

# Existentialist Politics and Political Theory

Edited with introductions by

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# Series Introduction

Perhaps no other philosophical movement has had as great an impact on the philosophy, literature, and general cultural outlook of the twentieth century as has existentialism. There are other contenders, to be sure—pragmatism, for example, or linguistic analysis or poststructuralism. The strongest rival of all is probably Marxism, but of course the originator lived in the previous century. Of all the prominent twentieth century philosophers, it is Jean-Paul Sartre to whom the “existentialist” label can be most securely affixed. It was also Sartre who, not by pure coincidence, during one long period of his career made the most concerted effort to bring Marxism and existentialism into a kind of synthesis, one that he himself ultimately found to be unstable.

The purpose of the present eight-volume collection of journal articles and book chapters, then, is to assemble some of the best of the secondary literature on Sartrean existentialism and on its background in, and connections with, existential philosophy in general, as well as on a few of its anticipations of post-existentialist thought. The collection includes some authors—Gabriel Marcel, Karl Jaspers, Paul Tillich, Herbert Marcuse, and Lucien Goldmann, to name five—who are generally regarded as original writers primarily rather than commentators (as if this distinction could ever be rigorously maintained in the field of philosophy, where every practitioner since at least Thales owes some debt to predecessors!). That they have so much to contribute to our central theme only serves to reinforce the claim of existentialism’s centrality to the twentieth century.

The objection will no doubt be raised that even Sartre himself, to say nothing of other writers on the subject, traced existentialism’s origins to the nineteenth century Danish religious thinker, Søren Kierkegaard (and that some have even discerned strong religious existentialist themes in Blaise Pascal’s *Pensées* from a much earlier time). This is true, but the identification of a distinctive way of thinking that eschews facile, self-assured, systematic rationalist formulas concerning some supposed essential structures of the cosmos, in favor of anguished reflection on the contingent situation of concrete human reality, as an *existentialist* way of thinking only became self-conscious nearly a century after Kierkegaard’s death. Prior to Sartre’s appearance on the stage, Marcel and Martin Heidegger both contributed to this developing self-consciousness, although both later preferred no longer to be called “existentialists” precisely because of the term’s increasingly Sartrean connotations—Marcel in reaction to Sartre’s atheism, Heidegger in reaction to his “humanism.” These historical labelings and “unlabelings” and the

philosophical reasons behind them will be among the topics explored, especially in the early volumes of this collection.

The collection spans fifty-five years of scholarship—sixty-one, if we count the date of the original German version of Jaspers' essay—from Dorothy Emmet's 1941 discussion, in the British journal *Philosophy*, of Kierkegaard and existentialism, which conveys in a good existentialist manner a concrete sense of her world at war (and incidentally makes it clear that the recognition, beyond Germany's borders, of Heidegger's Nazi sympathies is not really a recent development), to contemporary discussions of Sartre's contribution to the understandings of racism, of the relations between the sexes, of hermeneutics, and so on. One of the peculiarities of the Sartrean corpus is that he left a number of manuscripts, concerning the fate of which he appeared to be comparatively indifferent, unpublished at the time of his death, and that his intellectual heirs have concurred with his adopted daughter and literary executor, Arlette Elkaïm Sartre, in wishing to make these writings public. The result of all this is that Sartre as posthumous author has proven to be nearly as prolific as he was when alive, and the relevance of the most significant of his posthumous writings is also reflected in a number of the articles from the past decade and a half that are included here.

The contents of these eight volumes are distributed according to a rationale which, while no one would claim that it conforms to a preordained order such that each article belongs uniquely to its assigned volume and to no other, attempts to do justice to all aspects of this subject. For Sartre was, of course, distinguished not merely as a writer of philosophy but also as a literary figure in a much broader sense, and, although he himself gave occasional indications that he accepted the traditional distinction between philosophy and literature, the study of much of his actual corpus militates strongly against regarding this distinction as rigid. To take one obvious illustration of this among many, his last major work, *The Family Idiot*, is a three-volume study of the nineteenth-century writer, Gustave Flaubert, that is by turns literary criticism, psychoanalysis, sociology, history, and always, in an important sense, philosophy. Most of the contributors to these volumes, whether sympathetic, neutral, or unsympathetic toward Sartre, were well aware of the need to cross inter- and intra-disciplinary lines in order to do justice to their subject.

Nevertheless, a certain order has been observed in the arrangement of this collection, and it runs as follows. Volume one provides a general overview of existentialism as a movement, from what I have called its self-conscious beginnings in the 1940s to periodic reflections, over the ensuing decades, on its central issues, its metamorphoses, and its continuing (though no doubt metamorphosed) relevance. Volume two contains selected studies, many comparative, of Sartre's best-known existentialist predecessors; although a few of these articles, like a few of those in volume one, make no explicit reference to Sartre, when taken as a whole they are meant to convey a strong sense of his increasing centrality, during the period of existentialism's apogee, to the debates surrounding it. In volume three, the figure of Sartre is brought unqualifiedly to the fore, with a view to analyzing (a) the way in which his ideas and the arguments they generated came increasingly to dominate the intellectual terrain in France, Europe in general, and North America; (b) some of the more enduring themes

that he can be seen to have emphasized throughout his career; and (c) some of the specific events, literary and other, that have led to the claims of major shifts of position in the course of his evolution.

The next three volumes, four through six, are divided according to the more-or-less standard philosophical areas—ontology, ethics, and social and political philosophy—to which Sartre devoted his principal theoretical writings. Volume four is concentrated above all on the best-known and most magisterial work of Sartre's early philosophy, *Being and Nothingness*, but it also contains studies of important work on imagination, on the emotions, and on the ego that preceded it, as well as some probings of issues in ontology, philosophical psychology, and philosophical method that take account of Sartre's later work insofar as it bears on these issues. Volume six focuses mainly on the magnum opus of the later Sartre, the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, while also including discussions of certain political concerns that are not emphasized in that work. Between volumes four and six, the articles in volume five on Sartre's ethics, of which he never published an even partially definitive version in his lifetime, plunge the reader into considerations of such characteristically Sartrean concepts as bad faith, authenticity, radical conversion, and even—in this case drawing on extant manuscripts that still remain unpublished—the possibility of a socialist morality.

Volume seven concentrates both on another traditional philosophical subdiscipline, aesthetics, to which Sartre paid considerable attention, and also on philosophical issues in the area of literature, such as those emanating from his studies of Flaubert and Jean Genet. Eminent literary scholars are among the principal contributors to this volume. Finally, the collection in volume eight focuses on three of Sartre's erstwhile acquaintances who themselves made major contributions to the existentialist movement—Albert Camus, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Simone de Beauvoir—together with a few French "post-Sartreans," individuals whose own philosophies show obvious influences from him even if, as is true in most cases, they have been reluctant to acknowledge these influences. The last of these to be considered here, Emmanuel Levinas, who died recently at a very advanced age, is something of a special case, in that Sartre himself became acquainted with some of Levinas' already-published ideas at the beginning of his own career!

This selection might appear in a sense to close the circle (or as Sartre would put it, "*boucler la boucle*") of the literature surrounding Sartre and existentialism. But this would in fact be a false appearance, because articles and books dealing with Sartre, the most written-about French author of this century, continue and will continue to be published in great numbers, thus keeping the interpretation of his thought as open-ended as is that thought itself, undeviating as it is in its insistence on the centrality of human freedom.



# Volume Introduction

The great vogue of existentialist philosophy, though as we have seen in the early volumes of this series it had pre-war roots and beginnings, occurred worldwide during the decade and a half following World War II. But this was also, precisely, the darkest period of the Cold War, when Sartre and a number of his colleagues were living out his ideal of the “committed,” public intellectual while always fearing, along with many nonintellectuals, the real possibility of a nuclear holocaust. *Les Temps Modernes*, the journal cofounded by Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, with the collaboration of a number of other well-known figures, was a focal point for discussions of politics along with a number of other issues of a philosophical, psychoanalytic, historical, sociological, or literary nature. Sartre himself published a great many articles of a more ephemeral political sort (most of them eventually reprinted in a ten-volume collection of his essays on many subjects entitled, simply, *Situations*), and he came to dominate the direction of the journal after the rupture of his friendship with Merleau-Ponty, precipitated by disagreements over how to view the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 and subsequent events which led to the latter’s resignation from the coeditorship three years later.

Within the next few years France in particular was suffering from the death-throes of colonialism: the humiliating defeat of the French Army at Dien Bien Phu, Vietnam, in 1954 was followed by the intensification of the anti-French uprising in Algeria, officially regarded as a part of “Metropolitan France.” Sartre, like many intellectuals of the time who saw the justice of the Algerians’ cause, was plunged into despair. This despair was intensified by the unswervingly pro-Moscow “hard line” maintained by the French Communist Party, with which he had at one time hoped, without becoming a Party member, to make common cause against global oppressions. This is the background against which his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, the major treatise in existentialist-Marxist social and political theory which will be the focus of analysis in the majority of essays in this volume, was written during the late 1950s. A number of the selections place special emphasis on the connections between this theory and other aspects of Sartrean existentialism.

The earliest essay I have included, Arthur Lessing’s, is a solid critique of volume one of the *Critique*, which is virtually all that was known of it until volume two was published posthumously. Lessing concerns himself with philosophical structures and concepts—dialecticity, totality, *praxis*, freedom, etc.—in Sartre’s thought and also, to a

lesser extent, in Merleau-Ponty's, avoiding as far as possible the *ideological* aspects of the attempted marriage of Marxism with existentialism. What Sartre has achieved in the *Critique*, he points out, is by no means a mere appropriation of Marxism.

My own essay was prepared originally for the volume on Sartre in the Library of Living Philosophers; it was used by his three interlocutors as one of the sources of the questions posed to him in the interview published there in lieu of the series' more customary "replies to critics." (Virtually blind by the time of this interview, Sartre was no longer capable of reading or writing.) This interview, conducted in 1975, was one of the first public occasions on which Sartre declared that he no longer considered himself a Marxist. I point to possible divergences between Marxism and the theory of the *Critique* with respect to methodology, ontology (the special roles that Sartre assigns to *praxis* and scarcity, as well as possible discrepancies between the respective approaches to materialism and causality), and normative orientation toward the historical future.

Thomas R. Flynn takes up the theme of *praxis* as the later Sartre's preferred basis for a theory of knowledge, showing how much more readily it lends itself to the understanding of political and moral categories than does "intuition," Flynn's designation for the early Sartre's epistemological orientation. Flynn sees Sartre's Marxist-existentialist objectives as egalitarianism, the liquidation of alterity or otherness, and an end to authority. This last-mentioned goal, he points out, is Hannah Arendt's way of characterizing one of the, to her, most *deplorable* tendencies of our present age.

Monika Langer criticizes both Sartre and Flynn, the latter for having, in his book on Sartre's "Marxism," assumed that that theory is indeed a revisionist form of Marxism. But it is not a Marxism at all, she says, although Flynn's focus on *responsibility* offers an interesting perspective on it. Even though human freedom is a basic assumption of Marxism as it is of Sartre's existentialism, she acknowledges, this is never spelled out in ontological terms in Marx's writings, whereas of course it is in Sartre's. On the other hand, for Langer, Sartre's approach to politics has many problems, some of them already articulated by Merleau-Ponty: Sartre emphasizes oppression over exploitation (a more concrete, economic notion), has too vague a conception of scarcity, conflates alienation with objectification, and above all remains too much indebted to the legacy of Descartes.

In *his* treatment of the connection between existentialism and the later Sartre, Yirmiahu Yovel points to some of the ways in which Sartre has radicalized the early Heidegger's notion of "fundamental ontology," connected as it is with history and historicity through the concept of time, and in doing so has developed a dialectical sense of history that was lacking in his early writings. Yovel furnishes an especially lucid summary of some of the main ideas of Sartre's *Critique*, especially as it bears on the philosophy of history.

Wilfrid Desan, author of pioneering studies in the English language of both *Being and Nothingness* and volume one of the *Critique* and an erstwhile acquaintance of Sartre's, provides background information concerning Sartre's evolution in the direction of Marxism and admirably summarizes the overall *movement* of the *Critique* (from need to seriality to class and back to need), as well as indicating the nature, as he perceives it, of Sartre's lifelong struggle to overcome the individualist Cartesian child and adolescent that he had been.

George Allan's workmanlike elucidation of the *Critique*, volume one, articulates in greater detail Desan's claim that Sartre could never overcome his fundamental individualism and hence failed to generate a true dialectical theory of history despite all his good intentions. A footnote reference in this article to what volume two would have been illustrates very well how little was known about this unpublished material among the run of commentators in 1979, the year before Sartre's death.

George J. Stack's somewhat earlier study treats the *Critique* as a theory about the formation of groups. He challenges Sartre's faith in their thoroughgoing intelligibility by appealing to alleged irrational factors and arguing that Sartre underestimates the role, stressed by Max Weber, of "charismatic" leaders. (This criticism might have been somewhat mitigated if Stack had been aware of Sartre's treatment of Stalin in the posthumously published second volume.) Stack asserts that Sartre did believe that the individual can be absorbed into the group, but rejects Mary Warnock's accusation that Sartre's theory is totalitarian. Stack himself, however, finds it excessively prescriptive.

The appreciative chapter on Sartre from a translated collection of essays by the prominent Italian Marxist phenomenologist Enzo Paci is oriented around four philosophical topics *à propos* of the *Critique*: (1) the idea that *truth* is present in all human relations, and particularly that truths about economic structures condition the exercise of freedom; (2) Sartre's use, though he never explicitly mentions it in this work, of phenomenological techniques, together with his emphasis on *telos* — that is, the goal-oriented character of *praxis*; (3) his constant insistence that the object of his critique is *experience*; and (4) the temporal irreversibility of an individual's *praxis*. Paci believes that Sartre goes too far, however, in stressing the difficulty of overcoming exploitation, which he, perhaps the greater optimist, wants to see as potentially surmountable.

Garth Gillan situates the *Critique* within the tradition of Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*, in which existential subjectivity plays a role in history almost *despite* the intentions of the authors, and of Georg Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness*, with its strange notion of the proletariat as the "subject-object" of history. Beginning with the French *Annales* School in general, and particularly the work of Fernand Braudel (upon which Sartre draws in the *Critique*), according to Gillan, it has become impossible to think of history any longer as linear; Sartre has placed the dialectic of history on a new terrain.

Robert Denoon Cumming, another of the pioneering Sartre scholars in the United States, argues strongly for the continuity of Sartre's thought, eschewing the bifurcation of "earlier" and "later," and opposing the claim that Sartre's work is eclectic. He feels, however, that the Sartrean political philosophy has suffered some "contamination" from literature, particularly in those areas in which, as Sartre himself stressed in *Search for a Method*, mainstream Marxist thought has become ossified and therefore useless. Cumming regards Sartre's postwar travel to and in America, discussed in Giovanni Invitto's essay in volume three of this series, as having been highly influential in the development of his efforts to redefine political terms and to effect social transformation.

The second essay in this volume of that other "pioneer," Wilfrid Desan, heralds the appearance of Alan Sheridan-Smith's English translation of the *Critique*, published sixteen years after the French original of 1960. In addition to summarizing the main

points of the book, which his *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre* had already done at greater length some years earlier on the basis of that original, Desan discusses his own approach to the phenomenology of the social world and of history as epitomized in his two-volume *The Planetary Man*, contrasting it with Sartre's more individualist approach.

Juliette Simont's article, published in the very year, 1985, in which the posthumous second volume of the *Critique* first appeared in French (it was to take six more years for the English translation of this volume to go on sale), takes issue with some of the critical aspects in the account of the latter that had been provided by Ronald Aronson, on the basis of prepublication access to the typescript, in his contribution to the Library of Living Philosophers volume on Sartre. Aronson considered Sartre's reliance on "need" as an explanatory category to constitute a radical impoverishment of his thought, a judgment with which Simont takes issue. In fact, according to her, Aronson, who says that "society" is the missing term in Sartre's political theory, would like to restore the "hyperorganicist" sort of account (society considered as a large organism, a single whole at some level) that Sartre rejects repeatedly. What Sartre is seeking, she contends, is a "radicalizing realism" as opposed to either organicist or, at the other extreme, positivist nominalist approaches. She finds a fundamental though perhaps fruitful tension in Sartre's social thought between his longtime stress on "situation," against the background of which all activity takes place, and the conception, dominant in the *Critique*, of societies and of history itself as ongoing, ever-changing "totalizations."

Robert E. Birt's short piece discusses a specific area of carryover from the "earlier" existentialist to the "later" Marxist Sartre, to wit, his treatment of alienation. "Seriality," the later Sartrean term that designates the configuration of a large proportion of historical and contemporary societies, is characterized by alienation, Birt indicates, but at the same time the later Sartre holds out the possibility of genuine human community. It is important to note, he says, that Sartre distinguishes two senses of "alienation"—a broader one that is not limited to any particular type of social formation, and a narrower one that conforms to the usage of the word in the early Marx and is specific to capitalist society. Birt asserts his disagreement with the important critical work by Pietro Chiodi, written from an independent Marxist standpoint, which claims among other things that in his later work Sartre has returned to a Heideggerean conception of *Mitsein*.

Betty Cannon sees the *Critique* as above all defending an alternative to the "objective" approaches of Lévi-Strauss's structuralism or of Foucault in the domain of social explanation. What is missing from the latter, she argues, is, precisely, the element of existential freedom. At first disappointed, from the standpoint of her position as a psychiatrist, with this later Sartrean work, she relates, she now believes that it may be even *more* important than *Being and Nothingness*. She especially appreciates the contrast Sartre now draws between *praxis* and *hexis* or inert habit, and finds his views on the different types of social knowing, "intellection" as contrasted with "comprehension," quite illuminating.

Ronald Aronson's own contribution to this volume provides an excellent overview of the main themes in volume two of the *Critique*. It is prefaced by a plea to pay more attention to Sartre, about whom Aronson had previously written one of the

most comprehensive overviews (*Jean-Paul Sartre—Philosophy in the World*), and whom he says we need now more than ever, given a continuing deterioration in the political scene worldwide. The principal problem of Sartre's entire sociopolitical theory, as Aronson sees it, is his effort to understand history as "one," as an increasingly intertwined totalization. Aronson discusses, among other things, the way in which Sartre roots his dialectic in individuals, his tendency to try to understand the Russian Revolution through the French one, and the purpose of the very lengthy description of a boxing match (as a relatively simple form of conflict that anticipates the extremely complex conflicts of history) with which he begins volume two.

The article by John Erickson deals with Sartre's ongoing interest in political and cultural developments in Africa during the 1950s and 1960s, rather than with his political theory proper. Sartre took a very positive attitude, in particular, toward Léopold Senghor's once-popular concept of *négritude*, or blackness, which today finds many critics among writers in the fields of African and African-American studies, but which was regarded as a progressive notion in its time. Above all, according to Erickson, Sartre is to be congratulated for not trying to force the Black revolution into a Marxist (or any other ideological) mold, and for endorsing the idea of taking Africa as a very special and important part of the human community rather than, as some authors have urged, as the separatist base of an entirely new civilization.

Our final article, which is also the most recently published to appear in this volume, deals with sociopolitical aspects of a notion of Hegelian ancestry, "objective spirit"—the general cultural spirit of an age—that figures most prominently in Sartre's last major work, *The Family Idiot*. The article's author, Steve Martinot, juxtaposes Sartre's thought to postmodern philosophies on several issues, beginning with Roland Barthes' accusation that by using bourgeois language Sartre had made himself complicitous with the bourgeois class, and argues that in many respects they are not so very far apart. Sartre, for example, sees complicity as an aspect of historical "counterfinality" (the notion that the projects or ends we pursue often turn against our own intentions) and in the last analysis has a very similar sense of history to Barthes', according to Martinot. In a related manner, Sartre shares with Jacques Derrida a belief that multiplicity (social, cultural, etc.) is irreducible, since for neither of them is there an outside "totalizer" to pull all of history together into a final unity. And for both, Martinot says, the political notion of "liberation" is fraught with dilemmas.

These references to Sartre's work on Flaubert and to the inevitable connections between the political and the cultural serve as a useful bridge to the next volume of this series, one which will deal with some of Sartre's "literature" properly speaking along with his theories about aesthetics. Those theories, of course, in Sartre's case more than in most, touch at the same time on theories about ontology, ethics, and politics. Sartre stands for, among many other things, the notion of "engaged" or "committed" existential literature, as we have already had occasion to see. And despite Sartre's own more or less conventional acceptance of a clear dividing line between philosophy and literature, an idea that Cumming's essay here, for example, exploits by way of mild critique of his political philosophy, the fact that many of the essays in the next volume contain important reprises of topics dealt with in its predecessor volumes will raise useful doubts, I think, about the ultimate viability of that dividing line.

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## MARXIST EXISTENTIALISM

ARTHUR LESSING

### I

THE *rapprochement* of existential and Marxist philosophy has received a good deal of attention since Sartre published in 1960 his *Critique de la raison dialectique*.<sup>1</sup> Its introduction, *Question de méthode*, has been translated into English by Hazel Barnes.<sup>2</sup> At least two major explications of the work have appeared in the last two years.<sup>3</sup> Extensive reviews have appeared in philosophical journals in this country and abroad.<sup>4</sup> Finally, at least one critical study devoted explicitly to the problems such a marriage entails was published last year in paperback format.<sup>5</sup> Another publication which brings together a collection of essays and excerpts is titled *Existentialism Versus Marxism* and has already decided the future of the marriage by its sub-title: "Conflicting Views on Humanism."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique, précédé de Question de méthode, Tome I: Théorie des ensembles pratiques* (Paris, 1960).

<sup>2</sup> *Search for Method* (New York, 1963).

<sup>3</sup> Wilfrid Desan, *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York, 1965); Laing and Cooper, *Reason and Violence: A Decade of Sartre's Philosophy, 1950-1960* (New York, 1964).

<sup>4</sup> Burkle, "Schaff and Sartre on the Grounds of Individual Freedom," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. V, no. 4 (December, 1965); Burkle, "The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre" by Wilfrid Desan: A Book Review," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. VI, no. 1 (March, 1966); Javey, "Sartre from Being and Nothingness to a Critique of Dialectic Reason," *Philosophy Today* (Fall, 1961); Kaelin, "Three Stages on Sartre's Way," *European Philosophy Today*, ed. by G. Kline (Chicago, 1965); Morot-Sir, "Sartre's Critique of Dialectic Reason," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. XXII, no. 4 (October, 1961); Waelhens, "Sartre et la critique de la raison dialectique," *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* (February, 1962); G. Lichtheim, "Sartre, Marxism and History," *History and Theory*, Vol. III, no. 2 (1963); Kwaut, "Het Marxisme van Sartre," *Tijdschrift voor Philosophie* (December, 1960).

<sup>5</sup> Odajnyk, *Marxism and Existentialism* (New York, 1965).

<sup>6</sup> Edited by George Novack (New York, 1966).

The purpose of this essay cannot be the evaluation of this considerable body of critical study. Wilfrid Desan's critical *explication du texte* and Laing's sympathetic reading of the *Critique* present an excellent starting-point for those who want to join the controversy.

It seems evident, however, that some of the controversy generated by this union of "existentialism" and "Marxism" is proceeding on ideological rather than philosophical grounds. "Existentialism," one despairing critic writes, "has retained a meaning in American usage which it has practically ceased to have in Western Europe; it is associated with certain beatnik-like phenomena with clichés about the absurdity of life and despair."<sup>7</sup> "Marxism," on the other hand, is still commonly defined in this country as a materialist doctrine which reduces all human life to historical determinism and class conflict. The ideology of the absurd individual, on the one hand, has therefore obviously nothing to say, least of all propose marriage, to an ideology, on the other hand, which considers the obsession with the individual and his idiosyncratic *Angst* typical of corrupt bourgeois experience.

For us the problem does not lie in welding together two "historical" movements, "movements" which have been characterized and formulated by intellectual historians. It may well be that future historians can locate two strains of thought which can be labeled "existentialism" and "Marxism" and recount how some sort of ideological union was attempted in the 1960's, and either failed or succeeded. Such success or failure indicates little to the philosopher who continues to be concerned not with ideology or social attitude but *what truly is*, in other words, truth.

The problem at hand must deal with the philosophical structures themselves, in this case those of Sartre and, to a limited extent, Merleau-Ponty. To blandly identify their efforts to develop in their existential philosophy certain conceptual formulations which seek to do justice to current socio-economic and historical conditions with broad terms like "existentialism" and "Marxism" is to lose sight of the specific issues from the start. Both have

<sup>7</sup> James Edie, "Recent Work in Phenomenology," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. I, no. 2 (April, 1964).

developed full-fledged ontological systems which claim to do full justice to the definition of man, world, history, and thought. At the same time, both seek to return ontological realizations to the realm of historic and personal concreteness. Neither thinker is merely an ideologist, i.e., a "representative" of a socio-political movement; neither is merely an intellectual apologist for a political position. This does not mean, however, that Sartre and Merleau-Ponty have ever chosen the option of political neutrality; witness the pages of *Les Temps Modernes* since its birth in 1945. Their explicit and often controversial commitment to particular socio-political issues and causes emerges from their strong philosophical arguments for commitment and liberty. Their role in French political life is well-known and now well-documented in this country.<sup>8</sup>

It may well be the case that Sartre is responsible for the growth of what may be called existentialist ideology because his rich intellect continues up to today to serve literature, philosophy, and polemic as well as the critique of politics. He himself, however, has indicated more than once that he stands alone as thinker, dissociated from all ideology and party-membership. Philosophy for him has two functions: a) to develop a comprehensive metaphysics of human reality, and b) to actualize such a metaphysics in history. The revolutionary, critical, and therefore negative role of the philosopher in society distinguishes Sartre and Merleau-Ponty today from those who still believe that philosophy primarily addresses itself only to other philosophers. Sartre long ago left the ivory tower; the world is not to be reduced to the university.

If Sartre refuses to identify his later thought (embodied in the *Critique*) with the notion of *existentialisme*, it is equally true that his conception of *marxisme* can hardly be equated with Soviet or French Marxism. We must examine the meanings of these terms for Sartre. The same goes for Merleau-Ponty. This is the task of this paper.

The importance of this endeavor lies in the programmatic

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<sup>8</sup> David Cauter, *Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960* (New York, 1964); George Lichtheim, *Marxism in Modern France* (New York, 1966).

nature of their philosophies. Their attempt to extend their philosophies of individual existence to include the facts of social reality in history have important programmatic import for those who have not despaired of either metaphysics or contemporary historical crises. With this hope expressed, we can conclude these general remarks and turn toward the specific features of this expansion of their philosophic contexts.

## II

Both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty dealt with Marxism from the very start of their philosophic careers. Neither Sartre's *L'être et le néant* (1943) nor Merleau-Ponty's *La phénoménologie de la perception* (1945) takes up in any extensive fashion Marxism either as philosophy or ideology, although interesting comments are scattered throughout the pages of these principle works. Merleau-Ponty appends a long footnote to the chapter "The Body in its Sexual Being" in which he defends Marx's historical materialism:

If existence is the permanent act by which man takes up for his own purposes, and makes his own certain *de facto* situation, none of his thoughts will be able to be quite detached from the historical context in which he lives, and particularly from his economic situation. Precisely because economics is not a closed world, and because all motivations intermingle at the core of history, the external becomes internal, and the internal external, and no constituent of our existence can ever be outrun.<sup>9</sup>

A philosophy of subjectivity can hardly afford to minimize history and historical situation. At the same time, Merleau-Ponty is already critical of those French Marxists who reduce subjectivity to nothing else but economic relations. The question whether history is made significant in predominantly economic terms, Merleau-Ponty feels, is to be decided in the future by politics.<sup>10</sup> In a lengthy review of Sartre's *L'être et le néant*, Merleau-Ponty argues persuasively against the Marxists who accuse Sartre of "residual idealism." He warns Marxists that the denial of subjectivity leads to a theoretical treatment of consciousness which cannot make sense of reflec-

<sup>9</sup> *Phenomenology of Perception*. trans. by Colin Smith (New York, 1962), p. 172.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

tion and consequently knowledge. If interior lucidity is denied, how can consciousness ever recognize that it knows anything whatsoever? "No in-itself would be accessible to us, if it were not at the very same time *for us*, and the meaning we find in it depends on our consent."<sup>11</sup> He concludes that no man can theoretically reject the Cartesian *cogito* since he can ultimately no longer know what he is saying, affirming, or renouncing.<sup>12</sup>

Merleau-Ponty's review appeared in November, 1945, but already it was clear that a) Sartre and Merleau-Ponty both seek to incorporate in their philosophic position a theory of history; that b) such a theory must follow from rather than precede a theory of consciousness; and, finally c) that this can be accomplished by an existential critique rather than bland acceptance of the most pertinent theory of history available, namely Marxism.

Both agree that the Hegelian theory of history is unacceptable because it is essentially a quietism which conservatively encompasses the facts of history without submitting them to a thoroughgoing critique.<sup>13</sup> This becomes particularly clear after World War II. Hegel can say nothing about Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen.

Dismissing Hegel's conservative theory of history does not necessarily entail rejecting Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*. Sartre and Merleau-Ponty have learned too much from it. In it, Hegel aims for that consciousness which seeks to re-appropriate itself in historical temporality. The restless and contradictory *Bewußtsein* of Hegel serves as model for Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's Cartesian *cogito*, paradoxically enough. All three agree that consciousness seeks to come to its own "worldliness" (*Weltlichkeit*), that is to say, its *central place in the world as genuine subject*.<sup>14</sup>

To treat consciousness as an object alongside other objects

*to maintain it*

<sup>11</sup> "The Battle over Existentialism," *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. by Hubert and Patricia Dreyfus (Evanston, 1964), p. 79.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>14</sup> Introduction to Hegel's *Phenomenology*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann in his *Hegel* (New York, 1966), p. 410.

within the objective multiplicity of the world fails to define man's intentionality. Consciousness is placed in the world, but placed in the center if that world is to be intelligible and human. Only from this central position, in which consciousness always is subject, can it make sense to talk of dialectic movement in history and genuine freedom.

Such claims about dialectic movement and freedom need to be clarified if Marxism is to be treated as both enemy *and* friend of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. We can conclude at this point that a simple acceptance of Marxism is ruled out by both. If we can honestly speak of a Marxism in either Sartre or Merleau-Ponty, we must realize that the friend and enemy is given a new appearance. The reinterpretation of Marx by both constitutes at the same time their critique of Marx, Marxism, and contemporary Marxism in France.

In 1946, Sartre published in *Les Temps Modernes* a long essay titled "Materialism and Revolution." It spells out in detail his critique of Soviet and French Marxism. Again the problem is subjectivity and the Marxist attempt to eliminate it from his theoretical vocabulary:

The materialist thinks that by denying his subjectivity he has made it disappear. But the trick is easy to expose. *In order to eliminate subjectivity, the materialist declares that he is an object, that is, the subject-matter of science. But once he has eliminated subjectivity in favor of the object, instead of seeing himself as a thing among other things, buffeted about by the physical universe, he makes of himself an objective beholder and claims to contemplate nature as it is, in the absolute.*<sup>15</sup>

If observation is to be objective, what is the basis of certainty which allows the materialist to claim objectivity in the first place? It cannot simply be the fact of being an object in the world, because that fact itself is wholly contingent and even irrational. Certainty could claim itself on the basis of reason. But if reason itself is a contingent product of material and biological evolution, what stature *as truth* or certainty can it possibly possess? "How could

<sup>15</sup> Trans. by Annette Michelson, *Literary and Philosophical Essays* (New York, 1962), p. 202.

a captive reason, governed from without and manuvered by a series of blind causes, still be reason?" asks Sartre.<sup>16</sup>

Materialism cannot claim a rational basis because it cannot defend the absolute nature of rational truth on the basis of the existence of matter. Sartre, on the other hand, explains the absolute nature of reason by locating it in the consciousness with the aid of a theory which argues for the absolute autonomy of consciousness. If, as he declares in *L'être et le néant*, consciousness has no source other than itself, then its rationality too is absolute and not reducible to natural and material causes. This philosophic argument Sartre shares with Merleau-Ponty but ultimately derives from Hegel's *Phenomenology*. (Taking cognizance of these particular conclusions, it appears strange indeed that Sartre continues to be identified as an irrationalist or as a philosopher of the irrational by critics of his philosophy.)

The new position which Sartre seeks is clearly beyond naive idealism and materialism. Sartre's concept of "situation" replaces the notion of brute material existence. Only consciousness can posit the material world, and then only when it finds itself to be an

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203. Sartre goes on to argue against Engels rather than Marx that a dialectic conception of nature is impossible. Natural history is an absurdity because all history demands the notion of intention. "History cannot be characterized by change nor by the pure and simple action of the part. It is defined by the deliberate resumption of the past by the present; only human history is possible (*Ibid.*, p. 206). In fact, the notion of a dialectic of exteriority contradicts the very concept of dialectic as Hegel held it, since dialectic aims for absolute interiority. The materialist is operating with a vulgar definition of dialectic in trying to bend Hegel's dialectic toward a materialist direction. Dialectic is movement toward cumulative totality in which each advanced stage incorporates past stages. To superimpose this onto material and biological phenomena strains our credulity in the face of the scientific evidence itself. This Sartrean argument would however operate against Sartre's own philosophy. Hegel's dialectic does not only aim for interiority but for a transcendence of the dichotomy of interiority *and* exteriority. Sartre's own commitment to dialectic depends on (a) the contention that consciousness gives itself to itself only exterior of subjectivity, and (b) exteriority is dialectically the negation of consciousness; hence (c) the irreducible conflict between *pour-soi* and *en-soi* in *L'être et le néant*. The argument against a dialectic of nature, however, appears convincing. Generally, Sartre disassociates Engels from Marx in discussing his own brand of Marxism.

adversary of it. The facticity of matter is defined thus as a "co-efficient of adversity"<sup>17</sup> (Bachelard), i.e., relative to the intent of consciousness. "In order for a hill to be easy or hard to ascend, one must have planned to climb it to its summit."<sup>18</sup> This position Sartre calls "revolutionary realism." It can be summarized by saying that reality appears real only when man struggles against it.<sup>19</sup>

Sartre does not disagree with Marx's contention that the task of consciousness is to transform the world. Precisely by interacting and changing the natural and material world, we come to know it, and not the other way around.<sup>20</sup> In the encounter between consciousness and material reality (an encounter defined in terms now of struggle, action, and labor rather than comprehension) the *cogito* becomes worldly and the world appears for the first time as totality in process. Sartre never changed his mind that the only way to make sense of Marx is therefore to drop the notion of dialectic materialism and replace it with historical materialism. With Marx, he holds that history is the account of how man transforms his material world and is oppressed by the very processes of transformation.

For that reason, as Sartre recognizes, his philosophy addresses itself first to revolution and revolutionaries because his intent is to reintroduce the free consciousness in historical reality, not to simply abide with historical circumstance, but to struggle and realize a new authentic history. What does this mean?

The truth of man lies in his self-consciousness. But this consciousness is both *in* the world and *to* the world by the very nature of consciousness. Hence consciousness has no choice but to bring to the world its own freedom. If historical circumstances deny freedom to certain men, then in order for consciousness *to be itself*, it must liberate them. The oppressed are the subject matter of philosophy. A strict materialism, on the other hand, could stifle

<sup>17</sup> *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by Hazel Barnes (New York, 1956), p. 482 ff.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

any hope of revolution because it cannot make a genuine case for freedom.<sup>21</sup>

Sartre made the above arguments in 1946. The *Critique de la raison dialectique* (1961) represents nothing else but a continuation of these arguments. No radical conflict appears here between it and *L'être et le néant*.

### III

Critics of Sartre describe his *Critique de la raison dialectique* as the dissolution of his existentialism into Marxism. At least four critics (Desan, Morot-Sir, Odajnyk, and Novack) believe the transformation may well be doomed. Burkle and Lichtheim appear to be more optimistic.<sup>22</sup>

Sartre himself is responsible for this formulation of the problem. In *Question de méthode*, the introduction to the *Critique*, he typifies existentialism, including his own, as a temporary stage of the philosophy of dialectical reason expressed by Hegel and Marx. Existentialism is now recognized as an "ideological" reaction to a more pervasive world view which it at first criticized but in which it now seeks to be integrated.<sup>23</sup> Kierkegaard's human outcry against the Hegelian system was already incorporated in the Hegelian structure six years before Kierkegaard was born.<sup>24</sup> Kierkegaard's insistence on pathos versus reason, subjectivity versus The System, individual despair versus abstraction is itself characteristic of so-called Unhappy Consciousness, a philosophical pose transcended quite early in the pages of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Does this dispose of Kierkegaard's stand? Not really, as Sartre shows. The essence of Kierkegaard's stand against Hegel lies in his insistence that a concrete life cannot be reduced to a conceptual stage of theory.<sup>25</sup> The immediate reality of an individual existence cannot be surpassed by philosophic dialectics. Kierkegaard appears to

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. footnotes 3-6.

<sup>23</sup> *Critique*, p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Lessing, "Hegel and Existentialism: An Essay on Unhappiness," *The Personalist* (1967).

<sup>25</sup> *Critique*, p. 22.

Sartre as a revolutionary critic who will not obey the rules of Hegelian philosophy by which he must agree upon his own disappearance as individual into the totality of metaphysical history.

Sartre views Marx's protest against Hegel in much the same way. Marx, like Kierkegaard, insists upon the concrete individual who works, must eat and live, an individual who hopes, but almost always fails, to actualize his possibilities in history, not through logically successive stages of cognition, but through hard labor. Hegel wrongly believes that alienation is a necessary condition of all cultural objectification.<sup>26</sup> Estrangement, frustration, and homelessness are not products of a logic of historical motion but of particular socio-economic conditions. These conditions must be overcome. And this cannot be achieved by pure thought.

Marx, for Sartre, affirms "*la spécificité de l'existence humaine . . . l'homme concret dans sa réalité objective.*"<sup>27</sup> Marxism is "*la philosophie de notre temps*" because the very character of contemporary times is defined in economic and material terms, i.e., scarcity, labor, and production. Marxism cannot be surpassed because the very conditions which have given rise to it are not yet surpassed.<sup>28</sup>

A number of critical observations must be made at this point of our inquiry. If economic oppression does characterize man in modern times, then Marxism united with existentialism speaks for the individual by preparing him at the same time for his revolt against oppressing economic conditions and institutions. The aim of philosophy is liberation. With the end of oppression, however, would come the end of Marxism, as Sartre admits. Sartre seems to suggest that philosophies are either *passable* or *indépassable*, depending on the times in and for which they appear. This means that just as existentialism is a passing phase of Marxism, so Marxism must ultimately become a passing phase of dialectic reason. Sartre's conception of philosophy therefore seems now to include the historicity of all philosophy, including his own. Such

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29. Marxism "*reste donc la philosophie de notre temps; il est indépassable parce que les circonstances qui l'ont engendré ne sont pas encore dépassées.*"

a view seriously weakens the absolute basis on which he earlier developed his concept of consciousness. In *L'être et le néant*, Sartre argues persuasively that the synthesis of *pour-soi* and *en-soi*, nothingness and being, cannot dialectically develop. Man is therefore a useless passion. If this conclusion is now understood as a historical comment, or a philosophic realization which attains and consequently loses its truth in passage, then the basis of truth itself is no longer the *cogito* but history. Truth as the ontological condition of negative consciousness is replaced by the so-called truth of history.<sup>29</sup> Precisely for that reason, existentialism will be understood to have been a passing phase of Marxism.

Here we take issue with Sartre's interpretation of his own past work. First, the proposition that Marxism is *indépassable*, unsurpassed, because the circumstances it addresses are unsurpassed, establishes that any philosophy is viable and significant, even attains its truth insofar as it addresses a set of peculiar and particular socio-economic circumstances. Sartre's contention, moreover, is that reality today is Marxist reality (exploitation, oppression, and alienation through economic means). This contention is neither argued nor proven in the *Critique*.<sup>30</sup> It is in fact its assumption. If it is not merely an assumption, granting Sartre's point more truth than it deserves, the assertion "contemporary reality is Marxist reality" can only be an historical, i.e., empirical, observation generalized from interpreting socio-economic and historical phenomena. In any case, the proposition is not a metaphysical one. Why, if this is the case, should we therefore exchange and subsume one metaphysics (i.e., existentialism) into another (Marxism) on the basis of what is ultimately nothing more than an empirical generalization about what goes on in the world? If our choice of metaphysical contexts is decided upon by historical

<sup>29</sup> Sartre suggests along Hegelian lines that the *cogito* will realize itself completely in history and establish a new synthetic reality which he calls "La Vérité de l'histoire" (*Critique*, p. 142).

<sup>30</sup> This becomes quite clear in such statements as the following: "The essential discovery of Marxism is that labor, as historical reality and as the utilization of determined tools is an already determined social and material sphere, is the real basis of the organization of social relation. This discovery can no longer be challenged" (*Critique*, pp. 224-225n).

and socio-economic considerations, how can we ever bring a viable metaphysical critique *toward* such conditions?

Let us develop the implications of this argument a bit further. Sartre proclaims in *L'être et le néant* the absolute autonomy of the individual. This proclamation is the conclusion of a series of ontological arguments which point toward the irreducible character of nililation and its need to-be and to-be-in-the-world. To be "worldly" is both a) the projective destiny of consciousness because it is always intentionally directed toward the world, and b) the condition of "facticity," being-a-body in the world." Now Sartre argues in the *Critique* that this philosophical position *in toto* is to be subsumed by another in which the individual is now seen to be a socio-economic product defined by labor and production first, consciousness second. On the grounds established in *L'être et le néant* such a subsumption is not an expansion of the notion of man, but obviously a contraction. We have contracted a metaphysical definition of the individual to an empirical definition. More seriously, we have exchanged phenomenological descriptions of the necessary conditions of human existence (negation, time, body) for socio-political descriptions of certain contingent "facts" which shape contemporary man and society (the group, labor, authority). Yet Sartre maintains that this marks a philosophic advance.

From the point of view of the free *cogito*, socio-political life with its own demands and characterizations appears as one choice among a great many life-styles available to the individual. From the point of view of Marxism, this fact is historically untrue. Man is defined by *praxis* first, free-choosing consciousness later. Historically speaking, the latter position may well be more relevant and true to the facts of our times. However, to assert that man is laborer, producer, oppressed or oppressor is not to say anything which metaphysically appears self-evidently true, particularly if we continue to maintain, and rightfully so, that production, labor, economic life in general *is chosen* and therefore a contingent rather than necessary form of behavior—a particular structure of freely-

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. *Being and Nothingness*, p. 308 ff.

chosen projects rather than any essential definition of human reality as such.

Even if we grant Sartre's empirical contention that man is oppressed, that he does find himself caught in an economic prison which degrades all else in life, we fail to see why these facts of history force us to abandon the metaphysical position of the free *cogito* in favor of what appears to be a series of historical observations. How can historical circumstance determine the validity of metaphysical theory, particularly if the metaphysics in question (Sartre's earlier existentialism) defines history as a construct of the individual?

In short, if Sartre is intent upon subsuming existentialism into Marxism, he is running the clear chance that he will exchange rather than incorporate metaphysical for empirical theory, particularly if Marxism itself is only viable because it presently reflects the facts of modern life. There is no question that Sartre has the right to shift from metaphysical to sociological and economic theory. He does not, however, have the right to claim that such a shift actually expands the perspective of his earlier metaphysical position. In fact, as we have argued above, the result is the opposite.

If Sartre is to escape these criticisms, he must maintain that Marxism is not merely a product of a particular time, but establishes its validity beyond it as well. In short, Sartre must claim Marxism as a metaphysics. This is precisely what Sartre tries to accomplish in the *Critique*. Sartre's Marxism turns out to be another variety of Hegelian philosophy.

Dialecticity. Dialectical Reason is both the subject under discussion and the method by which the discussion is proceeding. Sartre accepts Hegel's general theory of dialectic but disagrees that all dialectic movement culminates in an absolute which lies beyond individual consciousness. With Hegel, Sartre holds that history and institutions show a dialectic development, that is to say, a growth ("totalization") governed by the action and reaction of consciousness. The dialectic, therefore, always has for its subject the self which seeks to place itself in the world through presenting, representing, and recreating itself in cultural institutions and projects. Dialectic is never merely logical but always "worldly" as

well. The creative effort of man to objectify himself in order to existentially recapture his soul in concrete universality is the task of consciousness. Sartre modifies Hegel's notion of universality somewhat. For Hegel, the concrete universal is essentially a religious achievement, God-in-process. For Sartre, the concrete universal is Man or Humanity.<sup>32</sup> And this concrete universal remains historical, i.e., temporal. It does not transcend time for the sake of attaining eternity. Sartre's world remains finite.

Although the dialectic can be understood abstractly by thought, its motion is most concretely found in *praxis*. *Praxis* is performed by individual consciousnesses through the use of the body, but its meaning is embodied in the processes themselves in labor and production rather than pure (intentional) consciousness.

Our difficulty in grasping Sartre's appropriation of Hegel's dialectic must focus again on how Sartre can locate nihilating consciousness in real history. First consciousness for itself, *pour-soi*, has only one activity, nihilation. It is difficult to believe that Sartre can locate any dialectic intention in nihilating consciousness, because by its very nature Sartrean consciousness is incapable of giving itself over to material being without falsifying itself.<sup>33</sup> Sartre defines self-deception and bad faith (*mauvaise foi*) as any and all attempts on the part of the *cogito* to define itself in any medium other than its own nihilations. How then can any authentic dialectic ever begin between mind and matter? If the *cogito* is nothing else but itself, i.e., thinking, how can it ever present itself as laborer and producer? The problem lies in the fact that Hegel believes that both positing and negating are authentic acts; Sartre in *L'être et le néant* denies any positivity for consciousness and, consequently, man.

While earlier Sartre maintained that each man by his choices constructs his own projects, in the *Critique* it appears that history

<sup>32</sup> *Critique*, pp. 141, 143.

<sup>33</sup> Even the incarnation of consciousness in a material body is an extremely uncomfortable situation for Sartre. The body is factually there, in the world, but consciousness does its best to either evade it or transcend it altogether. Nowhere in *L'être et le néant* does Sartre make out any kind of positive case for a positive relationship between *cogito* and body. The *cogito* fundamentally must negate its own incarnation. How then in the

and the construction of authentic collective history is the primary project for all. *Must* consciousness be historical? *Must* the individual who seeks a life-style submit himself to the political projects of history? Finally, what is the status of "history"? If there are irreducible free human beings, what can historical circumstance be except the limitations which these free beings face in their attempt to be individuals? If the ultimate project is to construct a dialectic totality called "history," will history still be inhabited by individuals? Is there no possibility to choose to be unhistorical?

*Totality and Totalizing.* What is "totality" for Hegel and what is it for Sartre? For Hegel, totality is the coming-to-be of some concrete whole which is permeated by rational consciousness. Such a totality could be a symphony, panorama, Greek sculpture, feudal society, mathematical theory, social class. For Hegel, all totalities by coming to terms with their own relative incompleteness and contradictoriness are taken up into more comprehensive totalities (symphony into music, panorama into perception, sculpture into art, etc.). Sartre here agrees with Hegel, but actively pursues social totalities which, he maintains, are the basis for all other totalities. With Hegel, he believes that all human productivity aims for its totalization within rational wholes. With Hegel's *Phenomenology*, Sartre holds that the reflective awareness of the totalizing process by which parts enter into social wholes is itself included in such wholes. The viewer cannot have a privileged standpoint. On the contrary, he is existentially placed within the very totalities which he seeks to comprehend. Critical experience "goes on inside the totalization, and cannot be a contemplative grasp of the totalizing movement. . . . Rather, it is a real moment of the totalization in process."<sup>34</sup> The upshot of this important Sartrean point is that the individual consciousness is always and already enclosed within historical totalities. These it can either reject, accept or change. No one can step out of history within this view. The point of human existence is therefore no

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*Critique* can the body's labor be intentional, i.e., conscious? Cf. my papers "Immediacy, Eros and Freedom," *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, Vol. V, no. 1 (Winter, 1965); "Eros, Dionysus and Ontology," *Existential Psychiatry*, Vol. I, no. 3 (Winter, 1966).

<sup>34</sup> *Critique*, p. 140.

longer the affirmation of one's own singular distance from the world through negation; but rather the opposite: one aims for intelligible inclusion in the processes within society, keeping in mind that society is itself a totality coming-to-be. The singular critic (every consciousness, insofar as consciousness is negative, is always critical) must go so far as "to deny his own singular determination in order to seek his dialectic intelligibility in the whole of the human adventure," writes Sartre.<sup>35</sup> In this manner does the individual discover through work that he is history personified, in fact, the truth of history itself.<sup>36</sup>

The truth of history is ultimately a network of relations which holds the individual within his totalities and makes his own totalizations meaningful: this is consciousness of "the totality of his practical links with others, and thereby the structure of the diverse practical multiplicities with others, and through the contradictions and struggles among these, the concrete absolute: historical man."<sup>37</sup>

The emphasis on *praxis* to the exclusion of everything else is disturbing. Why is there no mention here of all those impractical links with others which effect, even within their tension and release, concrete totalities of their own? Examples would be friendship, love, and playfulness. Are these totalities to be reduced to *praxis*?

Sartre seems to believe that the ultimate totality is history, but we have already posed the problem of the individual who demands to be unhistorical. Is this not the cry of Kierkegaard? With Marx, Sartre affirms that individuals collectively make history. With Marx, Sartre believes that the individual is already in history, but must rationally create new history. The aim of all consciousness, in any case, lies now beyond its immediate negative freedom. Negation serves history (but, curiously enough, is not free to deny historicity as such). This marks a questionable advance in Sartre's thinking. If structures of totality exist in which a multiplicity of totalizing processes find themselves inter-

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. pp. 470 and 471 of this paper.

<sup>37</sup> *Critique*, p. 143.

twined and interdetermined, the aim of negative consciousness is to seek out a total rational structure in which all totalizing processes will themselves be totalized, i.e., subsumed. Dialectic tension will keep the whole machine running and growing. But where will the individual make his home? In which totality will he pursue his *own* life?

Has Sartre, like Hegel, built another castle in which no human being can live? Hegel's castle is Absolute Mind. Sartre's, Absolute History. In a frightening way, they resemble Kafka's castle. ('Totality combined with reason, as we now know only too well, can give us Stalinism as well as Berkeley's bureaucracies.')

In fairness to Sartre's position, his final totality cannot complete itself since it is history itself. History can neither freeze nor end; in fact, Sartre depends heavily upon the negative consciousness of the individual to keep history going. At least the open and fluid character of institutions will make possible the possibility of freedom. Here Sartre must be distinguished from Hegel, for whom the last dialectic step effects a unity between freedom and necessity so that all protest ends.

Nevertheless, Sartre is overly optimistic about the individual's revolutionary role in history. The existence of totalities which seek inclusion in the final totality present a massive wall against which the revolutionary may well fail. Even the totalization of the individual into a revolutionary group may find itself powerless.

Freedom. Sartre's philosophy is a philosophy of human freedom. In *L'être et le néant*, Sartre presents the most absolute and radical theory of freedom in the history of Western philosophy. This is not the place to delineate the intricacies of his arguments; elsewhere I have done this.<sup>38</sup> Suffice it to say that the radical nature of Sartre's theory of freedom lies with his conclusions. These can be summarized as follows:

1. The nature of consciousness is such that a) it can not be reduced to any source or cause other than itself; and b) it is radically other

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Lionel Abel, "Metaphysical Stalinism," *Dissent* (Spring, 1961).

<sup>39</sup> Arthur Lessing, *Man Is Freedom: A Critical Study of the Conception of Human Freedom in the Philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre*. A Ph. D. dissertation. Tulane University (May, 1966).

than and excluded from all other beings which appear. Thirdly, consciousness is therefore through and through negative. To be conscious is to nihilate.

2. Negation is freedom. Consciousness is nothing else but freedom itself, i.e., the process by which consciousness establishes itself as for itself. All determinist arguments rest either upon self-deception or mistaken argument.

3. Man is not merely free, but the principle of freedom incarnate. Human reality is contingent. The individual through projects builds up life-styles and structures within historical situations which in themselves have no final efficacy or justification.

4. Freedom cannot be taken away except by death. Freedom can be degraded but only through the degradation of the body. Negative consciousness as an ontological condition of all concrete human existence can only be evaded. In order for man to be himself, he must be free. Freedom is the necessary condition of his contingency. *All else follows from this ontological condition, including meaning.*

The six-hundred pages of *L'être et le néant* explicate the implications of this argument. These emphasize the individual who, although free, either deceives himself or attempts to construct an authentic life. Either one contradicts freedom itself. The arguments for the radical freedom of the individual are ontological ones, based upon certain phenomenological descriptions. Sartre's position is essentially a metaphysical one. Historical circumstance might deny metaphysical freedom, but in fact become occasions to put freedom to work, to overcome these circumstances, in other words, *revolt*. In an essay written immediately after World War II, Sartre points out:

We were never more free than during the German occupation. We had lost all our rights, beginning with the right to talk. Every day we were insulted to our faces and had to take it in silence. Under one pretext or another, we were deported *en masse*. Everywhere, on billboards, in the newspapers, on the screen, we encountered the revolting and insipid picture of ourselves that our oppressors wanted us to accept. And because of all this we were free.<sup>40</sup>

For the early Sartre freedom is secure from history. The success of revolt is irrelevant to the definition of revolt itself. Ilhistorical facts never deny freedom, but, instead, provide a stage upon which the individual acts out his freedom, even if the only action

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<sup>40</sup> "The Republic of Silence" (New York, 1947), p. 498.

left must be the destruction of the stage itself. Witness the events of Watts in 1965. To be free one must revolt. All else is the hypocrisy of *salauds*.

This view has been modified in the *Critique*, modifications which Merleau-Ponty anticipated sixteen years earlier.<sup>41</sup> Freedom in the *Critique* is still founded on the nature of the *cogito*, but now is more and more located in the group and class.<sup>42</sup> Revolt is still stressed, but it is the revolution of the group, not the individual alone. The individual must (freely) join others if his freedom is to mean anything in social action. Individual freedom is now too "abstract" for Sartre because it cannot possibly succeed alone. Only the group can grasp power and use it, and consequently has concrete freedom.

In rejecting the Nobel Prize in 1964, Sartre said:

In the citation<sup>43</sup> of the Swedish Academy, freedom is spoken of. This is a word that lends itself to numerous interpretations. In the West, it is taken to mean abstract freedom. But to me it means a more concrete freedom—the right to have more than one pair of shoes and to eat when hungry.<sup>44</sup>

It need not be mentioned that food and shoes are the products of a society and not an individual. Negative consciousness appears irrelevant here. The argument is typically Marxian: thought fails to bring about true freedom; only the action of an authentic society can accomplish this task. For the existentialist, freedom is the individual; for the Marxist, it is the blessing of an authentic society. Sartre seems to be trying to maintain both in the *Critique*.

Sartre closes the introduction to the *Critique* with a reference to a few sentences of Marx taken from the third volume of *Das Kapital*:

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Merleau-Ponty's treatment of freedom in his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Part III, ch. 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Critique*, p. 425.

<sup>43</sup> The citation says that Sartre's authorship "has always been rich in ideas and has had a vast influence on our times, mainly through its spirit of liberty and quest for truth" (*New York Times*, Friday, October 23, 1964, p. 1).

<sup>44</sup> Cited on the dust-jacket of *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. by Robert D. Cumming (New York, 1965).

We all know the passage of Marx which makes an allusion to a distant epoch: "The reign of freedom actually begins only where labor imposed by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; it will find itself henceforth beyond the sphere of material production as such." As soon as there will exist for everyone a margin of real freedom beyond the production of life, Marxism will have lived out its span; a philosophy of freedom will take its place. But we have no means, no intellectual instrument, no concrete experience which allows us to conceive of this freedom or of this philosophy.<sup>45</sup>

Several points need to be made about this new notion of freedom:

1. Freedom must address itself to those economic conditions (exploitation, poverty, scarcity, etc.) if it is to be "concrete" rather than "abstract." <sup>46</sup> Real freedom is real by virtue of the philosophy's social relevance.

2. With a new reign of freedom, Marxism will be replaced by a philosophy of freedom which at this point in history has not yet any relevance. In fact, given our place, Sartre claims we cannot even conceive of such a philosophy. Does this really make sense? If we admittedly recognize oppression, on what basis do we recognize it? Oppression does not merely present itself; we interpret oppression to be the case if historical and socio-economic conditions do not live up to what we conceive to be human freedom. But we are not yet in a position to know what we conceive to be freedom, Sartre asserts above. How then can we judge that contemporary life is deficient in freedom? Is not an implicit commitment to Sartre's earlier theory of freedom precisely the basis of our judgment? But this basis is the one that Sartre wants to dissolve in Marxism. Presumably, the radical freedom of the individual is only a reactionary ideology rather than true philosophy.

3. We are therefore puzzled by Sartre's inability to conceive of a philosophy of freedom beyond the sphere of material production. Sartre developed such a philosophy eighteen years earlier in his *L'être et le néant*. We are puzzled by Sartre's inability to point

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<sup>45</sup> *Critique*, p. 32. The Marx passage can be found in *Capital*, Vol. III, (Moscow, 1959), pp. 799-780.

<sup>46</sup> We must keep in mind that Sartre uses "abstract" and "concrete" as relative descriptive terms applied to relative stages of totalization (*Critique*, p. 143n).

to any concrete experience for such a philosophy because in *L'être et le néant*, he provides us with many rich phenomenological descriptions of such experiences, from nausea, despair, flight to sexuality, action, and even skiing. Is not *L'être et le néant* the answer to the problem of the *Critique*? If it is, however, we have turned Sartre on his head because he argues for the opposite.

This is not merely a quibble about relative emphases. Sartre's claim is that the framework of a theory of free consciousness is to be subsumed and therefore replaced by the framework of Marxist theory. The problem is that Sartre has kept it as a) the basis for a critique of material and economic life which deprives us of freedom, and b) as the philosophy which ultimately Marxism aims for in overthrowing economic oppression.

It seems clear that the rock-bottom foundation of Sartre's Marxism is his earlier existentialism rather than the other way around. What Sartre is aiming for is not a new Marxism but a new existentialism, in fact, a Marxist existentialism.

#### IV

What is entailed in a Marxist existentialism? The basis of all existential thought is a metaphysics of freedom. Freedom is the foundation of existence. History is made up of the contingent structures which are both products and expressions of that freedom. Freedom is not a value associated with particular historical periods or specific economic institutions such as capitalism. All history and politics presupposes human freedom as their origin and their future. The individual does not have freedom the way he has "rights" which entail "responsibility" and "citizenship." Man is freedom. Hence, his human task is to be free, to be conscious because only as consciousness does freedom appear as itself.

The oppression of social and economic institutions can therefore be measured in terms of their attack on and destruction of the *cogito*. To liberate man from his obsession with material goods, material wants, profit, and the quantitative life of economic transaction means to liberate his very consciousness. The quantification of all human life which accompanies capitalism as well as communism degrades consciousness. The problem of the indi-

vidual in society must be reformulated in terms of the problem of qualitative existence within a quantified society. A society reduces and degrades human freedom when it quantifies the very qualitative awareness which gives us a measure of self-consciousness.

The achievement of existentialism (I speak of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre) lies in its recognition that the qualitative existence of human beings constitutes the foundation of all human life.

Capitalism claims, of course, that the life of quantity makes possible increased leisure which is to be used qualitatively. Increasingly, however, qualitative life is only possible after work in an industrial society such as ours. Strangely enough this would clearly seem to imply that only in leisure are we thus allowed to be human. This is intolerable.

On the other hand, it would seem that the solution does not lie in a new relationship between labor, capital, and means of production, as Marx suggests. The real problem lies in moving beyond material and economic life altogether, as Marx also suggests. Paradoxically, the increased quantification of production (through the immense development of automation and computer theory) may well make this a practical reality. I say "paradoxically," because increased automation of a socio-economic system does not necessarily lead to a great qualitative life for the leisured individual. The phenomenon of self-deception, so ably exposed by Sartre, is much in evidence in modern society. In creating machines, we are capable in the process of turning ourselves into machines as well. The negativity of freedom has always been a burden for the majority of us; we willingly give up our liberties for the sake of authorities which promise security and peace. What better way to give up the burden of freedom than to objectify our most precious possession, lucid awareness, in the machines of tomorrow? We cannot remain free and cowards at the same time.

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SARTRE AND MARXISM

SARTRE begins his *Search for a Method* (1957) by outlining a theory about philosophies in general; Marxism plays a central role in this theory. Briefly put, Sartre's formulation tells us that every major historical epoch is characterized by one or two particular philosophies, or world views (*visions du monde*), which capture and epitomize the dominant social and historical realities of that time. "Between the seventeenth century and the twentieth," he says, "I see three such periods, which I would designate by [famous names]: there is the 'moment' of Descartes and Locke, that of Kant and Hegel, finally that of Marx." In the present day, then, either one goes along with Marxism in some sense, or else one takes an anti-Marxist stance, which is in effect a pre-Marxist stance. Moreover,

As for "revisionism," this is either a truism or an absurdity. There is no need to readapt a living philosophy to the course of the world; it adapts itself by means of thousands of new efforts, thousands of particular pursuits, for the philosophy is one with the movement of society.<sup>1</sup>

In accord with this assertion, the existentialists, among whom Sartre then numbered himself, had not succeeded in going beyond Marxism to some new world view, since that would have been impossible; at best, they had made a contribution to the dominant, Marxist, "Knowledge" or "Wisdom" (*Savoir*) of the age by dealing with certain problems (roughly, with problems concerning the meaning and the role of the *individual* human being in society) which mainstream Marxists were, for various historical reasons, neglecting. Existentialism, thus understood, is what Sartre chooses to call an "ideology": "a parasitic system living on the margin of Knowledge, which at first it opposed but into which today it seeks to be integrated."<sup>2</sup>

My first quarrel with Sartre's "revision" of Marxism (in the sense in which "revision" expresses a truism) may seem a picky one; it has to do with his employment of the word "ideology." Although Marx himself never actually provided a final concise definition of this term (since *The German Ideology* was an unfinished work), he used it in a sense that is

clearly different from Sartre's usage. For Marx, all ideologies (including all systems of religion and metaphysics) are indeed "parasitic" in the sense that they depend for their vitality upon existing socioeconomic realities; but at the same time they are essentially *illusory*, since they pretend to be independent. However, Sartre, who is usually at his most brilliant when exposing illusions, seems to want to claim for the existentialist "ideology" at least a large fragment of important and otherwise neglected truth. Moreover, in Marx's usage ideologies are parasitic upon material facts rather than upon higher-level thought systems; indeed, Marx's conception of "ideologies" *includes* those higher-level systems which Sartre calls "philosophies." (Marx, of course, excepted his own theory from this general conception. Based as it was on the unveiling and critiquing of ideology, he did not consider it to be just one more ideology—or just one more philosophy, for that matter—on a par with all the others in the parade of history.)

It is the philosopher's prerogative to redefine technical terms within certain tacitly understood limits. Nevertheless, I consider it regrettable that Sartre redefined a term so central to the tradition with which he had aligned himself without even indicating in the passage in question that he was aware of doing so.<sup>3</sup>

But is it merely a rather pedantic matter of terminology that is at issue here? I am not so sure. In a frequently cited passage at the end of the first section of *Search for a Method*, Sartre looks ahead to a time when everyone will enjoy a certain modicum of freedom in his or her life and no individual will be required to devote every waking hour to working to provide the means of subsistence; at such a time, he says, "Marxism will have lived out its span [*le marxisme aura vécu*] [and] a philosophy of freedom will take its place."<sup>4</sup> He concludes, rightly, by stressing the impossibility of our now forming a precise idea of what that freedom would mean or what that philosophy would look like. (In this paraphrasing of Sartre's text the word "precise" is all-important: surely we can form some general ideas of this future time, as the Sartrean labels "*real* freedom beyond the production of life" and "a philosophy of freedom" imply. Sartre's own word for what we cannot do concerning the future condition and philosophy of freedom is *concevoir*, "conceive"; I assume that this word here connotes, among other things, the same quality of preciseness that it connotes in the language of Descartes.) But to speak in this way of a new epochal philosophy that will some day replace Marxism is to reinforce the previously implied model of Marxism as but one in the series of great world views—each, to be sure, corresponding to a determinate socioeconomic form—that have marched and will continue to march across the stage of history. I have no doubt that Marx, on the other hand, saw his theory as a radical break with

this series, indeed as a revelation that would bring this series to an end in some important, though perhaps ultimately elusive, sense.

From a mere difference in terminology have we now moved to a mere difference in perspective? Perhaps that is all; we shall see. And even if difference in perspective could be shown to lead to a more substantial difference in underlying world views between Marx and Sartre, that in itself would not give us reason to assume that Sartre's world view is less adequate and truthful than Marx's, although it would certainly call into question Sartre's claim of parasitism on Marx.

Let us return to our opening assertions. I have some doubts about Sartre's classification of pre-Marxian philosophical epochs—for example, I disagree with his lumping together of Kant and Hegel—but he provides no basis for argument about it since he reveals almost nothing about his criteria, and in any case it is of little importance with respect to his view of Marxism. Perhaps surprisingly, however, I do accept his point concerning the predominant importance, for our epoch, of ideas, language, and methods that are most concisely associated with the "famous name" of Marx. I anticipate that this agreement will occasion surprise because relatively few American philosophers can claim more than a superficial acquaintance with Marxist thought, and in many other academic spheres familiarity with Marxism is, if anything, even more rare. In Sartre's France and even in West Germany, it is true, Marxism has become so much a part of current culture that those thinkers who adhere to a different world view (Aron, the Americanophile, is a good example) are forced to define their positions in opposition to that of Marx and his followers. But here in the United States, the importance of Marxist insights for comprehending our historical situation remains veiled to most of our intellectual leadership and, to an even greater degree, to most of our general population.

Of course there is nothing logically incompatible between the two claims that Marxism is of predominant importance and that most members of our society remain unaware of this. The prevalence of false or mystified consciousness on a mass scale is, in my opinion as in Sartre's, not just a theoretical possibility but a frequently encountered reality. Wherever this is the case, it is incumbent upon intellectuals who are faithful to the main lines of Marx's thought to try to explain how mystification takes place and how it is sustained; for Marx himself provided precious little by way of such explanation. It is in carrying out this task, it seems to me, that Sartre has made his greatest contribution to twentieth-century Marxism. First of all, against the stultifying "orthodoxy" of rigidly disciplined Communist Party intellectuals of the post-World War II period, Sartre made a case for introducing a psychological dimension into any Marxist social explanation that pretends to adequacy. If in retrospect it seems shocking that such a case

ever needed to be made, it is even more shocking that it still needs to be made in certain circles. But it remains in large measure true, as Sartre maintained in 1957 in *Search for a Method*, that "today's Marxists are concerned only with adults; reading them, one would believe that they were born at the age when we earn our first wages. They have forgotten their own childhoods."<sup>5</sup> Those to whom this description applies can never take the first step toward accounting for the social attitudes and practices of an Eisenhower–Nixon America or of a Gaullist France. Unable to account for such phenomena, individuals are unlikely to be of much use in changing them.

Second, having made his case, Sartre proceeded to attempt to exemplify the requisite "anthropological" method in a number of detailed, concrete studies, combining Marxist categories with categories derived from Freud and other psychological theorists. Sketches of many such studies appear in *Search for a Method* and in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. In addition, Sartre's autobiographical work must be considered such a study; and his massive recent work on Flaubert, *L'Idiot de la famille*, is of course the most ambitious of all. I must admit that I find this last work uneven and not as successful as I would have hoped in fulfilling its assigned role of serving as the sequel to *Search for a Method*<sup>6</sup> (that is, I take it, of instantiating the method outlined therein). In particular, I am impressed by the fact that it presents a certain disproportion, even if it is primarily a quantitative one, between the psychological information and psychoanalytic interpretation concerning Flaubert that dominate (though not exclusively) the first two volumes, and the categorial framework of Marxist social explanation that comes to the fore only in the third volume. Of course ultimately the two types of explanation, individual and "universal," are not supposed to be seen as radically divergent; that is the point. But I am not entirely satisfied with the way Sartre integrates them. In any case, it is more important that Sartre undertook in this Flaubert enterprise the concrete, detailed work called for in *Search for a Method*, than that every sympathetic reader should find the result entirely satisfactory. *L'Idiot* can serve as a model, albeit an imperfect one, for future works of social explanation of a new type, a type that is far removed from the old-fashioned, superficial narratives that used to pass for history, biography, and even social science, and yet avoids the emaciating, distortive reductionisms associated with classical Freudian, behavioral, structural, and so-called orthodox Marxist methodological techniques.

So much for encomiums and my general view of the important place I think Sartre deserves in the history of that most important of twentieth-century world-views, Marxism. It is about the exact conceptual character of Sartre's Marxism, rather than, except incidentally, his interpretative em-

ployment of it in specific literary or current political matters, that I wish to raise some questions in the remainder of this essay. For among the legion of his detractors are many who contend that they themselves are Marxist and Sartre never was. Many of their objections are ridiculous, many pedantic, many simply politically inspired and dishonest, many honest but misguided. Having dismissed what I take to be all such criticisms, I find that some hard questions still remain. Just as Sartre was much more a Marxist than not, at least during the 1950s and 1960s, so I am much more a defender of his than not; yet on both counts there are certain points of deviance.

Let me begin with Sartre's own initial area of preoccupation in his more strictly Marxist philosophical works (a rubric by which I intend to exclude, in particular, *Being and Nothingness* and the important transitional essay "Materialism and Revolution")—namely, methodological questions. Although one chapter of *Search for a Method* is entitled "The Progressive-Regressive Method," I must confess to sharing in the puzzlement voiced by most students with whom I have discussed the book as to just what this method consists in. It is easy to form some general idea of what Sartre has in mind, needless to say; but to the extent to which his method may serve as a solution to the inadequacies of both contemporary "orthodox" Marxist and American social scientific approaches to the explanation of social man, it deserves the fullest possible clarification.

Sartre's point of departure in elaborating on this method, as far as I can determine, is a long footnote in the previous chapter. In that note he refers to an article by the Marxist sociologist Henri Lefebvre, in which a three-stage method of social explanation is proposed. (The ironies of the reference to Lefebvre—for whose work, though it is marked by very different theoretical influences from Sartre's, I also have great admiration—abound. Immediately after World War II Lefebvre had written a vitriolic and unworthy polemic against existentialist philosophers, including Sartre;<sup>7</sup> he later apologized for it, in the course of writing one of the more interesting early criticisms of Sartre's Marxism.<sup>8</sup> Another article by Lefebvre, this one critical of the then-current state of Marxism in France, appeared in the same issue of *Tworczosc* that contained the original version of *Search for a Method*, and this article was to play a major role in Lefebvre's subsequent expulsion from the Communist Party.) Sartre summarizes the method as follows:

- a) *Descriptive*.—Observation but with a scrutiny guided by experience and by a general theory. . . .
- b) *Analytico-regressive*.—Analysis of reality. Attempt to *date* it precisely. . . .
- c) *Historical-genetic*.—Attempt to rediscover the present, but elucidated, understood, explained.

And he comments:

We have nothing to add to this passage, so clear and so rich, except that we believe that this method, with its phase of phenomenological description and its double movement of regression followed by progress, is valid—with the modifications that its objects may impose upon it—in *all the domains of anthropology*. . . . [It] alone can be heuristic.<sup>9</sup>

This has always struck me as a good start toward explicating the sought-after Marxist method. Sartre proposes to use both regressive and progressive approaches together; this is what he actually does, as he informs us both in the index and at several points in the text, in *L'Idiot*.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, the method of “orthodox” contemporary Marxists, which Sartre rather confusingly (to the extent to which he wishes to identify himself as a Marxist) calls “the Marxist method,”

. . . is progressive because it is the result—in the work of Marx himself—of long analyses. Today synthetic progression is dangerous. Lazy Marxists make use of it to constitute the real, a priori; [politicians] use it to prove that what has happened had to happen just as it did. They can discover nothing by this method of pure *exposition*.<sup>11</sup>

But a number of important questions remain.

In the first place, one would like to know more about the role of Lefebvre's first phase of explanation, the “descriptive” phase, which Sartre identifies as “phenomenological” in his comment. This phase is left by the wayside not only in the remainder of *Search for a Method* but throughout the entire *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Although the latter contains a number of descriptions (such as the unforgettable account of the government-operated radio network's emission of propaganda into the homes of millions of isolated, impotent, “serialized” citizens<sup>12</sup>) that stylistically resemble descriptive passages in Sartre's subtitled “Preface to Phenomenological Ontology,” *Being and Nothingness*, the phenomenological movement receives no explicit mention in the *Critique*. In *L'Idiot*, it is true that he is somewhat less sparing in his references to various relevant intellectual traditions, including the phenomenological.<sup>13</sup> But, as one who was strongly and obviously shaped in his early intellectual evolution by the highly technical phenomenology of Husserl, and who both identified himself and has been identified by historians with the phenomenological movement, Sartre owed it to us to provide a clearer account than any now in print of his present estimation of phenomenology. (He has been quite definite, after all, about his present view of existentialism.)

If, in accord with the important footnote I have cited from *Search for a Method*, phenomenological description really does constitute a necessary first step in the total method of social explanation that Sartre is proposing, then why is so little said about it in his later writings? Can it be that the

adjective "phenomenological" that characterizes this description is now being used in merely a general, non-technical sense? Or will such description at its best involve techniques and presuppositions for which we might still be indebted to Husserl and his close disciples? If so, what are some of those techniques and/or presuppositions? And finally, does the "moment" of phenomenological description which Sartre, following Lefebvre, names as the first step in an adequate method have anything in common (as I think it has, or should have) with the prior "method of inquiry," never systematically presented to his readers, that Marx distinguishes from his "method of presentation" in a famous passage in the Afterword to the second German edition of *Capital*?<sup>14</sup> If this connection is admitted, then I think we shall have made progress in understanding at once the reason for certain lacunae in Marx's own published work (for example, his failure to analyze in detail the machinery whereby ideological mystification gains the upper hand in the consciousnesses of individuals) that have led to the disastrous blindness and "laziness" of some of his "orthodox" followers, the potential value of phenomenology for twentieth-century Marxism, and the relation between the Sartrean "progressive-regressive" method and that of Marx.

Of the two poles in this pair, "progressive-regressive," the former is said to be the final, synthetic step in social explanation (hence "regressive-progressive" might be a more felicitous label than "progressive-regressive"), and it is this step which Marx, particularly in the historical writings to which Sartre rightly pays great tribute, carried out with élan. Later Marxists have imitated Marx's example in this aspect of his work, but often without undertaking the requisite prior analyses. Very well; there is no problem here. Unfortunately, it is precisely the full-fledged progressive "moment," which Lefebvre characterized as "historical-genetic," that is lacking in Sartre's unfinished Marxist magnum opus, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. As the concluding paragraph of the single published volume of that work makes clear, it is the *regressive* part of his critical investigation that has been Sartre's principal concern throughout that tome; the "progressive" reconstruction of history on the basis of this achievement was to be the subject matter of the projected but never completed second volume.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, we should be able to form some idea of what the progressive movement of historical explanation would have looked like in Sartre's hands, and I shall return to this problem presently.

Meanwhile, on the subject of Sartrean *regressive* analysis I find many difficulties—and this despite the fact that so much of the published volume of the *Critique* (and of *L'Idiot* and *Words* as well) consists of illustrations of this aspect of Sartrean method. One could expound almost endlessly on the brilliance of the insights contained in some of these passages; but at present I am concerned about another matter, namely, their overall significance

with reference to the dominant theoretical structure of Marxism within which, as I agree with Sartre, they ought to be located. Sartre identifies the “regressive” movement with “analysis.” “Analysis” makes sense for him, of course, only as long as it is seen to be one part of the fuller, more complete method that we have been considering—as long as it is not divorced from the broad conception of dialectical reason, of which analysis is at most a “moment.” However, ambiguities arise with his use of this term, and the reason, I think, is twofold. First, in certain passages Sartre places greater emphasis than he should, for consistency’s sake, on the *opposition* between analytic and dialectical reason, thus deterring his readers (and perhaps himself) from recognizing their real, if asymmetrical, complementarity.<sup>16</sup> And second, quite simply, “analysis” is now commonly used as a shorthand for Freudian theory. I believe these ambiguities ultimately can be resolved, although that would be too tedious and lengthy a task to undertake here.

But just what is supposed to be the *aim*, the goal, of a regressive analysis? Presumably, its aim is to reach the component parts of the existing structure that is under investigation—by a process that may well involve proceeding in a direction inverse to the historical one.<sup>17</sup> In an important respect, this methodological conception is similar to that advocated by Marx in the *Grundrisse*—“Human anatomy contains the key to the anatomy of the ape”<sup>18</sup>—and actually employed by him in *Capital*, particularly in parts of volume I. (I assume that Sartre would acknowledge these methodological similarities and thus Marx’s right to be considered at least an occasional practitioner of the “progressive-regressive method,” even though the expression itself is not Marx’s.) At first blush, however, the theoretical results of the two regressive analyses, Marx’s and Sartre’s, seem quite disparate: in Marx’s case, the result is the systematic exploitation of that peculiar surplus value-producing commodity, human labor-power, in the “sphere of production” in order to generate a process of endless accumulation known as capital; in Sartre’s case, it is the dialectical action of free praxis on inert matter in a milieu of scarcity whereby the former takes on the characteristics of the latter in the “practico-inert field” and human collectivities assume the passive form of “seriality.” Moreover, Sartre’s application of regressive analyses to individuals, such as Flaubert, leads to the discovery of certain fundamental projects formed early in the individual consciousness.

Exactly what is the connection between these regressive analyses that employ the same method and arrive at such disparate (though not necessarily, from what has been said thus far, incompatible) results? In the original footnote in *Search for a Method* in which the progressive-regressive method was introduced, Sartre spoke of the possibility of applying this

method, with modifications appropriate to subject matter, "in all the domains of anthropology." Presumably, then, Sartre would be working in the domain of psychology (or psychoanalysis—the word is not important) in his regressive analysis of Flaubert, and in another domain (which for the moment we shall leave unnamed) in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Marx, on the other hand, devoted most of his later years to the domain of economics, to critiquing bourgeois political economy.

This resolution, however, is too neat to be satisfactory. For the boundaries of the domains of the "sciences of man" (that is, of anthropology, in Continental philosophy's broad sense of the word) are established in accordance with the needs of their practitioners at given times, and are constantly shifting. Marx understood this phenomenon with particular clarity, and that is why none of the conventional professional labels, such as "economist" or "philosopher," can neatly be applied to him. Sartre, too, has always recognized the contingent nature of disciplinary boundaries, and that is why it is difficult to assign any such label to the *Critique*, in particular. ("Sociology" comes closest to fitting it, but professional sociologists would have many reservations about this.) In the *Critique*, in fact, there are more than a few hints that it is to be regarded as a sort of master theory, itself fixing the boundaries for all the particular "anthropological" domains; it is to be, in Sartre's oft-cited phrase, a "prolegomenon to any future anthropology."<sup>19</sup>

What does this conception say about Sartre's regressive analysis vis-à-vis that of Marx? Does it mean that in the *Critique* (though not in *L'Idiot*) Sartre has regressed farther, penetrated more deeply? This would seem to be the most reasonable conclusion to be drawn from Sartre's claims, and it is strongly supported by the fact that Marx's great work *Capital* is by definition intended to be a systematic analysis of an historically transitory form of society. Sartre, then, inspired by some suggestions made by Marx in many of his writings, would have proceeded through his regressive analysis to attempt to discover the component parts of all of human history and society up to now, whereas Marx would have confined most of his efforts to a certain period.

Understood in this way, Sartre's method, in the writings of his identifiably Marxist period, leads back to ontological claims of very much the same sort as those he made in *Being and Nothingness*. Indeed, in a footnote in the *Critique*, Sartre himself asserts the linkage:

For persons who have read *Being and Nothingness*, I shall say that the basis of the necessity [for the practical agent to discover himself in the organized inorganic, as a material being] is practical: it is the for-itself, as agent, first discovering itself as inert or, at best, practico-inert in the milieu of the in-itself.<sup>20</sup>

In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre appeared as an ontologist in the grand tradition, even though in important respects the ontological ultimates of his system turned out to be inversions of the dominant conceptions of that tradition (a non-existent God, non-substantial selves, and the attribution of massive, full Being to those aspects of reality outside of thought or consciousness which had formerly been regarded as closest to non-being). On the basis of the above citation and my previous reflections on the aims or goals of Sartre's regressive analysis, it would seem that the *Critique*, too, must be seen as somehow heir to that same grand tradition. But this conception of the *Critique* conflicts with another conception both of the method and of the substance of what Sartre is doing in his later writings and, indeed, of what Marx himself was doing. Repeatedly, in *Search for a Method*, Sartre insists that the "living Marxism" of which he is in favor, as opposed to the dead-handed "orthodox" approach, is *heuristic*; that is, it eschews a priori categories. Both in that work and near the beginning of the *Critique* proper, he severely criticizes Friedrich Engels for generating the sort of Marxist metaphysics that he does (as I agree) in his *Dialectics of Nature*. As for Marx himself, one of his letters, commenting on a Procrustean application of his work (to the then-current situation in Russia) with which he was in profound disagreement, contains a passage that I find particularly significant:

My critic feels he absolutely must metamorphose my historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophic theory of the general path every people is fated to tread, whatever the historical circumstances in which it finds itself. . . . But I beg his pardon. . . .

In several parts of *Capital* I allude to the fate which overtook the plebeians of ancient Rome. They were originally free peasants. . . . What happened? The Roman proletariat became not wage laborers but a *mob* of do-nothings more abject than the former "poor whites" in the South of the United States, and alongside of them there developed a mode of production which was not capitalist but based on slavery. Thus events strikingly analogous but taking place in different historical surroundings led to totally different results. By studying each of these forms of evolution separately and then comparing them one can easily find the clue to this phenomenon, but one will never arrive there by using as one's master key a general historico-philosophical theory, the supreme virtue of which consists in being super-historical.<sup>21</sup>

There is, then, in my opinion, a basic ambiguity in Sartre's conception of what he, as a social theorist in an historical era dominated by the philosophy of Marx, has come to discover through his lengthy regressive analyses. Is the outcome a pair (praxis-inert matter), or perhaps a larger set, of ontological ultimates that is valid for all times and places within the world of human beings as it has existed up to now (though perhaps not valid for a future "reign of freedom" or for a possible other world not

characterized by scarcity<sup>22</sup>), and can this pair or set serve as a more generalized underpinning for the set of component parts found by Marx to constitute the basic social structure of the specific historical form known as capitalism? Or is the outcome rather another contribution, perhaps of great heuristic value, to the new type of comprehensive explanation of society that is called for in *Search for a Method*, offered without pretensions to exclusive validity as fundamental Marxist ontology? The answer to these questions may shed some light on the apparent anomaly of Sartre's at once accepting Marx's radical critique of ideology, which involves a conception of philosophy's somehow coming to an end with Marxism, and yet advocating a more traditional view of the history of philosophy, according to which Marxism would be seen as one more transitory, if epochal, philosophy, destined to be superseded by another philosophy.

The ambiguity concerning the intended significance of Sartre's social theory can be pinpointed by concentrating for a moment on one of his putative ontological ultimates, praxis. In the *Critique* Sartre first presents praxis in its most nearly pure state: as individual praxis operating on inert matter. He is thoroughly aware of Marx's own fundamental objections to the "Robinsonades," the example of Robinson Crusoe on his desert island which the bourgeois political economists were so fond of using as a point of departure for their lessons about the supposedly constant features of *homo oeconomicus*: in most cases these lessons surreptitiously introduce characteristics peculiar to the system of capitalism and thus forfeit their scientific credibility.<sup>23</sup> Sartre's own most compelling defense against the charge of resurrecting "Robinsonism" is, as I take it, that he has deliberately chosen to begin his analysis at the farthest limits of *abstraction* appropriate to his subject matter, human society; the entire published volume of the *Critique* is intended to be a movement from abstract to concrete levels of analysis. (Thus, the theoretical context within which he speaks, completely impersonally, of his isolated actor is entirely different from that within which the economists were writing.) "Individual praxis operating on inert matter" is meant to name an abstract situation, not an actual or possible historical one. But then, one may ask, what is more ultimate or more like a limiting case about "praxis" than about, let us say, "practice" or "labor" or, alternatively, "being-for-itself"? It is simply a matter of names, will be the reply; "praxis" has past and present historical connotations, including connotations derived from the history of thought, that make it a preferable word to use for Sartre's purposes in the *Critique*. The connotations are very important; for instance, to shift from describing the career of being-for-itself to describing that of praxis is to signal a change of emphasis in one's predominant conception of human reality, a change from the orientation toward consciousness or intellect that characterizes the contemplative tradi-

tion of earlier mainstream Western philosophy, to the orientation toward activity that characterizes Marxism and some other modern movements. Nevertheless, the two terms "being-for-itself" and "praxis" presumably do not denote two denumerably different entities or kinds of entities.

If this is the case, as I assume it to be, then "praxis" is a very general term indeed, and the variety of its potential specific contents appears to be nearly endless. "Praxis" has, it may be conceded, proved useful to Sartre as an omnipresent, unifying category in the *Critique*, but one is forced to question whether it will prove similarly useful to any other Marxist theorist (although it appears in the work of Marx himself, of course, its employment there is *extremely* limited). In any case, I can see no way of demonstrating the *necessity* of its being similarly useful to all future Marxisms. As far as I can determine, *L'Idiot de la famille* would not have been greatly altered in content if its author had refused to allow himself to use either "praxis" or any synonym of equal generality and technicality in the places where it now appears. These considerations put in doubt any claims that might be made or implied concerning the status of the results of Sartre's regressive analysis in the *Critique* as Marxism's definitive ontology. (Indeed, although this is not the place to discuss the issue in detail, I doubt that Marxism needs any such thing, in the sense in which the word "ontology" is being used here.) The same considerations may also be taken to provide a theoretical explanation, supplementing those reasons that have been given by Sartre himself, for his decision to abandon the work of massive general system-building that would have been entailed in completing the second volume of the *Critique*, in favor of the equally demanding and even more massive labor of infinite detail that is *L'Idiot*.

Thus far, in discussing Sartre's use of the category of praxis, I have concentrated primarily on only one critical issue, namely, that of its alleged ultimacy as a Marxist ontological building-block. To many critics of Sartre, this is by no means the most important issue surrounding his use of the term. Of far greater concern to them is the question of whether his theoretical conception of praxis prevents his adherence to materialism. It is rather generally agreed, for seemingly obvious (but in fact often very superficial) reasons, that one cannot reasonably be considered a Marxist if one rejects materialism.

In both *Search for a Method* and the *Critique*, Sartre proclaims his adherence to various conceptions of materialism, while keeping his distance from the familiar set of "orthodox" dogmas, derived more from Engels than from Marx, that often goes under the name of "dialectical materialism"—"diamat." For example, he says:

We support unreservedly that formulation in *Capital* by which Marx means to define his "materialism": "The mode of production of material life generally dominates the development of social, political, and intellectual life."<sup>24</sup>

Sartre is cautious; philosophically trained, he makes careful distinctions. He will not subscribe to a collection of vague slogans simply because it is fashionable. Although this attitude may dismay a certain type of political activist, it is not in question here. But although in the *Critique* Sartre goes so far as to accept "the monism of materiality" as the only viable contemporary philosophical world-view,<sup>25</sup> he has not resolved the fundamental doubts. In "Materialism and Revolution" he labeled materialism a "myth," albeit one that has been historically useful to oppressed classes (since it leads them to see their oppressors on their own level, their own "degree of reality," rather than on some intrinsically higher value plane). I have been assuming, and I continue to assume, that he has by now abandoned the first part of that position. But has this abandonment really been total?

In defining the source of this doubt, it is useless to focus on particular Sartrean texts. Its basis is all-pervasive; what is at issue is the elementary structure of Sartre's thought. Sartre has waged a career-long struggle against Descartes' dualism; both abetted and retarded by the influence of Husserl (whose own ambivalence about Cartesianism was as familiar to himself as it is to his interpreters), Sartre's struggle was launched in *Imagination*, is in a certain sense the principal theme of *The Transcendence of the Ego*, and is discussed with great explicitness in the introductory chapter of *Being and Nothingness*. And yet Wilfrid Desan, so far from being idiosyncratic, is merely representing a very widespread sentiment when he entitles the final chapter of his study of the *Critique* "The Last of the Cartesians."<sup>26</sup> Marx himself seldom uses the word "matter," and even "materialism" occurs with no great frequency in his writings. Granted, Engels introduced unnecessary difficulties into the question of Marxist materialism, and Lenin made a botch of a wide range of related issues in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, in which the role played by "matter" in our universe was assigned heroic dimensions. But in Sartre, in the *Critique* as elsewhere in his writings, matter is omnipresent, and its role is primarily negative: it is the anti-dialectical element—a needed element, to be sure, much as "nature" is needed for Hegel's spirit to evolve—in dialectical development. Even though Sartre acknowledges human reality to be inescapably material, he also writes constantly about praxis as if it were an agent or force in its own right, rather than simply a way of characterizing the structure of human reality. In the Sartrean account of the opposition between praxis and matter, it sometimes appears as if two qualitatively different types of basic entities were involved. This manner of writing and thinking is clearly at cross-purposes with a commitment to monistic materialism and gives new strength to the vestiges of dualistic ontologies in readers' thought-sets.

Marx foresaw, it seems to me, that the issues of materialism—dualism—idealism would cease to be important in a future "society of associated producers," since the basis for such disputes would then have been elimi-

nated; in this respect, I think, Sartre and Marx are in agreement. (Husserl, too, though for reasons quite different from Marx's, looked forward to a time when controversies of this kind might be obviated.) Lenin, on the other hand, was more thoroughly oriented toward immediate concerns, and thus one of his primary reasons for raising high the banner of materialism was its great polemical value, as he saw it, in current controversies. In "Materialism and Revolution" Sartre clearly recognized this value, while distinguishing it sharply from the question of materialism's truth. There, he said:

In so far as it permits of coherent action, in so far as it expresses a concrete situation, in so far as millions of men find in it hope and the image of their condition, materialism certainly must contain some truth. But that in no way means that it is wholly true as doctrine. . . . Materialism is indisputably the *only myth* that suits revolutionary requirements. . . . It is the philosopher's business to make the truths contained in materialism hang together and to build, little by little, a philosophy which suits the needs of the revolution as exactly as the myth does.<sup>27</sup>

Which of the following statements more clearly reflects Sartre's own perception of his intellectual evolution since 1946: (1) that he at least partially accomplished the task he set for himself in the above citation, that of building a philosophy to replace the "myth" of materialism; or (2) that he attained to a more nuanced, profound, and, most important, *positive* evaluation of materialism within the context of the dominant world views of the present era? My own perception of Sartre's evolution makes me favor statement 2, but I know that many critics, adherents of the political Right, Left, and Center alike, would disagree with this perception, contending that Sartre always continued to reject materialism in its most widely accepted usages. I must concede that there are passages throughout Sartre's later writings that can be singled out to justify such disagreement; indeed, if I am not completely mistaken, this latter opinion is a common one. And if that is the case, we are left with one question concerning Sartre's Marxism and the issue of materialism: is this not, perhaps, one crucial issue on which he failed to join theory with practice—an issue on which his theoretical constructions have either disserved, or at least failed to serve as well as they should have, his practical commitment to the side of the oppressed in the class struggle of the present time?

