Shame and desire. Intersubjectivity in Finnish visual culture

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Intersubjectivity and Otherness

In this sense, reciprocity is a permanent structure of every object: defined as things in advance, by collective praxis, we transcend our being by producing ourselves as men among men and we allow ourselves to be integrated by everyone else to the extent that they are to be integrated into our own project. And since the historical content of my project is conditioned by the fact of my already being amongst men, and being recognised by them in advance as a man of a certain kind of milieu. With my place in society already fixed by meanings engraved in matter, reciprocity is always concrete.

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*
Dialectical Reason

As we have seen in the previous chapter, in order for shame to occur, there must be a relationship between the self and the Other. Shame is 'shared' by everyone who has the concept of the Other, and therefore reveals that the structure of self-consciousness is necessarily intersubjective. This structure of intersubjectivity, however, can be criticized for being essentialist and asocial: especially (post)structuralist thinkers such as Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Lacan condemn Sartre's existentialism in favour of the centered subject that is mastered by, rather than the master of, language and thought structures. For instance, in his treatise of the development of an intersubjective world for the subject, Lacan extends Sartre's discussion of shame and the look of the Other in the following way:

Sartre (...) brings [the gaze] into function in the dimension of the existence of others. Others would remain suspended in the same, partially de-realizing conditions that are, in Sartre's definition, those of objectivity, were it not for the gaze. The gaze, as conceived by Sartre, is the gaze by which I am surprised—surprised in so far as it changes all the perspectives, the lines of force, of my world, orders it, from the point of nothingness where I am, in a sort of radiated reticulation of the organisms.

The problem with Sartre's formulation, according to Lacan, is that it defines the subject as the unique centre of reference, and does not take into account the symbolic nature of subjectivity, the way in which the individual is subjected to the order of language and the societal imperatives of his or her environment. In this process, the look (or 'the gaze' as Lacanian scholars usually translate the term le regard, while in connection with Sartre one usually talks about the Look) is of
fundamental importance. The look/gaze does not originate from one's human counterpart, as in Sartre's thinking, but from the realm of the linguistic unconscious.

Lacan is thus not wholly in agreement with Sartre's view of the look/gaze and its role in the development of intersubjectivity. Sartre's analysis of the gaze is not a correct phenomenological analysis, Lacan argues, because Sartre defines the gaze as a presence of other persons. For Lacan the gaze pre-exists the subject (in the same way as it might be said of language) and is, in this respect, the manifestation of the Symbolic within the field of vision. In Sartre's example of the voyeur he speaks of being seen peeking, but according to Lacan, it is not merely a gaze that the voyeur apprehends, but "a gaze imagined by me in the field of the Other," a gaze that reveals that the voyeur is a "subject sustaining himself in a function of desire."4

Lacan provides a different account of intersubjectivity by introducing two notions of otherness. There is the Other(A) with the capital letter (le grand Autre), the one who sees without being seen (not a person), and before which all others are merely others with lower case letters (the other persons, the Sartrean Other).5 Lacan illustrates this with a story of himself in his early twenties, on a boat with a group of Breton fishermen, when one of them points out a sardine can to him:

It was a small can, a sardine can. It floated there in the sun (...) it glittered in the sun. And Petit-Jean said to me—*You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!* (...) [I]f what Petit-Jean said to me (...) had any meaning, it was because in a sense, it was looking at me, all the same. (...) I, at that moment—as I appeared to these fellows who were earning their livings with great difficulty, in the struggle with what for them was
a pitiless nature—looked like nothing on earth. In short, I was rather out of place in the picture.\textsuperscript{6}

The sardine can looks back at Lacan, because it is situated at the level of ‘the point of light’, the point at which everything looks back at the subject. The sardine can looks back, because it is situated at the point on which the subject cannot have a point of view, the gaze in the field of the Other(A). By this example, Lacan establishes shame ("I looked like nothing on earth") as the operation of the gaze in the field of the Other(A), in the field of the Symbolic, which, for Lacan, is the foundation of intersubjectivity. The Lacanian notion of the Other(A) thereby assigns considerable importance to the Symbolic: our visibility is not merely a brute condition but a consequence of our possession of a symbolic system. Our original relations with others come into existence at the time of the subject’s entry into the Symbolic order, the order of language and culture. This occurs simultaneously with the birth of the unconscious, and this is the reason why (to quote Lacan’s famous phrase) “the unconscious is structured like a language.”\textsuperscript{7}

