

A Dramaturgical Conception of Authentic Living

*A Kinda Sartrean analysis of personal identity and
authenticity*

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Singed declaration

I, Chatchaya Sakchatchawan, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

The philosopher's task of formulating what authenticity consists in is made complicated when two seemingly conflicting intuitions are considered. On one hand, our liberal intuition suggests that authenticity entails resisting societal influences and acknowledging oneself as the primary source of one's endeavours. On the other hand, our communitarian intuition suggests that comprehending one's identity - the source of the authentic person's endeavours - necessitates reference to one's relations to others and positions within the pre-existing world-order. Combining the two intuitions, we may infer the puzzle of authenticity: How can we fulfil the demand from authenticity if it requires that we resist interpersonal influences when our understanding of who we are is derived from our interactions and relation to others? The aim of the thesis is to resolve the puzzle of authenticity by arguing for a *Kinda Sartrean dramaturgical conception of personal identity* (Chapter 1) and *authentic living* (Chapter 2). Drawing from Sartre's notion of ambiguity and contemporary ideas prevalent in narrative theory literature, Chapter 1, in dramaturgical terms, gives form to the communitarian idea that identity-work is a dialogical process. Chapter 2 argues that you can be said to live authentically if (i) you engage in identity-work in *good faith* and (ii) your co-actors have the appropriate interpretative framework to make sense of your identity. This implies that living authentically is not solely within an individual's control; one's possibility to live authentically, i.e. intelligibly as oneself, is in part dependent on others. Chapter 3 anticipates and tackles the challenge arising from the concept of unmasked authenticity by examining Iris Murdoch's idea of love as a moral vision that reveals another's 'true self.'

Impact statement

This thesis presents a new conception of authentic living. This is important and beneficial for academic purposes since it increases our understanding of what is involved in living authentically and offered a new framework for thinking about how authenticity is partly other-dependent rather than a solely individualistic endeavour that traditional accounts seem to assume. On top of authenticity, it also offers a conception of (practical) personal identity, arguing that we make sense of ourselves in ‘dialogue’ with other people. It is also significant for purposes outside of academia as it can inform social policies regarding representations in the media and can be used to advocate for the increase of more diverse narrative representations for the sake of the narratively underprivileged.

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Introduction

‘Living authentically’ is synonymous with ‘living true to who one is.’ In Greek, ‘*authentikos*’ is made up of the conjunction ‘*eauton*’ and ‘*theto*’. ‘*Theto*’ is derived from the same root as ‘thesis’. Thus, an ‘authentic’ is an individual who ‘posits oneself’ or ‘sets oneself as the thesis’. But what does this mean, to set *oneself* as the *thesis*? Let’s first consider what it is to *set something as the thesis*, and then move on to the sort of thing we refer to as ‘*oneself*’ that can be set as the thesis.

We may take it that to set something as the thesis is to set something as the *reason* for a certain occurrence in the world. A *theoretical* thesis is a reason or principle we give to *explain* how the world behaves in a certain way. For instance, I may employ the law of gravitation to explain why the tennis ball falls to the ground when I released it from my left hand: the reason that the ball fell to the ground is that objects such as tennis balls follow the law of gravitation. A practical thesis, on the other hand, is a reason given, not to *explain* state of affairs, but to *manifest* state of affairs; a practical thesis is a principle one chooses to *act* in accordance to. For example, I may refer to a recipe to make a curry for dinner. It would not be correct to say that I employed the recipe to explain my actions. I do not observe myself cook and think ‘oh my, looks like I am cooking a curry since I am chopping up an onion and taking the spices out of the cupboard.’ The curry recipe acts as guidance for my decisions and actions.

When we talk about acting authentically or setting oneself as the thesis, we are talking about setting principle *x*, in which *x* is reflective of who one is, as the practical thesis. But, what exactly distinguishes a practical principle as reflective of who I am? To say that an *object* is authentic is to say that the object is “of undisputed origin or authorship.” For example, an authentic Van Gogh is a painting that Van Gogh himself painted, not a replica made by others. However, it is not very obvious how this definition applies to the definition of an authentic *person*. On the one hand, surely, whenever I act, it is me who is doing the acting; *my actions* cannot have as its origin as from anywhere else but *me*. Thus, acting as myself is an inescapable thing since I am the one who does the acting. On the other hand, however, we are inclined to say that certain thoughts, actions and decisions that we undertake do not truly reflect who we are. On this picture, there are some actions that, though I am indeed the person who brought it about, can be said to not to genuinely express

who I am. To get to the bottom of what could be the hallmarks of authenticity as suggested in the latter sense, we may begin by asking what sort of thoughts, actions and decisions are *inauthentic*.

The first picture of an inauthentic person that may come to mind is of someone who is *overly malleable to other people's influences*. Take Thomas Hill's example of the Deferential Wife: she is

utterly devoted to serving her husband. She buys the clothes *he* prefers, invites the guests *he* wants to entertain, and makes love whenever *he* is in the mood. She willingly moves to a new city in order for him to have more attractive job, counting her own friendship and geographical preferences insignificant by comparison ... [S]he tends not to form her own interests, values, and ideals; and, when she does, she counts them as less important than her husband's. ... She just believes that the proper role for a woman is to serve her family. (Hill 1973: 89)

The wife, one may say, is utterly malleable to her husband's wishes: without resistance, the Wife accepts her husband's preferences as her own. She is, one may continue, not being herself since she's busy being an instrument to her husband. The crux of her inauthenticity seems to lie in the fact that the practical principle that she adheres to comes from her husband rather than herself. One cannot help but think of the Deferential Wife as being caged in by her husband, suppressing her true self to soar out of the cage by forming and expressing her own opinions and preferences. The opposite of the overly malleable sort of person is the picture of an authentic person who is not easily influenced by others. An authentic person is someone who excels at conducting their life in the way that reflects their freedom: they form their *own* judgments and choose their *own* course of action. Similar to how an inauthentic object has a false or alien origin, an inauthentic behaviour is of alien or external origin, i.e. interpersonal influences. Authentic living or living true to who one is, according to the liberal intuition, consists of living in accordance with self-imposed principles rather than principles that are imposed by others. Call this the *liberal intuition* about authenticity.

However, the liberal intuition alone cannot take us all the way to a complete picture of authentic living. The liberal intuition tells us that a practical principle corresponds to who I am so long as it originates from within myself and not from others. Yet, we quickly find ourselves hard pressed

to give a satisfactory example of a principle that truly meets the liberal's standard. For instance, I may have decided to become a teacher with the impression that no one pressured me into it, it was a conviction that perhaps I have had for many years. Nevertheless, I would be lying to say that no one else played any role in influencing my decision to pursue a teaching career. Growing up, if it were not for my mother who saw value in education and encouraged me to be curious about the world, I may not have developed the disposition and value system that gravitate me towards teaching in my adulthood. Moreover, my decision to pursue a teaching career is affected by factors outside of my control that I took into consideration at the time: e.g., whether I had the opportunity to procure a suitable education, whether there are job opportunities available, what the teaching conditions would be like, monetary benefits, opportunity costs, etc.

A stronger claim may be also made: not only that my decision to become someone, say a teacher, is *affected* by others' but, stronger than that, the very reason that becoming a teacher is *possible* or even *comprehensible* in the first place is because I exist as part of a web of pre-existing world-order. Charles Taylor argues that one does not create and endorse one's self-conception in isolation to others, but through a *dialogical* process; that coming to know and be who you are is something that is done with others (1994: 34). To even begin to describe who I am, I cannot but refer to the relation that I have to others and the world. Being a mother is being a mother to my child, being a teacher is being some students' teacher, being a woman is being expected to act in a certain way that is oftentimes opposed to acting like a man. Practical principles are not created *ex nihilo* from *within* oneself, but derived from *without*. Who I am, according to Taylor, is fundamentally a compilation of interpersonal influences; in order to know who I am, I must be self-aware of the position that I occupy within the world. Call this the *communitarian intuition*.

A philosopher's task of formulating exactly what authentic living consists in is a difficult and complicated task to begin with, but it is especially so when we consider the two intuitions.

- (1) *Liberal intuition*: An authentic person does not bend easily to societal pressures and takes herself as the source of her projects (cf. Kymlicka 1988; Dworkin 1983).
- (2) *Communitarian intuition*: If an authentic person is someone who knows who they are and who they are is socially constituted (cf. Taylor 1994; MacIntyre 1981; Sandel 1982), then

an authentic person is someone who is attuned to their position or role within the pre-existing world-order in order to cultivate their self-awareness.

Whilst our liberal intuition tells us that an authentic person is someone who is ‘true to herself’ by resisting the influences from other people, our communitarian intuition tells us that the project of being true to who one is can only begin when the individual derives the knowledge of who she is by referring to her position within the social world-order. By considering the two intuitions together, we quickly find that the so-called authentic project of setting oneself as the thesis is not as straightforward as looking inward to find one’s core ‘true’ self that is formed in isolation of interpersonal influences. Worse, considering the two intuitions together one may arrive at the troublesome conclusion that the project of trying to live authentically is an impossible project because the demand from authenticity seems to be self-defeating! This leads us to the puzzle of authenticity:

(The puzzle of authenticity) How can we live authentically when authenticity demands that we resist social influences when our understanding of who we are is derived from our relations to others?

This Thesis aims to solve the puzzle of authenticity by offering what I will refer to as the *Kinda Sartrean dramaturgical conception of authenticity*. Drawing from Jean-Paul Sartre (and Simone de Beauvoir) and theorists who work broadly in narrative or dramaturgical traditions, the dramaturgical conception interprets the two intuitions in such a way that one’s quest towards living authentically is not a self-defeating project.

Before I argue for my conception of authenticity in Chapter 2, I will first lay down the groundwork concerning the practice of personal identity, i.e. the process in which we form, maintain and transform who we are, in Chapter 1. In a similar vein, we may call it a *Kinda Sartrean dramaturgical account of personal identity*. The account gives form to both the communitarian idea that we are fundamentally socially malleable beings and the liberal ideal that we are capable of self-determination. I begin Chapter 1 with the clarification that the sense of ‘personal identity’ that we talk about in conversations about living authentically is not the subject of metaphysicians’ inquiries involving the asking and answering of *reidentification question*, e.g., ‘How do you exist as the same person or same thing over time?’. Rather, the questions that we are concerned with are *character-*

isation questions such as ‘Who am I?’. The sort of answer that you give to the characterisation question helps you orient yourself in a particular way in the world and offers guidance to your actions. It is through asking and answering the characterisation questions, then, that one works out one's practical thesis. The main claim that Chapter 1 argues for is that the practice of personal identity is a *dialogical* endeavour. To make my point, I examine Christine Korsgaard's (2009) endorsement conception of practical identity and argue that the conception is too voluntaristic (or too liberal) and consequently too narrow to fully capture the phenomenon identity-work precisely. It fails precisely because it assumes that the practice of personal identity is monological and so does not recognise the other-dependant aspect of identity-work. As an alternative to Korsgaard's account rooted in the Kantian tradition, I will construct and defend the *dramaturgical account of personal identity* which is grounded on a Sartrean pillar. The pillar consists primarily of Sartre's idea of *ontological ambiguity* - that a person is both transcendence and facticity. Having laid down an ontological picture of the self, I employ dramaturgical terminologies (e.g. author, actor, character, audience, addressee, co-actor, narrative-work, face-work, recognition, response, scripts, etc.) largely derived and repurposed from contemporary thinkers who work broadly in narrative traditions to argue for the dialogical conception of the practice of the self.

Chapter 2 argues for the Kinda Sartrean dramaturgical conception of personal identity that has its groundwork in the dramaturgical conception of identity-work. First, the chapter examines Daniela Dover's recent article ‘*Identity and Influence*’ (2023) where she argues against what she refers to as the *ethos of authenticity*. Dover argues that the ethos of authenticity, in prescribing that we scrutinise interpersonal influence on the transformation of the self, is misleading. Dover's rejection of the ethos of authenticity is analogous to someone's rejection of the demand from authenticity after concluding that the liberal and communitarian intuitions lead to a self-defeating prescription. In the article, she points out that the distinction between self-transformations that are brought about via endogenous influences and exogenous interpersonal influences is a false dichotomy. What we take as endogenous influences are in fact exogenous influences that are absorbed a long while ago or over a long period of time, and so they are not endogenous at all. Moreover, Dover correctly points out that some interpersonally influenced transformations are benign or even good influences. Thus, Dover concludes, we shouldn't judge interpersonal influences in accordance to the ethos of authenticity.

Though we are on the same page about the inadequacy of too liberal of an account of authenticity that demands unwarranted scrutiny of interpersonal influences due to its the ignorance of the social constitution of the self, something that has been incorporated in the dramaturgical view of personal identity argued for in Chapter 1, I argue that Dover is too quick to reject authenticity altogether. Chapter 2 suggests a conception of authenticity that accommodates Dover's communitarian-based worries. The dramaturgical account states that one lives authentically iff

- i. (*Actor's Condition*) one is in 'good faith' towards embodying one's identity, and
- ii. (*Co-Actors' Condition*) one's co-actors use the right interpretative schema to make sense of one's identity.

The Actor's Condition identifies authentic living as anti-bad faith. I offer a reading of Sartre's notion of bad faith, emphasising that good faith (the attitude of the authentic person) consists in having the appropriate attitude towards both one's transcendence and facticity, a virtuous balance between seriousness and nihilism. The Co-Actors' Condition identifies authentic living as only possible in a non-oppressive environment. On my view, your prospect at living authentically, i.e. living intelligibly as 'who you are', does not only depend on just you, the actor, but also on the social condition and those around you, your co-actors. This means that a person of good faith is not guaranteed the life of an authentic person, and, crucially, this is not through their own fault.

Chapter 3 tackles an anticipated challenge to my dramaturgical view, which I will refer to as the *challenge from unmasked authenticity*. The notion of unmasked authenticity refers to the idea or intuition that authentic living involves letting others see oneself as who one truly is, and this entails the exclusion of pretences; an authentic person is someone who does not put up a face. The dramaturgical account, the critic may object, confuses a person's social masks with their real identity. At the core of the idea of unmasked authenticity is the assumption that we have a true self that is revealed when we take off our social mask, and that we are at our most authentic when we let our guard down in this way. In response to the challenge, I suggest that we may get to the bottom of what the critic mean by 'true self' or our 'unmasked self' by examining Iris Murdoch's idea of love as seeing someone as who they really are. We may see the connection between love in Murdoch's sense and unmasked authenticity when we consider the phenomenon where we feel 'most like

ourselves' when we're around our loved ones; we do not feel like we need to put up a face or make a big effort to appear in a certain way around them. Ultimately, I will argue that what the critic thinks is the true self is after all not something entirely distinct from the 'social' identities or characters that we embody in different situations. Though Murdoch offers an insightful picture of attentive love, that the lover is required to let go of their self-aggrandising ego that often clouds the reality about who the beloved is, Murdoch is not entirely clear on what exactly the lover sees in the beloved through a loving gaze. Building on and refining David Velleman's Kantian interpretation of Murdochian love (1999), Chapter 3 argues for an interpretation of the intentional object of the loving gaze - something that supporters of the idea of unmasked authenticity would take to be the 'real' or the authentic self - as an identity not distinct nor 'hidden' underneath a mask but a deeper grasp of the beloved's identities from the beloved's own standpoint. To distinguish the loving gaze from the everyday other-characterising gaze, I employ Stephen Darwall's distinction between second- and third-person standpoints to characterise the gazes respectively.

Chapter 1:

A Kinda Sartrean Dramaturgical Conception of Personal Identity

Analytical philosophers' idea of 'personal identity' is varied in meaning and comes with much philosophical baggage. It's important that we're clear from the get go which sense of personal identity is relevant to our discussion. Marya Schechtman (1996) has usefully distinguished between two senses of personal identity: the *reidentification* personal identity and the *characterisation* personal identity. The reidentification identity is the subject of questions such as 'am I the same person over time?'. Theories of personal identity, which are usually more metaphysical, proposed by the likes of John Locke, David Hume and Derek Parfit fall under the reidentification category. The characterisation personal identity, on the other hand, has to do with how the person sees herself and how others understand her to be. One's answer to questions, 'Who am I?' will be the description of one's personal identity in the characterisation sense. A person in the grip of an authenticity crisis usually finds themselves asking the characterisation question such as 'Who I am, really?' 'Will this action reflect who I really am?' 'What sort of person would I like to become?'. It is the characterisation sense of personal identity that we are concerned with.

This chapter begins by examining a prominent account of characterisation personal identity proposed by Christine Korsgaard, commonly known as *practical personal identity*. According to her view, one's personal identity is constituted by sets of practical principles that one *endorses*. Who you are is constituted by the set of principles that, though contingently chosen, *you* determine as necessary in being who *you* intend to be. Korsgaard's voluntaristic account of personal identity is attractive precisely because it speaks to our liberal intuition. However, I will argue that her endorsement-based conception of personal identity is too voluntaristic since it fails to acknowledge the socially-dependent aspects of how we understand ourselves and the sort of projects that are available to us as a consequence of the world that is at large out of our control. The harsh reality is that no one has unlimited authority over who one is, and who one is is sadly not solely a matter of whether one endorses a certain identity or not. As an alternative to Korsgaard's account, the chapter constructs and defends the kinda Sartrean dramaturgical account of personal identity.

1.1 Practical Personal Identity

As someone in the grip of an existential crisis can vouch for, it is crucial that if you intend to live a worthwhile life, you make it a point to (ask and) answer the question ‘who am I?’ This is at least partly because to say something about who you are is to say something about the sort of things that you find meaningful and worthwhile. We find that having a sense of who we are is important since it orients us in the world and informs our actions, and it also gives us a sense of security and continuity. For instance, if I were to think of myself as someone who is a good friend to you, I see that it is worthwhile for me to maintain our friendship. My sense of who I am guides my actions and makes my livelihood intelligible.

