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The Self as a Thing Among Things

Sartre on Subjectivity & Selfhood

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It is not in some hiding-place that we will discover ourselves; it is on the road, in the town, in the midst of the crowd, a thing among things, a human among humans.

Sartre, "Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl's
Phenomenology"

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Abbreviations

A	Adieux
ASJ	Anti-Semite and Jew
B	Baudelaire
BO	Black Orpheus
BN	Being and Nothingness
CA	The Condemned of Altona
CD	The Chips are Down
CDR	Critique of Dialectical Reason volume 1
CDR2	Critique of Dialectical Reason volume 2
CF	Cartesian Freedom
CS	Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self
E	Sketch for a Theory of Emotions
EH	Existentialism is a Humanism
EMP	Empedoclé
F1	The Family Idiot volume 1
F2	The Family Idiot volume 2
F3	The Family Idiot volume 3
F4	The Family Idiot volume 4
F5	The Family Idiot volume 5
I	Intentionality
IF	Interview with L. Fretz
IG	Interviews with J. Gerassi
IJ	Interview with P. Carrière
IMN	The Imagination
IMY	The Imaginary
IPB	Interview with Playboy Magazine
IRP	Interview with M. Rybalka & O. Pucciani
IT	The Itinerary of a Thought
MPV	Merleau-Ponty <i>vivant</i>
MS	Marxism & Subjectivity
N	Nausea
NE	Notebooks for an Ethics
OR	Oeuvres Romanesques
OTF	On <i>The Idiot of the Family</i>
QM	Quiet Moments in a War
RTS	Replies to Structuralism
SG	Saint Genet
SM	Search for a Method
SU	Kierkegaard: The Singular Universal
TE	The Transcendence of the Ego
W	The Words
WD	War Diaries
WE	What is Existentialism?
WL	What is Literature?

Notes on translations

All quotations from Sartre are provided in English in the main text with the original French being given in the corresponding footnotes, which use the same abbreviation followed by an ^F. These footnotes are placed directly after the reference, in order to distinguish them from the footnotes that contain additional information. In most cases, I follow the most recent English translation. Translations are sometimes amended in order to correct errors or avoid inconsistencies. Some texts, namely, the working notes on *Nausea* published in *Oeuvres Romanesques*, the interview with Carrière and *Empédocle*, have never been translated into English. References to these works are to the French and the translations are my own. The interview with Fretz, on the other hand, has, to the best of my knowledge, never appeared in French, it was originally published in Dutch and later translated into English.

Preface

This dissertation examines the notions of subjectivity and selfhood that are developed by Jean-Paul Sartre throughout his work. The guiding thread of this analysis is the claim Sartre makes in many of his works that the Self is “a thing among things”. His thoughts concerning selfhood change and evolve throughout his career, and I aim to uncover the nuances of these developments.

The background of this research is the critical reception of Sartre’s philosophy. Sartre received much criticism from both his contemporaries and the succeeding generations of philosophers, and the focus of this criticism often concerns the role of subjectivity in his thought. Sartre is accused of defending an outdated view of the Subject – a being which has a perspective on and/or agency in the world. His critics thought he granted too much power and autonomy to human subjectivity. In spite of such earlier criticisms of his work, in more recent years Sartre’s ideas concerning subjectivity have – alongside those of other phenomenologists – become a source of inspiration for analytic philosophers of mind. In debates in which human subjectivity has often been dismissed and reduced to mere physical activity of the brain, a more subject-oriented approach that draws on Sartre’s work has afforded many authors a fresh perspective. Nevertheless, these scholars have little regard for the role of this notion within the framework of Sartre’s own thought, and they do not pay due attention to the criticisms Sartre’s work received in earlier discussions of his work.

Thus, both the earlier criticism and the more recent analytic reception of Sartre’s work are concerned with his conception of subjectivity. Subjectivity, in turn, is directly related to the topic of selfhood. A subjective being is usually regarded as something that has a certain degree of unity and individuality. In other words, it has a Self. What makes one Subject different from another? Why can I say that I am the same person throughout my life, while I am at the same time constantly changing? How does a Subject experience itself? The answer to these and other related questions are all central to the topic of selfhood.

For reasons that are soon to be addressed, my aim is neither to acquit Sartre from the charges made against him by his critics nor to discredit the reception of his thought in the philosophy of mind. Rather, against the background of Sartre’s contemporary status, my aim is to provide an in-depth study of one of the most important aspects of his philosophy. The Sartre revealed by my research is a thinker who aims to critique many of the traditional notions of subjectivity by rethinking them from within a largely subjective framework. For Sartre, the Self is ultimately a thing and hence

an object, more than it is a Subject. Furthermore, I will address a dimension of selfhood that is often overlooked by Sartre scholarship although it is very influential in contemporary debates: that of the *narrative* identity of the Self. This has to do with the stories we tell ourselves and others about our lives and how these influence our sense of selfhood. Our life-stories involve both subjective and objective dimensions, as they require a narrator as well as a narrative, hence it is, as we will see, a point where two of the central topics of Sartre's thought meet.

Introduction

The primary focus of this dissertation will be the work of Sartre himself. Before delving into this, however, it is necessary to address the themes and context of Sartre's works. We will begin with a thematic introduction that gives a general overview of the topic of subjectivity and selfhood. This will be followed by a discussion of the criticism his work has received and its more recent positive reception, which will allow us to properly understand the status of Sartre's philosophy within the contemporary philosophical landscape. We will end this chapter with some methodological remarks concerning this dissertation.

1. Subjectivity and Selfhood

Let us begin with the theme of subjectivity and selfhood. In this thematic introduction, we will refrain from using a lot of technical vocabulary and will avoid naming thinkers who have discussed this theme, save for a few who represent classic positions. We will turn to Sartre only at the end of this section. Instead, I will focus on what is at stake in this philosophical debate.

A subjective being is a being which has a perspective on and/or agency in the world. The things in this world are objects, and most people would agree that they have at least a certain degree of objectivity, that is, a way in which they are that does not depend on a subjective being's relationship towards them. To give a simple example, we agree that there are trees in a park. This is a matter of objectivity: these objects exist in the world outside, regardless of what we think about them, how we perceive them, how we feel about them or how we interact with them. Some people may perceive the park to be lovely, others may find it haunting. A colour-blind person would have a slightly different image of the trees than someone with full colour vision would, etc. Everyone has a different subjective experience of the objects at hand. Everyone has a different worldview which may or may not overlap with that of others. It is because of this that we say that a journalist or a scientist may strive for objectivity, in the sense that they try to suppress their own opinions on things and describe them as *objectively* as possible. This is, however, a matter of objective knowledge. When we speak of objectivity here, we do not refer to knowledge but to *being*. We take objectivity to mean that a thing exists as an object.

The same thing goes for subjectivity. When we speak of subjectivity, we do not mean subjective knowledge but rather the *being* that has (or, in the case of some theories, *is*) the perspective which makes this knowledge possible. It is also important to note that subjectivity is more than a perspective on the world that approximates to some degree how things really are: many aspects of things only exist because of subjectivity, namely the meanings we give to things. A well-known example of this is love. One could say that love is nothing but a chemical reaction in the brain that facilitates the reproduction of the species at the individual level. Of course, this does not do justice to what it is like to feel love. Another dimension of subjectivity is agency. Having a subjective view on the world allows a subjective being to perform actions in light of the meanings it perceives. In other words, a subject is autonomous to a certain degree. Even if one completely denies any form of free will, a subjective being will still behave as if it is autonomous and perceives its actions as such.

As already noted, most people would agree to some kind of distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, but, at the same time, many would disagree where the exact distinction lies and how much importance one ought to assign to either subjectivity or objectivity. This may lead to two extreme positions. On the one hand there is reductionism, which tries to reduce subjectivity to objectivity. People who adhere to this position claim that subjective experience is not real, and that love is, for example, indeed nothing other than a physical reaction in our brains. This is a form of reductionism that would reduce the subject to physical nature, but it must be made clear that in this context reductionism is an umbrella-term that can refer to any sort of position that fully reduces subjectivity to something else. One could just as easily imagine someone saying that love is nothing more than a word or nothing more than a disguised relation of power. While such statements may be considered true *objectively speaking*, they do not do justice to our experience of love. A reductionist view reduces everything that is meaningful to something that can be fully comprehended without taking what it feels like to love into account. This could in turn lead to positions in which subjectivity is disdained altogether. One could imagine all kinds of dystopian examples of this. You declare your love to someone, and this person asks whether you could provide a recent chemical analysis of your brain to prove this. Or, to give another example: a certain patch of land may have some kind of symbolic or even sacred value to some people, but soil samples have proven that it is in fact not different from earth found elsewhere and can therefore be repurposed. Although these are of course extreme examples, one can see that disregarding subjectivity does not do justice to the full extent of human reality. To disregard subjectivity is to fail to do justice to many of the aspects that we deem crucial to our existence.

The other extreme, however, would be to disregard objectivity. This boils down to privileging and isolating subjectivity. Such positions are known by many names, which may or may not refer to different ways in which subjectivity is overstated. Sometimes, it is simply called subjectivism, sometimes it is referred to pejoratively as idealism. It can also appear under the banner of Cartesianism, named after René Descartes. His philosophy is the most famous case of the tendency to privilege and isolate the subject. In his effort to find a secure basis for human knowledge, Descartes first put everything in doubt, in this way he came to recognize that the only thing that could not be doubted was the fact that he was doubting (Descartes 1996). As doubting is a form of thinking, Descartes articulated his discovery with the now famous formulation *cogito ergo sum* – I think, therefore I am. The subjective cogito became the foundation of knowledge, and he subsequently divided the subjective mind and the objective body into two different substances, the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*. This produces a mind-body dualism which further isolates the subjective from the objective realm. Subjectivity as a thinking thing is regarded to be a literal thing of another other kind than objects – as opposed to being simply the activity of having a perspective. Descartes ushered in an era in which such a Subject became the “official doctrine” of most philosophers.¹ I use the term Subject with a capital S to denote such accounts of subjectivity, that is, accounts in which the subject is overstated, privileged and isolated. Another aspect of such accounts is that subjectivity is regarded as an indivisible whole, as we will soon see.

Let us first discuss why such accounts are widely viewed as problematic. Because subjectivity is regarded to be something completely detached from objectivity, it is difficult if not impossible to bridge the gap between the two. This could lead to solipsism, which is the idea that only a single subjectivity exists, or the slightly less extreme position called idealism in which only subjectivity exists. Such positions have problems creating any form of objectivity or intersubjectivity that relates to a shared world. In other words, while reductionism cannot do justice to the different ways we perceive the world, subjectivism cannot do justice to the ways our perceptions of the world are the same, making it difficult to relate to other people’s views. Furthermore, it could lead to an overstatement of the autonomy of Subject. Although, as has already been mentioned, autonomy and subjectivity are inherently related, we as subjective beings are still influenced by the objective world around us in our decisions. If we filter out this factor, freedom becomes abstract, random and gratuitous.

1 This phrasing is found in Gilbert Ryle’s influential critique of Cartesianism in *The Concept of Mind* (Ryle 1949, 1).

Because of the problems concerned with the Subject, much of 20th century philosophy can be characterized as an attack on traditional notions of subjectivity. In many different ways, philosophers have opposed the crude divide between Subject and object and have decentred the traditional Subject as the focal point of philosophical inquiry. Although many authors refer to the cogito and Cartesianism, no univocal definition of what this doctrine entails can be given. Slavoj Žižek describes it as a spectre: 'A spectre is haunting Western academia... ..the spectre of the Cartesian subject. All academic powers have entered into a holy alliance to exorcize this spectre' (Žižek 1999, 1). It is precisely spectral, in the sense that we can give a general outline of ideas related to the Cartesian subject, but we cannot give a precise account of it. The various different criticisms of the Subject all boil down to a position in which the Subject is not privileged, not isolated, not fully autonomous. Instead, such accounts strive for a more balanced relation between subjectivity and objectivity.

This brings us to the second part of our thematic distinction: selfhood. If our subjectivity is not a substance, then we need a way to account for the unity and individuality of subjective beings. What makes one subjective being different from someone else? Why do we see ourselves as being the same person throughout our lifetimes even though we are constantly changing? How does a subjective being experience itself? The answer to these and other related questions are all related to a more fundamental question: What is the Self of subjective being?

Just like questions concerning subjectivity and objectivity, the question of selfhood can be answered in two diametrically opposed ways. The first one is the one we have discussed, is simply *positing* that a subjective being is characterized by selfhood, because it is a substantive Subject. The other position would be to deny that there is such a thing as a Self altogether, to claim that a subjective being has in fact no unity and individuality, a position famously defended by David Hume (Hume 2007, 164-171). This would not do justice to experiences of selfhood which are an integral part of our subjectivity. Furthermore, it would make it difficult to hold people accountable for their actions. If I commit a crime today, then I could only be judged guilty tomorrow if I am considered to be the same person. A theory of selfhood seems crucial for how we function as persons and as a society.

An important conceptual distinction in this dissertation is that between subjective and objective selfhood. The question of the Self can be approached both subjectively and objectively. It is addressed subjectively if we ask the following kind of questions: How do we experience our own selfhood? In what manner do we experience

ourselves as the same being over time? To what degree do we experience ourselves as the agents of our actions? All these questions boil down to our own subjective perspective on our own subjectivity and have hence to do with what is often called Self-consciousness. If the Self is regarded objectively, then it is understood as an object of attribution. We attribute a lot of qualities to ourselves, for example, that we are a certain haircut, height, nationality and age. While these are attributes of subjective beings, they are more or less objective. They do not necessarily have to do with how we experience ourselves, but relate more to how others may see us. This brings us to another important way in which the themes of subjectivity and selfhood relate to each other. As subjective beings we not only encounter objects, but also other subjective beings. The problem of intersubjectivity is a whole philosophical debate in itself but one can at least say that at its core is the idea that we do not have access to the subjective point of view of another person. We can nevertheless perceive them in a certain kind of objective manner as they exist within the world. Thus, everyone has both a subjective and objective side to them. This objective side of a subjective being can be regarded as another way of describing the objective Self. In short, we can offer both a subjective and objective account of what makes a subjective being itself.²

In recent decades, there has been a conception of selfhood defended by thinkers from all corners of the philosophical world, namely that of narrative identity.³ Although their approaches may differ in detail and emphasis, central to each is the idea that the Self has to do with stories. It is through the stories that we tell about ourselves and others that we create the Self. The interesting thing about such theories in light of our concern is that storytelling has both a subjective and an objective side to it. Stories require narrators in the form of subjective beings, and they are rooted in the meanings we assign to the world around us. Hence, they are clearly subjective. On the other hand, however, stories also have an objective dimension. Once it is more widely known, a story can take on a life of its own and may continue to exist in the world even after the original narrator is long gone. Furthermore, the stories we tell about ourselves are rooted in events that also take place in the objective world. The place we are born, for example, is something that exists in the world, and our birth is something that happened in this world. Nevertheless, how we view our place of birth within our life story may differ in respect to the subjective position we take towards it. We may view it positively as

2 This distinction is sometimes equated to William James' terminological distinction between the subjective I, on the one hand, and the objective Me, on the other (James 1983, 378-379).

3 For examples of well-known defenders of a narrative view of selfhood, see: (Dennett 1992, MacIntyre 1981, Ricoeur 1992, Schechtmann 1997, Taylor 1989).

our home or negatively as a place from which we needed to escape. In any case, stories occupy an interesting place, they exist as a kind of intersection between the subjective and objective. Although they are not physical entities, few would doubt that they exist in some way and as such prove to be a midpoint between a Cartesian and a reductionist view of selfhood.

Although this brief introduction cannot do justice to centuries of philosophical debates, it still allows us to get a preliminary grasp of the problems at stake. To sum up, the philosophical theme of subjectivity and selfhood is about how things in the world are and how we as beings with a perspective on these things relate to them. Subjectivity gives rise to the question concerning the manner in which the being which is or has this perspective *is*. What makes it the same over time and what distinguishes it from other beings of the same nature? In other words, what makes a subjective being *itself*?

Another dimension needs to be added to the foregoing thematic introduction, one which we have not discussed, because it is largely specific to Sartre's thought. This is the dimension of *negativity*. Although the dimensions of subjectivity and objectivity cover that which exists, there are also a lot of things which do not exist but nevertheless play a central role in reality. One can think about fictions, empty rooms and absent friends even though these are all examples of the absence of objects or subjects and hence of nothingness. This dimension of negativity also plays a central role in selfhood. For example, we need not only view our identity in terms of what we are, but also in terms of what we no longer are. We can focus on the life-goals we have *not* yet achieved, or the person who no longer wants to be. In short, in order to properly address the theme, we need to account for *nothingness* as well as *being*.

This Sartre-specific dimension of our theme brings us to the central claim of this dissertation: Sartre is a thinker who argues against a traditional notion of the Subject from the point of view of subjectivity itself. Although his methods are very much in line with more traditional Cartesian approaches, the results of his analyses suggest a much more minimal account of subjectivity. His focus on negativity is one of the features of his philosophy that allows him to provide such an account. This minimal account of subjectivity in turn allows him to argue against traditional notions of subjective selfhood, to place a strong emphasis on both the objective and the narrative Self, and to argue for a Self that can be regarded as a thing among things.

2. Criticism and Positive Reception

As already noted, before turning to Sartre's views on subjectivity and selfhood, we will first look at the reception of his philosophy. It may seem that this is putting the cart before the horse, that it would be more obvious to first discuss Sartre's philosophy and then the various strains of its reception. We shall not do this however, precisely because of the nature of the criticism his work has received. If much 20th century philosophy can indeed be characterized as the critique of traditional notions of subjectivity, then it is all the more interesting that one of the most well-known thinkers of that era was scrutinized for his views on the matter. The fact that his views were greeted as outdated has had a detrimental effect on the image of Sartre that has been cultivated by the philosophical community. To cite the words of John Gerassi in the aptly titled *Jean-Paul Sartre: Hated Conscience of His Century*:

No intellectual, no writer, no man is more hated by academics and newsfolk, by eggheads and politicians on both sides of the Atlantic than Jean-Paul Sartre. Nor is this new: Sartre has been hated by them for half a century (Gerassi 1989, 30).

Sartre's status as a public intellectual rose dramatically after the Second World War, and with this increasing fame came increasing criticism. In a 1965 interview, he complains about this himself:

[D]o you know why I'm really considered "scandalous"? It's because, ever since 1945, the press has made a point of describing me as dead and done for. Every paper has said the same thing, and so the rumor has spread. They haven't stopped announcing my death since I started writing; haven't stopped saying I was played out, in my grave (IPB 70).

The controversy surrounding the figure of Sartre, both as a person and as a philosopher, has had a lasting impact on his reception. Thus, in order to get a clear picture of Sartre's philosophy, it will be helpful to deal with these critics at the outset: we will first discuss the criticism Sartre received from communist circles, then that which he received from contemporary philosophers and, finally, that which he received from subsequent generations of thinkers within the continental tradition.

Afterwards, we will discuss two important tendencies in the contemporary reception of Sartre's philosophy. The first consists of those who argue that the criticism Sartre received is largely invalid, and that Sartre should be understood as someone who does not

attribute a privileged position to the Subject and whose philosophy is, upon careful inspection, much closer to that of his critics than they would care to admit. The second tendency is the reception of Sartre's philosophy within (analytical) philosophy of mind. Sartre is adopted by certain philosophers working within this field in order to combat the predominance of reductionism, which characteristically takes the form of a reduction of subjectivity to physical natural. We will first give a more historical overview of the reception of Sartre in the analytical tradition and then focus on the use of his ideas in the contemporary crossover between phenomenology, on the one hand, and philosophy of mind and the cognitive sciences, on the other.

The importance of discussing these various aspects of Sartre's reception is that they all have to do with the themes of subjectivity and selfhood. Examining his reception history helps us to gain a better understanding of Sartre's philosophy – and a better understanding of Sartre's philosophy will ultimately help us to gain a better understanding of the role his philosophy can play in contemporary debates, a topic to which we will turn in the concluding chapter.

While Sartre attracted a great deal of criticism, not all of this criticism takes the form of detailed philosophical treatises – it can also be found in newspaper articles, interviews, letters and suchlike. Given this diverse assortment, it is not worthwhile to devote attention to every piece of criticism. What is offered here instead is a general assessment of the most notable critical perspectives. We cannot claim to provide an exhaustive account, but it will be sufficiently comprehensive to discuss the most important ones. These criticisms will be divided into three separate categories: those of the communist writers who took aim at Sartre in the period directly after the War, those made by contemporary philosophers, and those made by later generations of philosophers.

The communists

The first wave of criticism came from intellectuals affiliated with communism. In the years following the publication of *Being and Nothingness*, there were numerous attacks directed at Sartre.⁴ These were usually attempts to discredit Sartre politically, accusing his existentialism of leading to political quietism by using obscure and irrational language to draw youth away from political action (Lefebvre 1945; 1946). These political attacks also struck a philosophical register, leading to commentaries on *Being and Nothingness* such as that of Lefebvre (1946), Mougín (1947), Kanapa (1947) and Lukács (1948).

4 For a detailed overview of the attacks, see: (Poster 1975, 109-160) & (Drake 2010, 69-94).

The charge of idealism was one of the favourite strategies of Sartre's communist critics. Both Lefebvre and Mougín argued that Sartre's ontology, like Marxism, aimed to overcome the dualism between idealism and materialism, but failed to grasp the material side of things because of his subjective approach (Mougín 1947). Lefebvre called it a bastard compromise (Lefebvre 1946, 224-225). Mougín further argued that Sartre's philosophy entailed a double idealism (Mougín 1947, 118): a subjective idealism, because he only accounted for reality through the subjective point of view, and an objective idealism because the being of objects were given in essence to the subject. Lukács thought overcoming the dualism between idealism and materialism was an impossible task and that the vain attempt to do so only seemed appealing because idealism was philosophically problematic and materialism was deemed dangerous by bourgeois society (Lukács 1948, 18-19). The way in which the term "idealism" is being used in this context, which was not discussed in the previous section, is to refer to a tendency to replace an analysis of concrete and complex situations with abstract idealized concepts, and this is something of which Sartre is also accused by the communists.

Sartre's account of freedom was also reproached by many for being too abstract (Caillois 1944, 5; Gaillard 1947, 110; Kanapa 1947, 84). Because we are fully free, we have no criteria for making choices anymore (Lefebvre 1946, 62-63). Lukács recognized that some Marxists underestimated individual freedom, but also stressed that Sartre's account of freedom went too far and choices became arbitrary because they have no social and historical context (Lukács 1948, 106).

This leads us to another accusation, namely that Sartre's ideas are too individualistic and cannot account for the social dimension of human existence. Lefebvre argued that it could only account for individual possibilities, not social ones (Lefebvre 1945). Lukács attributed this specifically to Sartre's use of the phenomenological method (1948, 108). This individualism in turn also limited Sartre's notion of freedom, as we do not really have the freedom to influence others and participate in social relations (Poster 1975, 124). Like the lack of a social dimension, Sartre's account of freedom was also seen as failing to take history into account (Garaudy 1947, 14; Lukács 1948, 108). Because one is always free, one is also free from the past. Sartre cannot account for how the past shapes us, and how we can make history and build a better future.

Thus, while the attack on Sartre was primarily politically motivated, roughly four underlying philosophical accusations can be discerned, all of which have to do with the nature of subjectivity: idealism, an overly abstract and detached notion of freedom, and the inability to do justice to social relations and to account for history. These

accusations are interrelated: because Sartre failed to take history into account, he opted for idealism, a position that is only possible in untroubled times (Lukács 1948, 18-19). This type of reasoning can be considered circular however, as failing to take history into account leads to idealism, which leads to abstract freedom, which in turn causes Sartre to fail to take history into account.⁵

The contemporaries

Sartre was also attacked by the communists because he was influenced by Martin Heidegger (WE 155). It is Heidegger, however, who can be regarded as the first critic of Sartre from within the continental tradition. He addresses Sartre's existentialism in his "Letter on Humanism" published in 1947. Although Heidegger was initially positive about *Being and Nothingness*,⁶ in this letter he voices his concerns:

Sartre expresses the basic tenet of existentialism in this way: Existence precedes essence. In this statement he is taking *existentia* and *essentia* according to their metaphysical meaning, which from Plato's time on has said that *essentia* precedes *existentia*. Sartre reverses this statement. But the reversal of a metaphysical statement remains a metaphysical statement. With it he stays with metaphysics in oblivion of the truth of Being (Heidegger 1993, 232).

Heidegger's main problem with Sartre is that his philosophy is rooted in traditional metaphysics. He famously argued that metaphysics was concerned with beings rather than the Being of those beings. Instead of searching for Being, metaphysicians tried to determine which being was the most fundamental. This is also called "ontotheology": 'one may understand this "core" of ontotheology to consist in the metaphysical quest for (or presupposition of) a unifying reason or ground' (Van der Heiden 2014, vii). For Sartre this unifying reason would be man, as he argued that his philosophy is a form of humanism: 'Every humanism is either grounded in a metaphysics or is itself made to be the ground of one (Heidegger 1993, 225). Thus, one could say that the criticism that Heidegger gives us is twofold: Sartre's thought is rooted in traditional metaphysics, and it takes man to be the unifying ground of his metaphysical system.

5 Sartre defended himself against these critics in a small article in the communist newspaper *Action* called "What is Existentialism?" and in the lecture *Existentialism is a humanism*. To the charge of political quietism he responded that existentialism is a philosophy of action, effort, combat and solidarity (WE 160).

6 For a detailed discussion of Heidegger's changing stance towards Sartre, see: (Safranski 1998, 348)

One of the most detailed discussions of Sartre's thought can be found in Herbert Marcuse's "Existentialism: Remarks on Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'être et le néant*", which was published in 1948. In it, we find a theme that haunts almost all the criticism we will discuss: the role of René Descartes. Like Descartes, philosophers during the Second World War saw the system of values of their civilization collapse, and were in need for answers: 'Once again, thought finds itself in the Cartesian situation and asks for the one certain and evident truth which may make it still possible to live' (Marcuse 1948, 309). Existentialism finds its one certain truth in a similar manner: 'Like Descartes, this philosophy finds the foundation in the self-certainty of the *Cogito*, in the consciousness of the *Ego*' (Marcuse, 1948, 309). Furthermore, he claims that 'Sartre's concept of the free subject is a reinterpretation of Descartes' *Cogito*' (Marcuse 1948, 311). Sartre is once again attacked for being too idealistic and metaphysical, but now not because of the inherent fault of metaphysics, but on the ground of denying the historical circumstances of his own thought:

Sartre's existential analysis is a strictly philosophical one in the sense that it abstracts from the historical factors which constitute the empirical concreteness: the latter merely illustrates Sartre's metaphysical and meta-historical conceptions. In so far as Existentialism is a philosophical doctrine, it remains an idealistic doctrine: it hypostatizes specific historical conditions of human existence into ontological and metaphysical characteristics. Existentialism thus becomes part of the very ideology which it attacks, and its radicalism is illusory (Marcuse 1948, 11).

Although Marcuse is critical towards Sartre's existentialism, he does see some revolutionary potential in its movement towards the concrete circumstances of freedom: 'concrete human existence' described 'in terms of what it has actually become: a "thing" in a reified world' (Marcuse 1948, 312). Marcuse ultimately thinks that Sartre fails to fulfil this potential.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty attacked Sartre in his 1955 book *Adventures of the Dialectic*. Although the scope of this book is mainly political, the political theories of Sartre are rooted in his philosophy. According to Merleau-Ponty, Sartre cannot think concrete political and historical circumstances: 'The question is to know whether, as Sartre says, there are only *men* and *things* or whether there is also the interworld, which we call history, symbolism, truth-to-be-made' (Merleau-Ponty 1973, 200). Sartre's philosophical dichotomy can be traced back to the Cartesian roots of his thought, as Merleau-Ponty stresses in the following quote:

What continues to distinguish Sartre from Marxism, even in recent times, is therefore his philosophy of the *cogito*. Men are mentally attached to history. The *cogito* perseveres in its claim to be everything that we are, taking as its own even our situation before others (Merleau-Ponty 1973, 158-159).

Sartre's philosophy is rooted in consciousness, and it is the *cogito* that gives the world its meaning and not the world that gives meaning to consciousness. We can only think about our social and political circumstances from our point of view and cannot grant these circumstances any agency themselves. At least, that is how Merleau-Ponty sketches Sartre's thought. Sartre was defended from Merleau-Ponty's criticism by Simone de Beauvoir in her essay "Merleau-Ponty and Pseudo-Sartreanism" (De Beauvoir 1998).⁷

The next major critic is Claude Levi-Strauss, who devoted a chapter to this topic in *The Savage Mind* in 1962. This work differs from the aforementioned ones because Levi-Strauss primarily discusses Sartre's Marx-inspired *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and not his earlier existentialist works. Although this work contains much less Cartesian terminology, Levi-Strauss still criticizes Sartre along these lines:

He who begins by steeping himself in the allegedly self-evident truths of introspection never emerges from them. [...] Sartre in fact becomes the prisoner of his Cogito: Descartes made it possible to attain universality, but conditionally on remaining psychological and individual; by sociologizing the Cogito, Sartre merely exchanges one prison for another (Levi-Strauss 1966, 249).

The "sociologizing" that Levi-Strauss describes concerns the project of the *Critique*, which deals with groups, societies and history rather than the traditional topics usually associated with the *cogito*, such as truth and subjectivity. The remainder of Levi-Strauss' criticism has to do the things Sartre writes about anthropology and the study of other cultures, which is too detailed to discuss here.

The subsequent generations

The philosophical generation that followed Sartre's in France is associated with labels such as post-structuralism, deconstruction

⁷ The relationship between Sartre, De Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty is much more intricate than we can devote attention to here. For a more detailed discussion of the topic, see: (Stewart 1998) & (Bernasconi 2006).

and postmodernism.⁸ These philosophers are associated with a decentring of the human subject. It is impossible to pinpoint the exact moment at which the generation of Sartre was succeeded by this generation. Sartre published books until the seventies and engaged in discussions with this generation. One could say that the publication of Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* in 1966 marked a decisive moment on account of its anti-humanism: 'man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end' (Foucault 2005, 422). Foucault himself traced the watershed moment in French philosophy to a divergence between Sartre and Jacques Lacan (Foucault 2000, 251). Both thinkers thought that the idea of the unconscious was irreconcilable with that of a Subject. Whereas Sartre concluded from this that the unconscious had to be jettisoned, Lacan reached the opposite conclusion: the Subject had to go. Lacan himself, however, was not as critical of Sartre as others and refers to his work positively (Lacan 1988, 215; 1998, 84).⁹ Foucault mainly criticized Sartre for his focus on the Subject as that which gives meaning to the world (Foucault 2000, 247-248).¹⁰ He also criticizes his notion of selfhood:

I think that from the theoretical point of view, Sartre avoids the idea of the self as something that is given to us, but through the moral notion of authenticity, he turns back to the idea that we have to be ourselves – to be truly our true self (Foucault 1994, 262).

A more detailed criticism of Sartre from this group of thinkers can be found in Jacques Derrida's 1968 lecture "The ends of man". He too criticizes the role of the subjectivity in Sartre's philosophy. He repeats many of the criticisms that we have already encountered. He characterizes Sartre's philosophy in the following way: 'Everything takes place as though the sign "man" had no origin, no historical, cultural, linguistic limit, not even a metaphysical limit' (Derrida 1969, 35). He reproaches Sartre for claiming that the unity of Being is grounded in the human project, and he also mentions Heidegger's criticism and reiterates the claim that Sartre's philosophy is an ontotheology (Derrida 1969, 36). In a later interview, Derrida was even more negative, stating that the influence of Sartre on him was 'nefarious and catastrophic' (Derrida 1995, 122).

8 For a more detailed account of this generation of philosophers in relation to Sartre, see: (Churchill & Reynolds 2013, 218-222).

9 Interestingly, Sartre himself says that he was friends with Lacan, who was also his therapist: 'I went to see a shrink, a young guy then with whom I have been good friends ever since, Jacques Lacan' (IG 63). He has also stated that he did not really know Lacan's work (OTF 217).

10 Sartre himself was in turn a fierce critic of Foucault, whom he mainly criticized for not having an account of History – an argument that has also, as we have seen, been raised against Sartre himself (RTS 110).

The power of subjective beings is also criticized by Jean-François Lyotard, who in the ironically named essay “A Success of Sartre’s” states: ‘To put it bluntly, I did not like the air of capability his writings exuded’ (Lyotard 1986, xi). The remainder of his criticism is primarily related to writing and language. He argues that the titular success of Sartre is to be found in his later studies of writers, ‘in which the subject is defeated by words’ (Lyotard 1986, xxii). In his view, language also has power over the Subject and cannot be used by the Subject in a fully autonomous way. Nevertheless, Lyotard thinks that there are two Sartres, the one known through his popular writings, and another who is ‘withdrawn into himself, secret, captivated by failure, unknown and never managing to recognize himself in the words that came to him or, rather, failed to’ (Lyotard 1986, xxii). Undoubtedly Lyotard found this hidden figure much more interesting and philosophically successful than the more wellknown Sartre.

One notable exception to this generation’s disdain for Sartre is Gilles Deleuze. In his essay “He was my teacher”, written in 1964, he speaks highly of both *Being and Nothingness* and *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (Deleuze 2004, 79). Nevertheless, he also states that ‘[w]e speak of Sartre as though he belonged to a bygone era’ (Deleuze 2004, 79). Thus, Sartre’s demise in popularity in philosophical circles and the generational break in French philosophy is confirmed by Deleuze. Furthermore, although he speaks highly of Sartre’s main works, he does criticize his appropriation of humanism in *Existentialism is a humanism* (Dosse 2010, 94-95)

In the years since, Sartre’s popularity within the continental philosophical tradition has faded. One can name but a few examples of his work being discussed, for instance, by Ricoeur (1981), Nancy (1993, 96-105) and Bourdieu (1996).

In recent years, however, a new school of philosophy has directed its attention towards Sartre and, more broadly, at phenomenology in general. New schools of speculative realism, such as object-oriented ontology, want to move away from both the subjective orientation of phenomenology as well as the criticism of metaphysics prevalent in 20th-century continental philosophy. Thinkers associated with such movements generally want to return to a speculative metaphysics, yet without ontotheology. Instead, they opt for a “flat” ontology in which every particular aspect of reality is thought of as a thing. Harman, an object-oriented ontologist, revives one of the oldest arguments against Sartre when he says that Sartre’s notion of intentionality ‘is not enough to rescue phenomenology from idealism’ and calls it the ‘basic prejudice of phenomenology’ (Harman 2005, 25). Tom Sparrow makes a similar criticism when he says that Sartre’s realism is a realism in name only. Although Sartre states that subjects and

objects exist independently from one another, '[t]he evidence for this independence [...] is neither forthcoming nor pursued by Sartre' (Sparrow 2014, 70).

Thus, although Sartre has received much criticism throughout the years, all such criticism has focused on the role of the Subject in his thought, whether it is in the charge of idealism (the idea that objects do not exist independently of subjectivity), granting the Subject too much power and autonomy, or depending too much on a specific subjectivist thinker of the past – Descartes. The charge of being too metaphysical also has to do with subjectivity, as ultimately his metaphysics is said to be grounded in subjectivity.

Apart from Sartre's role in the work of other continental philosophers, there has been a steady stream of commentaries on his work which are much more positive in tone. As already mentioned, there are two trends in Sartre's reception that are worth highlighting in light of our interests. On the one hand, we have those who argue that Sartre's philosophy is actually not so very different from that of some of his critics. The other main current is comprised of those who implement ideas from Sartre's work in debates in the analytic philosophy of mind.

The new Sartre

In the last couple of decades, there have been many scholars who have argued that the gap between Sartre and the generation of philosophers that followed him is not as wide as it was perceived in their time. Under the banner of 'the new Sartre,' a term coined by Christina Howells, they argue that in Sartre, we also find a decentring of the subject much akin to that of post-structuralism, deconstruction and postmodernism (Howells 1992, 1). The most detailed study in this strand of scholarship is Nik Farrell Fox's *The New Sartre: Explorations in Postmodernism*. In his introduction, he states the following:

I argue that Sartre's idea of a contingent, non-essential subject (which he argues for consistently throughout his work) has much in common with, and indeed prefigures, the decentred subject theorized by post-structuralists and postmodernists (Fox 2007, 7).

The idea that Sartre's notion of the Subject is not as classical as his critics made it out to be is the guiding thread for many scholars. This often leads to a more positive comparison to philosophers such as Foucault (Fox 2007), Derrida (Gardner 1983, Martinot 2006, Howells 2007) and Lacan (Borch-Jacobsen 1989, Charbonneau 1999, Gardner 1983, Leguil 2012, Tolini & Muller 2015, Van

Haute 1989). Although such comparisons place Sartre closer to his critics, and often identify him as a progenitor, it nevertheless remains difficult to equate Sartre's philosophy with those of his later opponents. As Fox puts it:

Sartre's philosophy can be situated in a transitional space that straddles the divide and creates a sometimes uneasy tension between a postmodern sense of despair, plurality, fragmentation and indeterminacy and a modernist longing for comprehension, meaning, constructivism and totality (Fox 2007, 4).

Fox draws on an interview with Roland Barthes, who was one of the first who argued for this view of Sartre's philosophy as a sort of crossroads between two eras in philosophy, which can roughly be called the modern and the postmodern (Barthes 1976). This idea is reminiscent of that of Lyotard, but while the latter links each of the "two Sartres" to definitive works in a fairly exclusive manner, Fox ultimately argues that in all his works, Sartre shifts between his two faces. In his conclusion he states:

In this book, I have sketched a picture in which two Sartres emerge alongside one another: the Old Sartre – aggressive and totalistic, Cartesian and classical, modernist and Marxist, an optimist and grand-thinker – and a New postmodern Sartre who is changing and plural, aestheticized and splintered, aporetic and anarchistic, a pessimist and arch-deconstructionist. Like two pugilists in a boxing ring, they shadow one another, join together, clash, contend and struggle for primacy within individual texts and in his work taken as a whole. However, as I have presented it, there is no clear resolution or victorious end to this fight but an ongoing agonism of differences and emphases that rise and fall as Sartre's critical perspective shifts (Fox 2007, 149).

Aside from its focus on the Subject, Fox's book also examines social and political aspects of Sartre's work which we will not address here, because it would entail straying too far from our topic. When it comes to subjectivity and selfhood, we hope to shed some light in this dissertation on how the two sides of Sartre's philosophy are evident throughout his oeuvre.

Analytic reception

Although the reception of Sartre in analytic philosophy has surged in recent years, it can be traced back to an essay by Alfred Ayer from 1945. While he often speaks jestingly about Sartre's philosophy, his

depiction is quite fair. He places a good deal of emphasis on the conception of time in *Being and Nothingness*, although he readily admits that he does not fully understand it. Furthermore, concerning Sartre's discussion of nothingness, he states: 'Psychologically, indeed, I think that Sartre's analyses are often very penetrating. But the logical and metaphysical structure in which he has enveloped them in this part of his work, does not seem to me sound' (Ayer 1945, 19). It is interesting to note that Ayer, whose own work is rooted in logical-positivism, attacks Sartre for his metaphysics. This, as we have already discussed, is of the same cast as the criticisms made by Heidegger, who was himself famously targeted by the logical-positivists (Carnap 1932).

Although there has been a constant stream of introductory literature on Sartre in the Anglophone world since the publication of *Being and Nothingness*, his *positive* introduction within analytic philosophy is much more recent. One of the landmarks in the general introduction of phenomenology into analytic philosophy of mind is Hubert Dreyfus' 1972 book *What Computers Can't Do*, in which he draws insights from Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty (Dreyfus 1972). Nevertheless, Dreyfus is very negative about Sartre, supposedly agreeing with Heidegger that *Being and Nothingness* is 'muck' (Magee 1987, 275). Furthermore, he says that the book is 'a brilliant misunderstanding of [Heidegger's] *Being and Time*' and 'you have to be a kind of genius like Sartre to take a book like *Being and Time*, which was anti-Cartesian through and through, and rewrite it as if it was a Cartesian book' (Dreyfus 2007, 34:56-35:10). This is an interesting sentiment because it echoes the many criticisms concerning Cartesianism that were mentioned in the last section. Cartesianism has also been one of the main targets of analytic philosophy. Perhaps the most famous example is Gilbert Ryle arguing against 'Descartes' Myth', which is the idea that there is both a mental and physical plane (Ryle 1949, 1). A more recent example can be found in Daniel Dennett's rejection of the idea that there is a place in the brain where consciousness "happens", which he refers to pejoratively as the 'Cartesian theater' (Dennett 1991, 107).

Such criticism of Cartesianism has led to a development within analytic philosophy that moves in the opposite direction, namely, reducing everything to the physical plane. This form of reductionism is called naturalism, as it aims to reduce all subjectivity to the world as it is described by the natural sciences (and hence to "objectivity"). As Dan Zahavi argues, 'naturalism is seen by many as the default metaphysical position. If you don't subscribe to naturalism you must be subscribing to some form of Cartesian substance dualism' (Zahavi 2009, 3). To counter this rising trend of naturalism, many turn to the phenomenological tradition to find a view of subjectivity and related

themes that avoids Cartesianism without falling into the snares of naturalism. Over the last few decades, there have been many notable publications that embody this tendency (Smith & Thomasson 2005, Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, Gallagher & Schmicking 2009). One could also point to the aptly titled journal *Phenomenology & the Cognitive Sciences* as an important channel for this current of thought.

Despite Dreyfus' early hostility to Sartre's contribution, in recent decades he has come to be regarded as just as important as the other phenomenologists to whom these analytic philosophers have turned. Gregory McCulloch, in *Using Sartre: An analytical introduction to early Sartrean themes* published in 1994, explicitly introduces Sartre as an anti-Cartesian thinker:

The Cartesian idea that the mind is a thing in the head (material or not) is alive and kicking in the analytical tradition, and my guiding assumption is that Sartre's anti-Cartesian views deserve more attention than they are wont to receive from philosophers in this tradition (McCulloch 1994, ix).

Although Sartre's ideas play a role in many debates, they are especially prevalent in those concerning subjectivity, self-consciousness and selfhood. Kathleen Wider, in her book *The Bodily Nature of Consciousness: Sartre and Contemporary Philosophy of Mind*, published in 1997, states in her introduction: 'In particular I am interested in exploring the meaning and use Sartre makes of his fundamental claim about consciousness: 'that all consciousness is, by its very nature, self-consciousness' (Wider 1997, 1). A more recent publication, *Pre-reflective Consciousness: Sartre and contemporary philosophy of mind*, emphasizes this dimension of Sartre's philosophy even more by adopting a Sartrean notion related to this theme as its title (Miguens, Preyer & Morando 2016).

The minimal and narrative Self

The biggest player to advocate a Sartrean view in the debate concerning selfhood is the aforementioned Zahavi. Many scholars who operate within the analytic reception of phenomenology defend the idea of a 'minimal self' (Gallagher 2000, 14). This is an umbrella term that encompasses multiple notions of subjective selfhood. The need for such notions stems from the limitations of scientific naturalism:

[S]tudies employing self-related processing approach self-experience through the self-attribution of mental and physical features, and thereby focus on the self as

an *object of attribution* and not the self as the *knowing subject* and *agent*. To invoke James' classic distinction, this paradigm targets the 'Me' – the self as known through its physical and mental attributes – and not the 'I' – the self as subjective knower and agent (Christoff, Cosmelli, Legrand & Thompson 2011, 104).

By focusing on the world through a lens of objectivity, it is difficult if not impossible to say something about the Self as it is experienced subjectively. The idea of minimal selfhood is thus based on an irreducible remainder that eludes naturalistic accounts: 'Even if all of the unessential features of self are stripped away, we still have an intuition that there is a basic, immediate, or primitive 'something' that we are willing to call a self' (Gallagher 2000, 15). This has to do with a sense of agency and ownership: we sense that we are the thinker of our thoughts and agent of our actions.

It is here that Zahavi's Sartrean notion of Self comes into play. He defends what he calls the 'experiential self' (Zahavi 2010, 56). He elaborates on this notion in many texts. The article "The Experiential Self: Objections and Clarifications", for example, opens with no less than three quotes from Sartre – one concerning the notion of the "prereflective *cogito*", and two concerning "prereflective self-consciousness". Furthermore, he draws on Sartre's notion of "ipseity" (Zahavi 2010, 58). Although we will not provide a detailed examination of how his notion of the experiential Self relates to Sartre's theories. It suffices to cite the following claim: 'the self is defined as the very subjectivity of experience, and is not taken to be something that exists independently of, or in separation from, the experiential flow' (Zahavi 2010, 60).

The minimal experiential Self does not account for the full spectrum of selfhood, but needs to be supplemented by narrative selfhood in order to account for full-fledged personhood. According to Zahavi, 'narrative personhood presupposes experiential selfhood' as '[o]nly a being with a first-person perspective could consider her own aims, ideals, and aspirations as her own and tell a story about them' (Gallagher & Zahavi 2008, 205). Interestingly, in another influential article on narrative selfhood, Galen Strawson's *Against Narrativity* Sartre's *Nausea* is given as an example of a position that opposes some forms of narrative identity in his novel *Nausea* (Strawson 2004).

Thus, Sartre plays an interesting role in current debates on selfhood in analytic philosophy of mind. His theories of subjective selfhood, in particular, have been taken up, although the scope is (often explicitly) limited to *Being and Nothingness* and, more sporadically, *The Transcendence of the Ego*. Although this focus seems to be justified by the context of the debates within which Sartre's ideas are being

deployed, the criticisms Sartre received for his views on subjectivity have not been taken into account. The charges of Cartesianism are not really discussed. This appears problematic because Zahavi draws heavily on the (at least terminologically) Cartesian notion of the “prereflective cogito”. Nevertheless, he does state that the experiential Self should not be understood ‘as some kind of Cartesian-style mental residuum, that is, as some kind of self-enclosed and self-sufficient interiority’ (Zahavi 2007, 189).

We will return to the topic of Sartre’s reception in the concluding chapter. For now, this exposition has allowed us to see that the topic of subjectivity and selfhood is central to Sartre’s philosophy and that, depending on the context of assessment, it is therefore the source of both the interest in and irritation with his work.

3. Method

Let us now turn to the methodological aspects of this dissertation. This study of places considerable emphasis on the exegetical study of the writings of Sartre, thereby providing a conceptual analysis of the notions he articulates and develops insofar as these concern our topic. We will draw from a wide range of works relevant to the topic, including many of the posthumously published ones.¹¹ In order to properly contextualize these, references to biographical details and Sartre’s relationship to other thinkers are provided in footnotes and in the introductory remarks of each chapter.

The structure of this work

With the exception of the conclusion, the chapters of this work all have a similar structure. Each one deals with a period of Sartre’s work. This division is mainly heuristic because I agree with Sartre’s own assessment of the absence of sharp breaks within his oeuvre: ‘I think that there is more continuity in thought. I do not believe that there is a break. There are naturally changes in one’s thinking; one can deviate; one can go from the one extreme to the other; but the idea of a break [...] seems to me to be mistaken’ (IF 225). Instead of such discontinuity, evolution and development can be identified within and across these periods.¹²

11 Our main concern is the study of subjectivity and selfhood. The fact that we take the posthumously published works into account means that we will not provide an historical account of the criticism of Sartre’s philosophy, as many of the works we will discuss were simply not available then.

12 Something we will aim to avoid is the tendency to read of Sartre’s work through the lens of other periods. Too often the ideas of Sartre’s supposedly “main” existentialist period are pasted onto the works of other periods, especially those preceding *Being and Nothingness*. Perhaps the most obvious example of this is the fact that older

The first chapter covers the period up until the Second World War.¹³ We will mainly discuss Sartre's discovery of phenomenology in the mid-thirties. We will not examine his youthful writings in much detail, though "Empedoclé" will be discussed because it elucidates the views presented in *Nausea*.¹⁴

The second chapter focuses on the works ranging from the war until the mid-50's.¹⁵ The *War Diaries* are discussed in both chapters, as they reflect back upon his previous writing and discuss what Sartre is writing at that time and plans to develop further. Furthermore, in these diaries Sartre also explicitly states that his views concerning selfhood have changed during the Second World War, which provides a strong case for dividing the first two periods.¹⁶

The last period marks the works ranging from the late 50s until his death.¹⁷ The division between this last period and the preceding

English versions of *The Transcendence of the Ego* were given the subtitle "An existentialist theory of consciousness" instead of the proper one, "A sketch for a phenomenological description". The original work was published in 1936, whereas Sartre did not adopt the label "existentialism" for his philosophy until 1945.

- 13 The works we will be focusing on from this period are listed below in the order in which they are published. For those published posthumously, the years in which they were written are given instead and italicized.

1926 Empedoclé

1936 The Imagination

1937 The Transcendence of the Ego

1938 Nausea (including working notes published in *Oeuvres Romanesques*)

1939 Intentionality

1939 Sketch for a Theory of Emotions

1940 The Imaginary

1939/41 War Diaries

- 14 For a more detailed discussion of the works of Sartre's youth, see: (De Coorebyter 2005).

- 15 The works we will be focusing on from this period are listed below in the order in which they are published. For those published posthumously, the years in which they were written are given instead and italicized.

1939/41 War Diaries

1943 Being and Nothingness

1944 What is Existentialism?

1946 Existentialism is a Humanism

1946 Baudelaire

1947 What is Literature?

1947/48 Notebooks for an Ethics

1948 Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self

1952 Saint Genet

- 16 Concerning the reasons for his changed views on selfhood, Sartre claims the following: 'It's the war and Heidegger which put me on the right path' (WD 324).

- 17 The works we will be focusing on from this period are listed below in the order in which they were published. For those which would be published posthumously, the years in which they were written are given instead and italicized.

ones is much more intricate. In general, it is marked by a change in vocabulary, with the primarily phenomenological terms giving way to a Hegelian-Marxist frame of reference. The reasons for this change are manifold and have to do with Sartre's shifting political views, the criticism he received regarding his earlier works and the continuing influence of the philosophers closest to him, such as De Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty.¹⁸

This division into three periods marks the general course of this dissertation. Each chapter follows the same bipartite structure. The first part of each chapter deals with subjectivity, objectivity and negativity. These themes are not, however, always discussed in that precise order, rather the approach Sartre himself uses in a specific period determines the way in which the first parts of each chapter takes shape. The second part of each chapter is centred around the topic of selfhood. Each of these parts has three sections, following the triad that was discussed in the thematic introduction: subjective, objective and narrative selfhood.

The results of the investigations into the different periods of Sartre's work will be compared in the concluding chapter in order to draw more general insights concerning Sartre's theories of subjectivity and selfhood. As already noted, the concluding chapter will also allow us to return to the topics discussed in this introduction and hence to re-examine the different critiques and appropriations of his philosophy in order to show the relevance of his theories for contemporary philosophical concerns.

1957 *Search for a Method*

1960 *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (Including the posthumously published second volume)

1964 *Marxism & Subjectivity*

1966 *Kierkegaard: The Singular Universal*

1969 *The Itinerary of a Thought*

1971 *The Family Idiot* (Volume 1-4)

1971 *On The Idiot of the Family*

1972 *The Family Idiot* (Volume 5)

1975 Interview with M. Rybalka & O. Pucciani

1976 Interview with L. Fretz

18 For an in-depth analysis of the politic aspects of this period, see: (Poster 1975).

Overview

The final part of this introduction provides a more detailed overview of the chapters in this dissertation. Chapter 1 will address the first period of Sartre's work and begins with a section on the notion of intentionality. Although he discovers this notion in the writings of Husserl, he gives his own original interpretation of it. We will also devote some attention to Sartre's interpretation of the phenomenological method. In the next section, we will discuss Sartre's notion of things, focusing mainly on the famous section in *Nausea* in which the protagonist is sitting on a park bench staring at the root of a tree. After this, we will devote a section to Sartre's theories concerning imaginary objects. Although this theme is not directly relevant to his theories of selfhood from this period, it will emerge that the question of whether or not the Self is an imaginary construct plays an important role throughout his work.

In the second part of the first chapter, we will first devote a section to the first part of *The Transcendence of the Ego*, where Sartre shows that there is no Self that "inhabits" consciousness, but that consciousness is itself individuated. We will also discuss his criticism of the cogito in this section. In the second section, the second part of the same work will be discussed with a focus on how the Self as an object relates to consciousness. In the last part, we will focus on two notions which are detrimental for Sartre's theories about narrative selfhood, namely, that of adventure and that of the biographical illusion as he presents them in *Nausea* and the *War Diaries* respectively.

