, which *uses me*. For example, pre-existing language impinges upon me as I find, to my horror, that alien words and cliché pre-fabricated phrases spew out of my mouth, as if the structure of my thoughts simply *force* me to say them. Language is facticity; pre-given, alterity structured and imposes itself upon us—we don’t use language, language uses us. In other words, it is through language that the radical alienation of the subject is manifest. That the subject is other to itself becomes palpable the moment she opens her mouth and this foreign voice begins to speak foreign words of a language pre-existing and not her own. I am split between this alien ego and my perception of it—my formal perspective which at times I may fantasize substantiates a ‘true’ self, i.e., a kernel or core that is ‘properly mine.’ That is, the only thing that I do not experience as ‘alien’ to me is my formal subjectivity—the nothingness of my consciousness. In the fantasy substantiation of this ‘true’ kernel of self, I fancy myself as ‘ex-sisting’ as a transcendental ‘I,’ and I refuse to accept that this ‘true self’ is nothing, is impossible (what Lacan describes as $\$$, the barred subject).

The mirror stage, then, describes both primal alienation (I can never be my imago) and fundamental desire (I want to be my imago). Alienation means frustration and aggressivity, while desire means eroticism. Lacan thus characterizes subjectivity as consisting in aggressivity and eroticism: the subject has a love/hate relationship with its imago, and with itself and its situation as a split-subject in general. This describes the erotic-aggressive character of narcissism:

Narcissism has both an erotic character and an aggressive character. It is erotic, as the myth of Narcissus shows, since the subject is strongly attracted to the gestalt that is its ideal image (imago). It is aggressive because the wholeness of the specular image contrasts with the disunity and deficiency of the subject's experience of itself; in defense of the imago, the subject therefore becomes aggressive toward itself—the real self which threatens to disintegrate the fantasy of the imago. Lacan coins the term “narcissistic suicidal aggression” to express the fact that the erotic-aggressive character of the narcissistic infatuation with the imago can lead the subject to self-destruction (as also illustrated by the myth of Narcissus). Thus ‘aggressivity’ in psychoanalysis is proportional to the narcissistic intensity of the subject’s relationship with its own ideal image, or as Lacan puts it:

Aggressiveness is the tendency correlated with a mode of identification I call narcissistic, which determines the formal structure of man’s ego and of the register of entities characteristic of his world (Lacan 2006, 89).

In accordance with the subject’s alienating identification with the imaginary other, the subject wants to be where the other is. The subject claims the other’s place as

the (unattainable) place of its own perfection. The identification with the imago thus implies an ambivalent relation between it and the subject, involving both eroticism and aggression (i.e., the subject directs narcissistic and aggressive feelings towards her imago). This ambivalent relationship is therefore self-destructive. Narcissism can thus easily veer from extreme self-love to the opposite extreme of ‘narcissistic suicidal aggression.’¹ The drama of this anxious condition all turns on the fact of primal alienation—that the subject is intrinsically split in the discrepancy between the *innenwelt* and the *umwelt*.

The Pre-Mirror Stage and the Fantasy (m)Other

But Lacan’s mirror stage is problematic. Namely, it seems that the experience of alienation in the apprehension of the imago is already symbolic. That is, insofar as the mirror stage describes an experience of alienation in which I grasp the discrepancy between my real self (i.e., my experience of myself), and my imago, this stage is already symbolic—I already know that I am ‘not that.’ How can I simultaneously self-identify or ‘misrecognize’ myself as the imago, and apprehend my eternal alienation from it?

For that matter, as long as I identify as my imago, how can I be said to ‘desire’ it? If desire is a constant striving for the unrealizable, I cannot ‘desire’ that which I have

¹ This idea is elucidated in the notion of self-punishing paranoia, in which the psychotic attacks an admired person with whom she ideally identifies, and in this way attacks/punishes herself for not achieving her ideal image. Lacan says that the self-punishing paranoiac ‘strikes in her victim her own exteriorized ideal... With the same blow that makes her guilty before the law, [she] has actually struck herself.’ The ego is essentially paranoiac because it always mistakes itself for the other.

realized. (Even though it is only an ‘imaginary identification,’ the important thing is that I *imagine* I have realized it.) Just as narcissus died at the pond, unable to move because he identified as his own reflection, not to desire is not to be set into motion, which is to remain static and die. In other words, given that the symbolic (the gap) creates the space for desire, I can never be said to desire my imago so long as I’m completely anterior to the symbolic order. I necessarily need to be alienated from my Imago in order to desire it; desire is only possible in the symbolic.

Given these insights, we cannot accurately speak of the mirror stage as operating (solely) on the plane of the imaginary; the mirror stage as the formative experience of primal alienation collapses into the (inauguration of the subject into the) symbolic. I therefore propose that the ‘mirror stage’ be divided into two parts: the pre-mirror stage in which the infant is mesmerized by the imago (where ‘mesmerization’ describes the fantasy of a pre-symbolic ecstatic unity—the wholeness and perfect love possible before the experience of deficiency and alienation inaugurated by the negating nothingness of consciousness), and the mirror-stage, in which the infant apprehends the imago *as* an imago, i.e., as that which “I am not.”

Whereas the mirror stage is (partly) symbolic, the pre-mirror is imaginary, or rather, *fantasy*. It is the fantasy re/construction of that paradise from which the infant emerged—the realm of das ding. Thus, the fantasy mother that loves me is das ding, that which existed *pre-mirror* stage (or so the infant imagines [fantasizes]).

The narcissism of the mirror stage in which the infant attempts to reproduce the ‘mesmerization’ of ecstasy in his hypnotic fixation on the specular image is a regressive repetition of this fantasy mesmerization.

The womb is imagined to be that place of wholeness where perfect love is possible; the trauma of birth precipitates the infant into the mirror stage (imaginary/symbolic). The developmental transition between womb and mirror stage is the closest the infant ever is to this ‘paradise’ of *das ding* that it re/constructs in fantasy. The infant does not consign itself to constant suicidal aggressivity, but rather eroticizes the imago because it feels it has been born from *das ding*, which was therefore once possible. When I say that the infant is mesmerized by the imago (the promissory note of wholeness and love), I mean ‘mesmerization,’ as a pulling, a returning back to womb, where *das ding* lives. The death drive ought therefore be conceived of as a desire to ‘crawl back into the womb’—not as a precipitation towards the decay of death, but as a return, or rather a *returning* to the pre-mirror real, the realm of *das ding*.²

In the classic Lacanian schema the loving dyad of mother-infant is broken up by the father. But given the preceding insights, the mother does not actually love me; the mother whom I imagine loves me is the fantasy mother—a figment of my imagination, of my *fantasy*. The *actual* mother is the symbolic mother. Thus, the ‘third’ which breaks me out of my imaginary trance (my ‘mesmerizing’ unity with the fantasy mother in the realm of *das ding*—the womb) is the symbolic mother. The symbolic mother jostles me

² The ‘death’ drive might better be termed the ‘pre-life’ drive so as to retain the non-derogatory, positive connotations of love and completeness.

out of my complacent phantasmatic illusion in the imaginary by making her presence as symbolic mother known, i.e., cutting in between me and my fantasy [of the] mother (by *cutting* the umbilical cord). She bursts my bubble insofar as she makes me aware that my estimation of the imaginary mother as *das ding* is erroneous—she is not in fact what I imagine she is. The symbolic mother reveals her presence to me at the moment I become aware of the discrepancy between my imaginary estimation of who she is and her (ostensive) assertion of who she is. Thus, birth is at once the entrance into the mirror stage and the symbolic order (to an important degree). The infant becomes more fully inscribed into the symbolic order (and more palpably alienated from fantasy paradise) as the cognitive faculties develop. In *The Origins and History of Consciousness* and “Narcissism, Normal Self-Formation and the Primary Relation to the Mother,” Erich Neumann expounds the link between alienating consciousness and (lost) paradise:

With the emergence of the fully-fledged ego, the paradisaic situation is abolished; the infantile condition, in which life was regulated by something ampler and more embracing, is at an end, and with it the natural dependence on that ample embrace. We may think of this paradisaic situation in terms of religion, and say that everything was controlled by God; or we may formulate it ethically, and say that everything was still good and that evil had not yet come into the world. Other myths dwell on the ‘effortlessness’ of the Golden Age, when nature was bountiful, and toil, suffering and pain did not exist; others stress the ‘everlastingness’ of the Golden Age, the deathlessness of such an existence (Neumann 1962, 114-115)

The paradisaic pre-ego time is also characterized as ‘existence in unitary reality,’ because in it there is not yet any polarization between inner and outer, subject and object, ego and Self. The state of total exteriorization, in which the child has not yet separated itself from the mother and from the world, may be regarded as existence in a total *participation mystique*, a universal extension of being, which constitutes the psychic amniotic fluid in which everything is still

‘suspended’ and out of which the polarities of ego and Self, subject and object, person and world, have yet to crystallize... One can do justice to the psychic reality of this phase only by formulating it paradoxically. If you speak of objectless self-love you must also speak of subjectless all-love, as well as of a subjectless and objectless totally-being-loved. In the completely instinctual condition of pre-ego universal extension, in which the infant’s world, mother and own body are undifferentiated, total connectedness is as characteristic as total narcissism (Neumann 1966, p. 108).

In sum, the mirror stage is characterized as the site of my primal experience of alienation, in which I realize that ‘I’ am not that which I had imagined to be the object of my mother’s affection, since I apprehend the discrepancy between my *innenwelt* which is inaccessible to others, and my pure *umwelt*, which is inaccessible to me. At the same time, however, it is only in the mirror stage in which I am first given access to (or rather, in which I fabricate as a desire) the mesmerizing love of completeness.³ Thus, it may not make sense to speak of the ‘*imago*’ I see in the eyes of the (m)Other as that which s/he loves, since that love only exists as long as the alienating discrepancy between my real self and my *imago* is still-to-come. To be loved, is not to know an ‘*imago*.’ It is only retrospectively that I can imagine who it was that the mother loved. That is to say that it is only retrospectively that the fantasy mother qua the one who loves me is apprehended as a fantasy mother qua fantasy *other*; during the mesmerizing love, the ineffable sense of

³ The infant can frame his desire in one of two ways:

- 1) If only the (m)Other loved me, I would be that (*das ding*)
- 2) If only I was that (*das ding*), the (m)Other would love me

Although the mother loving me *is das ding*, and there is no differentiation, in the symbolic order—in which conceptualization is the rule—a choice must be made. In the former case, salvation is not in my control; I passively await love which arrives from without. In the latter, I try to take my salvation into my own hands, and through neurotic activity I attempt to make myself into the *imago* (which only further confounds my true desire for oblivion.)

‘completeness’ prevents differentiation between self and (m)Other; (in the womb-paradise of das ding, there is no differentiation between infant and mother).

Now, if the ‘paternal’ or ‘symbolic’ *third* is not simply a father, but the Name of the Father (i.e., the *symbolic* per se), what happens to the Oedipus complex? Consider for a moment that Oedipus secretly/unconsciously/intuitively knew that Jocasta was his mother. What an illustration of the death drive this becomes, as Oedipus pursues his desire to literally return inside the mother’s womb, which of course fulfills the prophesy of his death. Oedipus kills the interrupting ‘third’ in order to get back to ecstatic unity with the mother (in order to ‘crawl back into the womb’). Since the interrupting third is nothing other than the symbolic (i.e., consciousness), Oedipus is killing *himself*.⁴ The Oedipus Complex viewed this way describes perfectly my conception of the death drive: Oedipus is disintegrating his subjectivity—the nothingness of consciousness in which it consists—in order to return to the fantasy womb of the pre-mirror paradise.