If you do not have a sense of who you are, you would find yourself directionless and the world void of sense and meaning. You wouldn’t be able to thread together a meaningful story about your past, rank one action as more worthwhile than any other, nor see your future as being meaningfully affected by your shaping. We often colloquially refer to people of such predicament as a ‘drifter,’ a ‘wasteman,’ or, more in tune with the analytical philosophical literature, a ‘wanton’. Philosophers such as Harry Frankfurt (1971) and Christine Korsgaard (2009) think that such an individual fails to achieve something that makes them a person, prohibiting them from living a full moral life.

Though there is no dispute about the importance of practicing personal identity, i.e. trying to make sense of who you are and sticking to it, it is not entirely clear how this is done. How, exactly, does one come up with the answer to the characterisation question, so that one may proceed to act in accordance with it? Is there *a* right answer about who one is? If so, on what or whose authority? Is who I am *merely* the product of my situation - e.g. being born in a certain geographical location, to a certain set of parents, and of a certain sex - such that I have no say in it? Is my personal identity, then, given from the beginning? What, even, are the right sorts of answers to the characterisation question? Surely, I do not really think of my having a birthmark on my left arm as something that characterises who I am in a meaningful way. Alright, my birthmark may seem irrelevant, but how come the shape of my genital seem to play such a prominent role in the formation of my identity? After all, many people seem to ground or justify their behaviour around me and their expectations of who I am on the basis of my sex. How much freedom, then, does one have over the con-

stituents of one's identity? In what follows, we will examine Korsgaard's argument that what constitutes one's personal identity is entirely up to the individual. We will see that Korsgaard's picture of the practice of personal identity, something that she refers to as the practice of *self-constitution*, gives ultimate authority to the individual whose the identity belongs to.

Korsgaard's endorsement account of practical personal identity

In *Sources of Normativity*, Korsgaard introduces the notion of *practical identity* as

a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking. (1996: 20)

This is no different, at least for our purposes, to the notion of characterisation personal identity. In her book *Self-Constitution* (2009), Korsgaard proposes that one's practical identity comes about via the process of *self-constitution*. Our ability to act - that is, to determine our behaviour in accordance to self-imposed laws - is the hallmark of what it is to be an agent. It is the ability to act in accordance to *reason* that distinguishes us from animals and other things in the world, and qualifies us as members of the moral community. Korsgaard points out that when you act accordance to some reason, you are not only choosing the sort of *effect* that you will make in the world but you are also at the same time choosing the sort of *cause* that you will be. And this means that you are deciding who you are through every action that you make (2009: 19-20). For instance, when you hurried out into the night to aid your friend at the hospital after receiving the emergency call, you are choosing to be a loyal friend. Thus, to act for a reason is to engage in the process of self-constitution. Korsgaard begins her book with the claim "Human beings are *condemned* to choice and action" (2009: 3). So long as you are conscious and nothing is derailing you, you cannot choose not to act; and so long as you are condemned to act, you are also condemned to the project of self-constitution.

For Korsgaard, my actions and my practical identity inform one another. As we have seen, I decide on the kind of person that I am by choosing to act in a certain way - this is the process of self-constitution. The logic also applies the other way around; not only do our actions inform our practical identities, our practical identities also inform our actions.

[O]ur conceptions of our practical identity govern our choice of actions, for to value yourself in a certain role or under a certain descriptions is at the same time to find it worthwhile to do certain acts for the sake of certain ends, and impossible, even unthinkable, to do others. (2009: 20)

She observes that we have an innate and universal desire to be a unified agent, and it is this ongoing struggle for integrity that structures our moral life. Not only do we strive to act, but we also strive to act *rationally*, that is, to act with integrity. To act rationally is to act in concord with your self-concept. For example, if you are a parent, you may think that it is worthwhile to save up money for your children's college funds. A rational action for you, then, is to not squander your savings away on unnecessary items such as a sports car. If you were to succeed in warding off the temptation of a new sports car, then you have successfully reaffirmed or re-self-constituted your practical identity as a parent. As Korsgaard suggested, the source of normativity lies in the human project of self-constitution (2009: 4).

Korsgaard's picture of practical personal identity is highly voluntaristic or empowering. She argues that whether or not one occupies a certain identity is purely a matter of whether or not one endorses such identity; one's embodiment of an identity is totally dependant on whether the agent necessitates it. She writes,

If you continue to endorse the reasons the identity presents to you, and observe the obligations it imposes on you, then it's on you. ... [Y]ou can walk out even on a factually grounded identity like being a certain person's child or a certain nation's citizen, dismissing the reasons and obligations that it gives rise to, because you just don't identify with the role. Then it's not a form of practical identity anymore: not a description under which you value yourself. (2009: 23)

Though Korsgaard admits that many of our practical identities are contingent, she argues that whether you take them as reason-giving is entirely "up to you". The voluntarism of Korsgaard's view is appealing precisely because it speaks to our liberal intuition: it tells us that we can be whoever we want to be so long as we have discipline enough to commit to such principles.

To many of us, however, Korsgaard's voluntaristic picture of practical personal identity just seems wrong and utterly unrealistic. We find that we cannot simply adopt a personal identity and keep at it solipsistically. A wife may *try* to reject her allegiance to her husband, a parent to her child and a citizen to his country, but they may nevertheless find that they cannot help but take these identities as reason-giving. As Rachel Cohon pointed out, "we can try to repudiate them, but it may not work" (2000: 70), and this is because their hold on us is too strong.

1.2 A Kinda Sartrean dramaturgical conception of personal identity

What went wrong? What is missing, then, from Korsgaard's account of personal identity? Recall the tension between the liberal and communitarian intuitions. Korsgaard's endorsement account accommodates the liberal intuition well. We are indeed the sort of beings that can choose our own principles of actions, and it is a mark of human excellence that we shape our lives in acknowledgement of our freedom. The very reason that we are plagued with existential crises and the characterisation questions in the first place is not only out of our interest to act well but also that our interest to constitute ourselves well. It is through our actions that we choose who we will be. However, Korsgaard's endorsement account does not accommodate our communitarian intuition well since, I argue, it overlooks our grounded-ness or historicity. Indeed, our hallmark of being a person, in virtue of being free, is that we are condemned to act, and Korsgaard is right to take this into consideration of what our personal identity would look like. However, it is also equally important that another fundamental human plight is taken into consideration - that is, our *situated-ness* or historicity. Though we are free, we are also situated in a specific moment in time, specific location in space and specific relation to others. What is missing from Korsgaard's account, then, is the acknowledgement that our situated-ness should also be taken as a source of reason.

In what follows, I will offer an alternative account of personal identity to Korsgaard's - call it the (Kinda Sartrean) dramaturgical account of personal identity - which conceives the practice of personal identity (i.e. forming, maintaining, transforming one's personal identity) as a, to use Charles Taylor's terminology, *dialogical* ordeal. Taylor writes,

The general feature of human life that I want to evoke is its fundamentally *dialogical* character. We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of de-

fining an identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression. ... No one acquires the languages needed for self-definition of their own. We are introduced to them through exchanges with others who matter to us - what George Herbert Mead called "significant others". The genesis of human mind is in this sense not "monological," not something each accomplishes on his or her own, but *dialogical*. (1991: 32-3)

Korsgaard's endorsement account can be understood as offering a monological picture of the practice of personal identity: your only obstacle in upholding a certain identity is yourself - identity-work is something that is done on your own. Contrary to Korsgaard's picture, the dramaturgical theory conceives identity-work as a fundamentally social practice where both you and others play important roles.

Whilst Korsgaard built her theory of personal identity on a Kantian pillar - perhaps it is her Kantian root that led her to the monological conception - I will build mine on a Sartrean one. I take as the starting point Sartre's idea, most illustriously explored in *Being and Nothingness (BN)* and less explicitly so in *Transcendence of the Ego (TE)* and *Anti-Semite and Jew (ASJ)*, that a human being is *ontologically ambiguous*: a human being is at the same time both *transcendence* (free) and *facticity* (historical or situated). By building my dramaturgical conception of personal identity on a Sartrean pillar, my conception acquires the edge over Korsgaard's in virtue of its resources to explain the nuances between the liberal and communitarian intuitions: that neither the individual herself nor others around her hold the ultimate authority over the individual's identity. After establishing our ambiguous duality on the ontological level, I construct the dramaturgical conception of identity-work (i.e. the practice of personal identity or what Korsgaard refers to as self-constitution) by drawing from both Sartre's description of the relation between the I and the Ego found primarily in *TE* and contemporary philosophers and thinkers working under the rough umbrella of dramaturgical or narrative theory. Ultimately, I hope to illustrate with the dramaturgical theory of personal identity that identity-work is dialogical.

Sartrean ambiguity

In *BN*, Sartre employs a phenomenological method to construct his ontological theory of human reality. Sartre's ontology operates on two different, but related, levels: the ontological level

and the experiential level (Aronson 1980: 75). This distinction ensures that the purpose of *BN* is two-fold: first, it systematically outlines the ontological categories (being-in-itself, being-for-itself, being-for-the-Other, etc.) on the ontological level; second, the experiential level of his analysis outlines particular ways that consciousness lives its ontological structure (i.e. *qua* being-in-it-itself and being-for-the-Other). It is on the experiential level that Sartre posits his picture of how consciousness lives its ontological nature either authentically or inauthentically (i.e. in bad faith), which is a consequence of his view on the ambiguous nature of our ontology as being at the same time transcendence and facticity. For Sartre, consciousness is lived authentically if it lives its ontological truth. On the other hand, consciousness is in bad faith if it engages in a form of self-deception, that is, to live in flight of its ontological truth. I will return to the topic of authenticity in Chapter 2. For now, I will focus on his discussion of our ontological ambiguity and how it, I propose, structures our practice of personal identity.

To get to Sartre's discussion on ambiguity, we must begin by making acquaintance with Sartre's phenomenological methodology. The phenomenological method marks the first and a key difference between my view and Korsgaard's Kantian conception of personal identity. Following phenomenologists such as Husserl and Heidegger, Sartre analyses human reality from within the sphere of consciousness. In establishing the analysis of consciousness as the ground for his phenomenological method, Sartre rejects the Kantian metaphysical dualism of the noumena and the phenomena:

The primary consequence of the 'theory of phenomenon' is that the appearance does not refer to being in the way in which the phenomenon, in Kantian philosophy, refers to the noumenon. Because there is nothing behind the appearance, and it indicates nothing more than itself ... it cannot be supported by any being other than its own, and cannot therefore be the thin skin of nothingness separating subject-being from absolute-being. (*BN*: 5)

It will be clear later on that the divergence in methodology shared between Kant and Sartre may account for the difference between Korsgaard's and my view on personal identity, especially when we later discuss Sartre's theory of intersubjectivity involving The Look, being-for-the-Other and shame.

After establishing the phenomenological method, Sartre offers a distinction between *pre-reflective consciousness* and *reflective consciousness* which gives rise to the ontological dichotomy of the *being-in-itself* and *being-for-itself*. Sartre draws from Husserlian phenomenology in his characterisation of consciousness at its most basic level:

Consciousness is consciousness of something. This means that transcendence is the constitutive structure of consciousness; that is, that consciousness is born supported by a being which is not itself. (*BN*: 23).

When a subject (a for-itself) is conscious of, say, a wall (an in-itself), the subject is having what Sartre refers to as ‘pre-reflective consciousness’ (*BN*: 97-103). In pre-reflective consciousness, one is, so to speak, looking out towards the world that is positively filled with things-in-themselves that are not the consciousness itself. For example, when I am surfing the waves, and especially when I am completely absorbed in the activity, I am only conscious of the wave and, maybe, the surfboard. We often describe experiences of flow state as involving the “falling away of the ego” or “losing oneself in the experience”. On the other hand, ‘reflective consciousness’ involves the consciousness’s awareness of itself as it stands in opposition to the given world or the world in-itself (*BN*: 108). The shift from the pre-reflective consciousness to reflective consciousness can be described as involving the shift in our focus from from the world back towards oneself, the thing that makes the experience of the world possible in the first place. Reflective consciousness is the awareness of oneself as situated in the world as one turns one's attention back towards oneself.

Sartre further distinguishes between pure and impure reflective consciousnesses. In pure reflective consciousness, the for-itself comprehends its ontological nature; it is in pure reflection that consciousness comes the most face-to-face with its transcendence. Sartre tells us that the reflected-on consciousness in pure reflection appears as a “quasi-object” (*BN*: 223). This is possibly due to the fact that the for-itself is described as a negative or a negating being in the world of positive things-in-themselves, and so cannot be comprehended as a full object due to its contentless characteristic (*BN*: 40).

Whilst Sartre takes pure reflection to be the “ideal” and “original” form of reflective consciousness (*BN*: 223), he takes *impure* reflection as appearing on the foundation of pure reflection

and impure reflection differs from pure reflection by demanding a *claim* about the *self*. Impure reflections, I suggest, refer to moments where we ask and answer the characterisation question about our personal identity. Sartre describes impure reflection as assuming the temporality of the self as it “seeks to determine the being that I am” (*BN*: 224). Impure reflection, which is the most common kind of reflection that we engage in, bears the most resemblance to our everyday notion of introspection. For instance, it includes moments when I ask myself about which “faults, virtues, tastes, talents, tendencies, instincts, etc.” (*TE*: 71) I possess; whether I am of the jealous type, or irascible, or clever; and includes the states I ascribe to myself whether I hate Pierre or love my job. The picture that I form in moments of impure reflection constitutes “psychic objects” within me, as they are “interiorised” and “objectivated” (*BN*: 160).

Crucial to our discussion about the authority over one’s characterisation personal identity, it should be pointed out that Sartre describes impure reflection as a *complicit* reflection (*BN*: 223). It is complicit because impure reflection only grasps what it reflects on from the *point of view of the Other* (*BN*: 231). The act of objectification of the self during impure reflection involves disclosing oneself as beyond what is actually being reflected on (i.e. the quasi-object grasped via pure reflection) and engages in a process of self-creation by the assuming the point of view of the Other. I will return to this point later in our discussion of being-for-the-Other and the formation and maintenance of the Ego.

I will also note here that my allegiance to Sartre is conditional on how intimate he takes the relation between impure reflection and bad faith to have. In Chapter 2, I will argue that bad faith involves a failure in conducting impure reflection *well*, assuming that impure reflections do not immediately lead to bad faith. Sartre scholars, however, interpret Sartre to hold that “impure reflection is in bad faith” (Morris 2008: 73) and take his notion of pure reflective consciousness as the gateway to his ethical and political thought (Morelli 2008: 61). In *BN*, as mentioned earlier, Sartre takes pure reflection to be the ideal and original form of reflective consciousness (*BN*: 223), i.e., it is the most truthful form of comprehending oneself. Impure reflection, in contrast, is not held in such high regards by Sartre. For instance, he tells us that the process of self-objectification in impure reflection involves ‘degrading’ oneself to an in-itself. And he describes bad faith precisely as the degradation of the for-itself into an in-itself.

My hesitation to join force with the scholars stems primarily from my reading of Sartre's description of the ambiguity or the duality of human-reality which indicates that he does not take transcendence as having higher priority than facticity, and, secondarily, from his later work *Anti-Semite and Jew* that offer an account of authenticity that involves having the right attitude towards one's identity, which can only be derived from impure reflection. I will now give an exegesis of his account of the ambiguity, and will later in Chapter 2 discuss bad faith.

Sartre's account of the ambiguity (*amphibolique*) of human reality is expressed in his claim about how a human being is not self-coincidental, i.e. we are "a being which is what it is not and which is not what it is" (BN: 58). The human reality involves "a double activity in the heart of unity" (BN: 95). Morris (2008: 79-80) usefully points out that Sartre identifies several pairs of duality that characterise human nature:

- (1) Facticity vs. Transcendence
- (2) Being-in-the-midst-of-the-world vs. Being-in-the-world
- (3) Being-for-the-Other vs. Being-for-itself.

The first term of each duality indicates how being a human is to be thing-like or object-like. The second terms, on the other hand, indicate a respect in which human reality is *not* thing-like. What this means for the seemingly encrypted quotation "a being which is what it is not and which is not what it is" is that the phrase 'is what it is not' refers to the first aspect of being human and that is what it is like to be facticity; and the second phrase 'is not what it is' refers to what it is to be a transcendence.

Not only that human reality is characterised by its transcendence and facticity like two sides of the same coin, each side is fundamentally *internally and inextricably related to one another* such that transcendence cannot be what it is without reference to facticity and vice versa. What it is to be a transcendence is to transcend or negate its facticity; and what it is to have facticity is to be something that is conscious of the void that separates consciousness from in-itself. Sartre's expression of the internal relation between the duality is reflected in his remark that 'freedom is situated': a freedom would not be a freedom without its overcoming or negating its facticity. Keeping the duality in

mind we will now examine in detail, one aspect at a time, what it is to live the ambiguity of our human reality.

Being a transcendence: a being which is not what it is

Similar to Korsgaard, Sartre expends many words in describing how we are condemned to be free (as a being-for-itself (*BN*: 119-162)). I suggest that the for-itself can be understood as a ‘self-activity’ in virtue of its transcendence: it is a contentless thing that exists in the world as a negating force - a transcending activity - as it separates and organises the in-itself into different particular objects - e.g. customers, tables, chairs, Pierre, etc., and then proceeds to bring into existence something that merely existed as a ‘possibility’ beforehand. In other words, the for-itself is at its core a free (or undetermined) teleological entity: it is a negating process that has a focal point that follows consciousness’s attention, in which its focal point is determined by the end that consciousness intends to bring into existence. Sartre describes the activity of the transcendence as ‘lighting up’ the contingent world before itself with meaning in accordance to the end that it chooses (*BN*: 636). For example, Sartre offers a scenario where a protagonist enters a cafe looking for Pierre (*BN* 41-2). Since the protagonist’s activity has its end as Pierre (or meeting Pierre), his attentive focal point rummages around the room bringing each object one by one into and out of focus - customer’s faces, chairs, etc. - searching for Pierre. These particular things come into sharp focus - ‘lit up’ - then fade into the background as the protagonist discerns one-by-one that each face is not that of Pierre. Interestingly, to the for-itself, Pierre’s absence appears as a ‘nothing’ in the world of in-itself (e.g. customers, tables and chairs in the cafe) in virtue of the emptiness of the protagonist’s intention (*BN* 64). In describing the intention as empty, Sartre conveys that the object of intention is something that is non-existent in the world of plentitude. As the protagonist looks for Pierre (a non-existent or a ‘nothing’ in the world), the protagonist strives to transcend the world as is towards actualising the object of intention in the world-to-be. Consciousness, Sartre writes, “transcends itself in order to reach an object, and it exhausts itself in this same positing” (*BN-B* 11). Thus, in its action, the for-itself strives to nihilate the world as is.