Chapter 2 will begin with a section on the being of things and Sartre's realist epistemology in *Being and Nothingness*. We will also discuss the methodology of phenomenological ontology that Sartre adopts in this work. In the second section, we will discuss the notion of nothingness, focusing both on non-real objects, which he calls "negatities", and their ontological origin in the being of consciousness. In the last section of the first part, we will turn towards freedom and investigate how freedom is always given through a project in a situation.

The second part will begin with a section on self-consciousness, and the notions of the prereflective cogito and ipseity in *Being and Nothingness*, the article "Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self" and the *War Diaries*. Although Sartre holds on to the idea that there is no inhabitant of consciousness, he does change his views about whether consciousness is personal rather than impersonal. The second section will address the objective Self as something that is posited in relation to our goals and ends, focusing mainly on the *War Diaries*. Next, we will once again turn to *Being and Nothingness* in order to examine how both bad faith and the presence of others

has an objectifying effect on us. Finally, we will devote a section to the notion of the original choice, examining how this notion is developed in *Being and Nothingness* through the method of existential psychoanalysis. We will also briefly discuss how this method is applied in some of the biographies written by Sartre. In the last part of this section, we will address the humanism of Sartre's *Existentialism is a humanism* in light of this notion.

Chapter 3 will begin with a section on *praxis* and totalisation, showing how people have a practical relation to their surroundings, as described by Sartre in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. We will also devote some attention to the progressive-regressive method as developed in the *Search for a Method*. In the second section, we will turn to Sartre's conception of things by exploring the notion of the practico-inert, which is also developed in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. This work will also be the main focus of the third section, in which we will discuss group-formation and History.

In the second part, we will first turn to a lecture entitled "Marxism & Subjectivity" and some relevant interviews in order to explore the notions of interiorization and lived experience, which are notions Sartre was developing at that time to describe subjectivity. In the second section, we will examine *The Family Idiot* and some interviews relating to this work in order to show how Sartre revisits his position in *The Transcendence of the Ego* and readdresses the question of whether the Self is an imaginary construct – something he denies in this period of his work. Finally, we will turn to Sartre's ideas concerning narrative identity and the return of the notion of adventure in the lecture entitled "Kierkegaard: The Singular Universal" and in the posthumously published unfinished second part of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

In the concluding chapter we will begin by presenting our findings, focusing first on the development and continuity of Sartre's ideas concerning subjectivity and objectivity and then turning, with the same intention, to his ideas on subjective, objective and narrative selfhood. In the second section we will devote some attention to the criticism of Sartre's work, to the idea of the "new Sartre" and, in the last part of this section, to the analytic reception of his thought. The final section will offer a general conclusion about the nature of Sartre's thought in light of our enquiry.

Chapter 1

Subjectivity Without Self

The following quotation was chosen as the epigraph of this dissertation: ‘It is not in some hiding-place that we will discover ourselves; it is on the road, in the town, in the midst of the crowd, a thing among things, a human among humans’ (I 4)¹⁹. This citation is to be found in the earliest text Sartre wrote after he discovered phenomenology. The article in question is “Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl’s Phenomenology”, which was written in 1934 but not published until 1947. This article foreshadows themes that will recur throughout the entirety of Sartre’s oeuvre. The most salient of these being the idea of omitting the Self from consciousness and plunging it into the world. In this chapter we will see how Sartre first works out this theme in the works leading up to the Second World War. His reasoning is motivated by two major ideas. The first is the notion of intentionality, which Sartre radicalizes and turns against some of Husserl’s own views. In his *War Diaries*, Sartre called this process the exhaustion of Husserl’s philosophy, by which he meant ‘to reflect within its perspectives, and create my own private ideas at its expense, until I plunge into a blind alley’ (WD 183-184)²⁰. The second central idea of Sartre’s thought is that of contingency, the idea that there are no ultimate reasons why reality is the way it is and that, rather than being discovered, a lot of the structure of reality is imposed upon it by us.

In this period Sartre was not yet a famous public intellectual, and his philosophy lacked the social and political dimension of his later work. The period from his discovery of phenomenology to the Second World War saw Sartre plagued by depression and mescaline-induced hallucinations, which meant he was primarily concerned with his own private life (De Beauvoir 1962, 208-220).²¹

19 ‘Ce n’est pas dans je ne sais quelle retraite que nous nous découvrirons : c’est sur la route, dans la ville, au milieu de la foule, chose parmi les choses, homme parmi les hommes’ (I^F 89).

20 ‘épuiser une philosophie c’est réfléchir dans ses perspectives, me faire des idées personnelles à ses dépens jusqu’à que je tombe dans un cul-de-sac’ (WD^F 226).

21 Sartre would later say that the advent of the Second World War brought an end to his depression: ‘I think what was happening was that my depression, which was a personal depression, caused, I insist, by the fact that I was dreading my life as a teacher, writing in off hours, like sneaking to write, was suddenly being put into a wider context, one in which I would be facing fascism, we all would’ (IG 91).

We will begin our discussion with the nature of subjective experience and its relation to objects, themes which are both centred around the notion of intentionality. We will see how Sartre alters the traditional relationship between subject and object by making subjectivity itself a kind of relation, rather than something which relates. Furthermore, we will see what objects themselves are apart from subjectivity and how real objects differ from imaginary ones.

After the intentional structure of subjectivity is made clear, we will see how this structure does not depend on a subjective Self. It is capable of uniting itself through the objects of which it is aware. I will use the metaphor of the chain of consciousness to show how this process works, and how it is used to criticize traditional notions of subjective selfhood, such as the Cartesian cogito.

The subjective Self is expelled from consciousness, which means the Self as object is reserved a bigger role in accounting for our identity. We will examine the nature of this objective Self, focusing on how it is imposed upon consciousness through reflection. We will see how this Self becomes a virtual locus of unity, an abstract centre of reflected experiences that we use to interpret our past actions. We will also devote attention to the question of whether this Self as object is real or imaginary and to the reason why this locus of unity is needed.

Finally we will turn to the question of narrative selfhood. If the Self as object is a virtual locus of the unity of reflected experiences, then one must still explain why some experiences are more important to our identity than others. This becomes clear when we look at the three related notions of adventure, perfect moments and the biographical illusion.

Part I **Consciousness Without Content**

1. Intentionality

'All consciousness is consciousness of something' (I 5)²². This motto is repeated by Sartre in almost every philosophical work up to and including *Being and Nothingness* (IMN 129, TE 6, IMY 11, BN 7, WD 232). According to Sartre, this idea is 'the essential principle of phenomenology', and it would become the leading idea in Sartre's philosophy for a decade (TE 6).²³ Although he discovers the idea in Husserl's philosophy, most agree that Sartre misunderstood

22 'Toute conscience est conscience de quelque chose' (I^F 88).

23 'le principe essentiel de la phénoménologie' (TE^F 100).

Husserl's notion.²⁴ The root of this misunderstanding is that Sartre took Husserl for a realist. Realism must be understood here as the philosophical position that states that the objects we experience exist outside of our relation to them and are hence not merely subjective.²⁵ The quest for a new form of realism, one that steers between idealism and representative realism, was one of Sartre's main motives in the early stages of his philosophical career, and he found the key to achieving this in phenomenology and its notion of intentionality: 'nothing can be more unjust than to call phenomenologists 'idealists'. Indeed, it has been centuries since philosophy has given evidence of such a realist trend. Phenomenologists have immersed man back in the world' (TE 29)^{26, 27} We will first discuss how Sartre's conception of phenomenology can be seen to immerse us in the world.

Empty consciousness

In the "Intentionality" article Sartre begins by outlining the position he seeks to overcome. He calls this 'digestive philosophy' in reference to the idea that to know something or to be conscious of something it somehow needs to enter the mind (I 3)²⁸. From such a perspective, all objects are nothing but 'a certain assemblage of "contents of consciousness"' (I 4)²⁹. We find him criticizing similar ideas throughout this period. In *The Imagination*, Sartre talks about 'thingism', treating the contents of consciousness as if they are of the same nature as the things in the outside world, and 'immanentism',

24 Sartre would later come to realize that he was mistaken: 'I took Husserl for a realist, which he is not' (IRP 25). The exact nature of Husserl's position has been hotly debated among scholars. For a discussion of this, see: (Zahavi 2003). For a more in-depth discussion of Sartre's discovery of Husserl, see: (Stawarska 2013).

25 It is important to note that Sartre is not consistent in his use of the term realism. Sometimes he uses it to refer to forms of indirect realism or representationalism, which he criticizes throughout his works. He also criticizes naïve realism (IMN 192-193). In the years before his death, he described his early realism as follows: 'the idea that the world existed as I saw it and that the objects I perceived were real. [...] [I]n order to be a realist, one had to have both an idea of the world and an idea of consciousness' (IRP 10).

26 'rien n'est plus injuste que d'appeler les phénoménologues des idéalistes. Il y a des siècles, au contraire, qu'on n'avait senti dans la philosophie un courant aussi réaliste. Il sont replongé l'homme dans le monde' (TE^F 131).

27 Sartre would later, in 1969, describe this philosophical project in the following manner: 'to provide a philosophical foundation for realism. Which in my opinion is possible today, and which I have tried to do all my life. In other words, how to give man both his autonomy and his reality among real objects, avoiding idealism without lapsing into a mechanistic materialism' (IT 36-37).

28 'philosophie digestive' (I^F 87).

29 'Un certain assemblage de « contenus de conscience »' (I^F 87).

the idea that objects are immanent to consciousness (IMN 6, 130)³⁰. In *The Imaginary* he criticizes the ‘illusion of immanence’, which he explains as the idea that there are two worlds: one on the inside and one on the outside (IMY 5)³¹. The one on the inside contains small imitations of the things in the outside world. These erroneous types of reasoning differ in details – some posit an outside world, some reduce everything to consciousness – but they are all characterized by the same fundamental error: the contents of consciousness are understood to be *literally* within consciousness. Even seemingly opposed positions can fall prey to this error: representational realists think that there are representations of objects inside our consciousness; (Berkeleyan) idealists maintain that there is nothing beyond subjective experience. According to Sartre, virtually all philosophers commit to some form of digestive philosophy, and he lists examples ranging from ancient philosophers to psychologists from his own time (IMN 6-76). All philosophers, that is, until Husserl:

Against the digestive philosophy [...] Husserl persistently affirmed that one cannot dissolve things in consciousness. You see this tree, to be sure. But you see it just where it is: at the side of the road, in the midst of the dust, alone and writhing in the heat, eight miles from the Mediterranean coast. It could not enter into your consciousness, for it is not of the same nature as consciousness (I 4)³².

If we perceive a tree, then the tree does not in any way enter our consciousness. Consciousness has no inside. It is not a thing, but a movement, a flight outside itself. If we follow Sartre’s reasoning strictly, then we should probably expand the general definition of consciousness referred to earlier so that it reads: “all consciousness is *nothing but* consciousness of something *outside of consciousness*.” Consciousness is itself empty, it is nothing other than consciousness of an object. It is nothing but a movement outside itself, which should not be understood in any way spatially, as consciousness is characterized by *not* being in any way like a thing, but as always being related to a thing. Even in the case of reflection, when the object is another conscious act, it is not inside the current conscious act. Sartre uses the term consciousness to refer to a single experience

30 ‘chosisme’, ‘immanentisme’ (IMN^F 5, 144).

31 ‘illusion d’immanence’ (IMY^F 17).

32 ‘Contre la philosophie digestive [...] Husserl ne se laisse pas d’affirmer qu’on ne peut pas dissoudre les choses dans la conscience. Vous voyez cet arbre-ci, soit. Mais vous le voyez à l’endroit même où il est : a bord de la route, a milieu de la poussière, seul et tordu sous la chaleur, à vingt lieues de la côte méditerranéenne. Il ne saurait entrer dans votre conscience, car il n’est pas de même nature qu’elle’. (I^F 87).

(IMN 129, IMY 3). The idea that consciousness is nothing other than consciousness of its object does not mean that the object exists precisely as it appears. Sartre immediately qualifies the previous citation with the following remark:

But Husserl is not a realist: this tree on its bit of parched earth is not an absolute that would subsequently enter into communication with me. Consciousness and the world are given at one stroke: essentially external to consciousness, the world is nevertheless essentially relative to consciousness (I 4)³³.

Husserl is not an indirect or representational realist, which is a position that can be categorized as a digestive philosophy because it assumes that a representation enters consciousness. If the representation is to be accurate, then there needs to be something absolute – a definitive set of qualities that make up the tree. This, however, is not the case: although the things in the world are out there, the way in which they appear has to do with our consciousness. If our consciousness did not have something to do with the way things appear, we would not be able to account for the different ways people see the world. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the predispositions that make our consciousness relate to the world in a certain way are somehow in our consciousness. These predispositions cause the objects in the world to appear in a certain way, but the ways in which the world appears remain on the side of the world:

It is things which abruptly unveil themselves to us as hateful, sympathetic, horrible, lovable. Being dreadful is a property of this Japanese mask: an inexhaustible and irreducible property that constitutes its very nature – and not the sum of our subjective reactions to a piece of sculptured wood (I 5)³⁴.

Thus, it is because of our consciousness that a mask can be dreadful, but this remains a property of the mask itself. As Sartre concludes: ‘Husserl has restored to things their horror and their charm. He has restored to us the world of artists and prophets: frightening, hostile, dangerous, and with its havens of mercy and love’ (I 5)³⁵.

33 ‘Mais Husserl n’est point réaliste : cet arbre sur son bout de terre craquelé, il n’en fait pas un absolu qui enterait, par après, en communication avec nous. La conscience et le monde sont donnés d’un même coup : extérieur par essence à la conscience, le monde est, par essence, relative à elle.’ (I^F 88).

34 ‘Ce sont les choses qui se dévoilent soudain à nous comme haïssables, sympathiques, horribles, aimables. C’est une *propriété* de ce masque japonais que d’être terrible, une inépuisable, irréductible propriété qui constitue sa nature même, – et non la somme de nos réactions subjectives à un morceau de bois sculpté.’ (I^F 89).

35 ‘Husserl a réinstallé l’horreur et le charme dans les choses. Il nous a restitué le monde

By emptying out consciousness, all facets of reality have to take place in the world outside and cannot be understood merely to take place in our consciousness. Hence, qualities which are traditionally thought to be subjective are genuine qualities of things in the world in Sartre's view.

Sartre refrains from using any technical vocabulary in the article, which is not even three pages long. He merely professes his admiration for how Husserl's notion of intentionality delivers us from a philosophical tendency to focus too much on the Subject, rather than on the world around us. He will provide a more technical analysis a few years later in *The Imagination*.

The phenomenological method

Sartre starts his chapter on Husserl in *The Imagination* work with a description of what the phenomenological method entails. Phenomenology is contrasted with psychology, which is understood as a natural scientific approach to the imagination that, like any other empirical science, 'implies a spontaneous realism' (IMN 125)³⁶. Phenomenology, by contrast, brackets this positing of existence in what is termed the "phenomenological reduction." This reduction is carried out in order to identify the essential structures that constitute our conscious experience. However, 'the essential structures of transcendental consciousness do not disappear when this consciousness imprisons itself in the world. Thus the main acquisitions of phenomenology will remain valid for the psychologist *mutatis mutandis*' (IMN 126)³⁷. The structures the phenomenologist discovers after the reduction are the same structures our consciousness had before the reduction. The reduction is thus a methodological tool with which to study consciousness, one which can be used to uncover *valid* statements about it. Phenomenology is a necessary precursor to psychology, for it is in phenomenology that concepts such as consciousness and imagination are defined and such basic conceptions of the field of investigation are prerequisites of experimentation (IMY 127)³⁸. One of the discoveries made by Husserl after the reduction is the essential structure of all consciousness:

des artistes et des prophètes : effrayant, hostile, dangereux, avec des havres de grâce et d'amour (I^F 89).

36 'implique un réalisme spontané' (IMN^F 139).

37 'les structures essentielles de la conscience transcendantale ne disparaissant pas lorsque cette conscience s'emprisonne dans le monde. Ainsi les principales acquisitions de la phénoménologie resteront valables pour le psychologue, *mutatis mutandis* (IMN^F 140).'

38 Sartre describes the kind of experimental set-up which is nowadays also known as 'front-loading phenomenology'. See: (Gallagher 2003, 85-99).

Intentionality—this is the essential structure of all consciousness. There naturally follows a radical distinction between consciousness and *that of which there is consciousness*. The object of consciousness whatever it is (save in the case of reflective consciousness) is in principle outside of consciousness; it is transcendent. This distinction, to which Husserl returns without tiring, has as a goal the fighting of the errors of a certain immanentism that wants to constitute the world from contents of consciousness (for example the idealism of Berkeley). Without a doubt there are contents of consciousness, but these contents are not the object of consciousness. Through them intentionality aims at the object that, itself, is the correlate of consciousness but is not *of consciousness* (IMN 129-130)³⁹.

Sartre's description of intentionality pits phenomenology against any kind of philosophy that constitutes the world from the contents of consciousness. It must be noted that "transcendent" in this context means transcending the conscious act. Sartre seems to be repeating the main ideas from "Intentionality" here in a less poetic fashion. There he called the opponent digestive philosophy, here he calls it immanentism. Sartre even goes on to use the same example of the tree, stating that 'Husserl begins by putting the tree *outside of us*' (IMN 130)⁴⁰.

Thus, the phenomenological reduction bracketed our natural belief about the existence of things in the external world. But even when we suspend this belief, we discover that consciousness has an essentially intentional structure and relates to objects outside of itself. It becomes clear again that Sartre has a realist interpretation of intentionality: we do not lose our judgments about the existence of things outside of us when they are bracketed in the phenomenological reduction, rather we exchange our naïve belief in the existence of these things for a phenomenologically grounded discovery that consciousness depends on things outside of it. In other words: 'The phenomenologist, indeed, having put the world 'in parentheses', has

39 'L'intentionnalité, telle est la structure essentielle de toute conscience. Il s'ensuit naturellement une distinction radicale entre la conscience et *ce dont il y a conscience*. L'objet de la conscience quel qu'il soit (sauf dans le cas de la conscience réflexive) est par principe hors de la conscience : il est transcendant. Cette distinction, sur laquelle Husserl revient sans se lasser, a pour but de combattre les erreurs d'un certain immanentisme qui veut constituer le monde avec des *contenus* de conscience (par exemple l'idéalisme de Berkeley). Sans doute il y a des contenus de conscience mais ces contenus ne sont pas l'objet de la conscience : à travers eux l'intentionnalité vise l'objet qui, lui, est le corrélatif de la conscience mais n'est pas *de la conscience* (IMN^F 144-145).'

40 'Husserl commence par mettre l'arbre *hors de nous* (IMN^F 145).'

not lost it by doing so' (IMN 136)⁴¹.

The main difference between Sartre's description of intentionality in *The Imagination* and the one given earlier in "Intentionality" is that Sartre no longer claims that consciousness is empty. He claims in the quotation above that there are undoubtedly contents of consciousness through which consciousness aims at its object. The contents of consciousness Sartre is referring to are the *hylē*, the subjective matter of consciousness (IMN 130). The subjective matter which makes up my consciousness is analogous to the visual and tactile qualities of the object outside consciousness. Hence, an experience of a red object involves a "quasi-red" subjective impression through which consciousness aims at the actual red of the object outside. Hence the object of consciousness is not the content of consciousness, but the contents of consciousness aim at an object in the outside world. The only problem he seems to have with the notion is that it is not able to account for the difference between perception and imagination (IMN 136).

Near the end of *The Imagination*, Sartre announces the project of creating a new phenomenological theory of images, which he would bring to fruition in *The Imaginary*. He states that for this project 'it will be necessary to study the *hylē* proper to the mental image' (IMN 142)⁴². Thus, it would seem that he himself has no problem with the notion, only with the role it plays in determining the difference between imagination and perception. In *The Imaginary*, however, the term is glaringly absent. It is not mentioned at all, save for a single note (IMY 142). Instead he treats intentionality as consisting only of the act and the object. Moreover, although the concept of intentionality still takes centre stage in the work, Sartre only mentions Husserl sporadically.

In the *War Diaries*, Sartre elaborates on the change that his views on Husserl underwent at this time. He recalls that for four years, starting in 1933, he was caught up in the project of Husserl's philosophy. He stresses that *The Imaginary* was written under Husserl's influence. He admits to being critical of Husserl, 'but just insofar as a disciple can write against his master' (WD 184)⁴³. While he did his best to study Husserl faithfully, without his own prejudices clouding his understanding, it was his goal to exhaust Husserl's philosophy. Sartre eventually found the blind alley:

41 'Le phénoménologue, en effet, ayant mis le monde « entre parenthèses », ne l'a pas perdu pour cela' (IMN^F 153).

42 'il faudra étudier la *hylē* propre de l'image mentale' (IMN^F 159).

43 Sartre stresses that the last chapters were not inspired by Husserl. Interestingly, it is in these chapters where Sartre stresses his realism most profoundly (IMY 179-188).

Gradually, however, without my fully realizing it, the difficulties were piling up and a deeper and deeper gulf was separating me from Husserl. His philosophy evolved ultimately towards idealism, which I could not accept. Above all, like every idealism or kindred doctrine, his philosophy had its passive matter - its *hylē* (WD 184)⁴⁴.

By eliminating all content from consciousness, Sartre's notion of intentionality is a radicalization of that of Husserl. Sartre has a realist version of the notion: because consciousness is empty, the object has to exist independently from consciousness. In his first text on the notion, he already presents a view that is more his own than that of Husserl. Although he does adhere to the idea that there are some contents of consciousness in *The Imagination*, he drops this idea in subsequent works, leaving intentional consciousness as empty as he originally envisioned it. Consciousness has only two elements: the conscious act, which is nothing but an activity, and that at which the act is directed: the object.

2. Real Objects

As we have noted earlier, the object of consciousness always transcends consciousness, but the object does not exist exactly as it appears to consciousness. If this were the case, we could not account for the fact that the same object can appear differently to different people. A colour-blind person sees the things around her in a different manner than someone whose vision is unimpaired. Furthermore, to use Sartre's example, a Japanese mask may be frightful for one person, while funny to another. How does Sartre account for this without reducing these qualities to subjective experiences and thereby reincorporating them into consciousness?

In the passage from "Intentionality" quoted above, Sartre makes clear that the world as we experience it is relative to consciousness. Consciousness bestows meaning upon the world. In a certain sense, it is because there is conscious experience that there is this specific tree, which provides shade and shelter from the rain. Does this mean that Sartre reverts back to a kind of immanentism? No, because consciousness is itself empty and nothing but a movement towards its object, so there needs to be an object wholly independent from consciousness. If this object were indistinguishable from the object as experienced, then we could not account for the inconsistencies

44 'Et puis peu à peu, sans trop que je m'en rendisse compte, les difficultés s'accumulaient, un fossé de plus en plus profond me séparait de Husserl : sa philosophie évoluait au fond vers l'idéalisme, ce que je ne pouvais admettre et surtout, comme tout idéalisme ou comme toute doctrine sympathisante, sa philosophie avait sa *matière passive*, sa « Hylé »' (WD^F 226).

in the ways different people experience the world. If this object was something entirely different from the object we experience, then we would duplicate the object and the experienced object would exist only in consciousness. This would again lead to the digestive philosophy of the illusion of immanence.

Superfluosness

In order to avoid these two pitfalls, Sartre needs to have an account of things as they are apart from experience. He aims to answer this question in *Nausea*, where he, as he put it later in the *War Diaries*, wants ‘to catch the secret smiles of things seen absolutely without men’, pushing ‘to the point of dehumanizing entirely the secret of things’ (WD 145-146)⁴⁵. Sartre himself has always stressed the philosophical nature of the novel, and we will therefore discuss it as if it were a philosophical treatise. This means that we will treat the views professed by protagonist Roquentin as if they are Sartre’s, which Sartre has done himself on various occasions (WD 80, IPB 70).⁴⁶ This means that we will treat the views professed by protagonist Roquentin as if they are those of Sartre himself.

The name of *Nausea* is derived from a certain feeling or mood that overcomes the protagonist throughout the book, and it is this feeling that is key in understanding how Sartre moves beyond human reality. Nausea with a capital N is not the same as physical nausea. Sartre describes it as the ‘the existential grasping of our facticity’, the fact that we are thrown into a world and surrounded by things (WD 133)⁴⁷. The most severe episode of Nausea occurs when the protagonist is looking at the root of a chestnut tree:

So I was in the municipal park just now. The root of the chestnut tree plunged into the ground just underneath my bench. I no longer remembered that it was a root. Words had disappeared, and with them the meaning of things, the methods of using them, the landmarks which men have traced on their surface. I was sitting, slightly bent, my head bowed, alone in front of that black, knotty mass, which was utterly crude and frightened me. And then I had this revelation.

It took my breath away. Never, until these last few days,

45 ‘saisir les sourires secrets des choses vues absolument sans les hommes’ ‘déshumaniser complètement le secret des choses’ (WD^F 182-183).

46 For a discussion of how the literary nature of the text relates to the philosophical side of it, see: (Gusman 2018b).

47 ‘la saisie existentielle de notre facticité’ (WD^F 168).

had I suspected what it meant to ‘exist’ (N 182)⁴⁸.

The protagonist is confronted with the bare existence of things. Usually, the existence of things goes unnoticed. Of course, we implicitly assume that the things we encounter exist, but we never explicitly experience their existence itself: ‘usually existence hides itself. It is there, around us, in us, it is *us*, you can’t say a couple of words without speaking of it, but finally you can’t touch it’ (N 182).⁴⁹ A few sentences later he adds: ‘I picked them up in my hands, they served me as tools, I foresaw their resistance. But all that happened on the surface’ (N 183)⁵⁰. When we normally use tools, we just use them without being fully aware of the fact that they exist. They are only experienced to the extent that they can be used by us. In contrast, in the experience of Nausea, we are suddenly aware of the existence that underlies how things appear to us.

Of course, the possibility of an experience of Nausea is debatable at least: an experience that reveals things how they are when they are not experienced seems like a contradiction.⁵¹ From a phenomenological point of view, it seems a contradiction to uncover things as they are when they are not experienced. Sartre is aware of this methodological conundrum:

I understood it was necessary to present meaning still adhering to things, since it’s never entirely detached from them, and - in order to exhibit it - to show rapidly some of the objects that secrete it, and to make their equivalence felt (WD 145)⁵².

48 ‘Donc j’étais tout à l’heure, au Jardin public. La racine du marronnier s’enfonçait dans la terre, juste au-dessous de mon banc. Je ne me rappelais plus que c’était une racine. Les mots s’étaient évanouis et, avec eux, la signification des choses, leurs modes d’emploi, les faibles repères que les hommes ont tracés à leur surface. J’étais assis, un peu voûté, la tête basse, seul en face de cette masse noire en noueuse, entièrement brute et qui me faisait peur. Et puis j’ai eu cette illumination. Ça m’a coupé le souffle. Jamais, avant ces derniers jour je n’avais pressenti ce que voulait dire « exister ». (N^F 162).’

49 ‘à l’ordinaire l’existence se cache. Elle est là, autour de nous, en nous, elle est *nous* on ne peut pas dire deux mots sans parler d’elle et, finalement, on ne la touche pas’ (N^F 162).

50 ‘Je les prenais dans mes mains, elles me servaient d’outils, je prévoyais leurs résistances. Mais tout ça se passait à la surface’ (N^F 162).

51 Sartre himself is ambivalent about whether he himself ever had such an experience. He has stated that he never experienced nausea in the *War Diaries* (WD 62). However, he also states that he did experience nausea, and relates it to his encounter with mescaline (IG 79-81).

52 ‘J’avais compris qu’il fallait présenter le sens encore adhérent aux choses, car il ne s’en détache jamais complètement et, pour le manifester, montrer rapidement quelques-uns des objets que le recèlent et faire sentir leur équivalence’ (WD^F 183).

It seems to me that Sartre does not mean that we fully grasp things, but, rather, that we realize that they can never be fully grasped. We experience the *limit* of our experience. We can only experience things endowed with the meaning we give them, and in *Nausea* we experience that this does not exhaust the object. This is stressed by Sartre in the claim that we cannot touch existence that was quoted above. Later on the protagonist says: 'Existence is not something which allows itself to be thought of from a distance; it has to invade you suddenly' (N 189)⁵³. This implies something similar: we do not know existence, we can only experience that there is an unknowable dimension to things: 'the world of explanations and reasons is not that of existence' (N 185)⁵⁴. He further emphasizes this by saying that you cannot pass from the function of a root to its existence.

We encounter the limit of what we can experience within our ordinary understanding of things, within our framework of how we can utilize things and how we label them and put them into categories. When this is stripped away, existence remains. But what exactly is this ungraspable meaningless existence?

It [existence] had lost its harmless appearance as an abstract category: it was the very stuff of things, that root was steeped into existence. Or rather the root, the park gates, the bench, the sparse grass on the lawn, all that had vanished; the diversity of things, their individuality, were only an appearance, a veneer. This veneer had melted, leaving soft, monstrous masses, in disorder – naked, with a frightening, obscene nakedness (N 183)⁵⁵.

This remark reveals something important about Sartre's ideas about the existence of objects. Their diversity and individuality are also only aspects of how they appear to us. It is because of the categories we impose upon things that we make clear-cut distinctions between objects. The objects themselves, however, do not have these boundaries. This can be interpreted as meaning that beyond human experience there are no individual things, just a single "Being". Consciousness fragments this being into different things, while in

53 'L'existence n'est pas quelque chose qui se laisse penser de loin : il faut que ça vous envahisse brusquement, que ça s'arrête sur vous' (N^F 168).

54 'le monde des explications et des raisons n'est pas celui de l'existence' (N^F 165).

55 'Elle avait perdu son allure inoffensive de catégorie abstraite : c'était la pâte même des choses, cette racine était pétrie dans de l'existence. Ou plutôt la racine, les grilles du jardin, le banc, le gazon rare de la pelouse, tout ça s'était évanoui ; la diversité des choses, leur individualité n'étaient qu'une apparence, un vernis. CE vernis, avait fondu, il restait des masses monstrueuses et molles, en désordre–nues d'une effrayante et obscène nudité.' (N^F 163).

reality, there is only one thing: pure Being. This notion of individuality has to do with the idea that consciousness introduces nothingness into reality. A demarcation requires nothingness in the form of a clear-cut line between what the object is and what is not. This would ultimately mean that objects only exist within human experience and not outside of it, which means that, his claims notwithstanding, Sartre's philosophy is no realism.

This reading contradicts many other claims he makes, such as the aforementioned claims he makes about the intentions of realism. In the passage quoted above, he speaks about "masses, in disorder", which implies heterogeneity. If Being were conceived as a single mass, then it would suggest order rather than disorder. It is true that *our* world emerges because our consciousness highlights certain beings, demarcates them from others and bestows them with meaning.⁵⁶ It is important to understand "world" here not as objective reality *per se* but as this reality as it appears to subjectivity, that is, with meaning attached to it. Consciousness is only able to make a meaningful world appear by drawing on *separate* things. How this world arises has to do with our biological constitution, history, knowledge, etc. This also sheds new light on the remark in "Intentionality" that consciousness and the world are given in one stroke. Another important notion is that of situation: 'I will call the different immediate modes of apprehension of the real as a world "situations"' (IMY 185)⁵⁷. Here Sartre seems to mean by situation a particular part of the (human) world in time and space. We will return to the notion of situation at length in the next chapter, where we will discuss the more elaborate definition Sartre gives to the situation in *Being and Nothingness*.

Let us return to the scene in the municipal park and see how it supports the realist reading of the monstrous masses of things. Overwhelmed by the experience of Nausea, the protagonist tries desperately to regain his grip on things.

Superfluous: that was the only connection I could establish between those trees, those gates, those pebbles. It was in vain that I tried to *count* the chestnut trees, to *situate* them in relation to the Velleda, to compare their height with the height of the plane trees: each of them escaped from the relationship in which I tried to enclose it, isolated itself, overflowed. I was aware of the

56 Sartre develops the issue further in *Being and Nothingness*, where he introduces nothingness into this scheme: we can only say that a tree is a thing, while the root of the tree is only a part of the tree and hence *not* a thing on its own, because we introduce nothingness into being. We will return to this topic in the next chapter.

57 'Nous appellerons « situations » les différents modes immédiats d'appréhension du réel comme monde' (IMY^F 355).

arbitrary nature of these relationships, which I insisted on maintaining in order to delay the collapse of the human world of measures, of quantities, of hearings; they no longer had any grip on things. *Superfluous*, the chestnut tree, over there, opposite me, a little to the left. *Superfluous*, the Velleda... (N 184)⁵⁸

In the same manner that functions and individuality are imposed upon things by us, all relations between objects are. We may perceive the root of a tree not as a separate thing but as a part of a tree, but this is a relation we impose upon it – it is demarcated as such in our world. Every object has a reality of its own which cannot be reduced to another thing. Also, everything we encounter is a thing: ‘Admittedly a movement was something different from a tree. But it was still an absolute. A thing’ (N 190)⁵⁹. This statement is contrasted with the following idea: ‘Movements never quite exist, they are transitions, intermediaries between two existences’ (N 189)⁶⁰. Sartre’s choice of the word “absolute” is noteworthy here: the thing as we experience it, is not an absolute. It is relative to the meaning we give to it. The thing that ‘secreted’ this meaning and which cannot be reduced to our experience is an absolute.

The plenitude of things

We now arrive at the core of Sartre’s analysis. No tree can be reduced to the group it stands in; a movement of a tree cannot be reduced to the moving tree. No thing can be reduced to any other thing. Things are superfluous, which means that they are ‘too much’ to be enclosed in any relationship. They can neither be reduced to their parts nor to a larger whole, rather each and every one is an absolute. A brief gust of wind may not be regarded as a thing, but a tropical storm even gets a name. Neither of them is any less a thing than the other, but one of them has a bigger impact on our lifeworld.

Not only is a thing irreducible to something else, it is also irreducible to itself. That is, it cannot be summed up in a definite set of

58 ‘*De trop* : c’était le seul rapport que je pusse établir entre ces arbres, ces grilles, ces cailloux. En vain cherchais-je à *compter* les marronniers, à les *situer* par rapport à la Velleda, à comparer leur hauteur avec celle des platanes : chacun d’eux s’échappait des relations où je cherchais à l’enfermer, s’isolait, débordait. Ces relations (que je m’obstinais à maintenir pour retarder l’écroulement du monde humain, des mesures, des quantités, des directions) j’en sentais l’arbitraire ; elles ne mordaient plus sur les choses. *De trop*, le marronnier, là en face de moi un peu sur la gauche. *De trop*, la Velleda.’ (N^F 163-164).

59 ‘Bien sûr, un mouvement c’était autre chose qu’un arbre. Mais c’était tout de même un absolu. Une chose’ (N^F 169).

60 ‘les mouvements n’existent jamais tout à fait, ce sont des passages, des intermédiaires entre deux existences’ (N^F 168).

characteristics – the absolute Sartre spoke of in “Intentionality”. This is what Sartre means when he says that an object overflows itself. This experiential inexhaustibility is not a trivial limitation of our consciousness, rather it is the existence of the object itself that causes it to have an infinite amount of qualities. This again reveals why the experience of Nausea is one of limitation: although existence is revealed, it is superfluous and therefore cannot be fully exhausted by our consciousness. If this were the case, the theory would revert back to naïve realism. Sartre stresses this by saying that things are superfluous for eternity (N 185). There is no point in time where we could have discovered everything about things and they would have ceased to be superfluous. Superfluosness is their very Being.

This exposition on the superfluosness of things not only provides a foundation for the emptiness of intentional consciousness, it also shows the other leading theme of Sartre’s early thought: contingency. There is no larger order of things, no ultimate reason as to why things are what and how they are. There are only masses in disorder. All order is imposed upon reality by consciousness, but is therefore entirely relative to us and therefore contingent. Of course, reasons can be given as to why we perceive the world as we do. We have certain colour receptors in our eyes, which cause things to appear to us in a set variation of colours for example. We need to organize reality and impose order on it in order to function, but this does not make the specific order of reality necessary. Things could easily appear otherwise because of their superfluous nature.

3. Non-real Objects

A meaningful world is generated when consciousness encounters things, that is, *real* things. There are also objects of consciousness which are not real but imaginary. The topic of imagination is a general theme of Sartre’s work during this period. Having already criticized earlier theories and having suggested that Husserl provides a new way of thinking about mental images in *The Imagination*, Sartre sets about articulating his own theory of imagination in the first chapter of *The Imaginary*, where he provides a list of four characteristics of imagination.

The characteristics of imagination

The first characteristic is that ‘the image is a consciousness’ (IMY 5)⁶¹. Sartre ended *The Imagination* with the idea that: ‘There are no and there couldn’t be any images in consciousness. But the image is a *certain type of consciousness*. The image is an act and not a thing.

61 ‘L’image est une conscience’ (IMY^F 17).

The image is consciousness *of* something' (IMN 144)⁶². Because of the intentional structure of consciousness, there can be no mental images inside of consciousness. There can only be a movement outward. Therefore, what we would ordinarily call a mental image is not a thing like a drawn image is. It is instead an act, a different way for consciousness to relate to its object than, say, an act of thinking or an act of perception. The objects of such conscious acts are called 'the imaginary', after which the book is named.

Sartre is here trying to distance himself from the view that, as we have mentioned before, he characterizes as the illusion of immanence. This is a position that holds that imagination is the same as perception, but that in imagination the object perceived is an inner, mental one. Thus, when I imagine my friend Pierre, I have a portrait of him in my mind, which is only connected to the real Pierre because it is he who is there depicted. Nevertheless, the fact that there is a reference to a real person does not change the fact that the object of my act of imagination is not Pierre but the inner portrait I have of him. Although Sartre thinks this view is wrong, he also acknowledges that it is widespread in both philosophy and everyday thinking (IMY 6). Sartre aims to show that this view is wrong by means of a thought experiment in which one looks at a chair and then closes one's eyes in order to imagine that same chair. According to Sartre, the chair does not enter our consciousness when we perceive it, nor does it suddenly do so when we imagine it, not even as an imitation. It is the same object in both cases:

[W]hether I perceive or imagine this straw-bottomed chair on which I sit, it always remains outside of consciousness. In both cases it is there, in space, in that room, in front of the desk. [...] [W]hether I perceive or imagine that chair, the object of my perception and that of my image are identical: it is that straw-bottomed chair on which I sit. It is simply that consciousness is *related* to this same chair in two different ways. In both cases, it aims at the chair in its concrete individuality, in its corporeality. Only, in one of the cases, the chair is 'encountered' by consciousness; in the other, it is not. But the chair is not in consciousness. Not even as an image (IMY 7)⁶³.

62 'Il n'y a pas, il ne saurait y avoir d'images *dans* la conscience. Mais l'image *est un certain type de conscience*. L'image est un acte et non une chose. L'image est conscience *de* quelque chose' (IMN^F 162).

63 'que je perçoive ou que j'imagine cette chaise de paille sur laquelle je suis assis. Elle demeure toujours hors de la conscience. Dans les deux cas elle est là, *dans* l'espace, dans cette pièce, face au bureau. [...] que je perçoive ou que j'imagine cette chaise, l'objet de ma perception et celui de mon image sont identiques : c'est cette chaise de paille sur laquelle je suis assis. Simplement la conscience se *rapporte* à cette

The first characteristic is that imagination is a different way for consciousness to relate to objects: 'an image is nothing other than a relation' (IMY 7)⁶⁴. Sartre remains true to his initial project of banishing everything from consciousness, and that includes things which are traditionally regarded as contents of consciousness. This project does pose some problems, however, such as how we can distinguish between perception and imagination and how this could be said to hold for non-existent objects, for objects that simply do not exist in the outside world. Sartre will offer solutions to these problems with the third and fourth characteristics of imagination that he outlines.

The second characteristic is 'the phenomenon of quasi-observation' (IMY 8)⁶⁵. This phenomenon is what separates imagination both from perception and from conceptual thought. In perception I always observe only one side of an object. If I see a cube, I can only see three faces at once, yet I only know it is a cube if I have seen all six faces. In order to know it is a cube, I must have experiences of it from multiple points of view. This is consistent with his claims concerning the superfluousness of real objects: the real objects we encounter in perception can never be exhausted by consciousness. When I think of something, it is not given from a certain angle. For example, when I merely think about a cube I do not think about just three sides of it, I think about all sides at the same time and apprehend the object in a single instant.

Imagination shares characteristics with both perception and imagination. As in perception, the object is given to us from a certain angle. We picture an object and in this act it is given from a certain point of view – as if it were perceived. Nevertheless, unlike perception and like thinking, Sartre claims that we cannot discover anything about this object. It is created in the very act of picturing, and thus we cannot find anything in it that we did not put there ourselves. If we rotate a cube in our mind's eye, we cannot discover that it is not a cube. As in thinking, we already know all its aspects, but, as in perception, only one perspective is given at a time (IMY 9). Therefore, it is only quasi-observed: the image only shares some of the characteristics of perception.

même chaise deux manières différentes. Dans les deux cas elle vise la chaise dans son individualité concrète, dans sa corporéité. Seulement, dans un des cas, la chaise est « rencontrée » par la conscience ; dans l'autre, elle ne l'est pas. Mais la chaise n'est pas dans la conscience. Pas même en image.' (IMY^F 20-21).

64 'une image n'est rien autre qu'un rapport' (IMY^F 20-22).

65 'Le phénomène de quasi-observation' (IMY^F 20-22).

Imagination and nothingness

The third characteristic is that ‘the imaging consciousness posits its object as a nothingness’ (IMY 11)⁶⁶. Sartre says that whether an object exists or not is given in the way consciousness posits the object. In perception the object is posited as existing. By the very fact that perceived objects are encountered, it is given that they appear as existing. In contrast to perception, an image can posit its object in four ways, namely, as non-existent, absent, existing elsewhere, or as neutral to whether the object exists or not (IMY 12). The last one remains an act of positing in the form of the suspension of belief (IMY 12). This is still a form of negation, as the object is not posited as existing. This positing of absence or of non-existence can only occur in light of the second characteristic. In perception the object is encountered, and in thinking one is only concerned with ‘*natures*’, which ‘are indifferent to the “flesh and blood” existence of objects’ (IMY 13)⁶⁷. Our relationship to such natures is always positive. Even when the absence or non-existence of an object is included in its nature, we are not confronted with it, because the object does not appear to us from a given perspective.

For example, I can think about Pierre as being my friend, which is a relation he has to me. I can also think about Pierre as living somewhere else than I am, but this constitutes a positive relation between him and that location. Absence can only be given on the basis of a sensory intuition. Only from my own point of view is Pierre’s presence in another place really an absence. His presence elsewhere means that although I imagine him as being at a perceivable distance, he is not. Otherwise he would not be absent. He is not first posited as present, rather his absence is part of the intuitive act. Hence, he is ‘intuitive-absent’, and Sartre adds: ‘In this sense, one can say that the image has wrapped within it a certain nothingness’ (IMY 14)⁶⁸.

Sartre’s reasoning concerning nothingness is directly related to his project of banishing all content from consciousness. Sartre revolts against the idea that because something does not exist in the world outside, it must either exist within the mind or in some kind of ideal realm. The idea that because something does not exist in one place it must exist in another place does not do justice to the fact that the object does *not* exist. It may not exist at all or may not exist in the given situation, but it remains a nothingness rather than a being. In *The Imagination* he already praises Husserl’s idea that non-existent objects are not mental:

66 ‘*natures*’ ‘sont indifférents à l’existence « de chair et d’os des objets’ (IMY^F 32).

67 ‘La conscience imageante pose son objet comme un néant’ (IMY^F 30).

68 ‘En ce sens, on peut dire que l’image enveloppe un certain néant’ (IMY^F 34).

The non-existence of the centaur or of the chimera thus does not give us the right to reduce them to mere psychic formations. [...] Husserl restores to the centaur precisely its transcendence at the very heart of its nothingness. As much nothingness as one wants, but by this very token it is not in consciousness (IMN 132)⁶⁹.

Although Sartre ultimately criticizes how Husserl handles nothingness, he is inspired by Husserl's ideas about intentional consciousness.⁷⁰ If the non-existent object consciousness experiences cannot be found inside of consciousness, then it must transcend consciousness. However, it would be a contradiction to say that it exists outside of consciousness, as it does not exist. Only by making nothingness a genuine part of the object can we do justice to the fact that it does not exist. This does not necessarily mean that nothingness is a quality of the object like its shape and colour are, but it does mean that it must be part of the way it is given to consciousness.

The fourth characteristic is simply called 'spontaneity' (IMY 14)⁷¹. The description of this characteristic is by far the least elaborate. In imagination the conscious act is aware of the fact that is creative, that is to say, that it creates its object. This is contrasted with the passive character of perception, in which the object is encountered in the world outside. Although one is not aware of the precise process through which the image comes to be, one knows that it does not come from the outside world but is instead conjured up spontaneously by consciousness. As Sartre further elaborates: 'It is a kind of indefinable counterpart to the fact that the object gives itself as a nothingness' (IMY 14)⁷². Because the object does not exist, it needs to originate from somewhere other than the real objects. In perception, the object is always presented to us by the world outside of us, while in imagination, it is the act of consciousness itself which presents the object. Of course, the object may exist in the outside world, but the way it is presented, its angle, is determined spontaneously by the act itself.

In the conclusion of *The Imaginary*, Sartre continues to discuss this topic and aims to answer the question of what consciousness must be in order to be able to imagine in the first place (IMY 179).

69 'ainsi, le non-existence du centaure ou de la chimère ne nous donne pas le droit de les réduire à simples formations psychiques. [...] précisément, Husserl restitue au centaure sa transcendance au sein même de son néant. Néant tant qu'on voudra : mais par cela même il n'est pas dans la conscience' (IMN^F 147).

70 For a detailed study of Sartre's criticism of Husserl with regards to nothingness, see: (Gusman 2017)

71 'la spontanéité' (IMY^F 35).

72 'C'est une espèce de contrepartie indéfinissable du fait que l'objet se donne comme un néant' (IMY^F 35).

Consciousness is able to do this because it can posit nothingness while still being consciousness of something (IMY 182-183). Because the imaginary object is posited as something which is not, and, for this reason it is a negation of reality. Since the image is a negation of the world, Sartre also refers to it as a 'negation of the world from a particular point of view', and this point of view is precisely the act of imagining (IMY 186)⁷³. Thus:

For the centaur to arise as irreal, the world must be grasped precisely as world-where-the-centaur-is-not[.] [...] Likewise, for my friend Pierre to be given to me as absent, I must have been led to grasp the world as a whole such that Pierre cannot currently be present in it for me (IMY 186)⁷⁴.

The real is the condition of the irreal or non-real. It is only because consciousness is intrinsically connected to reality that it can posit its object as not being part of reality. 'We can then say that the essential condition for a consciousness to imagine is that it be "situated in the world"' (IMY 186)⁷⁵. Sartre's theory of imagination thereby reinforces his realism. Non-existent objects do not exist within the mind but appear precisely as not existing in the world around us. We first need to grasp a situation in order to posit that something is not in that situation. Sartre stresses that this notion of non-real objects as transcendent nothingnesses violates the principle of intentionality:

It is not a question of consciousness ceasing to be consciousness *of* something. It is in the very nature of consciousness to be intentional and a consciousness that ceased to be consciousness of something would thereby cease to exist. But consciousness must be able to form and posit objects affected by a certain character of nothingness in relation to the totality of reality (IMY 183)⁷⁶.

73 'négation du monde d'un point de vue particulier' (IMY^F 356).

74 'Pour que le centaure surgisse comme irréel il faut précisément que le monde soit saisi comme monde-où-le-centaure-n'est-pas[.] [...] De même, pour que mon ami Pierre me soit donné comme absent, il faut que j'aie été amené à saisir le monde comme un ensemble tel que Pierre ne saurait y être *actuellement et pour moi* présent.' (IMY^F 355).

75 'Nous pourrions dire alors que la condition essentielle pour qu'une conscience imagine c'est qu'elle soit « en situation dans le monde »' (IMY^F 355).

76 'Il ne s'agit point pour la conscience de cesser d'être conscience *de* quelque chose. Il entre dans la nature même de la conscience d'être intentionnelle et une conscience qui cesserait d'être conscience de quelque chose cesserait par là même d'exister. Mais la conscience doit pouvoir former et poser des objets affectés d'un certain caractère de néant par rapport à la totalité du réel.' (IMY^F 351).

Thus, Sartre's project of banishing the contents from consciousness does not only concern real objects, it also concerns non-real objects. Although the latter do not exist without consciousness, consciousness posits them outside, in the world.

We can see that the imaging act is the inverse of the realizing act. If I want to imagine the hidden arabesques, I direct my attention towards them and I isolate them, just as I isolate on the ground of an undifferentiated universe the thing that I presently perceive (IMY 181)⁷⁷.

The process of imagination is hence similar to that of 'realizing', the word Sartre uses here for the process of isolating and demarcating objects. Just as real objects are isolated against the background of undifferentiated things, imaginary objects are determined as such on the ground of real objects. Sartre thus concludes that 'the imaginary represents at each moment the implicit sense of the real' (IMY 188)⁷⁸.

Another aspect of the imaginary process that is important to note appears in the conclusion of *The Imaginary*, where the notion of freedom enters the scene. The negation of the world in imagination is only possible if we are not fully bound to the world of objects but are able to escape from it:

For consciousness to be able to imagine, it must be able to escape from the world by its very nature, it must be able to stand back from the world by its own efforts. In a word, it must be free. Thus the thesis of irreality has delivered us the possibility of negation as its condition. Now, the latter is possible only by the 'nihilation' of the world as totality and this nihilation is revealed to us as being the inverse of the very freedom of consciousness (IMY 184)⁷⁹.

"Nihilation" is a term coined by Sartre that means, roughly, "to render as nothingness". It is because we posit a world that has the ability to be negated that we are free: 'So to posit reality as a synthetic

77 'Si je veux imaginer les arabesques cachées, je dirige mon attention vers elles et je les isole, tout comme j'isole sur un fond d'univers indifférencié telle chose que je perçois présentement.' (IMY^F 347).

78 'Ainsi l'imaginaire représente à chaque instant le sens implicite du réel' (IMY^F 360).

79 'Pour qu'une conscience puisse imaginer il faut qu'elle échappe au monde par sa nature même. En un mot il faut qu'elle puisse tirer d'elle-même une position de recul par rapport au monde. En un mot il faut qu'elle soit libre. Ainsi la thèse d'irréalité nous a livré la possibilité de négation comme sa condition, or, celle-ci n'est possible que par la « néantisation » du monde comme totalité et cette néantisation s'est révélée à nous comme 'étant l'envers de la liberté même de la conscience.' (IMY^F 353-354).

whole is enough to posit oneself as free from it and this surpassing is freedom itself since it could not be effected were consciousness not free' (IMY 184)⁸⁰. It is because we are in the world that we are free to negate it. In other words, freedom does not exist in isolation, it is part of the intentional relationship of consciousness to reality. This exposition of freedom is rather short and relatively simple, but it foreshadows the bigger role it plays in Sartre's later works, where he both continues and deviates from the views presented here.

Preliminary conclusion

Sartre's ideas concerning imaginary objects enable us to form a clear picture of his conception of the interplay between subjectivity and objectivity. Intentionality means that consciousness is empty, and is nothing more than an orientation towards objects. If these objects are real, they are superfluous and can never be fully exhausted. A meaningful world is created by our consciousness because some objects are isolated. These isolated objects are the meaningful objects that together form situations and the world. While there is a reality wholly independent from consciousness, the world is a result of the interplay between consciousness and this reality.

While there is nothing in consciousness, it is because there is a particular consciousness confronting reality that the world arises in a particular way. It is because of the physiological constitution of our eyes that we see colours; it is because of our cultural background and upbringing that we attach certain meanings to things; it is because of our own personal preferences and emotions that things appear in a certain way for us. This last claim is elaborated upon by Sartre in his *Sketch for a Theory of Emotions*. Emotions are not simply states of consciousness, rather '[e]motional consciousness is, at first, consciousness of the world' (E 51)⁸¹. When we are afraid, it is the world or certain objects in the world that appear to us as scary. We have already mentioned the example of dreadfulness being a property of the Japanese mask in "Intentionality".