One of Sartre's greatest concerns throughout his career, obviously, has been to defend both the reality and (especially in his later writings) the future possibility of human freedom. It is this concern more than any other that explains his antipathy to the "orthodox" Marxist interpretation of materialism, which has traditionally been linked with a doctrine of flat and fairly rigid determinism. Sartre admitted, both in the *Critique*<sup>28</sup> and in vari-

ous interviews, that over the years he became much more aware of the limitations on human freedom. Well and good; meanwhile, it is to be hoped, his subtle analyses of the internally generated, active, "intentional" aspects of human behavior have caused some "orthodox" Marxist thinkers to abandon a few of their more extreme and totally untenable formulations of the thesis of universal causal determinism. Marx himself never developed a systematic, comprehensive theory of causality, and I have no intention of attempting to invent one for him in the present essay. But it can at least be said with confidence that Marx had no qualms about admitting that non-conscious entities can and do exert a direct influence over the activities of human consciousness. Sartre, on the other hand, with his Cartesian and Husserlian biases, has always resisted analyzing free human activity, or "internality," in "external," causal terms. Naturally, he asserts that human "projects" are inconceivable except against a background of external "coefficients of adversity," permanent menaces<sup>29</sup> of all sorts, both human and non-human. But he has consistently (and persuasively) argued that to admit even a small amount of direct action by *things* on consciousness or praxis is to undermine the claim that radical freedom is a fundamental structural characteristic of consciousness.<sup>30</sup>

In *Being and Nothingness*, the problem of causality arises in a particularly acute form because of Sartre's total refusal to attribute any qualities, much less activities, to being-in-itself; all meaning comes from human reality. I see the culmination of the difficulties posed by this stance as occurring in a relatively obscure passage in his discussion of temporality:

So far our description of universal temporality has been attempted under the hypothesis that nothing may come from being save its non-temporal immutability. But *something* does come from being: what, for lack of a better term, we shall call *abolitions* and *apparitions*. These apparitions and abolitions ought to be the object of a purely metaphysical elucidation, not an ontological one, for we can conceive of their necessity neither from the standpoint of the structures of being of the for-itself nor those of the in-itself. Their existence is that of a contingent and metaphysical fact. . . .<sup>31</sup>

Two pages later, he connects these claims with a brief account of the meaning of the "principle of causality" (he himself places the phrase in quotation marks). "Causality," he says, "is simply the first apprehension of the temporality of the 'appeared' as an ekstastic mode of being."<sup>32</sup> A full explication of these remarks would have to be lengthy, since they presuppose a great deal of conceptual apparatus from other parts of Sartre's work (such as his strong distinction between ontology, which he thinks of himself as doing, and metaphysics, which deals with the genesis or origins of phenomena). But it should at least be clear that Sartre is here giving evidence that he feels some concern about his philosophy's ability to explain

what others might call causal sequences of events that originate in the non-human, in "being," rather than through the actions of a for-itself. And the response that he makes to this concern strikes me as singularly unsatisfactory, by reason both of its relative brevity and of its elusiveness and suggestion of unsolved mystery.

I submit that classical Marxism (and not just the "orthodox" version derived from certain writings of Engels and Lenin) takes for granted a less subjective and less mystery-shrouded conception of causality than the Sartrean one that is implied in the above citation from *Being and Nothingness*. Marx, of course, unlike Engels, was concerned almost exclusively with the human social world, so that he had little to say about *purely* non-human events. But in his accounts of human events—for instance, in his brief speculative anthropological reconstruction of the origins of human society in *The German Ideology* (which, it is true, he and Engels wrote jointly)—he deliberately stresses the evolution of consciousness out of what he sees as non-conscious factors, beginning with *need*. For Sartre, the primitive's active efforts to satisfy his needs are a sign that he is already characterized by consciousness. The difference is partly terminological, but it is by no means exclusively so; two different world views, one much more monistic than the other with respect to the relationship between the human and the non-human, are at stake.<sup>33</sup> My question is whether, regardless of the merits of the respective conceptions of causality, a philosophy that ultimately denies that there is such a thing as *la force des choses*—if one takes that idiomatic phrase to mean non-human entities actively exerting causal efficacy over human praxis—is compatible with the world view of Marx. For is it not the case that Sartre's philosophy, even in its later forms, entails just such a denial? Or is the later Sartre willing to accept a broader and less subjective conception of causality than that to be found in his treatises on imagination and in *Being and Nothingness*?

However these questions should be answered, it is certainly true that Sartre has come to give far greater *importance* in his later work to aspects of human experience in which reflective consciousness has little role to play. In place of, though not in opposition to, the analysis of human reality as fundamentally *lack* in *Being and Nothingness*, in later works the portrait of "the man of *need*," repeatedly appears. This is certainly, as we have seen, a move in a Marxist direction, although it would also be compatible, theoretically speaking, with a move in the direction of bourgeois political economy. The peculiar qualities of human need, as it is analyzed in the *Critique*, derive from a state of affairs that Sartre discerns as looming large in our world (though not necessarily in every possible world of active beings or even in our world under all possible circumstances)—namely, *scarcity*. While it might seem linguistically odd to call "scarcity" a causal agent,

even if Sartre were willing to admit the possibility of non-human causality, nevertheless it would be difficult for readers of the *Critique* to exaggerate the prominence of its role in Sartre's account. This fact gives rise to some additional questions.

Scarcity, for Sartre, is the milieu in which we live; as such, it is one of the major explanatory factors in the theory of the *Critique*. Its role in the writings of Marx is not nearly so prominent. This fact in itself may not be very significant, particularly if we consider that Marx concentrated the bulk of his attention on the capitalist system, whereas Sartre explicitly regards scarcity as having characterized all of human history up to the present time. If Marx and Engels, in *The Communist Manifesto*, can proclaim that all of human history up to the present time has been a history of class struggle, then Sartre's emphasis on scarcity can be seen as an attempt to answer, in a very general way, the question as to *why* this has been the case.

When Sartre's *Critique* was first published, in 1960, this emphasis of his may well have appeared somewhat passé to many readers in advanced capitalist countries, in light of their then-current atmosphere of self-congratulation about the rise of "the affluent society." Since then a great reversal has taken place, and the fact of scarcity now looms large in the consciousness of the same readers. Paradoxically, however, in my opinion, this recent historical development actually serves to increase skepticism about the validity of Sartre's employment of "scarcity" as a means of explaining social man. For the term is inherently quite vague and, in order to begin to make some sense of it, we must be able to form some conception of what a state of non-scarcity (that is, of "abundance") would be like; it seems to me that recent events have cast doubt on our ability to do so. To illustrate this difficulty, here is a superficial question, but an important one: Was the condition of the majority of the population of the United States in the early 1960s truly one of comparative abundance?<sup>34</sup> Or was the widespread belief that this was the case simply an illusion? (Of course no one disputes that at that time there existed numerous instances of what were arrogantly called "pockets of poverty," and that the United States, together with its nearest capitalist competitors, was at best an oasis of comparative abundance in a desert of world poverty.)

One might reply that in general the United States in that period did enjoy a temporary, isolated condition of comparative abundance, although it was a condition doomed to extinction for global reasons that could have been foreseen and in fact were foreseen by a few individuals at the time. The question then arises as to why strong class differences (as illustrated by income distribution statistics and by the continuation of great inequalities in social and political power), were generally maintained during that period of abundance; scarcity, in that case, cannot be very useful in explaining

these familiar social structures of dominance and subordination, since they seem to have survived the elimination of scarcity. If it is replied instead that "the affluent society" was only an illusion that was fostered and reinforced by our ideologists and our advertising industry (and I think that this is the sounder answer of the two), then we must confront the problem of *defining* scarcity. For the fact of conspicuous consumption in the early 1960s was *not* simply an illusion: in the society in question, at least, there was enough, and more than enough, matter of many kinds—food, clothing, and building materials, to begin with, and such other items as energy sources besides. Moreover, wastage was vast (there exist many impressive statistics on this subject). I am not recalling anything new, but merely raising a significant difficulty for Sartre's Marxism in light of very simple, well-known facts.

"Scarcity" is a relative term, as is "need." Marx insisted on this in many passages of *Capital*,<sup>35</sup> and it was the widespread failure to take this point seriously that led, probably more than any other factor, to the Bernsteinean "revision" of Marx (on the grounds that Marx's alleged predictions of increasing impoverishment of the working class had been falsified) in the late nineteenth century. Unlike such items as necessary labor time or the rate of surplus value, scarcity does not lend itself to precise quantitative measure; to require such a measure in the case of scarcity is to demand the impossible. Simply because it cannot be totally quantified, the concept of "scarcity" is not therefore to be considered meaningless, of course; far from it. But with respect to Sartre's Marxism, these facts raise the issue of whether it was advisable for him to lay so much of the weight of explanation on the concept of scarcity and on the alternative possibility of a scarcity-free social world of the future.

It seems to me that in his classical works, particularly in *Capital* and the later writings, Marx never allows any single concept to play as decisive a role in distinguishing between the structures of pre-socialist societies and that of a projected future socialist society as Sartre allots to "scarcity" in the *Critique*. "Class division" comes closest to playing such a role, perhaps, but unfortunately *Capital* breaks off just at the point at which Marx is beginning to analyze the concept of "class." It may be contended that in contrast with a capitalist system, Marx's socialist society would be one in which the exploitation of workers by means of forcing them to produce surplus value would have ceased, and *this* is a decisive difference; that is true, but Marx himself often stressed that surplus labor, that is, labor beyond the amount needed to reproduce the workers' means of subsistence (itself now redefined so as to allow everyone to maintain a *relatively* abundant living standard), would still exist under socialism in order to make possible rational planning and reinvestment toward the future. For Marx, a large network of interrelated concepts, some of them quite complex and

dependent for their meanings on concrete details of present-day society, must be brought to bear to draw the contrast between pre-socialist and socialist structures. Too often in Sartre's *Critique*, on the other hand, "scarcity" and its elimination seem to have been given a unique importance in establishing this contrast.

It is no doubt partly for this reason that Sartre encounters such great difficulties in speaking about the future. He says very little about it. He is convinced, as I pointed out near the beginning of this essay, that we do not have the intellectual tools to talk about Marxism's future "reign of freedom" in which Marxism itself will become dispensable. Marx likewise generally eschewed idle speculation about ideal societies of the future. But Marx was generally optimistic about the prospects for a full, undeformed version of socialism; Sartre, living in a time when a number of nations call themselves socialist while still suffering many obvious deformations, is not so optimistic. In a 1972 interview he admitted as much, even while explicitly denying it:

What I would say is that I know what I have to tear myself away from, but I do not know entirely with a view to what. Or again, what is the least founded in me is optimism: the reality of the future. I have that optimism, but I would not know how to found it.<sup>36</sup>

Does this difference in outlook stem from temperamental differences between Sartre and Marx? In part, certainly. Sartre has lived through most of the twentieth century; one could hardly have done that with intelligence and lucidity and still remain unreservedly optimistic about the future. But more than just this is involved, I think. The additional factor is Sartre's identification of a genuinely socialist society with one in which scarcity has once and for all, without qualification, been abolished. If I have been correct in my brief analysis of scarcity, then it can *never* be abolished without qualification. In this case, there is no alternative to pessimism.

A number of commentators have been so impressed by Sartre's tone of pessimism, particularly in the *Critique*, as to exaggerate its predominance. Such is the case, I believe, with Desan, who at one point reports as a Sartrean conclusion about "all of history" what Sartre in fact raises as a question, and then only in a somewhat context-bound manner, namely: "Is there not a perpetual double movement of regrouping and petrification?"<sup>37</sup> Such is also the case with Chiodi, who hammers away with great effectiveness at the theme that Sartre departs from Marx, in the direction of a partial return to Hegel, on the subject of whether alienation can ever be eliminated.<sup>38</sup> But in Chiodi's prize textual piece of evidence from the *Critique*, a passage in which Sartre himself asks whether his analysis constitutes a return to Hegel, "who makes of alienation a constant characteristic of objec-

tification of whatever sort [*quelle qu' elle soit*] and replies "yes and no," Sartre is in fact distinguishing two different senses of the word "alienation," and apparently is not dissenting from the Marxian view that alienation in the narrower sense, "exploitation," conceivably could be abolished.<sup>39</sup> Sartre does, after all, raise the possibility of there coming to be a non-alienated society at some time in the future, and he does it in the form of an open question:

The real problem—which we do not have to study here—concerns less the past, where recurrence and alienation are found in every time, than the future: to what extent will a socialist society abolish atomism *in all its forms?* . . . Must the disappearance of capitalist forms of alienation be identified with the suppression of *all* forms of alienation?<sup>40</sup>

Granted, these questions are raised in a long footnote, but this simply points to a quirk that Sartre shares with Marx: often the most revealing passages are those that occur in footnotes.

It seems to me certain that Sartre would have "had to study" the question of a possible, non-alienated historical future if he had set about the task of completing the second volume of the *Critique*. The reason he gave Jeanson for not having fulfilled that project, namely, that it required a more comprehensive knowledge of history than he had, particularly for non-Western nations,<sup>41</sup> is quite understandable. But the suspicion remains that an equally important deterrent was his recognition that it would be difficult, within the framework of his social analysis, to give credence to the possibility of a non-alienated future society.

It is my contention that if Sartre has experienced great difficulty in maintaining some "faith" (a useful word which he rejected in his interview with Verstraeten) in the future, it is largely because, in contrast to Marx, his conception of what a radically different future society would be like is just a bit *too* radical. It may be true that Marx in his later years scaled down his expectations too much; certainly some of his followers have seized upon his insistence that communism emerges from the womb of capitalist society bearing the birthmarks of the old society<sup>42</sup> to justify retention of those bureaucratic excesses and capitalist "vestiges" in supposedly socialist countries which Sartre so effectively assails in the *Critique*. But Sartre, on the other hand, in vaunting the capacity of dialectical reason to comprehend "the absolute intelligibility of an irreducible novelty,"<sup>43</sup> sometimes writes as if social revolution could bring about something like absolute change. Is such a thing indeed possible? Is the concept itself meaningful? I doubt it. Let me illustrate this final point of my criticism by referring to Sartre's famous analysis of the "group in fusion" in the *Critique*.

It should be recalled that Sartre's technical terminology for the two principal types of social collective in the *Critique*, the one, roughly speak-

ing, passive and other-determined, the other active and self-determined, is "series" (or "seriality") and "group." Apropos the formation of the group in fusion, which he illustrates by reference to the residents of the Quartier Saint Antoine in Paris who captured the Bastille in what is now thought of as the beginning of the French Revolution, he says:

From this moment on, something is given which is neither the group nor the series but what Malraux, in *L'Espoir*, called the Apocalypse, that is, the dissolution of the series in the group in fusion. And this group, still not structured, that is to say, entirely *amorphous*, is characterized as the direct [*immédiat*] contrary of otherness: in the serial relationship, in effect, unity, as the Reason of the series, is always *elsewhere*; in the Apocalypse, although seriality remains at least as a process on the path to liquidation—and although it may always reappear—the synthetic unity is always *here*.<sup>44</sup>

This high-water mark of incipient, perfervid revolutionary activity, group praxis at its limit (but so unique as to be irreducible, strictly speaking, to the status of a *group*) is, in Sartre's own words, "not structured, . . . *amorphous*." Phenomena of this sort may occur from time to time in any society; from this point of view, Sartre's account is simply an attempt to give a generalized description of such apparently structureless phenomena and to make them as intelligible as they can ever be made. But is it not in fact a mistake to say that any actual group in fusion, that is, any collective movement that breaks with old rules and restraints in an attempt to achieve novel social goals, is totally without structure in its initial phase of enthusiastic formation? After all, the members will always have their individual histories, which they will carry with them, and their nascent common project, whatever it may be, will itself dictate certain simple, general lines of conduct along which the group must act in order to retain any hope of success. Moreover, whereas the apocalypse of religious myth transcends time, no social group in fusion can ever operate totally outside temporal limits.<sup>45</sup>

If this is so, then Sartre's account of the group in fusion at its height can only be taken as an ideal model, not as a generalized description that is *exactly* applicable to any particular historical event, past, present, or future. This has important implications for his Marxism, particularly for that aspect of it which has to do with revolutionary change in the direction of a socialist society. Any such change, if it should occur (and I am inclined in my less cynical moments to concede that it already has occurred here and there in truncated form), would have to be radical and fundamental in order to be genuine, but it could not be apocalyptic.

One other aspect of Sartre's account of the group in fusion has caused considerable concern among some of his readers, and that is its normative force. Sartre does not, to be sure, explicitly present his group in fusion as a

social norm to be striven for; he himself depicts such phenomena as extremely ephemeral, and it is his clear intention throughout the *Critique* to avoid all moralizing and simply to describe various "social ensembles" in a certain conceptual order. He is, in fact, considerably more successful than either Hegel or Marx himself at maintaining this peculiar combination of strong, implicit, barely suppressed ethical commitment, together with a methodological ethical neutrality, which is characteristic of the Hegelian tradition. But if, as Sartre says, "the worker will only be delivered from his destiny if the entire human multiplicity is changed forever into group praxis,"<sup>46</sup> and if the group in fusion is the limiting case of group praxis, it seems to follow that the group in fusion must play some sort of ideal role in a normative, as well as in a conceptual, sense. This is dangerous, from a Marxist point of view, because Sartre's group in fusion is by definition a praxis without theory.<sup>47</sup> To treat it as being in any sense a normative model for social activity is to undermine Marxism's theoretical basis and to encourage the false charges, often made by political reactionaries, that revolutionary activity is inherently mindless and that Marxism is basically anti-intellectual.

It is paradoxical that a person of such intense intellectuality as Sartre should leave any opening within his theoretical framework for such inferences to be drawn. His detailed account of the Bastille episode and its prelude is, on the whole, not only powerful but extremely useful in facilitating our understanding of numerous relatively unanalyzed political protest incidents that have occurred throughout the world since the publication of the *Critique*. However, at certain points of Sartrean *interpretation* of the Bastille episode difficulties such as the one that I have just discussed arise. There has always been a streak of ultra-romanticism in Sartre's thought; perhaps it is just this streak which gives his works of philosophy and literature their peculiar flair, even much of their brilliance. But without doubt this same streak also accounts for the divergence—a relatively slight one, I think, not a large one—that I detect between Sartre's later philosophy and that of Marx on the related issues of revolutionary change and the possible socialist society of the future.

This concludes my survey of important possible deviations between Sartre's thought and Marxism, which I initiated in the domain of methodology and have developed through ontological questions about praxis, materialism, and causality and the categorial problem of Sartre's allegedly excessive stress on "scarcity" into the final issue of his normative orientation toward that portion of human history which remains to be acted out.

The Marx whom Sartre often appears to find most attractive is Marx the historian, the writer of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, *The Class Struggles in*

*France*, and so on. This is a good choice on Sartre's part. Toward the end of his third Flaubert volume he reminds us that Marx maintained, very profoundly, that history progresses by its worst sides.<sup>48</sup> Having recognized this, Marx still remained in some way hopeful about the future. Despite all surface appearances to the contrary, Sartre's Marxist-based social theory also provides us with real, material (as opposed to ideal) grounds for hope, as well as furnishing us with abundant intellectual tools for understanding the social movements of our own time—tools not to be found in the writings of Marx or of his so-called orthodox followers.

Among the frequently repeated criticisms of Sartre's Marxism that do not impress me is the charge that his account of social structures has not been sufficiently holistic to remain within the Marxist tradition. The critics who make this contention, many of them from the group of Marxists labeled "orthodox," are in danger of reducing Marxist theory to one more organicist theory that accords to social wholes some higher sort of existence than the individuals who compose them; to do this is to fall back into the kind of mystified view of the nature of society which Marx struggled assiduously to overcome. Another unimpressive criticism, along somewhat similar lines, holds that Sartre has shown up the deficiencies in his theory by his refusal to join "the party of the proletariat." This criticism, which greatly disturbed Sartre himself in the years of his disagreements with Merleau-Ponty at the height of the Cold War, has since been allayed in large measure by events. In May 1968, in particular, the foot-dragging tactics of the French Communist Party in the face of nationwide student-worker demonstrations raised profound questions in almost everyone's mind concerning the relationship between that party and the Marxist theory it claimed to espouse. These were precisely the questions over which Sartre himself had been agonizing for years. In fact, in order to view the Communist Party as the sole depository of revolutionary truth, one must hold some form of organicist conception of both the party and society. To his credit, and at times against very great pressures, Sartre has always seen this and resisted any such retreat to a neo-Hegelian idealism.

There have been pressures in an opposite direction as well, pressures in favor of treating Marxism as just another variety of humanism. This word, of course, has been given a thousand different meanings over time, and Sartre himself—unfortunately, in retrospect—once identified his existentialism with "humanism." But he has far more frequently resisted the humanist tendency to idealize present-day human beings and their societies in terms of whatever future possibilities they may be said to possess. What is actual is by no stretch of the imagination ideal, either in the capitalist bloc, in those countries now thought by some to be on the road to socialism, or anywhere else. In constantly and brilliantly insisting upon this

one stark truth, Sartre's philosophy exemplifies what is best and most important in Marxism itself, both now and for an indefinitely long time to come: its role of radical social *criticism*.

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## NOTES

1. See J.-P. Sartre, *Search for a Method* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), p. 7; hereinafter *SM*. For *des noms célèbres*, "famous names," Barnes' translation reads, "the names of the men who dominated them." See also Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 17; hereinafter *CRD*.

2. *SM*, p. 8.

3. Sartre indicates that he is aware of the divergence of his usage from the Marxist one in a footnote to a recent passage in which he does employ the term "ideology" in Marx's sense. See Sartre, *L'Idiot de la famille*, III (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 212; hereinafter *IF*. Unfortunately, many readers of *Search for a Method* and of the *Critique* will never read this later footnote.

4. *SM*, p. 34; *CRD*, p. 32.

5. *SM*, p. 62.

6. "The Family Idiot is the sequel to *Search for a Method*." *IF*, I (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 7 (first sentence of the preface). This and all subsequent translations from original, untranslated French texts are mine.

7. See H. Lefebvre, *L'Existentialisme* (Paris: Editions du Sagittaire, 1946).

8. In *Métaphilosophie* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1965), esp. pp. 77-88.

9. *SM*, p. 52.

10. See, for example, *IF*, I, p. 181.

11. *SM*, p. 133. Barnes's translation says "political theorists" instead of "politicians," which I favor, for *les politiques*. See *CRD*, p. 86.

12. *CRD*, pp. 319-25.

13. In *IF*, I, p. 26, for example, he alludes to the phenomenological expression *sinngebend*, "productive of meaning," to help explain a typical human characteristic that was singularly lacking in Flaubert at the age of six.

14. For English translation, see *Capital*, I (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961), p. 19.

15. See his statement in an interview reported by Francis Jeanson, in *Sartre dans sa vie* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1974), p. 298. Sartre did in fact, however, write several hundred pages toward this second volume, and they probably will be published some day. A short excerpt from them has already appeared, under the title, "Socialism in One Country," in *New Left-Review*, 100 (November 1976):143-63.

16. This point is made very well by Claude Lévi-Strauss at the beginning of his critical essay on Sartre, "History and Dialectic," in *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962), pp. 324-25. To commend Lévi-Strauss for exposing this ambiguity is not, of course, to express agreement with the main points of his essay.

17. See *IF*, I, p. 181.

18. *Grundrisse* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 105 (first German edition 1939).

19. *CRD*, p. 153.

20. *CRD*, pp. 285-86.

21. Marx and Engels, *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, ed. by L. Feuer (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1959), p. 441. Marx wrote the letter to the editorial board of

*Otechestvenniye Zapiski* in November 1877. Sartre cites some of this text approvingly in *CRD*, pp. 214–15.

22. Sartre alludes to the hypothesis of such a world, different from our own, in two important passages in *CRD*, to wit, on pp. 201 and 352.

23. *Capital*, I, pp. 76–77.

24. *SM*, pp. 33–34.

25. *CRD*, p. 248.

26. *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1965), pp. 279–309.

27. "Materialism and Revolution" in Sartre, *Literary and Philosophical Essays* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), p. 223.

28. Most notably, in a footnote in *CRD*, p. 491: "I used to think that total indeterminacy was the genuine basis of choice. But from the point of view of the group . . . it is the contrary that is true."

29. Both terms, the first more reminiscent of *Being and Nothingness*, the second more characteristic of the *Critique*, appear together as synonyms in *IF*, I, p. 666.

30. One should also consider the following early statement, concerning the connection between consciousnesses; this insistence is particularly striking: "Between two consciousnesses there is no cause and effect relationship." See Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination* (London: Rider, 1950), p. 34.

31. *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), p. 282; hereinafter *BN*.

32. *BN*, p. 284.

33. One avenue by which this relationship can profitably be explored further is, of course, animal consciousness. I used to have the impression that Sartre's view of animals was uncomfortably close to Descartes' relegation of them to the status of machines. It is interesting, therefore, to read his brief digression on household pets in *IF*, I, pp. 144–47. His point there is that human culture has made pets eternally bored, ruining them as purely natural beings and preserving them in an atmosphere in which they can only be perpetually frustrated. To the extent to which Sartre now acknowledges the existence (regrettable though it may be) of a quasi-consciousness or of some praxis in animals (an acknowledgement that is made even more explicitly in *IF*, II, p. 1875, fn. 2), then the organic-inorganic dichotomy which appears so frequently in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* has achieved greater importance than before by comparison with the simpler humans-things dichotomy.

34. This, after all, was being said by the Marcuses of the time (*One-Dimensional Man* was published in 1964), as well as by the Galbraiths.

35. For instance, Marx explicitly classifies tobacco as a consumer necessity, as distinguished from a luxury item, on the ground that it is habitually considered as such even if it is not a physiological necessity. See *Capital*, II (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1957), p. 403.

36. Interview with Pierre Verstraeten, cited in Jeanson, *Sartre dans sa vie*, p. 277.

37. *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p. 215; *CRD*, p. 643.

38. *Sartre and Marxism*, tr. by Kate Soper (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1976).

39. *CRD*, p. 285.

40. *CRD*, p. 349.

41. *Sartre dans sa vie*, p. 298.

42. "Critique of the Gotha Program," in Marx and Engels, *Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, p. 117.

43. *CRD*, p. 147.

44. *CRD*, p. 391.

45. For a more extensive development of these themes, see the chapter entitled "Totalization," in W. L. McBride, *Fundamental Change in Law and Society: Hart and Sartre on Revolution* (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), pp. 176–86.

46. *CRD*, p. 351.

47. This criticism constitutes an updating of sorts, from the point of view of the *Critique*, of certain charges made earlier by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his famous chapter on "Sartre

and Ultrabolshevism," in *Adventures of the Dialectic* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 95-201. However, I reject more of Merleau-Ponty's claims than I accept, even with respect to the journalistic Sartre of the pre-*Critique* period.

48 *IP*, III, p. 613.



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AN END TO AUTHORITY:  
EPISTEMOLOGY AND POLITICS  
IN THE LATER SARTRE

Spoken language without the correlative of evidence is characterized by this fundamental trait: credibility. And this comes to me from others via their words like the sovereign's power over his subjects.<sup>1</sup>

Following a suggestion from Plato's *Gorgias* (452 ff.), Peter Winch draws a provocative parallel between the political problem of distinguishing authority from power and the epistemic issue of differentiating between knowledge and belief. Inspired by the later Wittgenstein, he finds the feature common to both questions in the concept of rule-following which implies the corresponding notions of authority and of there being a right and a wrong way of doing things.<sup>2</sup>

While no admirer of Wittgenstein, Sartre too pursues Plato's suggestion as he implicitly compares the authority/power and the knowledge/belief distinctions. Inspired more by Rousseau and Nietzsche, he finds the common feature in the dichotomy *reciprocity/alterity* which he takes to be the paramount value and disvalue of epistemology and politics alike.

I should like to analyze Sartre's peculiar parallel in some detail both for the light it casts on his later philosophy in general and for the contrast it affords more standard resolutions of these issues in cognitive and political theory. After a critical probe into Sartre's understanding of the knowledge/belief distinction culminating in a characterization of the evidential situation (I), and a corresponding analysis of his use of "power" and "authority" in political theory (II), I shall focus on his underlying egalitarian ideal and the properly Sartrean reversal of the Platonic parallel which this ideal entails (III).

I. KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF

1.1. *Sartre's two epistemologies.* In the course of forty years of philosophic inquiry Sartre has developed two distinct, if not always separable, epistemologies. The earlier is a phenomenological epistemology of vision where

knowledge is a form of intuition and evidence is the "filling" (*Erfüllung*) of empty intentional acts by the intended object "in person" and not by some perfect likeness. This epistemology concentrates on reflective acts whereby consciousness fastens on essences and other phenomena with an infallibly certain grasp.

Sartre's later epistemology of *praxis* centers on the action whereby a free, organic agent internalizes his environment in the very project of changing it as a means of overcoming the material *scarcity* which transforms that environment into a field of struggle with other free agents. This more Hegelian-Marxian theory employs such terms as "dialectical necessity," "totalization," "becoming truth," and "notion" (Hegel's *Begriff*) in order to "integrate temporality into the categories" and thus achieve the comprehension of "a single meaning for History."<sup>3</sup> It is in the context of Sartre's *praxis* epistemology that I shall treat the knowledge/belief distinction, for only there are its moral and political dimensions fully exploited.

1.2 *Belief as alienating*. From the *praxis* epistemology of the politicized Sartre comes the claim that belief is fundamentally a sacrifice of autonomy, an alienated condition: "Belief is the Other in me."<sup>4</sup> Belief is a species of *passive activity*, that class of behavior contrasted with *praxis* and characterized by sociopolitical impotence, exteriority, separation, and otherness (alterity) which obtains among the serialized individuals so vividly described in the *Critique*.<sup>5</sup> Because belief is a form of impotence, it is in the interest of the authoritarian state (a redundancy for Sartre, as we shall see) to keep its citizens manipulable through a constant bombardment with propaganda and a general undermining of their critical powers by what Sartre terms "extero-conditioning."<sup>6</sup> The relationship which belief establishes with another is one of *authority-obedience*, and Sartre takes this to be essentially alienating (see IF, I, 159).

Sartre offers as a prolonged example the young Flaubert who was so constituted (by a complex dialectic of environment, especially early childhood experiences, and his reaction thereto) that he became incapable of "that reciprocity which is the pledge (*gage*) of the True" (IF, I, 622). Like a child, Flaubert was subsequently without critical sense; he had to accept all statements on authority (IF, I, 159)—an alienated condition. Sartre likens Flaubert to an actor on the stage who must communicate a feigned conviction by contagion because he is *ex hypothesi* incapable of the relationship, *knowledge-truth-evidence*, which presupposes *praxis* and reciprocity.<sup>7</sup> Like

the actor, Flaubert must live his life in a milieu of *belief-authority-imitation*.

1.3 *Varieties of epistemic alterity*. If belief is the epitome of epistemic alterity, it assumes various forms ranging from the temporary condition of the student in process of "finding out for himself" to the permanent state of a Flaubert, incapable of the liberating experience of evidence and truth. Along this continuum are ranged such examples of *pensée autre*<sup>s</sup> as the cliché (Flaubert's *idées reçues*), faddism, rumor-mongering, the spirit of seriousness, panics (the Great Fear of 1789), the racist idea, and various other forms of exteroconditioning which "push alterity to the extreme" (CRD, 620). They all share the characteristics of serial alterity, viz., passivity, impotence, exteriority, and heteronomy.

One might expect Sartre to seek epistemic autonomy for individual praxeis among universal concepts shared by all in the republic of letters. But this is not the case. Such conceptual conformity he associates with the analytical Reason of science, mathematics, and structuralism. Revealing the fundamentally political nature of his praxis epistemology, Sartre dismisses the agreement engendered by analytical Reason as *conviction autre*; it is a superficial, exterior unity of others as other. Such accord has no concrete reality, he claims, as long as individuals and groups are fundamentally *other*—tacit appeal to his concept of truth as the contrary of alterity.<sup>9</sup>

1.4 *Truth as the liquidation of alterity*. We must understand Sartre's pragmatic notion of truth in the context of these remarks about alterity and belief as the other in us. "Truth in its original sense," he insists, "is . . . the liquidation of alterity" (CRD, 530). As such, it is active and disalienating.<sup>10</sup> Correspondingly, the knowledge by which truth is gained (alterity dissolved) is autonomous in contrast with the heteronomy of belief. In fact, Sartre takes knowledge to be a form of praxis (again, as opposed to belief, which is passive activity): "Knowing (*connaissance*) is a moment of praxis, even of a most fundamental [praxis]; . . . it remains the captive of the action which it clarifies and disappears along with it" (CRD, 64). Because of its practical nature, Sartrean truth can sustain such moral and "political" predicates as "disalienating," "autonomous," "free," and "reciprocal" in a normative sense. Sartre seldom fails to exercise this option.

1.5 *Truth as reciprocity: the evidential situation*. If truth is defined negatively as the liquidation of alterity, in its positive sense it denotes reciprocity among free praxeis: "I sovereignly affirm what is sovereignly affirmed to me" (IF, I, 163). The true is a *common* undertaking: "My

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affirmation gets its infinite power (*force*) only from the chain of affirmations which have preceded and which sustain it" (IF, I, 164 n.). So Sartre can conclude that "the true . . . is praxis itself : the double, complex relationship of men among themselves via their work on the world and of men to the world via the (real or virtual) reciprocity of human relations" (IF, I, 166; see III, 12). To be capable of truth is to be capable of reciprocal praxis. (In anticipation of the findings of Part Two, we may add that truth thus seems possible only within the group.) Belief, on the contrary, is a "social relation of nonreciprocity" (IF, I, 165) like the generic authority-obedience relation of which it is a species.

The "exigency for reciprocity" (IF, I, 159) which describes truth is fundamentally a call for *evidence*. Sartre terms the appeal to evidence "an invitation to reciprocity" and the enunciation of an evidential judgment "a free act addressing itself to the freedom of another" (IF, I, 167). Let us conclude this portion of our analysis with a reconstruction of the *evidential situation* as Sartre sees it, for we shall argue that it is analogous to the moment of socio-political apocalypse which we shall describe at the end of Part Two.

What we have called the evidential situation, like all "situations" for Sartre, comprises a dialectic of the given and the taken. There is first an invitation by another "to escape oneself toward" the object.<sup>11</sup> If I as agent accept, I do so in an act which is "induced but autonomous" (IF, I, 160). Far from placing myself under a foreign will as in the belief situation, "I recover myself in losing myself" (IF, I, 162). Sartre claims that I do this precisely via an *intuition* of the thing itself in the *context* of a *commitment* (promise, oath) to respect *freedom* in myself and others. This last constitutes the *ethical* dimension of the evidential situation. If intuition keeps me from fooling myself, faithfulness to intuition prevents me from deceiving others; it guarantees the knowledge of the object as *our* good. I emerge as an absolute link in a chain of collective operations.<sup>12</sup> I recover myself literally in the evidential situation because, Sartre urges, "the immediate and basic structure of the Ego is the spontaneous affirmation at the heart of the concrete intuition" (IF, I, 162).

Reviewing Sartre's position with regard to knowledge and belief, we see that the practical nature of "truth" in his praxis epistemology lends itself readily to political and moral categories. This is especially true of his basic epistemic value dyad, reciprocity/alterity. The idea of detached observation or pure science, despite Sartre's phenomenological excursions, has been con-

sistently questioned since his earliest, Nietzschean essay "The Legend of Truth" (1931).<sup>13</sup> It is reciprocity among free praxeis mediated by *evidence* (intuition and oath) which constitutes the common enterprise called human truth. Autonomy is achieved by liberation from foreign wills (authority) and by the sovereign act of mutual affirmation. Thus knowledge is distinguished from belief as autonomy from heteronomy, equality from hierarchy, evidence from authority, and fundamentally reciprocity from alterity. Sartre is susceptible to Plato's suggested parallel precisely because each of these pairs carries a political significance as well.

## II. AUTHORITY AND POWER

2.1 *Sovereignty and power as invested in the group.* "By 'sovereignty,'" Sartre writes, "I mean the absolute, practical power of the dialectical organism, that is to say, his praxis pure and simple as ongoing synthesis of every multiplicity given in his practical field, whether inanimate objects, living beings or men" (CRD, 563). "Sovereignty" in Sartre's vocabulary is thus *descriptive* and *original*; it is coterminous with individual praxis-freedom. What it adds to the latter is reference to the multiplicities in the purview of its power. At this stage "power" is understood in a Hobbesian sense as *de facto* ability.<sup>14</sup>

But if the organic individual, man, alone is sovereign, this is true only in the abstract. Concretely, power and sovereignty belong to the *group member* (what Sartre calls the "common individual"), though not, he is careful to argue, to the group itself.<sup>15</sup> Each member is quasi-sovereign, being limited only by every other member.<sup>16</sup> As a political existentialist, Sartre believes that sovereignty is a feature of each man and not of the "people," much less of the "class." Yet as a dialectical nominalist, he holds that it is *individuals-in-relation* who are sovereign. This sovereign power is concretized in the group.

Power is one of the "specific modalities of the group"—what analytic philosophers would term a "societal fact." As such, it does not denote merely strength or force or "natural right" à la Hobbes as it seems to do outside the group; rather, as a group modality, "power" assumes a *juridical* sense for Sartre. In fact, the "common" feature of the individual as member, i.e., his being-in-the-group, "becomes *juridical power* of each over the organic individuality in himself and in all the thirds" (CRD, 462). Implicit in the group-in-fusion, this juridical power becomes manifest with the advent

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of the explicit *oath* as self-imposed group inertia. Sartre characterizes the oath which constitutes the sworn group, giving it a certain permanence, as “the beginning of humanity” (CRD, 453). Each member is the same; each vows not to betray himself in betraying his brothers. Yet in this milieu of *same-ness*, the distinction between right and duty is scarcely relevant.<sup>17</sup> It remains abstract and basically negative, expressing itself as “Fraternity-Terror.” With the *organized group* this power becomes positive and reveals itself in the distribution of tasks (duties) as *functions*. Yet even here, Sartre insists, “there is no difference between right and duty;” function is both of these simultaneously (CRD, 463-64). At most, power in the organized group can be described as “the right to do one’s duty” (CRD, 587).

2.2 *Authority achieved in institution.* The organized group solidifies into the institution with the revival of serial alterity among individuals. Under threat of dissolution from without, the members harden into rock-like unity by the sacrifice of their freedom (sovereignty) in exchange for institutional security. (If Sartre’s concept of the group is Rousseauian, his understanding of the institution is Hobbist.) Sartre terms this process “the systematic autodomestication of man by man” (CRD, 585). It generates authority.

The institutional system as exteriority of inertia necessarily refers to *authority* as its reinteriorization; and *authority*, as power over all powers and all thirds via these powers, is itself established by the system as institutional guarantee of institutions. (CRD, 586)

So authority is both the product and the guarantee of institutions. In the language of social psychology which Sartre often employs, authority is the “reinteriorization” of the institution.

Unlike sovereignty, authority is thus derivative. It is a unilateral development of the group’s quasi-sovereignty, i.e., a case of some becoming “more equal than others” in Orwell’s telling phrase. The power of life and death, fraternity-terror, which is a basic determination of sociality for Sartre, *loses its reciprocity* and is centered in one—the leader. The unilateral supplants the reciprocal, coercion (command-obedience) supersedes self-imposed inertia (*mot d’ordre*, oath) : “This permanent and living structure of coercion is a necessary determination of sovereignty as authority” (CRD, 587). Sartre continues

As soon as a regulating third . . . becomes the sworn titular head of the regulating [praxis] as an organized function and this same third receives and

concentrates the group's internal violence as the power to impose his regulation, the revolving quasi-sovereignty of each is immobilized and becomes *authority* as the specific relation of one individual to all. (CRD, 587)

So authority, for Sartre, is essentially *nonreciprocal sovereignty*. It "necessarily rests on inertia and seriality insofar as it is constituted Power" (CRD, 587). Its proper mode of exercise is the *command*, a form of constraint in Sartrean vocabulary. But as Sartre observes, "constraint does not suppress freedom (except by liquidating the oppressed); it makes [freedom] its accomplice by leaving it no choice (*issue*) but obedience" (CRD, 690). This obedience of the institutionalized individual, be he buck private or citizen, is "something like an acceptance" of sovereign authority; but being the "interiorization of the *impossibility of refusing*" (CRD, 604), such obedience constitutes at best a "serial, pseudolegitimacy" (CRD, 609). In fact, Sartre argues, the state, as supreme, institutional authority, is neither legitimate nor illegitimate.<sup>18</sup> The question of legitimacy cannot arise as long as citizens are serialized, he seems to be saying, and to the degree that they are disalienated, the state's authority is to that extent dissolved, much as belief is dissipated by evidence.

2.3 *Varieties of political alterity*. As belief is the epitome of epistemic alterity so *command-obedience* is the type of political nonreciprocity. It derives from the presence of a unilateral mediator who can cut or alter communication among members and transform revolving rights and duties into hierarchical orders which require unconditional compliance. The insuperable sovereign is *other* to each; his command is *volonté autre* (CRD, 593).

The institution, built on authority, i.e., on the command-obedience relationship, oversees numerous forms of social and political alterity which it is in its interest to foster. First of all there is the *bureaucracy*, the natural ally of the state (the institution *par excellence*), embodying a hierarchical order of alienated relationships which Sartre describes as "exteroconditioning of the subordinate multiplicity, distrust and serial terror of one's equals, and annihilation of organisms in obedience to the higher organism" (CRD, 626). Sartre terms this bureaucratic process at all but the highest levels the "mineralization of man."

A more generic type of alterity which the institution exploits is the inert gathering (*rassemblement*) with its serial structure, which forms "the fundamental type of sociality" (CRD, 383). A common form of such gatherings is

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the collective (*le collectif*) exemplified by the TV audience or the users of public services; theirs is a false unity-in-alterity imposed by the material object which they all rely upon. The collective is both the matrix of the group and its grave (CRD, 608).

As forms of alterity, the foregoing imply passive activity and serial impotence. But most radically they presume a condition in which *inert matter mediates* human actions, excluding all but negative reciprocity (struggle, competition). Sartre writes

When human intentions are addressed to us via worked matter, materiality renders them *other*. Inert but indelible, they designate us as *other* than ourselves or our cocitizens. Human reciprocity is broken by the mediation of the thing; and the curdled intention which solicits us inasmuch as we are *other* can have no other structure than that of obligation. (IF, III, 54-55)

This essential link between the mediation of matter and the nonreciprocity of human relationships lies at the heart of Sartre's particular form of anarchism. Political alterity is but a species of that serial otherness originating in the mediation of the practico-inert, where "obligation" (e.g., the demands of the machine or the exigencies of public opinion) excludes free reciprocity. Sartre calls this "the reign of necessity" (CRD, 375) and understands political liberation as entailing the end of such inert mediation.

2.4 *Freedom as liquidation of alterity*. The deep origin of the group, Sartre claims, consists in

The project of taking from worked matter its inhuman power to mediate between men in order to give it to each and all in the community so that the group, inasmuch as it is structured, may regain control of materiality in the practical field (things and collectives) by *free communal praxis*. . . . [This is] the project of removing man from the state of alterity which makes him a product of his product in order to transform him . . . into the product of the group, that is to say—as long as the group is freedom—into his own product. (CRD, 638-39)

The rationale of the group is the recovery of freedom-sovereignty dispersed in serial alterity because of the alienating role assumed by matter in a field of scarcity. The group is not only an instrument but "a mode of existence; it is posited for itself . . . as the free milieu of free human relations." Besides being the most efficient means of controlling material mediation in the context of scarcity, the group is "*absolute end* as pure freedom liberating men from alterity" (CRD, 639). Given that individual praxis is an ab-

straction, at least in the Hegelian sense which Sartre employs, it follows that man is concretely free *only* in the group.

2.5 *Freedom as reciprocity : sociopolitical apocalypse.* In one of the pivotal theses of his later philosophy, Sartre asserts : "The true relation among men is reciprocity which excludes commands properly speaking" (IF, III, 48).<sup>19</sup> Elsewhere he elaborates this claim.

What a man expects from another man, if their relation is human, is defined in reciprocity, for expectation (*l'attente*) is a human act. It cannot be a matter of *passive exigency* between them [except where materiality replaces the living bonds of mediation], for . . . no praxis as such can even formulate an imperative simply because exigency does not enter into the structure of reciprocity. (CRD, 253)

This is why Sartre speaks of invitation rather than demand when describing the evidential situation.<sup>20</sup>

Negatively, the milieu of freedom which the group constitutes is the liquidation of alterity; positively, it is mediated reciprocity, each praxis being *the same* as every other in a common enterprise. "Only reciprocity can produce the free limitation in me of my freedom" (CRD, 479), Sartre argues in a thesis basic to his epistemology as well. Since this mediated reciprocity is a defining characteristic of the group, let us examine that moment when the group arises out of serial alterity.

The group as synthetic enrichment of individual praxeis (CRD, 407) is generated in a qualitative leap from seriality which Sartre terms "apocalypse." He describes the apocalyptic appearance of the group in language used to characterize the evidential situation. Thus he refers to the move from serial alterity to reciprocity among praxeis as "the brusque resurrection of freedom" (CRD, 425) and ascribes it to the functioning of each praxis as mediating and regulating third (person) in every social situation.<sup>21</sup> As in the evidential situation, otherness is not so much denied as *disqualified* through a practical identity wherein each member becomes *the same* as every other (CRD, 530). In a manner which parallels the ego in the face of evidence, "the individual overcomes his common being in order to realize it" (CRD, 472). This is Sartre's understanding of the "word" (*mot d'ordre*) which circulates among group members in the heat of common action.<sup>22</sup> Like evidence which it functionally resembles, the *mot d'ordre* unites without appeal to alienating commands<sup>23</sup> and does so *ab intra*, being reproduced *here* each time by virtue of the common project, even if in fact it originated at a distance (see

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CRD, 409). And as the value of each person is both presumed and enhanced in the evidential situation, so "what is discovered by the group as common is the *singular* individuality of [the agent's] act" (CRD, 472).

Summarizing Sartre's approach to the power/authority question, we can say that authority is a form of "legitimate" power,<sup>24</sup> but that it is so *only* in an inverted-commas sense. Since authority for Sartre is essentially nonreciprocal and alienating, it can never be legitimate in the normative sense which that term usually bears. Authority is the devolution of sovereign power, not its authorization. Because the authority relationship is basically one of command-obedience, the only sociopolitical condition in Sartre's opinion which could possibly claim to create a truly human milieu would be "reciprocity which excludes commands properly speaking," in other words, an anarchist society. Where Plato's suggestion presumed a hierarchical order of truths and laws, i.e., a Cosmos, as the necessary condition for human reciprocity, that is, for communion and friendship (*Gorgias*, 507-508), Sartre's egalitarian ideal leads him to prefer epistemic and political autonomy over submission to rule in the hope that the resultant "reign of freedom" will achieve for all men that reciprocity which Plato valued but which he reserved for the few. The enduring question which Sartre raises anew is whether authority, even in the minimal sense of rule-following, is compatible with human autonomy and mutuality. We are now in a better position to understand why he thinks it is not.

### III. AN END TO AUTHORITY

Sartre once avowed to a Maoist friend: "I have been anti-authoritarian ever since I knew my stepfather."<sup>25</sup> Were our interests biographical, it would be easy to garner evidence of this attitude throughout Sartre's works. But our task is to uncover the conceptual link between the political and epistemic expressions of Sartrean anarchism in his systematic philosophy. In particular, we must account for the *asymmetry* which obtains between epistemological and political "legitimation" in Sartre's system. Evidence converts belief into knowledge,<sup>26</sup> but consent does not change power into authority. We have claimed that Sartre's basic commitment to the value dichotomy, reciprocity/alterity, accounts for his peculiar reversal of the Platonic parallel between politics and knowledge. We can now indicate in detail why this is so.

3.1 *The egalitarian ideal.* The ideal which inspires Sartre's politics and his theory of knowledge is conceived vertically as the *leveling* of hierarchies and

horizontally as the realization of positive *reciprocity*. Extended to the political and epistemic domains, this yields the following schema :

		<i>Political</i>	<i>Epistemological</i>
egalitarian ideal	<i>leveling</i> (vertical) :	dissolution of state; end to politics as a profession	demise of "experts" and of hierarchy of authorities
	<i>reciprocity</i> (horizontal) :	cooperation; persua- sion replaces command	evidence and open- ness remove belief

In the classless society, Sartre claims, the professional politician will be superfluous : "Each man will become mediator of the ensemble" (ORR, 288). In the socialism of abundance the gentle force of persuasion will replace the command-obedience relationship (see ORR, 345). This same ideal reigns epistemologically as well : the vertical alterity of experts' opinions, a form of authority-obedience relation, and the horizontal passive activity of belief cede to the immediacy and reciprocity of the evidential situation. These political and epistemological dimensions coalesce in Sartre's vision of a community of practical conviction and mutual transparency, free of the distorting power of the practico-inert, "where two men will have no more secrets from each other . . . because the subjective life as well as the objective life will be totally exposed to view (*offerte*), given."<sup>27</sup>

From a rationalist like Sartre who has consistently opposed the idea of an unconscious, this picture of a totally self-transparent society is not surprising. In fact there is something more than Marxian, almost Spinozistic, about this ultimate union of insight with freedom from bondage. In Sartre's case, however, both knowledge and freedom are functions of praxis, not contemplation, and the advent of the new society presumes the abolition of material scarcity.

Although it is disputed in political theory whether persuasive argument is contrary to authority, Sartre clearly believes it is.<sup>28</sup> The latter as command-obedience presumes and sustains a necessarily serialized ensemble, frequently manipulated by exteroconditioning; the former is proper to cosovereign praxeis in a face-to-face situation. The one is heteronomous, the other autonomous. Why? Because, as we have seen, Sartre excludes from true reciprocity all forms of *exigency* (of which the paradigm is the command-obedience

relationship of authority properly speaking). He roots all exigencies in the alienating power of the practico-inert.

As with so many appeals to self-evidence, Sartre's own rationalistic claims are open to the counterassertion, *non patet*. While Marx is doubtless correct to underscore the distorting effect of class structure on one's perception of the world, it is not at all clear that this conditioning is unlimited or that, if it is, it does not dissolve the Marxist intuitions in the very same critical acid.<sup>29</sup> Much less is it obvious how the pellucidity which Sartre believes will mark members of the new society is compatible with that radically free praxis which he has always insisted is capable of surprise and unconditional nay-saying. His ideal makes sense only if one reads it as a *countervision* to the stultifying state of contemporary bureaucracy—i.e., as a utopian *als ob*.<sup>30</sup> But this is tantamount to edging Sartrean rationalism with a romantic nimbus.<sup>31</sup>

3.2 *The evidential situation and sociopolitical apocalypse compared.* The prime value implicit in Sartre's egalitarian ideal can be articulated by a summary comparison of the evidential and apocalyptic situations.

3.21 *Evidential situation* (viz., intuition and implicit oath) :

as praxis, decides in a performative sense what it establishes;  
 is a liberating move from serial alterity (belief);  
 realizes free *reciprocity* among praxeis;  
 renders each knower *the same* as every other;<sup>32</sup>  
 is possible only within the group;<sup>33</sup>  
 establishes unity in interiority (over exterior unity of analytical Reason);  
 resurrects freedom from alienation;  
 is *sovereign* praxis.

3.22 *Sociopolitical apocalypse* (viz., *mot d'ordre* and implicit oath) :

as praxis, *effects* what it intends;  
 is a liberating move from serial alterity (*rassemblement*);  
 realizes free *reciprocity* among praxeis;  
 renders each group member *the same* as every other;  
 is possible only within the group;  
 constitutes a unity of interiority (over false, exterior unity of serial gatherings);  
 is the brusque resurrection of freedom;  
 generates *cosovereignty* among praxeis.<sup>34</sup>

3.23 This point by point comparison underscores the common value, *free*,

*reciprocal praxis*, which lends a certain consistency to Sartre's epistemology and to his political and social theory. "Reciprocity" is an amphibious term for Sartre—both descriptive and normative. It depicts that state of mutuality which obtains, if only briefly, in evidential and apocalyptic situations. But it likewise constitutes the norm by which our strivings against alterity of every hue are to be assessed.<sup>35</sup>

3.3 *The Sartrean reversal of the Platonic parallel.* As we have noted, rather than admit with Plato that authority stands to power as knowledge to belief, Sartre argues that the *reverse* is true: authority is alienated power, nonreciprocal sovereignty, in the same way that belief is alienated knowledge and obedience-command. The specific reason why Sartre declines to pursue the Platonic analogy, we said, consists in his conviction that exigency is basically rooted in the practico-inert and that it is excluded from true reciprocity. The more generic source of their differences lies in alternative views of the nature of man, world, and reality overall. We pointed to this contrast earlier; now that we have Sartre's views on evidence and apocalypse juxtaposed, let us reflect on the alternatives at greater length.

Plato sustains the classical *Weltanschauung* of a Cosmos where reason, if unhampered by passion, can guide the chariot of the soul or the ship of state securely to the good life. There is but one goal for man inasmuch as he is man; and just as one would not entrust his voyage to an amateur navigator or his health to a quack, so he should consign the governing of the body politic to *one who knows*, to the expert.<sup>36</sup> Thus Plato can draw parallels between political authority and knowledge because for him ideally authority *is* knowledge and knowledge authority. One could say that there should be no specific difference for Plato between authority and what has come to be called "*an authority*."<sup>37</sup> The distinction between the philosopher-king and the master navigator or cobbler lies in the objects of their respective expertise.

Despite important similarities such as Plato's conviction that the law should not compel until it has attempted to persuade (*Laws*, 719-723), Sartre's post-Rousseauian and Nietzschean world differs sharply from Plato's. It is a universe shot through with distrust of experts and absolute knowledge. It sets greater store on the social and economic conditions for knowledge and freedom. It values the basic moral and political equality of all men and it unabashedly seeks its ultimate criteria of truth and freedom not in the conceptually evident order of timeless forms and relations but among the moral values of *mutuality* and *disalienation*.<sup>38</sup>

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The underlying problem throughout this discussion has been whether mutuality (mutual autonomy) and authority are indeed contraries. The standard interpretation of "authority," which insists they are not, is exemplified by Winch's assertion that "to submit to authority (as opposed to being subjected to power) is not to be subject to an alien will."<sup>39</sup> Sartre's unequivocal denial of this claim is based on what we may term his *command* theory of authority: authority is essentially the imposition of an alien will. Prescinding from the objections which this position occasions by virtue of its affinity to the command theory of law, I should like to conclude with two positive criticisms which seem apt for Sartre's particular thesis.

First we may ask whether Sartre's own concepts of evidence and apocalypse, embodying as they do elements of both *decision* and discovery, necessarily imply his sharp dichotomy between authority and mutual autonomy (cosovereignty). Granted *argumenti causa* that nonreciprocal "sovereignty" is alienating, it seems that some submissions to rules (i.e., to authority in a minimal sense) is essential to the epistemic and political community Sartre advocates. How else can one make sense of that "power of persuasion" which is to supplant coercion in the free society? In a basic, pragmatic sense "respect" for norms is necessary for what has been called variously a "rhetorical community" or a "communication community" (*Kommunikationsgemeinschaft*).<sup>40</sup> These are social and epistemic models quite in accord with Sartre's "sworn group." Their norms are both discovered and established. A form of "oath" preserves the autonomy of free, reciprocal praxis. As long as the object of the oath remains the other freedom(s) and only indirectly the rule itself, the latter can function as a "vehicle of sovereignty" despite its necessarily practico-inert expression in the manner of Sartre's *mot d'ordre*. Then each member can emerge authoritative in the etymological sense of being the *auctor* of the common rule to the extent that each is "the same" as every other.<sup>41</sup>

The unresolved problem is the applicability of such a model to a community which significantly exceeds Plato's limit of 5,040 citizens.<sup>42</sup> This is, of course, *the* question separating the anarchist from his foes. My point is simply that there is need as well as room in Sartre's system for rule-following and for the concept of a right and a wrong way of doing things, i.e., for authority in a minimal sense. Yet once we see how Sartre employs the evidential and apocalyptic situations to synthesize the given and the taken, necessity and freedom, we can reasonably ask whether this relation-

ship may not be extended to larger "communities" of communities as well. Given Sartre's basic thesis of the abolition of material scarcity, his own principles would seem to justify such a chain of reciprocities, if not of "commands properly speaking."

Finally, our opening quotation from Sartre indicates that he considers the similarity between belief and authority to lie in the *otherness* (heteronomy) which each entails. I would contend rather that their common feature is a reliance on *extrinsic* evidence which, when adequate, renders both belief and "obedience" *reasonable*. Since the reason for proffering belief or obedience is not the intrinsic evidence of the proposition or imperative itself but the warrant of the *one who* utters the statement or issues the command, the corresponding act on the part of the agent is one of *trust*, a communication of freedoms which extends *beyond*, but not counter to, the limits of intrinsic evidence. Admittedly, this manner of speaking does not support those cases of absolute authority and blind obedience which some take to be paradigmatic of authority in the strict sense. With Sartre, however, I would simply reject such relations as dehumanizing. Rather than speak of command-obedience, therefore, we should perhaps speak of *fidelity-trust*. My claim is that it is not counter to mutuality, indeed it is one of its highest expressions, to place one's trust in another (not as other, but as "the same," as alter ego), provided only that this be a reasonable act and not a blind or impulsive "leap."

As is often the case with Sartre's examples, he chooses an extreme case as the type for all the rest. If there are forms of alienating belief (Flaubert's, for example, if we accept Sartre's interpretation), it does not follow that *all* belief is of that kind, much less that it need be. What we might call "extrinsically evidential" belief and obedience presume that the other's word is reasonable and its acceptance good—like the "invitation" of evidence or of the *mot d'ordre*. There is nothing here of the "sacrifice of intellect and will" which Sartre and rationalists generally so loudly decry, for the agent maintains his criteria of intrinsic evidence. If the one to be trusted violates these norms, it is possible and advisable to withdraw allegiance. Reciprocity no longer obtains. Indeed, it is difficult to understand how the society which Sartre advocates can exist solely on intrinsically evidential situations. The friendship and communion he prizes are themselves the fruit of fidelity-trust relationships.<sup>43</sup>

In a well-known essay, Hannah Arendt argues that "authority has vanished

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from the modern world."<sup>44</sup> Nowhere among contemporary writers is its absence more conspicuous than in the works of Jean-Paul Sartre. I have attempted to ground his political and epistemic libertarianism in a deep commitment to the primacy of free, reciprocal praxis as the norm for all relations which merit the title human—a stand fully in the tradition of French anarchism going back to Saint-Simone and Proudhon. The truth "which makes you free" for Sartre as for St. John is not a theoretical truth but a praxis. Sartre confirms this personally in his response to the challenge of a young French radical: "You aren't going to say all the same that you are a revolutionary because you wish the truth." Sartre's reply: "I wish the truth because I am a revolutionary, naturally" (ORR, 170).

### NOTES

1 Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Idiot de la famille: Gustave Flaubert de 1821 à 1859*, 3 vols. to date (Paris: Gallimard, 1971-1), I, 163 (hereafter IF with references to volume and page by roman and arabic numerals respectively). All translations throughout this essay, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

2 See the symposium "Authority" by R.S. Peters and Peter Winch, reprinted in *Political Philosophy*, ed. Anthony Quinton (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 98-100.

3 These themes are developed at length in my essay, "Praxis and Vision: Elements of a Sartrean Epistemology," *The Philosophical Forum*, Vol. 8, No. 2. A constant source of ambiguity in the later Sartre consists in his retention of these fundamentally incompatible epistemologies in the *Critique* and *The Family Idiot*.

4 IF, I, 166. "[Belief] is the presence in us of a foreign will, unifying words in an assertoric synthesis which both fascinates us and alienates us to the point that we make it our own will" IF, I, 163.

5 See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique, précédé de Question de méthode*, tome I, *Théorie des ensembles pratiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), especially pp. 306 ff. (hereafter CRD).

6 See CRD, 615-23. Sartre offers two characteristics of exteroconditioning: "the mediating action of the group which conditions each other via all the Others, and everyone's practical fascination with the illusion of totalized seriality" (CRD, 615). The "Hit Parade," which he experienced during a visit to the U.S. after the war, seems to have become paradigmatic of exteroconditioning for him.

7 Actors' performances have everything but "the certitude of the judgment founded on evidence. This last, when expressed, is an invitation to reciprocity; free, it is addressed to the other's freedom. But the actor wants to persuade by contagion" (IF, I, 167). This objection expresses Sartre's general conviction that "praxis is rigorously banished from every [dramatic] production" (IF, I, 168).

8 Sartre characterizes *pensée autre* as "materiality marking thought or, if you prefer, thought associating with (*hantant*) matter without being able to escape" (IF, I, 623). For an illuminating parallel, see the distinction between *compréhension-autre* and *compréhension de l'Autre* (CRD, 722 n.).

9 See CRD, 527

10 The standard analytical definition of knowledge as "justified true belief" is thus self-contradictory in Sartrean terms. For the alterity of "belief" is precisely what "knowledge" excludes.

11 In his shift to a praxis epistemology, Sartre seems to have surrendered the rationalist concept of self-evidence (*veritas index sui*) along with an individualist understanding of the

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evidential situation In the *Critique*, for example, he contrasts the interpretation which analytical and dialectical Reason respectively would offer of scientific understanding and exposition (see CRD, 527-30).

12 This is admittedly a rational reconstruction of a position which Sartre has not systematized. He claims, for example, that "fidelity to logical principles is but a form of fidelity to the oath" (CRD, 504) and that a group's truth and its ethic are not distinct (CRD, 503). Presumably this applies to "rules of evidence" and to what has come to be termed the "ethics of belief" as well; see, e.g., Roderick Chisholm's *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957).

13 Reprinted in *The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre*, 2 vols., ed. Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 2: 57-52; see especially p. 50.

14 "The POWER of a man, to take it unversally, is his present means to obtain some future apparent good" (*Leviathan*, Part I, Ch. 10). For a further precision of this account of power as means, see S.i. Benn, "Hobbes on Power," in *Hobbes and Rousseau*, ed. Maurice Cranston and Richard S. Peters (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1972), especially pp. 206 ff.

15 This is an expression of his "dialectical nominalism" (CRD, 132) which enables him to employ collective predicates without appeal to a collective subject. For the mechanics of this crucial Sartrean move, see my "The Alienating and the Mediating Third in the Social Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre" in *Heirs and Ancestors: Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy*, Vol. VI (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1973), pp. 3-38.

16 "The sole limitation of man's sovereignty over all the Others is simply reciprocity, i.e., the entire sovereignty of one and all over him" (CRD, 588).

17 Describing the imperative "Do that!" within the context of the sworn group, Sartre writes: "'Doing that' is a right that each has over all just as it is a right of all over each; the definition of power, inasmuch as a concrete function particularizes it, consists in its being for each the right to carry out his particular duty" (CRD, 463).

18 The only real legitimacy belongs to the group and rests on sworn faith (see CRD, 609). In fact, Sartre claims that "at the level of the series human multiplicities are completely denied juridical and institutional power by the very structure of their relations of exteriority" (CRD, 609). So even institutional power is a holdover from the group whose devolution gave it birth; originally group praxis, it emerges as institutional praxis-process, interiorized through obedience.

19 In the *Critique* he speaks of "the synthetic bond of reciprocity. . . which is an individualized universal (*universel singularisé*) and the very basis of all human relations" (CRD, 146).

20 He uses similar terms to describe the *aesthetic situation* as well; see my "The Role of the image in Sartre's Aesthetic," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 33, nr. 4 (Summer, 1975), pp. 431-42.

21 This function is discussed at length in my "Mediating and Alienating Third."

22 See CRD, 408. Sometimes translated as "order" or worse as "password" or "watchword," "*mot d'ordre*" is clearly intended by Sartre in an extended sense such as "word" in the expression "the word got around that. . ."—not as denoting a rumor (which would be a form of *pensée-autre*) but as signifying the practical self-understanding of a closely knit group. So we shall leave the expression untranslated.

23 "But the *mot d'ordre* is not obeyed. Who would obey it? And whom [would you obey]? It is nothing but common praxis in a third becoming regulative of itself in me and in all the other thirds in the movement of a totalization which totalizes me and everyone else" (CRD, 408).

24 His most succinct definition of authority characterizes it as "the complex relation of an insuperable third and the common individuals who legitimate his powers by obeying him" (CRD, 594 n.).

25 Philippe Gavi, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Pierre Victor, *On a raison de se révolter* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p. 172 (hereafter ORR).

26 Or, better, *replaces* belief with knowledge since, as we have noted, it is unlikely that Sartre would accept the common analytic definition of "knowledge."

## AN END TO AUTHORITY

27 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations*, 10 vols. to date (Paris: Gallimard, 1947-), 10:142. In the true utopian tradition, Sartre realizes that this requires "a new man" (ORR, 291) the product of "a genuine revolution." He continues

A man must exist entirely for his neighbor who equally must exist entirely for him in order that true social concord be established. That cannot be done today, but I think that it will be realizable as soon as a change in economic, cultural and affective relations among men has been brought about, first of all by the suppression of material scarcity, which is in my view, as I've shown in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, the basis of all past and present antagonisms among men. (*Situations*, 10:144)

28 Hannah Arendt and Robert Paul Wolff would agree with Sartre; see respectively *Between Past and Future*, new ed. enl. (New York: Viking Compass Books, 1968), p. 93, and *In Defense of Anarchism* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970), p. 6. The counterclaim that persuasive argument can itself be a form of authority seems to be implied by Winch (see Quinton, *Political Philosophy*, pp. 102 and 105), and by W.J. Rees (see his "The Theory of Sovereignty Restated" in *Philosophy, Politics, and Society*, 1st series, ed. Peter Laslett [Oxford: Blackwell, 1970], especially pp. 68-69).

29 A question faced from the Althusserian perspective by Göran Therborn in his *Science, Class and Society* (London: New Left Books, 1976).

30 See my "The Use and Abuse of Utopias," *The Modern Schoolman*, 53, nr. 3 (March, 1976), especially pp. 253-60.

31 A project initiated by Iris Murdoch in her *Sartre, Romantic Rationalist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953). It might be more apt to classify the later Sartre a "dialectical rationalist," since this adjective is omnivorous.

32 This sameness is not the substitutability of serial likeness, which Sartre would ascribe to analytical Reason, but the "losing oneself to gain oneself" of the dialectical relation between intuition and oath, analogous to Sartre's description of someone in the act of joining a sworn group; see CRD, 471 ff.

33 If our analysis of Sartre's praxis epistemology is correct, Robinson Crusoe could no more know the truth than he could exist in a state of political autonomy.

34 The *mot d'ordre* expressed in words is worked matter. But far from generating a practico-inert collective, "this thing is the vehicle of sovereignty" (CRD, 409).

35 In an excellent study Pietro Chiodi observes that "the concept of original reciprocity is, perhaps, the most important innovation contained in the *Critique*" (*Sartre and Marxism*, trans. Kate Soper [Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1976], p. 19).

36 See Renford Bambrough's "Plato's Political Analogies," in Laslett, ed., *Philosophy, Politics, and Society*, pp. 98-115.

37 See R.S. Peters in Quinton, ed., *Political Philosophy*, pp. 87-89. Arendt points out that the word and the concept of authority are Roman in origin but that both Plato and Aristotle "tried to introduce something akin to authority into the public life of the Greek polis" (*Between Past and Future*, p. 104).

38 In another "romantic" qualification of his rationalism, Sartre has called for "non-intellectual basis and criteria for the truth" (CRD, 741) so that the worker may free himself from that defense of the status quo entailed by nondialectical thinking.

39 Quinton, ed., *Political Philosophy*, p. 100.

40 For the former see Wayne C. Booth, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 80 and 146-50; and Stephen Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1958) where the notion of rhetorical community is implied by his concept of the "field-dependency" of criteria of arguments (see pp. 30-38). For the related notion of a "communication community" see Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), p. 105.

41 See R.S. Peters in Quinton, ed., *Political Philosophy*, pp. 85-86.

42 A question raised, analyzed, but not resolved by Peter Laslett in his "The Face to Face Society," in Laslett, ed., *Philosophy, Politics, and Society*, pp. 157-84.

43 I develop this fidelity dimension of Sartre's ethic in my "Vision, Responsibility, and Factual Belief in Existential Ethics" forthcoming in the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*.

44 "What is Authority?" reprinted in *Between Past and Future*, p. 91.

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## SARTRE AND MARXIST EXISTENTIALISM

Monika Langer

A recurrent theme in the philosophical literature of the last quarter-century has been the relationship between Sartrean existentialism and Marxism. Much of the discussion has centered on the unorthodox nature of Sartre's Marxism as presented in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, and on the connection between that work and his earlier *Being and Nothingness*. Thomas Flynn's book *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism* constitutes one of the most interesting recent contributions to the debate. Flynn contends that "Sartre's is an authentic, though 'revisionist,' Marxism" which, in combining "salient features" of existentialism and Marxism, incorporates "the morally responsible individual into the sociohistorical context."<sup>1</sup> My essay takes issue with Flynn's position on the grounds that Sartre's Marxism as articulated in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is basically at odds with authentic Marxism—whether classical or revisionist. I contend that the lately published second volume of the *Critique* retains the fundamental features of the first, and hence does not significantly alter the nature of Sartre's Marxism. Despite my disagreement with his interpretation of Sartrean Marxism, Flynn's focus on responsibility<sup>2</sup> reopens for me the intriguing question of whether Sartrean existentialism can provide the requisite foundation of freedom for Marxism.

My essay argues that Marxism indeed requires a philosophical foundation,<sup>3</sup> not because it *lacks* freedom—as Sartre claimed—but because it *presupposes* that “free, conscious activity is man’s species character” and that “estranged labour estranges the *species* from man.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, Marxism, which bases itself on an unclarified conception of freedom, must spell out and clarify its own conception. Accordingly, I will reconsider Sartre’s own intricate argument for the freedom of human reality (in *Being and Nothingness*). That argument seems to supply precisely the kind of philosophical basis that Marxism so sorely lacks—all the more so as Sartre himself anticipates and counters numerous objections. A closer scrutiny, however, reveals flaws that render Sartre’s argument ultimately untenable. Yet those flaws are fruitful in disclosing a possible corresponding weakness in Marxism and underlining the need for an adequate phenomenological analysis of freedom. While Sartre’s alleged Marxism and his existentialism are unable to provide the necessary philosophical grounding for Marxism, the reconsideration of his position sheds light on what remains to be done if Marxism is ever to have a genuinely firm footing.

At the time he was writing the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre thought this work provided the necessary foundation for Marxism:

It is *inside* the movement of Marxist thought that we discover a flaw of such a sort that despite itself Marxism tends to eliminate the questioner from his investigation and to make of the questioned the object of an absolute Knowledge. . . . And to come to the most important point, *labor*, as man’s reproduction of his life, can hold no meaning if its fundamental structure is not to pro-ject. . . . Existentialism, too, wants to situate man in his class and in the conflicts which oppose him to other classes, starting with the mode and the relations of production. But it can approach this “situation” in terms of *existence*—that is, of comprehension. It makes itself the questioned and the question as questioner. . . . Thus the comprehension of existence is presented as the human foundation of Marxist anthropology . . . the foundation of Marxism, as a historical, structural anthropology, is man himself inasmuch as human existence and the comprehension of the human are inseparable. . . . Marx’s own Marxism, while indicating the dialectical opposition between knowing and being, contained implicitly the demand for an existential foundation for the theory. Furthermore, in order for notions like reification and alienation to assume their full meaning, it would have been necessary for the questioner and the questioned to be made one. . . . It is necessary that the questioner understand how the questioned—that is, himself—*exists his alienation*, how he surpasses it and is alienated in this very surpassing.<sup>5</sup>

Fifteen years after the publication of its first volume, however, Sartre himself acknowledged that “the *Critique* . . . is *not* a Marxist work” and that he had been mistaken in regarding existentialism as “*only an enclave of Marxism*”: “It cannot be an enclave, because of my idea of freedom, and therefore it is ultimately a separate philosophy. I do not at all think that ultimately this philosophy is Marxist. It cannot ignore Marxism. . . . But now I do not consider it at all a Marxist philosophy.”<sup>6</sup> At the same time, Sartre noted the lack of freedom that “would be on the same level, a mixture of theory and practice, as Marxism—a philosophy in which theory serves practice, but which takes as its starting point the freedom that seems to me to be missing in Marxist thought.”<sup>7</sup> Sartre was correct in contending that Marx’s own Marxism required a foundation, and in realizing that the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* “is really *non-Marxist*.” He erred, however, in maintaining that the *Critique* “is not opposed to Marxism.”<sup>8</sup> Before reconsidering whether an appreciation of “the questioner” can supply the requisite foundation of freedom for Marxism, we must note the major factors that disqualify the *Critique* for that task.

Ronald Aronson points out that it is imperative that the first volume of Sartre’s *Critique* be reconsidered “in light of the project as a whole.”<sup>9</sup> By the same token, Merleau-Ponty’s scathing criticisms of Sartre’s pre-1955 philosophy must be recalled in any such reassessment, for Sartre almost certainly had Merleau-Ponty’s strictures in mind while writing the *Critique*. As Flynn noted in “Merleau-Ponty and the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*,” it is impossible to prove that Sartre was in fact responding to Merleau-Ponty’s attack contained in the latter’s *Adventures of the Dialectic*; nevertheless, the nature of the two philosophers’ personal relationship and the substance of their respective texts make such a supposition reasonable.<sup>10</sup> Aronson, going beyond Flynn, argues that once one moves “into Sartre’s and Merleau-Ponty’s intellectual-political universe of the 1950’s, it is impossible *not* to read the *Critique* as a reply to the challenge of Merleau-Ponty.” As Aronson explains, that challenge is highly complex, for Merleau-Ponty sought to disclose the inadequacies of Sartre’s ontology and politics, while himself criticizing Marxism from a “post-Marxist” stance. According to Merleau-Ponty, Marxism was itself fatally flawed philosophically and had in any case been invalidated by history. Aronson points out that in response, Sartre distinguished “dogmatic dialectic” from “critical dialectic” and employed the latter to make comprehensible why praxis had become divorced from theory in Stalinism. Further, Sartre embarked on an inquiry into history as a “totalization without a totalizer.” Not only did Sartre’s

monumental project remain unfinished, but its very formulations of the dialectic displayed a fundamental dualism. Aronson argues that the actual historical separation of theory from praxis left Sartre without "the basis for thinking his way beyond the dualism at the heart of his thought." Certainly, as Aronson points out, the problem of the gap between philosophical reflection and active politics is not Sartre's problem alone; and the limitations of his project do not prevent its being a remarkable achievement.<sup>11</sup> Yet it does seem to me that the dualism in Sartre's ontology, as it manifests itself in his *Critique*, precludes the work's fulfilling its intended purpose of providing a philosophical foundation for Marxism. In order to reassess the *Critique*, it will be useful to recall in some detail a number of Merleau-Ponty's earlier objections.

In *Adventures of the Dialectic* (French original published 1955), Merleau-Ponty contended that despite appearances to the contrary, Sartre's philosophy lacked any genuine intersubjectivity and interworld and, hence, any genuine appreciation of the real nature of action and history. According to Merleau-Ponty: "In Sartre there is a plurality of subjects but no intersubjectivity"; "there is no hinge, no joint or mediation, between myself and the other"; "there is an encounter rather than a common action because, for Sartre, the social remains the relationship of 'two individual consciousnesses' which look at each other"; "commitment in Sartre's sense is the negation of the link between us and the world that it seems to assert; or rather Sartre tries to make a link out of a negation"; for Sartre it is a question of "either him or me."<sup>12</sup> Merleau-Ponty acknowledged that

Sartre, however, is not unaware of the historical field in which the revolution, and consequently all Marxist politics, is established. The apparent paradox of his work is that he became famous by describing a middle ground . . . between consciousness and things—the root in *Nausea*, viscosity or situation in *Being and Nothingness*, here [*The Communists and Peace with A Reply to Claude Lefort*] the social world—and that nonetheless his thought is in revolt against this middle ground and finds there only an incentive to transcend it and to begin again *ex nihilo* this entire disgusting world.<sup>13</sup>

That Sartrean world, alleged Merleau-Ponty, is one in which "whether as a permanent spectacle or as a continued creation, the social is in any case before consciousness and is constituted by them." Thus, "Sartre's effort to annex history to his philosophy of freedom and of the other" means that, for him, history "is a history of projects"; "history and revolution are nothing but a pact of thought or of wills . . . it is con-

sciousness which gives meaning." In Merleau-Ponty's assessment, "what continues to distinguish Sartre from Marxism, even in recent times, is therefore his philosophy of the *cogito*. Men are mentally attached to history."<sup>14</sup> In short,

the social can enter [Sartre's] philosophy of the *cogito* only by way of the *alter ego* . . . the other can have the status of a self only by taking it away from me, and I can recover it only by reacting to the magic of the gaze with the counter-magic of pure action. . . . Although the enlarged *cogito*, the philosophy of For-Others, does not confine itself to the perspective of self on self, it is inside this perspective that it must introduce what puts this position into question. The social never appears openly; it is sometimes a trap, sometimes a task, sometimes a menace, sometimes a promise, sometimes behind us as a self-reproach, sometimes in front of us as a project. In any case, it is never perceived or lived by man except as incompleteness and oppression, or in the obscurity of action. It is the absolute of the subject who remakes himself when he incorporates the point of view of others, which he was dragging along behind him like a hardship. . . . With Sartre, as with the anarchists, the idea of oppression always dominates that of exploitation.<sup>15</sup>

Sartre's insistence on depicting things through "the eyes of the least-favored" tends to obscure the dominance of the idea of oppression over that of exploitation in his philosophy, noted Merleau-Ponty. The latter cautioned that centering on "the gaze of the least-favored . . . can ground any kind of politics," and that Sartre effectively subordinates "doing to seeing."<sup>16</sup> Sartrean philosophy lacks "the landscape of praxis" in which "my tasks are presented to me, not as objects or ends, but as reliefs and configuration," a world in which action fully "inhabits its field." Instead, Sartre reduces "history and the social . . . to a series of instantaneous views"; common action collapses into invention on the part of a few, with complicity on the part of the rest. Sartrean praxis is tantamount to continual intervention in history, rather than being "an activity inmanent in the object of history" as stipulated by Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*. For Sartre "we are what we contrive to be and, as for everything else, we are as responsible for it as if we had done it"; moreover, our de facto complicity "is always for the worse."<sup>17</sup>

Thus, Sartrean freedom remains fleshless "and tends toward violence"; it initially "presents itself trapped and powerless. . . . It is as if at each moment everything that has made us, everything from which we benefit, and everything which will result from our life were entered into our account. . . . To live is to wake up bound like Gulliver at Lilliput." Since "we are responsible for everything before everyone as if

we had done it with our own hands," "our relationship to a world already there" is violence; and our attempt to break out of "the original trap" will likewise "be violence"—this time, that violence is a matter of "conquest."<sup>18</sup> History thus understood is devoid of objective meaning—or, rather, "what one calls 'objective meaning' is the aspect taken by one of these fundamental choices in the light of another, when the latter succeeds in imposing itself." History becomes "a melodrama" in which "there is only a single monotonous fight, ended and begun at each moment, with no acquisition, no truces, no areas of abatement." Society, according to such a view, is rife with "rivalry" and "false fraternity"; it is the leader who confers meaning on the situation and "the path chosen is the only one possible and is *a fortiori* the best." The relationship "between the proletariat and the militants, between the militant and his leaders . . . is literally an identification"; nonetheless, "the workers' unity is always to be remade . . . they have not many more ties among themselves than with the bourgeoisie, and the problem is to erase by means of the class Other and through struggle the ineffaceable otherness of the individual Other." By force of will, the militant "molds or manipulates" the proletariat.<sup>19</sup>

Merleau-Ponty conceded that Sartre's "analyses have the benefit of helping one understand how backward forms of sociability and the cult of the leader have re-emerged even in communism," but pointed out that they leave us "far from Marxism." In fact, "the 'objective' critique of capital hardly enters into Sartre's study. Inside an immediate or moral relationship of persons, he deliberately focuses on those that capitalism ruins." Further, "he never evokes the basic Marxist hope of resolution in *true* action, that is to say, action fitted to internal relations of the historical situation, which await nothing but action to 'take,' to constitute a form in movement." In "this substantial action . . . which, in its culmination, is called revolution," there is no imposition of "impalpable" meaning on blind being—"there is neither pure authority nor pure obedience." Such true action is not Sartrean "pure action, which is to say, force." Merleau-Ponty concluded emphatically that "certainly [Sartre's] philosophy is the opposite of Marx's."<sup>20</sup>

Although it was not only the Sartrean denial of an interworld that led Merleau-Ponty to this conclusion—as is evident from the foregoing presentation of his criticisms—the latter's clearest pronouncements regarding that particular issue should be noted:

Marx . . . thought there were relationships between persons "mediated by things." . . . For Marx there was, and for Sartre there is not, a

coming-to-be of meaning in institutions. History is no longer for Sartre, as it was for Marx, a mixed milieu, neither things nor persons, where intentions are absorbed and transformed and where they decay but are sometimes also reborn and exacerbated, tied to one another and multiplied through one another; history [for Sartre] is made of criminal intentions or virtuous intentions and, for the rest, of acceptances which have the value of acts.<sup>21</sup>

Merleau-Ponty cautioned that the recent Sartre “has not gotten any closer to Marx” despite his apparent distance “from his [original] dichotomy between things and men.” Unlike for Marx, “for Sartre, the social whole never starts moving by itself, never yields more movement than it has received from ‘inassimilable’ and ‘irreducible’ consciousnesses.” In the Sartrean world, any “escape from equivocality” can be brought about only “through an absolute initiative” whereby subjects transcend the weight of the social whole.<sup>22</sup>

Any endeavor to distill “the ‘essence’ of Marxism” is “perilous” indeed, as Flynn notes;<sup>23</sup> yet Merleau-Ponty’s criticisms highlight fundamental features whose absence spells a distortion—rather than a development—of Marx’s own Marxism. Already in 1946 Merleau-Ponty had argued that for “authentic Marxism . . . everything has a meaning. . . . In the movement of history, man, who has alienated himself for the benefit of his fetishes and has been drained of his very substance, regains possession of himself and of the world.”<sup>24</sup> Emphasizing that “*for Marx, the vehicle of history and the motivating force of the dialectic . . . is concrete human intersubjectivity,*” Merleau-Ponty had ruled out any definition of the human being as consciousness. He had argued that Marxism recognizes the interior tie between a society’s specific “ideological formations” and “the way this society has set up its basic relationship with nature.” For Marxism, “it is a matter of understanding that the bond which attaches man to the world is at the same time his way to freedom.”<sup>25</sup>

In *Adventures of the Dialectic*, we must not forget, Merleau-Ponty was saying farewell to Marxism. Nevertheless, he reiterated that a philosophy that despite appearances to the contrary, lacks any genuine interworld and intersubjectivity, is basically at odds with Marxism. As we saw above, the latter’s incompatibility with Sartre’s philosophy centered on the following features of Sartrean thought: emphasis on oppression rather than exploitation and, hence, relatively little critique of capital; focus on the encounter of rival individual consciousness (moreover, usually the least-favored) whose self-assertion requires a negating transcendence of—or, at best, false fraternity with—the other; reduction of

social life and history to projects constituting a melodramatic fight with no real hope of resolution in common action; portrayal of praxis as violent response to initial entrapment and as incessant intervention in history; predominance of invention by a few, with pure compliance and burdensome complicity for the rest; prevalence of spectacle, instantaneous views, and the pact of thought or wills; lack of any agency on the part of the social whole, other than the movement imparted by inassimilable consciousness—in short, lack of that *genuinely* “mixed milieu” which *is* history for Marxism.

Does the *Critique* meet Merleau-Ponty’s objections, or does it in fact manifest the same fundamental features that occasioned this sharp attack on Sartre’s pre-1955 philosophy? Sartre himself indirectly shed some light on that question in the 1975 interview to which I alluded earlier. When asked whether he had ever abandoned phenomenology, Sartre replied in the negative and added: “I have never thought as a Marxist, not even in the *Critique de la raison dialectique*.”<sup>26</sup> Later in the interview, in response to the question “Can one consider that there is an interworld in your philosophy?” Sartre said: “I admit neither that I have the same philosophy as Merleau-Ponty nor that there is this element of interworld.” He went on to say that the difference between Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy and his own had to do with “a fundamental incompatibility” rather than a simple misunderstanding:

I am not much of a continuist; the in-itself, the for-itself, and the intermediary forms . . . that is enough for me. For Merleau-Ponty, there is a relation to being that is very different, a relation in the very depths of oneself. . . . I do not see any reason to speak of intersubjectivity once subjectivities are separated. Intersubjectivity assumes a communion that almost reaches a kind of identification, in any case a unity. . . . I see the separation but I do not see the union.<sup>27</sup>

In the first volume of his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre argues that from the beginning of history up to the present, humans have found themselves in a situation of scarcity experienced as need. All social structures are rooted in this situation. In a field of scarcity, each individual regards all others as rivals whose presence prevents there being enough for oneself. Compromise is the only feasible solution, given this mutual hostility. Prompted by fear of the others’ violence, each agrees to a mutual limitation of freedom and to collaboration—with its accompanying division of labor—aimed at the joint elimination of scarcity. This collaboration requires the dissolution of the “series,” which is an inert, loose aggregate of individuals who all have the same

aim but lack any collective purpose. When confronted with an external enemy posing a common danger that the individual as such cannot counter, all members of the series recognize that their only hope for survival lies in common action. This recognition, which transforms each one from serial “Other” into “third party,” signals the formation of the “group-in-fusion,” as all simultaneously direct themselves toward a common project. Each member interiorizes the emerging integration, and the latter spontaneously finds expression in a common praxis. The joint opposition to the perceived enemy takes the form of revolution. As soon as the revolutionary tension abates, however, the newly constituted group is in danger of relapsing into seriality. Further, once the immediate danger from the external foe recedes, the group’s members become aware of the potential menace from within their own ranks. To counter this perceived internal threat to the group, the members pledge to limit their own freedom voluntarily, so as to work together instead of destroying one another. To forestall the others’ betrayal, each freely consents to the institutionalization of terror, thus authorizing the exercise of violence against anyone (including oneself) who threatens to break the group’s paradoxical solidarity. For Sartre, in short, the original situation is one of conflict caused by scarcity: individuals encounter each other as rivals in a field of scarcity, and their apprehension of a common menace leads to the formation of a group whose continuing cohesion after the revolutionary moment rests on the threat of violence against defectors. Individuals can continue to work together only in what increasingly becomes a hierarchical structure reinforced by terror. Since it is unclear whether, and how, scarcity can ever be eliminated, it remains correspondingly unclear whether oppression can ever be overcome.<sup>28</sup>

We can see already that the basic argument of *Critique I* retains the traits that rendered Sartre’s pre-1955 philosophy incompatible with Marxism. The primacy of scarcity—to be considered in more detail below—mystifies the Marxist contention that a *society establishes* its fundamental relationship with nature and that *exploitation* characterizes contemporary social formations. Featuring the encounter of mutually threatening individuals whose fear of each other gives rise to an uneasy pact institutionalizing terror, Sartre’s account remains irreconcilable with Marxism. The section on “the third,” which presents one of the most arresting descriptions in *Critique I*, shows just how firmly Sartre remained committed to his earlier philosophizing despite appearances to the contrary. The situation depicted centers—typically—on *looking* and provides an instantaneous view of two least-favored individuals. The “concrete historical bond of interiority,” which Sartre intended to reveal

through this particular situation, explicitly involves *negation*—more specifically, mutual robbery and repulsion. Looking down from a window, Sartre sees a road mender and a gardener who are both busily working on either side of a wall and are unaware of each other's presence. It is the *passive viewer's* need to *project* himself through the two workers whom his look *confronts*, in order to *distinguish* their ends from his own, which prompts him to realize his membership in a particular society. Moreover, the two workers' reality affects him insofar as "it is *not* [his] reality." He "[sees] the *two people* both as objects situated among other objects in the *visual field* and as prospects of escape" who *rob* him "of an aspect of the real" and reduce him to "a living object" in turn. Their unity is predicated on reciprocal *limitation* and *deprivation*, on "seeing what the Other does not see"; it is the third's perception that mediates "between [the] two molecules." The "mutual theft," the "reciprocal negation" of the two manual workers, spells a profound "complicity against" the intellectual spectator. In short, here "the only true bond is negation."<sup>29</sup> As in *Being and Nothingness*, so in *Critique I* Sartre insists on the ineradicability of this negation: "it is impossible to exist amongst men without their becoming objects both for me and for them through me, without my being an object for them . . . the foundation of the human relation as the immediate and perpetual determination of everyone by the Other and by all . . . is simply *praxis*."<sup>30</sup>

Sartre does, it is true, employ crucial Marxist notions in his description of the mediating third. Thus he notes that the gardener is working on "bourgeois property," that the observing intellectual rediscovers "class struggles," that "the worker produces himself through his work," that *praxis* always arises "at a definite moment of History and on the basis of determinate relations of production."<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, Sartre's philosophy remains as remote from Marxism as it was at the time Merleau-Ponty penned his incisive criticisms. By then, the latter had himself abandoned Marxism in favor of "a noncommunist left," convinced as he now was that revolution is inherently doomed to failure, that the Marxist notion of a self-suppressing class precludes self-criticism, and that the idea of a dialectic rooted in "pre-existing relationships such as they are in things" renders Marxism dogmatic and germinates oppressions.<sup>32</sup> Sartre, likewise, was to reject the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat; yet, in his case, that dismissal was not to involve a farewell to Marxism—at least, not in his own eyes. On the contrary, as we know, while Merleau-Ponty was definitively taking his leave of it, Sartre was considering himself to be more firmly aligned than ever with Marxism. However, this in no way renders Merleau-

Ponty's criticisms invalid. The core of the fundamental incompatibility of Sartre's philosophy with that of Marx lies in the fact that Sartre never managed to let go of his Cartesian premises. In *Jean-Paul Sartre—Philosophy in the World*, Aronson explains why Sartre's account in the *Critique* remained so "patently unhistorical [and] unsocial."<sup>33</sup> The crux of the problem is Sartre's fundamental assumption of "isolated individual *praxis*," which precludes his arriving at historical and social reality. Aronson correctly points out that the simple multiplication of separated individuals—as in Sartre's leap from one to three (intellectual, road mender, gardener)—cannot yield social relations. Such an approach distorts individuality and human activity by failing to recognize that any individual can *be* such only as part of a particular society in which each one's activity implies that of all others. Not surprisingly, the second volume of the *Critique* similarly fails to show "how a *multiplicity* of hostile or unrelated *praxes* cohere . . . even at their most penetrating, the analyses of the *Critique* remain wholly within the pre-existing limits of Sartre's thought."<sup>34</sup> Once again, fundamental sociality is conspicuously absent, while rivalry and conflict—everywhere conditioned by scarcity—continue to occupy center stage. Sartre's intriguing description of a boxing match will serve to highlight the extent to which *Critique II*, like *Critique I*, is fundamentally at odds with Marxism.