Notice that Sartre’s philosophy of action that has transcendence as its key player resembles Korsgaard’s endorsement picture of reason. This is because both philosophies share in their Kantian heritage. Similar to Korsgaard, Sartre holds that for something to be a reason for me, I must take it

to be a reason. It is *my project*, the end that *I* have chosen, that confers upon it its reason-givingness. Though Sartre emphasises the role of transcendence, especially so in his earlier works like *BN*, he also paid attention to the significance of facticity, which becomes more prominent in his later works such as *ASJ* where he focuses more on practical freedom that incorporates his Marxist influences.

Being a facticity: a being which is what it is not

It is not only my freedom that constitutes my reality since transcendence assumes transcending *something*, and the thing that is being transcended is my situation or ‘facticity’. For Sartre, facticity refers to the element of the in-itself that I encounter that is thereby relevant to my life, e.g. tables, customers, Pierre’s absence from the cafe. As mentioned earlier, there is an inextricable relation between transcendence and facticity: if free choice is required to light up the in-itself, then the in-itself is required for the exercise of freedom (*BN*: 646). The interplay between transcendence and facticity applies to all elements of one’s situation, and pretty much all situations that one encounters from birth to death, e.g. my past, the society that I live in, people around me, my reputation, etc. *My* facticity is not something wholly unrelated to *my* transcendence, i.e. my actions. I am in the situation that I am today because of my past actions, and my past are related to my future possibilities just as much as my future is a possibility informed by my past. For instance, my being a philosophy student is now *my* facticity, which was a few years ago a mere possibility, but it was *my* possibility. My possibility branches out from the past as a lived trajectory - my having been interested in the subject during high school, for instance. Indeed, I could have become a law student instead - this was *a* possibility but not *my* possibility. It was not my possibility because, in virtue of being a transcendence, I did not choose it as my end. And indeed, I may *still* become a law student even if I am now a philosophy student, however, this would require my re-evaluation of the relative importance of, perhaps, money, opportunity cost, my love for philosophy, etc. and go through a change in my project. At the moment, however, that remains *a* possibility that is not *my* possibility.

One kind of facticity that is very relevant to our discussion is our being-for-the-Other, which is a mode of self-consciousness. To experience myself as a being-for-the-Other is to experience myself as an object out in the world that can be perceived by another consciousness. Sartre’s account of the Other-mediated self-consciousness can be found in his discussion of ‘the Look’:

And now I hear footsteps in the corridor: someone is looking at me. ... I am suddenly conscious of myself in so far as I escape from my *self* ... in so far as I have my foundation outside myself. For myself, I am no more than a pure reference to the Other. (BN: 356-7)

My experience of the Look involves a “decentering” from my original point of view, i.e. the point of view that I take in pre-reflective consciousness, to discover myself from the point of view of the Other who is looking at me. From this vantage point, the table has turned, the Other holds the power to interpret me in the way I usually hold the power to interpret and give meaning to the in-themselves in the world where I am sovereign. The Other confronts me as another freedom that mediates my self-consciousness, i.e. my being-for-the-Other (BN: 356).

It is through the emotion of shame (and other self-conscious emotions such as pride) that I experience myself as revealed by the Look *as* my being-for-the-Other. Shame is “the recognition that I really *am* object that is looked at and judged by the Other” (BN: 358); my being-for-the-Other is not a mere contingent part of the world but a part of *me* for I *am* my being-for-the-Other. This is true even if I cannot know for sure how the other person actually perceives me: “an object-Me is revealed to me as the unknowable being, as the flight into the Other as I am, as fully responsible” (BN: 468; cf. Gardner 2017).

Sartre also tells us that it is also through shame that I experience myself as alienated from my condition as transcendence. In experiencing myself as a being-for-the-Other under the Other’s gaze, I experience myself as “no longer the master of the situation” (BN: 363), alienated from my possibility (BN: 360). As my being a transcendence is to be in flight towards something that I am not (yet), then the Look freezes my flight at the threshold of my possibility as if I am photographed into a frozen, lifeless snapshot. And the snapshot’s meaning is determined by the Other, something that occurs beyond my control.

Though Sartre’s remark rings true that the experience of being-for-the-Other is *alienating* as it pulls me away from my transcendence, we should not jump to the conclusion that it pulls me away from what I am towards what I am *not*, such as a false self or a delusion. It is understandable that one makes the mistake of interpreting Sartre as assigning ontological priority to transcendence over facticity - similar to how certain Aristotle scholars interpret him as giving more importance to

the contemplative activity over moral excellence when it comes to human flourishing (eudaimonia) - since Sartre is bent on reminding us, especially in his earlier works like *BN* and very much so in *BN*'s chapter on bad faith, that bad faith involves self-deceptively denying the reality of one's freedom. However, it would be a mistake to say that bad faith excludes the inversed deceptive attitude where one denies the reality of one's being-for-the-Other (more on this in Chapter 2). Moreover, Sartre often employs pejorative terms to describe our facticity, especially in comparison to our transcendence, such as 'degeneration' or 'degradation': e.g., "Pure shame is [the feeling] of being *an object*, i.e. *recognising* myself in that degraded, dependent and frozen being that I am for the Other" (*BN*: 392). Nevertheless, Sartre tells us that we *are* the being-for-the-Other: he writes,

Beyond any knowledge I can possibly have, I am this self that is known by an other. I *am* this being. Not for an instant would I dream of denying it; my shame is an admission. I might, later on, *make use of bad faith in order to conceal it from me*, but bad faith is also an admission, since it is an effort to flee from the being that I am. (*BN*: 358, my emphasis)

Now that we have established the ontological structure of human reality as being ambiguous, i.e. duality of transcendence and faculty, we can move on to how we live out our ambiguity, which I take to constitute in the practice of forming and maintaining one's Ego. In what follows, I identify Sartre's discussion of the Ego, explicitly explored in *TE*, as the prototype of the dramaturgical conception of personal identity.

The dramaturgical conception of personal identity

The dramaturgical account of personal identity has three main claims:

- (1) The self can be metaphorically divided into two: the self as author-actor (the I or the consciousness) and the self as character (the me or the Ego).
- (2) *Narrative-work*: In reflective consciousness, the author-self narrates into being the character-self.
- (3) *Face-work*: In pre-reflective consciousness, the actor-self enacts the character-self.

This sub-chapter is dedicated to expanding and defending the three claims by drawing from Sartre's thoughts in *TE* and contemporary thinkers' that may be roughly taken as working within the dramaturgical or narrative theory tradition such as David Velleman, Peter Goldie, Erving Goffman and Hilde Lindemann. Ultimately, I aim to illustrate the dialogical nature of identity-work, which consists of what I call 'narrative-work' and, repurposing the term from Goffman, 'face-work'.

Self as author-actor and self as character

The dramaturgical distinction between the self as *author-actor* and the self as (dramaturgical or fictional) *character* corresponds to Sartre's distinction between the consciousness (the I) and the Ego (the me) first made in *TE*, often alluded to in *BN*, and playfully toyed with in *Kean*. Equating the character-self with Sartre's notion of the Ego, my dramaturgical account takes one's character-self *as* one's practical identity or the personal identity in the characterisation sense. On my view, the author-actor self functions as the author of one's character in reflective consciousness and acts out the character in pre-reflective consciousness. Though the author-actor identifies with the character, the author-actor never bridges the ontological gap to become the character itself. Here are a few points that I draw from Sartre in characterising the duality of the self.

For Sartre, whilst the I or the consciousness is contentless or a negativity in the world (in virtue of its transcendence), the me or the Ego is a positive in-itself that depicts the person (in virtue of their facticity). Similarly, on the dramaturgical view, as intentional objects, whilst the author-actor self is contentless, the character self is filled with content. For Sartre, whilst the I is encountered in pure reflection, the me or the Ego appears opaque in moments of impure reflections. Similarly, on my view, the author-actor self realises in pure reflection that they are *not* the character and comprehends the freedom that they have in authoring and acting; and in impure reflection (and pre-reflective consciousness) the author-actor forms and maintains the character through the practice of personal identity. For Sartre, the Ego is *created by* the consciousness; whilst the I is active (something that does the doing), the me is passive (something that is done upon or adhered to). It is in bad faith to think otherwise, i.e. taking one's character as given and one's action as followed from one's character (e.g. Lana del Rey's lyrics to *Norman Fucking Rockwell* may come to mind: "Cause you're just a man / it's just what you do"). Similarly for my account, the author is the one who nar-

rates the character into being and the actor is the one who enacts the character. For Sartre, whilst the Ego (and the I) falls away in pre-reflective consciousness, so does my dramaturgical account holds that the author-actor falls away when one is engrossed in the world pre-reflectively - the actor does not turn towards herself when she acts but outward towards the world, acting by enacting the character that the author created.

Echoing Korsgaard's remark about our innate desire to become a unified agent, Sartre characterises the Ego as the unification of our actions, states, and qualities (*TE*: 16). Of course, Sartre is not talking about the unification of the consciousness (author-actor) and the Ego (character) - this is ontologically impossible and to insist on it is to do so in bad faith (this will be explored in depth in Chapter 2). Rather, it is reflected in the sort of answer one gives to the characterisation question "Who am I?". I expect that I can give a coherent and unified explanation for why I acted the way I did and how the explanation also informs my future actions; that my emotions and mental states correspond to how I perceive and prescribe meaning to the world and state of affairs; that my dispositions deepen or transform in concord with the way that my life progresses. For my descriptions of who I am to form a satisfying answer to the characterisation question, my take on my actions, states and dispositions must be grounded on a unified picture of who I am. E.g., in explaining my action to stop fraternising with Norman I will refer to my beliefs and dispositions: "I distanced myself away from Norman because I believe that he is a toxic man-child who takes cruel pleasure in making me jealous of him, and I am so very tired of being the jealous woman". Incoherency or disunity, then, is a mark of a defected Ego: e.g. "I dislike Norman for always making me jealous but, as his wife, I let the love affairs slide", or "I have a penis and I am a woman, and real women have no penis". Note that not all defects of the Ego deserve moral blame, and some are consequences of injustice and oppression - I will return to this point in Chapter 2. The intelligibility of one's character is judged on the standard of unification: an excellent and intelligible Ego is a unified Ego; a defected Ego is an incoherent Ego. We see that 'touching base' with ourselves, keeping ourselves 'in check,' is a meaningful and worthwhile thing to do because we see the importance of having an intelligible character or, in other words, a good sense of self-understanding.

Sartre also tells us that the Ego is spontaneous, elusive and magical, and this is related to the fact that the unity of the Ego is produced by a *poetic* creation.

If it is the nature of the Ego to be a *dubious* object, it does not follow that it is *hypothetical*. Indeed, the Ego is the spontaneous transcendent unification of our states and our actions. In this capacity, it is not a hypothesis. ... When I unify my consciousnesses under the rubric of ‘hatred’, I add to them a certain meaning... The relation of the Ego to the qualities, states and actions is a relation of poetic production ... or of creation. (*TE*: 18)

My dramaturgical theory takes its cue from Sartre’s remark about the poetic element of the Ego (and other times that he used theatrical words and ideas to describe human reality) to unpack and build on Sartre’s thoughts in dramaturgical terms.

Sartre’s depiction of the practice of forming the Ego as *poetic practice* echoes David Velleman’s idea that we are ‘living novels’. In ‘The Self as Narrator’ (2020), Velleman examines Daniel Dennett’s (1991) speculation that the notion of self-constitution seems quite magical since it is analogous to how a magician’s magical hat (the human being) can pull the rabbit (the constituted self) out of itself without the magician’s help. Though agreeing with Dennett’s take that the rabbit is a sort of *fiction*, Velleman disagrees with Dennett’s conclusion that therefore the rabbit or the fictional self is an illusion or that it is not real. In Dennett’s metaphor, the self (rabbit) is a non-existent author of a fictional autobiography composed by the human organism (hat). Thus, on his view, the self has the status of a fictional object that we use to predict and make sense of our and others’ behaviour. Dennett argues that it follows that the idea of the unified agent (such as Korsgaard’s practical identity or Sartre’s Ego) is a fiction that has no legitimate place in a serious theory, and it is a mistake for one to think that we *are* the fiction or myth that we ourselves spun. Velleman disagrees: though it is the case that we invent ourselves, this invention is both fictive *and* true; he writes, “we invent ourselves ... but we really are the characters whom we invent” (2020: 280). I agree with Velleman’s remark that the self-narrator’s life is shaped by her story, and her story shapes her life. Velleman suggests:

The self is a “living novel” ... in the sense that they not only narrate the roles [they] play but also play the roles that [they] narrate. (Velleman 2020: 289)

Velleman’s remark about the reality of the fictive self echoes Sartre’s remark that though the Ego may appear elusive, it is no illusion nor should it be dismissed in virtue of honesty: “If it is the

nature of the Ego to be a *dubious* object, it does not follow that it is *hypothetical*” (TE: 18); the Ego “has a concrete type of existence, undoubtedly different from the existence of mathematical truths, of meanings, or of patio-temporal beings, but no less real” (TE: 52).

In line with his claim about the self as being a fictive object, Velleman also made an insightful analogy between improvisational theatrical actors and everyday agents in his book *How We Get Along* (2009). Like a improvisational actor who enacts the character that he is assigned to perform unscripted, an ordinary person like you and I also seem to act out the sort of person that we think we are, i.e. our character. An improvisational actor must have a good grasp of the character’s psychological make up - “wants, values, convictions, habits, emotions, and traits of personality” (2009: 13) - and thereby make it intelligible to the improvisational actor to perform. The difference between the improvisational actor’s play-acting and our everyday acting is that improvisational actor does not believe that he is indeed the character but we do often believe so about the characters that we enact. Whilst the improvisational actor play-acts the assigned character, I play-act as myself, i.e. my Ego.

I take the dramaturgical distinction between the self as author-actor and self as character as fleshing out Velleman’s and Sartre’s thoughts. Though Sartre seems to be on to something in saying that the Ego is a unity of actions, states and dispositions since we tend to think of who we are as having continued and harmonious characteristics across time and situations, but, speaking from personal experience that I believe many can relate to, we never experience the Ego in its entirety as a unified whole. The intelligibility of the Ego in each instances of our consciousness, I suggest, manifests differently depending on whether we are in pre-reflective or reflective consciousness, and so we practice poetic creation differently in accordance to the kind of consciousness we inhabit. Taking on Velleman’s suggestion that the I has at least two roles in regards to the self, my dramaturgical view suggests that the I plays the role of the author in reflective consciousness and the role of the actor in pre-reflective consciousness. To the author-self, the Ego appears as a *diachronic character* that is to be emplotted or narrated by the author - I call the author’s identity-work as *narrative-work*. To the actor-self, the Ego manifests as a *synchronic character* that must enacted in a scene - this I call, borrowing the term from Erving Goffman, *face-work*.

The synchronic and diachronic intelligibility of the character are inextricably related. Metaphorically speaking, the author and the actor consult one another in order to poetically produce and maintain a unified character, i.e. to upkeep the internal and external coherence of the narrative: with one another's help, the author must narrate a coherent story internally and the actor must enact an intelligible scene. Thus, the practice of personal identity is not as linear - where the author creates the character and the actor enacts it - as one might expect. How the actor's performance has been received by and responded to by Others inform not only the actor's next moves but also the author's narration. Thus, the diachronic and synchronic intelligibility of the character cyclically inform one another. Both levels of identity-work, I argue, are dialogical. This is where the dramaturgical theory can better accommodate the communitarian intuition and so fares better than Korsgaard's endorsement account. I will lay out in detail the mechanics of both interdependent practices of personal identity, beginning with narrative-work.

Narrative-work: authoring the character

What I have in mind by 'narrative-work' is in line with Paul Ricoeur's (1984) practice of '*emplotment*'. For Ricoeur, emplotment is the process where bare descriptions are transformed into a narrative. Peter Goldie (2012) expands on Ricoeur's notion of emplotment and usefully proposed that there are four parts to emplotment:

- (1) the raw material for emplotment,
- (2) the process of emplotment itself,
- (3) the outcome the process which is the narrative or the story, and
- (4) the possible effects of the narrative or story on the thinker, hearer and reader who grasps its import.

Goldie also defines a narrative as follows:

A narrative is a representation of events which is shaped, organised, and coloured, presenting those events, and the people involved in them, from a certain perspective or perspectives, and thereby giving narrative structure - coherence, meaningfulness, and evaluative and emotional import - to what is narrated. (Goldie 2012: 8)

The function of the author-I, according to my view, is to emplot the character-me into being, i.e. to shape, organise and colour the bare events and transform them into a narrative by giving bare materials coherency, meaningfulness and evaluative and emotional import.

A narrative of the character-me is a diachronic comprehension of the Ego. Ricœur tells us that the process of emplotment transforms ‘historical time’ (raw materials) to ‘human time’ (narrative); historical time becomes human time “to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full significance when it becomes a condition of temporal existence” (1984: 52). The diachronic character is backward- and forward-looking. Not only does the author, in threading together a coherent story, look to her historical past and picks out events that she deems relevant and imbue them with meaning and emotional import, the author also looks forward towards her future in order to explain her possibility in concord with the narrative. For example, when I look into my past qua raw material, I may pick out the time where the eight-year-old me got lost in the woods on a family trip. This happened because I went against my father’s explicit command to not wander by myself into the woods. I recalled that kept my cool until I found my own way out. As the author, I may describe my character as rebellious and this is in line with my decision to pursue risky endeavours such as joining a revolution in the future. Later next month, after the risky project did not turn out as planned, I may re-evaluate myself as having been too reckless and recolour my self-conception as not rebellious but foolhardy, and at the same time tweak my take on the eight-year-old me in the same vain too.