It is important to note that this does not mean that every individual has his or her own world. First of all, as has been said, when Sartre talks about a consciousness he does not mean the stream of consciousness of a person, but a single conscious experience. We will return to the topic of the continuity of different conscious experiences in detail in the next section. Second, although the topic of intersubjectivity does not play as large a role in this period as it will in later ones,

80 'Ainsi il suffit de pouvoir poser la réalité comme un ensemble synthétique pour se poser comme libre par rapport à elle et ce dépassement est la liberté même car il ne saurait s'effectuer si la conscience n'était libre' (IMY^F 354).

81 'La conscience émotionnelle es d'abord conscience du monde' (E^F 38-39).

Sartre makes clear that he understands the world as a shared one. The passage at the end of “Intentionality” not only says that we find ourselves in the world, but that the idea of intentionality also makes us ‘a human among humans’ (I 5).⁸² One reason for doing away with the idea of the inside world is that this also gets rid of the problem of the existence of other minds. In the *War Diaries*, Sartre even says that the idea that different people perceive the same world was one of the reasons he came to realize that Husserl’s theory was an idealist one, which served to strengthened his own realist views (WD 184). Although Sartre does not address the topic, we can see why we share a world. People are a lot more alike than they are different when it comes to how they are constituted. The idea that a lot of the ways we see the world are determined by our background is also an argument that supports the idea of a single human world, insofar as our culture and upbringing all comes about by way of other people. To be sure, our individual dispositions mean that the world appears a bit differently to each of us, but not to such an extent that it is entirely different.

82 ‘homme parmi les hommes’ (I^F 89).

Part II The Self in Hindsight

4. The Chain of Consciousness

The question concerning self-consciousness, or how the stream of consciousness becomes aware of itself, is one of the central topics of *The Transcendence of the Ego*. The main thesis of this work is in line with Sartre's project of banishing things from consciousness. If consciousness is empty, then there is also no room for any kind of Self inside of it. The first paragraph reveals Sartre's goal immediately:

For most philosophers, the Ego is an 'inhabitant' of consciousness. [...] We should like to show here that the Ego is neither formally nor materially *in* consciousness: it is outside, *in the world*; it is a being in the world, like the Ego of another (TE 1)⁸³.

We have seen the same rhetoric in "Intentionality": 'everything is finally outside: everything, even ourselves' (I 5)⁸⁴. As for the terminology, in *The Transcendence of the Ego* Sartre uses the term 'Ego' to refer to the combination of the Self as subject and the Self as object. The Self is not inside consciousness, for there can be nothing inside consciousness. With the notion of the inhabitant, Sartre takes aim at a traditional conception of selfhood, namely, that of the transcendental ego. This amounts to the idea that because our experiences are always changing, the unity of consciousness must be ensured by an unchanging Self underlying our experiences. This transcendental ego exists independently from individual experiences in the stream of consciousness. Such an account of the Self as subject is – according to Sartre, found in Husserl (TE 2). Sartre adopts the Jamesian terminology of the I and the Me that we have mentioned in the introductory chapter. He agrees with Husserl that the Me is an object in the world, which hence falls under the scope of the phenomenological reduction.⁸⁵ For Sartre, however, this does not

83 'Pour la plupart des philosophes l'Ego est un « habitant » de la conscience. [...] Nous voudrions montrer ici que l'Ego n'est ni formellement ni matériellement *dans* la conscience: il est dehors, *dans le monde*; c'est un être du monde, comme l'Ego d'autrui (TE^F 93).'

84 'finalement tout est dehors, tout, jusqu'à nous-mêmes (I^F 89).'

85 It is important to note that Sartre's choice of italics and capital letters when it comes to the I and the Me is very confusing. In the original French, he always writes 'Je' with a capital letter when he means the philosophical notion and in lowercase when he uses it in the ordinary sense. For the 'Moi' he also uses a capital letter when he means the philosophical concept. However, he refrains from doing so when he uses adjectives that make clear he is talking about the philosophical concept, such as 'moi psychique et psycho-physique' (TE^F 96). When he uses the word in the ordinary

mean that there needs to be an I in consciousness: ‘But the question we would like to raise is the following: is this psychical and psycho-physical Me not sufficient? Do we need to add to it a transcendental I, as a structure of absolute consciousness?’ (TE 3)⁸⁶. Sartre’s goal in the first part of the work is to show that these questions can be answered with a yes and a no respectively. As Sartre aims to show, there is no need for an I inside of consciousness to account for the unity of consciousness over time, on the one hand, or to separate it from the consciousness of other people, on the other. This renders consciousness impersonal (TE 3, 25).

Unity and individuality

So how does Sartre account for the unity and individuality of consciousness? According to him, the alternative to Husserl’s transcendental I can also be found in Husserl’s work, namely in his notion of intentionality and the related notion of “inner time-consciousness” (Husserl 1991). Through intentionality, consciousness ‘unifies itself by escaping itself’ (TE 3-4)⁸⁷. The unity of consciousness is constituted by the consistency of the objects that are experienced. The example Sartre uses here is that of counting. If objects did not appear to consciousness in a series, counting would be impossible, for we would have to start over again at every unit that is counted. The immediate past experiences need to be retained in the current experience for counting to be possible. This retention of our immediate past experiences is part of inner time-consciousness. This does not mean that inner time-consciousness is, like the transcendental I, something that actively unifies our experiences. Rather, it is the process of ‘perpetual syntheses of past consciousnesses with the present consciousness’ (TE 4)⁸⁸.⁸⁹ This does not mean that all past experiences are retained, just the ones that play

way, he puts it in italics. The English translation falls short in this regard not only because the pronoun ‘I’ must always be capitalized in English, but also because the translator changes the plural ‘nous’ which Sartre uses for the writer’s perspective into the singular ‘I’. The conventions for ‘Moi’ are abandoned completely. I have corrected the translation to match Sartre’s spelling and typography – except for the fact that I have taken the liberty of writing ‘me’ with a capital even when relevant adjectives are used.

86 ‘Mais nous nous posons la question suivante: ce moi psychique et psycho-physique n’est-il pas suffisant? Faut-il le doubler d’un Je transcendantal, structure de la conscience absolue?’ (TE^F 96).

87 ‘elle s’unifie en s’échappant’ (TE^F 97).

88 ‘synthèses perpétuelles des consciences passées et de la conscience présente’ (TE^F 97).

89 Sartre uses the term consciousness to denote a single experience, mimicking the German *erlebnis* (TE 93, IMN 129). Thus, “multiple consciousnesses” does not refer to the streams of consciousness of multiple people, but to different experiences in one stream.

an active role in constituting the meaning of the things currently given to consciousness. The same goes for anticipated experiences in the direct future which are “protained”. This process of retention and protention is how Sartre understands the notion of inner time-consciousness.

To better understand this process, we will use a metaphor of a linked chain. A linked chain is a unity, as all the individual links are united from one end to the other. Yet, not all links are directly linked to one another. Let us consider the stream of consciousness through time as a chain in which every link is an individual experience.⁹⁰ Every experience is directly linked to that of the immediate past and future, but not to every past and future experience. However, because every experience is linked to the adjacent ones, the chain of consciousness forms a proper unity.

It is important to note that Sartre emphasizes the role of the object in his reasoning. Because every individual link in the chain of consciousness is nothing but a movement outside of itself towards an object, the inner time-consciousness is not merely a property of consciousness. It is not simply because we have inner time-consciousness that we can experience series. The unity of our consciousness does not create the continuity of the world. Rather, it works both ways: it is because things in the world appear to us as continuous that we have inner time-consciousness, but this is only possible because there is a consciousness to which it can appear as such. Consciousness is perpetually in a process of unification. Thus, when Sartre says that consciousness unifies itself by escaping itself, he is referring to this process. The things in the world do not form a series before they are encountered by consciousness, and consciousness is not a unity before it encounters continuous objects (TE 4). These two dimensions of experience emerge simultaneously and are intertwined. In inner time-consciousness, the immediate past and future are not the object of consciousness, but they give meaning to the objects currently before consciousness. Sartre summarizes this as follows:

The object is transcendent to the consciousnesses that grasp it, and it is within the object that their unity is found. It will be objected that it is necessary for there to

⁹⁰ I do not want to suggest that this metaphor should replace that of the stream of consciousness. James, for example, criticizes the use of the metaphor of the chain because it suggests that consciousness is ‘chopped up in bits’ (James 1983, 234). By no means do I want to deny that experiences flow into one another or to suggest that they are chopped up. Rather, I would like to stress that the chains are linked to one another, but can still be distinguished from one another, both thematically and temporally. We need to keep in mind that it is only a metaphor, and that the borders between experiences are not always clear.

be some principle of unity *in duration* if the continual stream of consciousnesses is able to posit transcendent objects outside itself. Consciousnesses must be perpetual syntheses of past consciousnesses with the present consciousness. And this is perfectly true. But it is typical of Husserl [...] that he *never resorted* to any synthetic power of the *I*. It is consciousness that unifies itself, concretely, by an interplay of 'transversal' consciousnesses that are real, concrete retentions of past consciousnesses (TE 4)⁹¹.

The example of counting can now be understood more easily. Because I have inner time-consciousness, the things counted in the past are retained, and therefore the things in the present can appear as following the things in the past, thereby forming a series. This is not only true for a series of objects, but also for the series of manifestations in which individual objects appear. Sartre states that if I had no inner time-consciousness then it would be impossible for me to experience objects as a unity, instead of mere manifestations. I add two and two to make four, the transcendent object that appears to my consciousness is "two and two make four" (TE 4). In this example, the manifestations of the transcendent object are themselves objects. Yet the same goes for individual objects: the fact that the table before me is the same table throughout the different experiences I have of it can only be experienced if consciousness synthesizes the experiences through time.

Sartre also claims that the notion of inner time-consciousness accounts for the fact that an individual's consciousness exists separately from that of other people. Although he does not devote more than a few sentences to the elaboration of this claim, he does maintain that because consciousness unifies itself, it cannot be limited except by itself: 'It therefore constitutes a synthetic, individual totality, completely isolated from other totalities of the same kind' (TE 4)⁹².

Thus, the structure of consciousness itself, that is, its intentionality

91 'L'objet est transcendant au consciences qui le saisissent et c'est en lui que se trouve leur unité. On dira que pourtant il faut u principe d'unité *dans la durée* pour que le flux continu des consciences soit susceptible de poser des objets transcendants hors de lui. Il faut que les consciences soient des synthèses perpétuelles des consciences passées et de la conscience présente. C'est exact. Mais il est typique que Husserl [...] n'*ait jamais eu recours* à un pouvoir synthétique du Je. C'est la conscience qui s'unifie elle-même et concrètement par un jeu d'intentionnalités « transversales » qui sont des rétentions concrètes et réelles des consciences passées.' (TE^F 97).

92 'Elle constitue donc une totalité synthétique et individuelle entièrement isolée des autres totalités de même type' (TE^F 97).

and inner time, accounts for the unity of the stream of consciousness.⁹³ No extra principle beneath or within the stream is needed. It is not necessary to conceive of a separate link that connects to every other link in order for the chain to be a unity. The structure of the chain itself makes it a unity, and the same is true for consciousness. This provides Sartre with an answer to the question posed earlier about whether the assumption of a transcendental I is necessary:

We can thus unhesitatingly reply: the phenomenological conception of consciousness renders the unifying and individualizing role of the I completely useless. It is, on the contrary, consciousness that renders the unity and personality of my I possible. The transcendental I thus has *no raison d'être*.

Indeed, this superfluous I is actually a hindrance. If it existed, it would violently separate consciousness from itself, it would divide it, slicing through each consciousness like an opaque blade. The transcendental I is the death of consciousness (TE 4)⁹⁴.

Sartre inverts the traditional order by stating that the unity of consciousness renders that of the I possible, and not the other way around.⁹⁵ Not only is the I useless, it prevents the phenomenological conception of consciousness from being fully empty, and therefore fully transparent. Because consciousness is fully transparent it is an absolute: its existence does not depend on anything else. There cannot be anything inside of consciousness because this diminishes the absolute nature of consciousness. If consciousness were to lose its ontological absoluteness, we would fall into the dualistic scheme characteristic of the illusion of immanence. Hence, the transcendental I is the death of consciousness understood as an empty intentional activity. A transcendental I provides our consciousness with unity, but it is not something of which we can be conscious. Therefore, it would add something which is not purely conscious to consciousness, thereby creating division and destroying its absolute

93 For a more elaborate exposition of Sartre's arguments for this claim, see: (Tepley 2016).

94 'Nous pouvons donc répondre sans hésiter: la conception phénoménologique de la conscience rend le rôle unifiant et individualisant du Je totalement inutile. C'est la conscience au contraire qui rend possible l'unité et la personnalité de mon Je. Le Je transcendantal n'a donc pas de raison d'être.

Mais, en outre, ce Je superflu est nuisible. S'il existait il arracherait la conscience à elle-même, il la diviserait, il se glisserait dans chaque conscience comme une lame opaque. Le Je transcendantal, c'est la mort de la conscience.' (TE^F 97-98).

95 It is remarkable that Sartre uses the word personality rather than individuality in the second sentence. It makes sense however, if we consider Sartre's alternative to the transcendental I, on which we will soon focus.

nature: 'If it [the I] existed, it would violently separate consciousness from itself, it would divide it, slicing through each consciousness like an opaque blade' (TE 4)⁹⁶. However, if we follow this line of reasoning, it also means that consciousness has to be conscious of itself: if consciousness is only conscious of its object, then it would need a second act of consciousness to gain consciousness of itself. But this would diminish the absolute nature of consciousness, for it would have a non-conscious element. Therefore, it needs to be both conscious of its object and conscious of itself.

The existence of consciousness, indeed, is an absolute, because consciousness is conscious of itself; in other words, the type of existence that consciousness has is that it is consciousness of itself. And it becomes conscious of itself *insofar as it is consciousness of a transcendent object*. Everything in consciousness is thus clear and lucid: the object lies opposite it, in its characteristic opacity, but consciousness, for its part, is purely and simply the consciousness of being consciousness of this object: such is the law of its existence (TE 4)⁹⁷.

In order to be fully transparent, in order to be wholly consciousness and nothing else, it also needs to be conscious of itself, otherwise there would be an opaque facet to consciousness. This notion of self-consciousness, or rather reciprocity, is presented by Sartre as the very opposite of the transcendental I. A subjective Self in consciousness is the exact opposite of the kind of self-consciousness Sartre defends, whereas the former represents opacity, the latter represents translucency. It is because there is no Self in consciousness that the full translucency of self-consciousness is possible. He can be seen to anticipate what will become the ontological framework of *Being and Nothingness*, which we will discuss in detail in the next chapter, in his claim that '[p]ure consciousness is a 'non-*substantial* absolute' because it is conscious of itself (TE 5)⁹⁸.

We can now see more clearly what Sartre's non-egological view of consciousness entails. On the one hand, a subjective Self inside or behind consciousness is unnecessary because consciousness

96 'S'il existait il arracherait la conscience à elle-même, il la diviserait, il se glisserait dans chaque conscience comme une lame opaque' (TE^F 98).

97 'En effet, l'existence de la conscience est un absolu parce que la conscience est consciente d'elle-même. C'est-à-dire que le type d'existence de la conscience c'est d'être conscience de soi. Et elle prend conscience de soi *en tant qu'elle est conscience d'un objet transcendant*. Tout est donc clair et lucide dans la conscience: l'objet est en face d'elle avec son opacité caractéristique, mais elle, elle est purement et simplement conscience d'être conscience de cet objet, c'est la loi de son existence.' (TE^F 98).

98 'un absolu non *substantiel*' (TE^F 98).

unifies itself in the process of encountering things in the world.⁹⁹ A Self inside of consciousness would diminish the translucency of consciousness, as it would introduce something into consciousness of which we are not conscious. This would mean that consciousness would be more than just intentionality, and we would fall back into a substantial subject-object dualism. In order to be fully consciousness and nothing else, every conscious act needs to be consciousness of itself. But this is far from the traditional understanding of self-consciousness as consciousness of *a* Self, which Sartre has just shown to be incompatible with his theory of consciousness. Rather, every conscious act is conscious of *itself*. If we consider the metaphor of the chain, then we would have to say that every link is conscious of itself, rather than conscious of the entire chain.

The pseudo-cogito

If consciousness does not have an egological structure, then Sartre still needs some other way to account for the subjective side of selfhood. I do have some kind of sense of being the subject of my consciousness and the agent of my actions, regardless of the non-egological structure of consciousness. If the I is not in or behind consciousness, however, it must be somewhere else: in front of consciousness. In other words, the I is not transcendental, it is transcendent.

Sartre begins the exposition of this alternative for the transcendental I with an analysis of the cogito. The cogito is the a classic instance of the discovery of the I as a necessary component of consciousness, as the thing that thinks, as the *res cogitans*. For Sartre, the egological nature of the cogito could not be clearer: 'it is undeniable that the Cogito is personal. In the 'I think', there is an I which thinks' (TE 5). Every time I grasp my own conscious experiences, such as thinking, I detect the I as the subject of that experience.

Nevertheless, Sartre points out that this detection of the I always occurs in an act of reflection. 'This Cogito is performed by a consciousness *directed towards consciousness*, which takes consciousness as its object.' (TE 6)¹⁰⁰ The conscious experience of thinking, doubting in the case of the Cartesian cogito, is the object of a second experience, namely the realization that there is an I in the act of thinking. This second experience has the first experience as its object. Sartre concludes: 'Thus the consciousness that says 'I think' is precisely not the consciousness that thinks' (TE 6)¹⁰¹. The

100 'Ce Cogito est opéré par une conscience *dirigée sur la conscience*, qui prend la conscience comme objet' (TE^F 99).

101 'Ainsi la conscience qui dit « Je pense » n'est précisément pas celle qui pense' (TE^F

conscious experience that reflects is not the one it reflects upon.

If this is the case, who is to say that the I was there in the first place? Conscious acts seem to change upon reflection. Sartre therefore asks: 'Might not the essential aspect of the change be the fact that the I appears?' (TE 6)¹⁰². True to the phenomenological nature of his inquiry, Sartre thinks only a concrete example of the appearance of the I can settle the matter. He gives the example of being absorbed in reading. Although Sartre acknowledges the difficulty of remembering prereflective experiences without reflecting upon them, he deems it possible to do so. If I recall an episode of reading, I can relive it without altering it. Doing so, Sartre does not encounter an I: 'while I was reading, there was a consciousness *of* the book, *of* the heroes of the book, but the I did not inhabit this consciousness, it was merely consciousness of the object and non-positional consciousness of itself' (TE 7)¹⁰³. Thus, according to Sartre, the I is not only unnecessary from a theoretical point of view, it is also not to be found in concrete examples of experience (TE 7). Sartre concludes:

[W]e are forced to conclude: there is no I on the unreflected level. When I run after a tram, when I look at the time, when I become absorbed in the contemplation of a portrait, there is no I. There is a consciousness of the *tram-needng-to-be-caught*, etc., and a non-positional consciousness of consciousness. In fact, I am then plunged into the world of objects, it is they which constitute the unity of my consciousnesses, which present themselves with values, attractive and repulsive values, but as for *me*, I have disappeared, I have annihilated myself. There is no place for *me* at this level, and this is not the result of some chance, some momentary failure of attention: it stems from the very structure of consciousness (TE 7-8)¹⁰⁴.

100).

102 'L'essentiel du changement ne serait-il pas l'apparition de Je ?' (TE^F 100).

103 'tandis que je lisais, il y avait conscience *du* livre, *des* héros du roman, mais le *Je* n'habitait pas cette conscience, elle était seulement conscience de l'objet et conscience non positionnelle d'elle-même (TE^F 101).'

104 '[I] nous faut donc conclure : il n'y a pas de *Je* sur le plan irréfléchi. Quand je cours après u tramway, quand je regarde l'heure, quand je m'absorbe dans la contemplation d'un portrait, il n'y a pas de Je. Il y a conscience *du tramway-devant-être-rejoint*, etc., et conscience non-positionnelle de la conscience. En fait je suis alors plongé dans le monde des objets, ce sont eux qui constituent l' 'unité de mes consciences, qui se présentent ave des valeurs, des qualités attractives et répulsives, mais *moi*, j'ai disparu, je me suis anéanti. Il n'y a pas de place pour *moi* à ce niveau, et ceci ne provient pas d'un hasard, d'un défaut momentané d'attention, mais de la structure même de la conscience.' (TE^F 102).

In our ordinary coping with the world, there is not any form of Self present in our experiential life. Pre-reflective consciousness is therefore impersonal. It is in reflection that the I is imposed upon those experiences, and that is why we always have the feeling of being the subject of our experiences and the agent of our actions upon consideration.

The idea that the I is not present in consciousness before the act of reflection results in a criticism of the cogito. Because the I only appears in reflection it is always an object before consciousness. It is not the object of the reflective act, as this is the experience reflected upon. Nevertheless, it appears ‘*through* reflected consciousness’, as something which transcends that particular experience (TE 8)¹⁰⁵. Just like the number 3 transcends all particular instances in which there are three objects, the I ‘affirms its permanence beyond that consciousness and all consciousnesses’ (TE 8)¹⁰⁶. This means that although it is not the object of the reflecting act, it is still an object in the same sense that my specific experience of a table captures the table as a whole. Of course, Descartes did not realize that the I discovered in reflection was in fact an object and not part of the subjectivity of the thinking: ‘It is even evident that the reason why Descartes moved from the cogito to the idea of thinking substance is that he believed that I and ‘think’ are on the same level’ (TE 8)¹⁰⁷. Because the I is an object, it falls within the scope of the phenomenological reduction in Husserl’s terms, or is dubitable according to Descartes’ methodological doubt. The I thereby loses its apodictic status: ‘The Cogito affirms too much. The sure and certain content of the pseudo-“cogito” is not “I am conscious of this chair”, but “there is consciousness of this chair”’ (TE 9)¹⁰⁸. This further shows pre-reflexive consciousness to be impersonal, as it is not the I that is doing the thinking, there is just a thinking experience that is not endowed with selfhood.¹⁰⁹

105 ‘à travers la conscience réfléchie’ (TE^F 103).

106 ‘affirme au contraire sa permanence par delà cette conscience et toutes les consciences’ (TE^F 102).

107 ‘Il est même évident que c’est pour avoir cru que *Je* et *pense* sont sur le même plan que Descartes est passé du Cogito à l’idée de substance pensante’ (TE^F 102).

108 ‘Le Cogito affirme trop. Le contenu certain du pseudo « Cogito » n’est pas « j’ai conscience de cette chaise », mais « il y a conscience de cette chaise ».’ (TE^F 104).

109 Sartre uses the term cogito in a less critical manner a few times throughout *The Imaginary*. At different moments throughout the book he uses the cogito, and sometimes even the Cartesian cogito to refer to the fact that consciousness and its object are inseparable (IMY 148, 156, 160, 186). I can perceive a tree and mistakenly think it is a person, but this does not alter the fact that in the moment, the object was appearing to me as being a tree. Furthermore, Sartre stresses the link between reflecting and reflected consciousness by alluding to Descartes (IMY 4). He stated that if I imagine something, and reflect upon

5. A Virtual Locus of Unity

The idea that the Self is only present in reflection raises the question of its ontological status. Is the Self created or discovered by reflection? Or, in other words, is it real or imaginary? Sartre seems to imply that the Self is imaginary to a certain degree. It does not feature some of the characteristics of the imaginary discussed above – it is, for example, not visible and therefore cannot be quasi-observed. Yet it is created by consciousness in an act of reflection and is not a part of reality without this conscious activity. One could even argue that it is posited as a nothingness, as the I was *not* there before reflection.

This line of reasoning is not, however, what Sartre has in mind. Reflection alters the conscious act, but after this alteration the I is truly present. It is a genuinely existing object that can only be discovered in reflected conscious acts. Reflected conscious acts retain their own object, the book or the tram, but a new object also becomes present (TE 9). The act of reflection is directed towards two objects, the reflected act and the I is revealed in that act.

If the I is really not part of subjectivity but an object, the reason for the distinction between subjective and objective selfhood seems to be lost. This is indeed what Sartre is getting at: ‘We are starting to glimpse how the I and the Me are in fact one’ (TE 12)¹¹⁰. Sartre wants to dissolve the distinction between the two facets of selfhood. On the subjective side, there is just consciousness that is non-egological and impersonal; on the objective side, there is a single Self that embodies all facets of selfhood, both those that are traditionally subjective and those that are objective. Hence, both the I and the Me are objects of attribution. Sartre emphasizes this by stating that: ‘The distinction drawn between these two aspects of a single reality strikes me as simply functional, not to say grammatical’ (TE 12)¹¹¹. Both are transcendent, both appear before consciousness in acts of reflection, hence the title of the book: the Ego is wholly transcendent.

Sartre touches upon the same theme in *Nausea*. When visiting a portrait gallery, the protagonist compares himself to the people there depicted. Because he does not have an important role in society, he starts to question the reality of his own existence: ‘My existence was

the act of imagination, then I cannot be mistaken about the image. He does not elaborate on the I of the Cogito. He does state that the consciousness of the cogito ‘has a certain individual and temporal structure’, but he does not elaborate on this (IMY 160).

110 ‘Nous commençons à entrevoir que le Je et le Moi ne font qu’un’ (TE^F 107).

111 ‘La distinction qu’on établit entre ces deux aspects d’une même réalité nous paraît simplement fonctionnelle, pur ne pas dire grammaticale’ (TE^F 107).

beginning to cause me some concern. Was I a mere figment of the imagination?’¹¹² Later in the book the answer to this question becomes clear. During the confrontation with superfluous existence in the park scene that was discussed above, the protagonist realizes that ‘I – weak, languid, obscene, digesting, tossing about dismal thoughts – *I too was superfluous*’ (N 184)¹¹³. The first four characteristics are all facets of us that relate to the Me, and specifically to its bodily dimension. The last characteristic, thinking, is associated with the I, the thinker. The thinker is superfluous as well, however. There is only one Self, and this Self is superfluous. It is a thing, ‘an *existent*. It has a type of concrete existence, doubtless different from that of mathematical truths, meanings, or spatio-temporal beings, but just as real’ (TE 9).¹¹⁴ How then must we envision this concretely existing Self?

Actions, states and qualities

After criticizing the notion of subjective selfhood in the first part of *The Transcendence of the Ego*, Sartre aims to show what remains of the Self in the second part. He aims to do justice to the difference between the subjective and objective dimensions of selfhood while incorporating them into the same object. In order to understand what this transcendent Self entails, we have to gain a better understanding of the process of reflection through which it appears.

When we reflect upon our own experiences, we seldom reflect on a single experience. In the chain of consciousness, it is often difficult to see where one experience ends and another begins. Moreover, meaningful events often consist of multiple experiences. I may reflect upon the fact that I am reading a book, but reading a book already consists of different experiences. I experience the story of the book, I feel the book in my hands and I turn its pages. Therefore, the reflected experience of reading a book in which the I appears is strictly speaking a collection of experiences. This further shows why the Self is not imaginary: The Self may not be present in experiences, but it is present in these collections of reflected experiences. It is not a true alteration of the object of the reflected experiences. Instead, a new object is apprehended in the process of reflection. Sartre distinguishes between three categories of such collections: actions, states and qualities.

112 ‘Mon existence commençait à m’étonner sérieusement. N’étais-je pas une simple apparence ?’ (TE^F 114).

113 ‘*moi – veule, alanguie, obscène digérant, ballottant de mores pensées – moi aussi j’étais de trop*’ (N^F 164).

114 ‘un *existant*. Il a un type d’existence concrète, différent sans doute de celui des vérités mathématiques, des significations ou des êtres spatio-temporels, mais aussi réel’ (TE^F 104).

Actions are the reflected conscious states in which the Self appears as active. Sartre gives the examples of playing the piano, driving a car and writing (TE 15). The Self appears here as the agent of these actions, as the one who is playing the piano et cetera. This category also entails mental processes such as doubting, reasoning, meditating and making a hypothesis (TE 15). Here the Self appears as the subject of these thoughts. All these actions consist of multiple experiences. Sartre calls it a transcendent unity of consciousnesses (TE 12). An episode of conscious life in which we drive a car consists of numerous experience that follow each other in rapid succession: seeing, hearing, steering, shifting gears. None of these experiences is *the* experience of driving a car; they are all part of it, yet no single one of them is identical with driving as such. As Sartre says:

[I]t must not be forgotten that action requires time in which to be carried out. It has individual sections and moments. To these moments there correspond active, concrete consciousnesses, and the reflection that is aimed at the consciousnesses apprehends the total action in an intuition which displays it as the transcendent unity of active consciousnesses (TE 15)¹¹⁵.

The next category consists of the reflected experiences in which the Self appears as passive (TE 12). These are transcendent unites of conscious experience in which one overcomes something. The example Sartre gives is that of hatred. One might say that hate, or any other emotion, is an experience. This is simply a matter of words. Sartre intends something else. When I hate someone, I may have certain feelings of hatred or feelings associated with hatred, such as revulsion or anger, when I meet that person. However, when the person is not around anymore, my hatred for the person persists, even if it is not currently experienced:

[I]t [hatred] is given as continuing *to be* even when I am absorbed in other occupations and when no consciousness reveals it. This is enough, it seems to me, for one *to be* able to affirm that hatred is not *a form of* consciousness. It extends beyond the instantaneous moment of consciousness and it is not subject to the absolute law of consciousness for which there is no distinction possible between appearance and being.

115 'Mais il ne faut pas oublier que l'action demande du temps pour s'accomplir. Elle a des articulations, des moments. A ces moments correspondent des consciences concrètes actives et la réflexion qui se dirige sur les consciences appréhende l'action totale dans une intuition qui la livre comme l'unité transcendante des consciences actives.' (TE^F 112).

Hatred is thus a transcendent object (TE 13)¹¹⁶.

The hatred appears in the reflection of the conscious experiences of disgust, revulsion and anger that I feel at the moment of confrontation. Because this hatred persists between confrontations with its object, I am still in the state of hatred even if I may not actively feel it. This is why Sartre thinks states, unlike actions, are passive. Although he does not explicitly say that actions consist of an uninterrupted sequence of experiences, it is clear that for states the sequence can be interrupted. The state does not need to be experienced *actively*, and is therefore passive in nature.

Another example, which Sartre himself does not give, is that of knowledge. Although I am not actively talking about or remembering the fact that I know that the Eiffel Tower is in Paris, I am still in the state of knowing this. Sartre's example of hatred is ambiguous because the word could also be used to describe the experience rather than the state. However, the instances in which one calls the knowledge to mind actively seem to be rare. This is usually only presented in other experiences, such as answering a question or figuring out where to go on holiday.

Apart from actions and states, the Self can also appear in qualities. This is not another category of transcendent unities of reflected experiences, a quality is rather a transcendent unity of states or actions. Examples of this are 'failings, virtues, tastes, talents, tendencies, instincts' (TE 16)¹¹⁷. For example, if I hate many things, I may be a hateful person. I have the quality of hatefulness which remains even though I am not experiencing hatred in a specific encounter. The quality of hatefulness transcends the specific experience of hatred, just as hatred transcends the episodes of revulsion and anger. The same can be said for actions. If I perform the action of playing the piano a lot, it may be said that I have the quality of being a piano player. If I doubt a lot, then I am a doubting person. These qualities remain even when I am not performing the action they correspond to. Thus, even when the quality is the transcendent unity of actions, the Self appears as passive in qualities. These three categories of transcendent unities are themselves united in a transcendent pole of unity, which is the Self:

116 'elle se donne comme continuant d'être même lorsque je suis absorbé dans d'autres occupations et qu'aucune conscience ne la révèle. En voilà assez, ce semble, pour pouvoir affirmer que la haine n'est pas *de la* conscience. Elle déborde l'instantanéité de la conscience et elle ne se plie pas à la loi absolue de la conscience pour laquelle il n'y a pas de distinction possible entre l'apparence et l'être. La haine est donc un objet transcendant.' (TE^F 109).

117 'les défauts, les vertus, les goûts, les talents, les tendances, les instincts' (TE^F 113).

The Ego is not directly the unity of reflected consciousnesses. There exists an *immanent* unity of these consciousnesses, namely the stream of consciousness constituting itself as the unity of itself—and a *transcendent* unity: states and actions. The Ego is the unity of states and actions—only optionally of qualities. It is the unity of transcendent unities, and itself transcendent. It is a transcendent pole of synthetic unity, like the object-pole of the unreflected attitude. But this pole appears only in the world of reflection (TE 12)¹¹⁸.

The Self is the transcendent unity of actions, states and qualities, just as these are themselves transcendent unities. It is the unity of all my actions, states and qualities, regardless of what kind they are. Sartre stresses that qualities are optional because the Self does appear in actions and states, and therefore the category of qualities is not necessary in order to discover the Self. It is inconceivable that someone never reflects upon experiences and groups them into actions and states. It is conceivable, however, that someone never really thinks about her qualities.

The distinction between the I and the Me is retained to a certain degree by Sartre: ‘The I is the Ego as the unity of its actions. The *me* is the Ego as the unity of states and qualities’ (TE 12)¹¹⁹. Although both the I and the Me are objects of attribution, in the former case, the case of the I, being the subject of experiences and the agent of actions is attributed to it. Hence, the active nature of the I is retained. The Me as it appears to states and actions still has the same passive nature it always did. What is most important is that these are just two ways of looking at the same object, the Self that transcends reflected experiences.

A pole of unity

We have seen that the Self is the transcendent unity of reflected experiences, but the question remains as to how exactly this object relates to these experiences. Although it is the Self which appears in every act of reflection, it cannot be reflected upon in isolation, that is, without it being given simultaneously with an action, state or

118 ‘L’Ego n’est pas directement unité des consciences réfléchies. Il existe une unité *immanente* de ces consciences, c’est le flux de la Conscience se constituant lui-même comme unité de lui-même – et une unité *transcendante* : les états les actions. L’Ego est unité des états et des actions, – facultativement des qualités. Il est unité d’unités transcendantes et transcendant lui-même. C’est un pôle transcendant d’unité synthétique, comme le pôle-objet de l’attitude irréfléchie. Seulement ce pôle n’apparaît que dans le monde de la réflexion.’ (TE^F 108).

119 ‘Le Je c’est l’Ego comme unité des actions. Le Moi c’est l’Ego comme unité des états et des qualités’ (TE^F 107).

quality. As we have already seen, the Self appears as an *extra* object upon reflection. It is nothing more than the transcendent unity of the reflected experiences. In this connection, it does not differ from actions and states, which are also incapable of being regarded apart from their content. One could not conceive of someone driving a car without this thought including the experiences that go along with this action. In the same manner, one cannot conceive of the Self on its own: 'The Ego is nothing other than the concrete totality of states and actions that it supports' (TE 17)¹²⁰. Or, in other words:

It does not seem to us as if we could find a skeletal pole if we removed one by one all the qualities. If the Ego appears as lying beyond each quality or even beyond all of them, this is because it is opaque like an object: we would have to undertake an infinite stripping away if we were to remove all its potentialities. And, at the end of this stripping away, there would be nothing left, the Ego would have vanished (TE 19)¹²¹.

The Self is neither something that exists on its own nor the sum of reflected experiences. If it were the sum, then we would need to know all reflected experiences in order to discover it. Since there are in principle an infinite amount of reflected experiences, this would mean that we can never know it (TE 22). Instead, the term 'pole' implies some sort of axis: that around which the actions, states and qualities revolve. It is 'the infinite totality of states and actions that never permits itself to be reduced to *one* action or *one* state' (TE 17)¹²². In other words, it is 'a virtual locus of unity': the virtual centre of actions, states and qualities (TE 20)¹²³.

Because the Self is nothing but a virtual centre, it is characterized by a certain uncertainty (TE 22). I cannot study my Self in order to find out what my personality is, because it only appears when reflecting upon a specific aspect of my personality. The qualities I have may also change over time and in new moments of reflection. The Self is a transcendent object and as such it is as dubitable as any

120 'L'Ego n'est rien en dehors de la totalité concrète des états et des actions qu'il supporte' (TE^F 115).

121 'Il ne nous paraît pas que nous pourrions trouver un pôle squelettique si nous ôtions l'une après l'autre toutes les qualités. Si l'Ego apparaît comme au-delà de chaque qualité ou même de toutes, c'est qu'il est opaque comme un objet : il nous faudrait procéder à un dépouillement infini pour ôter toutes ses puissances. Et, au terme de ce dépouillement, il ne resterait plus rien, l'Ego se serait évanoui' (TE^F 117). Although Sartre talks about qualities here, the same reasoning can easily be applied to actions and states.

122 'la totalité infinie des états et des actions qui ne se laisse jamais réduire à *une* action ou à *un* état' (TE^F 115).

123 'un foyer virtuel d'unité' (TE^F 118).

other object. This is to say that I can be mistaken about my actions, states and qualities, especially in the case of more complex ones. The feeling I have may not be hatred at all, for example, but love that I am ashamed to admit. It is quite important that Sartre adds that this does not mean that there is a real Self about which we are mistaken, it is simply that in reflection we can misinterpret ourselves. The fact that the Self is an object to which I have the same access as other people do, bars any true self-knowledge:

‘[T]o know oneself well’ is inevitably to look at oneself from the point of view of someone else, in other words from a point of view that is necessarily false. And all those who have tried to know themselves will agree that this attempt at introspection appears, right from the start, as an effort to reconstitute, with detached pieces, with isolated fragments, what is originally given *all at once*, in a single surge. Thus the intuition of the Ego is a perpetually deceptive mirage, since, at one and the same time, it yields everything and it yields nothing. And how, indeed, could it be otherwise, since the Ego is not the real totality of consciousnesses (this totality would be self-contradictory, like any infinite totality actualized), but the *ideal* unity of all states and actions (TE 22)¹²⁴.

Since my Self is never given to consciousness except when it appears in an action, state or quality, I cannot focus our attention on it and truly come to know it (TE 23). The fact that he refers to the Self as a “mirage” here is also interesting in that it implies that the Self is imaginary. Nevertheless, it seems that Sartre here merely refers to the fact that the Self cannot be viewed apart from its constituents, as it is their abstract centre. The deceptive element in this equation is that if we aim to grasp ourselves, we cannot study the Self in isolation. Instead, we must paste together the bits and pieces given in our past actions. The idea that introspection can somehow reveal the Self as something asides from the virtual locus of unity is imaginary, but the Self as a virtual locus of unity is a real – yet abstract – entity.

The fact that we can never truly know the Self does not make it hypothetical: if it is the nature of the Ego to be a *dubious* object, it

124 ‘« bien se connaître », c’est fatalement prendre sur soi le point de vue d’autrui, c’est-à-dire un point de vue forcément faux. Et, tous ceux qui ont essayé de se connaître en conviendront, cette tentative d’introspection se présente dès l’origine comme un effort pour reconstituer avec des pièces détachées, avec des fragments isolés, ce qui est donné originellement *d’un coup*, d’un seul jet. Aussi l’intuition de l’Ego est-elle un mirage perpétuellement décevant, car, à la fois, elle livre tout et elle ne livre rien. Comment pourrait-il en être autrement, d’ailleurs, puisque l’Ego n’est pas la totalité réelle des consciences (cette totalité serait contradictoire comme tout infini en acte), mais l’unité *idéale* de tous les états et les actions.’ (TE^F 121-122).

does not follow that it is therefore *hypothetical* (TE 18).¹²⁵ Although I can wonder whether I am hateful, I cannot wonder whether I have a Self or not. This is the case because the Self is necessary in order for actions, states and qualities to make sense to us. Although unreflected consciousness can function without a Self, we cannot reflect on our experiences without a Self appearing. The statement “there is consciousness of this chair” makes sense, but to say “there is hatefulness” without referring to something that is hateful, does not. In light of this, Sartre says that the Self “creates” actions, states and qualities. Although the Self is discovered in reflection, it is also what makes the object of reflection possible and it ‘is given as producing its states’ (TE 18)¹²⁶. The relationship between the reflected experiences and the Self is therefore reciprocal: the Self is nothing more than the virtual centre of unity of the reflected experiences, but these actions, states and qualities are only possible because the Self appears through them (TE 19). The idea that the Self has creative power in the process of reflection gives us yet another reason to say that it is not itself created in this process, but discovered.

Another facet of the Self that stems from its transcendent nature is that I do not have an essentially different relationship to my own Self than I have to that of other people. Although I experience my own conscious experiences and others do not, when I reflect on them and they form actions, states and qualities, they have become objects and are thereby no longer subjective:

The Me, as such, remains unknown to us. And that is easy to understand: it is given as an object. So the only method for getting to know it is observation, approximation, waiting, experience. But these procedures, which are perfectly suitable for the entire domain of the *non-intimate* transcendent, are not suitable here, by virtue of the very intimacy of the Me. It is too present for one to look at it from a really external point of view. If we move away from it to gain the vantage of distance, it accompanies us in this withdrawal. It is infinitely close and I cannot circle round it. Am I lazy or hardworking? I will find out, no doubt, if I ask those who know me and if I ask them for their opinion. Or else, I can collect the facts that concern me and try to interpret them *as objectively as if I were dealing with another person* (TE 22)¹²⁷.

125 ‘Mais, s’il est de la nature de l’Ego d’être un objet *douteux*, il ne s’ensuit pas qu’il soit *hypothétique*’ (TE^F 116).

126 ‘est donné comme produisant ses états’ (TE^F 116).

127 ‘Tel quel. le Moi nous reste inconnu. Et cela peut facilement se comprendre : il se donne comme un objet. Donc la seule méthode pour le connaître c’est l’observation,

Although I cannot know the inner life of other people, I can still reflect on how they behave and what they say, and thereby reflect on their actions, states and qualities through which their Selves are revealed. If we hold on to the dichotomy of a subjective I and an objective Me, then we can only know the Me of other people. However, in Sartre's view the I is also an object, which results in the idea that '[m]y I, indeed, is no more certain for consciousness than the I of other men. It is simply more intimate' (TE 29)¹²⁸. It is more intimate because I have more information about myself, but this information is not different *in nature* from the things I know about other people. According to Sartre, this also leads to a refutation of solipsism (TE 29). If the I is not in consciousness, it cannot be the source of reality:

[I]f the I becomes a transcendent, it participates in all the world's vicissitudes. It is not an absolute, it did not create the universe, it falls like other existences under the *epochē*; and solipsism becomes unthinkable as soon as the I no longer has any privileged position (TE 29)¹²⁹.

Sartre does not develop this line of reasoning in much detail, but it is worth noting in light of the accusations discussed in the introductory chapter. In Sartre's interpretation of the idea of inner-time consciousness, the continuity of the stream of consciousness is only guaranteed by the continuity of things external to consciousness. If the continuing existence of these things were to depend upon the stream of consciousness, this would lead to a contradiction. If there were no continuous element in consciousness, then we could not account for the continuity of objects. Hence, it would be absurd to assume that these objects are lacking a reality outside of consciousness. Sartre also addressed the topic of the traditional subject, when he states that: 'This absolute consciousness, when it is purified of the I,

l 'approximation , l 'attente, l 'expérience. Mais ces procédés, qui conviennent parfaitement à tout le transcendant *non-intime*, ne conviennent pas ici , du fait de l'intimité même du Moi. Il est trop présent pour qu'on puisse prendre sur lui un point de vue vraiment extérieur. Si l'on se retire pour prendre du champ, il nous accompagne dans ce recul. Il est infiniment proche et je ne puis en faire le tour. Suis-je paresseux ou travailleur ? J 'en déciderai sans doute si je m'adresse à ceux qui me connaissent et si je leur demande leur avis. Ou bien encore je peux collectionner les faits qui me concernent et tenter de les interpréter *aussi objectivement que s'il s'agissait d'un autre.*' (TE^F 121).

128 'Mon *Je*, en effet, n'est pas plus certain pour la conscience que le *Je* des autres hommes. Il est seulement plus intime' (TE^F 130).

129 'si le *Je* devient un transcendant, il participe à toutes les vicissitudes du monde. Il n'est pas un absolu, il n'a point créé l'univers, il tombe comme les autres existences sous le coup de l'ἐποχή ; et le solipsisme devient impensable dès lors que le *Je* n'a plus de position privilégiée.' (TE^F 130).

is no longer in any way a subject' (TE 29)¹³⁰. Furthermore, he states that the transcendence of the Self causes 'the subject-object duality, [...] to disappear definitively from philosophical preoccupations' (TE 29)¹³¹.

A question that remains is why we need a transcendent virtual locus of unity, if the stream of consciousness is itself individuated. Sartre touches upon this question in the conclusion of *The Transcendence of the Ego* (TE 26).

Perhaps, indeed, the essential function of the Ego is not so much theoretical as practical. I have pointed out, after all, that it does not bind closely together the unity of phenomena, that it is limited to reflecting an *ideal* unity, whereas real, concrete unity has long been achieved. But perhaps its essential role is to mask from consciousness its own spontaneity (TE 27)¹³².

This spontaneity of the stream of consciousness is something we already touched upon when we discussed imagination in the third section. In the *Imaginary* Sartre says that the fact that consciousness produces its own objects is indicative of imagination. Here, Sartre alludes to a characteristic of consciousness that is not limited to imagining, namely, that consciousness 'determines itself to exist at every instant, without us being able to conceive of anything *before it*' (TE 27)¹³³. The stream of consciousness is a stream precisely because experiences keep flowing, one after the other. We do not create these experiences ourselves, they overcome us. We have little influence over what we perceive or what we think. Often our train of thought carries us, rather than being, so to speak, driven by us. Sartre gives the examples of the fact that it is impossible to will oneself to fall asleep and trying not to think about something and thereby immediately thinking about it (TE 27). Experiences of willing are themselves part of the stream and do not exclude spontaneity. 'On

130 'Cette conscience absolue, lorsqu'elle est purifiée du Je, n'a plus rien d'un *sujet*' 'la dualité sujet-objet [...] disparaît définitivement des préoccupations philosophiques' (TE^F 130).

131 'Cette conscience absolue, lorsqu'elle est purifiée du Je, n'a plus rien d'un *sujet*' 'la dualité sujet-objet [...] disparaît définitivement des préoccupations philosophiques' (TE^F 130).

132 'Peut-être, en effet, la fonction essentielle de l'Ego n'est-elle pas tant théorique que pratique. Nous avons marqué, en effet, qu'il ne resserre pas l'unité des phénomènes, qu'il s'agit de refléter une unité *idéale*, alors que l'unité concrète et réelle est opérée depuis longtemps. Mais peut-être son rôle essentiel est-il de masquer à la conscience sa propre spontanéité.' (TE^F 128).

133 'se détermine à 'existence à chaque instant, sans qu'on puisse rien concevoir *avant elle*' (TE^F 127).

this level, man has the impression of eluding himself ceaselessly, overflowing himself, surprising himself by a richness that is always unexpected' (TE 27)¹³⁴.

This does not mean that we are not free: 'Consciousness takes fright at its own spontaneity because it senses that it lies *beyond* freedom' (TE 27)¹³⁵. The stream of consciousness is neither autonomous nor determined, it is simply happening. The will exists only at the reflective level: 'The will aims at states, feelings, or things, but it never turns back round on to consciousness' (TE 27)¹³⁶. Wanting to see an elephant does not refer to a singular experience of an elephant, it refers to a plurality of experiences, such as going to the zoo, walking around the elephant enclosure and watching them for a while. Such an action is a reflective grouping of experiences. On the reflective level, the Self appears and the action appears to "emanate" from the Self. Thus, the Self allows us to make a distinction between voluntary and involuntary experiences, on the reflective level: 'it is, indeed, thanks to the Ego, that a distinction can be drawn between [...] what is willed and what is yielded to' (TE 28)¹³⁷.

Sartre can therefore be seen to have fulfilled the twofold goal of *The Transcendence of the Ego* that was mentioned earlier: he has shown that the Self is not in consciousness, and he has shown that it is a being in the world, like the Self of another (TE 1). He has expelled the inhabitant from consciousness and has driven it to the world outside. Although consciousness is devoid of Self at the unreflected level, there is a Self that appears in reflection. It is the virtual centre of unity of reflected experiences. It is neither the sum of these reflected experiences nor something that can be viewed in isolation. Both the I and the Me are facets of the same objective Self: the I as the transcendent unity of active experiences, the Me as that of passive experiences.

6. Adventures

Sartre's theory of the Self as a virtual locus of unity explains how the Self as object is discovered. Although it allows for change over time at different moments of reflection, it only focuses on the static elements of selfhood. These static elements may change in relation to one another. For example, I may have once been hateful, but I am

134 'Sur ce plan l'homme a l'impression de s'échapper sans cesse, de se déborder, de se surprendre par une richesse toujours inattendue' (TE^F 128).

135 'La conscience s'effraie de sa propre spontanéité parce qu'elle la sent *au delà* de la liberté' (TE^F 128).

136 'La volonté se dirige sur les états, sur les sentiments ou sur les choses, mais elle ne se retourne jamais sur la conscience' (TE^F 128).

137 'c'est grâce à l'Ego, en effet, qu'une distinction pourra s'effectuer entre [...] le voulu et le subi' (TE^F 129).

not so any more. This is a first step towards an account of selfhood over the course of a lifetime. It does not account for the fact that some reflected episodes are more important for our sense of Self than others. When I tell my life story, I am inclined to talk about experiences that somehow formed who I am. I may speak about where I grew up, what subjects I studied, or about a certain passion or hobby I have. It is extremely unlikely that I would talk about what I ate for breakfast or that I once took a train. How do different experiential episodes relate to one another? Of course, a lot of these things are simply trivial parts of our culture. We categorize people by where they grew up or what their profession is, and not by the fact that they may have seen a yellow car once. Although the reason why some experiences are important and others are not may be trivial, it does influence how we see our own lives and which episodes we incorporate in our life story.

There are no adventures

The topic of narrative selfhood is addressed by Sartre in *Nausea*, where we find two important notions pertaining to how experiential episodes fit together: “adventures” and “perfect moments”.¹³⁸

At the beginning of the story, the protagonist is sure that he has experienced adventures during the course of this life (N 39). He gives the clichéd examples of voyaging at sea, trekking through the woods and getting into brawls. He reflects on where those adventures have led him, and he can only conclude that they have led him to the exact moment he is now in, thinking about them while sitting in a bar. This is a moment that does not seem to be important or special in any sense. His attention is soon diverted, but a little later, when another character asks about his adventures, he makes the following realization:

I haven't had any adventures. Things have happened to me, events, incidents, anything you like. But not adventures. It isn't a matter of words. [...] I have just learned, for no apparent reason, that I have been lying to myself for ten years. Adventures are in books. And naturally, everything they tell about in books can happen in real life, but not in the same way. It was to this way

138 The name *Nausea* was not the name Sartre originally had in mind when he was writing the novel. His first choice was *Melancholia*, after an engraving by Dürer. One of the other names he considered was *The Extraordinary Adventures of Antoine Roquentin*, which would have been accompanied by a promotional banner with a citation from the book as its slogan: “There are no adventures”. Although rejected by the publisher, this would-be title reveals that adventure is one of the central notions of the book (Churchill & Reynolds).

of happening that I attached so much importance (N 58)¹³⁹.

The protagonist did not experience adventures at all. While he did travel the world, his travels did not constitute real adventures. What, then, are adventures? First of all, an adventure needs to have a real beginning. This beginning could be anything, it does not matter how insignificant, as long as it feels like a beginning. You could just be walking across the street and have the feeling of that this event is the beginning of great things to come.

Something begins in order to end: and adventure doesn't let itself be extended; it achieves significance only through its death. Towards this death, which may also be my own, I am drawn irrevocably. Each moment appears only to bring on the moments after. To each moment I cling with all my heart: I know that it is unique, irreplaceable – and yet I would not lift a finger to prevent it from being annihilated (N 59)¹⁴⁰.

From the outset, every moment that makes up the adventure leads towards the goal or end of the adventure.¹⁴¹ For example, we can easily imagine someone who travels to a faraway place in order to find herself. Everything that happens on the journey somehow contributes to the goal of the quest. If positive things happen, it can lead to new-found wisdom. If negative things happen, they can be seen as life lessons. Ordinary events may suddenly be meaningful in light of the “death” of the adventure. When the adventure is over, time returns to ‘its everyday slackness’, and moments do not have meaning in light of other moments anymore (N 60)¹⁴². Ordinary life is just a random sequence of events. Nevertheless, the idea of adventure, the idea that some sequences of events have significance in light of a goal, is illusory:

139 ‘Je n’ai pas eu d’aventures. Il m’est arrivé des histoires, des événements, des incidents, tout ce qu’on voudra. Mais pas des aventures. Ce n’est pas une question de mots[...] [...] Je viens d’apprendre, brusquement, sans raison apparente, que je me suis menti pendant dix ans. Les aventures sont dans les livres. Et naturellement, tout ce qu’on raconte dans les livres peut arriver pour de vrai, mais pas de la même manière. C’est à cette manière d’arriver que je tenais si fort.’ (NF 56-57).