In *Critique II* as in *Critique I*, Sartre begins with mutually opposed individual *praxes* and—unsuccessfully—seeks to show how a plurality of such irreducibly conflicting *praxes* composes a synthetic unity. The first concrete study in the second volume is particularly significant insofar as it not only sets the tone for the remainder of the work but also provides its clearest expression of those features that Merleau-Ponty, though himself no longer a Marxist, correctly condemned as incompatible with Marx's philosophy. Like the road mender and gardener in the previous volume, the boxers Sartre now depicts belong, typically, to the least-favored segment of society. The physical violence each boxer inflicts on the other is, according to Sartre, their response to the perceived powerlessness of their initial status in society. Sartre points out that the boxers' managers exploit this situation for the sake of profit, and that "boxing is an economic enterprise."<sup>35</sup> He notes that most boxers come from the working class and have experienced "the violence of oppression, of exploitation" all their lives. Having interiorized this violence, they attempt to escape from their oppressive condition by venting their anger in aggression against one of their own class. While a few champions succeed in fleeing their class, most boxers do not significantly improve their

situation by agreeing to sell their violence in exchange for wages. This *pact* means, moreover, that the “liberating power” of these workers becomes alienated in the very marketing of their bodies, for the rules governing boxing ensure that the combatants’ explosive violence simultaneously “unleashes and derealizes itself” in becoming a spectacle.<sup>36</sup>

This appeal to Marxist notions (such as the working class, exploitation, alienation, capital) unfortunately does not signal a Marxist study of boxing, any more than Sartre’s use of such notions in his discussion of “the third” indicated genuine compatibility with Marx’s philosophy in *Critique I*. It is true that Sartre places the boxing match within a larger socioeconomic system and emphasizes the boxer’s desire to succeed economically (by winning the match, the championship, and thus leaving their socioeconomic class). Nonetheless, oppression still takes precedence over exploitation in Sartre’s presentation. As in *Critique I*, the focus is ultimately on the hostile encounter of individuals whose self-assertion necessitates negating the other—indeed, Sartre stresses that the boxers “find their own life only in the destruction of the other’s life,” and that they reproduce the regime’s social structure in their conduct.<sup>37</sup> Given Sartre’s insistence that the boxing match not only retotalizes all matches but also publicly incarnates “*all* conflict,” we have here the graphic reduction of history and social life to a melodramatic fight. Nor should it be thought that Sartre’s reference to workers’ “liberating power” and “will to unite against exploitation” indicates any genuine hope of resolving the conflict through joint action. Sartre contends in *Critique II*, as he did in *Critique I*, that conflicts—be they “single fights” or “social struggles”—“are *all* conditioned by scarcity, negation of man by the Earth interiorizing itself as negation of man by man.”<sup>38</sup> Describing the universe “as field of scarcity,” Sartre maintains that within this framework relations are “fundamentally antagonistic” and that struggles “represent the very way in which men live scarcity in their perpetual movement to go beyond it.”<sup>39</sup> Although he acknowledges that ours is only one history among all possible histories, and that it is impossible to demonstrate a priori “that all possible histories must be conditioned by scarcity,” Sartre claims that any history free of scarcity (whether it be scarcity of products, tools, titles, or humans) “is as unknown to us as that of another species living on another planet.”<sup>40</sup> These alleged limitations to our knowledge and affirmations effectively dash Marxism’s basic hope for a positive human coexistence.

Sartre implicitly equates action with continual *intervention* in history, by focusing on the two boxers’ ferocious effort to break free of the oppressive condition into which both have been born. Their competition

for titles constitutes a *spectacle* which supplies an instantaneous view and involves a *pact*, of wills. Further, the boxers *invent* their responses to each other, while the onlookers—who form the vast majority—become accomplices. So total is the spectators' complicity that (according to Sartre) this collective "participates" in the incarnation of violence—and even "*produces the boxers.*" In observing the boxers' fight, the public simultaneously becomes unified into a group and torn "full of holes" by the bets which "transform each neighbor into an adversary of his neighbor or (if they wager on the same fighter) into brothers-in-arms."<sup>41</sup> Any such unity is, of course, extremely unstable, and, as in Sartre's earlier work, it is predicated on the rivalry of mutually opposed individuals who remake themselves by a negating transcendence of the Other. Moreover, Sartre continues to insist on the oath taking and fraternity-terror he had described in *Critique I*. Here, as there, he tries to unify mutually adversarial individual projects; yet he fails to see that his Cartesian starting point still precludes any such unification.<sup>42</sup> Thus he distorts the *positive* awareness of social existence that was so essential to Marx's philosophy. The "indissoluble unity of the human and the anti-human," which Sartre claims exists "even outside all alienation," is destructive (rather than constitutive) of that "mixed milieu" in which—according to Marx—"nature [exists] . . . as a *bond* with *man* . . . as the *foundation* of his own *human* existence."<sup>43</sup> Unlike for Marx, for Sartre there is no "*genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man—[no] true resolution of the strife . . . between objectification and self-confirmation . . . between the individual and the species."<sup>44</sup> For Marxism, Sartre's *Critique* is a profound distortion of both our actual and our potential situation.

Earlier, I noted that in both volumes of his *Critique* Sartre insists that scarcity conditions all conflicts. This insistence on scarcity plays a central part in his distortion of Marxism. Sartre himself readily admitted, when questioned about his overemphasis on scarcity, that this notion "is not Marxist thought. Marx did not think that primitive man or feudal man lived under the rule of scarcity."<sup>45</sup> In the *Critique*, Sartre castigates Marx (and Engels) for failing to stress scarcity; yet Marx himself emphatically rejected such emphasis, alleging that "abstract and contradictory notions like scarcity and abundance" are useless for understanding the class struggle.<sup>46</sup> In fact, for Marxism such notions mystify that struggle by obscuring the exploitation that underlies it. Why, then, does Sartre make scarcity central? I suggest that the answer is to be found in his continuing adherence—appearances to the contrary notwithstanding—to the philosophy of freedom elaborated in *Being and Nothingness*. There Sartre had

argued that the apprehension of *lack*—the nihilating rupture with plenitude—is constitutive of the very being of human reality. In the *Critique*, Sartre attempts to annex history to this ontological freedom by recasting lack as scarcity. As William McBride has pointed out, “it would be difficult for readers of the *Critique* to exaggerate the prominence of its role in Sartre’s account.”<sup>47</sup> Although he was referring to Volume I, McBride’s point applies equally to Volume II. The term *scarcity* is inherently vague, in the *Critique* Sartre identified the overcoming of alienation with the unqualified elimination of scarcity, and the inherent impossibility of achieving the latter effectively ruled out the attainment of a genuinely socialist society.<sup>48</sup>

Klaus Hartmann, too, has argued persuasively that “Sartre’s principle of scarcity merits only dubious theoretical status,” and that “the theory of the *Critique* deprives itself of acceptable social solutions by dint of its very theoretical foundations; its lack of ultimate affirmativity is a function of these foundations.”<sup>49</sup> The latter consist of highly abstract principles centering around the notions of scarcity, rivalry, otherness, the third, and the practico-inert. These principles preclude any durable affirmative communion or union and prevent the nonantagonistic nascent group (the “*groupe en fusion*”) from ever becoming more than a fleeting phenomenon. As Hartmann argued, Sartre moreover submerges “the economic specificity of alienation” in his nexus of negative principles.<sup>50</sup> Like McBride, Hartmann was commenting on the first volume of the *Critique*. It is clear, however, that his argument holds for the second volume as well.

Marxism, unlike Sartre’s *Critique*, posits the original situation as one of cooperation rather than confrontation and emphasizes the socio-economic origins of the subsequent historical antagonisms. The division of labor initially occurs quite spontaneously, and it is tribes or families, rather than individuals, who encounter each other on an independent footing. Far from being rooted in an inevitable scarcity and in the very nature of human activity, alienation arises from the fact that some human beings appropriate the means of production, thereby putting themselves in a position to control the others’ labor power. The relationship between employer and worker is based on the former’s desire to make a profit, rather than any deliberate will to negate the other’s freedom. Marxism very carefully distinguishes between alienation and objectification, whereas the *Critique* implicitly collapses that distinction.<sup>51</sup> In acting to satisfy their needs, so Sartre argues, humans work upon inert matter and initiate a process that strikes back at them as an alien force. Marxism, by contrast, emphasizes that only under conditions of exploita-

tion does humans' objectified activity become an alien force that turns against them. Those conditions can, and must, be eliminated through the abolition of the entire system of production and exchange that brought them into existence. Sartre is unable to offer any such solution to the problem of alienation, given the ineradicability of human need, the *de facto* existence of others, the apparent inevitability of scarcity, and the inescapable ossification of all revolutionary activity.<sup>52</sup> No matter how intriguing, Sartre's *Critique* thus clashes with Marxism and cannot possibly provide its foundation.

The notion of freedom lies at the core of Marxism; yet unfortunately the meaning and status of freedom are not at all clear. Marx himself appealed to "human status and dignity" for labor and the worker, in calling for "universal human emancipation."<sup>53</sup> By "human status and dignity," Marx seems to mean our "spiritual essence, [our] *human being*"; and this in turn seems to hinge on the contention that, unlike animals, we do not *coincide* with our "life-activity" but rather are *conscious* of it. The *human being* is thus a being *for itself*; and only because of this is it "a free being." What distinguishes it from other species—its "species character"—is therefore "free, conscious activity":

The whole character of a species—its species character—is contained in the character of its life-activity; and free, conscious activity is man's species character. . . . The animal is immediately identical with its life-activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is *its life-activity*. Man makes his life-activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has conscious life-activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges. Conscious life-activity distinguishes man immediately from animal life-activity. It is just because of this that he is a species being. Or rather, it is only because he is a species being that he is a conscious being, i.e., that his own life is an object for him. Only because of that is his activity free activity. Estranged labor reverses this relationship, so that it is just because man is a conscious being that he makes his life-activity, his *essential* being, a mere means to his *existence* . . . in degrading spontaneous, free, activity, to a means, estranged labor makes man's species life a means to his physical existence. . . .

But man is not merely a natural being: he is a *human* natural being. That is to say, he is a being for himself. Therefore he is a *species being*, and has to confirm and manifest himself as such both in his being and in his knowing.<sup>54</sup>

These words were written in 1843–44. Over the next forty years, Marx does not give any argument in support of these claims. In fact, in reiterating the fundamental distinction between humans and animals in

*Capital*, Marx explicitly makes that distinction a *presupposition* of his critical analysis of capitalist production: "We pre-suppose labor in a form that stamps it as exclusively human."<sup>55</sup> Marx notes that whereas "mere" animals operate purely instinctively, humans labor purposively. Thus the latter imagine the product to be made, subordinate their will to the *modus operandi* for its construction, and by doing so realize a purpose of their own. The more distasteful the task, the closer must be their attention in carrying it out.<sup>56</sup> Purpose, imagination, will, and attention have to do with *consciousness*, surely; hence, the crux of Marx's contrast between animals and humans is unchanged. Our very being as humans seems to hinge on the freedom that is constitutive of noncoincidence, that is, consciousness, being for itself—in short, "spontaneous, free, activity." Ontological freedom thus appears to be Marx's pivotal presupposition in unmasking capitalism and calling for an end to exploitation and alienation.

A presupposition can always be challenged; consequently, Marx's basic assumption concerning the being of humans renders his sustained critique of capitalist society at least somewhat dubious. Ironically, the non-Marxist and earlier Sartre of *Being and Nothingness* may hold more promise for solving this problem. Sartre's early philosophy could conceivably come to the rescue. The foregoing has, I hope, revealed a rather striking similarity between Marx's claims regarding the "human being" and Sartre's claims in *Being and Nothingness*. Unlike Marx, however, Sartre provides an intricate argument to support those claims—rather than leaving them simply as presuppositions.

It seems to me that the whole of *Being and Nothingness* constitutes a detailed argument for humans' "original, ontological freedom."<sup>57</sup> Our very ability to question—in the everyday sense of the word—reveals that freedom defines our existence as humans, contends Sartre. The crux of his argument is that all questioning presupposes the noncoincidence of the questioner and the questioned—the detaching, "nihilating withdrawal" that supposes rupture with the causality of self-identical being-in-itself. Questioning is not restricted to the posing of actual questions in our usual sense of the term; rather, it is synonymous with "the being of consciousness qua consciousness." Moreover, "the ontological foundation of consciousness" is the "ontological act" whereby being-in-itself "deteriorates" into that "presence to itself" which is constitutive of being-for-itself, or "human reality." The for-itself is the original, perpetual project of noncoincidence; it "is the being which determines itself to exist inasmuch as it cannot coincide with itself."<sup>58</sup> This project, this primordial nihilation which is the foundation of "empirical freedom," is

the very being of humans—namely, pure spontaneity. Ontological freedom is simply this “nihilating spontaneity.” To preclude an infinite regress we must recognize the nonsubstantial absoluteness, the “immediate self-consciousness” of human reality. Thus Sartre argues that “man is free because he is not himself but present to himself.”<sup>59</sup>

Paradoxically, the absoluteness of ontological freedom does not entail the elimination of motives, causes, obstacles, and limits. According to Sartre, the for-itself by its very upsurge as freedom structures undifferentiated being-in-itself into a world; and any specific action expresses that fundamental project. To act is to choose, and the for-itself’s choice of ends “carves out” objective configurations and brings about the emergence of causes in the world. Motives are merely the apprehension of such causes, inasmuch as this apprehension is nonthetic self-consciousness. Far from being internal or external *givens*, end, cause, and motive are therefore indissoluble terms of a project—that is, of a particular way of being-in-the-world. Any deliberation is itself part of the primordial project; while any reflective decision is predicated on the fundamental choosing which is nothing but the for-itself’s very existence as freedom. The latter’s structure rules out caprice because freedom as project, as nihilating spontaneity, precludes instantaneity and lack of restrictions. Nihilation requires that there be something to be nihilated, or surpassed; moreover, if that something were simply created *ex nihilo* by freedom, the fundamental project—the for-itself as noncoincidence—would collapse. Thus human reality everywhere encounters obstacles it has not created; but those obstacles can reveal their resistance only in the context of a (human)) project. Freedom exists solely in a *situation*; and the latter is such only through freedom. By its very upsurge, freedom confers meaning and value on brute being according to its fundamental choice of itself. This ontological freedom, or “autonomy of choice,” supports empirical freedom—that is, physical, religious, social, political, and economic freedoms. *Being and Nothingness*, however, concerns itself exclusively with analyzing ontological, rather than empirical, freedom.<sup>60</sup>

Despite its ingenuity, Sartre’s analysis is flawed. As Merleau-Ponty points out in the final chapter of his *Phenomenology of Perception*, the very notion of *ontological* freedom actually destroys freedom—such freedom is a contradiction in terms. If humans’ very being is freedom, then it is impossible to detect its appearance anywhere—for no matter what we feel or do, that primordial freedom remains the same. If “freedom is total and infinite,” as Sartre claims, then it lacks any background of nonfreedom from which to stand out. Consequently, it cannot *be* anywhere. If “choice and consciousness are one and the same thing,” the

notion of *choice* becomes utterly meaningless. To declare all acts free is effectively to declare none of them free and to do away with the very idea of action. Sartre's contention that humans are "wholly and forever free or . . . not free at all" presents us with a specious either/or; for to be infinitely and eternally free is to have nothing to choose, nothing to acquire, nothing to do.

The heart of the problem is discernible in Sartre's own stipulation "that the choice, being identical with acting, supposes a commencement of realization in order that the choice may be distinguished from the dream and the wish." If choice is infinite and omnipresent, it is difficult to see how there can be any such distinction. Further, as Merleau-Ponty notes, there is an unresolved difficulty in the very notion of a global choice of ourselves and our way of being-in-the-world: since that primordial choice is synonymous with our very upsurge in the world, it is perplexing how it can even be considered *our* choice. Ultimately, such an originating choice spells a fundamental contradiction insofar as choice implies an antecedent commitment, or acquisition. Despite Sartre's insistence on the contrary, freedom cannot be absolute; it must indeed have a "support" and a "springboard." Human reality must be *receptive* if there is to be "concrete and actual freedom" at all. There must be—as Merleau-Ponty maintains—a transformatory, prereflective interaction, between "a power of initiative," that is, a bodily intentionality, and an intersubjective world that *solicits* favored forms of response without *dictating* any of them. Sartre's conception of freedom as a nihilating spontaneity masks our primordial *bond* with the natural and cultural world, our fundamental *inherence* in prereflective coexistence with other incarnate subjectives who share a particular situation. All of them live through, and modify, that situation. There is thus a dialectical relationship in the emergence of historical events: history offers meanings for humans to take up and carry forward. The historical situation elicits responses—but it is humans who actually respond. Merleau-Ponty reminds us that, as Saint-Exupéry said, we are "but a network of relationships." It is by assuming those relationships and carrying them forward that we realize our freedom.<sup>61</sup>

Earlier I contended that, its centrality notwithstanding, the meaning and status of freedom are by no means clear in Marxism. In light of the foregoing critique, that ambiguity could turn out to be a boon for Marxism. If the latter is in fact claiming *ontological* status for freedom, then Merleau-Ponty's criticism of Sartrean freedom applies—rendering Marxism likewise fatally flawed. As I indicated, there are passages in Marx's writings that seem to authorize such an interpretation of freedom. A

number of other passages, however, suggest an interpretation more in keeping with the notion of freedom that emerges in Merleau-Ponty's own philosophy. Thus, for example, Marx criticizes Feuerbach for presupposing "an abstract—*isolated*—human individual," and argues instead that "the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations."<sup>62</sup> Similarly, in his famous critique of Bruno Bauer's position "on the Jewish question," Marx challenges the notion of "individual freedom" which "lets every man find in other men not the *realization* but rather the *limitation* of his own freedom":

Far from viewing man here in his species-being, his species-life itself—society—rather appears to be an external framework for the individual, limiting his original independence . . . the sphere in which man acts as a member of the community is degraded below that in which he acts as a fractional being, and finally man as bourgeois rather than man as citizen is considered to be the *proper* and *authentic* man. . . .

The *political revolution* dissolves civil life into its constituent elements without *revolutionizing* these elements themselves and subjecting them to criticism. . . .

Only when the actual, individual man has taken back into himself the abstract citizen and in his everyday life, his individual work, and his individual relationships has become a *species-being*, only when he has recognized and organized his own powers as *social* powers so that social force is no longer separated from him as *political* power, only then is human emancipation complete.<sup>63</sup>

Similar passages stressing that freedom has to do with the *realization* of human *potentialities*, and that such realization can occur only in and through *community* with others, are to be found in other early works as well as in Marx's later writings.<sup>64</sup>

If freedom is *not* synonymous with the *being* of humans, for Marx—and that is the more plausible interpretation—where does that leave Marxism? I have argued that neither Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* nor *Being and Nothingness* can provide a philosophical foundation for Marxism. The criticism of the Sartrean conception of freedom would suggest that one might draw on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy. Yet is it viable to bring the "post-Marxist" Merleau-Ponty to the rescue of Marxism? Even if one were to answer in the affirmative, one would look in vain for a full-fledged phenomenological account of freedom in Merleau-Ponty's writings. The final chapter of the *Phenomenology of Perception* is explicitly devoted to the topic; yet Merleau-Ponty's treatment is primarily critical and fails to offer more than the barest outline of a

positive conception of freedom. Further, not only does the meaning of freedom within history remain quite undeveloped, but it is by no means clear that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology can serve as a fruitful point of departure. Geraldine Finn, for example, has claimed that "phenomenology is especially vulnerable to [feminist] critique because it has assumed that the phenomenology of male-consciousness is tantamount to the phenomenology of consciousness as such."<sup>65</sup> It remains to be seen whether Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology can survive such a feminist critique or whether a specifically feminist phenomenology will ultimately need to be developed. Similarly, it remains an open question whether Marxism itself can withstand contemporary feminist critiques. As is well known, a number of feminists have argued that Marxism fails to deal with women's oppression, and that it is not philosophically feasible to amend the theory with respect to women—"the exclusion or denigration of women is integral to the system, and to give equal recognition to women destroys the system."<sup>66</sup> The question whether Marxism can accommodate contemporary ecological concerns, or whether the domination of nature is integral to it, similarly remains open. In short, it is not certain that marxism *can* be given a genuinely firm philosophical footing. What *does* seem certain, however, is that any such footing would need to include an adequate phenomenological analysis of freedom.

### Notes

1. Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism: The Test Case of Collective Responsibility* (Chicago, 1984), xi, xiii-xiv.

2. The focus on responsibility is not, of course, entirely new. Already in 1957, Leszek Kolakowski sought to combine Sartrean existentialist insights with Marxism in emphasizing that "the essential social engagement is moral" and that "every individual's access to . . . any . . . form of political life is a moral act for which he is fully responsible." From "Responsibility and History," in *Existentialism versus Marxism: Conflicting Views on Humanism*, ed. by George Novack (New York, 1966), 292-93. Far from reiterating Kolakowski's moral individualism, however, Flynn explores the notion of responsibility in Sartre's philosophy and argues that Sartre combined existentialist and Marxist features in articulating a satisfactory theory of collective responsibility.

3. An examination of arguments for and against the claim that Marxism requires a philosophical foundation lies beyond the scope of this essay. For a consideration of some recent work on this issue, I refer the reader to Supplementary Volume VII of the Canadian Journal of Philosophy, *Marx and Morality*, ed. by Kai Nielsen and Steven C. Patten (Guelph, Ont., 1981).

4. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. by Martin Milligan, ed. by Dirk J. Struik (New York, 1964), 112-13.

5. *Search for a Method*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (New York, 1968), 175-80.

## Rethinking Sartre: Philosophy, Political Thought

6. "An Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre," in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. by Paul Arthur Schilpp (LaSalle, Ill., 1981), 20.
7. *Ibid.*, 21.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Ronald Aronson, "Sartre and the Dialectic: The Purposes of Critique II," *Yale French Studies*, no. 68 (1985), 95. Aronson makes the same point in chap. 1 of *Sartre's Second Critique* (Chicago, 1987).
10. Thomas R. Flynn, "Merleau-Ponty and the Critique of Dialectical Reason," *Hypatia* (Boulder, Colo., 1985), 248.
11. Aronson, *Sartre's Second Critique*, 11–32.
12. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, trans. by Joseph Bien (Evanston, Ill., 1973), 205, 142, 152, 193, 200.
13. *Ibid.*, 137–38.
14. *Ibid.*, 158–59, 161.
15. *Ibid.*, 155.
16. *Ibid.*, 147, 194, 168, 153–54, 198.
17. *Ibid.*, 199, 198, 163, 132, 192, 193.
18. *Ibid.*, 196, 161, 193, 163.
19. *Ibid.*, 146–51, 123.
20. *Ibid.*, 151–53, 181, 122, 124.
21. *Ibid.*, 124.
22. *Ibid.*, 139–40.
23. Flynn, *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism*, 173.
24. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Marxism and Philosophy," in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. by H. L. Dreyfus and P. A. Dreyfus (Evanston, Ill., 1964), 128.
25. *Ibid.*, 126, 129–30. By 1960, Merleau-Ponty had become convinced that "the Marxist link between philosophy and politics" had ruptured, and that it therefore no longer made "much sense" to ask whether someone was or was not still a Marxist. "Introduction," *Signs*, trans. by Richard C. McCleary (Evanston, Ill., 1964), 8–11.
26. "An Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre," 24.
27. *Ibid.*, 43–44.
28. In "An Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre," he declared: "In any case, there is a difference between supply and demand that arises from the way man is made, from the fact that man demands more, whereas the supply is limited . . . need is not an oppression; it is a normal biological characteristic of the living creature, and he creates scarcity. . . . Scarcity is social to the extent that the desired object is scarce for a given society. But strictly speaking, scarcity is not social. Society comes after scarcity. The latter is an original phenomenon of the relation between man and Nature. Nature does not sufficiently contain the objects that man demands in order that man's life should not include either work, which is struggle against scarcity, or combat," (*ibid.*, 31–32). When asked whether he saw "a possible end to scarcity," Sartre replied: "Not at the moment." He added that socialism "would not lead to the disappearance of scarcity" (32). See also *Critique of Dialectical Reason I: Theory of Practical Ensembles*, trans. by Alan Sheridan-Smith, ed. by Jonathan Rée (London, 1982), 105, 112–13, 127 ff., 140 ff., 318 ff., 735 ff. In the original French text, the corresponding pages are *Critique de la raison dialectique I: Théorie des ensembles pratiques* (Paris, 1960), 186, 192, 204 ff., 214 ff., 358 ff., 688 ff.
29. *Critique I*, 100–106.
30. *Ibid.*, 105–6.

31. *Ibid.*, 100, 101, 103, 106.
32. "Epilogue," *Adventures of the Dialectic*, 203–33. See especially 207 ff., 219, 226–27, 231–32.
33. Ronald Aronson, *Jean-Paul Sartre—Philosophy in the World* (London, 1980), 243–92. See especially 263–68. See also Aronson's article "Sartre's Return to Ontology: Critique II Rethinks the Basis of *L'Être et le Néant*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48, no. 1 (January–March 1987), 99–116.
34. *Ibid.*, 264, 285, 286.
35. *Critique de la raison dialectique II; L'Intelligibilité de l'histoire*, ed. by Arlette Elkäim-Sartre (Paris, 1985), 45–54. Here and in subsequent quotations from *Critique II* the English translation is my own. Ronald Aronson's article "On Boxing: 'Incarnation' in *Critique II*" provides a useful summary of this part of *Critique II*; *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 39, nos. 152–53 (1985), 149–79; republished as chap. 3 of *Sartre's Second Critique*. However, Aronson's interpretation of Sartre's study of the boxing match is more sympathetic to Sartre than is my own view. While the placing of the specific conflict within a larger socioeconomic system can be seen as a step forward for Sartre, the study itself constitutes a singularly clear expression of the very features that render Sartre's philosophy incompatible with Marxism.
36. *Ibid.*, 45, 46, 51–53, 56.
37. *Ibid.*, 46, 57. Sartre says that his aim "cannot be to outline here a historical and dialectical interpretation of boxing" (45); nevertheless, his study of a boxing match is not only limited in scope but antithetical to any genuinely Marxist account of such a match.
38. *Ibid.*, 29, 32, 37, 57, 22.
39. *Ibid.*, 22–23.
40. *Ibid.*, 22, 23, 26, 32, 58, 349, 394–95n.
41. *Ibid.*, 35, 36, 22.
42. *Ibid.*, 76, 106, 61, 71, 194, 239–40, 301.
43. *Ibid.*, 301; Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 137–38.
44. *Ibid.*, 134–35.
45. "An Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre," 30.
46. *Critique I*, 144 ff.; and Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* (Moscow, 1955), 37.
47. William Leon McBride, "Sartre and Marxism," in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, 621.
48. *Ibid.*, 621–24.
49. Klaus Hartmann, "Sartre's Theory of Ensembles," in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, 636–37, 648–49.
50. *Ibid.*, 636–41, 649.
51. Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 175 ff.; and Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. by Martin Nicolaus (Harmondsworth, 1973), 211 ff., 831–32.
52. See, for example, *Critique I*, 81–83, 122 ff., 222 ff., 333 ff., 661 ff., 735–48, 804–5, 811–12. *Critique II*, 21 ff., 58 ff., 76 ff., 106, 131 ff., 198, 248 ff., 298 ff., 349, 364, 394 ff.; Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 106 ff., 137 ff., 170 ff.; Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, trans. by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. by Frederiek Engels (Moscow, n.d.), I, 76 ff., 340 ff., 667 ff., 686 ff., 702 ff.; *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, trans. and ed. by Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddet (New York, 1967), 144, 272, 281–82.

53. Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 118.

54. *Ibid.*, 112–14, 182. I am hyphenating “life-activity” in keeping with 113, line 3, and with the 1959 edition also translated by Martin Milligan (Moscow, 1967).

55. *Capital* I, 174. Incidentally, I would question Marx’s radical dichotomy between humans and animals. Sartre prudently refrained from considering the being of animals; but when asked directly, he stated that “animals have consciousness.” See “An Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre,” 28.

56. *Capital* I, 173–74.

57. *Being and Nothingness*, 569, 583.

58. *Ibid.*, 16, 58 ff., 124–26.

59. *Ibid.*, 12 ff., 60, 84, 567 ff.

60. *Ibid.*, 16, 84, 564 ff., 575 ff., 594 ff., 612 ff., 619 ff., 635 ff., 645 ff., 675 ff., 705 ff.

61. *Ibid.*, 60, 473 ff., 534–59, 562–63, 568 ff., 595, 616 ff., 654–80; and Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London, 1962), 434–56. Note that Sartre’s emphasis in *Being and Nothingness* is on separation rather than interconnectedness. The recurrent notions of “rupture,” “wrenching away,” and “conflict” are indicative. Thus he says, for example: “Human-reality is free because . . . it is perpetually wrenched away from itself and because it has been separated by a nothingness from what it is and from what it will be. . . . But this power of nihilation cannot be limited to realizing a simple withdrawal in relation to the world. . . . This means evidently that it is by a pure wrenching away from himself and the world that the worker can posit his suffering as unbearable suffering and consequently can make of it the motive for his revolutionary action. This implies for consciousness the permanent possibility of effecting a rupture with its own past, of wrenching itself away from its past . . . so as to be able to confer on it the meaning which it has in terms of the project of a meaning which it does not have. . . . To come into the world as a freedom confronting Others is to come into the world as alienable. If to will oneself free is to choose to be in this world confronting Others, then the one who wills himself such must will also the passion of his freedom. . . . Thus the Other’s freedom confers limits on my situation. . . .” It is “useless for human-reality to seek to get out of this dilemma: one must either transcend the Other or allow oneself to be transcended by him. The essence of the relations between consciousness is not the *Mitsein*; it is conflict.”

62. Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology and Supplementary Texts*, ed. by C. J. Arthur (New York, 1970), VI, 122.

63. Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” in *Writings of the Young Marx*, 236–41.

64. See, for example, *The German Ideology*, 83; *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 137 ff., 181 ff.; Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, ed. by F. Engels (Moscow, 1971), III, 820; *Grundrisse*, 487 ff.

65. Geraldine Finn, “On the Oppression of Women in Philosophy—Or, Whatever Happened to Objectivity?” in *Feminism in Canada: From Pressure to Politics*, ed. by Angela Miles and Geraldine Finn (Montreal, 1982), 155.

66. *Ibid.*, 151. See also such works as Mary O’Brien, “Reproducing Marxist Man,” in *The Sexism of Social and Political Theory: Women and Reproduction from Plato to Nietzsche* (Toronto, 1979); Lydia Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* (Boston, 1981); Mary O’Brien, “Hegemony and Superstructure: A Feminist Critique of Neo-Marxism,” in *Taking Sex into Account: The Policy Consequences of Sexist Research* (Ottawa, 1984).



## EXISTENTIALISM AND HISTORICAL DIALECTIC

Sartre's *Critique de la raison dialectique* represents a kind of Marxian *Aufhebung* of his early existentialist thought. Although Sartre did not claim that his later theory is a continuous development of the former, he views them at least as basically compatible. His Marxian philosophy of history and society is supposed to transform the former existentialist concepts from a purely ontological into a historical context, preserving their original import while abolishing their one-sided restriction. Moreover, despite the seemingly deprecating language which Sartre uses with respect to his own early doctrine,<sup>1</sup> in fact he assigns it a vital role in the very foundations of Marxism itself. It is existentialism that should serve as the primary doctrine, upon which alone a Marxian social philosophy can be based. Refined and concretized, the existential analysis of man will provide Marxism with its *fundamental* philosophy—a philosophy whose absence constituted, so far, the major *lacune* of all Marxian analyses of society and history.

From the methodological viewpoint, the existential approach to Marxism implies a regression from the key concepts of Marxism to a deeper, primordial level, in which they should be rooted. Existentialism will thus constitute a *critique* of the Marxian concepts, in the dual Kantian sense of the term, namely, both as a limitation and as a fundamental grounding.<sup>2</sup> But, in contrast to Kant, the concepts will not be grounded in man as an abstract transcendental ego, but in man as an actual mode of being.

### I

#### *Heidegger's Program Radicalized*

It should be observed that Sartre reverts here to the same Heideggerian program, to which he had already subscribed in his existentialist classic, *Being and Nothingness* (henceforth: *BN*). A few words should therefore be said about this Heideggerian model.

Having qualified traditional ontology as abstract and caught up in mystification (the "forgetfulness of Being"), Heidegger, in what I consider a basically Kantian vein, called for a critical transformation

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<sup>1</sup> See Sartre's introductory essay to *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris, NRF, 1960), p. 18 (henceforth *CRD*). This essay has first appeared separately as "Existentialism and Marxism" in a Polish magazine, a fact which may account for Sartre's blunt words.

<sup>2</sup> It is therefore no accident that the title of Sartre's *CRD* is a paraphrase of the famous Kantian titles.

of the grounds of ontology. Before any ontological work can be done, the field itself must be criticized and reappraised in terms of a “*fundamental* ontology”; and to establish the latter, one must look for an inherent link between the ontic and the ontological. Ontology is the comprehension of Being: if it is to be grounded—as it should be—in its own subject matter, then we must start with that kind of being, for whom to be is immediately to understand Being, and to be concerned with the meaning of its own being; or in other words, whose very ontic structure is such, that it turns ontologically back upon itself. This inherent link between the ontic and the ontological is supplied by *Dasein*, as the specific structure of human existence. Man is the creature for whom to be is not only to have a preontological understanding of Being but, at once, to question his own being and that of the world “in” which he exists (although not necessarily in a conscious or explicit way). This reflective, or self-referential mode of being introduces an inner “break” between *Dasein* and itself, making it a perpetually self-transcending activity “in” the world; and in this fundamental structure (interpreted as “care” and, ultimately, as “temporality”), Heidegger anchors the other existential characteristics of *Dasein* which, in turn, serve as a clue for the reinterpretation of the major ontological concepts, such as “time,” “things,” “world,” “space,” and even “historicality” (*Geschichtlichkeit*). Instead of serving as general a priori concepts, under which human (and all other) existence is subsequently subsumed and explained, the order is reversed, and all these ontological terms become rooted in the primordial structure of human existence.

Heidegger thus performs a “Copernican Revolution” of his own, modelled upon that of Kant, yet aiming not at the foundations of knowledge and ethics, but rather at those of the theory of being. Analyzing the way in which man exists provides the clue and the necessary conditions for grasping, first, the meaning of *specific* ontological terms (world, time, etc.), and, eventually, the meaning of Being-in-general—which is for Heidegger the ultimate goal of philosophy.

In *BN* Sartre followed this Heideggerian scheme, trying to create a fundamental ontology through a philosophical *anthropology*. Yet Sartre went beyond the Heideggerian program and, by taking it to its extreme, denied its ultimate goal. Asking about the meaning of Being-in-general, mere Being (which is not taken as a moment of human existence), is for Sartre a meaningless question. Being-in-general (in Sartre’s language: Being-In-Itself) can have no meaning by definition; it is the ultimate opacity which, like the Parmenidean

“One,” can have no properties and no articulation in itself whatsoever, and thus it is beyond the realm of meaning. For Sartre, Being-In-Itself is only a component in the synthesis of man in-the-world and, therefore, *all* that can properly be said or known about it is brought to light by the existential analysis of man. In conclusion, Sartre regards the ontology of man neither as a *special branch* of general ontology (here he agrees with Heidegger), nor as a *preliminary* to general ontology (and here he opposes Heidegger), but as being ipso facto also general ontology.<sup>3</sup>

This radicalization of the Heideggerian program led to two opposite results with respect to the problem of developing a subsequent philosophy of history. On the one hand, the exclusive emphasis on existential and ontological analysis accounts for the absence, in Sartre's early work, of a genuine historical conception of man.<sup>4</sup> All that Sartre says about man in *BN*—his structure, his condition, his freedom and spontaneity, his relation to other men and to the world—is conceived in *nonhistorical* terms, as man's fixed and eternal fate. Even the *processuality* of human existence is not explained historically. Man is portrayed as perpetually transcending himself and any given content and state; his very being is in flux, unable to attain a stable identity, and only by activity and development can he assume some discernible characteristics or “essence.” Yet this is not conceived in *BN* as involving the movement of whole social and historical structures. Rather, the processuality of our existence is described in terms of a pure existential *temporalization*, i.e., a constant self-transcendence from what I am no-longer to what I am not-yet, which makes time itself a structure of my being. But this temporality is not historicized. It belongs to each separate consciousness and is *exhausted* within its scope. Although my freedom temporalizes itself in given “situations,” these situations do not disclose, in their facticity, the marks and dimensions of existential temporality (in the sense of human projects). They are taken as thinglike entities, simple forms of the In-Itself which I merely confront. Existential temporality is thus confined in *BN* to the individual consciousness, without extending to the structure of the historical contexts in which it exists. And this also means that historical configurations cannot properly be seen as

<sup>3</sup> This is why Heidegger rejected the title “existentialist”; for he did *not* see the existential analysis as exhausting the task of ontology. Rather, he was looking beyond human existence to a broader ontological horizon—in fact (I think) a residue of the religious problematic.

<sup>4</sup> Here again he departs from Heidegger, who developed the concept of existential temporality in terms of historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*).

totalities—not even in the sense of “detotalized” totalities (the only sense Sartre recognizes).

This is one of the least dialectical, perhaps the least Hegelian, features of Sartre’s early thought—although he borrowed much of the terminology of *BN*, and many ideas about the relation of consciousness to itself and its other, from Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. Moreover, here too Sartre takes a more restricted ontological view than Heidegger. Heidegger concluded his *Being and Time* by developing a philosophy of history from the notion of existential temporality, whereas the early Sartre denies history any place at the level of fundamental ontology. History is not itself a dimension of being. It partakes of man’s life only parasitically, as a mere conglomerate of rigid “situations.” Accordingly, history cannot form a totality in itself, nor can it be assigned a processuality similar to that of human existence. The individual confronts history as something ontologically alien,<sup>5</sup> as an assemblage of thinglike facts. His existential temporalization is not also a *historization*.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, the radicalization of Heidegger’s program enabled Sartre at a later stage—when he finally recognized the existential import of history—to pass on with greater systematic ease to his present version of dialectical materialism, which regards human praxis as involved in whatever may count as reality. We have seen that Sartre viewed Being-In-Itself only as a moment of man’s concrete existence-in-the-world. This led him to reject a general ontology which is not immediately an ontology of man; and, equally, to make his famous statement, that “the world is human.” The meaning of this dictum is, among other things, that everything which may be considered as part of the world presupposes, as such, the “nihilating” effect of human consciousness. To understand this point we must remember that “Being-In-Itself” denotes the sheer, indefinite passivity of being, which lies beyond the realm of meaning; whereas the con-

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<sup>5</sup> I say “alien” and not “alienated,” because the context is ontological. History to me is like “things” in general. In the later Sartre, history is no longer *ontologically* alien. Rather, it incorporates and discloses existential—not thinglike—features. Therefore, I do not confront it—as I do things—but exist *within* it. Yet the course of history has been such that men exist within it in a quasi thinglike manner, and this is historical *alienation*. Thus, it is precisely by denying that history is ontologically *alien* to man, that the late Sartre could construe his Marxianlike concept of historical alienation.

<sup>6</sup> Sartre occasionally uses the term “historization” in *BN*, but in the sense of temporalization within rigid “situations.” The genuine sense of *historization*—that man shapes himself through history and history through himself—is ignored and in fact rejected.

cept of "world" denotes a system of definite meanings and interpretations, which presupposes the activity of consciousness. The world is thus the synthetic product of Being-In-Itself and Being-For-Itself (human consciousness), in which the latter "nihilates" the former and thus gives it determinate shapes and articulation.

It follows that the absolute other of consciousness is not the world, but only Being-In-Itself. What we call "world" (also "nature," "things," etc.) is already a "humanized" form of being—not, to be sure, in the sense that it has the same existential structure as we have (in this sense it is alien), but in that it bears the marks of our negating and interpreting consciousness.

This view is perhaps reminiscent of Kant's type of idealism. But it also contains the germ of the Marxianlike historical materialism (as distinguished from mechanical materialism) which Sartre later develops. The transition between the two positions (which Sartre never explained in detail) is accomplished, I think, by renouncing the purely ontological concepts of the For-Itself and the In-Itself, or rather, by giving them a new, practical<sup>7</sup> explication. In the first place, the negative activity of consciousness (the For-Itself) is reinterpreted in terms of need and praxis. Secondly—and correspondingly—the inert facticity of the world is now *initially* described as practical inertia (*le Pratico-Inerte*), and thus as a historical, not a purely ontological, facticity. Thirdly, the futile ideal of the For-Itself-In-Itself is also explained practically, in terms of alienation. And, finally, *this enables Sartre to view the individual's temporalization as involved in a collective process of historization, and to find an existential (i.e., projective) form of temporality in the subject matter of history itself.* History becomes a mode of totalization no less than individual action or personal biography (although in a secondary, collective mode); and both these terms—biography and history—are conceived as constituting (or, "totalizing") each other in a nondeterministic process. I shall review these changes in more detail.

(a) *Existential negativity (the For-Itself) as praxis.*

Sartre did not give up his basic idea that man shapes himself and the world by projecting negation into being. But in *CRD*, this negation is no longer conceived in terms of consciousness and intentionality in general, but specifically in terms of praxis—that is, as *need, action, and work*. Need and work are not just examples of negative intentionality, but its most fundamental modes. Moreover, these practical attitudes extend beyond my particular being. They cannot be

<sup>7</sup> I use the term "practical" throughout as a derivative of "praxis." (It does not, therefore, connote a property, like pragmatic utility, but action as a form of being.)

exhausted in the one-time relationship of an individual to his isolated situation, but involve a whole *moving network* of practical relations, which obtain between him, other men, and the inert matter of history which they jointly interiorize and reproduce. In this way, existential freedom (the For-Itself) is no longer described as an abstract negation of abstract being, but a historicized negation of historicized being. My negations are primarily practical; and they acquire their specific content with respect to the changing historical context with which I am *existentially* interwoven, and which I, in turn, also regenerate and help to reshape by these negations.

(b) *Facticity as practical inertia.*

Correspondingly, even the factual side of things—that rigid, inert passivity which envelops our freedom on all sides—is now given a practical, and not a purely ontological interpretation. Sartre does not abandon his original idea, that human spontaneity is surrounded by external facticity, which qualifies and limits it. But in *CRD*, this facticity is conceived as having a practical significance from the start: it is what it is, and contains the particular constraints it does, with respect to our practical being and actual praxis. This means that freedom is not limited by an absolute, primordial and transphenomenal Being, but by a historically shaped world—in which the marks of praxis are inertly crystallized. *The passive inertia we face, that affects our own being, is itself constituted by praxis.* It is the objectified remnant of past historical action—the inert bulk of products, institutions, traditions, class relations, and externalized processes, in which human praxis has in the past been embodied and which now constitute the external constraints under which this praxis must continue.

Sartre names this historical facticity le Pratico-Inerte (or Practical Inertia). It should be observed that, as historical, practical inertia is already “totalized” in itself. It embodies the teleologic patterns of the many projects that have shaped it, and is, therefore, structured as an inertly organized whole, not as an aggregate of isolated “situations” (the view of history that emerges from *BN*). Consequently, the individual is not limited in isolation from other people by some particular situation of his own taken as simple and static. Rather, situations have themselves a dynamic relation to one another, and to the organized plurality of human projects operative in constituting them. This historization of the concept of “situation” will, as we shall see, present Sartre with one of his major tasks in *CRD*, i.e., to show *how* the different features of situations become mediated with one another through their interiorization and reexternalization by individual men in their collective praxis.

Sartre thus renounces his old concept of Being-In-Itself, and replaces it with the concept of historical facticity, or the *Pratico-Inerte*, to summarize the moment of sheer passivity in the world—that which philosophers since Aristotle have called “matter.” Indeed, even matter in the elementary sense, as an inorganic substance our organism needs, is explained by Sartre as a being-for-praxis! In a long and somewhat convoluted discussion, Sartre argues that matter does not enjoy ontological simplicity or independence. It is initially constituted through its relation to its dialectical counterpart—the existential project taken as need. By this relation, inorganic matter becomes teleologically preorganized in itself, as the instrumental field for the occurrence of praxis.<sup>8</sup> Matter thus bears the marks of praxis not only in the mode of the past, as something already embodied in it, but even in its very constitution, as something yet to be actualized through it. Therefore, matter is not to be conceived as an aggregate of external components either, for in its very inertia, it has the deep structure (Sartre says: the “interiority”) of a pre-organized totality—albeit a static or a “passive” totality—a first manifestation of inert praxis.

However, the factual inertia we face and interiorize is not material in the crude sense, but in the more elaborate sense of the cultural products and of the *socioeconomic and political constraints*, which prevail in a given historical context; and these, specifically, are what Sartre calls *le Pratico-Inerte*. These historical configurations presuppose the occurrence of *actual* praxis (including the use or appropriation of inorganic matter), and are equally presupposed by it; and so they form a closed dynamic system, of which one cannot sensibly ask, whence it came from. Historical facticity—as the genuine and most comprehensive meaning of “practical inertia”—is simultaneous with the being of man. To use Heideggerian language (since this is a revised Heideggerian ideal!), this kind of inertia is an existential structure, disclosed through our own mode of being.

The concept of practical inertia is thus inclusive of the concept of materiality in its broad sense. As such, it also represents Sartre’s interpretation of the notion of historical materialism—as distinguished from mechanic or metaphysical materialism, which Sartre (like Marx) rejects. The matter of reality is that inert facticity, through which our freedom is projected and in which human praxis takes place; but this facticity is itself constituted by praxis, whose marks it

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<sup>8</sup> In this theory, Sartre combines Marxian ideas with Heidegger’s interpretation of worldly things as *Zuhanden*, i.e., as having an instrumental feature by their very constitution.

embodies in a passive way; and so it is a historical and humanized factor, not something primordial and transhistorical.

What Sartre has achieved by these two shifts (reinterpreting the For-Itself as practical negativity, and renouncing Being-In-Itself in favor of practical inertia), is to convert his old description of man-in-the-world from purely ontological to historical terms, *without relinquishing the ontological import of the discussion*. Historical facticity and historical praxis have now themselves been promoted to ontological status, as basic structures of the Being of man. From this viewpoint, the old claim that "the world is human" will now be given a historical interpretation, and possibly read as "the world is historical." History is the most comprehensive totalization, through which human negativity—now conceived as need and work—shapes itself and the world, thus also determining the very facticity which limits and binds it.

(c) *Futile passion as alienation.*

Saying that the world is "human" or "historical" is, however, still an ontological description. It does not mean that, ipso facto, man can be at home with himself in this world. Alienation, too, is a basically *human* phenomenon, created (and possibly diminished) through history. Overcoming historical alienation replaces, in *CRD*, the former ontological ideal of the For-Itself-In-Itself. This ideal, the ultimate value of man, signified in *BN* a superior mode of being towards which our existence projects itself as its uttermost lack (*manque*). As a free subject, man is never what he is; he is constantly transcending every determination, unable to come to rest in a fixed identity. This is precisely his humanity—the feature that distinguished him from inert things. Yet his greatest passion—a passion embedded in his ontic structure—is to *capture* a fixed and determined identity, while remaining the free, spontaneous being he is. In other words, he strives to become objectified in the domain of the In-Itself, but in such a way that his spontaneous being For-Itself would not be impaired, but rather enhanced: it should be reflected back to him from his very facticity. Yet this ideal is contradictory, and man is condemned to be a "futile passion."

In *CRD*, together with the interpretation of the For-Itself as praxis, and of facticity as embodied praxis, the futile ideal of For-Itself-In-Itself is reinterpreted as *historical* alienation.<sup>9</sup> Man needs to

<sup>9</sup> Sartre's discussion of this topic includes the only occurrence of the old terminology of *BN* in *CRD* (cf. p. 285 n.). The equation of the For-Itself-In-Itself with alienation was also specifically asserted by Sartre in his 1967 conference in Jerusalem.

objectify himself "as the capture of himself through the world and out of himself" (*CRD*, p. 285 n.); but he cannot succeed in this. The matter in which he objectifies his deeds, designs, etc., does not reflect the image of his spontaneity, but rather escapes him, while constraining from without. His life is spent attempting to imprint himself on the structure of things, but instead of finding himself in them, he loses his humanity to them. This alienation is emphasized in historical contexts where the *Pratico-Inerte*, as the sum of material conditions for action, prescribes in advance a mode of life, class membership, and economic prospects, which shrink the range of man's spontaneity to mere, insignificant deviations; and it reaches its apex where the individual gives expression to no spontaneity at all, but plays his socioeconomic role in a completely inert or routinized manner.<sup>10</sup> In this case, Sartre says, the external matter is revealed to man not only as nonhuman, but as *antihuman* (*ibid.*). Moreover, his alienated being is coupled with an alienated consciousness and with the consciousness of alienation. The agent knows himself only through his material objectivation; but this objectivity reflects to him his image as a mere object, determined like a thing by external forces, and lacking the spontaneity which is not embodied materially (although he is still aware of possessing it in a *prereflective* manner).<sup>11</sup>

Although the kind of alienation which stems from scarcity, oppression, the capitalist mode of production, or routine work, and the inert assumption of roles, can be reduced or even abolished historically, there appears to be a "fundamental" form of alienation which, like the old *en-soi-pour-soi*, is man's *existential* lot. Even in the classless society, with its abolition of oppression and possibly of scarcity, the ontic difference between spontaneity and inertia will continue to prevail.<sup>12</sup> Even history cannot solve the basic tension in

<sup>10</sup> Sartre's example is the working class woman who, for a low salary, is busy in the plant eight hours a day, then fulfills her family duties, etc., with no prospect of mobility and change. Nominally, she too is spontaneous; but her spontaneity replays a preestablished scenario, which it takes upon itself. Thus it completely alienates itself and assumes a thinglike character.

<sup>11</sup> Alienated consciousness thus takes the central place assigned in *BN* to bad faith. Alienated consciousness is still *consciousness*, in the sense that although it grasps itself as a thing—in accordance with its actual mode of life—it cannot lose complete self-awareness of freedom, albeit in a nonthematic (or prereflective) way. In bad faith, it is I who conceal my true being from myself; in alienation, I am *actually* condemned to thinglike existence, and so the mystifying veil is primarily due to my historical life-conditions. Alienated consciousness can also take the form of abstract, unhistorical indeterminism—as Sartre now sees his doctrine of freedom in *BN*.

<sup>12</sup> Moreover, its effect will be enhanced, with the growing horizon for human spontaneity!

human existence, that while wishing to do so, man cannot fully capture himself by objectivation. And therefore, not only under capitalist conditions, but even beyond them, there is a sense in which it must remain true that "I am that which I have done, and which escapes me while constituting me as an other" (*CRD*, 286 n.).

(d) *Historical and existential time.*

By describing history as a "totalization" we have something that has still to be explicated. According to *BN*, history discloses no temporal structure of its own—in the existential sense of temporality—but must be conceived as a conjunction of diverse, thinglike "situations." But with the changes introduced in *CRD*, the rigidity of "situations" is dissolved. They are no longer simple, isolated modes of facticity, but aspects of a broader dynamic whole, which has an organized form in its own right. This can be seen from the viewpoint of both major changes indicated above, that is, the Pratico-Inerte and negativity as praxis.

In the first place, the historic materiality through which I operate already embodies the praxis of the past, as so possesses in itself the pattern of the human project and of temporality (albeit in a passive or a "dead" manner). More specifically, *the matter of history is the inert crystallization of the past which limits the future, while being transcended towards this future as the formative overcoming of the past.* In this respect, historical states are "inert totalities" in themselves; their structure discloses a similarity to my own existential past, and the movement of history resembles the kind of existential temporality that *BN* discovered in the life of individuals.

But, secondly, historical configurations (classes, groups, epochs, production modes) possess a temporal (= projective) form not only as a dead relic of the past but also as their mode of further subsistence. They have a different mode of being than persons and mere "things" alike. They subsist by the sustained praxis of individuals, who interiorize the meaning of this historical configurations into which their lives happen to be thrust, and who, thereby, assume specific content for their projects and negations, and constitute their individual personalities. In this way, history and biography are mutually constitutive and have a similar teleological form.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, history

<sup>13</sup> To understand this argument it should be remembered that already in *BN*, temporality was, in fact, a derivative mode of teleology. I exist temporally, i.e., transcending my inert-no-longer towards my possible not-yet, only with respect to some *specific* set of possibilities, which I project as my goal. In other words: I do not exist as abstract temporality, but only in so far as this temporality is embedded in some *actually qualified* project.

can no longer be seen as an aggregate of rigid "situations," each relating to the individual in isolation, as his own conjecture of facticity. It must, instead, be conceived as a network of actual and embedded projects, which stem from men's collective action and relate to one another as a self-totalizing process, analogous to (although not identical with) the self-totalizing process which *BN* found in the life span of the individual.

This immediately raises the question of the relationship between the individual and history—their similarities and differences and the way in which one constitutes the other.

The major difference between historical and biographical totalities lies in the fact that history is not a For-Itself. In other words, it is not the biography of any one particular subject. Therefore, the identity of a *single* totalizing project or intention cannot be ascribed to it. In the sphere of the individual, Sartre introduced in *BN* the concept of a "fundamental project," to serve as the basis for unifying a person's various particular projects within the framework of a single individuum. It is the "fundamental project" which accounts, among other things, for the occurrence of regularities and discernible patterns in the behavior of the individual and not deterministic principles or the uncritical concept of a fixed "personality." But, obviously, the same solution cannot be applied to the sphere of history, where no comprehensive individuum can be recognized. Hegel did not hesitate to individuate history as the life of a comprehensive individual, which he called the spirit. But such a solution is barred at the outset by Sartre's existentialist principles, which recognize only the spontaneous, essenceless activity of the particular consciousness and exclude all notions of a superhistorical consciousness (spirit, providence, God, and the like) from providing history with its totalizing project or intention.

Needless to say, all deterministic solutions are barred alike from fulfilling this function. If history is to be rooted in the spontaneity of existential projects, it certainly cannot be unified by a preordained scheme or scenario, which manifests itself in it by the force of necessity (dialectical or otherwise). And yet, if history is to be understood as a totalization, not as mere diversity; if it has to display a temporal form analogous to that of the individual project, but not identical with it, then some other solution must be found for its possibility. What can this solution be?

Avoiding the pitfall of a *deus ex machina* postulate, Sartre looks for the answer in the dynamics of group formation and in the phenomenon of human collectively. Historical totalities must be

rooted in the existential project, working not as a superhistorical agent but as a *community of intention*. But then the problem reverts to the possibility of such communality. Since every single project is existentially free—that is, spontaneous in the *arbitrary* sense—are we not condemned from the outset to an atomized situation, where a community of projects is either impossible or, at best, a “happy chance?”

Other philosophers, like Kant, faced a similar problem. If every man is completely spontaneous, how can he form a community of intention with his fellow men? Kant answered this question by postulating a common rational essence for man. Freedom is spontaneous, yet not absolutely arbitrary, because there is an a priori rule by which alone freedom is authentically actualized. The good will is not *determined* by this rule, but it can find in it an a priori guidance for the proper use of its freedom; and since this guidance is universal, the individual wills would by following it spontaneously coalesce. They would form an “Ethical Community” (or a “Kingdom of Ends”), whereby all rational wills unite in the same mode of willing and, finally, in one ultimate goal.

Sartre can find no help in Kant’s solution. First, he cannot admit the idea of an a priori essence of freedom; and secondly, even if he did, the totalization of the many intentions which Kant achieves cannot explain actual, only ideal history; but Sartre must account for the structure of history as it actually occurs.

And so Sartre’s problem can be reformulated as follows: he cannot individuate history as a singular person; he does not admit of providence or of a superhistorical intention; he must reject an a priori human essence; and he wants to root historical totalities in individual projects. Sartre therefore has to show how these projects coalesce in producing a meaningful totality, resembling the structure of human action and yet extending beyond its individuality.

To solve this problem, Sartre uses his concept of the *Pratico-Inerte* and the dialectic of its constitution. Our projects are existentially free, but they cannot be materialized in a void. To acquire a specific content and direction, they must internalize the ingredients of the actual historical situation, into which they have been thrust. In this way they become “totalized” from the start in a broader configuration which points to man’s *collective* activity, both as something embodied in it, and as new praxis made possible through it. Moreover, in this way individual projects gain a meaningful direction—not, however, from a hidden essence of their own, but from the common externality which they interiorize. This externality deter-

mines in advance the material scope in which the individual projects can take shape, and thus serves as their *common material ground*.

It may, therefore, be said that whatever communality there is in human action does not rest, as in Kant, upon an a priori essence or an abstract sense of solidarity. Instead, its primary foundation is contemporary historical facticity. Or, putting it more bluntly, if men unite and set up common projects, it is not because their inherent rationality prescribes this, but because they share a common externality which each must interiorize (and through which he also relates to other men as well as to his own projected future).<sup>14</sup>

This externality is not, however, an independent metaphysical "given." It is, as we saw, the objectification of the human past: that which men have made of themselves and of their social and natural environment. In the last analysis, therefore, we are still united by a humanized factor, not by an absolutely alien matter.<sup>15</sup> The externality through which men coalesce is, in fact, the *constituted* human "essence" — not an abstract, a priori essence (like in Kant). Already in *BN*, the concept of a human essence was explained in terms of the individual's past: it was the specific determination he has given to himself in previous action (and which adheres to his being as his private "facticity").<sup>16</sup> Now, the same kind of idea is applied, in a secondary sense, to collective groups and to humanity at large. The "other" through which we coalesce is a common human past.

Sartre's account of the communality of projects implies a significant modification of his old theory of freedom. *With the historization of man, his scope for spontaneous expression shrinks*. Existentially, man is absolutely free. But this absolute is only nominal. Historically, he enjoys only "relative autonomy," since he must interiorize the common material ground of his situation. He is thus free not *from* the historical context but *within* it. This freedom is now expressed in a twofold way: first, as a spontaneous *deviation* from the interiorized contents, and, secondly, as their novel and uniquely singular reorganization. But the individual cannot "leap"

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<sup>14</sup> This material foundation, however, provides *simultaneity* rather than communality. Communal action is created by each of us operating individually in a similar or quasi-parallel direction. Working upon this substrate, Sartre will need *further* constitutive elements to explain solidarity, groups, etc.

<sup>15</sup> I have previously made a distinction between "absolutely alien" and "alienated." The former is no longer found in Sartre's world; the latter is omnipresent.

<sup>16</sup> Sartre plays here with the Hegelian dictum *Wesen ist was gewesen ist* — essence is what has been.

beyond his historical context, withdraw from it, or create himself—as the stoic or the mystic deem it possible—as a completely trans-historical being. Rather, he must constitute his life and personality *in and through* contemporary externality, which involves the projected and embodied life patterns of other men as well.

At the same time, we saw that historical totalities themselves depend upon their constant regeneration by individual and communal praxis; and that the latter involves spontaneity in the dual sense of deviation and novel reorganization. This ontic fact has important consequences. It accounts for change, transcendence, and the possibility of unexpected shifts in history; it dissolves the rigidity of historical totalities, making them precarious (or, “detotalized”) wholes; and it explains why the individual cannot be fully predetermined by history—even in the (weaker) sense of having to completely *routinize* his activities. In all these respects, freedom is preserved even within our historization. Moreover, the existential project remains the first motivating principle of history, both as engendering and as diverting it. And yet, the individual’s influence on history is rather small, not only because his project can only become concretized in the historical context, but also because he can deviate from historical configurations only while reenacting them. The collective historization of projects and reduction of their freedom thus go hand in hand in Sartre’s new theory.<sup>17</sup>

Sartre’s attempt to account for historical totalization is not quite successful. After all that has been said and done, since they rest on existential generation, historical totalities must remain contingent—a sort of happy chance.

In *BN* Sartre has already faced the problem of how to explain the consistency and regularities in one person’s choices and behavior, given his spontaneous freedom. He did this with the help of the concept of the “Fundamental Project.” Yet, in the case of history, where no suprapersonal individuation is possible, the continuity of processes, states, etc., cannot be explained even by the fragile concept of project. It must, therefore, rest on some *external* factor, but one

<sup>17</sup> It is not surprising that Sartre does not speak in a Hegelian manner of “world historical individuals” who personally shape history or introduce significant shifts into it. For Sartre, it is basically the *mediocre* man who produces history (and in this sense we are all “world-historical individuals”). This is also related to the fact that, for Sartre, history is not an independent, superego working *through* great figures like Moses or Napoleon. Rather, it is constituted by the many men, as they constitute themselves and vice versa. (Accordingly, the figures Sartre analyzes with respect to history are not shapers of history, but those, like Flaubert, who reflect it in their particularized ways.)

which is constantly incorporated into the individual's life project. This external factor is "inert praxis" — the factual "matter" of history. This facticity is, as we saw, on the one hand, produced by our praxis in the past, and thus bears its marks in a "passive" way. But at the same time, it also constitutes the only available material through which new projects can assume a specific content and be concretized. The historical situations, which embody the meaning of past action, are necessarily interiorized by each new individual, but in such a way that he can modify them or deviate from them. As the inevitable "inertia" that envelops his freedom, the historical totality (trend, class, situation) becomes constitutive of the individual's self-shaping as a person, while on the other hand history itself is reproduced, changed, and carried on through its interrelation with existential projects. What keeps the substantive continuity of history, and ensures the possibility of historical totality which stretches beyond the individual's scope, is the factor of "practical-inertia," through which biography and history become dialectically related.

We may thus say that in Sartre the "practical-inertia" represents the element of *historical schematism* — the bridge between the diverse individual projects — which is supposed to guarantee the possibility of historical totalization.

## II

To penetrate into the innermost stages, whereby history and existential project become so intertwined, is the task of existential psychoanalysis, working as a psychohistory. Its task is to explain in concrete detail, *how* an individual life interiorizes the meaning of its historical context, and how it projects itself through this context in an irreducibly particular way of its own, thus participating in the formation of the historical universal itself. Existential psychoanalysis, which was confined in BN to single individuals, thus functions in Sartre's later thought as a form of psychohistory. It is used to shed light not only on the innermost attitudes and projects that form an individual life, but — through it — on a whole "historical universal" (an epoch, a class, a subculture); and Sartre's systematic claim is that only in this way — through its involvement in the self-constitution of an individual existential project — can the meaning of a historical universal be grasped and enlightened at all. It is in his theory of psychotherapy that Sartre comes close to offering an explanation for the possibility of historical totalities.

Hence the prominent role which existential psychoanalysis plays in Sartre's *CRD*, and in such applied works as *Les Mots* and *L'Idiot de la Famille* (Flaubert). And this is also the crucial meeting ground

between existentialism and Marxism, as well as the major issue in Sartre's criticism of Marxism. To this subject we turn now.

Marxism suffered from two major ills: it neglected the particular (particular facts, and, especially, the particular *human* agent), in favor of a variety of historical *generalizations*, thus working with empty or "abstract" universals rather than with a genuine concept of totality. Secondly, it lacked a fundamental philosophy of man in which to root its social and historical concepts. Sartre's existential psychoanalysis is supposed to provide the necessary correction on both counts. This theory, which Sartre develops at the end of *BN*, is based upon almost all the major elements of his existential doctrine: the concepts of intentionality, Being For-Itself, nihilation, freedom without essence, temporalization, motivation, transcendence, etc., and may thus be seen as summarizing his early doctrine. By implication, therefore, existential psychoanalysis provides the nonempirical (or, ontological) anthropology which Marxism hitherto lacked, which provides a foundation for the concepts of action, work, or historical totalization. More specifically, Sartre now uses existential psychoanalysis as psychohistory, *whose task is to "anchor" the individual within his historical context, rather than simply to "situate" him there* (as Marxists are bound to do). This means that we should not simply subsume an individual life under some historical universal, but must instead discover the particular, irreducible ways in which an individual's existential freedom projects itself (from early childhood) *through* these universals, thus both giving him a featured personality and regenerating (and modifying) the universals themselves. This existential approach is to do justice to the full concreteness of the category of particularity and at the same time to serve as a warning that the historical universal can neither determine the individual, nor fully capture the sense of his life.

Since historical universals provide the factual contents through which my "empty" freedom must project itself, they fulfill a vital role in the process of my constitution, personalization,<sup>18</sup> and choice of social role. I cannot but interiorize their meaning, which is then reexternalized by my individual and collective action. Yet my freedom also transcends any given content or state, reasserting its irreducible spontaneity in the face of the same universals which it helps to constitute. This introduces an element of instability into historical totalities, making them precarious wholes which are "detotalized" in

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<sup>18</sup> I have borrowed these terms from the names of the main chapters in Sartre's work on Flaubert. They also cover what is otherwise called "socialization," "acculturation," etc., sometimes with a semideterministic connotation.

their very constitution. I, the individual, on the other hand, retain in the midst of my historization a *transhistorical* particularity—the “dark side” of existence which, Sartre holds, had been established by Kierkegaard as against the historicist philosophers.<sup>19</sup>

Existential psychohistory is supposed to show in some detail *how* history and biography become intertwined in a nondeterministic process. I shape history by shaping myself and shape myself by shaping history, but in such a way that I am not fully integrated in history, and history is not fully integrated in itself. Neither of the moments of this special dialectic can fully mediate the other. Yet their interrelation is sufficient for Sartre to say that we do not confront history but exist *within* it. By interiorizing historical configurations and reexteriorizing them in our own particularized ways, we both form our own personalities and make for historical continuity.

Because he is concerned with the problem of “how,” the existential psychohistorian cannot be satisfied with the statement that *some* particularity—as a general moment—is necessary for historical totalization. Historical totalities are possible only in the *irreducibly* particular ways in which they were actually generated through individual projects. If we eliminate the actual lives of a Napoleon or a Flaubert, assuming that “someone else could have fulfilled the same historical function,” no historical intelligibility remains. This counterfactual represents precisely the kind of empty generalization with which certain Marxists (Sartre cites Plechanov) replace the “concrete universal.”

Even Marxists who wish to do justice to actual individuals tend to deal with the adult man, who already assumed a productive role. Thus they start when most of the chips are already down and overlook the crucial stage at which the subject’s sociohistorical relations are actually constituted. Sartre, on the other hand, sets out to penetrate the individual’s *prereflective* project and the early stages of his life. Historical facticity is another shortcoming of the Marxists, who must naively assume that the agent is conscious of his class interest and values if they are not to be left without any theoretical account of *how* these values and interests become reflected *nonconsciously* in the agent’s behavior. In the absence of a sufficient explanation, even those who are not vulgar Marxists must start with the crude generalization that “the means of production determine consciousness,” and then *situate* a given individual within his

<sup>19</sup> The last point is made especially in Sartre’s essay on Kierkegaard, *L’Universel Singulier*, where he also introduces this new category, later repeated in the work on Flaubert.

socioeconomic context without any rules of correspondence or application. Sartre's Existential psychoanalysis, however, supplies the bridge (or "schematism," in Kant's famous phrase), necessary to "anchor" the individual in his socioeconomic framework.

In his essay on Kierkegaard, Sartre summarizes his dialectic of history and existence by the category of the "singular universal." We have seen that universals must not be grasped in the abstract, but only through their singularized expression in the unique life of an individual. An individual life (like Flaubert's) incorporates a "singular universal" in that it manifests the historical universal as something singularly *lived* (*vecu*). We grasp the "singular universal" when we *watch* a person totalizing the meaning of his time or class in his lived singularity, while retaining his transhistorical irreducibility which no universal can capture. Thus, existential psychohistory and the concept of the "singular universal" complement each other, the first being the means for the application of the second.

This leads to a final remark. Although existential psychohistory has a theoretical basis, it is not a self-contained *doctrine*, but basically a hermeneutic *method*. It therefore has systematic significance that Sartre did not leave his method on the merely programmatic level, but actually put it to work.<sup>20</sup> By its own program and basic meaning, this method *demand*s to be used, and so the exemplification of its theoretic assumptions in actual research must count as an integral part of the theory itself.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> In *Les Mots*, his short, splendid, autobiography, Sartre tried to illuminate a whole social and cultural background—his early bourgeois milieu—through an existential psychoanalysis of himself in early childhood. Yet his most ambitious attempt in this field is his monumental (and one must admit, cumbersome) biography of Flaubert: *L'Idiot de la Famille*. The systematic importance of these works lies in the fact that they bring the idea of existential psychohistory beyond the merely (and, in itself, empty) programmatic formula.

<sup>21</sup> For further background and criticism of the issues discussed in this paper, see the author's "Dialectic without Meditation (on Sartre's variety of Marxism and dialectic)," in *Varieties of Marxism*, ed. by Shlomo Avineri, The Hague, Nijhoff, 1977.

# Sartre the Individualist

*Wilfrid Desan*

THE INTENT OF THIS PAPER is to trace some of the aspects in Sartrean thought which more than any others bring to the fore, I believe, the great contribution of the French existentialist. I shall attempt to show that the overriding character of Sartre consists in his defense of the individual. It may appear that this defense is also his weakness. I shall not attempt to refute what I consider deficient, for the refutation is already taking place elsewhere through the formulation of contrary ways of thinking, such as the neo-Marxist trend in France, the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss, and the interpersonalism of Lacan. Even Teilhard de Chardin, although older in years, in some way constitutes a corrective to the existential position. It is not this turning point which interests us at present, but rather that which in Sartre gave rise to it.

## II

IN HIS BRILLIANT AUTOBIOGRAPHY, *The Words*, Sartre wrote:

Every man has his natural place; its altitude is determined by neither pride nor value: childhood decides. Mine is a sixth floor in Paris with a view overlooking the roofs. For a long time I suffocated in the valleys; the plains overwhelmed me: I crawled along

the planet Mars, the heaviness crushed me. I had only to climb a molehill for joy to come rushing back: I would return to my symbolic sixth floor; there I would once again breathe the rarefied air of belles-lettres; the Universe would rise in tiers at my feet and all things would humbly beg for a name; to name the thing was both to create and take it.<sup>1</sup>

This already is the Sartre of later years: "To name the thing was both to create and to take it." *Being and Nothingness* is the forceful illustration of a thought where man is presented as organizer of a world, where he is made not to be ruled but to rule. Man is a meaning-giving center: without man nature would be deaf-mute.<sup>2</sup> Sartre would agree with Heidegger in claiming that "knowledge is the world"<sup>3</sup>—not in creating the world in the strict sense of the word but in causing it "to appear." No one has emptied consciousness as much as has Sartre—for him it is "*néant*," yet paradoxically this consciousness, which has nothing to be, has everything to *do*. It ensures that there is being; it ensures that there is *this* being; it makes time; and, juxtaposing this thing to that thing, it makes space. All the so-called categories—unity-multiplicity, whole-part, more and less, outside of—are ideal manipulations of things, which leave reality itself completely intact. They are different ways in which the For-itself, or individual consciousness, "attacks" and organizes the "apathetic indifference" of things.<sup>4</sup> Meyerson was wrong when he accused reality of a "scandalous diversity." It is man who is responsible, man who stands at the center of reality and constitutes a world.

### III

Children played in the Luxembourg Gardens. I would draw near them. They would brush against me without seeing me. I would watch them with the eyes of a beggar. How strong and quick they were! How good-looking! In the presence of those

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Words*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Braziller, 1964), p. 60.

2. Wilfrid Desan, *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1965), p. 41.

3. Wilfrid Desan, *The Tragic Finale* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), p. 49.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

flesh-and-blood heroes, I would lose my prodigious intelligence, my universal knowledge, my athletic physique, my blustering shrewdness. I would lean against a tree, waiting. . . . To save me from despair, [my mother] would feign impatience: "What are you waiting for, you big silly? Ask them whether they want to play with you." I would shake my head. I would have accepted the lowliest jobs, but it was a matter of pride not to ask for them. She would point to the ladies sitting in iron chairs and knitting: "Do you want me to speak to their mothers?" I would beg her to do nothing of the kind. She would take my hand, we would leave, we would go from tree to tree and from group to group, always entreating, always excluded. At twilight, I would be back on my perch, on the heights where the spirit blew, where my dreams dwelt.<sup>5</sup>

At that moment the famous play *No Exit* was born. "L'enfer, c'est l'autre!" Sartre's theory of the *look* grounds the theory of the Other—the Other who looks at me, annihilates me as a subject, and reduces me to the rank of object. No rational demonstration proves it, but feelings like shame, envy, resentment, etc., make it manifest. The presence of the Other is hostile: in some ways he limits my own consciousness. Where Spinoza says that thought is only limited by thought, Sartre would claim that awareness is kept within bounds through awareness. But—and this is important—this limitation is active: it encloses me, it surrounds me, and yet I never reach it. For Sartre, the Other no less than I myself is center, his whole life is a continual disposition of the world around himself. The Other is an "absence-presence," a mysterious being which ought to be handled with care. "I want him to stay *object* and I hate to see him *subject* again! He makes it nevertheless from time to time. The dead alone stay object for ever."<sup>6</sup>

#### IV

IT IS BANAL by now to stress the element of freedom in a global view of Sartre's philosophy. Let us merely mention that it is part of his concept of nought. What is not, is free; what is not, is not and cannot be caught within the laws of a mechanistic world like any being other than consciousness. In being

5. Sartre, *The Words*, p. 134.

6. Desan, *The Tragic Finale*, p. 72.

nothing, individual consciousness knows that which is and at the same time escapes determinism. Man is the future of man. This implies that since there is no weight of the past on him, man is condemned at every moment to invent man. Consequently, "There is no action of things on the subject, but merely a signification (in the active sense), a centrifugal *Sinngebung*."<sup>7</sup> This attitude of total freedom and of incessant departure is also Sartrean. It is a pleasant feeling, of course, but it may be illusory. "At the age of ten, I had the impression that my prow was cleaving the present and yanking me out of it; since then, I have been running, I'm still running. For me, speed is measured not so much by the distance covered in a given time as by the power of uprooting."<sup>8</sup>

Sartre went to the *lycée* and to the university, where, as is well known, René Descartes dominated the philosophical scene. Sartre, like anybody else who went to school in France in those days, was a Cartesian and at his best a Bergsonian. No less than any other Frenchman but with far more talent than most, Sartre has carried on a lifelong struggle to protect what the French have so aptly called *la lucidité*, which is of course Descartes's old *cogito*, the privilege that mind alone has of not being earth, or any kind of matter. In the depths of his doubt Descartes discovered one certainty, namely, that he thinks, and therefore is a spiritual being. *Lucidité* is that unique light that, containing a world of sense data, itself stands outside and above the world. This is Descartes's defense against a world that is myth—*mundus est fabula*—and Sartre, as a descendant of the Cartesian tradition, introduces it into his own life and doctrine as the negation of matter. Mind alone is supreme and free. In the Cartesian view, thought contains the complex activity of perceiving, knowing, willing, and desiring. Yet knowing is not exactly desiring, since the latter has no limits. Only because you know as a man can you desire as a god. Sartre has inherited this view, but he has eliminated God from his inheritance and replaced him by man, who now has absolute freedom. The conclusion of Sartre is obvious: man must take over the freedom of God.<sup>9</sup>

So there we have Sartre, the philosopher maturing out of the

7. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), p. 436.

8. Sartre, *The Words*, p. 232.

9. Desan, *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p. 262.

child, taking as his cornerstones *subjectivism*, *conflict* with the Other, and *all-out freedom*. The method no less than the content stresses the superiority of the Self. The method is phenomenological, which means that one attempts a description of the world and oneself-in-the-world as they appear. Sartre has a method, but a method which only emphasizes his Cartesian seclusion.

Where is the Marxist in all this? There is none except in desire. No doubt as a young intellectual Sartre nurtured a strong opposition to the bourgeoisie. While a teacher at the *lycée*, he refused to wear a tie, as if he could shed his class with his tie and thus come closer to the worker. For this he deserves no blame. Like the *petit bourgeois intellectuel* that he is, he uses more words than the workers, words with which he can analyze their status and rebel in their name. His concern for the worker is the reverse side of his contempt for the strength of the bourgeois; his concern with man is the fight against anything that humiliates man, and his rebellion the reaction against all power. The freedom and power and esteem of the subject that are so deep in Sartre revolt against the suffering itself, whether that suffering results from the egoism of the Continental bourgeoisie or from oppression preached in the name of Marx and of Lenin. Sartre virtually grew up writing and attempting to publish his writing, for he was devoted to literature, not as art for art's sake but as a means whereby man justifies himself and at the same time fills a need for others.<sup>10</sup>

Sartre now stands at high noon: we are in the 1950's, and he has reached world fame as a philosopher, a playwright, and a novelist, but has not yet committed himself in the domain of social studies and ethics. He will do so in another magnum opus, *Critique de la raison dialectique*, 755 pages of small print which came off the press in 1960, unbelievably difficult and chaotic, with one central message: Marxism is the answer; existentialism is merely a correction. Sartre declares himself a Marxist.

## V

IN THE *Critique* the concept of need is presented as concrete, and human reality is called a "being of need" (*un être*

10. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

*de besoin*), a being that is, which must have an object capable of assuaging its hunger in order to live. This of course is Marx: "Hunger is a natural need: it requires therefore a nature outside itself, an object outside itself in order to be satisfied and stilled."<sup>11</sup> Hunger is only one need. Man also seeks clothing, sex, habitation, etc. All these needs are inseparable from material production. We can assert, therefore, that material production lies at the beginning of history. On all this Sartre agrees. He does add, though, that it is in a world of scarcity (*dans un monde de la rareté*) that need originates; because there is not enough of certain things, need originates. This correction may seem merely redundant. It is not. It is, on the contrary, important, for it is because there is not enough of certain things that the Other is transformed into a menace. The Other for Sartre, more than for Marx, is the opponent who threatens me in my very survival.

Need thus lies at the beginning of the dialectic between man and matter, man and man. The dialectic continues and transforms individual man into the common man (member of the group), the organization man, and the institutionalized man. Proceeding along that road, his freedom has dwindled, yet his power is hundredfold. When the moment comes that all will share alike in the abundance of things, freedom itself will again triumph in all its sovereignty. That is the dream of tomorrow. As for today—and on this Sartre seems to agree with Marx—the need to unite has clipped the wings of freedom.

As far as the opposition of Sartre is concerned, it is directed not so much against Marx himself as it is against a modern interpretation of Marx by certain present-day Communists who in his opinion have distorted the pristine Marxist view.

Sartre is dead set against what he calls the *Marxist rigidity* which so often in the past has forced the ways of living of a country or of an individual into a prearranged scheme without regard for their peculiarity or uniqueness. He calls this the sclerosis of modern Marxism. Examples are, among others, the repression of the Budapest revolt in 1956 and the interpretation of cultural achievements like those of Paul Valéry or Gustave Flaubert. It is naive to call their achievement merely an expression of bourgeois idealism or a result of economic factors. Such

11. Kárl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. with Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1961), p. 182.

generalities explain everything and nothing. Although Sartre has no wish to deny the relation between culture and economics, he wants to deepen the meaning of that relationship in trying to show that both are "mediated" through the individual. In Sartre's opinion, the modern Marxist has forgotten that a case is something unique, that it is not just money which shapes man but the way in which he is directed in and by the individual, in and by his parents. Childhood and growth play a role, and they may in one way or another alter the impact of economic factors.

This commutation of the economic situation by the "mediating" individual must be understood in the light of some of the views developed in *L'Être et le néant*, where man is seen above all as capable of "going beyond" a given situation through his "project," which is precisely his attitude toward the multiple possibles open to him. "To say what man is, is to say what he can," and, conversely, "To say what a man can is to say what he is."<sup>12</sup> Man surpasses his given, and in this sense surpasses the merely mechanical.<sup>13</sup> It is through his "project" that he surpasses the given and looks toward the future as to that which needs to be fulfilled.

Even the worker's rebellion implies in depth that attitude, for it presumes a "going beyond" toward the possibility of change in his situation. Because the worker is not a "mere" thing, his act of rebellion plans and fulfills a new set of possibles.<sup>14</sup> If one would object that the material conditions of his existence determine the number of possibilities which are open to man, Sartre would agree. Yet, although limited, there is a choice of possibles from which he can positively realize one. The subjective in man can surpass one objectivity and reach unto another and, in doing so, define him. It is in his *project* that man is defined.

It is paramount, therefore, to discover this (fundamental) project which will reveal the uniqueness of the self. In order to do so, Sartre suggests a return (regressively) to the beginnings of the self, and from there, with the knowledge obtained, a climb back to the deed itself, where the project is fulfilled in a work or a book or some other accomplishment. Man must be studied as

12. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), I, 64.

13. Desan, *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, pp. 56 ff.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

an entity which is in tension toward a future and an end to be fulfilled.

If we apply this method to *Madame Bovary*, the masterpiece of Flaubert, we shall discover that it is much more than the product of an epoch. Going back to the genesis of the work, we shall discover who the author was and how his "project" was fulfilled, and how, in order to escape from himself and from his inner contradictions, he had to tell a story. Flaubert then will use this instrument to tell a story, but what a story it will be: "l'ouvrage monstrueux et splendide . . . Madame Bovary."<sup>15</sup>

## VI

IT IS IN EXAMINING the growth of the collective in its different phases that Sartre attempts to show most clearly that indestructible something in the hearts and minds of men called individual freedom.

We are in Paris in Sartre's apartment on the corner of the rue Bonaparte, and through his window we are looking down upon a small crowd of people waiting for the autobus at the stop on the place Saint Germain des Prés.<sup>16</sup> What strikes us first of all in this crowd is the solitude of the individual members. These people neither know one another nor care about one another; as Sartre quotes from Proust, "Chacun est bien seul." All this fits into the spirit of the modern metropolis, where the individuals are interchangeable, yet in their solitude somehow protected, as, for example, behind their newspapers on the bus. The local limitation (the sidewalk, the sign around which they gather) and the similarity of purpose unify them in a loose way. Of course, the autobus itself is the central link, what Sartre calls the *collective entity*: as object, it overflows its inert materiality and is full of meaning, with a future and a past in the life of the travelers. In the present, it is also that which will dictate the *seriality*: for this is indeed what this gathering is, a series; it is

15. Sartre, *Critique*, I, 94.

16. For more detail and for close references to Sartre's *Critique*, Vol. I, refer to my book, *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, from which the following pages are partly borrowed.

not a group. It is a series, and by this is implied that through this object, which is the bus, the potential passengers become interchangeable, their internal qualities are negated, and they become simply *Other among Others*.

It becomes immediately apparent that the *seriality* is not structured; in contrast to the *group*, which, as we shall see later, is within itself structured and hierarchical, the Other is never the subordinate or the superior but simply the Other. In this series gathered together by the approaching bus, the factory owner is equivalent to the lowest clerk, the duchess to the char-woman; each one is leveled, each takes his anonymous place in the line. The multiplicity—the waiting crowd—finds in an inert (but man-made) object—the bus—its unity of exteriority, that which makes them Other among Others. Yet the gathering implies a certain unity, a serial unity, or what Sartre calls *une unité en fuite*, a gathering loosely held together and constituted only by way of not being a structured group. The seriality comes from the practico-inert multiplicity of individuals, all of whom are equivalent to one another, yet compelled to give in to a certain order of succession—I get on the bus first, you second, and so on. It is the bus which makes them *inert* beings-outside-themselves, and Other among Others. As Other among Others, they are linked in powerlessness; the seriality, lacking any organization or intercommunication, is inert, powerless to act or move.

Nevertheless, the serial structure should not be considered as just an ideal, fictive entity or a mere concept, for it is something very real. This becomes apparent in the case of Jewishness. In a society which persecutes Jews, to be a Jew is not a fiction. The plurality of Jews as an object of scorn is on this basis a unity and constitutes a seriality. The individuals exist in solitude next to one another and are interchangeable; they belong to the collective only by virtue of their Jewishness, not by virtue of their *individual* internal qualities. The series once more is a collection of people related to one another only through their common Otherness and common being-an-object-of-scorn to those not in the collection. Examples of seriality are many, such as, for example, the listeners to a radio program, the readers of *Figaro*, and so on.

But the seriality can become much more complex, as when it constitutes a certain milieu, whether this be the unorganized cohesion of individuals, as Others, working within a certain

profession, living within a certain section of a city, or belonging to a particular business collectivity. Milieu is structured only through the *Other*, although there is a certain unity—we all live in the 16ème *arrondissement*, we are all small grocers of Montmartre—but it immediately appears that this unity is a fleeting one. *C'est une unité fuyante*. There is a form of container in which one finds oneself Other among Others but where no attempt toward any grouping is made.

We are now in a position to understand what a “class” is, for it, too, is a collective with a practico-inert character, while the individual himself as a member of the class is a powerless member of a seriality. Man discovers his being-outside-himself as his truth and his reality. It is the practico-inert or the ponderosity of matter in and around him which catches hold of man and places him in a social class; this inorganic presence, strangely enough, both describes and is man. This “weight” of the practico-inert which defines the individual man also classifies him socially. One can truly say that the worker who spends eight hours a day in a monotonous and fatiguing job, from which his needs are barely fulfilled, has no other essence outside this frustrated self; he truly is what he does. These conditions are part of his individuality and actually define it. *They make him what he is and hold him where he belongs*, Other among Others. The loose, unorganized unity of individuals is built around an object—in the case of the proletarians, the machine.

Yet—and this is a hopeful sign—there is something incomplete in this ontological identification of one’s self with the practico-inert of one’s career. No essence is ever completely rigid, and one may very well revolt and attempt to go beyond it. Sartre wishes always to make clear that the individual on this globe, although caught in many ways, as for example the impotent member of the seriality, is *not unfree*. This should never be forgotten: although the individual in the series is a prisoner, he can always go beyond his impotency through the consideration that the present condition is *provisional* and *relative*. The proletarian is powerless now, but he *will change a world*.

At a certain moment the exploited or serialized man feels the pain of his alienation and, under some stimulus, the ineptitude of the seriality breaks up and the group is formed. We have seen this happen. Take the case of the bus-riders in Alabama, when the Reverend Martin Luther King stepped out of the seriality and

organized his fellow Negroes into a resistance against the inequality with which they were treated. But we are stepping ahead. All that should be made clear at this point is that the riders may be inert, Other among Others, prisoners of their particular seriality, but the potentiality of changing that situation, of going beyond, gives them a measure of freedom, even within their present prison.

Oddly enough, however, the walls of that prison will only fall with the formation of the group.

## VII

IN OUR APPROACH to this matter, we come back to a recurrent theme of the *Critique*, one which is basic to Marxism itself, and observe that at the start of all change lies a *need*.<sup>17</sup> Need is the stimulus for all human activity—man's work begins in order to fulfill his basic needs, and his *project*, engendered by "what is lacking" (above and beyond the means for bare physical survival), carries him always beyond-himself-toward. The need is such that it results in the impossibility for the individual to remain what he is. One must change, that is, one must break the ground of what is *forbidden*. Yet this conquest of what is forbidden contains a paradox, since upon the basis of scarcity one thinks of oneself and not of the Other. How can it be explained that in a situation where all that matters is the survival of the *self*, the *group* has come into being? In answering that question, let us remember that it is an *object* which brings men together. It was the common object, e.g., the bus, which resulted in the vague unity of the seriality, and in the same way it is an object which will provoke a closer unification, and ultimately the formation of the group itself. To show this, we return once more to Paris; this time we bring our imagination to the eve of one of the most striking events of the French Revolution, the days before the capture of the Bastille.

It is July 12. There is a state of insurrection in Paris. We observe several things. The Parisians, still juxtaposed in the manner of seriality, are hungry and tired. They are not sup-

<sup>17</sup> Desan, *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p. 127; Sartre, *Critique*, I, 385 ff.

ported by the government. On the contrary, the king and his ministers are set against them, provoking some form of unity in the Parisian seriality in an effort to strengthen its opposition. Paris is surrounded by the army, and this physical fact accelerates the unification. Everyone in Paris discovers that he is a "particle of a sealed-off materiality." All of these factors—mutual discomfort, the opposition of the government, and the siege of the army—strengthen the cohesion of the people: everyone sees himself as Other in the Other, and yet as himself.

At this moment the arms depot is looted. This is, no doubt, a positive deed against the king. The gathering has acted, and in this *free deed* it has suddenly discovered that it was fusing into a *group*. This is as far as the past is concerned. As for the future, they prepare a self-defense with their weapons, positing a new act of free self-assertion, *qua group*. The dissolution of the seriality is now manifest for everyone. It is not yet a group in the full sense of the word, but it can be called *un groupe en fusion*. Sartre, borrowing a term from Malraux, calls the mystique of the collectivity tumbling into the phase of group formation *un apocalypse*. Sartre chooses his epithets with great care at this moment. Using Jaures's beautiful expression to focus on these moments of pressure, he calls them moments of *haute température historique*.

The menace now becomes more precise in one section of the city, namely, in the neighborhood of the Bastille, the so-called quartier Saint Antoine. Since the inhabitants of the quartier Saint Antoine will have to defend themselves against the enemy in front of them coming from outside the quartier, and against the enemy in the rear posted in the Bastille, they are more pressed than others and must act as a group if they want to survive. They come out on the street.

Let us stop for a moment and philosophize upon what happens, for what matters above all for an existentialist way of looking at group formation is the avoidance of a positivistic interpretation.

What happens is this. Up to now I have always totalized my quartier from the outside, and by this I mean that, although inhabitant of the quartier, the mental act by which I considered its totality was an englobing act which automatically left me out. At present, however, under the menace of the planned attack from the outside, I am integrated in this (totalized) totality.

There is a strange contradiction in my mind; I, the totalizer of my quartier, now become, under menace of the advancing army of the government, the passively totalized one. The human subject is not an object which is pushed around like a robot. He is subject and must fulfill his dignity in freedom. The inhabitants of the quartier Saint Antoine come out on the street, each one constituting the mental synthesis englobing the totality; in this act of totalization they constitute the unity of the group and at the same time are part of it. A concrete example will clarify this point. Someone, while running toward the Bastille, gives the *mots d'ordre* "Stop," "Go ahead." These *mots d'ordre* are not strictly orders; they are simply manifestations coming from the "third man" (myself or the Other in the group). One cannot call these *mots d'ordre* products of the group; they come from an individual, but, in the act of understanding and of executing them, I, who did not give the orders, recognize myself, and my free choice confirms them. If the *mots d'ordre* are followed, it is because each member has himself given them. There are in the *groupe en fusion* hundreds of individual syntheses; yet they are, as multiplicity, dialectically negated in the very act of constituting the group. Each act can be said to be a free individual development—it is Sartre's constant worry to protect individual freedom—yet it is such through the *group*. The group alone makes the act efficient and is instrumental in its success. Although it can be said in truth that the individual freely joins the group, it is no less certain that if he wants to survive, he has to do so. Salvation is where the group is. And while, as we saw above, the seriality was always elsewhere, or, as Sartre puts it, *en fuite*, it can be said now that salvation is *here*. The *we* expresses the ubiquity of the *me* as interiorized by the Others, which was not and is not at all the case in the seriality.

Although there is at this stage of *groupe en fusion* no leader, there is a strong solidarity and a common action, which although internally diversified—I do this, you do that—keeps all of us subordinated to the common purpose. Once the victory is achieved, which in our example is the capture of the Bastille, some form of frustration is not excluded, but this only comes later. In this case it will be fear: at night the group settles down among the old stones, but it does so uneasily, for the old fort, although tamed, is still a menace.

There is in this phenomenology of the *groupe en fusion* no

super-organism tying the group together, nor is there any hyper-synthesis transcending the individual act; but there is the individual synthesis, which knows itself to be identical with any other individual synthesis. This synthesis or totalization happens from within, in freedom. It is from within, then, through the individual choice, that the plurality becomes unity. A group, or better still a group formation, is nothing but a multiple and ubiquitous presence of the individual synthesis, hundreds of syntheses holding together the group and embracing its totality in freedom.

From the outside there is of course the object, the common danger to be avoided, the Bastille to be taken, Paris to be defended, the common purpose to be fulfilled. The group, to be alive, needs a purpose, offensive or defensive. This purpose indeed challenges the individuals, but their response is not a deterministic one, nor is it a mechanistic necessity as positivism would have it. It is, on the contrary, an act of self-determination performed by the individual; it is his internal choice and approval, his cooperation in the whole move toward the Bastille down the boulevard Saint Antoine. In all this, existentialism discovers the individual subject, whose dignity asserts itself and freely responds to the impact of the future upon the group.

Since the group was merely action, and since in this action it was sufficiently unified, the group did not feel the need to reflect upon its status. Once, however, it has done what it had to do, it becomes more conscious of itself. Now that the Bastille is taken and the group is sitting on its laurels, the need for a new form of integration becomes urgent. It is very important for the survival of the group that I, for example, who am a guardian during the night after the taking of the Bastille, keep alive the awareness of the group as a common reality. The interiorization must survive, but it will have to struggle against solitude and fragmentation.