The outcome of narrative-work should not be thought of as a single autobiographical story with a linear form that has a clear beginning, middle and end. As Hilde Lindemann (Nelson 2001) objects to Alastair MacIntyre’s (1981) linear picture of narrative self, it is doubtful that anyone live their life according to such a strict plot especially when we constantly selectively change and edit our self-understanding all the time as we progress through life. Since our self-understanding regularly gets a makeover, it would make editing an epic one-story autobiography an unrealistically cumbersome task. Thus, it is misleading to think of narrative construction as an epic narration of an ‘overarching story’. Rather, the outcome of narrative-work is constituted by many *fibrous stories* that are loosely connected and are interwoven into whole of the person’s diachronic identity. As the author selectively depicts and characterise her actions and events that she deems important or just

conveniently in the forefront of their mind, these stories either loosely form a web of stories that may explain one or few local events or become an umbrella narrative that explains many events in her life.

The reason that certain stories surface to the forefront and enjoy more attention from the author whilst others sink back into the depth of the reservoir of loosely connected stories is partly due to the people that frequent our lives. We often find that meeting new people or becoming closer to someone often give us new insights and fresh perspectives that help us understand ourselves in different lights (e.g. leaving home and moving to a new city for university, securing a new job, getting married, binge-reading a certain novelist's works, etc.). And the loss of someone close often results in our feeling disoriented as if we have lost a part of ourselves. This is because, I argue, narrative-work is a dialogical process. For Sartre, as mentioned, it is in moments of impure reflection that one encounters the Ego, which Sartre describes as a *complicit* kind of reflection. It is *complicit* in the sense that the Ego appears from the Other's point of view, that is, my consciousness of my Ego is *Other-mediated*. In comprehending and emplotting the Ego the author takes the point of view external to the character's, someone who is not-the-character herself and also someone who is entirely outside of the story altogether. Whose perspective could the author assume if not the actor's? Similar to how an author of a novel or a play imaginatively assumes the point of view of their audience as they try to narrate a story that would be intelligible to them, the author-I also assumes the perspective of the a particular audience, a particular perspective that has its own set of intelligible standard. It is precisely that the author must assume the perspective of the audience that narrative-work is dialogical. The author's narration of the diachronic character, then, is dialogical in the sense that the author has the implicit intention of making the character intelligible to the audience.

One example that illustrates how the author inhibits the audience's perspective comes from the Aristotelian literature on moral development and habituation. In her reading of Aristotle's claim in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that one becomes virtuous by acting virtuously (*NE*: 1105a17-21), Margaret Hampson (2019) suggests that a student of virtue learns to act virtuously by engaging in *emulative imitation* of a virtuous person. Hampson supports her imitation-based interpretation of Aristotle's habituation by pointing to *Poetics*: "through imitation [man] takes his first steps in understanding" (*Poetics*: 1148b7-8). A learner engages in emulative imitation, and consequently habituation, if she adopts the virtuous person's perspective, e.g. by reflecting on the virtuous person's ends

for the virtuous action he is performing. For example, instead of merely imitating the temperate person's refusal of the second piece of cake, the learner adopts the temperate person's perspective and takes time to figure out what the reason behind her refusal could be. By doing so, the learner steps away from her mindset (i.e. the intelligibility standard that her character holds) and into the virtuous person's mindset (i.e. the audience's intelligibility), the learner is then granted accessibility to a fuller appreciation of the fineness of the virtuous action.

It is through emulating the audience's perspective that the author sets the standard of intelligibility for the narration. If the student of virtue were to reflect on her past whilst emulating the virtuous person's perspective then she will shape, organise and evaluate her past experiences in the way that the teacher would. For example, when John began living in the university dorm, he may emulate his new flatmate whose healthy lifestyle he admires and engages in narrative-work by re-colouring his lunchtime episode at the all-you-can-eat restaurant last week as not being a bang-for-the-buck sort of win but rather superfluously gluttonous. Of course, we do not often always go around consciously trying to emulate virtuous people (though we often emulate people who we admire). For instance, a child often emulates its parents and makes sense of itself through their eyes whether or not the child judges the parents to be morally admirable (if it can even do that).

When one thinks of narrative-work, one may imagine that it is exclusively carried out in solitude (e.g. writing in a journal, reflecting on a couch with a cup of tea, etc.) but this is not the case. Impure reflection, contrary to how Sartre may have made it to seem, can be done in a collaborative setting. In her article 'Conversational Self' (2022), Daniela Dover observes that human beings are eager to understand one another. This urge to understand each other is not merely to understand just another's remark or action, but to understand one another *globally* - to be both understood and understand one another on 'deeper levels' whatever this means (I will return to this in Chapter 3 where I discuss love and knowing someone as "who they really are"). Usually, we satiate this desire by engaging in what Dover refers to as 'interpersonal inquiry', i.e. conversation with the aim of trying to 'get to know one another'. We often engage in interpersonal inquiry for example, at parties, catching up with an old friend after a hiatus, over family dinner, etc. Interpersonal inquiry, as Dover rightly points out, does not necessarily involve interlocutors taking turn telling one another their autobiographies, confessing their deep dark secrets, nor having a heart-to-heart about art or politics. Rather, if you and I were to have a 'good conversation' - ones where we feel heard as if we have

temporarily wearing the same shoes - we would feel that we are *figuring the world out together*, a common world that contains both of us. Discussions about gardening or food or dogs can be just as revealing as heart-to-heart confessions since our inquiries into one another and our inquiries into the world at large are comprehensively mixed up: when I talk about myself, i.e. telling stories, I am also talking about the world, and when I talk about the world, I offer you a sense of who I am. For us to have a good interpersonal inquiry, Dover argues, we must ‘take one another seriously’, which involves my adopting the attitude of *input-seeking*, *abdication* and *reciprocity* towards you (2022: 200-4):

- (1) I have an *input-seeking* attitude when I treat your understanding of you as relevant to my understanding of you; I do not suppose that I can get to know you from the outside but seek to know you from the inside, e.g. I seek to get you to answer my questions about you.
- (2) I have an *abdication* attitude when I treat your understanding of me as relevant to my understanding of myself; I withhold from ‘pulling rank’ by claiming privilege authority over my self-understanding and self-interpretation.
- (3) I have a *reciprocating* attitude when I do not uphold the two stances above but also expect you, or even encourage you, to adopt the same attitudes towards me.

Through taking one another seriously, as I get to know you I also get better acquainted with myself. For instance, I might embrace your interpretation of me, or I might come to a newfound understanding of myself by rebelling against your understanding of me. To engage in a interpersonal inquiry, we can say, is to engage in a *narrative-team-work*. Similar to how a great author reads widely, it is partly through interpersonal inquiry that we cultivate our narrative skills as an author-I in developing the imaginative audience that the author-I assumes the point of view of.

Face-work: enacting the character

As we have seen, in reflective consciousness the Ego appears as a diachronic character and we maintain or transform it through author-self’s narrative-work. Now, when consciousness reverts to pre-reflective consciousness, the I switches from taking on the role of the author to that of an *actor*; and instead of engaging in narrative-work, the I takes on the task of forming and maintaining its identity through the practice of *face-work*. The dialogical aspect of face-work is perhaps more

apparent than narrative-work as I encounter the Other and their Ego face-to-face rather than as a figment of my imagination. Sartre tells us that I find my Ego in a similar way that I find other's Ego:

the Ego is neither formally or materially in consciousness: it is outside, *in the world*; it is a being in the world, like the Ego of another. (*TE*: 1)

My character exists in the same realm as others' characters or Ego and it is through face-work that people negotiate and manifest their Egos. In dramaturgical terms, an instance of face-work resembles a scene that comprises of actors interacting with one another by expressing, interpreting and reacting to one another's character.

In his article 'On Face-work' (1955), sociologist Erving Goffman observes that much of our social interactions seem to revolve around the upkeep of our 'faces'. What he means by 'face' is an individual's claimed public self-image that they want others to have of them (1955: 213). When our face is under threat or has been damaged, we normally feel the need to restore it. On the other hand, when we are being praised or complimented in front of others, we normally feel our face to be enhanced. Goffman theorises that one's face changes and develops through social interactions and employs the concept of "face-work" to refer to those communicative behaviours that one performs to manage one's and/or others' faces (1955: 216). Successful face-work leads the person

(S1) to be "in face" (to maintain or to have face) as she effectively self-presents an image of herself that is consistent with the face that she internally takes herself to have (1955: 213).

Unsuccessful face-work, on the other hand, leads the person either

(US1) to be in the "wrong face" if his internal self-image cannot be integrated into the face that is being sustained for him by other participants in the social interaction, or

(US2) to be "out of face" if he participates in a contact with others where other participants do not have a face for him to occupy in the social interaction (1955: 214).

Whilst a person typically responds with feelings of confidence and reassurance when he is conscious of himself to have maintained his face, a person who finds himself to be in the wrong face or out of face is likely to feel ashamed (1955: 214).

What Goffman refers to as ‘face’ can be roughly understood on my dramaturgical framework as one’s *synchronic character*, and ‘face-work’ the synchronic practice of personal identity or identity-work. The intelligibility of one’s synchronic character or one’s face depends on the success of face-work. In her book *Holding and Letting Go* (2014), Hilde Lindemann suggests that there are *four necessary moments* to what I take to be face-work, i.e. synchronic identity-work (2014: 53).

1. [*Internal identity formation*.:] the actor feels, watches, wonders, thinks, or in some other respect engages in the mental activity that gives rise to her personality or character.
2. [*Expression*.:] The actor expresses her character; the personality finds bodily expression.
3. [*Recognition*.:] Another human being, i.e. co-actor, recognises the expression of the actor’s character.
4. [*Response*.:] The co-actor responds based on their interpretation of the actor’s performance.

Lindemann admits that though we may theoretically distinguish between the four moments, the practice is more often than not very fluid such that the moments are not as easily distinguishable from one another. Note that the intelligibility of one’s character now depends on, instead of the author’s audience in narrative-work, the *co-actor’s* standard of intelligibility. Thus, a skilled worker is someone who is equipped with the cultural knowledge that guides her to an expression of identity that would allow her to occupy a face that is intelligible to her co-actor. Let’s go through each of the four necessary moments in more detail and see how one may fail at each moment of face-work.

(1) *Internal formation*. One’s diachronic identity informs one’s synchronic internal formation of identity at each situation. For instance, diachronically-speaking, I may narrate myself as a free-spirited intellectual who do not endorse dogmatism. This informs how I conduct myself as a teacher. Perhaps I’ve taken it upon myself to take the students on a field trip to a farm to discuss

animal ethics - something that wouldn't be a preferred trip for other teachers who are not as eccentrically inclined.

A person may fail at this stage perhaps by having a loss of face where they couldn't fathom the right sort of face that they could occupy given the situation. For example, a person who knows that they have been pre-judged as a sort of 'monster' by other characters in the scene, perhaps based on their sexuality, race or religion, would be at a loss of face. Or, to fail in a different way, that they do not have a settled diachronic identity ready to fire into a synchronic identity. For instance, an individual may have been refusing to reflect on their life and has been indulging in many forms of distractions and intoxications such that when they are thrown into situation, they may be unable to keep a consistent face. This example should bring to mind Frankfurt's wanton.

(2) *Expression*. Though I may have a coherent narrative of myself and an appropriate face that I intend to manifest, I may nevertheless be clumsy at expressing it. For example, I may not be able to conduct the class discussion in a manner that gets the students excited about the discussion due to my pre-disposition to timidity or shyness. Or I may not have the appropriate knowledge of the culture and signals that would get the students excited for class.

(3) *Recognition*. Despite being skilled at expressing my character, I may be performing to a 'tough crowd' who cannot or outright refuses to recognise me as occupying the face that I am expressing. For example, when I suggested at the school board meeting that we start teaching philosophy to younger students, my traditional older colleagues who are dead set at shutting down my unorthodox teaching methods and refuse to recognise me as an innovative teacher may instead recognise me as a 'corruptor of the youth'.

(4) *Response*. Others may refuse to play along with my expressed character, perhaps by trying to cast themselves as the victim and me the perpetrator. Or, others may not allow me to access the resources that I need to continue on my intended character's path: e.g. I may be prevented from enrolling on a prestigious training programme that would ensure my career progression based on my race or sexuality. Notice that the co-actor's response to my character expression *is* their expression of their character or face that resulted from their own internal formation of personality.

Just as my diachronic identities inform different instance so of my synchronic character, it is also the other way around. For example, just as my diachronic narration of myself as a free-thinker and writer informs my decision to pick a teaching job to pay my bills, my synchronic experiences of teaching will also inform my bigger narrative. Perhaps as I kept on teaching I may find a knack for it and decided to put more time and effort into teaching, aspiring to make it as my long-term career. Alternatively, though I may have put my spin on becoming the sort teacher that I would have had appreciated as a high schooler many years back, I may find the teaching job too bureaucratic and consequently develop an anti-establishment sentiment that would later colour my narrative. Therefore, my face-work also informs my narrative-work.

If it is the case that my success at face-work influences my narrative-work, then my consistent failure at maintaining a face will lead me to revise my diachronic character. If not, my consistent failures at face-work will result in disharmonious or disunited diachronic narratives. For instance, if I am consistently being misgendered as a man among a group of people that I regularly interact with, I may find it hard to narrate myself as a woman.

In virtue of our ambiguity, the fate of the actor-self is that it can never truly become the character-self that it enacts. Successful face-work is not to be confused with the actor-self's successful attempt at becoming identical to the character that tries to enact or what Sartre refers to as the unrealisable-to-be-realised. Even if it may seem futile, this is the human condition and should not be casted aside.

Consciousness can exist only as committed within this being [the unrealisable], which surrounds it from all sides and permeates it with its ghostly presence - this being that consciousness is, and which, however, is not it. ... Doubtless it could not exist without the for-itself, but nor could the for-itself exist without it. Consciousness maintains itself in relation to this being in the mode of *being* this being - because this being is consciousness itself - but as a being that it cannot be. It is consciousness itself, at the heart of itself and out of reach, unrealisable and like an absence, and its nature is to contain its own contradiction within itself. (BN: 143-4)

Sartre tells us that the consciousness and the Ego have a very ‘intimate’ relationship, and this is because the consciousness takes itself to *be* the Ego when it operates in pre-reflective consciousness (*TE*: 21). In dramaturgical terms, the actor-self performs as the character in pre-reflective consciousness. Like an improvisational theatrical actor, the actor-self tries to manifest the character in the real world and goes through the world as if it really were the character. This should bring to mind Sartre’s description of the Cafe Waiter who he describes as “playing at *being* a cafe waiter” (*BN*: 103) but is not *really* the waiter in the same sense that an inkwell is an inkwell.

Sartre further explores the idea that people *play* at being what they are in his adaptation of Alexandre Dumas’s play *Kean* (Dumas 1836; Sartre 1953). The play follows the infamous Shakespearean actor Edmund Kean, a womanising alcoholic whose intensity and personality spills over into his brilliant performances. Kean struggles to tell apart theatre from real life and struggles with his inferiority complex as an actor - ‘a mirage of a man’ - in the face of the ‘serious men’ that form his social circle (e.g. the Prince of Wales, the Duke and Duchess of Denmark, cheesemongers, etc.). After a climatic scene - a fiasco that is meant to be his last performance ever - Kean came to the realisation that he is nothing more than the parts he plays; when he is not acting on-stage as Othello or Hamlet he is still playing the part of Kean the great actor off-stage. And this logic also applies to all the ‘serious men’: the Prince of Wales plays the part of the Prince of Wales, the cheesemonger the cheesemonger, Elena the Duchess of Denmark, etc. After the fiasco that potentially put Kean on the crown’s black list, Elena confronted him and suggested that they escape England together. It is here that Kean had the eureka moment: in a snapping moment of sobriety, he suddenly see himself as play-acting the *runaway lovers scene* with Elena. This comes as a ‘plot twist’ to the audience since Kean had his eyes set on Elena for the entirety of the play but instead of jumping on to the opportunity to be with her, he became disinterested and pointed out that she is play-acting. Here, Kean takes a step back from his synchronic character and takes the stance of the author-actor, he is now soberly watching himself (and Elena) play-acting. As Sartre mentions in *TE*, “reflection ‘poisons’ desire” (*TE*: 11), Kean’s prior desires to be with Elena - desires that came from his embodying the playboy Kean character - disappears in his moment of reflection.

Though we are very often prone to bad faith or deluding ourselves into thinking that we are set to walk and act the way that people expect us to, being pigeon-holed as a certain sort of character, we also must not forget that we are not determined to act as so. Our body does not move on its

own accord to enact the role. Kean's moment of reflection that poisons his desire to runaway with Elena is a great reminder of this point. Sartre tells us that we are always faced with the *original choice*: that we must always affirm ourselves, i.e. the character that we chose to enact, at every action - the choice is always original and we cannot 'automate' or code ourselves into performing a certain action ahead of time. In the scene with Elena, he has the option to reaffirm his identity as the same old Kean who had always, and would continue to, pine for Elena *or* he could take up another character. Sartre writes,

We are constantly engaged in our choice, and constantly conscious of the fact that we ourselves can suddenly reverse this choice and change course, because we project the future through our very being, and we constantly eat away at it through our own existential freedom, declaring to ourselves by means of the future what we are, and lacking any grip on this future, which remains always possible without ever passing into the ranks of the real. Thus we are constantly *threatened* with the nihilation of our current choice, constantly threatened with choosing ourselves - and in consequence becoming - other than we are. (BN: 608)

For example, a gambling addict must re-affirm his decision to stop gambling when he walks past a casino:

What the gambler grasps at this moment is again the constant break in determinism, the nothingness separating him from himself: I would have liked so much to stop playing; yesterday I even grasped the situation, in a synthetic apprehension (the threat of ruin, the despair of my loved ones) as prohibiting me from playing. It seemed to be that I had thereby constituted a real barrier between myself and the game, and suddenly now I realise that this synthetic apprehension is only the memory of an idea, the memory of a feeling. For it to help me again, I must reproduce it *ex nihilo*, and freely; it is only one of my possibles. (BN: 71)

Whatever character the actor is trying to become, they can only strive to realise it through action. Just as a man can never *just be* a non-gambler, the waiter cannot *just be* a waiter as well.