However, the entry into the Symbolic splits the subject from the ‘primal object’, the infant’s original experience of wholeness (Sartre would say that the subject loses his or her ‘original spontaneity’), leading to the emergence of a desire for fullness (in this sense, Lacan’s concept of desire is very close to that of Sartre, since it is associated with lack of being) or the desire for the Other(A). As already said, the Other(A) is not a person but the linguistic unconscious, “the locus of the signifier”\textsuperscript{8} that can be equated with discourse and the Symbolic Order. The subject’s desire for the Other(A) is frustrated since there is a fundamental absence at the centre of language. Since every sign indicates the absence of the object it stands for, this intensifies the frustration of the infant, since the infant now has to accept his or her essential lack: we never acquire what
we so passionately desire. Hence, we are compelled to seek substitute objects for our desire.

For Lacan, the origin of the gaze itself is non-human, but the gaze is nevertheless socially codified through what Lacan calls the 'cultural screen’. The gaze assists the subject’s psychic processes of introjective and projective identification, through which the subject assimilates what is desirable about him- or herself to the self, and exteriorizes what the subject cannot accept about him- or herself outside the self. Therefore, the gaze functions also in ego-constitutive activities. As Kaja Silverman explains it:

"[T]he gaze also comes into play in a range of other activities whereby the conventional subject fortifies him- or herself against lack, activities which are also constitutive of ‘difference’. Most classically, the subject procures for him- or herself a fantasmatic identity, whereby he or she attempts to fill the void out of which desire proceeds. The mirror stage [the stage at which the subject (mis)recognizes his or her self in his or her mirror image] gives us, of course, our primary model for conceptualizing this particular visual misrecognition, which denies the alterity and exteriority of the constituting image."

Yet despite Lacan’s insistence on the significance of intersubjectivity, he has lost the Other as another subject. The Other as another subject does not appear anywhere here, merely as an object with an ego-constitutive function. Furthermore, Lacan has not only lost the Other, he has lost the subject as well. As Lacanian ego is purely and simply an imaginary mirage (a subjectivity based on identification with a ‘mirror’ image that gives the subject an illusion of a bodily integrity which he or she in fact does not possess), there is an adoption of the image of the Other in the place where there should be the self. Since the subject literally takes (misrecognises) the
mirror image for him- or herself, the Lacanian mirror refers not to the discovery of the other person as a subject, but to the alienation of subjectivity in the Other.

This means that Lacan regards both the self and the Other as objects, not conscious subjects like Sartre. This is why, in Lacanian thinking, there can be no subject-object alteration (the self is always the 'subject' that uses the Other as an object) and no connection with the world. Everything in human subjectivity is reduced to unconscious linguistic structure without intentionality. Even the subject’s entrance into the Symbolic order does not provide him or her with a connection to the world. For Lacan language ‘speaks’ the person, and the subject is merely a “plaything of linguistic structure,”¹⁰ while for Sartre language arises with the subject’s need to express him- or herself in a world where there are others.¹¹

While in Sartre’s account of intersubjectivity there is an eternal conflict, a *separation* between the subject and the Other, in Lacan there is an obliteration of boundaries, a confusion of identities between the subject and the Other. Both Sartre and Lacan’s view of intersubjectivity is quite pessimistic: either the subject cannibalistically consumes the Other in an attempt to overcome his or her fundamental lack (as in Lacanian thinking) or the subject aims to possess the freedom of the Other who has the power of making the subject into an object (as in Sartrean thinking). Thus while Lacan finally maintains an integral transcendental subjectivity, escaped into a merger with a self-same Other, Sartre’s subject is doomed to unbearable loneliness.¹²

Is there no solution from this conflict of self with the Other? Is there no way to dissolve this classic opposition of subject and object, and to formulate a model of intersubjectivity that would respect the externality of the Other and at the same time connect with the Other? Even though in Sartre’s account the constitutive function of the Other to the self is to some extent limited to a threat, Roland Aronson has noted that
there are two opposing impulses in Sartre’s philosophy formulated in *Being and Nothingness*, “one leading towards the world and the other away from it.”\(^1\) While in popular conceptions of Sartre’s philosophy the latter impulse is emphasized, Sartre elsewhere (especially in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*) moves away from it and replaces the idea of self-sufficient consciousness with the idea of the subject in a socio-material field that influences the subject’s sense of self through a dialectical, collective-based logic. As Nik Farrell Fox puts it, in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*

