MEDWIN PUBLISHERS
Committed to Create Value for Researchers

Philosophy International Journal
ISSN: 2641-9130

The Agency of the Other and the Question of Violence: Otherwise than Levinas

Pimentel D*

Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Israel

***Corresponding author:** Dror Pimentel, Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Afner St. 15 Givatayim, Israel, Tel: +97237821280; Email: drorpim@zahav.net.il

Conceptual Paper
Volume 6 Special Issue 1
Received Date: December 06, 2022
Published Date: January 03, 2023
DOI: 10.23880/phij-16000S1-009

Abstract

It is well known that Emmanuel Levinas places the ‘other' at the heart of his phenomenology, as an agency the relation toward which constitutes subjectivity. As such, the Levinasian other is deprived of violence, and it is identified with the figures of the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow. The only resistance the other could muster against the violence directed at him/her, argues Levinas, is what he terms as the resistance of lack of resistance. This article aims at questioning this premise. Is the other indeed deprived of any violence? The readings of Derrida, Sartre, Foucault, Agamben, Freud, and Lacan can prove otherwise: either the other is equipped with contingent violence, in accordance with its intentions, as Derrida argues; or it is equipped with a priori violence, administered through the gaze, as Sartre shows. The violence of the other is linked to the violence of identity, as that which alienates the self from itself by depriving it of its fluctuating heterogeneity, whatever name it assumes.

Keywords: The other; Gaze; Sovereignty; Violence; Hospitality

The Event of Hospitality

As is well known, the notion of hospitality plays a key role in Emmanuel Levinas' philosophical discourse.[1] Hospitality is defined by means of two underlying terms: the Same (*le même*) and the Other (*l'autre*).[2] The term “sameness” refers mainly to the self-sameness of the subject, as first formulated in the certitude of Descartes's Cogito. The disintegration of knowledge in the process of casting doubt leads Descartes to the conclusion that the only thing that cannot be doubted is the existence of the doubting self. This is the ground from which he derives the subject's self-sameness, as well as his self-transparency, in the sense that there is nothing within him that is foreign to him, such as an unconscious. Kant expands the subject's self-sameness to include the entire world that is given to experience. The inclusion of experience within the limits of subjectivity is made possible by means of the pure concepts of understanding—the categories—which structure a meaningful world out of the raw data of sensory perception. Modern philosophy thus gives rise to a totalitarian worldview, according to which the experienced world is shaped and acquires its meaning and objective

1 Albeit his substantial use of this notion, Levinas was not the first to introduce the notion of hospitality to the philosophical discourse. This privilege is reserved, as it were, to Emmanuel Kant, who addressed this notion in his essay ‘Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch.' See Kant, ‘Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch', 82–85

2 Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 33–47.

validity in accordance with the economy of reason, in a process that Levinas terms, following Husserl, "thematization." The Cartesian-Kantian subject may thus resemble a voracious monster, whose economy of reason consumes the entire world for no other motive other than affirming the certitude of its own being. The goal of the economy of reason is thus the reduction of alterity to sameness. The economy of the Same may thus be likened to an allergy—that is, to the resistance of reason to all that is other than it, a resistance that elicits a violent struggle leading to rejection or imprisonment. This ongoing violence, exercised by the economy of the Same against all that is other, is identified by Levinas with war, as opposed to peace.[3] In such a state, there is obviously no room for hospitality.

Yet in pointing to the economy of the Same, Levinas points to something that cannot be reduced to its values. This is the other, and more specifically, his face.[4] The face is not a visible phenomenon, but rather an enigma that lies beyond phenomenality.[5] As such, it offers a first resistance to the murderous violence exercised by the economy of the Same, since it cannot be thematized by it. The face is not defined by its gaze but rather by its expression, establishing a pre-linguistic meaning. What is expressed by the face is the commandment "Thou shalt not kill," which is engraved upon the other's forehead. The other is thus possessed of a power to resist, yet this resistance is defined by the absence of resistance. Helplessness without violence—characteristic, for instance, of a baby's face—produces the greatest resistance to the violence exercised by the economy of the Same. The face is not only without violence, but is also nude. Nudity serves as a metaphor for the epiphany present within it, for its existence as a site of revelation. It is as if the face opened up, allowing for the emergence of an excess too great to be contained, an excess that is invisible and thus does not belong to the enlightened order of reason. The face disrupts the economy of the Same, since its nudity reveals something that cannot be assimilated into this economy. The finite face fails to contain the infinite nature of God revealed in it, while nevertheless allowing for His appearance. The face thus serves as a trace of God within the economy of the Same, while creating a fusion between philosophy and theology: the disruption of the economy of the Same by the face is a religious event: God is not revealed in the Burning Bush, but rather in the face of another human being. In this sense, Levinas' face is similar to the skull in Hans Holbein the Younger's painting *The Ambassadors* (1533): the skull, like the face, serves as a metaphor for a radical alterity that eludes calculative reason: in the case of the face, it is the alterity of God. In the case of the skull, it is the alterity of death. The face is thus transformed into a skull. For what is a skull if not a denuded face, stripped of its flesh and disclosed to its very bones.