## VIII

AT THIS MOMENT a new qualification appears; it is called the *oath* and will be the protection against the menace of atomization.<sup>18</sup> The oath brings with it a new form of inertia and

<sup>18</sup> Desan, *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p. 139; Sartre, *Critique*, I, 139 ff.

abridges freedom. The group becomes its own inertia as a protection against seriality. I can also call the oath a form of reciprocity in the sense that through the oath I protect myself and the third man, the one through the other. But this reciprocity is mediated by the whole group: my oath is only a guarantee when taken for granted by the others as well. This definitely modifies the group, for the clear implication is that from now on *I can become* a traitor. The group, to avoid fragmentation and dissolution within its own ranks, through the oath exerts pressure upon its own members. The members themselves are in danger *within* the group. If the group has a political coloring, we call this group pressure *terreur*, and a traitor is not only dismissed but, as is well known, is eliminated as well. The oath implies punishment or death as a possible destiny, since it really means this: if the individual weakens, the group will take care of him, in one way or another. There is in each of the members a solicitude for the other, but it is a fatal solicitude. Yet underneath all this, freedom is not dead: it was and is my free choice which at present is being protected. It is a common freedom, a freedom which belongs to all, but it is a freedom which, as a result of the oath, must be protected by violence. It should be added that the oath at times has a sacred and noumenal character and that ceremonies are used as the means through which that sacred character reaches me. But the oath does not necessarily have this explicit exteriorization and may very well be implicitly present although never performed as such.

## IX

WE NOW STEP into a new phase, which is called the *organization*.<sup>19</sup> The oath having cemented the unity of the group, the distribution of tasks within this unity requires a differentiation of the members. The function individualizes, no doubt, and in this sense limits the freedom of the individual. The player on the team who is chosen to be the goalkeeper automatically has his freedom restricted, since he has that particular function and no other. But if it is his duty, it is also his privilege and his right.

19. Desan, *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p. 142.

We notice also how, within a group, a function is a determining limitation in the way a *tool* acts. We discover that a tool is a contact with the world, implying both a sovereignty upon a portion of the world and a restriction of my own world. Take, for example, the airplane in Saint Exupéry's *Terre des hommes*. To be a pilot is to be a pilot only, but within this function the possibilities are great. In the same way the individual, caught in the praxis of the group and confined through the oath, can exercise his common function in an uncommon way. The road is free toward that achievement. But in whatever way it is done, it is negated and absorbed in the common end of the group. Each individual function creates a situation within the group and through the group with each one of its members. We members of the group are all brothers tied together by this complex dialectic of each toward each through the group. One can also specify the functions of X with an eye upon Y, or one can point at the functions of Y with an eye upon X. There is indeed a form of brotherhood at work, but it is, as was implied above, *une fraternité terreur*. When one speaks of the organized group, one does not mean that every member is indispensable, even though his function is. Sometimes the indispensable member is thrown out after a purge; sometimes he is kept on as a mere unit, thus proving that he was not indispensable.

Because of the fact that groups within the society are very complex—e.g., the intricate relation within one city of the productive and nonproductive elements, such as children and old people—it remains true that a mathematical logistics can be made up of the mutual actions and reactions, of growth and decline. Only when A freely decides to marry B does he begin the complicated logistics of relations between cousins, nieces, parents, aunts, and uncles. In other words, the possibility of using mathematics results from a free decision of Peter or perhaps of Mary.

When the child is born, it is born into a group. To be born *into* implies acceptance of the group. This is the rationale behind the practice of baptizing a child at his birth and making a decision for him. Sartre here surprisingly, but no less consistently for that reason, takes a stand in favor of the French Catholic who, although perhaps not practicing his religion, wants baptism and first communion for his children. This indeed implies some passivity in the individual, but allows for later

interiorization or internal acceptance of these ceremonies once the child has become an adult. Freedom is not denied; actually it still is part of the group as such, since the group in Sartre's conviction is not an objective totality or organic reality by itself, but merely the result of subjective synthesis or totalization, or better still of the interiorization or acceptance of the total activity as such. The individual is still alive, as is the group. The individual is still alive but under menace, for the next stage of development is the institution.

## X

THE GROUP, sadly enough, will become an institution. The deeper reason for this final change is the fact that the organized group does not and cannot live within a spatial container.<sup>20</sup> Its practical unity, which is a unity for action, requires a sort of ubiquity in space and time. The individual member in the very exercise of his duty is led geographically out of the group. Against this the oath is of no great help, for contact with the Other is a necessity. It is a strange paradox which affects even the religious group, namely, the fact that the group requires unity, yet its action is impossible without dispersion. The group was made for action, yet dissolves in the action, and here once more we put our finger on the fluidity and freedom of human participation. The individual subject, which actually is everyman, is never entirely in the group, nor is he entirely out of the group. Every act could be a refusal of the oath.

Against this menace the group reacts and becomes an institution; and the common individual becomes the institutional one. This may appear to be an unavoidable evolution, but it is quite often far from progress in the full sense of the word.

What characterizes the institution is, first, that from now on what counts is the *function*, which becomes essential, while the individual is unessential and is merely perpetuated in the function. The immediate result is a great rigidity and an increase of the *inert*. From now on any individual who proposes a change is suspect, since that very proposal is already a manifestation of

20. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

freedom and a revelation of individuality. The institution clearly wants impotency toward alteration. It is in a way a return to seriality, where the individual is merely Other; yet it is more powerful, since it keeps active toward a common objective. The trend toward the same and common objective remains, because the praxis (or action) remains, and the praxis remains because it is a praxis under command.

This is a second feature of the institution. The institution has *authority*.<sup>21</sup> The remote foundation of authority has to be sought in the *groupe en fusion*. The people of the quartier Saint Antoine, who, as you will remember, were "on the run" toward the Bastille, have a third man regulator. Leadership was present but very vague. Later on, it became more specific but not stable. Authority becomes permanent only when the institution is born. According to Sartre, authority does not come from God, nor does it come from the people as a direct expression of their wishes; it is merely a concession of the masses. According to his existentialist view, "every man is sovereign," but there is one who becomes *the Sovereign*, and he is the Sovereign because he is the mediator of communications and obtains this particular function through explicit or implicit concessions. He becomes the *indépassable* entity: One cannot go around him, since he stops the flow of circularity. An imperative ordering me to work in a specific way toward the common cause reaches me through him. We commonly call that an order. From now on my freedom is alienated, or rather my freedom is *in the sovereign*, because I want it to be so.

At this moment, the *unity* of the group still lies in its object and its purpose; it lies in the members *qua* inert; it lies in the Sovereign. It is *not* in the group. There is power in the group, but this power paradoxically lies in the impotency of its members. This impotency constitutes a power of inertia. During this phase, the aims of the group are still fulfilled, but they have become destiny. What matters now is consolidation of power in the hands of the one regulator or Sovereign. If he is omnipotent and incarnates both State and Party, he is worshiped as a god. The phenomenon is known as personality cult, and its most notorious example is of course Stalin.

The Sovereign wants unity and he gets it, but notwithstand-

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 176 ff.

ing this unity, or rather because of it, he remains distrustful. "His right hand trusts his left hand and no other hand." This beautiful quotation reveals one thing clearly: in an institution-ized group with authority, even with, as Sartre calls it, *une autorité terreur*, the Sovereign remains suspicious, because he cannot prevent humans from being what they are, namely, at heart free. In and through the institution my freedom is alienated, or rather my freedom is in the Sovereign, because I want it to be there. Yet can I say farewell to what I am? Although quasi-inorganic, inert and submissive, *perinde ac cadaver* ("like a corpse"), shall I forever remain that way?

Here we are, at the end of the long duel between man and the inert, which attempts to immobilize him but without which he cannot exist. Seriality, *group en fusion*, group under oath, organization, institution, authority—there are so many means which make the individual act with power, yet which also make him powerless, powerless but not unfree. Someday, when the time is ripe, perhaps the Bastille will be taken again.

In conclusion, Sartre basically accepts dialectic as the infrastructure of sociological growth, but he looks at this dialectical procedure with a critical eye. His book—and this must be kept in mind—is a *Critique de la raison dialectique*. The dialectic which moves through history is *not merely a deterministic one* to which man must blindly submit. At every stage the subject intervenes; even in the seriality man chooses to an extent his prison, and if the walls become too confining, he, in unison with others, is driven to escape and to form a group. In the case of the bus passengers, they chose to embark at a certain point and to disembark at a particular destination—they were of course compelled to stand and wait for the bus which would take them there. One might say that they were caught, but, on the other hand, there is always the possibility of going beyond. Thus, we have already seen that the Negro riders in Alabama might always have accepted unequal service, which as members of a series they were forced to do—but they did not; they united. There is always the human element; man is caught, yet free. He is not the mere helpless pawn of a dogmatic dialectic, as the Marxists would have us believe. Furthermore, Sartre would have us always be *aware* of the events which are operating, as now when we observe the genesis of the group as a *rational* and *intelligible* procedure. It is the intention of the entire work of

Sartre to lay all this before us, to bring it out of the darkness into the light; but as we have said before, others may—and must—do it also. It has always been a preoccupation of Sartre's to investigate how much a person is conditioned by his class and how far he is self-determined.

The obsession of the *Critique*, not always overt yet always there at least subterraneously, is that the individual is *center* and that the Other in one way or another is a menace. In the analysis of the sociological development, Sartre makes it abundantly clear that the group is born through *me as individual* and for *my* protection. When the Other is no longer a help, he becomes in the world of scarcity a menace. In a world such as ours, where there is not enough for all, he appears as a menace, a scandal, a perpetual opponent.<sup>22</sup> Having erected an impressive defense of the subject, Sartre has exploded the concept of the intersubjective. The foremost French existentialist has no philosophy of the group as *an ontological totality*. As long as he installs the individual as sovereign and refuses to accept the group as ontological entity, the existence and the accomplishment of which surpasses the being and the activity of the individual self, one must conclude that Sartre has not really and in depth given us the speculative basis on which to build a philosophy of the collective.

Where then lies Sartre's merit? Sartre's merit is precisely the glorification of his sin, namely, of the self. Sartre, more than his predecessors, has drawn attention to the individual, to his freedom and his creation. Marxism had not sufficiently seen this (and in stating this, I merely repeat Adam Schaff). At present the power of the Subject comes to the fore. Besides the indubitable impact of economic factors, there is also in individual man that ineffable something which escapes quantification, which is irrepressible, starts anew, affects and mutates a surrounding world and in this very deed creates. In this Sartre corrects Marx. But to correct does not necessarily mean to become.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 265.



## SARTRE'S CONSTRICTION OF THE MARXIST DIALECTIC

GEORGE ALLAN

**J**EAN-PAUL SARTRE, in the *Critique de la raison dialectique*,<sup>1</sup> develops a theory of *praxis* which extends the anthropology of *L'être et le néant* while simultaneously claiming to correct and complete Marxism. Central to Sartre's argument are two assertions: (1) that dialectic is fundamental to human action, and (2) that all historical development is rooted in the *praxis* of individual persons. These twin assertions, by insisting upon the existential element in social change, do not merely correct Marxism. They fundamentally alter it. In affirming the dialectical structure of *praxis*, Sartrean Marxism is compelled to deny a dialectic of history. It modifies the Marxian dialectic by radically constricting its scope, denying a becoming of the dialectic by insisting upon a dialectic of becoming.

### I

The *Critique* is a complex book, but its central argument is relatively simple. *Praxis* is a structure unique to conscious reality: it is the shape of human action. Individual human acts are free within the limits dictated by facticity, but the very exercise of freedom spawns facticities that turn back upon freedom, thwarting its goals, transforming its achievements into unintended consequences. *Praxis*, says Sartre, creates its anti-*praxis* in the form both of socioeconomic forces and of supposedly natural forces. Although impersonal and apparently inexorable, these behave in quasi-pur-

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<sup>1</sup> Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1960 (henceforth *CRD*). Translated by Alan Sheridan-Smith as *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1976), but omitting the prefixed essay *Question de méthode* which is translated separately by Hazel Barnes as *Search for a Method* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963).

poseful ways, seeming to have as their goal the enslavement of freedom, the alienation of action from the ends it pursues. Sartre refers to these manmade but no longer man-controlled realities as the "practico-inert." They are historical forces massive with the solidity of inert matter yet active with the oriented focus peculiar to purposive behavior.

Persons are able to gain control over these Frankenstein monsters of their own creation only through the formation of groups, through pursuing common ends by cooperative means. Groups are of myriad sorts: mobs, gatherings, clans, special interest groups, bureaucracies, nations, federations, empires. This communal *praxis* overcomes the serial impotence of individual *praxis*. But groups are unstable accomplishments. Their mutuality is undercut by the very individual purposes that first called them into being. Group *praxis* becomes stultified as individual aims require coercion and regimentation in order to retain effective coordination of their varied activities. It fragments, disintegrating into the frustrated powerlessness of scattered individuals until such times as new groups emerge.

The emphasis on dialectic seems to locate Sartre squarely in an Hegelian and Marxist perspective. An historical situation generates its implicit contradictions, this tension is overcome through a negation of the emergent negation, culminating in a new achievement which lays the conditions for a new dialectical development. Hegel and Marx, however, ascribe dialectical processes to history in a utopian manner. They claim that the presence of a dialectic in history entails that there is a dialectic to the whole of history, that the movement of human events must be interpreted in terms of a progressive surpassing of the contradictions inherent in any level of social achievement toward less distorted, less alienated, less irrational levels. First there is an attained solution to previous conflict, then a working out of the inadequacies inherent in that solution until explicit social contradictions reemerge in new form, and finally a new solution emerges which passes beyond the alternatives proposed by the conflicting parties, negating their differences while also utilizing those differences in unforeseen ways to effect new and improved structures of social unity. This new

achievement has its implicit contradictions needing to be made explicit, and so the passions of men expend themselves in animosity and compromise until such time as the solution achieved is a final, fully adequate one. History is thus the story of humankind's quest for the kingdom of God, the working out of the destiny of peoples toward the absolute incarnation of ideal possibility in the flesh of time.

Sartre's argument in the *Critique* undercuts this utopianism, despite his occasional protestations to the contrary.<sup>2</sup> Thus although he embraces Hegelianism and Marxism by introducing dialectic into the *pour-soi, en-soi* structure of human being, Sartre constricts what he embraces by restricting its scope. In affirming a dialectic of *praxis* Sartre denies a dialectic of history.

I would willingly grant that in these matters Hegel may not be an Hegelian nor Marx a Marxist. Perhaps Sartre is merely joining his two German predecessors in providing us with a tragic view of history, an anti-utopian interpretation of the revolutionary struggles of people for the sake of ideals to be sought but not attained. Sartre, after all, describes his *Critique* as involving a purification of Marxism from its accumulated ideological baggage—its historical determinism, its abstract dogmatism, its facile utopianism. Less explicitly, but just as basically, the *Critique* is deeply tinged with He-

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<sup>2</sup> Sartre frequently alludes to the never-published second volume of his *Critique*, in which historical development will replace structural analysis as the subject of inquiry. The claim is usually made that the result will demonstrate the necessity and the unity of the truth of human history. For instance: "Le tome II, que le suivra bientôt, retracera les étapes de la progression critique: il tentera d'établir qu'il y a une histoire humaine avec une vérité et une intelligibilité" (*CRD*, p. 156). This need not imply utopian closure, of course, but it comes close to contradicting the explicit rejection of historical perfectibility upon which this paper focuses. Perhaps even more utopian in its implications is the famous visionary conclusion to the first part of *Question de méthode*: "Aussitôt qu'il existera pour tous une marge de liberté réelle au delà de la production de la vie, le marxisme aura vécu; une philosophie de la liberté prendra sa place. Mais nous n'avons aucun moyen, aucun instrument intellectuel, aucune expérience concrète qui nous permette de concevoir cette liberté ni cette philosophie" (*CRD*, p. 32). It is one of the underlying theses of this paper that such utopian implications are not warranted by the ontology of the *Critique*.

gelian concepts and method, such that it is as foundationally Hegelian as *L'être et le néant* was fundamentally Cartesian.

Nonetheless, whatever the truth of Hegel's thought and of Marx's, the destiny of both has been to support a view of history as progressive, marking inexorably the triumph of reason, of law and justice, of human freedom and fulfillment. The progress may be via conflict, but it is progress nonetheless; there may be contradictions, but they are contradictions from which the overcoming of contradiction emerges; change and transformation are the essence of history, but they are for the sake of the serenity of utopia, for the peace of the classless society, for the perfection of the Messianic kingdom. Consequently the Marxism attacked by Sartre's dialectical ontology should be understood as asserting the utopian thesis that there is a dialectic of history and that this dialectic assures the ultimate triumph of human freedom, the ultimate abolition of social strife and human suffering. In contrast, Sartre's philosophy affirms that dialectic is the living heart of the historical and that human action is essentially a structure of dialectic, but that there are no utopian consolations. In affirming a dialectic of *praxis*, Sartre denies a dialectic of history, and denies it precisely because the dialectic of *praxis* is what it is.

## II

*Praxis* has to do solely with persons. It names the unique way they comport themselves amid the world. For Sartre, an act is an interplay between the subject and its world, between the intending consciousness and the object it knows, between the energizing purpose and the objective transformation of the environment that ensues. In *L'être et le néant* Sartre's focus is on the act of knowing, the negating *pour-soi* of consciousness and the *en-soi* rich in its objective plenitude of being toward which consciousness projects itself. In the *Critique* Sartre shifts the emphasis to doing, to the way in which purposes sought, needs demanding fulfillment, shape the material world into new configurations of plenitude. In both foci, undergirding the differences result-

ing from the divergence in perspective, is Sartre's insistence that the elements involved—subject and object, purpose and satisfaction—are moments in an underlying fundamental process, the dynamic fact of *l'homme-dans-le-monde*.<sup>3</sup> To be, for human being, is to be a whole which, although capable of analysis into public and private factors, is in fact and primordially their unity. The duality exists only as a process perpetually reaching out toward complex unity, perpetually interrelating interiority and exteriority, consciousness and thinghood, in an organic whole. Being and consciousness, sundered by the incompleteness of all human reality, are nonetheless united in that very reality when it is taken as "in the making" and not viewed statically, i.e., analytically (*CRD*, p. 131).

Merely to assert that *praxis* has a structure which encompasses a duality within a unity is not to have accomplished very much, however. Sartre's claim needs to be articulated with convincing care and with a phenomenologically adequate attention to detail. He has pursued this task throughout a lifetime of writing, but only in the *Critique* does he draw the dialectical character of this structure with sufficient clarity. The dialectical structure of *l'homme-dans-le-monde* is exposed to view when our attention is drawn away from intentional consciousness and directed toward the problem of need. The move is a shift from the petit bourgeois intellectual's concern for theory to the properly Marxist concern for living persons. When suffering rather than ignorance is taken as definitional, when human being is said to be fundamentally in the world as felt insufficiency, as *l'homme du besoin* (*CRD*, pp. 166–68), then the structures of dialectic are manifest as lying at the heart of the human condition.

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<sup>3</sup> "Le concret . . . est une totalité qui peut exister par soi seule. . . . De ce point de vue, la conscience est un abstrait, puisqu'elle recèle en elle-même une origine ontologique vers l'ensoi et, réciproquement, le phénomène est un abstrait aussi puisqu'il doit 'paraître' à la conscience. Le concret ne saurait être que la totalité synthétique dont la conscience comme la phénomène ne constituent que des moments. Le concret, c'est l'homme dans le monde, avec cette union spécifique de l'homme au monde que Heidegger, par exemple, nomme 'être-dans-le-monde'." *L'être et le néant* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1943) (henceforth *EN*), pp. 37–38.

Everywhere and always the way of a person's being in the world, according to Sartre, is as felt insufficiency. I am situated within my world aware of myself as needing its resources but not in fact having them. Thus I always must live my given material situation needfully. The "how" of my living in my world, the adverbial character of my actions, is unavoidably that of need. This landscape of the given includes an horizon of possibles, a vision of alternatives to the present inadequate state of my affairs. I negate this given world of mine, consequently, by organizing it around me instrumentally, shaping it into a practical field for action within which I strive after an outcome sufficient to my sensed need, an outcome satisfying the deficiency I feel. The deficiency overcome, the satiation of need satisfied, is only momentary. Its perishing is the birth of negation. Doubly so, for the new situation is tinted with negativity both because the rejected actualities are now known to be inadequate and because the candidates for adequacy are not yet actual. This double negation is in its turn negated when the individual attempts to transmute the given toward some specific possibilities, and thereby achieves some reordering of the material world, some resolution of its inadequacies, however momentary that be, however unsatisfying.

Sartre calls this process of world-transformation, this negating of negativity, *totalisation*. Totalization is dynamic, the effort through adversity toward a specific, determinate outcome: *l'unification en cours*. He uses the term '*totalité*' for the outcome itself, apart from the process of its accomplishment (CRD, pp. 138–39).<sup>4</sup> Totalization and totality, process and product, are both caught up into the notion of *praxis*. *Praxis* comprises the whole of the dynamic structure. It encompasses the given material landscape for action, the horizon of possibles, the effort to come to terms with the conflict between a deficient actuality and an unactualized alternative, the weaving of conflict into unified outcome, that out-

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<sup>4</sup> To encapsulate this dialectic of need in a phrase: "Or la *praxis* née du besoin est un totalisation dont le mouvement vers sa propre fin transforme pratiquement l'environnement en une *totalité*" (CRD, p. 170).

come as a settled fact, as a definitive achievement, this new landscape with its new horizon, its new conflict, its new effort toward reconciliation. All this is *praxis*, and it is all, without question, dialectical.

Four characteristics of *praxis* are implicit in this sketch of the human condition as Sartre interprets it, this assertion of *praxis* as a structure which is dialectical. They are that *praxis* is residual, surpassable, partial, and fragile. These four characteristics will provide the basis for my subsequent argument, on behalf of Sartre, against utopianism.

(1) The quest after totality is endless; the rhythm of its dialectic, repetitive and incessant. The victory of the quest is marked by the achievement of a residue, a determinate outcome. The living fullness of totalizing activity becomes, in the moment of its success, something not quite sought. By achieving completion dynamic process is lost; the living becomes dead. The sweat of creative human labor objectifies in its very success a reality transcending its subjective immediacy, escaping its control (*CRD*, p. 200). In this residualizing of my labor I come to know myself as objective, but this means that my subjectivity is a process the destiny of which lies in achievements that endure independently of my living self. To labor is to fashion material artifacts which are the residue of purposes, the separated remains of the quest after possibility.

(2) Yet living awareness always leaps beyond such dead finalities, viewing them from the open perspective of future possibilities. From such a vantage the given is seen as having been the negation of previous givens, and thus itself negatable, itself an instrument for its own overcoming. Totality thus appears as a *passé dépassé* (*CRD*, p. 160). I know my past as surpassable, the ossification of my accomplishments as the very foundation for moving beyond them to some new totality. We pass beyond our old attainments by using them as stepping stones toward new accomplishment.

(3) Totalities are not only residual and surpassable: they are also partial. Breadth of inclusion and cohesive intensity of achievement are at odds in art, in politics, in every human endeavor to bring harmony and order into the relative cacophony of the world. A work of art or the organization of a

group are achievements of value, for they enrich experience and improve our common situation. They take many disparate elements and make them one unity intense in the quality of life provided. But such unities are purchases at the price of omission and subordination. The partialities of my totalizations are especially revealed when they disclose other totalizings which exclude me, or which include me only as an objective given within a field of action. Thus in the face of the *praxis* of others I discover my own finiteness, my distinctiveness from that which is other than myself. I discover my insufficiency, the deficient and unmasterful character of my undertakings (*CRD*, pp. 182–86). My achievements are incomplete and thus in no ultimate sense finalities.

(4) According to Sartre, this structure of recurrent need-unification-loss-need, although dialectical, lacks one further factor before it can break out from mere cyclicity into the unsettling rhythms of historical change. This is the element of *rareté* which opens up a gap between the appearance of need and its satisfaction.<sup>5</sup> In a context of scarcity, the reach after totalities becomes threatened. Quite possibly the totality may never be attained, need may never find its satisfaction. I recognize within this new and frightening dialectic of scarcity the fact of my destructability. The partiality of my accomplishments means that in the presence of other purposes I might find them attempting to thwart me or to destroy me. The inertia, the objective residue, of my accomplishments appears now as an instrument which can be used against me. My ability to surpass old totalities reveals itself as also the ability others have to surpass me, to use me, to render me among *les excédentaires*. I am expendable by virtue of my own accomplishments.

Thus the dialectic of *praxis* exposes my existence and activity, as well as that of other persons, as radically incomplete. Our attempts at closure, our pursuit of completeness across the tangled contours of the material landscape, turn out to be ephemeral and in constant need of renewal. If successful, they are prone to decay, marred by deficiency, and

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<sup>5</sup> "Le processus cyclique . . . est brisé *du dehors* et par l'environnement, simplement parce que la *rareté*, comme fait contingent et inéluctable, interrompt les échanges" (*CRD*, p. 168). See also *CRD*, pp. 200–24.

constrained by the boundaries of their finitude. If unsuccessful, they make of my projects and myself something surpassed, useless, *de trop*.

Sartre, following Marx's lead, is aware of the alienated character of contemporary life, the distortive, perverting power exercised by the contradictions inherent in capitalism and in existing modes of socialism. Sartre calls this alienating force *réification* (e.g., *CRD*, p. 179). Historical in origin, reifications are caused by contingent factors and are therefore open to remedy. Human beings make history, and thus the alienations they create they can, in principle at least, overcome. Moreover Sartre is ready to accept Marx's argument that the contradiction between the mode and relations of production inherent in capitalism generates a form of alienation which can be corrected only by the radical violence of social revolution.

Sartre's analysis of *praxis*, however, makes it clear that in stripping away the causes of such alienation and exposing the pure, undistorted structures of human action, one has not removed all contradiction. The structure of *praxis* is itself contradictory. As such, furthermore, it carries at its living center the ever-present possibility of renewed reification. Security beyond the threat of new-burgeoning alienation is impossible. There can be no historical development which unfolds over time a final resolution to the violences and conflicts of human existence, no establishment of a utopian society freed permanently from the dangers of dehumanization. The dialectic of *praxis* forecloses to human being the utopian expectations nurtured by a dialectic of history.

### III

These implications coiled at the heart of Sartre's ontology can be further explicated by bringing them into dialogue with some notions sketched by Marx in his early writings.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Auszüge aus James Mills Buch "Élément d'économie politique"* (1844), in Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels, *Werke* (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1974) (henceforth *MEW*) 1:445-63. Translated by Clemens Dutt in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1975) 3:211-28. After tracing

In his excerpt notes from 1844 on James Mill's *Elements of Political Economy*, Marx with enigmatic brevity provides a profile of ideal personhood in terms of structures of need which are satisfied by truly human production and distorted by the alienated conditions of capitalist labor. The similarity to Sartre's analysis of the reifying effects of capitalism upon *praxis* is sufficient to warrant a closer look and to suggest some speculative extrapolations.

One of the two fundamental human needs, according to Marx, is the need to exist: to be alive and to be aware of oneself as an existing, enduring reality.<sup>7</sup> By laboring upon the earth, men are able to transform it into objects capable of satiating and sustaining the demands of their metabolic and collective survival, demands for food, clothing, shelter, progeny. In addition, the very act of production itself fulfills the need to realize oneself as existent. For it is a proof of my existence, of my objective reality, that my own efforts can fashion the real into public objects. The externalized product and the externalizing production, residue and creative effort, reveal to me the reality, objective and subjective, of my self.

This need to exist and to be aware of existing is distorted by capitalism into avarice,<sup>8</sup> into the need to own, to possess in rich proliferation the goods that sustain existence. The means of existence are hoarded in excess of need until they

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in various ways the alienated relationships in an economy based on private property, relations which he says are acts of "mutual pillaging," Marx concludes by envisioning the ideal alternative: "Gesetzt, wir hätten als Menschen produziert: Jeder von uns hätte in seiner Produktion sich selbst und den andren *doppelt bejaht*" (MEW 1:462). Marx then sketches four structural consequences, the first two of which are primary and will be the focus of our attention.

<sup>7</sup> "Ich hätte 1. in meiner *Produktion* meine *Individualität*, ihre *Eigentümlichkeit* vergegenständlicht und daher sowohl während des *Tätigkeit* eine individuelle *Lebensäußerung* genossen, als im *Anschauen* des Gegenstandes die individuelle Freude, meine *Persönlichkeit* als *gegenständliche, sinnlich anschaubare* und darum *über allen Zweifel erhabene* Macht zu wissen" (MEW 1:462).

<sup>8</sup> Here and following I occasionally use, modified to my own purposes, some distinctions developed by Jean Hyppolite in his *Études sur Marx et Hegel* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Riviere et Cie, 1955). See pp. 159–60 for the distinction between avarice and ambition, which Hyppolite traces to Hegel.

become the end and purpose of existence, and persons, both others and oneself, become the means. Avarice spins a spiral of increased debasement until both rich and poor, both owner and laborer, lose their humanity. The owner becomes an instrument for the accumulation of money, a slave to his own greed. The laborer no longer labors for his own existence but for that of another. His existence is consequently not his own self-expression but is possessed by another who gives it to him in the form of wages paid for the sake of subsistence, who gives him his existence as though it were a gift for which he is beholden. His labor has become a broken image of itself.

Indeed, under the regimen of industrial production, labor as an expression of the existing self entirely disappears. Workers are debased below even the animal dimension of their being, to a machine's mode of existence with a machine's needs. They need fuel, not food; they require upkeep, not a livelihood; their worn-out labor demands replacement, not regeneration or new birth. "*L'homme est alors la machine de la machine*" (CRD, p. 74). Relationships among persons become violent and antagonistic, a struggle for the means of existence, a contest determining who shall live and who shall die.

Interpersonal relationships, whether or not alienated, are not mere side effects, however, of the basic human need to exist. Marx in those same early excerpt notes argues that the need to relate to other persons is also fundamental, its satisfaction a matter of intrinsic value.<sup>9</sup> This second of the two fundamental human needs should ideally take the form of a sense of one's humanity and of the mutual interdependence of persons. In producing the objects which exhibit and sustain my existence, I am fashioning something that can be enjoyed by others, that can be utilized by anyone, by Everyman. Thus I enjoy in creation not only my peculiar individual self but also what Marx calls my "species being." I give reality not only to my subjective self but also to human na-

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<sup>9</sup> "2. In deinem Genuss oder deinem Gebrauch meines Produkts hätte ich *unmittelbar* den Genuss, sowohl des Bewusstseins, in meiner Arbeit ein *menschliches* Bedürfnis eines andren *menschlichen* Wesens seinen entsprechenden Gegenstand verschafft zu haben" (MEW 1:462).

ture. And I recognize in this transcending character of my labor that I am able to assist others in satisfying their similar needs for self-expression and mutuality. Further, I recognize that you in your undertakings have, and recognize yourself as having, the same capacity to help me and thus to exhibit along with me the reality of our common nature.

The contradictions of capitalism twist this ideal interrelatedness among human beings into the disfiguring furrows of ambition. The need for mutuality is transmuted into a need to possess power, to control the lives of others, to transform interdependence into dependence. Power over human beings, however benevolent its intent, entails control over the ability others have to rise above mere existence and to satisfy higher, more specifically human capacities. Control of the means of production furnishes a person the power to withhold or provide the materials and instruments without which another person cannot labor creatively. But if our sense of human nature is aroused in the creative act, if our awareness of mutuality first buds in the artifice of toil, then the control of the means of production means control over the quality of a person's humanity. The meaning of my existence is in the hands of him who provides to me the materials through which meaningful creation can take place, just as my very existence is in the hands of him who pays my wages.

Thus ambition defiles human mutuality. Persons become no more than exemplars of a ruler's schemes, pawns in purposes that brook no respect for their own purposes nor exhibit any care for their humanity. If the economics of industrial capitalism makes people into machines of the machines, the politics of mass society makes them into fodder for canon and food for others' ambitions.

Human beings, thus, are creatures of need—most basically a need to exist, to feel themselves as existing, and a need to find in their existence self-transcending dimensions of mutuality. Capitalism, as a specific historical form of individual and social existence, has distorted—reified, alienated—these basic human needs, siphoning the quality of life down below legitimate levels of fulfillment. Authentic human *needs* have been reduced to mere *desires*. Authentic human interaction with the natural and social environment has been debased

into the desire to possess that environment, to own avariciously its products and to control ambitiously its population.

Key to the movement of this devolution is a growth in scarcity. For the dark netherside of the desire to possess is the manufacture of artificial scarcities, compounding the inevitable natural scarcities of a finite world:<sup>10</sup> (1) The desire to possess products of human labor creates an artificial scarcity in the means of subsistence. Some hoard avariciously while the rest must starve. (2) The desire to possess money, to own the means of access to the products required for existence, creates an artificial scarcity in consumers. For instance, in economic depressions products rot and productivity goes unused because of insufficient persons with the resources required for purchasing available products.

Both of the preceding artificial scarcities are rooted in avarice and hence are reifications of Marx's first dimension of authentic *praxis*, the need to exist. Two further artificialities arise from ambition, from distortions of the need for mutuality. (3) The desire to possess the means of production creates an artificial scarcity in tools. People are denied at the whim of other people the opportunity to express their humanity by being denied the instruments of that expression. (4) The desire to possess the power to determine society's expendables, those whose death or debasement it can afford, creates an artificial scarcity in producers. This determines by fiat the number and the nature of those whose labor shall sustain society's existence and provide its cultural meanings.

The desire to possess, to have goods and to have power, is in turn reducible to the desire to *be*.<sup>11</sup> The pursuit of abundant possessions is evidence of an inner orientation toward riskless existence, an urge toward the kind of plenitude, the kind of fullness, which human reality, because it is both conscious and metabolic, lacks. Similarly the quest after absolute power manifests a craving for unthreatened

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<sup>10</sup> The four kinds of artificial scarcity which follow are suggested by Sartre's discussion in *CRD*, pp. 211-14. Especially important for Sartre, as we shall see later, is the last: *les excédentaires*.

<sup>11</sup> Recall the famous fourth part of *L'être et le néant*, "Avoir, faire et être," especially *EN*, pp. 663-90.

self-expression and mastery of the meaning of one's existence. Sartre in *L'être et le néant* calls this aim after completion "the desire to be God."<sup>12</sup> In the *Critique* this same theme appears as the desire for a totality that is unsurpassable, indestructible, and in no sense partial. In the more socially articulated context of this latter book, the metaphor of a desire to be God is transformed into the imagery of a clash among the desires of the gods: a Manichaeian struggle between totalities, between the powers of good and evil, the divine absolutes *l'homme* and *le contre-homme* (CRD, pp. 208–209). Applied to the specific milieu of capitalism, it is the clash of bourgeoisie and proletariat.

#### IV

Marx and Engels, clearly, believed that the abolition of capitalism will bring with it the abolition of the reifications it has engendered. This means, first of all, that the proximate sources of human alienation will be eliminated. By collectivizing the means of production, antagonisms bred by the struggle for their ownership will disappear, as class antagonism will evaporate with the end of the division of society into exploited and exploiter. But the revolution involves an overthrow of the ultimate sources of alienation as well. If until the advent of capitalism social division was necessary and antagonism inevitable due to the scarcity of goods, the need for most to labor and a few to manage, then capitalism's industrial expansiveness has remedied the difficulty. No longer is natural scarcity a threat. It remains only for socialism to abolish the artificial scarcities created by the distortions of money and market.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> "Ainsi peut-on dire que ce qui rend le mieux concevable le projet fondamental de la réalité humaine, c'est que l'homme est l'être qui projette d'être Dieu. . . . Être homme, c'est tendre à être Dieu; ou, si l'on préfère, l'homme est fondamentalement désir d'être Dieu" (EN, pp. 653–54).

<sup>13</sup> E.g., Engels: "Die Möglichkeit, vermittelt der gesellschaftlichen Produktion allen Gesellschaftsgliedern eine Existenz zu sichern, die nicht nur materiell vollkommen ausreichend ist und von Tag zu Tag reicher wird, sondern die ihnen auch die vollständige

Neither Marx nor Engels claimed that this transformation shall come in the twinkling of an eye. But with the resolution of capitalism's contradictions the corner will have been turned away from the narrow alleys of alienation and toward the broad-running thoroughfares of human fulfillment. Moreover the abolition of class antagonisms means the abolition of any further need for revolution. The far side of revolution, in the Elysian fields of communism, is an irreversible achievement, and thus a condition no longer threatened by recurrent antagonisms and alienations.<sup>14</sup>

Sartre, in contrast, argues that scarcity is not so easily expunged. What disappears with capitalism is the form of alienation specifically instantiated by capitalism. But scarcity remains as an enduring character of the social milieu,<sup>15</sup> and within that parsimonious landscape the structures of *praxis* remain prone to reification—or, at minimum, vulnerable to its recurrence.

What Sartre is doing, in effect, is criticizing Marx and Marxism for confusing proximate and ultimate sources of alienation, for mistaking the cure of a symptom for the cure of the disease. The Marxists have treated a sufficient condition for the appearance of a specific form of alienation, namely the contradictions between private ownership of the means of production and the relations of industrialized society, as though it were the necessary and sufficient condition for the appearance of alienation as such. But at least one necessary condition, *rareté*, remains even on the far side of capitalism's demise. Scarcity is not itself sufficient to produce alienation, but its presence makes alienation always a real possibility.

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freie Ausbildung und Betätigung ihrer körperlichen und geistigen Anlagen garantiert, diese Möglichkeit ist jetzt zum erstenmal da, aber sie ist da" (MEW 20:263–46). Translated in *Anti-Dühring* (New York: International Publishers, 1939), p. 309.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. Marx: "Nur bei einer Ordnung der Dinge, wo es keine Klassen und keinen Klassengegensatz gibt, werden die *gesellschaftlichen Evolutionen* aufhören, politische Revolutionen zu sein" (MEW 4:182). Translated in *The Poverty of Philosophy* (New York: International Publishers, 1963), p. 175.

<sup>15</sup> ". . . la possibilité de la réification est donnée dans tous les rapports humains, même en période précapitaliste, même dans les relations familiales ou d'amitié" (CRD, p. 225).

The contradictions implicit in *rareté* are kneaded into the very substance of *praxis* and thus are more fundamental than the distortions surfacing in any particular moment of history.

Scarcity, in fact, is rooted in the very soil of human being's two foundational needs. The need to exist proliferates itself in the form of an expanding population pressing relentlessly upon available resources for subsistence. And the quality of life incarnated in interpersonal relationships grows out into ever more complex and sophisticated sociocultural needs that soon press upon the resources for their satisfaction. Human beings are finite inhabitants of a finite world, but their needs bloom in unending and infinite variety. Consequently, scarcity remains at the root of all human activity, fostering or at least permitting the unavoidable antagonisms of the struggle for existence.

Thus for Sartrean political economy a society can be best understood by reference to how it deals with the problem of *rareté*: whom it defines as *les excédentaires*, the extent to which it is able to reduce or eliminate artificial scarcities and correct the ravages of various reifying tendencies. On these counts, Sartre is unequivocal in his criticism of both capitalist and Stalinist imperialisms. He would see the triumph of a revolutionary proletariat as a radical improvement of the human condition. But this is quite different from claiming final victory over alienation in all its possible forms, or irreversible escape from the social and personal sources of alienation.

Scarcity remains an omnipresent scar crevassing the face of *praxis*. Even though historically contingent and not at all logically or ontologically necessary, it is nonetheless all-pervasive. So much is this so that its absence from the human condition is for Sartre literally inconceivable.<sup>16</sup> History, the history of human being, can neither occur nor be understood except with constant reference to the brute facticity of scar-

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<sup>16</sup> "Mais dire que notre Histoire est histoire des hommes ou dire qu'elle est née et qu'elle se développe dans le cadre permanent d'un champ de tension engendré par la rareté, c'est tout un" (*CRD*, p. 202).

city. Sartre again and again identified human existence with the struggle for existence. Wherever people starve, there history flourishes.

But the inconceivable is not the impossible. Suppose, in some utopia of abundance beyond history as we now know it, scarcity were abolished. As Marx might say, suppose our prehistory were to become truly a human history. The reciprocities of human relationships would then all be positive, lacking the development of reifying antagonism and violence. Even then, for Sartre, *praxis* would remain dialectical, would husband contradictions at its heart. Its totalizations, even in a utopia beyond scarcity, would be partial and its totalities forever detotalized.

Consider, first of all, the need to exist. Achieving and sustaining existence requires constantly the labor of partial unification. That is, the whole must be fractured in order that a particular life might appear in the full solidity of its unique concreteness. An aim at intensity of satisfaction is the positive counterpart to avarice. The need to exist is an urge toward the enjoyment of self as this and not that, as distinctive here amid the world. This need is always purchased at the expense of something else—the not-me, the not-us.

There is consequently a profound tension in life between breadth and intensity.<sup>17</sup> For instance, the peculiar intensity of existence achieved in consciousness—the perspectival distancing that discloses the self as over-against, as not-being that of which it is aware—is purchased at the price of plenitude, of fullness and amplitude. Even the occasional impartial self-transcending totalizations which we manage to achieve are unstable accomplishments. They quickly break up into less encompassing unities or decay into petrified obstacles populating the practico-inert. Thus the impossibility inherent in the desire to be God is but one way to express a

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<sup>17</sup> E.g., Sartre's discussion of "the negation of the negation," *CRD*, pp. 165–72. "Du coup, le rapport de cette totalité partielle à la totalité totale se manifeste comme conflit, l'intégration absolue exige que soit brisée la détermination singulière en tant qu'elle risque de constituer une nouvelle pluralité. Inversement l'inertie et les nécessités de l'intégration partielle obligent chaque partie de la totalité relative à résister aux pressions du tout" (*CRD*, p. 172).

structural fact of human action: existence of a human sort is an impossible contradiction between completeness and cohesiveness.

A somewhat similar problem appears when we consider the second of our fundamental human needs, the need to relate to others. The totalizing thrust of our undertakings soon encounters the totalizings of others. To bring some sort of unified meaning to my life requires that I organize my world around me as an instrument for realizing that meaning. But since my world is a social world, this organizing act necessarily involves me in overriding the meanings others pursue, incorporating them within my own totalization and thereby subordinating them to my own ends. To unify all things within one's *praxis* means devaluating the *praxis* of others.

This overriding of others need not be, concretely, a dictatorial or brutal act. Sartre can speak eloquently of the various ways in which persons aid one another by instrumentalizing each other and each other's values (*CRD*, pp. 191–92). But clearly the reality of other totalizings entails a permanent failure in the case of any given one of them to be the master of the meaning of life and of the character of human interdependence. Each totalizing act is haunted by an “elsewhere” beyond its perview or control, not a part of its world, of its arrangement of things and their meaning—“*un ailleurs qui m'échappe*” (*CRD*, p. 186). The upsurge of intentional consciousness unavoidably desubjectivizes, objectifies, whatever it reaches out to understand.<sup>18</sup> Interpersonal existence thus becomes a seesaw back and forth between objectifying and being objectified, broken only by the few unstable moments, such as in love and in lovemaking, when the relatedness of selves is fleetingly approximated (*EN*, pp. 431–84).

For Sartre, therefore, the reality of human *praxis* is through and through contradictory. In its pure form, apart from all special contingencies, existence appears as the irreconcilability of breadth and intensity; interrelatedness, as the

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<sup>18</sup> The whole of *L'être et le néant* is devoted to this epistemological point, but especially the section on “Le regard”: *EN*, p. 310–63.

dilemma of objectifying and being objectified. Within the tenacious milieu of scarcity, *praxis* unfolds itself existentially as awareness of one's vulnerability and of the threatening gap between need and satisfaction; socially, as the violent struggle for the right to determine the expendables. Within the contingencies of capitalist alienation, *praxis* takes the debased forms of avarice and ambition, exploitation and dehumanization. Hence *praxis* is necessarily, apodictically, dialectical. At any possible moment persons, in their concrete labor amid the world, are confronted with contradictory conditions calling for resolution. *Praxis* is the tale of the successes and failures issuing from this call and leading on past it into further contradictions.

## V

Sartre's philosophy of *praxis* is more than an "ideological" eddy in the Marxist whirlpool, despite his attempted modesty to the contrary.<sup>19</sup> Granted, the anthropology of *L'être et le néant* is extended in *Critique de la raison dialectique*, under the tutelage of Marx, to deal explicitly and fully with the social and historical. But the tutor is also sent to school to learn from the pupil. The scope of the Marxian dialectic is sharply and fundamentally constricted as a result of Sartre's interpretations. According to Sartre, it is human becoming that is dialectical: *praxis* unfolds a process of coming-to-be in which given totalities are negated by need and the negation dialectically negated by the dynamic of totalization. Although each human act, each *praxis*, is inescapably and universally an illustration of this dialectic structure, the

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<sup>19</sup> "Le véritable rôle des 'idéologies de l'existence' n'est pas de décrire une abstraite 'réalité humaine' qui n'a jamais existé, mais de rappeler sans cesse à l'anthropologie [la philosophe marxiste] la dimension existentielle des processus étudiés. . . . A partir du jour où la recherche marxiste prendra la dimension humaine (c'est-à-dire le project existentiel) comme le fondement du Savoir anthropologique, l'existentialism n'aura plus de raison d'être . . ." (*CRD*, pp. 107, 111, in italics). This is from *Question de méthode*; see the whole of "Conclusion," *CRD*, pp. 103-11.

same cannot be said of history taken as a whole. The sweep of the human adventure through historical time has no single overall dialectical structure.

There is a dialectic *in* history, for the restless dynamic of social change is a function of particular human acts, of concrete individuals attempting to bring to be some needed or desired resolution to a contradictory situation. These dialectical becomings succeed in preserving past accomplishments and building upon them new realities. They also function such that old achievements are radically destroyed and new beginnings attempted.

But it nowhere follows that there is a dialectic *of* history. *Praxis*, indeed, excludes the possibility. Progress—even dialectical progress—implies a gradual reduction in the contradictions infesting human existence and mutuality. Sartre's anthropology, however, leads us to understand *praxis* as the effort to reduce certain kinds of contradiction only to be faced by new kinds, the effort to eradicate one form of inhumanity only to be confronted once again by a new form. Dialectical progress further implies a final triumph over all such contradictions, the attainment of sanctuary, of a human condition free from antagonism and incompleteness and free from even the danger of its recrudescence. Dialectic ends in a triumph over dialectic, its own negation and surpassing. For Sartre, however, the partiality of totalization, the residual and surpassable character of totality, the contingent irremediableness of scarcity, all give to the structure of *praxis* a fundamentally contradictory character, and make of it a reality apodictically dialectical.

To deny to history a dialectical movement is not to deny it movement, nor to deny that this movement is the result of antagonisms, tensions, dialectical struggles. Sartre believes antagonism to be the motor of civilization, as did Marx.<sup>20</sup> But Sartre roots the antagonisms more deeply than at the social

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<sup>20</sup> "Mit dem Moment, wo die Zivilisation beginnt, beginnt die Produktion sich aufzubauen auf den Gegensatz der Berufe, der Stände, der Klassen, schliesslich auf den Gegensatz zwischen angehäufter und unmittelbarer Arbeit. Ohne Gegensatz kein Fortschritt; das ist das Gesetz, dem die Zivilisation bis heute gefolgt ist" (*MEW* 4:91-92).

level of orders, estates, and classes. These social contradictions are but manifestations of a less contingent and hence less curable antagonism, one that plumbs the core of *praxis* itself. There is no dialectic of history because the dialectic of action is apodictic, is necessarily a dialectic and hence necessarily a doomed attempt to overcome the contradictions in its situation. There is, in history, no becoming of the dialectic precisely because there is a dialectic of becoming.

The pessimistic slogan of *L'être et le néant* comes to mind: *l'homme est une passion inutile*.<sup>21</sup> Insofar as the tension between being and knowing, consciousness and facticity, is unresolvable in any permanent sense, insofar as *praxis* is constantly a totalization detotalized, is constantly the achievement of a *passé dépassé*, then the human adventure is an impossible grasp after something that exceeds our reach, a useless striving after a goal which if attained would deny the fundamental character of what it is and what it means to be a person.

Yet in the *Critique* Sartre has learned from Marx the inappropriateness, indeed the petit bourgeois character, of pessimism as a response to the impossibility. If no cure is permanent to individual and social ills, at least the open character of *praxis* makes it abundantly clear that each specific disease is curable, each concrete form of alienation surmountable. Marx has taught Sartre the importance of concrete action in and upon the world aimed at radically eliminating situations distortive and destructive of the human capacity to exist in open mutuality. Sartre's philosophy, in turn, teaches the Marxist that specific remedies cannot resolve irremediable structures, and that the importance of practical action does not protect it from the risks of failure and incompleteness.

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<sup>21</sup> "Toute réalité humaine est une passion, en ce qu'elle projette de se perdre pour fonder l'être et pour constituer du même coup l'En-soi qui échappe à la contingence en étant son propre fondement, l'*Eus causa sui* que les religions nomment Dieu. Ainsi la passion de l'homme est-elle inverse de celle du Christ, car l'homme se perd en tant qu'homme pour que Dieu naisse. Mais l'idée de Dieu est contradictoire et nous nous perdons en vain; l'homme est une passion inutile" (*EN*, p. 708).

Sartrean Marxism is thus an attempt to be revolutionary but not utopian, to embrace the impassioned optimism that demands concrete struggle against all forms of alienation and mutual antagonism, but without the comforts of dogmatic certainty concerning the nature of present developments and the contours of the future. Marx used to denigrate utopian socialists for being motivated by moral outrage rather than by scientific understanding. Sartre returns to the stance of the socialists in that the classless society, the community of authentically existing persons, becomes once more a moral "ought" orienting action, and ceases to be a factual "shall" vouchsafed to the probings of the scientific seer. But Sartre, unlike the utopian socialists, has learned from Marx that moral ideals are the demonic tools of immorality unless they come out from their verbal havens and lead men persistently, endlessly, into real practical action aimed at making the "ought" an "is."

Most interpretations of the world, and most acts seeking to transform the world in behalf of some interpretation, are put unguardedly in their initial form. They claim too much about the truth of what is and about the necessities of what will be. The task of those who follow after is to reveal the limits of the vision and the acts of great men, to negate their unguardedness, and then to fashion new worlds and new interpretations which weave the fibers of the old narrownesses now displayed upon the silken threads of possibility.

Sartre's constriction of the Marxist dialectic should be understood in this dialectical manner. It negates the unguarded claims of Marx's world-shaking call to revolutionary human redemption in order to surpass that negation toward a yet more profound understanding of human being. In Sartre's existential Marxism, the revolutionary aim after the sanctuary of the classless society becomes the unceasing effort on the part of persons to redeem their times despite the immense risks, the unequal odds, and the ultimate impossibility.

*L'homme est une passion sans fin.*

*Dickinson College.*



## SARTRE'S DIALECTIC OF SOCIAL RELATIONS

If Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* was an attempt to provide a phenomenology of the modes of being of human reality as such, his *Critique de la raison dialectique* (1960) is an attempt to present a phenomenology of group formation and of the role of groups in history. Although Sartre is still generally faithful to the method of phenomenology, he is concerned with an ambitious attempt to revise Marxism in terms of his own existentialistic interpretation of the nature of human reality. In this paper I will not be concerned with the success or failure of this synthesis. Rather, attention will be focused upon Sartre's contribution to a sociology of group formation and the dynamics of the social relations which characterize the initial process of the formation of groups and the gradual solidification of groups. Particular critical emphasis will be placed upon (a) an analysis of Sartre's interpretation of the dialectical process of the formation of groups and (b) his general neglect of the irrational factors contributing to the formation and unification of groups. An appeal will be made to the fruitful insights of Freud and Le Bon in an attempt to undermine Sartre's apparent confidence in the assumption that the phenomenon of group dynamics is intelligible through and through and is characterized by a 'rational' dialectic.

### I

In his general orientation towards social relations Sartre accepts the Marxian principle that the mode of production of material life determines the development of social, political, and intellectual life.<sup>1</sup> It is for this reason that he will seek the concrete foundation of social relations in a 'material' or economic factor. But Sartre disagrees with the Marxists on a significant point. That is, he denies that there is a dialectic in nature apart from a human interpretation of this process or apart from the *Lebenswelt* of man. The impersonal dialectic of nature is neither a 'law' nor a fact; it is a metaphysical hypothesis.<sup>2</sup> It is analogous, Sartre be-

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris, 1960), I, 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

lieves, to the view that historical events can be understood in terms of a mechanistic determinism. This dogmatic dialectic must be replaced by a critical dialectic which understands human history and human actions in terms of a dialectical process of reciprocal interaction between individual and individual, man and the world, the individual and the group. Although human existence is obviously affected by the material conditions of life, man is not merely a passive victim of an impersonal dialectical process. If this were the case, it would make no sense to speak of a *human* history. Borrowing an Hegelian term, Sartre claims that man is 'mediated' by things in the same measure in which things are themselves mediated by man.<sup>3</sup> Material objects are encountered in their facticity, but they *are* in relation to human consciousness, in a field of instrumentalities in which they are objects of the intentional consciousness of man. In referring to the use or value or meaning of objects we imply the existence of a signifying being, man. Man, as *créateur de signes*, determines the significance of the facticity of objects and transcends this recognition by converting things into signs which are instruments of purpose by which he can attain his projects. When human understanding is linked to action, the 'movement' of man is progressive, projective. It is for this reason that Sartre rejects the metaphysics of dialectical materialism (which cannot account for the free, creative practice of man) and asserts that the "only practical and dialectical reality . . . is *individual action*."<sup>4</sup>

In an earlier essay, *Matérialisme et Révolution*, Sartre had argued that materialism was a self-contradictory metaphysics which attempted to eliminate human subjectivity by converting man into an object. But instead of understanding man as an object moved by other objects, the materialist claims that he is an objective observer who can 'know' reality. In his *Critique* he repeats these criticisms, charging that dialectical materialism is negated by the assertion of its truth. If man is immersed in material processes, if he is completely conditioned by an absolute dialectical process which affects every aspect of his being, how can he be that 'consciousness' which is certain of its own existence and of the 'truth?'<sup>5</sup> The dynamics of social relations cannot be understood unless we assume that the individual is the basis of the historical dialectic, that social actions are the result of a human praxis which is manifested in a series of intelligible dialectical processes. Sartre intends, then, to trace the

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 165: "La découverte capitale de l'expérience dialectique . . . c'est que l'homme est médié par les choses dans la mesure même où les choses sont médiées par l'homme."

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

development of groups in order to arrive at an understanding of a concrete individual being, the historical man. Since "praxis is the measure of man and of the foundation of truth,"<sup>6</sup> the initial stage of the social dialectic is discovered in individual praxis.

Sartre adopts a dialectical approach to explicate social phenomena because he believes that the analytical conception of man and his social relations treats man as a determinate object, a 'thing' which can be understood in the same way in which a physical object is understood. Physicalistic analysis converts man into an abstraction which is no longer a living entity whose existence is revealed in his becoming. Social reality is a complex, indefinite multiplicity of reciprocities.<sup>7</sup> Sartre is opposed to the 'sociologism' of Durkheim, to the view that social facts are to be considered as things, that social phenomena are to be studied as are natural phenomena. Social phenomena are characterized by dialectical processes, by action and reaction, opposition, conflict, a dynamic interaction of individual and collective social 'forces.' An analytical approach to social phenomena discovers only the quantitative aspects of such phenomena. Analytical reason is a synthetic transformation which affects itself intentionally and is a mode of thought which makes itself a thing.<sup>9</sup> It is a mode of reasoning appropriate for an understanding of a mechanical order (*ordre mécanique*) but inappropriate when applied to emergent, novel, and contingent social phenomena.

The individual is able to understand the dialectical character of social phenomena, the dialectic of experience, because he himself practices it.<sup>10</sup> The dialectic is a 'living logic of action' which manifests itself through the totalizing activity of individuals. Totalization is the process by which parts enter into social wholes, the synthetic unification of elements within rational totalities. Social totalities are the fundamental basis of all other totalities. The 'human adventure' is totalized by the past, by history. And the individual, as a man of culture, totalizes his own experiences (*je totalise cette expérience . . . dans la mesure de ma culture*).<sup>11</sup> Hence, the individual cannot escape history since he already exists within historical totalities. In social experience there is a *nisus* towards totalization; and such totalizing activity (within the dialectic of experience) always

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 741.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>8</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique* (Paris, 1950), 15, 27f. Sartre, characteristically, adopts a paradoxical viewpoint in this regard. He claims that "les faits sociaux sont des choses dans la mesure ou toutes les choses, directement, ou indirectement, sont des faits sociaux." *C.R.D.*, I, 246.

<sup>9</sup> *C.R.D.*, 148.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

tends towards praxis or action. It is never merely an act of contemplation.<sup>12</sup> In effect, society is itself a totality-in-process, a phenomenon, as it were, 'produced' by the multiplicity of practical relationships with others who are engaged in the totalization of their singular experiences.

Totalization is an intentional act of consciousness directed towards actual or possible action. The activity of totalization is itself 'within' the totalities which are objects of reflective awareness. Objects for use (e.g., tools) are totalities and so, too, are large-scale instrumentalities (e.g., factories). But they are totalities *for* individuals. Reflective awareness places the individual within a totalizing movement of which he is a part or moment and the multiplicity of totalizing activities in itself is the dialectical process of which the individual is already a 'part.'

An individual's use of a totality (a stabilized entity constituted by a holistic interrelationship of elements) is praxis. Sartre tends to emphasize praxis exclusively because he is under the pragmatic influence of the Marxist interpretation of human experience and because of his commitment, in *Being and Nothingness*, to the view that *faire* or doing is one of the "cardinal categories of human reality." Sartre has long been concerned to argue that man creates himself through action.<sup>13</sup> The immediate relationship to the material field (*champ matériel*) for an individual is work. The original *praxis* by which man produces and reproduces his life takes place in a material milieu in which the fundamental totalization of human relations takes place. The material milieu is a practical field (*champ pratique*) in which the individual exercises his praxis. It is already given (*déjà-donné*), already constituted (*déjà-constitué*). And, since Sartre accepts Marx's general sociological principle, the social relations of man within a practical field are determined by the existing material conditions of life. It is for this reason that Sartre seeks an economic factor as the underlying causal factor determining individual and collective action. For, he claims that scarcity dominates all praxis — "*la rareté . . . domine toute la praxis.*"<sup>14</sup>

In assuming that the basic foundation of social development is the 'fierce struggle against scarcity' Sartre seems to believe that he is presenting a Marxist view. But it has been pointed out by Adam Schaff that Sartre is mistaken since

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. G. Lichtheim, "Sartre, Marxism and History," *History and Theory*, III, no. 2 (1963).

<sup>13</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*. Trans. H. Barnes (New York, 1956), 433.

<sup>14</sup> *C.R.D.*, 206.

The Marxist conception of exploitation and surplus value is based on the fact that the worker produces *more* than the minimum amount required for his own satisfaction according to his historically determined living standards.<sup>15</sup>

Although Sartre may be correct in assuming that some social movements, some group formations, come about as a result of scarcity in certain regions or under specific historical conditions, it is a hasty generalization to say that *all* social movements arise out of a struggle against scarcity. To say that human history develops in "the permanent framework of a field of tension engendered by scarcity"<sup>16</sup> is simply false. If we extend the conception of *rareté* to include the absence of means to satisfy human needs, we can agree that need (*besoin*) or the subjective experience of needs is a basic motivating factor determining human action and social change. A need, for Sartre, is a lack, a negation. And the dialectical structure of action involves the overcoming of this negation by intervention in the material field. That extreme scarcity has often generated individual and collective action is obvious. But there are instances (e.g., in certain regions of India) in which scarcity does not necessarily bring about action, but inaction. Assuming that revolutionary action is a dynamic reaction to scarcity and that Sartre's conception of the role of scarcity as a quantitative factor in human history justifies the assertion that those who suffer the effects of scarcity most would react most violently to this condition, then the historical facts of the English revolution of 1647, the American revolution, and the Russian revolution do not support Sartre's claims. For, the individuals most affected by scarcity were not those whose praxis brought about these revolutions.<sup>17</sup> The facticity of scarcity does not necessarily bring about spontaneous collective unification or praxis. It is not case that social conflict will result because there is not enough for everyone;<sup>18</sup> but a self-conscious recognition of a need or 'lack' may indeed generate severe social conflicts. The mere 'absence of matter' (*pace* Sartre) does not necessarily cause the kind of praxis which would overcome this concrete condition.

Granting that need is an essential stimulus to action, it is clear that conflict of some sort is inevitable since there is a direct struggle against the physical world and a direct or indirect struggle against others. Through need there is a totalization of material entities and others.

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<sup>15</sup> Adam Schaff, "A Philosophy of Man," in *Existentialism versus Marxism*. Ed. G. Novack (New York, 1966), 314.

<sup>16</sup> *C.R.D.*, 202.

<sup>17</sup> Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York, 1965), 98-100.

<sup>18</sup> *C.R.D.*, 204.

When individuals act on their needs, their projects involve them in a material milieu which is 'humanized,' totalized. The subsequent relationship between man and his practical field reveals a dialectical circularity and the individual is immersed in a reciprocal conditioning process. That is, the individual's praxis synthesizes and unifies the phenomena in the social and material milieu and he, in turn, is conditioned by the field of instrumentalities of which he is a part. There is an interaction between the material world (matter-in-itself) and the human world (*le monde de l'homme*), the two modalities of being which constitute 'reality.' Matter is 'humanized' when it becomes an instrumentality or *matière ouvrée*, 'matter worked upon by man.' This concrete relationship between man and a totalized material field provides the material conditions for the totalization of men into specific groups.

The social condition for the emergence of groups is the recognition of the alterity of others. A social milieu is structured by means of this recognition since the experience of isolation and alienation reveals the individual's atomic existence. Social alienation is aggravated by the worker's alienation from the product of his labor: the instruments he has used, the objects produced, become inert forces conditioning his own existence. Social relations between men are determined by inorganic phenomena in a practical field. These relationships are initially characterized by opposition.

Although opposition is an ingredient in social unification, Sartre tends to agree with Georg Simmel that "relations of conflict do not by themselves produce a social structure, but only in cooperation with unifying forces."<sup>19</sup> The initial 'unifying force' which generates group formation is interest. Interest is a particular relationship of men to an object in a social field.<sup>20</sup> A common concern or interest brings about totalizing activity on the part of the members of this loosely structured 'group.' A need combined with a common interest provides an individual with a goal which is shared by others. Whether ambiguous or clearly defined, this goal provides an intentional object of concern and introduces a teleological factor (for Sartre, a *finality*) into the social relationship. Every finality, in the dialectic of experience, brings about a reaction, a counterfinality. Human action in terms of a recognized finality always runs the risk of producing an undesirable counterfinality. For Sartre, this is an illustration of the paradoxical character of social relations. The free praxis of individuals transforms the practical or material field; this

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<sup>19</sup> Georg Simmel, *Conflict and The Web of Group Affiliations*. Trans. K. Wolff and R. Bendix (Glencoe, Ill., 1955), 20.

<sup>20</sup> *C.R.D.*, 261.

change, in turn, affects the social relations of individuals. These dual totalities, then, condition the individuals affected by them; the freedom of the individual has brought about a necessity which 'limits' the freedom of the individual. Man's own actions rebound against himself. Thus, although Sartre desires to emphasize human freedom in his *Critique*, he has admitted that there are a host of conditioning factors which limit the freedom of the individual.<sup>21</sup>

The loosely structured social unity comprised of a juxtaposition of individuals Sartre calls a seriality (*sérialité*). It is a diffuse social structure characterized by passivity in which the individual, as such, is impotent. The individual experiences himself as other than the other members of the seriality and exists, in relation to others, in a reciprocity of antagonism.<sup>22</sup> Serialities are unstable and subject to dissolution. They are transitory social liaisons which lack the influence of a common threat, a common danger, a common object, or a common idea. The inadequacy of the seriality as an effective social unit produces a 'new dialectic' which results from the free praxis of individuals. Although a seriality tends towards dissolution, it can, however, be the primitive basis of a cohesive social unit if each individual becomes aware of the potentiality implicit in the seriality. There is a contradiction between the individual as a member of a seriality and the individual as dialectical mediator (i.e., an individual who imposes unity on the seriality or totalizes it). Despite the physical juxtaposition of individuals in such social units there is a psychological sense of disunity and powerlessness which makes such units ineffective. The tendency towards passivity or inertia in serialities prevents the individuals comprising them from seeing what is necessary to accomplish a recognized finality. There is a lack of a 'synthetic objective,' of cooperative concern with a dominant 'idea' or cause. Despite its weakness as a social force, the seriality is anterior to group formation and is the social structure out of which groups emerge.

If some concrete commitment occurs within a seriality, then 'contagious reactions' appear which lead to group formation. The emergence of concerted action within a previously inert seriality transforms this social unit into a group-in-fusion (*groupe en fusion*). Through a multiplicity of free choices by which individuals commit themselves to a more cohesive social unity which requires a degree of self-sacrifice, the passive plurality of individuals now comprise a unified group. In addition, the recognition of a common threat or common danger generates a tendency

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 369: "Qu'on n'aille pas nous faire dire, surtout, que l'homme est libre dans toutes les situations, comme le prétendaient les stoiciens. Nous voulons dire exactement le contraire . . ."

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

towards group formation. This collective praxis brings about the transcendence of the previous situation.

The group-in-fusion is further unified when another social unit totalizes it. This opposition of the non-group provides the group-in-fusion with a unifying synthetic objective. The member of the group-in-fusion, through the recognition of the totalizing activity of the nongroup (or other group), now realizes a common danger; hence, the individual, as mediator, totalizes his own loosely structured 'group' and thereby solidifies the unity of his group.<sup>23</sup> The members of the group are, then, unified by a common praxis and a common need (*exigence commune*).

The transition to group formation is not described by Sartre as necessary nor as a mechanistic phenomenon. For, at each stage of development the individual is present and active. The development of a group is a social process which can be described as intelligible or 'rational' insofar as its stages are discriminable and the intentions of those comprising the group presuppose a consciousness of this directed action. There is a reciprocal interrelationship between the individual, the material field, and the social unit to which he belongs. The relationship between the individual and the group is ostensibly contingent.

The self-conscious recognition on the part of the individual member of a group of the common purpose of the group leads him to synthesize the group as a totality. There is an emergence of a unifying inner orientation within the group which Sartre (unlike Lewin and Moreno) thinks is intelligible. There is a dual determination of the group as totality. The members of a group determine its unity through shared purposes, aims, or goals. Those who do not share this inner orientation objectify the group as an alien totality and determine its structure and nature. The member of the group trusts in it and relies upon the "praxis under oath" (*praxis jurée*)<sup>24</sup> which determines the proper function of the group. The individual who uses the services or protection of the group conceives of it as a totality or *un objet pratique*.<sup>25</sup>

Sartre interprets the inner synthetic act of unifying a group as a response to the externally imposed totality of the alien others. Here he seems to be relying upon the general Hegelian notion that self-consciousness emerges by means of the recognition of opposition or 'otherness' (alterity). Thus, in *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, Hegel avers that "Self-consciousness (*Selbstbewusstsein*) attains its satisfaction in another self-

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 556.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

consciousness.”<sup>26</sup> The recognition of my group by others and the subsequent sense of opposition brings about a heightened self-consciousness on my part of my membership in a group. Eventually, the group becomes a unified multiplicity capable of an organized praxis. The individual becomes a self-conscious member of a group by interiorizing the multiplicity (*interiorisant la multiplicité*).

The individual has a determinate place within a group by virtue of the tasks he has to perform. As a member of a group, the individual's action emerges out of a common power (*commun pouvoir*) directed towards a common objective. The individual's praxis is determined “as an ephemeral mediation between the common power and the common objective.”<sup>27</sup> This praxis is a ‘mediation’ because it suppresses itself in order to serve a common end. The power of the individual within a group is expressed through “the right to fulfil his particular task.”<sup>28</sup> There is, however, a basic tension between the individual's practice and the organized practice of the group. It is for this reason that Sartre insists that the primary action of the cohesive group is its action upon its members.<sup>29</sup> The group must protect itself, as it were, against the tendency of the individual's practice to project itself beyond (*à dépasser vers*) the common end of the group. Sartre, like Simmel, is aware of “the positive and integrating role of antagonism.” Conflict can be an integrating force in groups insofar as a certain amount of discord, inner tension, and external opposition tends to hold the group together.<sup>30</sup> The structure of a group entails contradictory tensions (*tensions contradictoires*). But these internal tensions could bring about the dissolution of a group if there is no coercive power to enforce the cooperative action of individuals.

The ‘dominant idea’ accepted by the group exerts an indirect coercive power over its members insofar as it functions as an interior norm, a unifying conception which creates a common bond between members of a group. The mutually accepted ‘idea’ serves the function of a centripetal social force which produces “the consensus and concord of interacting individuals, as against their discords, separations, and disharmonies.”<sup>31</sup>

Aside from the rather indirect cohesive power of a ‘dominant idea,’ the group, in order to prevent its disintegration, must place restrictions

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<sup>26</sup> *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, in *Sämtliche Werke*. Ed. Georg Lasson (Hamburg, 1907), 121.

<sup>27</sup> *C.R.D.*, 470.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 463.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 474.

<sup>30</sup> Georg Simmel, *op. cit.*, 17-18.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

upon its members. The internal danger of disintegration is checked by the demand that the individual express his allegiance to the group by means of an oath. The oath binds the individual to the group and entails submission to the threat of 'terror.' *Terreur* involves the threat of expulsion, ostracism, or physical punishment. The common oath (*serment commun*) commits the individual to an agreement that he shall suffer some penalty if his actions threaten the integral unity of the group. The individual's being-in-the-group (*être-dans-le-groupe*) is a free consent to accept the right of the group to his praxis and the absolute right of all over each individual.<sup>32</sup> The terror is the sanction of the oath; without it the oath would be impotent. Through the *serment* or oath the group gives itself an ontological status which diminishes the danger of excessive differentiation. By means of the oath (made coercive through the threat of 'terror') each individual has limited his liberty through the other.

With Sartre's continued emphasis upon the coercive character of the group one may be skeptical when he assures us that the interiorization of the common freedom (granted by the individual to the group) is "the real power of . . . individual freedom."<sup>33</sup> Sartre seems committed to the view that the importance of a common end requires the sacrifice of the individual, his conversion into an instrument of a collectivity. This is ironical since some Marxist revisionists (e.g., Leszek Kolakowski) have only recently attacked the view that individuals must be sacrificed in order to bring about a "new era."<sup>34</sup> Although it is unfair to suggest that Sartre advocates a kind of totalitarianism<sup>35</sup>, it is clear that he believes that absorption of the individual by the group is necessary if an effective social unit is to survive. It is difficult to believe that the group Sartre describes could be one in which the individual is able to manipulate the group in the interest of his own security.<sup>36</sup> His own emphasis upon the need for *terreur* makes us skeptical concerning his sanguine remarks about the preservation of individual liberty in a group. In his own terms, the individual has no natural rights (as a member of a group) and is ultimately reduced to his function.<sup>37</sup> A man completely defined by his function is surely an object (not, as Sartre would have us believe, a subject), an instrument which must serve the interest of the sovereign group.

<sup>32</sup> *C.R.D.*, 449-50.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 491.

<sup>34</sup> Leszek Kolakowski, "Responsibility and History," in *Existentialism versus Marxism*, 291-92.

<sup>35</sup> Mary Warnock, *The Philosophy of Sartre* (London, 1965), 175.

<sup>36</sup> *C.R.D.*, 498.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 463: "... la fonction est une définition positive de l'individu commun."

## II

The most valuable contribution which Sartre has made to an understanding of group formation is the method of dialectical reasoning as a means by which social phenomena may be interpreted. Man acts upon the world through a 'living dialectic' which is the "very structure of concrete reality itself."<sup>38</sup> The complex, qualitative changes which characterize the temporal succession of social relations do seem to 'manifest' something like a dialectical process. To be sure, the method of dialectical reasoning is only one way in which social phenomena may be understood. The reciprocal interrelationship of individuals in social processes may or may not, *in concreto*, be structured dialectically. But the question is, what method of explaining social phenomena has the most viable heuristic value. Sartre's dialectical interpretation of social development is, with some modifications, a useful, valuable method of interpretation of complex social phenomena. His analysis of social relations, however, does seem to generate some internal difficulties.

Although Sartre is sympathetic with Kierkegaard's insistence upon the primacy of what is concrete and real in relation to what is thought, with the emphasis upon the "brute realities" which thought cannot change, he seems to undermine the central characteristic of Kierkegaard's dialectic of life.' That is, under the influence of Marxism, he seems to admit necessity as dominating the 'singular adventure' of the individual, contradicting Kierkegaard's (and his own) claim that individual existence is characterized by possibilities, by contingency. He seems to have denied the existentialist contingency.<sup>39</sup> That Sartre does tend to describe the individual's existence in a group in terms of necessity (despite his claims that the group remains a group through the free praxis of individuals) is clear when we are told that the structures of the 'functional organization,' insofar as their inorganic materiality is reworked by the group, are characterized as the 'necessity of liberty.'<sup>40</sup> In the group the individual is converted into an inorganic being, is appropriated by the group. Although groups are formed in order to satisfy the needs of individuals and come into being through the free praxis of individuals, it is clear, from Sartre's account of groups, that they end by negating the individual as such. The counterfinality in group development leads to the gradual deprivation of individual freedom. The social dialectic Sartre describes deprives man of as much freedom as does the dialectical materialism of the dogmatic Marxists he attacks. The social structures he describes

<sup>38</sup> A. Kojève, "Hegel, Marx et le Christianisme," *Critique I* (1946), 339.

<sup>39</sup> Mary Warnock, *op. cit.*, 180.

<sup>40</sup> *C.R.D.*, 494.

seem to entail the maximum curtailment of individual freedom. This is especially so since he empowers the 'sovereign' group with the constraining instrument of terror.

Although Sartre intended to preserve the freedom of the individual within the totalities which limit this freedom, he tended to introduce necessity into the dialectic of social development to such an extent that he undermined his intention. The dialectical process is inevitable, proceeding from stage to stage in accordance with necessity. Every finality *must* generate a counterfinality. Groups inevitably tend to revert to serialities. The individual (as a member of a group) must be converted into a common individual and the common individual is ineluctably transformed into an inorganic being. The individual must totalize the phenomena he encounters. Scarcity dominates *all* praxis. These dicta clearly indicate that Sartre's sociological analysis is shot through with the unveiling of necessity.

The individual's relation to history in Hegel's philosophy of history is parallel to the relationship between the individual and the group in Sartre's sociology. The freedom of the individual, for Sartre, is sacrificed for the freedom of 'humanity' just as the individual is sacrificed, for Hegel, in order that the 'idea' of freedom be fully realized in time. For Hegel, the history of the world presents us with a rational process; for Sartre, social relations and group formations present us with a rational process. Sartre admits that necessity is the apodictic structure of dialectical experience.<sup>41</sup> The assumption that there is a transparent logical structure in social relations has led him to describe such relations in terms of necessity. There is more than a trace of Hegelian rationalism in Sartre's account of social phenomena.

The chink in the armor of Sartre's analysis of group formation is his neglect of the irrational factors influencing the nature and form of social processes. This neglect can be emphasized by contrasting Sartre's account of groups and the descriptions of 'psychological groups' provided by Le Bon and Freud.

Bracketing some of the conceptual models used by Le Bon in his study of groups (e.g., the concept of 'racial unconsciousness'), we can focus our attention upon his understanding of the irrational characteristics of group formation. Despite his usual psychological acumen Sartre has neglected the influence of emotions and sentiments (Pareto's *residues*) on the formation of groups. In this regard, Le Bon's analysis of the dominant role which unconscious phenomena play in group dynamics is a corrective to Sartre's hyperrationalistic account.

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

The individual who becomes a member of a group, Le Bon maintained, acquires a 'sentiment of invincible power' which he would not have if he remained isolated. In group formation every sentiment and act is 'contagious' to such an extent that the individual would sacrifice his own personal interest for the sake of the collective interest.<sup>42</sup> Although Sartre does refer to such contagious reactions, he minimizes their importance as unifying factors because he believes that consciously recognized ends are more influential in leading an individual to become part of a group. For this reason, the *ambiguity* of group formations is obscured in Sartre's account. Thus, for example, he claims that the 'storming of the Bastille' in 1789 illustrates the way in which a common danger and a common object convert a seriality (e.g., the *quartier* St. Antoine) into an organized group. This is an unfortunate illustration since the attack upon the Bastille was motivated by fear of the intervention of foreign troops which, it was thought, would surround the city. The attack on the Bastille was the result of the irrational action of two men (who had not known that the governor, de Launay, had agreed to allow arms to be withdrawn) who invaded the inner courts and drew the fire of the governor's garrison. The attack was the result of a chaotic series of misunderstandings.<sup>43</sup> One may say that a dialectic was at work here; but it was the result of irrational factors and not a social process governed by a self-conscious pursuit of a clearly discerned common end. Le Bon's conception of the 'suggestibility' characteristic of group actions, the importance of a 'contagion of feelings,' might be more appropriate to an understanding of this event.

For Le Bon, groups are not fused merely by a rational self-consciousness of an intentional project; rather, the group obeys impulses and feelings which tend to obscure rational goals. A seriality can be transformed into a group not only through the intentionality of individuals, but by means of the atmosphere of excitement which surrounds and permeates social movements. Contagious passions, sentiments, or emotions — as Pareto has also said — can often generate a "complex concatenation of actions and reactions."<sup>44</sup>

In his emphasis upon the oath (*serment*) Sartre tends to neglect the irrational power of symbols or 'ideas' which unify groups without the implementation of an oath. Le Bon argues that groups are often unified through the 'magical power' of words which, when repeated over and

<sup>42</sup> Gustave Le Bon, *Psychologie des foules* (Paris, 1895), 33.

<sup>43</sup> Albert Goodwin, *The French Revolution* (New York, 1962), 75-77. Cp. Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York, 1965), 74-75.

<sup>44</sup> Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society*. Trans. A. Bongiorno and A. Livingston (New York, 1935), II, 647.

over again, create a strong psychological bond among members of a group.<sup>45</sup> Although Sartre is not unaware of the influence of rituals (or verbalized symbols) on the unification of groups, he minimizes the non-rational appeal of such symbols (or symbolic acts) and the irrational basis of their cohesive effects.

In his *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* Freud agreed with Le Bon that suggestion or contagion plays a significant role in group formation. But, in examining the psychological basis of this suggestibility, he thought that it could be found in identification and *kathexis*. Groups are held together by libidinal 'ties' which are sublimated and not overtly expressed. The individual's submission to the group indicates a "limitation of narcissism" which implies a libidinal association.<sup>46</sup> In contrast to Freud's views, Sartre's account of the bond unifying a group is (with the exception of the *terreur*) too abstract. His emphasis upon a material (rather than a psychological) basis for group formation is the result of his commitment to the view that scarcity is the motivating factor in social processes. Freud's emphasis upon identification as a significant factor in group unification is a corrective to Sartre's emphasis upon the material basis of human motivation.

Although Sartre does refer to the role of leaders or activists in social organization, he claims that leaders emerge as a result of a 'contingent' advantage and are an expression of the group's restructuring of itself. Freud, on the other hand, describes the leader as the "key figure in group psychology."<sup>47</sup> The leader is the personal objectification of the sovereignty of the group. The individual member of a group identifies with the leader and reinforces his psychological commitment to the leader and the group. Sartre conceives of the sovereignty of the group in collective terms and bypasses the significance of the prestige of the leader on the process of group formation.<sup>48</sup> For Sartre, the 'collectivity' (which holds the threat of terror) is the only 'leader.' His emphasis upon collective sovereignty indicates that he has transcended his intention of presenting a phenomenology of social processes and reveals his commitment to the promulgation of a particular social theory (i.e., a revisionist Marxism).<sup>49</sup> He has yielded to the temptation to *prescribe* what social organizations should prevail.

Sartre's omission of a description of the role and function of leaders

<sup>45</sup> Gustave Le Bon, *op. cit.*, 117.

<sup>46</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. Trans. J. Strachey (New York, 1960), 43.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>48</sup> *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Ed. Kurt Wolff (New York, 1964), 184.

<sup>49</sup> Wilfrid Desan, *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York, 1965), 250. Cp. Walter Odajnyk, *Marxism and Existentialism* (New York, 1965), 161-63.

in social organization is a serious lacuna in his social theory. It is clear that the conferring of consensual power upon a leader is (and has been) an important aspect of group formations. Sartre's emphasis upon the need for the threat of terror prevents him from seeing that many social groups are unified by the respect members of a group have for their leader or leaders. He entirely neglects the importance of what Max Weber called the charismatic qualities of men who are able to generate and sustain social groups.<sup>50</sup> Despite the unfortunate role which such men have occasionally played in history, Sartre's neglect of this aspect of social unification indicates an incompleteness in his phenomenology of group formation. His collectivistic orientation prevented him from examining the phenomenon of the role of leaders and thereby deprived his sociological theory of comprehensiveness. (Of course, we may hope that this may be remedied in volume two of the *Critique*.)

Sartre's description of social processes is insightful insofar as he has stressed the complex network of reciprocal interactions among men (within a material field) and has provided a methodological tool for the interpretation and description of social processes: the critical dialectic. Although such an approach to social phenomena is by no means metaphysically neutral, it is possible that, if it is shorn of its Hegelian terminology, it can be a useful alternative to a purely analytical approach to social processes.

It has been argued that Sartre's dialectic of group formation seems to lead him to describe the relevant social processes in such a way as to undermine the contingency of social events and individual actions by inadvertently admitting a necessity into such events and actions. His description of the dialectic of social relations takes on the necessitarian coloration of Hegel's dialectic of history. In addition, Sartre's description of the structure of groups tends to negate his ostensible protection of the free praxis of individuals. Although he begins by saying that the individual determines the growth, development, and stabilization of groups, he ends by saying that the group (*groupe en contrainte*) dominates the individual, substituting collective power for individual freedom. Finally, Sartre's sociological analysis, despite its accomplishments, neglects the nonlogical or irrational factors which contribute to the emergence, development, and unification of social groups and fails to present an adequate account of the role of leadership in social organization.

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<sup>50</sup> Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Berlin, 1922), 140. Cp. Carl J. Friedrich, "Political Leadership and the Problem of the Charismatic Power," *The Journal of Politics*, 23, no. 1 (1961).

# Practico-Inert Praxis and Irreversibility

[73] *Irreversibility and Economic Structure.*  
*The Duty of the Transformation*  
*of Irreversibility into Meaning*

FOR SARTRE, intentional consciousness is consciousness that “explodes toward”<sup>1</sup> the object. Consciousness is the self-negation of being in the presence in order to transcend itself. This is true to the extent that each subject transcends himself in meaning. Although the subject explodes toward the object, he nevertheless remains a subject in the presence from which and in which he explodes. If we think about being in terms of traditional philosophy—or in terms of any ontological philosophy—we must say that consciousness is annihilation insofar as it is the negation of being. But for phenomenology the word “being” is only a category or a bias. As such, it must be bracketed. If we return to the original subject, i.e., the ego in flesh and blood, rather than the word “subject” which is but a category, we realize that “being” refers to the categorial operations of my subject in flesh and blood and its reflection or consciousness. I am always already in the world and I contain the world; among other operations, I can carry out that abstractive operation which leads me to speak of being. What is lacking in Sartre is the epochē, i.e., the return to the concrete subject and his intentionality.

The subject is negation to the extent that it becomes presence, outdistances the past, and denies it as presence. To the extent that it succeeds in remaining in the epochē and aims at

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), I, 33.

transforming the mundane according to the meaning of truth, it is also the negation of the mundane. But truth is a horizon which is never equivalent to being. We understand the meaning of truth, free from the danger of considering "truth" as a category, if we think of the *telos* which operates in each part and the various relations of its parts. ("Truth" can be considered as a category when, in formal logic, we say that truth is tautologous, i.e., that it is based on certain operations which lead to a tautology.) Truth appears as a relation among subjects, or as a society of subjects in which no subject is an object for another subject. For example, in the case of the dialectic that Sartre rediscovers within existential psychoanalysis, truth is the overcoming of both sadism and masochism. However, without having the idea of a sexual relation which goes beyond the sadistic and the masochistic, one cannot even talk about the sadist and the masochist. This means that the meaning of truth lives in the sexual relation even when one pretends to deny it. This is a particular instance of the Husserlian principle whereby it is only by recognizing the normal within me that I can talk about the abnormal. The subject is self-revelation to himself. Departing from the evidence in the first person, he discovers in the universal correlation the possibility of knowing all that his evidence implies. The subject contains the initial truth that he discovers only by negating the mundane and the biases. Yet he discovers it as the original point of departure.

The subject can never be the whole truth. He is a nucleus surrounded by dark zones which must be discovered. Their discovery is infinite and, to the extent that the subject is intentional, he always goes beyond himself. He aims at a meaning which is not yet realized but which can be gradually attained. Here, transcendence is negation, but not a total negation: the subject negates only that part of himself that must be transformed, since he continues to realize himself in transformative operations.

That the subject is never self-sufficient and always depends on something pre-categorially, i.e., in the domain of economic need, is connected to the fact that consciousness is never separable from its own body (*Leib*) and causality. Here, the negative element that constitutes the subject is the economic need which is bound to pre-categorial causality, the organic body, and the environment. To the extent that the subject has needs, he is *presence* as lack of a satisfaction which is necessary if he is to be maintained alive. By the same token, presence is finite: the pre-categorial structure of needs is temporal, and organic bodies

gradually wear out and die, just as, in order to live, they must rest and sleep. The principle of irreversibility is not the same as the second principle of thermodynamics. Since we cannot go back in time, we experience in the first person the irreversibility of time in fatigue and in the aging of our bodies. This is a principle which is really a factual experience. As we can subsequently discover, ours is ultimately the reality of each temporal entity which wears out, begins, and ends.

The irreversibility of the second principle of thermodynamics derives from a precategorical experience which we live in the first person and which is valid both for us and for things, since, as concrete monads, we are both body and thing. Our reality is structured as a reality which is always *in need of something*, i.e., as precategorical economic reality. This is why economics is a decisive science and we are always conditioned by the economic structure: we experience a world and, if we want to live, the world must satisfy our needs. In this sense, the relationism whereby nothing is isolated and each thing and subject needs other things and other subjects is the opposite of the principle whereby substance needs nothing in order to exist. As in Husserl, relationism also discovers the modalities of time in the basic structures of the life-world. In temporal modalities there is irreversibility and, therefore, economic need.

Pure freedom is thus impossible: freedom must always pass through the economic structure, i.e., necessity. Sartre makes this clear in his *Critique de la raison dialectique*. The fact that in this work he arrives at the principle of irreversibility, by means of a path other than mine, confronts me with the scope of my analyses of 1951–54.

As I said then, the problem of man is that of living according to a value and a meaning, even if he lives in irreversibility. Irreversibility must be transformed into a direction which has a value and a meaning of truth. This is the work of culture and civilization which, given irreversible and basic structures, cannot jump to the “spiritual” level without passing through economic necessity. Thus, culture and civilization can be considered as human answers to becoming and death.

Man is rooted in irreversibility and in the precategorical economic structure. His consciousness is always consciousness-of-something. It is intentional. It always transcends itself by going toward a truth at which it aims: the man-subject is transcendental. But consciousness has a body and a world. Furthermore, it needs an environment in order to live. Its intentional motion to-

ward truth is conditioned by the economic structure, and, therefore, by labor, production, and distribution. It is impossible for man not to have needs which begin and end in time. If the temporal structure is fundamentally the economic structure, and the precategorical base is undeniable, it is impossible to occlude the economic structure.

I breathe in the first person: I can say that the air I breathe is *external* to me, since I lack it and must introduce it into my lungs. Here I experience in the first person the lack of something: Husserl has hinted at this type of experience in connection with hunger and food. Hunger can be indeterminate. It constitutes a special relationship between me and the objects that can satisfy my hunger. This is the subject's original experience of the *external*. Sexual impulse is a particular form of hunger. Husserl writes:

The drive towards the other sex. The drive in one individual and the reciprocal drive in the other. The drive can be in the stage of the indeterminate hunger that does not yet contain within itself its object as its goal. Hunger in the ordinary sense is more determinate when there is a drive towards the food—determinately directed in the original mode (even before the hunger has been satisfied by such a food and this food already has that certain character which allows its recognition, the typical character, of course, of a "food" of a familiar object which can satisfy a hunger).<sup>2</sup>

What do I experience in hunger? That I lack something and that this something is away from me: I want it close enough to me to make it my own, i.e., "internalize it." I therefore experience the external as that which is lacking in me and as that which I must make my own. When I am hungry, the whole world that I experience is valid for me only as a complex of foods which can satisfy my hunger. I pay attention only to foods—in the same way that the baby pays attention only to the maternal breast that can feed him. Before he is born, he probably does not experience the world. "Within procreation," to use Husserl's terminology, there is no distinction between the internal and external. To the extent that it is external, the world is not constituted. Here, we clearly see how the "world" is bound to genetic concatenation, irreversible temporality, the original economic structure, and, therefore, *historicity*. We rediscover Marxism's *precategorical phe-*

2. See manuscript E III 5, published as "Universal Teleology," in *Telos*, no. 4 (Fall, 1969), pp. 176-77.

*nomenclological foundations* or, in terms of what we said earlier, its transcendental foundations. Economic structure, reality, and historicity are inextricably connected. To the extent that it is temporal, the precategorical structure is *necessary*. *Possibility depends on this basic necessity*. There cannot be a possibility that is not conditioned by necessity. Temporality as the irreversible and necessary structure is the real and transcendental foundation of possibility. Irreversibility is the very structure of history, where we find an authentic historicism. The economic structure conditions freedom but, at the same time, also makes it possible.

To be in history means to be originally and precategorially mortal and to have to satisfy hunger. Since, as a real economic and precategorical subject, I must nourish myself, I must work. Also, another subject can make me work for him. This is the social origin of alienation. For Marx, alienation is always an intersubjective social relation: this is why he poked so much fun at the example of Robinson Crusoe in political economy. This alienation can be overcome only if the economic problem is resolved. There must be an abundance of economic goods. For Sartre, the *base* of the problem is the *scarcity* of goods. This scarcity entails the work needed to produce them, the importance of the type of environment, and the quantity of the population in relation to it. Here a reevaluation of Malthus is in order.

Marx had good reasons to discard Malthus; he does so for the same reasons that Engels criticizes the theory of the *struggle for existence*. The scarcity of products as such does not cause true and genuine alienation. This is not to deny that man is mortal and that death is the total externalization which makes him a cadaver. Here, it is nature which alienates man. In war, however, it can also be another man. I can say that, if death comes because of hunger, it is due to a natural law, "scientific" in the naturalistic sense of the self-multiplication of population. In this case, history is dominated by an inviolable scientific law and alienation is unavoidable, i.e., there will always be exploitation of man by man. Marx objects by saying that true and genuine alienation is an intersubjective relation. It is possible that a subject exploits another because the latter is hungry. Alienation would be impossible if man were not rooted in the precategorical economic structure. However, it does not follow from this that man cannot act upon nature in such a way as to satisfy his needs and, if necessary, regulate population in terms of a global plan.

In fact, an environment without resources leads to misery. But Marx recognizes man's ability to modify the environment

through labor. Alienation obtains to the extent that the subjects are in a relationship of labor and production. In labor, my operations are my own: I am in the product of my labor. If someone else, or another class, expropriates my labor and hides the fact that the *value* of labor is in the subject's operations by saying that the belabored object is only a commodity, I, who work, am reduced from a subject to an object and become estranged from myself. Alienation is *a reversal of subjectivity*.

The center of the whole problem is, and remains, the return to subjectivity. We have alienation when social relations do not allow this return. Now, we know that subjectivity is the point of departure of truth. The struggle against alienation is a struggle for emancipation and for the liberation from exploitation. The latter is a struggle for the meaning of truth, which departs from the becoming-conscious of the subject. Thus, the meaning of truth is the very meaning of history.