140 ‘Quelque chose commence pour finir : l’aventure ne se laisse pas mettre de ralonge ; elle n’a de sens que par sa mort. Vers cette mort, qui sera peut-être aussi la mienne, je suis entraîné sans retour. Chaque instant ne paraît que pour amener ceux qui suivent. A chaque instant je tiens de tout mon cœur : je sais qu’il est unique ; irremplaçable – et pourtant je ne ferais pas un geste pour l’empêcher de s’anéantir.’ (NF 57).

141 Although he never refers to it in this context, Sartre’s definition of adventure is very reminiscent of that given by Georg Simmel in his essay *The Adventure* (Simmel 1997). For a comparison of the two theories, see: (Gusman 2018a, Roth 2015).

142 ‘sa mollesse quotidienne’ (NF 57).

[F]or the most commonplace event to become an adventure, you must – and this is all that is necessary – start *recounting* it. This is what fools people: a man is always a teller of tales, he lives surrounded by his stories and the stories of others, he sees everything that happens to him through them; and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it.

But you have to choose: to live or to recount (N 61)¹⁴³.

We can only apply this structure of adventure to experiences in hindsight. We create adventures by recounting our life and thus structuring the events into a story, a *plot*. This is why the protagonist says that adventures are things that only exist in books. A written adventure usually has a plot, that is, the things that happen in the story happen for a reason and hence have a certain necessity to them. They drive the story forwards toward some kind of climax. Sartre states that his inspiration for this idea of the necessity of stories comes from cinema (OR 1661, 1698-1699).¹⁴⁴ The more clichéd the movie plot, the more apparent it becomes that every scene is only there in order to move the plot forward. The events have a certain necessity, while the events in real life are contingent. The scenes gain their necessity from the end of the movie, which is known in advance. In this way, all scenes can be written as leading up to the conclusion of the story. We apply the same thinking to our own lives when we speak about them:

[W]hen you tell about life, everything changes; only it's a change nobody notices: the proof of that is that people talk about true stories. As if there could possibly be such things as true stories; events take place way and we recount them the opposite way. You appear to begin at the beginning [...] [a]nd in fact you have begun at the end which gives these few words the pomp and value of a beginning. [...] [T]he story goes on in the reverse: the moments have stopped piling up on one another in a happy-go-lucky manner, they are caught by the end of the story which attracts them and each one of them in turn attracts the preceding moment[.] [...] And we have

143 'pour que l'événement le plus banal devienne une aventure, il faut et il suffit qu'on se mette à le *raconter*. C'est ce qui dupe les gens : un homme, c'est toujours un conteur d'histoires, il vit entouré de ses histoires et des histoires d'autrui, il voit tout ce qui lui arrive à travers elles ; et il cherche à vivre sa vie comme s'il la racontait. Mais il faut choisir : vivre ou raconter.' (N^F 58-59).

144 In the conversations between Sartre and De Beauvoir published in *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre*, he recounts: 'I saw films in which there was no contingency and then when I left the cinema there I found contingency. It was therefore the films' necessity that made me feel that there was no necessity in the street when I went out' (A 141).

the impression that the hero has lived all the details [...] like annunciations, promises, or even that he lived only those that were promises, blind and deaf to everything that did not herald adventure. We forget that the future was not yet there (N 62-63)¹⁴⁵[.]

Because we are superfluous objects however, there is no inherent purpose to our endeavours. The meaning of the experiences that constitute our Self cannot be intrinsically derived from other experiences. This means that there is no natural order to them:

When you are living, nothing happens. The settings change, people come in and go out. That's all. There are never any beginnings. Days are tacked on to days without rhyme or reason, it is an endless, monotonous addition. [...] There isn't any end either: you never leave a woman, a friend, a town in one go. [...] Occasionally – not very often – you take your bearings, you realize that you're living with a woman, mixed up in some dirty business. Just for an instant. After that, the procession starts again, you beginning adding up the hours and days once more (N 61-62)¹⁴⁶.

The idea of the flow of time that Sartre presents here is reminiscent of the views he expresses in *The Transcendence of the Ego*. Normally, we are absorbed in our activities and only assign a certain meaning to them in hindsight, upon reflection. Just as the Self only appears upon reflection, the way different episodes in our life relate to others and have a certain meaning with regard to each other is also

145 'quand on raconte la vie, tout change ; seulement c'est un changement que personne ne remarque : la preuve c'est qu'on parle d'histoires vraies. Comme s'il pouvait y avoir des histoires vraies ; les événements se produisent dans un sens et nous les racontons en sens inverse. On a l'air de débiter par le commencement [...] [e]t en réalité c'est par la fin qu'on a commencé. Elle est là, invisible et présente, c'est elle qui donne à ces quelques mots la pompe et la valeur d'un commencement. [...] [L] e récit se poursuit à l'envers : les instants ont cessé de s'empiler au petit bonheur les uns sur les autres, ils sont happés par la fin de l'histoire qui les attire et chacun d'eux attire à son tour l'instant qui le précède[...] [...] Et nous avons le sentiment que le héros a vécu tous les détails de cette nuit comme des annonces, comme des promesses, ou même qu'il vivait seulement ceux qui étaient des promesses, aveugle et sourd pour tout ce qui n'annonçait pas l'aventure. Nous oublions que l'avenir n'était pas encore là' (N^F 59-60).

146 'Quand on vit, il n'arrive rien. Les décors changent, les gens entrent et sortent, voilà tout. Il n'y a jamais de commencements. Les jours s'ajoutent aux jours sans rime ni raison, c'est une addition interminable et monotone. [...] Il n'y a pas de fin non plus : on ne quitte jamais une femme, un ami, une ville en une fois. [...] Par moments - rarement - on fait le point, on s'aperçoit qu'on s'est collé avec une femme, engagé dans une sale histoire. Le temps d'un éclair. Après ça, le défilé recommence, on se remet à faire l'addition des heures et des jours.' (N^F 59).

determined when we “take our bearings”.

Because it is only in hindsight that we assign meaning to the way in which different episodes of our lives relate to each other, we can never live our lives as if they are adventures, that is, as if the things that are happening now are *naturally* leading towards something. We can, of course, have the feeling that we are currently experiencing an adventure, but this is an illusion.

In the working notes for *Nausea* that were published posthumously, Sartre further links the notion of adventure to the structure of time: ‘The feeling of a fatal connection from the past to the present and the future that entails knowledge of all three of them and their connection’¹⁴⁷. The implication is that the past, present and future have the same structure. He also calls it a ‘feeling of a musical flow of time’, the idea that the individual moments of our lives form a melody¹⁴⁸.

Even after realizing that adventures are illusory, the protagonist still experiences feelings of adventure throughout the book. This is the feeling that somehow the things that are happening are leading up to something meaningful. He clings to this illusory feeling, and proclaims that ‘[p]erhaps there is nothing in the world I value more than this feeling of adventure’ (N 84)¹⁴⁹. Adventure has to do with a feeling of purpose, the feeling that a certain situation is leading up to something important. The reason that we fall prone to this illusion has to do with our consciousness, and more precisely our inner time-consciousness:

This feeling of adventure definitely doesn’t come from events: I have proved that. It’s rather the way in which moments are linked together. This, I think, is what happens: all of a sudden you feel that time is passing, that each moments leads to another moment, this one to yet another one, and so on; that each moment destroys itself and that it’s no use trying to hold back, etc., etc., and then you attribute this property to the vents which appear to you *in* the moments; you extend to the contents what appertains to the form (N 85)¹⁵⁰.

147 ‘sentiment d’une liaison fatale du passé au présent et à l’avenir impliquant connaissance simultanée des trois et de leur liaison’ (OR 1681).

148 ‘Sentiment d’un cours musical du temps’ (OR 1881).

149 ‘Ce sentiment d’aventure, il n’y a peut-être rien au monde à quoi je tiens tant’ (NF 78).

150 ‘Ce sentiment d’aventure ne vient décidément pas des événements : la preuve en est faite. C’est plutôt la façon dont les instants s’enchaînent. Voilà, je pense, ce qui se passe : brusquement on sent que le temps s’écoule, que chaque instant conduit à un autre instant, celui-ci à un autre et ainsi de suite ; que chaque instant s’anéantit, que ce

The illusion of adventure stems from a confusion of the structure of consciousness with its content. As we discussed in the fourth section of this chapter, the structure of consciousness links individual experiences together through time, which makes it possible to see series of objects and to witness events that consist of multiple experiences. However, the problem occurs when we confuse the mere interlocking of experiences through time with an interlocking of the meaning of these events for us. We should not confuse this with the idea that the series allows us to give meaning to it: when we are counting, we also assign meanings to objects, for example an object being the first in a series of objects. However, it is only because of our activity of counting that the object gains this meaning, it is not inherent in the object. Each moment leads to other moments, but each event within those moments does not necessarily lead to a related event. Sartre gives the following example:

You see a woman, you think that one day she will be old, only you don't *see* her grow old. But there are moments when you think you *see* her growing old and you see yourself growing old with her: that is the feeling of adventure (N 85)¹⁵¹.

As already noted, a notion related to the feeling of adventure is that of a "perfect moment". A perfect moment can only occur in a "privileged situation", which is an event that is more significant than others. These are the kinds of events that we write about in history books, such as the death of an important person (N 210). These situations make perfect moments possible: 'First there are annunciatory signs. Then the privileged situation, slowly, majestically, comes into people's lives. Then the question arises whether you want to make a perfect moment out of it' (N 211)¹⁵². Transforming the privileged situation into a perfect moment has to do with the way a person reacts to a situation. If one performs the right actions, those suited to the situation, it becomes a perfect moment. The nature of the actions that must be performed depends on the situation. The only example that is given is that of a defeated king who weeps not when he sees his children in chains, but only when he sees a servant in chains. He had to be strong for his children and thereby acted in a manner suited to the situation. However, the capture of the

n'est pas la peine d'essayer de le retenir, etc., etc. Et alors on attribue cette propriété aux événements qui vous apparaissent *dans* les instants ; ce qui appartient à la forme, on le reporte sur le contenu.' (N^F 79).

151 'On voit une femme, on pense qu'elle sera vieille, seulement on ne la *voit* pas vieillir. Mais, par moment, il semble qu'on la *voie* vieillir et qu'on se sente vieillir avec elle : c'est le sentiment d'aventure' (N^F 79).

152 'Il y a d'abord des signes annonciateurs. Puis la situation privilégiée, lentement, majestueusement, entre dans la vie des gens. Alors la question se pose de savoir si on veut en faire un moment parfait' (N^F 187).

lowly servant was not a privileged situation and therefore could not be transformed into a perfect moment. This meant that the king's reaction was not important.

Privileged situations and perfect moments are illusions, just like adventures. We cannot know that a given event will have lasting impact upon the world when it is happening. We can guess, but the importance of an event is still only determined afterwards and cannot be directly intuited. Furthermore, the idea that there is an ideal way to react to a situation is illusory. As we have seen, situations only arise through our presence in contingent masses of things. Therefore, they do not carry within themselves any meaning and do not demand any actions from us. That is why the protagonist concludes that '[t]here are no adventures—there are no perfect moments', near the end of the book (N 213)¹⁵³.

The biographical illusion

Although the notion of adventure concerns the recollection of specific episodes of our lives, we can easily transpose the reasoning behind it to our whole life story and with it to our narrative identity in general. When someone asks us who we are or to tell them something about ourselves, we tell a story in which some things that we have done in the past constitute our identity. Our education, jobs or hobbies may be part of this, but other experiences are not. For one thing, we do not include experiences that are the same for everybody: everyone eat, sleeps, washes and so forth. These experiences exist solely in the light of the more important experiences or, in Sartre's words, as the annunciations and promises of those privileged situations. I only eat in order to stay alive to achieve a goal of some sort or another. Therefore, our narrative identity is a certain structure imposed upon past experiences, it is a collection of adventures.

The relation between adventures and life story becomes clearer in other texts. We find the first trace of it in a very early text, one that precedes his encounter with phenomenology. Written in 1926, the text "Empedoclé" is a fictive dialogue between the titular character and Narcissus. In it, they discuss melancholy, which reminds us of the original title of *Nausea*. Narcissus proclaims that he has felt the call to adventure: 'She came to me, Adventure. At the corner of the street my Destiny suddenly appeared, and I sensed the colour of Adventure.'¹⁵⁴ Now, he want to have adventures like in the books of Jules Vernes and Daniel DeFoe (EMP 36).¹⁵⁵ Empedocles response

153 'Il n'y a pas d'aventures – il n'y a pas de moments parfaits' (N^f 189).

154 'elle venait à moi, l'Aventure. Au détour de la rue surgissait mon Destin et je sentais la couleur de l'Aventure.'

155 In the working notes on *Nausea*, Sartre again mentions Jules Vernes as a typical

is noteworthy:

There are no adventures, he told me. There are only occupations. Whatever you do, you go and return, you touch the surface, you simply refuse to comprehend the truth: life has no meaning. [...] There is no adventure, because the link between life in the present and life in the past is too weak.¹⁵⁶

Here, Sartre makes the link more clear between adventures and contingency more explicit. Not only do certain sequences of events have no meaning, life in general has no meaning and therefore makes adventures impossible.¹⁵⁷ In light of this, we can reinterpret the aforementioned statement in *Nausea* about the adventure being not only drawn towards its own death, but also to *my* death, which is to say, the closing chapter of my life story. In the *War Diaries*, Sartre also discusses the theme of the course of a life. He recounts how he had experienced the course of his own life up until that point. He had always wanted to be a writer and had interpreted his life accordingly. He had already envisioned his future greatness at a young age, and thought of himself as “the young Sartre”, in the sense that we speak about famous people before they become famous (WD 74). This view of “life” entails that life as a whole somehow precedes the moments that comprise it and that these moments all add up to some larger meaning. Thus, each event only gains significance in light of the life they are a part of:

To me, an instant did not appear like some vague unit aggregated to other units of the same kind; it was a moment that rose *against a background of life*. I envisaged each present moment from the point of view of an accomplished life – or, to be precise, I should say: from the point of view of a biography. And I considered myself bound to account for that moment to this biography: I felt its full meaning could be deciphered only by placing oneself in the future, and I always sketched out for myself a vague future that would allow me to make my

author for the kind of adventure stories he has in mind (OR 1680).

156 ‘Il n’y a pas d’aventures, me dit-il. Il n’y a que des métiers. Tu as beau faire, tu tournes et retournes, tu effleures du doigt, tu refuses de prendre franchement cette vérité : la vie n’a pas de sens. [...] Il n’y a pas d’aventure, parce que le lien est trop lâche qui unit dans la vie le présent au passé’ (EMP 36-37).

157 It is interesting to note that Kierkegaard is also discussed in this text. Sartre says of him that ‘plagued by melancholy, he became an individual without being a person’ (EMP 35). He is ultimately criticized for finding refuge in religion. This mention of Kierkegaard in the same context as adventure is reminiscent of Sartre’s lecture “Kierkegaard: The Singular Universal”, which we will discuss in chapter 3 of this dissertation.

present yield up its whole significance (WD 79)¹⁵⁸.

In order to do this, he sketched a path towards the goal of his life – to be a famous writer. He compares his faith in the future to religious devotion. Although he managed to achieve success as a writer, it was never enough. He came to the realization that he was living a lie by the time he wrote the *War Diaries*:

[I]t's true enough that I've had all that my naive imagination desired. And it's true that each time I've been disappointed. For I'd have wished every event to befall me as in a biography: in other words, as when the story's end is already known. This is the disappointment I expressed with respect to adventure, in *La Nausée*. [...] I was imbued to the very marrow with what I shall term the biographical illusion, which consists in believing that a lived life can resemble a recounted life (WD 80-81)¹⁵⁹.

Sartre's notion of the biographical illusion is similar to that of adventure, but whereas adventures refer to episodes in one's life, the biographical illusion is a similar way of thinking about one's life as a whole. Sartre foreshadowed it in *Nausea* when he said that the adventure is not only drawn to its own death, but also to *my* death, the closing chapter of my life story. Living towards the future and recounting the past are vastly different, and we cannot lead our life as if we already know our biography, as if we already know that we will become great or perhaps failed individuals. This mirrors the example of the life-changing journey I mentioned earlier. It does not make any sense to book a trip knowing you will have a life-changing adventure. The unpredictability one seeks in adventure is incommensurable with the idea of each moment leading to the goal of the adventure. The same is of course true for the biographical illusion: if one lives every moment as if it is leading to something

158 'Un instant ne m'apparaissait pas comme une unité vague s'ajoutant à d'autres unités de même espèce, c'était un moment qui s'enlevait *sur fond de vie*. [...] j'envisageais chaque moment présent du point de vue d'une vie faite, pour être exact il faudrait dire : du point de vue d'une biographie, et je me considérais comme devant rendre compte de ce moment à cette biographie, je sentais qu'on ne pouvait en déchiffrer le sens complet qu'en se plaçant dans l'avenir et j'esquissais toujours devant moi un avenir vague qui me permit de faire rendre à mon présent toute sa signification.' (WDF 103-104).

159 'il est assez vrai que j'ai eu tout ce que désirait mon imagination naïve. Et il est vrai qu'à chaque fois j'ai été déçu. C'est que j'aurais voulu que chaque événement me survînt comme dans une biographie, c'est-à-dire comme lorsqu'on connaît déjà la fin de l'histoire. C'est cette déception que j'ai exprimée à propos de l'aventure dans *La Nausée*' 'J'ai été jusqu'aux moelles pénétré de ce que j'appellerai l'illusion biographique, qui consiste à croire qu'une vie vécue peut ressembler à une vie racontée' (WDF 104-106).

great, then one will only be disappointed.

Sartre mentions the notion of adventure later in the *War Diaries*, where he notes the following:

[T]he relation between my youthful ambitions and my mature years can exist, for example, for the Beaver. But not for me. Of the same type, I'd say, is the 'adventure' which always eludes the adventurer, amid the most extraordinary circumstances, and which is nevertheless an essential category of human action. I appeared to be saying, in *La Nausée*, that it didn't exist. But that's wrong. It's better to say that it's unrealizable. Adventure is an existent, whose nature is to appear only in the past through the account one gives of it. (WD 192)¹⁶⁰¹⁶¹

This is a simple but important nuance. We cannot live our lives as adventures, be we cannot recount it as if it were not one. There are adventures, but they are only created in hindsight. This means however that we cannot simply call it an illusion, it is a necessary part of interpreting one's past. From the point of view of *Nausea*, if one wants to be honest one has to add a disclaimer to one's life story: this is not how it really happened. In the view presented here, the adventurer gains a certain level of truth in retrospect. Again, when we put it in terms of our narrative identity, it is easy to see the appeal of Sartre's adjustment. We cannot have an identity if it does not have some kind of structure, and how we interpret the events of our lives in retrospect does genuinely change them.

It goes without saying that I don't call 'realizing an object' the mere fact of visualizing that object with more or less intense feelings. One realizes an object when that object's presence is given to us as a more or less essential modification of our being, and through that modification. To have an adventure isn't to visualize oneself having an adventure, but to be-in the adventure - which, as I showed in *La Nausée*, is impossible (WD 199)¹⁶².

160 'le rapport de mes ambitions de jeunesse à mon â mûr peut exister pour le Castor, par exemple. Mais pour moi non. Du même type, dirai-je, est cette « aventure » qui fit toujours l'aventurier au milieu des conjonctures les plus extraordinaires et qui est pourtant une catégorie essentielle de l'action humaine. J'ai semblé dire, dans *La Nausée*, qu'elle n'existait pas. Mas c'est ma fait. Il vaut mieux dire que c'est un irréalisable. L'aventure est un existant dont la nature est de n'apparaître qu'au passé à travers le récit qu'on en fait.' (WD^F 244).

161 The Beaver is a nickname of De Beauvoir.

162 'Il va de soi que je n'appelle pas « réaliser un objet » le simple fait de se représenter cet objet avec des sentiments plus ou moins vifs. On réalise un objet lorsque

If adventures are true in retrospect, and our adventures make up our life story, a true biography is indeed possible – a least when the subject of the biography is dead. This is something he seems to deny in *Nausea* when he says that there are no true stories whatsoever. In *Nausea*, the life story is made in retrospect and is therefore imaginary, it is actively created by consciousness at the moment of narration. It is based on reality, on events that took place, but it creates an imaginary plot from these events. The position that Sartre defends in *The Transcendence of the Ego* is much closer to that of the *War Diaries*. Reflected experiences show us the transcendent Self, but only in reflection. Adventures are the structures of experience, but only in hindsight. A life lived and a life recounted are still two very different things, but the life story is not imaginary, it is something which genuinely exists. Sartre clarifies that not only are adventures solely characteristic of past events, but also that they only acquire this structure through our act of recounting them. This again stresses that adventures are indeed narratives.

Thus, Sartre, in the voice of Roquentin, denied the existence of adventures in *Nausea* because one cannot live one's life as if one were recounting it. This is expanded upon by the notion of the biographical illusion, which adopts a broader perspective that links all the episodes of one's life that are recounted in an adventure that encompasses one's whole life. Nevertheless, Sartre does add that adventures become real in retrospect, which does not alter his views towards the future, but it does change how he views the past. Once experienced and recounted, we cannot but see a certain structure in our lives, to see episodes building up to other episodes, and to see events in the light of other events.

In both cases, our life story is to a large extent contingent. If our life story is merely a fiction projected upon the past, this means that there is no necessary way in which the narrated events fit together. Even if we adhere to the view of the *War Diaries*, if we admit that the adventurous structure of the past is true for a specific moment of narration and that a certain structure is perceptible in the event, we must nevertheless admit that it can still change in the light of future events. Hence, a past event that could be considered life changing at a certain moment may lose its apparent significance in light of other events. In other words, the way in which past events fit together may be "true" at a certain moment, this is still not their necessary structure as it may still change. A final judgment about the way in which the moments of a life fit together in a life story can only be

la présence de cet objet nous est donnée comme une modification plus ou moins essentielle de notre être et à travers cette modification. Avoir une aventure ce n'est pas se représenter qu'on a une aventure mais être-dans l'aventure - ce qui, je l'ai montré dans *La Nausée*, est impossible.' (WDF 245).

given after the death of a person. This fits with what is perhaps the main lesson to be drawn from Sartre's thought concerning narrative selfhood: one can never live one's life as if the end of the story is already known.

Conclusion

Sartre's early theories of selfhood emerge from his general project of radicalizing the notion of intentionality and thereby eradicating all contents from consciousness. This also means that there is no Self in consciousness. Sartre's first goal, which he sets out to achieve in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, is to show that consciousness can indeed function without a Self. It can do so because it makes itself an individuated unity through inner time-consciousness. What remains is an impersonal subjectivity, rather than a transcendental Subject. This leads Sartre to a criticism of the cogito: unreflected consciousness does not contain an I that does the thinking. Both the subjective and objective facets of selfhood are attributed to the objective Self, which is transcendent and only appears through reflection. Thus, there is no Self inside of consciousness, only outside of consciousness: it is an object that appears in the world.

This object is described by Sartre as the "virtual locus of unity" of reflected actions, states and qualities, which are themselves bundles of reflected experiences. When we reflect on experiences, a Self appears in hindsight as the ideal unity of those experiences, and it cannot be understood apart from them. It is an abstract centre of unity which only appears upon reflection, but it is nonetheless not a fiction: we cannot but look back upon our lives and see this Self as if it were behind our experiences, although it was not there at the time when these experiences happened.

This discrepancy between looking back on one's life in hindsight, on the one hand, and living it in the present, on the other, is the guiding thread of Sartre's thought concerning narrative identity. When we look back upon our life and when we recount it, the events seem to have a certain "necessary" structure to them, with one event leading to another and thus gaining its significance only in light of the later event. Although our past may appear to us as such, we can never live our lives as if present events automatically lead up to other events. We simply do not know the outcome of our lives yet and therefore cannot live our lives as if they are going to unfold like an adventure. He provides more a more nuanced account of this view in his *War Diaries*, where it comes closer to that of *The Transcendence of the Ego*. Our life stories do have a plot, but it only comes into being when the past is recounted in the present. Thus, a life lived and a life reflected and recounted are not the same. The Self is something that only emerges in reflection and in the stories we tell about ourselves, but it

is not something that exists in the present or in the future: the Self only exists in hindsight.

Chapter 2

The Fundamental Project

The second period of Sartre's oeuvre contains his most famous philosophical works, the magnum opus *Being and Nothingness* and the lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism*. Because the latter lacks the philosophical substance of the former, we will focus mostly on *Being and Nothingness*. We will also make use of some other texts, primarily the *War Diaries* and the lecture entitled "Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self". This period of Sartre's career represents a tumultuous time in his life, which greatly influenced his thinking about human beings. Having been drafted into the French army to serve as a meteorologist in the Second World War, he was subsequently captured and spent time as a prisoner of war. Upon his release, he started a resistance group. Moreover, the period after the war saw Sartre's rise to prominence as one of the world's most well-known public intellectuals.¹⁶³ Sartre's experiences in the Resistance, in particular, would lead him to focus on that idea for which he is perhaps best known: freedom (IT 33-34). This emphasis on freedom changes Sartre's views on subjectivity and selfhood: while subjectivity becomes almost synonymous with freedom, his conception of selfhood comes to focus on the future rather than on the past, that is, on that which we are not yet, but strive to become through our choices.

The first part of the chapter will be devoted to subjectivity and objectivity, although this time we will start with objectivity, move to negativity and turn to subjectivity thereafter. We first discuss the "ontological proof" that Sartre presents in the Introduction to *Being and Nothingness*. Although Sartre already provided a literary articulation of his main ideas about objecthood in *Nausea*, he gives a more rigorous, ontological argument for the superfluous Being of objects here. This forms the basis of Sartre's phenomenological realism, which grounds the reality of objects outside of consciousness while studying them from a phenomenological point of view. In the second section, we will turn to nothingness. Although Sartre already discussed non-existent objects in the context of imagination in his earlier works, the topic of nothingness takes central stage in this period of Sartre's works because of its close association with freedom. We will discuss Sartre's notion of "negativity" and how this

¹⁶³ For more information about Sartre's rise to fame, see: (Beart 2015).

is related to the “for-itself”, the Being of consciousness. In the third section, we will see how the interplay of these two conceptions of Being and his notion of nothingness creates a meaningful world. We will then focus on Sartre’s idea that every conscious experience is part of a free project.

In the second part, we will again begin our investigation with an analysis of the Introduction to *Being and Nothingness*, but focusing this time on the ontological substantiation of the other kind of Being, the for-itself. Although this notion already plays a role in the first part of this chapter, it is here that Sartre touches upon the unity and individuality of the for-itself and with that subjective selfhood. The central notions are the prereflective cogito and “consciousness (of) self”. In light of the latter notion, in particular, we will also focus on “Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self”. Afterwards, we will turn to the objective Self, focusing on the notion of ipseity as Sartre presents it in *Being and Nothingness* and the *War Diaries*. We will also devote some attention to the notions of bad faith and the gaze of the Other, as they act as a sort of counterpart to the objective Self that Sartre has in mind. Finally, we will turn to narrative identity, focusing on Sartre’s method of existential psychoanalysis as presented near the end of *Being and Nothingness*. We will focus on the two central notions, the fundamental project and the original choice. Since this method is applied in *Baudelaire* and *Saint Genet*, we will also touch upon these works. We will also see how it relates to Sartre’s acclamation of humanism in *Existentialism is a Humanism*.

Part I Phenomenological Ontology

1. The Search for Being

In order to fully understand Sartre’s position concerning subjectivity and objectivity in *Being and Nothingness*, we need to know something about the method of the book. In the Introduction to *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre commits himself to the task of grounding Being as it exists outside of consciousness, from the point of view of consciousness. The subtitle of the book, *An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, already promises this: a theory of how things are, an ontology, from the point of view of how they appear (to consciousness), a phenomenology. The method of the book has been characterized in different ways, such as literary (Leak 2011) and dialectical (Welten 2007).¹⁶⁴ I will add a different interpretation

164 The scholars who defend the literary interpretation downplay the phenomenological character of the book. Although the reader can of course be persuaded by a vivid description, there would be no reason for Sartre to make his arguments

of the methodology of the book to this list, namely a deductive one. To put it simply, Sartre starts from a general axiom, which he calls ‘the phenomenon’ and which corresponds to his conception of intentionality. From this principle, he deduces that there needs to be something which appears and something to which it appears. Hence, the two absolute forms of Being are deduced: being-in-itself and being-for-itself.¹⁶⁵ Once these have been established, the main task of the book becomes an inquiry into their relation to one another. As these two forms of Being designate the things in the world and the individual who is aware of them, the main questions of the book become:

1. What is the synthetic relation that we are calling ‘being-in-the-world’?
 2. What must man and the world be, in order for this relation between them to be possible?
- In truth, each of these questions enters into the other,

phenomenologically sound. Many of Sartre’s examples use the Husserlian toolbox, primarily the phenomenological reduction, thus indeed showing that they are not (mere) examples but analyses.

The fact that his method in *Being and Nothingness* is not dialectical can be easily ascertained by contrasting it with *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*, a manifestly dialectical work. As we will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, Sartre defines dialectics as the idea that ‘a negation of a negation can be an affirmation’. This idea does not play a role in *Being and Nothingness*, at least not as a leading methodological principle (CDR 15). Sartre makes this clear in the interview with M. Rybalka & O. Puccian, where he claims that he discovered the dialectic after writing *Being and Nothingness*: ‘I had known what the dialectic was ever since the Ecole Normale, but I did not use it. There are passages that somewhat resemble the dialectic in *L’Être et le Néant*, but the approach was not dialectical in name and I thought there was no dialectic in it’ (IRP 9). In a dialectical method, which, as we will see, Sartre deploys in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, oppositions are overcome in a synthesis. This means that the theory changes throughout its development, as positions that are overcome are no longer simply “true”. This is definitely not the case for *Being and Nothingness*, where all positions that are developed hold for the remainder of the book. This becomes especially clear when Sartre returns to the topic of the two modes of Being in the conclusion. They are not overcome dialectically, but are elaborated upon in the book. Although I do not agree with his statement that Sartre’s systematic approach is not deductive, a more elaborate exposition of the method of *Being and Nothingness* can be found in Catalano’s commentary on the work. See: (Catalano 1985, x-xii).

165 It is interesting to note that although Sartre does not deploy a dialectical method, he does add these Hegelian terms to his predominantly Husserlian terminology. Although the terms “in-itself” and “for-itself” come from Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel 1977), Sartre would later state that he had never studied Hegel when writing *Being and Nothingness*: ‘I knew of him through seminars and lectures, but I didn’t study him until much later, around 1945’ (IRP 9). The seminars and lectures Sartre is referring to are those by Kojève, which were later published in English as *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (Kojève 1980).

and we cannot hope to answer them separately (BN 34)¹⁶⁶.

Apart from the phenomenological starting point of his ontological system, phenomenological analysis also plays another key role in the book. Whenever Sartre's reasoning is at a crossroads where multiple options can be deduced from the position arrived at, a phenomenological analysis provides the next step. The two prime examples of this concern the two other main categories of Sartre's system, which also correspond to two of his most well-known phenomenological analyses. The notion of nothingness is found at the first crossroads, where Sartre proves by the absence of Pierre that nothingness cannot be reduced to the two forms of Being. The other important juncture arises where Sartre asks the same question concerning the existence of others. The example of the person looking through a keyhole and getting caught proves that another category needs to be added to the system: 'being-for-the-Other' (BN 402)¹⁶⁷. We will encounter both examples again in this chapter. For now, this methodological exposition allows us to delve deeper into Sartre's ontological system.

The being of the phenomenon

As has been said, Sartre takes the phenomenon as the starting point for his enquiry:

The phenomenon remains relative because its 'appearing' necessarily implies someone to whom it appears. [...] It does not indicate, behind its shoulder some true being, a being that is itself the absolute. It is what it is absolutely, because it is disclosed *as it is* (BN 2)¹⁶⁸.

The phenomenological account of a phenomenon eliminates a dualism between a thing as it appears and the thing itself. If consciousness does not contain anything and is nothing but a relationship to the object, then it follows that the object as it appears is in fact the object and not something which exists within consciousness, a mental representation or something in that regard.

166 '1° Quel est le rapport synthétique que nous nommons l' 'être-dans-le-monde ? 2° Que doivent être l'homme et le monde pour que le rapport soit possible entre eux ? A vrai dire, les deux questions débordent l'une sur l'autre et nous ne pouvons espérer y répondre séparément.' (BN^F 38).

167 'l'être-pour-autrui' (BN^F 336).

168 'Relatif, le phénomène le demeure car le « paraître suppose par essence quelqu'un à qui paraître. [...] Il n'indique pas, par-dessus son épaule, un être véritable qui serait, lui, l'absolu. Ce qu'il est, il l'est absolument, car il se dévoile comme il est. Le phénomène peut être étudié et décrit en tant que tel, car il est *absolument indicatif de lui-même*.' (BN^F 12).

In a letter to De Beauvoir, Sartre calls his position ‘an absolute realism’ which ‘is very sensibly organized around the idea of Nothingness or pure event at the core of being’ (QM 43)¹⁶⁹. It ‘allows a *true* transcendence of realism and idealism’ (QM 30)¹⁷⁰. Both of these other theories are rooted in the idea that things as we are aware of them only exist within consciousness.

This position leads to a new kind of dualism however, the dualism between ‘the finite and the infinite’ (BN 4)¹⁷¹. Although the phenomenon is an appearance of the object, it never reveals the object in full but always from a certain point of view. It gives us an “*Abschattung*” of the object. The example Sartre gives in *The Imaginary* of the dice is once again illuminating: when we see a six-sided dice, we only ever see three of its sides at most. This means that each object can manifest itself in an infinite series of appearances. If the series was finite, it would mean that appearances could not reappear, or could all be given at once. Sartre considers both ideas to be absurd. We have an appearance that is finite, which refers to a series of appearances that is infinite. This series is ‘connected by a *principle* that does not depend on my whim’ (BN 4)¹⁷². The various profiles of the dice are not connected by me, but they somehow refer to one another in a series which is infinite. The principle of the series is itself an essence: every manifestation of the dice may be different, but they are all appearances of the same thing. This essence however, is also not something that is somehow *behind* the series: ‘an essence, understood as the principle of a series, is no more than the connection between appearances – which means it is itself an appearance’ (BN 3)¹⁷³. It is implied by the very fact that we can deduce an essence that it can appear to us. This does not mean that we actively join the different manifestations together, it is given in two appearances of the same object that it is the same object. When I walk around a table, I do not actively judge that the table is the same table, but this is itself manifested. The essence, regarded as the principle of the series, is therefore not the product of a synthesis of manifestations, but ‘that which permits me to join’ them (CS 120)¹⁷⁴. This means that each thing has an individual essence and that the notion should not be understood in the universal manner of a genus or species, but in a specific manner. It is the appearance of the principle of the series of manifestations of an object, though it does not exhaust the

169 ‘un néo-réalisme absolu’ ‘c’est ordonné très sagement autour de l’idée de Néant ou événement pur ai sein de l’être’ (QM^F 56).

170 ‘elle permet de transcender *pour de bon* le réalisme et l’idéalisme’ (QM^F 41).

171 ‘du fini et de l’infini’ (BN^F 13).

172 ‘est liée par une *raison* qui ne dépend pas de mon bon plaisir’ (BN^F 13).

173 ‘l’essence comme raison de la série n’est que le lien des apparitions, c’est-à-dire elle-même une apparition’ (BN^F 12).

174 ‘ce qui me permet de joindre’ (CS^F 145).

totality of the series, which would be impossible.

Thus, as the essence is also an appearance, instead of dividing an object into the appearance on the one hand and the true object on the other, the object is present both inside and outside of its appearance:

This new opposition, between the ‘finite and the infinite’ or, better still, ‘the infinite within the finite’, replaces the dualism of being and appearing: what appears is in effect only an *aspect* of the object, and the object is entirely *within* this aspect and entirely outside of it. Entirely *inside*, in so far as it manifests itself *in* this aspect: it is indicated as the structure of the appearance, which is at the same time the principle of the series. Entirely *outside*, because the series itself never appears, and cannot appear (BN 4)¹⁷⁵.

This means that there is nothing *behind* the series of appearances which supports its Being. The appearance or the series of appearances must hence have itself a kind of Being. Sartre adds that this ‘being of the phenomenon’ is something else than the ‘phenomenon of being’ as it is disclosed in experiences such as nausea (BN 5-6)¹⁷⁶. If it is indeed true that through such fundamental experiences we can encounter Being as a whole, Being still appears to us and is hence itself a phenomenon. This again begs the question of the Being of this phenomenon. A phenomenological analysis of Being cannot answer the question, as it can only study Being in so far as it appears. Thus, we must instead search for its ‘transphenomenal foundation’ (BN 7)¹⁷⁷. That does not mean that Being is *behind* the phenomena (we saw that the phenomenon cannot mask Being), nor that the phenomenon is an appearance that refers to a being distinct from it (the phenomenon has Being *qua appearance*, i.e. it indicates itself on the foundation of Being). The preceding considerations imply that, although the Being of the phenomenon is coextensive with the phenomenon, its appearing does not fully exhaust it.

We have now arrived at the point where Sartre explicitly diverges from

175 ‘Cette opposition nouvelle, le « fini et l’infini », ou mieux « l’infini dans le fini », remplace le dualisme de l’être et du paraître : ce qui paraît, en effet, c’est seulement un *aspect* de l’objet et l’objet est tout entier *dans* cet aspect et tout entier hors de lui. Tout entier *dedans* en ce qu’il se manifeste *dans* cet aspect : il s’indique lui-même comme la structure de l’apparition, qui est en même temps la raison de la série. Tout entier *dehors*, car la série elle-même n’apparaîtra jamais ni ne peut apparaître.’ (BN^F 13).

176 ‘phénomène d’être’ ‘l’être du phénomène’ (BN^F 14).

177 ‘un fondement qui soit transphénoménal’ (BN^F 16).

phenomenological analysis and turns towards speculative enquiry. He maintains that there are two options for the transphenomenal Being of appearance: either it is something on the side of subjectivity or it is something on the side of objectivity. Both are true as they ultimately correspond to the distinction between being ‘*for itself*’ and being ‘*in itself*’ (BN 27)¹⁷⁸. In the remainder of this section, we will first explore how subjective transphenomenal Being is not enough to account for the Being of the phenomenon and then show how Sartre argues for an objective transphenomenal Being.

Up until this point in his reasoning, Sartre notes, he implicitly held to an ‘ontological realism that is wholly incompatible with the very idea of *appearance*’ (BN 8)¹⁷⁹. Why not say that ‘the being of an appearance is its appearing?’ (BN 8)¹⁸⁰. This position amounts to a form of idealism which is best captured in George Berkeley’s dictum, “*esse est percipi*” or “to be is to be perceived”. If we follow this path, we need to account for a transphenomenal Being on the side of consciousness.

We will not go into the full argument concerning this transphenomenal Being of consciousness here, because it concerns the prereflective cogito or consciousness (of) self. As these are forms of self-consciousness, they will be discussed in the second part of this chapter when we examine subjective selfhood. A cursory overview shall suffice for the time being. Sartre again begins from his definition of intentionality: ‘all consciousness is consciousness *of* something. In other words, there is no [act of] consciousness that does not *posit* a transcendent object or, if you prefer consciousness has no ‘content’ (BN 9)¹⁸¹. Although we experience a thing, we do not exhaust it fully as we can always discover new things aspects of it, or in other words ‘an infinite process would be required to make an inventory of the total content of a thing’ (BN 9)¹⁸². This means that if the object only existed in consciousness, then there would be something of which we are not conscious inside of consciousness, which would contradict the principle of intentionality.

Nevertheless, if consciousness is *only* consciousness of its object, it would require a second act of consciousness to become aware of the first experience. As has been discussed in the previous chapter,

178 ‘*en soi*’ ‘*pour soi*’ (BN^F 32).

179 ‘ne manière de réalisme ontologique tout à fait incompatible avec la notion même d’*apparition*’ (BN^F 16).

180 ‘l’être de l’apparition c’est son apparaître ?’ (BN^F 16).

181 ‘Toute conscience [...] est conscience de quelque chose. Cela signifie qu’il n’est pas de conscience qui ne soit position d’un objet transcendant, ou, si l’on préfère, que la conscience n’a pas de « *contenu* »’ (BN^F 17).

182 ‘il faudrait un procès infini pour inventorier le contenu total d’une chose’ (BN^F 17).

this would lead to an infinite regress. Hence, consciousness is also conscious of itself. This self-consciousness is the transphenomenal Being of consciousness. In other words, consciousness exists *for itself*: 'it is a pure "appearance", where this means it exists only to the extent to which it appears' and 'it is precisely [...] because of this identity within it between its appearance and its existence, that it can be considered as the absolute (BN 16)¹⁸³.

Although Sartre has encountered an absolute form of Being, this mode of Being is not enough to account for the Being of phenomena. If we wanted to reduce the Being of a table, for example, to a 'synthesis of subjective impressions', we must still account for the fact that it appears as a table (BN 17)¹⁸⁴. We cannot account for the fact that we group certain manifestations to one object and other ones to another. Although the principle of a series of manifestations can appear to consciousness as essence, the fact that a series is a series needs to be accounted for. The reasons that the series cannot be reduced to consciousness has to do with 'relativity and passivity' (BN 18)¹⁸⁵. Sartre states that 'the mode of the *percipi* is *passive*' (BN 18)¹⁸⁶. Although he does not really elaborate on this claim, it is not difficult to accept that things which are perceived are encountered and do not act upon consciousness. Something is passive, according to Sartre, when it undergoes modification of which it is not the origin. This is the case when something appears, because the way in which it appears is relative to consciousness: it is because I walk around a table that its other side is made manifest. It does not decide to show a certain profile. However, the relation of passivity is always relative to the being that acts upon it. It can only act on something if this being supports action and hence exists on its own. Thus, Sartre states: 'From this it follows that passivity does not involve the very being of the passive existent: it is a relation between one being and another being' (BN 18)¹⁸⁷. The example Sartre gives of this is creation: I write a book, but once I have written it, it exists independently from me. I do not support its being once it has been created. The same is true for consciousness:

How much passivity should we attribute to perception, to knowledge? They are entirely active, entirely spontaneous. It is precisely because it is pure spontaneity, because nothing can bite into it, that consciousness

183 'c'est une pure « apparence », en ce sens qu'elle n'existe que dans la mesure où elle s'apparaît' 'c'est à cause de cette identité en elle de l'apparence et de l'existence qu'elle peut être considérée comme l'absolu' (BN^F 23).

184 'la synthèse d'impressions subjectives' (BN^F 24).

185 'Relativité et passivité' (BN^F 24).

186 'le mode du *percipi* est le *passif*' (BN^F 24).

187 'elle est une relation d 'un être à un autre être' (BN^F 25).

cannot act on anything (BN 19)¹⁸⁸.

Consciousness is pure activity, it is not a thing which acts but itself an act. It does not, however, act *on* the thing it is conscious of. A table is not altered in any way when I perceive it. Consciousness, although active, is therefore also passive in its relation to the perceived thing. This is of course based on the premise that we are talking about conscious acts that have existing things as their object, and not non-existent objects. This is why Sartre mentions perception and knowledge, and not, for example, imagination. We will return to non-existent objects in the next section. For now, Sartre has shown that because of relativity and passivity, the '*esse* of the phenomenon cannot be its *percipi*' or, in other words, that '[t]he transphenomenal being of consciousness cannot provide the foundation for the phenomenon's transphenomenal being' (BN 20)¹⁸⁹.

Being-in-itself

We have now seen that the being of phenomena cannot be reduced to subjectivity. What Sartre has thereby shown is that there must be a being outside of consciousness, on the side of objects:

Consciousness is consciousness *of* something: therefore transcendence is a constitutive structure of consciousness, which is to say that consciousness is born *bearing on* a being that it is not. Let us call this the ontological proof. [...] Naturally, this being is nothing other than the transphenomenal being of phenomena and not a noumenal being hiding behind them. Consciousness implies the being of this table, of this package of tobacco, of the lamp and more generally, the being of the world. Consciousness requires simply that the being of that which *appears* does not exist *only* in so far as it appears (BN 22-23)¹⁹⁰.

188 'Quelle est la part de passivité qu'on peut assigner à la perception, à la connaissance ? Elles sont tout activité, tout spontanéité. C'est précisément parce qu'elle est spontanéité pure, parce que rien ne peut mordre sur elle, que la conscience ne peut agir sur rien.' (BN^F 25).

189 'L'être transphénoménal de la conscience ne saurait fonder l'être transphénoménal du phénomène' (BN^F 26).

190 'La conscience est conscience *de* quelque chose : cela signifie que la transcendance est structure constitutive de la conscience ; c'est-à-dire que la conscience naît *portée sur* un être qui n'est pas elle. C'est ce que nous appelons la preuve ontologique. [...] Il est bien entendu que cet être n'est autre que l'être transphénoménal des phénomènes et non un être nouménal qui se cacherait derrière eux. C'est l'être de cette table, de ce paquet de tabac, de la lampe, plus généralement l'être du monde qui est impliqué par la conscience. Elle exige simplement que l'être de ce qui *apparaît* n'existe pas *seulement* en tant qu'il apparaît.' (BN^F 28-29).

We now have proof that the being of the phenomenon lies beyond consciousness. Although we cannot describe this being in full – for we would then, once more, encounter the phenomenon of being rather than the being of the phenomenon – we can describe its meaning (BN 24). What does it mean for a thing to exist?

Sartre gives three characteristics of the being of phenomena: being is itself, being is what it is and being is (BN 29). Although these sound similar and – especially in the case of the last one – obvious, Sartre is trying to convey something quite nuanced with these characteristics. The first one, the idea that being is itself, means that it is not created or otherwise rooted in something else (BN 26). If another being supported it, then this would itself need to exist, thus causing another infinite regress. It also follows that it is beyond passivity and activity, as we have seen that these are relational qualities and need to be supported by something existing. It is also beyond affirmation and negation, once again because something needs to exist prior to being affirmed.

The second characteristic, being is what it is, entails that it is also not a relation to itself, but that it completely coincides with itself. Although “it is what it is” may sound like a patent tautology, this is not the case according to Sartre. It is not, because consciousness does not coincide with itself and can instead be described as ‘being what it is not and not being what it is’ (BN 27)¹⁹¹. This means that it is ‘*massive*’, it has no parts or secret aspects (BN 28)¹⁹². Furthermore, ‘being is isolated in its being, and maintains no relationship with anything else’ (BN 28)¹⁹³. Of course, things may have a relationship to one another, but this does not affect their being. The fact that a lamp may rest on a table does not mean that the being of the lamp rests on the being of the table. This also means that being in itself is ‘full positivity’, it does not entail any alterity, ‘it never presents itself as *other* than some other being’ (BN 28)¹⁹⁴. We may judge this to be the case, but it does not entail this relationship *in itself*. The same goes for its temporality: we may judge something to exist no longer or to have come into being. This does not affect being itself, or, in other words, the fact that something no longer exists does not affect what the way in which it existed when it did. As such, it escapes temporality. We will return to this topic later.

The third and final characteristic is that being *is*. This aspect has to do with necessity. Being never entails necessity, as this would require

191 ‘il n’est pas et n’étant pas ce qu’il est’ (BN^F 32).

192 ‘*massif*’ (BN^F 32).

193 ‘l’être est isolé dans son être et qu’il n’entretient aucun rapport avec ce qui n’est pas lui’ (BN^F 32).

194 ‘Il est pleine positivité’ ‘il ne se pose jamais comme *autre* qu’un autre être (BN^F 33).

that it is derived from something else. It simply is and is therefore fully contingent. This is also opposed to the possible, as something which is possible is *not yet* and is therefore no being at all. For this last characteristic Sartre employs a terminology similar to that of *Nausea*:

Being-in-itself is never either possible or impossible; it *is*. Consciousness expresses this by saying – in anthropomorphic terms – that it is superfluous, which is to say that it is absolutely unable to derive it from anything, either from another being, or from something possible, or from a necessary law. Uncreated, without any reason for being or any relationship with another being, being-in-itself is superfluous for eternity (BN 28-29)¹⁹⁵.

Being is superfluous, it “overflows” any full explanation we try to give it. We cannot give a reason why being is what it is, because this would mean that we have to ground it on another being, which leads to the aforementioned infinite regress. Although we can describe some general characteristics of it, we cannot exhaust it, because it cannot in principle be demarcated.

These three characteristics of being-in-itself are prone to misinterpretation. Sartre’s argument is often taken to mean that, outside of consciousness, there is a single *monolithic* being-in-itself. It is important to discuss this reading as it interprets Sartre’s position too idealistically, which does not do justice to the arguments he presents. One of the most glaring examples of this line of interpretation can be found in Hazel Barnes’ translator’s introduction to the first English edition of *Being and Nothingness*. She describes the being of phenomena in the following manner:

It is a fullness of existence, a plenitude which can not possibly isolate one part so as to contrast it with another, or posit a whole over against its parts, or conceive a “nothing” in opposition to which it is “everything.” It is simply undifferentiated, meaningless massivity. Without consciousness there would not be a world, mountains, rivers, tables, chairs, etc.; there would be *only* Being. In this sense *there is no thing* without consciousness, but there is not *nothing*. Consciousness causes there to be things because it is itself nothing. Only through

195 ‘L’être-en-soi n’est jamais ni possible ni impossible, il est. C’est ce que la conscience exprimera – en termes anthropomorphiques – en disant qu’il est *de trop*, c’est-à-dire qu’elle ne peut absolument le dériver de *rien*, ni d’un autre être, ni d’un possible, ni d’une loi nécessaire. Incréé, sans raison d’être, sans rapport aucun avec un autre être, l’être-en-soi est de trop pour l’éternité.’ (BN^f 33).

consciousness is there differentiation, meaning, and plurality for Being (Barnes 1978, xx).

This interpretation clearly confuses the “being of the phenomenon” with the “phenomenon of being”.¹⁹⁶ It is true that when we describe being-in-itself, it is massive, a plenum, undifferentiated, etc. However, if we take this to mean that outside of experience there is a single monolithic being, we clearly make the mistake of searching for a being *behind* the appearance. Being-in-itself is the mode of being of things. A more precise description of how being relates itself to the things that are can be found in Sartre’s “Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self”. There he says:

[B]eing accompanies all the appearances of an object. It is not different in each of these appearances. The appearance does not disguise it, no more does it reveal it. If I cut this book into little pieces, if the fancy takes me, there will be as much being in each of the pieces as in the book. When I give it another form by burning it or in compiling from it, it will always have as much being in each of its manifestations. A division to infinity or a transformation will not reveal the book to me in a better way, nor will it hide it from me.

The being is something which I cannot grasp in its being, except as a phenomenon originating from the object which is presented. Being is that which makes the object appear. Each object is on a foundation of being. Each appearance has a being. But the being cannot in any case be reduced to appearance (CS 120)¹⁹⁷.

Appearance does not reveal being, because being is inexhaustible, and it does not reveal it, because it is not itself something separate from the thing that is. The being of each thing is massive and

196 Apart from the problematic interpretation of the being of the phenomenon, the idea that consciousness is itself nothing is also false. We will discuss this in the next section.

197 ‘l’être accompagne toutes les apparitions d’un objet. Il n’est pas différent dans chacune de ces apparitions. L’apparition ne le masque pas, mais ne le révèle pas non plus. Que je coupe ce livre en petits morceaux si la fantaisie m’en prend, il y aura autant d’être dans chacun des morceaux qu’a dans le livre. Lorsque je lui donne une autre forme en le brûlant ou en le compilant, il y aura toujours autant d’être dans chacune de ces manifestations. Une division à l’infini ou une transformation ne me révélera pas davantage le livre ou ne me le masquera pas. L’être est quelque chose que je ne peux pas saisir dans son être, sauf comme phénomène à partir de l’objet qui est présenté. L’être est ce qui fait que l’objet paraît. Chaque objet est sur fondement d’être. Chaque apparaît à un être. Mais l’être en aucun cas ne peut se réduire à un apparaître.’ (CS^F 145-146).

undifferentiated, but to say that this amounts to a single being-in-itself violates Sartre's own reasoning throughout the whole introduction of *Being and Nothingness*. He explicitly states that we should not 'understand being as *one* undifferentiated self-affirmation' (BN 27)¹⁹⁸. If being in-itself would be a single monolith, two of the arguments discussed above would not make any sense. The first is that the essence as the principle of the series does not depend on my whim, and the second is that a series is not a mere synthesis of subjective impressions, because we would have no reason to group certain impressions into a series.