Levinas ties the other person to the helpless other: the foreigner, the orphan or the widow. To these one may add the muselmann in the concentration camps, as outlined by Agamben, who will be addressed later on. And now to the most important question: What are we to do with the other? There exist two possibilities—war or peace: one can declare war on the other, either by excluding him from the economy of the Same or by assimilating him into it. In this manner, the economy of the Same shall be preserved, yet the alterity of the other shall be lost. Alternately, one can make peace with the other and host him within the economy of the Same, while paying the price of its traumatic disruption by him. This is precisely the meaning of hospitality as Levinas understands it: an unconditional response to the call of the helpless other, which also entails taking responsibility for him. Hospitality thus lies at the origin of ethics, which must be distinguished from morality: [6] morality is predicated upon laws, whether ones originating in the word of God as defined by religion or ones originating in an autonomous subject as defined by Kant. Ethics, by contrast, is grounded in the response to the call of the other, and as such cannot be defined by laws, since any legal formulation of it will inevitably lead to its loss.

Hospitality does not stem from blind obedience to the law. If it did, it would occur automatically, and would thus lose its validity. Indeed, not only does it not stem from obedience to the law, but at times it can even exist in conflict with it. The response to the other's call is a supreme ethical imperative, which transcends all moral laws. Hospitality thus occurs outside of the economy of the law, as well as outside the economy of self-preservation. As such, it must be thought of as an event: it cannot be deduced from an algorithm; its results cannot be foreseen, and one cannot calculate the benefits or damage to which it will lead. Any such calculation would undermine its eventual character.

3 Ibid., 304–7. See also Derrida, Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas, 78–101. Levinas, Totality and Infinity, 194–216.

4 Ibid.

5 Levinas, 'Phenomenon and Enigma', 61–74.

6 The terminological distinction between morality and ethics is not unequivocal: Spinoza refers to his moral philosophy as "ethics," and Kierkegaard refers to Protestant morality as "the ethical circle." On the other hand, the Hebrew term for "morality" (*musar*)—perhaps more aptly defines ethics as hospitality, due to the connotations of giving (*mesira*) and devotion (*hitmasrut*)—which share the same root word. Ethics, according to Levinas, places the subject in an a-symmetrical position, since the other always occupies a preferred stance. One can thus understand ethics in the sense invested in it by Levinas—as a form of unconditional devotion to the other, or unconditional hospitality. The term "morality," meanwhile, serves here to denote any moral philosophy predicated upon laws originating in God or in the subject.

Copyright© Pimentel D.

No less than an event, hospitality is also a gift. These two values are related, as they both exceed economy and calculation. As Levinas claims, hospitality as an unconditional response to the call of the other is what endows us with the gift of subjectivity. Being a subject does not mean being ensconced in a state of solipsism that excludes the other from the confines of subjectivity, in the spirit of Descartes. Rather, being a subject means declaring "Here I am" in response to the call of the other. In contrast to the Cartesian Cogito, which is conditioned upon nothing but itself, Levinas positions a self that is not itself as long as it does not respond to the call of the other. Responsibility towards the other lies at the origin of subjectivity. The self has no existence without the other, who is contained within the self as if it were its double. The event of hospitality thus shakes the very foundations of the subject, while endowing him with the gift of his selfhood.[7]