All this indicates that Sartre's investigations must be phenomenologically founded. In general, Sartre's work comes out clearer and more valid if reconsidered from within phenomenology, i.e., if based on the precategorical foundation (irreversibility) and on the discovery of the subject as the original nucleus of truth, operations, and intersubjective relationships. The subject is in time, in irreversibility: he is hungry and discovers food. If we depart from the "internal" subject and analyze his operations, we find everything—not only our being as material things, but also our experiencing of the distant and the near, of what is lacking, and of what can allow for its satisfaction. The nothingness that is rooted in man is actually experienced as economic need. The "external" which I experience by departing from myself in the first person is the difference between need and satisfaction.

The relationship between man and food, however, is not the same as the relationship between man and woman. The woman is not a substance with which to work. Here we have a matter of relationships among subjects. Similarly, the relationship between the exploited worker and he who exploits him is not the same as that between the worker and the matter with which he works. It is, rather, a relationship between two subjects where one exploits the other by taking advantage of economic need. But exploitation does not necessarily follow from economic need in the same way that economic need does not necessarily lead to the reduction of the worker to a thing or a packhorse. Similarly, the sexual relationship does not necessarily entail that I must be the object of some subject or vice versa (sodomasochism). The same is true of

war. This is what becoming-conscious means: it is the discovery that exploitation, sadomasochism, or war are historical facts which are neither fatalistic nor necessary and insuperable. The precategorical structure of needs and satisfactions remains perpetually valid: it is a permanent structure of the life-world. However, this permanence does not entail the permanence of the ways through which I can satisfy my needs in order to live. Relations of production and social relations are alterable.

The irreversible temporal structure is dialectical and is not a function of temporal changes. In Sartre's terms, in every society the present negates the past and the future negates the present. In every society I will have to compensate for consumption by nourishing myself, by sleeping, or by undertaking similar actions. In every society I must still be born—and I would be born even if artificially—and, although I could prolong my youth and my old age, I will eventually die. In every society I will have to depend on an artificial or natural environment. In fact, in the ultimate analysis, any artificial environment will fall back on the natural. But the fact that I cannot avoid death is different from the fact that I can kill or be killed. The duty of the revolutionary class must be that of abolishing the dialectic of war and exploitation in the new society. This is related to the modalities of the struggle, and to the abolition by the liberating class of the ways through which the bourgeoisie has come into being.

Returning to the subject, I discover in myself and in others the ways in which the external is given to me. Each one of us contains the external. In the intersubjective and social dialectic, this fact is exploited by the exploiter who seeks to make me external to myself. He will impose a way of life in which the environment and my working relationships make me external to myself. When I say that I internalize the environment which is imposed upon me, it is the same as saying that the other prevents me from being a subject. However, my rebellion proves to the other that I am still a subject. Thus, the dialectic of internalization and externalization is a dialectic among concrete subjects in which one class does not allow the other to live in or have an environment of its own.

The problem remains: everything is based on irreversibility and the structure of needs and satisfactions. The man who satisfies one level of needs finds himself confronting new ones. Ultimately, even if he has abolished misery and war, he can become aware of the desire to escape death as well as every type of social exploitation. If I consider my answer to the challenge of death as

my assertion of superiority, the solution to this problem can reintroduce war and the negated dialectic on a new level.

At any rate, even within the limitations of my life, if I want to become a subject who is compensated for death by his own imposition upon others, and who asserts himself in proportion to the degree to which he negates others and therefore reduces them to objects, I would be, according to Sartre, on the road of self-deification. Since self-deification is impossible, it becomes a "useless passion." This obtains on the level of the phenomenology of impure consciousness. In order to constitute a society of subjects and, therefore, in order not to absolutize myself, I must develop a relationship, between myself and the other, in which neither of the two negates the other in order to assert himself. The revolutionary group which negates a constituted order where relationships between subjects are reciprocally alienating must not reproduce the same relationship that it negates, or it will repeat the dialectic of alienation.

The problem of the psychological, social, and cultural relationships among men remains even after economic alienation has been overcome. These relationships are expressed in the dialectic of tradition and renewal, the heredity received from those who have preceded us—including negative heredity—and the renewal of the meaning of life. Here, the formation of personality among other personalities becomes as fundamental a task as culture.

The constitution of a human society according to the meaning of truth, and its intentional life in each work and each man, must permit a society of subjects in which no subject can assert himself by negating another as a subject, i.e., a society in which the assertion of a subject requires the assertion of the other as a subject as well.

This goal is a meaning of truth as well as the reengagement, the retotalization, of the tradition and its renewal in daily life activities. It is the problem of irreversibility in an infinite temporal transformation toward the direction of truth.

[74]      *Practico-Inert Praxis*  
              *and the Sociohistoric Dialectic*

THERE IS NO EXPLICIT REFERENCE TO HUSSERL in the *Critique de la raison dialectique*. But, whether or not he knows it,

the path that Sartre treads is a phenomenological one, if by phenomenology we understand what has been outlined in Part II of this volume. The recall to subjectivity in the *Critique* is compelling and obtains even where it is not explicitly declared. Naturally, it is a matter of returning to the individual and concrete subject: "The only practical and dialectical reality, the motive force of all, is *individual action*." <sup>3</sup>

The subject is the very possibility of praxis: "Praxis, in fact, insofar as it is the praxis of an organism that reproduces its life by reorganizing the environment, is man." <sup>4</sup> It is man who transcends himself in his own subjectivity while remaining subjectivity and persisting as such. For the subject, "the consciousness of its praxis as free efficacy, remains, throughout all the constraints and all the exigencies, the constant reality of itself insofar as it is the perpetual supersession [*dépassement*] of its ends." <sup>5</sup> It is the supersession of its immediate ends for the meaning of truth and the totalization in progress.

Man as the subject contains inertia. In order to realize himself and his ends, he must pass through material inertia. However, inertia must not "externalize" man and his human relations. Through inert praxis, I must work and dominate matter. This does not necessarily mean that I must be externalized or rendered into an object by another man. Ultimately, my praxis must come to terms with the precategorical economic structure in which I live: with the environment (*Umwelt*) and with the scarcity of products. Man lives with nature in a symbiosis which is constituted by labor. In order to dominate nature, satisfy economic needs, and overcome the scarcity of products, man must use his own body in "practico-inert praxis." From the phenomenological viewpoint, this is possible because man is not just an organic body (*Leib*). He is also the material original thing (*Ursache*) at the very center of the causal series. According to Sartre, social life is dominated by inertia, and human activity goes through inertia in order to dominate it.

Therefore, the constitution of social life is a struggle, using all the technical means, against dominating inertia. Technical means are, in fact, the true and genuine symbiosis with nature. The constitution of a society free from exploitation is impossible if nature dominates man. On the other hand, man's domination

3. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 361.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 367.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 366.

of nature, the inert praxis through which one must pass, must not reduce man to nature.

If human organization (which must pass through the practico-inert praxis) does not overcome inertia, society remains dominated by naturalization, which renders men external to one another. A class can take advantage of the fact that man must pass through inertia in order to be rendered external to himself. This is crucial. Social inertia is due to a usage of labor, technology, and science that have lost their intentionality. That man must pass through labor does not necessarily imply that he must live in an alienated society. Alienation is a result of the organization of labor and the relations of production. Thus the social struggle is a struggle against nature. This struggle is possible because man externalizes himself in labor and uses his body as an instrument. The social dialectic, which in order to be understood must return to the man-nature symbiosis, is not a direct struggle against nature. Rather, it is a struggle mediated by man and by the group: it is rendered possible by the fact that one class naturalizes another class, or that one man naturalizes another man.

The scarcity of products is conditioning. However, capitalist exploitation could remain even in a situation of abundance. In the final analysis, what renders man external to himself is the fact that he works and, as such, passes through the inert praxis. But a man is exploited by another man only when the latter forces him to remain inert praxis. The dialectic is, therefore, a struggle among subjects. Only through the relationships among subjects, who are also nature, does it become the struggle against natural inertia. Sartre seems to stress the fact that the dialectic among classes and groups is ultimately due to the *symbiosis* of man and nature. Now, symbiosis is necessary but not sufficient to explain the historical dialectic, which is explained only in terms of the operations whereby one man naturalizes the other. Not all poor societies which are forced to live with scarcity are capitalist. In fact, the contrary is the case. The dialectic is intelligible if we clarify the fact that the inert praxis to which nature forces us does not require that inertia dominate human relationships. Labor overcomes inertia. The relation of exploitation obtains when the victory of a man, a class, a group, or a people is exploited by another class, group, or people, who take advantage of the victory over inertia to appropriate to themselves the results of that victory.

The fact that the subject has needs, and works, does not invariably necessitate exploitation, even if products are scarce. The

naturalization of man is not a naturalistic fact. Recognition of the necessary character of inert praxis, i.e., the precategorical economic structure, does not entail that the sociohistorical dialectic is a result of inert praxis. I must pass through necessity in order to reach freedom: labor gives me freedom, which is taken away from me in the social relation of labor. The struggle for emancipation is the struggle for the freedom of the worker to conquer himself through his own labor.

Theoretically, capitalism is in a position to overcome the *scarcity* of products. This is why socialism presupposes capitalism. The contradiction of capitalism lies in the fact that, although it is in a position to overcome scarcity, it holds peoples and classes in inertia as if it were impossible to do so and as if scarcity were the only problem. This also explains Soviet planning, which, although it has goals opposed to capitalist ones, has been forced to reproduce the state of practico-inert praxis in order to reach the abundance of goods already attained by capitalism. This explains the Soviet race with capitalism. But the goal is not the abundance of goods. Rather, it is the reorganization of society on the basis of abundance. Here is where the quantitative must change into the qualitative. If the goal were only the abundance of goods, then the Soviet planning of production would run the risk of being indistinguishable from that of capitalism. However, these two types of planning become distinct in the process of realizing the plan. In becoming realized, Soviet production planning does not lose sight of the *telos*. If this were to happen, it would be the whole man who would be planned, and not just his work. De-Stalinization has a meaning to the extent that it is the regaining of subjectivity on the part of each subject who, in order to become a subject, has had to pass through necessity and alienation in order to avoid being reduced to the mere necessity of economic need.

The struggle against natural necessities demands the *telos*: *logical* use of labor, technology, and the sciences. Otherwise, nature rebels against us with its counterfinalities. Here, Sartre's viewpoint becomes valid once again. For instance, in their secular march, the Chinese peasants clear the land. But deforestation causes landslides, the obstruction of rivers, and catastrophic floods. The Chinese peasants' praxis must be rationally organized. Unless we become aware of natural and historical necessities, we vainly exalt ourselves in an abstract scientism or in a sterile idealism (Sartre speaks of a "Stalinist idealism"). It is possible to avoid deforestation and landslides even in a capitalist

society by retaining the state of exploitation of the peasants. I can avoid counterfinality without removing the exploitation of man, and, having avoided the counterfinality and having attained a state of abundance, I can force man to consume the products that capitalist production deems necessary. As Sartre puts it, capitalism can place me in the situation of desiring and of doing precisely what capitalism wishes me to desire and do. Sartre's critique of the idealistic organization of labor that overlooks the finality remains valid. However, the organization that overcomes the counterfinality is not yet socialism and must not lose its own socialist intentionality. Science and technology must rediscover their function and their meaning while becoming conscious of praxis.

This helps us understand the importance of Sartre's critique of a nonoriented praxis which is not guided by reason. What is criticized is praxis for its own sake. Therefore, praxis must not be separated from theory. "The separation of the theory and practice resulted in transforming the latter into an empiricism without principles; the former into a pure, fixed knowledge."<sup>6</sup> This amounts to the submission of men and things to abstract ideas. This is why one can talk about idealism and the "idealist violation." Such a position is not in accordance with Marxism "as the interpretation of man and history." Thus, it is necessary for the epoch $\acute{e}$  to free us from prejudices and these positions. Praxis must always reconsider itself, its own results, and its own projects.

Realism demands consciousness and reflection: It "necessarily implies a reflective point of departure." As in phenomenological analysis, here reflection is considered as a point of departure in the actual present. Sartre continues: Reflection allows the "revelation" of a situation "in and through the practice which changes it." The term "revelation" [*d $\acute{e}$ voilement*] is crucial: that which is hidden must therefore become disoccluded, i.e., must become a *phenomenon*. Sartre criticizes the dualism of consciousness and practice as if the former were a *res cogitans* separated from *res extensa*.

We do not hold that the first act of becoming-conscious of the situation is the originating source of an action; we see in it a necessary moment of the action itself—the action, *in the course of its accomplishment*, provides its own clarification. That does

6. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 22.

not prevent this clarification from appearing in and by means of the attainment of awareness on the part of the agents; and this in turn necessarily implies that one must develop a theory of consciousness.

It is, therefore, recognized that the agent, i.e., the subject who is already in the world and in praxis, must depart from the act of becoming-conscious. The theory of consciousness needed here is no different from the continuous retention of intentionality in the praxis, i.e., from the fact that the subjects are the ones who become conscious. Therefore, realism is not the negation of subjectivity. It is not to be understood as an absolute reality which confronts us as if we ourselves, the subjects, were not reality. If knowledge were knowledge of a reality already fully displayed before us, we could not fit in it, know it, or modify it, precisely because of the pretense of catching "a world of objects inhabited by object-men." <sup>7</sup> Here Sartre's discussion of objectification is a Husserlian critique and, as such, it demands a return to subjectivity. Within himself the subject always discovers matter, labor, and what Sartre calls externality. The subject has a body which is a point of transformation and reciprocal encounter of the internal and the external (*Umschlagspunkt*). Alienation begins when the other reduces me, or tries to reduce me, to pure matter by using science and technology devoid of their function and intentionality.

The dialectic is clarified in the ongoing praxis. This means that the subject is always in the already given world and he has become what he is. He finds within himself the world that has preceded him, and before himself the world as a project to be realized. Subjectivity as presence in time has historically become what it is, in intersubjective history, in an irreversible dialectical and temporal process of being fulfilled and totalized. Thus it is not a matter of deducing praxis from a theory or philosophy. It is necessary to begin historically from the presence by continually reconsidering past experiences and projects. Historicism demands the reconsideration, the act of becoming-conscious, and the retotalization of previous consciousnesses and their results. Continuity obtains by always undertaking anew the analysis and the critique. Otherwise, praxis is always right simply because it has been performed. More concretely, it is precisely the lack of consciousness and the loss of the intentional continuity of meaning that lead my praxis into contradictory counterfinalities. True

7. *Ibid.*, p. 32 n.

empiricism is the reconsideration of temporal modalities: it is conscious work in the movement of the precategorical structure, and the retention of the intentionality of the totality in every part, and the retotalization of every group and *whole*.

Relativistic empiricism prevents praxis from examining counterfinalities and continually forces it to change direction, thus annulling the results or resulting in the same situation that has to be transformed. We must remember here that experience and reason are never abstractly separable, and that experience is valid only to the extent to which it retains the meaning of truth. So conceived, experience is bound to the irreversible temporal structure, to the precategorical economic level, to matter, and to necessity, without thereby blocking man in necessity.

For Sartre, in pragmatic and relativistic empiricism, "success is substituted for the notion of truth." A scientific and technological success which is not the realization of humanity in history, or a qualitative transformation of the subject and social relations, is a technological but not a human and social success. It is certainly not technological and scientific success that differentiates socialism from neocapitalism. If the problem is only practical and technological, and praxis itself is reduced to technology in both the socialist and the capitalist camps, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish the neocapitalism that claims the abundance of goods as its goal from the empirico-pragmatic Marxism which aims only at the same abundance.

Neocapitalism stresses a neutral and nonoriented science. Sartre correctly claims that dialectical reason is contraposed to dualistic reason: science loses its function and society hides the meaning of praxis through technistic ideology.

Science is not dialectical. . . . The contradiction is not here: it is between the bourgeois resolution to adhere to scientific positivism, and in the progressive effort of the proletariat . . . to dissolve positivism in the dialectical movement of human praxis. In reality, it is simply a matter of the existence of a self-conscious dialectic in the movement of the working class and of the tactical negation of this very same reason in the movement (in fact, dialectical) of the bourgeois class. It is in fact dehumanization by bourgeois oppression that leads the workers to humanity and to praxis organized as a constituted dialectic (i.e., to a positive supercession [*un dépassement positif*] of abstract and destructive Reason); but, conversely, it is this dialectic itself as praxis-totalization which reinforces analytical Reason in the bourgeoisie.<sup>8</sup>

8. Sartre, *Critique*, p. 742.

Therefore, when the working class accepts analytical reason and bourgeois technism, i.e., when it accepts the bourgeois thesis that everything must be reduced to particular technical problems, the proletariat is already at the mercy of the bourgeoisie and renounces its own totalizing praxis. This is how the problem appears on the level of a concrete self-conscious praxis. Technism, pure pragmatism, and relativistic historicism are ideological masks of a praxis which has renounced its own duty, leading to a situation in which man, consciously or unconsciously, accepts dehumanization and objectification.

The proletariat has a universally human mission: the annihilation of itself as a class through the *return of the sciences to their functions*. Science and technology are no longer neutral, and they become necessary to the totalizing meaning of the subjects' concrete operating. For neocapitalism, science is reconciled with technistic alienation and dehumanization, even in the maximum abundance of products and in a wealthy society. But for Marxism, the original function of science is the elimination of alienation. Technistic alienation tends to atomize and divide. It tends to hinder the attainment of consciousness as the unification of groups. Technistic exploitation seeks to extinguish the subjects' consciousness of their having become objects. As a subject, I understand that I am being exploited and alienated by another subject, "*departing from the object that I am for him.*"<sup>9</sup> The rebellion against technistic alienation allows man to rediscover his own subjectivity and to get together with others. "He who says: 'I will not force others to do more than they can do, so that another will not force me to do more than I can do,' he is already a master of dialectical humanism." And Sartre observes that, even if verbally refuted, the dialectic can be actually instrumentalized and used by capitalism in spite of analytical reason and "positivistic mystification."

The boss departs from the analytic viewpoint of atomization and competition: each is free, if he is able, to work more than his neighbor and gain an advantage over him; and the neighbor is free to enter into competition. But dialectical Reason, insofar as it is a carefully hidden mystery, establishes in fact for management that the raising of a norm of labor for and on the part of some, is the elevation (to a lesser degree) of all.<sup>10</sup>

9. *Ibid.*, p. 746.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 743 n.

[75] *Individuation and the  
Intentional Horizon of Truth*

SARTRE CHARGES DOGMATIC MARXISM with using a pre-constituted a priori method.

It does not draw its concepts from experience—or at least not from the new experiences which it seeks to interpret. It has already formed its concepts; it is already certain of their truth; it will assign to them the role of constitutive schemata. Its sole purpose is to force the events, the persons, or the acts considered into prefabricated molds.<sup>11</sup>

This inevitably leads one to ignore the concrete particular by reducing it to an abstract universal. The “different” is suppressed. “The aim is not to integrate what is different as such, while preserving for it a relative autonomy, but rather to suppress it. Thus the perpetual movement *toward identification* reflects the bureaucrat’s practice of unifying everything.”<sup>12</sup> Marx did precisely the opposite: in a letter to Lassalle he defines his own method as a pursuit which “rises from the abstract to the concrete.” For Marx, the concrete was the “hierarchical totalization of determinations and of hierarchized realities.” Ultimately, what is most concrete are men, human relations, and relations among subjects.<sup>13</sup>

Sartre shows a certain amount of interest in Henri Lefebvre’s method, which departs from an actual situation or from an actual presence which is indicated as a horizon. Each horizontal presence is also *vertical* or historical. Considered with respect to the horizontal presence, every actual presence is regressive. From the present I regress to its genesis, in order to return subsequently to the present which is now “elucidated and explained.” The method must use the various auxiliary disciplines, i.e., the various sciences and technologies. However, it must use them genetically in order to subsequently return to the present that it wants to explain. This is acceptable to Sartre, who observes that Lefebvre’s method, “with its phases of phenomenological descriptions and its double movement of regression followed by progress, is valid—with the mediations which its object may impose on it—in all

11. Sartre, *Search for a Method*, p. 37.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

the domains of anthropology.”<sup>14</sup> If rigorously pursued, such a method demands the foundation of the sciences in man’s actual presence, temporally situated among other men and in the world, in the now. This involves the problems of the presence and its modifications, of the reenactment of the past, of the ongoing temporal reflection, of the relationship of temporality and truth, of the relation of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and of the relation of the categorial and precategorial structures of the various sciences.

An immediate identification of an individual or “collective” fact and the abstract universal is impossible. Some *mediations* are therefore necessary. The mediations must allow for the explanation of “this man,” e.g., Flaubert, and his work in his time in relation to us, to our time, and to the *project* of our time. We are dealing with the “subject” Flaubert. Thus, the mediations, and all that they imply, are connected to the problem of subjectivity and its relations, to the problem of the relations between the subject Flaubert and the document he has left us *sedimented* in his writings, and to the problem of the relations between the subject Flaubert and the subject Sartre or *us*. Clearly, in his own examination, Sartre cannot occlude his own subjectivity: the regressive-progressive method obviously also involves its user.

One’s subjectivity in the *first person* must always be disoccluded. One must find a principle of scientificity without thereby considering himself as already disoccluded a priori. He must find, in his very being, a “part” or something which can be valid not only *for itself*. This leads to the principle of *universal correlation*, which in turn implies the presence of the totality in the part, and, more precisely, in that part which is *us*. I can investigate it because I have discovered myself as a *practical whole*, i.e., because I know that my investigation is not just *mine*, but that it also belongs to society, the world in which I live, ongoing history, and its meaning of truth. In reality, I know myself in the world and in others. To use Sartrean language, to know myself amounts to knowing the externality that has made me and the internality that I make of it. My history is separable neither from the history which has constituted me nor from its critical investigation. To disocclude myself is to discover myself in the world and to understand the meaning of the truth of my *individuation* in relation to others who have constituted me from infancy in the society that has led to my birth. This is precisely the problem of the *first per-*

14. *Ibid.*, p. 52 n.

son and his experiences in relation to the world and its history. It is the problem of the historico-genetic concatenation. Sartre does not overlook this problem, precisely because of its unavoidable theoretical and practical implications, which are connected with the analysis of the *practical whole*. The dialectical subject-object relation as praxis is valid for me and for my humanity in the first person. Thus it is also valid for all the first persons and their intersubjective relations. Praxis is the point of departure: a passage "from the objective to the objective through internalization." Here, "objective" indicates the situation that changes into another situation. It is the world in which I live and which I want to transform.

The project as the subjective supersession of objectivity toward objectivity, and stretched between the objective conditions of the environment and the objective structures of the field of possibles, represents *in itself* the moving unity of subjectivity and objectivity, those cardinal determinants of activity. The subjective appears then as a necessary moment in the objective process. If the material conditions which govern human relations are to become real conditions of *praxis*, they must be lived in the particularity of particular situations.<sup>15</sup>

The project is certainly connected to the horizon of truth, to the meaning of the totalization and its *intentionality*. It seems that to understand the other is to go beyond, with, and through him according to a praxis. This praxis is not just common, but is in some sense "cooperative." Thus, intentionality acquires a pregnant sense in actual praxis and in its self-transcendence, and, as such, in the totalizing movement of the dialectic. Sartre elaborates the meaning of intentionality in connection with temporalization. He writes:

Man defines himself by his project. This material being perpetually goes beyond the condition which is made for him; he reveals and determines his situation by transcending it in order to objectify himself—by work, action, or the gesture. The project must not be confused with the will, which is an abstract entity, although the project can assume a voluntary form under certain circumstances. This immediate relation with the Other, beyond the given and constituted elements, this perpetual production of oneself by work and *praxis*, is our peculiar structure. It is neither a will nor a need nor a passion, but our needs—like our passions or like the

15. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

most abstract of our thoughts—participate in this structure. They are always *outside of themselves toward*.<sup>16</sup>

Here, “to exist” means *to be outside of oneself toward*, i.e., to overcome one’s own condition in the intentional negation. On the other hand, this presupposes that existence is in an already given world (*vorgegebene Welt*).

The subject has always been in the genetic intersubjective concatenation. He has already become. Therefore, he has always had a past and has become in it. But he knows this only if, by recognizing this necessity that has conditioned him, he negates it in relation to the liberty of the project, i.e., in relation to the meaning of the truth of the future. Here, dialectical laws appear as temporal laws. Yet they are not laws in which the project has always been preliminarily realized. Rather, they appear as laws which include, in dialectical necessity, i.e., in temporality, temporalization as reflection, and, therefore, the freedom of reflection as temporalization. Subjective reflection is an integral part of the “objective” dialectic which is always negated in the subjectivity included in it. The project (or the future) is not a simple deduction or a simple causal dependence. Similarly, it is not independent of genetic-temporal conditioning. Thus, in the final analysis, it is not independent of causal circumstantiality (pre-categorical with respect to each category of cause understood in the physicomathematical sense). All of this entails a “circularity” which must be investigated. The implied problems are connected with the problem of the counterfinality and what Sartre indicates as the “antidialectical” dimension in relation to the dialectical one. In other words, the project for the future does not coincide with its meaning of truth, even though I must think about the future as the realization of a horizon of truth. The expectation can remain unfulfilled, and my work can result in a future which is different from that toward which my project aims, depending on my relations with others and on the nature of the situation. Yet it would be erroneous to hold that, in every case, the “failure” of a project is a failure of others or of “things,” since I myself do not exist independently of others and things.

This leads to the problem of the reality and intelligibility of the dialectic. Sartre is interested in what he sometimes calls the “formal” conditions of intelligibility of the dialectic. These formal conditions concern the “theme” of intelligibility. Actually, for Sartre, these conditions are never purely formal, but are al-

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 150–51.

ways concrete and individuated. They are always a function of individual situations, and, therefore, of the actual presence, i.e., the actual historical presence. In other words, dialectical reason always starts from a particular historical moment. It becomes "historicized" by continually reenacting, in the historical moment when it arises, a past which under certain conditions becomes "a present that has passed," i.e., the historical past. At the same time, however, it finds in the present the expectation and the project for a future present which may or may not be oriented according to the horizon of truth. This is where the philosophical tradition poses the problem of the negative that will have to be recognized as the *negation of the negation*. Insofar as it is intelligible, dialectical reason *departs* from an individuated historical presence in which totalization is in progress. As Sartre observes:

We will see later on in the paragraph reserved for "The Critique of Dialectical Experience" how the dialectic can be at the same time historical reason and self-historicization departing from a particular moment of history.<sup>17</sup>

This note refers to the second volume of the *Critique*. However, even in the first volume, the dialectic must depart from its "historicization" of the actual presence.

The critique of reason is thus inextricable from a *critique of experience*. Rather, it is a function of the critique of experience and, therefore, of the actually "lived" temporality or of the temporalizing of reflection. In other words, the "categories" of dialectical reason are a function of "how" these categories operate in experience. Here we find a critique of Kant similar to Husserl's. For us, the critique of experience must be the pre-categorical foundation. The Kantian analysis offers us the necessary forms of experience, but, in principle, the Kantian dialectic separates the dialectic from experience. The reverse also obtains: the dialectic is immanent in experience. Therefore, a critique of dialectical reason must also be a critique of dialectical experience. Hegel's answer to the problem leads to the identification of dialectical experience with its intentional horizon of truth, of the actual with the rational, or, as Sartre puts it, of being with thought. We hold that the dialectic is obscured if it does not operate in experience. Furthermore, it presupposes the nonidentity of the actual and the

17. Sartre, *Critique*, p. 741 n. [The section on "The Critique of Dialectical Experience" appears in the projected second volume of Sartre's *Critique*, which has not yet been published (1972).]

rational, of being and thought. This nonidentity is the assertion of intentionality. On one hand, it is the inclusion of the totality in the part, of the infinite in the finite, and of truth in individuality; on the other hand, it is the identification of the part and the whole, of actuality and rationality, and of individuality and totality. There are *mediations* between abstract individuals and the abstract totality. Along with all "science and auxiliary technology," both individuals and the totality are grounded in the "historicization" of dialectical reason, "starting from a particular moment of history," i.e., the moment that *we* live and experience.

The *we* and the subjectivity are therefore constituted by the *intentional difference* between the actual presence and its horizon of truth which never coincides with the being-present as such. Contrary to what Heidegger claims, it is not a matter of an *ontological difference* between being and the presumed *being-in-itself*. The latter, along with determinate being (*Dasein*), is an abstraction. If this *being-as-such* [*Sosein*] replaces the intentional horizon of truth, such a horizon is compromised and rendered impossible, and man's concrete subjectivity is denied in the name of an abstract being which is nothing but the product of a particular form of alienation. It is a great achievement of the *Critique* to have dealt with the theme of the horizon of truth and the intentional orientation toward truth. Time, through reflection, and therefore through *subjectivity*, appears in us not only as a project, but also as action for a project directed toward the intentional horizon of truth.

### [76] *Irreversibility and Repetition*

I REDISCOVER THE WORLD and history within myself, but not as pre-given things separated from me: this would presuppose a mythological absolute consciousness in opposition to which these things would be "being." I rediscover them as things among which I am also a thing precisely because I am a subject. I know myself in the praxis of this relation which is ultimately a common project. It is a project which is directed toward the future and the orientation of its truth. I depart from myself as original and incomplete praxis which is, and makes itself to the extent that it aims at realizing the totalization in the historical process, in myself, and in others. In this sense, Sartre's observations seem important:

The critical experience will start out from the immediate, i.e., from the individual attaining himself in his abstract *praxis*, to rediscover, through deeper and deeper conditionings, the totality of his practical links with others, and thereby the structures of the diverse practical multiplicities and, through the contradictions and the struggles among these, the concrete absolute: historical man.

Thus, historical man is not concrete because he declares himself to be concrete. Evidently, I am individuated and historically concrete from the very beginning. Yet, *I must discover myself-as-such*, not as the man who I already am, but as the man who makes himself concrete "through the contradictions and the struggles" of practical multiplicities. Here, concrete praxis is constituted in a project which is oriented toward the horizon of truth. My historical concreteness consists in completing myself by departing from the actual presence which is recognized as negative and incomplete. This completion obtains in a praxis which is oriented toward the meaning of intentional truth. In this context, Sartre notes:

I understand "abstract" here in the sense of "incomplete." From the point of view of his singular reality, the individual is not abstract (one might say that he is the concrete itself), but *on condition that* more and more profound determinations have been discovered which constitute him in his very existence as an historical agent, and, at the same time, as a product of history.<sup>18</sup>

Here we encounter irreversibility: the real subject is "a structure of irreversibility"<sup>19</sup> who allows the possibility of a future and its determination.<sup>20</sup> The totalization in process of the practical individualities obtains in the concrete temporal dialectic. It is in the reciprocal encounter of subjects: in the constitution of individual subjectivities in *series* and in *groups*. Inert praxis and externality characterize the *series*, while the *group* is constituted as freedom only in opposition to the externalizing coexistence of the series. According to Sartre, the series ultimately appears as repetition and circularity, unlike the progressive meaning which is implicit in the irreversibility which shatters the repeti-

18. *Ibid.*, p. 143 n. This may also be found in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. Robert D. Cumming (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 427 n. [In this and the passage quoted immediately above, we have used Professor Cumming's translation.]

19. *Ibid.*, p. 472.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 473.

tion. Irreversibility is opposed to repetition, and if the dialectic is progressive temporality, the serial repetition generates the counterdialectic.

Sartre's position must be clarified and corrected. Temporal irreversibility, which for physicists is the increase in entropy, appears to man's precategorical experience as the necessity of satisfying the needs which arise from the consumption of his body (the increase of entropy). This necessity forces him to eat, work, or make others work for him. Precisely because time is irreversible and everything wears out, everyone must repair his own consumption with food and rest—or risk death, which will eventually come anyway. Everyone must sate his own hunger. The need to eat always reappears. If this repetition is a serialization, then the series and the need to eat *always* reappear, precisely because irreversibility cannot be overcome. This is parallel to the impossibility of perpetual motion and circular reversibility (the living being cannot eat itself).<sup>21</sup> It may seem paradoxical, but I have needs because I change in time, and because I always change in time I have needs which must be continually satisfied. From this follows the need for work, and practico-inert praxis. This does not prevent me from making someone else work for me, and thus I become a master, i.e., it does not prevent the exploitation of man by man. Now, the inexorable reappearance of needs because of irreversibility and consumption does not entail the reappearance of exploitation. Thus the group that fights serialization also fights the exploitation of practico-inert praxis. Therefore, one fights a *kind* of intersubjective dialectic and not the fact that needs reappear. Once again, scarcity of food does not entail that I must be exploited. If by working I make myself practico-inert praxis, this is not equivalent to exploitation: the latter is different from the former even if it is a function of the former. More precisely, the fact that needs reappear makes exploitation possible, but it does not make exploitation necessary and insurmountable. The sophism of exploitation is as follows: since needs always reappear, exploitation must always reappear. Or, since this land is inadequate and its goods are scarce, the exploitation of man by man is unavoidable. The revolutionary group must overcome the circle of exploitation, so that a man does not come to be used as an inert means by another man. Ultimately, social inertia can be overcome because it is due to human relations, unlike the serialization of needs which is in-

21. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

evitable. What must be overcome is the externalization of a man rendered into a thing by another man, and not the fact that I am also a natural thing, i.e., that I experience my own inertia and that of things among which I live in a causal precategoryal relation. What must be broken is the reduction of man to the level of a thing or commodity (*Verdinglichung*). The externalization which I always contain, whereby I always live and experience nature, is not social alienation, even if it is the origin of this alienation. History is nature, but it is not simply nature or natural history. If social inertia were to reappear in the same way that needs do, and if the externalization of a subject in relation to another were inevitable, exploitation could never be avoided. The laws of political economy that Marx criticized for reducing human relations to "scientific," naturalistic, and insuperable laws would then be eternal. According to economic naturalism, however, men become abstractions. They are degraded to the level of natural things in the same way that the worker is forced to live abstractly and not as a man. Thus serialization is the reduction of man to the level of a natural thing, and the struggle against serialization is the struggle against *Verdinglichung*. The struggle against serialization brings us to the discovery that, although man has to pass through necessity and practico-inert praxis, he can still constitute a society of subjects.

*A Question of Method:  
History and Critical Experience*

In subjecting Sartre's conception of historiography to scrutiny, the concept of *problematic* as developed by phenomenology and structuralism will provide us with an avenue of approach. As elaborated by Husserlian phenomenology and post-Saussurean structuralism, the concept of *problematic* focuses upon the manner in which theoretical questions are posed. Theory is as much the search for an object and the specification in discourse of a domain of objectivity as it is the expression of statements about that object and domain. The manner in which the question concerning the object is phrased creates the domain of objectivity to which it refers. Sartre's thought falls naturally into that characterization, for from *Nausea* through *The Roads to Freedom* to the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* his thought has been a search *for* history. And not in an idle sense, for from the start the concept of the being of consciousness as freedom, the project, in *Being and Nothingness* meant that nothing would do, but that the actions of men and, consequently, history must have a political urgency animating them. The question is one of man's fate. And everything hangs in the balance.

From its side, Husserlian phenomenology emphasized the necessity of outlining the complex of concepts that in their interrelationships specify a particular objectivity and, in that way, concentrated on the programmatic nature of philosophical method and discourse. Although deeply involved with its content, the phenomenological method retained the appearance of a formal discourse. It was to be a way of introducing the world into philosophical discourse; it did so by suspending the thesis of the natural world, so that the natural world and the layers of objectivity founded upon it could shine forth, appear, as phenomena. This, however, was a program; philosophy remained an introduction to the world; it could never pretend to equate itself with the world. As such an introduction to the world, it was up to philosophy to provide the initial concepts that would allow the world to be seen and spoken: to present the world as a program for thought.

Since de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, structuralism has emphasized the concept of system as the concept that makes it possible to tie

down the concrete analysis of phonological systems or kinship relations. Linguistic or anthropological data become relevant only when they become the indices of relations. The significance of facts lies in their interrelationships; their meaning lies at the level of the network of those relations, in their specific coherence. The task of theoretical reflection is, then, to elaborate from the oppositions found in the sensible given the systematic interconnections that elaborate it into a system. The object of theory is promoted to the level of meaning at the moment when it takes on the characteristics of a network, of a text, of a paradigm, or of a discourse.

What both of those conceptions emphasize is that the specific coherence of a thought is to be found on the axis of synchrony. Thought is suspended in the daze of the question. Before it can move on along the axis of diachrony or exposition, it must bring that question to the point: In what way does the problem at stake become a problem? Hence, the concept of *problematic*: the network of interrelated concepts—the web of discourse—that introduces thought to a new domain of objectivity.

The above considerations make it possible to pose or to formulate as the essential problem the *question* of history. The first task in the construction of history is the manner in which the question of history is asked. The *problematic* of historical theory is that complex of concepts which locate it within the world as an object of discourse and provide an introduction to its theoretical explanation. The question of history is, in that way, the problem of historiography: *how* is one to write history? Sartre accentuates this aspect of the matter in the very title of his major work on history and historical method, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.<sup>1</sup> The term *critique* is used, above all, in the sense of the search for the real outlines of the question of history. The form which that search takes is by reason of necessity one of criticism of the *status questionis*. What is the state of the question?, as a question, requires that the fog of dogmatism be pierced by the bright rays of a political passion for the meaning of history. Through critique, history becomes a question, carrying with it all the insecurity and the submerged anguish of a humanity constantly threatened by economic scarcity, the inertia of things, and the counter-humanity of others.

In order to sharpen our focus upon the elements entering into the structure of the question of history for Sartre, it is necessary to introduce two preliminary matters: the terrain of history—the question of historiography—and the subject of history—the question of politics. Both of these questions are interwoven and are what give historical and political theory within the Marxist stream of the Western revolutionary tradition its particular cast and conflicts. The first stage in our analysis can be reached through a con-

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1. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, trans, Alan Sheridan-Smith, ed. Jonathan Rée (London: New Left Books, 1976). Henceforth cited in the text as CDR with original French ("Fr."): *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).

sideration of the opposition between the theory of history, or historiography, and the philosophy of history in *The German Ideology*.<sup>2</sup> The second stage can be achieved by examining the role of the proletarian movement as the subject of history in Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*.<sup>3</sup>

*The German Ideology* of Marx and Engels is a transitional work, not only in the mere chronological sense of the term, but also because it marks out a new theoretical terrain for social and political criticism. It establishes a break, or *coupure*, to use the phrase that Althusser has introduced, between the philosophy of history and the theory of history. In introducing "the mode of production" as a guiding concept for history, Marx was introducing a new way of "writing" history.<sup>4</sup> The concepts involved, then, in setting the writing of history on a materialist foundation are methodological concepts that have relevance only in the organization of historical events. But they themselves do not provide a meaning for concrete, diachronic history. "They can only serve," in the words of *The German Ideology*, "to facilitate the arrangement of historical material, to indicate the sequence of its separate strata. But they by no means afford a recipe or schema, as does philosophy, for neatly trimming the epochs of history."<sup>5</sup>

The terrain for the theory of history is established for Marx in a space created by the interrelationships of historical events. Although not a formal theory in the strict sense in which those terms are understood today, historical theory is concerned with the form that events possess as they occur in material reality. The opposition between the theory and the philosophy of history, consequently, focuses upon the issue of historical methodology. The philosophy of history provides a categorization of historical facts, prior to a confrontation with their form. It is an interpretation of the sequence of historical events and not a comprehension arising from the organization of historical events into a text, into an exposition. Once that point is established, it becomes clear that the opposition between historical theory and the philosophy of history is between a methodology for the exposition, or "writing," of history and a schema emphasizing the arrangement of historical periods along a line. As a consequence of that opposition, "when reality is depicted, philosophy as an independent branch of activity loses its medium of existence."<sup>6</sup> The idealist nature of philosophy, which consists in the fact that it creates a schema for historical facts prior to exposition, results in its absolute condemnation. There is no Marxist philosophy of history; there is only a Marxist historical methodology.

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2. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1965).

3. George Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1970).

4. Marx and Engels, *German Ideology*, p. 7.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

6. *Ibid.*

The problem, however, is not quite that clear-cut. The philosophy of history conceives of historical facts as ranged along a line leading from the past into the present. And its interpretation focuses upon the stages into which that line can be graduated. From that linear conception come the concepts of progress, inevitable development and evolution, concepts to which, at one time or another, the Marxist tradition has been extremely hostile, particularly as seen in Luxemburg and Lenin. Because it is involved with the form of facts and hence with different levels of history—economic, political, religious, social, cultural, artistic—and with their foundation in the modes of social production, historical theory would, on the contrary, seem to be located on the axis of synchrony. It would seem to be concerned with historical forms of human production at various levels to which time—the essential factor in historical explanation—would be an extrinsic factor. From that point of view, the materialist conception of historical methodology would not in fact match the real nature of the material of history, events whose character is to be the marks of transition, repetition, or revolutionary change. Hence, the ever-recurrent temptation to see Marxism as a pure science in an empiricist or positivist sense. But, on the other hand, once the axis of synchrony is dissolved for the benefit of diachrony, historical theory lapses inevitably into a variant of the philosophy of history. It, once again, becomes a chronicle of epochs and a teleology guided by subjective ideals.

But, rather than being the sign of a failure, the conflict of synchrony and diachrony in historical method exposes an underside to history, the question of historical subjectivity. Historical theory as the theory of the social production of human life leads in Marx's view to the discovery of the real movement of history and to the subjectivity that is at work in that development. It is not a subjectivity that bears that development, for the idea of carrying along certain anticipated forms of historical development to their completion belies an implicit idealism, a subjectivity that explains history rather than being explained by it. The theory of history, on the contrary, discovers a material subjectivity, one that erupts from the description of the capitalist mode of production, a subjectivity that is defined as the *practice* of a form of historical production. From this vantage point, historical subjectivity is not the bearer of history but the practice of history, an intersubjectivity *at work* in the social production of life. Its unity is not that of an epistemological subject that is assured by the unity of its internal life. Rather, it is a unity across dispersion: a subjectivity existing between individual subjects. Whether that conception still retains the characteristics of subjectivity remains in question, for the difficulties involved in specifying class consciousness and in establishing a politics based upon the existence of potential or actual proletarian class consciousness points to an unresolved problem: whether the "subjectivity" of history can be created or thought of

as arising from or between—the “inter” of intersubjectivity—individual subjects.

In *History and Class Consciousness* Lukács places the emergence of proletarian consciousness in the modern era at the center of the development of historical theory.<sup>7</sup> The dialectical, unreified understanding of history and society is reached in the principle of totality. Historical processes at work in society can be understood, not on the basis of their isolated singularity, but on the basis of their social totality—the totality of social relations—in which they occur. It is at that moment that they are seen not as brute, irreducible facts, but as relationships, or as facts mediated by one another within society. However, that theoretical viewpoint is dependent upon the emergence within bourgeois society of a consciousness that is its negation and transcendence.

The possibility of a dialectical understanding of history and society demands that a singular perspective can be taken upon history that is at once the opening up of the room necessary in order to see the functioning of social processes in their totality, and its own validation. The proletariat fulfills that function, for it is at once a rupture with and a negation of bourgeois society and the consciousness of being that negative moment.<sup>8</sup> It is consciously a revolutionary class. The specific consciousness of the working class is not limited to the reified forms of consciousness typical of bourgeois society, in which social relations are masked in the commodity fetish. As a rupture with bourgeois society, the proletariat is the only perspective upon history and society that can occur outside of the social exchange that sees every social relation as a commodity. Bourgeois consciousness contains its own theoretical limitations. It cannot really understand; it can only “fetishize” social relations. Hence, as Lukács states, the principle of totality is the revolutionary principle in theory.<sup>9</sup>

The unity of historical theory and its material—the events and social movements of history—are achieved along the same lines for Lukács. The rubric under which that unification is effected is the unity of theory and practice: the unity of historical theory and proletarian politics. That unity rests upon the dialectical idea that the proletariat as a social consciousness is both the subject and object of history. To that point Lukács writes, “Only when a historical situation has arisen in which a class must understand society if it is to assert itself; only when the fact that a class understands itself means that it understands society as a whole and when, in consequence, the class becomes both the subject and the object of knowledge; in short, only when these conditions are all satisfied will the unity of theory and prac-

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7. “What is Orthodox Marxism?”, Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, pp. 1-26.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

9. “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, pp. 83-222.

tice, the precondition of the revolutionary function of the theory, become possible."<sup>10</sup>

In the "Preface to the New Edition" (1967) Lukács expresses some serious doubts about the primary role *History and Class Consciousness* originally gave to historical subjectivity in the exposition of historical rationality. The first reservation Lukács states about his original views is that nature was seen solely within the immanence of society; nature was a social category and not something exterior. His second reservation is that the central role played by the mediation of labor in social production, the exchange between society and nature, is missing. The consequence of the first two theoretical distortions leads to a third: the overvaluation of knowledge as a practice.<sup>11</sup> While Lukács's self-critique on this occasion and on others is almost universally downplayed in the literature that has grown up around his works, in this instance it points to a fundamental weakness in the position that accords to proletarian subjectivity as class consciousness the primary role in historical theory. Can the concepts or the historical method arising from the dialectics of subjectivity effect the material exposition of historical events and movements? Lukács, without rewriting *History and Class Consciousness*, indicates that the answer must be in the negative. The dialectical rationality of history has to be recovered on a new terrain. In the *Critique*, Sartre has willingly accepted the task.

The *Critique of Dialectical Reason* does not attempt to pose the problem of the dialectical rationality of history in the same terms and to solve it by effecting a new synthesis. The *Critique* attempts, rather, to recover the dialectic in historical method and place in on a new footing, or on a new terrain. As a consequence, the *Critique* has all the power and pulse of a work rediscovering the concrete dimensions and developing the requirements of historical methodology toward the formation of a new approach to historical comprehension. Its rigor and irreducibility lie in the fact that Sartre will not shun one of the most embarrassing issues in modern historiography: the study of the way in which the general, anonymous structures and movements of history are sustained by the daily life of men. Not *man*, but *men*; and the shift in terms here points to the need to expose the rationality of collective praxis in the praxis of individual consciousness.

The *Critique* as we have it is the first of two projected volumes; the second, which may never appear, is an exposition of the history of the contemporary era. The first volume is itself composed of two somewhat distinct works that, Sartre warns us, are uneven. The first part, "Search for a Method," describes the overture to history in terms of the existential project as it is concretely lived within specific material conditions. And it retains the tone of existentialism, for, in Sartre's intentions, it is the incorporation

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10. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

11. *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

of the existentialist program into what Sartre terms the unsurpassable philosophy of our time, Marxism. The second part of the *Critique*, the *Critique* properly so called, opens on to the horizon of history from within the experience of praxis as it is a totalization of natural and social conditions. The problem and its terms remain the same, but the orientation of the second part is more clearly a response to the possibility of a materialist conception of history. Its terrain is the critique of the critical experience of historical structures.

The first volume of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is, then, clearly situated within the historiographical question: in Sartre's terms, the a priori determination of the limits of dialectical reason and its validation as the form of historical movement within a totalization of historical truth. (CDR, p. 823; Fr., pp. 10-11) The historical question for Sartre is thus strung out along the axes of both synchrony and diachrony. The suggestion that the limits of dialectical reason can be determined a priori points to a synchronic moment. And, in turn, the idea of history and historical truth as a totalizing process, and not a totality, indicates that the limits of dialectical reason are to be found within the boundaries of the actual course of history, that is, along the axis of diachrony.

The manner in which Sartre develops the question of historical rationality in the *Critique* constitutes a break with the philosophy of *Being and Nothingness*, particularly in the shift from action as choice to action as praxis. The latter concept fulfills its role in focusing upon the way in which the dialectical comprehension of transindividual history arises from a description of the experience that praxis has of itself. Yet, even though existentialism is reduced to an "ideology" within Marxism,<sup>12</sup> Sartre's concern is still anthropology. The *Critique* is concerned with the foundation of a philosophical anthropology. (SM, pp. xxxiv-xxxv; Fr., 10) Ethics, however, has given way to history; the meaning of the human adventure can be discovered only by reflection upon man's materiality. The *Critique* is, in spite of its focus upon praxis, in accord with the phenomenological starting point of *Being and Nothingness*: the sense of being or the meaning of history can be revealed only through human behavior.

That phenomenological or existentialist starting point secures the concrete characteristics of reflection and prevents it from losing its way in the entanglements of an abstract and universal dialectic. (SM, p. 91, n. 3; Fr., p. 63, n. 2) Everything depends upon this first step. For, if the transindividual character of history is reduced to a play of abstract concepts and universal descriptions, as has taken place in what Sartre terms transcendental materialism (CDR, p. 27; Fr., p. 124), then the very historical character of

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12. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search For a Method*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Vin Fage, 1963), p. 8; henceforth cited in the text as SM. French page reference is to *Critique de la raison dialectique*, p. 18.

history— historicity— is lost. Access to the uniqueness and generality of historical movements can be gained only by reflecting upon an experience which, in order to be self-conscious, must be a dialectical comprehension of itself and its world. That experience is the critical experience of praxis.

The recovery of the dialectic from the hands of dogmatism serves to discover a critical dialectic founded upon the experience of an observer situated within the dialectic. To that point Sartre writes, "the dialectic reveals itself only to an observer situated in interiority, that is to say, to an investigator who lives his investigation both as a possible contribution to the ideology of the entire epoch and as the particular *praxis* of an individual defined by his historical and personal career within the wider history which conditions it." (CDR, p. 38; Fr., p. 133) The recovery of the dialectic installs the concept of the project at the center of historical comprehension. If the dialectic is to be a real portrayal of the movement of history and not a logical method to subsume historical particulars under universals, then it must encompass the self-comprehension of action, of the way in which human action is temporalized by the past and the future. That is, at once to restore to praxis both its positivity and its negativity: "The most rudimentary behavior must be determined both in relation to the real and present factors which condition it and in relation to a certain object, still to come, which it is trying to bring into being. This is what we call the project." (SM, p. 91; Fr., pp. 63-64) What the dialectical comprehension of history captures, then, is the "original temporalization" in which an action is a temporal movement. In possessing a future, action, or praxis, opens up a field of possibilities; its meaning is its possibility. The transindividual, or collective, nature of history appears at this point, for the field of possibilities is not a *zone of indetermination*, but a *strongly structured region* in which every individual possibility is at the same time a social possibility.

In choosing an action, the individual inserts himself into history, that is, into the field of past and present conditions and of future possibilities that are sustained by the material existence of human objects, the practico-inert. The individual is from that point on an objective being; in choosing he has objectified himself. The counter-movement to that objectification is internalization. The field of social conditions and possibilities are taken up and surpassed toward their future by becoming part and parcel of the temporality of the project; they become its conditions and possibilities lived from within. In this sense, the project, or praxis, is itself the dialectic, for it unites within itself the play and counterplay of subjectivity and objectivity, not in a unilateral determination of one by the other, but in a reciprocity, in a movement of objectification and internalization taking place within action. The recovery of the dialectic within history is, from that vantage point, the recovery, as with Lukács, of subjectivity within the objectivity of social conditions. History is the movement of a subjectivity within the collective dimensions of history. It is no longer a subject, but praxis.

The substitution of praxis for the concept of the subject in the comprehension of history is a crucial step made possible by the introduction of the idea of totalization. The "original temporalization" of human action means that social conditions, social possibilities, and the social complex do not appear as a totality, as they did for Lukács, but as a process of totalization: "The only conceivable temporality is that of totalization as individual process." (CDR, p. 53; Fr., p. 143) Subjectivity does not give birth to the meaning of history. Nor is the meaning of history borne on the shoulders of subjectivity toward its realization. History is a meaning in the course of being made on the basis of past conditions in the process of being transformed by the work of the future: totalization. It is, from the vantage point supplied by the dialectical comprehension of praxis, always history in the making. (CDR, p. 47; Fr., p. 139) The task of historical understanding is to comprehend that meaning as it comes to be within the actions of individuals, confronting one another in a world of scarcity. As historical agents, men define themselves in terms of one another and against one another, for their reciprocity is discovered through need and through the lack of food, clothing, and shelter. (CDR, pp. 125-134; Fr., pp. 205-215) They are in conflict; the synthesis of their actions, thus, never forms a totality, a whole in which equilibrium is the rule, but rather an unstable collective overcoming of past and present conditions.

The concept of action, or praxis, can sustain the meaning of history in the *Critique*, because it provides a terrain in which the transition from individual action to collective action can be made within the material conditions constituted by the practico-inert. Within the project, objectification and internalization both mean that the concrete temporality of the project — what its past, present, and future really are — comes into being only by means of the insertion of the individual into the objective conditions of history and by means of the social conditions taken up and transcended in the choice of the future. The meaning exposed within praxis is thus dialectical. That raises the perspective of collective action, or praxis, within the structure of the individual project. And yet, the dialectical structure of praxis, its reciprocity and interchange with others and nature, means that its sense is particular to itself. The individual subject is not the paradigm for the disclosure of the subjectivity of history; nor is totality the term in which social conditions, modes of production, ideology, and culture can be understood. The work of praxis sustains at the same time both poles of what was Lukács's dilemma.

The comprehension of history occurs within the course of the experience of totalization by means of a progressive-regressive reflection based upon the experience of a praxis caught up in that process of totalization. The incorporation of human objects and others into a process of totalization can be understood by understanding past conditions, the regressive moment, in terms of the future possibilities that arise upon them, the progressive mo-

ment, through the action of praxis. Hence, historical comprehension is at once an understanding of historical movement from within history and an understanding that grasps that movement as an objective movement at work within the transformation of nature into objects of use and into the conditions of collective action, totalization. (CDR, p. 49; Fr., p. 141) The characterization of critical experience as within history and yet capable of assuming a perspective on history paves the way for the dialectical intelligibility of history. The unity of theory and practice—which, as we have seen with Lukács, is also the unity of subject and object—for Sartre arises from the unique place that the critical experience of praxis occupies within historical methodology. It is “the fundamental identity between an individual life and human history (or, from the methodological point of view, of the ‘reciprocity of their perspectives’).” (CDR, p. 70; Fr., p. 156)

That reciprocity of historical perspectives is the founding moment of the methodology of the *Critique*, for it defines the very nature of critical experience. Its impact depends upon the epistemological rigor of the view that “the epistemological starting point must always be consciousness as apodictic certainty [of] self and as consciousness of such and such an object.” (CDR, p. 51; Fr., p. 142) The same rigor can be felt in the very notion of critique that is to establish criteria in which the false can be separated from the true, or, more important for Sartre, “to define the limits of totalizing activities so as to restore to them their validity.” (CDR, p. 50; Fr., p. 141)

The understanding (*intellection*) of the totalizing forces at work within society rests upon the comprehension (*compréhension*) of each individual praxis as totalizing. (CDR, p. 45-46; Fr., 138-139)<sup>13</sup> “Therefore, if there is to be any such thing as totalization,” Sartre writes, “the intelligibility of constituted dialectical reason (the intelligibility of common actions and of *praxis*-process) must be based on constituent dialectical reason (the abstract and individual *praxis* of man at work).” (CDR, p. 67; Fr., p. 154) The limitations to be given to totalizing forces—the critical recovery of the dialectic from the abstract and universal dialectic of transcendental Marxism—arise from the understanding (*intellection*) of totalizing forces at work in society on the basis of the methodological concepts derived from the comprehension (*compréhension*) of individual praxis, from its transparency to itself as a totalizing of objects and others within its project. (CDR, p. 60; Fr., p. 149)

The self-comprehension of individual praxis is, thus, the methodological base upon which the sense of history that arises from collective praxis can be understood. Individual praxis is not the transformation of nature and the assumption of the work of others that creates the meaning of history; that is the role of collective praxis. Rather, individual praxis provides the

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13. See also CDR, pp. 74-76 (Fr., pp. 160-161) for the distinction between *intellection* and *compréhension*.

point of departure for the elaboration of the a priori methodology of history; it supplies history with the tools of comprehension. The problematic of the question of the intelligibility of history—the historiographical question—is contained in the concepts that arise from the structural components of the self-comprehension of individual praxis: project, totalization, the practico-inert, and the group. The problematic of a materialist theory of history is provided by the transparency of individual praxis to itself. The founding rationality of history is that of the constituting dialectic, the dialectic of individual praxis. This contrasts with the substitution of praxis for the concept of subjectivity at the level of the *exposition* of the diachronic movement of history for which the *Critique* is an introduction. In that respect, individual praxis is a methodological paradigm, but not a paradigm for the *exposition*, or writing, of history. The meaning of history in its exposition lies, for Sartre, at the level of collective praxis. The axes of synchrony and diachrony are once again at right angles to each other. They intersect, but they form neither a vertical nor horizontal synthesis.

Sartre recognizes the problem, for at the end of the *Critique* he has posed it in somewhat similar terms. "Thus," he writes in summing up the achievements of the *Critique*, "on the one hand, we have remained on the level of synchronic totalization and we have not portrayed the diachronic depth of practical temporalization; on the other hand, the regressive moment has ended upon a question: that signifies that it must be completed by a synthetic progression which will attempt to raise itself to the double synchronic and diachronic movement by which history totalizes itself without respite." (CDR, p. 817-818; Fr., p. 755) That second, progressive, diachronic part of the *Critique* will, perhaps, always remain an uncompleted task. The reason for that suspension of the exposition of diachronic history indirectly pinpoints the nature of the problem of history in its entirety: it would, in Sartre's mind, require a vast collective effort.<sup>14</sup> The exposition of history lies at another level than that of the *Critique*'s methodological paradigm. The transparency of praxis to itself may be instrumental in gaining a foothold upon the terrain of history: as an experience it shows us where to look and what to see; it specifies, in that exact sense, the objectivity of history and its internal structure. However, the transparency of praxis to itself does not allow us to occupy that terrain.

The contestation of the primacy of subjectivity in the formation of historical theory posed by Lévi-Strauss's *Savage Mind* and the writings of Michel Foucault and the *Les Annales* group in the name of the exposition of history has, then, a counterpart in Sartre's thought. The roles played in the formation of historical theory by ideas such as the mode of production

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14. Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, *The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre*, vol. 1, *A Biographical Life*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), pp. 373, 546.

(Marx), discursive practice (Foucault) and the long duration (Braudel) bring forth aspects of diachronic history that are exterior to subjectivity. They refer to an exchange between subjectivity and what is irreducible to it; what subjectivity works with without ever assimilating: a realm of exteriority. The exposition of history works at the level of nonintuitive facts, discursive facts, which only become facts once they are assembled together into a text.

In the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx noted that "labour is *not the source* of all wealth. *Nature* is just as much the source of use values (and it is surely of such that material wealth consists!) as labour, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labour power."<sup>15</sup> Focusing upon the mode of production in the explanation of history does not, then, confine history within the creations of human activity, or labor. Labor is, itself, a natural force; its meaning is not exhausted in its subjectivity. It is a praxis in as much as it is a natural force and exterior to itself. Exteriority is installed within the concept of action itself, for the concept of praxis occupies a ground common to itself and nature, not a ground confined to the relation of self to self. History at the level of praxis, then, is the repetition of an overture to what is exterior to itself, both within itself and in its objects, nature. The question asked of history cannot be answered, consequently, by citing a cause or discovering an origin in the past for subsequent events. In this respect, the exteriority of nature in Marx's thought has a direct relationship to the exteriority of language in Foucault's. The relationship exists not in specific answers given to the question of history, but in the structure of the question itself: in the way and on what terrain history is interrogated about its meaning.

The exteriority of language to consciousness is the acquisition of structural linguistics and structural anthropology: language is first of all a system independent of expression. In Michel Foucault's *The Archeology of Knowledge* this exteriority is assumed in the concept of discourse.<sup>16</sup> Discourse, for Foucault, is a system of signs whose unity rests not upon the self-expression of subjectivity, but upon the practice of discourse in discursive formations. Discursive *practice* defines a field of statements that arises through the specification of its object, through enunciative modalities—concepts and strategies—and takes the shape of a discursive formation. The latter is not a unified field of discourse with an internal essence, unifying theme, or singular type of expression, but a "system of dispersion."<sup>17</sup> It arises across different levels and planes. The subject of discourse, then, rather than defining the way in which discourse is used—is defined by it. The subject is accorded a position within a discursive formation; he is given

15. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Writings* (New York: International Publishers, 1969), p. 319.

16. Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Random House, 1972).

17. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

a *site* from which he speaks.<sup>18</sup> "Thus conceived," Foucault writes, "discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject, but, on the contrary, a totality, in which a network of distinct sites is deployed."<sup>19</sup>

What is at work here in this transformation of the historical subject is the corresponding transformation, in the sources of historical exposition, of the document into a monument.<sup>20</sup> Linking up with the *Annales* critique of the dependence of historical method upon documents, Foucault sees the crucial turning point in historical method in the contestation of the privilege of the document as the witness to historical events and as the testimony of consciousness to its own historical intentions and content. The document is, rather, an item to be disassembled into its elements, planes, levels, unities, and relations. Historical method—the posing of the question of history in exposition—revolves around this transformation. "History is undoubtedly constructed with written documents. When there are any. But it can be constructed, it must be constructed, without written documents, if there are none. . . . In one word, with all that which exists for man, depends on man, serves man, expresses man, signifies the presence, the activity, the preferences and the ways of being man."<sup>21</sup> There is an anthropological remnant in those words of Lucien Febvre that Foucault would most likely criticize, but they express very well Febvre's intention to submerge the primacy of political and diplomatic history with its dependence upon written documents into a wider historical *problematic*: a posing of the question of history in terms of facts dispersed among different levels and planes of human activity. The document owes its sway over historical method to its pre-conceived unity and plenitude of meaning. But once transformed into a question, a subject cannot speak in historical events from the plenitude of its preestablished unity. Subjectivity remains to be specified; rather than being the *place of* history, it has a *place in* history.

Beginning with the *Annales* group, with Febvre and Bloch, and then with Braudel and his colleagues, history is no longer conceived as linear, as the history of events (*l'histoire événementielle*), the time, *par excellence*, of political history. The long duration (*la longue durée*) opposes the dominance of linearity in historical method. The long duration is the time of a "history whose passage is almost imperceptible, that of man in his relationship to the environment, a history in which all change is slow, a history of constant repetition, ever recurring cycles."<sup>22</sup> The conception of the history of the long duration is not the only history. There is the history of the con-

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18. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

21. Lucien Febvre, *Combats pour l'histoire* (Paris: , 1953, p. 428.

22. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II*, vol. 1, trans. Sian Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 20.

junction and of the event. In Braudel's words, "history is the sum of all possible histories."<sup>23</sup> But history can avoid the error of "historizing" history—that is, of dissipating the work of time in history—only if the question of history is *posed* across the multiple levels of historical exposition.

The amplification of historical methodology in the *Annales* conception of historical time brings with it the posing of the question of history in terms of that which is exterior to subjectivity: the relationship of man to nature, to his environment, to the slow work of time. The exposition of that history is a writing whose style and structure—whose method—rest upon another historical problematic than that which can be provided by historical subjectivity. It poses the question of a history whose sense is derived from what is outside of man, exterior to him and incapable of internalization, as much as it is derived from the exchange of men *with* it.

The conception of the exposition of history in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* brought us to the threshold of this other history. Rigorously focused upon the crucial importance of the concept of praxis in historical method, it exposes, along with Marx, the horizon of a dispersed subjectivity at work in and, at the same time, worked upon by history. But the question remains whether Sartre's posing of the question—his way of defining what concepts must come into play in the exposition of history—makes it possible to cross that threshold. The substitution of praxis for subjectivity is irreducible to Sartre's starting point: the transparency of praxis to itself. Braudel's conception of the long duration and Foucault's theory of discursive formations do not dispel the dilemma. Although they do show that the philosophy of consciousness is a failure as a basis for the formulation of the problematic of history, they do not make any clearer what the *Critique* has shown to be crucial: the exchange of exteriority and consciousness in praxis. Perhaps the solution is not only a new way of writing history, but a new way of creating it.

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23. Fernand Braudel, *Écrits sur l'histoire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1969), p. 55.

# THIS PLACE OF VIOLENCE, OBSCURITY AND WITCHCRAFT

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## DIALECTICAL INTELLIGIBILITY

A striking intellectual feature of our time is that its most influential philosophers have been bifurcated: we allude to the "later Wittgenstein" and the "later Heidegger"—even to "Heidegger I" and "Heidegger II." Admittedly there was also a precritical and a critical Kant, but our entire philosophical interest is taken up with how he became the critical Kant, whereas the *Tractatus* and *Being and Time* still retain a philosophical interest of their own. What this apparently unprecedented state of affairs illustrates about the stresses or distresses of our time I leave to others to decide.

A third very influential philosopher has suffered the misfortune of not having been allowed to bifurcate into his own earlier and later self. The already well-worn label "existentialist" was promptly affixed to Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and the threadbare label "Marxist" to his later *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. The problems of interpreting Sartre then became largely problems of determining whether or not the "Marxist" was still an "existentialist." Nowadays Sartre's influence may have waned; in fact he has himself acknowledged (in English) that he is a "has been."<sup>1</sup> But he has become a "has been" without its having become clear what he has been. One reason is that Sartre, in contrast with Wittgenstein and Heidegger, has always seemed a derivative and eclectic philosopher. Interpreters who had stressed the influences of Husserl, Heidegger, and Hegel on *Being and Nothingness* were well prepared to dismiss the *Critique* as the accretion of still another influence, Marxism.

I do not believe anyone interested in social philosophy in the grand manner can afford to be quite so dismissive these days. There is little that is explicit in Wittgenstein or Heidegger which can be labeled social

philosophy, even though extrapolators of implications have produced such philosophy. We are left with Sartre: whether we search the recent past or look toward the horizon, there is no other comparably influential contemporary who started out with a philosophy and who tried on his own to make it over into a social philosophy. Moreover I deny that Sartre's social philosophy is eclectic in the sense that it is seriously incoherent. I claim that it can be credited with that sustained effort at coherence which we acknowledge as the application of a method.

However in pushing this claim, I concede what may be a worse sin than eclecticism. The social structure that comes to the fore in Sartre's philosophy and determines the character of other social structures is the "practico-inert." Such barbaric jargon is of course entirely acceptable sociology, but Sartre goes on to describe the "practico-inert" as "this place of violence, obscurity and witchcraft."<sup>2</sup> Such vivid descriptions have earned for the *Critique* the slur "literary sociology." Rather than just discount Sartre as incurably a man of letters by temperament or vocation, I shall try to explain how and why his philosophy gets methodologically contaminated by literature.

Sartre's own methodological claim regarding "this place" is that it exhibits "dialectical intelligibility" in spite of its "violence, obscurity and witchcraft." I shall sort out some of the basic traits of the dialectic whose application renders such structures intelligible. It is impossible to reproduce Sartre's actual dialectic in the *Critique*, for the *first* basic trait which has to be stressed is that a dialectical development conforms to the transformation of a *content*. Hence Hegel warns against "impatience," explaining: "The length of the way must be endured, since each phase is necessary, and besides, we must linger at each phase."<sup>3</sup> Judging by the unresponsive reception accorded Sartre's *Critique*, such endurance cannot be counted on. His expositor can only cope by oversimplifying. Thus I shall linger at the single phase of the "practico-inert," and shall rely on illustrations which are relatively simple. In particular, I shall exploit an early and quite literary illustration of what is in effect the "practico-inert," although Sartre had not yet coined the expression. But the illustration will be sufficient to demonstrate the primarily dialectical character of his method, notwithstanding the fact that at this early period he preferred to characterize his method as phenomenological. Later, in his "Marxist" *Critique*, he does characterize his method as dialectical, but my illustrations from the *Critique* will demonstrate that his earlier method has undergone adjustment rather than

drastic revision, that it still retains a secondary component which is phenomenological, and that it still remains "literary."

### REDEFINITION

In 1945 Sartre made his first trip to the United States on a journalistic assignment arranged by Albert Camus. In his report, Sartre presents his experience as an attempt to determine "what America is."<sup>4</sup> Such an attempt illustrates a *second* trait of his dialectic. It is a method of sustained *definition*. Thus Plato's *Republic* is a sustained attempt to define justice; *Das Kapital*, a sustained attempt to define capitalism. Those who employ undialectical methods usually get their definitions out of the way promptly and then settle down to what they regard as the real business of dealing with objective facts.

A dialectician is skeptical of this procedure. "Yesterday," Sartre reports, "it was Baltimore, today it is Knoxville, the day after tomorrow it will be New Orleans, and after admiring the biggest factory or the biggest bridge or the biggest dam in the world, we fly away with our heads full of figures and statistics." A dialectical method does not proceed inductively by accumulating objective facts or figures. This inductive scientific procedure Sartre identifies in the *Critique* as "analytic reasoning" to which he opposes his "dialectical reasoning." Why is analytic reasoning inadequate? The objective facts Sartre has listed are random and unrelated; their range of implication is indefinite, so that they cannot settle the problem of definition. The biggest dam? So what! The biggest bridge? So what! A dialectical method cannot operate on facts that remain isolated; instead its process of definition continues by correlating *relations* (its *third* trait).

As we all know, the most dialectically significant of these relations is often that between *opposites* (a *contradiction*), and this relation can be distinguished as a *fourth* trait. An illustration is the way Sartre's method of "dialectical reasoning" is itself defined by its opposition to the scientific method of "analytic reasoning."

A dialectical attempt to define "what America is" may hardly seem to be the "simple" example promised, at least not to the social scientist who would reason analytically. But a *fifth* trait of Sartre's dialectical method is that it is applied to states of affairs with which we are already familiar but do not examine until they are brought to our attention by some contradiction. The examination then deals with the precon-

ceptions and presuppositions that constitute this familiarity rather than with an array of facts that have never been tampered with. In other words, Sartre's dialectic is less a process of definition than of redefinition, and we find Sartre making use of definitions already available—"the two contradictory slogans that are current in Paris—'Americans are conformists' and 'Americans are individualists.'" These are not facts he has encountered in America; they are definitions which he has brought with him.

It is by virtue of this process of redefinition, which subsumes as a *sixth* trait the preceding traits, that Sartre's dialectic is a "critique," but since this label has too specifically Kantian associations, I shall characterize the resulting dialectic as *reflexive*. The contradictory definitions of justice that Socrates deals with in the first book of the *Republic* are also current slogans. Whether it is Athens or Paris, dialectic dislodges familiar preconceptions from the back of men's minds, by forcing them into relation with each other and displaying some implicit contradiction between them.

### SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

The contradiction triggers *movement*, which is a *seventh* trait of dialectic. The first trait, I have indicated, is that this movement is a development in which the dialectic conforms to the transformation of a content. This dynamic conformity displaces the inert conformity that is being subverted by the movement. In other words, the process of redefinition takes hold of something whose inertness was the familiarity it enjoyed from our previously having taken it for granted. The process of redefinition is the recovery of the process of transformation to which we have become insensitive. (Thus the "practico-inert" will be rendered intelligible by Sartre's exposing the practical activities that originally produced the inert state of affairs which now seems imposed on us as the way things are.) At the beginning of Plato's *Republic*, conformity is exhibited by the slogans offered as definitions of justice. These having been subverted by contradictions in the first book, the dialectic develops by tracing the process by which the unjust society these definitions manifest might be transformed into a just society. The process is reflexive, involving a critical redefinition of the participants' preconceptions.

Sartre's definition of America as conformist is an attempt to recover the dynamic process by which an individual is transformed into an

inert, conforming American. In fact, the original title of Sartre's report was "How a Good American is Made." Sartre starts out with a familiar preconception: "Like everybody else, I had heard of the famous American 'melting-pot' that transforms, at different temperatures, Poles, Italians, and Finns into American citizens. But I did not know what the term 'melting-pot' actually meant." He soon finds out:

The day after my arrival I met a European who was in the process of being melted down. I was introduced, in the big lobby of the Plaza Hotel, to a dark man of rather medium height, who, like everyone else here, talked with a somewhat nasal twang, without seeming to move his lips or cheeks, who laughed with his mouth but not with his eyes, and whose laughter came in sudden bursts, and who expressed himself in good French, with a heavy accent, though his speech was sprinkled with vulgar errors and Americanisms.

When I congratulated him on his knowledge of our language, he replied with astonishment, "But I'm a Frenchman." He had been born in Paris, had been living in America for only fifteen years, and before the war had returned to France every six months. Nevertheless America already possessed him half-way. . . . He felt obliged every now and then to throw me a roguish wink and exclaim: "Ah, New Orleans, pretty girls." But what he was really doing was conforming to the American image of the Frenchman rather than trying to be congenial to a fellow-countryman. "Pretty girls," he said with a laugh that was forced. I felt puritanism just around the corner, and a chill ran through me.

I had the impression I was witnessing an Ovidian metamorphosis. The man's face was still too expressive. It had retained the rather irritating mimicry of intelligence which makes a French face recognizable anywhere. But he will soon be a tree or a rock. I speculated curiously as to the powerful forces that had to be brought into play in order to actualize these disintegrations and reintegrations so reliably and rapidly.

We saw that Sartre started out with opposed preconceptions regarding America—the one defining Americans as "conformists," the other defining Americans as "individualists." We now see that he next defines the way conformity is secured by redefining the preconception of America as a melting-pot. His redefinition is dialectical: a Frenchman is transformed into his opposite—an American. This Franco-American is an *ex-sistential* phenomenon:<sup>5</sup> as a French expatriate he is "outside" himself, violently dislocated from his proper place. The process of his transformation is itself composed of opposing movements—his disintegration as a Frenchman and his reintegration as an American. The contradiction is carefully balanced: the Frenchman is visualized as having reached the "half-way" point in the process of transformation.<sup>6</sup> The climactic opposition between French and American culture in 1945 was in the attitude toward sex. (The only area where Sartre could have

found Frenchmen and Americans so diametrically opposed today would have been in their attitudes toward philosophy.) The American attitude towards sex is in turn contradictory—at once prurient and puritanical.<sup>7</sup> Observe, too, how even Sartre's detailed touches are dislocating contradictions: the Franco-American talked "without seeming to move his lips or cheeks"; he "laughed with his mouth but not with his eyes," and "in sudden bursts."

### THE AFFECTIVE REACTION

"What America is" is defined in terms of the process of transformation that makes a Frenchman over into an American, but a dialectical process of definition cannot be reduced to this sort of process of transformation. The *definiendum* is only the objective pole of the dialectic, which sets up a *bilateral* relation between a subjective pole and this objective pole. This is an *eighth* trait of dialectic. Here we can see how misleading it is to regard Sartre's method as strictly phenomenological. In Husserl, consciousness as "consciousness of something" is a unilateral reference to the object "intended" (e.g., a cube, a tree,) but the object in Sartre's dialectic is characteristically another subject. This bilateral relation provides a terrain for a dialectical shift, such as the dueling between self and other in *Being and Nothingness*.<sup>8</sup>

A social scientist might ask why Sartre selected as the object of his consciousness an ex-Frenchman, instead of an ex-Italian or an ex-Pole. As a matter of statistics, the number of Frenchmen that have been melted down into Americans is not comparably significant. Sartre's warrant is identical to my own. It is not a matter just of literary flair, but illustrates a further accentuation of what I have called the reflexive character of Sartre's dialectic. He himself is a Frenchman or rather a stand-in for his French reader. As Sartre will later explain, "The truth of a dialectical movement can only be demonstrated . . . if one is drawn into the movement."<sup>9</sup> In the present episode it is not just an ex-Frenchman who is undergoing a dislocating transformation but an actual Frenchman, Sartre, who is in the process of defining him. Sartre's initial impression that he is talking to an American is dislocated and transformed into the realization that he is talking to a Frenchman who is being transformed into an American. Such a *reversal* is an *eighth* trait of dialectical method. It is part of the subversion of preconceptions indispensable to their redefinition.

In Sartre the process of redefinition is designed less to delineate objectively the way the melting pot operates as a process of transformation than to elicit reflexively an *affective* reaction (a ninth trait). The subject is not just disconcerted and disoriented by the discovery that the apparent American was once a Frenchman like himself. He is disgusted. Reactions of revulsion such as this frequently impel Sartre's dialectic, and Sartre can elicit it even to the extent of nausea.

We recall that Sartre began by admitting that he did not know before this episode "what the term 'melting-pot' actually meant." He only knows when he is exposed to his own affective reaction. This reflexivity also holds for the other subject. Sartre initially becomes conscious of someone who appears to him to be an American; the appearance is then contradicted with the claim, "But I'm a Frenchman." This is not, however, what he really is objectively; it is only what he still appears to himself to be. And Sartre's own feeling of disgust reaches its climax when he discovers that the Frenchman is no longer a Frenchman and not quite yet an American, but is instead "conforming" to the requirements of "an American's image of a Frenchman."

Finally, since the entire dialectical process of redefinition turns reflexively on Sartre and his reader being French, it cannot remain objectively and straightforwardly anti-American in what it is opposed to, but is complicated by the reflection: "The man's face was still too expressive. It had retained that somewhat irritating mimicry of intelligence which makes a French face recognizable anywhere." Thus if the Frenchman at the Plaza has been disparaged as only a subjective appearance (not a real Frenchman but only "the American image of a Frenchman"), a real Frenchman enjoys no real superiority, since he is only apparently intelligent.

### *SELF-REFERENCE*

Caught up in the reflexivity that is pivotal to Sartre's dialectic are traits which I have already sorted out. Self-definition is at stake, but the self is a "contradictory composite," since I become "conscious of" it as "something" which is like an object in that I attribute to it certain properties (e.g., bravery or cowardice), and yet it cannot be detached (as a real object can) from its dependency on the subjective act of consciousness by which I produce it (or its properties) by becoming self-con-

scious.<sup>10</sup> This self is not brave or cowardly in the same sense that grass is green or ink is black.

At the lower level of the particular self-images that Sartre selects we also encounter contradictory composites: not only the Franco-American but also the protagonists of *The Respectful Prostitute* and of *Saint Genet, Actor and Martyr*.<sup>11</sup> In each of these cases, what preoccupies Sartre is the violence the individual does to himself in perpetrating the contradictions—not physical violence but reflexive psychological violence, which further requires for its implementation his self-deception; for the individual must bewitch himself in order to obscure from himself the contradictory character of what he is perpetrating.<sup>12</sup> Thus the prostitute can define or identify herself as a victim of her society by identifying herself with another victim, the black who is about to be lynched; but she also becomes “respectful” when she is instead duped into identifying with their persecutors and into conforming with mores in terms of which she is herself beneath respect.

Sartre’s other title I have cited also embodies contradictions. *Saint Genet* confers sanctity on a criminal. The rest of the title introduces a secondary dialectic with an additional contradiction: if the original Genet (the victim of Diocletian) was a saint (the patron saint of actors), our contemporary Jean Genet acts the female role of a passive homosexual. Sartre equips him for the martyrdom of the female role with a pun, *saint/seins*.<sup>13</sup>

The reflexive and affective character of Sartre’s existential dialectic is one of the differences between it and a Marxist dialectic. Even when Sartre felt politically close to the French Communist Party, his summons to collaboration included a reflexive twist: “One cannot struggle against the working-class without becoming an enemy of mankind and of oneself.”<sup>14</sup> Such twists, often propelled by some affective reaction or larger-scale reflexive maneuver, are designed to dislodge familiar, ostensibly objective preconceptions (e.g., with respect to “what America is” or to how the bourgeoisie maintains its domination) so that the individual “finds himself there” by having to consult his own reaction to what is transpiring.<sup>15</sup> At this juncture Sartre is able to incorporate some characteristics of the phenomenological reflexive appeal to immediate experience. When Sartre admitted that he had “like everybody else . . . heard of the famous American ‘melting-pot’” but “did not know what the term . . . actually meant,” he had not yet had the immediate experience the encounter with the ex-Frenchman provided.

Closely associated with this reflexive and affective emphasis on immediacy of experience are other differences between an existential and a Marxist dialectic. Marx's *Das Kapital*, as a dialectical attempt to define what capital is, is broadly similar to Sartre's definition of the melting-pot: it is an analysis of the contradictions operating in the process of transformation whereby a capitalistic society must disintegrate in order to be integrated into its opposite—a socialist society. In the case of Sartre's encounter with the Franco-American, the movements of disintegration and reintegration are accelerated, as if they were taking place right there in front of Sartre in the lobby of the Plaza, rather than proceeding at what would be the historical pace of a melting-pot—the historical pace a Marxist analysis would respect. Their acceleration accentuates the sense of dislocation associated with the transformation of Sartre's initial impression, and thus seems to have more to do with the rapidity with which Sartre reacts reflexively (or would have his reader react) to the Franco-American than with any actions on the part of the Franco-American as they might be appraised objectively.

Other examples can be cited where scope is rapidly sought reflexively. When Sartre suggests the reflexive reference required to analyze anti-Semitism by citing Richard Wright—"There is no black problem in the United States, only a white problem,"<sup>16</sup>—it is clear from the brusque shift that Wright was addressing himself to white readers in the hope of eliciting their reflexive recognition of the truth of his pronouncement. When Sartre similarly defines the Jew as "a man whom other men treat as a Jew,"<sup>17</sup> it is clear that he is peremptorily circumventing a considerable accumulation of specific sociohistorical evidence, and addressing these other men directly in the hope of eliciting their reflexive recognition of the truth of his definition.

### MECHANISTIC EXPLANATION

In his later so-called "Marxist" writings, Sartre elaborates his reflexive dialectic in opposition to what he calls Marxist "objectivism," which makes "subjectivity an absolute effect—i.e., an effect which never transforms itself into a cause."<sup>18</sup> The individual becomes the predetermined product of social history; he is not the voluntary agent who can carry out the reflexive accomplishment of remaking himself by making history. Sartre criticizes Marx himself for writing, "The

materialist conception of the world simply refers to the conception of nature as it is in itself, without an extraneous addition." A reference simply to objective nature is undialectical, and Sartre interprets Marx as "stripping himself of all subjectivity" and adopting an ostensibly objective point of view.<sup>19</sup> But the notion of an objective point of view conceals a contradiction: a point of view is always the point of view of a subject. Granted the sequence of levels Marx distinguished as constituting "the objective hierarchy of social structures," this "dialectical sequence does not determine by itself the way which it is experienced."<sup>20</sup>

Here Sartre finds Marxism guilty of a "reversion" to bourgeois analytic reasoning—that is, to a mechanistic explanation which is only applicable where analysis can cleanly separate effects from their causes. Where the reflexive dimension of our experience intrudes, this separation cannot ultimately be maintained: an effect on us enters inextricably into a process of transformation by our agency. Thus a mechanistic explanation does violence to the structure of our experience. This opposition that Sartre sets up between a dialectic adapted to the structure of our experience and analytic reasoning is itself a dialectical version of the opposition by which Husserl distinguished his reflexive phenomenological descriptions from the causal explanations of natural science.

At a lower level the reflexive character of Sartre's dialectic renders him alert not only to circumstances under which our behavior does in fact tend to become mechanical but also to the concomitant reflexive tendency to become bewitched in order to obscure from ourselves what is happening to us. Thus the Puritanical depravity of the Franco-American is exposed by applying to his experiences both the mechanistic metaphor of the "melting-pot," which derives from metallurgy, and an "Ovidian metamorphosis," which is magical and mythical.

### *THE MACHINE*

An obvious next step from here to Sartre's "Marxism" is to consider the way behavior tends to become mechanical when involved in the operation of a machine. In Sartre, this becomes an encounter with the "practico-inert." Where the starting point in a Marxist analysis would be some technological development, the invention of some tool (the lever, the wheel, the stirrup, the pulley, the steam engine), Sartre starts out phenomenologically with the immediate experience of the indivi-

dual, with the way he has this experience, and hence with the reflexive movement through which the individual makes himself his own tool.<sup>21</sup> When the individual leans on a lever, or pushes a wheelbarrow, or pulls a rope over a pulley, he is using his own body as a subjective tool for using the objective tool. Thus his immediate experience is the reflexive experience of his own instrumentality, and the transformation of the structure of his experience has to be taken into account in dealing with his becoming a worker, or a different kind of worker from the type that prevailed at a previous stage of social history. In other words, technological development is more than man's causal transformation of his external environment; man's reflexive self-transformation is involved. When the tool that is introduced is the machine, we are dealing with a technological development which can be visualized by Sartre, not as lying at the basis of the substructure and generating a sequence of effects which extend into the superstructure, but as "interposed between men" as their dialectical antagonist—"the inhuman" which "disrupts [*déchire*] human relations."

Of course, Marx also deals with such disruptions. But what is striking in Sartre is the way the machine is interposed between the individual and himself where it tends to disrupt the reflexive relation by instituting a mechanical relation. It is here that Sartre's emphasis passes from the violence inherent in the capitalistic system to the violence the individual does to himself. For example, "girls working in a factory are ruminating a vague dream," but they are "at the same time traversed by a rhythm external to them" so that "it can be said that it is the semi-automatic machine which is dreaming through them." The rhythm of the machine was "so alien to a girl's vital personal rhythm that during the first few days it seemed more than she could endure." But "she wanted to adapt herself to it, she made an effort." So she "gave herself to the machine," which takes possession of her work, until finally "she discovers herself as the object of the machine."<sup>22</sup> A dislocating reversal has taken place: the machine is no longer her tool; she has become its tool. But the machine cannot qualify as a subject; we are left with the contradiction that she is no longer the subject of her own experiences.

*Being and Nothingness* Sartre characterizes as an "eidetic analysis of self-deception"—that is, as an analysis of its essential structure.<sup>23</sup> The example from the *Critique* of the girl tending a semi-automatic machine illustrates a certain adjustment in this analysis, since the structure of her experience has been violated by the machine in a fashion which

contributes to her deception. The ensuing rumination is an obscure and bewitched effort to regain her own subjectivity:

In vain would she take refuge in her most intimate "privacy"; this attempt would betray her at once, and would be transformed into what is simply a mode of subjective actualization of objectivity. When semi-automatic machines were first introduced, investigations showed that women workers who were trained to use them surrendered to their sexual fantasies as they worked; they recalled their bedrooms, their beds, the previous night—everything that specifically concerns a person in the isolation of the couple closed with each other. But it was the machine in them that was dreaming of caresses; the kind of attention demanded by their work allowed them neither distraction (thinking of something else) nor total mental application (thinking would slow down their movement). The machine demands and creates in the worker an inverted semi-automatism which complements its operation—an explosive mixture of unconsciousness and vigilance. The mind is absorbed but not used. . . . It is accordingly appropriate for her to let herself go to passivity.<sup>24</sup>

The "essential discovery" of Marx, Sartre announces, "is that work, as an historical reality and as the utilization of specific tools in an already determined social and material situation, is the real foundation of the organization of social relations."<sup>25</sup> Having seen that a "tool" undergoes subjective, metaphorical extension in Sartre, when we make ourselves our own tools in order to employ tools in a literal sense, we can anticipate that work will undergo a similar extension. In Sartre, work involves not only transformation of the external environment but also reflexive self-transformation—"the work of our inner life—resistances conquered and perpetually reborn, efforts perpetually renewed, despairs surmounted, provisional setbacks and precarious victories." Sartre cites psychoanalysts who "consider certain developments of our inward life to be the result of a work which it performs upon itself."<sup>26</sup> The addition of this reflexive dimension to "work" in the literal Marxist sense suggests how Sartre feels he is able to combine psychoanalysis with Marxism.

### *CONFLICT*

We can move now from the level of production to the level of social relations. Although Sartre repeatedly endorses the Marxist conception of class-conflict, it is treated in his reflexive dialectic by reference to the "practico-inert" as the "practice which actualizes in urgency everyone's

relation to his being as an object.” (The same description would hold for the activity of the girl tending the semi-automatic machine.) Sartre’s simplest model for this process of actualization is boxing: my antagonist makes a feint to my head, I cover, and this action enables him to hit me in the stomach. Thus I can be deceived into performing an action that enables my antagonist to employ my own action against me.<sup>28</sup> This reflexive dimension of an action still intrudes when Sartre offers an explicitly social example of conflict, that of two armies opposed. This example is another rather different reflexive and metaphorical extension of the Marxist conception of work, for Sartre defines war as “the work of man on man.”<sup>29</sup> As with the example of boxing, a feature of the “urgency” involved is a demand that one’s “consciousness must be as lucid as that of the enemy.”<sup>30</sup> For “one not only has to actualize one’s own objectivity, starting out from a particular action by the enemy,” but one also has to carry out reassessments. Thus it is known that the enemy is “going to advance to a particular place to attain a specific objective.” But for us this objective can be assessed as a “trap,” an “ambush.” Yet in assessing the prospect, we have to recognize that “the enemy has his own game to play; he foresees the trap, and we foresee his foresight.”<sup>31</sup>

To recognize this reflexive dimension is to recognize, according to Sartre, that contemporary Marxism lacks a lucidity and flexibility of application which have become urgent. In short, “the origin of critical investigation is itself dialectical”—“the divorce between *blind* unprincipled praxis and *paralyzed* thought.” From this “contradiction, lived in malaise and at times in agony,” emerges a “reflexive and critical consciousness.” Each of us is prompted “to reexamine his intellectual tools.”<sup>32</sup> This is metaphorically speaking what Sartre is up to in the *Critique*.

### THE INDIVIDUAL

The reflexive dimension of Sartre’s social philosophy that I have been examining as a methodological trait is usually referred to as his individualism, and a more adequate exposition would take into account the individualistic character of his phenomenology of experience. But the individual himself is dialectically reconstructed in Sartre. Take his comments on the stylistic change which supervenes in the course of his trilogy of sociohistorical novels, *Roads to Freedom*:

During the deceptive calm of 1937-38, there were people who could still maintain the illusion of having their impenetrable individual histories. [So far Sartre is dealing with the familiar, solid, individual who is susceptible of bourgeois, analytic reasoning.] But when September 1938 arrived [in *The Reprieve*, the second novel which deals with the Munich crisis as a social experience] . . . the individual, without ceasing to be a monad, feels that he is playing in a game that transcends him. He is still a point of view on the world [the subjective point of view which is sacrificed in Marxism], but he is surprised to find himself involved in a process of generalization. . . . He is a monad which has sprung a leak and which will go on leaking without ever sinking.<sup>33</sup>

We are already aware that the individual is a "contradictory composite" by virtue of the reflexive dimension of his experience. Here he becomes a "contradictory composite" by virtue of the social dimension of his experience: monads do not leak; what does leak eventually sinks. We are confronted with an individual whose experience, although social, remains his own experience.

Sartre upholds this reflexive dimension by repudiating the discounting of the individual and of the particularity of the individual's experience: "That such a man," Engels argued, "precisely that particular individual, emerges at this particular epoch and in this particular country is naturally a matter of pure chance. If Napoleon had not turned up, someone else would have taken his place."<sup>34</sup>

But who are the particular individuals whom Sartre reinstates when he undertakes "to reexamine his intellectual tools"? Not Napoleon, whom Engels perhaps used as an example because he had been a "world-historical" individual in Hegel. In reexamining psychoanalysis in order to develop the reflexive dimension he would add to Marxism, Sartre selects Baudelaire, Jean Genet, Flaubert, as well as himself. The "rumination" of the working girl may have its place in the *Critique*, but all these individuals are engaged in literary activity. This hardly startles us, since we have just watched Sartre state the problem of the individual involved in a social transformation in terms of a shift in style (in his *Roads to Freedom*). We have also watched him extend metaphorically the meanings of "tool" and of "work" in Marx. Not only does Sartre "reexamine" his "intellectual tools" in the *Critique*, but he introduces language as the first social institution that comes up for appraisal as a specimen of the "practico-inert"—what the writer comes up against in its inertness and would make over into his own set of tools.<sup>35</sup>

## METAPHORS

Where Marx provides us with facts and figures regarding social transformations, Sartre also provides us with metaphors: "Like everyone else, I had heard of the famous American 'melting-pot' that transforms, at different temperatures, Poles, Italians and Finns into United States citizens." Like an American, a metaphor is the outcome of a process of social transformation. "Melting-pot" has been transformed from its literal meaning in metallurgy into a term depicting the social transformation of aliens into Americans. Of course, this metaphor has long since become a familiar commonplace, as Sartre reminds us when he admits, "Like everyone else, I had heard." A dead metaphor is thus the outcome of the process of transformation that produced it, for it has been detached from its relation to this process. When we refer familiarly to America as a "melting-pot" we do not usually think of the metallurgical derivation. In its detachment and rigidity the outcome is a challenge to Sartre as a dialectician committed to the relational and the dynamic, even though his more fundamental concern in reviving the metaphor is to bring out the violent character of the process of social transformation. Observe how Sartre revives the metaphor. Just as he puts the social process of producing an American into motion again by introducing the contradiction of the man protesting "But I'm a Frenchman" when Sartre takes him for an American, so he puts the social process that produces the metaphor into motion again by contradicting the metaphorical character of the dead metaphor: "Like everybody else, I had heard of the famous American 'melting-pot' that transforms, at different temperatures, Poles, Italians and Finns into American citizens." Sartre's interlarding "at different temperatures" construes the metaphor literally, so that the reader is half prompted to ask: "How hot for a Pole? Hotter for an Italian? Must be very hot for a Finn?" This recapturing of the literal meaning dislocates the inert metaphor and renews our awareness of the process of transformation that has gone into the making of the metaphor, at the same time that our awareness is renewed of the process of transformation that has gone into the making of a "good American."