At any rate, the pre-mirror-stage is pure fantasy. In other terms, since the pre-symbolic (pre-mirror stage) is inaccessible, the fantasy mother (‘she who loves me perfectly’) is only intelligibly experienced as a (m)Other in the *imaginary-symbolic* mirror stage. Because of the nature of conceptual intelligibility and my necessarily retrospective re/construction of the pre-mirror stage, the imaginary and the symbolic collapse around the mirror stage. Thus, the mirror stage, as the transition from pre-alienation to symbolic, is never fully traversed; it is not a chronological event that occurs

⁴ Freud missed his own precursor to the death drive with the Oedipus complex, which turns out to be an exemplary illustration of death drive desire, regardless of sex, gender, cultural-symbolic familial infrastructure—any of the issues originally associated with the ‘Oedipus complex.’ Still, metaphor turns on patriarchal reality: the ‘father’ is intolerable logos; the ‘mother’ is *real* corpus (matter derives from *mater*).

and is over; we are forever trapped in the mirror stage (though that's not to say that we are not also in the symbolic and the real). In other words, we never fully accept our inherent deficiency and perpetual alienation, as we feel the regressive pull of pre-symbolic, pre-alienation nirvana.

The Factual Imago

The pre-mirror as pre-symbolic is inaccessible (since subjectivity arises with the alienating negation of consciousness in the symbolic mirror stage); the pre-mirror stage in which the subject is self-identical with its imago is therefore a *fantasy*. But does this mean that the imago itself is fantasy as well? To be sure, Lacan defines the imago as *imaginary*—it is the impossible ideal-ego for which I strive. But here I find another problem: Lacan notes that besides the literal mirror, the infant sees its imago in the eyes of the (m)Other. The (m)Other sees me as whole, and it is this image of me that she loves. From my perspective, I recognize the image of myself that the (m)Other sees as my *imago*. That is, I recognize that when 'I' am looked-at, it is not really 'me,' i.e., my *innenwelt*, that is being looked-at, but something other—my alien *umwelt*.⁵ But likewise, from the (m)Other's perspective, this image of me is also an imago in the sense that it is an image of wholeness and unity, an image of someone lovable, an image of the *umwelt*—not the 'true,' incomplete, deficient self.

⁵ This love is therefore not 'perfect,' since it is not really 'me' that the (m)Other loves.

Is my imago which the (m)Other sees also *imaginary*? From the perspective of the (m)Other, my imago is not an impossible ideal-ego; on the contrary, it *is me*. It is only from my formal perspective—from my alienating consciousness—that my ‘imago’ is on principle never ‘me.’ That is, from the (m)Other’s perspective, I am whole in a way that she is not; viz., whereas she has access to the anxiety and deficiency of her ‘selfness’—the experience of her subjectivity (i.e., the frustrating experience of living the void of the barred subject)—she does not and cannot have access to *my* unbearable ‘selfness’ or subjectivity. Thus, that I experience myself being seen as my imago means that my ‘selfness’—the experience of my subjectivity—is on principle inaccessible to others. Being seen as the imago (and seeing others as the imago) describes the unbridgeable gap between the *umwelt* and my own private hell of the *innenwelt*. Denied access to that hellish experience of subjectivity that is responsible for, or rather *is* the experience of deficiency, the (m)Other sees me as whole, as my imago, which thus collapses into my external, factual being.

Clearly, there is another dimension to my imago besides its imaginary quality; the imago exists as facticity. And this other factual dimension of the imago is the efficient cause of my desire. I look in the mirror. I see my image, the image of my body. This body is a *real thing*; but *to me* and *only to me*, it is always ‘image.’ Imaginary imago image... of a real factual thing...

Sartrean Connections

Sartre's 'Secret Face' as the Factual Imago

Something is missing from Lacan—something which Lacan leaves out, and only Sartre affirms. Namely, the imago is not merely 'imaginary,' but *factual*. Hence, the imago that I apprehend in the eyes of the (m)Other is that 'me' that the (m)Other actually sees. This 'me' is real; it is in-the-world. Thus, I on principle can never reach a one-to-one self-identification with my imago, yet in an important and true sense, I nevertheless *am* it.

This 'me' that I cannot experience and yet nevertheless am, Sartre calls the 'secret face.' The secret face is my factual self—my being-in-the-world-for-Others—the 'out there'ness of my umwelt, that on principle escapes me. "The Other holds a secret—the secret of what I am" (Sartre 1966, 445). Though I as my for-itself 'am-not' my secret face, I as my facticity *am* my secret face. (Again, that I am a split-subject means that I am both 'in here' and 'out there.')

Even though Sartre privileges the for-itself, since the for-itself is precisely *nothing* whereas facticity is being, he adamantly affirms that he *is* his secret face, though he cannot on principle know/experience it:

Originally I perceive myself to be over there *for the Other*, and this phantom-outline of my being touches me to the heart. For in shame and anger and fear I do not cease to assume myself as such. Yet I assume myself in blindness since I *do not know* what I assume. I simply *am* it (Sartre 1966, 325).

Once one considers the imago from the (m)Other's perspective, one realizes that the Imago is not simply imaginary, but factual, and that Lacanian psychoanalysis therefore needs Sartrean existentialism in order to develop this newly complicated account of the imago. I find that as Sartrean existentialism and Lacanian psychoanalysis talk to each other, the picture of split-subjectivity grows more complex and comprehensive, and problems and unanswered questions on each side get addressed in a way that eludes us if we keep each system separate.

Sartre's 'Look' as a Mirror Stage

Sartre's description of the look is strikingly reminiscent of Lacan's mirror stage, in which the subject apprehends itself as intrinsically split:

[The look] suddenly pushes me into a new dimension of existence—the dimension of the *unrevealed*. Thus the appearance of the look is apprehended by me as the upsurge of an ecstatic relation of being, of which one term is the 'me' as for-itself which is what it is not and which is not what it is, and of which the other term is still the 'me' but outside my reach, outside my action, outside my knowledge (Sartre 1966, 329).

Hence, the function of ‘the look’ and the ‘mirror stage’ is the same; viz., to reveal to the subject its inherent splitness between the subjective *in here*-ness of the for-itself/innenwelt and the objective *out there*-ness of the factual being/umwelt.

Accordingly, I think it’s appropriate to view Sartre’s look as analogous to the mirror stage, in which the imago that I apprehend in the eyes of the Other is my ‘secret face.’ By making this analogy between Lacan’s *imago* and Sartre’s *secret face*, I want to show the connection between the imago I desire and facticity (more specifically, my own purely factual being, devoid of subjectivity), which describes the death drive.

The death drive is desire for the dissolution of the transcending ‘I’ (the for-itself); it is the striving toward the annihilation of subjectivity, both insofar as the experience of subjectivity is intolerable since it necessitates the anxiety and frustration of narcissistic suicidal aggression (i.e., the experience of the ‘deficiency’ of the *transcending I*), and insofar as subjectivity necessarily excludes love as conceived of as the perfect ‘completeness’ of unity with the (m)Other. In other words, by viewing the imago not as some imaginary construct, but as an actual thing in-the-world, we see desire (of the imago) as more directly linked to death (the dissolution of subjectivity), where ‘death’ describes becoming my immanent, purely factual being, both *ontologically*, as my secret face which is ‘me’ devoid of my ‘selfness,’ or subjectivity, and *literally*, as my dead corpse.

‘Death’ and ‘Unbirth’

Now it may seem that the analytical distinction between imaginary and factual imago results in two different types of death drive: the ‘pre-life’ death drive that desires to crawl back into the womb, thereby becoming the whole and loved imaginary (fantasy) imago, and the destructive death drive that desires to precipitate towards the decay of death, thereby becoming the whole and loved factual (real) imago. But it is imperative to note that ‘imaginary’ and ‘factual’ are qualities of the same imago, or rather, the same *true desire*; the ‘imaginary’ imago is merely our apprehension of the existence of our factual imago. Because we cannot know our factual imago, we *imagine* it, we fantasize about it. The only difference between these two terms is that one refers to an actual thing in-the-world, and one refers to our fantasy reconstruction of it. In any case, what we desire is the same—to be the whole, objective *thing*; to rid ourselves of the subjective *innenwelt* (that which *splits* us), and step with perfect alignment into the *umwelt*. What the notion of the factual imago does is tease out our desire as consisting in the fantasy of existing as pure objectivity. In other words, the realization of our desire, whether astutely and precisely identified as consisting in a literal death wish, or felt more vaguely and unsophisticatedly as consisting in an inarticulable longing for self-coincidence, always reduces to the same thing—viz., the dissolution of the unbearable ‘I,’ which of course means our literal death.

Still, it may be objected, there is an essential discrepancy which distinguishes the two death drives—namely, the element of *regressivity*: at first glance, the aggressive

precipitation toward the inevitable dissolution of subjectivity in natural death which characterizes the destructive death drive seems to preclude the regressive aspect of the desire to crawl back into the womb (i.e., the ‘pre-life’ death drive). How, then, can the desire to become my dead corpse accord with my desire to return to the womb? Isn’t there a difference between ‘death’ and ‘unbirth,’ and does not this difference imply psychoanalytic consequences?

I want to argue that, in fact, these two seemingly distinct notions of the death drive paradoxically reduce to the same thing. The death drive, comprehensively conceived, appears both aggressive and erotic: one seeks one’s own demise, though not through simply squashing the self, but through augmenting the self in amalgamation with the (m)Other to the point that the definition of/between ‘self’ and ‘other’ is eroded. Prima facie, the destructive death drive seems to be spurning the (m)Other by retreating into solitary oblivion. But the salient feature of being-with the (m)Other in the womb is existing non-subjectively as pure facticity—as blood, flesh, tissue. If ‘crawling back into the womb’ is regaining this mode of existence, then becoming once again mere blood, flesh, and tissue in dying into a corpse is a sort of re-fetusing.

In this way, the ‘destructive death drive’ *is* regressive. Failing the possibility of actually, physically returning to the womb, dying into a corpse becomes its symbolic stand-in—the corpse becomes an avatar of the fetus, and death becomes a regressive performance of true desire. If a psychoanalytic interpretation of Orson Welles’ *Citizen Kane* is to demonstrate anything, it is the profoundly regressive element of death: Kane’s dying word is a purely regressive epitaph. His childhood sled ‘Rosebud’ conjures

romanticized images of the blank, snowy white void of infancy, of the bond with his mother. ‘Rosebud’ symbolizes the traumatic break with the mother; the forceful separation; the tragic loss of the pure, ivory-white, streetless, thingless, structureless snowed-in hearth and home that is cohabitation with the mother—that is pre-symbolic paradise. ‘Rosebud’ is Kane’s dying word; Kane’s *death* invokes his *pre-life*—it has less to do with decay, more to do with ‘re-fetusing.’

The ostensive fact that a dead corpse lies alone, isolated, is only a symbolic epithet of our primordial alienation. It becomes painfully obvious that as soon as one is born, one is separated, never again to return to the paradisaal womb, the pre-symbolic, pre-subjective ‘void’ from which we burst into existence. But there is no pre-symbolic for us—there is no ‘void’; we are always already in subjectivity; we are always already in logos—there is no ‘outside.’ Accordingly, there is no transcendently-informed ‘void’ from which we are *thrown* into existence. And there is no perishing back into this ‘nothingness.’ That is, death appears to us as *death*, as a ‘perishing’ from this world into the transcendent realm of nothingness. But ‘death’ only makes sense *as death* from the perspective of subjectivity. Someone who is no longer ‘inside’ logos is therefore perished with respect to the inside. But if the perished could have a point of view, would this understanding of ‘death’ hold? The solitary corpse signifies our primal and eternal alienation—we are born alone, and we die alone—but the corpse remains *inside*, as a reminder of eternal alienation for those who remain inside. Indeed, the religious notion of returning to our loved ones in the afterlife, or returning to the wholeness of the apeiron or the Parmenidean ‘One,’ or finally being completed, fulfilled by God shores up the

ingrained belief that from the perspective of the ‘perished,’ death is not merely an abdication of subjectivity, but a return to wholeness, and not a chronological ‘end’ to subjectivity, but a kind of un-birth in that the ‘outside’ on principle does not and cannot stand in relation to the ‘inside.’ We seek to get ‘outside’ logos; the ‘outside’ is the same in both directions, coming and going, because the inside between entrance and exeunt is inconsequential to the peripheral realm of ‘outside.’ The distinction between ‘death’ and ‘unbirth’ only holds from within logos. Pre-symbolic and post-symbolic both turn out to be simply *non-symbolic*.