However, though my synchronic character is not determined nor my body puppeteered by those around me, that the manifestation of the character is dependent on my will to enact it, not all identities can be achieved through sheer force of will. The gambler may intend to become a better man for his family by deciding to quit gambling, but if his wife were to have given up on him, perhaps recognising him *not* as a changed and better man but a ticking gambling time-bomb, he would fail to become the person that he would like to become, the particular synchronic character remains out of reach. By the same logic, a person of certain sex, skin colour, religion, disability etc. may be recognised to occupy faces that they did not intend to occupy. And try as they might, so long as their co-actors refuse to change their standard of intelligibility, they may never be able to escape the doomed face. For better or for worse, one's success at face-work, and identity-work in general, is other-dependent in virtue of its dialogical nature.

Chapter 2:

A Kinda Sartrean Dramaturgical Account of Authentic Living

Authenticity seems to demand that the sort of answer that you give to Schechtman's (1996) characterisation question 'who am I?', must be *your* answer, and not anyone else's. On this line of thought, we may say that an authentic person is someone whose identity is not too malleable to interpersonal influences; that *they* can be said to be the source of their identity rather than others. However, recall the puzzle of authenticity that I posed in the Introduction:

(The puzzle of authenticity) How can authenticity demand that we resist social influences when our understanding of who we are is derived from our relations to others?

The puzzle of authenticity arises when we consider the tension between the liberal intuition and communitarian intuition:

- (1) *The liberal intuition*: An authentic person does not bend easily to societal pressures as they take themselves as the source of their projects (cf. Kymlicka 1988; Dworkin 1983).
- (2) *Communitarian intuition*: If an authentic person is someone who knows who they are and who they are is socially constituted (cf. Taylor 1994; MacIntyre 1981; Sandel 1982), then an authentic person is someone who is attuned to their position or role within the pre-existing world-order in order to cultivate their self-awareness.

A fair question that can be raised after considering the puzzle of authenticity is whether the demand from authenticity is, after all, ludicrous, or, worse, self-defeating? Daniela Dover begins her article '*Identity and Influence*' (forthcoming) with the question "How worried should we be about how impressionable we are?" and ends it with the conclusion that our worry about interpersonal influences grounded on the demand of authenticity is misguided and, consequently, we should stop letting the concern from *authenticity* live in our head 'rent-free'. Dover suggests, in other words, that authenticity is not something that is worth our dime. However, I think that Dover's giving up on authenticity is to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

In the previous chapter, I constructed a dramaturgical account of personal identity and argued that the practice of personal identity (actions involved in forming, maintaining and transforming one's identity) is dialogical. To think that one's identity can be forged and maintained in isolation from other people is, according to the dramaturgical view of personal identity, a grave mistake. In this chapter, I will argue that though Dover is correct to point out that some interpersonal influences are benign and are merely a natural part of how we form identities, which coincides with my view on identity-work, she is too quick to reject authenticity altogether. As an alternative to Dover's extreme suggestion that we abandon authenticity altogether, I will instead offer a *dramaturgical account of authenticity*. In what follows, I will first offer a brief exegesis of Dover's argument against the ethos of authenticity. Second, taking the dramaturgical account of personal identity as the starting point, I offer a correspondent dramaturgical account of authenticity. On my view, authentic living is *anti-bad faith* (authentic living is partly 'up to you') and *anti-oppression* (authentic living is also partly 'up to others').

2.1 Against authenticity: the challenge from the banality of interpersonal influences

Dover employs the term *ethos of authenticity* to refer to the cluster of ideals that the languages of "autonomy, sincerity, integrity, steadfastness, wholeheartedness, self-authorship, self-ownership, self-discovery, self-reliance, self-mastery, self-determination, or self-realisation" (Dover 2023: 3) are used to conjure. As an example of the ethos, Dover points to Laurie A. Paul's remark:

You are expected to take charge of your own destiny. You chart your future, deliberating and reflecting on who you really are and what you really want from life. ... You live an authentic life by faithfully modelling your preferences, and you live a rational life by matching your choices to these preferences. Rational authenticity, then, is hewing as close as you can to the kind of life that best realises your dreams, hopes and aspirations. (Paul 2014: 105)

Dover makes the connection that the ethos of authenticity leads to the acute stigmatisation of, borrowing the term from Paul, *transformative interpersonal influence*. Examples of such influences on self-transformations include "fall in love, change our minds after an argument, or admire

someone so much that it gives us appreciation for a new sort of art, hope for revolution, or faith in a new God or a new philosophical theory” (Dover 2023: 7). For someone deep in the ethos of authenticity, changes to who they are that are brought about via interpersonal influences - an external force - are deeply unsettling. And philosophers who favour the heightened scrutiny view about interpersonal influences are especially worried about how we can preserve our authenticity in the face of interpersonal influences (2023: 7). This is because, in its crudest form, Dover suggests, the ethos of authenticity prescribes: ‘stay the same’ or ‘do not change’. Or, a with a little more sophistication: ‘change but become the ‘truer’ version of yourself’ or ‘become a fuller realisation of what you already are’. At the heart of the ethos is the mandate of preservation of the sanctity of inner force from within the individual - the preservation of the “true self”. As the captain of my life, it is I and not others that should steer it; to let others in on the navigation is to fail at preserving the purity of my journey - this is the mandate of the ethos of authenticity.

Deference is the defining vice of an inauthentic person on the ethos’s framework. A deferential person is someone who is overly malleable to others such that they allow others to become the ghost-writer to their own life story. A stock image of someone who fails at rising up to demands of authenticity is epitomised by Thomas Hill in his example of the ‘Deferential Wife’, a woman who reeks of ‘servility,’ ‘conformity’ and ‘submissiveness’ (Hill 1973: 90).

She is utterly devoted to serving her husband. She buys the clothes he prefers, invites the guests he wants to entertain, and makes love whenever he is in the mood. She willingly moves to a new city in order for him to have a more attractive job, counting her own friendship and geographical preferences insightful by comparison ... [S]he tends not to form her own interests, values, and ideals; and, when she does, she counts them as less important than her husband’s. ... She just believes that the proper role for a woman is to serve her family. (Hill 1973: 135)

Dover points to Micheal Garnett’s recent article (2023) that diagnoses the essence of the Wife’s deference to lie in her “willingness to do whatever her husband wants just because he wants it” (2023: 198), that “his preferences simply are her reasons” (198). According to the heightened scrutiny view of interpersonal influences such as Hill’s and Garnett’s, the difference between a ‘self-authored’ life and a ‘ghostwritten’ life hinges on how much one lets oneself be malleable to exogenous forces.

Thus, the heightened scrutiny view suggests that we should be more careful to guard against outside influences as a source of change in the self than ones that come from within.

However, authenticity-based concerns about interpersonal influences, Dover argues, are misguided. This is because the heightened scrutiny view's assumption that there is a principled distinction between endogenous and exogenous influences is not as obvious as their proponents may assume. As Dover correctly points out, what we would normally label as an instance of interpersonal influence may not be something foreign at all, but a natural part of being a person or becoming someone. In examples that philosophers employ to discuss authenticity, such as high school sweethearts Jack interfering with Jill's desire to go to college on a full scholarship, we assume that the original desire - in this case, Jill's desire to go to college - is an authentic one. But where does the initial desire come from? Where do *any* desires come from? Dover suggests that what we normally think of endogenous 'core values' are just values that we have adopted long ago by osmosis perhaps in early childhood or from our society at large. Perhaps Jill grew up in a household of academics and built her personality around the values that she adopted from her parents. On the flip side, what we usually think of exogenous influences are perhaps long-repressed desires. Dover also points to our practice making oneself intelligible to oneself and others: agents have "reason to strive for second-personal intelligibility - not intelligibility as such (if there is any such thing), but indelibility to a *particular* other person - in order to function well in a relationship with them" (Dover 2023: 14). For instance, if we want to have friends then we have a reason to be intelligible and attractive (in the general sense) to the people that we want to form elective relations with. I think that Dover can even push for a stronger claim that we have good reasons to be intelligible to even the people who we do not particularly want to be friends with but have to interact with on prudential grounds.

I hope that Dover's argument for the banality of interpersonal influences brings to mind my dramaturgical picture of identity-work from in Chapter 1, especially face-work. Recall that face-work is the practice of embodying a synchronic character; one's attempt at face-work is considered successful if my co-actor recognises and responds to my expressed character with their own enactment of their character. Dover and I thus share the view that actors have to be mutually intelligible in order for both of us to maintain our faces and make sense of ourselves. However, even if I agree with Dover that interpersonal influences are usually banal and should not by default warrant scrutiny, I think that her rejection of the concern from authenticity altogether is a little too quick. Even if

it is the case that many interpersonal influences are benign and being intelligible to others a fundamental way of life to us social beings, it does not mean that we should not be concerned about filtering influences and take ownership or responsibility for who we become. Indeed, the concern from malleability is very much present.

In his book *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1991), Charles Taylor observes that the debates surrounding authenticity, i.e. the uprising ideal that became more and more prominent in the modern era following society's disenchantment of the 'age of honour' and strict social hierarchy, usually involve those who support it and those who want to knock it down. The proponents of authenticity sing the praises for self-sufficiency and freedom-related dignity of self-authorship whilst the opponents of authenticity point their pitchforks at what they perceive to be ego-centrism and anti-sociality. Taylor thinks that both sides are wrong; the debate that we should have is not for or against authenticity but about the *meaning* of authenticity (1991: 72). Against the view that authenticity promotes moral laxity and disregard of others, he argues that authentic living actually requires a more "self-responsible form of life" (1991: 74) and sensitivity to moral sources outside oneself that resonates within him or her. For Taylor, authenticity entails a "language of personal resonance" (1991: 90) that allows for other- and self-understanding. This communitarian element of Taylor's conception of authenticity will be unpacked in dramaturgical terms.

2.2 A Kinda Sartrean dramaturgical account of authentic living

To give authenticity a fair fight, I will offer a dramaturgical analysis of authenticity that accommodates Dover's, if I may say so, communitarian worries. On the dramaturgical view, one lives authentically if and only if:

- i. (*Actor's condition*) one practices identity-work in 'good faith', and
- ii. (*Co-Actors' condition*) one's co-actors uses the right interpretative schema to make sense of one's identity.

The key differences between Dover's conception of authenticity and mine are that the former not only gives absolute importance to the liberal intuition over the communitarian intuition whilst the

latter equally to both, but also that the former also interprets the liberal intuition as primarily antagonistic towards others. On my view, the Actor's condition interprets the liberal intuition by ensuring that authentic living is *anti-bad faith* and the Co-Actor's condition appeases the communitarian intuition by ensuring that authentic living is anti-oppression. Thus, a person succeeds at living authentically if she is in good faith and her co-actors recognise her for who she is.

Like Sartre and Taylor, I interpret authenticity as involving a self-responsible attitude. On the dramaturgical view, this means taking the matured responsibility of one's ambiguity; authentic living is led in sober recognition of both transcendence and facticity. And to take flight from this, as Sartre famously suggested, is to be in *bad faith*. This leads us to the first of the two necessary and jointly sufficient conditions of the dramaturgical account of authenticity: *authenticity is anti-bad faith*. The liberal intuition is interpreted as involving the demand to take responsibility to one's ambiguity, and this excludes making villains out of others. Keeping with the dramaturgical structure, we will call the first condition the Actor's Condition because whether or not the condition is met is *up to the actor*.

The second condition of the dramaturgical theory appeases the communitarian intuition by ensuring that the account is sensitive to authentic living's other-dependency. This is because whether or not the second condition is met is *up to the co-actors*. Being who you are, in virtue of the dialogical characteristic of identity-work, requires that others are able to make sense of you too. In virtue of the second condition, the dramaturgical theory does not immediately put the blame on the inauthentic person since unjust societies make it harder, and even at times impossible, for certain narratively underprivileged individuals to live intelligibly as who they understand themselves to be.

Actor's Condition: authenticity as anti-bad faith

Let's unpack the first condition. The actor's condition demands good faith,¹ and whether or not you live in good faith is "up to you". Good faith, on my dramaturgical framework, is the attitude of an excellent identity-worker; identity-work is done in good faith if one responsibly recognises

¹ Though I will refer to the authentic actor's attitude as 'good faith', it should be noted that it is unclear whether Sartre himself takes good faith to be equivalent to authenticity or that good faith is a form of bad faith (cf. BN: 116-7).

that one is both the author-actor (transcendence) and the narrated-enacted character (facticity). Of course, I am not suggesting that authentic people engage in identity-work with explicit conception of themselves as “authors” and “actors” of their life story - I employ the dramaturgical terminologies metaphorically. The good faith attitude is about acknowledging the *reality* of one’s character *and* one’s (limited) freedom at forming and maintaining it. Since good faith is a necessary but not sufficient condition for authentic living, one can indeed be in good faith and yet unable to enjoy the life of an authentic person (this will be made clear in the next sub-section on the co-actor’s condition). It is best to characterise good faith by examining ways in which one can fail at it, i.e. ways that one fall into bad faith.

Sartre conceptualises the irresponsible and dishonest attitude towards one’s ambiguous human condition - that one is both transcendence and facticity - as *bad faith*. As Sartre argues in *BN* that the reason that bad faith, roughly characterised as ‘self-deception,’² is possible because what we are is not ontologically co-incidental. Though Sartre offered (now infamous) examples that captivate many scholars since the publication of *BN*, it should be acknowledged that many of them seem a little outdated and at times smell of prejudicial undertones which could have been dealt with more tact - a coward who runs away from the army by convincing himself that he is looking for another venue to better display his courage (*No Exit*), the Homosexual Man (“pederast”) who insists that his rendezvous with men resulted from his unfortunate circumstances of not having found the right woman yet (*BN*: 108), the hardworking Waiter who seems a little too absorbed in his role as the waiter (*BN*: 102), etc. - we can all think of similar instances from our own experience.

Before we move on to my interpretation of Sartre’s bad faith, it is crucial to note Sartre’s characterisation of *faith*. I propose that, on the dramaturgical framework, faith is the sustenance of identity-work. For an atheist (and a ‘rationalist’ according to Iris Murdoch) like Sartre, Sarah Richmond suggests in her introduction to *TE*, his use of theological words such as ‘emanation’ and ‘magic’ to characterise the Ego connote the Ego’s pre-rational nature. The same reading can be applied to his use of ‘faith’ in *BN*. Faith is a special kind of belief that does not have certain truth to justify it; such belief is vulnerable to reflection where upon a closer inspection it is transformed into

² We must be careful about taking to bad faith as synonymous to lying to oneself or self-deception. For Sartre, bad faith is not an act of lying since lying requires at least two consciousnesses where one can conceal a truth from another.

mere opinion (*BN*: 70 n.9). Epistemologically, we cannot claim to *know* who we are in the same way that one knows that the inkwell is black. The moment one reflects on who one is, one's confidence in the character melts away. On the dramaturgical view, this is the shift from acting to authoring. The problem with bad faith is that it exploits this characteristic of faith: bad faith is "resigned in advance to not being fulfilled by this evidence... It stands forth in the firm resolution not to demand too much, to count itself satisfied when it is barely persuaded, to force itself in decision to adhere to uncertain truths" (*BN*: 68). In other words, bad faith is bad because it sets the bar of acceptance too low. Good faith, then, should not be thought of as an unwavering certainty on who one is or a complete resignation in the whole ordeal of identities, but a matured sensibility to the magical yet real phenomenon of the Ego.

From my reading of *BN* and *Anti-Semite and Jew (ASJ)*, I suggest that there are *three kinds of bad faith* (though Sartre did not put it so himself).

- (1) *Sincere bad faith*. The Serious or Sincere Person identifies too much with their facticity as they take on a masochistic attitude towards their identity, treating it as an unalterable destiny, thus denying the responsibility for their transcendence.
- (2) *Quixotic bad faith*. The Quixotic Person flees from their facticity by identifying with a fantastical scenario, and so lives in a sort of deluded and inconsistent world.
- (3) *Nihilistic bad faith*. The Nihilistic Person identifies too much with their transcendence, thus denying responsibility for their facticity.

We may imagine sincere bad faith and nihilistic bad faith as being on two opposite ends of the transcendence-facticity gradient, effectively representing the two 'inauthentic vices' within the sphere of authenticity. The quixotic bad faith, however, does not fit nicely on the pole. The Quixotic Person's mistake is not about identifying too much or too little with their transcendence or facticity, but identifying with an incoherent identity. Thus, we can still characterise the Quixotic Person's inauthenticity as a faulty or inauthentic attitude towards their facticity.

Sincere bad faith (the Serious Person)

Let's begin by examining the first kind of bad faith - we will call this, following Sartre in *BN*, 'sincerity', or, following Simone de Beauvoir in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 'seriousness'. Beauvoir describes the spirit of seriousness from a child's perspective who looks upon the adult's world as the serious world that he will one day participate in:

The world in which [the child] lives is a serious world, since the characteristic of the spirit of seriousness is to consider values as ready-made things. ... [The child is] the naive victim of the mirage of the for-others, he believes in the *being* of his parents and teachers. He takes them for the divinities which they vainly try to be ... In his universe of definite and substantial things, beneath the sovereign eyes of grown-up persons, he thinks that he too has *being* in a definite and substantial way. He is a good little boy or a scamp; he enjoys being it. (*The Ethics of Ambiguity*: 37-8)

A Serious Person, as Beauvoir describes, takes the values as ready-made, i.e. takes their *being* as definite akin to being a substantive fabric of the universe. The attitude of seriousness is similarly adopted by Sartre's Cafe Waiter who exhibits signs of sincerity in his comical behaviour: "His movements are animated and intent, a bit too precise, a bit too quick: he approaches the customers with a bit too much animation; he leans forward a bit too attentively, his voice and his eyes expressing an interest in the customer's order that is a bit too solicitous" (*BN*: 102-3). Like the child who enjoys being 'a good little boy' or 'a scamp' as ordained by the authoritative eyes of the grown-ups, the cafe waiter, Sartre tells us, enjoys "playing at being a cafe waiter ... the cafe waiter plays with his condition in order to actualise it" as ordained by the eyes of other people - perhaps by his boss, customers, colleagues, etc. - whom he takes as other participants in the serious world.