Sartre (...) moves towards a more dialectical understanding on subject and object in which the subject is engaged, immersed, and permeable to the world, both transcendent and material.\(^1\)

To what extent, then, can we get new insight into national cinema through Sartre’s dialectical logic? In what ways can national cinema epitomize the intersubjective, dialectical relationship between the self and the Other in a socio-material field? In what ways does the film spectator participate in this process? And to what degree is it possible to recognize and respect the subjectivity of the Other in one’s field of vision in the dialectical process? In this chapter, I shall provide a dialectical reading of Aki Kaurismäki’s *Drifting Clouds* (1996) in order to give it a socio-historical dimension. Through Sartre’s notion of communality, I shall show how the process of identification in the cinematic experience can be dialectical instead of a two-way mirror, a ‘common project’ that recognizes and respects both the freedom of the self and of the Other, and that allows for authentic relations with the Other.
Triadic Communalitv

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre claims that even though the subject can experience a feeling of ‘we’, it is an individual feeling rather than “an intersubjective consciousness and a new being which surpasses and encircles its parts as a synthetic whole.”¹⁵ This means that one does not encounter the other subject in the we-experience, but that the two subjects are united in a purely external way (for instance in interest or a shared action toward a common goal). Yet in his book *Critique of Dialectical Reason* Sartre extends his analysis of inter-subjectivity from dyadic self/Other relationships to triadic social and community relationships. In this book, Sartre writes that the community, like subjectivity, is dependent on the look of the Other. If I am walking with a person in the street, and we are looked at by another, we become a community in a sense of community-as-object. This means that a community is constituted as such by the subjective awareness of a third party, be it a “master, (...) a feudal lord, (...) a bourgeois or a capitalist.”°¹⁶ This means that while dyadic relations are the necessary ground for subjectivity (as described in *Being and Nothingness*), “the real relation between men is necessarily triadic.”°¹⁷ This is so because it is the third party that “makes reciprocity visible to itself,”°¹⁸ providing the social context and perspective which allows for authentic relations with others.

Consider, in this light, the following case of shame. In November 2001, the International Documentary Filmfestival Amsterdam showed a Finnish documentary *The Idle Ones* (2001) by Susanna Helke and Virpi Suutari. The documentary deals with youth unemployment in Kainuu, the area at Finland’s eastern border, at the turn of the millennium, when the economy was thriving in the rest of Finland. The documentary concentrates on the experiences of three young men,
Hapa, Lötkö and Bodí, who fill their days with shooting rats at the refuse dump, cruising around the town centre, drinking, playing video games, and fishing. The documentary starts with the portrayal of Hapa, who is still sleeping at noon when his mother comes to visit. She is now on vacation, so she dusts, cleans the windows, and changes the curtains, while Hapa is getting up. In the next sequence, Lötkö is waking up, and without even getting out of the bed he lights a cigarette, turns on the television and calls his buddy on the telephone: “Morning! Are you still sleeping? How long will it take? Come get the car keys and get me a pizza. I’m starving. Get me a pizza. I’m starving, and there’s no food here.”

As the documentary from the very beginning took a rather unvarnished dive into the daily lives of these three young men, I, in the audience, was sinking down in my seat, ashamed that my countrymen were confirming all the negative cultural stereotypes Finns have to deal with everywhere. Furthermore, I was ashamed to be associated—through my nationality—to these negative stereotypes. This is not merely a question of identification with the characters either in a positive (introjective) or negative (projective) sense. On the one hand there is too much of my own self involved in these boys for me to project them outside of myself as others. On the other hand there is too much distance between me and these boys for me to ‘use’ them as the construction material for my ego. Rather, this is a question of identification with oneself as a member of community (Finns) as seen by the ‘third Other’ (other Europeans). But my moment of shame can also be traced back to the national-romantic cultural discourse (discussed in the introduction) that constructed the Finnish shame and sense of inferiority before other (more civilized) Europeans. My identification with Hapa, Lötkö, and Bodí confirms that I too am a lazy child of nature that is living day by day and has a tendency towards drinking, and justifies the cultural
discourse according to which Finland is incompatible with the rest of Europe.

The shame that I am describing also reveals the dialectical nature of human relations: the subject identifies with the community as well as with the third Other outside of the community. This means that even though the community is dialectically opposed to the Other, it is nevertheless dependent upon the Other. Furthermore, this third Other provides the basis of the structure of interiority for the community: in the dialectical process whereby the community modifies its bonds in response to the Other: “the bond of exteriority (...) is itself interiorized by practical multiplicities.”