So viewing the imago as a factual secret face delineates clearly the connection between desire and death, while retaining the regressive character of fantasy re-fetusing. Furthermore, whereas Lacan’s view of the imago as a complete and powerful master leads to building a fortress ego, which confounds the true desire of the dissolution of the ‘I’ in achieving the love of ecstatic unity with the (m)Other, viewing the imago as Sartre’s secret face fulfills the definition of the imago as complete, loved, and impossible for me, while retaining clearly the ‘true’ death drive desire of effacing the ‘I.’

Sartrean Aggressivity and Suppressed Desire

Of course the initial difference between Lacan’s mirror stage and Sartre’s look is that whereas Lacan describes the subject as desiring (to become) the imago in addition to manifesting aggressivity toward it, Sartre is usually understood as *only* hating his secret face:

To be looked at is to apprehend oneself as the unknown object of unknowable appraisals... [B]eing seen constitutes me as a defenseless being for a freedom which is not my freedom. It is in this sense that we can consider ourselves as 'slaves' insofar as we appear to the Other... I am a slave to the degree that my being is dependent at the center of a freedom which is not mine and which is the very condition of my being. Insofar as I am the object of values which come to qualify me without my being able to act on this qualification or even to know it, I am enslaved. By the same token insofar as I am the instrument of possibilities which are not my possibilities, whose pure presence beyond my being I cannot even glimpse, and which deny my transcendence in order to constitute me as a means to ends of which I am ignorant—I am *in danger*. This danger is not an accident but a permanent structure of my being-for-others (Sartre 1966, 328).

According to Sartre, my secret face haunts me, and I attempt to exorcise it by returning the look, i.e., by objectifying the Other and checking her ability to reveal to me my splitness. Essentially, I am trying to deny and escape the fact of my 'ecstatic relation of being.' The tension is that as much as I *want* to escape this condition, I know that I cannot. In fact, my 'wanting to' is contingent on my not being able to; i.e., in order to be constituted as an ontological being, I need the other. Thus though Sartre is more aggressive toward his secret face, he does acknowledge a necessary identification with it.

One might object that the acknowledgment of an identification with the secret face is not the same as an actual *desire* of the secret face since it may remain superficially theoretical; this may be true. But to conflate Sartre's merely predominantly aggressive attitude toward the secret face to a wholly aggressive attitude, thereby excluding erotic narcissism is to ignore a consequential point he stresses—the fact that one can never 'know' one's secret face. That is, Sartre can be viewed as hating the secret face not

simply because he has no control over it, but rather because he can never ‘know’—i.e., experience— it. That is, Sartre’s aggressivity toward the secret face stems from the disappointing fact that he is necessarily barred from it; he cannot experience himself being the secret face. Sartre’s aggressivity toward the secret face is therefore rooted in the necessary failure of this unrealizable desire.

To clarify, perfect knowledge of the secret face entails an impossible one-to-one identification between the for-itself and the secret face. One can certainly encounter the *phantom outline* of the secret face, but not the secret face itself; since the for-itself is non-objectifiable, the perceiving ‘*innenwelt*’ can never coincide with the factual *imago*. In fact, in the original French, Sartre’s ‘phantom-outline’ is ‘*esquisse phantome*.’ *Esquisse*, though meaning outline, primarily means ‘sketch’ or ‘rough draft.’ Had Sartre meant a purely aesthetic ‘outline,’ he would have used ‘*contour*.’ Thus, the *esquisse phantome* is a provisional, removed approximation of the actual secret face; it is an outline, in the sense that it picks out, terse generalities and inchoate, preliminary approximations, whereas the final and intricate details remain unfilled out. The phantom outline is to the secret face what Cliff’s Notes are to Shakespeare: the two are quite distinct, and experiencing the outline is *not* the same as experiencing the real thing.

Accordingly, the experience of shame in which I feel myself being ‘sucked-out of’ myself so that I undergo punctuated qualms of grasping ‘me’ from the outside only acquaints the *outline* of my secret face with the for-itself; the secret face is still alien, and it is this out-of-body experience of suddenly *being* alien facticity that shames me. But the experience of ‘being alien’ clearly implies a negating consciousness—the lone for-

itself/innenwelt that effects split-subjectivity. Indeed, the very feeling of *shame* is the uncanny sickness that accompanies self-reflexive apprehension of (the fact of) one's own secret face. The desire is to fulfill a perfect one-to-one correlation of the secret face and the perceiving self. That I feel shame is evidence that there is not a one-to-one correlation; the shame comes from the fact that I am watching myself, that I grasp myself being facticity. In other words, in shame, I feel the *phantom outline* of my secret face as *almost* congruent with 'me,' but it is that gap which accounts for the *almost* that manifests the disappointing incongruity: "Shame—like pride—is the apprehension of myself as a nature although that very nature escapes me and is unknowable as such" (Sartre 1966, 322). Shame is the nightmarish feeling of realizing that I *am* my secret face, but I can never 'know' (i.e., experience) it. For if I did manage to perfectly step into the secret face, I would not feel shame; indeed, I would not feel anything. The 'secret' of the secret face is non-subjectivity; since I am always already in subjectivity, my secret face always eludes me.

Because the desire of perfectly knowing the secret face is impossible, Sartre discounts it and suppresses it. That is, grasping the futility of this impossible desire, he turns aggressive. Whereas Lacan's model describes aggressivity and narcissistic eroticism as manifesting simultaneously or intermittently, Sartre begins from the fundamental disappointment of impossible, unrealizable desire, and suppresses the inclination toward eroticism. Instead, he retreats into his for-itself—that which is not alien to him—in order to shore up his mastery. That is, he privileges the for-itself, which he considers more properly 'his,' (i.e., which he misidentifies as the kernel of his 'true'

self), and disparages the *for-others* and *in-itself*, which he considers less ‘his,’ more alien. In other words, from Sartre “we discover that there is no equal dignity in my being for others and my being for myself. We discover that my being for others is a degradation of my being for myself and that the very appearance of another human being is a threat to my dignity” (Bergoffen 1992, 223).

Sartre’s position that there is no equal dignity in my being for myself and my being for others manifests his aggressivity, which is rooted in his narcissistic and futile desire for mastery, i.e., to be his own foundation and exist as an in-itself, for-itself—in Lacanian terms, to experience being the imago of mastery. Sartre laments that “My original fall is the existence of the Other” (Sartre 1966, 322). But the appearance of the Other is not my ‘fall’—it is a necessary component of my being. To be sure, it can be considered my ‘fall’ in the sense that it initiates the anxious and frustrating drama of split-subjectivity; but at the same time, it is the initiation of my existence as such. Indeed, insofar as the look of the Other is the upsurge of my apprehension of my ‘ecstatic relation of being,’ it is the rise of my for-others, i.e., the becoming of my being. It is the rise of ‘me’ as *something*—something more than a ‘nothing.’ In fact, the apprehension of my splitness *is* my subjectivization; my experience of primal alienation as my initiation into the symbolic is nothing other than the inauguration of consciousness. Sartre’s downfall is that unlike Lacan, he fails to recognize that his ‘true self’ is barred; he instead confounds this fantasy ‘true self’ with the nothingness of his for-itself, and therefore experiences the Other as a threat to the ‘dignity’ of his existence as a *nothing* which he romanticizes as pure transcendence. The problem is that *nothing* is precisely nothing; I

as my 'transcendence' am-not. Though he emphatically rejects a transcendental ego, Sartre nevertheless confusingly substantiates the 'nothing' of the for-itself into an impossible Cartesian self; by defining his 'essence' as consisting in transcendence, he suggests that the for-itself can be regarded as something of a 'true self.' Of course, if the nature of his 'true self' is to *not-be*, then this can be rewritten as 'there is no true self.' The problem is that Sartre does not manage this. In defining his essence as transcendence, Sartre takes a Cartesian turn and substantiates 'transcendence.'

If the 'I' is not denotative of identity but of agency, then the 'I' is a function of the for-itself. In the function 'I am' the 'I' disappears, as the for-itself in which the 'I' consists resists objectification; I as my being (rather than my nothingness) lose my 'I.' The 'I' agent is therefore an illusion of negativity. The negating nothingness of my for-itself maintains its 'I' insofar as this 'I' consistently resists objectification. Clearly, the 'I' is precisely nothing (but an 'illusion' in that it deceptively seems to be something). When I buy into this mistaken substantiation of 'nothing'—this illusion of the 'I' agent which appears only through the negation of that very 'I'—I mistake the consistent resistance of the I's objectification, ironically enough, as actual instantiations of the objectification of the 'I.' For example, in proclaiming "I am not-that," the 'I' thus appears to have gained a positive quality—the quality of 'not-that-ness.' In other words, negativity is confounded into positive qualities, into the identity of presence. This is how and wherefore one begins to build a fortress ego in pursuit of one's 'true kernel.' Thus, the more Sartre chases after what he thinks he desires—the imago of mastery,

characterized by (transcendental) agency—the more he actually confounds his true desire of the non-subjective secret face, by building up a fortress ego.

If it seems that this estimation of the for-itself is paradoxical to Sartre's account, that's exactly the point; Sartre wants to escape the notion of the transcendental ego, but he ends up simulating his impossible desire of self-coincidence in the (failed) construction of a powerful, transcendental agent. To be sure, as long as I relate to the for-itself as purely an existential mode of not-being, the pure negativity of its nothingness remains unbastardized. But as soon as I ascribe to the for-itself more than pure negativity, viz., as soon as I imbue it with agency by identifying it as the source of 'self-creative power,' I create a paradox, namely, I substantiate 'nothing.' To fall into this fallacy is to fall into the path of confounding one's misidentified desire by building a fortress ego

But of course a fortress ego is necessary to a significant degree, for if I realized my *true* death drive desire of entering the realm of pure objectivity, everything would stop—I would die. Thus, I need to cling to the self delusion that I harbour some true kernel of self. It is only because I desire my own agency—some true kernel of myself which is properly my own—that I fabricate the transcendental 'I' (i.e., that I refuse to admit that the subject is barred). I then fancy myself as occupying the precarious and unstable position between my objective alterity and the wishfully dis-barred subject. Again, this 'gap' between these two poles describes the gap of the (symbolic) mirror stage—the differentiation, the alienation of consciousness in which subjectivization consists. That the symbolic opens up the space for desire means that (impossible) desire

is fabricated, as a fantasy. My true desire is a fantasy in the relevant sense that it is necessarily anterior to the symbolic. If my fantasy desire is desubjectivization, and I on principle always already find myself subjectivized, then from within the context of the symbolic, my desire is pure fantasy. Analogously, that the symbolic opens up the space for subjectivization, (i.e., that one is created as a subject by entering the symbolic, or rather, that one finds oneself as a subject in the symbolic order) seems to suggest that the 'subject' is fabricated as a desire in the symbolic. In other words, part of what it means to find oneself in the symbolic is wishfully dis-barring the subject. This is what 'symbolic castration' means; that I grasp the discrepancy of the 'gap' between my *innenwelt* and my *umwelt* entails that I romanticize the *innenwelt* as suggesting something *beyond* itself. This *thing* beyond is always out of my reach, just as my *umwelt* is.