Of course, one's quest to become a waiter or a good boy are instances of our perpetual quest towards the unrealisable-to-be-realised. Urged by the expectant eyes of others to 'stay in character', the Serious Person flees from the fact that

their condition is entirely ceremonial, and the public demands them to actualise it as a ceremony: there is the dance of the grocer, the tailor, the auctioneer, through which they try to

persuade their customers that they are nothing more than a grocer, an auctioneer, a tailor.
(BN: 103)

Another of Sartre's serious character, which I think better illustrates the fault of seriousness than the case of the cafe waiter, is the masochistic inauthentic Jew from *ASJ*. *ASJ* can be taken as a further study, after BN, of the reality of being-for-the-Other and the struggle for authenticity in the face of oppression. Sartre proposes the genesis of what we think of as Jewishness to originate from the Anti-Semite's fantasy: "The Jew is one whose other men consider a Jew... it is the anti-Semite who *makes* the Jew" (*ASJ*: 69); "far from experience producing [one's] idea of the Jew, it was the latter which explained experience of [people whom we call Jew]" (*ASJ*: 13). The Jew face is thrust onto the people who the anti-Semite deems as a Jew; the anti-Semite looks at the Jew with the expectation that the Jew occupies the face that is inferior to them such that they can amuse themselves, similar to how the cafe waiter amuses himself by playing at being the cafe waiter, as the superior ones (*ASJ*: 27-8). Weary of the struggle against their condemnation and disdain, Sartre tells us, the Jews are attracted to the pull of masochism. Masochism, Sartre tells us, is

the desire to have oneself treated as an object. ... The masochist has the joy of seeing himself moved, handled, utilised like a thing. He tries to think of himself as an inanimate thing, and thereby to abdicate his responsibilities. (*ASJ*: 106)

In other words, the Jews are tempted to run away from their responsibility as transcendence. A masochistic Jew let himself be poisoned and corrupted by the Anti-Semite's stereotype of him and, instead of revolt, he accepts it as truth: "they seek to be made Jews by the looks, the violence, the disdain of others, by having qualities and fate attached to them - to be Jew as a stone is a stone: thus for a moment they can find relief from the bewitched freedom which to impose upon them a responsibility for what they reject with all their strength" (*ASJ*: 107-8); "in masochism, he repudiates his liberty as a man in order to escape the sin of being a Jew and in order to seek the repose and passivity of a thing" (*ASJ*: 109). Faith in his Jewishness, as constructed by the anti-Semite, appears as if it is knowledge to him through the spirit of seriousness. The spirit of seriousness allows the inauthentic Jew to deny his subjectivity. They let themselves succumb to the injustice and give up on the fight.

Quixotic bad faith (the Quixotic Person)

Now you may ask, what then is the Waiter supposed to think of himself when he's carrying out his waiterly duties if not a cafe waiter? Or, surely, are there no other conceptions of Jewishness that are not steeped in anti-Semitism that the Jew could adopt instead? I shall further examine the first question about the cafe waiter and leave the second question about the non-anti-Semitic reality of Jewishness for the next sub-chapter on oppression (spoiler alert: it's found among one's people or via insubordination. *Vive la révolution!*). Now, in response to the waiter question, I must admit that there is no straightforward answer since, if we recall, Sartre emphasises that on top of being-for-itself (transcendence) man also *is* facticity, which includes one's existence as a being-for-the-Other (*BN*: 388) - e.g. being a waiter. Following his discussion of 'the look' and shame, Sartre informs us that bad faith seems to be an inescapable part of being human since what I call identities or characters - the details of our being-for-the-Other - are formed with, and in relation to, others. We have no complete control over how others perceive us - this is a limitation of our freedom by the Other *qua* individualised freedom - yet it *is* an aspect of what we are. For the Waiter to outright deny his being a waiter, a homosexual man his homosexuality, or a Jew his Jewishness, is to put themselves in danger of committing another kind of bad faith - one that involves the flight from their facticity.

There are at least two kinds of *self*-denial or *being*-denial: Quixotic bad faith and Nihilistic bad faith, the latter being somewhat more extreme than the former due to its globality. Quixotic bad faith involves denying a particular being or situation and illegitimately replace it with another whilst Nihilistic bad faith involves denying altogether the human business of being or situated. Let's take a look at the Quixotic bad faith. Take Sartre's case of the Homosexual Man:

It is common for a homosexual to feel intolerably guilty, and for that feeling to condition his entire existence. We can predict without difficulty that this man is in bad faith. And often, in fact, such a man - even while he admits to his homosexual weakness, even while he acknowledges, one at a time, each particular sin he has committed, he will refuse with all his might to consider himself 'a pederast'. His case is always 'different', and particular: it involves games, accidents, mishaps: those mistakes are in the past; they can be explained by a particular conception of beauty that women are unable to instantiate; we should see them as the outcome of an anxious pursuit, rather than as manifestations of a deeply rooted drive,

etc. Here we have, without doubt, a man whose bad faith borders on the comical as, while admitting to all the deeds ascribed to him, he refuses to draw the clear consequence. (*BN*: 108)

The Homosexual is on a similar boat, socially speaking, to the Jew. The sort of face and narrative that others thrust upon them are painful and difficult to make sense of themselves by. This is why good faith is harder to achieve for the narratively oppressed individuals (more on this later). In dramaturgical terms, diachronically speaking, the Quixotic Person accepts the reality of the oppressive narratives, which, in our case, is the homophobic narrative that “homosexuals are pederasts”. Yet, when it comes to applying the narratives to himself, he makes up stories that exempt himself from it by exploiting the nature of faith.

The word ‘hypocrite’ perhaps comes to mind when describing a Quixotic Person. There are fatal inconsistencies in the Quixotic person’s narrative that upon a closer inspection (i.e. for the author-self to pick up their game) cannot but reveal that their stories are contradictory. The Quixotic Person invents a fantastical refuge with the sole purpose of fleeing the painful reality of his being and does not attempt to incorporate the inherently conflictual utopic story with their other live diachronic narratives. Take another version of Sartre’s inauthentic Jew who attempts to escape the anti-Semite’s demeaning look by becoming one with his perpetrator.

He makes himself an anti-Semite in order to break all ties with the Jewish community yet he finds that community again in the depths of his heart, for he experiences in his very flesh the humiliation that the anti-Semite impose upon other Jews. (*ASJ*: 106)

One can only live quixotically by being irresponsible for one’s facticity.

Nihilistic bad faith (the Nihilistic Person)

In the passages immediately after the Homosexual Man earlier quoted, Sartre tells us that, hypothetically, if the man were to deny his homosexuality as a result of his conviction towards his transcendence, then he exhibits *potential* for authenticity:

The homosexual acknowledges his misdemeanours, but he fights with all his strength against the crushing perspective from which his mistakes constitute for him a *destiny*. He does not want to let others regard him as a thing: he understands, obscurely but powerfully, that a homosexual is not a homosexual in the way this table is a table, or this red-haired man is a redhead. ... Is he wrong? Is he not recognising by himself, the peculiar and irreducible character of human-reality? His attitude, therefore, contains an undeniable understanding of the truth. ... [H]e would be right if he understood this sentence, 'I am not a pederast', to mean: 'I am not what I am'. If he declared, in other words, that 'To the extent to which a set of actions is defined as a pederast's behaviour, and I have performed these actions, I am a pederast. To the extent that human-reality escapes any definition in terms of its behaviour, I am not one'. (BN: 108-9)

Nevertheless, the acknowledgement of one's transcendence is not a guarantee for good faith since one may still err by identifying *too much* with with one's freedom. Following Beauvoir, we may call this kind of bad faith *nihilism*:

This failure of the serious sometimes brings about a radical disorder. Conscious of being unable to be anything, man then decides to be *nothing*. We shall call this attitude nihilistic. ... [i]nstead of realising his negativity as a living movement, he conceives his annihilation in a substantial way. He wants to be *nothing* (The Ethics of Ambiguity: 56).

The defining characteristic of the Nihilist Person is the denial of their historicity altogether and the responsibility or ownership that comes with their facticity; they think 'since I am a subjectivity, there is no pre-existing reason for me to take up any particular sort of being, so I shall not.' Take Sartre's illustration of the nihilistic psyche of the Homosexual Man:

It seems to him that he can escape from any mistake, the moment he posits and acknowledges it, or - even better - that psychological duration, by itself, washes him clean of every misdemeanour, constitutes an indeterminate future for him, and allows him to be born anew. ... [A]t the same time, he needs this continual renaissance, this constant escape, in order to live: to avoid the community's terrible judgement, he has constantly place himself out of reach. (BN: 108-9)

What characterises the Nihilistic Person is their utter detachment from the world, their aloofness; he takes himself to have an ahistorical livelihood, and thus is he *de facto* blameless. This allows him to live the nihilistic fantasy that he is not responsible for his actions and existence.³ Whilst the Quixotic Homosexual Man denies his homosexuality by replacing it with another substantial fantasy, the Nihilistic Homosexual Man simply denies it and *leave it at that*. Similar to Sartre, in pointing out that there is some potential for authenticity for the person whom I refer to as the Nihilist Homosexual Man, Beauvoir also thinks that there is some truth in nihilism in the sense that the Nihilist man recognises his freedom, but fails at being honest all the way as he denies responsibility for his facticity.

The nihilist is right to think that the world *possesses* no justification and that he himself *is* nothing. But he forgets that it is up to him to justify the world and to make himself exist validly. Instead of integrating death into life, he sees in it the only truth of the life which appears to him as a disguised death. However, there's life, and the nihilist knows that he is alive. That's where his failure lies. He rejects existence without managing to eliminate it. He denies any meaning to his to his transcendence, and yet he transcends himself. (*The Ethics of Ambiguity*: 61)

Co-Actors' Condition: authentic living as anti-oppression

Sartre tells us that a Jew can be authentic if he accepts his painful historicity as a Jew, ceasing to flee in bad faith from his subjectivity and objectivity. Take the key passage from ASJ where Sartre can be read as positing his view on authenticity:

Jewish authenticity consists in choosing oneself *as Jew* - that is, in realising one's Jewish condition. The authentic Jew abandons the myth of the universal man; he knows himself and wills himself into history as a historic and damned creature; he ceases to run away from himself and to be ashamed of his own kind. He understands that society is bad; for the naive monism of the inauthentic Jew he substitutes a social pluralism. He knows that he is one

³ The worry about this kind of nihilistic bad faith is similar to the kind of worry that motivates Kierkegaard's account of authenticity.

who stands apart, untouchable, scorned, proscribed - and it is *as such* that he asserts his being. At once he gives up his rationalistic optimism; he sees that the world is fragmented by irrational divisions, and in accepting this fragmentation - at least in what concerns him - in proclaiming himself a Jew, he makes some of these values and these divisions his. He chooses his brothers and his peers; they are the other Jews. He stakes everything on human grandeur, for he accepts the obligation to live in a situation that he is defined precisely by the fact that it is unlovable; he derives his pride from his humiliation. (*ASJ*: 136-7)

I grant that the Jew illustrated in the passage is in good faith, but I do not think that he can be said to be living authentically, period. He is someone who could potentially be synchronically authentic around 'his brothers and sisters', i.e. within a non-oppressive community, with whom he can intelligibly make sense of himself whilst this privilege is not granted for him within the anti-Semitic world. Though dignified and the closest to the authentic mode of existence that he can have in an unjust society, a martyr's good faith does not necessarily guarantee that he may live authentically.

Though not by his own fault, the Good Faith Jew *couldn't* live authentically among the anti-Semites because authentic living, on my dramaturgical view, requires that others recognise you as who you are too. The fact that one's authentic living is partly "up to others" is acknowledged on the dramaturgical theory of authenticity in its second condition:

- ii. (Co-Actor's Condition) one's co-actors uses the right interpretative schema to make sense of one's identity.

Due to the dialogical nature of identity-work, authentic *living* involves being able to be who you are or a character that you can make sense of yourself and act by, and this is only achievable if your co-actors have the right interpretative schema to make sense of your identity.

You are narratively oppressed in an unjust society when your co-actors make sense of you via what Hilde Lindemann (Nelson 2001) refers to as *oppressive master narratives*. Lindemann defines master narratives as

the stories found lying about in our culture that serve as summaries of socially shared understandings. Master narratives are often archetypal, consisting of stock plots and readily recognisable character types, and we use them not only to make sense of our experience ... but also to justify what we do As the repositories of common norms, master narratives exercise a certain authority over moral imaginations and play a role in informing our moral intuitions. (Nelson 2001: 6)

Master narratives, then, are the socially recognisable interpretative schema that actors and co-actors appeal to in order to interpret one another and themselves. Examples of master narratives include “best-known fairy tales, landmark court cases, canonical works of great literature, movie classics” (Nelson 2001: 6-7). Not all master narratives are oppressive. For instance, take the restaurant script: as a ‘customer’ entering a restaurant you may either wait to be seated or permitted to seat yourself, then wait until someone brings a menu, then you and your companions take turn telling your choices of food, then after you all have finished with your meal you ask for the bill, and after paying you may be expected to leave some tip and then exit the restaurant. By this restaurant master narrative, you understand yourself as the customer and others in the restaurant as waiters, chefs, cashier, etc.; similarly, others in the restaurant also interpret you as the customer by the restaurant master narrative too.

Some master narratives are indeed oppressive as they are laced with sexism, classism, racism, ethnocentrism, etc. Oppressive master narratives can harm the oppressed’s identity on both synchronic and diachronic levels. On the level of face-work, one is prevented from living the synchronic character that one intends to embody due to the frigid master narrative employed by the co-actor to make sense of you; these narratives prevent them from recognising and responding appropriately to your expressed identity. For instance, you may intend to be a competent lawyer, but you were never assigned important cases, especially compared to your male colleagues, purely based on your sex; no matter how hard you try to get your boss to recognise you and your redeeming characteristics - either by working over time, producing immaculate paperworks, etc. - you are only seen as a second rate lawyer in virtue of being a woman (e.g. you are an unreliable lawyer because women are prone to emotional bursts of irrationality, etc). Your identity as a competent lawyer is harmed by your boss’s sexist master narrative. The Jew’s inability to feel like a man amongst other Frenchmen is precisely due to this.

On the level of narrative-work, one can internalise the oppressive master narrative and construct one's narrative in accordance to it. Take the master narrative of the Bildungsroman trope ugly-Betty-turns-pretty. As a young girl, you are expected to develop a crush on an attractive and popular adolescent boy and this is the most pressing concern for a 'normal young girl', and of course he does not notice you because you're an ugly Betty. Then, in order to turn his head, you must go through a makeover which usually involves, on top of other appearance-enhancing things, wearing more tight-fitting and revealing clothes. And only then that you are made the happiest girl in the world by having caught the attention of the aforementioned boy. Being constantly exposed to such stories through movies and books that you consume, you interpret yourself in line with what it is to be a young woman, equating your worth with your sex appeal. The term 'male gaze,' originally coined in by Laura Mulvey (1975) in film literature, nicely fits within the dramaturgical picture of narrative-work where the woman may construct her identity under the gaze of the male addressee. Beauvoir describes woman's internalised misogynistic narrative by making the analogy between women's situation to slavery:

There are beings whose life slips by in an infantile world because, having been kept in a state of servitude and ignorance, they have no means of breaking the ceiling which is stretched over their heads. ... This is the case, for example, with slaves who have not raised themselves to the consciousness of their slavery. ... This is also the situation of women in many civilisations; they can only submit to the laws, the gods, the customs, and the truths, created by the males. (*The Second Sex*: 39-40)

In the same vein, Franz Fanon writes about the 'white gaze' from the black psyche in *Black Skin, White Masks*:

The white world, the only decent one, was preventing me from participating. It demanded that a man behave like a man. It demanded me that I behave like a black man - or at least a Negro. I hailed the world, and the world amputated my enthusiasm. I was expected to stay in line and make myself scarce. ... The white gaze, the only valid one, is already dissecting me. I am *fixed*. Once their microtomes are sharpened, the Whites objectively cut sections of

my reality. I have been betrayed. I sense, I see in this white gaze that it's the arrival not of a new man, but of a new type of man, a new species. A Negro, in fact! (1952: 94-5)

One can say that those who adhere to oppressive master narratives are people who are, as one may say in everyday manner, not very “understanding” people. I will explore Iris Murdoch’s notion idea of love as involving attentive ‘looking again’ in the next chapter.

The dramaturgical view allows that one may live authentically in one community and not in another that is perhaps more mainstream and oppressive communities. For example, a trans woman may be able to make sense of herself synchronically in queer safe spaces but not on the mainstream stage. Within a community that adhere to transphobic master narratives, the transwoman is an impossible identity: by the fact of merely existing amongst others (and especially men), Talia Mae Bettcher (2007: 50) pointed out, transwomen are expected to either ‘disclose who they *really* are’ and come out as a *pretender* or *masquerader*, or refuse to disclose and be a *deceiver*. Bettcher concludes that “it would appear that this representational system actually prevents transpeople from existing at all” (2007: 55). On the dramaturgical view, then, the Good Faith Jew may achieve a certain degree of synchronic and diachronic authenticity depending on the co-actors that frequent his life, but not authentic, period, in the way that Sartre suggests. The more that his narrative-work is done with the anti-Semite as the addressee to his narration, the less intelligible he can make sense of himself. If he instead chooses his fellow “brothers and sisters” to whom his identity is not over-determined, he will be able to form, express and maintain various facets of his identity - analogous to the transwoman being recognised in queer safe spaces not only merely as a ‘woman’ but also other facets of her identity in, e.g. she may be seen as ‘endearingly quirky,’ ‘artistic,’ ‘generous,’ etc. This would not have been available recognisable under the anti-Semite’s gaze or the homophobic community - “Bah! He’s a pederast!” (BN: 110). For the Jew, under his brothers and sisters’ gaze, he is not a ‘good Jew’ but simply ‘good’, not a ‘kind Jew’ but ‘kind’, or not a ‘Jewish mother’ but a ‘mother’. When it comes to face-work, one does not always get to choose one’s co-actors. Since the existence of one’s synchronic Ego is made real by other co-actors, the shame of unsuccessful face-work is felt more acutely than in narrative-work. In other words, the Jew can only occupy an impossible identity or go along with the demeaning characters ordained by the anti-Semite. With the haphazard face, his diachronic identity will be affected over time and this further ensures that authentic living is out of his reach.