This means that the communal individual internalizes the “adopted inertia, function, power, rights and duties, structure, violence and fraternity” of the group and actualizes these new reciprocal relations as “his new being, his sociality.” Our subjectivity is then defined by our historical situation, and our relations with others are socially conditioned; indeed, as Fredric Jameson notes, all action takes place against a background of society, and “human life is, in its very structure, collective rather than individualistic.”

Furthermore, these internalized social relations are often understood in visual terms; we define our subjectivity according to how we are being seen by the Other in a certain social situation. As Hazel Barnes puts it:

Our only genuine sense of community comes in the form of an Us-object when we perceive ourselves along with other forming the object of the gaze of an Other. Our attempt to feel ourselves one with all of the mankind necessitates the presence of a Third who looks at us collectively but upon which no outside gaze may be directed.
According to Thomas Elsaesser, the films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder in particular are centred on intersubjective relationships and the question of social identity through a heavy investment in visuality, especially in the exchange of looks and the problem of voyeurism/exhibitionism:

One is tempted to say that in Fassbinder’s films all human relations, all bodily contact, all power structures and social hierarchies, all forms of communication and action manifest themselves and ultimately regulate themselves along the single axis of seeing and being seen.23

In his analysis of *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1973), Elsaesser suggests that the behaviour of the protagonists, Ali and Emmi, is defined by how they wish to appear in the eyes of others:

They play the roles with such deadly seriousness because it is the only way they know to impose an identity on aimless, impermanent lives. (...) They discover that they cannot exist without being seen by others, for when they are alone, their own mutually sustaining gaze is not enough to confer or confirm a sense of identity.24

This means that the field of vision presents itself to the Arab-German couple as a contradiction. On the one hand they cannot be seen together, because there is no social space in which they are not objects of aggressive, hostile, disapproving looks. On the other hand they cannot exist without being seen by others—the social eye—because being seen by others means possessing an identity in the field of vision, the social world to which they want to belong. Any act of being seen is thus communal and—since it requires recognition by another—*necessary* in order to ‘belong’ and to have a subjectivity. It is precisely being seen breaking the rules that makes
somebody a rebel, but this is first and foremost so to the rebel him- or herself. This is why the disapproving looks discounted by Ali and Emmi confirm “what they already know: that they are ‘different’ and not ashamed of it. Their sense of identity is supported by a ‘negative’ look.”25 This means that in order to exist, one has to be perceived, and in order to be perceived, one has to be an image, a recognizable representation in the socially conditioned field of vision.

According to Elsaesser, most of Fassbinder’s films can be seen illustrating the way in which subjectivity is formed by specific social relations in the field of vision that is organized by the gaze. Fassbinder’s protagonists are characterized by their desire to attract someone to play the spectator who would confirm them as subjects. In fact, Elsaesser goes so far as to claim that, in the films of Fassbinder, the spectators are inscribed as voyeurs, since the characters “are so manifestly exhibitionist.”26 The spectators, then, are invited to enter into the film as the bearers of the gaze, through primary identification (the infant’s feeling of oneness with the mother before he or she has discovered the otherness of objects) with the camera. Fassbinder’s cinema, then, is a cinema in which all possible subject matter seems to suffer the movement between fascination and exhibitionism, of who controls, contains, places whom through the gaze or the willingness to become the object of the gaze. It is as if all secondary identifications were collapsed into primary identification, and the act of seeing itself the centre of the narrative.27

I agree with Elsaesser insofar as subjectivity and belonging are dependent on the social look, but I have a problem with his claim that the manner in which the spectator experiences the characters’ interaction within a social reality would be conditioned by primary identification with the camera, thereby adopting the role of the
gaze as a social eye (either in its approving or disapproving mode). By comparison, what Sartre shows us is that the question of social identity in an intersubjective, visual field is dependent on the subject's identification with the Other as well as with the third Other outside the social community that the subject and the Other have formed. In this structure, both the spectator and the film character are conditioned by an intersubjective triad, and the process of identification is triadic. Furthermore, this kind of communal identification should not be regarded in ontological-individual terms, as it is produced by a dialectical relation between an (oppressive) third Other (be it the 'European presence' or the systematic nature of contemporary global capitalism) and the progressive integration of subjects into a totality which comes to be the (oppressed) group (Arabs, Finns, unemployed). In this relation, the Other is no longer a threat; no longer the only foundation for social existence, but a 'mediating' Other who potentially provides an affirmation for the subject's existence without becoming an objectifying, transcendent Other.