Sartre's Cartesian self: the Transcendental Ego

I have been contending that Sartre substantiates a Cartesian self. Of course, Sartre clearly and adamantly repudiates a Cartesian transcendental ego in *The Transcendence of the Ego*. How, then, can I maintain this claim? Although Sartre does deny a transcendent ego in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, in *Being and Nothingness*, he introduces ideas that require something of a transcendent ego. When one revisits *The Transcendence of the Ego* with these complications in mind, it becomes clear that Sartre, if not changing his views, certainly later introduces great tensions that prompt us to revisit and critically question his relationship to the Cartesian ego.

In the history of Western Philosophy, the subject is ‘transcendental’ because in order for it to enjoy autonomy, it must escape, or *transcend* the order of the deterministic chain of being. Of course, just how anything transcendental can affect the corporeal realm of objectivity remains problematic, and proposed solutions appear untenable—even humorous (was Descartes’ *pineal gland* meant to be taken seriously?)

In the context of Sartre, the problem of the transcendental is crystallized, as he maintains a necessary but curious relationship between the constructed, objective ego and *transcendence*. In *The Transcendence of the Ego*, Sartre disavows the ‘Transcendental I,’ and maintains that Ego is not the seat of consciousness, nor is it an empty principle of unification; Ego is an *object* of consciousness—it is simply *in-the-world*. In other words, consciousness comes first, then the artificial ‘I’ is constructed.

For Sartre, ‘transcendental’ means an impersonal spontaneity:

[T]ranscendental consciousness is an impersonal spontaneity. It determines its existence at each instant, without our being able to conceive anything *before* it. Thus each instant of our conscious life reveals to us a creation *ex nihilo*. Not a new *arrangement*, but a new existence. There is something distressing for each of us, to catch in the act this tireless creation of existence of which *we* are not the creators. At this level, man has the impression of ceaselessly escaping from himself, of overflowing himself, of being surprised by riches which are always unexpected (Sartre 1957, 98-9).

This spontaneity is ‘monstrous’ because it is *before* (and therefore ‘outside’ of) ‘us,’ i.e., our constructed egos. “Consciousness is frightened by its own spontaneity because it senses this spontaneity as *beyond* freedom” (Sartre 1957, 100).

This is clearly seen in an example from Janet. A young bride was in terror, when her husband left her alone, of sitting at the window and summoning the passers-by like a prostitute. Nothing in her education, in her past, nor in her character could serve as an explanation of such a fear. It seems to us simply that a negligible circumstance (reading, conversation, etc.) had determined in her what one might call ‘a vertigo of possibility.’ She found herself monstrously free, and this vertiginous freedom appeared to her *at the opportunity* for this action which she was afraid of doing. But this vertigo is comprehensible only if consciousness suddenly appeared to itself as infinitely overflowing in its possibilities the *I* which ordinarily serves as its unity (Sartre 1957, 100).

Thus, Sartre surmises that “Perhaps, in reality, the essential function of the ego is not so much theoretical as practical... perhaps the essential role of the ego is to mask from consciousness its very spontaneity” (Sartre 1957, 100).

Likewise, we mask this horrible, monstrous spontaneity from ourselves in, for example, the definition of ‘vertigo.’ In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre observes that we describe vertigo as a fear of falling instead of what it really is—a fear of *jumping*: “Vertigo is anguish to the extent that I am afraid not of falling over the precipice, but of throwing myself over.” At a great height, I realize there is nothing stopping me from hurling myself over the precipice. Just as Janet’s anxiety of the uncontrollable spontaneity underlying her fragile and destructible ego is experienced as ‘infinitely overflowing in its possibilities’ and therefore threatening the ego, actual *vertigo* is the anxious experience of this radically free spontaneity. When one gazes into the abyss of the dooming fall, one sees the abyss at the heart of her own being, and that there is *nothing* holding her back—there is no foundational ‘me’ to declare “do not jump!

Remain in your eternal me-ness!” Rather, if consciousness is created *ex nihilo*, perhaps at the next instant, it will spark an uncontrollable and spontaneous urge to jump.

These nightmarish illustrations of ‘vertiginous freedom’—our encounter with the impersonal spontaneity of consciousness—emphasizes the true horribleness of Sartrean radical freedom: it is not simply the case that we are totally and incontrovertibly *free* to determine who we are, but this *freedom* even precedes the ‘we.’ Of course, one might reply that surely the freedom must precede the we, else we could not be free to determine who the ‘we’ is; but the problem is that the very precedence of freedom renders the usual sense of ‘freedom’ incomprehensible:

...spontaneity renders impossible any distinction between action and passion, or any conception of an autonomy of the will. These notions have meaning only on a level where all activity is given as emanating from a passivity which it transcends; in short, on a level at which man considers himself as at once subject and object. But it is an essential necessity that one not be able to distinguish between voluntary spontaneity and involuntary spontaneity (Sartre 1957, 101).

In other words, spontaneity renders freedom impossible. True ‘freedom’ is horrible, monstrous, and not ‘freedom’ at all.

However, with the same stroke in which Sartre demolishes the possibility of freedom, he renders freedom possible by redefining it. That is, he disavows the traditional Western philosophic conception of ‘freedom’ as consisting in total subjective autonomy (a stark impossibility), and reconceptualizes ‘freedom’ as definitive of the ambiguous condition in which we find ourselves as embodied consciousnesses.

Sartre repudiates the subject/object split because that results in either autonomy (which has been shown to be problematic) or determinism. In either case, 'freedom' is incomprehensible. Thus, Sartre defines freedom in terms of the 'facticity of freedom,' by claiming that freedom only has meaning because it is located *in between subject and object*; Freedom is made possible by facticity. And of course, in order for this schema of 'freedom' to work, "it is an essential necessity that one not be able to distinguish between voluntary spontaneity and involuntary spontaneity." This may at first appear unsatisfying, since we tend to want to identify true 'freedom' as consisting in a *voluntary* spontaneity, but we must remember the classic problem of the transcendental—that the conception of the autonomous subject is meaningless because there is no effective link between subjective and objective through which 'freedom' can take on a personal intentionality. In other words, 'freedom' or 'free will,' as has been defined by the likes of Descartes, is untenable, meaningless. Sartre's 'facticity of freedom' salvages the general sense of 'freedom' and renders it possible only by substantially altering it.

Yet precisely because it subverts the philosophical framework in which we are used to thinking, this radically altered conception of freedom can appear unsatisfying or difficult to grasp. The term 'freedom' has a lot of baggage, and the problem one tends to have with 'the facticity of freedom' is that 'freedom' becomes an almost ironic description of the necessary instability of hovering in the grey zone between subject and object. I am only 'free' insofar as I am between these two orders; but precisely *because* I am in between, I am trapped at the junction of monstrous impersonal spontaneity and dead, detached determinism. 'Freedom' makes sense only between these two, but it is

quite an effort to *remain between*, and not slide to one or the other pole. It is difficult to live the uncertain logic of ambiguity, and resist falling back into the framework that ossifies the strict and simplistic categorical distinction of pure ‘subject’ and pure ‘object.’

According to Sartre, freedom is instability; it is a laborious and perpetual struggle to continue vacillating between subject and object, and to continue to resist stabilizing at one or the other pole. It is quite tempting to absolve oneself of responsibility by attributing the cause of one’s actions to either the impersonal spontaneity of consciousness, or the deterministic chain of being. To refuse to shirk responsibility by living in between, where freedom is possible, is not easy. We are always in danger of falling into ‘bad faith,’ which stabilizes (at either subject or object) to mask the instability that is freedom.

But there is a big problem here: the notion of ‘bad faith’ seems to undermine the notion of radical freedom (the impersonal spontaneity of consciousness). Or to be precise, the *possibility of good faith* implies that we can have control over this radical freedom. That I am not always merely the plaything of the horrible abyss of transcendent freedom—that I am not fatally used by it, but can *use it* to ‘my’ own constructed ends—is a truth I must grasp in order to be in good faith. So for example, if the impersonal spontaneity of consciousness apparently compels Janet to call out to passers-by like a prostitute, attributing that action to this monstrous spontaneity, thereby absolving herself of responsibility, would be considered (according to Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*) ‘bad faith,’ since in this case Janet reduces herself to her inert, objective ego (the sum of her actions), and utterly subordinates herself to the free spontaneity, to which she denies

any personal connection. The problem is that this is exactly how Sartre describes consciousness in *the Transcendence of the Ego*. In *Being and Nothingness*, he seems to suggest that in order to be in 'good faith,' it is necessary for me to answer for my own impersonal spontaneity; but how is this possible, since in order for me to have control over this freedom, my 'I' would have to emerge from underneath total subordinacy to it? Thus, the possibility of 'good faith' contradicts Sartre's theory of consciousness in *The Transcendence of the Ego*. If Sartre posits that we are fundamentally a radically free and spontaneous impersonal consciousness, of which our egos are merely objects, we cannot avoid characterizing ourselves as essentially at the mercy of this wholly impersonal spontaneity. In order to render responsibility possible, Sartre must personalize in some way the free spontaneity of consciousness. This personalization of consciousness describes a resurrection of the transcendent ego. Thus though Sartre conveniently ignores this problem, that he maintains the doctrine of good and bad faith demonstrates that he does not wholly exclude a personal consciousness, i.e., a transcendent 'I' capable of exerting agency over the empirical ego.

By introducing bad faith and the possibility of good faith in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre greatly complicates his original account of consciousness and the ego in *the Transcendence of the Ego*. The possibility of good faith is in strong tension with the monstrous, impersonal spontaneity of consciousness. It seems that in order for good faith to be possible, we need to personalize consciousness. Thus, from 1937 when *The Transcendence of the Ego* was published to 1943 when *Being and Nothingness* was published, Sartre began moving further and further from his original adamant preclusion

of an ego that at least partly consists in or has some control over transcendent agency. And three years after *Being and Nothingness*, in 1946, Sartre had drifted even farther from his original views of consciousness and the ego, positing notions of responsibility and self-determination/creation: In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre arrives at his ‘humanistic’ characterization of existentialism as championing existential responsibility and the power of self-determination—a position that clearly contradicts the ‘monstrous freedom’ of involuntarily spontaneous consciousness. What kind of ego do I have in *Existentialism is a Humanism*? This ego does not merely mask our true horrible freedom and impersonal spontaneity; rather, this ego, although not necessarily *prior to* transcendental freedom, has in some significant way control over or access to transcendental freedom, thus calling into question the supremacy/precedence of the free spontaneity of consciousness.

Of course, *Existentialism is a Humanism* is a problematic text—the publication of which Sartre expressed regret— so let’s not attribute too much importance to it. The point remains that in *Being and Nothingness*, the doctrine of the involuntary spontaneity of consciousness begins to give way to bad/good faith, an alternative which is in direct tension with the radical freedom originally expounded in *The Transcendence of the Ego*. Of course, Sartre does not denounce his earlier views; he still adamantly decries a transcendental ego. But what he does introduce, is the strange capacity of the ego to control transcendental freedom. In this way, Sartre is resurrecting the transcendental ego of agency. Of course, Sartre’s newly emerging conception of the self as somehow possessing access to transcendental agency does not exist prior to the abyss of

consciousness, just as his resurrection of ‘freedom’ does not exist without facticity. But the point is that, though ‘freedom’ presupposes facticity and the ‘ego’ presupposes ex nihilo consciousness, Sartre *does* reinstitute these notions. The subject is now only partly autonomous, or rather, ‘autonomous’ within constraints (the constraint of being between subject and object, and therefore not ‘autonomous’ but some tenable alternative which makes sense in this context). And freedom is now only partly ‘freedom’—the old conception of freedom didn’t work, so Sartre had to change it until it did work.

The way to understand what Sartre is doing is this: Sartre is resurrecting the old, untenable notions of subjectivity and free-will by molding them until they work, until they make sense. Indeed, *Being and Nothingness* is a reaction to the determinism of empiricism, which came along and invalidated Cartesian free will; the motivation—the *raison d’être*—of Sartre’s project is to free humankind from determinism, and give ‘humanity’ back to the human. The question is, does it work? Does the new framework of ambiguity work, or will we keep reverting back to the categorical distinction between subject and object? Does this seeming semi-freedom, semi-ego work, or does the given nature of consciousness require we choose either a distinct ‘yes’ or ‘no’? This, of course, is all beyond the scope of this paper; but what is certain is that by positing bad and good faith, Sartre is personalizing the spontaneity of consciousness—that is, resurrecting the transcendental ego—even if only in some measure.