2.3 Counterstory as narrative insubordination

That being said, master narratives are not set in stone. An oppressed person is not necessarily condemned to live inauthentically forever. In *ASJ*, Sartre prescribes martyrdom, choosing one's own people and revolution. In the face of oppressive master narratives, social progress is possible through the telling of *counterstories*. According to Lindemann, a counterstory is

a story that resists an oppressive identity and attempts to replace it with one that commands respect. ... In piecing together the fragments of various narratives that have constructed their oppressive identity and challenging the unjust assumptions that lie hidden in those narrative fragments, [one] began to develop a counterstory that identifies [oneself] more accurately and fairly. (Nelson 2001: 6)

In other words, counterstories are “narrative acts of insubordination” (2001: 8). To tell a counterstory, one must first identify the oppressive master narrative one intends to combat. Similar to how one creates any story whose aim is make sense of one's life, the creator of the counterstory must choose from particular array of experiences and interpret them in light of important, perhaps thick, moral concepts that highlight the relevance of other particular experiences - threading together a story of, say, comradeship, grace or bravery that each particular experiences involve. Take the story of *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. Whilst Huck Finn was helping Jim escape down the Mississippi River on a raft, he was torn by his community's racist master narrative that he should report on any black slaves escapees and his sympathy and camaraderie with Jim. However, over time, Finn develops an inner conviction that he cannot return Jim to slavery by coming up with a counterstory, threading together their adventures together, that Jim is not a slave but a human being and that they are friends, two people who care for one another.

Lindemann suggests that counterstories can work ‘both ways’: first, it can repair the *oppressor's* master narrative that chain others to their unjust and disrespectful characters. This would increase the success rate of face-work done by those who were previously narratively oppressed by increasing the number of more attractive faces offered to them. Second, it repairs the *oppressed individual's* own internalised oppressed narratives about themselves. This allows them to narrate

themselves in better and more consistent light to the stories that were narrated with addressees who are friendlier and more supportive in mind. Counterstories, though usually told by those oppressed themselves, can also be told by a third party, as evident in Huck Finn's case. Someone who saw the plight of the oppressed may feel compelled to advocate for the 'truth' of the oppressed and tries to dispel the unjust and untruthful oppressive narratives by offering a counterstory. Thus, the telling of a counterstory is an attempt to make people understand better those who were previously misconceived or too quickly dismissed, either themselves or others, such that the expected outcome is for those who are told the counterstory to 'look again.'

2.4 Dramaturgical conception of authenticity vs. the ethos of authenticity

On Dover's conception of the ethos of authenticity, the liberal demand of authenticity is interpreted as leading towards an antagonistic reception of interpersonal influences; the liberal demand is interpreted as prescribing that we stay the same or become a truer version of ourself that can be *found deep within*, and others as villains who will take us off this course. On my Kinda Sartrean dramaturgical account, the 'deepest version' of what one is, or at least to the liberal's purity-seeking eye, is encountered in moments of pure reflection and, funny enough, one may be disappointed to encounter nothing(ness). Transcendence is contentless; not only that I find no pre-ordained truest version of me to be discovered deep down, but I also find that I am always in the process of becoming and transcending. You *are* the freedom, and you also *are* the facticity.

One my view, it is a mistake to use the language of preserving something that results from your condition of being free. Freedom in itself is not something to be preserved since it is the human condition of having to be something by your own choosing. What you should do if you want be authentic - being 'true to yourself' - is to own up to the truth of the responsibility for your ambiguous human condition, that is, by realising both your subjectivity (transcendence) and objectivity (facticity). This is the good faith interpretation of the liberal demand. The search for the true self leads one to the nauseating realisation that there is no 'true self' and identity is *work* that is done *dialogically*, that is, *with others*. And as I have shown, sometimes one is dealt a bad hand when it comes to the set of others whom one gets to live with, and this makes the project of good faith difficult and painful to not flee from.

Dover is right to point out the harm that the ethos of authenticity (so conceived) can bring about, especially in oppressive or unjust societies. She writes,

[s]kepticism about the celebration of authentic self is, I think, especially warranted in a monstrously unjust society such as ours, in which so much of what we absorb and imbibe, whether in early childhood or after on, is poisonous. Many authors (and not to mention whole social movements) have prescribed a reaffirmation of the ethos of authenticity as an antidote. But I think this is a serious mistake. (2023: 22).

Instead of taking up the ethos of authenticity's advise to 'look deep within oneself' and 'preserve your true self' and ask oneself "is this who I really am?", Dover suggests that we should instead ask "is this person a good influence on me?". I sympathise with Dover's concern and agree that the latter question is usually more enlightening than the former. My dramaturgical conception of authenticity, in incorporating the communitarian intuitions, accommodates this very concern about victim-blaming, and rejects the view that authenticity is blind to social reality and injustices. The dramaturgical account of authenticity incorporates the communitarian intuition in two steps. First, it recognises that good faith, on top of realising the liberal demand by having the responsible attitude towards one's transcendence, must also brave the recognition of one's facticity - this counts as a kind of self-awareness of one's position within the world-order that the communitarian intuition urges.

Second, in virtue of the Co-Actor's condition, the dramaturgical conception leaves behind the view that the quest for authenticity is something entirely individualistic - i.e. that authenticity only requires certain capacities, competencies, and intentions that lie within the individual - and acknowledges that authenticity also requires the recognition on the part of others of *who one is*. This is why having the right sort of people in your life - "is this person a good influence on me?" - who can help you realise better characters and make sense of them is key to authentic living. This brings us back to the case of the Deferential Wife. In his illustration, Hill does not give us any information on her situation nor other significant others who frequent her life; he merely told us of her choices but never her reasonings and how she sees herself. Dover picks up on this point:

A big part of her problem, traceable but not fully reducible to the social circumstances that led her to this cretin's bed in the first place, is that she lacks the supra-moral love of particular others whose conception of her she could counterpose to his. Under those conditions, where can a social animal turn for self-love and self-knowledge? What keeps the Wife in her place may not be excessive care for what other people think of her, let alone a 'vice' or 'defect' of 'servility' or 'submissiveness'. Her problem could more charitably be reframed as a consequence of a degree of social isolation that no amount of psychic bootstrapping will allow her to escape. (2022: 26)

As Beauvoir notes in *The Second Sex*, a woman's project to go against the society's expectation of her time is not for the faint of heart:

Refusing to be the Other, refusing complicity with man, would mean renouncing all the advantages an alliance with the superior caste confers to them. Lord-man will materially protect the liege-woman and will be in charge of justifying her existence: along with the economic risk, she eludes the metaphysical risk of a freedom that must invent its goals without help ... the anguish and stress of authenticity assumed existence are thus avoided. (1949: 10)

Without friends who can help her envision a better future, a better story, and any idea of post-divorce communities where she can forge a new identity, the act of foregoing all of the benefits that come with complying to a bourgeoisie husband, not to mention the humiliation from the world that she currently lives in, is difficult to justify given the enormous uncertainty.

Chapter 3:

Unmasked authenticity and Love

The idea of ‘unmasked authenticity’ refers to our everyday sentiment that authentic living involves letting your social guards down and letting others see you as who *you truly are*. To live authentically in this sense seems to require that one stops putting on a face or “pretending” to be someone (that one is not). At the core of the idea of unmasked authenticity is the assumption that we have a *true self* that can be revealed and recognised by others when we take off our ‘social mask.’

I anticipate that a critic of my dramaturgical theory may appeal to the idea of unmasked authenticity to object that the dramaturgical account confuses social masks with a person’s ‘real identity’. Authenticity on my view, the critic may say, cannot distinguish between the phenomenon where one is merely putting on a social mask and where one is truly being authentic by putting away those masks. Thus, the critic concludes, my view offers a rather ugly picture of humans as narcissistic, manipulative and, frankly, phoney. This is the challenge from unmasked authenticity.

In response to the challenge, I want to first point out that it is not obvious what the nature the so-called “true self” that undergirds the idea of unmasked authenticity is like. Though I have briefly touched on the illusion of the true self when we discussed Sartre’s notion of transcendence and nothingness in the last two chapters, I think that there is nevertheless some truth to the idea of unmasked authenticity and so it is worthwhile for us to dive a little deeper into it. At the end of the day, however, I do not think that it is something that contradicts the dramaturgical view at all.

Consider the phenomenon where we feel ‘most like ourselves’ when we’re around our loved ones. It is usually around those who we feel loved that we do not feel like we need to put up a face or make a big effort to appear in a certain way around them. I suggest that we may inquire into the idea of the true self and the authenticity related to the act of ‘unmasking’ by examining the idea of love, specifically Iris Murdoch’s notion of love as a moral vision. In her collection of essays *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970), Murdoch argues that love, conceived as moral vision, reveals to the lover a reality about who the beloved truly is. Murdoch tells us that love involves the process of

‘unselfing’, i.e. looking past a superficial persona that we create for other people based on our Ego. For Murdoch, to love is to attentively comprehend the beloved’s reality. The idea of unselfing thus resembles the idea unmasking: there is a social mask that one can take off to reveal one’s true identity. By stripping away one’s Ego, one thereby strips the fantastical Ego of the beloved to reveal their true self. By this line of thought, if we can figure out what the intentional object of love is, then we will arrive at the nature of true self which, as the critic may say, hides behind the mask.

That being said, though Murdoch offers an insightful picture attentive love, she is not entirely clear on what exactly the lover sees in the beloved through a loving gaze. Thus our project will rely on secondary literature too. Building on and refining Velleman’s Kantian interpretation of Murdochian love, I will argue in this chapter for an interpretation of the intentional object of love as an identity not distinct or ‘hidden’ underneath the social mask but a *deeper* grasp of the beloved’s identities from the beloved’s own standpoint. To distinguish the loving gaze from the everyday other-characterising gaze, I employ Stephen Darwall’s distinction between second- and third-person standpoints to characterise the gazes respectively. Ultimately, I will argue that what the unmasked authenticity critic thinks is the true self is after all not something entirely distinct from the ‘social’ identities or characters that we embody in different situations.

3.1 Murdoch on love as revealing another’s true self

In *All About Love*, bell hooks writes the following about *true love*, which she takes to be the highest kind of love:

The essence of true love is mutual recognition - two individuals *seeing each other as they really are*. We all know that the usual approach is to meet someone we like and put our best self forward, or even at times a false self, one we believe will be more appealing to the person we want to attract. When our real self appears in its entirety, when the good behaviour becomes too much to maintain or the masks are taken away, disappointment comes. All too often individuals feel, after the fact - when feelings are hurt and hearts are broken - that was a case of mistaken identity, that the loved one is a stranger. *They saw what they wanted to see rather than what was really there*. ... True love is a different story. When it happens, individuals feel *in touch with each other’s core identity*. Embarking on such a relationship

is frightening precisely because there is no place to hide. We are *known*. (hooks 2001: 184, my emphasis)

Hook's sentiment about true love, that it involves seeing the beloved as *who they truly are*, parallels Iris Murdoch's account of love as a *moral vision* found in her collection of essays *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970). Murdoch proposes that love reveals a certain *reality* about the beloved:

[T]he central concept of morality is "the individual" thought of as knowable by love. (1970: 30)

In particular situations '*reality*' as that which is revealed by the patient eye of love is an idea entirely comprehensible to the ordinary person. (1970: 40, my emphasis)

Similar to hooks, Murdoch points out that in order to perceive the beloved justly and attentively, love requires that one let go of one's selfish ego:

It is in the capacity to love, that is to see, that the liberation of the soul from fantasy consists. The freedom which is the proper human goal is the freedom from fantasy, that is the realism of compassion. What I have called fantasy, the proliferation of blinding self-centred aims and images, is itself a powerful system of energy, and most of what is often called 'will' or 'willing' belongs to this system. What counteracts the system is attention to reality inspired by, consisting of, love. (1970: 17).

To truly see the beloved as who they really are, the lover must not see merely what they wanted to see in the beloved. In other words, the lover must not paint the beloved's identity in a way that is conducive to one's selfish *fantasy*. In simple terms, love conceived as clear vision requires that you "get over yourself". Selflessness is thus a key characteristic of Murdochian love. Take Murdoch's famous example of M's renewing her understanding of D:

A mother, whom I shall call M, feels hostility to her daughter-in-law, whom I shall call D. M finds D quite a good-hearted girl, but while not exactly common yet certainly unpolished and lacking in dignity and refinement. D is inclined to be part and familiar, insufficiently

ceremonious, brusque, sometimes positively rude, always tiresomely juvenile. M does not like D's accent or the way D dresses. M feels that her son has married beneath him. Let us assume for purposes of the example that the mother, who is a very "correct" person, behaves beautifully to the girl throughout, not allowing her real opinion to appear in any way

Thus much for M's first thoughts about D. Time passes, and it could be that M settles down with a hardened sense of grievance and a fixed picture of D. ...However, the M of the example is an intelligent and well-intentioned person, capable of self-criticism, capable of giving careful and just attention to an object which confronts her. M tells herself: "I am old-fashioned and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded, I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again."...M observes D or at least reflects deliberately about D, until gradually her vision of D alters. ...D is discovered to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, and so on. (1970: 17-18)

Initially taking herself as a "correct" sort of person or a proud sort of mother (a self-aggrandising fantasy), M held on to the narrative that her son has married beneath him. Since M wanted to see D as someone who does not deserve her son, M took D as "unpolished", "brusque", and "juvenile". Now, when M looks at D again, having gotten over herself, M discovers that D is "not vulgar but refreshingly simple" and "not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful".

It is not hard to nod along to Murdoch's picture of love since we often come to realise that those who genuinely love us tend to be the ones that best understand us, and that we feel like we are truly seen for who we are and not for our social masks that we often put up to impress others. We tend to let our guard down around people that we know love us in this way, and the sense of letting go of one's project to self-present in a certain way (e.g. in contrast to a job interview) is the core sentiment of the idea of 'unmasked authenticity'. The kind of recognition that a lover has of the beloved can be contrasted with the kind of recognition that others have of us, for instance, at work. At the cafe, I am often seen as a skilled barista by my manager, colleagues and customers, and I am treated and respected as one. If a loving friend were to pay me a visit me at work however, and maybe grab a coffee to-go too, I would feel myself come out of my barista shell or mask as I engage

in a conversation with him whilst making him an espresso. The barista-friend is now ‘being himself’ around me.

The critic of my dramaturgical theory may point out that Murdoch’s picture of the practice of assigning fantasies to others based the sort of character that I want to embody resembles the practice of face-work that I proposed in Chapter 1. They may argue that the whole practice of face-work, then, is an egotistical practice and a betrayal of the spirit of authenticity. In other words, my dramaturgical theory is prescribing that we *be* inauthentic.

However, we must still ask the question: what *exactly* does the lover see in the beloved? If the friend does not see me as a barista, what exactly does he see (in me)? What is the nature of this ‘reality’ about me that is being perceived through the loving gaze? Murdoch is not clear on this. Considering that we often think of objective knowledge as derived from an *impersonal* or *impartial* point of view, it is not obvious how love could be an objective(-like) perception of a reality since love is often taken as a paradigm of the *personal* or the *partial*. It is hard to square our everyday sentiment that “love is blind”, or at least that to love someone involves giving more weight to the beloved’s positives over the negatives, with Murdoch’s claim that ‘love is clear-sighted’.

3.2 Velleman’s Kantian interpretation of Murdochian Love

In his article *Love as a Moral Emotion* (1999), Velleman argues that Murdochian love is a *moral* vision because its intentional object is the same as that of moral respect in the Kantian sense. In other words, Velleman argues that to love someone is to see the beloved as an end in themselves.

If love is indeed a matter of “really looking,” then it ought to resemble other instances of valuation-as-vision, including Kantian respect. (Velleman 1999: 343-4)

[W]hen the object of our love is a person, and when we love him *as* a person — rather than as a work of nature, say, or an aesthetic object - ... we are responding to the value that he possesses by virtue of being a person or, as Kant would say, an instance of rational nature. (Velleman 1999: 365)

To have the attitude of love towards another is no different, Velleman argues, from the *respectful* attitude in which all moral beings are due.

[T]he capacity to be actuated by reasons is a capacity for appreciating the value of ends, including self-existent ends such as persons. For Kant, then, people have a capacity whose value we appreciate by respecting them; and that capacity, at its utmost, is their capacity for respect. ... [L]ove is an appreciation for the same value, inhering in people's capacity to appreciate the value of ends, including self-existent ends such as persons. (Velleman 1999: 365)

One doesn't want one's value as a person to be eclipsed by the intrinsic value of one's appearance or behaviour; one wants them to elicit a valuation that looks through them, to the value of one's inner self (Velleman 1999: 372)

To truly love someone is not to admire them for their impressive contingent traits, but to love the *individual herself*, this *person*. The core of what it is to be an individual or a person - what the individual truly is - is described by Kant as their *humanity*. This is why, Velleman argues, the vision that the Murdochian lover has of her beloved as who they truly are resembles the vision of the Kantian agent's who sees another as an end her themselves (and not merely as a mean). Moreover, the selflessness of Murdochian love echoes Kant's picture of respect in its command to arrest "self-love". Self-love is a term that Kant uses for motivation that has its source in our prudential reasoning that aims to achieve certain ends through the employment of empirical means. The desire to be with someone for their admirable contingent properties does not qualify as love because it would be a superficial and selfish relationship. My friend would not be a true friend if he only loves and befriends me for my killer coffees. Thus, according to Velleman, Murdoch's moral vision parallels Kantian respect in their recognition of the beloved as an end in herself, and not the recognition of their instrumental properties.