The Hostile Host

At this point one must address a fundamental question: is the other is indeed devoid of any type of violence? In order to address this question, we must turn now to Derrida's distinction between two types of hospitality—conditional and unconditional hospitality—and two types of guests: the first type of guest, the foreigner, is recognized by the institutions of the state; the second type of guest is a total stranger to them—the absolute other.[8] The distinction between them is clarified by the meaning of the Greek term for a foreigner, *xenos*, which is derived from the word *xenia*, meaning "agreement" or "contract." The foreigner is the one who is always already engaged in a contractual relationship with the state that is hosting him, and is thus eligible for hospitality in accordance with its laws. The foreigner is a legal entity recognized by the law. He is provided not only with privileges, but also with obligations, and can thus also be subject to accusations and punishment. He must be fluent in the language of the place, and possess a first name and a family name—in other words, a genealogy. Before he is provided with hospitality, one can demand of him to reveal his name, and command him to identify himself. The absolute other entertains no contractual relationship with the state, and as such has no legal status. He does not speak the language of the place, and has neither a first name nor a family name. He is not examined as a legal subject, and receives no inquiries concerning his identity. He bears no obligations, is granted no rights, and does not enjoy the privilege of hospitality. This is the status of the refuge, regardless of whether he is a Syrian refugee illegally entering Germany, a Mexican illegally entering the United States, or a Sudanese illegally entering Israel. If the refugee were an immigrant or a defector, he could be legally recognized and deported. Yet in the absence of a legal status, his deportation becomes illegal, since the law does not recognize him to begin with.

Conditional hospitality is provided under the aegis of the law to the foreigner who is recognized by the law, whereas unconditional hospitality is provided outside of the law to the absolute other who is not recognized by the law. Unconditional hospitality is not grounded in any right or anchored in any contract, and is provided to the absolute other without inquiring about his identity. This form of hospitality defies the law, and as such is beyond any form of economy or calculation. Yet despite the distinction between these two forms of hospitality, they also contaminate one another. Unconditional hospitality obeys one law, the law of hospitality, which is not supported by legal motivations, and in this sense it is a law without a law—*nomos a nomos*. Conditional hospitality obeys numerous laws. The two are thus aporetically entangled: the law of unconditional hospitality commands one to disobey the laws of conditional hospitality, whereas the many laws of conditional hospitality corrupt the law of unconditional hospitality. Yet the law of unconditional hospitality must be corrupted by the laws of conditional hospitality, for this is how it is rendered concrete. Otherwise, it would become abstract and utopian, and thus meaningless.[9] The possibility of pure hospitality is undermined, since it is always already corrupted by the law that prevents its occurrence. In this context, the precedence of justice over the law is similarly undermined: there is no pure justice that exists above and beyond the economy of the law. Justice can only appear within the economy of the law. It is always already corrupted by the law, and vice versa.

What is important for us is that a similar undecidability partakes of the question concerning the question of the violence of the other: the French word for "guest" (*hôte*) is etymologically related to words whose context is positive and devoid of violence, such as "hospice" (*hospice*), "hotel" (*hôtel*), "hospital" (*hôpital*), and "hospitality" (*hospitalité*). At the same time, it is also related to words whose context is violent and negative, such as the Latin "*hostis*" (guest, as well as enemy), "hostage" (*otage*), and "hostility" (*hostilité*). In this light, Derrida rephrases the word hospitality as "hos(t)pitality" (*hos(t)pitalité*)—where hostility is inscribed at the heart of hospitality.[10] However, the violent dimension of hospitality must not be ascribed exclusively to the host: for the encounter with the other is not only an encounter unfolding face to face, but also hand to hand. The gesture of hand-shaking is designed to confirm the assumption that the other whom I have agreed to host holds no malicious intentions in

7 Levinas, Time and the Other, 92.

8 Derrida and Dufourmantelle, Of Hospitality, 19–31.

9 Ibid., 75–81.

10 Ibid., 43–45.

 Copyright© Pimentel D.

my regard, is not carrying a weapon, and does not intend to kill me. But what if the other intrudes into my home without first asking for my consent? What if he pretends to be needy, only to transform me into his captive? The other can also be my enemy, the one who is hostile towards me, pursuing me in order to take my life. An aporetic tension thus exists not only within hospitality, but also within the figure of the other, who may be simultaneously non-violent and violent, pleasant and hostile, friend and foe.