Sartre's Aggressivity versus Beauvoir's Eroticism

Sartre is mistakenly horrified at becoming a thing in the world—horrified because he flees in bad faith away from the particularities of immanence and toward the infinite abyss of transcendence. But becoming 'somebody' is only horrific as long as I confuse the nothingness of my for-itself with objet petit a (the unattainable object of desire generated as a remnant leftover by the introduction of the Symbolic into the Real) and therefore chase after that, oblivious that my true desire lies in my factual being. Just as Sartre fills in a gap in Lacan, Beauvoir contributes a consequential development to Sartre. Beauvoir gives an account of our relationship with the Other which identifies the flawed assumptions and motives in Sartre's preference for individualism, and instead promotes the more ontologically and socially sound *mitsein* of intersubjectivity.

Sartre flees from immanence because he fears the reality that the human condition, as consisting in sociality (and ontologically speaking, as rooted in radical intersubjectivity), is first of all precarious:

My original fall is the existence of the Other. Shame—like pride—is the apprehension of myself as a nature although that very nature escapes me and is unknowable as such. Strictly speaking, it is not that I perceive myself losing my freedom in order to become a *thing*, but my nature is—over there, outside my lived freedom—as a given attribute of this being which I am for the Other (Sartre 1966, 322).

That is, I am shamed of my objectification not insofar as I lose my freedom to become *something*, but insofar as this something that I become, as determined by the Other, is on principle both intimately mine and inaccessible to me. As I've asserted above, shame as the realization of the radical precariousness of my being consists not in the fact that I am out of control to determine who I am, but in that I can never know who I am: "And the one who I am—and who on principle escapes me—I am he in the midst of the world insofar as he escapes me" (Sartre 1966, 323). In the case that 'I' am reducible to my being for-itself, I know what I am; I am 'not that,' i.e., I am 'nothing.' Having to *be something* is not the source of anxiety, nor that I am not free to determine what that something is; the source of anxiety is that, due to formal subjectivity, I can never know (i.e., *experience*) what I nevertheless am:

To be looked at is to apprehend oneself as the unknown object of unknowable appraisals... [B]eing seen constitutes me as a defenseless being for a freedom which is not my freedom. It is in this sense that we can consider ourselves as 'slaves' insofar as we appear to the Other... I am a slave to the degree that my being is dependent at the center of a freedom which is not mine and which is the very condition of my being. Insofar as I am the object of values which come to qualify me without my being able to act on this qualification or even to know it, I am enslaved. By the same token insofar as I am the instrument of possibilities which are not my possibilities, whose pure presence beyond my being I cannot even glimpse, and which deny my transcendence in order to constitute me as a means to ends of which I am ignorant—I am *in danger*. This danger is not an accident but a permanent structure of my being-for-others (Sartre 1966, 328).

I wholly depend on the Other to make me something (i.e., to love me), and furthermore, I can never know what this something is (i.e., experience being it), due to my ontological bifurcation—my being for-itself is 'in here' while my being for-others is 'out there':

[The look] suddenly pushes me into a new dimension of existence—the dimension of the *unrevealed*. Thus the appearance of the look is apprehended by me as the upsurge of an ecstatic relation of being, of which one term is the ‘me’ as for-itself which is what it is not and which is not what it is, and of which the other term is still the ‘me’ but outside my reach, outside my action, outside my knowledge (Sartre 1966, 329).

“The Other holds a secret—the secret of what I am” (Sartre 1966, 445). Consequently, I experience my objectification as shameful to the extent that I am anxious about my ‘secret face.’ For Sartre, being the secret face is a source of conflict, anxiety, and shame:

Originally I perceive myself to be over there *for the Other*, and this phantom-outline of my being touches me to the heart. For in shame and anger and fear I do not cease to assume myself as such. Yet I assume myself in blindness since I *do not know* what I assume. I simply *am* it (Sartre 1966, 325).

I only have access to my own ‘selfness,’ and the ‘me’ that is outside myself for and in the Other is unrevealed to me; I cannot know/experience my secret face—my purely factual being, the ‘me’ drained of the unbearable experience of deficiency that is subjectivity. Thus the refusal to assume my being for-others is a denial that the Other can and does know what I am (something which I on principle cannot know and must concede to the care of the Other). I thus assert my absolute mastery by identifying with my for-itself, which is not in-the-world and objectifiable; rather, my for-itself is the ‘God’s eye’ point-of-view—the *absolute*. In other words, even though I *am* my secret face, I can never experience this existential mode. In one very true sense, I, as my *umwelt*, *am* my *imago*; nevertheless, I as my *innenwelt* can never experience being my

imago. Hence, I respond with fervent aggressivity, and, in Sartre's case, I attempt to deny my structural bifurcation and instead identify as my for-itself, shunning the alluring imago of the secret face.

Aggressivity originates as and fundamentally is a solipsistic enterprise—aggressivity is self-aggressivity, initiated through the egoistic narcissism that arises from 'being' a subject. When Lacan describes aggressivity in terms of the child's relationship with others in the world, this externally-projected aggressivity is a sublimated manifestation of the more primal narcissistic aggression. That I want to be where the other is means that I am aggressive toward external others because I want to be them; I want to be foreign, alien, exotic otherness. Hatred of the other, as consisting in narcissism, means not that I love myself so much that I find others despicable by comparison, but that *something* about the 'me' which I love (my powerful, complete imago) that I'm so confused about and misidentify and cannot put my finger on, actually is the *otherness* (or as Arendt says, the *who* of the other) of the other, the non-subjectivity of the other. The taste of myself (subjectivity/selfness) drains my puissance; I want to be imago, I want to be other. That external others apparently possess this elusive treasure fills me with a most intense and deeply imbedded aggressivity. My narcissistic suicidal aggressivity which begins as an internal relation between the two bifurcations of my split self thus becomes sublimated in my relationship with external others. I've noted that in self-punishing paranoia, I strike in my victim my 'own exteriorized ideal,' thus punishing myself for not achieving my ideal image. Isn't this exactly what happens in aggression toward others? Doesn't all hatred mask a fundamental grain of bitter jealousy?

Beauvoir's Death Drive

In sum, taking up my facticity and assuming my secret face is not an 'indignity,' but an asset, in that it renders being possible, and love possible. In this way, the tending toward facticity and the dissolution of the for-itself (as absolute, or primary existential mode) is preferable to the flight away from facticity and toward the nothingness of the for-itself. According to the dictates of death drive desire, sociality and eroticism are preferable, because through tending toward ecstasis, the 'I' which is the source of all frustration and aggressivity is (partially) effaced. In this way, ecstatic love is a performance of death drive desire; that the 'ecstasy' of ecstatic love is a more pleasurable feeling than the frustration and anxiety of narcissistic suicidal aggression accounts for its linkage with 'desire,' while its element of self-effacement delineates the death drive association.

At any rate, ecstatic love *is* my true desire, by definition, and playing at ecstatic love in real, social life ('playing at' because *perfect love* is impossible) is hence more *desirable* and 'normal,' (i.e., in accordance with the human capacities) than suppressing desire, and experiencing the symptomatic re-emergence of that unfulfilled desire which characterizes the drama of the fortress ego. Sartre too steadfastly identifies anxiety as the truth of the subject, ignoring that this fundamental anxiety can be reasonably assuaged by playing at the death drive in *love*. Essentially, in discounting eroticism Sartre is discounting the value of *fantasy*—what I've described as 'playing at' death drive desire—in achieving a semblance of satisfaction. He therefore fails to appreciate the Other as

essential—essential to my own psychoanalytic sanity; the other does not exclusively evoke indignity, but *salvation* as well.

Whereas Sartre thinks that “my original fall is the existence of the Other,” Beauvoir realizes that I depend on the Other to make me what I *am*: “The me-others relationship is as indissoluble as the subject-object relationship” (Beauvoir 1976, 72). Whereas Sartre finds the Other threatening and a harbinger of hatred and aggressivity, Beauvoir’s endorses ontological intersubjectivity in which each subject finds her foundation in the Other. This valorization of intersubjectivity is concretized in her conception of erotic harmony: “Male and female stand opposed in a primordial *Mitsein*, and woman has not broken it. The couple is a fundamental unity with its two halves riveted together... in a totality of which the two components are necessary to one another” (Beauvoir 1974, xxiii). My ontological structure constitutes me equally as transcendence *and* facticity, and both of these existential modes are tied up with and rendered possible by the Other.

I cannot ‘be’ my secret face, but I can ‘assume’ it; i.e., I can ‘take up’ rather than spurn my facticity, and in taking up my facticity, I ‘live’ my secret face. And although I cannot ‘know’ my secret face, I can trust and believe the Other when s/he tells me what I am to her/him. And after all, while the Other holds the secret of who I am, I hold the secret of who she is. We find our foundations in each other. And once we start acknowledging that the boundaries between ‘self’ and ‘other’ are blurred, we begin to see that it may not be wholly impossible to experience in part (i.e., to ‘approximate’) the secret face. That is, though I cannot perfectly experience the secret face, I can get

closest to it only through the Other. As long as I am mired in the mirror stage and pursue my impossible goal in solitude as Sartre and Lacan illustrate, I will be stuck in perpetual narcissistic suicidal aggression. Being stuck-in the mirror stage, trapped on the ‘I’ side of the mirror, I can never touch my secret face. I cannot be my own foundation; I cannot be the master. I need access to the other side of the mirror. It is only in extending myself through (my foundation in) the Other, as Beauvoir illustrates, that I can metaphorically walk through the looking glass and turn around to see myself as alien facticity. Of course, as Lewis Carroll makes apparent, everything on the other side of the looking glass is phantasmagorical fantasy; but, as Lacan notes, the distinction between ‘reality’ and ‘fantasy’ holds little clout in the psychoanalytic subject. In the fleeting moment in which the vivid fantasy of my factual imago is compounded with the ontological and phenomenological aid of the Other in ecstatic intersubjectivity, the mirror shatters.

Following Sartre’s descriptions of how my flesh becomes ‘flesh’ for me only through the touch of the Other, Beauvoir observes that erotic ecstasis in which the ‘I’ is partially dissolved allows me to approximate my secret face in a similar way in which Sartre describes the self-objectification of my flesh through the Other. Essentially, Beauvoir sees the possibility of erotic ecstasy (of experiencing my own otherness) as beginning in literal eroticism: “Genuine love ought to be founded on the mutual recognition of two liberties; the lovers would then experience themselves as both self and other...” (Beauvoir 1974, 741).

Let's take a closer look at Sartre's description of the self-objectification of my flesh and his definition of desire. Sartre speaks of desire as the desire to be the body—the desire for the body to produce a 'clogging of consciousness':

“[I]n desire consciousness chooses to exist its facticity on another plane. It no longer flees it; it attempts to subordinate itself to its own contingency... In this sense, desire is not only the revelation of the Other's body but the revelation of my own body. And this, not insofar as the body is an *instrument* or a *point of view*, but insofar as it is pure facticity...[The for-itself] continues to exist but it experiences the vertigo of its own body. Or, if you prefer, this vertigo is precisely its way of existing its body. The non-thetic consciousness allows itself to go over to the body, *wishes to be* the body and to be only body” (Sartre 1966, 475).

“[I]n desire I make myself flesh *in the presence of the Other in order to appropriate* the Other's flesh. This means that it is not merely a question of my grasping the Other's shoulders or thighs or of drawing a body over against me: it is necessary as well for me to apprehend them with this particular instrument which is the body as it produces a clogging of consciousness. In this sense when I grasp these shoulders, it can be said not only that my body is a means for touching the shoulders but that the Other's shoulders are a means for my discovering my body as the fascinating revelation of facticity—that is, as flesh. Thus desire is the desire to appropriate a body as this appropriation reveals to me my body as flesh” (Sartre 1966, 476).