Mason's epistemic challenge

In her objection to Velleman's conception of love in *Iris Murdoch and the Epistemic Significance of Love* (2021), Mason argues that Murdochian love cannot be a mere appreciation of the

inherent value in the beloved as Velleman interprets it. This is because, in Velleman's conception, love does not reveal the features of persons that Murdochian love reveals if love is a mere recognition of value (albeit inherent *qua* end in itself). Mason (2021) draws our attention to Murdoch's explicit rejection of Kant's picture of morality:

Kant does not tell us to respect whole particular tangled-up individuals, but to respect the universal reason in their breasts. In so far as we are rational and moral we are all the same, and in some mysterious sense transcendent to history. (Murdoch 1959: 51)

Kant's idea of an individual's humanity or personhood is too narrow a concept to be the object of Murdochian love because it does not accommodate the epistemic role of love that Murdoch intends. For Murdoch, to love someone is to direct our attention "towards the great surprising variety of the world" (Murdoch 1970: 66). Usually, a lover discovers things that would have otherwise gone unnoticed by the inattentive eye.

Echoing Mason's objection to Velleman's Kantian reading, Vida Yao (2020) argues that the Kantian humanity or personhood of each individual is too thin a concept to be an object of love.

[O]ne might want to be loved for the second set of qualities (of the character or personality) not because they are expressive of a "deeper" value or "inner self" that lies underneath or beyond them, or because they are the necessary means to loving that deeper value, but because they constitute *who he is*. (Yao 2022: 14)

We would never find a lover in his right mind saying to his beloved, "I love you as an end in yourself". Surely, what my barista friend saw in me is not exactly the a person who deserves respect owed to all. Love must reveal something about the beloved that is more substantial and particular than that.

3.3 Refining Velleman's interpretation: Love as a second-person recognition

Though Mason and Yao are right that the epistemic role of Murdochian love cannot be accommodated by Velleman's interpretation (as it is) that love is a *mere recognition* of the beloved's intrinsic *value*, I think that Velleman is on the right track to take the object of love as the beloved's humanity conceivable in the Kantian framework. In other words, I think that Velleman is right to the extent that love and moral respect have one thing in common: their *intentional object*. Though love and moral respect are both directed at the beloved's core identity of what it is to be a person, they are different *attitudes* towards the humanity of the beloved. I suggest that the Kantian interpretation of Murdochian love can be supplemented with Stephen Darwall's notion of second person standpoint to overcome Mason's epistemic challenge.

In his article '*Contempt as an Other-Characterizing "Hierarchizing" Attitude*' (2018), Darwall distinguishes between second and third-personal recognition of another individual by contrasting two kinds of respect: *recognition respect* and *appraisal respect*. To hold another with recognition respect involves taking a reactive attitude towards the other such that it renders the other as subject to moral praise and blame. Drawing from Strawson's (1968) idea of reactive attitudes, Darwall argues that to take the second-person perspective is to recognise or address the other as a *free individual*. Darwall writes,

Everyone is entitled to recognition respect of her equal dignity as a moral person, but the respect that can be deserved or earned by conduct and character is appraisal respect or esteem. (2018: 199)

The second personal standpoint thus presents others as subject to moral praise and blame in the same way that one is subject to.

On the other hand, to have appraisal respect towards another is to have esteem for the kind of person they are (e.g. for their wealth, social status, expertise, etc.). The negative evaluative counterpart of holding someone with appraisal respect or esteem, Darwall observes, is to hold them with pity or contempt. Darwall refers to such evaluative attitudes, either positive or negative, as *other-*

characterising attitudes. To view the other from the third-person perspective, Darwall proposes, is to judge them with other-characterising attitudes. For example, we may hold a professional football player with appraisal respect for her athletic skills. Whilst to judge the other from the second-person standpoint is to judge them as a “person” that is subject to blame and praise, to take the third-person perspective is to judge another as a “persōna” or a “character” (2018: 200). He writes about what it is to hold another as a character:

Rather than viewing their objects as individuals [when one takes the second personal perspective], they regard them as exemplifying kinds. And in so characterizing their objects, they take a third-person perspective on them rather than relating to them second personally. They thereby take the person holding the attitude out of relation to the object individuals and effectively “reduce” the latter to characters and kinds. (2018: 193)

Darwall employs Erving Goffman’s (1959) concept of *face* to depict what he means by “character” or a “persōna” (2018: 200-1). According to Goffman, one’s face is “a mask used by a player, character in a play, dramatic role, the part played by a person in life, character, role, [or] position” (OED). In other words, one’s face is the public self-image that one presents to others - e.g. being a waiter, a tired mother or a kind-hearted teacher who is always there to help the students out, etc. - such that others respond to my face with honour, esteem, pity or contempt.

Similar to moral respect, I argue, love is second personal. When the lover sees the beloved as who they truly are, the lover’s gaze is primarily directed at the beloved as a *person* rather than their “persona”. Darwall’s distinction parallels Velleman’s endorsement of the Kantian distinction between valuing someone’s *price* and valuing their *dignity*:

[B]eing valued merely as persons is compatible with being valued as special because our value as persons is a dignity rather than a price. ... [T]he distinction between price and dignity rests on a distinction between the responses that constitute their proper appreciation. Preference and choice belong to one mode of appreciation, which is warranted by that kind of value which Kant calls a price. Dignity is a different kind of value because it warrants a different mode of appreciation, consisting of motives and feelings in which we submit to the object’s reality rather than strive toward its realization. (Velleman 1999: 366-7)

However, we must not confuse the attitude of respect with that of love. Whilst, in holding another second personally, moral respect commands that the individual limits his freedom to the extent that the freedom of another begins, love *adores* the recognised free living of the beloved's. The language of dignity does not apply to the attitude of love because dignity does not connote the myriad particularities about the beloved. Whilst the morally respectful agent can be emotionally indifferent to the freedom of another, the lover is a "fan" of the beloved's living her (freely) chosen projects and her overall humanity. To love someone is not to only recognise them as a free individual or an end in themselves, but to positively track their free-living attentively and endearingly. As Susan Wolf writes,

Loving someone is, at least in part, a matter of caring about her, and about her good. One rejoices not only in the happiness of the beloved but also in the beloved's possession of excellences; one is saddened not only by the beloved's misfortunes but also by the unfortunate features of her character. Looking attentively at one's beloved, then, one naturally looks for and hopes to see good in her rather than bad. One will, moreover, be naturally inclined to highlight the good in one's picture of the beloved, putting her flaws into a perspective that emphasises her virtues, and perhaps her potential for virtue, rather than the other way around. (Wolf 2014: 173)

This is how love is partial and personal yet clear-sighted: the lover sees the goods and the flaws of the beloved clearly - things that would probably have remained hidden to the selfish eye - and cheer them on as they go through life, and is invested in her life. So to speak, the lover is on the beloved's team where the sentiment is often expressed: "I will always be on your side".

By understanding love as a second personal attitude towards the beloved, we can see that to love is an epistemically rich endeavour. Since the lover is in the mindset that the beloved, this *person*, is someone with her own thoughts and desires just like the lover himself, the lover endearingly attends to *how* the beloved's life is played out *qua* person - what her thoughts, projects and dreams are. In other words, the lover occupies the most clear-sighted perspective of the beloved by putting himself in the beloved's shoes, i.e. understanding the beloved second personally. Thus, love conceived in this Kantian light is, *contra* Mason, epistemically and emotionally rich. As Julia Driver

(2020) writes about Murdochian love that it does not only involve taking the beloved's perspective empathically but also sympathetically:

To see another person justly we may need to adopt the perspective, or become clearer on the 'context' that another person is living in. ... of taking the perspective of another person. This skill is important in our interactions with others, since if we cannot see another's perspective they will be a mystery to us. But there is another kind of empathy as well. We might care about others and want to see the world from their point of view as a matter of understanding them sympathetically. (Driver 2020: 172)

Unselfing, then will involve close attention, and in understanding others we need to pay close attention in such a way as to 'share' their contexts. (Driver 2020: 172)

Love is a matter of one person seeing another clearly enough to understand and appreciate the beloved's true self. This isn't knowing everything there is to know about the beloved and is compatible with overlooking flaws that do not impact the self. Through empathy with the person one loves, one understands what they do and don't endorse. One can speak authoritatively about who they really are. (Driver 2020: 179)

Let's circle back to the cafe case. Before my friend leaves with his coffee, he said, "you make a killer coffee and I love you for that, but since I know how much you would rather be pursuing your career in music right now, I hope that you quit your job soon". Indeed, this remark is that of a true and attentive friend.

For the other to love and understand us from the second-person standpoint does not exclude the other's consciousness and appreciation of our characters and our socially constituted projects that are the common objects of third-person recognition. Love extends from the beloved's humanity to her projects and character. Just as we take ourselves to be transcendence *and* facticity, love tracks both our modes of being by sympathising with our being-for-itself and branching out to appreciate our myriad of characters and stories. Thus, to be loved for how well we execute our roles or for our characters should not be instantly counted against how genuine the other loves us. Indeed, to be loved *solely* for our character is to be admired from the third-person standpoint, it is a kind of ap-

praisal respect. In the cafe case, even if I were to finally had quit my job and have had a great music career under my belt, my friend would still be invested in me and love me when I move on to other projects such as raising a child. I note that the idea of “character” should not be taken as a superficial mode of being. Most of the time, our striving towards and maintaining our characters are a deep source of meaning in our lives. Our project of being a good teacher or a good father, for instance, provides action-guiding principles that are significant to our good life. It is a telltale of a rather selfish friend to think that you are not being your ‘true self’ when you are attending to a new area of your life such as child-bearing, meanwhile insisting that your true self is the wild party animal that you both were in your yonder years.

3.4 Unmasked authenticity and Dramaturgical authenticity

As I have shown through considering Murdoch’s notion of the loving gaze, to be seen as who we really are is for the lover an epistemically rich understanding of our free living as a person. It does not involve being perceived as something or someone entirely different from our social identities; rather, it is a deeper and more sympathetic attention that we receive from another that tracks and appreciates how we come to be who we are and where we are going. This means that when we feel a sense of ease about ourselves that is associated with the idea of unmasked authenticity around the people that love us - that we are being seen as who we really are - we feel that we are being understood from our own perspective. We feel that, as Driver suggests, the other shares our perspective and the context in which we live our lives and pursue our projects. Thus, the sentiment of unmasked authenticity should not be interpreted as a demand that we denounce our social identities in hope of revealing who we truly are, nor for our loved ones to pin us down to one true narrative hidden behind our identities. After all, the idea of who we truly are - our true self - is not to be limited to the scope of our personhood as conceived by Kant (“the universal reason in their breasts”) but extends to include how we play out our human life through the pursuit of various projects and the characters that we acquire along the way. I hope to have shown that the idea of ‘unmasking’ is a mistake. The intuition is better reframed as a desire to be understood deeply, and not only synchronically. In other words, our desire to live as if unmasked all the time is a desire for someone to get under our skin and sympathise with our author-self. It is my desire for someone to understand my world from my point of view and the way that I live it. It is the desire to be diachronically intelligible. Realistically, it is perhaps too much an ask to expect this from anyone and everyone that we

meet, all the people that we pass on the streets, though the effort practice the loving gaze or compassion as much as we can deserves moral praise, as Murdoch suggests.

That being said, I think that there is another facet of truth to the intuition about the demand from unmasked authenticity. In the context of love, it would be a key obstacle to those who try to love and understand us if we were to always put up a front between us and them, not letting ourselves be vulnerable to them. E.g., a mother who only demands the very best from us in the name of being a “good mother” without considering our wishes, a boyfriend who buys elaborate gifts as a gesture of apology instead of talking about why he has wronged us in the first place, a friend who says that she’s fine yet overcommits to her job at the firm after a devastating divorce. These are cases of those we try to love deeply but they hide behind a facade of an identity, a defensive act that results in bad faith. Love is a two-way street: it requires the lover’s attention *and* the beloved’s willingness to be vulnerable and let the other in.

Concluding remarks

I began the Thesis with two seemingly contradictory intuitions about the human ideal of living authentically:

- (1) *Liberal intuition*: An authentic person does not bend easily to societal pressures and takes herself as the source of her projects (Kymlicka 1988; Dworkin 1983).
- (2) *Communitarian intuition*: Since an authentic person is someone who knows who they are and who they are is socially constituted (Taylor 1994; MacIntyre 1981; Sandel 1982), an authentic person is attuned to their position or role within the pre-world order and aware of their socially constituted projects.

By considering these two premises together, we may derive the conclusion as follows:

- (3) An authentic person is someone who defines themselves socially and resists social influences.

This conclusion suggests trouble for proponents of authenticity: it suggests that the demand from authenticity is *self-defeating*. In other words, it leads us to the puzzle of authenticity:

(The puzzle of authenticity) How can authenticity demand that we resist social influences when our understanding of who we are is derived from our relations to others?

And so I promised to solve it by offering a Kinda-Sartrean dramaturgical theory of personal identity and authenticity. I shall directly tackle the puzzle now that I have laid down my theory and defended it against a possible objection.

In Chapter 1, I argued for the the dramaturgical theory of personal identity. This theory fleshes out the communitarian intuition about self-constitution; it tells us that the practice of forming, maintaining and transforming one's personal identity - what I referred to as identity-work - is a dialogical practice. We make sense of who we are *with others*, whether imaginatively (narrative-

work) or face-to-face (face-work). One's awareness of one's personal identity is, then, to use Lucy O'Brien's term, an instance of 'ordinary self-consciousness' (2011). When we say that being authentic involves 'setting oneself as the thesis,' the content of 'oneself' comes about via the other-mediated project of dramaturgical self-creation. Thus, the idea that the authentic person is someone who creates herself *ex nihilo* is a misleading liberal wishful-thinking.

It is through pulling apart and laying down the mechanics of identity-work that we gain the appropriate perspective to tackle the puzzle of authenticity. In Chapter 2, I offer a dramaturgical theory of personal identity. The theory interprets the liberal intuition and communitarian intuition about authenticity as follows. One lives authentically iff:

- i. (*Actor's condition*) one practices identity-work in 'good faith', and
- ii. (*Co-Actors' condition*) one's co-actors uses the right interpretative schema to make sense of one's expressed identity.

The Sartrean interpretation of the liberal condition, a condition that is rooted in the demand for us to realise our freedom, emphasises the sense of *responsibility* towards our condition as an ambiguously free being. The truth about being human is that we are always setting ourselves as the thesis, this is the plight of being ambiguous. The good faith attitude consists in taking the matured responsibility towards this plight, to own up to it, to be honest to ourselves about it. The anti-bad faith condition interprets the liberal premise that an authentic person 'does not bend easily to societal pressures' to mean that an authentic person 'consciously lives the truth of being the author and actor of her story and character'.

However, though you are the author and enactor of your character, in virtue of your facticity you are not the author of the whole world in which your character's stories take place nor the enactor of the other characters within it. Indeed, you are no God. This is where the communitarian intuition comes into play. A person of good faith recognises that she lives in a shared world, and she is no lousy author and actor to ignore this. There are many ways in which one can err in bad faith but only one way in which one can be in good faith. I argued that there are three kinds of bad faith: thinking and living as if one's story is pre-determined (serious bad faith), to take one's hands off the

steering wheel of character altogether yet the car continues to run (nihilistic bad faith), or to live in a fantasy that is detached from and incoherent to the real world (quixotic bad faith). It is crucial to underscore the fact that living in good faith is sometimes more painful than living in bad faith depending on how oppressed one is, but it would be a mistake to say that anyone is condemned to live in bad faith. The satisfaction of the Actor's Condition is "up to you," but it is more painful and costly for some actors than others.

Indeed, my account of authentic living is Kinda Sartrean rather than a loyal Sartrean theory. I do not think that good faith alone necessarily carries one all the way to authentic living. On top of highlighting the role of facticity in the Actor's Condition, the dramaturgical theory interprets the communitarian intuition in the Co-Actor's condition to ensure the view that authentic living is also other-dependent. Though no one is condemned to bad faith, those who are oppressed are socio-contingently condemned to be obstructed from 'living true to who one is', that is, from living authentically. On my account of authenticity, whether or not one can live authentically is also partly "up to others". If your co-actors were to use oppressive master narratives to interpret you, i.e. an interpretative schema that inhibits your character expression to 'land', then you cannot be said to be yourself in failing to manifest your character in the world. If you were a the Jew from *ASJ*, you cannot be said to live authentically among anti-Semitic co-actors as they employ an overly determined master narratives that make it impossible for them to recognise nor respond appropriately to your character expression. Indeed, contrary to Sartre's view, not even when you live as martyr of good faith.

To finally tackle the puzzle of authenticity head-on: authentic living does not require that we resist social influences in order to preserve a true self, a self untainted by interpersonal influences. The idea of the true self, something that is pure in virtue of its self-birth, is a mistake - a misleading and harmful liberal fantasy. Authenticity also excludes the serious attitude that we strictly *define* ourselves by our social relations. It demands that we realise that authentic self-creation requires the social space for one to make oneself intelligible to oneself and others. In conclusion, the puzzle of authenticity is dissolved when we understand that living as oneself or setting oneself as the thesis is a shared imaginative endeavour, a living drama. The demand from authenticity, as conceived on the dramaturgical view, is a demand on both the actor and co-actors: it requires good faith from the actor and the abolition of oppression from others. To live an authentic drama or fiction may seem at first a paradoxical idea, but I hope that I have made a persuasive enough case. I shall end the Thesis with

a quote from Iris Murdoch about life and literature from her interview with Bryan Magee on ‘Literature and Philosophy’ (published in *Iris Murdoch: Existentialists and Mystics*).

Literature ... is indeed something in which we all indulge spontaneously, and so [literature] might seem to be nearer to play, and to the cast irresponsible variety of play. Literary modes are very natural to us, very close to ordinary life and to the way we live as reflective beings. Not all literature is fiction, but the greater part of it involve fiction, invention, masks, playing roles, pretending, imagining, story telling. When we return home and “tell our day”, we are artfully shaping material into story form. So in a way as word-users we all exist in a literary atmosphere, we live and breathe literature, we are all literary artists, we are constantly employing language to make interesting form out of experience which perhaps originally seem dull or incoherent. How far reshaping involves offences against truth is a problem any artist must face. A deep motive for making literature or art of any sort is the desire to defeat the formlessness of the world and cheer oneself up by constructing forms out of what might otherwise seem a mass of senseless rubble. (1997: 6-7)

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