To characterize the renewal as a recapturing of the literal meaning is inaccurate. When Sartre takes the metaphor literally, he is reversing the sequence (from the literal to the metaphorical) by which it was originally produced. Similarly, he is reversing the sequence in the process of transformation that a melting-pot familiarly involves. In a

literal melting-pot a solid metal which is rigid is melted into fluidity; in America as a metaphorical melting-pot someone whose native culture gave him definite shape becomes malleable. But the Franco-American is instead losing his French fluidity and becoming rigidly American. Recall how "like everyone else here, he talked . . . without seeming to move his lips or cheeks; how he laughed with his mouth but not with his eyes"; how his laugh was "forced" when he insinuated "New Orleans, pretty girls," and "a chill" ran through Sartre. We are to assume (by dialectical contrast) that the lips and cheeks of a real Frenchman move when he speaks, that he laughs with his eyes as well as with his mouth, and that he is equally flexible in his relations with girls. But the Franco-American, Sartre anticipates, "will soon be a tree or a rock." Contradicting the familiar rigid-becoming-fluid by recognizing that the fluid must become rigid helps release the metaphor "melting-pot" itself from its moribund rigidity, as well as plays up the metallurgical rigidity of American conformity.

### *LITERAL SOCIOLOGY*

I have tried to demonstrate that Sartre's sociology does indeed deserve the epithet "literary," if only by virtue of his small-scale reliance on metaphors and his large-scale reliance on literary works in delineating social processes. But I have also suggested that this reliance is not the sort of haphazard incompetence that is to be expected when someone with imagination stumbles into an area where stubborn facts and figures should prevail. Throughout his career, and before his dialectic ever became "Marxist," Sartre employed a dialectical method. He revives "Marxism" in much the same way he revives a dead metaphor: Marxism is (in its own terms) the outcome of a process of social transformation. The Marxism that Sartre copes with, Stalinism, is more specifically the outcome of a phase in this process during which it has become detached from the process. Its application to succeeding phases has become merely "ceremonial," like the application of a dead metaphor.<sup>36</sup>

However, Sartre does not revive Marx's original Marxism any more than he revives the original metaphor "melting-pot." Marx himself was sensitive to the difference between his dialectical materialism and the mechanistic materialism of the French enlightenment, and Sartre likes to graft his own dialectical materialism on this distinction, in order to

consign to the eighteenth century the ceremoniously mechanical ideologues of the French Communist Party. But Sartre in fact incorporates in his opposition to mechanistic materialism a reflexive phenomenological appeal to immediate experience. Thus when he revived the dead metaphor, he started out by conceding that he "did not know what the term 'melting-pot' actually meant" until he was confronted by the Frenchman being melted down.

Sartre can incorporate this phenomenological appeal to immediate experience because he disavows Husserl's conception of phenomenology as "rigorous science."<sup>37</sup> With this disavowal Sartre's method can become primarily dialectical and literature can inherit the reflexive function of reliving the immediate experiences of a social history which in the Marxist interpretation has become "ossified."<sup>38</sup> Thus Sartre's first effort to deal with social history was an answer to the question *What is Literature?* whereas his most persistent and final effort, for which the *Critique* itself prepared the way, is his three-volume interpretation of the transformation of French society as the experience which lies behind Flaubert's literary works and Flaubert's own transformation from "the family idiot" into "the creator of the 'modern' novel."<sup>39</sup>

## NOTES

1. *Life/Situations* (New York, 1977), p. 22. I cite from, but frequently revise, the available translations of Sartre in English.

2. *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (London, 1976), p. 318.

3. *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford, 1977), p. 17.

4. *Literary and Philosophical Essays* (New York, 1955). The portion of the report I cite is found on pp. 97-98.

5. *Ex* ("outside") derives its metaphorical force in Sartre from Heidegger's etymologizing use of *ex-sistere* and *ekstasis* ("dislocation") in *Being and Time*. The prefix undergoes further manipulation in Sartre's transition to a dialectic of *Being and Nothingness*: "Heidegger's philosophy characteristically describes *Dasein* by using positive terms which conceal implicit negations. *Dasein* is 'outside of itself, in the world'; it is 'a being of distances.' All this amounts to saying that *Dasein* 'is not' in itself" (*Being and Nothingness* [New York, 1966], p. 52).

6. Similarly when Sartre analyzes Flaubert's family, he finds that it suffered from "an internal disequilibrium" because it was "half-way bourgeois, half-way rural [sc., feudal] in its structures" (*L'idiot de la famille* Paris, 1972], Vol. 3, p. 34). This balanced lack of balance is clearly a demand of the dialectic rather than the result of sociological computation.

7. Sartre has continued to equate Americanism with Puritanism, which is one of his favorite social phenomena. In denouncing, on behalf of the Russell Tribunal, American genocide in Vietnam, Sartre faced the question of whether its perpetrators "were clearly aware of their intent," and one feature of his reply was to refer to the "miracles that Puritan self-deception [*mauvaise foi*] can pull off" (*Between Existentialism and Marxism* [New York, 1975], p. 80).

8. For a brief exegesis of Husserl's "consciousness of something," see my *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York, 1965), pp. 10-11. Although *Being and Nothingness* starts off phenomenologically with an analysis of "consciousness of something," it becomes fully dialectical with the introduction of the other into the analysis:

While I attempt to free myself from the hold of the Other, the Other is trying to free himself from mine, while I seek to enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me. We are by no means dealing with unilateral relations with an object-in-itself, but with reciprocal and moving relation [*ibid.*, p. 209].

9. *Situations* (Paris, 1965), Vol. 7, p. 21.

10. For the self as a "contradictory composite," see *The Transcendence of the Ego* (New York, 1957), p. 84. Not just a self-image but any image is inherently contradictory according to Sartre (see *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p. 88).

11. How the relations between levels are handled dialectically will be discussed in considerable detail in my *Starting Point* (Chicago, 1979).

12. Such reflexive psychological violence is at the focus of Sartre's interest in Flaubert. Where a Marxist would be interested in praxis, Flaubert, Sartre notes, "from his earliest childhood . . . cannot make contact with human praxis," for "his realm . . . is *pathos*— that is, affectivity insofar as it is pure violence, succumbed to without his accepting it" (*L'Idiot*, Vol. 3, p. 48).

13. Of course, the original Saint Genet is merely a pious legend, but Sartre's point regarding Jean Genet's affectivity is that he would confer legendary status on himself.

14. *Situations*, Vol. 6, pp. 86-87. The comparison with Marxism is feasible because it is also a dialectical relational analysis. Thus Marx argues, "The antithesis between propertylessness and property . . . remains indifferent, not grasped as a dynamic connection in its internal relation as contradiction, so long as it is not understood as the antithesis of labor and capital" (*Writings of the young Marx on Philosophy and Society*) [Garden City, 1967], p. 301). In this present essay there is no intent on my part to do justice to Marxism or any other dialectical philosophy besides Sartre's. I am only trying to clarify certain features of Sartre's "Marxism."

15. For Heidegger's analysis of *Befindlichkeit*, see section 29 of *Being and Time*.

16. *Anti-Semite and Jew* (New York, 1948), p. 52.

17. Cited by Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka in *The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre* (Evanston, 1974), Vol. 1, p. 145.

18. *Situations*, (Paris, 1964), Vol. 6, p. 27.

19. *Search for a Method*, p. 32. The first quotation is actually from Engels, and its attribution to Marx is a curious mistake on Sartre's part, since he is eager to saddle Engels with as much of the blame as possible for rendering Marxism undialectical.

20. *L'Idiot*, Vol. 1, p. 686. Sartre would impose a reflexive interpretation on "the reaction," which Marx concedes, "of the superstructures on the substructures from which they derive" (*ibid.*).

21. The original phenomenological analysis, which I am oversimplifying, is found in *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 422-429. I am also neglecting Sartre's debt to Heidegger's analysis of the relation to the tool as something "available" (*zuhanden*) rather than as something "confronting" us as an object (*vorhanden*).

22. *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, pp. 462-463. Political theorists have usually been tantalized by Sartre's activism. But my examples are selected to suggest that he is more adept at delineating its dialectical opposite, "pathos," and the ruminations that take place in its "realm" (see n. 12 above), by virtue of the reflexive and affective character of the phenomenological component of his dialectic.

23. *Situations* (Greenwich, 1965), p. 161.

24. *Critique*, p. 233. Sartre is trying to avoid the simplistic notion of "reification" as the "metamorphosis of the individual into a thing" (*ibid.*, p. 176. I cite a phase of the dialectic where Sartre's *ex-sistentialist* metaphor becomes materialistic: "man, defined by his being-outside-himself . . . is defined as *bewitched matter*—that is, specifically as an inorganic, worked materiality which develops a non-human activity because its passivity synthesizes the serial infinity of human acts which sustain it" (*ibid.*, p. 219).

25. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

26. *Search for a Method*, p. 12. Sartre cites "mourning" as an example of "work" in this reflexive sense and refers us to Daniel Lagache's *Le travail du deuil*.

27. *Critique*, pp. 808-809.

28. *Search for a Method*, p. 157. Sartre admits that the example of boxing represents an abstraction from the complexity of social relations since the individuals involved are "of the same profession, the same age, in a closed-off sector" (*Critique*, p. 806).

29. *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p. 444.

30. *Critique*, p. 809. Sartre's concept of "urgency," like most of his concepts, is not natively social psychology but derives from his psychology of the individual. Husserl carefully distinguishes between an "intentional" act of consciousness and "attention," but Sartre obtains from Heidegger's analysis of affectivity a conception of consciousness as appetitive, which he consolidates with *in-tentio* so that consciousness becomes "*ad-petitio*" (*The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, p. 264). Thus the intentional act of consciousness becomes dialectically an *attente*—an expectant "waiting upon" what it is a "seeking toward." Hence "urgency" becomes a pivotal phenomenon, as in the famous episode of the woman about to be seduced: "She knows . . . that it will be necessary sooner or later for her to make a decision. But she does not want to feel the urgency of it" (*ibid.*, p. 147). Sartre's contempt for the woman about to be seduced, for the Frenchman being melted down into an American, for Flaubert, for our time, is obvious; but in each instance it is contempt for passivity that is dictated by his dialectical version of phenomenology.

31. *Critique*, pp. 807-809.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 50; emphasis added.

33. Contat, p. 113.

34. *Search for a Method*, p. 56.

35. I can only suggest the character and scope of Sartre's analysis of language as an example of the "practico-inert" by sampling some of his generalizations: "A good example is language. . . . There can be no doubt that language is in one sense an inert totality. But this materiality is also a constantly developing organic totalization. . . . Every word is . . . external to everyone; it lives outside, as a public institution; and speaking does not consist in inserting a vocable into a brain through an ear, but in using sounds to direct the interlocutor's attention to this vocable as public exterior property. . . . Language as the prac-

tical relation of one man to another is praxis, and praxis is always language" (*Critique*, pp. 98-99).

36. Contemporary Marxism, according to Sartre, has "reduced" its "analysis . . . to a simple ceremony." It "consists solely in getting rid of detail, in forcing the meaning of certain events" (*Search for a Method*, p. 27). It has thereby become "frozen" (*ibid.*, p. 28). In the *Critique* Sartre's recurrent description is "sclerotic." In reaching the linguistic and ideological levels, I have skipped over the political level where the same development takes place. Here institutions constitute a detached, rigid outcome of a process which had been fluid in its earlier revolutionary phase.

37. *Situations*, (Paris, 1972), Vol. 9, p. 70.

38. The inheritance is not acknowledged by Sartre who comments instead that "in the book I am writing on Flaubert [sc. *L'idiot*] I have replaced my old notion of consciousness . . . by what I call *le vécu*" (*ibid.*, p. 108). But *le vécu* or *l'expérience vécu* had been his old translation for *Erlebnis* (usually translated into English as "lived experience"), which was Husserl's term for experience as it is immediately given to consciousness, and thus exhibits the reflexive character that enables a phenomenological analysis to take hold. In *What is Literature?* (1947) Sartre had already credited novels with enabling us to "live our experiences" (p. 217). This can be true for the writer himself: "Fiction enabled Flaubert to say what he feels" (*L'idiot*, Vol 1, p. 195) but would otherwise have remained "unsayable" (*Situations*, Vol. 9, p. 111).

39. On the one hand, Sartre finds "Flaubert's "existence an excellent resumé of a century of vicissitudes in French society (*L'idiot*, Vol. 2, p. 1199); on the other hand, "Flaubert as the creator of the 'modern novel' is at the crossroads of all our literary problems today" (*L'idiot*, Vol. 1, p. 8).

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# An English Version of Sartre's Main Philosophical Work:

## CRITIQUE OF DIALECTICAL REASON



wilfrid desan

In an interview with the French weekly, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Sartre declared that he would rather be prematurely old and worn out but having written the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* than be healthy without having written the *Critique*.<sup>1</sup> This is a rather unpleasant disjunctive, from which to all appearances Sartre emerged having fulfilled the first part: he has written the *Critique* and became both old and blind. In conversing with Sartre — that was before blindness struck him — I felt the same attitude: Sartre was proud of his work, although

it nearly killed him. The composition of the *Critique* was such a gigantic effort that it actually made him sick for quite a while. He took corydrane to speed up his writing and according to Simone de Beauvoir, did not disdain a glass of whiskey. At the end he emerged from under a mountain of words with no strength left to write a table of contents. Sartre wrote the book with a feeling of urgency, as if it had to be written and as if he were the only one made for the task.

Although the main purpose of the book could be said to be an attempt to

correct the Soviet type of Marxism by means of existentialism, it is still not clear to me whether Sartre was in fact a Marxist. I am wondering about that and in the last chapter of my book, *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, I concluded that Sartre was indeed "the last of the Cartesians," assuming also that he was a Marxist.<sup>2</sup> At present I would say that Sartre himself claimed to be an anarchist (although the term as he uses it lacks a clearcut definition) and a socialist, but here again of a sort not completely defined.

Now that the book has been available in English, let us examine its message and check its new appearance.<sup>3</sup> Does the English translation do justice to the original? This author for one is of the opinion that both editor and translator did a very praiseworthy job. Some passages are so obscure that not even Sartre could make them totally intelligible in the original, while certain expressions are so colorful and so typically Sartrean that no literal translation — and that is what our translator was constantly aiming for — could possibly render Sartre's peculiar mixture of philosophy and metaphor. Take for example Sartre's use of the words *forêt humaine*, translated into *forest of humanity* with a definite loss of meaning. Such a translation makes one wonder whether at times some words or expressions should not remain untranslated.

Both translator and editor have done much more than translate, however. They have in fact restructured the book: sentences have been brought to normal size, divisions have been introduced, the table of contents replaces the four lines of the French text with six pages, etc. I am very happy with their remodelling of the book as a whole. As it stands, the book, although not easy, is readable. I have some qualms about the division toward the very end of the

book, which in my opinion could have been different. But this is a debatable point and does not affect the contents.

What about the content? Before attempting a more detailed answer to this question, let us first point to an underlying design and briefly show that there is a *projet fondamental* in Sartre's work and that this *projet fondamental* is pervasive. Since space does not permit us to go through Sartre's work as a whole, let us for our purpose look both at his first book, *Nausea*, and at his last book, *L'Idiot de la Famille*. At first sight these two worlds may appear to be quite disparate. Roquentin, the main character in *Nausea*, is very much the hyper-individualist, rebelling against all structure, above all against the bourgeois world and its conventions. Roquentin wants "to exist" and in no way to be caught in any form of restraint. "To exist" according to Roquentin — and Sartre is clearly behind his character — is to avoid the conventionalities of an "ideal" order. But in this confrontation with a naked reality, Roquentin gets caught in the viscosity of nature and discovers "nausea." Contact with the existential weighs heavily upon this morbid individual, who ultimately indulges in some forms of escape. His love for Annie is one, his enjoyment of American jazz is another, but the greatest happiness for him is the fact of writing his diary. Writing is a justification unto itself. In *Nausea* Sartre equates these forms of escape with "being," although this term is in for variations of meaning in later works. What matters here for the understanding of the Sartrean view is that his mind moves on a double track, one of mobility and freedom, which in this occurrence is called existence, and one of stability and structure, to which the shifting mood arrives as at a haven. *Sartre's preference clearly lies with ex-*

*istential mobility*. Freedom is cherished above all throughout his life and work, freedom as the apanage of individual man.

In his last work, *L'Idiot de la Famille*, which is actually an extremely detailed biography of Gustave Flaubert (so far three volumes have appeared, we are spared a fourth volume which was once projected) Sartre is, as usual, smitten with the problem of the individual. This time life itself has taught him a lesson, particularly the Marxism of which he claims to be a disciple, however heretical. Gustave Flaubert is a concrete individual, undoubtedly, yet in order to discover the exceptional nature of the man and of the writer, Sartre claims that one must *regress* into the past and bring to light the economic status of Flaubert's bourgeois family *and* the impact of this social status upon his childhood, and from there *progress* into his manhood and his work. The method, called *regressive-progressive*, is an attempt to grasp the individual and the unique. It is important here to see the man famed for his defense of all-out freedom in previous publications acknowledge in this work a *causal* connection between Flaubert as a singular and uncommon type on the one hand and the moving pressures which have affected his youth and shaped his growth on the other. What we confront is a dual dimension once again, containing the existential as lived, "vécu," in Flaubert *and* also the presence of the Freudian and Marxist influence within the concrete reality of a person. This is both an existential fulfillment as brought to pass in the person of Gustave Flaubert *and* a concession to the world of stability and systematization. But one should not forget that here as elsewhere by far the most salient component of the dual structure is Flaubert himself.

Having discovered in the beginning and the end of a career the poles of distention which keep the schizophrenic mind of France's most brilliant existentialist on the move, we can now zero in on what is the center of our attention: what matters in the *Critique* is the same continuing and sharply evolved dichotomy that we have observed in the works above. The *Critique* is both sociological and anthropological, as we shall detail at some length later on. As far as the practical and political implications of the book are concerned, one could say that they are part of Sartre's "engagement." The French philosopher, more than his Anglo-Saxon counterparts, believes in being politically involved. In many cases he is not just a professor of philosophy, a writer of speculative treatises; he is also a journalist, a writer of editorials. Sartre, more than his French colleagues, wished to be a man of praxis no less than *un homme de lettres*. Believing that a philosopher can not live apart from events, nor from the masses who carry the events, he at times carried his fervor into the streets, where he participated in strikes and riots. It was obvious, however, when the *Critique* was published that Sartre's most fruitful commitment was to his desk.

## II

A look at the title is instructive. What Sartre intends is a *critical* examination of the *dialectic*. The title is an alteration of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Just as Kant probed the complex activity of *Reason*, Sartre in turn wants to investigate the power and the limit of *dialectic*, inherited from Hegel and applied by Marx. It is his explicit intent to test critically this *dialectic* and at the same time point out how and where the Moscow type of Marxism has deviated from the "au-

thentic" form of dialectic. This alone stresses the paramount importance of Sartre's attempt for anyone interested in discovering a philosophical substratum for a socialistic world vision without the Soviet disregard for individual freedom. The subtitle "*Theory of the Practical Ensembles*" clarifies the main title. The word *practical* is very important, for etymologically one with *praxis*, it denotes the *active* intervention of individual man as the one who in so doing makes the *ensembles* or collectives. The book, then, must be seen as a theory on the philosophy of collectives, called here somewhat unexpectedly *ensembles*, perhaps in imitation of the French word *ensemble*, itself not a usual term. Sartre from the start wants to stress that the ensemble has no noumenal or vague metaphysical content; it directly results from individual praxis.

The original French text contained an introduction which was apparently not written explicitly for the *Critique* but appeared independently, first in *Les Temps Modernes* and later on as a separate volume (Gallimard 1967). It was translated by Hazel Barnes and appeared separately in English. That introduction does not appear in the English translation of the *Critique*. Although it is not an absolute necessity for the understanding of the *Critique*, there are two points which are worth mentioning. First, Existentialism plays an auxiliary role to Marxism, which is "the philosophy of our times." Existentialism is necessary as a protest against the expulsion of *man*, until Marxism, realizing its oversight and fully "comprehending its vocation, fulfills its obligation." Second, the Progressive-Regressive Method already mentioned in connection with *L'Idiot de la Famille*, is also applied here in the *Critique*. Although this does not

appear as compelling, it was definitely Sartre's intent, having established a structural and historical anthropology and sociology in Volume One, the regressive phase, to write also Volume Two, containing the progressive phase, or the basis for the intelligibility of historical knowledge. What Part Two ultimately would have been no one can say, for it was never published and according to Sartre's statement to me, never will be. Even so, I cannot help feeling that the use of the term *regressive* for the revelation of the structures is forcing the meaning somewhat, if as we noticed above, *A Search for a Method* did indeed offer us the real and definitive (?) meaning.

If Sartre is a disciple of the dialectic — a method and structure which he considers essential — it should not be inferred from this that he shares the position of what he calls "modern Marxism." For those "positivistic" Marxists who in fact accept determinism and mechanistic succession, prophecy is easy, since the future is nothing but a mechanistic repetition, an unavoidable effect of the present *cause*. Sartre protests against such a view, and in tracing the *human* element integrated within scientific trends, shows their consequent unpredictability. One might even go so far as to say that this is the *raison d'être* of his book. That *human* elements or praxis give birth to the dialectic, i.e., the incessant relation between man and the world, man and man, man and the group. What matters for Sartre is to go to the structures which the sociologists have tackled before him and show the place of the Subject within the structures. It is in this way that individual man will be defined; for there is no universal definition of man. The concrete existent, which in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* was called freedom, project and

Being-for-itself, becomes in the semantics of the *Critique* praxis or conscious activity of the individual. This praxis must not necessarily be a manual performance, it may be a *presence* which, by its sole "being there," builds up a relation between events or persons. Without that presence a dialectic would never have been there.

There is more to it though, when e.g. my praxis although born in freedom results in an anti-social force. Capitalism in Sartre's opinion is a tragic example of this: an immense amount of energy and potential power were unleashed through the discovery of the uses of iron-and-coal, an immense wealth was poured into the Western world through the media of steel and the machines which were made out of steel, yet notwithstanding the fabulous enrichment of a few, poverty continued as before. This result Sartre calls *anti-man* or *anti-dialectic*, or *anti-praxis*, or *destiny*. This inevitable transition of praxis to what Sartre calls the *practico-inert* is discussed at great length. In Sartre's opinion that counter-finality is the fate of a *human* deed: it brings us face to face with what man does not want and which in some way becomes his alienation. The free deed becomes the human *thing*. There is more. Not only does man in and through his free praxis make this practico-inert or ponderosity of matter around him, but he is also through this matter around him placed in a social class. The practico-inert becomes his or her definition. The working woman who spends eight hours a day in a monotonous and fatiguing job has no other essence outside her frustrated self: she truly is what she does. The belonging to a class is the result of the practico-inert, or to use Sartre's semantics, the belonging to a class is the

result of materiality.' This emphasis upon the importance of man as a being-of-class caught in a material matrix is a strange phenomenon indeed, but it points out once again how freedom and its unavoidable counterpart get strangely mixed up in reality. Class has a viscosity, and it is difficult to free oneself from its retentive pull.

### III

Sartre proceeds thereafter into the close and interesting study of the successive evolution of collective structures or ensembles, as he calls it, starting with the *series*, and then the *fused group*, the *statuted group*, the *organization* and the *institution*. The enumeration of these conventional forms of collectives is, by itself, not new, but they are treated in a novel way, for what matters to Sartre is to lay stress upon the presence of man as the free and creative power amidst the encompassing collective, alive and indestructible, yet prisoner of the gravitational force to which he belongs. Man may be a prisoner of a particular series of people, a mere *object* of society, but as *subject*, he is always free to revolt and go beyond his status. At a certain moment the exploited or serialized man feels the pain of his alienation and, under some stimulus, breaks through the ineptitude of the seriality and forms a group as was the case with Martin Luther King's bus-riders in Alabama. (Example mine.) The Negro riders might always have accepted unequal service, which as the members of a series they were forced to do, but they did not, they united. The riders may be inert, Other among Others, prisoners of their particular seriality, but the potentiality of changing that situation, of going beyond, gives them a measure of freedom, even within their present prison. The walls of that prison will only fall,

however, with the formation of the group.

We have fallen quite naturally into the metaphor of the prison, which with its evocation of deprivation shows us man as a being of need; it is when man needs something that he is carried beyond-himself-toward, that he is driven to scale the walls of the prison and conquer the forbidden that lies beyond. Yet where those walls are too high, it will take many to scale them; one alone can never conquer the Bastille. The serial man has up to now accepted his seriality and objectivity as inevitable, but he reaches a point when his *subjectivity* reasserts itself and the seriality steps from its loose ineptitude into a more forceful phase. Such a point was reached when Mrs. Rosa Parks, a Negro day-worker in Montgomery, Alabama was simply too tired to stand up on a bus and sank into a seat in the "white" section. (Example mine.) Such a point was reached in Paris on the July day that launched the French Revolution. (Sartre's example.) In both cases the menace imposed from the outside pressed the individuals so threatened into acting as one. The unification, which is definitely not wanted by the outside group, comes about, however, not merely as reaction, a product of the outside actions; it is also produced from the *inside* of the new *fused group*, for the birth of the new group cannot be induced or artificially provoked if there is no *interiorized* existence of the new-born.<sup>5</sup>

Here we should stop for a moment because Sartre's philosophical explanation is here paramount. In *Being and Nothingness*, we recall, the third man, who is every man, brings together in a dual relation what he confronts and by the same token reveals a new dimension, e.g., in making through his sole presence two lovers whom he ob-

serves an us-object. Now the third man becomes a *mediating* third man. Instead of constituting merely a dual relation, he introduces while running on the rue St. Antoine to the Bastille a triadic relation. As a rioter among rioters, he totalizes the others who run with him and makes the group: he holds them together just as they hold him in their totalizing grasp. Since everyone plays the role of the third man, a new *ensemble* emerges, the unalienated and unserialized group, or the *fused group*.

This unity is not merely the abstract unity provided by the passive gaze of the onlookers, nor is it like "the charity of the Christians"; it is a true unifying function. Man as individual unifies men as group, or as Sartre puts it incisively, the *we* is only through the *he*. A *collective consciousness* is herewith excluded, and so of course is God, as a unifying Entity from above.<sup>6</sup>

The newly-formed group — the fused group — fascinates Sartre; it is clearly his favorite act in the drama of human history because the subject, the human individual, stands so clearly on the stage. This explains, in part, Sartre's fondness for Fidel Castro. Sartre visited Cuba during the first weeks of the Cuban revolution and thought he saw a perfect example of the fused group. For this period was the honeymoon of the Revolution, one in which there was as yet no bureaucracy, no apparatus, but still a direct contact between the leaders and the masses. One is tempted to think here of the youthful Sartre himself, in the days when he sat with his disciples in the Café de Flore, discussing the problems of freedom and existence, bolstered by the friendship of the writers and co-editors of *Les Temps Modernes*, yet unencumbered by the inconveniences of fame.

When Sartre in a further analysis of the stages of sociological evolution steps from the group into more rigid forms such as *organization* and *institution*, he is still the master in describing what he sees, but he is now on hostile territory: his dislike of structures is apparent, and one wonders at times whether he sees only what he wants to see. What characterizes the *institution* is that from now on what counts is the *function*, which becomes essential, while the individual is unessential. He is merely perpetuated in the function. The immediate result is a great rigidity and an increase of the *inert*. From now on any individual who proposes a change is suspect, since that very proposal is already a manifestation of freedom and a revelation of individuality. *Institution* clearly wants impotency toward alteration. It is in a way a return toward *seriality*, where the individual is merely other, yet it is more powerful, since it keeps active toward a common objective. The trend toward the same and common objective remains because praxis (or action) remains, and praxis remains because it is under command.

There is a second feature of the institution: it has *authority*. The remote foundation of authority has to be sought in the *groupe en fusion*. The people of the Faubourg Saint Antoine who, as you will remember, were "on the run" toward the Bastille, have a third man regulator. Their leadership was present but very vague. Later on, it became more specific but still not stable. *Authority* becomes permanent only when the *institution* is born. According to Sartre, authority does not come from God, nor does it come from the people as a direct expression of their wishes: it is merely a concession of the masses. Thus, "every man is sovereign," but there is one who be-

comes *the* Sovereign because he is the mediator of communications and obtains this particular function through explicit or implicit concessions. He becomes the *indépassable* entity: one can not go around him, since he stops the flow of circularity. An imperative ordering me to work in a specific way toward the common cause reaches me through him. We commonly call that an order. From now on my freedom is alienated, or rather my freedom is *in the sovereign* because I want it to be there.

#### IV

In the last section of his book, contained in the chapters "The Place of History" and "Class Struggle and Dialectical Reason," Sartre makes a vigorous attempt to "locate" his views in relation to 19th and 20th century Europe, more specifically to France. The principles and their Sartrean interpretation are now applied to the milieu of the worker, the unions, the bourgeois (whom Sartre thoroughly despises and copiously insults) and the colonizing powers. Although this section contains brilliant flashes of insight, the practical application remains controversial to me. It is instructive for anyone who wants to interpret the capitalism of the last 150 years in the light of Sartre's dialectical reasoning, but one can not help feeling that Sartre plays the moralist in these emotional pages. Clearly on the side of the worker, Sartre does not exclude violence as a means to reconquer one's rights. Since he always appeared to me as generous and at heart a tolerant person, this has often surprised me. "For a long time," Sartre told me, "I was against violence, but over the years I gradually discovered that without violence or without the threat of violence one does not obtain one's

rights." Violence must not always be, for the rising awareness of the dialectical movement is a reality. Above all, there is the voice of the petty bourgeois intellectual. He is a "traitor" to his class, but he is also the one who, while looking for a "universal," as all intellectuals do, has finally discovered that the worker and his praxis contain in potency the real universal. The *praxis* of the blue-collar man is the real measure of truth. This the petty bourgeois intellectual reveals to the world. Sadly enough — and this is a reflection of this writer — what the intellectual makes of it, the blue-collar worker is unable to grasp.

These pages reveal both the strengths and the weaknesses of the Sartrean vision. There is no question about the fact that Sartre acknowledges in the *Critique* as a whole, as in his other works, the existence of two elements: the individual subject on the one hand and the ensemble on the other. Sartre makes no attempt to reject this double dimension, but for all practical purposes he concentrates on the Subject. How must this Subject be understood? It is not just the individual as such, nor is it the individual as single and irreplaceable entity. What Sartre understands by individual Subject is the *individual as the necessary condition of the unity of the representative elements*. This Subject thinks and acts. All the rest must be seen as object of this thinking and acting. For this reason totalization is the recurrent theme, echoing all through the book: totalization is the individual thinking and acting. It is clearly in that function that the dialectic finds its source. The *Critique* is built around the all-important subject: *a Subject which moves into the surrounding reality, which it constitutes and structures, and the re-*

*lation which results from this particular activity.*

I can not say that this relation, called dialectic, has ever been totally clarified, not even by Hegel, its inventor. Although it is an habitual theme in Hegel and in the writing of so many other philosophers, it remains a mystery even to its users. Sartre, no less than his predecessors, but with more talent than most, uses the dialectic as the relation from man to man, from man to group, from man to nature. It is the study of this connection which makes the warp and woof of the whole book. By the same token, though, while the function of the creative Subject is pushed to the hilt, the *ensemble*, as Sartre somewhat facetiously calls it, is belittled in its dignity and in its undeniable momentariness. It suddenly becomes secondary and merely instrumental, nothing more; in fact it becomes evil. Practico-inert, as the author contemptuously calls it, denotes the way in which he wants it to be understood. Yet Sartre, in doing this, undercuts the function — I should say the sacred function — of collaboration and of "ensemble" in general. Institution has its drawbacks and abuses, this is beyond debate, yet both organization and institution have accomplished a lot. Notice also how Sartre in his attack against the institution chose the Russian model that existed under Stalin. That this was an institution at its worse no one can deny, but as an example it does not cancel the beneficial effect of all institutions or structures. I choose on purpose the term *structure*, for it is this type of discipline which Sartre's genre of freedom finds totally intolerable. Ironically *structure* has shown itself to be a necessity for Sartre himself, if he was to become what he indeed grew up to be, a first-rate writer. He only succeeded in his own

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career because he acceded to the intricacies of a very complex *structure* called language, acquiring great skill in the use of a tool which indeed is made by the collective for the collective. Man needs balance to keep his power of survival, and this balance is provided by society and by the structures which society imposes and in which one is born *before* making them. It merely goes to show that individual man is built for co-existence and that his primordial disposition is fragmentary and destined for redemption. The redemption is the Other . . . I fail to see how and why alterity is a menace of death, when it could be and is on many occasions a salvation.

In reflecting upon my own writing, I see now how my book *The Planetary Man* was written subliminally as an answer to Sartre while I was working as a commentator on his main philosophical works. *The Planetary Man* undertakes to place man in a cosmic ambiance, and to this end, it starts from the totality, in the end discovering man to be part of that totality. This is tantamount to saying that the cosmic ambiance must be taken into consideration. There is at this point a strange similarity between Monod and Sartre. For Monod, no less than for Sartre, man appears on this planet as a considerable exception, almost accidentally, with no close ties to nature, a miracle without God. But once he is there, unexplained and absurd, Sartre places him at the center of the universe, ordering space and time, dominating the chaos and in freedom competing with the gods. It is this centric attitude which seems debatable to the extent that it takes the relative for the absolute, instead of taking the absolute of man as relative, a stance more in line with modern physics. Admittedly, in the *Critique* Sartre has moved *considerably*

away from the extreme individualism of his earlier works, such as *Nausea* and *Being and Nothingness*. What is remarkable in the book under examination is a definite move from the Pure Subject to a growing impact of what he calls the *inert* and the *anti-man* or *destiny*. Actually what surrounds us and restrains that freedom, of which our century is so proud, is not really anti-man. It is merely anything which is not I. However, Western thought, which in the last three hundred years has strongly espoused the predominance of the Subject, revolts against the idea of man being a normal product of Nature, of which he is and remains a part. And so does Sartre, even the Sartre of the *Critique*. Yet he has reached a turning point; he is a man in transition. And I guess that is as much as we can expect.

Be this as it may, it is regrettable that so few people have read the *Critique*, even in France, for its readers would have noticed this beneficial shift from Pure Subject to the presence of whatever is not Pure Subject, a presence that threatens this isolation. Sartre, possessed by a Cartesian psyche, struggles to free himself. In all this, a strange fatalism of the collective is at work. If at one time I called Sartre "the last of the Cartesians," it is because of the growing conviction that the world of Descartes is running out. Yet it was opportune and even necessary in its time. For all his eccentricities, we shall remain grateful to Sartre for his vigorous defense of the individual before the latter is pulled back and placed where he belongs. Perhaps the world needed a man like Sartre to seal once and forever the quintessence of freedom in a world of human oppression, realizing later on that there must be more than freedom and violence if survival is to be achieved in our times.

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1. *Le Nouvel Observateur*, June 23, 1975, interview by Michel Contat.
2. Wilfrid Desan, *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, Peter Smith, Gl. Mass, p. 260 ff.
3. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Theory of the Practical Ensembles*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, ed. Jonathan Ree, London, NLB, Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, N.J.
4. See the *Critique*, pp. 245 ff., or eventually my comment in *The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, pp. 106 ff.
5. The English translation "fused group" of the French "groupe en fusion" is unfortunate because the past participle "fused" denotes the deed as accomplished, while the French term stresses what has to be stressed: the act in the process of being accomplished.
6. On the function of the Third in Sartre, see the masterly analysis by Thomas Flynn, "The Alienating and the Mediating Third in the Social Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre," in *Studies in Philosophy and the History of Philosophy*, Volume 6 (Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C. 1973), pp. 3-38. I discussed this topic at length with Sartre. At the time of our discussion he had not notably changed his mind, but seemed then to agree to the term, *quasi-organic*. The group is a quasi-organic structure. In my book, *The Planetary Man*, I have introduced "the Observer from Afar." His function is to synthesize a totality which is real ontologically but the appearance of which comes to me only through the eyes of the Observer from Afar.

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The *Critique of Dialectical Reason*:  
From Need to Need, Circularly

"Everything is to be explained through need."<sup>1</sup> So says Sartre at the beginning of the first chapter of the first volume of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. And in the last pages of the manuscript of the second volume: "The determination of action in its entirety by the need it transcends in order to satisfy it, such is the foundation of historical materialism."<sup>2</sup> The point of departure turns out, in accordance with what appears an eminently dialectical circularity, to be a point of arrival as well, at the end of an itinerary involving the progressive disclosure of what was nevertheless disclosed from the beginning. It is precisely for this circularity at once unfolded and folded back again upon itself, for this return to a *déjà-là*, that Ronald Aronson reproached Sartre in his critical review of the manuscript of the second volume.<sup>3</sup> He indeed detects in the text something like a break, a schism, a crack, which he situates at the exact spot where Sartre, after studying the concrete evolution of the U.S.S.R. up to the Stalinism of the fifties, returns to the notion of *need* as the very foundation of historical materialism. Far from understanding this return as the dialectical unveiling of an evolved truth, Aronson sees in it the sign of a radical impoverishment of Sartre's thought—perhaps the depletion or exhaustion of the dialectic to which Sartre himself alludes.<sup>4</sup> He sees Sartre suddenly lapsing into tautology, redundancy, the rehashing of an outmoded conception of Being, the sluggishness of argumentation. The abrupt change, from the brilliant

1. *Critique of Dialectical Reason* trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, (London: New Left Books, 1976), 80.

2. *Manuscript*, 500. The pagination is that of the typed version of the text.

3. Ronald Aronson, "Sartre's Turning Point: The Abandoned *Critique de la raison dialectique*, Volume Two," in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* (The Library of Living Philosophers, 1981), ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, 685–706.

4. *CDR*, 519.

analysis of the history of the U.S.S.R. to the flat and repetitious text of the last pages of the manuscript, testifies, according to Aronson, to a profound internal drama in Sartre's mind, to an impassable breach in his thought, the impossibility of his project become manifest, the discovery of the inaccessibility of his goal given the premises he had posited. Whence a circular and emptily circulating panic of the dialectic, whence psychic upheaval and shipwreck.

The goal was to provide an intelligible foundation, a founded intelligibility, for History or common action. The premises stipulated that the attempt to do so should be based on constituent *praxis* in its primordial translucence, on the *praxis* of the free individual organism; and that common *praxis* possessed no being irreducibly its own, but always found its intelligibility in constituent *praxis*. It is, according to Aronson, the absolute primacy accorded to individual *praxis* that, on principle, dooms Sartre's undertaking to failure, and it is the manifest ineluctability of this failure that leads Sartre to a very profound crisis, which translates in the text as an obstinate, almost obsessional repetition of the problematic *in its very impossibility*: the fundamental, preeminent character of the individual organism in the genesis of common action. . . . The return to the notion of need as the very Being of History would represent Sartre caught in his own trap, condemned to turn infernally in a circle whose closure he himself has determined, prisoner of that false absolute—individual *praxis*—which bleeds and kills the possibility of his project. For Aronson, this failure is beyond doubt. The proof is that Sartre, in the pages devoted to the U.S.S.R., had set himself the task of elucidating the intelligibility of class conflict, and that, ever obsessed by the fact of free individual *praxis* alone, he deviates from the prescribed itinerary and misses his mark; while he should have applied himself to studying the relations of different practical multiplicities and to showing how they can be totalized to form *one* History, he focuses anew on individuality and studies the *praxis* of a dictator, Stalin, or how the *praxis* of a single individual can enslave an entire society and divert that common project, socialism. Thus, Sartre's intention, swayed by his fascination with individual *praxis*, is reversed: it is no longer a question of how multiplicity can become one in the unity of a historical totalization, but of how the unity of an individual *praxis* can reduce a whole society to itself. At the end of this deviation from his objectives, Sartre, at once discovering and denying the impossibility of the whole undertaking, falls into a weary repetition of the problematic of need and of the relations of the organic and the inorganic with which he had inaugurated this work, a work of whose pointlessness he is now aware.

"'Society' is in fact the missing term of the entire project,"<sup>5</sup> concludes Aronson, who seems to believe that he thus administers an infallible panacea capable of relieving all of Sartre's discomfiture. If Sartre believes that the *praxis* of the roadmender and of the gardener, even if they are reciprocal, "*will always remain separate*,"<sup>6</sup> it is because he chooses to ignore the prior cooperation that unites them even in their separation and that consists in their belonging to a society that comprises estates large enough to require the work of a gardener and public thoroughfares requiring regular maintenance. By degrees, the relation of the roadmender and the gardener expresses the social whole and exists only on its basis. In brief, why does Sartre, proposing to study common action, not begin from the right end, that is, the community? This would have spared him a good many setbacks. . . .

One immediately sees the paradoxical character of this critique, which amounts to reproaching Sartre not for this or that point of his project, but for what is at stake in it. The critique appears as a reaffirmation of the necessity of a hyperorganicism, which Sartre continually refused, denouncing it as illusory. It is apparently less a matter of an internal critique of Sartre's ambition than of a pure and simple opposition to what it entails. Sartre supposedly fails to reach the level of common action . . . but to propose as a remedy what Sartre endeavored to show would inevitably fail is perhaps to attach too little importance to the relentless rigor with which he pursues and sustains his own failure. This latter is perhaps a triumph of thought, and conversely, to try to make it good through recourse to the agency of community or society is perhaps to rely on an apparent plenitude deeply undermined by failure. The sense of the last pages of Sartre's manuscript will accordingly be understood either as the frantic babbling of thought in distress, or as an implacably rigorous and lucid conclusion, one which is perhaps desperate but whose desperation derives from a flawless respect for reason rather than from its collapse. This is a debate that can only be decided if we examine the pages attacked by Aronson, while trying to bring to the fore what is at stake and the way in which the argument progresses.

Sartre places himself in these pages at the level of an *ontological* problematic. He intends to ground therein the *reality* of the dialectic, or, which amounts to the same, the being-real of the totalization of envelopment, that is, of History as it has unfolded in dialectical discourse.

5. Aronson, *op. cit.*, 704.

6. *CDR*, 114. [The French reads: "*elles resteront toujours deux*," and the English translation: "*there will always be two of them*."—Tr.]

The stakes therefore are as follows: to prove that the dialectic cannot be accused of idealism, that it is never simply a method or a theory of knowledge, but that it *is* and that Being is dialectical, that the dialectic has being and that this being is that of Being itself. It is apparently a matter, therefore, of a decisive moment in the economy of the project, at which the legitimacy of the project as a whole is subjected to scrutiny. According to Aronson, this move to the ontological plane, to the quintessential level of philosophical discourse, is only a show designed to mask Sartre's inability to solve the central problem: how can *practical* multiplicities *concretely* become *one* historical totalization? In moving to the plane of the *being* of the totalization of envelopment, Sartre forgets that he has not even elucidated the possibility of this totalization, and proceeds as though, having solved all the problems, he could at last raise himself to this culminating and conclusive stage of thought. This false self-assurance actually conceals a core of absolute uncertainty. . . .

Let us try, then, in order to test this critique, to evaluate the importance of this ontological problematic. Sartre has established that History has a *meaning*, which is its objectification as produced by the historian. If History is intelligible or possesses a *meaning* that the historian can and must grasp, this is because the *comprehension* he summons is practical, homogeneous with all practices, and hence with common, historical practice. The historian comprehends History, that is, gives it a meaning, because he does his work—research, reading of archives, of historical accounts, etc.—through the very movement of temporalization, which is also that of History: the present is illuminated and becomes past on the basis of its self-projection toward the future. The historian's relation to History becomes the internal relation of *two praxes* separated by a temporal lag, and the individual *praxis* of the historian is directly related to the common *praxis* of History to the extent that it is itself enveloped by the common *praxis* of History in progress. The danger of idealism inherent in the status of comprehension is plain to see. How can the historian, who grasps the past comprehensively in giving it a meaning, who is situated by the historical process of his own era, by its methodological prejudices, by the lacunae and the specificities it manifests in its apprehension of the real—how can the historian avoid reducing the being of History to his own, partial point of view, reducing Being to being-known, how can he avoid producing but an idealistic extrapolation of his own limits to the totality of Being?

To put it plainly: what is the status of the *Critique of Dialectical*

*Reason*, of this situated discourse which purports to explain the intelligible foundation of History? Has it no other status than that of a purely formal system? Must it be considered a nominalism? In brief, must one see an irremissible contradiction between situation and enveloping totalization, between situated individuality and History? It is on this question that the being of the dialectic depends, to the extent that—if Sartre's ambition proves justified—this being is Being itself.

Sartre endeavors, then, to show that if History assumes a meaning through the comprehension of the historian, it is certainly not to the extent that this meaning is *relative* to the knowledge gleaned from History and receives its being from it, but, on the contrary, that it is Being itself that expresses itself in knowledge. It is at this point that Sartre begins his "refutation of idealism," that the debate is brought to a properly ontological level, and that Sartre announces that he must confront the question of *the being-real of the being-meaning* of the totalization of envelopment. It is not situated comprehension that reduces the totality of Being to itself, it is Being that opens situated comprehension to the future. That the historian has only a partial view of Being does not prevent this view from being totally true and from bearing the truth of *Being*. To be sure, any epistemological practice—and, as we shall see, any practice whatsoever—is limited by an *external ignorance*: techniques of apprehension not yet invented, the totality of future socio-cultural relations whose advent will allow a transformation of historical disciplines. But far from enveloping Being by reducing it to itself, this basic limitation of knowledge marks its own envelopment in the enveloping totalization. The situated character of comprehension does not make Being relative to being-known, but is the guarantee that knowledge is always relative to Being. The limitations of a given historical synthesis necessarily inscribe it at the heart of future historical syntheses, to the extent that the latter will themselves be conditioned by the modifications of History in progress.

But it is also necessary to understand the reverse of this movement. If, in the relation of the situation to the totalization of envelopment, that is, to History, the situation has no autonomy of being that would allow of its reducing the whole of Being to its being-limited, neither does Being have any such autonomy, nor is there any supreme envelopment of all situations that would reduce them to being but epiphenomena without any consistency of their own, entirely determined by the whole that envelops them. The being of the totalization of envelopment is nowhere but in what is made of it by situated comprehensions extending beyond themselves. Being is everything the situation is not, the

external limit of situated comprehension. But the latter can be limited only inasmuch as it is internally affected by its limit; a limit purely exterior to the limited would annul itself, since the limited is limited only by encountering its limit, by being internally related to it, without which the limit could not constitute the positivity of the limited. The external limit of the situation is therefore its internal limit as well, already exceeded by that which it should contain. That which limits—exteriority or envelopment—has no autonomous being by which it would dominate enveloped situations, but is only the movement by which those situations are transcended, or by which, outside themselves within themselves, they push back the borders of this false outside by expanding their interiority. Thus, the relation is two-way: exteriority is only the movement by which interiority constitutes itself by interiorizing its limit, interiority is only the movement by which exteriority is repelled. Situated comprehension is at once enveloped and enveloping, and the totalization of envelopment at once enveloping and enveloped, in an indefinitely revolving spiral where each term expresses the vanishing perspective immanent to the other. *Made history*, the result of a given historical synthesis, *meaning* as the sedimentation of common *praxis*, is therefore also *history in the making*, just as history in the making ceaselessly makes of itself the past of what it is and deposits itself in totalizations enveloped by its own movement. Knowledge is the *being-past* of Being, or the movement by which Being becomes what it has been.

At present, it is proven that situation and totalization of envelopment, rather than being contradictory and mutually exclusive, so that a situated point of view could never constitute more than an ideal extrapolation unduly claiming to say the last word on being, are in a relation of mutual envelopment and reciprocal implication. What indeed emerges at this stage of the argument is that there is an unavoidable relation between situation and totalization. But the problem has only slipped back a notch: although, in a dialectical logic, situation and totalization are inseparable, this does not yet prove that *the logic of this relation itself* is not idealistic, or that this relation as it has been logico-dialectically established, as the very being of *praxis*, is not actually cut off from the being-real of Being. In other words, even if the partiality of the situation is eliminated in favor of the double, spiral envelopment of situation and totalization, nothing yet says that this double movement itself is anything other than a "theory of knowledge," one which is simply a bit more flexible and supple than others, but which for that does not reach the fundamental level of Being. The question therefore is

raised again: "What matters for us is to determine if we must view the totalization of envelopment through a positivistic nominalism or in the perspective of a radicalizing realism."<sup>7</sup> It is clearly the second way that Sartre chooses, and to test its pertinence he uses—still affirming paradox to the extreme—what seems poles apart from realism, namely, myth or science fiction. An interplanetary traveler—a Martian—astonished, watches humanity bustling about with a relentlessness whose inanity it does not for a moment perceive. This Martian is the expression of the superior indifference of Being to the surface disturbances of the human world. He grasps human activity and its totalizing claims as mobilizing an infinitely limited sector of Being, a proof of that limit being the knowledge the Martians acquired long ago of a cosmic catastrophe whose advent will reduce humanity to dust. For this absolute witness, how could human *praxis*—the relation of mutual envelopment between situation and totalization—not appear as an absurd commotion having nothing to do with the most profound being of Being, how could it not seem quite similar to the abrupt movements of puppets oblivious to the strings that pull them or to the complacency of the dove that ignores its dependence on the air that bears it? The reciprocal immanence of interior and exterior, of situation and totalization, changes, before the cosmico-synthetic gaze of the absolute witness, into illusion and dream, into absolute exteriority with regard to the absoluteness of Being. In brief, it seems that the Martian, while grasping our ends, does not comprehensively reactualize the movement by which we project ourselves toward them, that he grasps them as pure *exis* and not as *praxis*.

But actually, the absurdity of the bustle of the human anthill for the Martian is itself absurd. Such an external point of view is possible only inasmuch as it becomes internal to what it supposedly looks down upon, as it therefore negates itself, situates itself by the very negation it produces of every situation. If the Martian were absolutely transcendent, really outside of our practical field, he would absolutely not be; if he grasped our *praxis* only as *exis*, he would not grasp it at all. It is clear that the Martian could not see human *praxis* as being-already-past in view of the cosmic catastrophe to come if he did not identify with human ends before differentiating himself from them. Yet this still does not suffice to prove the impossibility of the Martian's transcendence, for he could carry out this identification only in order decisively to detach himself from it, and such would be precisely the definition of the

7. *Manuscript*, 445.

superior point of view. It must therefore be shown that, for the Martian, the simple fact of having to pass through the identification with human ends as with his own exteriority involves him in a relation of definitive immanence with the terrestrial world. The proof of this is easy to come by. In order to be really *extraterrestrial*, the extraterrestrial would have to assert himself through a properly unheard of mode of self-production, befall the world as an absolute strangeness, that is, exhibit an absolute independence in the matter of temporality. Ultimately, his gaze would have to strike the world with the instantaneous and blinding violence of the cosmic catastrophe itself. But if this gaze relates an unveiling of the future and a present unveiled on the basis of this unveiling as already-past, if this gaze effects an opening and a reflective distancing, then the Martian does not do otherwise than the situated and very human historian who turns back upon made history on the basis of that which declares itself in history in progress. If the Martian's operation is identical to that of the historian, this homogeneity, which entitles the extraterrestrial to objectify the *praxis* of humanity, also entitles the historian to objectify the Martian in return. What this means, finally, is that the Martian *is a man* like all and like any, who, in unveiling an as yet unknown future, attests to no absolute transcendence but reveals himself only as an inventor more daring than others: he who has enlarged the practical field by introducing into it the cosmic catastrophe and by adapting past *praxis* to this knowledge, he who has pushed back the frontiers of external ignorance.

By its very absurdity, by its necessarily mythical or fictional character, the myth of the Martian will have served to show the absolute irreducibility of the relation of the situation to the totalization of envelopment. This relation is unsurpassable, and to try to surpass it by locating it in a superior envelopment is always to resituate oneself within it. This relation is Being, and to be is necessarily to be this relation. It is to be noted that one finds the translation of this apparently childish myth in great philosophical theories that are, throughout the critique, Sartre's appointed adversaries: principally Leibniz and Spinoza, and through them every theological or materialist determinism. For these are forms of thought based on the attempt at a radical desituation, on a conception of the relation of situation and totalization, of the parts and the whole, such that the whole always acquires a kind of autonomy or sufficiency of being that enables it to absorb the parts. "There are two ways to desituate oneself in relation to the object: one is to become Nature; the other, less easily detectable, is to refuse the situation as reciprocity. . . . The first desituation leads to the dog-

matism of the outside, the second to positivist idealism."<sup>8</sup> To become Nature or to understand man as a fragment of the adventure of the universe, such is Spinoza's substantialist determinism. Positivist idealism is only a modernization of Leibnizian idealism: the positivist abstracts himself from his object in order to consider it as constituted by a myriad of irreducible punctualities, or *facts*, but at the same time he must, in order to confer a meaning upon his undertaking—which might seem destined to lapse into a pure and simple passivity—assume a horizon of reconciliation, an optimistic progressivism which appears precisely to be excluded by the careful respect for the single, isolated fact. The hand of a God incomprehensibly sorts out from on high the brute incomprehensibility of facts. . . . In Leibniz as well, the supreme Monad harmonized, with a view toward the best, a multiplicity of monadic isolations *sans portes ni fenêtres*, cut off from any mutual relationality.

Both Spinoza's substantialist determinism and Leibniz's theological determinism are characterized by an *absence* of the relation of the whole and the parts, of totalization and situation. In Spinoza this relation is absent through an *excess of immanence*: any distance between the substance and its intensive manifestations is abolished, so that there is no longer a relation but a pure compactness of being, so that what is lacking is that lack of being or that distension in being which is the very freedom of relation. This pantheism of absolute immanence is a dogmatism of the outside, a form of thought consigned purely to exteriority, a ruthless determinism, since the compactness of Being, always fully present in a totalitarian manner in the least of its expressions, reduces the latter to an immediate, fused identity with the whole that excludes any inventive circularity or mutual readjustment. In Leibniz this relation is absent through an *excess of transcendence*: no longer absorbed through excessive proximity in a confusional immanence, but broken by the infinite distance that separates its terms, a relation so dissociated and dualized that one no longer sees how it might hold together. On the one hand, there is the infinite dispersion of a-relational monads *sans portes ni fenêtres*, the exacerbation of a principle of atomistic individuality; on the other hand, there is the level of the whole or of God's relating of these monadic entities. Spinoza-Leibniz, two impossible non-relations, each becoming its opposite by the simple fact of its occurrence. That the substance multiplies itself in an infinity of finite self-expressions means that it must never cease leaving itself in

8. *Ibid.*, 446.

order to be itself, that it must exteriorize itself in order to reinteriorize itself, therefore that this pantheism which assumes the immediate, fused identity of the whole of Being is actually mediated by a circularity that is at bottom nothing but the very *life* of nature. And as for the harmony established by the supreme Monad, it is enough to examine it to see it negate itself at once: either there is a relationality of monads, in which case God, in order to produce it, must become internal to them, become their multiplicity, and therefore relinquish his transcendence and become immanent to the monads, so that he is nothing but *their* relation; or else, in the hypothesis of an absolute transcendence of God, who would confine himself to his pure being-exterior with regard to the world, harmony would never be the harmony of the monads and the best of all possible worlds would go up in smoke.

There is no desituation; there is neither Martian, nor substance extending itself unitarily as the whole of Being, nor is there a great operator or divine hand harmonizing from on high the monads or factual punctuality. There is a necessary relation of the part and the whole, or rather of situation and totalization, a relation which is simultaneously Being and the intelligibility of Being. In the end, all the preceding developments lead back to this single conclusion: there is no absolute objectification, no "point of view of the whole"—and moreover, the very expression, contradictory in itself, is enough to reveal its own impossibility. Indeed, how could the whole, if it is everything, abandon itself to that partial activity of taking a point of view on. . . . how could its power of inclusion not be self-sufficient, a full positivity having no need to adopt a perspective on a limited sector of itself. If knowledge as such is the objectification of Being as *meaning* or as being-past, if objectification has no autonomy, no irreducible specificity, but must always become internal to that in relation to which it purports to maintain a relation of exteriority, then it is indeed in a *problematic of Being* that we are involved with the dialectic of situation and totalization and not in a theory of knowledge. Still, it is necessary to produce from this problematic an intelligibility that is not simply negative, that is not defined by what it *is not* (*neither* Spinozist idealism *nor* Leibnizian idealism, *neither* confusional immanence *nor* inaccessible transcendence). It is now a question therefore of clarifying, in its specific originality regarding the idealisms it refutes, the dialectic of situation and totalization, of the part and the whole, as Sartre upholds it throughout the critique.

Sartre wishes in fact to avoid the danger of a further misunderstanding. If one understands things too quickly, it might seem that this di-

alectic is only a mixture of Leibnizianism and Spinozism, their simultaneous mobilization, their contradictory union: at once the whole is the parts (Spinoza) and is not the parts (Leibniz). What else is at issue in the dialectic of the mutual envelopment of situation and totalization than this double movement? Every situated practice is irreducible in its singularity (the monadic universe), and at the same time it is the human totalization or "human milieu" that expresses itself in each of these singularities (the substance multiplying itself in its modes). And yet it cannot be the union of these two idealisms, each refuted for itself, that enables Sartre to escape all idealism. He therefore specifies that although in fact he often uses such turns of phrase or lines of reasoning, although he frequently adopts a certain formalism concerning the relation of the whole and the parts, this must be seen only as a *metaphor* and not understood literally: "This language, as one can tell, is our own, it is the language of all dialecticians, and in fact it presents no danger if one sees in it only a set of efficient, figurative locutions that save time and that cancel themselves in the very act of comprehension. But if one takes it literally, it plunges us back into an idealistic optimism"<sup>9</sup>—into that optimism which considers that the human relation that links the parts to the whole, situated individuals to society, is always and everywhere first. The relaxation of the thought of Leibniz and Spinoza through their mutual balancing is a form of idealism, as is that fluid and circulating double relation through which the whole is and is not the parts, the parts are and are not the whole. It is a humanist idealism, since it is always a question of the *human* project and of its inscription within the total horizon of human realizations. Sartre returns, then, to the original source of his project, namely, the free practical organism and need, and recalls the profound truth of this highly spiritual and ethereal flexibility, to wit, that the latter is always only metaphorical with respect to an eminently concrete relation, one which is linked to a fundamental material rooting.

It is this fundamental materiality of *praxis* that could be clouded by the "levity" of the formal relation. It must therefore be emphasized that this excessively pure relationality is not the substance of the human act, that "the 'substance' of the human act is on the contrary the non-human (or at most the pre-human) to the extent that it is precisely the discrete materiality of each human being."<sup>10</sup>

This does not mean that Sartre returns to a positivist materialism—which is, as we have seen, only a facet of idealism—that he subjects

9. *Ibid.*, 452.

10. *Ibid.*

freedom to a factical given. It is simply a matter of showing the *emergence* of the totalizing relation *at its primary and most elementary level*, that beyond which intelligibility cannot go, that of the very advent of historical humanity. The biological organism is the site of this advent and the absolute guarantee of the *reality* of the dialectic. Sartre then finally develops what he had begun rather abruptly with in the first chapter of the first book of the *Critique*. Humanity cannot survey itself, there is no point of view that might attain to the inhuman while retaining the unifying and synthetic power of the human. But although this elevated inhumanity is impossible, one must affirm the necessity of a prehuman inhumanity which is not a desituation but an a-situation, which is not a superior synthesis but an external dispersion: matter, or the *being-in-itself* of the totalization of envelopment. It is in matter, that is, at the crudest and most opaque level of reality, on a plane of being that seems governed by pure laws of exteriority, that "one must consider as an absolute reality the appearance of practical, toolmaking organisms, with their own temporalization, and the transformation of this sector by the improbable physico-chemical systems these organisms engender."<sup>11</sup> Being-in-itself or unsurpassable factical dispersion cannot be reduced to an inert succession of exterior, material *states*, precisely because it includes those complex systems, highly improbable in light of natural mechanisms, constituted by organisms with their circular structure, their feedback reactions, their relation of interiority to exteriority. This is where the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* began, this is where it ends; and what could be more justified, whatever Aronson may think, since it is here that the *dialectic as such* begins, and here as well that it stops: "It goes without saying that, although the real existence of organic totalities and totalising processes reveals a dialectical movement, the existence of organic bodies can in no way be derived from the dialectic. However biology may develop in future, organic bodies can never be regarded as any more than *de facto* realities; we have no means of establishing their existence by reason alone."<sup>12</sup> The paradoxical tension between situation and totalization that Sartre sustained throughout the text, that tension which is but dialectical discourse itself and whose being-real he now turns back to examine, finds its ultimate and quintessential expression in this *emergence* of the dialectic—the human organism—which is at the same time the *arrest* of the dialectic—the impossibility of establishing the appearance of this organism by reason alone. There is an absolute reality of the dialectic

11. *Ibid.*, 459.

12. *CDR*, 91.

through the absolute reality of the dialectical functioning of the organism, but an absolute contingency of that absoluteness through our external ignorance as to the genesis of this functioning, as to the "why" of this leap out of itself toward itself of being-exterior interiorizing itself as organism.

The dialectic finds the ultimate guarantee of its being-real in this, that far from being a discourse masking the contingency of Being beneath the fluidity of its conceptual perfection, it is radically situated with regard to that contingency by the very inexplicability of its emergence. Thus, just as we established that there was an exterior of every interior *in* the dialectic, so there is an exterior *of* the dialectic itself which prevents it from becoming an idealist overview of Being. But also, just as *in* the dialectic the exterior of the interior was interior to the latter, so the exterior *of* the dialectic is interiorized by the dialectic itself, which constitutes its internal limit. Consequently, if the dialectic interiorizes its outside, there is no difference between what is *in* the dialectic and what befalls it *from without*. In other words, although the dialectical functioning of the organism is limited by the opacity of its own appearance, although it is bounded on all sides by external being-in-itself, it interiorizes in return this being-exterior, modifies it practically, situates it in relation to its own circularity. Or again: the circularity of the organism's activity cannot enclose itself within a limited sector that would not summon the totality of external being-in-itself. Therefore it is indeed the whole of Being that the practical organism totalizes—be this in the mode of a fleeting and inaccessible whole—and hence the totalization of envelopment *is* absolutely: Q.E.D. But we must still provide the ultimate demonstration of this, which Sartre develops through the notion of *need*.

"Thus, the reality of the totalization stems from the presence of these two absolutes and from their reciprocity of envelopment."<sup>13</sup> The two absolutes are external being-in-itself and the interiorizing activity of the practical organism. What must finally be reached is the intelligibility of this apparently untenable paradox: that of *two absolutes*. It seems that the absolute, in order to be absolute, must be total and unitary, that a duality of absolutes could only reciprocally limit itself and therefore cease to be absolute. In brief, this question must be answered: how can *two* absolutes guarantee, by their dual presence, the absolute reality of the totalization, when their very duality appears to imply that they mutually condemn themselves to contingency and can

13. *Manuscript*, 466.

therefore found nothing absolutely? What must be understood is that these two absolutes are of course contingent, but that this contingency in no way detracts from their absoluteness. *Need*, which is closest to the emergence of organic practice outside of external being-in-itself, is what gives a contracted, purified visibility to this absolute duality of the absolute. "Everything is to be explained through need." Through need, the external absolute of scarcity or the threat of death that weighs upon every organism, and the internal absolute of the reproduction of organic life, confront each other absolutely. Through it, that which—in a universe where scarcity was masked by a *relative* material abundance—was lived as an uninterrupted, cyclical immanence of life to nature, of nature to life, is suddenly revealed as antagonism and *exteriority*: nature is what represents to the organism its impossibility, the organism is what represents to nature the impossibility of that impossibility. This is the moment at which the two conjoined absolutes seem to impose upon themselves a mutual limit or to rob each other of their absoluteness, it is the moment at which the tense relation between the organism and the universe seems to explode. Yet such an explosion cannot take place, for it would in fact abstract the unsurpassable exteriority of the organism. The organism cannot, in response to the need that assails it and enjoins it to negate the negation imposed upon it by the world, produce from itself, through purely organic processes, what will fill the gap; the simple fact that it is "assailed" by need is enough to prove this, for if the organism had a self-sufficient power of synthesis, it would be a pure, self-creative springing forth, never letting itself be affected by any negativity. The duality of the two "states of matter,"<sup>14</sup> external being-in-itself and the practical organism, that duality which constituted the absolute duality of the absolute of Being, is to be found therefore *within the organism*, as the necessary relation it must maintain with the inorganic in order to reproduce itself. The organism must become inert in order to act upon the inert, or it chooses directed passion as a means of action. What this means is that, through the very limit that being-in-exteriority imposes upon it, through the break that this latter introduces into the smooth harmony of life, the organism, in moving from function to action, from reproduction in immanence to the expanded implementation of means in view of ends, interiorizes this being-exterior or expands into a totalization that extends to the very confines of the universe. The organism, echoing *within itself* that scission of the two states of matter which is the absolute of Being,

14. CDR, 87.

comes to be such that it can absolutely totalize Being, such that its own movement of self-pursuit is the movement of Being. Thus, the two absolutes do not exclude but rather imply each other *to the extent that organic interiority is its own exteriority*. It is to be noted that this mediation required by the practical organism does not relativize the absoluteness of being-in-itself, since it is only when provoked by it, when threatened by scarcity, that the organism will become the duality it is and thus project itself in an action that totalizes Being itself. The organism has no *de jure* privilege (this would be yet more idealism), there is simply the *de facto* impossibility of freeing ourselves from the absolute fact of organic circularity, the impossibility of claiming that it is not through interiority that being-exterior befalls us. But being-exterior is everywhere, it is the very depth of our practice, the infinitely infinite relations our practice forms with the whole universe, the necessary horizon of its movement.

It is thus shown that the two absolutes, by the very limits they impose upon each other, by the "contingentization" each attempts to inflict upon the other, reciprocally propel each other back into their absoluteness, in a spiral which is but the totalization of envelopment or Being itself. Let us try now to assess the significance of all these developments with regard to our starting point, namely, Aronson's critique of Sartre. This critique was twofold: it concerned at once the text of the manuscript whose development we have attempted to reconstruct and Sartre's general ambition, the text being denounced as redundant and quasi-neurotic, the ambition as impossible, the second denunciation supporting the first. In trying to follow closely the meanderings through which Sartre delimits more and more precisely, from the most abstract to the most concrete, from historical knowledge to organic reproduction, the double envelopment that characterizes the totalization of envelopment, we have perhaps already invalidated the first critique. Invalidating the second will be easier as a function of the distance already covered. This critique holds that the agency of society is the "missing term" of the *Critique*. To be sure, it is missing, but only in the sense that this lack is not the sign of any failure, and expresses the movement of the mutual envelopment of the two absolutes, that is, of the totalization as Being itself. He is not an idealist whom one thinks to be. According to Aronson, Sartre idealistically abstracts the material infrastructure of society, the whole concrete play of the social relations of "prior cooperation," when, undoing the totalization he has just produced, he breaks the reciprocity of the *praxes* of the roadmender and the gardener with this irrevocable verdict: "they will always remain separate." But what

sort of concrete, material infrastructure would this be that would bring the two men together in an indissoluble community? Does it not dangerously resemble an otherworldliness of ends in themselves, a fantastic domain of pure recognition, of the "communication" of minds"? Does it not deny the very being of matter, namely, discontinuity? Is it not a pretext masking a kind of Leibnizian or idealist-positivist aspiration to harmony? What could be the difference between preestablished harmony and "prior cooperation"? As for the supposed impossibility of Sartre's project, we have seen that it was the necessary condition of its own possibilization. Now that the dialectical relations of situation and totalization have been elucidated as relations of *being*, the task of understanding common *praxis* on the basis of constituent *praxis* becomes implacably coherent. The internal bond that ties the interiority of the organism to its exteriority, to the very depth of the universe, makes possible the being-real of its attempted totalization of Being. Stalin's *praxis* is internally linked to that of his era and of his society, according to the double, contingent absoluteness of envelopment already evoked, just as *Madame Bovary* concentrates and expresses the whole drama of 1848. Not only are there singular absolutes, there are *only* singular absolutes, totalizing by their very situation, "programs" summarizing in a foreshortened temporalization the development of a broader, historical temporalization. Enveloping-enveloped, enveloped-enveloping, we cannot attain to any realm of recognition, we can but infinitely pursue the broken relation of totalization. No, matter is not yet immaterial, no, "we are not angels and we do not have the right to understand our enemies, we do not yet have the right to love *all* men."<sup>15</sup>

Translated by Thomas Trezise

15. Sartre, *Saint Genet: comédien et martyr* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), 202.



## ALIENATION IN THE LATER PHILOSOPHY OF JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

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What has become of the Sartrean conception of alienation since the later Jean-Paul Sartre's attempted rapprochement between his earlier existentialist philosophy and Marxian philosophy? For the early Sartre, alienation was an ontological category rather than a social one; it was an immutable metaphysical condition of human existence rather than a surpassable historical condition. Can this still be the case in light of his synthesis of existentialism and Marxism given their apparently divergent philosophical anthropologies? Aside from a vital exploration of his theory of man, upon which his conception of alienation is necessarily based, nothing can be more essential to our efforts to understand Sartre than a clarification of what he actually means when he speaks of "alienation." Unless we can elucidate the meanings entailed in that notion we can hardly make much progress in our study. Thus it seems appropriate that we begin with an act of clarification, and that we begin this with an examination of how Sartre uses the notion of alienation in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

In his book, *Sartre and Marxism*, Pietro Chiodi offers one of the broadest possible definitions of alienation. In the most general way, alienation can be defined as the process whereby someone or something (for Marx, nature itself is involved in human alienation) is constrained to become "other" than that which it properly is in its being. Inasmuch as it implies "becoming other," the notion of alienation presupposes in every case, the notion of alterity.<sup>1</sup> This, of course, is very general, and cannot begin to plumb the various levels of meaning entailed in the concept of alienation. However, it is basically valid as a broad working definition. We shall certainly see how alterity (or "otherness") is essential to Sartre's conception of alienation. But there is conceivably more than one possible mode or source of alienation, and thus more than one way in which otherness can afflict human existence.

From the beginning we can notice more than one sense of the Sartrean notion of alienation, which is itself bound up with other related and frequently indistinguishable notions such as counterfinality, alterity, anti-dialectic, the practico-inert, seriality, praxis, etc. At least two essential forms of alienation are discernible in Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, both of which entail the condition of otherness. In one sense, Sartrean alienation is historical and basically a consequence of exploitation and oppression. In another, deeper sense, alienation seems to be structurally rooted in human existence (now conceived as praxis) and in man's fundamental relations with the world and others. The former seems more or less identical to Marxian conceptions of alienation. But the latter mode of alienation is more fundamental and is reminiscent of the classical existentialist view of alienation as an immutable metaphysical condition of human reality. It is indeed the very foundation of historical alienation, the necessary condition of the possibility of its existence.

Sartre speaks of the need to elucidate the "formal structural conditions" of alienation which he thinks discernible "without reference to concrete history." By this, he means a dialectical investigation of "alienation as an a priori possibility" of human praxis which constitutes the basis upon which "real alienations" are found in concrete history. Moreover, Sartre claims that it is inconceivable that human activity should be alienated or human relations reified "if there were no such thing as alienation and reification in the practical relation of the agent to the object of his act and to other agents."<sup>2</sup> What we have is a kind of relation constituted by praxis; a relation of the human agent to Other "through the thing," and to the thing through the mediation of Others. It is here, Sartre claims "that we shall be able to discover the foundations of all possible alienations."<sup>3</sup>

Thus we have at least two notions of alienation. There is the "real" alienation of concrete history, which for Karl Marx is alienation per se and in its totality. But for Sartre there is a more fundamental form of alienation. For if the reification in the practical relations of the human agent to Others and to the object of his action is not identical with historical alienation — and it cannot be since here it is the essential condition for historical alienation being possible or even conceivable — then it must be ontologically prior. And if the mediation of our relations to Others by things, and to things by Others, is the foundation of all alienation, then we come close to an experience of *déjà vu* with the classic existentialist view of alienation as an ontological condition. For those relations are constituted by praxis itself. Moreover, praxis

increasingly becomes the definition of human beings as was “project” and “pour-soi” in *Being and Nothingness*. And Sartre has already asserted that alienation is an “a priori possibility” of praxis, and not only an historical condition as Hegel and especially Marx would prefer.

Alienation as an “a priori possibility” of human praxis presupposes the capacity of the human being to become reified by means of his own free action. The “constituent dialectic” find its limits within its own activity and is transformed into an anti-dialectic (a dialectic of passivity) – which Sartre describes as the ‘moment of intelligibility corresponding to a praxis turned against itself as it is reinstated as the permanent seal of the inert.’<sup>4</sup> This anti-dialectic, this “dialectic against the dialectic” also reveals the series as a type of human collective existence and “alienation as a mediated relation to Others and to the objects of labor in the element of seriality and as a serial mode of existence.”<sup>5</sup>

Seriality itself is characterized by the predominance of worked matter over human relations, while series is a kind of human collective (mediated by things) with no internal structure except otherness. Thus it is virtually a prototype of the Sartrean version of alienation in human relations. A paradigm case of a serial relation which Sartre uses to illustrate seriality is that which holds between members of a collection of people waiting at a bus stop. Imagine a queue of people at a Saint-Germain bus stop. They are not turned toward each other but to an exterior object, namely the bus. The bus is the only common aim they can be said to have, and they are united as a collectivity only through it. Yet they are essentially in solitude. With respect to one another they are like identical, interchangeable units. Each is simply another person waiting for the bus. The fundamental relation between them as members of the series is “otherness.” But the series is nonetheless the result of human action. They are part of what Sartre calls the “practico-inert.”

At one point Sartre described the practico-inert as the equivalence between alienated praxis and worked inertia.<sup>6</sup> The collective relation to nature, constituted by human praxis (especially labor), aided by tools, produces “worked matter.” When human beings act upon their environment their activities leave traces: transformed landscapes, monuments, artifacts, buildings, etc. These become part of their environment and that of their descendants. They are derived from human praxis but they are now encountered as part of the “totalized totality” of the material world, i.e. as inert. Since they are simply given and do not necessarily correspond to the needs of those who encounter them

they are often experienced as alien. Yet what are they but human actions objectified? This “alienated objectification of individual and collective praxis,” is, especially in the limit where it is simply encountered after a lapse of time, what is meant by the practico-inert. More generally, it entails the whole external world of both the material environment and human structures – the formal rules of language, public opinion molded by mass media, or any “worked matter.”

The practico-inert, as the center of serial activity, constitutes a limiting condition for praxis. The practico-inert is our freedom exteriorized (the “exteriorisation of interiority”). It generates a forceful experience of alienation, in which the action of a person returns to him in the form of Other. This is the character of all praxes where one is objectified in something outside oneself, thus discovering oneself as Other in the totalized object.<sup>7</sup> For the practico-inert is the product of action; it is past praxis become reified.

What should be obvious by now is that praxis often creates its own inertia. Our choices and actions have consequences which are what they are regardless of our intentions, and which frequently range far beyond our capacity to anticipate. Our intentions (always embodied in actions) become objectified and externalized in forms where they are barely recognizable and may even become counterfinalities. “The consequences of our acts always end up escaping us,” Sartre claims, “since every concerted enterprise, as soon as it is realized, enters into relations with the entire universe, and since the infinite multitude of relations goes beyond our intention.”<sup>8</sup> Free actions frequently spawn facticities which turn back upon freedom, modifying in results the purposes of action. According to Sartre in “Materialism and Revolution,” the “act in being realized, undergoes the pressures of the world’s real forces which deform it and render it unrecognizable to its very author.”<sup>9</sup>

This phenomenon is described by Sartre as “primitive alienation” (or “fundamental alienation”). It involves the influence of materiality in the inversion of our praxis. In *Search for a Method*, Sartre spoke of the “permanent possibility” that an end may be inverted or “transformed into an illusion,” while claiming that the “notions of alienation and mystification have meaning only to the precise degree that they steal away the ends.”<sup>10</sup> In the *Critique*, he speaks of the returning of a “*stolen* praxis to man in the form of a counter-finality” which results from a “type of passive action which materiality as such exerts on man and his History.” Here the “pressures of the world’s real forces” in the form of a kind of “passive activity” of materiality becomes the means by which praxis is originally inverted into an anti-praxis and becomes Other. Hence Sartre writes:

...What has never been attempted is a study of the type of passive action which materiality as such exerts on man and his History in returning a stolen praxis to man in the form of a counter-finality ... History is more complex than some kinds of simplistic Marxism suppose; man has to struggle not only against nature, and against the social environment which produced him, and against other men, but also against his *own action as it becomes other*. This type of primitive alienation occurs within other forms of alienation, but it is *independent* of them, and, in fact, it is their *foundation*. In other words, we shall reveal, through it, that a permanent anti-praxis is a new and necessary moment of praxis.<sup>11</sup>

Praxis, simply insofar as it is free purposeful activity, becomes open to reification or alienation because its purpose can always be lost in execution or in the consequences of the action of the agent. Alienation is an ontological possibility intrinsic to the very being or structure of praxis. But praxis becomes alienated in actuality through man's practical relation to the object of his action, his practical relations with materiality and, as we shall have reason to mention again, in relations to Others mediated by materiality especially as marked by scarcity. This primordial alienation cannot be a mere product of history, since it is the result of the effect which materiality as such exerts on history. And the "materiality as such" which has this effect on man and history cannot be merely the "historical material conditions" in the orthodox Marxist sense of the historically developed "relations of productions." Sartre seems to be speaking of a fundamental relation of the human being qua human with the world which expresses itself in labor and whose alienation is the ground for the kind of alienation in "concrete history" which appears in certain historical productive relations. And inasmuch as it is a matter of inverting praxis — praxis stolen by the materiality of the world and transformed into counterfinality — then it is both praxis and materiality, subject and object which are constitutive of a primordial alienation in human experience. Alienation appearing first as an "a priori possibility" of human praxis becomes actualized as a virtual necessity in praxis' practical relations with matter.

Now the practical relations of man with materiality in which he effectuates his own self-externalization in praxis is designated by Sartre as "objectification." With this notion he further develops his own conception of alienation and his distinction between the two modes of alienation. Objectification, as that which is carried out by a subject, is itself a source of alienation. Sartre even goes so far as to say that

“objectification is alienation” and designates this a “primitive alienation” which at first “does not express exploitation ... but rather materialisation by recurrence.”<sup>12</sup> He further explains that:

Although exploitation as alienation is inscribed in materiality with its own characteristics and mingles there indissolubly with alienation by recurrence, the latter cannot be reduced to the former. The former defines the relation of *forms of production* or productive forces in a concrete historical society; the latter ... is a permanent type of separation against which men unite, but which attacks them even when united.<sup>13</sup>

So it appears that by alienation in “concrete history,” Sartre has been thinking of historical forms of exploitation rooted in certain productive relations while, on the other hand, the alienation which is structural to human praxis is, insofar as it entails “becoming-other” of human actions, designated by Sartre as “primitive alienation.” But this primitive alienation actually occurs only in the practical activity of praxis on materiality. The latter is termed “objectification,” and as such, is also identified with recurrence. In the *Critique*, Sartre describes recurrence as the “totalization of series.”<sup>14</sup> And in general, the notion of recurrence seems to denote the process of serial mediation. In light of this, Sartre has nearly established an identity between primitive alienation and seriality by identifying primitive alienation with a recurrence born of objectification. The separation among men which he thinks typical in the condition of alienation by recurrence is precisely the separation that characterizes serial relations, insofar as relations mediated by things possess no internal structure aside from alterity. Thus Sartre writes that “the absolute separation is when individuals as products of their own product (and therefore as passive and alienated) institute relations among themselves.”<sup>15</sup>

Seriality emerges from the mediation of things and of human relations by things. But this is the result of objectification — especially in the form of human labor — which Sartre calls “the original praxis by which man produces and reproduces his life.”<sup>16</sup> But as a result of this process, man “sets himself in opposition to himself through the mediation of the inert.”<sup>17</sup> He “makes himself an instrument” by objectifying himself in action upon materiality, and for this reason is unable to regard himself (much less the Other) as simply an end in himself. For he appears as Other in his objectification, as an object. And so Sartre writes that the meaning of human activity or labor is that “man is reduced to inorganic materiality in order to act materially upon mat-

ter."<sup>18</sup> Man is thus subject to that "materialisation by recurrence" which Sartre identifies as part of primitive alienation. Thus do the human being's relations with himself and others become initially reified.

What is also noticeable is that Sartre emphasizes that "exploitation as alienation" is inscribed in materiality with primitive alienation by recurrence. The two are bound together, though not identical. In human existence as we know it, one never experiences them separately. Yet the latter is not reducible to the former, since it is "permanent" while exploitation is historical and presumably eliminable. Materialisation by recurrence is a permanent possibility (if not necessity) of human praxis. Materiality itself is essential to the exercise of praxis. But matter always has the capacity of inverting praxis and reifying our relations with others. Hence Sartre writes that "alienation becomes the rule of objectification in a historical society to the extent that materiality, as the positive presence of worked matter ... conditions human relations."<sup>19</sup> But this occurs only with human agency and then is possible in any conceivable historical-social context. Thus Sartre writes:

At this level the real foundations of alienation appear: matter alienates in itself the action that works it, not because it is a force nor even because it is inertia, but because its inertia allows it to absorb ... labor power ... and then turn it against everyone ... The inertia and material exteriority of objectification mean that, whatever else human relations may be, it is the product that defines men as Others and constitutes them as another species, as anti-human; and that it is in the product that people produce their own objectivity, which returns to them ... and conditions them as Other. Historical society could not produce itself through class struggles if the praxis which has been detached from it did not return to men as an independent and hostile reality — not only in the context of the capitalist process, but also at every other moment of the historical process.<sup>20</sup>

Sartre goes on to emphasize that it is only within the fundamental relation of man to the world, and upon the basis of a more fundamental alienation within that relation, that there is any possibility of the "capitalist process" constituting itself as one of the possible historical moments of alienation.

A noticeable pattern can be discerned here. It is in the context of the fundamental relation of man and world, praxis to materiality, interiority to exteriority, and implicitly subjectivity to objectivity that one finds a primordial alienation that is the foundation of all alienation

in history. Matter repeatedly appears as the negation of man. Its inertia absorbs human labor, and its exteriority apparently threatens to usurp human interiority. The product, a result of human action on materiality in objectification, becomes the source of objectivity which afflicts men with otherness. Possibly objectivity is a limit to human subjectivity in the mode of praxis which is reified in the objective. But there is another characteristic of man's relation to materiality which we have barely mentioned.

One of the very important and enigmatic elements in the inverting of praxis and the making of alienation "a rule of objectification" is the Sartrean notion of scarcity. We have mentioned it in passing. Since Sartre greatly emphasizes its importance it seems appropriate to make a few comments now upon its role in human alienation. Scarcity is experienced as part of man's active relation to the world, and is a source of the reifications that occur in human action and the strife that afflicts human relations. At one point, Sartre makes the very strong claim that scarcity "is the abstract matrix of every reification of human relations in any society."<sup>21</sup> This would suggest that it is part of a more fundamental alienation than that of exploitation. Moreover, Mark Poster in *Existential Marxism*, claims that for Sartre, scarcity, or the "mediation of scarce matter" in human affairs, is the original source of exploitation as well as violence and "evil."<sup>22</sup> This is not altogether unproblematic, and we shall have to examine it later.

Sartre does affirm that scarcity is a "univocal relation of each and all to matter."<sup>23</sup> But we must keep in mind that matter by itself does not really produce a relation among men, and is only relevant after having received its "seal of unity" from human projects. Matter is unified by means of human acts and does not (by itself) possess an inherent force independent of men's projects. This unification of matter, which is part of the whole process of world transformation by praxis is, as such, designated by Sartre as "totalization." It is only in light of the end of a totalizing praxis that scarcity can appear. The reason that we can understand the concept of scarcity in Sartre is because for him it is based on worked matter. Gold, for example, is pure materiality, a passive substance which becomes scarce only after having become significant *vis-à-vis* human projects. Scarcity in this context is produced, and is "transmitted to matter through men and returning to men through matter."<sup>24</sup> Scarcity is said to be a basic relation to nature, but is nonetheless constituted by man.

It is a source of conflict in human relations insofar as those relations are mediated by materiality. In the context of scarcity, each individual,

when he consumes an object, implicitly consumes it against everyone else. Scarcity means that some of a human group will be determined as "expendables," while between groups, each will see the other as a threat to its survival or satisfaction. Thus man's "own activity is turned against him and returns to him as Other," says Sartre. "Through socialized matter and through material negation as an inert unity, man is constituted as Other than man. Man exists for everyone as non-human man, as an alien species."<sup>25</sup> Consequently, there is sharp social conflict. In the context of scarcity, the mere existence of everyone becomes a threat of death for one another. It is partly due to scarcity that a man's "relation to the Other insofar as it comes from matter is a relation of exteriority,"<sup>26</sup> rather than interiority.

But just how fundamental to alienation is scarcity? Is scarcity merely an historical condition? Or is it intrinsic to man's fundamental relation to the world and Others? I do not find Sartre altogether clear on this and there is much wavering. Mark Poster claims that scarcity is the "foundation" of alienation. At times that seems plausible, but not always. For example, Sartre states that scarcity "is a *fundamental* relation of our History." But he also says that it is a "*contingent* determination of our univocal relation to materiality."<sup>27</sup> It would seem that scarcity would not be merely contingent to our relation with the world were it an ontological condition. He does say that scarcity is universal, but there is no reason why that which is universal cannot also be wholly historical. Scarcity may be a fundamental relation of our history. But we have seen that for Sartre it is not History which is most fundamental to his concept of alienation. Ultimately it is praxis which is the foundation of History. Unless scarcity is somehow intrinsic to praxis, i.e., structurally constitutive of human existence, it can hardly be the foundation of alienation.

Aside from describing scarcity as contingent to our relation to materiality, Sartre clearly states that it is altogether possible to conceive of "a dialectical praxis, or even of labor without scarcity." And yet the inversion of praxis and "the counter-finalities of matter would still necessarily subsist."<sup>28</sup> But if both the absence of scarcity and the continued alienation of praxis are conceivable, then it is hardly possible that Sartre can consistently consider scarcity as the ultimate foundation of alienation or a permanent feature of human mediation of materiality. Now Sartre does say that with the disappearance of scarcity, "our quality as men" would disappear insofar as this quality is historical.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, he says that to assert that our History is a History of men is to say that "it is born and developed within the

permanent framework produced in the field of tension produced by Scarcity.”<sup>30</sup> Here he does speak of a “permanent” framework produced by scarcity. This may be taken to imply the permanence of scarcity, and permanence may seem to suggest a fundamental status for scarcity. But just how permanent is scarcity? Why can we not surpass our History as we have hitherto known it, relegating it (as does Marx) to pre-history, and leave it along with scarcity in what would then be considered the primitive past or the childhood of the race? That Sartre at least ponders the possibility of this is evident from that famous passage from *Search for a Method*, when he envisions a new philosophy of freedom emerging to supplant Marxism “as soon as there will exist for everyone a margin of real freedom beyond the production of life.”<sup>31</sup>

One statement which might appear to clearly support the view that scarcity is fundamental and ineliminable, is the claim that despite its contingency, scarcity is a basic relation to nature and Others. But basic in what sense? Consider the claim in its context: “The fact is,” says Sartre, “that after thousands of years of History, three quarters of the world’s population are *undernourished*. Thus, in spite of its contingency, scarcity is a very basic human relation, both to Nature and to men.”<sup>32</sup> Here the evidence that scarcity is a “basic” relation is the persistence of hunger and poverty for most of humanity for thousands of years. But surely there is far less extreme deprivation than previously in developed societies, and the overcoming of deprivation in all societies is at least historically possible. If such were accomplished, then what would become of the Sartrean notion of scarcity, unless there were a kind of ontological scarcity intrinsic to human existence? Surely the elimination of scarcity (or its radical reduction to negligibility) would mean the end of History as we now know it, and of our qualities as men insofar as they are “historical” in the current sense. But the surpassing of our old history may mean the development of new human qualities and the elimination of any alienation which derives from scarcity. Sartre is not clear as to whether or not this is possible.

Indeed it is almost as if Sartre both does and does not want to maintain that scarcity is a fundamental condition of alienation. Certainly his claim that it is the “abstract matrix of every reification” in human relations indicates a more fundamental role for scarcity. For this is the language in which he earlier spoke of primitive alienation. Such a view seems implied in his claim that “the origin of struggle lies, in fact, in some antagonism whose material condition is scarcity.”<sup>33</sup> But he continues to speculate about the possibility of the elimination of scar-

city. In the same passages where he claimed that it is conceivable that there could be a dialectical praxis and even labor without scarcity, he also claimed that there is no reason why the products needed by the practical organism (man as praxis) should not be "practically inexhaustible."<sup>34</sup>

Pietro Chioldi points out the tensions and ambiguities in Sartre's position fairly succinctly. Chioldi notes that on Sartre's view, we can generally say that since scarcity renders human reciprocity inhuman, the restoration of relations of reciprocity to their humanity, which is the goal of the socialist revolution which Sartre advocated, calls for the abolition of scarcity. But this makes sense only if scarcity is contingent and historical. On the other hand, to the extent that scarcity is a means by which the relation of alterity is imposed upon social man, and this relation is founded in the statute of human reality itself insofar as this is a relation to materiality, scarcity can be seen as "the necessity of our contingency and the contingency of our necessity."<sup>35</sup> Chioldi concluded that with all his ambiguities, vacillations, and apparent inconsistencies, Sartre has not provided himself grounds for a definitive transcendence of scarcity.

Chioldi may be right, though I also doubt that Sartre has adequately established grounds for the ineliminability of scarcity. Even if scarcity were founded on the ontological statute of human reality, it would share this in common with other social phenomena, including historical alienation. And since Sartre claimed that counter-finality and alterity could persist even if scarcity disappeared, it is far from clear whether alienation would vanish with scarcity. The question of the ontological status of scarcity remains undetermined.

Whatever the ontological status of scarcity, it is important to the theory of alienation insofar as it constitutes man as "Other than man," turning his action against him and returning it to him as Other. By now Sartre's frequently reiterated emphasis on the phenomenon of 'otherness' should suffice to indicate its centrality to his theory of alienation. We noted Chioldi's general definition of alienation as a process whereby someone or something is constrained to become other than that which it properly is in its being. This raises the obvious anthropological question of what Sartre thinks man properly is in his being. But it also raises our present problem viz., the ontological status of alterity or otherness itself. For Sartre, otherness and objectification seem inextricably bound as intrinsic to man's primordial relation to the world. We saw earlier that Sartre designates as "primitive alienation" that experience in which man's own action becomes Other —

which already implies the fundamental status of Otherness. And this alienation he later identifies with alienation by recurrence which occurs only in objectification. Hence his claim that "objectification is alienation." Otherness is experienced in objectification, if not actually identical with it.