But Sartre says that at first the Other's body is not flesh for me, but a 'body in situation':

“flesh, on the contrary, appears as the *pure contingency of presence*. Ordinarily it is hidden by cosmetics, clothing, etc.; in particular it is hidden by movements.”

“Desire is an attempt to strip the body of its movements in an attempt to *incarnate* the Other's body.”

“In caressing the Other I cause her flesh to be born beneath my caress, under my fingers. The caress is the ensemble of rituals which *incarnate* the Other. But, someone will object, was the Other not already incarnated? To be precise, *no*. The Other's flesh did not exist explicitly for me since I grasped the Other's body in situation; neither did it exist for her since she transcended it toward her possibilities and

toward the object. The caress causes the Other to be born as flesh for me and for herself” (Sartre 1966, 476-7).

“What for the Other is his *taste of himself* becomes for me the *Other’s flesh...*” (Sartre 1966, 421). Sartre only mentions this ‘taste of oneself’ briefly, in passing, but it is nevertheless compelling. The ‘taste of [my]self’ is the conscious experience of my body. ‘Other flesh’ is foreign, alien, exotic. Other flesh is *flesh* because it is Other. For me, on the other hand, my body is not a ‘body in situation’ because—precisely because it is *mine*—it is not ‘hidden.’ It is a nauseatingly naked body—nauseating because I self-reflectively live in it. The taste of nausea is the ‘taste of oneself.’ But when, in desire, I become my body as flesh, my reflective consciousness is suspended in vertigo—this is what enables me to escape from the taste of myself. Suddenly, I am mostly alien facticity, as my for-itself is suspended; and this factual being that I am is not an instrumental thing, but pure contingent *flesh*. I somehow experience my body through Other eyes/the Other’s eyes. In this way, my *flesh* can be viewed as my *secret face*. Thus, through the erotic touch of the Other in the desire to become flesh/to appropriate the Other’s flesh in order to discover mine, I can experience the approximation of my secret face.

Given all this, I can say that what Beauvoir adds in response to Sartre is the death drive—the desire for the ecstatic unity of love, the desire for the dissolution of the ego. The Beauvoirian ‘death drive’ would then be the ‘death’ of the (mastery of the) for-itself, owing to the acceptance of facticity. I seek my death (insofar as ‘I’ am my for-itself) by sticking to my facticity. In this death of ego I enjoy the ecstasy of love. While Sartre is

stuck in the aggressive alienation of the mirror stage, Beauvoir finds herself in the mirror stage and develops a regressive desire (the death drive) to return to wholeness and love (the ecstatic unity of love) by taking up one's facticity and attempting to 'become' the secret face/imago, i.e., attempting to shake off 'selfness'/subjectivity).

But, one may object, didn't Beauvoir condemn this type of co-dependent love? Was not her entire goal in *The Second Sex* to encourage woman's 'I,'—not suborn its dissolution? This, I think, is a superficial simplification and, therefore, fundamental misunderstanding of Beauvoir's project: she condemns the one-sided, total-dependency woman has of man—not *co*-dependency between two equals.

To be sure, Beauvoir does identify the fundamental desire for annihilation at the core of woman's desire for erotic unity with man. Thus she recognizes—and ardently denounces—a gendered 'death-drive,' which she describes as,

“...the childhood dream, the mystic dream, the dream of love: to attain supreme existence through losing oneself in the other” (Beauvoir 1957, 720).

It has sometimes been maintained that this desire for annihilation leads to masochism. But as I have noted in connection with eroticism, it can be called masochism only when I essay 'to be fascinated by my own status as object, through the agency of others'; that is to say, when the consciousness of the subject is directed back toward the ego to see it in a humiliating position. Now, the woman in love is not simply and solely a narcissist identified with her ego; she feels, more than this, a passionate desire to transcend the limitations of self and become infinite, thanks to the intervention of another who has access to infinite reality. She abandons herself to love first of all to *save herself*; but the paradox of idolatrous love is that in trying to save herself she *denies herself* utterly in the end (Beauvoir 1957, 721).

It is important to note that Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* does not respond to the patriarchal schema (in which the masculine-gendered 'I' identifies as transcendence while the feminine-gendered 'I' identifies as immanence) by simply championing woman's identification with transcendence, but by endorsing a measured *ambiguity* for all human subjects. Thus though she may be read as condemning ecstatic love insofar as it describes the almost parasitic attempt on the part of objectified woman to extend out of her miserable self, for man, whose subjectivity is not in question, ecstatic love is not degrading 'bad faith,' but an opportunity to perform ambiguity. That is, Beauvoir does not categorically condemn the suppression of transcendence, the need of which in the balance of ambiguity is relative to one's starting point as a subject. In this way, the Beauvoirian 'death drive' in which one seeks one's transcendence-neutralizing facticity through the Other is but a necessary element of both living in good faith as a human subject, and living in love, with love:

Genuine love ought to be founded on the mutual recognition of two liberties; the lovers would then *experience themselves as both self and other...* (Beauvoir 1957, 741 [my italics]).

Whether that death drive is taken too far is a matter with which Beauvoir finds fault. Indeed, Beauvoir endorses erotic abdication of transcendence only to the extent that it balances ambiguity in good faith. For her, the objective of erotic ecstasis is to thrive—to live a *human life*, which is characterized by ambiguity. When this ambiguity-oriented 'death drive' is performed to an excessively suicidal end, i.e., when this death drive is taken 'too far' towards facticity on the transcendence-immanence scale and

becomes bad faith as the balance of ambiguity is upset, the ‘death drive’ becomes a destructive means of annihilation:

“On the day when it will be possible for woman to love not in her weakness but in her strength, *not to escape herself but to find herself*, not to abase herself but to assert herself—on that day love will become for her, as for man, *a source of life and not of mortal danger*” (Beauvoir 1957, 742 [my italics]).

Beauvoir condemns this bad faith ‘escape’ of transcendence towards facticity, typified by the patriarchal ‘woman,’ just as vehemently as she condemns the flight *from* facticity toward excessive transcendence, typified by the patriarchal ‘man,’ whom Beauvoir castigates as unable to love:

“Men have found it possible to be passionate lovers at certain times in their lives, but there is not one of them who could be called ‘a great lover’; in their most violent transports, they never abdicate completely; even on their knees before a mistress, what they still want is to take possession of her; at the very heart of their lives they remain sovereign subjects” (Beauvoir 1974, 713).

It is therefore of paramount importance to stress that Beauvoir’s erotic ecstasy is always performed with the goal of ambiguity, and of rendering possible *genuine* love, as described above.

Here the divergence between Beauvoir’s ethical and authentic ‘death drive’ and my death drive becomes apparent. Beauvoir aims at ‘genuine love,’ a *possible* love between two authentic subjectivities. On the other hand, the tragic and catastrophic desire of impossible, *perfect* love hurls one into the spiraling descent of the destructive death drive in which the aim is not the possibility and ambiguity of human life, but the impossible stability that is realizing my perverted and terrifying true desire—death.

Again, insofar as the human condition consists in a balance between transcendence and facticity, and good faith is characterized by ambiguity, depending upon the starting point and motives of the subject, the partial dissolution of the 'I' in Beauvoir's erotic ecstasy aids in the achievement of a full and authentic human experience. This partial suppression of the 'I' is to that extent ultimately life-affirming. My death drive, on the contrary, runs amok with unbridled morbid desire. Whereas Beauvoir condemns the 'death drive' of patriarchal woman, I recognize its universal appeal if it is de-gendered: I do not amalgamate myself with my partner because I want to share in his transcendence; I have my own transcendence, and it is precisely this which torments me.

Beauvoir experiences transcendence and freedom as liberating and meaningful. Perhaps because she writes from the perspective of one whose subjectivity is not necessarily recognized, she lionizes and romanticizes these gifts. But Sartre, who has always claimed transcendence and freedom as his birthright, is more sensitive to the nightmarish aspects of these 'gifts'—they are perhaps more of a *curse*. From Sartre's perspective, the fantasmatic desire to annihilate the self is suppressed; 'man' is not allowed the death drive of woman.

To get a more comprehensive picture of what's going on, it's imperative to sustain a deep intermingling of Sartre and Beauvoir. I've shown that Beauvoir is useful in developing Sartre in that she champions intersubjectivity, and the ambiguity of our ontological condition. Now, it is equally important to re-read Beauvoir's feminist-existentialism from a Sartrean standpoint, de-gendering Beauvoir's insights. Is patriarchal woman *deprived* of these 'gifts,' or *spared the curse*? If it is possible to suppress our

feminist sensibilities and deference to bad/good faith for a moment, perhaps we ought to consider: what benefit does the patriarchal ‘woman’ enjoy—the exalted, impossibly beautiful ‘Helen,’ the chimerical, dead ‘Lenore’? If Sartre’s abundance of anxiety is to suggest a horrifying, inconceivable malady at the heart of subjectivity, could it not be that the terror of this unspeakable distress is that its alleviation consists in the ‘feminization’ that is suppression of the unbearable ‘I’ and identification with ethereal, surreally beautiful facticity?

This forbidden desire, which the ethics of existentialism bars, nevertheless pervades the undercurrent. Though Beauvoir recognizes it as a desire which must necessarily be resisted in order to live as a human subjectivity, in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* she allows room to play with this desire:

I should like to be the landscape which I am contemplating, I should like this sky, this quiet water to think themselves within me, that it might be I whom they express in flesh and bone, and I remain at a distance. But it is also by this distance that the sky and the water exist before me. My contemplation is an excruciation only because it is also a joy. I can not appropriate the snow field where I slide. It remains foreign, forbidden, but I take delight in this very effort toward an impossible possession. I experience it as a triumph, not as a defeat (Beauvoir 1976, 12).

What is this a description of but the object-cause of desire? In the pain of my inability to realize my desire, I exult. Though this desire is unfulfillable, I delight in its absurd pursuit. It seems that despite Beauvoir’s commitment to the existentialist ideals of freedom and transcendence, there remains within her work a subdued courting of facticity. She may chastise those who “reject with despair the distance which separates

us from being,” but between the lines, she seems to sanction the foreshortening of that distance (Beauvoir 1976, 34).

Though *The Second Sex* was written as a scathing feminist criticism of the way patriarchy informs our existential structures, Beauvoir’s insights into the magic of courting facticity illuminate a de-gendered psychoanalytic re-reading of Sartrean existentialism. If man performs bad faith by tending towards transcendence, and woman performs bad faith by tending towards facticity, what Beauvoir introduces—paradoxically, and counter to her explicit aims—is the death drive desire of becoming facticity. If we adopt this death drive, complete with its associations with desirable immanence and regression towards childhood, and connect it to the desire of the secret face, what begins to emerge is a unique, ‘existentialist death drive’ characterized by the sticking to facticity. We can now import this into the psychoanalytic death drive, and describe the Lacanian death drive as consisting in a ‘desire for’ and a tendency toward facticity—object fetishism: the obsessive fascination of the non-subjective because it is devoid of that ‘selfness’ of the ‘I.’ In other words, facticity ‘calls me’ because it’s objectivity to counteracts my subjectivity—the death drive.