This model is intriguingly similar to psychoanalytic criticisms of Metz's theory of primary identification: it is not that the subject first has to identify with some transcendent, all-seeing eye in order to be able to recognize him- or herself as an image within a symbolic field. Rather, the subject first has to identify with him- or herself in order to become conscious of him- or herself as seen by the Other. As Kaja Silverman writes in her *The Threshold of the Visible World*: "[T]he subject can only successfully misrecognise him- or herself within that image or cluster of images through which he or she is culturally apprehended." What is determinative for the social subject is thus not how the subject sees or would like to see him- or herself, but how the subject apprehends the operation of the gaze of the Other(A) upon him- or herself in the field of vision.

In order to address the spectator as a historical subject the film must therefore invite the spectator into a
dialectical process, where the spectator identifies with the Other (as seen by the third Other) as well as with the third Other (as the carrier of the social look). In this model, it is both the spectator and the character that are under the regime of the social eye, in an intersubjective relationship with each other. So instead of identifying with the Lacanian Other(A) that the transcendental camera embodies in Ali: Fear Eats the Soul, the spectator identifies with Ali and Emmi (the Other as being seen) as well as with the disapproving neighbour (the look of the third Other). This is an important aspect in the concept of intersubjectivity which becomes visible in the emotion of shame: the capacity of the subject to shift his or her viewpoint ‘outside’ him- or herself in a specific cultural context.

In this light, let us consider the following case study, Aki Kaurismäki’s Drifting Clouds (1996). Drifting Clouds tells about Ilona (Kati Uotinen) and Lauri (Kari Väänänen), a happily married Finnish couple, whose life and happiness take a turn as they both lose their jobs in the dark years of recession in the Finland of the 1990s. The narrative structure of Drifting Clouds resembles an Elizabethan tragedy à la Christopher Marlowe, where a courageous and ambitious subject is forced to struggle against greater forces, and where the narrative structure is not completely unilinear and causally determined, but which follows the principle of a chronicle. Relatively separate sequences follow each other in a chronological order: Ilona and Lauri are living happily together—Lauri loses his job—Lauri searches for work—Ilona loses her job—Ilona searches for work—Lauri gets work—Lauri loses his job—the idle life—Ilona gets work—Ilona loses her job—Lauri is assaulted and disappears for a week—Ilona decides to set up her own restaurant—Ilona does not get a bank loan—Lauri gambles all the money that is left—Ilona and Lauri receive an eviction notice—Ilona meets Mrs. Sjöholm—Ilona sets up the restaurant. The hope and despair alternate, evoking compassion and also pity in the spectator. And it is
through this emotion of pity that the moment of intersubjectivity sets in. Unlike compassion, which signifies feeling with the Other in a manner of “emotional telepathy” as Milan Kundera has described it,30 pity not only signifies feeling sad about the Other’s bad luck, but may involve looking down upon the pitied. Pity, then, is a sign of lack of social value and of being vulnerable to shame, and both the person who pities and the person pitied know this—nobody wants to be pitied. In pity the subject identifies both with the Other and with the third Other, who refuses to respond to the Other’s identity claims. This is followed by the emotion of shame, which, again, is the result of seeing oneself being seen by the Other but now through the process of identification with the Other. The subject imagines the shame that he or she would feel in a situation where he or she is being looked down upon.

However, the spectator’s emotional reaction demands cultural knowledge about the importance of work for the Finnish subject. This does not mean that, say, an African or a Latin-American spectator could not understand the ‘message’ of the film. Neither does this mean that my (Finnish) reading of the film is the only accurate one. For instance, Drifting Clouds can be seen as ‘cinema of irony’, a definition that Elsaesser has used to characterize the European cinema of the 1960s and the 1970s, but that can also be seen characterizing the films of contemporary directors like Pedro Almodovar, Michael Haneke, and Lars von Trier. According to Elsaesser, the cinema of irony is cinema that uses self-reflective attitude and emotional detachment as techniques to comment on and parody itself.31 Drifting Clouds has ironic sensibility insofar as it is emotionally detaching in its avoidance of psychological realism. Both the tragicomic and the melodramatic elements in the film are portrayed with the same self-reflective and laconic neutrality that reminds the spectator of the artificial nature of the film. Kaurismäki’s protagonists often articulate with an over-restrained and formal manner,
which adds to the general atmosphere of the film an absurd trait, and the cinematography is close to immobile, except for a few, nearly invisible pans and zooms. The emphasis lies in the carefully chosen camera angles, lighting and setting which results in stylized and in its simplicity often breathtakingly beautiful mise-en-scene (figure 7). All this draws the spectator’s attention to the composition of the film, and it would seem that the film appeals to the spectator on the level of aesthetics rather than on the level of identification.