But for the experience of becoming Other and losing one's actions in something other to be real, alterity must be a real state and not just a state in which (*à la Hegel*) the self finds an identity to itself in an objectified reality which initially appeared to be wholly Other. This means that both the Other and the material world must be objective realities. The objectivity and exteriority of the world is as real as is the subjectivity and interiority of the human agent. Materiality is at least as persistent and irreducible as was the *en-soi*. While in *Being and Nothingness* "the multiplicity of consciousnesses is unsurpassable," so is the multiplicity of Others in the *Critique* as praxes or "practical organisms" with their divergent projects and totalizations. Both the Other and the world are essential to Sartre's conception of alienation inasmuch as it is through them that otherness afflicts a human agent and his project.

In objectification we have the externalization of the self on the part of the human subject who is alienated by his objectification of himself in something Other. There cannot be the kind of freedom which Marcuse attributes to Hegel, whereby the "subject comprehends all objects, so that their independent objectivity is overcome."<sup>36</sup> There can be no definitive surpassing of objectivity, no escape from involvement with materiality, and no deliverance from the necessity for objectification. Hence there is no escape from otherness, from the primitive alienation which accompanies an inescapable objectification.

Since there is for Sartre a fundamental alienation that coincides with objectification, we are presented with the problem of the relation of his view with the Marxian view of alienation. On Marx's view, alienation does not result from the fact that man objectifies himself, produces objects, etc. — for this is his distinctive character. Alienation occurs when he produces in such a way (conditioned by an oppressive political economy) that his products are at once an expression of his labor power and at the same time not a true expression of his potentialities (or "species-being"). It is in this context that man's products become hostile to him, and even negate and dehumanize him.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed this is the point of Marx's criticism of Hegel's theory of alienation. Marx insists on the need to distinguish between alienation and objectification. Objectification represented for Hegel the finite

stages in the development of *Geist* dirempting itself and overcoming its diremptions. At least in some contexts, Hegel uses the terms “objectification” and “alienation” interchangeably. Even nature for Hegel is a congealed form of *Geist* that must be thoroughly subjectivized when *Geist* comes to full realization.<sup>38</sup> For Marx, objectification is the condition for human material existence. There is nothing about the intrinsic nature of objectification that results in alienation. Objectification becomes alienation only in a certain historical social setting. When man exists in a social situation where the objects that he produces and the “system” in which these are exchanged in such that his products gain mastery over him and dehumanize him, then *this* form of objectification is alienation. Alienation has *no fundamental ontological status*, but is an historical condition, and one of Marx’s chief endeavors was to lay bare the structures of the historical social situations in which objectification becomes alienation.<sup>39</sup>

Since for Marx objectification per se does not result in alienation, a de-alienated condition of human life would hardly be one in which objectification does not take place – which is impossible. Rather, a radically different kind of objectification would occur – one in which the objects that a man produces are no longer the chains alienating him, but the means by which there is free, social, and human expression of himself in his activity.<sup>40</sup> Thus, for Marx, alienation is essentially a social category for understanding “political economy,” and not an ontological category. Alienation is no more or less fundamental than the reality of determinate sets of political and economic institutions and practices. If these are radically transformed (and they can be so transformed) then alienation can and will be overcome.<sup>41</sup> Hence for Marx, there is only the alienation in “concrete history” deriving from exploitation, and no fundamental alienation which could constitute its foundation.

In view of this, probably the most serious charge that Marxists are likely to make against the theory of alienation in Sartre’s *Critique* is that it proceeded to re-think Marxism (after what Sartre calls the “sclerosis” of Stalinism) in such a way that it reproduces within Marxism the Hegelian identification of alienation and objectification against which the Marxist critique is explicitly directed. Chiodi claims that what Sartre has focused his critique upon in the Marxist theory of alienation is the, for him (i.e. Sartre) implausible thesis, of the definitive removal of all alienation.<sup>42</sup>

In light of this, and of Sartre’s efforts to achieve a rapprochement between existentialism and Marxism, how does he himself view his

theory of alienation *vis-à-vis* Marx? There is no extensive discussion of this specific problem, only some sporadic comments. One would have hoped for a chapter from Sartre simply on the relation between his concept of alienation and that of Marx. Still, there is a passage in the *Critique* where Sartre does explicitly pose the problem of the relation between his theory of alienation and those of Hegel and Marx. Sartre writes:

... The man who looks at his work, who recognizes himself in it completely, and who also does not recognize himself in it at all; the man who can say both: 'This is not what I wanted' and 'I understand that this is what I have done and that I could not do anything else,' and whose free praxis refers him to his prefabricated being and who recognizes himself equally in both — this man grasps, in an immediate dialectical movement, necessity as destiny in exteriority of freedom.

Should we describe this as alienation? Obviously we should, in that *he returns to himself as Other*. However a distinction must be made: alienation in the *Marxist* sense begins with *exploitation*. Shall we go back to Hegel who sees alienation as a constant characteristic of all objectification? Yes and no. We must recognize that the *original relation* between *praxis as totalization* and *materiality as passivity* obliges man to objectify himself in a *milieu which is not his own*, and to treat an inorganic totality as his own objective reality. It is this relation between interiority and exteriority which originally constituted praxis as a relation of the organism to its material environment; and there can be no doubt that as man begins to designate himself not as a mere reproduction of his life, but as the ensemble of products which reproduce his life, he discovers himself as Other in the world of objectivity...<sup>43</sup>

Very noticeable is the metaphysical basis for the distinction between Sartre's and Marx's views of alienation. In part, alienation appears here as a necessary relation (that of 'destiny') between freedom and exteriority. The relation between man and things appears as a "relation between interiority and exteriority." And there seems to be a kind of "metaphysical privilege," in Chioldi's words, ascribed to interiority comparable to that given to the For-itself relative to the In-itself in *Being and Nothingness*. Interiority, praxis, subjectivity, freedom, consciousness, totalization and purposiveness are of the human order. Exteriority, materiality, inertness, necessity, objectivity and passivity are of the order of things or the world. And the latter becomes a condition of alienation for the former. To speak of the material realm in which man must objectify himself as a "milieu which is not his own," points out a dichotomy between

subjectivity and objectivity abhorred by Marx. It is not surprising then that man “discovers himself as Other in the world of objectivity,” since that world is metaphysically separated from the human world of subjectivity, as was the *pour-soi* and *en-soi*. And since man must objectify himself — materiality being essential to the actualization of praxis — it stands to reason that objectification entails a kind of alienation (an insurpassable otherness) of man in the world. This is intrinsic to an *original* relation between “praxis as totalization,” or conscious activity and “materiality as passivity.” Hence the realm of exteriority, materiality and objectivity cannot be viewed, like Marx’s natural substratum, as the inorganic body of man, with which man can be at harmony providing his relation to the world is not distorted by civil society. Moreover, it is noticeable that in a footnote translating his ideas back into the language of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre says that the “For-itself, as agent” reveals itself as inert “in the milieu of the In-itself.”<sup>44</sup> Also, there is a “fundamental alienation” deriving from an original fundamental relation between interiority and exteriority, praxis and materiality, which appears in all objectification.

Yet it must be remembered that Sartre distinguished between kinds of alienation. Sartre does not deny “alienation in the Marxist sense” which originates in exploitation. Thus he can agree with Marx that historical-social alienation has no ontological status, and that social causes in the socio-economic and political institutions of civil society are the source of that alienation. But he disagrees with Marx’s view that these are the source of all alienation, a view which implies that there is only historical alienation. Sartre can answer “yes and no” to the question of whether Hegel is right in viewing alienation as a characteristic of all objectification. For there is a “primitive” or “fundamental” alienation which accompanies all objectification as an original metaphysical relation between human interiority and material exteriority. The human being must submit himself to the laws of things (exteriority) in order to master them for his own ends, and he cannot exercise his free praxis except through the instrumentality of inert materiality. “The point is to conceive *praxis* and its result from two *inseparable* points of view,” says Sartre, “that of objectification (or man acting on matter) and that of objectivity (or totalized matter acting on man).”<sup>45</sup> And you cannot have objectification without objectivity any more than you could have freedom without facticity in *Being and Nothingness*. But although alienation is characteristic of objectification, it does not follow that *all* alienation is caused by objectification. Hence Sartre insists that there is some alienation which is due to the domina-

tion of man by man, and which is not identical to fundamental alienation nor caused by objectification. Thus, in agreeing with Marx that objectification cannot be transcended (*aufgehoben*), but also agreeing with Hegel that a kind of alienation does accompany all objectification, Sartre is compelled to acknowledge an ontological alienation, but he is not compelled to regard all alienation as ontological. Hence there are grounds for a partial rapprochement between Sartrean and Marxian notions of alienation, but not for total reconciliation.

## NOTES

1. Pietro Chiodi, *Sartre and Marxism* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1978), p. 126.
2. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (London: New Left Books, 1976), p. 66.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Gila J. Hayim, *The Existential Sociology of Jean-Paul Sartre* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), p. 81.
8. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), p.
9. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Literary and Philosophical Essays* (London: Rider and Company, 1955), p. 222.
10. Sartre, *Search for a Method*, p. 158.
11. Sartre, *Critique*, pp. 124–125.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 89.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 151–152.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
22. Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 230.
23. Sartre, *Critique*, p. 131.
24. Sartre, *Critique*, p. 123.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., p. 125.
31. Sartre, *Search for a Method*, p. 34.
32. Sartre, *Critique*, p. 123.
33. Ibid., p. 113.
34. Ibid., p. 124.
35. Chiodi, *Sartre and Marxism*, pp. 100–101.
36. Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 163.
37. Richard Bernstein, *Praxis and Action* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), pp. 44–45.
38. Ibid., p. 45.
39. Ibid., p. 46.
40. Ibid., p. 47.
41. Ibid., p. 48.
42. Chiodi, *Sartre and Marxism*, p. 91.
43. Sartre, *Critique*, pp. 226–227.
44. Ibid., p. 227.
45. Ibid., p. 225.



## THE DEATH OF THE OBJECTIVE OBSERVER: SARTRE'S DIALECTICAL REASON AS AN EPISTEMOLOGY FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

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The social sciences, true to the English derivative rather than the Latin origin of their name, often mimic the natural sciences in striving for objectivity. While *scientia* merely means knowledge, social science's insistence on knowledge derived from objectively verifiable evidence based on "scientific" laws of cause and effect reflects the nineteenth century birth of much social science research. Yet contemporary social science, ignoring the Heisenberg principle of indeterminacy, still frequently strives to fulfill this nineteenth century scientific ideal of non-involved objective observation — as recent criticism of pioneer anthropologist Margaret Mead's "subjective" reading of Samoan life would indicate. Even Structuralism, which is not "cause and effect" oriented, ignores consciousness in favor of an objective analysis of social structures. This is why Jean-Paul Sartre insists that Claude Lévi-Strauss's work, valuable though it is, must be recast in existentialist terms for full comprehension. While Sartre would certainly agree that one must not substitute novel writing for anthropology, he at the same time would reject Structuralist Michel Foucault's pronouncement that man as an historical subject is dead.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Sartre questions the utility of analytical positivistic reason, determinist or Structuralist, to grasp its objects in the social sciences. What if, Sartre asks, by reducing men to statistical predictions or environmental effects and societies to structural or other relations, the social scientist leaves out the one ingredient which makes individuals and human groups intelligible? This ingredient is exactly what Sartre proposes to restore in *Search for a Method* and *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.<sup>2</sup>

The missing ingredient, as readers of *Being and Nothingness* might guess, is freedom — not a purely abstract freedom which is at liberty regardless of circumstances, but human "praxis"<sup>3</sup> acting as it is acted upon in the world. Human praxis — alienated, oppressed and oppressing,

relating to and creating structures of violence in a field of scarcity<sup>4</sup> – is nonetheless the motive force of human history. Analytical reason is well suited to grasp the objects of the natural sciences, since it is man (dialectically) making himself a human thing in order to grasp the thing world.<sup>5</sup> But to attempt to grasp the social world analytically, from the position of the objective observer, is to deprive it of intelligibility. In the social world, analytical reason can be useful as a moment in the dialectical process; but it will not fully elucidate the objects of study in the social sciences – human individuals, groups, or societies. Sartre's *Search for and Method* and *Critique of Dialectical Reason* propose to provide a critical tool for elucidating that object. I would therefore like to discuss in detail some of Sartre's ideas on sociality and the social scientist, concluding with a summary of their usefulness to the social sciences in general and to my own discipline, psychotherapy, in particular.

Sartre agrees with Engels that “men make their history themselves but in a given environment which conditions them.” Human projects make sense on the face of a particular world; Sartre would not return to the purely interior existence emphasized by Kierkegaard and even more by Jaspers. He would, however, insist on the subjective as a moment in the objectification process – that it is “*the men* who make [history] and not the prior conditions.”<sup>6</sup> To leave out the moment of interiority is to leave out the glue that binds the moments of objective history together. As R.D. Laing and D.G. Cooper put the matter in their book on the later works of Sartre, “Only the project as mediation between two moments of objectivity can account for history, that is, for human creativity.”<sup>7</sup> Hence when I as a social scientist note the various structures, forces, and material circumstances within which individuals and groups make their histories, I only tell half the story. This is perhaps natural, since praxis itself is merely the making of a particular future on the basis of present material conditions. Once that future has been made, it looks determined by the past. Inevitability in human affairs is, however, retrospective, rather than projective; one can always “predict” the past, never the future. Once I have constituted the world as such, it seems inevitable, personally and historically. The social scientist, if he is faithful to his calling, must resuscitate the past praxes inscribed in the material (including the linguistic) world as these relate to present individuals and groups.

The stance of the objective observer looking at human groups as natural phenomena is intolerable for another reason than the fact that human groups are basically different from beehives and human history

from geological processes. This is that such objectivity is impossible, a sham. The objective observer does not exist, since the social scientist, if he does not look at a group as a member of that group, looks at it as a member of another group or groups. The de-grouped single individual, Robinson Crusoe, does not exist. The response of social scientists to this fact of human existence has been either to ignore it or (more recently) to consciously work to minimize the influence of the social scientist's own acculturation. The latter position would, in fact, be the only possible valid position from the viewpoint of analytical reason. From the viewpoint of dialectical reason, however, the sociality of the social scientist is a positive addition, provided he recognizes and uses his awareness of his own insertion into groups and his own intentionality to understand others. This form of understanding Sartre calls "comprehension," the understanding of an (individual or group) praxis in terms of the purposes of its agents. Implicitly, when I act, I comprehend the meaning of my action — whether or not I engage in the bad faith process of mystification or lying to myself about my intentions. Likewise, when I see another act, I understand his actions in terms of his ends — as when I see my friend get up to open a window to make the room less stuffy. Human history, likewise, is partially comprehensible through reconstructing group and individual praxes in terms of their ends. A purely objective observer, say a visitor from outer space, would be at a disadvantage over a human observer in achieving such comprehension.

Comprehension, however, is not sufficient to understanding human history and sociality. Comprehension must be supplemented with "intellection" — not the merely intellectual analysis of analytical reason, but a going beyond individual and group praxes where history itself goes beyond such praxes. It does so in the counter-finalities, processes without authors (because they are authored by multiple praxes), and anti-dialectical revenges of the material world which no one intended. If I am to understand human history, I must understand these as well as human significations — I must understand history as "praxis-process."<sup>8</sup> All this I must do dialectically — that is, I as an experimenter must willingly comprehend that I am part of the experimental system and use this comprehension to approach the object of my study. Dialectical reason, then, is a dialectical knowing of a dialectical object — which can, in fact, only be known dialectically.

What then does Sartre mean by dialectical reason? Obviously Sartre specifically rejects the idealism of the Hegelian dialectic while going beyond the Marxist, though he owes a debt to both. While Sartre con-

siders Marxism the philosophy of the age and accepts the idea that historical materialism provides the only valid interpretation of history and existence,<sup>9</sup> he believes that existentialism (presumably his own brand of existentialism) provides the only concrete approach to reality. Also, while Hegel understands objectification but not alienation and attempts to reduce being to knowing, Marx understands alienation but not objectification and fails to grasp the enriching mediation between knowing and being. Sartre's dialectic transcends these difficulties. Indeed while Sartre criticizes contemporary American sociology for foundering on a sea of theoretical uncertainty while providing riches of concrete information, he criticizes contemporary "Marxist idealism" for liquidating particularity in the interest of theory. For example, in one of those footnotes which provide an instant clarification of his discussion, Sartre attacks contemporary Marxist "idealism" for its non-elucidation of the Russian intervention in Hungary:

I have already expressed my opinion on the Hungarian tragedy, and I shall not discuss the matter again. From the point of view of what concerns us here, it matters little a priori that the Communist commentators believed that they had to justify the Soviet intervention. What is really heart-breaking is the fact that their "analyses" totally suppressed the originality of the Hungarian fact. Yet there is no doubt that an insurrection at Budapest a dozen years after the war, less than five years after the death of Stalin, must present very particular characteristics. What do our "schematizers" do? They lay stress on the faults of the Party but without defining them. These indeterminate faults assume an abstract and eternal character which wrenches them from the historical context so as to make of them a universal entity; it is "human error." The writers indicate the presence of reactionary elements, but without showing their Hungarian *reality*. Suddenly these reactionaries pass over into eternal Reaction; they are brothers of the counter-revolutionaries of 1793, and their only distinctive trait is the will to injure. Finally, those commentators present world imperialism as an inexhaustible, formless force, whose essence does not vary regardless of its point of application. They construct an interpretation which serves as a skeleton key to everything out of three ingredients: errors, the local-reaction-which-profits-from-popular-discontent, and the exploitation-of-this-situation-by-world-imperialism. This interpretation can be applied as well or as badly to all insurrections, including the disturbance in Vendée or at Lyon in 1793, by merely putting "aristocracy" in place of "imperialism." In short, nothing new has happened. That is what had to be demonstrated.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, Sartre objects to the reduction of change to identity in contemporary Marxist analysis, a reduction which makes of Marxist idealism a “paranoiac dream.”<sup>11</sup> What Sartre’s dialectic would do is to provide American sociology a way of conceiving the particularities it often so accurately describes and Marxism a way of knowing the concrete world. As an addition to dialectical theory, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is intended to overcome a weakness in Marxism: theory of knowledge.

Marxist epistemology is weak because it ignores the insertion of the concrete individual into the world. Hence while Marxism explains something important about the world, contemporary Marxism proposes a world of objects inhabited by men-objects moved like robots by the forces of production and exchange. The problem with this position is not its materialism — Sartre accepts subjectivity as a moment in the objective process; rather it is the fact that the world thereby becomes as incomprehensible as the world of bourgeois analytical reason. For example, Marxist theory explains Paul Valéry as a petit bourgeois intellectual whose thinking and writing are explained by his class affiliations. Certainly, Sartre says, Valéry is a petit bourgeois intellectual — but not every petit bourgeois intellectual is Valéry. Sartre’s dialectic would achieve the concrete, presenting us with a Valéry or Flaubert or Genet<sup>12</sup> who are not simply products of class loyalties or class antagonisms, but rather concrete individuals who live their insertion in society in very particular ways.

In saying this, Sartre does not, as some Marxists claim, return to bourgeois liberalism and individualism — we have as much to learn about society from its treatment of Genet as about Genet from his response to society. Rather he goes beyond Marxist reductionism to understand the inevitably social individual in his dialectical particularity and to understand the group as constituted by such individuals to the extent that individuals (through internalization of the external) are constituted by groups. In other words, Sartre would not replace the particular by the universal (Marxist or bourgeois), nor would he reduce all human culture and individual achievement to mere epiphenomena — though he at the same time would not deny that the production of material life in general dominates the development of social, political, and intellectual life. Sartre’s viewpoint, in fact, by allowing for originality in an alienated (in the secondary — Marxist — sense discussed below) society, introduces the possibility of a genuine future culture based on non-alienated reciprocity.<sup>13</sup>

The Sartrean dialectic, then, begins with the individual. No longer an

abstract law of nature or history, the negation of the negation occurs on the most basic level of human praxis. This happens because human beings live the present as a future lack – as the Emperor Constantine, for example, saw on the face of the Roman world of his time the material lack of a new Christian capital in the east. As creatures of need, human beings negate the negation (lack of food, a degree, Byzantium) in the direction of a (future) affirmation (satisfied hunger, the completed degree, the new capital). Not that one does not partially discover one's project in the context of realizing it, nor that the product one ends with is necessarily the one originally conceived. The new fullness is often realized as "counter-finality": One has indigestion, the job one hoped the degree would provide does not materialize, the city is attacked by barbarians – or, as Sartre points out, becomes a repository of Greek culture which undermines the Christian intent of its founding.<sup>14</sup> Indeed the anti-dialectic is worked matter (the "practico-intert"<sup>15</sup>) returning to haunt man in the form of a distortion or reversal of his intentions. An example which Sartre gives is the Chinese peasants who for years cleared forests for farmland, only to become the victims of erosion and floods. The effects of technological development on the environment is another obvious example.

Yet alienation in the Sartrean, not the Marxist sense, is even more basic than the discovery of the anti-dialectic. All objectification is alienation in that I can no longer identify my freedom with my completed project, which drops at once into the world of others and into my past. The universal human project, discussed in *Being and Nothingness*, is the project of achieving the in-itself-for-itself, freedom which is free yet secure in its being – in other words, the "useless passion" of man is the desire to be God.<sup>16</sup> The attempt, however, to identify with my objectification while yet remaining absolutely free (I *am* a banker in the sense that a rock is a rock and yet I am completely free to be anything at all) is doubly doomed: My objectification in the world is no longer my free project, and my free project is always created on the face of a particular world, which includes my past. This alienation from the product I make of myself in the world is primary alienation. As the ontological basis for all other forms of alienation, it cannot be overcome.

Other forms of alienation, secondary alienation, can be overcome. The exploited worker, whose objectification in work is dictated to him by the machine which he animates with his freedom together with the employer who uses him for his own ends, can, for example, band together with other workers to transcend this situation. Objectification itself, in a world where others make one an object and where matter and other

men produce counter-finalities to one's intentions, is a given of human existence. This does not mean, however, that I am justified in reifying the other along with objectifying him. I *must* see him (as he sees me) from the outside; however, if I treat him as a mere instrument, degrading his freedom while at the same time implicitly recognizing it by manipulating him, as the colonialist or the racist or the capitalist do, then I cross the line between objectification and reification. Reification is possible, of course, not because men are things but because they can be treated like things.<sup>17</sup> Analytical reason engages in reification when it conceives of men and human groups as things, ignoring intentionality in favor of the causative power of the environment. This is why analytical reason is the proper epistemology, Sartre says, of capitalism. As R.D. Laing notes, violence can be perceptual and conceptual as well as practical.<sup>18</sup>

In order to avoid conceptual violence, analytical or Marxist, Sartre proposes a dialectic which accounts for actions and processes, substituting the idea of "totalization" for that of totality. In fact, Sartre says the totality in human individuals and groups, like God, does not exist — at least, not short of death, at which time it is totalized by Others. In the social world, there are only totalizations, de-totalizations, re-totalizations. The importance of the totalization versus the totality in Sartrean dialectics cannot be over-emphasized. A totalization is a constantly developing process, supported by individual and groups praxes; it involves the grasp of possibilities not abstractly but concretely as the "presence at the very heart of the particular action" of the "future as *that which is lacking*."<sup>19</sup> A totality is a fictionalized inert whole, the relationship of whose parts can be studied like a dissected frog in a laboratory. The problem is that in both cases the living reality is sacrificed to "scientific" analysis.

To grasp that living reality in human affairs, we must substitute the totalization for the totality — which must now be understood as an (imaginary) future projected whole.<sup>20</sup> We as social scientists must understand that our conceptualization of human individuals, history, society, is a developing interaction between knowledge and being — that the act of knowing itself, like all human activity, is a negation of a negation. Sartre says that "research is a living relation between men" which is itself a moment of history.<sup>21</sup> Hence he asserts that to understand is to change, to go beyond oneself, as the older Sartre came to understand Marxism in a way that Sartre as a student at the Sorbonne had failed to do — an understanding which came out of an encounter with French working class movements and society. In a

dialectical anthropology, then, a totalizing knowledge grasps the totalizations of others in the social field. In fact, Sartre uses the word "totalization" for both the act of totalizing the field and the field totalized. Hence the social scientist would make a totalization of totalizations — defined both as individual and group praxes and as the field totalized by a particular individual or group. In such a use of terms, one encounters the deep connection between consciousness and its objects — a connection which Sartre had elaborated in *Being and Nothingness*.<sup>22</sup> Everyday language also recognizes such connections, as when it refers to *work* both as the act of working and its product. Everywhere man inscribes his meaning in things, in what Sartre calls the practico-inert, matter infused with human meanings as a hammer is infused with the meaning of pounding. It is partially the task of the social scientist to decipher those meanings, to read in the objectification the objectifying praxis, to retotalize the totalization before him.

Where he deals with human groups in the social world, however, the social scientist must go beyond comprehension of individual praxis. He must understand how the individual is inserted into the group. Group praxis is, in fact, a different kind of totalization than individual praxis. The group is neither a totality composed of fixed functions and structures nor a hyper-organism. It is what Sartre calls the "constituted dialectic" to distinguish it from the "constituent dialectic" of individual praxis — which is its only source and sustenance. Sartre's theory of sociality, however, is not a contract theory. Groups arise, solidify, ossify, and decay as human responses to particular material and social conditions — and they are held together in a manner which has nothing to do with anything so deliberately intellectual as a contract.

Since groups originally arise out of seriality, Sartre begins his discussion of "practical ensembles"<sup>23</sup> with a discussion of serial existence. It is, I believe, one of his most important contributions to social theory. A human series is a collective of single individuals relating to a single objective situation. Sartre gives the examples of individuals waiting for a bus, non-unionized workers in a factory, people listening to radio or television, or anti-Semites or Jews in a country dominated by a strong policy or feeling of anti-Semitism. In so far as they relate to their common object, they are solitary, separate, interchangeable, identical. The first individual in the line enters the bus first, not the individual who most deserves or needs to enter the bus (to use only two criteria for differentiation). Yet the individuals in a series are aware of each other, as when I wonder whether I will be able to get a seat on the bus or when I turn off a particular broadcast with which I disagree in disgust

over its possible effect on the other listeners or viewers.

Indeed serial reality, and Sartre notes that there are serial behavior, serial feelings and serial thoughts, is a reality of alterity – of “everyone’s interiorisation of his common-being-outside-himself in the unifying object” as one among many, that is, as the Other.<sup>24</sup> For example, scandal is a serial curse, occurring when I apply to a particular situation the fantasized disapproval of the Other; the “they” of “they think” is everybody and nobody – its locus is always *elsewhere*. Sartre puts the matter this way, “Everyone is the same as the Other in so far as he is Other than himself.”<sup>25</sup> Serial behavior is thus characterized by what Sartre calls “recurrence,” my acting as I know the Other will act because my interest requires me to do so. For example, Sartre discusses price as recurrence:

The price imposes itself on me, as a buyer, because it imposes itself on my neighbour; it imposes itself on him because it imposes itself on his neighbour; and so on. But, conversely, I am not unaware that I help to establish it and that it imposes itself on my neighbours because it imposes itself on me; in general, it imposes itself on everyone as a stable collective reality only in so far as it is the totalization of a series.<sup>26</sup>

To undo this situation, I would have to go in turn to each individual buyer and get his agreement in an enterprise which would be doomed because the moment I moved on to the next buyer, the individual with whom I had made contact would become Other again. In a series, Sartre says, the collective object, while it evokes my behavior on the basis of what I expect will be the behavior of the Other in this practico-inert field, is “an *index of separation*.”<sup>27</sup> The horrifying thought arises that U.S.-Soviet relations may be presently lived as recurrence – with each side acting as Other in response to the Other in a field of scarcity where each lives its own violence as “counter-violence,” believing that the Other is “the one who started it.”<sup>28</sup>

Impotence, in fact, is the bond between members of a series, whether they are factory workers or investors in the free market. Sartre comments that the “celebrated *inexorable laws* of bourgeois economics in the nineteenth century have never been anything but the effect of scarcity appearing in a practico-inert field of serial impotence.”<sup>29</sup> Another example is the Great Fear of 1789, which Sartre uses to demonstrate the way in which a historical process may be motivated by serial impotence. The French peasantry of that time were in a relationship of alterity to Paris – they were the objects, the Parisians the

subjects who were making history. Out of this situation, there arose the Great Fear, which was characterized as a “fear of bandits.” Any events or persons viewed from a distance were thought to be bandits – often described as “Englishmen” or “foreigners” – or the work of bandits. This is interesting considering Sartre’s idea that the Other in a field of scarcity tends to become the anti-human, the alien evil absolute Other. What these peasants were doing, in their serial impotence and in the face of the information gap which existed between themselves and the historical subjects in Paris, was reacting to their situation with a fear of the absolute Other who would make them impotent objects – as in fact the historical agents in Paris might be doing at this very moment.

Sartre’s final example of serial impotence is perhaps his most important. He defines class as “a totalized series of series.”<sup>30</sup> Not simply the working class, but members of all classes experience seriality as a link of impotence in the socio-economic world.<sup>31</sup> It is the capitalist as Other who buys a new machine because his competitors will soon have one, or in order to outstrip them, or because he must keep up with them. The plight of the worker is, of course, more thoroughly impotent – since the capitalist through the factory objectifies himself in his own work. The worker, on the other hand, “feels himself confirmed in his inertia by the inertia of all the Others....the Other [Sartre is specifically discussing the period of the first industrial revolution, to around 1900] is primarily the serial totalization of Others (in which he features as an Other), that is to say, of all those, including himself, who represent for everyone the possibility of being out of work or of working for lower wages.”<sup>32</sup> Sartre concludes that if, as Marx often said, “everything is *other* in a capitalist society, this is primarily because atomisation, which is both the origin and the result of the process [of capital], makes social man Other than himself, conditioned by Others in so far as they are Other than themselves.”<sup>33</sup> Seriality, in the modern milieu of mass media and class conflict, is not freedom (though it is constituted and sustained by human freedom), but counter-finality. Hence Sartre believes that “the worker [and the capitalist?] will be saved from his destiny only if the human multiplicity as a whole is permanently changed into a group praxis.”<sup>34</sup>

Since dispersal creates the impotence of seriality, this impotence can be overcome by banding together in common action. Sartre says that groups “constitute themselves as determinations and negations of collectives”<sup>35</sup> on the basis of need against perceived danger. In other words, it is the *practio-inert* which calls forth group praxis. In the

“group-in-fusion,” which is obviously Sartre’s favorite kind of group, each individual immediately comprehends his own future in the future of the Other. For example, the people of Paris after 12 July 1789 perceived their common danger as the possibility of massacre by the king’s troops. The result was the common action of a group-in-fusion in storming the Bastille. Originally an impotent series, the object of troop massification, the group was “constituted by the liquidation of an inert seriality under the pressure of definite material circumstances.”<sup>36</sup> From the unity of the series, which is always *elsewhere*, the serialized individuals moved to the unity of the group-in-fusion, which is always *here*. It is I as a “common individual,” the member of the group who acts in this way or that to further the group praxis – which, though not the praxis of a hyper-organism, can achieve what is impossible for individual praxis. A single man storming the Bastille would be a madman; a group is the inception of the French Revolution. As such, the group is the negation of a negation – in this case the serialized individual’s perceived impossibility of living if stormed by the troops.

But how does a series transform itself into a group? Why do men in a situation of common danger not simply quarrel over food like dogs, as Sartre notes that they sometimes do?<sup>37</sup> Obviously, individual praxis can grasp the usefulness of acting in concert in particular situations, but this does not explain the whole experience of being grouped nor does it indicate how the group can continue to exist after the crisis has subsided. How, for instance, does it command an individual’s loyalty and duty? Sartre finds the answer in the fact that the group, as a group-in-fusion or in any other form, implies a ternary relationship. In proposing this, Sartre opposes the usual sociological conception of the group relationship as binary: individual-community. The Third, who binds the group together by totalizing the others at the same time that he realizes himself as integrated into the group by partaking of the common danger and the common praxis against that danger, is a positive extension and modification of the Third in *Being and Nothingness*. There the Third unifies the couple from the outside, as an *us object*, thereby making himself the hostile Third to the reciprocity of the duo. *Us objects* still exist in *Critique*, both as individuals and as groups. But within the group the Third is a unifying force, the basis of group solidarity. Neither subject nor object, the Third forges the group as a union of “myselfes,” the *we subject* of common praxis (which, of course, is not a union of consciousness, but rather the product of the individual praxes of various Thirds). Totalizing the others as he is totalized by them as a member of the group, each

Third acts, obeys, commands for the group and demands that the others do likewise. Thus the Third sustains group praxis by his individual praxis. In the group-in-fusion, with its lack of role differentiation, anyone may perform any function – the person nearest the stump becomes the “myself” who urges the others on to the Bastille. In organized groups, the situation changes, though the group in so far as it maintains solidarity remains a union of Thirds.

The Third is also the source of the pledge, implicit or explicit, by which the group seeks to maintain itself once the immediate danger is past. As constituted dialectic, the group, though able to achieve more than the individual in the social field, has a double praxis or work to perform. The group must overcome both external and internal obstacles, must work on the world and work on itself. The flourishing new field of organizational development and group process perhaps attests to the difficulty of this second kind of work. In any case, the work of a group on itself is primarily achieved by what Sartre calls Fraternity-Terror. As a group member, I have certain rights and obligations. Where those duties are difficult or dangerous or perhaps simply onerous, each Third in the group (and I myself as Third) keeps me in line by insisting that I keep my pledge (even if this pledge was given beforehand by my birth into a particular group, as, for example, the pledge of military service by a young male) on pain of death, or what amounts to the same thing, ostracism from the group. As the Third, I wish to count on all the others, and hence I enforce Fraternity-Terror, as the other Thirds enforce it on me. Treason and desertion become meaningful terms simply because of this demand that individual praxis support group praxis – and they are designated as such in order to keep the organic individual acting as a common individual. My pledge to the group is my guarantee against my (future) exercise of my own freedom. As the group is forged by an external threat, it is maintained by an internal threat of violence.<sup>38</sup>

Internal violence is necessary because the negation of seriality from which the group was born constantly threatens to reappear and cause the group to disintegrate. Hence as the group-in-fusion gives way to the pledged or statutory group, the statutory group gives way to the organization, and the organization to the institution. Each of these groups has more structure and more differentiation of function than the last, and each is more invaded by seriality to the point where the institution, especially if it is also bureaucratized, is permeated with seriality. External structure, while it is an attempt at efficiency and control over group praxis, signifies internal ossification. Sometimes

the group solidity is personified in a sovereign or sovereign group, which is supposed to hold the group together. Unfortunately, the sovereign becomes the only subject (although a “common subject”<sup>39</sup>) with the group as his object — that is, he apparently objectifies himself through the group. Hence seriality is reintroduced in the relation of everyone to the king.

Thus we come to understand group praxis as a double negation: the negation of seriality at the same time that it is the negation of an external situation. The balance falls between internal and external violence. Seriality re-enters as the group solidifies and ossifies and individuals lose interest and enthusiasm for its endeavors. The dead institutions which a new generation opposes (or sustains) were once living realities. Hence individual praxis, having constituted the group, becomes the downfall of the institution.

Groups, of course, do not exist and evolve (and Sartre places no order on the evolution and devolution of groups<sup>40</sup>) in a vacuum. Born of a response to the practico-inert or to other groups, they exist in a social field where they struggle and may be transcended by other groups or frustrated by the anti-dialectic of matter. Indeed the dialectic of history includes those moments in which one group attempts to negate another, only to discover itself negated by the other group. An example which Sartre gives is an army in the process of fulfilling a certain plan, only to discover that its enemy has anticipated its plan and used it as a trap. Another example might be a strike which results in the shut-down of a factory. Most often, groups act, react, and interact in various situations which change the practico-inert field in ways which no one intended or could have fully predicted. Throughout all this, human interaction, individual or group, implies reciprocity, the recognition of the Other as intentional, whether this reciprocity is positive or negative or even mystified and denied — as when the racist pretends to believe that the other race is subhuman at the same time that he humanly comprehends and attempts to anticipate the reactions of its members or groups.

Granted, then, that Sartre’s dialectic provides a way of looking at human sociality, how then do we use it as a methodology for the social sciences? First of all, Sartre himself has sketched an outline for a methodology which is in harmony with his epistemology. Despite his criticism of contemporary Marxism, it is from a Marxist writer, Henri Lefebvre, that Sartre draws the outline of his method, which he calls the “progressive-regressive method.” Lefebvre recognizes three moments in studying human groups (for example, the French peasantry)

in a way that preserves their full complexity: (1) phenomenological description — observation informed by experience and general theory; (2) an analytico-regressive moment — a regression backward into the history of the group and its earlier stages; and (3) a synthetico-progressive moment which moves from past to present in an attempt to re-discover the present in all its particular complexity. Synchronic and diachronic, Sartrean anthropology (in the European sense of the human sciences in general) would study human individuals and groups in terms not simply of the material conditions and social structures which they presently live, but the past which they live by transcending it in these particular ways. The meanings inscribed in things, together with the intentionality of individuals and groups in living these particular material and social conditions, would be important to Sartrean history, political science, sociology, anthropology (in the American sense), and psychology. In looking at the past through the progressive-regressive method, human beings would not be reduced to objects in the natural world and human history to the play of natural forces. Rather, in the synthetico-progressive moment, meaning would be placed back where it belongs: at the heart of all human undertakings, individual or group.

I think the usefulness of Sartre's ideas in *Critique* and *Search for a Method* to historians, political scientists, sociologists, and anthropologists should be fairly obvious. In addition to the progressive-regressive method, which is useful in all the social sciences, his ideas on the practico-inert field, on praxis-process, on class struggle, and on reconstitution of history in terms of individual and group praxis would be useful to the historian and the political scientist. His ideas on groups, the Third, constituent and constituted dialectic, and totalization versus totality could be adopted by the political scientist, the sociologist or the anthropologist. But what of the single individual psyche which is the subject matter of psychology? Has it gone out of style with Sartre's abandonment of the emphasis on the individual in *Being and Nothingness*?

As a psychotherapist interested in individual struggle, I must admit that I was at first disappointed with *Critique* in comparison with the psychological riches of *Being and Nothingness*. Now, however, I think *Critique* may be more important than *Being and Nothingness* in providing the basis for a truly human psychotherapy. At least, as a theory of how knowledge can be acquired in the social sciences, it provides a much needed supplement to the "existential psychoanalysis" of *Being and Nothingness*. Interestingly enough, it was two well-known psy-

chiatrists, R.D. Laing and D.G. Cooper, who wrote one of the most interesting books on the later works of Sartre (*Search for a Method, Saint Genet, and Critique of Dialectical Reason*<sup>41</sup>). Writing to Laing in the foreword to *Reason and Violence*, Sartre has this to say,

In addition to your perfect understanding of my *La Critique de la Raison Dialectique*, what attracted me in this and your earlier works was your constant concern to find an 'existential' approach to the mentally sick. Like you, I believe that one cannot understand psychological disturbances *from the outside*, on the basis of a positivistic determinism, or reconstruct the illness as lived and experienced. I also believe that one cannot study, let alone cure, a neurosis without a fundamental respect for the person of the patient, without a constant effort to grasp the basic situation and to relieve it, without an attempt to rediscover the response of the person to that situation, and — like you, I think — I regard mental illness as the 'way out' that the free organism, in its total unity, invents in order to be able to live through an intolerable situation. For this reason, I place the highest value on your researches, in particular on the study that you are making of the family as a group and as a series — and I am convinced that your efforts will bring closer the day when psychiatry will, at last, become a truly human psychiatry.<sup>42</sup>

Obviously, Sartre believes that Laing has applied the principles of *Critique* to psychotherapy. In a BBC interview with Max Charlesworth, Laing himself elaborated on the debt to Sartre which he had previously acknowledged in *Sanity, Madness, and the Family* and elsewhere. *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Laing said, "contained a number of theoretical terms which I found extremely useful in attempting to bring some theoretical order to the phenomena that I was studying in families."<sup>43</sup> Especially relevant to his own work, Laing said, were Sartre's idea of the totalization versus the totality: his theory of groups, the insertion of the individual into groups, and the relationships between groups; his distinction between praxis and process; and his insistence on "retaining a human theory of human beings."<sup>44</sup>

From the viewpoint of psychotherapy, I believe with Laing that Sartre's insistence on retaining, in the face of objectivism in the social sciences, a "human theory of human beings" is his most important contribution. Other psychotherapeutically useful concepts in *Search for a Method* and *Critique of Dialectical Reason* include the concept of "hexis"<sup>45</sup> versus praxis, the idea of the individual as always social though particular, the idea that psychoanalysis is the only method for discovering the insertion of the individual into his class and thereby

into history, the idea that it is a movement toward future meaning which defines human praxis, and the idea that it is not merely material conditions but the past (one's own past and the past of the group) which one lives dialectically by transcending it toward the future. The past, in other words, is part of the material conditions on which "individuals make history."

Sartre uses *hexis* to denote a stable condition which the individual or group perceives as untranscendable. As an example, he cites certain peasants in the south of Italy who, constantly malnourished, live their hunger as *hexis* — they only expect one meal a day or every other day and degrade their physical vitality to live in a state of semi-starvation. An example of overcoming *hexis* is the workers in a factory who, having previously lived semi-starvation wages as "the way things are," organize to overcome this situation through group praxis. Translated psychologically, the individual who learns to live his needs for love, touch, stimulation, acceptance, individuation, or creativity as *hexis* as a child must come to grasp them as praxis. He must cease to degrade himself in these ways. Hence revolutionary praxis can be individual as well as social.

With respect to the individual as always grouped, it seems to me that psychotherapists often ignore the particular world of the individual in favor of psychological structure. Understanding a person's way of living his social class and his groups (including his family group) with their structures of Fraternity-Terror is important to comprehending his individual praxis. Not only this, Sartre's discussion of thought as the thought of the Other, rather than as one's own thought, and of one's actions as recurrence can be important to the de-mystification and de-reification of individual praxis. The importance of the family not simply as an individual entity, but as the vehicle of an individual's insertion into his class, can enrich psychotherapeutic explorations into an individual's past.

Indeed Sartre's discussion of the past and the future as ground and meaning provides, I believe, a major contribution to psychotherapeutic theory, explaining perhaps both the possibility of remaking one's project and the ways in which certain projects seem to have been short-circuited by having no viable future (leading to the creation of a fantasy future). The way in which an individual lives his past dialectically is, of course, one of the major inquiries of psychotherapy — and its object is to recover the past in the interest of creating a different future. Obviously, recovering the past as intentionality and meaning, rather than as determinism, is important to making different life

choices – to remaking one's fundamental project."<sup>46</sup>

On the basis of what seems to be its revolutionary significance for psychotherapy alone, I am therefore tempted to accept Sartre's *Critique* as what he would have it be: "Prolegomena to any future anthropology."<sup>47</sup> As the dialectical knowing of a dialectical object, "the foundation of anthropology is," as Sartre says, "man himself, not as the object of a practical Knowledge, but as a practical organism reproducing Knowledge as a moment of its *praxis*."<sup>48</sup> As a psychotherapist, I know that the dialectical relationship between knower and known is the only effective instrument of change.<sup>49</sup> I am therefore willing to accept the death of the objective observer, in place of the death of man as an historical subject, in psychoanalytic theory. I also believe with Sartre that his time may have come as well in history, political science, sociology, anthropology, academic psychology, and even economics.<sup>50</sup> After all, not only does the objective observer not exist; our very attempts to bring him into being may well obscure those human significations which are the real intelligibility of the social sciences.

Obviously this does not mean that as a social scientist, I should return to the purely subjective – that, like the bad psychotherapist who imposes his own illness on his patients, I should read others as projections of myself. Rather, it means that I must use my own knowledge of myself as signifier to relate to and decipher the significations of others – groups or individuals, past or present. Indeed Sartre notes that it is as a signifier that I comprehend the human world, past and present:

Thus significations come from man and from his project, but they are inscribed everywhere in things and in the order of things. Everything at every instant is always signifying, and significations reveal to us men and relations among men across the structures of our society. But these significations appear to us only insofar as we ourselves are signifying. Our comprehension of the Other is never contemplative; it is only a moment of our *praxis*, a way of living – in struggle or in complicity – the concrete, human relation which unites us to him.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, as Sartre says in the conclusion to *Search for a Method*, the role of existentialism "is not to describe an abstract 'human reality' which has never existed, but constantly to remind anthropology of the existential dimension of the processes studied":

Anthropology studies only objects. Now man is the being by whom becoming-an-object comes to man. Anthropology will deserve its name only if it replaces the study of human objects by the study of the various processes of becoming-an-object. Its role is to found its *knowledge* on rational and comprehensive *non-knowledge*; that is, the historical totalization will be possible only if anthropology understands itself instead of ignoring itself. To understand itself, to understand the other, to exist, to act, are one and the same movement which founds direct, conceptual knowledge but without ever leaving the concrete – that is, history, or more precisely, the one who *comprehends what he knows*. This perpetual dissolution of intellection into comprehension and, conversely, the perpetual redescend which introduces comprehension into intellection as a dimension of *rational non-knowledge* at the heart of knowledge is the very ambiguity of a discipline in which the questioner, the question, and the questioned are one.<sup>52</sup>

Most psychotherapists know the importance of wedding intellection to comprehension in practice.<sup>53</sup> Are social scientists prepared to accept this in theory as an epistemological principle? If so, we would then have a tool for understanding what has formerly been inexplicable in the human sciences: novelty.<sup>54</sup> We would cease to reduce change to identity.

## NOTES

1. Michael Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), p. 387. The abandonment of scientific cause and effect thinking in Structuralism is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the first chapter of Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, where Lévi-Strauss discusses the structure of magic and the structure of science ("The Science of the Concrete," pp. 1–34). Noting that both kinds of thinking are cause and effect oriented, Lévi-Strauss is interested more in comparing and contrasting their structures than in discovering their relative truth value. Sartre himself greatly appreciates the contributions of Lévi-Strauss, although he would translate Lévi-Strauss's structural objectivism into his own dialectical system, as he does in *Critique of Dialectical Reason I*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London: Verso/NLB, 1982), pp. 479–504.
2. I am using Alan Sheridan-Smith's translation of *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and Hazel E. Barnes' translation of *Search for a Method* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968). I am grateful to Hazel Barnes for pointing out to me the French original on such important matters as *group-en-fusion*, for which I have used the translation "group-in-fusion" rather than the Sheridan-Smith translation of "fused group" with its quite different connotation. A group-in-fusion is a group in the nonreflective process of forming/acting. Afterwards the "pledged

group" (*le groupe assermenté*) ensures this fusion by reflectively pledging the freedom of everyone; hence this group would more properly be called "fused" rather than "in fusion."

3. The use of the word *praxis* to denote human activity is as old as Aristotle. Sartre's immediate predecessor is Marx, who uses *praxis* to mean social activity. Raymond Aron suggests in his book *Marxism and the Existentialists* (New York, Evanston, and London: Harper and Row, 1969) that Sartrean *praxis* is little different from being-for-oneself in *Being and Nothingness* (p. 168). While *praxis* is similar to being-for-itself, the emphasis in *Critique* has shifted from desire as the human motivating force to need and the social context of that need. Sartre says, "*The entire historical dialectic rests on individual praxis in so far as it is already dialectical*, that is to say, to the extent that action is itself the negating transcendence of contradiction, the determination of a present totalisation in the name of a future totality, and the real effective working of matter" (*Critique*, p. 80). See footnote 20 below for Sartre's distinction between totality and totalization.
4. Sartre's theory of scarcity is a social theory, since there are for Sartre no facts which are not social facts. For example, the fabulously rich heir to a mine might experience scarcity as "dispersal, poverty of means, and the resistance of matter" constituting impediments which threaten to slow down production. "For the heir, scarcity is the possibility of not coming into his inheritance unless he reorganizes his field of actions as soon as possible" — rather than a threat to his physical existence as such (*Critique*, p. 739). His workers might experience it as the lack in this particular field of decent work and wages. In certain phases of capitalism, scarcity might be a scarcity of consumers, rather than products, leading to an expansion of markets. Or scarcity might be scarcity of time. Men in a primitive society might experience scarcity still differently — as ritual repetition, rather than as history. In "our history," however, scarcity is the source of that "antagonistic reciprocity" which characterizes its movement. Because scarcity is a "*human fact*, rather than the malignity of a cruel Nature," (*Critique*, p. 140), however, it might be overcome — though at present man, according to Sartre, must be defined as "a practical organism living with a multiplicity of similar organisms in a field of scarcity" (*Critique*, p. 735). Scarcity is likewise the source of that Manichaeism which is at the heart of morality — of that sense of the Other as an evil anti-value or anti-*praxis* which has to be destroyed. As Sartre says, "At the most elementary level of the 'struggle for life,' there are not blind instincts conflicting through men, but complex structures, transcendences of material conditions by a *praxis* which founds a morality and which seeks the destruction of the Other not as a simple object which is dangerous, but as a freedom which is recognized and condemned to its very root" (*Critique*, p. 736). Hence the scandal of existence is not, as Hegel supposed, "the mere existence of the Other, which would take us back to a statute of unintelligibility. It lies in suffered (or threatened) violence, that is, in interiorized scarcity" (*Critique*, p. 815). In a world where three-fourths of the population are still undernourished, it lies in the fact that each is a real threat to the other's existence — at a variety of levels.

5. Sartre suggests that while further scientific investigation might reveal a “dialectic of nature,” especially in the passage from inorganic matter to living bodies and the evolution of life, this is at present no more than a “metaphysical hypothesis” (*Critique*, p. 34). It would not, in any case, change the description of the social dialectic in *Critique*. What Sartre objects to is the tendency of Marxists and positivists alike to reduce living human praxis to a dialectic of nature. Sartre explains and condemns the reification procedure which accomplishes this reduction in the following passage: “The procedure of *discovering* dialectical rationality in *praxis*, and then projecting it as an unconditional law, on to the inorganic world, and then returning to the study of societies and claiming that this opaquely irrational law of nature conditions them, seems to us a complete aberration. A human relation, which can be recognized only because we are ourselves human, is encountered, hypostasized, stripped of every human characteristic and, finally, this irrational fabrication is substituted for the genuine relation which was encountered in the first place. Thus in the name of monism the practical rationality of man making History is replaced by the ancient notion of a blind necessity, the clear by the obscure, the evident by the conjectural, Truth by Science Fiction (*Critique*, p. 33).” It is the discovery of “man making History,” in place of “unconditional laws,” that distinguishes what Sartre calls the “critical” from the “dogmatic” dialectic.
6. *Search*, p. 87.
7. R.D. Laing and D.G. Cooper, *Reason and Violence* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971), p. 87.
8. For a fuller discussion of “praxis-process,” see *Critique*, pp. 549–559. Sartre defines process as “the permanent obverse of common praxis,” which sustains and moves it (p. 552). Group process, Sartre says, “is comparable *neither* to an avalanche nor to a flood, *nor* to an individual action, since it is constituted by the directed action of a multiplicity of individuals”; it is instead “suffered inertia” since it is dependent not only on my activity here but the activity of others elsewhere on a common practical field (*Critique*, p. 549). Hence while processes might be mistaken for destiny, they really proceed not according to the exterior laws of analytical Reason, but from “an external law of interiority” (*Critique*, p. 551). When one becomes their dupe, processes appear not as temporalizations, but as temporalized realities or destiny. Hence Sartre contends that American sociologists like Lewin, Kardiner, and Moreno explain praxis as process — without seeing that the “fundamental truth of all process is still praxis” (*Critique*, pp. 551–552). Social scientists using a dialectical approach would reverse the usual direction of social science: They would explain process as the outside of praxis, rather than praxis as a passive reflection of process.
9. Indeed Sartre specifically says that existentialism is an “ideology” (or minor application of major ideas) within the philosophical territory of Marxism, which is the philosophy of our age. Between the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries, Sartre recognizes only three philosophical moments which he designates by the names of the men who dominated them: the “moment” of Descartes and Locke, that of Kant and Hegel, and that of Marx: “These three philosophies become, each in turn, the humus of every particular thought and

the horizon of all culture; there is no going beyond them so long as man has not got beyond the historical moment which they express. I have often remarked on the fact that an 'anti-Marxist' argument is only the apparent rejuvenation of a pre-Marxist idea....As for 'revisionism,' this is either a truism or an absurdity. There is no need to readapt a living philosophy to the course of the world; it adapts itself by means of thousands of new efforts, thousands of particular pursuits, for the philosophy is one with the movement of society" (*Search*, p. 7). If this movement stops, it is either because "the philosophy is dead, or it is going through a crisis" (*Search*, p. 7). Sartre believes that Marxism, which is yet in its infancy, is going through such a crisis — partially produced by the Stalinist bifurcation of theory and practice, partially by an epistemological insufficiency. Existentialism, as an ideology within Marxism, has as its task the return of the "human dimension (that is, the existential project) as the foundation of anthropological knowledge" (*Search*, p. 181). When this has been accomplished, "existentialism will no longer have any reason for being. Absorbed, surpassed and conserved by the totalizing movement of philosophy, it will cease to be a particular inquiry and will become the foundation of all inquiry" (*Search*, p. 181). Marxism itself will also one day be surpassed by a "philosophy of freedom," but not until the material conditions for its existence have been surpassed. Until that happens, we will have "no means, no intellectual instrument, no concrete experience which allows us to conceive of this freedom or this philosophy" (*Search*, p. 34). In other words, Sartre takes philosophy seriously as the living engagement of an age with its material and social realities.

10. *Search*, pp. 29–30.

11. *Search*, p. 53.

12. Sartre has, of course, presented us with such an analysis in *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: George Braziller, 1963) and his three volume work on Flaubert, of which the first volume, *The Family Idiot*, has been translated into English by Carol Cosman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). The whole work has been discussed by Hazel Barnes in her book, *Sartre and Flaubert* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

13. Sartre does not describe this genuine future culture, since he believes it will have to be discovered in the process of creating it. He does, however, give some hints about its features. First of all, it could not come into existence without the elimination of scarcity, since it is scarcity which makes of other people our "demonic double" (*Critique*, p. 132). However, even alienated reciprocity rests on simple reciprocity, the recognition of the other as a consciousness like my own. With the elimination of scarcity, this reciprocity could conceivably emerge as the caring of each for all. In *Critique* Sartre has outlined the ways in which community becomes possible through the liquidation of serial impotence. In the genuine future culture, however, a value would have to be placed on what Sartre calls "immaterial matter" (*Critique*, p. 183) — the divesting of things of their power in the interest of "a true inter-subjective community in which the only real relations will be those between men" (*Critique*, p. 307). Obviously, socialist societies as well as capitalist societies suffer from scarcity and from that reification of men by machines which Sartre has described so well. And they are especially subject to that limitation

to "true unification" which Sartre has described as the serial impotence of bureaucracy. Sartre says: "Bureaucracy, in effect, is the Other erected into a principle and a means of government: it means that the decomposition of the group has totally enclosed men in the internal field of the practico-inert. It is not that man has ceased to be the future of man, but that the man of the future comes to man *as a human thing*" (*Critique*, p. 306). Sartre's genuine future culture, then, in a society no longer forced to "discreetly select its dead" (*Critique*, p. 129), would be a culture which was constantly in the process of overcoming seriality through group praxis (especially the "sudden resurrection of freedom" characteristic of the group-in-fusion, *Critique*, p. 401) and of overcoming the tendency of groups to ossify and the practico-inert to dictate the relations of men through the creation of "immaterial matter" – that is, through making free praxis the "sole ethical relation between people in so far as they dominate matter" (*Critique*, p. 249).

4. Sartre uses the example of the founding of Byzantium in *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 559–561, to demonstrate the way in which consciousness lives its objects as a future lack. This is the same lack which is the basis of the Sartrean dialectic in *Critique*, though the emphasis there has shifted from "desire" to "need."
15. *Practico-inert* is, of course, a word coined from the notion of matter (the inert) infused with praxis. If hell is other people in *Being and Nothingness*, then hell is the practico-inert in *Critique*. Actually, one might say that in both books, hell is objectification – since it is the other's objectification of me which creates misery in the former while it is my objectification of myself (together with the objectifications of others) which creates the practico-inert hell of the later book. What Sartre calls "the shifting hell of the field of practical passivity" (*Critique*, p. 219) is a "place of violence, darkness, and witchcraft" (*Critique*, p. 318) because of its power to steal my actions from me and to limit my freedom in terms of my own past actions and the actions of others.
16. Sartre says, "Is not God a being who is what he is – in that he is all positivity and the foundation of the world – and at the same time a being who is not what he is and who is what he is not – in that he is self-conscious and the necessary foundation of himself? The being of human reality is suffering because it rises in being as perpetually haunted by a totality which it is without being able to be it, precisely because it could not attain the in-itself without losing itself as for-itself. Human reality therefore is by its nature an unhappy consciousness with no possibility of surpassing its unhappy state" (*Being and Nothingness*, p. 140).
17. There is a form of reification, like alienation, which is universally human. This occurs when man makes himself a thing in order to manipulate the thing world. The material world thereby becomes inscribed with the human, the human with thingness. Sartre says that "things are human to precisely the extent that men are things" (*Critique*, p. 180).
18. Laing and Cooper, pp. 14–15.
19. *Search*, p. 94.
20. One reason the notion of totality makes sense is its connection with that other Sartrean impossibility, the in-itself-for-itself, by which man attempts to make himself free and yet complete, like God. Another is the easy move-

ment from objectification to reification. The notion of totality is in fact useful as a “regulative principle of the totalization” (*Critique*, p. 46), so long as one remembers that a totality, unlike a totalization, is imaginary: “Thus, as the active power of holding together its parts, the totality is only the correlative of an act of imagination....our present action makes them [a painting, a symphony, a machine, or consumer goods] seem like totalities by resuscitating, in some way, the *praxis* which attempted to totalize their inertia” (*Critique*, p. 45). A totalizing *praxis* sustains all that is.

21. *Search*, p. 72.
22. This connection is, of course, presented in *Being and Nothingness* in the form of negation. Consciousness is *nothing* but its objects. The for-itself encounters the in-itself as a lack of being, since the for-itself is aware that it is not its objects. Another way of saying this is that my being is always behind me in the world, like a comet's tail – hence when I work, I produce *work*; when I totalize, I produce a *totalization*. My meaning is inscribed in its material objectification, which I am perpetually beyond.
23. The subtitle of *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is “Theory of Practical Ensembles.”
24. *Critique*, p. 264.
25. *Critique*, p. 260.
26. *Critique*, p. 288.
27. *Critique*, p. 288.
28. *Critique*, p. 149.
29. *Critique*, p. 304.
30. *Critique*, p. 315.
31. Sartre, following Marx, comments that this was not always so, since there is “no trace of atomisation in medieval communities,” where the relation of man to man was one of personal dependence (*Critique*, p. 306).
32. *Critique*, p. 312.
33. *Critique*, p. 308–309.
34. *Critique*, p. 309. I add “capitalist” because of Sartre's very interesting analysis of the ways in which nineteenth century “bourgeois respectability” is “the presence in the oppressor of the oppressed in person” (*Critique*, p. 771). The bourgeois of that time, Sartre argues, became bourgeois by suppressing his own needs as well as those of his workers. One wonders if a similar psychosocial analysis could be made of capital-labor relations at the present time.
35. *Critique*, p. 248.
36. *Critique*, p. 361. Sartre comments that it really does not matter that the government seems not “to have had any very precise plans” for exterminating the populace because “the deployment of troops and the beginning of the encirclement bore their objective meaning in themselves” (*Critique*, p. 353).
37. *Critique*, p. 350. A horrifying example of the kind of situation in which individuals do “quarrel over food like dogs” rather than re-grouping is Colin Turnbull's description of the cultural disintegration of a hunter-gatherer tribe in *The Mountain People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972).
38. Sartre comments that when he discusses groups as maintained by a threat of mortal danger, he is not referring to anglers clubs or old ladies book exchanges, which are superstructures or secondary groups within a larger totalizing move-

- ment of class structures, class against class, and national and international organizations (*Critique*, p. 350). The experienced member of secondary groups wonders, however, if they too do not have their share of Fraternity/Terror.
39. Sartre says that the "true function of sovereignty" is "the institutional reinteriorization of the exteriority of institutions or, in so far as the latter are the reifying mediations between passivised men, it is the institution of *one man* as a mediation between institutions." Since the institution of sovereignty is "based on the impotence of its members," the sovereign himself becomes "a reflexive synthesis of dead-practices which were tending to be separated in a centrifugal movement" (*Critique*, p. 618). Since the sovereign "in himself is no more than the institutional system lived in a reflexive synthesis of interiority," his practical possibilities are limited because they are determined "by the unifying ensemble of institutional instruments" (*Critique*, p. 619). Whatever his personal idiosyncrasies, the sovereign is a "common individual" in so far as he lives his role of unifying a social system threatening to disperse into seriality because of institutional ossification.
  40. Sartre says that "there is no formal law" to compel groups to pass through the logical succession from group-in-fusion to institution: "A fused group may either dissolve instantaneously or be at the beginning of a long development which will lead to sovereignty; and in the complex world glimpsed here, the sovereign group itself may arise directly from the collective itself (or rather from its sector of other-direction). But it cannot really arise unless all the formal rules of its statute (separation, the institution, the exteriorisation of practices, and reinteriorisation by the untranscendable third party) are given simultaneously in their mutual conditioning. But in itself this should cause no surprise, and only the whole historical complex can determine whether the group will emerge *already half-petrified*, since in concrete reality, this is to say, in every moment of a temporalisation, *all statutes of all groups*, whether alive or dead, and *all types of seriality*...are given together as a tangle of strict relations and as the dispersed raw material of the developing totalisation" (*Critique*, p. 676). Hazel Barnes points out that the translation "status" for *statut* almost always makes better sense than "statute" -- as seems to be the case here in the first use above. In the second use, the translation "constitutions" rather than "statutes" would seem to be clearer.
  41. Sartre's volumes on Flaubert had not appeared when Laing and Cooper wrote *Reason and Violence* in 1964. Sartre's biography of Flaubert further illustrates the later thinking of Sartre along lines outlined by Laing and Cooper -- especially Sartre's idea in *Search for a Method* that "a life develops in spirals; it passes again and again by the same points but at different levels of integration and complexity" (*Search*, p. 106).
  42. Laing and Cooper, p. 6.
  43. Max Charlesworth, "Sartre, Laing & Freud," *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, Vol. XVII, No. 1 (1980-81), p. 27.
  44. Charlesworth, p. 28.
  45. Hazel Barnes reminds me that the breath mark (*éxis*) makes the Greek word *hexis* rather than *exis*, as it is transcribed by Sheridan-Smith. Praxis and hexis are the same words Aristotle uses in his *Nichomachean Ethics* to denote action and conduct on the one hand versus a state of mind or character on the other.

46. The fundamental project of being, discussed at length in *Being and Nothingness*, is the individual's way of throwing (*pro-jecting*) himself into the world in the direction of the future. The world always becomes *this world* in the light of my project; if that project changes, the world changes. I believe this insight of Sartre's is of major usefulness to psychotherapy, since it does away with that subject/object dichotomy which can create such therapeutic confusion and instead characterizes therapy as a world-remaking process.
47. *Critique*, p. 66.
48. *Search*, p. 179.
49. Since in this case the known is a living individual who has entered into a contract for therapeutic intervention, the known also becomes the knower in the joint project of reflectively examining the patient's way of living his life in the world.
50. My hesitation about applying Sartre's ideas to economics has less to do with their usefulness to this field – his suggestions appear to be rich indeed, as his analysis of inflation in seventeenth century Spain and his analysis of the structure of capitalism in the two phases of the industrial revolution, to take only two examples, would indicate – than with my own lack of knowledge of this field. It does seem to me that Sartre provides a social theory for understanding economics, rather than a purely economic theory, but I am unsure how far his comments would revise economic theory.
51. *Search*, p. 174.
52. *Search*, p. 174.
53. Even Freud, Laing says, from his own letters and case histories, seems “to have had a very human relationship with his patients.” Yet when Freud came to write psychological theory, he seemed “to feel that it was his scientific obligation to translate all that happened in human terms into terms of things” (Quoted in Charlesworth, p. 32). In practice it was the combination of intellection and comprehension which aided Freud in working with his patients. If Laing is right, Freud did not reify in the office as he did in the library.
54. Sartre says that “if there is any such thing as dialectical Reason, it must be defined as the absolute intelligibility of the irremediably new” (*Critique*, p. 58). Only a dialectic resting on the shoulders of free individual praxis can explain the irreducibly new. Every other social theory, with the possible exception of certain theological approaches, is reductive in principle.



RONALD ARONSON

## Sartre and the Dialectic: The Purposes of *Critique, II*

Today, more than ever, we need Sartre—we who live at a time when the future itself is in question, when the human world has never seemed more out of human control. Uniquely among this century's great writers, Sartre's body of work points towards understandings and actions which may possibly return the world to its creators and so let there be a future. But how so, since at first glance the harsh judgement of neglect mounting even before his death might appear justified by the extraordinary topicality of his writings? After all, what other great twentieth-century thinker has given himself so unstintingly to his specific historical situation? A body of writings, even as bequest, is only in situation. This simultaneously Marxist and existentialist concept, developed by Sartre as early as 1939<sup>1</sup> and then enriched and deepened by him over the next three decades, suggests that changing times may quite appropriately diminish his own importance for us. Most of his plays, for example, deal with problems of the moment, as does much of his fiction. The ten volumes of his political and literary essays read mostly as precisely dated interventions: the postwar call for the writer's *engagement*, discussions of contemporary writers and artists, moral and political wrappings with Communism and colonialism, the cold war and Cuba, De Gaulle and the New Left. Only a few "timeless" works stand out to sustain his claims before "posterity": *La Nausée*, *L'Être et Le Néant*, *Huis clos*, *L'Idiot de la famille*, and now his *Lettres au Castor*. Is not Sartre falling under the sway of history's pitiless process of sorting out, destined as it is to leave a few major works alive and in the foreground of continuing general interest, while consigning the topical works to the near oblivion of doctoral dissertations and specialist studies?

1. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Carnets de la drôle de guerre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), 56–57.

This might be an appropriate posthumous trajectory if the world had resolved the political problems which preoccupied Sartre. But, alas, we have not yet become free of colonialism and its heritage, the capitalist-communist confrontation, or the blockage of hope represented by the Communist states. For half his life Sartre searched, and struggled, for a meaningful politics of liberation: for those who still care, the search and struggle continue today. Along his way Sartre sought to reflect on, and develop appropriate forms of intellectual involvement. He also sought to recover theoretical Marxism's revolutionary force by a grounding and reshaping which would found it as *the* human science. Certainly no better answers to these political-intellectual problems lie ready to hand today, and the problems themselves have hardly lost their interest. On a more purely theoretical level, Sartre's abiding concern with freedom, which yielded a lifetime of exploration of the ways in which the individual is shaped, shapes himself and takes shape, has not been rendered obsolete by recent wisdom on the subject, any more than his studies of the individual's relationship with society and of the dynamics of social formation have been dated by later research.

If Sartre's work is largely ignored today, it is not so much because his questions have been better answered elsewhere, but because they are not being asked.<sup>2</sup> This says less about their intrinsic importance or the merits of his answers, than about today's intellectual fashions. When interest reawakens in such questions, there is no doubt that the paths to be taken by those who ask them will lead in each case, through Sartre's works. His insights, his concerns, his answers may or may not in any case be definitive; but politically and theoretically, he will command attention for having lived and thought them so fully, so courageously, so deeply.

Yet even since Sartre's death times have worsened. The development of the atomic bomb, which Sartre indicated in the late 1940s in the *Cahiers sur la morale* as having transformed our world,<sup>3</sup> has indeed changed everything. The threat has broadened, deepened, become part of our daily lives. The kind of terror mentioned only briefly by Sartre at the darkest days of the cold war,<sup>4</sup> is imposed on us at every moment of every day by strategic policies making us all hostages during "peace-

2. For a cogent description of the process in France, set within a wide-ranging sketch of the overall intellectual scene today, see Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1983).

3. Paris: Gallimard, 1983.

4. See "Merleau-Ponty," *Situations 4* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 247-48; trans. Benita Eisler, "Merleau-Ponty," *Situations* (New York: George Braziller, 1965), 286.

time." Similarly, Sartre's pitched struggle for political hope chronicled in his changing attitudes towards Communism and his efforts to create a New Left can be seen as remarkably optimistic in the face of that New Left's subsequent collapse everywhere, of martial law in Poland, of the—at least momentary—exhaustion of the forces for social change in the West, their containment in the East, and the general absence of any hopeful alternative in the Third World. The zones of hope for which Sartre searched and to which he attached his support and analysis have become, one by one, cancelled by events, leaving us today facing the greatest danger in memory and with the greatest sense of disarray. As a consequence, hope itself has not been more in jeopardy since the beginning of the modern world.<sup>5</sup>

Yet if the situation has deteriorated, our darker time only makes Sartre's work more relevant. In repeatedly trying to understand the worst, and indeed to make way for change within it, he is one author who provides keys and encouragement.<sup>6</sup> In extreme situations Sartre again and again points not towards paralysis and confusion, but radical clarity and commitment. As he wrote, so did he act: moving towards the most intractable and painful problems of his lifetime, locating the point of most extreme tension between threatened hope and crushing reality, working within the tension, and from there insisting on finding a way forward.<sup>7</sup>

The theory of this practice of radical hope in extreme situations is perhaps the most important of all of Sartre's ideas: that human beings are the source of the human world. If we live entranced by a network of material and ideological mystification which raises our creations beyond our control, Sartre insists on revealing the *praxis* at their origin.<sup>8</sup> Both those who would demonize the human world on the one hand and

5. For an elaboration of this and the next three paragraphs see the author's *The Dialectics of Disaster: A Preface to Hope* (London: Verso, 1984).

6. I have criticized Sartre's ontological individualism as a structurally pessimistic mode of thought, unable to grasp, or foresee the transformation of, a sociality which it excludes from the outset and in any event sees primarily as negative. Such qualifications should not, however, keep us from the great riches of Sartre's thought, especially in a period when so few other thinkers wrestle with such fundamental questions.

7. Sartre was self-conscious about this approach. See Simone de Beauvoir, *La Force des choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 280–82; *The Force of Circumstance*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: G. Putnam's Sons, 1965), 261–62.

8. Earlier, when his social philosophy was less developed, Sartre's key idea in this respect was *responsibility*: that we have to assume the world's weight, whatever its source, inasmuch as we internalize it as a decisive step of our own action. *Praxis* points to the prior level, as Sartre seeks to understand the human actions and intentions in which the world first takes shape.

those who would remove its human, *moral* dimension, on the other, can be educated by Sartre's emphasis on human responsibility and intentionality, on choice and action even in the most difficult situations: neurosis, for example, is the path chosen by the organism "in order to be able to live an unlivable situation."<sup>9</sup> With such concepts Sartre can help us to grasp the logic of evil and defeat: nuclear madness, the destructiveness which has so marked our century, the partially realized but repeatedly betrayed hopes of socialism, the dispiriting course taken by Third World revolutions.

If times have indeed darkened since the optimistic postwar decade and a half of Sartre's richest productivity, a way out will not be found by abandoning his chosen terrain for various modes of sophisticated evasion. Compared with the ambitions of other thinkers much in vogue today we can only be struck by Sartre's courage, his conviction that anything human can be understood, his indefatigable insistence on seeing human action and intention, however deviated, as the world's source. If we are, indeed, to survive, it will probably only be by a concerted intellectual-political practice paralleling his own: of deconstructing the fixed, frozen, menacing entities—above all, the Bomb—created by us but placed beyond our control by determinate *and comprehensible* human institutions and intentions; of reconstructing the world so that human intentionality prevails with as few deformations as possible. The only hopeful politics for today and the future will seek to return this world gone mad to its human source.

## I

With these thoughts in mind we turn to one of his richest works, *Critique de la raison dialectique*, II, in the hope of contributing to the revival of interest in Sartre by making the arguments of this unpublished work available. It will and must be criticized; but first it must be understood and appreciated; and before that, it must simply become known. Here I will take a modest first step in the detailed presentation of Volume Two by describing Sartre's purposes as he spells them out, both throughout Volume One and in the first pages of Volume Two.

Considering the notorious difficulty and complexity of the published first volume of the *Critique*, the guiding question of its second volume appears as clarity itself. How, Sartre asks at the outset, can we "conceive that a struggle between individuals or between groups is

9. Sartre's foreword to R. D. Laing and D. G. Cooper, *Reason and Violence* [London: Tavistock, 1964], 7.

dialectically intelligible?"<sup>10</sup> What enables us to view each side's action according to the terms of dialectical thought—as participating in the creation of history, as leading to progress and development, as proceeding by contradiction and transcendence? The issue is a simple yet absolutely basic one: how can a meaningful larger whole emerge "when we are in the presence of two actions, that is of two autonomous and contradictory totalisations?" (II, 3).

Those who have studied the published portion of the *Critique* will readily feel at home within the tone, register and conceptual universe of such questions. The first pages of the second volume, indeed, begin precisely where the first leaves off. Unlike the beginning of Volume One they reveal no sense of starting out afresh, no need to create a place for the entire undertaking in the world of human praxis and discourse—or indeed in the history of thought—but rather they seem merely to pose, after a pause, the next question of a sustained line of thought whose basic concepts and frames of reference have already been carefully established. To be sure, we shall see later in this essay that Sartre devoted considerable energy in Volume Two's opening two dozen pages to specifying, focussing and circumscribing this line of thought, and we shall travel this path with him to understand better the work and its significance. But, as we shall also see, it is clearly indicated as being no more than the continuation and completion of Volume One.

In a remarkable parallel with *L'Être et le Néant*, the final paragraphs of the published *Critique* had posed a series of questions to be taken up by the sequel. Yet the sequel to the first, the *Cahiers pour une morale*, also unfinished and unpublished during Sartre's lifetime, point towards a fundamentally new work, stamped by an entirely new problematic, written at the time of a personal-political transformation. The second half of the *Critique*, on the contrary, is a single, coherent and well-developed manuscript, unlike the *Cahiers*, which are a series of preliminary studies and notebooks.<sup>11</sup> It reflects a stable conceptual universe, not one undergoing challenge and transformation.<sup>12</sup> To be sure, it drops

10. *Critique de la raison dialectique*, tome 2 (manuscript), 2. All references are to the New Left Review / NLB typescript. Gallimard will publish the manuscript in 1985.

11. Their editor, Arlette Elkaim-Sartre, has perhaps exaggerated their unfinished state by proclaiming that these "notes," if "they have a thread and are often more than half-written," "do not have structure", 5. As Perry Anderson has pointed out in his discussion of it, Sartre unambiguously sets out the project's overall structure on 484–87, and it takes only the briefest study to see the internal logic linking the various issues treated.

12. On the other hand, it is also true, as André Gorz has written to the author, that "the ms. is not only unfinished but unpolished, had never been reread and is full of wandering (though interesting) digressions and excursions sometimes leading nowhere."

off unfinished at the end, and it seems to turn radically from its main purpose at least once.<sup>13</sup> Yet in it Sartre does pursue, with great vigor and clarity, at considerable length and in detail, the project announced early in Volume One. In taking up "the same structures as those brought to light by regressive investigation," he indeed seeks "to rediscover the moments of their inter-relations, the ever vaster and more complex movement which totalises them and, finally, the very direction of the totalisation, that is to say, the 'meaning of History' and its Truth."<sup>14</sup> The structures laid out in the first volume—individual *praxis*, the practico-inert, the series, the fused group, the sworn group, the institution, social classes—are intended in the second as "the condition of a directed, developing totalisation" (I, 69).

## II

This is, after all, the daunting terrain of the *dialectic*. The very term serves to remind us of the deeper complexity lying within the relative simplicity and clarity of Sartre's project in Volume Two. "Relative" indeed: just to attack one of the key terms of dialectical reason, "totalization," in order to clarify Sartre's meaning, would require a massive essay necessarily exploring a number of other key terms, precious few of which could be defined succinctly at the outset. After all, under the rubric of the dialectic, we are dealing with a process of ever more complex self-development. Even the study's formal categories cannot be spelled out in advance, because they are intended as the emerging substance and structure of the study itself (and indeed of reality), and so must bear a considerable weight of ambiguity, serving more than one purpose and often changing over time. And finally, no key term can be understood without the others, in an analysis destined for complexity and lack of analytical precision by its very focus on a region synonymous with "totalization" and the "truth of history."

Access to the area of reality which Sartre seeks to describe—the dialectic, but as created by the multiplicity of *individual praxes*—requires persistent, and often confusing, acts of abstraction. Thus even

13. Perry Anderson suggests that the text wanders off after Sartre's discussion of Stalin (*Arguments within English Marxism* [London: Verso, 1980], 53), a position with which I agreed in my *Jean-Paul Sartre—Philosophy in the World* (London: Verso, 1980), 284. But is not the first wandering the very study of the Soviet Union itself (hardly a "totalisation without a totaliser"), and the return, Sartre's ontological speculations at the end? Michael Sprinker has suggested this in discussion: a fuller analysis will have to wait the conclusion of the study of which this is the introduction.

14. *Critique de la raison dialectique*, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1960) trans. Alan Sheridan Smith, *Critique of Dialectical Reason 1* (London: Verso, 1976), 69.

Volume Two is not intended to lead us "to the absolute concrete, which can only be the individual (*this* event and *this* date of *this* history) {but} at least to the absolute system for applying the determination 'concrete fact' to the fact of one history" (I, 69).

In such a study, self-consciously seen as a process paralleling the self-development of human reality itself, the reader will be challenged to determine just what is at stake in any particular discussion. And indeed, once a moment of precision is attained, the next stage of discussion may necessitate shifting ground and require yet another act of self-situation before the reader is again sure of its direction—whereupon, once again, the ground may shift, forcing yet another retaking of bearings, far now from the original moment of clarity. Moreover, it should be evident from the quotations above that Sartre's agenda for Volume Two simultaneously contains, and may even confuse, a number of separable if interconnected purposes. If he will indeed focus and narrow the direction of Volume Two at its outset, let us first establish its place in the *Critique* project, allowing the part and the whole to illuminate each other mutually.

Why, we may ask, does the central thrust of the *Critique* call for an attempt to decode both individual struggle and "the complex phenomenon which has to be described as a *praxis*-process and which sets classes in opposition to one another as circular totalisations of institutions, groups and serialities?" (I, 806). The most obvious part of the answer lies in Sartre's description of the two halves of the *Critique* in the terms announced in *Question de Méthode*, as a *regressive-progressive* project. *Critique*, I, as the regressive component has sought to deconstruct social reality into its abstract elements, categories and processes, its synchronic structures, to demonstrate "the intelligibility of practical structures and the dialectical relations which interconnect the various forms of active multiplicities" (I, 818). But this achieved, "we are still at the level of synchronic totalisation. . . ." It is time for the progressive study, in which the researcher turns back towards reconstructing the concrete by considering "the diachronic depth of practical temporalisation"—"whose aim will be to rise up the double synchronic and diachronic movement by which History constantly totalises itself" (I, 818). In other words, having first revealed "the static conditions of the possibility of a totalisation, that is to say, of a history," it is time to "progressively recompose the historical process on the basis of the formations in question" (I, 68) in order to learn whether the complex interactions, including struggles, "reveal an intelligible (and thus directed) totalising movement" (I, 68).

In asking about History with a capital *H* Sartre is, however, point-

ing to another goal of the project's second part: "it will attempt to establish that there is *one* human history, with *one* truth and *one* intelligibility. . . ." One history? Althusser's attack on the first volume was precisely his denunciation of the "historicist" reading of Marxism, dominated as it was by "the shade of Hegel."<sup>15</sup> But Sartre's unflinching purpose was indeed "to establish the dialectic as the universal method and universal law of anthropology" (I, 18). This strategy entailed establishing "the permanent necessity for man of totalising and being totalised, and for the world of being an ever broader, developing totalisation" (I, 21). Marxism's Immanuel Kant would "explore the limits, the validity, and the extent of dialectical Reason," allowing it "to ground itself and to develop itself as a free critique of itself, at the same time as being the movement of History and of knowledge" (I, 21).

The dialectic: method, structure of reality, vision of universal History being unfolded through our acts. With a breathtaking Hegelian ambition and sweep so uncharacteristic of the latter half of the twentieth century, Sartre then sought, in laying the a priori basis for Marxism, simultaneously to claim the dialectic as *the* method of any study of human reality and "to discover the basic signification of History and of dialectical rationality" (I, 818). But besides accepting Marxism as providing the decisive keys into the meaning of history and the overarching logic by which that meaning is grasped—as well as illuminating and advancing the struggle by which the historical process advances—Sartre's project was to be shaped and driven forward by yet another commitment, also falling under the rubric of the dialectic. He criticized Hegel and Engels for dogmatically and onesidedly making the dialectic external to, and imposing it on, the individuals who create it.

So, in a sense, man submits to the dialectic as to an enemy power; in another sense, he *creates it*; and if dialectical Reason is the Reason of History, this contradiction must itself be lived dialectically, which means that man must be controlled by the dialectic in so far as he *creates it*, and *create* it in so far as he is controlled by it. Furthermore, it must be understood that there is no such thing as man; there are people, wholly defined by their society and by the historical movement which carries them along; if we do not wish the dialectic to become a divine law again, a metaphysical fate, it must proceed *from individuals* and not from some kind of supra-individual ensemble. Thus we encounter a new contradiction: the dialectic is the law of totalisation which creates *several* collectivities, *several* societies, and *one* history—realities, that is, which impose themselves on individuals; but at the same time it

15. Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1977), 116.

must be woven out of millions of individual actions. We must show how it is possible for it to be both a *resultant*, though not a passive average, and a *totalising force*, though not a transcendent fate, and how it can continually bring about the unity of dispersive profusion and integration. [I, 35–36]

Paradoxically, then, while seeking the most general and abstract laws of self-unifying human social development—laws whose existence many thinkers, some Marxists among them, would deny—Sartre simultaneously insists on their origin in the activities of individuals:

Thus, there is no *one* dialectic which imposes itself upon the facts, as the Kantian categories impose themselves on phenomena; but the dialectic, if it exists, is the individual career of its object. There can be no pre-established schema imposed on individual developments, neither in someone's head, nor in an intelligible heaven; if the dialectic exists, it is because certain regions of materiality are *structured* in such a way that it cannot not exist. In other words, the dialectical movement is not some powerful unitary force revealing itself behind History like the will of God. It is first and foremost a *resultant*; it is not the dialectic which forces historical men to live their history in terrible contradictions; it is men, as they are, dominated by scarcity and necessity, and confronting one another in circumstances which History or economics can inventory, but which only dialectical reason can explain. Before it can be a *motive force*, contradiction is a result; and, on the level of ontology, the dialectic appears as the only type of relation which individuals, situated and constituted in a certain way, and on account of their very constitution, can establish themselves. The dialectic, if it exists, can only be the totalisation of concrete totalisations effected by a multiplicity of totalising individualities. [I, 37]

Sartre seeks *the* dialectic, rooted in *individuals*: the striking originality of the *Critique* lies in his adherence to *both* poles and all they imply. It lies above all in his determination to see the second as the source of the first: "it is no more than ourselves" (I, 39, tr. changed). The still dubious reader can perhaps glimpse the immense scale of Sartre's ambition by considering that these twin commitments intend not merely to present, but to integrate, the most radical ontological and sociological individualism and the most sweeping sense of the oneness of human history. In short, Sartre seeks both to trace the dialectic back to its source in individual action and to view it, writ large, as the meaning of history.

Whatever its difficulties, and indeed whatever its subsequent weaknesses and structural improbabilities, Sartre pursues this ambi-

tion with a consistency, force, and honesty which mark it as a truly great intellectual adventure. The entirety of Volume One is a remarkably bold and sustained effort to explain basic structures of social reality without recourse to the "hyperorganicism" of *Society*, an independent being seen to move and act on its own—by demonstrating how each structure under consideration depends on a multiplicity of individual actions. The materiality thereby created—as product, as tool, as organizational structure of the producers themselves—absorbs the separate actions of the multiplicity, holds them in its inertia, and then in turn imposes itself as the given of future actions, redirecting and reorganizing them according to *its* logic. Indeed, this brilliant concept, the practico-inert, points to a socialized dimension of individual activity without conceding the existence of *Society*.

Given these purposes, however, it will be in volume two that the wager is won or lost. In addition to its more genial formal purpose of allowing the structures adduced in Volume One "to live freely, to oppose and cooperate with one another" (I, 818), it bears the urgent substantive burden of establishing that the scattered and separate multiplicities do indeed produce a single History. "In Volume Two, which will appear later, I shall approach the problem of totalisation itself, that is to say, of History in its development and truth in its becoming" (I, 824). Were he not to meet this challenge we would indeed be left viewing a series of elements with no sense of whether or how they combine, a sense of those focused and directed moments of historical rupture and their congealing into institutions, but no understanding of how separated and even hostile multiplicities combine to create *a* History. Lacking Volume Two, we have many histories, but no History. In Sartre's eyes this result would drain each history of its meaning, depriving the dialectic, totalization and even Truth of their sense, destroying any hope of achieving *an* anthropology. Volume Two, then, is more than fully half of the project—it is its completion, its culmination.

Until now, readings of the first volume have had to assume a self-sufficiency and completeness not inherent in its pages but imposed by Sartre's subsequent decision to break off the project before its completion. As a result, understandably, specific structures have been emphasized rather than the larger historical process into which they are to be inserted;<sup>16</sup> or indeed, the (reversible) passage from one structure to another is mistaken as a kind of totalizing study of History itself rather than a highly abstract study of its elements and their modes of combina-

16. See for example Pietro Chiodi, *Sartre and Marxism* (London: Harvester, 1976).

tion and transformation.<sup>17</sup> I hope this discussion of the *Critique's* purposes—mostly drawn from Volume One, but framed by Volume Two, has so far suggested new angles of vision into the published portion. As knowledge of Volume Two becomes more accessible, and especially after its publication and translation, the first volume can for the first time be widely read in light of the project as a whole. Knowledge of the second volume may impose new lenses through which to view the purposes and analyses of the first. New evaluations and appreciations may become possible, allowing in turn a fuller understanding of the *Critique* in Sartre's overall philosophical trajectory and, above all, of the scope of his considerable contribution to twentieth-century thought.

With these considerations in mind, Volume Two helps place in appropriate relief the most monumental aspect of the *Critique*: its attempt to dissolve the frozen, fixed givens of social life—virtually all of the human world—into the process of its constitution. Sartre does not merely proclaim that "*praxis* creates the world" but sets out to *demonstrate* it. And the first volume shows evermore complex realities being built up from simpler ones, beginning with individual *praxis*. Indeed, his concern is to reveal how and under what conditions our products become forces beyond our control and in turn dominate the *praxis* which creates them. In a sense, nothing is given, all is created, even in its genielike escape from its creator's control—and by the end of the second volume this focus will be extended to the very meaning and direction of History itself. Volume One concerns itself only with the elements and first-level products of action, or with structures which, in one form or another, have been specifically intended. But no less important, and absolutely essential for completing the map, are the products intended by *no one*—on the first level, the results of class conflict, and on the furthest reaches of study, the direction of history itself.

Sartre's great ambition is to explain precisely how separate and even opposed individual actions can add up to a meaningful history, enabling it indeed to be described as a "totalisation without a totaliser." But however extraordinary, these are not merely philosophical ambitions, coming as they do from a political thinker-activist aware that "the dialectic is both a method *and* a movement in the object" (I, 20). As "the living logic of action" (I, 38) it can only appear in its true light, as "the rationality of *praxis*" (I, 39) to one who performs the *Critique* "in the course of *praxis* as a necessary moment of it . . ." (I, 38). What is Sartre's *praxis*? Most evidently, to ascertain the limits of the dialectic

17. See for example Mark Poster, *Sartre's Marxism* (London: Pluto Press, 1980).

after Stalinism, "the *abuses* which have obscured the very notion of dialectical rationality and produced a new divorce between *praxis* and the knowledge which elucidates it" (I, 50).

Such a critique makes sense only *after* the dialectic "was posited for itself in the philosophies of Hegel and Marx," then had become the algebra of twentieth-century socialist revolution, and then "Stalinist idealism had sclerosed both epistemological methods and practices. It could take place only as the intellectual expression of that re-ordering which characterises, in this 'one world' of ours, the post-Stalinist period" (I, 50). If the "totalising activity of the world" had led to a "divorce of blind unprincipled *praxis* and sclerosed thought, or in other words the obscuring of the dialectic," the movement of de-Stalinisation now makes a critique of dialectical reason both possible and necessary, indeed urgent.

But these formulations from Volume One suggest a still more contemplative approach than would satisfy the thinker whose work on these questions was framed by his sustained contribution to the Algerian struggle for independence, on the one hand, and his attempts to create sympathy for revolutionary Cuba menaced by the United States, on the other. Most readings of the *Critique*, I have grasped its formal and metatheoretical Marxist ambitions. But the imposed self-sufficiency of Volume One has forced them to miss the concrete political purpose which, for Sartre, lay at the heart of the project:<sup>18</sup> to determine why the Bolshevik Revolution followed the course it did, and to explore the prospects of its thawing into a genuine socialism. This had indeed been one of Sartre's great obsessions even before his formal adherence to Marxism, to be explored time and again in the ten years before beginning the *Critique* in plays (*Les Mains sales* [1948], *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu* [1951], and the screenplay *L'Engrenage* [1946]) and in extended political essays (most notably in *Les Communistes et la paix* and *Le Fantôme de Staline*). In the *Critique* he finally poses the question of revolutionary success-cum-deterioration as, remarkably, the central question of social theory.

While his specific analysis begins with the storming of the Bastille, and most of his references are drawn from the French Revolution, the study of the passage from the fused group to the Terror to the institutionalization of the revolution, to bureaucracy and the cult of personality ends up by focussing not on Napoleon but on Stalin.<sup>19</sup> Whereas

18. The exception confirms the rule: it is based on a study of Volume Two. See Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, 70–72.

19. See 660–63.

considered by itself, Volume One may not allow us to say confidently that in its central sections Sartre meant to understand the Russian Revolution through the French, this impression is strengthened not only retrospectively, by the remarkably anticipatory analyses in *Les Communistes et la paix*, but above all by the central sections of Volume Two. There, Sartre discusses first the general problem of contradictions and opposition within a revolutionary group, then the Trotsky-Stalin conflict, then Stalin's political practice in the 1930s (including collectivization and industrialization), and finally the question of Stalin's anti-semitism. This sustained four-hundred page work on the Soviet Union is both theoretical and political, finally asking—and answering—the question of questions: why Stalin? In it Sartre's ambitions as political thinker rival his ambitions as social philosopher, as he reflects not only on how the dialectic became "obscured" under Stalin but also on whether the Revolution's positive results can now be freed from its negative ones.

In these monumental analyses we see Sartre exerting intellect and commitment with all his considerable might, insisting not only on the dialectical character of the blockages of the dialectic,<sup>20</sup> but also on the *praxis*-process at the heart of some of the grimmest facts of the century. A labor of hope as I termed it in my introductory words, it is a pitched struggle on behalf of socialism and against all political and intellectual tendencies which would confirm human products as forces *beyond* human control (and reversal). Sartre here combats both bourgeois and Stalinist outlooks which would separate our (however alienated) product from us and would impose it back upon us as the creation of laws, Society or fate. One senses in these analyses—and, through the retrospective light they throw, in the entire *Critique*—a heroic single-handed effort to move heaven and hell (indeed to expose both as human creations), in order to restore our ability to think about the world as *ours*.

