

# The Gaze of Medusa. Some Philosophical Reflections on the Experience of Loneliness in the Context of Mental Illness

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## Sartre and Three Kinds of Being

Being in-itself

Being for-itself

Being for-others

“The structure at the basis of intentionality and of selfness is negation, which is the internal relation of the for-itself to the thing. The for-itself constitutes itself outside in terms of the thing as the negation of that thing; thus its first relation with being-in-itself is negation” (B&N:123)

“The world (is) mine because it is haunted with possibilities, and the consciousness of each of these is a possible self-consciousness which I am. It is these possibles as such which give the world its unity and its meaning in the world.” (B&N: 104)



“At the end of this long description of relations of the for-itself with others we have then achieved this certainty: the for-itself is not only a being which arises as the nihilation of the in-itself which it is and the internal negation of the in-itself which is not. This nihilating flight is entirely reapprehended by the in-itself and fixed in in-itself as soon as the Other appears. The for-itself when alone transcends the world; it is the nothing by which there are things. The Other by raising up confers on the for-itself a being-in-itself-in-the-midst-of-the-world as a thing among things. **This petrification in in-itself by the Other’s look is the profound meaning of the myth of Medusa.**” (B&N: 425)



## Influences of existential phenomenology on psychiatry

"We do not experience ourselves or the worldly entities that we encounter merely in terms of the present and the actual. Rather all experience is structured by possibilities. We experience ourselves in potential ways in which we might be. Some of which we pursue through our projects. But this projection is orientation towards the possible, is not unconstrained. We do not pluck our projects out of nowhere. The kinds of possibilities that we are able to pursue are determined by how we find ourselves situated in the realm where things matter to us in different ways. Such as there being practically significant, available, enticing, terrifying, inaccessible, etc."  
(Ratcliffe & Broome, 2012 p. 12)

How is the interpersonal experience affected in experiences of schizophrenia and depression?

“Changes in the shape of interpersonal experience can take quite different forms...people as threat; disconnectedness from people; loss of sense of others as people....What unites these experiences is an alteration of the sense of belonging to a world and being with other people, central to which are shifts in the experience of worldly significance, one’s own possibilities and one’s body.”  
(Ratcliffe & Broome, 2012 p. 19)

**I:** When you feel alone, how you would describe that feeling?

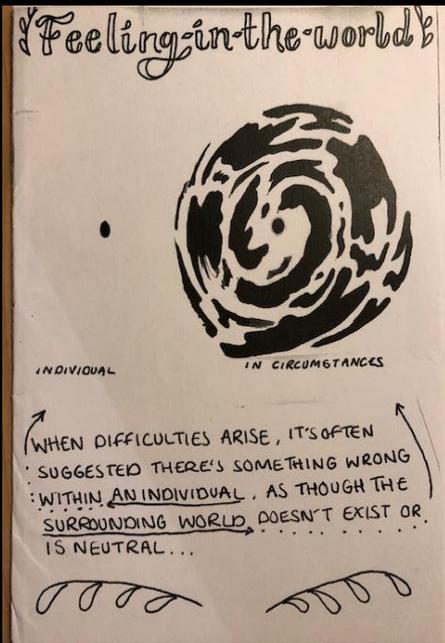
**P:** Oh, that's easy! A complete... a whole... that I can see complete darkness and then I keep... Let's say someone jumped into the swimming pool, keeps falling and falling and falling and falling until there's no more light. And then, you... you could still feel it falling but you cannot physically see yourself.

**I:** You cannot...physically?

**P:** See yourself, so... How can I describe it? You know, you can imagine... what you, you can... look like... Like if you, let's say, jumped off a board or try diving, you start seeing yourself less and less as you imagined it and enters into complete darkness even when you can still feel yourself falling.