This same tension exists in the film *The Beguiled*, which is set against the backdrop of the American Civil War. John McBurney (Colin Farrell), an injured Union soldier, finds refuge on the grounds of a southern girl's school run by Martha Farnsworth (Nicole Kidman). In this case, Levinas' assumption concerning the other's helplessness is undermined: the soldier, who has suffered an injury to his leg, is indeed helpless, yet is also capable of reclaiming his strength. The injured guest enjoys the hospitality of the women living alone on the school grounds. It is worth noting the inversion of gender roles occurring in this context: the powerful host is a woman, whereas the helpless guest is an injured man. The unfolding narrative vacillates between compassion and hostility, hospitality and captivity: on the one hand, the guest awakens the compassion of his female hosts, who care for him devotedly until he recovers. At the same time, he is an enemy whom they must disclose. In contrast to Kant's recommendation, the women lie to the authorities about his presence on the grounds, and thus prolong his stay under their protection. Yet it is soon revealed that the hiding of the guest is less related to ethics and more to the increasingly passionate sentiments arising between him and his hosts: during a nocturnal escapade in the bed of one of the women, the guest falls on the staircase and breaks his leg. The injury deteriorates, forcing the women to amputate the leg. Following the amputation, they lock their guest in his room fearing that he take revenge, for he views the amputation as a threat to his masculinity. After he manages to escape from the room, the guest gets hold of a revolver and terrorizes his hosts, who do not respond with equanimity: during the farewell dinner they hold in his honor, they poison him with a mushroom stew moments before he leaves the house in the company of one of the women, whom he promised to marry. What began with an act of hospitality ends in a bloodbath, as the guest is murdered by his hosts.

The other is thus not blameless. He does not only suffer violence, as Levinas would have it, but can also inflict it. He can act violently or non-violently, according to his intentions. He can have my best interests at heart, even at the price of endangering himself, or else act towards me with hostility, wishing for my death.

The Violence of the Gaze

Yet one can also argue that the violence of the other is not contingent, but is rather defined by an a priori status due to his position in my world. This is precisely the stance taken by Sartre: the other does not appear in my world as an object among other objects, for the simple reason that he possesses conscious awareness.[11] The other is an instance of being-for-itself (*être-pour-soi*)—that is, a subject—in contrast to being-in-itself (*être-en-soi*)—that is, an object. In this sense, the other resembles me: he is gifted with conscious awareness, and is consequently possessed both of freedom and of a world that belongs to him alone. As a subject endowed with consciousness, freedom and a world, he cannot be controlled and managed like the rest of the objects populating my world. He thus creates, in my world, a lacuna that is not subject to my will.

Not only is the other not subject to the economy of the Same, he even disrupts its due course. Yet whereas Levinas identifies this as a blessing, Sartre sees it as a curse: by disrupting the economy of the Same, the other does not endow me with the gift of subjectivity, but rather robs me of it. For the lacuna that he inserts into the economy of the Same serves as a sort of drainage hole, through which objects belonging to my world flow into his. My world and the other's world cannot coexist, and the constitution of one world always comes at the expense of the other's world. This process leads to the growing disintegration of my own world, which comes under the threat of total dissolution. In his very essence, the other is a thief stealing not only my world—but also, as we shall soon see, my very subjectivity.

The theft of the world occurs with the assistance of the gaze, the main category through which Sartre conceptualizes the other. The moment that the other's gaze rests on an object included in my world, it is appropriated into his world, as it is inserted into the matrix of his intentions concerning its possible uses. Yet the other does not only observe the things populating my world—he also observes me. What distinguishes the other is the fact that he is not only observed by me, but can also observe me in turn. "'Being-seen-by-the-Other,'" remarks Sartre, "is the truth of 'seeing-the-Other.'"[12] The essence of the other is thus defined by his ability to transform me into an object through his gaze. Beyond the unbearable nature of this situation, which haunts me and can provoke embarrassment, it also subjects my very being to an ontological metamorphosis, transforming me from a subjective entity (for-itself), which is possessed of freedom and of a world, into an objective entity that is dispossessed of them (in-itself). The other's gaze does not only disenfranchise

11 Sartre, Being and Nothingness, 252–302.

12 Ibid., 257.

Copyright© Pimentel D.

me of my world and the objects that populate it, but also transforms me into an object—a thing in the world rather than a thing with a world. I am no longer a subject possessed of freedom and a world of his own, but rather an object existing in the world of the other, subject to his use like any other object. The other's gaze is thus an alienating gaze: it alienates me from my world and the objects that populate it. Even worse, it alienates me from my very selfhood. The self can indeed appropriate the other. Yet this is a double-edged sword, since the other's gaze can also appropriate the self. This gaze—the appropriating and alienating gaze—is precisely the gaze that Levinas effaces from the face of the other. If this were not the case, one could not state that the other suffers violence, yet does not inflict violence.

The fundamental difference between Levinas and Sartre's conceptualizations of the other revolves around the question of violence: Levinas' other does no violence, whereas Sartre's other is filled with violence, armed as he is with the powerful weapon of the gaze. Whereas for Levinas the encounter with the other provides me with the gift of subjectivity due to my response to his call, for Sartre the encounter with the other strips away my own subjectivity, transforming me into an object. The act of hospitality vis-à-vis the other becomes, for Sartre, a duel between one consciousness and another, as each aspires to annihilate the other by gaining more freedom at the expense of the other.