How radical, then, how ambitious is the *Critique*! This sketch of its purposes in light of its second volume may enable us better to appreciate it, especially if we set it in its environment in a postwar period marked by growing cynicism and narrowing horizons. A sense of how vast are Sartre's goals may help to explain why he wrote it as a man obsessed, under the greatest strain, helped along by corydrame capsules.<sup>21</sup> And it may encourage forgiveness of the project's failings, of the chaotic char-

20. And implying a sense of progress he had rejected in his first reflections in *Cahiers sur la morale*. See *Critique*, 1, 660.

21. See de Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance*, 385.

acter of much of Volume One, and the difficulty it imposes on the reader.

This sketch of the project's purposes may also indicate how much depends on Volume Two. Few of the *Critique's* major goals as I have outlined them have been met by the pause at the end of its first volume; most of them must await the completion of the second. Early on, Sartre himself poses four questions which must be answered "if the dialectic is possible":

(1) How can *praxis* in itself be an experience of necessity and of freedom since neither of these, according to classical logic, can be grasped in an empirical process?

(2) If dialectical rationality really is a logic of totalisation, how can History—that swarm of individual destinies—appear as a totalising movement, and how can one avoid the paradox that in order to totalise there must already be a unified principle, that is that only active totalities can totalise themselves?

(3) If the dialectic is comprehension of the present through the past and through the future, how can there be a historical future?

(4) If the dialectic is to be materialist, how are we to comprehend the materiality of *praxis* and its relation to other forms of materiality?

[I, 79]

Solutions to questions (2) and (3), it will be obvious, cannot even be attempted before the second volume. Numbers (1) and (4) can be posed, but the first can certainly not be completed without exploring and establishing the meaning of History as a joint production of necessity and freedom. Only the last question might have been answered—but was not—in the first volume. The point is that through the pause we have understood certain elements of the dialectic, have seen the way they may combine, but have not yet observed them combine to form the irreversible and large-scale entities which emerge in and seem to direct our history. And so we must accordingly turn to its second volume.

### III

Given that the overall purpose of the *Critique* is to philosophically anchor and delimit the dialectic as method of comprehension, course and meaning of history and guide to concrete political action, Volume Two has been seen to bear most of its burdens. It must, to return to our first and simplest formulations, show how and whether totalization does take place even at the heart of conflict, which is to say, how history's positive direction takes shape and sustains itself even within

negativity. If, as Sartre in agreement with Marx says, "[t]he history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles,"<sup>22</sup> he seeks to explain, on the most rudimentary theoretical level, why those struggles yield human development, rather than—nothing at all.<sup>23</sup>

Sartre makes these questions more precise at the end of Volume One, and because of their great interest they are worth quoting even at the risk of some repetition.

We have seen how the mediation of the Third party realizes the transcendent unity of positive reciprocities [That is, how individuals each engaged in the same practice form themselves into a coherent single fused group through the mediation of a third person engaged in the same activity]. But is this unity still possible when each action is aimed at destroying that of the Other and when the observable results of this double negation are nil—or as usually happens—when the teleological significations which each adversary has inscribed in it have been partly erased or transformed by the Other, so that no trace of concerted activity is any longer to be seen? [I, 816–17]

Taking the example of individual combat, how are we to understand that significant results are produced in a situation in which "each blow dealt by the one is dodged or parried or blocked by the Other—but not completely, unless they differ greatly in strength or skill" (I, 817). In the face of the complex totalization which is History we are left trying to understand efforts which "have to be comprehended not as the realization of a project, but in terms of how the action of each group (and also of chance, accident, etc.) prevented them from realizing that of the Other, that is to say, to the extent that they *are not* practical significations, and that their mutilated, truncated meaning does not correspond to any one's practical plan so that, in this sense, they fall short of being human."

At stake in the next stage of analysis is nothing less than the nature and meaning of History itself, seen as:

the totalisation of all practical multiplicities and of all their struggles, the complex products of the conflicts and collaborations of those very diverse multiplicities. . . . This means that History is intelligible if the different practices which can be found and located at a given moment of the historical temporalization finally appear as partially totalizing and as connected and merged in their very oppositions and diversities by an

22. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto, The Collected Works* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976), vol. 6, 482.

23. A position he explored with considerable sympathy in *Cahiers sur la morale*. See 47–49.

intelligible totalisation from which there is no appeal. It is by seeking the conditions for the intelligibility of historical vestiges and results that we shall, for the first time reach the problem of totalisation without a totaliser and of the very foundation of this totalisation, that is to say, of its motive-forces and of its non-circular direction. [I, 817]

And so we come, after a pause, to Volume Two. In its first pages Sartre further clarifies and refines his goal, throwing considerable further light on what *Critique*, II is to be about and why. In a step by step introductory discussion he both indicates what Volume Two is *not* about and deepens our sense of its tasks and importance. In following him closely we can observe his remarkable intellect at work shaping the terrain of study, and perhaps complete this introduction to Volume Two.

If the question is to understand *contradiction*, at the outset Sartre indicates and dismisses the kinds of contradictions he does not have in mind: those arising "at each moment of action" (II, 2) of a single, coherent *praxis* as, for example, it must inevitably oppose this or that section of a practical field to the others, or as it necessarily seeks to go beyond its initial results and limits. Indeed, "contradiction" may well be used in an a priori fashion to assimilate two opposing sides—a "double *praxis* of antagonistic reciprocity"—as "a given moment of totalisation" (II, 2). But wherein lies the unity? Dialectical intelligibility, after all, starts with totalization; and totalization is the product of a unifying *praxis*. A given region is intelligible *because* human intentionality itself shapes its structures and history. But what if, on the contrary, *conflicting* intentionalities are at play:

in fact there is, if one wishes, a single movement of the two bodies but this movement is the result of *two* enterprises which oppose each other. It belongs at the same time to two practical systems but precisely because of this, it escapes in its concrete reality—at least partially—each of them: if the plurality of the epicenters is a real condition of *two* opposed intelligibilities (insofar as there is comprehensive intelligibility in each system and starting with each *praxis*) how could there be *one* dialectical intelligibility of the process in course? [II, 3]

We may certainly regard a boxing match as *a fight, an object* to appreciate, to find tickets for, to remember, "but this unity is imposed *from the outside on an event*" (II, 4). The point demands closer attention:

Object for individuals, groups, collectives, defined as totality by language, by the press and the organs of information, and then subse-

quently, in the past designated as a unity in its being-past by memory (it was *the day of the Carpentier-Dempsey fight*) the fight, in itself, appears as one of those mathematical symbols which designate an ensemble of operations to carry out, and which figure as such in the series of algebraic equivalences without the mathematician ever being troubled to really carry out the indicated operations. It is an object to be constructed, to be utilized, to be contemplated, to be designated; in other words it figures as such in the activities of others; but no one is troubled to know whether this reality—noematic and unified correspondent of individual and collective *praxis*—is in *itself*, as internal operation to be carried out by two individuals in the reciprocity of antagonism, real unity or irreducible duality. [II, 4–5]

Sartre admits without reservation that *the match* exists, for many people and for many purposes; his goal is "to know if as struggle, as objective fact of reciprocal and negative totalisation, it possesses the conditions of dialectical intelligibility" (II, 5).

Appreciating this question as relevant, legitimate and important is critical to grasping Sartre's purpose. We see here, on the level of struggle (but not yet class struggle), *the questions of the progressive synthesis: how do separate, antagonistic actions yield a history; how do individual totalizations lead to Totalization (and also progress, the direction of history, its truth and meaning)?* Here more than anywhere in his *oeuvre* Sartre directly and unflinchingly approaches the master problem, of the passage from Descartes to Marx, the cogito to society, individual *praxis* to collective membership.

But before continuing to approach it directly, Sartre embarks on a lengthy methodological reflection whose purpose is to distinguish the dialectical analysis of struggle from the study of battles usually undertaken by analytical reason, for example in military schools. His goal is to define his terrain of analysis further. Rationally and in a systematic manner, the instructing officer "again goes over all *possible* maneuvers in the envisaged situation to determine whether the one which was done in reality is indeed the *best possible one*, as it should and claims to be" (II, 6). The point is that this approach does not give us the whole, as struggle, but rather as a "complex whole of possibilities which are rigorously linked to each other" (II, 6). Whatever its utility for practical purposes, an approach which concentrates on "a multiplicity of relationships between possibles" (II, 7–8) has abandoned the plane of dialectic. This is the gravamen of Sartre's criticism of analytical reason: it evades "the scandal of irreducible antagonism in order to fall into conditionings in exteriority" (II, 8).

Why must this approach be described pejoratively? Because here as elsewhere in the *Critique* analytical reason is seen as a mode of rational analysis which is unable to grasp both the individual specificity and the larger social processes with which Sartre is concerned. Because it is an abstract and external understanding, carrying us "far from what could be called the irreducible singularity of the epicenters" (II, 8). To elaborate further, "it has definitively abandoned every characteristic which makes the historic reality and the temporal individuality of a given conflict" (II, 9). Under the rubric *dialectical* Sartre has in mind understanding which would both center itself in the perspective of either of the combatants rather than claiming a—necessarily external—neutrality, and illuminate the individual situation of that combatant. Nothing could be further from the military schools' abstract calculus of possibilities than the "blind and passionate" combatant, under threat, urgently forced to respond.

A real combatant is a violent and passionate man, sometimes desperate, sometimes ready to seek death, who risks everything to destroy the adversary but who maneuvers in a time which is measured for him by the rhythm of the other's attacks (and by a hundred other factors of every order). In having at his disposal (for example) a limited number of men and arms (which forbids certain operations) and who struggles in a variable but always profound ignorance (ignorance of the enemy's real intentions, of the relationship of real forces, of the real position of reinforcements—for the adversary and for him, etc., etc.) this obliges him to take risks, to decide upon the most probable without having the necessary elements for being able to calculate it, to invent the maneuvers which take account of several eventualities (if the enemy is disposed in such a fashion, the operation will take place in such fashion or such manner, if it is discovered in the course of action that he is otherwise disposed the operation is conceived to be able to be instantaneously modified, etc., etc.). It is this blind and passionate inventor who gambles in uncertainty in trying to limit risks, and whose every action is conditioned by external and interiorised scarcity, this man we call a battler [*lutteur*]. [II, 11–12]

Ignorance, urgency, blindness, passion, scarcity—may be obstacles to an analytical reconstruction of the map of possibilities; a dialectical understanding on the contrary understands our action "in its insufficiency, in its imperfection, in its mistakes beginning with the negative determinations which it conserves in transcending them" (II, 10). For in fact no action, in its historical reality, can be understood in terms of "the best possible solution since the best possible solution can only be

found if one possesses every element of the situation, all the time necessary to regather them into a synthesis which transcends them, all the calm and objectivity necessary for self-criticism" (II, 10-11). In short, a dialectical understanding of a struggle is constructed *in terms of*, not in spite of, these various negativities, and therefore takes place "at the very level of struggle" (II, 11).

For Sartre, then, intelligibility, if it exists, appears in and through the individual project—it is a function of subjectivity in action. Sartre's famous individualist starting point is here above all a commitment to an internal, concrete and thus dialectical understanding. If the match indeed "should be revealed as a unity," the point is not to posit it a priori, which would force us to pretend that each *praxis* is somehow a determination of that larger unity (which would thus be a hyper-organism operating on its own and imposing itself upon individuals from the outside). The point is, rather, to observe how each specific unity is indeed created in "a very particular *praxis*-process" in which "the process is here defined as the deterioration of one *praxis* by the other" (II, 12).

Having further clarified the nature of a dialectical, as opposed to an analytical understanding, Sartre now formulates "the two essential problems." First, to return to the notion of *contradiction*, he now asks about conflicts which "can be, in the interior of a group, the real actualisations of a developing contradiction." In other words, the collectivities studied in Volume One suggest that we may think of a battle in terms of a contradiction, and its adversaries as the terms of a contradiction-in-the-making. But to do so, in addition to being able to find in each struggle "the three characteristics of dialectical intelligibility, that is, totalisation, particularisation and contradiction" (II, 12), the opponents "must be able to be considered as the transitory determinations of a more ample and more profound group one of whose present contradictions their conflict would actualise . . ." (II, 12). And, at the same time, the group would have to transcend the "struggle towards a new synthetic reunification of its practical field and an internal reorganization of its structures." In other words, no matter how bitterly opposed might be the adversaries, the real secret of their struggle would be *the group's* self-development.

The second essential problem receives far more development, obviously because of its greater difficulty and complexity. It concerns the products and residue of struggle—the "ambiguous and insufficiently developed" events, incomprehensible objects which become "the factors and conditions of further history" (II, 13). A certain intention—to create

the Ateliers Nationaux in 1848—may have been conceived to meet a social need of the moment, but was generated by, and became the object of, class struggle. The products of such struggles appear "as *aporias* since they stand at one and the same time as results of a common enterprise and testify that this enterprise has never existed unless as the inhuman inverse of two opposed actions each one of which aims to destroy the other" (II, 13). The original intention has not been met, but "in spite of the deviations and partial annullments, something remains of the original project and the enterprise conserves a confused efficacy which leads to unforeseen results" (II, 14).

Here we reach *the* problem: to make sense of history as totalization, and thus of each struggle in turn as *a* totalization, we must be able to grasp "individuals or groups in struggle as collaborating in fact on a common work. And as the work is perpetually given, as residue of the struggle—be it the devastation of a battlefield, insofar as one could consider the two adversaries as having together burned and sacked the fields and woods—it must be grasped as the objectification of a group at work, itself formed of two antagonistic groups" (II, 14). Not as achieved by their concerted *praxis*, but as in the case of the Ateliers Nationaux, having indeed become "historical realities only to the degree that they do not conform to any of the projects which have achieved them in reciprocal antagonism" (II, 14–15). Remarkably, then, they are historical to the degree that they are made by men, escaping from their makers without thereby becoming unworked matter. "To the degree, in sum, that they deviate from every route one wants to assign them, themselves taking an unforeseen route and producing results that could not be guessed" (II, 15). They deviate, that is, not because of the exteriority of materiality as such, of seriality or alienation—but rather because "each one steals his act from the other" (II, 15) in a history based on a plurality of epicenters in conflict.

Social objects formed in such processes and bequeathed to future generations would thus "contain as internal structure the double negation of themselves and of each component by the other" (II, 15). Every social whole contains "a certain *aporia*": "the apparent unities and partial syntheses cover over lacerations of all orders and sizes; from a distance the society seems to hold all by itself [*tenir toute seule*]; from up close it is riddled with holes" (II, 16).

What is the deeper source of these strange objects and the conflicts which produce them? All conflicts are "conditioned by scarcity, negation of man by Earth, interiorised as negation of man by man" (II, 16). Thus struggles "are never in any way accidents of human history: they

represent the very manner in which men live scarcity—in their perpetual movement to transcend it" (II, 16). That is, the original relationship to nature—*there is not enough*—is interiorised, translated onto other levels and transformed into permanent struggles, and into classes. Some societies, as Lévy-Strauss and American sociologists have shown, may transform original scarcity through "rigorous systems of mediations-compensations" and thus "correct chance by a redistribution of certain goods" (II, 17). But then, conflict being prohibited, it remains present as tension and as latent conflict, the malaise of the entire society.

Still, the necessity and universality of scarcity is no more demonstrable a priori than that of history: no one can say "that every practical ensemble should secrete a history, nor even that all possible histories should be conditioned by scarcity." Sartre limits his claims by insisting that such developments "arise with all the contingent richness of a *singularity*" (II, 18). It happens that *our* history, internalizing *our* society, has been one of class struggle: "in the framework of scarcity, the constitutive relationships are fundamentally antagonistic; from the point of view of their temporal development they come under the form of this event which is struggle" (II, 18). This, then, is the very definition of the specific historical process whose intelligibility we seek: first, its strange products "will become the material circumstances which will have to be transcended by other generations torn by other conflicts" (II, 18). Second, these products refer us "wholly and from every point of view" to the conflicting *praxes* in which they originated; but thirdly, the product "overflows the adversaries and by them becomes other than what each one projects" (II, 19).

In this sense, with Marxism, we can regard the class struggle as "the motor of history." For indeed, it reveals "to us the dialectical development of the historical process" (II, 19). Framed in Marxist terms, we can now pose the question of Volume Two: "Is there a unity of different classes which sustains and produces their irreducible conflicts?" Certainly, at the theoretical level, this is the question of questions. Given (a). the primacy of the active *cogito* on which the *Critique* is founded, and given equally (a). that history is a dialectical process, how does (a). produce (b).? If the class struggle is intelligible to dialectical reason, "it must be possible to totalise classes in struggle, and this amounts to discovering the synthetic unity of a Society torn completely apart" (II, 19). Indeed, Marx himself was aware of this problem, as is evidenced by his discussion of the capitalist process as "an anti-social force *in society*. But on the other hand he always refused—and for good reason—to

give a reality to this verbal entity that one calls society. He saw there only one form of alienation among others" (II, 19). Neither he nor subsequent Marxists, appropriately concerned as they were with material results, explored such formal problems of intelligibility. But it is today, "at the very moment when the machine seems to jam that it is fitting to clean up the formal difficulties which have hitherto been neglected" (II, 20). It is time today to ask whether struggles are totalizing or detotalizing—that is, whether they create a larger, meaningful and developing whole, or whether they amount to nothing at all or indeed dissolve previous totalizations. Marxism itself is at stake, as Sartre indicates in this trenchant summary:

Marxism is rigorously true if history is totalisation; it is no longer so if human history is decomposed into a plurality of particular histories. Or if in any case within the relationship of immanence which characterises struggle, the negation of each adversary by the other is on principle *detotalising*. Certainly, we have neither the project nor the possibility of showing here the full truth of dialectical materialism—which we will without doubt attempt elsewhere, in a book devoted to anthropology, which is to say to struggle as such. Our single goal is to establish whether in a practical ensemble torn by antagonism (whether there are multiple conflicts or they are reduced to a single one) the breaks themselves are totalising and entailed by the totalising movement of the ensemble. But if in fact we establish this abstract principle, the materialist dialectic, as movement of history and of historical understanding need only be proven by the facts it illuminates, or if one prefers, need only be itself discovered as a fact and through other facts. [II, 20–21]

But if such a totalizing movement exists, "it occurs everywhere"—leading Sartre to the important new idea, central to what follows: "that each singular event totalises in itself this whole [be it planetary or indeed were it to become interplanetary] in the infinite richness of its singularity" (II, 21). Which suggests indeed that each particular struggle may itself be seen as a "totalisation of every struggle." Before asking, later, about the nature of history or its truth, we must first seek to comprehend a single irreducible conflict, such as the boxing match, "as totalisation of the whole of contemporary irreducibilities and splits . . ." (II, 21).

And so, in the next paragraphs, Sartre launches into his analysis of a particular conflict—a boxing match, for which his introductory discussion has carefully prepared us. The study proper begins. By now its question has been given precision, its outer limits and internal structure

shaped, and its significance indicated. I have let Sartre speak at length in order to allow the reader maximum access to the manuscript. We now know what we must look for and why. It is, I said at the outset, a clear yet decisive question. Indeed, we have seen the same question amplified, lent meaning from a number of angles, and representing a rather remarkable self-challenge to Sartre's conceptual universe. We may now be prepared to enter the study from within, understanding and sharing Sartre's purposes—and perhaps even his enthusiasm and urgency.

# Sartre's African Writings: Literature and Revolution

John Erickson

THE twentieth-century African's search for identity and self-determination have something of the mythic stature of Narcissus and Orpheus. Like Narcissus he has become enamored of himself, of his race and history, and like Orpheus he has had to descend and is descending still into the hell of his being — the years of slavery and oppression — to lead himself back into the world and the community of men.

Jean-Paul Sartre refers naturally to Narcissus and Orpheus in his writings on Africa and the Africans. The questions posed by Africa for philosophers, historians, or literary critics take on mythic dimensions, for they span centuries, sweep continents and oceans, lead us to the metacenter of the human condition. Sartre's African writings are important in that they bring together one of the most lucid and challenging thinkers of our century and one of the most pressing of human problems: namely, the ability of men to live together without self-aggrandizement.

Sartre's African writings treat obvious problems: colonialism past and present, the clash of dissimilar cultures, the question of race, the process by which Africa has begun its liberation from the West. These writings have appeared as prefaces to controversial books such as *La Question* of Henri Alleg which was banned by the French government in 1958 or *Les Damnés de la terre* of Frantz Fanon which is one of the few true handbooks of revolution existing today. (And a copy of which Fred Hampton had with him when he was shot by police in Chicago.) Most celebrated of Sartre's African writings is *Orphée noir*, the preface he wrote for Senghor's classic anthology: *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre de langue française*. In addition Sartre has written several short pieces on Africa, which remain uncollected in book form.

*Orphée noir* is central to Sartre's writings on literature and revolution in Africa. And though I shall refer to his ideas having to do with the

colonial situation elsewhere in Africa and the Third World, I shall consider principally his view of the West African writer, and the Afro-Caribbean writer of the former French Antilles.

Senghor's anthology, prefaced by Sartre's essay, appeared in 1948.<sup>1</sup> But it is important for us to go back to July, 1946, when another essay by Sartre, entitled "Matérialisme et révolution," appeared in *Les Temps modernes*. In that article he spoke at length about the revolutionary. "Le révolutionnaire..., à la différence du révolté, veut un *ordre*" (*Situations, III*, 201). Following the historian Mathiez, Sartre defines a revolutionary as one who enjoys a "condition sociale déterminée," is *en situation* in the society he lives in and intentionally seeks to overthrow its institutions as well as to change profoundly the rule of property ("le régime de la propriété"). The fact of oppression does not make one a revolutionary, Sartre says, and he refuses to call the colonial nationalists revolutionaries, for the reason that their integration into colonial society is not complete. They want a return to a past state: "ils veulent *retrouver* leur suprématie et trancher les liens qui les attachent à la société colonisatrice" (pp. 176-177). By striking contrast, in *Orphée noir*, Sartre considers the African not just a revolutionary but a revolutionary *par excellence*, by his situation and history better suited than other men to serve as spokesman for oppressed humanity. Thus, between mid-1946 and 1948, Sartre's ideas with regard to the role of the African writer as revolutionary changed dramatically.<sup>2</sup>

In speaking of the poetry of black Africans in his essay, Sartre refers over and over to three terms: *négritude*, revolution, and surrealism. While the black writer in Africa and the Antilles invented neither revolution nor surrealism, he can claim *négritude* as uniquely his. *Négritude* is a key concept, for it is *négritude* that makes African surrealist poetry fundamentally different from European surrealism; moreover, it is *négritude* that makes that same poetry revolutionary in nature. *Négritude* is the African's identity — what he is, what he has been, what he will become.

To call *Orphée noir*, as Michel Beaujour does, "a hymn to the redemption of Surrealism by Black poets..." looks at only one of

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1. Later the same year the essay was published separately in *Les Temps modernes*, no. 37.
  2. Some evidence of this change is manifest in Sartre's essay, "Présence noire," which appeared in the first number of *Présence Africaine*, nov.-déc. 1947.

multiple aspects of Sartre's essay.<sup>3</sup> Surrealism is, for certain black poets, the means for revolution, and *négritude* is the life spirit of revolution.

Frantz Fanon, the psychiatrist-revolutionary from Martinique, who died in Algeria in 1961, saw political and literary thought in the Third World developing through three stages: 1. in the first stage the colonized person assimilates the culture of the colonizer, 2. in the second he returns to his past and makes it the basis for a pre-revolt literature, 3. in the third the oppressed writer commits himself to a struggle of liberation. Fanon emphasized not historical continuity, but states of mind having no strict chronology. As Janheinz Jahn points out, these stages intermix in African literature of all times and places, but the accent has come increasingly in this century to fall on revolutionary expression. This third stage enters on a literature of social and political commitment, and that is precisely the quality of African and Antilles poetry that intrigued Sartre when he first read, probably in 1947, Senghor's selections for his anthology. Sartre set out, accordingly, to tell the whites "pourquoi c'est nécessairement à travers une expérience poétique que le noir . . . doit d'abord prendre conscience de lui-même et, inversement, pourquoi la poésie noire de langue française est, de nos jours, la seule grande poésie révolutionnaire."<sup>4</sup> Sartre's stated purpose is twofold: to show, 1. the African's consciousness of self, 2. his revolutionary objective which will transcend self and lead to a consciousness of others. Here basically are the self-assertion and reaction found in Senghor's writings on *négritude*. Sartre and Senghor agree in defining the general characteristics of *négritude*. They differ, however, in their contextual evaluation of it, for Senghor sees it mainly as a cultural-artistic process, whereas Sartre treats it in a revolutionary (socio-political) context.

The black, like the white proletarian, has been victimized by the capitalist structure of western society — though the circumstances of his victimization vary because of historical-geographical conditions. He has in addition been victimized because of his color and, for that very

3. "Sartre and Surrealism," *Yale French Studies* 30, p. 91.

4. *Situations*, III, 233 (Paris: Gallimard, 1949). Succeeding page references in the text to "Orphée noir" will be to this edition. Though one of the first, Sartre is far from being alone in stressing the revolutionary nature of African poetry. As Mercer Cook points out (*The Militant Black Writer*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969, p. 52, n. 52), Quaison-Sackey in *Africa Unbound* "also stresses the revolutionary aspect of the African Personality."

reason, he must become conscious of his race (p. 236). He cannot change his blackness even if he wanted to, so he must defend it, assert it, fiercely. Black becomes the way to authenticity. Before he can tread common ground with oppressed peoples, he must first undergo "the moment of separation or negation" — an antiracist racism must precede the abolition of racial differences.<sup>5</sup> Paradoxically, the black man must assert his differences before he can reject them.

The open scorn of whites for blacks has had no parallel in the bourgeois-proletariat relationship. The black must oppose that scorn by emphasizing his black self or black subjectivity.<sup>6</sup> Since the term *négritude* appears often in Senghor's anthology, Sartre restates the problem in relation to it: consciousness of race for the black has as its axis "une certaine qualité commune aux pensées et aux conduites des nègres que l'on nomme la *négritude*" (p. 238). To develop racial concepts one either exteriorizes subjective character traits or interiorizes exterior traits of conduct. The black revolutionary, in contrast to the white revolutionary, has as his point of departure his subjective being. The black calling on his brothers to be conscious of themselves tries to present "l'image exemplaire de leur *négritude*." The same mode of conduct Sartre saw as a basis for existential humanism here relates itself to an existential blackism, being in the world as a black man.

The black writer, from Haiti to Cayenne, begins in exile. He carries with him the stigma of his contact with the western mind and culture, having passed from a state of immediate experience to that of reflection. Reflection comes from standing back from oneself, from exile from the black man's inner self—his immediate and spontaneous *négritude*. Along with this exile from self, which Sartre calls "l'exile de son cœur," the black writer often undergoes exile of the body. In black

5. It is for this very inference of racism by the use of the term *négritude* that several younger African writers have totally rejected the term. This would seem to be because of Sartre, for the traditional spokesmen of *négritude*—Damas, Césaire, Senghor—have not emphasized racism. Cf. Lilyan Kesteloot, *Les Ecrivains noirs de langue française* (Brussels: Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1965), pp. 297 ff.

6. The term "essence noire" used by Sartre has been called racist by the Malagasy poet Jacques Rabemananjara because it implies that his color makes the African different, whereas it is his African-ness ("Le Poète noir et son peuple," *PA*, n° XVI, oct-nov 1957, p. 12). Kesteloot says, "Rabemananjara a donc raison d'insister sur le fait que la *négritude* n'est pas une *essence* séparant l'homme noir des autres hommes: qu'elle n'est pas non plus liée à la couleur, mais à une communauté de situation" (*Les Ecrivains noirs*, p. 300).

poetry, reflection on *négritude* (exile from self) often merges with physical exile: the black in London, Paris or New York dreams of being homeward bound, while the black in Port-au-Prince or Fort-de-France dreams of the edenic land of his ancestors — “l’Afrique fantôme vacillant comme une flamme, entre l’être et le néant...” (p. 241). Black poetry takes as its dominant symbols: exile, slavery, “le couple Afrique-Europe” and the manichean division of the world between black and white.

The black revolutionary writer then is exiled from homeland and self. *Négritude* eludes him, lies just beyond his grasp, “comme son enfance ensevelie, trahie, et l’enfance de sa race et l’appel de la terre...” (p. 241). Two of its themes inextricably mingle in his poetry: that of the “retour au pays natal” and that of the orphic “redescence aux Enfers éclatants de l’âme noire” (p. 242). He quests, strips his being in a systematic asceticism, moves continually deeper into the depths of his being. In going in to himself, he goes out to others, “en se montrant le plus lyrique . . . le poète noir atteint le plus sûrement à la grande poésie collective: en ne parlant que de soi il parle de tous les nègres” (p. 243).

A minority in search of self-preservation logically seeks to preserve its language. But the black revolutionary, schooled in European languages, can only through them disseminate his views widely in Africa and the Caribbean. Thus, the black writing in French encounters the problem of expressing his *négritude*, a subjective state, by means of an analytic language. He faces the poetic experience of failure “devant le langage” (p. 246), he undergoes the process of *autodestruction* which characterizes the goal of poetry from Mallarmé to the surrealists (p. 247). The language itself becomes for the revolutionary a mode of revolution: he sets out to defrenchize the words, fragment them, break their accustomed associations, unite them through violence (p. 247); he creates “un superlangage solennel et sacré, la Poésie” (p. 248).<sup>7</sup> The French language, a language of direct expression, cannot speak directly of *négritude* (“puisque la négritude est silence”), can only suggest it. The “courts-circuits du langage” Breton spoke about hold that suggestive power.

7. Kesteloot disagrees with Sartre. Césaire, she says, sets out not to destroy the language but to restructure it (*Les Ecrivains noirs*, p. 174). She takes Sartre’s words here literally instead of poetically.

Here lies the substance for poetic change: destruction, a linguistic *autodafé*, magic symbolism, conceptual ambivalence — in short, the negative power of modern poetry (pp. 251-252), the detonating caps for one of the most promising explosions in contemporary literature: a realization of that Surrealist dream of a poetry in the service of revolution.

So far as Sartre is concerned, the French surrealists (*qua* surrealists, one might add), like Dante's Bellacqua, sit eternally against their rock, dreaming of some future ascent to revolutionary paradise that will never come about. In *Qu'est-ce que la littérature* Sartre charges them with being anti-revolutionary. He sees them as having escaped self-consciousness and consequently their "situation dans le monde,"<sup>8</sup> whereas the true revolutionary lives *en situation*. Automatic writing achieves not liberation but a destruction of subjectivity, by annihilating the "distinctions reçues entre vie consciente et inconsciente, entre rêve et veille" (allusion to *Les Vases communicants, Situations, II*, p. 215). Moreover, the surrealist attempts to discredit the objective world through deception, as for example when Duchamp places his pieces of marble, resembling sugar cubes, in a bird cage and deludes the person picking it up who expects it to be light and finds it extraordinarily heavy. The French surrealists have dissipated their efforts in gratuitous games.

With African surrealism we are dealing not with a "jeu gratuit" but with the black poet-revolutionary whose situation, exile, imposed alienation (in sum, the social-political factors of his existence), oblige him to "reconquer his black existential unity" (p. 252). He undertakes, consequently, a dialectic and mystic return to the origins of his being. Behind this return lies a method. The mode of literature becomes revolutionary, that is, the way to bring about successive transformations (dialectically) leading the black to a confrontation with himself — a descent or ascent to *négritude*. Literature becomes *engagée*, a means for the black to "devenir ce qu'il est" (p. 252).

Two ways exist for the black's return to self. One way is by means of *négritude* that goes outward, away from the poet, and expresses itself through externals such as manners, art, song and dance. Wole Soyinka speaks of poetic mysticism in African poetry, which is only "an extension of the sensuous animist in man, the sifting, the

8. In *Situations II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), p. 215. Succeeding page references to *Qu'est-ce que la littérature* will refer to this edition.

distillation, the insidious understanding that develops between the object and imagination." There emerges the "magical moment, the evocation of the animist understanding... the poet simply reaches inside and out to a psychic brotherhood, a rare instant of total comprehension, a superior self-consciousness." <sup>9</sup> We observe the close animistic relation between self and objects. By such a process, the black poet tries to install in himself "le temps de ses ancêtres..." (p. 253); "il tente de se faire posséder par la *négritude* de son peuple..." (p. 253). The black poet of Africa and the Antilles lives closer than the poet of graeco-roman habits to the wellspring of poetry: the oral, folklore tradition.

A second way is by means of a subjective *négritude* that leads inward through dream and desire. Césaire has chosen this way. It is the way of the surrealists. The poet plunges beneath the superficial crust of regularized life, beneath reason and common sense, to the depths of desire. In desire Césaire finds the power of refusal and love, the basis for surrealism itself: the "négation radicale des lois naturelles et du possible, appel au miracle..." (p. 255).

Poetry for the French surrealists served as a force to liberate the imagination rather than the whole man. The crucial difference between the European surrealist and the African surrealist comes from that fact. European surrealism has traditionally stood for a force capable of freeing us from the contingencies of race, class, earthbound condition, thought and language, and capable of discovering "un aspect caché de l'être" (p. 257). If surrealism reveals tensions, contradictions and oppositions, ultimately, according to Breton, attainment of surreality will bring about the reconciliation of these opposites. As Sartre says, one could speak of a certain impassivity or impersonality of a surrealist poem, which rises above the contingent. In his second manifesto Breton refers to the problem of social action: "... l'action sociale n'est... j'y insiste, qu'une des formes d'un problème plus général que le surréalisme s'est mis en devoir de soulever et qui est *celui de l'expression humaine sous toutes ses formes.*" <sup>10</sup>

As we have seen, the oppressed black revolutionary must deal in particular with the problem of his blackness. Consequently, we can assume that surrealism, which serves the particular demands of the black man's struggle against oppression, will itself change in substance.

9. "And After the Narcissist?," *African Forum*, I, 4 (Spring 1966), p. 54.

10. *Manifestes du surréalisme*, Collection idées (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 108.

Surrealism has evolved beyond national boundaries, despite the view of many surrealists.<sup>11</sup> European surrealism and African-Antilles surrealism differ. The traditional mode of surrealism, rising above race and condition, had to change, to become black and revolutionary. Césaire is the most illustrious exponent of that seemingly contradictory method Sartre calls "écriture automatique engagée et même dirigée" (p. 258), in which reflection plays no role, but words and images continually reveal an underlying obsession.

Sartre suggest that "In Césaire the great surrealist tradition culminates, finds its definitive meaning and destroys itself..." (p. 260). Césaire's originality lies in uniting his desires and instincts as an oppressed black militant, with the most destructive, free and metaphysical poetry, at a moment when Eluard and Aragon were failing in their effort to give a political content to their work (p. 260). With Césaire surrealism becomes revolutionary and political. The *négritude* he seeks serves as the basis for the social-political resolution of his situation. Moreover, his treatment of *négritude* conforms to "surrealist tradition which wishes a poem to be objective." Because "Césaire's words do not describe *négritude*... [but] create it," the method is subjective, but he achieves *la négritude-objet* in the best surrealist manner.

We have spoken of the two methods of African poetry: the objective method which is directed outward, away from the poet, to external phenomena, e.g., an object, an African dance or mask that is described explicitly *in order to go within* (Sartre: process of "absorption") to find the spirit of *négritude*; the subjective method which is directed inward, to internal phenomena, e. g., the love and desire of the poet himself (who incarns the spirit of *négritude*), and then goes *outward* (Sartre: process of "excrétion") in the indirect expression of *négritude-objet* (in the "cri de douleur, d'amour et de haine," p. 260).

The result of the two methods is the same. There occurs what Sartre calls "Ce double spasme d'absorption et d'excrétion" (p. 261), the systolic-diastolic rhythm of black poetry. In short, it is *négritude*, which the white can know only partially, only intellectually.

The quest for *négritude* by the black man synthesizes revolutionary and poetic aspirations. Sartre sets out to show how this notion is one of

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11. See, e. g., Paul Ilie, *The Surrealist Mode in Spanish Literature* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1968).

“poésie pure” (p. 261). He quotes Senghor to the effect that *négritude*, “c’est moins le thème que le style, la chaleur émotionnelle qui donne vie aux mots, qui transmue la parole en verbe.” Sartre glosses this as “une certaine attitude affective à l’égard du monde.” Sentiment is, Sartre reminds us, “une manière définie de vivre notre rapport au monde.” It expresses as well our comprehension of the universe. “C’est une tension de l’âme, un choix de soi-même et d’autre, une façon de dépasser les données brutes de l’expérience...” *Négritude* is, then, in Hegelian terms, “l’être-dans-le-monde du Nègre” (p. 262).

*Négritude* for Sartre takes the form of an act, rather than a disposition of our nature; rather than transforming the world, “il s’agit d’exister au milieu du monde” — whereas, the whites are driven to possess, to transform, notably through technology. What Sartre views as the difference between European and African culture, Octavio Paz has extended to define the difference between Western civilization and that of the Third World — Asia, Africa, and South America. Western civilization, as seen by Paz, seeks to destroy or change nature; it fights against nature and does violence to it, while non-western cultures adapt to nature.<sup>12</sup> Technology in this sense may be understood as a means to dominate our physical environment. However, the tools of technology obviously do not belong to the worker — he is deprived of freedom and the “joie au travail.” Sartre sees in black poetry (and in particular in the often-quoted verses written by Césaire to describe the African and Afro-caribbean culture: “Ceux qui n’ont inventé ni la poudre ni la boussole”<sup>13</sup>) an impulse toward what he calls “non-technicité” — by which the lack of technological means becomes a “source positive de richesse” (pp. 263-264). The relationship between nature and technology is one of exteriority wherein nature dies. Black literature emphasizes the refusal of the African and West Indian to become a *homo-faber*. He instead gives life back to nature (p. 264).

12. *Conjunciones y disjunciones* (México D. F.: Ed. Joaquín Mortiz, 1969). A good many critics and philosophers have explored the differences between western and eastern culture, not the least of whom was Wilhelm Worringer in his *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (München: R. Piper & Co., 1907) where, in his theory of art, he regards creativity as distinguished in the East and West by the processes of intuition and abstraction respectively. Such a distinction brings to mind Senghor’s ideas.

13. See Kesteloot, *Les Ecrivains noirs*, p. 156. She disagrees that Césaire’s poem extols “non-technicité.”

The African tries to understand things through sympathy, whereas the European would manipulate them and thus destroy them. Sartre sees the black's secret as consisting in the fact that "les sources de son existence et les racines de l'Être sont identiques" (p. 265). He draws an analogy between the poetic creation of the black and farming. Unlike the technician, the farmer enters into communion with nature: he plants, and the wheat ripens through the interaction of sun, rain and wind — so the farmer reaps more than he plants while the technician gets back only what he puts in. The theme of sexual pantheism runs through African poetry and relates to the dance and phallic ritual (p. 266). For the black African the sexual act celebrates the mystery of being (p. 268). Sartre sees this unity of vegetal and sexual symbols as the greatest originality of black poetry. In Western literature only Lucretius and D.H. Lawrence treat sexuality in a comparable manner.

Another important theme of *négritude* comes from the suffering in which the black man's "authenticity" resides. Like Nietzsche the black poet seeks and discovers that "inexpiable suffering that is the universal essence of man" (p. 270). A double movement occurs — of sexuality leading us towards nature, of suffering leading towards man. Psychiatrists have established the close relationship of anguish and sexual desire. The nature of the black — the creative abundance of his poetry, love and dance (all fundamentally sexual) — allows him to go beyond his suffering (p. 271). In Harlem blacks dancing to the blues ("les airs les plus douloureux du monde"), in the rhythm of the tam-tam, black poetry and jazz, one discerns the indissoluble unity of suffering, eros and joy.

Suffering also brings to the black collective consciousness a historic dimension — that of slavery. The black's poetry is violently anti-christian because christianity has sought to mystify him, to make him share, through the expiation of Original Sin, the responsibility for a crime of which he is the victim — the crime of enslavement which is the white man's crime, not his (p. 275). For him, christianity has served as the handmaid of colonialism. The past provides him with a history of suffering, but not only that:

...la souffrance comporte en elle-même son propre refus; elle est par essence refus de souffrir, elle est la face d'ombre de la négativité, elle s'ouvre sur la révolte et sur la liberté. (p. 276)

*Négritude* goes through a process of temporalization — it enters a historical continuum — “l’Histoire Universelle” of the black race: “ce n’est plus un état ni même une attitude existentielle, c’est un devenir...” (p. 277). First comes the insistence on his blackness — an antiracist racism designed to abolish race privilege — then the turn towards his historical situation which gives him a sense of mission — the mission of a member of the most exploited race, the member of a race which has more than any other understood the meaning of revolt and love of liberty. Tom Mboya, Kenya’s Minister of Economic Development and Planning, tragically assassinated in Nairobi on July 5, 1969, has said that “Most African leaders have emphasized the *universality* of the black man’s struggle for freedom and equality. Thus, we see the gains made in Africa as representing battles won in a much bigger war that must continue until total victory is achieved. It is in this spirit that African states accept as their responsibility struggles that continue in parts of our continent not yet freed from colonialism and white racist domination.”<sup>14</sup> Sartre, in the framework of world socialism, sees the black African’s struggle of liberation as including the liberation of all oppressed peoples (p. 278).

Thus the black African passes from “the subjective, existential, ethnic notion of *négritude*” to (as Hegel says) the “objective, positive, exact notion — of the proletariat” (p. 280). As such, *négritude* is an evolving principle, a process of becoming, wherein the black moves from his particular situation as black to his universal situation as a man oppressed who senses solidarity with his oppressed fellowmen. Senghor says of Césaire: “A travers les hommes à peau noire de sa race, c’est la lutte du prolétariat mondial qu’il chante” (p. 280). And Sartre points out the fact that the most ardent champions of *négritude* are also militant marxists.<sup>15</sup> Such poets bring together the notions of race, which is concrete and particular, and of class, which is universal and abstract. *Négritude* for Sartre represents an early stage of a dialectic process. The thesis is the theoretical and practical affirmation of white superiority, of which *négritude* is the antithesis — “le moment de la

14. “The American Negro Cannot Look to Africa for an Escape,” *The New York Times Magazine*, July 13, 1969, p. 22.

15. “Contrairement à ce que pense Sartre..., il semblerait donc que le socialisme ou le communisme ait été une étape vers la revendication proprement nègre, plutôt que l’inverse” (Kesteloot, *EN*, p. 184, n. 44).

négativité.” Sartre projects the process into the future, however, beyond *négritude* and towards the synthesis or what he terms the “realization of the human being in a raceless society.” *Négritude* carries in it the impulse to reject itself and uncover what Sartre calls a nudity without color — “car la Négritude n’est pas un état, elle est pur dépassement d’elle-même, elle est amour. C’est au moment où elle se renonce qu’elle se trouve...”

Thus *négritude*, as dialectic principle, is born to oppose and die or become subsumed into something greater — like the Marxist ideal. Black African poetry, based on this dialectic tension, is fundamentally revolutionary. *Négritude* finds its natural expression in poetry. Because it is the “living and dialectic unity of contraries,” because it refuses analysis, chant and poetry can alone express it: chant through its “multiple unity” (words, rhythm, tonal qualities, etc.); poetry through “cette beauté fulgurante du poème, que Breton nomme ‘explosante-fixe’” (p. 284). Here is where surrealism has truly put itself at the service of revolution, and consequently has renewed its source of inspiration as well as its means of expression. “La Négritude c’est le contenu du poème, c’est le poème comme chose du monde, mystérieuse et ouverte, indéchiffrable et suggestive: c’est le poète lui-même” (pp. 284-285). *Négritude* is the “triumph of Narcissism and the suicide of Narcissism” — it is, “in its essence, Poetry.” “Pour une fois au moins, le plus authentique projet révolutionnaire et la poésie la plus pure sortent de la même source” (p. 285). Sartre’s *Orphée noir*, as preface to the book which more than any other made the world aware of the poetry of contemporary African and West Indian blacks, spoke eloquently of that poetry and its revolutionary impulse.

A discussion of Sartre’s writings on Africa and of *Orphée noir* in particular would not be complete without reference to the fortunes of the latter since it appeared in 1948. I have here and there mentioned comments made by critics of Sartre regarding individual passages or ideas expressed in his work.

Critical discussion often bears on the difference between Sartre’s notion of *négritude* and that of Senghor. It has often been said that Senghor sees *négritude* in terms of culture, whereas Sartre sees it in socio-political terms. It strikes me that the difference is one of emphasis or context, as I mentioned earlier, for African culture and the social and political situation can hardly be viewed apart. Mboya has stated:

Our [African] culture is... the sum of our personality and our attitude toward life. The basic qualities that distinguish it are our extended family ties and the codes governing relations between old and young, our concept of mutual social responsibility and communal activities, our sense of humor, our belief in a supreme being and our ceremonies for birth, marriage and death. These things have a deep meaning for us, and they pervade our culture, regardless of tribe or clan. They are qualities that shape our lives, and they will influence the new institutions that we are now establishing.<sup>16</sup>

Mboya's definition of African culture ("...the sum of our personality and our attitude toward life") comes close to Sartre's definition of sentiment mentioned earlier (in speaking of Senghor's definition of *négritude*): "une manière définie de vivre notre rapport au monde." That "relation with the world" is the sum of our culture [our situation], which Sartre sees in terms of action ["vivre notre rapport"]. In this way, as I said earlier, disposition (Senghorian "culture") becomes pure act (Sartrean political commitment).

Most attacks on Sartre's essay have come from his having attempted to place the revolutionary aspect of black poetry into the historical perspective of Marxist-Proletarian revolution. That revolutionary aspect is not to be denied, nor its relation to French surrealism. Sartre's notion that the black man's consciousness of his blackness (*négritude*) will eventually be *dépassée* (replaced by proletariat consciousness) has been criticized by Kesteloot who sees *négritude* as persisting, sees black specificity (what she calls "l'âme noire") as persisting, because it is based on black culture and civilization and not merely color. But the argument is perhaps moot because surely Sartre does not envisage the black man becoming "blanchi," as Fanon might say, but speaks rather in terms of psychic awareness.

Kesteloot criticizes Sartre further for speaking of an imaginary "essence noire": "... le Noir n'est pas d'une 'essence' différente de la nôtre." She insists it is his civilization that makes him what he is, not race: "cet être-dans-le-monde du noir [described by Sartre] ... est moins affaire de race que de civilisation, ... tient moins à la couleur de la peau qu'au climat culturel."<sup>17</sup> I have the feeling that Miss Kesteloot sets up a straw man, because she disregards the fact that Sartre speaks of the black only *en situation* ("l'être-dans-le-monde"). He does

16. *Op. cit.*, p. 23.

17. Aimé Césaire, série "Poètes d'aujourd'hui, 85" (Paris: Seghers, 1962), p. 84.

not say that the black man differs from the white man only because of his color. The black, according to Sartre, will eventually pass from awareness of his black quality to awareness of his human quality. Kesteloot says that “‘L’âme noire’ [as described above] ... est de tous les temps et n’a pas à être ‘dépassée’ comme l’a prétendu Sartre...” (*Aimé Césaire*, p. 86). Alioune Diop<sup>18</sup> and others have emphasized the “irréductibilité de la négritude” (Kesteloot’s term). Kesteloot says further that “‘L’être-dans-le-monde du Noir’ possède une constante: cette *âme noire* dont nous venons d’esquisser la silhouette.”

Have Sartre’s desire to view the black revolutionary process in a marxist context and his speculation on a synthesis, a *dépassement* of specific being, led him into error? First, accepting his terms, we must acknowledge that he does not force black revolution into a marxist mold but rather sees in the former a natural process running its course, which is “marxist” only by virtue of a man called Marx seeing it in other phenomena and eventually giving his name to the process. In this sense, black revolution is marxist not because Sartre names it so, but because it follows certain universal principles the eventual course of which Sartre is perfectly justified in speculating upon. The misunderstanding, I believe, comes in a misreading of Sartre’s use of “*dépassement*.” The black man does not reduce his blackness or go beyond it in a literal sense. There occurs a shift in awareness, in which he merely becomes unconscious of “blackness” relative to his growing awareness of his role as a revolutionary. He changes, so to speak, from a black revolutionary into a revolutionary without color, through a process in which blackness becomes a subordinate element (once again unconscious, instinctive, as it was before he became educated to Western ways, and exiled from his own).

Thus for Sartre the African black will enter the community of human beings, while for Kesteloot he will create a new civilization apart from white and other civilizations. Some of the contention, it appears to me, comes from speculation on the sagacity of one or the other in telling the future. First of all, Kesteloot has the advantage of writing more than twenty years later than Sartre, but let us allow her that edge. It is true that, without claiming the black African has entered the “proletarian”

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18. *Discours d’ouverture du deuxième congrès, n° spéc., Présence Africaine*, fév-mai 1959, n° 24-25, p. 41.

revolution, "With few exceptions ... nearly every African leader advocates a socialist society as the second phase of the African revolution."<sup>19</sup> Needless to say, African socialism does not assume classic lines (on the other hand, "proletarian" seems with age to become less viable as a term denoting revolutionary — more and more revolution has become peasant-based), but the fact nonetheless speaks eloquently for Sartre's sense of the future.

It is primarily the issue of race that has bothered Sartre's critics. It might be argued that *négritude* as a revolutionary reaction to a specific socio-political situation emphasizes differences of race and in that way reverts to a type of racist attitude. That certainly would seem to be the reason why numerous African writers, the majority from English-speaking countries, I believe, have rejected *négritude* in favor of broader concepts that stress human similarities rather than racial differences. But race became an issue with the colonizers long ago and the revolutionary would, according to Sartre, merely turn it to his advantage. Thus, a more reasoned interpretation sees *négritude* as a necessary if temporary solution to the problem of the African who has newly recovered or is in the process of recovering his freedom. Chinua Achebe sees *négritude* in this way, and acknowledges Sartre's ideas.

...no thinking African can escape the pain of the wound in our soul. You have all heard of the African personality, of African democracy, of the African way to socialism, of negritude, and so on. They are all props we have fashioned at different times to help us get on our feet again. Once we are up we shall not need any of them any more. But for the moment it is in the nature of things that we may need to counter racism with what Jean-Paul Sartre has called an anti-racist racism, to announce not just that we are as good as the next man but that we are better.<sup>20</sup>

While complementing, not denying, Senghor's theory of *négritude*, the socio-political interpretation of Sartre seems more alive to the possibilities of immediate happenings in Africa.

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19. Charles F. Andrain, "Patterns of African Socialist Thought," *African Forum*, I, 3 (Winter 1966), p. 41.  
 20. "The Novelist as Teacher," in J. Press, ed., *Commonwealth Literature, Unity and Diversity in a Common Culture* (London: Heinemann, 1965), p. 203.

## L'Esprit objectif as a theory of language

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Sartre's writing, which has continued to produce itself since his death (each new production being a totalization without a (or with a different) totalizer), can be historicized on three levels. First, there is its own internal development. For instance, some commentators argue that a philosophical break occurs between the early and later texts, while others see a continuity, or at least an ontological coherence.<sup>1</sup> In either case, an internal development is discernible, needing articulation. Still other critics, such as Thomas Busch, relate Sartre's development to his interaction with his times, to his response to real history with its surrounding philosophical debates and developments – in a word, to the “force of circumstances” themselves. Sartre's text evinces an “external” history, a development articulated with its own “historical other.”<sup>2</sup> And finally, there are Sartre's own times, the real circumstances that surrounded him, beset him – and which he in turn lived as one of his epoch's “events.” There is a totality laminating 1) Sartre's thinking the world in his writing; 2) Sartre's thinking in terms of the world and its writing; and 3) the writing and thinking in Sartre's world – in short, a historicity in Sartre, a historicity to Sartre, and a history for Sartre.

Hazel Barnes invokes all three historicities when she argues that, in defining *l'Esprit objectif*, in *L'Idiot de la Famille*, Sartre combines and develops ideas from both *What is Literature?* and the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.<sup>3</sup> In the latter, Sartre confronts the interrelation between freedom and one's determination by social praxis, the problem of how one makes history and is made by it. In the former, on the other hand, he theorizes writing as an autonomous activity of engagement in the world. And this thesis initiated a “secret” debate (an “external” interaction) with Roland Barthes on freedom and determination in language and writing.<sup>4</sup> In *What is Literature?*, Sartre posed the problem of writers grasping their historical moment as their own, to which Barthes had “responded” (in *Writing Degree Zero*) by asking how history grasped writers, and writing, as its own. Barthes discussed writing as manifesting itself within a deter-

mined and determining structure of language; and Sartre “responded,” in his later writing, by re-posing the question of how practical structures determine through forms of exigency, or imperative. Though Sartre would never abandon his view of language as the instrumentalized rather than instrumentalizer, and though he was not only responding to Barthes in his later shifts on language, there is a domain (beyond Sartre’s interaction with structuralism) in which Barthes stands as a singular interlocutor for Sartre’s thinking. And it is this domain (the mere edges of which I will touch here) that marks Sartre’s concept of *l’Esprit objectif*,<sup>5</sup> and claims it as a moment in a theory of language.

### On Barthes

In *Writing Degree Zero*, Barthes presents *l’écriture*<sup>6</sup> as an operation within a space produced by the givens of language and style. Language defines a space or realm of possibility, characterized not so much by its instrumentality as by its limits, its boundedness, as a “horizon of intelligibility.” It is bequeathed by history and tradition as an inherited realm of familiarity. “Orthogonal” to this space of signification, style manifests the biographical as the writer’s personal given. It is the upsurge of individual psychobiological being and past experience, not as if from elsewhere, but as a “here.” If language is a material structure of signifiers that is both (historically) determined and determining, style is an immaterial signifier whose signified is the unquotable immediacy of the personal (a signifier without a signified), similarly determined and determining. Within this space of givens, and constrained by them, Barthes argues, a writer chooses a mode of writing as a Form. Form is not itself an object to be intended or played with; it is precisely where intention, or object, may reside. And it is not without signification; it is itself a sign system that brings with it a certain socio-historical meaning. For instance, literary modes of writing signify Literature itself, among other things. This formal, second order signification provides an “alibi” for the author, an objectivity that bequeaths to the writer a certain justification, an elsewhere where meaning is made.

Because modes of writing, as form, present an aura of the objective, a history of writing and of literature becomes possible. For Barthes, this formal history both defines and constrains the possibility of being a writer; it is the place where the writer becomes a writer through the choice of how to become one. Form is where the writer is engaged. Barthes expresses this as “l’ecrivain s’engage,” leaving ambiguous whether the writer engages him/herself, or is engaged, whether this is reflexive or passive. And this ambiguity of form resides at the core of each mode of writing.

Though Barthes' notion of l'engagement is not the same as that proposed by Sartre, it is closer than it looks. For Sartre, writing can succeed in its project only if the reader is free; therefore, in order for the writer to be a writer, s/he must engage themselves in their historical moment in such a way as to guarantee the reader's freedom. In this sense, every writer is inherently engaged at the moment of lifting the pen, and Sartre exhorts the writer to take to heart what this means (in both its import and importance). For Barthes, the problem lies elsewhere. The writer's engagement is a question of how the reader is also determined by both historical tradition (language) and literary history (l'écriture); and it is from the determining meanings given by form that the reader must be freed. For instance, 19th Cent. naturalism, though affecting a mimesis of popular speech, was still a form of bourgeois writing; the passions it described remained imprisoned within its bourgeois (individualist and objectivist) character. The political writers of the left, Barthes argues, while attempting to articulate their rejection of the bourgeois, nevertheless made use precisely of bourgeois modes of writing, which in the end sustained the society they had sought to oppose through its formal significations. The discourses of contestation, by taking their language from the discourses contested, become complicit. As Barthes says, "the revolution must borrow from what it wants to destroy the very image of what it wants to possess." (DZ, 87) And it is with such complicity that he charges Sartre. For Barthes, only a zero degree writing, a mode of writing whose connotations and second order significations (the meanings of form) have been eliminated, will escape complicity. Whether this is possible or not is a different question. But for Barthes, certain avant-garde movements, post-modernist experimentation with language, the New Novel movement, etc., were tending in that direction; in flattening language toward pure denotation, or pushing writing to the point of violating its own internal logic, a significationless (zero degree) form seemed to be in sight. Herein lies the hypothetical political or revolutionary content of the avant-garde – its historical role, as it were.

In sum, though both address the freedom of the reader, Sartre differs from Barthes in locating freedom in the dimensions of content rather than form, and with respect to language's referentiality rather than its self-referentiality.

### L'Esprit objectif and the practico-inert

In the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (CDR), Sartre rethinks the issue of determination, and the givenness of the social past.<sup>7</sup> He asks how praxis becomes constrained, or unfree, when embedded in the contradictions of a

social situation. But for the question of writing as praxis, the language of the CDR is insufficient. Writing resists translation into the terms of the practico-inert; it does not, strictly speaking, work on matter nor produce worked matter. Though Sartre will speak of the written as a “thingified idea” (*l’idée chosifiée*) (IF, 49), and of literature in general as “a work of material production” (IF, 49), a contextualization that would give these a cultural rather than merely material meaning is still necessary. To transcend the CDR’s language, Sartre develops (in IF) the notion of *l’Esprit objectif*, by which he means “culture as the practico-inert.”

For Sartre, praxis constitutes itself through a dialectic between of one’s activity in pursuit of a project, and the given world of/as worked matter to be transformed by that pursuit. Within this dialectic, one gains a grasp of the given (the practico-inert) through one’s activity (an interiorization of exteriority), and one realizes one’s project through that activity (an exteriorization of interiority). Furthermore, against the given as known through one’s activity, one’s activity becomes known in terms of its effect on the practico-inert. In these terms, instrumentality (both material and tools) constitutes a material aspect of epistemological access to the given acted on; and it gives access to the nature of the project thereby enacted (self-knowledge) as well. Thus, instrumentality in general functions as a way the world is apprehended that is irreducible either to itself or to that apprehension. It too is intelligible in terms of what it transcends through use, and the project whose realization it facilitates (CDR, 44). In this sense, it interposes itself between praxis and matter as a materialization of their very relation, an avatar for it. In so far as it discloses the object and the subject, the world and the person acting in the world, to each other without subsuming them, it functions (in Sartre’s metaphor) as an “organ of perception.”<sup>8</sup> And this only emphasizes that the encounter between praxis and matter as instrumentality is never arbitrary. Certain imperatives accompany it. Matter in general, through its qualities, demands to be worked in certain ways and not others; and instrumentality likewise demands of its employment: “use this way, and not that.” The instrument itself, in representing the jobs it can perform and the socio-technical relations that have produced it, constitutes itself as a form of practical knowledge, “an implicit and non-verbal intuitive knowledge” within the realization of a project – a knowledge whose direct and totalizing comprehension is an immediate condition of praxis. (IF, 45)

Sartre underlines its immediacy. Such knowledge is coincident with the praxis that contains it; (IF, 47) when one’s activity changes to a different project, so does the attendant intuitive knowledge of what one is doing. It is thus to be distinguished from the articulated, and from institutionalized ideas and discourses (“ideologies, cosmogonies, ethico-esthetic and

confessional systems” (IF, 48)). Sartre also emphasizes that such knowledge includes awareness of both the work done and the social relationships surrounding and conditioning it. That is, more than mere know-how or technique, it situates praxis in its social world, as an intuition of one’s lived (class, socio-economic, personal) relations to others.<sup>9</sup> For instance, a lathe in a factory making auto parts may be familiar to a farmer taking his produce to market past that factory, but it is not informed for him in its productive instrumentality by the immediate social relations of the factory as it is for a lathe operator. “The mode of use becomes an inert discourse, participating in the inertia of matter.” (IF, 48)<sup>10</sup> In other words, there is a certain dialogue between worker and matter that accompanies the practical dialectic between interiority and exteriority, between apprehension and activity. This implicit dialogue constitutes a kind of “subjectivity of work.” (IF, 46)

We can relate this sense of implicit knowledge to Sartre’s earlier notion of non-reflective consciousness. In *Being and Nothingness*, he says:

[Non-reflective consciousness] is penetrated by a great light without being able to express what this light is illuminating. ... in full possession of it, [it] apprehends all. But ... this possession is deprived of the means which would ordinarily permit analysis and conceptualization. It grasps everything, all at once, without shading, without relief, without connections of grandeur.<sup>11</sup>

Sartre is speaking of an individual’s grasp of his/her fundamental project, here, but the image is appropriate. Furthermore, it suggests a certain constancy in Sartre’s appeal to the unreflective. It is a kind of signified without a signifier, a meaning that both is and is not, and manifests itself in real activity as a form of second order signification, or connotation. For instance, Sartre suggests that the primordial forms of class rebellion emerge from just such non-reflective (social) consciousness.

When reflection addresses this intuitive knowledge, it necessarily does so through recourse to language. (IF, 45) In Sartre’s account, articulation avails itself of the terminologies and ideational forms already culturally extant (as mode of production, relations of production, institutions, laws, etc.); (IF, 45) that is, it makes instrumentalities of them. But the process of articulation is never innocent. Sartre points out in BN that the language chosen for deliberation (or articulation) is always deceptive because its use is pursuant to a different project than what it articulates. (BN, 551) And as instrumentality, it subjects practical knowledge to the discourses of social, human, and technological relations – those discourses which already pretend to articulate and clarify social knowledge. Articulation also divides such knowledge, isolating parts, cutting them up into theoretic moments standing aside from praxis and its goals. Thus, it transforms what it ap-

proaches – from the lived into the known. In general, implicit knowledge is falsified, i.e. constituted as a form of non-knowledge.

In this transformation, knowledge also becomes “thingified,” passive – what Sartre calls “mineralized.” (IF, 47) Sartre uses the term “mineralization” in CDR to describe how an assembly line worker, for instance, becomes an adjunct to a machine, living to the machine’s rhythms, and thinking as it were the machine’s thoughts. Similarly, though culturally given discourses do not determine what one must think or respond, they necessitate that one respond (i.e. think) within their given terms. That is, there is an imperative in these discourses that they be “read and understood this way, and not that.” One’s thought becomes thus ruled by them. In this manner, the articulation of practical knowledge becomes a process of acculturation. And subjected to such instrumentality, the subjectivity of work is transformed into ideology. (IF, 46)

For Sartre, the totality of institutional discourses, ideologies, truths, mystifications, cosmogonies, etc. present (i.e. mineralize) “the totality of imperatives imposed upon a person in a particular society.” That is, a way of understanding *l’Esprit objectif* is as the totality of texts, (FI, 48) including written texts, oral texts whose mode of existence is a particular inscription in memory, and the already experienced meanings given to worked matter that articulate its material imperatives.<sup>12</sup> “It is in writing that all these ideas [the totalized, mute, and practical ideas which are one with those of work] are preserved” – and for which the literary, as actual books, is “the last avatar.” (FI, 49) In short, *l’Esprit objectif* is culture to the extent that culture is practico-inert. (FI, 47)

If *l’Esprit objectif* is the synthetic milieu in which prior discourses instrumentalize themselves, then Barthes’ sense of the historical determination of language may be included in it. The very notion of a “horizon of intelligibility” names a space (as instrumentality itself) of the play of articulation. Of course, there is a difference between spatial boundedness and discursive determinism. Within the space of that difference, there remains a value to considering language as instrumental; a freedom is preserved for the individual. But it is a relative freedom, because it is practical rather than ontological. Indeed, it is a constrained freedom because, unlike material exigency, to which one need not accede (though perhaps at one’s peril), the unbeyed discursive imperative remains an imposition of terms. Situated by given discourses within which to speak, and to have spoken, the spoken (as the impossibility of idea not becoming non-knowledge) contains (with its imperatives) what is chosen as speech. A refusal of terms only becomes another concretization (and accession to) the imperative of those same terms. Barthes’ view of complicity is an aspect of this. And Sartre recognizes it (as counterfinality) when he says that the

development of a working class consciousness must involve freeing class subjectivity from the given (ideological) discourses available for its articulation. This would constitute a purifying process analogous to that projected by Barthes for zero degree writing.

Thus, Sartre accedes, in a sense, to the thrust of Barthes' historicization of writing; and he extends this accession into the realm of semiotics. For Sartre, the phenomenological approach to language recognizes that, in the absence of both a writer (or speaker) and a reader, there are no signs; signs serve only to guide a transcendence. (IF, 50) But, if signification persists in the objectivity of texts, then writer and reader must be independent of each other; neither reader nor writer can require the existence of the other to those signs for an apprehension of their meaning – and signs must be in some sense independent of both. That is, both reading and writing are essentially determined by the written. In other words, Sartre has embraced a sense of language's priority as determining that parallels Barthes', though recontextualized within Sartre's thinking. In a sense, Sartre gives an ontological foundation to what Barthes had asserted because Barthes gives a semiotic foundation to what Sartre responds.<sup>13</sup>

There is a third realm of imperative to be considered, that of social collectives. The statutory or "pledged" group, which is an already fused group<sup>14</sup> enacting its own group desire for permanence, (CDR, 418) embodies in itself a social imperative for that permanence. Its permanence is concretized in a commitment (*le serment*, which Sheridan has translated as 'pledge') made to the group by each member, the violation of which would result in isolation, social ostracism, or injury. Desire thus objectifies the group, and renders it contradictory. Though composed of free praxes, the imperative renders the group a materiality that restricts its members' freedoms, "an inert synthesis within freedom itself." (CDR, 417) Individuals retain "a free but given link" to it that is both "regulatory and totalized." (CDR, 418) It becomes what Sartre calls a "totalitarian synthesis," a unity that brooks no alternative points of view. The group imperative is, thus, "untranscendable;" it takes the (organizational) form of an "opaque elsewhere" that remains unignorably "here". In effect, the group's common desire, with its nostalgia for originary collective praxis and elan, is replaced by an alterity in appearance. As an object reflected on, the group arrives at constituting a moment of freedom's own complicity in its unfreedom.

In sum, there are three levels of imperative: that of worked matter as instrumentality, that of group self-objectification, and that of l'Esprit objectif. These render a sense of the "determining" intelligible within the structure of praxis (1) as socially produced materiality, (2) as socially constructed intersubjectivity, and (3) as historical and ideological discourse.

Each produces a different mode of practico-inert structure, that of technology, of group organizational identity, and of ideational and linguistic acculturation.

This triad also stratifies the notion of intuitive practical knowledge; and on the plane of *l'Esprit objectif*, the question of articulation presents a critical problem. Implicit knowledge is coherent at the level of the for-itself, as a form of non-reflective consciousness. It is also intelligible dialectically as know-how accrued in and through activity at the level of praxis; work, for instance, is surrounded by meaning because it is material within a human world, and lived as such – it is the human world that is thus revealed. But intuitive knowledge pertaining to the instrumental use of cultural and ideological discourses in the praxis of writing, or as acculturation, is already surrounded by language. This includes articulated processes of training, explanation, social relationship, and definition of social usage: discourses which are at once the conditions and the vestiges of the birth of discursive instrumentalities. One's social, political, or technological relations are always already constituted by language. What does it mean to have an implicit, unarticulated knowledge of them?<sup>15</sup>

Sartre has argued that these relations are already inscribed within (material) instrumentality. In order to think (intuitively) one's praxis or its social relations, one would have to have already read those discourses into that praxis. As means of articulation of implicit practical knowledge, they would already have to have constituted what was to be articulated, and thus become means of self-rearticulation. If a use of different terms would amount to inventing new knowledge, then articulation only means reading back what had already been read in. That is, at the level of *l'Esprit objectif*, (implicit) meaning is already an intuition of articulated meaning; and the subject becomes a conduit through which given discourses pass and reorganize themselves. This begins to resemble Barthes' restriction of the writer to a choice of Form. And it dismantles the dialectic that, for Sartre, constitutes praxis.

What is further implied, for the praxis of writing, is that implicit knowledge is inseparable from the praxis of reading. Let us turn, then, to Sartre's account of the praxis of reading.

### Reading the text(s) of *l'Esprit objectif*

We have encountered a multiplicity of social textualities: (1) institutionalized ideas entextualized as ideologies, cosmogonies, cultural and class practices, etc.; (2) the instrumentalization of these texts as articulatory (mineralizing) language; and (3) an articulated non-knowledge extracted

from intuitive knowledge within praxis. As textual materiality, they are what is read (or listened to, if such is the case); and as the instrumentality of reading praxis, they are the mode of reading. That is, the totality of social textuality is what one reads with, as well as what one reads. Sartre recognizes that intellection, the “synthetic surpassing of signifying materiality toward signification” which constitutes the intuitive knowledge contained in the praxis of reading, cannot totalize this social textuality. As the “practical knowledge” of reading, it “lasts no longer than does the material surpassed in the act that transcends it.” (IF, 49) Intellection has no greater longevity than the writing it transcends, unless written.<sup>16</sup> The social textualities that articulate intellection may limit and determine it by providing the terms for its practical act of reading, but their dictate is not unitary; their terms continue to engender multiple and overlapping forms of representation and falsification.

For Sartre, reading praxis also obeys a second logic of multiplicity. Each reader reads a text knowing (implicitly) that there are others, unknown, who are reading the same text, each of whom is reading it differently – and each of whom is aware in some sense of this variance. “I know that other readers appropriate the idea at the same moment [as I do] ... who surpass the same material toward nearly the same, but *sensibly different*, meanings.” (IF, 50, 52) Reading praxis is detotalized; each reader reads with a different intuitive knowledge, a different intellection, employing different re-articulatory instrumentality.

But how is a detotalized praxis of reading, as different appropriations of the text’s “idea,” possible without reflecting a semiotic polysemia? If readings differ because each reader’s praxis is different, surpassing the same signs toward different meanings, then the possibility of submitting to these different praxes must be part of the sign. The text read must already contain the possibility of being a polysemic sign. In particular, the fact that each reading through a different instrumentality reflects a different practical contextualization of the sign (text) is one way this polysemia manifests itself. Context is not inherent in the sign; it is always, in some sense, metatextual. And the transcendence that is guided by the sign assists that guidance through its choice of contextualizing (instrumental) discourses. If reading is a (multiple) detotalized praxis, this is made possible by the play of signifiers among permissible meanings.

For Sartre, *l’Esprit objectif* is a totalization of this “detotalized (atomized) totalization of readers”. But what totalizes for each reader is neither articulation nor intellection, which are already semiotically diffuse, but the future, a “presentiment” or apprehension, at the level of implicit knowledge, of the way the future will see the present as its past – how “generations to come will make of today’s lived present a totalized past.”

(IF, 50) This provisioned future abolishes the present's experience of itself because the present is then expressed in the name of what future readers will experience of this present as *their* past. (IF, 51) Though the multiplicity of individual readings of a text appears irreducible, cancellation of present experience "in the name of this future experience represents an imposed objectification" (objectivation totalitaire), which totalizes the present multiplicity.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, however, the present remains an irreducible multiplicity, not "objectively" in the sense that for each reader the present is (subjectively) totalized through the future; but subjectively in the sense that what I read (objectively) is "enriched in my eyes by a thousand interpretations that escape me." (IF, 52)

The presentiment of the future through which totalization occurs is without content. First of all, one cannot see the future; and second, if it wasn't, the multiplicity of other readings would not be irreducible. The totalization is only form, the form of living an already fixed (objectified) present. Thus, the present understood as what a future will understand is always a deferred totalization, a mode of non-being. That is, the present gives itself as not yet given, while at the same time, it is already given as a past, as no longer the present. The praxis of reading is an alterity to its own (re)construction of the text through given discourses, a reading that is other than it's reading of the text. Thus, the praxis of reading is both a deferral (to a future) and an alterity (through it). In effect, l'Esprit objectif represents a "totalization without a totalizer," (IF, 50) since the totalizer is always elsewhere, later. But this is also Sartre's characterization of "history" in CDR.

Three things must be said about this. First, to the extent that the alterity and deferral of l'Esprit objectif holds true for any writer (a writer is also a reader who specifically totalizes him/herself as a self-projected future past), l'Esprit objectif becomes itself an historicization of writing. As such, we could find Barthes' notion of "mode of writing", i.e. the significations of form in particular readings, within it. In this context, one can read bourgeois writing as exemplary rather than demonstrative or mimetic; one's critique of the individualism of its representations, however, would have to be in a different "écriture," and the difference would have a meaning of its own. An attempt at zero degree writing becomes one possible articulation among others extant within an historical moment. In this respect, it is noteworthy that the avant-guard on which Barthes focused some attention never succeeded in subsuming an entire social situation, thus always functioning within a multiplicity.

If Barthes' historicization of écriture becomes one of the aspects embraced by Sartre's l'Esprit objectif, however, it is in an inverted sense. Where, for Barthes, the past determines the present, Sartre asks how that

past is determined, or indeed constructed, and answers that it is the future, constituted (or written) by present praxis, that constructs the present which contains such a past for itself. The present writes its own past by envisioning itself through its future.

Second, if the praxis of reading contains the history in which the reader lives (the world totalized as a historical discourse), it also contains the history that s/he lives (a detotalized world of real readings), and the lived historicity of each reader (the deferral and alterity of the present as a totalization of detotalized givenness). *L'Esprit objectif* thus reflects the triad we encountered earlier – of materiality (present), intersubjectivity (the present as the past of a future), and the structures of discourse (the present as the future of a past) – i.e. the three levels of (Sartre's) historicity with which we began this essay. The form of language is implicated in this triadic historicity.

Third, as a totalization without a totalizer, *L'Esprit objectif* is not dialectical. If it manifests itself as alterity and deferral, it has constituted itself through two inseparable incommensurables both of which are positivities; there is neither opposition nor synthesis. Instead, *L'Esprit objectif* constitutes a sense of the present as history, the present as a sense of history, in terms of a different structure. And it is the form of that structure we must now examine.

But first let us simply note that Sartre's approach to the writer synthesizes an ontology of praxis with a Barthesian structure, though through certain inversions. Language and intentionality are inverted in terms of which grounds which; and past and future are in terms of the ground of an historicization of the present. Sartre has replaced his earlier notion of engagement in one's own time with a sense of one's own time as a past present produced in form through an envisioned future. Both Barthes' project in *DZ* and Sartre's in *IF* now project the liberatory through form rather than content. The difference has become what form language takes in its imposition of itself on the present.

### **L'Esprit objectif as a theory of language**

In Sartre's account of the inner dynamic of *L'Esprit objectif*'s readability,

What characterizes *L'Esprit objectif* at this level is that it is outside, not the product of thought in the present, but above all in books, i.e. in the writing of others. ... In whatever form, reading is an undertaking that transforms a thing into an idea: the eye must retrieve (reconstitute) the ideational act of the other through that act's vestiges, and the reading must restrain the dispersion of signs and discursively recompose, according to learned codes, what the object of [the writer's] possibly instantaneous intuitions were. (*IF*, 51)

That is, *l'Esprit objectif* is always elsewhere, in things (books), though it produces itself by reversing the thingification of idea. The signs of the text, as material vestiges, are the traces of an other's ideation left in worked matter. This is not the Derridean trace, which is the semiotic investment of each sign by its differences from other signs, as the presence of absence (see note 13). Nevertheless, the act of reading is a search within otherness, a residence in an alterity that is already, at the moment of reading, an implicit knowledge: viz. that there is an other's ideation. Sartre's trace is the presence of a beckoning, enticing idea, no longer there, a presence of absence also – but an absence that is ontological rather than semiotic. The Sartrean trace pertains to the generation of meaning, but as the praxis of making meaning where it had once already been made. At the semiotic point of present absence, Sartre refuses to erase the person who acts.

In the next sentence, however, Sartre's account takes on a distinctly Derridean flavor. If "the reader must restrain (as a praxis) the dispersion of signs," to "discursively recompose" the author's thought, there is already a recognition of a sign's prior dispersion. And we have already seen that this dispersion is a polysemia within the very structure of signs. The dispersion of "sensibly different" meanings (to be restrained) must already be structural if a totalization of a multiple (detotalized) reading is necessary. The "restraining" is done by each reader apprehending multiplicity not in others but as otherness in his/her own reading in order to read in the first place. The praxis of reading must already embrace, in some manner, a kind of Derridean dissemination.<sup>18</sup> It relinquishes dissemination only in the absolute otherness of totalization through the envisioned future that abolishes the present's experience of itself in the name of that future's experience. (FI, 51)

We are at an interface between Sartre and Derrida, where their two approaches to language dovetail. And at that interface, the irreducibility of multiplicity signifies both a structural polyvalence, and a totalized alterity; each is the incommensurable product of the other, the other's outside that is ever rediscovered within. Structural polyvalence produces a totalized (material) alterity, though it encounters it elsewhere in the historicized trace (the present as the trace of itself in the future for which it is the past). Totalized alterity produces structural polyvalence, though it encounters it as still to be discovered in the present (material) trace. Material polyvocality is seen through the historicized trace, and the semiotic trace (as material, the text to be read) is seen through an historicized polyvocality (others reading it elsewhere). The difference between these two outsidenesses constitutes, for Derrida, the possibility of the sign's (or text's) meaning, and for Sartre, its being as, and in, *l'Esprit objectif*. In other words, in *l'Esprit objectif*, we encounter alterity (difference) as historicity and historicity as deferral;

difference (alterity) as materiality and materiality as deferral. The trace of the sign's multiple differences overflows a totalized present; and the possibility of univocity, a totalization of the signifier, diffuses into deferral to a future. If we recognize the operation of (Derridean) differance in this,<sup>19</sup> we also find it exemplified in Sartre's statement that "the thought, in the instant I make it mine, remains definitively other, an other's thought that commands me to resuscitate it." (IF, 51) It is always elsewhere, always later. Derrida's notion of dissemination, which embraces the incommensurability of appropriation and structural polyvocality, the deferral (as a perpetual need of resuscitation) to contingent contextualizations (as inescapable alterity), is structurally similar to this. In effect, Derridean differance, dissemination, and the Sartrean account of reading as praxis, are all homologous.

Finally, we can add that for both, not only is the sign polyvocal, but it is not unlimited in that respect. Both recognize that inherent in the act of reading is a choice of code (or context) delimiting meaning – a code whose phenomenality is an implicit knowledge contained in socially given discourses (ideology, etc.), and whose objectifications belong to the deferred present.<sup>20</sup> This implies that, in theorizing the material interplay of thing and idea, Sartre has placed, upon a different practical plane, a semiotics that is not structurally dissimilar to Derrida's.<sup>21</sup>

Ironically, what remains different between them is their similar rejection of the transcendent. Where Sartre cancels appeal to God or human nature as transcendent being, Derrida cancels appeal to the future, to the abolition of the present's experience of itself in transcendent meaning (a transcendental signifier). Perhaps what remains so disturbing about Derrida's thinking is that in revealing the inner dynamic of language/textuality in the present, he has refused to allow this abolition to continue. As Sartre traps us in freedom, Derrida traps us in our present experience; we can no longer totalize without an awareness of profound self-violation.

What, now, is the meaning of the displacement of the dialectic by incommensurability, by this logic of alterity (as a "hybrid" of synchronic multiplicity and diachronic future pastness)?

What is important for the moment is the double character of l'Esprit objectif, which can only be an upsurge in us toward that idea if it is outside as worked matter. Its thingness is its guarantee of its permanence. It doesn't exist, it is. When, by reading, I transform the thing into idea, the metamorphosis is never complete. It is an idea-thing that penetrates me, since this hybrid being that can only return to life through me necessarily has its reality outside me as thought congealed in matter. (IF, 51)

That is, there is no synthesis. If the transformation of thing into idea is

never complete, then there is always a residue. Meaning never exhausts the sign.<sup>22</sup> That one is “penetrated” by this idea-thing only testifies to the artifactuality of knowledge; viz. that there is always more knowledge contained in signs than we can mean with them. This artifactuality is the fact that outside discourses always impinge on knowledge as the very condition for there to be knowledge in the first place (an outside inside the inside, as Derrida would say). It is the necessary condition for multiple readings, which, as “the enrichment of meaning through other readings that escape me,” are the condition for anyone reading. This residue is the elsewhere that is in addition to my reading within detotalization, and which displaces mine through totalization. It is what Derrida refers to as the logic of the supplement, that which is beyond the limit only by being implicated inside what had established that limit for itself. In the logic of the supplement, the other, the differing, is implicit in the sign to which meaning is assigned (as if signed) through that difference. Leonard Lawlor, in discussing Derrida’s essay, “White Mythology,” summarizes this appropriately (in a manner that mediates Derrida’s and Sartre’s languages). The logic of the supplement “implies the impossibility of determining completely any particular linguistic element, but also thought and being themselves.”<sup>23</sup> That is, there is no transcendental point from which to apprehend the whole. That apprehension must come from within, through the leakage of what is within to an outside that is already central to what leaks, a present that leaks out to a future whose present it already is. On the one hand, there is no non-linguistic place from which to designate meaning. And on the other, there is no non-present place from which to designate meaning; one apprehends *l’Esprit objectif* always as unthinkably enriched by an unknowable other, always out of reach through a formal future.

In Derridean semiotics, what constitutes the sign’s meaning is that it remains other, behind the trace, at the very moment of appropriation, a sustained deferral at the moment of difference. These are not negations of each other, nor mutually generating. They map out a negative space in which meaning is generated. In Sartrean semiotics, meaning emerges from an alterity (my thought of another’s thought) and a deferral to future pastness (my assignment of another’s assignment of my meaning) – a state of irreducible otherness, and an act of presentiment. In both, meaning emerges from a confluence of inseparable incommensurables, for which, again, there is no synthesis. Sartre is operating within a logic of the supplement. In representing *l’Esprit objectif* as an historical operation, Sartre has revealed a certain materiality possible for that logic.

## Conclusion

There are three distinct moments in Sartre’s description of *l’Esprit objectif*,

each of which, at the interface in question, can be associated structurally with an element of Derridean theorization of language within a logic of supplementarity. There is, first, the relation of reader to text, as the trace; second, the relation between readers as both serial and lived sociality, as the polyvocality of textuality, or dissemination; and third, the relation between one's reading and the totalized yet irreducible multiplicity of other readings, as differance.

For Sartre, these three semiotic moments of *l'Esprit objectif* rematerialize themselves at the three levels of imperative: the trace as materiality (book), polyvocality as an intersubjectivity in praxis, and differance as the instrumental operation of given discourses. *L'Esprit objectif* overlays these moments upon each other, a lamination of different textual levels that structures both writing and the reader's acculturation. This triad converts the relation between the (immaterial) materiality of writing and the (material) immateriality of discourse as praxis homologically into the relation between the Derridean critique (and theorization) of language and *l'Esprit objectif*. Where Derrida understands contextualization as contingent, and only metatextually (and always to an extent falsifyingly) given in the process of reading, rather than inherent in the text read, Sartre is positing reading as a contextualization, the articulation of meaning as the falsification of thought by contingent discourses understood metatextually as instrumentality. And it is the falsification of implicit knowledge (not its falsifiability) that opens praxis to creativity. The creative moment lies in the praxis of reading that surrounds writing, rather than in writing itself (most writers recognize that writing is really re-writing, meaning rereading what they have already written as a form of "intersubjectivity").

Because *l'Esprit objectif* is embedded within the logic of the supplement, it preserves the ontological relation of alterity between people and language. Language becomes the way in which the ontological is linked to the practical. In this sense, the practico-inert is an extension of *l'Esprit objectif*, rather than the latter extending the former to writing. The logic of the supplement renders language the envelope for the mutual relations of the ontological, the practico-inert, and the discursive.

In this regard, *l'Esprit objectif* is a theory of language. If it has embraced and incorporated the Barthesian critique, it has done so through an ontological projection into the deconstructive; and if it has formed an interface with this latter, it is through an ontological transformation of the former. This is *l'Esprit objectif*'s interiorization of its history (as history's effect on Sartre). It is as if a Sartrean praxis had been lurking within the transformation engendered by deconstruction's critique of structuralism itself<sup>24</sup> – as the external historicity of Sartre's thought, reflected in the real *Esprit objectif* of the last few decades. But in that sense, Sartre's text has responded to the

change in l'Esprit objectif of his time, from one in which a Barthesian structuralism could flourish, to one which would spawn a post-structuralist critique and theorization of language.

Finally, we might add that the liberatory motif has not been forgotten. For Sartre, it has been shifted from individual ontological engagement to collective temporal totalization in which the future is the praxis of the present at the same time that the present is the praxis of the future. That is, the imperatives of language and social structure remain detotalized, non-determining, instrumental, the ground of an ever self-asserting and self-dissolving avant-garde. However, as the deconstructive critique, the operation of l'Esprit objectif, and the ontology of reading have all revealed, the liberatory project must always do two things at once, only one of which can be ascertained at a time (like an Uncertainty Principle). If we live our freedom as agency in the present, it will be at the expense of history and the ability to totalize our being in it; and if we make our own history, it will be at the expense of deferring the present.

## Notes

1. Some, like Mark Poster, or Thomas Flynn, argue that there is an ontological consistency from beginning to end, with only a change in emphasis from individual consciousness to social praxis. Others, like Wilfred Desan, argue that Sartre's radical freedom is self-contradictory. For Ronald Aronson, radical freedom obviates a practical account of human solidarity, and necessitates Sartre's later theorization of collectives and social constraints on a different basis. Cf. Mark Poster, *Marxist Existentialism in Post-war France* (Princeton University Press, 1975); Thomas Flynn, *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism* (Chicago University Press, 1984); Wilfred Desan, *Tragic Finale* (Harper, 1960). Ronald Aronson, *Philosophy in the World* (London: NLB, 1980).
2. Thomas Busch, *The Power of Consciousness and the Force of Circumstances* (Indiana University Press, 1990).
3. Barnes, Hazel, *Sartre and Flaubert* (Chicago University Press, 1981).
4. Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature?*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (Washington Square Press, 1966). Hereafter Lit. Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers (Hill and Wang, 1968). Hereafter DZ.
5. Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Idiot de la Famille*, Vol. 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1971). Hereafter FI. The translations are my own. I will use the French term (l'Esprit objectif) to preserve its Sartrean specificity, and not dilute it with, or disseminate it among, the Hegelian or positivist connotations of "objective mind" – a luxury attendant upon the positive act of non-translation.
6. Annette Lavers translates l'écriture as "mode of writing." This objectifies the notion a little more than Barthes may have intended, but in some contexts it makes it easier to talk about. I will use both.
7. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (London: Verso, 1982), trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, pp. 220–252. Hereafter CDR.
8. This is analogous to Sartre's account of totality itself. (CDR, 45ff.) The whole

constitutes the parts as parts that constitute it as a whole, and is a transcendence irreducible to those parts. Its meaning emerges from the relations of its parts, and is the foundation for those relations. The whole, as meaning, relates to the parts and the relations it engenders among them as act of perceiving to perceived.

9. Two things should be noted here. First, for Sartre, this implicit knowledge contains a certain social critique in its intuition of the inhumanity of an exploitative structure, of the subhumanity of the exploited, and thus constitutes the “first germ of a political attitude of refusal.” (IF, 45) Second, social superstructures are not the locus of disclosure of this implicit knowledge, but only the higher levels of its elaboration. That is, the relation of implicit practical knowledge to social structure, literature, law, or ruling political ideology, already constitutes a transformation (from the “practico-theoretic” to the “theoretico-practical”) through a complex process of explication. (FI, 45)
10. In discussing this, Sartre transforms the Hegelian master-slave relation slightly, in an interesting manner. The master becomes a transmitter of the imperatives of matter to the worker. Though he becomes a transmitter by dint of ownership, and through participation in certain economic relations such as markets, he himself, nevertheless, becomes the avatar of the exigencies he faces, and which he needs production to fulfill. His own orders to the worker take on the nature of the materialities he is dealing with. As Sartre says, the boss “plays an inorganic role with respect to the worker, and his orders emerge from a mouth of stone.” (IF, 48)
11. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (Washington Square Press, 1966), p. 699. Hereafter BN.
12. In this last instance, for example, a hacksaw makes a certain demand for its use as instrumentality, even when lying on a parlor coffee table, though the act of having placed it on that coffee table may have its own “novelistic” or inscriptive meaning quite apart from its instrumentality.
13. This relationship is most pronounced in Sartre’s particular definition of ideology. “By ideology, one does not mean here a philosophical system, a rigorous construct (even on false premises), or even a vague, loose set of ideas held in common by the members of a class. In truth, it is a question of a group of relations between terms that are only defined by their reciprocal oppositions, or by a “differential” that determines each by others such that the essence of each resides in its difference with such and such other terms, and ultimately, with the whole.” (IF, 222) We recognize this as the structuralist view of language itself, which is precisely how Sartre sees ideology, or institutional discourses, operating in the articulation of intuitive knowledge.
14. The group in fusion, for Sartre, is the formation of a common praxis through a fusing of praxes (for some immediate goal, or in defense against some immediate threat) through a common recognition that each other’s praxis is also one’s own. His account of the group allows him to begin to speak of a collective subject, as an historical entity. Cf. CDR, Book II, Ch. 1.
15. Sartre’s own critique of an unconscious is apropos here. In his critique of the Freudian unconscious, Sartre asks how the censor can repress certain material without being conscious of discerning it, and of the need to repress what is discerned (i.e. of what it would have to be conscious). One would have to “conceive of a knowledge that is ignorant of itself.” (BN, 63) And for l’Esprit objectif, we would have to conceive of articulated knowledge that could no

- longer articulate itself, and have to be articulated anew, in different terms, though its initial form as articulated had only been that of certain terms.
16. Most poets suffer this to be unfortunately the case; if the suddenly encountered poetic line is not immediately written down, either on paper or in some special memory, it is lost with the first change of the physical, somatic, or environmental circumstances in which it was born.
  17. This is a central point for Sartre, whose major question is how writers acculturate themselves (and, in particular, how that happened in 1850). His apprehension of an objective unity of a mode of writing inverts Barthes' notion of *écriture*. It resides in a determination by a future, upon a past, rather than a past grasping the present as its future. And he points out that, for Flaubert, in particular, this future-present-past was not an immortality, but a mode of not-being.
  18. Derrida's notion of dissemination is his articulation of the dispersion of the sign, the multiplication of its meanings among discourses, contexts, inflections, and levels of narrativity. Cf. Derrida: *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago University Press, 1981).
  19. Cf. Jacques Derrida, "Differance," in *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. David Allison (Northwestern University Press, 1973). Differance is Derrida's way of naming the inseparability of two incommensurable dimensions of the production of signification: the sign's system of differences with other signs, and the deferral of presence, meaning, the signified.
  20. Derrida has often warned that the act of reading a text which attempted to escape a metaphysics, with its assertion of apriori hierarchies, and universalization of its own origin, would necessarily have to reestablish some metaphysics, simply in the attempt to render the text intelligible for itself. Sartre's attempt to subvert the particular priority of idea over signifier, in recognizing that the sign "can only be a surpassing toward the idea if it is outside as worked matter," is already a reincorporation of the sign in the idea of it, in the process of writing.
  21. A word about why it is permissible to speak of a Sartrean semiotics at all might be in order, since Sartre generally deals ontologically with consciousness. What I am tracing here is one of the moments in Sartre's development as an internal historicity of his theories of language and textuality. This historicity includes Lit, St. Genet, Sartre's debates with structuralism, and IF, as its major moments. His theorizing subsumes and dovetails with other semiotics. On both counts, it can be considered a semiotics as such.
  22. See, for instance, Derrida's discussion of the unsaturation of the sign in *Grammatology*, and in *Limited Inc.*
  23. Leonard Lawler, "A Little Daylight: A reading of Derrida's 'White Mythology'," *Man and World* 24:(1991): 285-300. Lawler's article is interesting for the present discussion. He discusses "White Mythology" in terms of Derrida's "law of supplementarity." He critiques Husserl's account of the subject in a way that parallels Sartre's critique of Husserl, and which leads Sartre to posit non-reflective consciousness (*conscience (de) soi*) to escape the *mise en abyme* of that critique. That is, for Sartre, there is no non-subjective place from which to designate the subject. Though Sartre never generalized this move beyond its structural particularity in his early argument (BN), it is no surprise that it resurges in his account of the detotalized praxis of reading.
  24. Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago University Press, 1978).

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