The Tragedy of Consciousness

In addition to the self-objectification in becoming flesh, Sartre seems to open a door for approximating my secret face in his discussion of belief. Actually, he makes a point of elucidating the tension between the for-itself and being. His goal in elucidating this tension is legitimating his flight from being, but for us, this tension illustrates the mechanics of the death drive desire to be, and its relation to subjectivity.) In his section “The ‘Faith’ of Bad Faith,” Sartre describes good faith as a rising above the distrust of the Other—as a believing⁶ in the Other and of the love he professes:

I believe that my friend Pierre feels friendship for me. I believe it *in good faith*. I believe it but I do not have for it any self-evident intuition, for the nature of the object does not lend itself to intuition. I *believe* it; that is, I allow myself to give into all impulses to trust it; I decide to believe it, and to maintain myself in this direction; I conduct myself, finally, as if I were certain of it—and all this in the synthetic unity of one and the same attitude. This which I define as good faith is what Hegel would call the *immediate*. It is simple faith (Sartre 1966, 84).

Sartre soon diverges, however, when he contends that good faith, though possible, is more-or-less infeasible. He invokes the metastable structures of consciousness in illustrating how the bad faith of retreating toward the for-itself is—if not an almost spontaneous and intuitive response—conducive to and therefore mitigated by the given nature of consciousness. He observes that “the immediate calls for mediation and that belief by becoming *belief for itself*, passes to the state of non-belief” (Sartre 1966, 84):

[T]he nature of consciousness is such that in it the mediate and the immediate are one and the same being. To believe is to know that one believes, and to know that one believes is no longer to believe...

⁶ To ‘believe’ (in) the Other is to come to ‘know’ (in the sense in which I *can* know) my secret face.

Thus belief is a being which questions its own being, which can realize itself only in its destruction, which can manifest itself to itself only by denying itself... To believe is not to believe. We see the reason for it; the being of consciousness is to exist by itself, then to make itself be and thereby to pass beyond itself. In this sense consciousness is perpetually escaping itself, belief becomes non-belief, the immediate becomes mediation... The ideal of good faith (to believe what one believes) is, like that of sincerity (to be what one is), an ideal of being-in-itself (Sartre 1966, 84).

To believe is not to believe. We see the reason for it; the being of consciousness is to exist by itself... Here, Sartre links the impossibility of belief with the bad faith flight from the in-itself, toward the for-itself. Thus though it seems that the impulse to bad faith lies in the given metastable structures of consciousness, it is not therefore the case that this impulse is inevitable and insurmountable. Although “it is very true that bad faith does not succeed in believing what it wishes to believe,” the general failure to believe what one wishes to believe does not necessarily imply bad faith (Sartre 1966, 85); this failure in fact can be overcome, and bad faith consists in the unwillingness to overcome it. Sartre points out: “It is precisely as the *acceptance* of not believing what it believes that it is bad faith” (Sartre 1966, 84 [italics mine]). That is, I have a choice whether or not I want to accept this paradigm of belief that exploits the metastable structures of consciousness in order to render belief impossible, in order to render *being* impossible. Good faith is a non-exploitative interpretation of and relation to consciousness and the ontology of the human—an interpretation which renders good faith belief possible. “Good faith wishes to flee the ‘not-believing-what-one-believes’ by finding refuge in being. Bad faith flees being by taking refuge in ‘not-believing-what-one-believes.’ It has disarmed all beliefs in advance...” (Sartre 1966, 85). In other words, in good faith, I

believe in order that I may take up my being for-others, and I take up my being for-others in order that I may believe. In bad faith, I refuse to take up my being for-others in order that I may disbelieve, and I disbelieve in order that I may refuse to take up my being for-others.

Thus, in good faith I render trust and belief possible by realizing that the metastable structures of consciousness do not necessarily force me to consistently deny that I am (a) being. In fact, in realizing that I *am*, I realize that I *am* only because I believe (in) the Other. Bad faith, in refusing to become a thing, sticks to the metastable structures of consciousness, thereby foreclosing the possibility of belief, and the possibility of *being*:

[T]he first act of bad faith is to flee what it cannot flee, to flee what it is. The very project of flight reveals to bad faith an inner disintegration in the heart of being, and it is this disintegration which bad faith wishes to be (Sartre 1966, 85-6).

Thus it seems that the ‘bad faith’ of retreating toward the for-itself seeks the disintegration of the ‘am’ toward the void of the I (the destructive, aggressive death drive toward nothingness—pure god-like subjectivity), while ‘good faith’ easily tips into the ‘bad faith’ of retreating *from* the for-itself, toward factual being, in seeking the disintegration of the ‘I’ and the nirvana return to an ecstatic, pan-corporeal origin.

Good faith seeks to flee the inner disintegration of my being in the direction of the in-itself which it should be and is not. Bad faith seeks to flee the in-itself by means of the inner disintegration of my being (Sartre 1966, 86).

This self-recovery of being required of good faith Sartre terms *authenticity*; authenticity demands that I take up my facticity in good faith by believing the Other (when he tells me what I am; that he loves me because I am what I am). However, as soon as Sartre introduces it, he shies away from *authenticity*, “the description of which,” he jarringly proclaims, “has no place here” (Sartre 1966, 86). It seems Sartre dismisses authenticity because it clashes with consciousness’ predilection for the bad faith of escaping toward the for-itself. Indeed, Sartre attempts to naturalize bad faith; he posits that “If bad faith is possible... it is because consciousness conceals in its being a permanent risk of bad faith. The origin of this risk is the fact that the nature of consciousness simultaneously is to be what it is not and not to be what it is” (Sartre 1966, 86). In other words, consciousness is non-objectifiable, and therefore only ‘is’ something in the non-technical sense that it surpasses whatever is in order to reach its ontic destiny of ~~being~~ a pure negating nothingness. Consciousness always courts nothingness; consciousness always passes being toward nothingness. (Again, this is why belief is impossible: to believe is to believe that one believes, which thereby passes into non-belief.)

Subjectivity as consisting in the negating nothingness of consciousness is inherently ‘aggressive’ because its nature is to always court, identify with, and return to itself—viz, nothingness. If I am at heart a pure nothing, then within the context and from the point of view of factual being, I am aggressively suicidal. As a non-objectifiable nothingness amidst immanent facticity, consciousness is out-of-joint. For example, consider the *being* of a female. It can be said that in order to affirm its essence, in order

to reach its metaphysical telos, the female must identify with and court femininity and femaleness. The *substance* of ‘femininity’ exists as present identity. But the negating nothingness of consciousness has no identity; its ‘essence’ is to resist identity, to resist objectification and substantiation. Indeed, in order for the negating nothingness of consciousness to reach its respective ‘metaphysical telos,’ it must consistently affirm its ‘essence’ as nothing. The negating nothingness of consciousness is unique in this respect; thus it is understandably viewed as somehow ‘suicidal,’ even though it retreats from itself not in order to efface itself but in order to affirm itself; the *nature* of the for-itself is to not-exist.) From the point of view of one who identifies as the for-itself, the ‘bad faith’ disintegration into the void of nothingness is not ‘suicidal,’ but an affirmation—an affirmation of the ‘identity’ of *non-identity*. Of course, this sounds like bad faith—and it is. The point is that, ‘bad faith is possible’ precisely because “consciousness conceals in its being a permanent risk of bad faith. The origin of this risk is the fact that the nature of consciousness simultaneously is to be what it is not and not to be what it is” (Sartre 1966, 86). That is, ‘bad faith’ is nothing other than consciousness ‘identifying’ as itself, as feeling at home in its ‘disintegration.’ Consequently, Sartre tolerates the tendency toward bad faith, even though this tendency is only compelling to the extent that one identifies with the nothingness of consciousness while spurning its facticity.

Sartre’s bad faith desire of the inner disintegration is therefore not a true ‘death drive’ desire, since it is actually an affirmation and only happens to make more sense viewed as a nihilation. Or rather, she who identifies in bad faith with the for-itself does

not do so in the fundamental hope of being ‘nothing,’ but rather of being the ‘God’s eye’ master, who just ‘happens to be’ nothing. Beauvoir’s death drive, on the contrary, turns on the desire to efface oneself as the subjective ‘I’ agent (or to be more precise, as the void of the subject), in the hope of recapturing one’s incarnation as ‘the thing’ of the fetus-womb corporeal mass. In other terms, the death drive as I conceive of it consists in the disintegration of the splitting, insufferable *I*, in an effort to return to one’s origin as the co-dependent (m)Other’s clot of blood, not in the disintegration of the *am*, in an effort to return to the autonomous transcendental I. And again, because misidentifying *objet petit a* as my for-itself leads to the paradoxical endeavor of the fortress ego, the true death drive desire of becoming pure facticity is confounded. Thus though we might be tempted to view Sartre’s fascination with and pursuit of the for-itself as illustrative of a death drive, to do so would be to undo my cohesive definition of the death drive as consisting in a tending toward pure objectivity. Let’s therefore instead call it a ‘Sartre complex,’ after Sartre’s unquestioned naturalization of the tendency toward bad faith and his almost pathological fear of facticity.

The 'Regressivity' of Death Drive Desire

Whereas Sartre is stuck in the aggressivity of the (symbolic) mirror stage, Beauvoir chooses instead the *regressive* alternative of eroticism, i.e., of desiring to regress to the erotic ecstatic unity of the pre-mirror stage. The desire to 'regress' to the pre-mirror stage in which ecstatic love and unity is possible is elucidated in conjunction with the conception of the imago as my secret face when we consider 'nostalgia.' Nostalgia as a regressive obsession is a sublimation of the regressivity of the death drive desire to return to the pre-mirror stage.

I want my secret face; my phantom outline which haunts me. That I want 'me' stripped of my 'selfness' means that I desire my 'death.'

I have elucidated that 'I' cannot on principle experience my secret face—the 'me' stripped of its 'selfness'; to the extent that I inch closer to my secret face, my 'I' commensurately dissolves. (Experiencing myself) being the imago is, of course, logically impossible. What is possible, however, is for the 'I' to dissolve (partially) as in Beauvoir's (critical) account of woman's desire to meld into ecstatic unity with man, thereby rendering 'love' possible, where 'love' refers to a pleasurable feeling of 'completeness' (which is only the dissolution of the 'I' through the aid of the Other). (Again, it is only the 'I' that effects the feeling of deficiency.) So when I 'take up' my facticity by assuming my secret face for the Other, thus rendering Beauvoirian eroticism

possible, I am chasing after the true desire of my imago (not my fortress ego, but that which the (m)Other loves⁷). Of course, ‘perfect’ love is not possible—a perfect one-to-one identification with the secret face is impossible; Beauvoirian ‘love’ is thus the result of playing at the death drive—the ‘I’ is never dead, but suppressed. True desire is never gained, but ‘approximated.’ An apt metaphor is erotic asphyxiation—cutting off oxygen to the brain for sexual arousal. Erotic asphyxiation accrues hypoxic euphoria, while threatening the danger of death. But paradoxically, as pleasure supposedly increases, the ability to experience (pleasure) decreases. Just as the realization of desire is the end of desire, losing consciousness in erotic asphyxiation confounds its own purpose. I always need this gap: though I desire the fulfillment of my desire, I also don’t desire its fulfillment, but its deferment, since desire only *is* yearning, constant and eternal deferment.

⁷ i.e., not that which *I think* is loved, but that which *is loved* apart from my suspicions and opinions. The (m)Other loves my umwelt—my secret face. What makes my secret face so lovable is that it is utterly divorced of the subjectivity of the innenwelt. My fortress ego, on the other hand, is the innenwelt’s attempt to appropriate and control the umwelt; it describes the dream of welding the two bifurcations of the split subject together, thus re-creating a whole and powerful master. Since the fortress ego involves the innenwelt half of the subject, complete with its neuroses and deficiencies, to misidentify my fortress ego as the object of the (m)Other’s affection is to make the catastrophic mistake of eroticizing the crux of hatred, aggression, anxiety.

Nostalgia

“Nostalgia comes from the Greek word *nostos*, meaning ‘return home,’ and *algia*, meaning pain or longing” (Wilson, 21). It is described as a longing for the past, often in idealized form, and as a “vague and constant desire for something that does not and probably cannot exist,... a turning towards the past or towards the future” (Bell, 402). In other words, nostalgic longing is for something necessarily and constantly absent. This lay conception of *nostalgia* strikingly describes the psychoanalytic death drive desire of *objet petit a*—that which must necessarily never be attained. Because nostalgia denotes an arresting ‘returning,’ it helps demonstrate the connection between death drive desire and regressivity, namely, the radical regression to return to the womb. And in fact, nostalgic reminiscence of the past describes our attempt to recapture *objet petit a*.