This sense of alienation from myself, when I am appropriated as a pawn by the other; this metamorphosis that is imposed on the subject; this annihilation of subjectivity—is there any greater violence? This is not a contingent violence that depends on the intentions of the other, but rather an a priori violence stemming from the other's position in my world. There is no distinction between violent others and non-violent others. All others are violent. There is no face-to-face encounter that is without violence. Every encounter is a life-or-death battle for the very existence of subjectivity. Hell is other people due to the self's objectification by the other.

This argument also has an ontological context: much like the Platonic Idea, the gaze serves as an agent of fixation: the Idea fixates the flow of sensory experience, whereas the gaze of the other fixates the self's unconditional freedom, reducing the self to an entity with a distinct identity and permanence. The gaze is violent in the sense that it divests the self of its heterogeneity, of the possibilities available to it, i.e., of its very freedom. The violence of the gaze thus partakes of what can be termed the violence of identity: the very acquisition of any identity—be it that of a subject or of an object—involves its fixation as something permanent and stable—that is, something that is self-identical, which does not include within itself any contradictory element. This fixation involves the negation of any sort of heterogeneity, which does not accord with the economy of identity.

The Violence of Sovereignty

This is true concerning the gaze of a concrete other, whom I meet by chance in the street or plan to meet in a conference room. Yet more than the gaze of a concrete other, what is at stake here is the very possibility of being gazed at. This is the subject of Sartre's distinction between the gaze and the eye: the eye belongs to a concrete other, whereas the gaze becomes a general name for the very possibility of being looked at. Who, or more precisely, what, is the other who has constant access to the possibility of gazing at me? In contrast to the concrete other, who has a face and a name, one can position the big Other, who amplifies the objectifying effect of the gaze. The big Other is detached from any concrete time and place, acquiring a sort of transcendental status. We are not exposed only to the gazes of concrete others, but are also constantly exposed to the gaze of the faceless, nameless big Other.

This is primarily he gaze of God, which follows me wherever I go and from which I cannot hide. The gaze of God is omnipresent and penetrates all partitions. It can even penetrate my flesh, observing my inner organs. Sartre raises a possibility that was not considered by Levinas: not every encounter with the other occurs face-to-face, so that the gazer is also the one being gazed at and vice versa. There can be encounters in which the gaze is unilateral, and the other's returned gaze is precluded for one reason or another: it is possible for someone to gaze at another who does not return his gaze because he is not aware of being gazed at. This is the witness. It is also possible for someone to be aware that he is being gazed at, and to want to be observed without returning the gaze. This is the exhibitionist. Finally, it is possible for someone to be aware of being gazed at, but to be prevented from returning the gaze. This is the suspect in the interrogation room, who is exposed to the gaze of the interrogators observing him through semi-opaque glass.

This is also the divine gaze: the God whose face is concealed is the one who always gazes at me, while I can never gaze back at him. God cannot be seen even when he is encountered, as in the scene of the Burning Bush (Exodus 3), in which Moses is only capable of observing God from behind, as He departs. God is thus elevated to the status of a pure subject: since he can never be gazed at, he can never be objectified. Man, by contrast, will never attain such a status, since he is constantly exposed not only to the gaze of others, but above all to the gaze of God. This is the source of Adam's shame, which is provoked by God's question: "Where art thou?" Shame, as Sartre argues, does not stem from Adam's recognition of the primeval sin, or of his nakedness, but from his objectification by the divine gaze. The purpose of being

Copyright© Pimentel D.

clothed is thus not to hide the naked body, but rather to serve as a partition that will prevent the naked body from being objectified by the divine gaze.

