

## **The Relation of Power and Violence of Gaze in No Exit**

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### **Extended Abstract**

#### **1. Introduction**

Sartre's famous line in *No Exit* "Hell is other people" (p. 45) stands as a direct confirmation of the power of Others. In fact, "[o]ur perception within the field of the Other is therefore always a battle with the Gaze: we struggle with the limitations of the structure that is laid out for us" (Grootenboer, 2012. p.45). To spin a piece of common thread intertwining all entities together right at the outset, Burt (2008) asserts that: "When validation and identity derives from others, others become hell, a state where torture is not meted out by devils but self-inflicted and inescapable" (p. 411). Therefore, under the gaze of the other person, our identities withdraw into the shell of reduction. We no more exist by ourselves, but our lives seem to be entangled in the labyrinthine network of others' existences.

The story of *No Exit* turns around three people trapped in a setting resembling a hotel room in Hell. Finding themselves situated in the endless life after death free of earthly boundaries, they are seemingly given the desired liberty to define who they may be. But as it happens they are unable to do so because of the power of the Others in the room.

#### **2. Methodology**

This paper adopts Sartre's theories about gaze and individuality in the light of Foucault's insights (1997) about power relations. We can follow the reiteration of this commitment in Boileau's thesis (2004) as well. He has acknowledged the vote in favor of "[t]he gaze and discipline of the Other actively weave individuals into the relations of power," as interspersed among his observations (1998, p. 13).

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### 3. Discussion

Sartre's famous play *No Exit*, as it was initially entitled *les autres* (*The Others*), betokens the sweeping declaration of Sartre that Garcin yields to near the end of the play that "Hell is other people" (p.30). So the very title shows Hell and Others are aligned with the very same attributes that frame their perimeters. Lois Gordon brings to light the significance of the original title: "For those who have spent their lives catering to or dependent on the world of Others, hell is indeed, and appropriately, other people, with an emphasis on 'other'" (Fahy & King, 2005, p. 170). And as it is obvious Sartre's *No Exit*, treats "not only with life at its limit (namely, death) but also with the utter Hell of human relationships" (Solomon, 2006. p.51).

The story of *No Exit* pivots on a very few characters, "each take turns attempting to gain control of the situation through their looks" (Brunner, 1997. p.60). The characters of Garcin, Estelle and Inez see themselves helpless at the surveillance of the Other's mutual gaze, their destiny becomes directed by their power, as Inez's words reverberates and epitomizes this state, "each of us will act as torturer of the two others" (Sartre, 1989.p. 49). And what the Others make of them in fact, will torture their self-identity (Solomon, 2006).

In the light of the Other's habit of superintendingly defining one's body, it conglomerates the jurisdiction of gaze with power relations. And as it does not escape Foucault's notice "power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (Foucault, 1997.p.63).

The body that is enslaved to the gaze and judgment of other individuals, its conscience is stubbornly under their surveillance to shape its own morality. Carving out their beings in the grips of a judging look ushers the three of characters in the labyrinths of objectifications. This happens while the comfort of their solitude is totally shattered and in consequence they grapple with conflict of freedom.

The characters find themselves subject to the look of the Other. As they are conscious of the presence of someone else, another consciousness, who is watching and scrutinizing them, their individuality is tampered and flirted with what Sartre calls being-for-others. As he claims in *Being and Nothingness* "the Other as a *look*", enforces the subjects to experience their "inapprehensible being-for-others in the form of a *possession*. . . . the Other's look fashions [their] body in its nakedness, causes it to be born, sculpts it, produces it as it *is*, sees it as [they] shall never see it" (p. 364). INEZ's words give credit to the Other's look that can harness the subject's individuality in a volley of abuse: "And why shouldn't you 'tame' *me*?" (Sartre, 1989.p.55)

As pointed out earlier, the unstable power relations have given rise to individual's freedom where he can defy or act on his own from the power relation. Naturally, "power relations are not equivalent to a physical determination where there is no choice available" (Boileau, 2004.p.81). Individuals within the realm of power relations settle upon enlisting the game, or withdrawing from it. "Once within the relation, individuals continue to have the possibility of reasoned choice and refusal" (Boileau, 2004.p.82).As it goes, the power relations cannot subsist on reluctant participants.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Sartre claims that people relate to themselves and to one another through either looking or being looked at. When they give false images of themselves, they assume to be no more than the objects of their own look or confine themselves up in their own subjectivity.

The power that Look exerts on the body becomes visible to the naked eye through the particular discipline to which the body is exposed and henceforth inclined. By tailoring a particular use of the body for a certain atmosphere, the gaze casts its net of power over one's individuality, freedom and judgment to fix and define them on its whim.

A final recapitulation binds all the above-mentioned claims together. Accordingly appearing as atomized and alienated individuals "annihilating each other through their Look" (Boileau, 1998, p. 219; Boileau, 2004, p. 78); Garcin, Estelle and Inez can't follow an ethics of authentic existence lending credence to the idea of false reciprocity.

**Key Words:** Gaze, Freedom, Alienation, Self, Objectifying, Relations of power, Others.

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