Due to the structure of subjectivity, ‘I’ cannot know my secret face; however, I can experience grasping a recreation of my secret face by conjuring up its representation in memory: I look at old photographs of myself. That ‘me’ is pure facticity—I do not inhabit it as a ‘self.’ It therefore possesses a ‘far-away’ feel. It is me, but it is not *me*. It is this which I long for, I chase after; it is this which I want to be. This is why things always seem so much better in memory; that unbearable ‘selfness’ of subjectivity is gone. We’re left with that nostalgic, longing feeling, for our phantom outline.

My secret face as revealed to me in nostalgic reminiscence is that imago which I desire. Because that ‘me’ is pure facticity—stripped of subjectivity—it is in a way, pre-symbolic, and pre-mirror; it is my fantasy self, my imago. Of course, the secret face we

have access to in this manner is ‘expired.’ We can never know our current, ‘live’ secret face.

So far I’ve been describing the ‘secret face’ as my imago, as my true death drive desire. I’ve identified one ‘incarnation’ of the secret face as my flesh—the physical, factual secret face. Another incarnation of the secret face is my secret face as my *memory self*—the *psychic* secret face objectified in mental representation.

To elucidate, I realize that I, as my facticity, *am* my imago/secret face when I experience the memory of myself (my facticity at a moment in the past) as possessing that fulfilling ‘je ne sais quoi’ that I find so desirable. When I reminisce about myself at age five, for example, ‘myself’ at age five (i.e., my current memory of myself at age five) is not ‘open’ with the deficiencies of subjectivity, but ‘closed’ and complete. That ‘memory me’ is objectified in psychic representation. I mustn’t mistake ‘nostalgia’ for this fulfillment. The facticity in which I was mired at age five did not possess this tincture when I was actually experiencing it; only in retrospect does it acquire this je ne sais quoi. This closedness, this quality of pure facticity, divorced of subjectivity, accounts for the longing, desirable fulfilling feeling that we term ‘nostalgia.’ The very *sense* of ‘nostalgia’—that nothing can be experienced as ‘nostalgic’ during its time—is not a mere logical tautology (not a semantic feature of the concept), but rather turns on the way we experience and relate to our subjectivity. Something is ‘nostalgic’ not insofar as its time is passed, but insofar as it objectifies ourselves in psychic representation, thus revealing our factual secret faces.

Take myself a month ago. Surely, I am still ‘myself’ in a substantial sense (in terms of personal identity), the only difference being that I am not currently experiencing myself as that self. ‘Myself’ a month ago is myself abstracted from my subjectivity. ‘Myself’ a month ago is more or less ‘myself’ now, only pure facticity, pure object, cleansed of subjectivity. It is clear that I *am* that self, factually speaking, yet not that self, insofar as the for-itself is concerned. Or, if you like, that self is a ‘me’ and not an ‘I.’ My ‘memory self’ as my psychic secret face is the ‘me’ ‘objectified’ in memory; i.e., the psychic representation of ‘me.’ I am no longer ‘I,’ but ‘me’; I am part of the landscape. This memory self is ‘other’ to me, because it is devoid of my subjectivity. From my current perspective, that memory ‘me’ is an Other. Likewise, *I* am ‘other’ to that memory me. Therefore, that memory me is *how I am seen by others*—this time, the ‘Other’ is myself. Thus, we drive home the inverse relationship between my secret face (how I am seen by others) and my subjectivity; the desirable treasure of the secret face consists in the absence or lack of the experience of the unbearable ‘I.’ ‘How I am seen by others’ has nothing to do with the content of my ego (‘how’ [*comment*] I am seen, i.e., what I’m like), it has everything to do with the *absence of subjectivity*.

The point is that the secret face is not factual insofar as it is a physical thing in the world, rather it is factual because objectivity is the negation of subjectivity. The secret face is just a fantasy to me, but it becomes clear that it actually is a thing in the world because I receive knowledge of it through experience with the immanent world. It’s *not* ‘merely a fantasy’ since it exists; it just doesn’t exist *for me*. And insofar as it exists for me, the ‘me’ disappears. From my perspective, *everyone else* is a secret face.

They live as their secret face; I see them and experience them as others, whose subjectivity, whose experience of selfness is inaccessible to me. This is *real*.

Think of the children's book *Sideways Stories from Wayside School*. In one 'sideways' story, the teacher creates for each student his or her own flavour of ice cream: One day, Maurecia, who is known for her love of ice cream, finally tires of the frosty treat. So her teacher, Mrs. Jewels, invents a new flavour of ice cream just for Maurecia. She calls it 'Maurecia-flavoured ice cream.' Unfortunately, when Maurecia tastes it, she doesn't taste anything at all! Everybody else, however, thinks it's delicious. As it turns out, 'Maurecia-flavoured ice cream' simply tastes like the taste that remains in Maurecia's mouth all the time, when she isn't tasting anything else. Using this tale as an ontological allegory, we can see that 'Allia-flavoured ice cream' is the taste of myself: for me, it has no taste, because it is the taste I always have in my own mouth. For others, Allia-flavoured ice cream tastes like something. The 'taste of oneself' is the taste of subjectivity. The taste of the Other is foreign, exotic. I desire this taste of alterity, but I desire to taste my own alterity; I desire to lose my unbearable subjectivity.

I've said that in viewing the imago as my 'secret face' (or 'phantom outline'), I draw the connection between the image of myself as whole (i.e., as abstracted from my 'selfness'/subjectivity), and my immanent being. That is, *das Ding* resides in facticity. (I long for my facticity in old photographs, in my secret face.) The imago if viewed as a secret face is *factual* (rather than *imaginary*); it is the way I appear to Others. From the perspective of the subjective Other, I am whole, complete, there is *something* about me, something far-away and desirable. I seem to be a mystery, to hold some secret—the *who*

of the other, the experience of ‘selfness,’ and therefore of my inherent deficiency, frustration, and anxiety—is inaccessible, and I therefore appear magically whole and desirable. The interesting thing that happens in adopting this view is that my secret face becomes *objet petit a* for both me (since I want to be the non-subjective lovable me) and for the Other, since she sees me as whole, and desires that *thing* in me that makes me that way (that ‘thing’ being nonsubjectivity, the absence of that unbearable ‘I’).⁸

I want to *be* how the (m)Other sees me. I want to be the imago that I nevertheless am yet paradoxically can never experience. This becomes painfully clear in nostalgia—especially when the ‘me’ for which I pine is remarkably young, e.g., last week or the other day. When one covets a ‘me’ so young, the common adage that ‘things always appear better in memory’ fails to adequately explain this longing. It is the fact that my subjectivity is always anchored in this temporal ‘now’ that illuminates my regressive desire of my factual self; everything seems better in memory because ‘I’ am not there, suffering the curse of unbearable split-subjectivity.

⁸ As Žižek says, *objet petit a* is that *thing*, that ‘secret,’ that treasure in my beloved that I makes him so lovable.

Conclusion

By incorporating Sartre's remarkable notion that although it remains impossible for me, I nevertheless *am* my secret face, we complicate and develop Lacan's account of the imago and colour the psychoanalytic narrative with an arresting shade of black: my true desire is *right there*, with me—in me—at all times! I am encased in this factual flesh, this whole and complete *being*. In a way, I *live* my fantasy every day, though it remains categorically impossible for me to experience it. That my desire is *right here* in my flesh, and therefore patently unavailable to me adds to the irony of our human situation. And as the loose 'threads' tie together and the philosophical categories link up to form a cohesive and comprehensive account of split-subjectivity and death drive desire, Lacan's almost cryptic dicta become illuminated:

The idea that *les non-dupes errent* sums up the ironic nature of human existence: not to be duped into thinking that I *am* my ego, have control over creating my ego, or that I even possess some true kernel of self, is to err. It is only this confusion, this misidentification of desire, this fantasy, that perpetuates my existence in the symbolic, and hence my existence as such.

The play on sounds, *le non du pere* (the paternal injunction), shores up the meaning of the former locution: in order to persist in the symbolic, it is necessary to bar

the desiring subject from returning to the mother's womb, as Oedipus in my reading of the Oedipus complex. And like Oedipus, the third locution, *le nom du pere* (the paternal metaphor)—the fundamental signifier which permits signification to proceed normally and situates the subject in the symbolic order—is that harbinger of the symbolic which throws us into the realm of conceptualization (and hence alienation), thereby rendering impossible the return to the paradisaal womb.

These three homonymic locutions of the paternal/symbolic Law underscore that the possibility of 'erring' is a false choice—we are always already in the symbolic; this means that—as fantasy and desire becomes possible in the symbolic—we are *forced* to fantasize about our imagoes. Just as it is impossible to break the laws of nature, by virtue that whatever happens in 'nature' is therefore 'natural,' it is impossible to disobey the Paternal/Symbolic Law. In this way, *les non-dupes errent* is ironic, mocking chicanery. To be *truly* non-duped, to the point that one has fully extricated oneself of any glimmer of suspicion or hope of the barred subject, is to cease to be. The human subject as living ambiguously between fantasy subject and inert object needs both poles defined; the fortress ego is necessary—the illusion of my true kernel of self is necessary.

Fantasy thus becomes a sort of necessary lie. Desire, which is always necessarily unrealizable, lies to me; it makes me at least partly believe that *this* is what I want, or that there is hope of one day *achieving* this. This, it seems, is the truth of being human. To live is to undertake the Sisyphean task of absurdity. It is to be aware of the absurdity, and to *live* it.

Epilogue

William Blake said, “Some are born to sweet delight, and some are born to endless night.” For me, endless night *is* sweet delight. According to Lacan, the object-cause of desire is the reason we go on living. Fantasy is bittersweet: bitter because it is unrealizable, sweet because we achieve some level of satisfaction in remaining unsatisfied. (My fantasy desire is satisfying to the extent that it is necessarily *just* out of my reach.)

But the bittersweet ‘satisfaction’ of fantasy is only so placating. How can I go on when I know that my fantasy is forever and necessarily impossible? I’m relegated to utter torture, and furthermore, I *know* it! I’m but a plaything, perpetually and eternally *used*.

Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player, That struts and frets his hour upon the stage, And then is heard no more. It is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing.

Macbeth Act 5, scene 5, 19–28

Like Albert Camus once suggested, the main reason I don’t kill myself is inertia; it is simply *out of habit* that I go on living. To actually commit the romantic deed and extricate myself from this absurd state of affairs requires an intentional and implemented momentum. It’s not bad enough that I didn’t ask to be born, but was born anyway;

furthermore, I am somehow inexplicably subordinate to the perfunctory routine of being. In a sense, I am a coward—subjugated by the chain of being (the ‘petty pace’ of ‘tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow’), and placated by the bittersweet addiction to fantasy.

Life is an addiction—a *habit* that we cannot quit. And each attempt to do so results in that infinite regress that is awareness of the absurdity of our inscrutable condition; each attempt to quit this habit is foiled by our perpetual hope of fulfillment—a hope that stubbornly persists in spite of our despairing apprehension that such fulfillment is impossible. This absurd hope plainly describes our impossible relation to *objet petit a*, *fantasy*: it is only in remaining unfulfilled that ‘fantasy’ is realized; it is through the indefinite deferral of satisfaction that I am ‘satisfied.’ *Fantasy* is absurdity par excellence. That life is sustained by the absurdity of fantasy seems a cruel joke; but that this false hope is itself somehow senselessly satisfying at once liberates and enchains. I am addicted, I am powerless; but in my powerlessness, I find my puissance. Absurdity becomes my meaning.

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