Yet God is not the only big Other gazing at us. Sartre's discussion of the gaze takes place in the midst of World War II. His anxiety concerning the gaze is anchored in the actual threat posed by France's Nazi occupiers. One can thus also identify the big Other with the totalitarian sovereign, in this case the Nazi sovereign, who strives for total control over the public sphere.[13]

Totalitarian sovereignty goes hand in hand with the transition to a new form of governance, which Foucault terms "bio-political" sovereignty. This form of sovereignty does not limit itself to the ordering of life, but demands the privilege of nourishing it on the one hand, and of ending it on the other hand.[14] This process is related to the treatment of life in its purely biological context. It involves the transformation of the historicist term "people" (*Volk*), which is considered in terms of the abstract categories of character and spirit, into a "population," which is considered in terms of material categories of quantity and number, so that it may be more closely surveyed. Bio-political sovereignty reached its fullest expression in the Nazi state. In this context, one can understand its racial policy, which served as a tool for surveying the population by instituting a categorical distinction between those whose life is to be nourished, and those whose life must be ended. On the one hand, those worthy of living were encouraged to lead a healthy lifestyle and to foster the Nazi ideal of beauty. A high birthrate was also fostered through planned encounters between senior S.S. soldiers and young Aryan women. At the same time, racial legislation, enjoying scientific support, leading to the systematic identification of those whose life must be ended.

Initially, these were members of the German people who did not confirm to the dictates of racial purity: the disabled and the mentally ill. At first, they were forcefully sterilized. Later, their systematic extermination began under medical supervision in gas chambers located in hospitals, as part of a secret plan known as T4.[15] At the same time, the practice of purification was directed at the Jews, who were distinguished from the Aryans and from half-Jews. As Agamben notes, the road to death unfolded through a gradual process of humiliation: Jews were first stripped of their citizenship and later deported, finally becoming prisoners in work camps and concentration camps. The last stop was the muselmann, that walking corpse that had lost its human dignity, faltering along the camp paths as it awaited its death in the gas chambers. Beyond the muselmann there is nothing but death, whose dignity has similarly been expropriated by banalization and technological processes.

The muselmann is the name given to the human body reduced to raw material by the big Other as the bio-political sovereign. As such, it serves as an extreme example of the manner in which this sovereign impresses his power on the body. Yet the muselmann does not belong solely to the foreign planet of Auschwitz. Bio-political sovereignty reached its climax at Auschwitz, yet its spectacle of power is still present today, impressing itself on the body of each and every one of us. So, for instance, the Zionist sovereign sprayed the bodies of its incoming citizens with DDT as they arrived in the country, and scarred them with vaccines administered at schools. The bio-political sovereign creates a new sphere that is one of neither life nor death but of survival, leading to the creation of a new life form that Agamben calls "bare life." The muselmann's struggle to survive in the death camps is not different, in essence, from that of the refugee knocking at the gates of sovereign states that refuse to let him in. Moreover, not only refugees are currently subject to an existential struggle to survive. Common citizens are also increasingly threatened by the destructiveness of the market economy, which has led to the rise of tycoons and the eradication of the middle class. In this context, it seems that the reality TV show "Survival" not only provides its viewers with a daily portion of escapism, but also serves as a mirror for their own daily struggle to survive.

The structure of sovereign power is remarkably reflected in Diego Velázquez's painting *Las Meninas* (1656): at its center is the king's daughter—the Infanta—surrounded by her ladies-in-waiting. The figure of the sovereign—the king of Spain—remains outside the frame. Yet despite his absence, his invisible gaze dictates the arrangement of the figures throughout the pictorial space. In this manner, the composition exemplifies the panoptic practice of surveillance associated with the bio-political sovereign: he himself lacks visibility, yet his power is dispersed throughout the entire sphere. Like God, nothing is concealed from his gaze.[16]

This is all the more true in the age of late capitalism, in which the public sphere is pervaded by cameras: on roads, in shopping malls, airports, and even on the beach, the sovereign's gaze ceaselessly surveils the citizens in order to ensure their proper conduct, while encoding it as biometric data and storing it in databases. Every transgression is met with a sanction, whether in the form of a parking ticket or of being held up at a border checkpoint. This state of affairs has reached its culmination in China, where the

13 Ibid., 295.

14 Agamben, Remnants of Auschwitz, 82–6.

15 The plan was named after the address where its Berlin offices were located: Tiergarten Str. 4.

16 Foucault, The Order of Things, 3–18.

Copyright© Pimentel D.

network of cameras in the public sphere has been extended to the maximum: the citizens of China cannot elude the close surveillance of the sovereign, which allows for the classification of their conduct and thus for the determination of their status, giving rise to a new form of dictatorship—the digital dictatorship. In the West, meanwhile, surveillance has taken on a new form in the shape of mega-corporations such as Google and Facebook, which closely surveil the online behavior of citizens, encoding their surfing patterns by means of algorithms and offering them for sale. In this case, every transgression of accepted patterns of conduct leads to sanctions such as blocked access and the removal of user contents. The subject in the twenty-first century has thus been objectified into a consumer commodity bearing two functions: the reception of messages that solicit endless consumption, and the emission of the fiscal values required for such consumption. Between the time of reception and the time of emission, the subject consumes all of his energy at work, which ensures his continual participation in the magic circle of consumption.