However, there is a reason that this interpretation is as prevalent as it is, which stems from the fact that at a conceptual level, it is true that consciousness is involved in the demarcation of objects. Sartre hints at this when he says that being 'escapes temporality' (BN 28)¹⁹⁹. It is because there is a temporal consciousness present that it can be said that something was and that it is now no longer. This takes place at what can be described as the conceptual level or the level of meaning Barnes mentions. This is something Sartre discusses much later in *Being and Nothingness*, in a section called 'On Determination as Negation' (BN 255)²⁰⁰. Here he states that 'its [the for-itself] presence is what makes it the case that *there is* a 'this one' rather than a 'that one' (BN 255)²⁰¹. We can compare things to each other and we can determine where one thing ends and another one begins *at this level*. Sartre describes this idea in a nutshell in "What is Literature?":

Each of our perceptions is accompanied by the consciousness that human reality is a 'revealer', that is, it is through human reality that 'there is' being, or, to put it differently, that man is the means by which things are manifested. It is our presence in the world which multiplies relations. It is we who set up a relationship between this tree and that bit of sky. Thanks to us, that star which has been dead for millennia, that quarter moon, and that dark river are disclosed in the unity of a landscape. It is the speed of our car and our aeroplane which organizes the great masses of the earth. With each of our acts, the world reveals to us a new face. But, if we know that we are directors of being, we also know that we are not its producers. If we turn away from this landscape, it will sink back into its dark permanence. At least, it will sink back; there is no one mad enough to

198 'l'être est *une* affirmation de soi indifférenciée' (BN^F 32).

199 'il échappe à la temporalité' (BN^F 33).

200 'de la détermination comme négation' (BN^F 216).

201 'c'est sa présence qui fait qu'il y a un « celui-ci plutôt qu'un « celui-là »' (BN^F 216).

think that it is going to be annihilated. It is we who shall be annihilated, and the earth will remain in its lethargy until another consciousness comes along to awaken it. Thus, to our inner certainty of being ‘revealers’ is added that of being inessential in relation to the thing revealed (WL 48)²⁰².

We distinguish things from one another, as is the case when we say that something is *this* rather than *that*; and we group things together, as is the case when we say that the moon and the river are part of the same landscape. If we take Sartre’s reasoning concerning the in-itself into account, we cannot but conclude that this takes place at the conceptual rather than the ontological level.

For example, it is through our presence that there are things which we consider trees that can be differentiated from their grouping as a forest or from the elements that constitute them, such as branches and leaves. However, this demarcation is contingent and takes place at the level of meaning. The best example of this is the one from *Nausea* that we discussed in the previous chapter, where Sartre distinguishes a tree, a root and the movement of a branch as different things. We determine that a tree is a thing, a branch is a part of this thing and a movement is something which a part of this thing does. This has to do, however, with how we relate to the plenum of things, which consists of all these things. That which consciousness introduces into the world is the element that cannot be part of being-in-itself: nothingness. Saying that there is this, rather than that, is not merely a question of what there is, but also a question of what there is not. We will turn extensively to this topic in the next section. For the moment it suffices to say that the plenum of things is undifferentiated, but it is therefore not *one*, that is, it is not

202 ‘Chacune de nos perceptions s’accompagne de la conscience que la réalité humaine est « dévoilante », c’est-à-dire que par elle « il y a » de l’être, ou encore que l’homme est le moyen par lequel les choses se manifestent ; c’est notre présence au monde qui multiplie les relations, c’est nous qui mettons en rapport cet arbre avec ce coin de ciel ; grâce à nous cette étoile, morte depuis des millénaires, ce quartier de lune et ce fleuve sombre se dévoilent dans l’unité d’un paysage ; c’est la vitesse de notre auto, de notre avion qui organise les grandes masses terrestres ; à chacun de nos actes le monde nous révèle un visage neuf. Mais si nous savons que nous sommes les détecteurs de l’être, nous savons aussi que nous n’en sommes pas les producteurs. Ce paysage, si nous nous en détournons, croupira sans témoins dans sa permanence obscure. Du moins croupira-t-il : il n’y a personne d’assez fou pour croire qu’il va s’anéantir. C’est nous qui nous anéantissons et la terre demeurera dans sa léthargie jusqu’à ce qu’une autre conscience vienne l’éveiller. Ainsi à notre certitude intérieure d’être « dévoilants » s’adjoint celle d’être inessentiels par rapport à la chose dévoilée.’ (WL^F 90).

a single monolithic Being. Outside of us is a sheer endless plurality of undifferentiated things.

At this stage, there are two *modes* of Being: the for-itself of consciousness and the in-itself of things. As has been said, we will return to the “ontological proof” of the first mode of Being in the second part of this chapter. For the moment, it is important to understand that Sartre’s neo-realism is rooted in his phenomenological ontology: starting from the phenomenological conception of phenomena, we can establish that there are two kinds of transphenomenal Being, one on the side of subjectivity, and one on the side of objectivity. Consciousness is relational in nature because of its intentional structure, and its mode of existence is therefore dependent on the primordial existence of the plurality of things which exist in-themselves.

2. Nothingness

As the title of the book suggest, Sartre’s ontology is not just an enquiry into Being. A full account of reality should incorporate *everything* and therefore also *nothing*. The question of how the two forms of Being introduced by Sartre relate to one another is the first confrontation with nothingness (BN 33-37). The very fact that we can pose a question reveals to us that there is a nothingness: there is something for which there is *no* answer yet and there is a possibility that the answer will be *negative*. Hence, we need to account for those objects which do not exist, in other words, we have to account for nothingness.

Negatities

Sartre’s introduction of the theme of nothingness is a perfect example of his phenomenologico-ontological deductive method in action. We have arrived at a theoretical juncture. The question is whether the newly introduced element of the ontological system, nothingness, can be reduced to the elements introduced earlier, the two forms of Being. The option of reducing nothingness to being-in-itself can be immediately eliminated insofar as it is ruled out by the very definition of this form of Being, which *is* as a fullness of Being (BN 37). The remaining option is whether it can be reduced to the for-itself, in the form of a negative judgment:

I think there are fifteen hundred francs in my wallet and I find only thirteen hundred francs in it: that does not mean, we might be told, that experience has revealed the non-being of fifteen hundred francs but simply that I counted thirteen one-hundred franc notes. The negation, strictly speaking, should be imputed to me: it appears

only at the level of my act of judgment, through which I make a comparison between the result I anticipated and the result I obtained. In this way, negation is only a quality of judgment (BN 37)²⁰³[.]

If it is true that negation only exists in the form of a negative judgment of consciousness, it does not have a reality of its own and can be reduced to the for-itself. It can then be reduced to the Being of consciousness and has no proper non-being. Thus, we are tasked with the following question: 'is negation, as the structure of a judicative proposition, the origin of nothingness or, on the contrary, is nothingness, as a structure of reality, the origin and foundation of negation?' (BN 38)²⁰⁴. As already noted, when an important question like this is encountered in the text, its resolution is provided by means of a phenomenological analysis. It is at this point that we find one of Sartre's most famous phenomenological analyses, the absence of Pierre in the café.

I am meeting Pierre at four o'clock. I arrive a quarter of an hour late: Pierre is always punctual; will he have waited for me? I look at the room, the customers, and I say 'He is not here.' Is there an intuition of Pierre's absence or does negation only intervene alongside judgment? At first sight it seems absurd to talk here of 'intuition', just because there cannot be an intuition of *nothing*, and Pierre's absence is this nothing. Yet popular consciousness bears witness to this intuition. Do we not say, for example, 'I saw right away that he was not there'? In this case is the negation simply displaced? Let us take a closer look.

Certainly, the café by itself, with its customers, its tables, its seats, its mirrors, its light, its smoke-filled atmosphere, and the sounds that fill it – of voices, saucers bumping against each other, footsteps – is a fullness of being. And all the particular intuitions I may have are fulfilled by these smells, these sounds, these colours, all of them phenomena that have a transphenomenal being. Similarly, Pierre's current presence in a place I do not know is also a plenitude of being. We seem to have

203 'Je pense qu'il y a quinze cents francs dans mon portefeuille et je n'en trouve plus que treize cents : cela ne signifie point, nous dira-t-on, que l'expérience m'ait découvert le non-être de quinze cents francs mais tout simplement que j'ai compté treize billets de cent francs. La négation proprement dite m'est imputable, elle apparaîtrait seulement au niveau d'un acte judicatoire' (BN^F 40).

204 'la négation comme structure de la proposition judicative est-elle à l'origine du néant – ou, au contraire, est-ce le néant, comme structure du réel, qui est l'origine et le fondement de la négation ?' (BN^F 41).

found plenitude everywhere (BN 41)²⁰⁵.

One thing that is important in Sartre's analysis is the difference between an intuition and a judgment. When we see a chair, we do not see something nondescript and *judge* that it is a chair. This would require two acts of consciousness, seeing and judging. This, however, is not the case. Even when we are mindlessly coping with the world around us, we experience things that have a certain meaning for us.

Sartre continues to analyse the situation in the bar by discussing the difference between figure and background. When we perceive an object, this object is always either figure or ground, depending on the focus of my attention. For example, when I am in a café and I am looking for a free chair, all the other things become the ground for chairs. In the case of Pierre, when I look around the café searching for him, objects detach themselves from the ground only to quickly collapse back into it. This is especially the case for faces: when I see someone who vaguely looks like Pierre, my attention is grabbed and when I quickly realize that it is not Pierre, my attention shifts to someone else. This what Sartre calls the 'first nihilation', the process of intuitively realizing none of the figures is the one you are looking for (BN 42)²⁰⁶. Within the situation, he is not: no thing or face turns out to be Pierre. After the first nihilation comes the realization that he is really not there.

[I]n fact Pierre is not there. That does not mean that I discover his absence in some precise part of the building. In fact Pierre is absent from the *whole* café: his absence freezes the café in its evanescence; the café remains as *ground*; it continues to present itself to my merely marginal attention as an undifferentiated totality; it slides away, in pursuit of its nihilation. Only it makes itself the

205 'J'ai rendez-vous avec Pierre à quatre heures. J'arrive en retard d'un quart d'heure : Pierre est toujours exact ; m'aura-t-il attendu ? Je regarde la salle, les consommateurs et je dis : « Il n'est pas là. » Y a-t-il une intuition de l'absence de Pierre ou bien la négation n'intervient-elle qu'avec le jugement ? A première vue il semble absurde de parler ici d'intuition puisque justement il ne saurait y avoir intuition de *rien* et que l'absence de Pierre est ce rien. Pourtant la conscience populaire témoigne de cette intuition. Ne dit-on pas, par exemple : « J'ai tout de suite vu qu'il n'était pas là » ? S'agit-il d'un simple déplacement de la négation ? Regardons-y de plus près. Il est certain que le café, par soi-même, avec ses consommateurs, ses tables, ses banquettes, ses glaces, sa lumière, son atmosphère enfumée, et les bruits de voix, de soucoupes heurtées, de pas qui le remplissent, est un plein d'être. Et toutes les intuitions de détail que je puis avoir sont remplies par ces odeurs, ces sons, ces couleurs, tous phénomènes qui ont un être transphénoménal. Pareillement la présence actuelle de Pierre en un lieu que je ne connais pas est aussi plénitude d'être. Il semble que nous trouvions le plein partout' (BN^F 43-44).

206 'première néantisation' (BN^F 44).

ground for a specific figure, it bears it everywhere in front of it, it presents me with it everywhere and this figure, sliding constantly between my gaze and the real, solid objects of the café, is precisely a perpetual dissolution: it is Pierre, detaching himself as a nothingness against the ground of the nihilation of the café. What is given to intuition, therefore, is a flickering of nothingness: it is the nothingness of the ground, whose nihilation calls for, and requires, the appearance of the figure; and it is also the figure, a nothingness that slides in the guise of *nothing* across the surface of the ground. Therefore the foundation for the judgment 'Pierre is not here' is clearly my intuitive apprehension of a double nihilation (BN 42)²⁰⁷.

After the first nihilation a second nihilation arises: none of the figures that appear in the café are Pierre, this causes all the objects in the café to become the ground of a figure which is precisely the absence of Pierre as an object. This figure is in a certain sense an object that is present in the current situation, although what is present is the absence of Pierre: 'his absence is an objective fact that I have *discovered*, and it presents itself as a synthetic relation between Pierre and the room in which I am looking for him: Pierre's absence *haunts* this café' (BN 42)²⁰⁸.

There is a difference between Pierre's absence, which I can intuitively grasp, and the absence of unrelated other people. It is evidently true that if I were to go to a café right now, Sartre would not be there. Yet I do not encounter this fact intuitively within the situation. It is precisely a judgment: the relationship between Sartre and the café in Nijmegen is 'judged' by me and 'is merely *thought*'. It does not take place in the café.

207 'justement Pierre n'est pas là. Cela ne veut point dire que je découvre son absence en quelque lieu précis de l'établissement. En fait Pierre est absent de *tout* le café ; son absence fige le café dans son évanescence, le café demeure *fond*, il persiste à s'offrir comme totalité indifférenciée à ma seule attention marginale, il glisse en arrière, il poursuit sa néantisation. Seulement il se fait fond pour une forme déterminée, il la porte partout au-devant de lui, il me la présente partout et cette forme qui se glisse constamment entre mon regard et les objets solides et réels du café, c'est précisément un évanouissement perpétuel, c'est Pierre s'enlevant comme néant sur le fond de néantisation du café. De sorte que ce qui est offert à l'intuition, c'est un papillotement de néant, c'est le néant du fond, dont la néantisation appelle, exige l'apparition de la forme, et c'est la forme – néant qui glisse comme un *rien* à la surface du fond. Ce qui sert de fondement au jugement : « Pierre n'est pas là », c'est donc bien la saisie intuitive d'une double néantisation.' (BN^F 44).

208 'l'absence de Pierre [...] c'est un fait objectif, à présent, que cette absence, je l'ai *découverte* et elle se présente comme un rapport synthétique de Pierre à la pièce dans laquelle je le cherche : Pierre absent *hante* ce café' (BN^F 45).

Yet, although non-being is directly encountered and can therefore not be reduced to being-for-itself, it does come into the world because of our expectations: 'Evidently, non-being always appears within the limits of a human expectation. It is because I expect to find fifteen hundred francs that I find *only* thirteen hundred' (BN 38)²⁰⁹. The peculiar thing is that the absence of Pierre in Sartre's analysis is not a matter of subjective judgment, *precisely because of Sartre's subjective presence*: 'I was expecting to see Pierre, and my expectation has made Pierre's absence *happen* as a real event concerning this café' (BN 42)²¹⁰. Negative objects 'originate in a human being's act, or expectation or project; all of them underline an aspect of being as it appears to a human being engaged within the world' (BN 60)²¹¹. Sartre calls these negative objects which inhabit the world around us 'negatities' (BN 56)²¹².

It is important to note that the category of negatities is broader than that of the imaginary that we discussed in the previous chapter. Imaginary objects are, as Sartre put it, a form of 'nothingness', but Sartre posited all imagined objects as a negation of the complete world. This is quite a difference from the view that Pierre's absence takes place as an event within the setting of the café. The notion of negatities that haunt the world allows Sartre to expand upon his notion of nothingness. He lists the following examples: 'absence, alteration, alterity, repulsion, regret, absent-mindedness, etc.' (BN 56)²¹³.

In any case, Sartre's analysis of the intuitive apprehension of Pierre's absence has shown that non-being cannot be reduced to Being: 'There is a transphenomenality of non-being, as of being', and this transphenomenality is the nothingness that "haunts" the world in the form of negatities (BN 41)²¹⁴. We now have a much more complete picture of the ontology Sartre defends in this period of his oeuvre. Up until this point in his reasoning, Sartre has shown that there are three transphenomenal grounds, namely two forms of Being and one form of nothingness. The question remains, how the latter relates to the former two.

209 'Il est évident que le non-être apparaît toujours dans les limites d'une attente humaine. C'est parce que je m'attends à trouver quinze cents francs *que* je n'en trouve que treize cents.' (BN^F 41).

210 'je m'attendais à voir' Pierre et mon attente a fait arriver l'absence de Pierre comme un événement réel concernant ce café' (BN^F 45).

211 'Elles tirent leur origine d'un acte de l'être humain, ou d'une attente ou d'un projet, elles marquent toutes un aspect de l'être en tant qu'il apparaît à l'être humain qui s'engage dans le monde' (BN^F 58).

212 'négatités' (BN^F 56).

213 'l'absence, l'altération, l'altérité, la répulsion, le regret, la distraction' (BN^F 55).

214 'Il y a une transphénoménalité du non-être comme de l'être' (BN^F 43).

Self-presence

Although nothingness has its own place in the world, it is still related to Being. We already touched upon this when Sartre said that non-being only arises within the expectations of consciousness. Furthermore, a negativity is always a negation of a being. The fact that Pierre is absent requires Pierre to exist.

[B]eing can be conceived of without any need of nothingness, and we can exhaustively explore the notion of being without finding in it the slightest trace of nothingness. But, on the contrary, the nothingness *that is not* can have only a borrowed existence: it takes its being from being (BN 50)²¹⁵[.]

Being-in-itself can function without nothingness. We saw in the definition of this mode of Being that this is the case. It is difficult to put into words, which is apparent from the fact that Sartre says that nothingness has existence. It would be more appropriate to say that nothingness' place in reality and in the ontological system can only be derived from something which does really exist. We have thus arrived at a new question: if nothingness cannot be reduced to Being and cannot be derived from being-in-itself, then where does it come from? (BN 57-58).

At first glance, it seems that the answer to this question is already given in Sartre's reasoning. It is consciousness that makes negativities possible through its expectations and which can negate existing objects: the question remains, however, how consciousness is able to do this. Being-for-itself has to have itself some kind of relationship to nothingness: 'the being through which nothingness comes to the world cannot *produce* nothingness while remaining indifferent to this production' (BN 58)²¹⁶. Nothingness cannot come from 'any fully positive being', because there would be nothing that enables it to generate non-being. Thus, Sartre states:

The being through which nothingness arrives in the world is a being in which, in its being, the nothingness of its being is in question: *the being through which*

215 'l'être n'a nul besoin de néant pour se concevoir et qu'on peut inspecter sa notion exhaustivement sans y trouver la moindre trace du néant. Mais au contraire le néant *qui n'est pas* ne saurait avoir qu'une existence empruntée : c'est de l'être qu'il prend son être' (BN^F 51).

216 'l'être par qui le néant vient au monde ne peut *produire* le néant en demeurant indifférent à cette production' (BN^F 57).

nothingness comes to the world must be its own nothingness
(BN 58-59)²¹⁷.

Being-for-itself can be neither a full positivity nor something which is negated as negatities are. The latter cannot be the case because negatities require something that is negated and therefore the question of where negation itself comes from recurs.

Where, then, does nothingness come from? The answer to this question is rooted in the structure of intentionality itself. If a conscious act is nothing but consciousness of its object, then this means that it does not coincide with its object, but is also not something entirely separate from it. In the previous chapter we have discussed the idea that, according to Sartre, all consciousness must also be conscious of itself if it is not to fall into infinite regress. We will return to how Sartre further develops this argument in detail in the second part of this chapter.

Although Sartre uses the word “itself” in the names of both modes of Being, the in-itself does not have a relationship with itself. Because it is a plenitude of Being, it fully coincides with itself: ‘at the limit of self-coincidence, the “itself” vanishes, to make way for identical Being. The *itself* cannot be a property of being-in-itself’ (BN 126)²¹⁸. Truly having a relationship to oneself requires a certain distance without real separation from oneself. Only a subject is able to have this kind of relationship with himself:

[T]he subject cannot *be* himself because, as we have seen, where something coincides with itself, the ‘itself’ disappears. But neither can he *not be* himself, since the ‘himself’ points to the subject himself. The ‘himself’ represents therefore an ideal distance, within the subject’s immanence, in relation to himself, a way of *not being his own coincidence*, of escaping from identity even while positing it as unity – in short, a way of being in a constantly unstable equilibrium between identity as a state of absolute cohesion without any trace of diversity, and unity as the synthesis of a multiplicity. We may call this *self-presence*. The law of being of the for-itself as the ontological foundation of consciousness is to be itself in

217 ‘L’être par qui le néant arrive dans le monde est un être en qui, dans son être, il est question du néant de son être : *l’être par qui le néant vient au monde doit être son propre néant.*’ (BN^F 57).

218 ‘A la limite de la coïncidence avec soi, en effet, le soi s’évanouit pour laisser place à l’être identique. Le *soi* ne saurait être une propriété de l’être-en-soi’ (BN^F 112).

the form of self-presence (BN 126)^{219, 220}.

Within a single conscious experience, there is this self-presence. An example that Sartre gives of such a presence is believing: to have an experience of believing something and to be conscious of this belief at the moment I am having the experience are one and the same thing (BN 125). Yet, it is not fully one and the same thing in the sense that it coincides with itself: 'About this table here, I can say purely and simply that it is *this* table. But if I am talking about my belief, I cannot confine myself to saying that it is a belief: my belief is a conscious (of) belief' (BN 123)²²¹. The conscious experience is both a belief and a presence to this belief. Sartre calls this the 'mirror-mirroring structure' of consciousness (BN 125)²²².

Thus, self-presence is the relationship consciousness has to itself. Yet, we cannot say that the two sides of consciousness are separated by something, as this would violate the principle of intentionality and the idea that consciousness is empty and fully translucent:

The introduction of an external and qualified element from outside [...] would break its unity and destroy its translucency; there would be something in consciousness that it was not conscious of, something that did not itself exist as consciousness. The separation that separates belief from itself cannot be grasped, or even conceived on its own (BN 127)²²³.

219 'le sujet ne peut être soi, car la coïncidence avec soi fait, nous l'avons vu, disparaître le soi. Mais il ne peut pas non plus *ne pas être* soi, puisque le soi est indication du sujet lui-même. Le *soi* représente donc une distance idéale dans l'immanence du sujet par rapport à lui-même, une façon de *ne pas être sa propre coïncidence*, d'échapper à l'identité tout en la posant comme unité, bref, d'être en équilibre perpétuellement instable entre l'identité comme cohésion absolue sans trace de diversité et l'unité comme synthèse d'une multiplicité. C'est ce que nous appellerons la *présence à soi*. La loi d'être du *pour-soi*, comme fondement ontologique de la conscience, c'est d'être lui-même sous la forme de présence à soi.' (BN^F 113).

220 Although Sartre uses the term subject here, he is not talking about the subject as something transcendental, but rather the *subjective* side of a single conscious experience.

221 'De cette table, je puis dire qu'elle est purement et simplement *cette* table. Mais de ma croyance je ne puis me borner à dire qu'elle est croyance : ma croyance est conscience (de) croyance' (BN^F 110).

222 'structure du reflet-reflétant' (BN^F 112).

223 'Introduire [...] un élément qualifié extérieur [...], ce serait en briser l'unité, en détruire la translucidité ; il y aurait alors dans la conscience quelque chose dont elle ne serait pas conscience, et qui n'existerait pas en soi-même comme conscience. La séparation qui sépare la croyance d'elle-même ne se laisse ni saisir ni même concevoir à part.' (BN^F 114).

The fissure that is implied by self-presence cannot truly be something: 'if we now ask: *what* separates the subject from himself, we are forced to admit that it is *nothing*' (BN 127)²²⁴. We now have an answer to Sartre's question concerning the nature of nothingness: 'the for-itself must be its own nothingness. The being of consciousness, as consciousness, is to exist *at a distance from itself*, as self-presence, and this zero distance that being bears within its being is Nothingness' (BN 128)²²⁵. Consciousness exists in such a way that it carries within itself its own nothingness. While the in-itself simply *is*, 'consciousness is what it is not and is not what it is' (BN 117)^{226, 227}. It does not coincide with itself: it is nothing but consciousness of an object, but it does not coincide with this object; it is conscious of itself but does not coincide with this self-consciousness. The fact that consciousness carries nothingness within itself is what allows it to nihilate Being and therefore cause negatities to arise.

Not only is a single experience endowed with its own nothingness, the stream of consciousness also has this structure. As discussed in the previous chapter, inner time-consciousness links our experiences together through time. But what separates these experiences? The answer is once again nothing. If they were truly separated, we would no longer have a continuous stream of experiences; if they were not separated, there would be a single non-temporal experience (BN 64).

We now have an even more complete picture of Sartre's ontology: there are two transphenomenal modes of Being and a transphenomenal nothingness. This transphenomenal nothingness is an aspect of the transphenomenal Being of consciousness, namely its self-presence. An integral part of Sartre's ontological system is nothingness. The world does not only consist of object which *are* but also objects which *are not*. These negatities haunt the world and are encountered as objective events yet can only exist because there are conscious beings with a certain disposition towards the world. This is possible because conscious beings carry within themselves their own nothingness, in the form of self-presence rather than self-coincidence.

224 'qu'est ce qui sépare le sujet de lui-même, nous sommes contraints d'avouer que ce n'est rien' (BN^F 113).

225 'L'être de la conscience, en tant que conscience, c'est d'exister à distance de soi comme présence à soi et cette distance nulle que l'être porte dans son être, c'est le Néant.' (BN^F 114).

226 'la conscience [...] est ce qu'elle n'est pas et n'est pas ce qu'elle est' (BN^F 106).

227 This phrasing is found in Kojève's reading of Hegel, who characterizes the I in the following manner: 'not to be what it is (as static and given being, as natural being, as "innate character") and to be (that is, to become) what it is not' (Kojève 1980, 5). See: (Van Haute 1989, 93-94).

3. Freedom

We now know how Being and nothingness relate to each other, which allows us to see how the two forms of Being relate to each other. If subjectivity is nothing but an intentional relationship to the world, which is not even always aware of this fact, what can be said about the relationship between consciousness and the world? If human beings do not coincide with themselves, how do they relate to the world around them besides from merely being conscious of it? The answer to these questions is that because consciousness does not coincide with anything, it can be characterized as freedom:

[F]reedom, as the condition required for nothingness's nihilation, cannot be a *property* that belongs, along with others, to the essence of a human being. Moreover, we have already noted that, for man, the relation of existence to essence is not the same as for worldly things. Human freedom precedes man's essence and makes it possible; the human being's essence is in suspense in his freedom. It is therefore impossible to distinguish freedom, in the sense in which we refer to it, from human-reality's *being*. Man does not exist *first* in order to be free *later*; rather, there is no difference between man's being and his *being-free* (BN 61)²²⁸.

As we have seen, consciousness does not coincide with itself, and, for that reason, it has no definitive set of characteristics. This means that it can change how it relates to the things around it, which entails that it is not fully determined by those things. Therefore, it is free.²²⁹ As Sartre maintains, this does not mean that there is a human being who *has* freedom as a mental faculty, it means that conscious experience itself *is* freedom: the freedom to escape the rigidity and self-coincidence of the in-itself.

This theme of freedom preceding essence is also where existentialism gets its name from. Although Sartre does not use the term anywhere

228 'la liberté comme condition requise à la néantisation du néant n'est pas une *propriété* qui appartiendrait, entre autres, à l'essence de l'être humain. Nous avons déjà marqué d'ailleurs que le rapport de l'existence à l'essence n'est pas chez l'homme semblable à ce qu'il est pour les choses du monde. La liberté humaine précède l'essence de l'homme et la rend possible, l'essence de l'être humain est en suspens dans sa liberté. Ce que nous appelons liberté est donc impossible à distinguer de *l'être* de la réalité-humaine. L'homme n'est point *d'abord* pour être libre *ensuite*, mais il n'y a pas de différence entre l'être de l'homme et son « être libre ».' (BN^F 59-60).

229 Sartre attributes this conception of freedom to Descartes and the Stoics (BN 61). In the essay "Cartesian Freedom", originally published as a preface to a selection of texts by Descartes, he characterizes Descartes as a thinker of nothingness akin to Heidegger (CF 196-197).

in *Being and Nothingness*, in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, he would say that ‘existence precedes essence’ for a human being (EH 22)²³⁰. Existence here refers to the in-itself as free consciousness.

Actions and ends

In order to see what this freedom entails, Sartre asks the question ‘What is it to *act*?’ (BN 566)²³¹. We will know in what way consciousness is free when we see how it practically relates to the things in the world. ‘The point we should note at the outset is that an action is, by definition, *intentional*’ (BN 569)²³².

An action is a type of behaviour in which a person tries to achieve a certain goal. Someone who inadvertently does something has not acted. This does not mean, however, that we know the consequences of our actions, it means that we know the *intended* consequences (BN 569-570). In order to intend something, one must posit an end. For example, wanting to write a book entails positing the end of the finished book. The book does not exist at the moment however, which means that it is a non-being. This goes for every end: if one needs to act, it means that one somehow has to change the world as it is, in light of what it is not. Even the preservation of something is only possible in light of a future in which it is no longer, thus aiming to preserve something means positing a negative goal: a future in which the thing does not cease to exist.

Therefore, ‘an action is a projection of the for-itself towards what is not, and nothing that is can ever determine by itself what is not’ (BN 572)²³³.²³⁴ Actions are by definition free because they involve a negative being: an end which implies a state of the world which is not:

There is no circumstance or way in which the past on its own can give rise to *an act*, i.e. the positing of an end,

230 ‘l’existence précède l’essence’ (EH^F 21).

231 ‘Qu’est-ce qu’*agir*?’ (BN^F 471).

232 ‘Il convient, en effet, de remarquer d’abord qu’une action est par principe *intentionnelle*’ (BN^F 477).

233 ‘Car un acte est une projection du pour-soi vers ce qui n’est pas et ce qui est ne peut aucunement déterminer par lui-même ce qui n’est pas’ (BN^F 479-480).

234 The terms “project” and “projection”, which play key roles in *Being and Nothingness*, stem from Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1996, 136). Sartre did not study *Being and Time* in detail until he was finished with Husserl, which roughly coincides with the time he started writing *Being and Nothingness*: ‘I could come to Heidegger only after I’d exhausted Husserl’ (WD 183). The influence of Heidegger on *Being and Nothingness* is essential which Sartre acknowledges in the *War Diaries*, when he says that Heidegger put him on the right track by showing him that ‘there was nothing beyond the project whereby human reality realized itself’ (WD 324).

in whose light, thrown back on it, it is seen. [...] In fact, once we attribute to consciousness this negative power in relation to the world and itself, once nihilation becomes an integral part of the *positing* of an end, we have to acknowledge – at the indispensable and fundamental condition of any action – the freedom of the being who acts (BN 573)²³⁵.

Nevertheless, the idea that acting always involves breaking free from reality seems to contradict the idea that actions have reasons and motives. It may be the case that one freely posits a goal, but one has a reason for doing so and this reason is given by the circumstances one is in. However, we can only detect reasons in light of ends.

Sartre gives the example of a clumsy smoker who inadvertently blows up a powder keg and a worker charged with dynamiting a quarry (BN 568). In the first case, the person has not acted, according to Sartre's definition of the term, because events simply happened without real reason. In the second case, the person has acted, and his reason for acting is that he was told by his supervisor to do so. We can only attribute this reason to his action because we know the result of his action and can work back from this to the reason. A reason 'is the objective grasp of a determinate situation in so far as this situation is revealed in the light of a specific end as being able to be used as a means to achieve this end' (BN 586)²³⁶. The projecting of ends precedes reasons, and not the other way around. As in the case of negatities, the presence of the for-itself changes the objective state of the world.

The counterpart of a reason is a motive, which is 'a subjective fact' (BN 586)²³⁷: 'It is the collection of desires, emotions and passions that drive me to perform a certain act' (BN 586)²³⁸. For example, the quarry worker has a motive for complying with his supervisor's demand. He might want to get paid, he might be ambitious, wanting to be a better worker, or he might just like blowing things up. Whatever the objective reason, it seems there needs to be a subjective motive to answer the question *why* the reason is "obeyed"

235 'En aucun cas et d'aucune manière, le passé par lui-même ne peut produire *un acte*, c'est-à-dire la position d'une fin qui se retourne sur lui pour l'éclairer. [...] En effet, dès lors qu'on attribue à la conscience ce pouvoir négatif vis-à-vis du monde et d'elle-même, dès lors que la néantisation fait partie intégrante de la *position* d'une fin, il faut reconnaître que la condition indispensable et fondamentale de toute action c'est la liberté de l'être agissant.' (BN^F 480).

236 'la saisie objective d'une situation déterminée en tant que cette situation se révèle, à la lumière d'une certaine fin' (BN^F 491).

237 'un fait subjectif' (BN^F 491).

238 'C'est l'ensemble des désirs, des émotions et des passions qui me poussent à accomplir un certain acte' (BN^F 491).

and hence *is* the reason for the act.

However, Sartre argues, the distinction between the two is based on a wrong conception of consciousness. If we conceive of consciousness as intentionality, we cannot conceive of pure desires, emotions and passions that drive us. They are always directed at an object: I desire a cup of coffee, for example. The quarry worker's desire to get paid and his obedience cannot be seen apart from each other. Hence, 'the motive is [...] nothing but the apprehension *of* the reason' (BN 589)²³⁹.

Thus, the question why we freely posit the ends that we do cannot be answered in a way that diminishes the free character of our actions: 'the reason, the motive and the end are the three indissoluble terms in the bursting forth of a living and free consciousness, projecting itself towards its possibilities' (BN 589)²⁴⁰.

Although we cannot identify the motives "behind" actions, this does not mean that we must conceive of 'freedom as a series of unpredictable upheavals' (BN 593)²⁴¹. Sartre's conception of freedom does not entail gratuitousness or the ability to choose literally anything: 'each of my acts, even the smallest, is wholly free [...]; but that does not mean that it can be *anyhow*, or even that it is unpredictable' (BN 594)²⁴². In order to explain this, Sartre gives the example of someone who is hiking:

I have gone on an excursion with some friends. After several hours of walking, I am growing tired, and eventually my fatigue becomes oppressive. At first I resist and then suddenly I let myself go: I give in; I throw my bag down on the side of the road, and I drop down beside it. I will be reproached for my action, with the implication that I was free, which means not only that nothing and nobody determined my action, but also that I could have resisted my fatigue, done as my fellow-travellers did, and waited for my rest until we reached our stop. I will defend myself by saying that I was *too* tired (BN 594-595)²⁴³.

239 'le mobile n'est rien autre que la saisie du motif' (BN^F 493).

240 'le motif, le mobile et la fin sont les trois termes indissolubles du jaillissement d'une conscience vivante et libre qui se projette vers ses possibilités et se fait définir par ces possibilités' (BN^F 493).

241 'la liberté comme une série d'à-coups capricieux' (BN^F 497).

242 'chacun de mes actes, fût-ce le plus petit, est entièrement libre [...]; mais cela ne signifie pas qu'il puisse être *quelconque*, ni même qu'il soit imprévisible' (BN^F 498).

243 'Je suis parti en excursion avec des camarades. Au bout de plusieurs heures de marche ma fatigue croît, elle finit par devenir très pénible. Je résiste d'abord et puis, tout à coup, je me laisse aller, je cède, je jette mon sac sur le bord de la route et je me

Freely chosen ends do not exist in isolation, they exist in relation to other freely chosen ends. The fact that I am plagued with fatigue cannot by itself be used to explain why I sit down, as the others may be just as tired as I am. When I compare my fatigue to that of my companion, he says that he likes his fatigue as conquering it gives him a feeling of accomplishment (BN 596-597). 'Thus', Sartre concludes, 'my companion lives his fatigue within a larger project that is a trusting surrender to nature' (BN 597)²⁴⁴. My actions and their ends can only be explained in light of other ends, and in this case, I do not have a larger project of surrendering to nature. Sartre continues his analysis of the hike:

There is no doubt that I could have done otherwise, but that is not the problem. We should instead formulate it like this: could I have done otherwise without markedly changing the organic totality of projects that I am, or would the fact of resisting my fatigue, rather than remaining a mere local and accidental modification of my behaviour, be possible only with a radical transformation of my being-in-the-world (BN 595)²⁴⁵[.]

While all our actions have their own projected ends, they form a totality which Sartre calls the 'fundamental choice' or 'fundamental project' (BN 604, 615)²⁴⁶. This choice is not a deliberate one – though deliberation can exist against the background of this choice – yet it is conscious (BN 604). The fundamental choice 'is one and the same as the consciousness that we have of ourselves' (BN 604)²⁴⁷. We can interpret this by saying that because our experiences of choosing are part of the same stream of consciousness, we also have awareness of the other choices that influence the situation we are in. This is what Sartre means by the organic totality of my projects: my choices cannot be reduced to external motives, nor can they be viewed as unpredictable, because phenomenological evidence shows us that

laisse tomber à côté de lui. On me reprochera mon acte et l'on entendra par là que j'étais libre, c'est-à-dire non seulement que rien ni personne n'a déterminé mon acte, mais encore que j'aurais pu résister à ma fatigue, faire comme mes compagnons de route et attendre l'étape pour prendre du repos. Je me défendrai en disant que j'étais *trop* fatigué.' (BN^F 498).

244 'Ainsi la fatigue de mon compagnon est vécue dans un projet plus vaste d'abandon confiant à la nature' (BN^F 500).

245 'Il ne fait pas de doute que j'eusse pu faire autrement, mais le problème n'est pas là. Il faudrait plutôt le formuler ainsi : pouvais-je faire autrement sans modifier sensiblement la totalité organique des projets que je suis, ou bien le fait de résister à ma fatigue, au lieu de demeurer une pure modification locale et accidentelle de mon comportement, ne peut-il se produire qu'à la faveur d'une transformation radicale de mon être-dans-le-monde' (BN^F 498).

246 'choix fondamental' 'projet fondamental' (BN^F 506, 515).

247 'Il ne fait qu'un avec la conscience que nous avons de nous-même' (BN^F 506).

they are not.

The precise way in which this fundamental choice is part of our identity is much more intricate. We will return to the question of how our choices relate to one another and how they relate to our identity in some detail in the next part of this chapter. For now, concerning the nature of consciousness, Sartre concludes that because our choices can only be explained by a fundamental choice, 'to choose, one has to be conscious and, to be conscious, one has to choose. Choice and consciousness are one and the same thing' (BN 605)²⁴⁸. We are free because our consciousness is self-presence and hence entails its own nothingness, which allows it to break away from the in-itself. This allows us to posit ends and act in light of these ends. The choices we subsequently make can be related to each other in the form of a fundamental choice. This works both ways, however: we act in light of our fundamental choice, and since every conscious experience contains nothingness within it, it is also a choice. Thus, every conscious act gives the world meaning in light of posited ends:

[T]he world necessarily appears to us as we are; indeed, it is by surpassing it towards ourselves that we make the world appear the way it is. We choose the world – not in its in-itself construction, but in its meaning – by choosing ourselves (BN 606)²⁴⁹.

The situation

Although every experience is a free choice, it is still bound to its circumstances. We have already seen that to posit ends one needs to access the world as it is in light of what it is not. Hence, freedom is always situated. 'The *situation* [is] a joint project of the contingency of the in-itself and of freedom' (BN 636)²⁵⁰. We have already touched upon the notion of the situation in the previous chapter, but in *Being and Nothingness* Sartre gives a much more detailed description of it. His description is found in his development of the example of rock climbing:

There I am at the foot of this rock, which seems to me to be 'not climbable'. Therefore the rock appears to me

248 'Choix et conscience sont une seule et même chose' (BN^F 506).

249 'le monde nous apparaît nécessairement comme nous sommes ; c'est en effet en le dépassant vers nous-mêmes que nous le faisons apparaître tel qu'il est. Nous choisissons le monde - non dans sa texture en-soi, mais dans sa signification - en nous choisissant.' (BN^F 507-508).

250 'la situation, produit commun de la contingence de l'en-soi et de la liberté' (BN^F 533).

in the light of a projected rock-climbing – a secondary project whose meaning is given on the basis of an initial project which is my being-in-the-world. In this way the rock is outlined against the ground of the world as a result of the initial choice of my freedom. But, on the other hand, what my freedom is unable to decide is whether or not the rock ‘to be climbed’ will lend itself to my climbing. That forms part of the rock’s brute being. However, the rock can only manifest its resistance to the climbing if it is included by freedom within a ‘situation’ whose general theme is rock-climbing. For the walker who is simply passing by on the road, and whose free project is purely the aesthetic ordering of the landscape, the rock is encountered neither as climbable nor as not-climbable: it only manifests itself as beautiful or ugly. Thus it is impossible to determine in each particular case what is due to freedom, and what is due to the brute being of the in-itself (BN 637)²⁵¹.

Our projects give meaning to the world around us, but these meanings are given to the things that have a rigidity of their own. It is impossible to determine to what extent the world as we experience it is formed by us or by the things we encounter. The situation therefore ‘is an ambiguous phenomenon within which it is impossible for the for-itself to discern the contributions of freedom and the brute existent’ (BN 636)²⁵².

Situations do not arise out of nowhere, and they are determined by the facticity of the for-itself. Sartre provides details of the different factors that determine our place in the world, namely ‘my place, my past, my surroundings, my death and my fellow man’ (BN 711)²⁵³.

251 Me voilà au pied de ce rocher qui m’apparaît comme « non escaladable ». Cela signifie que le rocher m’apparaît à la lumière d’une escalade projetée–projet secondaire qui trouve son sens à partir d’un projet initial qui est mon être-dans-le-monde. Ainsi, le rocher se découpe sur fond de monde par l’effet du choix initial de ma liberté. Mais, d’autre part, ce dont ma liberté ne peut décider, c’est si le rocher « à escalader » se prêtera ou non à l’escalade. Cela fait partie de l’être brut du rocher. Toutefois le rocher ne peut manifester sa résistance à l’escalade que s’il est intégré par la liberté dans une « situation » dont le thème général est l’escalade. Pour le simple promeneur qui passe sur la route et dont le libre projet est pure ordination esthétique du paysage, le rocher ne se découvre ni comme escaladable, ni comme non-escaladable : il se manifeste seulement comme beau ou laid. Ainsi est-il impossible de déterminer en chaque cas particulier ce qui revient à la liberté et ce qui revient à l’être brut du pour-soi.’ (BN^F 533). I have followed the translator’s advice presented in a footnote on the same page and assume that Sartre’s ‘for-itself’ was meant to be ‘in-itself’. I have changed the translation accordingly.

252 ‘est un phénomène ambigu dans lequel il est impossible au pour-soi de discerner l’apport de la liberté et de l’existant brut’ (BN^F 533).

253 ‘ma place, mon passé, mes entours, ma mort et mon prochain’ (BN^F 593).

We will not dwell on the specifics of these analyses but instead focus on the conclusions that Sartre draws from them. In the first place, Sartre concludes that 'I am an existent *in the midst* of other existents. But I can only 'actualize' this existence in the midst of others, grasp the existents surrounding me as *objects*, and grasp myself as a *surrounded* existent, if I choose myself' (BN 711-712)²⁵⁴. He means that a situation cannot exist apart from the fundamental project of a for-itself, because the roles that the objects and other people play only get their meaning with regard to the goals and ends that are projected by the for-itself.

It follows that a situation cannot be comprehended from the outside, that is, from a point of view other than that of the people in it and their projected ends: the person wanting to climb the cliff or the person wanting to experience its beauty, these specific projects constitute the situation in question. Without a point of view from within the situation itself, the situation collapses into the in-itself. This causes the situation to have a peculiar relationship towards subjectivity and objectivity:

In consequence, we can describe the situation neither as objective nor as subjective, even though the partial structures of this situation (the cup I am using, the table on which I am leaning, etc.) may and must be strictly objective.

The situation cannot be *subjective*, because it is neither the sum nor the unity of the *impressions* that things make on us: it is *the things themselves*, and myself among things, because the only effect of my arising within the world as the pure nihilation of being is to make it the case that *there are* things, and it adds *nothing*. In this respect, the situation makes visible my *facticity*, which is to say the fact that things *are there*, simply as they are, without either the necessity or the possibility of being otherwise, and that I *am there*, among them.

But it cannot be *objective* either, in the sense of a pure given which the subject could observe without being in any way committed within the system thereby constituted (BN 712)²⁵⁵.

254 'Je suis un existant *au milieu* d'autres existants. Mais je ne puis « réaliser » cette existence au milieu d'autres, je ne puis saisir les existants qui m'entourent comme *objets* ni me saisir moi-même comme existant *entouré* ni même donner un sens à cette notion d' « *au milieu* » que si je me choisis moi-même' (BN^F 593).

255 'En conséquence, la situation ne saurait être dite ni objective ni subjective, encore que les structures partielles de cette situation (la tasse dont je me sers, la table sur

The situation is not subjective, because it is nothing more than how the subject relates to things, and it is not objective, because the meaning of these things only arises due to the presence of a subjective agent. Again, we should not understand Sartre's phrasing that my arising in the world causes there to be things in an idealistic manner. First of all, the sentence seems to contradict itself in saying that it is because of our arising in the world that there are things, yet that we do not add anything. Sartre's italics further emphasize that this is just a way of phrasing it: things *as we encounter them* only exist because we encounter them, and that is with meaning given to them by our projects. The situation is subjectivity 'lighting things up through its very surpassing' (BN 713)²⁵⁶. It is therefore not objective either, because we cannot comprehend it without subjectivity. An objective description of a situation would lose its meaning, and this meaning is what constitutes it.

The idea of the situation is what makes Sartre's conception of freedom such a radical one. The situation is neither freely chosen nor is it the constraint a free consciousness undergoes. Rather, 'it is a product of the constraint's illumination by the freedom that gives the constraint its meaning' (BN 715)²⁵⁷. Hence, we cannot say that one freely chooses the situation, as freedom does not produce it but manifests itself therein, so that the two exist simultaneously. The same goes for the objective obstacles that freedom faces, which also arise simultaneously with the situation. This reasoning is even applicable to our own body:

Even this disability that I suffer is something that, by the very fact of living it, I have taken up; I surpass it towards my own projects, I make of it the necessary obstacle for my being, and I cannot be disabled without choosing myself as disabled, which is to say choosing the way in which I constitute my disability (as 'intolerable', 'humiliating', 'to be concealed', 'to be revealed to

laquelle je m'appuie, etc.) puissent et doivent être rigoureusement objectives.

La situation ne saurait être *subjective*, car elle n'est ni la somme ni l'unité des *impressions* que nous font les choses : elle est *les choses elles-mêmes* et moi-même parmi les choses ; car mon surgissement dans le monde comme pure néantisation d'être n'a d'autre effet que de faire qu'*il y ait* des choses et n'y ajoute *rien*. Sous cet aspect, la situation trahit ma *facticité*, c'est-à-dire le fait que les choses *sont là* simplement comme elles sont, sans nécessité ni possibilité d'être autrement, et que je *suis là* parmi elles.

Mais elle ne saurait non plus être *objective*, au sens où elle serait un pur donné que le sujet constaterait sans être nullement engagé dans le système ainsi constitué.' (BN^F 593).

256 'éclairant les choses par son dépassement même' (BN^F 594).

257 'l'éclairément de la contrainte par la liberté qui lui donne son sens de contrainte' (BN^F 596).

everyone', 'an object of pride', 'the justification of my failures', etc.) (BN 440)²⁵⁸.

Every situation is as free as any other, or, in other words, no situation is any more or less free than any another (BN 713). 'The slave in chains is free *in order to break them*; in other words, the very meaning of his chains will appear to him in the light of the end he has chosen: to remain a slave or to risk the worst in order to emancipate himself from slavery' (BN 714)²⁵⁹. Sartre's conclusion can be summarized as follows: if the free nihilating structure of our consciousness always puts us in a situation coloured by the ends we project, then there is no situation in which we are not free.²⁶⁰

The situation helps us to further define the for-itself. Sartre has started from the idea of intentionality as an empty relationship towards an object and is now able to give a more precise characterization of what this entails. He states that 'being-in-situation defines human-reality, by accounting at the same time for its *being-there* and its *being-beyond*' (BN 713)²⁶¹. Consciousness is directed towards an objective outside of itself, and hence it is "there", it exists within its surroundings. However, because it is a relationship and therefore does not coincide with itself, it is able to nihilate and transcend the situation. This constitutes its being-beyond the surroundings, which allows it to posit ends and thereby give meaning to the surroundings, which in turn can be transcended.

Thus, Sartre's conception of freedom is what allows him to bridge the gap between the for-itself and the in-itself. This answers the main question of *Being and Nothingness* that we cited at the beginning of this chapter: what is being-in-the-world and what must man and world be in order for this to be possible? The answer is: human beings and world can only exist in a *situation*, which is made possible by the freedom of man: 'there is freedom only *in a situation*, and

258 'Même cette infirmité dont je souffre, du fait même que je vis, je l'ai assumée, je la dépasse vers mes propres projets, j'en fais l'obstacle nécessaire pour mon être et je ne puis être infirme sans me choisir infirme, c'est-à-dire choisir la façon dont je constitue mon infirmité (comme « intolérable », « humiliante », « à dissimuler », « à révéler à tous », « objet d'orgueil », « justification de mes échecs etc.)' (BN^F 368).

259 'L'esclave dans les chaînes est libre *pour les briser* ; cela signifie que le sens même de ses chaînes lui apparaîtra à la lumière de la fin qu'il aura choisie : rester esclave ou risquer le pis pour s'affranchir de la servitude' (BN^F 594).

260 Sartre's radical conception of freedom was regarded by many to be highly problematic. He distanced himself from these views later: 'I [...] was truly scandalized. I had written: "Whatever the circumstances, and wherever the site, a man is always free to choose to be a traitor or not. ..." When I read this, I said to myself: it's incredible, I actually believed that!' (IT 33-34).

261 'l'être-en-situation définit la réalité-humaine, en rendant compte à la fois de son être-là et de son être-par-delà' (BN^F 594).

there is a situation only through freedom' (BN 638)²⁶². We can only understand objects in a meaningful way because subjectivity posits goals and thereby gives them meaning and we can understand subjectivity only in its relation to surrounding objects and other people. The latter will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

Preliminary conclusion

In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre lays out an ontological system that is centred around the interplay of subjectivity and objectivity. Taking the conception of intentionality that he also propagated in his early works as his starting point, he grounds a system that entails two forms of Being and two forms of nothingness. Being falls into two modes. The in-itself is characterized by self-coincidence. Because consciousness is itself no container, yet can experience objects which transcend their manifestations in a series, there needs to be something outside of consciousness. This Being of things is irreducible to anything else but is the ground for all objects. The other mode of Being, the for-itself, is the Being of consciousness that is characterized by self-presence, which means that it does not coincide with itself. The for-itself is conscious of its object and also conscious of itself, otherwise it would cease to be a fully transparent consciousness.

Nothingness in turn is encountered as an object in the form of negatities, which are negative objects that we encounter in the world around us, such as absences and distances. These negatities make their appearance because of the predisposition of a subjective entity. The origin of these "nothingnesses" can be traced back to being-for-itself: because it is self-presence and does not coincide with itself, it contains within itself its own nothingness. Hence, "it is not what it is, and it is what it is not". As no being can exist within consciousness, the only thing that can separate consciousness from itself is nothingness.

Because consciousness carries this nothingness with it, it can break itself away from the world as it is. This means that it must be understood as freedom. The ability to nihilate Being makes it possible to posit goals and ends which do not (yet) exist and which enable purposeful action. The ends projected by a free consciousness in turn give meaning to objects, which are always encountered within a situation coloured by the project posited by free consciousness.

Thus, with regard to Being, the in-itself is the most fundamental mode in that it can exist without the for-itself. The for-itself, because it needs an object to be conscious of, can only exist because

262 'il n'y a de liberté qu'en *situation* et il n'y a de situation que par la liberté' (BN^f 534).

there is being-in-itself. With respect to nothingness, however, this relation is reversed: negativities, which are objective, can only exist because of the nihilating self-presence of the for-itself. In other words, for Being objectivity precedes subjectivity, for nothingness, subjectivity precedes objectivity. This is a purely formal description of how the modes of Being and nothingness are grounded; in reality, however, each one can only appear within situations in which it is fully entangled with the other. Objects arise only within the projects of consciousness, while consciousness can only project its ends on objects.