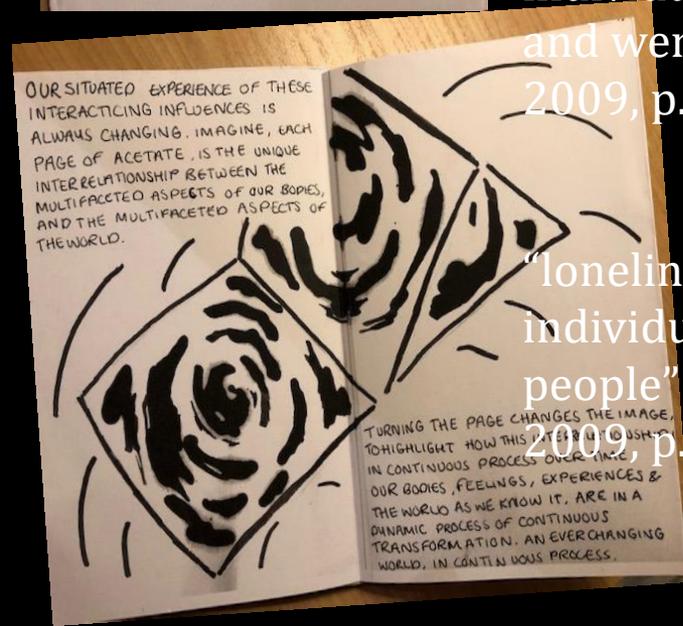
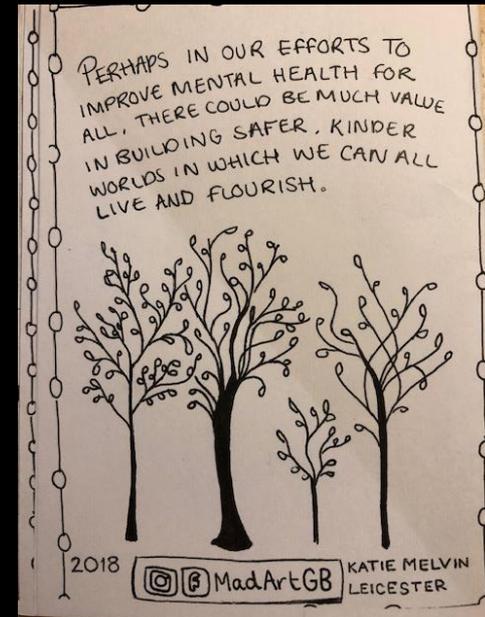
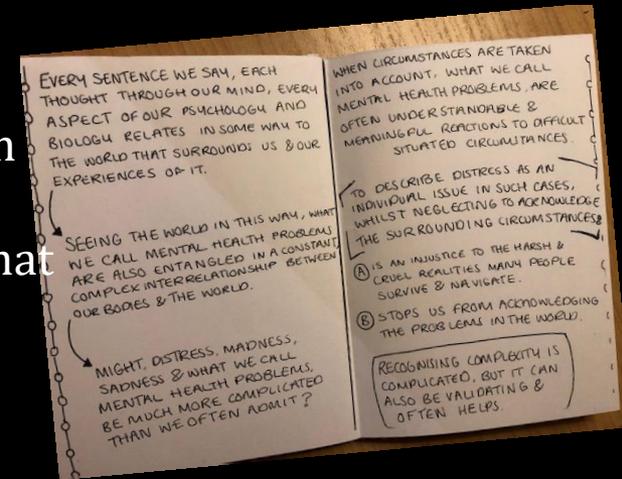
# From the person to the environment



Like loneliness, suicide has often been considered as entirely individualistic. However, Emile Durkheim suggests that suicide may be partly determined by broader social processes.

“The suicide rates stayed the same across time and across groups, even though the individual members of those groups came and went” (Cacioppo, Christakis & Fowler, 2009, p. 977).

“loneliness is not only a function of the individual but also a property of groups of people” (Cacioppo, Christakis & Fowler, 2009, p. 977)



DIAGNOSTIC •  
AND  
STATISTICAL •  
MANUAL

MENTAL  
DISORDERS



AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION

You can be lonely anywhere but there is a particular flavour that comes from living in a city, surrounded by millions of people. One might think this state was antithetical to urban living, to the massed presence of other human beings, and yet the mere proximity is not enough to dispel a sense of internal isolation. It is possible -easy even- to feel desolate and unfrequented in oneself while living cheek by jowl with others. Cities can be lonely places, and in admitting this we see that loneliness doesn't necessarily require physical solitude, but rather an absence or paucity of connection, closeness, kinship: an inability for one reason or another to find as much intimacy as is desired. (Laing, 2016, pp.3)