Nevertheless, the way in which Kaurismäki deals with Finnish shame cannot be discussed in isolation from the Finnish culture especially if we accept the assumption that shame arises through an intersubjective encounter in a specific social context. The way in which *Drifting Clouds* deals with shame is closely connected to a Finnish understanding of shame caused by unemployment. The reason for this is that Finnish identity is primarily based on work. Given the lack of admirable ancestors and other national heroes, the place of the ‘ego ideal’ has been defined by the features of an honest, hard-working subject. While Freud defined a normal individual as one who is able to love and to work, in Finnish culture normalcy is only defined through one’s ability to work. And indeed, in *Drifting Clouds* the basis for one’s subjectivity is one’s work; it is not one’s ‘independent’ features, but work through which the subject is accepted as a member of the collective. For a Finn, work signifies not only bare necessity but also acceptance by one’s environment. If a Finn fails to create an acceptable interaction with his or her environment, he or she feels—deeply ashamed—that for him or her there is no place in the world. According to the Finnish sociologist Pekka Ylöstalo and the psycho-historian Juha Siltala, working is an attempt to control one’s own life and claim the right to existence. Through work the Finnish subject escapes shame, gains control of his or her own life, and claims the right to existence. Furthermore, through work the Finnish subject takes under his or her
control not only the hostile outside world, but also his or her personal emotions that he or she finds hard to deal with.  

This is why losing their work becomes a catastrophe for Lauri and Ilona in the film, a catastrophe that they are so ashamed of that they cannot admit it even to themselves. The denial of shame is so extreme that Lauri, for instance, becomes voluntarily marginalized by cutting all the ties to society. He refuses to apply for unemployment benefit ("I won't live with unemployment benefits, I am I") and as he loses all hope of finding a new job, he shuts himself completely up in his apartment and starts spending his days playing solitaire and solving crossword puzzles. Other characters in the film deal with shame by developing a 'false pride' in their marginality. This is why, in Finnish style, they take their marginality to the extreme, and many of them end up alcoholics—according to Siltala, a solution to a crisis for a Finn is to escape either into work or into alcohol.
The emotion of shame is almost intolerable for Ilona and Lauri, even though they become unemployed without their own fault. It is the social life that has thrown them into a new situation which they interpret and are forced to act upon. Restaurant Dubrovnik, in which Ilona works as a maître d', is driven to bankruptcy by the bank; and Lauri, a tram driver, is forced to leave his job as tramlines are being closed. It seems as if fate itself is putting them to shame and dragging them into despair as they also lack the confidence to believe that their circumstances eventually will change. The scene in which Lauri loses his job illustrates their sense of helplessness before their fate. Lauri hears that some of the tram drivers have to leave their job, but the decision is being made by choosing a card. Thus, it does not matter how well or badly Lauri has done his job, he becomes unemployed because he picks a low card from the pack, because he has bad luck, because it is his fate. The spectator sees a close up of his hand as he turns the bad card into view, followed by a close up of his seemingly expressionless face (figure 8a&b). But the 'Kuleshov effect' of the shots makes the spectator share Lauri's awareness of the meaning of his new situation. In one second, everything has changed; he has become an unemployed person. Furthermore, the spectator comes to understand Lauri's awareness and shame of how he is being seen from now on: a marginalized figure, a loser, the one with the bad cards—even though he has had no control over his fate. It seems like the whole world is against him and his self-respect.

From the moment Ilona and Lauri lose their jobs their life becomes a struggle for winning back their subjectivity, their identity as a working person. As they have lost their subjectivity they have become just a name and a number in the wheels of bureaucracy, at the mercy of the unemployment office and the bank. Furthermore their struggle is the desire to take part in the community again, and to be seen as members of the community, without having to feel shame. In this desire Lauri suffers
the most serious setback as he gets beaten up by Ilona’s dubious employer and his sinister friends. After this incident Lauri feels that he has lost face so completely that he has to avoid being seen by disappearing ‘from the picture’ for a week.