Part II Possibilities and Choices

4. Consciousness (of) Self

The general descriptions of subjectivity and objectivity given in the first part of this chapter have revealed to us three major themes that also play a central role in his theories of selfhood from this period. The first one is apodicticity: the fact that his ideas are strictly derived from each other and the fact that he wants to find absolute elements that ground his ontological system. The second one is negativity: Sartre is much less interested in the “things themselves” than in things which are not. The third theme, related to the second, is freedom. Because consciousness is characterized by a freedom so fundamental that it makes every conscious act a choice, all actions ultimately concern choosing oneself.

As has been said at the beginning of this chapter, in order to proceed we have to take a step back and return to the Introduction to *Being and Nothingness*. It is in the “proof” of the existence of the for-itself that we find the basis for Sartre’s theory of subjective selfhood. Although we have largely discussed the place of the for-itself in Sartre’s ontological system, we must take a closer look at this notion in order to turn to the topic of the unity and individuality of consciousness. The cornerstone of Sartre’s theory is, as already discussed, the notion of intentionality:

As Husserl showed, all consciousness is consciousness *of* something. In other words, there is no [act of] consciousness that does not *posit* a transcendent object or, if you prefer, consciousness has no ‘content’. [...] A table is not *in* consciousness, not even as a representation. A table is *in* space, beside the window, etc. [...] All consciousness is positional in that it transcends itself to reach an object, and it is exhausted by just this act of positing (BN 9-10)²⁶³.

Sartre’s conception of intentionality has not changed since his early works. Consciousness is consciousness of an object outside of itself and *nothing* else. We have already discussed the nothingness

263 ‘Toute conscience, Husserl l’a montré, est conscience *de* quelque chose. Cela signifie qu’il n’est pas de conscience qui ne soit *position* d’un objet transcendant, ou, si l’on préfère, que la conscience n’a pas de « contenu ». [...] Une table n’est pas *dans* la conscience, même à titre de représentation. Une table est *dans* l’espace, à côté de la fenêtre, etc. [...] Toute conscience est *positionnelle* en ce qu’elle se transcende pour atteindre un objet, et elle s’épuise dans cette position même[.]’ (BN^F 17-18).

of consciousness in the first part of this chapter. Let us now turn to the details of Sartre's reasoning concerning this form of self-consciousness and the conclusions that he draws from it.

The prereflective *cogito*

Apart from the more technical infinite regress argument for the idea that all consciousness is self-consciousness, Sartre gives a phenomenological description of what it entails to become self-conscious. The example he uses is again that of counting:

[A]ny positional consciousness of an object is at the same time a non-positional consciousness of itself. If I count the cigarettes which are in this case, my impression is that they are disclosing an objective property of this collection of cigarettes: *they are twelve*. This property appears to my consciousness as a property existing in the world. I may well have no positional consciousness at all of counting them. I do not 'know myself as counting'. [...] And yet, at the moment when these cigarettes disclose themselves to me as 'twelve', I am non-thetically conscious of my adding activity. Indeed, if I am questioned, if someone asks me: 'What are you doing?', I will reply immediately 'I am counting', and my reply does not aim only at the instantaneous [act of] consciousness that I can reach through reflection, but also at those [acts of] consciousness that have passed by without being reflected upon, which will forever remain *unreflected* in my immediate past (BN 11-12)²⁶⁴.

If self-consciousness were reflective, it would be impossible to perform an action that spans more than one experience, such as counting in this example. Sartre points out that if I am absent-mindedly counting, I do not have a positional experience of the act of counting or of a single moment of that act. If someone would ask me what I am doing, I would immediately reply that I am counting.

264 'toute conscience positionnelle d'objet est en même temps conscience non positionnelle d'elle-même. Si je compte les cigarettes qui sont dans cet étui, j'ai l'impression du dévoilement d'une propriété objective de ce groupe de cigarettes : elles sont douze. Cette propriété apparaît à ma conscience comme une propriété existant dans le monde. Je puis fort bien n'avoir aucune conscience positionnelle de les compter. Je ne me « connais pas comptant ». [...] Et pourtant, au moment où ces cigarettes se dévoilent à moi comme douze, j'ai une conscience non-thétique de mon activité additive. Si l'on m'interroge, en effet, si l'on me demande : « Que faites-vous là ? » je répondrai aussitôt : « Je compte », et cette réponse ne vise pas seulement la conscience instantanée que je puis atteindre par la réflexion, mais celles qui sont passées sans avoir été réfléchies, celles qui sont pour toujours *irréfléchies* dans mon passé immédiat.' (BN^F 19).

I would know that I am counting, without the need of a separate act of reflection. Furthermore, as counting requires a series of conscious experiences over time, my reply not only pertains to the instant the question was asked, but the past experiences too. It is important to note that Sartre talks about experiences in the immediate past, which accords with the idea of inner time-consciousness. One is not conscious of all the experiences one has ever had, but of those that still play a role in the current situation.

Up to this point, Sartre's reasoning has been very much in line with that of *The Transcendence of the Ego*. As we have seen in the previous chapter, in his early works Sartre also adopted the idea of prereflective self-consciousness. The conclusion that Sartre draws from it now, however, seems – at first sight – to be a very different one:

Thus, reflection lacks any kind of primacy in relation to reflected consciousness: it is not by means of the former that the latter is revealed to itself. On the contrary, non-reflective consciousness is what makes reflection possible: there is a prereflective *cogito*, which is the condition of the Cartesian *cogito* (BN 12)²⁶⁵.

Sartre's idea that the stream of consciousness unifies itself through inner time-consciousness was used in *The Transcendence of the Ego* as a criticism of the cogito. As we saw in the previous chapter, he held that there was no I in prereflective consciousness and hence no cogito. Now Sartre defends the very same view of prereflective self-consciousness and derives the existence of a prereflective cogito from this. What explains this change in his position? The answer can be found in "Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self", where he discusses the theme of the cogito in more detail. In this text he states:

[I]f we refuse to use the cogito as a first truth in the order of philosophical truths, it is necessary to take the whole of knowledge, matter, and form, as a guarantee of particular knowledge. In that case, the whole system is probable. The apodicticity disappears (CS 114)²⁶⁶.

Sartre's return to the cogito must be seen in light of the project and

265 'Ainsi n'y a-t-il aucune espèce de primat de la réflexion sur la conscience réfléchie : ce n'est pas celle-là qui révèle celle-ci à elle-même. Tout au contraire, c'est la conscience non-réflexive qui rend la réflexion possible : il y a un *cogito* préreflexif qui est la condition du *cogito* cartésien.' (BN^F 19).

266 'si nous refusons d'utiliser le « Cogito » comme vérité première d'un ordre philosophique des vérités, il faut prendre la connaissance tout entière, matière et forme, comme garantie de la connaissance singulière. En ce cas, le système entier est probable, l'apodicticité disparaît.' (CS^F 136).

methodology of *Being and Nothingness*, which aims at establishing a classical ontological system by means of phenomenology. Sartre introduces the notion as the transphenomenal Being of consciousness (BN 9). Thus, the reason he describes the prereflective cogito as a cogito concerns its status as a “first truth”. Just as Sartre grounds the Being of things in the absolute in-itself, so too does he ground the Being of consciousness in prereflective self-consciousness or, in other words, in the fact that it exists for-itself. This echoes Descartes’ experimental doubt, through which the cogito is discovered as the first truth. Without an apodictic fundament, systematic philosophy becomes impossible in Sartre’s view. In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre will say something similar:

[O]n the basis of a few wrongheaded notions, we are also charged with imprisoning man within his individual subjectivity. In this regard, too, we are exceedingly misunderstood. For strictly philosophical reasons, our point of departure is, indeed, the subjectivity of the individual – not because we are bourgeois, but because we seek to base our doctrine on truth, not on comforting theories full of hope but without any real foundation. As our point of departure there can be no other truth than this: *I think therefore I am*. This is the absolute truth of consciousness confronting itself. Any theory that considers man outside of this moment of self-awareness is, at the outset, a theory that suppresses the truth, for outside of this Cartesian *cogito*, all objects are merely probable, and a doctrine of probabilities not rooted in any truth crumbles into nothing. In order to define the probable, one must possess what is true. Therefore, in order for any truth to exist, there must first be an absolute truth (EH 40)²⁶⁷.

267 ‘on nous reproche encore, à partir de ces quelques données, de murer l’homme dans sa subjectivité individuelle. Là encore on nous comprend fort mal. Notre point de départ est en effet la subjectivité de l’individu, et ceci pour des raisons strictement philosophiques. Non pas parce que nous sommes bourgeois, mais parce que nous voulons une doctrine basée sur la vérité, et non un ensemble de belles théories, pleines d’espoir mais sans fondements réels. Il ne peut pas y avoir de vérité autre, au point de départ, que celle-ci: *je pense donc je suis*, c’est là la vérité absolue de la conscience s’atteignant elle-même. Toute théorie qui prend l’homme en dehors de ce moment où il s’atteint lui-même est d’abord une théorie qui supprime la vérité, car, en dehors de ce *cogito* cartésien, tous les objets sont seulement probables, et une doctrine de probabilités, qui n’est pas suspendue à une vérité, s’effondre dans le néant ; pour définir le probable il faut posséder le vrai. Donc, pour qu’il y ait une vérité quelconque, il faut une vérité absolue’ (EH^F 63-64)

It must be noted that Sartre immediately adds that the cogito as he envisions it is not individual but intersubjective, something which we will discuss in the next section. Furthermore, Sartre does not introduce his own prereflective cogito here but instead aligns himself with the Cartesian one. We could argue that this is due to the fact that this text is a public lecture and that Sartre is therefore a bit less nuanced when it comes to the terminological details. What remains clear is that Sartre adheres to the cogito mainly because it provides him with an apodictic, absolute truth, further highlighting the idea that Sartre adheres to a deductive ontological methodology. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that in the Introduction Sartre only mentions one of the two absolute grounds of Being and that he thus risks giving the reader of *Being and Nothingness* the impression that it is a much more subjective enterprise than is in fact the case.

The fact that the cogito is understood as a way of Being rather than a being itself indicates another difference between Sartre's version of the cogito and that of Descartes:

[I]f we wish to avoid the error which consists in attributing to knowledge a substantial being analogous to that of a thing, it is necessary to return to the *cogito* and to examine it anew. The *cogito* is only the manifestation of consciousness. [...] [I]f we consider consciousness as a mode of being, instead of attempting to confer a being upon it, perhaps we will be able to mitigate the imperfections of the cogito, as did Descartes and Husserl. Perhaps we will be able to discover in it the possibility even of escaping it, that is, of escaping instantaneity, idealism, and solipsism (CS 114)²⁶⁸.

The prereflective cogito does not imply a *res cogitans*, the thinking substance of Descartes. This would violate the principle of intentionality as it would mean that there is a thing in consciousness or that consciousness is a thing. He even reprimands Descartes for this:

268 'si nous voulons éviter l'erreur qui consisterait à attribuer à la connaissance un être substantiel analogue à celui de la chose, il fait revenir au cogito et l'examiner à nouveau. Le « cogito » n'est rien, en effet, que le manifestation de la *conscience*. [...] Si donc nous considérons la conscience comme *mode* d'être au lieu de chercher à lui conférer un être, peut-être pourrions-nous pallier les imperfections du *Cogito*, tel que l'ont pratiqué Descartes et Husserl ; peut-être pourrions-nous trouver en lui la possibilité même d'en sortir, c'est-à-dire de sortir de l'instantané, de l'idéalisme et du solipsisme.' (CS^F 136).

Of course, that thinking substance exists only in so far as it thinks [...]. But it *is*. It retains the character of in-itself in its entirety, even though the for-itself is its attribute. This has been described as Descartes's substantialist illusion (BN 135)²⁶⁹.

For Sartre, 'the for-itself is in no way an autonomous substance' (BN 799)²⁷⁰. We should therefore understand the self-presence of the cogito 'not in the manner of a thing but as an operative intention' (BN 12)²⁷¹. In other words, '[t]his being is not 'the subject' [...], but subjectivity itself' (BN 16-17).²⁷² This is how consciousness works, and we must assume it works this way in order for it to be wholly conscious, fully transparent, and hence nothing but intentionality. This is why it escapes instantaneity, for objects can only appear in a temporal manner. It likewise escapes idealism and solipsism, since it is only an operation that is part of the intentional process of being aware of something other than itself.

Because the cogito is a function and not a separate element in consciousness or another conscious act, Sartre adopts the term 'consciousness (of) self', the brackets referring to the fact that the self is not the object of consciousness, but part of the subjective process (BN 13)²⁷³. Moreover, this separates this form of self-consciousness from reflective self-consciousness in which the Self is the object (CF 123).

The circuit of ipseity

Strictly speaking, Sartre still holds to the view that the stream of consciousness unifies itself, but he largely changes the emphasis, shifting from the reflective to the prereflective level. He also still holds the view that the Ego appears in hindsight as a thing and refers to *The Transcendence of the Ego* (BN 159). Although the prereflective cogito is a function of consciousness and the choice of the term is largely reflective of its apodictic status, we cannot ignore the fact that cogito means 'I think'. There is a dimension of subjectivity that acts as a sort of I that thinks, and, although it is not a thing, it is still that which makes consciousness personal:

269 'Certes la substance pensante n'existe qu'autant qu'elle pense [...]. Mais elle *est*. Elle conserve le caractère d'en-soi dans son intégrité, bien que le pour-soi soit son attribut. C'est ce qu'on nomme l'illusion substantialiste de Descartes.' (BN^F 120).

270 'le pour-soi n'est aucunement une substance autonome' (BN^F 666).

271 'non comme une chose mais comme une intention opératoire' (BN^F 20).

272 'Ce n'est point le sujet, [...] mais c'est la subjectivité même' (BN^F 23).

273 'conscience (de) soi' (BN^F 21).

[W]e ascertain that there is no distinction of subject-object in this consciousness. The fact of saying that it is not inhabited by an ego has essentially the following significance: an ego as an inhabitant of consciousness is an opacity in consciousness; in reality, if consciousness does not have an ego at the level of immediacy and nonreflexivity, it is nonetheless personal. It is personal because it is a return, in spite of everything, to itself (CF 123)²⁷⁴.

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre also states that self-presence is enough to make consciousness personal: ‘consciousness, from the moment it arises, makes itself *personal* through the pure nihilating movement of mirroring’ (BN 160)²⁷⁵. He does not develop this claim any further, but there is also another dimension of subjective selfhood introduced in *Being and Nothingness*, that of “ipseity”:

[T]he Ego appears to consciousness as a transcendent in-itself, as an existent of the human world and not as [something] *of* consciousness. But it would be a mistake to conclude that the for-itself is purely and simply an ‘impersonal’ contemplation. It is simply that, far from the Ego being the personalizing pole of a consciousness that would, without it, remain at the impersonal stage, it is consciousness, on the contrary that, in its fundamental ipseity, enables the Ego to appear in certain conditions as the transcendent phenomenon of that ipseity. In fact, as we have seen, it is not possible to say, of the in-itself, that it is *itself*. It *is*, quite simply. And similarly, we should say of the ‘I’ – which is quite incorrectly regarded as an inhabitant of consciousness – that it is the ‘Me’ of consciousness, but not that it is its own *self* or *itself* (BN 159-160)²⁷⁶.

274 ‘nous constaterons qu’il n’y a pas de distinction de sujet-objet dans cette conscience. Le fait de dire qu’elle n’est pas habitée par un « ego » a essentiellement la signification suivante : c’est qu’un « ego » comme habitant de la conscience est une opacité dans la conscience ; en réalité si la conscience n’a pas un ego au niveau de l’immédiat et de la non-réflexivité, elle n’en est pas moins personnelle. Elle est personnelle parce qu’elle est renvoi, malgré tout, à soi.’ (CS^F 150).

275 ‘la conscience, par le pur mouvement néantisant de la réflexion, se fait *personnelle*’ (BN^F 140).

276 ‘l’Ego apparaît à la conscience comme un en-soi transcendant, comme un existant du monde humain, non comme *de la* conscience. Mais il n’en faudrait pas conclure que le pour-soi est une pure et simple contemplation « impersonnelle ». Simplement, loin que l’Ego soit le pôle personnalisant d’une conscience qui, sans lui, demeurerait au stade impersonnel, c’est au contraire la conscience dans son ipsité fondamentale qui permet l’apparition de l’Ego, dans certaines conditions, comme le phénomène transcendant de cette ipsité. En effet, nous l’avons vu, il est impossible de dire de

The Ego or the I is not what makes consciousness personal, but the dimension of ipseity does make it personal and allows us to form an Ego on the level of reflection.²⁷⁷ The I does not correspond with the stream of consciousness, as it is a transcendent object.²⁷⁸

What then is this ipseity of consciousness? In order to understand this notion, we have to understand Sartre's conception of possibilities. The example of Pierre in the café, which we have already discussed, shows that there is a difference between a genuine negativity and a negative conceptual judgment. The same reasoning can be applied to possibilities. There are those which are encountered and those that are merely thought. The latter can be anything one is capable of thinking, the former are possibilities that one actively wants to pursue in light of one's projected ends. In the *War Diaries*, Sartre calls them 'exigencies', and they are said to 'draw their transcendent objectivity from the matter through which they are grasped, which is precisely the present object to be modified' (WD 39)²⁷⁹. As we have discussed, within a situation it is impossible to distinguish objects from the meanings that we project on them. Therefore, certain possibilities demand certain actions of us. This does not mean that we unwillingly submit to these demands, as it is our own free projects that cause the objects to demand something of us in the first place. For example, if I made the choice to go rock-climbing, a certain rock may "demand" to be climbed by me. That does not mean that I automatically succeed in climbing it. I may be hindered in some way or another, but if I am not, I know that I will succeed in climbing it. For merely judged possibilities, this is not the case and they always remain merely probable.

My possibilities are also quite often embodied. Sartre for example

l'en-soi qu'il est *soi*. Il *est*, tout simplement. Et, en ce sens, du Je dont on fait bien à tort l'habitant de la conscience, on dira qu'il est le « Moi » de la conscience, mais non qu'il est son propre *soi*.' (BN^f 140).

277 Sartre's notion of ipseity is inspired by Heidegger's notion of *Selbstheit* (BN 52). Zahavi equates the notion with Husserl's *Meinheit* (Zahavi 2010, 58). He uses the term "mineness" to describe both terms, which he also equates with Heidegger's notion of *Jemeinigkeit* (Zahavi 2007, 189). Sartre only mentions this notion indirectly, by mentioning the statement '*Dasein ist je meines*' (BN 337). He does not mention the term ipseity in this context however. Although *Selbstheit* and *Jemeinigkeit* are related, they do not mean exactly the same thing. For a discussion of these notions, see: (Romano 2017).

278 Apart from de-emphasizing the reflective Self, Sartre is also more critical of the idea that reflected experiences are objects in the sense that actions, states and qualities are in *The Transcendence of the Ego*. He introduces a difference between pure and impure reflection (BN 230). Pure reflection is the for-itself becoming aware of itself as for-itself, whereas impure reflection is the for-itself becoming aware of itself as in-itself. For a more elaborate discussion of this distinction, see: (Reisman 2007, 45-74).

279 'exigences' 'tirent leur objectivité transcendante de la matière à travers quoi elles sont saisies, qui est précisément l'objet présent à modifier' (WD^f 55).

says that my legs are ‘*the possibility that I am* of walking, of running or playing football’ and speaks about the body ‘as a living possibility of running, of dancing, etc.’ (BN 411)²⁸⁰. Moreover, he states that: ‘It is in its entirety that being-for-itself has to be body, and in its entirety that it has to be consciousness: it cannot be *joined* to a body’ (BN 412)²⁸¹. He distances himself explicitly from Descartes’ mind-body dualism:

It seems at first sight that our preceding observations are in conflict with the findings of the Cartesian *cogito*. ‘The soul is easier to know than the body,’ said Descartes. And by that he intended to draw a radical distinction between the facts of thought that are accessible to reflection, and the facts about the body, whose knowledge has to be guaranteed by divine goodness, and indeed, it seems at first that reflection does only disclose pure facts of consciousness to us. Of course we will encounter phenomena at this level that appear to include within themselves some connection with the body: ‘physical’ pain, discomfort, pleasure, etc. But these phenomena are not any less *pure facts of consciousness*. There is a tendency therefore to make them into *signs*, affections of consciousness *on the occasion* of the body, without realizing that in so doing we have irremediably chased the body out of consciousness and that no connection will any longer be able to reunite this body [...] and the consciousness that, it is claimed, is its manifestation (BN 412-413)²⁸².

Our bodies are part of the ‘structures of non-thetic consciousness (of) self’, but precisely because of this we cannot know our subjective

280 ‘*possibilité que je suis* de marcher, de courir ou de jouer au football’ ‘tant que possibilité vivante de courir, de danser, etc.’ (BN^F 344).

281 ‘C’est tout entier que l’être-pour-soi doit être corps et tout entier qu’il doit être conscience : il ne saurait être *uni* à un corps.’ (BN^F 344).

282 ‘Il semble, à première vue, que nos remarques précédentes vont à l’opposé des données de *cogito* cartésien. « L’âme est plus aisée à connaître que le corps », disait Descartes. Et par là il entendait faire une distinction radicale entre les faits de pensée accessibles à la réflexion et les faits du corps dont la connaissance doit être garantie par la bonté divine. Et, de fait, il semble d’abord que la réflexion ne nous découvre que de purs faits de conscience. Sans doute rencontre-t-on sur ce plan des phénomènes qui paraissent comprendre en eux-mêmes quelque liaison avec le corps : la douleur « physique », le désagréable, le plaisir, etc. Mais ces phénomènes n’en sont pas moins de *purs faits de conscience* ; on aura donc tendance à en faire des *signes*, des affections de la conscience à l’occasion du corps, sans se rendre compte qu’on vient ainsi de chasser irrémédiablement le corps de la conscience et qu’aucun lien ne pourra plus rejoindre ce corps [...] et la conscience dont on prétend qu’elle manifeste.’ (BN^F 345).

body as an object (BN 442)²⁸³. It is ‘neglected, “passed over in silence”, and yet it is what consciousness *is*; it is even nothing but the body; the rest is nothingness and silence’ (BN 442)^{284, 285}. Our body determines our place in the world and thereby determines our possibilities, but we project these possibilities on the objects around us. Thus, being able to climb a rock is directly related to our body, but we do not thematize the body explicitly in assessing this possibility. We will return to the topic of the (objective) body briefly in the next section. The key point for the moment is how it reveals that exigencies are not judged but prereflectively experienced in our engagement with the world.

As all actions are directed towards goals which demand to be fulfilled, exigencies ‘appear on the horizon of my actions, as their meaning’ (WD 40)²⁸⁶. Sartre concludes that ‘the meaning of our situation is given at every instant by these possibles/options, noematic correlatives of our will awaiting us in the future. And it is they that motivate and shape our perceptions’ (WD 40)²⁸⁷.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Sartre held the view in *The Transcendence of the Ego* that the stream of consciousness unifies itself through inner time-consciousness. It is able to do so because objects remain constant. This position assumes a much more simplistic division between subjects and objects: if I exist within a situation, in which subjectivity and objectivity are intertwined, and I perceive within it “possibles”, which refer to actions not yet performed, then we cannot say that the continuity of the stream of consciousness is solely found in objects. As Sartre claims: ‘the bond between consciousness and its possibles is as real and concrete a bond as that between consciousness and things perceived’ (WD 41)²⁸⁸.

This adds another degree of nihilation to the structure of the self-presence of consciousness. Not only does consciousness not coincide with the objects it is intentionally related to, it is also always confronted with possibilities which refer to actions not *yet* performed:

283 ‘structures de la conscience non-thétique (de) soi’ (BN^F 369).

284 ‘le *négligé*, le « *passé sous silence* »’ (BN^F 369-370).

285 In order to get a better understanding of this idea of being “passed over in silence”, it is helpful to think of it in terms of “lived experience”, a central notion in Sartre’s later works which we will discuss at length in the next chapter.

286 ‘paraissent à l’horizon de mes actes comme leur sens’ (WD^F 56).

287 ‘le sens de notre situation est donné à chaque instant par ces possibles-options, corrélatifs noématiques de notre vouloir et qui nous attendent dans l’avenir’ (WD^F 56).

288 ‘le lien de la conscience à ses possibles est un lien aussi réel, aussi concret que le lien de la conscience aux choses perçues’ (WD^F 57).

Within ipseity, my possible casts its reflection on to my consciousness and defines it as what it is. Ipseity represents a degree of nihilation that goes further than the pure self-presence of the prereflective *cogito*, in so far as the possible that I am is not a presence to the for-itself (in the way that the mirrored relates to the mirroring) but is a *presence-absence* (BN 160)²⁸⁹.

Iipseity refers to the fact that in perceiving possibles, one is always confronted with what one is not yet. Exigencies can only be perceived as *my* possibilities if I am the same person now as the person that I will be when I have performed the required action. Things can only be perceived as meaningful within my fundamental project, but this also means that I am the same person at this point in time as I will be when the goals of my projects are attained. Hence, if we extend the notion of inner time-consciousness so that it can account for our own possibilities, we cannot hold that it is only the continuity of objects that makes the unity of my stream of consciousness possible. We can only recognize our possibilities as our own if our consciousness has some degree of *selfness* through time, and this is what ipseity entails. Hence, Sartre claims that '[t]he world (*is*) mine because it is haunted by possibles, of which the possible [acts of] consciousness (of) self that *I am* are conscious, and it is these possible as such that give the world its unity and its meaning as a world' (BN 161)²⁹⁰.

Thus, the dimension of ipseity refers to the fact that I perceive a world of possibilities, and these refer back to the fact that they are my possibilities. Therefore, we cannot say that the process of unification through inner time-consciousness is impersonal. Not only are things retained and protained, so is my own identity as it unfolds through actions. Of course, over time, as I perform actions and other possibles arise, the possibles themselves do not remain continuous. Nevertheless, they do all refer to me as the agent who performs them. This is also why Sartre calls the relation we have to our possibles the 'circuit of ipseity' (BN 159)²⁹¹: it is a constant movement of perceiving possibilities, performing actions and perceiving new possibilities in light these actions. This circuit is of course only possible in light of the fact that our possibles reflect back upon ourselves as the one who needs to perform these actions.

289 'Dans l'ipséité mon possible se réfléchit sur ma conscience et la détermine comme ce qu'elle est. L'ipséité représente un degré de néantisation plus poussé que la pure présence à soi du *cogito* préreflexif, en ce sens que le possible que je suis n'est pas une présence au pour-soi comme le reflet au reflétant, mais qu'il est *présence-absente*.' (BN^F 140).

290 'Le monde (*est*) mien parce qu'il est hanté par des possibles dont sont consciences les consciences possibles (de) soi que *je suis* et ce sont ces possibles en tant que tels qui lui donnent son unité et son sens de monde' (BN^F 141).

291 'circuit de l'ipséité' (BN^F 139).

To sum up, Sartre's ideas concerning subjective selfhood in this period of his work are marked by two major developments. One is the change of emphasis from the reflective to the prereflective. The other is the introduction of the notion of ipseity, which is closely related to his conception of situated freedom. His systematic interest in apodicticity motivates the first change, and it is for this reason that the self-presence of consciousness is named the prereflective cogito. The second development is related to Sartre's emphasis on consciousness as a free project which is only possible if it has a degree of self-identity that allows it to perceive its possibilities as belonging to their future Self. This renders the stream of consciousness definitively personal.

5. The Unattainable Self

As in the case of subjective selfhood, Sartre's account of objective selfhood places a strong emphasis on negativity. As we will see, this is the only period in Sartre's work where the idea that the Self is a thing is something he actually denies. The idea still plays a major role in his theories, but in a critical guise: when we regard ourselves and others as things, we misrecognize our "real" Selves. Before we turn to this topic, however, we will first discuss how Sartre sees the negative objective Self.

The Self beyond the world

In the circuit of ipseity, one continually recognizes one's possibles. In the *War Diaries* Sartre states: 'Let us note that they are *my* possibles in two senses: first, because they are my own options, as we have seen; then, because they are the objective and transcendent image of my being-in-the-world' (WD 40)²⁹². We project an image of ourselves into the situation opened up by our current possibilities. This future Self transcends my current Self, but I never truly become this future Self, because when I act, new possibilities appear, and I thereby project another future Self. Hence, the transcendent image of ourselves also transcends our possibilities. Therefore, it is always 'on the other side of the world' (WD 40)²⁹³. This transcendent Self is therefore like the horizon, always in the distance but never something we can actually arrive at. We 'throw ourselves once into the world through a gap of nothingness, and [...] throw our human reality to the horizon of the existent as an ideal' (WD 147)²⁹⁴. Because

292 'Notons qu'ils sont *mes* possibles en deux sens : d'abord parce que ce sont mes options propres, comme nous l'avons vu – ensuite parce qu'ils sont l'image objective et transcendante de mon être-dans-le-monde' (WD^F 56).

293 'de l'autre côté du monde' (WD^F 56).

294 'de se jeter dans le monde une fois, par une trouée de néant, et de jeter à l'horizon de l'existant notre réalité humaine comme un idéal' (WD^F 185).

this image of ourselves is projected but never grasped, he uses the metaphor of a shadow:

Options are the noematic correlative of projects that are realized through acts, and projected human reality is the synthetic unity of options. [...] This is what we shall call the ipseity or shadow of consciousness beyond the world – which has nothing to do with the Me, unity of reflexive consciousnesses (WD 40-41)²⁹⁵.

The transcendent Self that Sartre describes here is the opposite of the one he described in *The Transcendence of the Ego*. The Ego as the unity of reflexive consciousnesses can, as has been discussed in the previous chapter, only be grasped in hindsight by an act of reflection. It is based on actions and states that have taken place in reality and have cemented themselves in this reality. Note that Sartre does not deny that this Ego exists, he simply does not regard it to be important for our existence at this point in his intellectual development.

The Self beyond the world is not reflectively grasped, it is rather implied in the circuit of ipseity and hence plays an active role in our lives. It is something which we continually *do* by projecting our ends on the world. Furthermore, it transcends possibilities, things which are not. Although they may be fulfilled, they do not have to be. Hence, they transcend not things that are but nothingness. Although the image we project may take the guise of an object, it is really only a projected image, and, therefore, something which can never exist:

The characteristic of Nothingness is not just to nihilate being, but to nihilate itself towards the in-itself. That's why the transcendence of consciousness consists in surpassing the world towards an ipseity which it wants as an in-itself. But that in-itself which it projects beyond the world holds in itself the essential features of consciousness. It's an in-itself which is to itself its own foundation, just as consciousness is to itself its own motivation; an in-itself which enwraps facticity, surpasses it and retains it in its womb. An in-itself that to itself is a for-itself. This hybrid projection of the in-itself and the for-itself is the only way in which consciousness can give itself the in-itself as an end (WD 206)²⁹⁶.

295 'Les options sont le corrélatif noématique des projets qui se réalisent à travers les actes et la réalité humaine projetée est l'unité synthétique des options. [...] C'est ce que nous appellerons l'ipséité ou ombre portée de la conscience au-delà du monde – qui n'a rien à faire avec le Moi, unité des consciences réflexives.' (WD^F 56-57).

296 'Le propre du Néant n'est pas seulement de néantiser l'être mais de se néantir soi-

Thus, the projected Self is treated by us *as if it were* a thing. One could say that becoming a thing is the ultimate end of all our projects. This is however by definition unattainable. The only being which is at once in-itself and for-itself is God, and to become God can be considered our ultimate end: 'But the idea of God is contradictory and we lose ourselves in vain; man is a useless Passion' (BN 797)²⁹⁷. This statement once again conveys Sartre's idea that the Self we project beyond the world is unattainable, that by positing ends and making choices we try to become that which will always elude us. Furthermore, Sartre also calls the projected Self the 'ontological mirage of the Self' and says that we are 'projecting ourselves, in vain, towards the Self' (BN 201, 202)²⁹⁸.

One could argue that because it is a projected image, it is more closely tied to imaginary objects than to real ones. However, we must realize that the Self beyond the world is not posited as the object of our acts, but is rather non-thetically implied in our projects. Hence, it is not a negativity, a definite non-existent object – indeed, it is not an object at all:

[T]he being of self-consciousness is such that in its being its being is in question; therefore, it is pure interiority. It constantly refers to a *self* that it has to be. Its being is defined by this: that it *is* this being in the mode of being what it is not, and of not being what it is. Its being is, therefore, a radical exclusion of all objectivity: I am the one who cannot be an object for myself, and who cannot even conceive for himself of existence in the form of an object (BN 333)²⁹⁹[.]

même vers l'en-soi. C'est pourquoi la transcendance de la conscience consiste à dépasser le monde vers une ipséité qu'elle veut comme un *en-soi*. Mais cet en-soi qu'elle projette par-delà le monde retient en lui-même les caractères essentiels de la conscience. C'est un en-soi qui est à soi-même son propre fondement, comme la conscience est à elle-même sa propre motivation, un en-soi qui enveloppe, dépasse et retient en ses flancs la facticité. Un en-soi qui est à lui-même un pour-soi. Cette projection hybride de l'en-soi et dur pour-soi est la seule manière dont la conscience puisse se donner à elle-même comme fin l'en-soi.' (WDF 253).

297 'Mais l'idée de Dieu est contradictoire et nous nous perdons en vain ; l'homme est une passion inutile' (BN^F 662).

298 'le mirage ontologique du Soi', 'se projeter vainement vers le Soi' (BN^F 172, 173).

299 'l'être de la conscience de soi est tel qu'en son être il est question de son être, cela signifie qu'elle est pure intériorité. Elle est perpétuellement renvoi à un *soi* qu'elle a à être. Son être se définit par ceci qu'elle *est* cet être sur le mode d'être ce qu'elle n'est pas et de ne pas être ce qu'elle est. Son être est donc l'exclusion radicale de toute objectivité : je suis celui qui ne peut pas être objet pour moi-même, celui qui ne peut même pas concevoir pour soi l'existence sous forme d'objet' (BN^F 280).

Just as a single conscious act does not coincide with an object, we never coincide with the image of ourselves we project beyond the world. Sartre abandons the idea that our Self is a thing, and instead makes it a nothingness, an unattainable ideal of a thing, which is itself the transcendent totality of mere possibilities, of actions not (yet) taken, of deeds left undone. Although this Self is at the limit of our conscious experiences, it is still no “inhabitant” of it. As Sartre says about his new theory: ‘Does that mean I’m going to allow the Me back in? No, certainly not. But though the ipseity or totality of the for-itself is not the Me, it’s nevertheless the *person*’ (WD 324-325)^{300, 301}.

The futile nature of this project is also a reason why people succumb to what Sartre calls “bad faith”. This is the idea that people can genuinely fool themselves into thinking that they are something which they are not. Bad faith reveals the individual as a ‘being that can adopt negative attitudes in relation to itself’ (BN 87)³⁰². Not only do we not coincide with ourselves, we *do not coincide with the fact that we do not coincide with ourselves*. Because of this, we can act as if we are in-itself, but we never really are. Sartre’s famous description of the waiter conveys this:

Consider this café waiter. His movements are animated and intent, a bit too precise, a bit too quick; he approaches the customers with a bit too much animation; he leans forward a bit too attentively, his voice and his eyes expressing an interest in the customer’s order that is a bit too solicitous. Finally, here he is, on his way back, and attempting in his attitude to imitate the inflexible exactitude of some kind of automaton, while carrying his tray with the recklessness characteristic of a tightrope walker, holding it in a constantly unstable and constantly disrupted equilibrium, which he constantly restores with a light movement of his arm and hand. His behaviour throughout strikes us as an act. He concentrates on his successive movements as if they were mechanisms, each one of them governing the others; his facial expression and even his voice seem to be mechanical; he adopts the pitiless nimbleness and rapidity of things. He is playing, amusing himself. But what, then, is he playing at? One does not need to watch him for long to realize: he is

300 ‘Est-ce à dire que je vais laisser rentrer le Moi ? Non, certes. Mais l’ipséité ou totalité du pour-soi n’est pas le Moi et pourtant elle est la *personne*’ (WD^F 394).

301 This idea is close to that of “personalization”, which we will discuss in the next chapter.

302 ‘celui qui peut prendre des attitudes négatives vis-à-vis de soi’ (BN^F 81).

playing *at being* a café waiter (BN 102-103)³⁰³.

The café waiter tries to conform as much as possible to the stereotype of the waiter, to the essence of what it means to be a waiter. Since they are conscious beings, however, people do not coincide with themselves and thereby do not coincide with their activities, occupations or roles. When one tries to coincide, one appears unnatural, and it becomes clear that one is merely *playing* at being something rather than actually being that thing. Bad faith then consists in denying one's fundamental indeterminacy: 'bad faith's most basic act is to flee from something it is impossible to flee from: to flee from what one is' (BN 117)³⁰⁴.

One could also define this as acting as if one were a thing. Another example Sartre gives of bad faith is a woman who is on a first date with a man and does not acknowledge his sexual advances:

Let us take, for example, this woman who has arrived at a first meeting. She knows full well the intentions entertained, in relation to her, by the man speaking to her. She also knows that sooner or later she will have to make a decision. But she does not want to feel its urgency: she takes account only of the respectful and discreet aspects of her partner's attitude. She does not see his behaviour as an attempt to make the so-called 'opening moves'; in other words, she does not want to see the possibilities of development over time that his behaviour presents; she confines his activity to what is present, and has no wish to read, in the sentences he addresses to her, anything but their explicit meaning. [...] The man speaking to her appears to her as sincere and respectful, in the way a table is round or square, or a wall-hanging is blue or grey. And the properties she

303 'Considérons ce garçon de café. Il a le geste vif et appuyé, un peu trop précis, un peu trop rapide, il vient vers les consommateurs d'un pas un peu trop vif, il s'incline avec un peu trop d'empressement, sa voix, ses yeux expriment un intérêt un peu trop plein de sollicitude pour la commande du client, enfin le voilà qui revient, en essayant d'imiter dans sa démarche la rigueur inflexible d' 'on ne sait quel automate, tout en portant son plateau avec une sorte de témérité de funambule, en le mettant dans un équilibre perpétuellement instable et perpétuellement rompu, qu'il rétablit perpétuellement d'un mouvement léger du bras et de la main. Toute sa conduite nous semble un jeu. Il s'applique à enchaîner ses mouvements comme s'ils étaient des mécanismes se commandant les uns les autres, sa mimique et sa voix même semblent des mécanismes ; il se donne la prestesse et la rapidité impitoyable des choses. Il joue, il s'amuse. Mais à quoi donc joue-t-il ? Il ne faut pas l'observer longtemps pour s'en rendre compte : il joue à être garçon de café.' (BN^F 94).

304 'l'acte premier de mauvaise foi est pour fuir ce qu'on ne peut pas fuir, pour fuir ce qu'on est' (BN^F 105).

hereby attaches to the person to whom she is listening are, therefore, frozen in a thing-like permanence – which is nothing but the projection, into the flow of time, of their strict present (BN 97)³⁰⁵.

This example can be understood in light of the circuit of ipseity and its projecting of possibilities. The woman has to decide between two possibilities of action: does she accept the advances of the man, or not. She denies, however, that she is a free project. She does this by denying that possibilities are projected towards the future and instead acts as if there is only the present situation. Thereby the situation gains a “thing-like” permanence: it is no longer regarded as the interplay between for-itself and in-itself, but merely as an objective state of affairs that does not change in light of her actions.

Continuing his example, Sartre depicts how the man takes her hand and urges the woman to make an immediate decision. She finds a way to defer the decision, however: ‘We know what happens now: the young woman leaves her hand where it is but she *does not notice* she has left it there’ (BN 98)³⁰⁶. She continues to talk about her life, as if she were pure spirit: ‘And while she does this, the divorce of body from soul is accomplished: her hand rests there, inert between the hot hands of her partner, neither consenting nor resisting – a thing’ (BN 98)³⁰⁷. Hence, she not only makes the situation into a static one without possibilities, she turns her own body into a thing:

[S]he actualizes herself as *not being* her own body, and she contemplates it from a height as a passive object to which things might *happen*, but which can neither

305 ‘Voici, par exemple, une femme qui s’est rendue à un premier rendez-vous. Elle sait fort bien les intentions que l’homme qui lui parle nourrit à son égard. Elle sait aussi qu’il lui faudra prendre tôt ou tard une décision. Mais elle n’en veut pas sentir l’urgence : elle s’attache seulement à ce qu’offre de respectueux et de discret l’attitude de son partenaire. Elle ne saisit pas cette conduite comme une tentative pour réaliser ce qu’on nomme « les premières approches », c’est-à-dire qu’elle ne veut pas voir les possibilités de développement temporel que présente cette conduite : elle borne ce comportement à ce qu’il est dans le présent, elle ne veut pas lire dans les phrases qu’on lui adresse autre chose que leur sens explicite [...] L’homme qui lui parle lui semble sincère et respectueux comme la table est ronde ou carrée, comme la tenture murale est bleue ou grise. Et les qualités ainsi attachées à la personne qu’elle écoute se sont ainsi figées dans une permanence chosiste qui n’est autre que la projection dans l’écoulement temporel de leur strict présent.’ (BN^F 89-90).

306 ‘On sait ce qui se produit alors : la jeune femme abandonne sa main, mais ne s’aperçoit pas qu’elle l’abandonne’ (BN^F 90).

307 ‘Et pendant ce temps, le divorce du corps et de l’âme est accompli ; la main repose inerte entre les mains chaudes de son partenaire : ni consentante ni résistante – une chose’ (BN^F 90).

provoke them nor avoid them, because all possibles lie outside it (BN 98)³⁰⁸.

Of course, we exist within a world of things. Even our body in so far as it is a physical object is a thing. As we have seen in the first part of this chapter, however, only our projects give this meaning to the state of affairs in the world. If one treats oneself as a *mere* object, one still acts as if this is not the case. Our facticity and our transcendence are one, in the sense that they give meaning to one another, not in the sense that one can be reduced to the other. Thus, bad faith comes down to saying that “we are what we are”, we are what our circumstances have made of us. As we have seen, this is the mode of Being of things, and we are not what we are (and are what we are not). The woman in the example does exactly this by freezing time and hence denying the transcendence of the present. In other words, she acts as if the fact that we are situated amongst things that appear in light of our projects meant merely to be one object amongst others that fully determine the situation:

We have [...] seen the use our young woman was able to make of our being-in-the-midst-of-the-world – i.e. of our inert presence as a passive object among other objects – in order to unburden herself suddenly of the demands of her being-in-the- world, i.e. of the being that makes the world happen, by projecting itself beyond the world towards its possibilities (BN 101)³⁰⁹.

Of course, the things around us determine our projects, but they can only do so because we project ends upon them. Hence, one cannot isolate this element of human existence and act as if one were a passive object determined by the things in one’s environment, as if one is a thing. Furthermore, Sartre also distances himself from the views of *The Transcendence of the Ego* in this context. Because it is also a thing, if one considers the transcendent Ego that appears before reflection as all that one is, one is also in bad faith (BN 231).

The opposite of bad faith is authenticity. Leaving aside his discussions of the related notion in Heidegger’s work, Sartre only refers to this notion once in *Being and Nothingness*. In a footnote at the end of the chapter on bad faith, he says that in order to truly escape bad faith,

308 ‘elle se réalise comme *n’étant pas* son propre corps et elle le contemple de son haut comme un objet passif auquel des événements peuvent *arriver*, mais qui ne saurait ni les provoquer ni les éviter, parce que tous ses possibles sont hors de lui.’ (BN^F 91).

309 ‘On a vu [...] l’usage que notre jeune femme faisait de notre être-au-milieu-du-monde, c’est-à-dire de notre présence inerte d’objet passif parmi d’autres objets, pour se décharger soudain des fonctions de son être-dans-le-monde, c’est-à-dire de l’être qui fait qu’il y a un monde en se projetant par delà le monde vers ses propres possibilités.’ (BN^F 92).

being-for-itself needs to reclaim itself (BN 117). In the *Notebooks for an Ethics*, he relates it to the Self:

Get rid of the I and the Me. In their place put subjectivity as a lived monadic totality that refers back to the self of consciousness by itself (laterally—cf. *The Transcendence of the Ego*) and the *Ego* (I reserve this name for the always open-ended Me which is referred to by the undertaking. Always open-ended, always deferred) (NE 417)³¹⁰.

Although Sartre here explicitly uses the terms differently, referring to the *Ego* as the Self beyond the world and not the totality of the I and the Me, the message is clear: one should not see oneself as a determinate object, but as an open-ended undertaking. Still, the notion of authenticity is ultimately very difficult to understand because Sartre provides very few concrete examples of how one can act authentically.³¹¹ We can only give a negative definition: not to act in bad faith, as we have seen, amounts to not considering oneself as a thing.

The notion of Self Sartre defends in *Being and Nothingness* and related texts is still closely related to objectivity, but negatively so. That is, Sartre vehemently denies that the Self is a thing, in stark contrast to his early works, while maintaining, at the same time, that in bad faith we continually act as if it were a thing.

Object-for-the-Other

Another way in which subjects can appear as objects is when they appear before another subject, before the Other. We will not go into all the details concerning Sartre's ideas about alterity and intersubjectivity, but will instead focus on what Sartre's theories concerning the Other can tell us about the question of selfhood.

Most philosophers who tried to tackle the problem of intersubjectivity or of the existence of other minds have tried to find a subjectivity behind the object-Other as it is encountered. Sartre compares this approach to the search for a true noumenal object behind the object as it appears to us (BN 348). As we have discussed in the first part of this chapter, Sartre does not think that there can be an object behind the series of appearances, and the same is true for the Other

310 'Se débarrasser du Je et du Moi. En face mettre la subjectivité comme totalité monadique vécue avec renvoi à soi de la conscience par elle-même (latéralement, cf. *Essai sur la transcendance de l'Ego*) et l'*Ego* (je réserve ce nom à ce Moi toujours ouvert, qui est renvoyé par l'entreprise. Toujours ouvert, toujours en sursis).' (NE^F 433).

311 For a discussion of Sartre's notion of authenticity, see: (Webber 2013).

as object. The most famous instance of such a search for a subject behind the Other which we encounter is perhaps Descartes, when he asks: ‘what do I see from the window but hats and coats which may cover automatic machines?’ (Descartes 1996, 56–57). This phrase is echoed by Sartre when he says that ‘it is infinitely *probable* that the passer-by whom I see is a man, and not a sophisticated robot’ (BN 347)³¹². Probability is however not sufficient for the construction of a philosophical theory of the Other. Other people appear to us differently than inanimate objects do because we can perceive the intentional relationship they have towards their surroundings to a certain extent. Sartre gives the example of seeing a man who is walking on a lawn despite the presence of a sign prohibiting this:

[I]t is *probable* that this object is a man; further, even if it were certain that he is one, it remains merely probable that he *sees* the grass in the same moment as I see it: he might be dreaming of some enterprise without being fully conscious of his surroundings, he might be blind, etc. Nonetheless, this new relation between the man-object and the grass-object has a particular character. It is given to me in its entirety, since it is there, in the world, as an object that I am able to know (and it really is an objective relation that I express when I say ‘Pierre glanced at his watch’, ‘Jeanne looked through the window’, etc.), and at the same time it escapes me entirely (BN 350)³¹³[.]

Although I perceive others as having meaningful relations with their surroundings, I can never fully grasp how they perceive them. These relations can appear to me in a certain manner, but I never really know whether I perceive them in the same way as the Other. Hence, when it comes to knowing the Other as a subject rather than an object, I can only attain the level of probability.

In light of this, it is important to stress that the view of the Other found in *The Transcendence of the Ego* cannot sufficiently account for this subject-Other:

312 ‘il est infiniment probable que le passant que j’aperçois soit un homme et non un robot perfectionné’ (BN^F 292).

313 ‘il est *probable* que cet objet soit un homme ; ensuite, fût-il certain qu’il en soit un, il reste seulement probable qu’il voie la pelouse au moment où je le perçois : il peut rêver à quelque entreprise sans prendre nettement conscience de ce qui l’environne, il peut être aveugle, etc. Pourtant, cette relation neuve de l’objet-homme à l’objet-pelouse a un caractère particulier : elle m’est à la fois donnée tout entière, puisqu’elle est là, dans le monde, comme un objet que je puis connaître (c’est bien, en effet, une relation objective que j’exprime en disant : Pierre a jeté un coup d’œil sur sa montre, Jeanne a regardé par la fenêtre, etc.) et, à la fois, elle m’échappe tout entière’ (BN^F 294).

I once believed that I could escape solipsism by denying Husserl the existence of his transcendental 'Ego'. At the time it seems to me that, since I was emptying it of its subject, nothing would be left in my consciousness that could be privileged in relation to the Other. But in fact, even though I remain persuaded that the hypothesis of the transcendental subject is useless and harmful, abandoning it does not advance the question of the Other's existence by a single step. Even if, outside the empirical Ego there was *nothing other* than [...] a transcendental field without a subject – it would remain no less true that my assertion of the Other postulates and demands the existence, beyond the world, of a similar transcendental field and in consequence that, here too, the only way of escaping solipsism will be proving that my transcendental consciousness is, in its very being, affected by the extrawordly existence of other consciousnesses of the same type (BN 324–325)³¹⁴.

It is clear that Sartre considers the theory of the Other he provided in his previous work to be insufficient from the more general perspective of his theory of selfhood. Indeed, if the Self is a transcendent thing and the stream of consciousness is impersonal, then it would follow that if we wanted to know the Other in a meaningful way, we would only have to know this object. However, as we have seen, Sartre's theory has changed. He still thinks we can prereflectively grasp the "ego" as a thing, but he does not seem to give this notion any existential weight. Our true Self lies in the circuit of ipseity and the transcendent Self beyond the world that arises from this. From the perspective of *The Transcendence of the Ego*, where the Self is understood as a thing, we have – as we have seen in the previous chapter – the same epistemological access to our own Selves as we have to that of Others. If our Self is the transcendent horizon of our possibilities, which only arise in the situation created by our projects, then we no longer have the same access to the Self of other people. The most fundamental dimension of selfhood no longer lies in the

314 'J'avais cru, autrefois, pouvoir échapper au solipsisme en refusant à Husserl l'existence de son « Ego » transcendantal I. Il me semblait alors qu'il ne demeurerait plus rien dans ma conscience qui fût privilégié par rapport à autrui, puisque je la vidais de son sujet. Mais, en fait, bien que je demeure persuadé que l'hypothèse d'un sujet transcendantal est inutile et néfaste, son abandon ne fait pas avancer d'un pas la question de l'existence d'autrui. Si même, en dehors de l'Ego empirique, il n'y avait rien d'autre que [...] un champ transcendantal sans sujet - il n'en demeurerait pas moins que mon affirmation d'autrui postule et réclame l'existence, par delà le monde, d'un semblable champ transcendantal ; et, par suite, la seule façon d'échapper au solipsisme serait, ici encore, de prouver que ma conscience transcendantale, dans son être même, est affectée par l'existence extra-mondaine d'autres consciences de même type.' (BN^F 274).

objective but in the subjective dimension.

Sartre's theory of the Other as subject can be found in the notion of 'the look' (BN 347)³¹⁵. He develops this notion through the analysis of an example of someone who is spying on people:

Let us imagine that, through jealousy, curiosity or vice, I have come to stick my ear against a door or to look through a keyhole. I am alone and non-thetically conscious (of) myself. That means in the first place that there is no *me* inhabiting consciousness. [...] I am a pure consciousness *of* things, and the things caught within the circuit of ipseity, offer me their potentialities as a response to my non-thetic consciousness (of) my own possibilities (BN 355)³¹⁶.

In this situation, I am not aware of myself but only of the spectacle that unfolds behind the closed door. Of course, the situation is generated by jealousy or some other interest in the things, which thereby become a spectacle. Nevertheless, my attitude is 'nothing but the simple fact that *there is a spectacle to be seen* behind the door' (BN 356)³¹⁷. In other words, there is a situation, which is an interplay between my projects and the things around me, but there is no explicit awareness of myself as someone who plays a part in creating the situation. The example continues:

And now I hear footsteps in the corridor: someone is looking at me. What does this mean? That all of sudden I am touched in my being, and that essential modifications appear within my structures [...].

In the first place, I exist now for my unreflected consciousness as my *me*. [...] [W]hile we were considering the for-itself in its solitude, we were able to maintain that the unreflected consciousness could not be inhabited by a me: my me could only be given, as an object, to reflective consciousness. But now we see the me coming to haunt unreflected consciousness (BN 356-357)³¹⁸.