The Idealizing Other

Yet is it also possible that the face not only blocks the gaze directed at it, but also directs it back to its point of origin? Is it possible that the face is not simply opaque, but is also reflective? This is what psychoanalysis would have us believe. In his essay on narcissism, Freud argues that the libido, like Janus' face, is oriented in two opposing directions:[17] The libido of the object is directed to objects of desire in the world, allowing for love and thus for the survival of the species; and the libido of the self turns inward, thus ensuring the preservation of the self. Narcissism must thus be understood as an enhancement of the libido of the self at the expense of the libido of the object, which can lead to a loss of interest in the world. Yet we were all once narcissists, given the fact that the libidinal economy of the infant is auto-erotic. The child is no less narcissistic than the infant, being convinced that he is the center of the world. Yet the cruel reality of life involves the painful recognition that this is not the case. "Everyone," as Oscar Wilde puts it, "is born a king, and most people die in exile."

The recognition of the inevitable loss of primary narcissism is accompanied by a longing for compensation, by means of both self-love and the narcissistic idealization of our children, which Freud identifies with secondary narcissism. Yet in order to love ourselves—and this is the key point—we must idealize ourselves by repressing our faults and glorifying our virtues. Freud calls this idealized self "the Ego-ideal." For the sake of self-idealization, the self may also seek another person to emulate. This person, whom Freud calls the "ideal-Ego," is internalized by the self to the point of becoming part of it. The Freudian categories of the Ego-ideal and the ideal-Ego thus contaminate one another: in both cases, what is at stake is an ideal model of the self, whether one originating within the self (Ego-ideal) or one that is external to it (ideal-Ego).

17 Freud, 'On Narcissism: An Introduction', 67–102.

The phenomenon of narcissism sheds new light on the other as an ideal figure which the self seeks to resemble. The face of the other, in this case, is not an epiphanic sphere of appearance, as Levinas claims, but rather an opaque sphere of reflection. The gaze directed at the other is returned to the self and exercises a powerful effect on it, which amounts to the occlusion of its denigrated aspects and the assimilation of the other's ideal aspects. One way or another, the effect is one of giving form: like the seal whose outlines are imprinted on wax, the other's ideal figure is inscribed upon the self and contributes to its shaping as a whole, harmonious, and necessarily ideal entity, which exists at a great distance from the real self, or primal self (*Ur-ich*), as Freud calls it.

The resemblance between the self's gaze at the ideal other and the gaze at the mirror serves Lacan in formulating the mirror stage, in which the reflection in the mirror is not only returned to the self, but also completes it.[18] Yet how can the reflection of the self supersede its origin? For the reflection is a copy, and the copy is always inferior to its origin. Kant sees the mirror reflection as a visual distortion of the body not only due to its elimination of depth, but also due to the inversion of left and right. Plato views the being of sensory being as validated by its reflection in the supra-sensory being, that is, the Idea, yet this faint reflection never equals the original.

The complementary effect can be explained by the split in the subject between physical existence and psychic existence: on the one hand, the self is present in the world (*Umwelt*) as a physical entity with a tangible form. At the same time, the self has an intangible inner world (*Innenwelt*). The mirror serves as a point of encounter between the two worlds: the baby facing it experiences the insoluble gap between the chaos of its psychic being and the formal perfection of its physical being. In this sense, the reflection of the subject in the mirror (as a physical entity) is more complete than its origin (as a psychic entity). Much like the faces projected onto featureless dolls in artist Tony Oursler's video works, the formal perfection of the self as a physical entity is projected through the gaze returning from the mirror to the self as a psychic entity, and endows it with form.

18 Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', 75–81. See also Lacan, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique, 73–162.

 Copyright© Pimentel D.

Lacan thus transposes the procedure of constitution from phenomenology to psychoanalysis, and, accordingly, from the object to the subject: in the first case, it is the constitution of the ontological excess of the phenomenon into a distinct object. In the second case, it is the constitution of the instinctual excess of the self as a psychic entity into a distinct subject. In both cases, what is at stake is writing in the broad sense, as a form of setting limits and giving form:[19] in the phenomenological context, consciousness inscribes its formal impression on phenomenality. In the psychoanalytic context, the self as a physical entity inscribes, with the help of the mirror, its formal impression on the self as a psychic entity.