Finally Ilona and Lauri are left with only two options: to abandon all hope or to become self-employed. As the owner of the former Dubrovnik is willing to finance their dreams, Ilona and Lauri decide to set up their own restaurant: ‘Restaurant Work’. They bring back all the old employees from Dubrovnik—some of whom first have to come via the sanatorium for the alcoholics—and start the business. The opening day becomes the turning point of their lives, the moment which determines which direction their lives will take. The silent, immobile shots of the staff as they are waiting for the first customers render the emotions of anticipation and fear for failure and shame almost palpable for the spectator. When the restaurant in the end is full of customers, is it a big moment of relief that in one stroke restores Ilona and Lauri’s sense of self-esteem and subjectivity. Yet something has changed in comparison to the past. While their subjectivity previously was conditioned by the demands of society—which let them down—and the style of living which expects everybody to contribute to economic growth, they have now themselves created the conditions for their subjectivity, through solidarity between the marginalized.
The spectator participates in Ilona and Lauri’s attempt to win back their sense of self-esteem through a process of identification that is based on an inter-subjective triad. The spectator identifies both with Ilona and Lauri (the Other as seen by the third Other) and the social eye (the third Other as the bearer of the look). This triadic model constantly recurs on the visual level of the film: in the beginning of the film the approving look zooms into the close up of Ilona’s pleased face. The look is approving, as it is clear that Ilona in her work is a responsible person who with efficiency takes care both of the customers and the emergency situations in the kitchen. A same kind of zoom into a close up of the face takes place when Lauri picks up a three of clubs from the pack of cards offered him by the director of the tram line, but in this case the social look is disapproving. A disapproving look is implied also after the elliptical montage sequence that shows Ilona looking for a job in different restaurants and coffee bars: the sequence ends with a close up of Ilona in the rainy street, Tchaikovsky’s *Pathétique* on the soundtrack, camera zooming out (figure 9). In the final image, Ilona and Lauri are looking together at the sky in a medium close-up, now independent from the approving or disapproving look of the third Other (there is no zoom that would imply the presence of such look) (figure 10). It would be tempting to claim that the use of zoom would invite the spectator to a primary identification with the camera, the function of the camera being to act as a look of the third Other. Yet the spectator does not identify with the camera as the look of the third Other, but the fixed point of identification both with the Other as the third Other is in the faces of the protagonists. The face is the site of shame, and the face is also the ‘space’ in which the subject can identify with the Other as well as the third Other.  

In this example it can clearly be seen how the subject constitutes him- or herself as a part of the community through identifying with the Other (other
unemployed) under the determining look of the third Other (the social eye). Ilona and Lauri see themselves as losers, because they know how unemployed are being seen in the Finnish society; they identify both with the
community of the unemployed and with the Other outside the community. Yet this process is not limited to the characters within the film: the spectator participates in it also by identifying with Ilona and Lauri as well as with the third Other: the spectator’s emotional response (shame and pity) is based on imagining being looked upon by the Other in a social situation. This process of identification is not cannibalistic, but triadic, and it presumes the separateness of the Other. Here, shame reveals the intersubjective structure of social existence, and especially the Other’s impact on the self within a community. The shame revolves around the question of how the subject would like to be and appear (the so-called ego ideal in psychoanalytic language), of how the subject actually is being seen by the Other, and of what effect the Other has on the subject’s sense of self. Consequently it can be said that shame reveals that all subjects exist in a world with other subjects within a community with established values and norms of behaviour, thinking, and feeling. According to Sartre, shame demonstrates that human life is intersubjective—without a relationship to the Other there would be no shame—but this relationship between the subject and the Other does not have to be based on a struggle over the control of the look, but it can be based on communality where the subject and the Other look together in the same direction.

*Drifting Clouds* thus evokes an emotional response in its spectators by inviting them to identify both with the Other and the third Other at the same time as the object and the subject of the look: the spectators and the protagonists in their shame (caused by unemployment and the loss of human dignity) are the same in the eyes of the ‘onlooker’. Yet this ontological solidarity does not remain bound to the look of the third Other (although in the beginning it comes to being against this third Other). Eventually the members of the newly formed community will all become ‘thirds’, serving as unifiers and supporters of each other. Now the
community carries its own source of being within itself as its members become both observers and participants at the same time. This kind of community also protects the subject (from shame) by joining him or her with others similarly committed, thereby moving the subject from the unbearable loneliness of self absorbed with itself to the freedom of a community of shared values. In *Drifting Clouds*—as in Sartre’s thinking—communality thus manifests itself also in a positive way, in a solidarity that aims at social change, and the viewing position it invites its spectators to is supporting, not objectifying. In this model of communality no subject has to give up his or her self-determination for the group, since his or her individual desire coincides with the desire of the group, and since the subject finds an affirmation for his or her action in the actions of others: “everyone continued to see himself in the Other, but saw himself there as himself.”