315 'le regard' (BN^F 292).

316 'Imaginons que j'en sois venu, par jalousie, par intérêt, par vice, à coller mon oreille contre une porte, à regarder par le trou d'une serrure. Je suis seul et sur le plan de la conscience non-thétique (de) moi. Cela signifie d'abord qu'il n'y a pas de *moi* pour habiter ma conscience. [...] Je suis pure conscience des choses et les choses, prises dans le circuit de mon ipséité, m'offrent leurs potentialités comme réplique de ma conscience non-thétique (de) mes possibilités propres.' (BN^F 298).

317 'sinon le simple fait objectif qu'*il y a un spectacle à voir* derrière la porte' (BN^F 299).

318 'Or, voici que j'ai entendu des pas dans le corridor : on me regarde. Qu'est-ce que cela

A dimension of selfhood we have not yet discussed is introduced here: I am aware of myself being an object in the eyes, or, more precisely, the look, of another person. According to Sartre, the moment I get caught by another person, I become aware of the fact that I have an outside. This does not require an act of reflection as I am immediately caught in the act. Instead, 'I have my foundation outside myself. For myself, I am no more than a pure reference to the Other' (BN 357)³¹⁹.

This does not mean that this me, the object the Other perceives, is *merely* something that this person perceives and that remains unrelated to me. In a certain sense, it is me, but I can never know myself in this manner. The reason is that I cannot be subject and object at the same time, because of the self-presence of consciousness. I do, however, feel the effects of having an outside in the form of feelings such as shame or pride: 'shame is shame of *oneself*; it is *recognition* that I really *am* this object that is looked at and judged the Other' (BN 358)³²⁰. Such emotions are again not a matter of judgment, I can feel them prereflectively. Thus, in the look of the Other, I truly am an object:

As a spatio-temporal object, as an essential structure of a spatio-temporal situation within the world, I am offered to the Other's assessment. I grasp that, too, through the pure exercise of the *cogito*: to be looked at is to grasp oneself as the unknown object of unknowable assessments [...]. But, to be precise, at the same time as I recognize – through shame or pride – the validity of these assessments, I do not cease to take them for what they are: a free surpassing of possibilities. [...] In this way, being seen constitutes me as a defenceless being for a freedom that is not my freedom (BN 365)³²¹.

veut dire ? C'est que je suis soudain atteint dans mon être et que des modifications essentielles apparaissent dans mes structures [...].

D'abord, voici que j'existe en tant que *moi* pour ma conscience irréfléchie. [...] tant que nous avons considéré le pour-soi dans sa solitude, nous avons pu soutenir que la conscience irréfléchie ne pouvait être habitée par un moi : le moi ne se donnait, à titre d'objet, que pour la conscience réflexive. Mais voici que le moi vient hanter la conscience irréfléchie.' (BN^F 299).

319 'j'ai mon fondement hors de moi. Je ne suis pour moi que comme pur renvoi à autrui' (BN^F 300).

320 'la honte [...] est honte de *soi*, elle est *reconnaissance* de ce que je *suis* bien cet objet qu'autrui regarde et juge' (BN^F 300).

321 'En tant qu'objet temporo-spatial du monde, en tant que structure essentielle d'une situation temporo-spatiale dans le monde, je m'offre aux appréciations d'autrui. Cela aussi, je le saisis par le pur exercice du *cogito* : être regardé, c'est se saisir comme objet inconnu d'appréciations inconnues [...]. Mais, précisément, en même temps que, par la honte ou la fierté, je reconnais le bien-fondé de ces appréciations,

In his analysis of getting caught Sartre has articulated a proof of the existence of the Other as a subject, a proof that is ‘produced entirely at the level of the cogito’ (BN 366)^{322, 323}. In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre emphasizes the intersubjective nature of the cogito very explicitly:

The subjectivity that we thereby attain as a standard of truth is not strictly individual in nature, for we have demonstrated that it is not only oneself that one discovers in the *cogito*, but also the existence of others. Contrary to the philosophy of Descartes, or of Kant, when we say “I think,” we each attain ourselves in the presence of the other, and we are just as certain of the other as we are of ourselves (EH 41)³²⁴.

Just as Sartre had earlier argued that the I would fall under the phenomenological reduction in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, he now argues that the Other cannot be reduced in such a way:

[T]he Other is given to me as a concrete and evident presence that I can in no way derive from myself and which cannot in any way be placed in doubt, be made the object of a phenomenological reduction, or any other ‘ἐποχή’ (BN 370)³²⁵.

This irreducible presence brings us to the third form of Being in Sartre’s ontological system. There is a set of beings which are neither truly in-itself nor for-itself. These are the outside of a for-itself, the

je ne cesse pas de les prendre pour ce qu’elles sont : un dépassement libre du donné vers des possibilités. [...] Ainsi, être vu me constitue comme un être sans défense pour une liberté qui n’est pas ma liberté.’ (BN^F 306).

322 ‘a été faite tout entière sur le plan du cogito’ (BN^F 307).

323 It is interesting to note the similarity here with Lacan’s idea of the mirror stage: the idea that small infants can recognize themselves in the mirror and hence recognize themselves as an object, rather than as a subject. Lacan thinks, however, that this idea is one that stands in opposition to the cogito: ‘The conception of the mirror stage [...] is an experience that leads us to oppose any philosophy directly issuing from the *Cogito*’ (Lacan 2001, 1). Interestingly, Sartre would later say that his descriptions of Flaubert in *The Family Idiot* are close to Lacan’s description of the mirror stage (OTF 117).

324 ‘la subjectivité que nous atteignons là à titre de vérité n’est pas une subjectivité rigoureusement individuelle, car nous avons démontré que dans le *cogito*, on ne se découvrait pas seulement soi-même, mais aussi les autres. Par le *je pense*, contrairement à la philosophie de Descartes, contrairement à la philosophie de Kant, nous nous atteignons nous-mêmes en face de l’autre, et l’autre est aussi certain pour nous que nous-mêmes’ (EH^F 65-66).

325 ‘autrui se donne à moi comme une présence concrète et évidente que je ne puis aucunement tirer de moi et qui ne peut aucunement être mise en doute ni faire l’objet d’une réduction phénoménologique ou de toute autre « ἐποχή ».’ (BN^F 310).

way it appears to another for-itself: the being-for-the-Other:

[My] object-being or being-for-the-Other is radically different from my being-for-myself. [...] The object is what is not my consciousness and, in consequence, something that does not have the characteristics of consciousness for me is the consciousness that is *mine*. Thus, the me-object-for-me is a me which is *not* me, i.e. me that does not have the characteristics of consciousness. It is a *degraded* consciousness: objectification is a radical metamorphosis and, even if I were able to see myself clearly and distinctly as an object, what I would see would not be an adequate representation of what I am (BN 372-373)³²⁶[.]

Thus, in a certain sense, I am an object rather than a subject, but I can never have any real relation towards this objectivity. It is radically different from my Being as a subjectivity. Only in the presence of another subject does this object-being truly appear: 'the Other is for me in the first instance the being for whom I am an object, i.e. the being through whom I gain my objecthood' (BN 369)³²⁷. We must keep in mind, however, that this object is a 'deformed image' of my true being as a subject, but it is still *an image of me* (BN 101)³²⁸. As we have seen, it is for this reason that we can experience feelings such as shame and pride. In the *Notebooks for an Ethics*, Sartre relates this to the terminology of *The Transcendence of the Ego*, stating that 'the I and the Me' are 'forms of the Other's ontological priority' (NE 418)³²⁹. The image that others create of us can be overwhelming. In these cases, as Sartre puts it in *Saint Genet*: 'we are tempted to regard the information of our consciousness as dubious and obscure. This means that we have given primacy to the object which we are to Others over the subject we are to ourselves' (SG 33)^{330 331}.

326 'mon être-objet ou être-pour-autrui est profondément différent de mon être-pour-moi. [...] L'objet c'est ce qui n'est pas ma conscience et, par suite, ce qui n'a pas les caractères de la conscience, puisque le seul existant qui a pour moi les caractères de la conscience, c'est la conscience qui est mienne. Ainsi, le moi-objet-pour-moi est un moi qui n'est pas moi, c'est-à-dire qui n'a pas les caractères de la conscience. Il est conscience *dégradée* ; l'objectivation est une métamorphose radicale et, si même je pouvais me voir clairement et distinctement comme objet, ce que je verrais ne serait pas la représentation adéquate de ce que je suis' (BN^F 312).

327 'autrui est d'abord pour moi l'être pour qui je suis objet, c'est-à-dire l'être *par qui* je gagne mon objectivité' (BN^F 309).

328 'image déformée' (BN^F 92).

329 'le Je et le Moi' 'formes de la priorité ontologique de l'Autre' (NE^F 433).

330 'nous avons donné la primauté à l'objet que nous sommes pour Autrui sur le sujet que nous sommes pour nous-même' (SG^F 37).

331 Sartre's theory of the Other in *Being and Nothingness* can be considered one of his most influential ideas, especially in philosophies that address social issues. He

As Sartre sees it, those instances in which I do perceive myself as an object only bring about a degraded object, in which I look at myself as if I were another person: 'I cannot be an object for myself' and when I assume that I can, 'I implicitly presuppose [...] the Other's existence' (BN 369)³³². The phenomenon of bad faith is rooted in this idea. Because it is given that in one's experiential life one can always become an object in the eyes of another subject, one applies this way of looking to oneself. In (certain instances of) bad faith, 'the for-itself escapes to the for-the Other, and the for-the-Other escapes to the for-itself' (BN 101)³³³.

It is also evident that the same confusion of Self and Other lies at the core of mind-body dualism. Methodologically speaking, this clarifies why Sartre discusses the body at such a late stage in the book. He first needs to develop his theory of the Other in order to properly tackle the problem of the body. When we see our bodies from an anatomical point of view, we already look at them as if they belonged to someone else: 'the being that is in this way revealed to me is its *being-for-the-Other*' (BN 411)³³⁴. There is no mind-body dualism, because the body-for-itself is entirely conscious and the body is at the same time entirely for-the-Other:

It is in its entirety that being-for-itself has to be body, and in its entirety that is has to be consciousness: it cannot be *joined* to a body. Similarly, being-for-the-Other is entirety body; here there are no 'psychological phenomena' to be joined to the body; there is nothing *behind* the body (BN 412)³³⁵.

One could say that the two facets of the body are two ways of looking at the same thing, but this description misses the point: one is the body as subject, which cannot be grasped as an object but is only experienced subjectively; the other is the body as an object, which can only be experienced from the point of view of another subject. Sartre claims to 'fully embrace the view that each of these

himself elaborated upon it in relation to anti-Semitism in *Anti-Semitism and Jew* (ASJ), De Beauvoir has used aspects of Sartre's theory in her feminist classic *The Second Sex*, and Fanon has used it to critically examine racism in *Black Skin, White Masks* (De Beauvoir 1953, Fanon 1986).

332 'Je ne puis être objet pour moi-même' 'je suppose implicitement [...] l'existence d'autrui' (BN^F 309).

333 'évasion perpétuelle du pour-soi au pour-autrui et du pour-autrui au pour-soi' (BN^F 92).

334 'l'être qui m'est ainsi révélé est son être-pour-autrui' (BN^F 344).

335 'C'est tout entier que l'être-pour-soi doit être corps et tout entier qu'il doit être conscience : il ne saurait être *uni* à un corps. Pareillement l'être-pour-autrui est corps tout entier ; il n'y a pas là de « phénomènes psychiques » à unir au corps ; il n'y a rien *derrière* le corps.' (BN^F 344-345).

two aspects of the body, being at two different and incommunicable levels of being, is irreducible to the other' (BN 412)³³⁶. Hence, he states: 'Either it [the body] is a thing among things, or it is that through which things are disclosed to me. But it cannot be both (BN 410)³³⁷. We will not delve further into the details of Sartre's theory of embodiment, as its role in selfhood is clear from what we have already discussed: either it is that which gives me a place in the world and which determines my possibilities for a large part, or it is that which the Other sees when she looks at me.³³⁸

Thus, to sum up Sartre's view of objective selfhood in this period of his work, we can say that his idea that the Self is a thing among things only has prominence in a negative sense at this stage. Although we continually tend to view ourselves as objects, we do so in bad faith. We are never really objects *for ourselves*. Only the Other can view us as such, and hence if there is still some semblance of the idea that the Self is a thing among things, then it is so *for-Others*. The other part of Sartre's theory of objective selfhood hinges on a negative object, a Self that is projected beyond the world as the limit of one's possibilities. *We are* a free consciousness that posits ends and perceives possibilities, but in this project, we create an image of ourselves on the horizon of this process which we could refer to as a Self of some sort.

6. The Original Project

Having examined the subjective and objective sides of selfhood, let us turn now to narrativity. Sartre does not explicitly discuss the topic of narrative identity in this period. We have already discussed his approach to the topic in the *War Diaries*, but he was there mostly elaborating the ideas expressed in *Nausea*. Still, as we have also seen, he does link the topic of narrative identity to that of biography. In the chapter that precedes the Conclusion to *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre also touches upon this subject. He introduces the method of 'existential psychoanalysis', which is a way of understanding our fundamental projects at a conceptual level (BN 723)³³⁹. Such a method can also be employed to write biographies, and he makes known his intention to write one about Flaubert and one about Dostoyevsky (BN 746). He did go on to write a biography of Flaubert, which we will discuss in the next chapter, but by then his methodology had already changed. Nevertheless, he does write

336 'nous nous pénétrons de l'idée que ces deux aspects du corps, étant sur deux plans d'être différents et incommunicables, sont irréductibles l'un à l'autre' (BN^F 344).

337 'Ou bien il est chose parmi les choses, ou bien il est ce par quoi les choses se découvrent à moi. Mais il ne saurait être les deux en même temps.' (BN^F 343).

338 For more information on Sartre and the body, see: (Morris 2010).

339 'psychoanalyse existentielle' (BN^F 602).

biographies of Baudelaire and Genet in the period presently under discussion. These enable us to discuss the method of existential psychoanalysis in light of the question of narrative identity: how does a lived life relate to a recounted one?

Existential psychoanalysis

Sartre's characterization of human beings as projects calls for an investigation of how the different ends that constitute that project relate to each other:

If, as we have tried to establish, it is true that human-reality becomes acquainted with itself and defines itself through the ends it pursues, an investigation and classification of these ends becomes indispensable (BN 723)³⁴⁰.

In the first part of this chapter, we discussed the fact that in order to account for the idea that every consciousness is free yet non-arbitrary, we need to assume the existence of a fundamental project that weaves the choices one continually makes together into a coherent whole. It is because of this fundamental project that we can account for the choices we make, as Sartre shows with the example of the group of hikers. Nevertheless, although our choices within a given situation can always be traced back to a fundamental project, this does not mean that all the choices we make during our life can be traced back to a single *fundamental* project. Nevertheless, it is possible, as we will see, for us to trace them back to a single *original* project.

Before we examine this notion, let us first see how fundamental projects can change. As has been said, the choices we make within a given situation hang together in the form of a fundamental choice. This does not mean that this fundamental choice precedes my other choices. Rather, the fundamental choice *is* the very coherence of these choices:

[E]ach fundamental choice defines the direction of the pursued-pursuit at the same time as it temporalizes itself. That does not mean that it *provides an initial impulse*, or that there is anything already acquired, of which I might take advantage as long as I stay within the limits of this choice. On the contrary, the nihilation is pursued continuously and, in consequence, my free and

340 'S'il est vrai que la réalité-humaine, comme nous avons tenté de l'établir, s'annonce et se définit par les fins qu'elle poursuit, une étude et une classification de ces fins devient indispensable' (BN^F 602).

continuous reclamation of this choice is indispensable (BN 611)³⁴¹.

With every choice one makes, one determines one's fundamental choice. This is a continuous process. Since every conscious act is a choice, we always seem to be in the process of making the fundamental choice. It is therefore difficult to grasp the moment in which this fundamental choice can change. As we have seen, ends projected upon things create situations. We cannot, therefore, say that from a change of situation, a change of fundamental choice follows.

Most achieved goals do not imply that the overachieving fundamental project of which they are a part is also completed. If we take the example of rock climbing, one may see a rock that needs to be climbed as an obstacle that one must overcome despite being tired because of the overarching project of surrendering to nature. When one climbs a rock, the overarching project of surrendering to nature is not necessarily completed, as one may find new obstacles in nature to overcome.³⁴²

A change of fundamental choice can therefore only exist in those rare instances in which 'the end of a project coincides with the beginning of another project' (BN 610)^{343, 344}. Such an instance 'will only exist therefore, if we are, in relation to ourselves, a beginning and an end within the unity of a single act. Now this is precisely what occurs in the case of a radical modification of our fundamental project' (BN 610).³⁴⁵ It is important to stress that we are our projects and that a modification of our fundamental projects implies an important

341 'tout choix fondamental définit la direction de la poursuite-poursuivie en même temps qu'il se temporalise. Cela ne signifie pas qu'il *donne un élan initial*, ni qu'il y ait quelque chose comme de l'acquis dont je puisse profiter tant que je me tiens dans les limites de ce choix. La néantisation se poursuit continûment, au contraire, et par suite la reprise libre et continue du choix est indispensable.' (BN^F 512).

342 It is interesting to note that the example of rock climbing is also discussed by Merleau-Ponty who uses it to critique Sartre's conception of freedom (Merleau-Ponty 2002, 512-514). For a comparison of the two thinkers on this issue, see: (Compton 1998).

343 'la fin d'un projet coïncide avec le commencement d'un autre projet' (BN^F 511).

344 The fundamental project seems to be similar to the notion of adventure discussed in the previous chapter, as it is a series of experiential episodes with a definitive beginning and end in which every episode gets its meaning from a certain goal. The main difference, however, is that in the fundamental project the goal is merely projected and not necessarily achieved. Sartre does use the term adventure sporadically in *Being and Nothingness*. A further discussion of such uses of the term is provided in the account of adventure in the last section of the next chapter of this dissertation.

345 'n'existera donc que si nous sommes à nous-même commencement et fin dans l'unité d'un même acte. Or, c'est précisément ce qui se produit dans le cas d'une modification radicale de notre projet fondamental.' (BN^F 511).

change in our identities. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre gives the example of religious conversion as an instance of such a change.³⁴⁶ Religious conversion can change the way one sees oneself and the world in a fundamental manner. Other examples can be found in the aforementioned biographies, to which we will soon turn.

A change in fundamental choice is not arbitrary: 'it is not possible for this choice not to determine itself *in connection* with the past which it has to be' (BN 610)³⁴⁷. Hence, someone who converts to a religion is always a former non-believer. The criminal who tries to better her life is never merely a law-abiding citizen, she will remain a former criminal: her current project is defined in relation to a former project. Thus, there needs to be some form of unity which transcends even the fundamental projects of the individual:

[W]e should be able to find within it [the Other] a unity (of which substance was only a caricature), that must be a unity of responsibility, a unity that we can love or hate, blame or praise – in brief the unity of a *person*. This unity, the being of the man under consideration, is a *free unification*. And the unification cannot come *after* some diversity which it unifies. Rather, for Flaubert, as for any subject of a 'biography', *to be* is to unify oneself within the world. The irreducible unification that we need to encounter, which *is* Flaubert, and which we are asking the biographers to reveal to us, is therefore the unification of an *original project*, a unification that must be revealed to us in the form of a *non-substantial absolute* (BN 728-729)³⁴⁸.

The genuinely irreducible factor of a person's projects is the original project (BN 727).³⁴⁹ Just The fundamental project does not precede

346 In the *Notebooks for an Ethics*, Sartre also uses the term 'conversion' to refer to the conversion to authenticity (NE 506).

347 'il ne se peut pas que ce choix ne se détermine pas *en liaison* avec le passé qu'il a à être' (BN^F 511).

348 'on puisse découvrir en lui cette unité - dont la substance n'était qu'une caricature - et qui doit être unité de responsabilité, unité aimable ou haïssable, blâmable ou louable, bref *personnelle*. Cette unité qui est l'être de l'homme considéré est *libre unification*. Et l'unification ne saurait venir *après* une diversité qu'elle unifie. Mais être, pour Flaubert comme pour tout sujet de « biographie », c'est s'unifier dans le monde. L'unification irréductible que nous devons rencontrer, qui *est* Flaubert et que nous demandons aux biographes de nous révéler, c'est donc l'unification d'un *projet originel*, unification qui doit se révéler à nous comme un *absolu non substantiel*.' (BN^F 606).

349 We must be aware of the fact that Sartre is not always precise with his terminology, as he sometimes uses fundamental and original project interchangeably. See, for example: (BN 736). Nevertheless, he clearly defines the break between fundamental

the choices that comprise it, and the same is true of the original project, which does not precede the choices one makes during the course of one's life. It is also not their sum, however, as it cannot unify them if it only exists afterwards. Rather, as with the fundamental project, one continually unifies oneself by existing. We can see the contrast here with the idea of substantial Self which Sartre rejects, which would exist first and only subsequently act.

In the above citation, Sartre also links the notion to biography. Although a person *is* their original project, we are usually not aware of this project. On the one hand, this is simply due to the fact that we do not know enough about most people to see what it is that binds all their actions together. Although a person 'is expressed in its entirety – although from a different angle – in each inclination, each tendency', we must know a person over a significantly long period of time to form such an image of them and hence know their original project (BN 731)³⁵⁰. A part from its biographical usage, the original project can also be understood as the proper object of psychology. The method of existential psychoanalysis which Sartre proposes aims precisely at uncovering this project:

The *principle* of this psychoanalysis is that man is a totality and not a collection. [...].

The *goal* of psychoanalysis is to *decipher* man's empirical behaviour, i.e. to place in full daylight the revelations each behaviour contains and to determine them conceptually.

Its *point of departure* is *experience*; its *reference point* is the preontological and fundamental understanding of the human person possessed by man. [...]

Its *method* is comparative: since in fact each instance of human behaviour symbolizes in its way the fundamental choice that needs to be uncovered and since, at the same time, this choice is concealed by in each instance by accidental characteristics and its historical juncture, it is by comparing these ways of behaving that we will be able to make the unique revelation, differently expressed in each one of them, come forth (BN 738)³⁵¹.

projects, and he explicitly states that the person in their entirety is a single original project.

350 'en chaque inclination, en chaque tendance, elle s'exprime tout entière, quoique sous un angle différent' (BN^F 609).

351 'Le *principe* de cette psychanalyse est que l'homme est une totalité et non une collection [...].

Le *but* de la psychanalyse est de *déchiffrer* les comportements empiriques de l'homme, c'est-à-dire de mettre en pleine lumière les révélations que chacun d'eux

The original project is ultimately that which makes a human being into a coherent person and not a mere accidental series of choices. 'Existential psychoanalysis seeks to determine the *original choice*', the choice which is 'totalizing' (BN 739)³⁵². As with its fundamental choice and project, Sartre uses original project and original choice interchangeably. Because the point of departure is experience and experience is intentional, the existential psychoanalyst must investigate how the world appears to the subject of the investigation and therefore must aim at 'a psychoanalysis of *things*' (BN 777)³⁵³.

The original project is something we can only truly grasp on a conceptual level. It 'is fully *lived* by the subject and as such, fully conscious, [but] that does not at all mean that it must by the same token be *known* by him' (BN 740)³⁵⁴. Thus, while we do have a preontological understanding of such a project, it is unclear whether Sartre means by this that we have an understanding of original projects in general or just of our own original project. In any case, this understanding is non-conceptual. Consequently, we do not have a different epistemological relationship towards it:

[T]he projects that are uncovered by existential psychoanalysis, are apprehended *from the Other's point of view*. Accordingly the *object* that is hereby brought to light will be articulated in terms of a transcended-transcendence, i.e. its being will be being-for-the-Other even if, moreover, the psychoanalyst and the subject of the psychoanalysis are identical. Thus the project that [...] psychoanalysis brings to light can only be the person's totality, the irreducible fact of transcendence, as they are in *their being-for-the-other*. What escapes forever from these investigative methods is the project as it is for itself, the complex in its own being. This project-for-itself can only be *enjoyed*; there is an incompatibility

contient et de les fixer conceptuellement.

Son *point de départ* est *l'expérience* ; son *point d'appui* est la compréhension préontologique et fondamentale que l'homme a de la personne humaine. [...]

Sa *méthode* est comparative : puisque, en effet, chaque conduite humaine symbolise à sa manière le choix fondamental qu'il faut mettre au jour, et puisque, en même temps, chacune d'elles masque ce choix sous ses caractères occasionnels et son opportunité historique, c'est par la comparaison de ces conduites que nous ferons jaillir la révélation unique qu'elles expriment toutes de manière différente.' (BN^F 614).

352 'La psychanalyse existentielle cherche à déterminer le *choix originel*' 'totalitaire' (BN^F 615).

353 'une psychanalyse des *choses*' (BN^F 646).

354 'est pleinement *vécu* par le sujet et, comme tel, totalement conscient, cela ne signifie nullement qu'il doive être du même coup *connu* par lui' (BN^F 616).

between existence for itself and objective existence (BN 741)³⁵⁵.

Thus, the original project is a fully-fledged conceptual assessment of the object I am for the Other, even when I assess myself. Sartre clearly distances it from reflection and hence from the objective Ego that it uncovers. We have a closer relation to the latter than others do, as we have already discussed in the last chapter.

Sartre's description of existential psychoanalysis is relatively brief. 'This psychoanalysis has not yet found its Freud: at most we may be able to get a sense of it from especially accomplished biographies' (BN 745-746)³⁵⁶. As already noted, Sartre's own biographies make use of the method. Let us take a brief look at the biographies of Baudelaire and Genet, which were published in 1946 and 1952 respectively. As both studies are very specific, we would stray too far from our general topic of selfhood if we attempted to provide a detailed overview of them. Hence, we will solely focus on the original choices uncovered in these texts in order to gain more insight into what Sartre has in mind.³⁵⁷

In both cases, the original choice can be traced back to a specific moment in their respective childhoods.³⁵⁸ For Baudelaire it is occasioned by his mother's remarriage: 'The sudden break and the grief it caused forced him into a personal existence without any warning or preparation' (B 17)³⁵⁹.

355 'les projets décelés par la psychanalyse existentielle, seront appréhendés *du point de vue d'autrui*. Par suite, l'*objet* ainsi mis au jour sera articulé selon les structures de la transcendance-transcendée, c'est-à-dire que son être sera l'être-pour-autrui ; même si d'ailleurs le psychanalyste et le sujet de la psychanalyse ne font qu'un. Ainsi le projet mis au jour par [...] psychanalyse ne pourra être que la totalité de la personne, l'irréductible de la transcendance tels qu'ils sont dans *leur être-pour-l'autre*. Ce qui échappe pour toujours à ces méthodes d'investigation, c'est le projet tel qu'il est pour soi, le complexe dans son être propre. Ce projet-pour-soi ne peut être que *joui* ; il y a incompatibilité entre l'existence pour soi et l'existence objective.' (BN^F 617).

356 'Cette psychanalyse n'a pas encore trouvé son Freud ; tout au plus peut-on en trouver le pressentiment dans certaines biographies particulièrement réussies' (BN^F 620).

357 For a more detailed study of Sartre's biographies, see: (Dobson 1993, 128-149; Howells 1988, 166-193)

358 The idea that the original choice does not in fact transcend specific choices but is made in a specific moment is again stressed by Sartre in 1965: "'Original choice'" is the term I use to describe what happens at the moment—a protracted moment, covering a certain span of time—in which one makes something of oneself, of that self which so far has been made by others' (IPB 71).

359 'Cette brusque rupture et le chagrin qui en est résulté l'ont jeté sans transition dans l'existence personnelle' (B^F 19-20).

This brings us to the point at which Baudelaire chose the sort of person he would be—that irrevocable choice by which each of us decides in a particular situation what he will be and what he is. When he found himself abandoned and rejected, Baudelaire chose solitude deliberately as an act of self-assertion, so that his solitude should not be something inflicted on him by other people (B 18)³⁶⁰.

The idea presented in *Being and Nothingness* that the choice is not made deliberately but throughout every choice seems difficult to reconcile with this account, insofar as Sartre now claims that Baudelaire's choice was a deliberate one. He concludes *Baudelaire* with the statement that 'the free choice which a man makes of himself is completely identified with what is called his destiny' (B 192)^{361, 362}. This can be understood to mean that from a particular moment in childhood onwards we start *revealing* the original choice that gives shape to all our subsequent choices. We might infer from this that one is not born as a *person* and that personhood is something acquired at some point during childhood – yet Sartre does not say this explicitly.³⁶³

In Genet's case, the original choice is much more related to the look of the Other, as it can be traced back to a moment when he is caught stealing: '[t]he gaze of the adults is a *constituent power* which has transformed him into a *constituted nature*' (SG 49)³⁶⁴. However, 'what is important is not what people make of us but what we ourselves make of what they have made of us' (SG 49)³⁶⁵.

So he has chosen the worst. He had no other choice. His life is all laid out: it will be a journey to the end of misfortune. He will later write: "I decided to be what crime made of me." [...] He wills his destiny; he will

360 'Nous touchons ici au choix originel que Baudelaire a fait de lui-même, à cet engagement absolu par quoi chacun de nous décide dans une situation particulière de ce qu'il sera et de ce qu'il est.' (B^F 20).

361 'le choix libre que l'homme fait de soi-même s'identifie absolument avec ce qu'on appelle sa destinée' (B^F 224).

362 For a more in-depth comparison of the notions of original choice and destiny, see: (Simont 2013).

363 It should be noted that Sartre would later say that his study of Baudelaire was '[a] very inadequate, an extremely bad one' (IT 42).

364 'le regard des adultes est un *pouvoir constituant* qui l'a transformé en *nature constituée*' (SG^F 55).

365 'l'important n'est pas ce qu'on fait de nous mais ce que nous faisons nous-même de ce qu'on a fait de nous' (SG^F 55).

try to love it. [...] I was a thief, *I will be the Thief* (SG 49-50)³⁶⁶.

Thus, Genet submits to a life of crime: 'his original choice [is] to do evil' (SG 127)³⁶⁷. Nevertheless, his idea of being a thief and therefore evil is mainly something that has to do with how others perceive him. Hence, he steals for an imaginary audience that may catch him in the act. This turns Genet towards the imaginary, which is ultimately poetic. Leaving aside poetic and aesthetic considerations, what is interesting for our purposes is that we can see here how a fundamental project changes, while the original project remains the same:

For he immediately makes his second major decision: he will be *the* poet. Actually, this choice, which changes his life, involves nothing new: it is a reaffirmation of his original choice. He had decided to be what they had made of him; in striving to *be* a thief, he realized that he had become a *dreamer*; but his original will to assume himself entirely has not changed (SG 353)³⁶⁸.

Thus, being a thief in the eyes of others leads Genet to a poetic take on life. Later, he will once again change his fundamental project by becoming a writer, and more precisely, a writer who writes about thievery: 'He becomes the person who *manifests theft*' (SG 549)³⁶⁹. Thereby, he synthesizes his former fundamental projects into one that embodies all the former ones (SG 554).

Sartre concludes *Saint Genet* by saying that although other methods can go a long way in studying a person, his aim is 'to demonstrate that freedom alone can account for a person in his totality' (SG 584)³⁷⁰. This is ultimately what the notion of the original project boils down to: Sartre has argued that a human being as a project is nothing but freedom. However, he also wants to account for a type personal identity that persists throughout one's entire life. The only way he can do this within his own framework is to have a free choice

366 'Donc il a choisi le pire : il n'avait pas d'autre choix. Sa vie est tout tracée : ce sera le voyage au bout de malheur. Il écrira plus tard : « J'ai décidé d'être ce que le crime a fait de moi. » [...] Il veut son destin ; il tâchera de l'aimer. [...] J'étais voleur, *je serai le Voleur*[.]' (SG^F 55-56).

367 'son choix originel de mal faire' (SG^F 124).

368 'Car il prend aussitôt sa deuxième décision capitale : il sera *le* poète. A vrai dire, ce choix, qui change sa vie, ne comporte rien de neuf : c'est une réaffirmation de son choix primitif. Il avait décidé d'être ce qu'on l'avait fait ; en s'efforçant d'être voleur, il s'est aperçu qu'il était devenu *rêveur* ; mais sa volonté originelle de s'assumer tout entier n'a pas changé.' (SG^F 327).

369 'Il devient celui qui *manifeste le vol*' (SG^F 505).

370 'que seule la liberté peut rendre compte d'une personne en sa totalité' (SG^F 536).

that spans the course of one's life. Nevertheless, although we seem to have some knowledge of our fundamental projects, we can only *know* this choice in hindsight and as an object-for-the-Other.

The notion of the original choice remains a problematic one. Sartre has to account for the coherence of a person while adhering to the idea that a person is totally free. It seems as though, at least if we follow the examples of Baudelaire and Genet, our original choice determines other choices and therefore diminishes how free these choices are.³⁷¹ If we regard these examples as unfaithful to the theory presented in *Being and Nothingness*, where Sartre states that the choice is not made at a definite moment but continually, the explanatory power of the notion remains difficult to grasp. Sartre's reasoning seems to be circular: there needs to be some sort of coherence to a person's choices and hence we can retroactively deduce an original choice from them which is that which guarantees the coherence of our choices. This does not explain why our choices are coherent, it just seems to posit that they are.

Humanism

The notion of the original project can not only account for the totality of a specific human being, but can do so for human beings in general. As has been said, we have a non-conceptual understanding of the original project, and Sartre is ambiguous about whether this understanding is about our own specific project or the original project as such. Apart from the fact that we can deduce an original project from a person's fundamental projects, there is something else that can be discovered:

[A]n abstract and meaningful structure which is the desire to be in general, and which we must take to be *human-reality in the person*, which makes up his commonality with the others and allows us to claim that there is a truth about man, and not merely a set of incomparable individuals (BN 736)³⁷².

As discussed in the previous section, this desire to be is the desire to

371 Sartre's screenplay *The Chips are Down* is interesting in this regard (CD). In the screenplay, two people are brought back from the dead because they had been destined to be lovers. They have a day to prove that they can begin their new life as a couple. However, they are too caught up in the projects of their previous lives and they fail. In an interview, Sartre said that the work should not be interpreted as existentialist, but instead as determinist (IJ 156).

372 'une structure abstraite et signifiante qui est le désir d'être en général et qui doit être considéré comme la *réalité-humaine dans la personne*, ce qui fait sa communauté avec autrui, ce qui permet d'affirmer qu'il y a une vérité de l'homme et non pas seulement des individualités incomparables' (BN^F 612).

coincide with the Self beyond the world: ‘the project-for-itself of being *in-itself-for-itself*’ (BN 737)³⁷³. Although one cannot comprehend freedom apart from how it is manifested in choices, the abstract structure Sartre is describing here can be regarded as the ‘freedom’s *truth*, which is that it is freedom’s human meaning’ (BN 737)³⁷⁴. This is why Sartre’s ideas concerning existential psychoanalysis are applicable to every human being: we cannot conceive of someone who does not have – or who is not – an original project. Again, this original project can only be derived from concrete desires and does not precede them:

That does not mean that there are abstract desires that exist, common to all men, prior to any specification, but that there are structures to concrete desires which fall under the study of ontology because every desire expresses all of human-reality (BN 746)³⁷⁵.

The connection between the specific choices we make and what it means to be a human being in general is also one of the themes in *Existentialism is a Humanism*. Here, he also describes a fundamental or original choice – although he uses neither of the terms: ‘I may want to join a party, write a book, or get married – but all of that is only a manifestation of an earlier and more spontaneous choice than what is known as “will”’ (EH 23)³⁷⁶. Because we are in the first instance a free choice, we are fully responsible for ourselves. Nevertheless, our responsibility reaches even further: ‘when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men’ (EH 23)³⁷⁷. This idea is the root of Sartre’s humanism:

When we say that man chooses himself, not only do we mean that each of us must choose himself, but also that in choosing himself, he is choosing for all men. In fact, in creating the man each of us wills ourselves to be, there is not a single one of our actions that does not at the

373 ‘projet-pour-soi d’être *en-soi-pour-soi*’ (BN^F 613).

374 ‘la *vérité* de la liberté, c’est-à-dire qu’elle est la signification humaine de la liberté’ (BN^F 613).

375 ‘Cela signifie, non qu’il existe avant toute spécification des désirs abstraits et communs à tous les hommes, mais que les désirs concrets ont des structures qui ressortissent à l’étude de l’ontologie parce que chaque désir [...] exprime toute la réalité humaine.’ (BN^F 621).

376 ‘Je peux vouloir adhérer à un parti, écrire un livre, me marier, tout cela n’est qu’une manifestation d’un choix plus originel, plus spontané que ce qu’on appelle volonté’ (EH^F 23-24).

377 ‘quand nous disons que l’homme est responsable de lui-même, nous ne voulons pas dire que l’homme est responsable de sa stricte individualité, mais qu’il est responsable de tous les hommes’ (EH^F 24).

same time create an image of man as we think he ought to be. [...] If, moreover, existence precedes essence and we will to exist at the same time as we fashion our image, that image is valid for all and for our whole era. Our responsibility is thus much greater than we might have supposed, because it concerns all mankind. [...] I am therefore responsible for myself and for everyone else, and I am fashioning a certain image of man as I choose him to be. In choosing myself, I choose man (EH 24-25)³⁷⁸.

It seems that Sartre turns the descriptive account of how our desires express something about humanity in general into a normative account. In *Being and Nothingness*, every choice reveals something about humanity in general. In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, every choice creates (an image of) humanity in general. In the latter text, moreover, it is unclear to what extent we are supposed to be aware of the fact that we are creating an image of man or what this image is. Sartre speaks about “man as we think he ought to be”, but does not explicate whether we are conceptually aware of this image or whether we merely have a preontological understanding of this choice, as is described in *Being and Nothingness*. He goes on to say that we should always ask ourselves what would happen if everyone does what I am doing, and that if we are not asking ourselves this question, then we are in bad faith (EH 25).

In any case, there is a discrepancy between the two texts. In *Being and Nothingness*, the original choice – even when it concerns humanity in general – can only be conceived of in hindsight and as an object-for-the-Other. Acting like one is *merely* such an object is an act of bad faith. In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, our choices all express an image of what man should be, and it seems that this is what binds them together. We can be aware of this while we act and not merely in hindsight. Furthermore, we could also identify this image with the Self beyond the world, which is also an image. Yet whereas in *Being and Nothingness* to identify with this image is to be in bad faith, in the lecture Sartre seems to say exactly the opposite.

378 ‘Quand nous disons que l’homme se choisit, nous entendons que chacun d’entre nous se choisit, mais par là nous voulons dire aussi qu’en se choisissant il choisit tous les hommes. En effet, il n’est pas un de nos actes qui, en créant l’homme que nous voulons être, ne crée en même temps une image de l’homme tel que nous estimons qu’il doit être. [...] Si l’existence, d’autre part, précède l’essence et que nous voulons exister en même temps que nous façonnons notre image, cette image est valable pour tous et pour notre époque tout entière. Ainsi, notre responsabilité est beaucoup plus grande que nous ne pourrions le supposer, car elle engage l’humanité entière. [...] Ainsi je suis responsable pour moi-même et pour tous, et je crée une certaine image de l’homme que je choisit; en me choisissant, je choisit l’homme.’ (EH^F 25-27).

It does not seem, therefore, that we can reach any conclusive account of how Sartre's brief description of his humanism in *Existentialism is a Humanism* can be mapped onto his broader theories of selfhood. At a general level, we can say that human beings as free projects all have something in common: the desire to be. Our original projects are, therefore, both what binds all the fundamental projects of throughout our life together and that which binds us all together as a single humanity.

Conclusion

With regard to selfhood, the period of Sartre's oeuvre that has been discussed in this chapter stands out as the one in which the idea of the Self as a thing among things is, by and large, regarded as false. Instead, selfhood is mainly understood in terms of nothingness, or, in other words: freedom.

With regard to subjective selfhood, the idea that all consciousness is self-consciousness – or rather consciousness (of) Self – is the leading principle. Although Sartre also calls this idea the prereflective cogito, it does not entail a *res cogitans* or any other substantive subjective Self. As I have argued, Sartre's appeal to the cogito should be understood as an apodictic claim: within his philosophical system, consciousness (of) self is the *ground* for one of the two (initial) forms of Being. Apart from this new name, Sartre emphasizes prereflective selfhood much more than reflective selfhood. He argues that consciousness is personal because it is present to itself. Furthermore, it contains a dimension of selfhood that ties different moments of consciousness together throughout time: ipseity.

Iipseity is the idea that we can prereflectively perceive possibilities, which project a future Self. This idea is also the root of Sartre's conception of objective selfhood. In the projection of ends, we project an image of ourselves "beyond the world", one which we aim to be but which is in principle unattainable. Although Sartre does not adhere to the idea that the Self is ultimately a thing, he does spend a lot of time discussing ways in which we act as if it were one. There are two main categories of this form of misleading objective selfhood: bad faith and being-for-the-Other. In bad faith, one acts as if one were an object and therefore not free. In being-for-the-Other, we appear in the look of another person as an object. This is inevitable and only becomes problematic if we reduce ourselves to being merely this object. Somehow, we are a free project that cannot be reduced to an object, and, at the same time, when viewed "from the outside" we are an object. A person is both for-itself and for-the-Other.

The dimension of narrative selfhood is not developed as such in this

period. As has been argued, we can link the method of existential psychoanalysis and its object, the original project, to this topic because Sartre himself ties it to biography. In order to account for the fact that our choices comprise a coherent person, Sartre claims that they hang together in a fundamental project. Over time, we can have different fundamental projects, which in turn hang together as an original project. It is difficult to see what this original project entails specifically, as the examples Sartre gives in the biographies he wrote are problematic, as we have seen. What is clear, however, is that we can *know* an original project only in hindsight, when we describe our own lives or read the accounts other people have given of theirs. Hence, it does give us an answer to the question of narrative identity – how does a life lived relate to a life recounted: a life lived is always *enjoyed*, while a life recounted can also be *known*.

Chapter 3

The Force of Things

The third and last period of Sartre's oeuvre can be characterized as a turn from a philosophy of consciousness to 'the force of circumstances' (IT 33)³⁷⁹. This phrase comes from the title of an autobiographical work by De Beauvoir. Sartre's use of the phrase exemplifies the lasting influence these two thinkers had on each other.³⁸⁰ In the book, De Beauvoir describes how Sartre's political activities had caused him to rethink his philosophical views on human beings: 'All my political efforts are directed toward finding a group that will give a meaning to my transcendence[.] [...] I must renounce the optimistic idea that one can be a man in any situation, an idea inspired by the Resistance: even under torture one could be a man.' (De Beauvoir 1964, 148). Although Sartre had tackled social issues such as anti-Semitism and racism as early as the 1940s (ASJ, BO), the early periods of his thought are characterized by an emphasis on the individual. As the years went by his thought would become less individualistic as he became increasingly drawn towards a Marxist framework, which he sought to reconcile with his existential philosophy. As we have discussed in the introductory chapter, the Marxists were among the first to criticize existentialism for being idealist and lacking a positive socio-political dimension. Sartre's project to reconcile the two can be understood both as an acknowledgment of this criticism as well as a defiant response that seeks to show that many of the tenets of his existential philosophy can in fact be integrated within a materialist framework that allows for a social and political action.

Sartre's increased emphasis on concrete circumstances in this period leads him to foreground two fundamental questions, which mirror each other: the question of how human beings create history and the question of how history creates human beings. Most of his philosophical texts of this period are somehow related to these questions. Sartre characterizes man as a 'singular universal' (F1 ix; SU 420), a singular instance of the universal epoch. Another way of phrasing the theme of human beings in light of history would be to ask how the singular creates the universal and how the universal

379 'la force des choses' (IT^F 151).

380 For more information concerning the philosophical side of their relationship, see: (Daigle & Golomb 2009).

creates the singular. When we consider this new emphasis within the context of his theories of selfhood, we encounter two peculiar movements in this period. On the issue of subjective and objective selfhood, Sartre's later works seem to return to the positions he had maintained prior to *Being and Nothingness*, though they draw some important lessons from the latter work as well. On the issue of narrative identity, however, Sartre's later position marks a complete reversal from his early dismissal of narrative structure.

As in the previous chapters, the first part of this chapter will be devoted to the triad of subjectivity, objectivity and negativity, focusing largely on the first volume of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. We will start with a discussion of Sartre's methodology and the notion of *praxis*, which replaces consciousness as the main activity of subjective beings. We will then turn to the expanded notion of the world and the things in it, in the form of the practico-inert. Afterwards we will discuss Sartre's ideas concerning group formation and how this ultimately leads to History.

In the second part of the chapter, we will first discuss subjective selfhood. We will discuss the process Sartre calls "interiorisation" and the related notion of lived experience, which Sartre describes in the lecture "Marxism and Subjectivity". Next, we will turn to objective selfhood and the process of personalisation, focusing largely on *The Family Idiot* and various interviews. We will end with a discussion of the notion of the singular universal as it is presented in "Kierkegaard: The Singular Universal" and *The Family Idiot*, and show why this notion can be understood as a form of narrative identity.

Part I From *Praxis* to History

1. *Praxis* and Totalisation

In order to understand the rationale behind Sartre's new approach to subjectivity, we have to understand the problem he is facing. This problem has to do with dialectical thinking, the idea that the object studied has an internal logic that relates to opposing positions which are subsequently overcome. In Sartre's own words, it is the idea that 'a negation of a negation can be an affirmation' (CDR 15)³⁸¹. He is primarily interested in dialectical thinking concerning History, in which opposing forces clash and create new circumstances. History with a capital H is distinguished from history as the former is intended to encompass the entirety of human development. There can be multiple histories, but there can be only one History. Furthermore, there are 'societies with no

381 'une négation de négation peut être une affirmation' (CDR^F 115).

history' which are characterized by Sartre as 'societies based on repetition' (CDR 125)³⁸². These are societies in which there are no meaningful technical and social changes. Another way of putting this is that History is the totalisation of all human development into a single process. The opposition between the state of totality and the process of totalisation is that 'the totalisation differs from the totality in that the latter *is* totalized while the former totalizes itself' (CDR 53)³⁸³. A totality is an organized whole, a totalisation is in a perpetual process of retaining this state, which it therefore never fully achieves.³⁸⁴ In this sense, a work of art or another artefact may be viewed as a totality because its maker decides that it is finished.

The progressive-regressive method

The problem Sartre faces within this field is that two opposing interpretations of the role of subjectivity in History fall short: Hegelian idealism and Marxist monism. Hegelian idealism, according to Sartre, involves the idea that History is shaped by ideas rather than material circumstances. This idealism should not be confused with the Berkeleyan idealism Sartre criticizes in his earlier works, although both are examples of a worldview in which the role subjectivity is overstated. Hegel considers his own position to be the end of History, that is to say, the position in which the process of ideas shaping History has come to an end (CDR 21). Sartre claims that, according to Hegel, History is the unfolding of ideas, which means that at the end of History all ideas have culminated in Truth. Thus, Hegel's position is the Truth and every historical situation we describe from his point of view is necessarily true. Or, in other words, knowledge and truth are the same thing and all being can be reduced to knowledge (CDR 22-23). This position is regarded as false because the positing of an absolute point of view of History implies that there can be no more real changes. The world as it is, is absolute, and we cannot understand it better, nor can we (radically) change anything about it.

The counterpart of this idealism, Marxist monism, is a monist historical materialism. Rather than make the subject the absolute force in History, this position makes the object, material circumstances, absolute. It is not the position of Marx himself (SM 86-87), but that of 'modern Marxists' whom Sartre does not name directly (CDR

382 'des sociétés sans histoire, fondées sur la répétition' (CDR^F 203).

383 'la totalisation se distingue de la totalité parce que celle-ci *est* totalisée et que celle-là se totalise' (CDR^F 143).

384 Sartre claims that totalities can only be created by an act of imagination (CDR 45). Someone has to decide that something is finished, as is the case with a work of art. Once the decision has been made, the totality can persist. This idea of objects being totalities is reminiscent of the notion of 'this' as discussed in the previous chapter.

26)³⁸⁵. If this is the case, there is no role for subjectivity in history whatsoever: ‘There is no longer *knowledge* in the strict sense of the term; Being *no longer manifests itself* in any way whatsoever: it merely evolves according to its own laws’ (CDR 26)³⁸⁶. The problem with this position is that according to its own logic, it cannot prove itself. If human understanding is an epiphenomenon of material processes, then there is no reason to assume that our understanding is right. Hence, the position that our knowledge is completely irrelevant becomes itself a claim of absolute Truth, which cannot be proven.³⁸⁷ Thus, ‘historical materialism has established everything except its own existence’ (CDR 19)³⁸⁸.

Thus, both positions suffer the same problem: they cannot prove themselves, they simply posit that there is a development in History. For idealism, the ideas that govern History are true because History follows ideas. For monist materialism, our understanding of History is a mere epiphenomenon because it is not part of the Historical process. Therefore, Sartre concludes:

A materialist dialectic will be meaningless if it cannot establish, within human history, the primacy of material conditions as they are discovered by the *praxis* of particular men and as they impose themselves on it. In short, if there is to be any such thing as dialectical materialism, it must be a *historical* materialism, that is to say, a materialism from within; it must be one and the same thing to produce it and to have it imposed on one, to live it and to know it (CDR 33)³⁸⁹.

To understand History, we have to understand it from our own point of view within History. To live it and to know it are the same, meaning that in order to study History we have to begin studying our own lives within material circumstances. It is not enough to study general historical, sociological, and economical movements, rather

385 ‘marxistes d’aujourd’hui’ (CDR^F 123).

386 ‘Il n’y a plus à proprement parler de *connaissance*, l’Être ne *se manifeste plus*, de quelque manière que ce soit : il évolue selon ses lois propres’ (CDR^F 123).

387 It is because of this impossibility it faces in justifying itself that Sartre also calls this form of materialism an idealism in *Search for a Method*: ‘There are two ways to fall into idealism: The one consists of dissolving the real in subjectivity; the other in denying all real subjectivity in the interests of objectivity’ (SM 33).

388 ‘le matérialisme historique [...] a tout fondé, sauf sa propre existence.’ (CDR^F 118).

389 ‘Une dialectique matérialiste n’a de sens que si elle établit à l’intérieur de l’histoire humaine la primauté des conditions matérielles telles que la *praxis* des hommes situés les découvre et les subit. En un mot, s’il existe quelque chose comme un matérialisme dialectique ce doit être un matérialisme *historique*, c’est-à-dire un matérialisme du dedans : c’est tout un de le faire et de le subir, de le vivre et de le connaître.’ (CDR^F 129).

we have to understand how our own individual lives constitute these processes. Therefore, if we locate dialectics not in our understanding, as idealism does, and not in the material circumstances, as monist materialism does, but in the relationship between the two, then the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity itself becomes dialectical. In this case, there is a true dialectic from within, rather than from without. Sartre's goal in the *Critique* is showing that neither subjectivity nor objectivity is capable of carrying out the movement of History. Thus, Sartre aims to show how a subjective agent is able to understand History from within: 'if we are to determine its [dialectical Reason's] significance, then we must realize the situated experience of its apodicticity *through ourselves*' (CDR 39)³⁹⁰.

[I]f 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 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 *totalizing force*, though not a transcendent fate (CDR 36)³⁹¹[.]

This means that Sartre has found a starting point for his enquiry into dialectical reason: 'our starting point is individual *praxis*' (CDR 65)³⁹².³⁹³ The fact that *praxis* replaces consciousness as the central activity of subjective beings exemplifies the change between this period and the previous one. Sartre now thinks that *Being and*

390 'si nous devons déterminer sa portée, il faut réaliser *par nous-même* l'expérience située de son apodictivité.' (CDR^F 134).

391 'si nous ne voulons pas que la dialectique redevienne une loi divine, une fatalité métaphysique, il faut qu'elle vienne des individus et non de je ne sais quels ensembles supra-individuels. Autrement dit, nous rencontrons cette nouvelle contradiction : la dialectique est la loi de totalisation qui fait qu'il y a des collectifs, des sociétés, une histoire, c'est-à-dire des réalités qui s'imposent aux individus ; mais en même temps, elle doit être tissée par des millions d'actes individuels. Il faudra établir comment elle peut être à la fois résultante sans être moyenne passive et force totalisante sans être fatalité transcendante' (CDR^F 131).