The ideal figure reflected in the mirror joins other ideal entities such as the Imago, the Gestalt, and the Genus, which enable the self to establish its identity based on its affinity with them. This ideal figure is identified by Lacan with the imaginary self, whereas the pre-mirror psychic entity is identified with the real self. The ideal self reflected in the mirror is imaginary in the sense that it contains elements of illusion and misrecognition, while the pre-mirror self it what really is. On this basis, Lacan extrapolates the imaginary register in its entirety: anything presented as a whole, ideal entity—regardless of whether it is an object or a subject—is an illusion involving a misrecognition of its inevitable lack.

The formative function of the ideal self is thus similar to that of the Platonic Idea: the latter shapes sensory being, while the former shapes psychic being. Yet this involves a double difference: for Plato, the origin of the perfect ideal is the eidetic entity (the Idea), whereas for Lacan the origin is a physical being (the imaginary self). For Plato, the ideal being is identified with what truly is (the Idea), whereas for Lacan, the ideal being is identified with illusion (the imaginary self), whereas what truly is, what does not involve pretense, is the chaos of the pre-mirror self.

The baby looking in the mirror is indeed full of joy, since its ideal reflection in it marks the beginning of its constitution as a distinct self. Yet this joy involves a process of alienation from the pre-mirror real self, if this primordial form of being may indeed be called a "self." Overshadowing the real self is the veil of illusion spread by the imaginary self, which causes the self to be alienated from its unmediated affinity to itself, from what Freud referred to as auto-erotic narcissism. The formation of the imaginary self thus involves the negation of the real self. And what is negation if not a form of violence—the violence of identity—which, for Lacan, is embodied by imposing the imagined perfection of the ideal self upon the flesh of the real self, just as the digital model of an object shapes the formation of the material in a 3-D printer.

Conclusion

The gap between Lacan and Sartre is thus reduced: Lacan indeed critiques Sartre for the negation involved in his theory.[20] Yet the negating gaze of Sartre's other is reflected in Lacan's gaze being reflected in the mirror: in both cases, the gaze is accompanied by a function of negation, whether it is the gaze of the other or the gaze of that imagined other peering at me from the mirror. What is negated is a primordial form of being, whether we call it by the name given to it by Sartre—freedom, or by its Lacanian name—the Real.

The analytics of the other has shown that the other is not helpless. The other is not a muselmann. Violence is embedded in him either contingently, as a function of his undecidability, as Derrida would have it, or a priori, on the basis of the position he occupies in my world, as Sartre would have it. His gaze—whether that of the other person, of God, of the sovereign, or of the mirror image—is violently inscribed upon the self, while objectifying and alienating it.

References

1. Agamben G (1999) Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive. Heller-Roazen D (Trans.). New York: Zone Books.
2. Derrida J (1999) Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas. Pascale-Anne B, Naas M (Trans.). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
3. Derrida J, Dufourmantelle A (2000) Of Hospitality. Bowlby R (Trans.). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
4. Foucault M (2002) The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences. London and New York: Routledge.
5. Freud S (1914) On Narcissism: An Introduction. In: The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. 14th (Vol.), (1914–1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works. Strachey J (Trans.), London: Hogarth Press, pp: 67–102.
6. Kant E (2006) Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch. In: Kleingeld P (Ed), Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History. Colclasure DL (Trans.), New Haven and London: Yale University Press, pp: 67-109..

19 On writing in the broad sense, see Pimentel, Heidegger with Derrida, 204–6.

20 Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 84.

Copyright© Pimentel D.

7. Lacan J (2006) The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience. In: Ecrits. Fink B (Trans.), New York and London: W.W. Norton, pp: 75–81.
8. Lacan J (1988) The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953–1954. Forrester J (Trans.). New York: W. W. Norton,
9. Lacan, Jacques. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton, 1981.
10. Levinas E (1987) Phenomenon and Enigma. In: Collected Philosophical Papers. Lingis A (Trans), Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, pp: 61–74.
11. Levinas E (1987) Time and the Other. Cohen RA (Trans). Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
12. Levinas E (1969) Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority. Lingis A (Trans.). Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
13. Pimentel D (2019) Heidegger with Derrida: Being Written. New York: Palgrave.
14. Sartr JP (1992) Being and Nothingness. Barnes HB (Trans.). New York: Washington Square Press.
15. (2017) The Beguiled. directed by Sofia Coppola. San Francisco: American Zoetrope Productions.

Copyright© Pimentel D.