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5 To distinguish Lacanian Other from the Sartrean Other I shall from now on follow Betty Cannon’s style and refer to the former as the Other(A).


11 In Search for a Method, however, Sartre comes closer to the Lacanian conception of language, defining it as the “objectification of a class, the reflection of conflicts, latent or declared, and the particular manifestation of alienation.” Jean-Paul Sartre, Search for a Method. Trans. Hazel E. Barnes. (New York: Vintage, 1957), p. 113.

12 And, either way, there is no way out of shame, as shame always carries a sense of naked isolation from community, a sense of being before community without being part of it. The subject is either caught between the state of freedom with anxiety and shame, or bondage with shame but no anxiety. See Michael Lewis, Shame: The Exposed Self. (New York: Free Press, 1995), p. 231-2.


16 Sartre, Critique of Dialectical Reason, p. 421.


19 Sartre, Critique of Dialectical Reason, p. 57. Sartre’s term for this kind of community is the ‘fused group’. The fused group is based on the positive forms of reciprocity and collectivity unlike, for instance, the ‘institutional group’ that is based on conflict and ‘vertical otherness’.

20 Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. 632.


22 Hazel Barnes, “Translator’s Introduction.” In Sartre, Being and Nothingness, p. xxxviii.


24 Elsaesser, “Primary Identification and the Historical Subject,” p. 542.

25 Thomas Elsaesser, Fassbinder’s Germany: History, Identity, Subject. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), p. 65. In the biography of Jean Genet, Sartre describes in a similar manner the way
in which Genet achieved identity, after being seen in the act of stealing. After hearing his whole home village dizzying the words “You’re a thief,” Genet decided to be the thief they said he was, to be what crime made of him. By storing the Look (and the voice) of the Other in his consciousness Genet becomes what he is being seen as. This makes Sartre conclude that “I is another.” Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*. Trans. Bernard Frechtman. (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), p. 138.

26 Elsaesser, “Primary Identification and the Historical Subject,” p. 542.

27 Elsaesser, “Primary Identification and the Historical Subject,” p. 540.

28 In fact, Metz’s thesis of primary cinematic identification has already been rejected on the grounds that Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage does not support it. In Lacan’s thinking, primary identification means in particular the child’s identification with the image in the mirror stage. The child first has to identify with his or her own (mirror) image; and from this first identification the child becomes conscious of him- or herself as being seen by the others, and this is the precondition for all the following identifications through which subjectivity is being constituted in the symbolic order. It is only through an identification with its own image from the outside point of view that the subject recognizes and ‘identifies with’ the gaze, after which the symbolic starts to function as a signifying practice in the subject’s psychic life. See, for instance, Elizabeth Cowie, *Underworld USA: Psychoanalysis and Film Theory in the 1980s.* In James Donald (ed.) *Psychoanalysis and Cultural Studies: Thresholds.* (London: Macmillan, 1991) and Elizabeth Wright, *Speaking Desires Can Be Dangerous.* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).


33 The reasons of why this should be so are several. In Finnish culture, alcohol is, for instance, an instrument of (momentary) equalization of the disparities in social and communal life. Being intoxicated is a sign of being a man who could handle his own affairs. Alcohol is also an expression of male-bonding type solidarity (the prestige and social value of alcohol is very much tied to masculine honour). Or the reason can be a simple counterreaction to the traditional alcohol culture in Finland that is very much in harmony with the social structure (the social right to consume alcohol is earned through

34 See, for instance, Donald L. Nathanson, “A Timetable of Shame”: “Shame operates at the locus of the zone of perceptual-expressive interaction, which is defined in terms of the face and facial interaction.” In Donald L. Nathanson (ed), *The Many Faces of Shame.* (New York, Guilford Press, 1987), p. 30. Lewis takes a similar stance: “Because the face is the seat of one’s identity, and one wishes to conceal [one’s face] during shame, the face becomes the locus of the shame.” Lewis, *Shame,* p. 23.

35 See also Jameson: “We both feel the group as something larger than ourselves which we are able to observe in the others from without and at the same time (...) we feel ourselves so observed as making up the group in question.” *Marxism and Form,* p. 253.