392 'nous partons de la *praxis* individuelle' (CDR^F 153).

393 Sartre attributes his discovery of *praxis* to Merleau-Ponty: 'Merleau taught me that I would find it everywhere, in the most hidden aspect of my life as well as in the broad daylight of history, and that there is only one, which is the same for all of us: the event which makes us becoming action, action which unmakes us by becoming through us event, and which, since Marx and Hegel, we call *praxis*. [...] The course of things made the last rampart of my individualism crumble' (MPV 582).

Nothingness is a 'rationalist philosophy of consciousness' (IT 41)³⁹⁴. While Sartre has a very broad conception of consciousness, the term is still associated with the contemplative and conceptual relationship we have to the world around us, whereas *praxis* stresses the practical nature of subjectivity. In this context, the term idealism is also used to refer to theories that only describe subjective beings at an abstract level. Although he does not distance himself from the views of *Being and Nothingness*, he does stress that it only describes human beings in an abstract manner:

F. – I think that the concept of individuality in *Being and Nothingness* is a totally different concept than that in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

S. – Certainly, certainly, but that is perhaps because *Being and Nothingness* is a general point of view, a fundamental point of view. And the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is a point of view that on the contrary is social and concrete. The one is abstract, studies general truths, and the other is not so concerned with that and places itself upon the plane of the concrete (IF 225).

The fact that Sartre regards the *Critique* to be on the plane of the concrete does not mean, however, that everything he describes in the work takes place on this level. This is due to the dialectical nature of the book, in which oppositions are overcome and brought to a new level. This means that not everything that Sartre describes can simply be considered true, as many aspects of his theory can be modified in a new dialectical movement. Catalano describes this well when he says that Sartre 'always proceeds from the abstract to the concrete, but the concrete is already on the horizon awaiting critical examination' (Catalano 1986, 14). Hence, the concrete is not Sartre's starting point but the finish line of the first volume of the *Critique*. This is most evident when we consider that the starting point of individual *praxis* is a 'fictitious abstract state' based on the 'pure abstraction' of a person taken only as an organism, and it is in reality a much more complex social phenomenon (CDR 197, 454)³⁹⁵. In a slightly different context – that of the relationship between collectives and groups – Sartre states that 'the term 'fundamental' here does not imply temporal priority' (CDR 348)³⁹⁶. We can easily transpose this statement to the theme of individual *praxis*. A single individual motivated by its own survival may never have existed. Yet, it must still be the starting point of the investigation as it is the most

394 'une philosophie rationaliste de la conscience' (IT^F 112).

395 'état fictif d'abstrait' 'pure abstraction' (CDR^F 261, 466).

396 'le terme « fondamental » ne saurait désigner ici une priorité temporelle' (CDR^F 383-384).

fundamental relation between subjectivity and objectivity.

In the *Search for a Method* Sartre develops the methodology for his enquiry, which he terms ‘the progressive-regressive method’ (SM 85)³⁹⁷. As the name of the method suggests, it consists of two movements. Both start from a specific situation and the experience of the individuals within it. In order to fully understand the events or people in the situation, one has to understand both the determining factors which make the situation possible, as well as the intentions, goals and motivations of the people in it. In other words, from the situation one has to *regress* towards the origin of the situation and *progress* towards the point to which the situation is leading. The regressive movement can incorporate all kinds of scientific and historical research: ‘We demand of general history that it restore to us the structures of the contemporary society, its conflicts, its profound contradictions, and the over-all movement which these determine’ (SM 134)³⁹⁸. It is important to note that we should not confuse specific with concrete in this context: while the starting point of individual *praxis* is a specific situation, it is not a concrete situation that has ever existed. This abstract starting point is necessary to ‘place man in his proper framework’ (SM 134)³⁹⁹. In order to fully understand a situation, however, a purely regressive analysis is too abstract. One has to show how individuals act within this framework. This movement is progressive, as it focuses on the (temporal) progression within the situation. In general, this progressive movement corresponds with the method of existential psychoanalysis (SM 62, 148).⁴⁰⁰ One has to show how the situation appears to the individual within the situation, who may not be aware of the factors that created it, factors that are uncovered in the regressive movement.⁴⁰¹ The fault of many of Sartre’s contemporary Marxists is that they confuse regression with progression, which

397 ‘La méthode progressive-régressive’ (SM^F 60). The chapter in which the method is explained places progressive before regressive, but in the text Sartre uses the term ‘regressive-progressive’ (SM 148).

398 ‘Nous demandons à l’histoire générale de nous restituer les structures de la société contemporaine, ses conflits, ses contradictions profondes et le mouvement d’ensemble que celles-ci déterminent.’ (SM^F 86).

399 ‘replacer l’homme dans son cadre’ (SM^F 86).

400 Sartre uses the biography of Flaubert as an example of progressive analysis, just like he did in *Being and Nothingness* when outlining existential psychoanalysis.

401 Phenomenology does not correspond to the progressive movement, as it does not focus on the experience of the individuals within the studied situation, but on that of the researcher. Hence, both regressive and progressive analyses are able to use phenomenological analysis to study the objects at hand. Phenomenology becomes one tool among others rather than an all-encompassing method. It is sometimes used in *The Family Idiot*. This does not seem radically different to the role played by phenomenological analysis in the ontological inquiry of *Being and Nothingness*, as has been outlined in the previous chapter.

results in a crude positivism which takes the framework itself to be the active factor, rather than the human beings within the framework (SM 133).

Although the *Search for a Method* is often printed alongside the *Critique* as its introduction, it actually serves as a thematic introduction to both this work and *The Family Idiot*. In the latter, Sartre moves quite freely between the regressive and progressive movements, focusing at times on the spirit of the age and the people around Flaubert and at other times on Flaubert's own experience as he describes it in various written texts.⁴⁰² In the *Critique*, however, the regressive and progressive movements are more strictly separated (CDR 39). The first part is entirely regressive and the unfinished and posthumously published second part serves as the progressive analysis. The regressive analysis is nevertheless sufficient to 'establish dialectical rationality' (CDR 39)⁴⁰³.

We have now discussed the methodological background of this period of Sartre's work, and we have seen that Sartre wants to reveal that *praxis* is dialectical. Let us now turn towards this notion itself.

Praxis

Sartre's analysis of individual *praxis* is not a study of a specific situation, person or event, but a more abstract analysis of *praxis* itself. It must be therefore understood that although this regressive analysis is about subjectivity, it does not take the subjective *as subjective* as its object:

[T]he epistemological starting point must always be *consciousness* as apodictic certainty (of) itself and as consciousness *of* such and such an object. But we are not concerned, at this point, with interrogating consciousness about itself: the object it must give itself is precisely the *life*, the objective being, of the investigator (CDR 51)⁴⁰⁴

Sartre is not concerned with the abstract relation of consciousness to its object, but with our practical relation to objects. This does not mean that Sartre is not interested in the subjective dimension of life *per se*, which we will discuss at length in the second part of this chapter, but that it simply cannot be the starting point of the

402 See for example (F1 10, 40, 319; F4 42, 247).

403 'de fonder la rationalité dialectique' (CDR^F 134).

404 'le point de départ épistémologique doit toujours être la *conscience* comme certitude apodictique (de) soi et comme conscience *de* tel ou tel objet. Mais il ne s'agit pas, ici, de questionner la conscience sur elle-même : l'objet qu'elle doit se donner est précisément la vie, c'est-à-dire l'être objectif du chercheur' (CDR^F 142).

regressive enquiry into dialectical reason. It must first be shown that History is dialectical before it makes sense to answer the question of whether its dialectical nature is subjectively intelligible to the people in it. Sartre seems to make a distinction with regard to the researcher who studies History, in this case he himself or the reader of the *Critique*, on the one hand, and *everyone* who is part of the Historical process, on the other. The question of whether the dialectical nature of History is immanently intelligible to historical actors corresponds to this second perspective and is developed in the progressive part of the research, found in the second volume. We will further discuss this progressive analysis in the last section of this chapter. For now, we have the necessary information to delve into the details of Sartre's inquiry into the dialectical nature of life:

The experience of the dialectic is [...] the very experience of living, since to live is to act and be acted on, and since the dialectic is the rationality of *praxis*. It must be *regressive* because it will set out from lived experience in order gradually to discover all the structures of *praxis* (CDR 39)⁴⁰⁵.

It must be possible to understand History as dialectical because the people that make History *are* dialectical. The people are dialectical because their most fundamental way of being in the world – their *praxis* – is. The question at hand is therefore: What is *praxis*? The answer to this question is rooted in the notion of need, which drives all life (CDR 80).

Need is a negation of the negation in so far as it expresses itself as a *lack* within the organism; and need is a positivity in so far as the organic totality tends to preserve itself *as such* through it (CDR 80)⁴⁰⁶.

The first part of the definition of need is that it is a negation of the initial 'negation' between organic and inorganic. Sartre's definition of the term "organic" is a bit narrower than its common connotation: for him it simply means living. The inorganic also includes 'less organized elements' or dead matter (CDR 80)⁴⁰⁷. Need negates the dichotomy because the organic lacks and therefore needs something which is not organic, such as food, shelter or warmth.

405 'L'expérience de la dialectique est même de vivre, puisque vivre c'est agir et subir et puisque la dialectique est la rationalité de la *praxis* ; elle sera *régressive* puisqu'elle partira du vécu pour retrouver peu à peu toutes les structures de la *praxis*.' (CDR^F 134).

406 'Le besoin est négation de négation dans la mesure où il se dénonce comme un manque à l'intérieur de l'organisme, il est positivité dans la mesure où par lui la totalité organique tend à se conserver comme telle.' (CDR^F 166).

407 'moins organisés' (CDR^F 166).

This characterisation is also present in the second, positive, part of the definition of need, which is that through need the organism preserves itself. It is because a living being fulfils its needs that it keeps on living and therefore that it keeps existing *as* a living being. An organism is nothing *but* an organized whole. An organism ceases to be an organism in this sense upon death. Need is therefore not only the need to have something which is absent, it is also the positive need to preserve the living being as an organized whole. This simple interplay between organisms and beings already reveals a fundamental dialectical relationship: there is a negation between organic and inorganic which is resolved by the fact that organisms depend on the inorganic to sustain themselves.

We encounter yet another process of totalisation. What needs to be preserved is the organism in its totality. Since the organism is in a constant state of need for food, warmth, oxygen etc., however, the totality is never fully established because there are always new needs that arise. Hence, the organism is always in a process of becoming and sustaining itself as a totality, a process of totalisation. This means that 'dialectical time came into being, in fact, with the organism; for the living being can survive only by renewing itself' (CDR 82)⁴⁰⁸. The organic totality is always present as a goal that needs to be attained, a virtual totality which is not yet – and will never be – a full totality. Sartre therefore calls it a 'de-totalised totality' (CDR 85)⁴⁰⁹.

In this process of totalisation, the material environment is transformed into a totality. The process of totalisation, by aiming at a state of totality, transforms the environment into a 'false organism', an organisation which is only present because of the need of the organism (CDR 81)⁴¹⁰. The material environment, on the other hand, makes the organism a 'pure materiality' (CDR 81)⁴¹¹. The organism can only act on the environment because it is itself a material body. In order to survive, it needs to make itself into a material tool for survival. In short, through need the subject and the object mirror each other: need inscribes certain aspects of the organic into the inorganic by making it a totality, and it inscribes certain aspects of the inorganic into the organic by making it a materiality.

In order to preserve itself, the organism needs to act. The answer to the mere function of need is the action of *praxis* (CDR 82-3). Needs are almost never immediately satisfied. Although most human beings live in an oxygen rich environment, food, warmth and shelter need

408 'avec l'organisme, en effet, le temps dialectique est entré dans l'être puisque l'être vivant ne peut persévérer qu'en se renouvelant' (CDR^F 167).

409 'totalité détotalisée' (CDR^F 169).

410 'faux organisme' (CDR^F 167).

411 'pure matérialité' (CDR^F 167).

to be sought out as they are not immediately available. Thus, ‘the material environment [...], by not containing what the organism seeks, transforms the totality as future reality into *possibility*’ (CDR 83)⁴¹². Thus, ‘*praxis*, in the first instance, is nothing but the relation of the organism, as exterior and future end, to the present organism as a totality under threat; it is function exteriorized’ (CDR 83)⁴¹³. While needs transform the environment into possibilities of satisfaction, *praxis* goes one step further and transforms the environment into the possibility of existing at all. It exteriorizes the function in the sense that it projects the organic function of need into the surroundings. An organism needs to do more than identify sources of nutrition, it also needs to identify when there are no such sources and the environment needs to be changed in order to satisfy its needs. That which is lacking is no longer registered as simply being within the organism, it is a lack in the world outside and thus exteriorized. Therefore, ‘it is through man that negation comes [...] to matter’ (CDR 83)^{414 415}.

Although ‘*praxis*, born of need, is a totalisation whose movement towards its own end *practically* makes the environment into a totality’, it still needs to distinguish between different parts of the total material environment (CDR 85)⁴¹⁶. Although survival is the main project of every human being, the material environment cannot simply be divided along the lines of its relevance or irrelevance for survival. It needs to be divided in more specific ways that account for the specific needs that can be fulfilled by it. Hence, ‘[m]an, who produces his life in the unity of the material field, is led by *praxis* itself to define zones, systems and privileged objects within this inert totality’ (CDR 89)⁴¹⁷. Fertile land is distinguished from barren land, twigs suitable for making a fire are privileged in comparison with non-flammable stones. The material world remains a totality

412 ‘de l’environnement matériel [...] transforme — par l’absence de ce que l’organisme y cherche — la totalité comme réalité future en *possibilité*’ (CDR^F 168).

413 ‘la *praxis* n’est d’abord rien d’autre que le rapport de l’organisme comme fin extérieure et future à l’organisme présent comme totalité menacée ; c’est la fonction extériorisée’ (CDR^F 168).

414 ‘c’est par l’homme que la négation vient à [...] la matière’ (CDR^F 168).

415 Sartre adds to this that although matter does change, this does not entail a true negation: ‘There is no denying that matter passes from one state to another, and this means that change takes place. But a material change is neither an affirmation nor a negation; it cannot *destroy* anything, since nothing was *constructed*; it cannot *overcome resistances*, since the forces involved simply produced the result they had to’ (CDR 84).

416 ‘la *praxis* née du besoin est une totalisation dont le mouvement vers sa propre fin transforme *pratiquement* l’environnement en une totalité’. (CDR^F 170).

417 ‘L’homme qui produit sa vie dans l’unité du champ matériel est amené par la *praxis* même à déterminer des zones, des systèmes, des objets privilégiés dans cette totalité inerte’ (CDR^F 172-173).

as the background against which these zones, systems and object can appear: the hunter or fisherman *lies in wait*; the food-gatherer *searches*: the field has been unified so as to provide a basis on which the object sought may be more readily *apprehended* (CDR 90-91)⁴¹⁸.

Sartre considers labour, physical work, to be ‘the original *praxis* by which man produces and reproduces his life’ (CDR 90)⁴¹⁹. In it, we can easily see the dialectical nature of *praxis*. The organism needs to survive, which takes the form of the project of “putting food on the table”. This project gives the material world a unity as the environment in which the labour needs to take place. In order to do the labour, the human needs to make itself inert. Sartre gives the example of using one’s body weight to press a lever (CDR 90). The lever, in turn, becomes a privileged object as that which needs to be turned in order to do one’s job, get paid and survive. The use of this object requires it being manipulated in relation to other objects. The lever operates machinery which in turn produces something. ‘[T]he subsequent task of labour must be to put the created object back in contact with the other sectors within the whole and to unite them from a new point of view; it negates separation’ (CDR 89)⁴²⁰. We once again find a negation of a negation. The negation of the privileged object with regard to the material world in light of its practical use is negated by using it to manipulate the material world, and hence reintegrating the object in it. In light of this, the full definition of *praxis* becomes:

[*P*]raxis [is] an organising project which transcends material conditions towards an end and inscribes itself through labour, in inorganic matter as a rearrangement of the practical field and a reunification of means in the light of the end (CDR 734).⁴²¹

Thereby, Sartre has shown that *praxis* is itself dialectical. Living the dialectic and knowing the dialectic needs to be the same thing if there is such a thing as dialectical rationality. Sartre has shown that in our most fundamental relationship to the world, in terms of our needs as living organisms, we are dialectical. The initial negation is that between the subjective and the objective. There are subjective beings, which are organic, and there are material objects, which

418 ‘on *guette* à la chasse, à la pêche ; on *cherche* à la cueillette. C’est-à-dire qu’on a réalisé l’unité du champ pour mieux *saisir* sur le fond l’objet quêté’ (CDR^F 174).

419 ‘la *praxis* originelle par quoi il produit et reproduit sa vie’ (CDR^F 174).

420 ‘la démarche ultérieure du travail doit être nécessairement la remise en contact de l’objet créé, à l’intérieur du tout, avec les autres secteurs et leur unification d’un point de vue neuf ; il nie la séparation’ (CDR^F 173).

421 ‘la *praxis* comme projet organisateur dépassant des conditions matérielles vers une fin et s’inscrivant par le travail dans la matière inorganique comme remaniement du champ pratique et réunification des moyens en vue d’atteindre la fin’ (CDR^F 687).

are inorganic. Because the organism has needs, it *lacks* something inorganic. The first negation is negated because in order to exist and keep on existing, the organic needs the inorganic. The project of fulfilling needs transforms the material environment into a totality, mirroring the organized nature of the organism. The material environment, in order to be traversed by the organism, causes the organism to be thrown back to its own materiality, its body becoming a tool for survival. The initial negation of the environment as the place in which means of nutrition are not always abundant and thus lacking, is negated as some objects can be used to survive. *Praxis* is dialectical because every physical action is a negation of a negation (SM 92): an object is separated, hence negated, from the material world and is subsequently reintegrated in this world in light of a project with a certain goal.

In demonstrating the fundamentally dialectical nature of *praxis*, Sartre subsequently shows that ‘the project [of *praxis*] represents *in itself* the moving unity of subjectivity and objectivity’ (SM 97)⁴²². The subjective organic needs to become inorganic in order to manipulate the material world, and the material objects are in turn structured by the projects of subjective enterprises.

2. The Practico-Inert

The question concerning the nature of the material environment is not about matter in itself or about the particles that constitute it (CDR 122, 188). Sartre is interested in matter as it is already unified by *praxis*. As *praxis* inscribes itself into the material circumstances, what becomes of this material totality, or ‘worked matter’ (CDR 71)⁴²³?

The first thing that must be noted is that an individual is of course never alone in the material world. We are surrounded by other human beings who constantly change the material environment through their *praxis*. Because all human *praxis* is essentially the same in its ultimate orientation, we always have a rough understanding of the acts of others. However, because of our needs and the scarcity of the environment in which they can be fulfilled, the *praxis* of others stands in an adversarial relation to our own. This opposition is due both to competition for food and other resources, and to the fact that the Other can kill us and thereby end our process of totalisation once and for all (CDR 131-132).

422 ‘le projet [...] représente *en lui-même* l’unité mouvante de la subjectivité et de l’objectivité’ (SM^F 66).

423 ‘matière ouvree’ (CDR^F 158).

Inertia

Apart from the others with whom we currently share the world, there are also those who came before us and whose actions are already inscribed into the material world. *Praxis* gives the material world a unity by inscribing itself in it, but once it has been inscribed it is retained in matter to an extent that far exceeds the project of *praxis*. Matter is *inert*, meaning that it retains the changes we make in it (CDR 161). In other words, it absorbs *praxis* or *praxis* is crystallized in it (CDR 161, 164). In this process, it is 'enriched with new meaning [...] to the extent it eludes the labourer' (CDR 164)⁴²⁴. Thus, '[e]very *thing* maintains with all its inertia the particular unity which a long forgotten action imposed upon it' (CDR 101)⁴²⁵.

While the person who acts may have certain intentions with the specific way in which he or she reorganized matter, the reorganisation may have certain unforeseen side effects or even a completely undesired effect. The example Sartre gives of this is deforestation (CDR 162-162). Clearing forested areas in order to turn them into farmland is a prime example of *praxis*: the matter of the forest is reorganized as trees are chopped down, the land is divided up into zones suitable for certain crops, and all this is done to produce food in order to survive. Nevertheless, the forest also has a protective function, as it retains sediment from mountains that will otherwise find its way to rivers. If the forest is taken down, the sediment ends up in the river, raising the riverbed and ultimately causing the river to overflow. Thus, deforestation causes floods which destroy crops, settlements and human life. The quest for survival that led to deforestation ultimately turns against this project in the form of deadly floods. In more abstract terms, what we see here is the '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' (CDR 123)⁴²⁶. Flooding is passive because it is not instigated by materiality, it is instigated by human *praxis*. It is, however, also active because it does act on human beings and their environment without direct human interference. Hence, the *praxis* of deforestation leads to the finality of farmland and food, but also to the counter-finality of floods. Hence, 'man has to struggle not only against nature, and against the social environment which has produced him, and against other men, but also against his own action as it becomes

424 's'enrichit de significations nouvelles dans la mesure même où il échappe au travailleur' (CDR^F 234).

425 'Chaque chose supporte de toute son inertie l'unité particulière qu'une action aujourd'hui disparue lui a imposée' (CDR^F 183).

426 'd'action passive qu'exerce la matérialité en tant que telle sur les hommes et sur leur Histoire en leur retournant une *praxis* volée sous la forme d'une contre-finalité' (CDR^F 202).

other' (CDR 124)⁴²⁷. At first it was the need of human beings which demanded something from the environment, but subsequently the environment demands something from human beings. They need to find a way to protect themselves from the flood. In other words:

Thus we can begin to see an actual state of labour [...] in which there is a constant transformation of man's exigencies in relation to matter into exigencies of matter in relation to man. In this state, man's needs for material products [...] are homogeneous in relation to the exigencies of matter in so far as these express a crystallised, inverted human *praxis* (CDR 165)⁴²⁸.

Another example Sartre gives of the inverted *praxis* of matter is that of a house and its inhabitants.

To preserve its reality as a *dwelling* a house must be *inhabited*, that is to say, looked after, heated, swept, repainted, etc.; otherwise it deteriorates. This vampire object constantly absorbs human action, lives on blood taken from man and finally lives in symbiosis with him. It derives all its physical properties, including temperature, from human action. For its inhabitants there is no difference between the passive activity which might be called 'residence' and the pure *re-constituting praxis* which protects the house against the Universe (CDR 169)⁴²⁹[.]

Building a house for shelter is a *praxis*, and once the house is built, it requires upkeep. This is not necessarily an example of a counter-finality as most people who build a house expect the additional

427 'l'Histoire est plus complexe que ne le croit un certain marxisme simpliste, et l'homme n'a pas à lutter seulement contre la Nature, contre le milieu social qui l'a engendré, contre d'autres hommes, mais aussi contre sa propre action en tant qu'elle devient autre' (CDR^F 202).

428 'Ainsi, nous commençons à entrevoir un état réel du travail [...] dans lequel il y a une transformation perpétuelle de l'exigence de l'homme par rapport à la matière en exigence de la matière par rapport à l'homme et où l'exigence de l'homme, en tant qu'elle exprime son être, de produit matériel, est homogène [...] à l'exigence de la matière en tant qu'une *praxis* humaine cristallisée et inversée s'exprime à travers elle.' (CDR^F 235).

429 'Pour conserver sa réalité de *demeure*, une maison doit être *habitée*, c'est-à-dire entretenue, chauffée, ramonée, ravalée, etc. ; sinon elle se dégrade ; cet objet-vampire absorbe sans cesse l'action humaine, se nourrit d'un sang emprunté à l'homme et finalement vit en symbiose avec lui. Tous ses caractères physiques, y compris sa température, lui viennent de l'action humaine et, pour ses habitants, il n'y a pas de différence entre l'activité passive qu'on pourrait nommer la « résidence » et la pure *praxis reconstituante* qui défend la maison contre l'Univers[.]' (CDR^F 238).

requirement of its upkeep. Yet, it is still an example of *exigencies*: the needs and demands that worked matter exerts on us. While it is possible to abandon a house, if one wants to continue the initial project of survival it would be more obvious to do what the house demands of us. In most cases, this would be easier than finding other shelter. Hence, the house has power over us. It is an example of what Sartre calls ‘*the human thing*’ (CDR 170).⁴³⁰ Because of our *praxis*, material things acquire certain characteristics of human beings, such as the ability to demand and the ability to act – albeit in a passive manner. As Sartre says:

[T]hings can absorb the whole of human activity, and then materialise and return it: it could not be otherwise. Nothing happens to men or to objects except in their material being and through the materiality of Being. But man is precisely the material reality from which matter gets its human functions (CDR 182)⁴³¹.

Once matter has been organized by *praxis* it can also act on other matter. Sartre calls this the ‘magical *life*’ of matter because it takes on a so-called “life of its own” (CDR 173)⁴³². An example of this is how the invention of steam-engines changed the world as we knew it. For example, ‘steam *initiated* the tendency towards larger factories’ (CDR 191)⁴³³. One could argue that steam in itself cannot initiate anything as it consists of inert inorganic matter, but this argument has no value for Sartre because ‘we *never* make contact with anything but worked and socialised matter’ (CDR 189)⁴³⁴. Therefore, just as worked matter creates exigencies for human beings, so too can it exert them upon other objects:

[E]very object, in so far as it exists within a given economic, technical and social complex, will in its turn become exigency through the mode and relations of production, and give rise to other exigencies in other objects (CDR 189)⁴³⁵.

430 ‘*la chose humaine*’ (CDR^F 238).

431 ‘Nous avons vu, dans l’exemple précité, la chose absorber toute l’activité humaine et la restituer en la matérialisant : il ne peut en être autrement. Rien n’arrive aux hommes et aux objets que dans leur être matériel et par la matérialité de l’Être. Mais l’homme est justement cette réalité matérielle par quoi la matière reçoit ses fonctions humaines.’ (CDR^F 249).

432 ‘*vie magique*’, ‘« *vie propre* »’ (CDR^F 241).

433 ‘la vapeur *provoque* la tendance aux grandes usines’ (CDR^F 256).

434 ‘nous n’avons *jamais* affaire qu’à de la matière ouvrée et socialisée’ (CDR^F 254).

435 ‘tout objet, en tant qu’il existe dans un complexe économique, technique et social quelconque, devient exigence à son tour, à travers le mode et les rapports de production, et suscite d’autres exigences en d’autres objets.’ (CDR^F 255).

This transference of exigencies always requires human activity. If steam power requires bigger factories, human beings need to design and build these structures. We are once more reminded that the actions of worked matter are passive. The human beings who heed the call of the exigencies of matter do not work according to their own goals, however, but to goals imposed on them by matter. The result of this is that we can understand the workings of matter without describing the actions of man: 'this intelligibility requires precisely that the action of man should be constituted as inessential' (CDR 189)⁴³⁶. It is inessential because the fact that the work is done by a human being does not contribute anything to the process. For example, it does not matter whether commands are given by a supervisor or by an automated system, as long as the workers follow the commands (CDR 191). This process can even be conceived of as a purely automated system in which the workers are replaced by machines. In other words, 'it is by and through men that these exigencies arise, and they would disappear if men did. But still, [...] the exigency of matter ends up by being extended to matter itself through men' (CDR 191)⁴³⁷. The fact that matter not only demands the action of human beings but can also re-organize other matter, fundamentally changes the relationship of *praxis* and inert matter:

[T]he very *praxis* of individuals or groups is altered in so far as it ceases to be the free organisation of the practical field and becomes the re-organisation of one sector of inert materiality in accordance with the exigencies of another sector of materiality (CDR 191)⁴³⁸.

As a result, a new being appears which transcends both 'the individual as an isolated agent and inorganic matter as an inert and sealed reality' (CDR 191)⁴³⁹. This new being is what Sartre calls the *practico-inert*. The results of *praxis* working on inert matter turns back upon the individuals and now matter is re-organizing matter. Every person and all worked matter exist within the *practico-inert* field, and there is no escaping it:

436 'cette intelligibilité réclame justement que l'action de l'homme se constitue comme inessentielle' (CDR^F 255).

437 'c'est à travers les hommes et par eux que ces exigences apparaissent : elles disparaîtraient avec les hommes. Mais il n'en demeure pas moins [...] que l'exigence de la matière finit par s'étendre à la matière à travers les hommes' (CDR^F 256).

438 'la *praxis* même de l'individu (ou du groupe) est altérée en ce qu'elle n'est plus la libre organisation du champ pratique mais la réorganisation d'un secteur de matérialité inerte en fonction des exigences d'un autre secteur de matérialité' (CDR^F 256).

439 'l'individu comme agent solitaire et la matière inorganique comme réalité inerte et scellée' (CDR^F 256).

There are no material objects which do not communicate among themselves through the mediation of men; and there is no man who is not born into a world of humanised materialities and materialised institutions (CDR 169)⁴⁴⁰[.]

Another way of describing it is to say that ‘the practico-inert field is the field of material exigencies, of counter-finalities and of inert meanings’ (CDR 399)⁴⁴¹: it is everything humans inscribe into matter that transcends their original intentions and gains a life of its own.

Counter-finalities add a layer of complexity to the practico-inert, because they often become finalities in their own right (CDR 196). Let us take the factory as an example. If a bigger factory causes more noise as a counter-finality, then noise reduction may become a finality for people who suffer from the loud noises. If people are powerless to do anything about the counter-finality, it can become a ‘*negative exigency*’: not something that urges one to do something, but something that expresses the fact that one can do nothing (CDR 196)⁴⁴². Furthermore, to the extent that a counter-finality has “pros and cons”, it is always a finality ‘from the point of view of particular practico-inert ensembles’ (CDR 196)⁴⁴³.

The practico-inert field allows for the existence of new kinds of entities which cannot exist in the mere relationship of *praxis* to the material world. These are what Sartre calls ‘collectives’ (CDR 253)⁴⁴⁴. All social objects are collectives, and one can think of examples such as a company, a newspaper or money. A collective is rooted in seriality (CDR 255). A series of people includes all those who have the same practical relationship towards an object. The example Sartre gives is that of people waiting for a bus (CDR 256). All people who wait for the bus are oriented towards the same object, the bus, but do not do so together. The unity of the queue at the bus stop is partly accidental, as these people happen to wait for the bus at the same

440 ‘pas de *praxis* qui ne soit dépassement unifiant et dévoilant de la matière, qui ne se cristallise dans la matérialité comme dépassement signifiant des anciennes actions déjà matérialisées, pas de matière qui ne conditionne la *praxis* humaine à travers l’unité passive de significations préfabriquées; pas d’objets matériels qui ne communiquent entre eux par la médiation des hommes, pas d’homme qui ne surgisse à l’intérieur d’un monde de matérialités humanisées, d’institutions matérialisées et qui ne se voie prescrire un avenir général au sein du mouvement historique.’ (CDR^F 238).

441 ‘le champ practico-inerte est le champ des exigences matérielles, des contre-finalités et des significations inertes’ (CDR^F 343).

442 ‘*exigence négative*’ (CDR^F 260).

443 ‘pour certains ensembles practico-inertes’ (CDR^F 260).

444 ‘collectifs’ (CDR^F 306).

time and ‘*partly* by the *real* but *transcendent* unity of a practico-inert object’ (CDR 264)⁴⁴⁵.

There are serial behaviour, serial feelings and serial thoughts; in other words a *series* is a *mode of being for individuals both in relation to one another and in relation to their common being* (CDR 266)[.]⁴⁴⁶

This relation to one another is of a specific nature. The idea of public transportation is based on the fact that everyone could be waiting for the bus. Public transportation is dependent on the idea that *other* people could also use it, but those people are interchangeable and unspecific. Thus, ‘the formal, universal structure of alterity produces the *formula of the series*’ (CDR 264)⁴⁴⁷. The structure of alterity arises from the fact that the situation, a series of people waiting for the bus, can only exist because others can also use it. If there was only one person, or a designated group, the bus would cease to be a form of public transportation. Another example of a series that Sartre gives is that of the audience of a radio broadcast (CDR 270). A radio program can only exist because people listen to it. Someone may accidentally listen to it, but not feel addressed by the things said by radio host. This person is not the *audience* of the radio program. Yet, one can only distance oneself from this audience because it exists, as the Other who is not present. In any case, the listeners form a series through the object they are invested in. In other words, ‘*the series* represents the use of alterity as a bond between men under the passive action of an object’ (CDR 266)⁴⁴⁸.

The relationship between the series and the object constitutes a collective, which Sartre defines as the two-way relation between a material, inorganic, worked object and a multiplicity which finds its unity of exteriority in it’ (CDR 269)⁴⁴⁹. It is a two-way relationship because the series depends on the object, but the object also depends on the series. A bus would not be part of the public transportation system if people were not going to use it, and people would not use it if there was no public transportation system.

Furthermore, just as *praxis* demarcates certain zones, for example

445 ‘*en partie* par l’unité *réelle* mais *transcendente* d’un objet practico-inerte’ (CDR^F 315).

446 ‘Il y a des conduites sérielles, il y a des sentiments et des pensées sérielles ; autrement dit, *la série* est un *mode d’être des individus les uns par rapport aux autres et par rapport à l’être commun*’ (CDR^F 316).

447 ‘la structure formelle et universelle d’altérité fera *la Raison de la série*’ (CDR^F 314).

448 ‘*la série* représente l’emploi de l’altérité comme lien entre les hommes sous l’action passive de l’objet’ (CDR^F 316-317).

449 ‘la relation à double sens d’un objet matériel, inorganique et ouvert à une multiplicité qui trouve en lui son unité d’extériorité’ (CDR^F 319).

farms and wilderness, so the *practico-inert* demarcates collectives of persons. A factory transforms people into owners and workers, a university transforms people into teachers and students. It is important to note that collectives which consist of persons are not the same as groups. A collective is passive, while a group is active. Although a collective is a fundamental structure of any group, a group is the negation of this collective (CDR 254). Sartre means by this that the group takes the collective as a starting point but overcomes it in light of a common aim. A group does not have the structure of alterity which a series and, ultimately, a collective has. Hence, a social class is the biggest example of what Sartre calls a “gathering”, but a political movement which aims to unite people within this class is a group. In other words: ‘the group is defined by its undertaking and by the constant movement of integration which tends to turn it into pure *praxis* by trying to eliminate all forms of inertia from it; the collective is defined by its being’ (CDR 255)⁴⁵⁰. Groups play a central role in Book II of the first volume of the *Critique* as they are what ultimately move History.⁴⁵¹

Being-outside-oneself

We have discussed how *praxis* results in the practico-inert field. As has been said, the account of individual *praxis* describes an abstract state which is not really how human beings exist within the world. We will now examine how individuals exist within the practico-inert field.

Another characteristic of the practico-inert is ‘interest’ (CDR 197)⁴⁵². Although in the abstract state of individual *praxis* people are *interested* in survival, genuine interest can only exist within a social context: ‘Interest is a certain relation between man and thing in a social field’ (CDR 197)⁴⁵³. It is the concrete way in which the abstract relationship of humanity to its material environment manifests itself. In light of the practico-inert, the environment is no longer the abstract totality in which man seeks survival, rather it becomes ‘*this* particular practico-inert set of worked materials’ (CDR 197)⁴⁵⁴. Thus, the definition of interest becomes:

450 ‘le groupe se définit par son entreprise et par ce mouvement constant d’intégration qui vise à en faire une *praxis* pure en tentant de-supprimer en lui toutes les formes de l’inertie ; le collectif se définit *par son être*’ (CDR^F 307).

451 The full analysis of groups is too detailed to discuss at this point. We will return to it in the next section of this chapter.

452 ‘intérêt’ (CDR^F 261).

453 ‘L’intérêt est un certain rapport de l’homme à la chose dans un champ social’ (CDR^F 261).

454 ‘*cet* ensemble practico-inerte de matériaux ouverts’ (CDR^F 261).

As soon as an objective ensemble is posited in a given society as the definition of an individual in his *personal* particularity and when *as such* it requires this individual to act on the entire practical and social field, and to *preserve it* (as an organism preserves itself) and *develop it at the expense of the rest* (as an organism feeds itself by drawing on its exterior milieu), the individual *possesses an interest* (CDR 199).⁴⁵⁵

As interest takes place within the practico-inert field, the individual mediates between the exigencies of matter, on the one hand, and its own exigencies, on the other. The factory owner may realize that in order to compete in a certain sector of the market, he must purchase certain machines. These machines in turn require him to expand his factory. It is in his interest to buy the machines, and he acts accordingly, but he also mediates between sectors of materiality, namely the demands of the market, the newly assembled machines and the size of the factory. Furthermore, in the same way that finalities cause counter-finalities and vice versa, the interest of some is the destiny of others: 'the machine is also a determination of the practical field of the working population and [...] it is *destiny* for the workers to precisely the extent that it is *interest* for the employer' (CDR 206)⁴⁵⁶.⁴⁵⁷ The worker has no particular interest in the new machine, it does not matter for him which machine he works. Yet, it is his destiny in so far as the new machine comes with exigencies in light of which he needs to act. The idea of a person being wholly invested in objects is what Sartre calls 'being-outside-oneself' (CDR 202)⁴⁵⁸. In this regard, interest and destiny are the positive and negative sides to the same phenomenon. In other words, 'destiny and interest are two contradictory statutes of being-outside-oneself' (CDR 219).⁴⁵⁹

Not only does the passive activity of the practico-inert field exert power on persons as free *praxis*, it also alters what they are. We already saw in our analysis of *praxis* that in order to act we need to

455 'A partir du moment où, dans une société définie, un ensemble objectif se pose comme définissant un individu dans sa particularité *personnelle* et où il exige *en tant que tel* que cet individu en agissant sur l'ensemble du champ pratique et social *le conserve* (comme l'organisme se conserve) et *le développe aux dépens du reste* (comme l'organisme s'alimente en prélevant sur le milieu extérieur), cet individu *possède un intérêt*.' (CDR^F 263).

456 'la machine existe aussi comme détermination du champ pratique de la population ouvrière et qu'elle est *destin* pour les ouvriers dans l'exacte mesure où pour le patron elle est *intérêt*' (CDR^F 268).

457 Sartre calls the relationship between interest and destiny the third characteristic of the practico-inert, yet he never explicitly states what the first two are (CDR 206).

458 'l'être-hors-de-soi' CDR^F (265).

459 'destin et intérêt sont deux statuts contradictoires de l'être-hors-de-soi' (CDR^F 279).

turn our body into a tool, and thus into a material object. The same is true for the practico-inert. In order for it to turn us into a tool that acts according to its exigencies, it needs to turn us into objects as well. This is the final characteristic of the practico-inert. It is central to Sartre's argument, as is apparent from the fact that he emphasizes it many times throughout the *Critique*:

[M]achines, by their structure and functions, determine the nature of their servants as the rigid and imperious future of undetermined individuals and, thereby, *create men* (CDR 159)⁴⁶⁰.

[T]he machine defines and produces the reality of its servant, that is to say, it makes of him a practico-inert Being who will be a machine in so far as the machine is human and a man in so far as it remains, in spite of everything, a tool to be used: in short, it becomes his exact complement as an inverted man (CDR 207)⁴⁶¹.

The worker is socially constituted as a practico-inert object to the extent that he receives a wage: he becomes a machine that has to be maintained and fed (CDR 238)⁴⁶².

Within the practico-inert field, persons are things. They have the same characteristics as any other practico-inert object, a function and meaning inscribed in their materiality. The example of the worker which Sartre gives is a very striking one because the objects that give the worker an objective status are right in front of him. They function as a machine *created and tasked* with the operation of other machinery. Hence, they become part of sections of materiality exerting influence upon one another. The example does not imply that other people, especially people from other classes, are not practico-inert objects also. We already saw this in the example of interest and destiny. The machine makes the worker into a thing, but it does the same to the employer, the one tasked with assuring that the factory will keep making profits: 'The worker who serves the machine *has his being in it* just as the employer does' (CDR 206)⁴⁶³.

460 'la machine, par sa structure et ses fonctions, détermine comme avenir rigide et subi d'individus indéterminés, le type de ses servants et, par là, *créé des hommes*' (CDR^F 230).

461 'Elle définit donc et produit la réalité de son servant, c'est-à-dire qu'elle fait de lui un Être pratico-inerte qui sera machine dans la mesure où celle-ci est humaine et homme dans la mesure où elle reste malgré tout outil à diriger : bref, son exact complément à titre d'homme inversé.' (CDR^F 269).

462 'où un salaire lui est attribué, l'ouvrier est socialement constitué comme cet objet pratico-inerte : une machine qu'il faut entretenir et alimenter' (CDR^F 294).

463 'L'ouvrier qui sert la machine *a son être en elle* tout comme le patron' (CDR^F 268).

We can easily apply the same logic to other occupations. Sartre gives the example of a bureaucrat or clerk: ‘manipulated by things (his *office*, as a collective, his boss as an Other), he is for other men a factor of alterity, of passivity and of counter-finality, as if he were a thing (a Spanish ducat) circulating through men’s hands’ (CDR 235)⁴⁶⁴. This does not mean that people become the mindless drones of material exigencies. It only means that in so far as they have position in the social field, the person ‘subordinates his *praxis* to his Being-outside-himself’ (CDR 190)⁴⁶⁵. This means that the *praxis* is altered:

In so far as he is characterised by *praxis*, his *praxis* does not originate in need or in desire; it is not the process of realising his project, but, in so far as it is constituted so as to achieve an alien object, it is, in the agent himself, the *praxis* of another (CDR 188)⁴⁶⁶[.]

As was said before, everything within the practico-inert originates in human *praxis*, but this does not mean that every action by every individual is part of their own project. The possibilities of *praxis* are determined by practico-inert objects which originate in the *praxis* of others, even if the others in question cannot be localized and are nothing more than an abstract Other. Thus:

[I]t must be pointed out both that the practico-inert field *exists*, that it is *real*, and that free human activities are not thereby eliminated, that they are not even altered in their translucidity as projects in the process of being realised. The field exists: in short, it is what surrounds and conditions us. I need only glance out of the window: I will be able to see cars which are men and drivers who are cars, a policeman who is directing the traffic at the corner of the street and, a little further on, the same traffic being controlled by red and green lights: *hundreds of exigencies* rise up towards me: pedestrian crossings, notices, and prohibitions; collectives (a branch of the Credit Lyonnais, a cafe, a church, blocks of flats, and also a visible seriality: people queueing in front of a shop); and instruments (pavements, a thoroughfare, a taxi rank, a bus stop, etc., proclaiming with their frozen voices

464 ‘manié par les choses (son *bureau*, comme collectif, son chef en tant qu’Autre) il est pour les autres hommes un facteur d’altérité, de passivité et de contre-finalité comme s’il était une chose (un ducat espagnol) circulant entre des mains d’hommes’ (CDR^F 363).

465 ‘subordonné sa *praxis* à son Être-hors-de-soi dans le monde’ (CDR^F 255).

466 ‘la *praxis*, celle-ci ne prend pas sa source dans le besoin ou dans le désir, elle n’est pas la réalisation en cours de son projet mais en tant qu’elle se constitue pour atteindre un objectif étranger, elle est, dans l’agent même, *praxis* d’un autre’ (CDR^F 253).

how they are to be used). These beings – neither thing nor man, but practical unites made up of man and inert things – these appeals, and these exigencies do not yet concern me directly. Later, I will go down into the street and become *their thing* (CDR 324)[.]⁴⁶⁷

Sartre immediately adds in a footnote that '[i]t goes without saying that while I am in my flat I am the thing of other things (furniture, etc.)' (CDR 324N)⁴⁶⁸. Just as need makes our body into a tool for survival and, hence, into an object, so too does the practico-inert make us into a thing. It does so not in the abstract sense of *praxis*, in which there is no difference between people because everyone's body is a tool for survival, but in a specific sense. We are an object in the sense that we fit into the meaningful whole of the practico-inert field. In a different example, that of Sartre himself looking out of the window while on holiday, he states: 'the concept of man is an abstraction which never occurs in concrete intuition. It is in fact as a 'holiday-maker', confronting a gardener and road-mender, that I come to conceive myself' (CDR 101)⁴⁶⁹. The policeman who directs traffic has a different role than the person who is waiting in the car, and they are therefore different *things*. Furthermore, there is no essential difference anymore between a human who is also a thing and the things that are already human. Our *praxis* makes the world into a meaningful one and makes things human. The practico-inert makes humans into things that have a designated role and place in the world. Because of this, Sartre can state that, in the practico-inert, there is no essential difference between car and driver.

We now have a clear overview of the practico-inert and thereby of

467 'il faut dire à la fois que le champ practico-inerte *est*, qu'il est *réel* et que les libres activités humaines ne sont pas supprimées pour autant, *pas même altérées* dans leur translucidité de projet en cours de réalisation. Le champ existe : pour tout dire, c'est lui qui nous entoure et nous conditionne; je n'ai qu'à jeter un coup d'œil par la fenêtre : je verrai des autos qui sont des hommes et dont les conducteurs sont des autos, un sergent de ville qui règle la circulation au coin de la rue et, plus loin, un réglage automatique de la même circulation par des feux rouges et verts, *cent exigences* qui montent de terre vers moi, passages cloutés, affiches impératives, interdits; des collectifs (succursale du Crédit Lyonnais, café, église, immeubles d'habitation et aussi une sérialité visible : des gens font la queue devant un magasin), des instruments (proclamant de leur voix figée la manière de se servir d'eux, trottoirs, chaussée, station de taxis, arrêt d'autobus, etc.). Tous ces êtres — ni choses ni homme, unités pratiques de l'homme et de la chose inerte — tous ces appels, toutes ces exigences ne me concernent pas encore directement. Tout à l'heure, je descendrai dans la rue et je serai *leur chose*' (CDR^F 362-363).

468 'Il va de soi que je suis dans mon appartement la chose d'autres choses (meubles, etc.)' (CDR^F 363).

469 'le concept d'homme est une abstraction qui ne se livre jamais dans l'intuition concrète : en fait je me saisis comme un « estivant » en face d'un jardinier et d'un cantonnier' (CDR^F 183).

the theory of objects in this period of Sartre's oeuvre. As *praxis* rearranges matter, meanings are inscribed in it, and counter-finalities give material objects a life of their own. This allows them to exert exigencies on human beings, who can thereby be made to manipulate other material objects through passive-activity. This turns persons into practico-inert objects themselves, which can manipulate and be manipulated by other material beings: 'We put all of modern civilisation between us. Thus we *ourselves* become things' (IPB 72).

This moment in Sartre's investigation is still not fully concrete, however (CDR 324). In order to fully understand both subjectivity and objectivity, we must see how the interplay between *praxis* and the practico-inert works in its temporal dimension, and, consequently, how groups and History are shaped.

3. Groups and History

We have seen that human beings manipulate the material world through their free individual *praxis* and that, in turn, the practico-inert rebounds upon human beings and manipulates them. This gives rise to necessity as human beings are determined by the practico-inert. This, however, is not the full story of subjectivity and objectivity. A full analysis would have to include a level of reality which we briefly touched upon already, that of groups. Groups are not a kind of being, but a certain way in which the organic and inorganic, or freedom and necessity, are organized: 'the group is not a metaphysical reality, but a definite practical relation of men to an objective and to each other' (CDR 404)⁴⁷⁰. Or, in other words:

On the ontological plane, there are not three beings, or three statutes of being: class-being is practico-inert, and defines itself as a determination of seriality, as we have seen. The two kinds of group (fused and pledged, organisational and institutional) have no inner group-being; their statute is that their being-outside-themselves (the only group-being) lies in the series from which they have emerged and which sustains them (and which affects them even in their freedom) (CDR 686)⁴⁷¹.

Sartre preliminarily describes groups as 'the equivalence of freedom

470 'le groupe n'est pas une réalité métaphysique mais un certain rapport pratique des hommes à un objectif et entre eux' (CDR^f 427f).

471 'Sur le plan ontologique, il n'y a pas trois êtres ni trois statuts d'être : l'être-de-classe est practico-inerte, il se définit comme une détermination de sérialité, nous l'avons vu. Les deux groupes (fusion ou serment, organisation ou institution) n'ont pas d'être-intérieur-de-groupe ; leur statut c'est d'avoir leur être-hors-de-soi (le seul être de groupe) dans la série dont ils émanent et qui les soutient (en même temps qu'elle les marque jusque dans leur liberté).' (CDR^f 649).

as necessity and of necessity as freedom' (CDR 345)⁴⁷². This abstract definition is refined and made more precise throughout the greater part of Book II of the first volume of the *Critique*. We will not go into all the details of Sartre's analysis here but give a relatively concise overview of his notion of groups and, more precisely, the question of what they are, of how they arise and of what kinds of groups there are. After this overview, we can show how groups lead to History.

Groups-in-fusion and the pledge

Groups arise from and collapse back into practico-inert collective gatherings in a circular fashion. Just like Sartre's description of individual *praxis*, the description of groups is abstract. First of all, the genesis of groups which he describes is not temporal, but formal (CDR 348). The question how the first groups emerged from the practico-inert is unanswerable from our point of view: 'In other words, the historical problem of the priority of the group over the gathering (or of the gathering over the group) is, in this context, a *metaphysical* problem, devoid of meaning' (CDR 364)⁴⁷³. Second, the different stages in the process of the formation of groups and their disbandment is not absolute, that is, a group does not always go through the different stages in the given order: 'any form can emerge either before or after any other' (CDR 583)⁴⁷⁴. Or, in other words:

I will recall here that circularity is conditioned only by the movement of History and that, regardless of their statute, groups can either arise from the practico-inert field or be reabsorbed into it; and there is no formal law to compel them to pass through the succession of different states (CDR 676)⁴⁷⁵.

Even when a group does not enter a certain stage, it needs to comply to the formal requirements of these stages (CDR 676-677). Although the workings of these stages are intricate and many variants exist, there are roughly four: the group-in-fusion, the pledged group, the

472 'L'ÉQUIVALENCE DE LA LIBERTÉ COMME NÉCESSITÉ ET DE LA NÉCESSITÉ COMME LIBERTÉ' (CDR^F 381). (The original French is capitalized and serves as the title for the first of two parts (A) of Book II of the first volume of the *Critique*. The English translation divides these two parts into eight chapters, and the original title is used as the subtitle for the first chapter, entitled 'The Fused Group'.)

473 'Autrement dit, le problème *historique* de l'antériorité du groupe sur le rassemblement (ou du rassemblement sur le groupe) est dans les circonstances présentes un problème *métaphysique* et dénué de signification.' (CDR^F 396).

474 'toute forme peut toujours naître avant ou après toute autre' (CDR^F 367).

475 'Je rappelle ici que cette circularité n'est conditionnée que par le mouvement de l'Histoire et que les groupes peuvent surgir du champ practico-inerte ou s'y résorber, quel que soit leur statut et sans qu'une loi quelconque et formelle les oblige à passer successivement par les différents statuts que nous avons décrits.' (CDR^F 641).

organisation and the institution.⁴⁷⁶

The first condition for a gathering, a collective of people, to make itself into a group is that the members are in some kind of mortal danger, which can only be overcome by grouping together.⁴⁷⁷ '[T]he group constitutes itself on the basis of a need or common danger and defines itself by the common objective which determines its common *praxis*' (CDR 350)⁴⁷⁸. As has been said, gatherings are passive and groups are active and are therefore characterized by *praxis*. Individual *praxis* arises from the need to survive, and the *praxis* of a group stems from the same need.

The common objective of survival is not a sufficient condition, however. A gathering is also defined by its common objective. The second condition required for a gathering to become a group is that the threat comes from the actions of another already established group: 'a collective derives its possibilities of self-determination into a group from its antagonistic relations with an already constituted group or with a person representing this group' (CDR 362)⁴⁷⁹.⁴⁸⁰ This does not mean that the already constituted group creates the group in question. In that case, the gathering retains its passive nature. Rather, the action of the already constituted group is what allows the other group to become active. The group that acts threateningly does not have the objective of creating another group, rather its objective is to annihilate the gathering (CDR 360). Hence, the creation of another group is not the intended result of an action by an antecedent group but a reaction to their action, counteracting rather than furthering their objective.

Although the newfound group has a common objective, the objective itself is not what binds the group together, it is the *praxis*

476 The English translation translates *groupe en fusion* as fused group. In most scholarship it is translated as group-in-fusion and I will follow this translation. See for example: (Catalano 1986, 165).

477 It should be noted that Sartre is giving a formal description of how groups arise from gatherings. Once this has been established, we could conceive of a society in which secondary groups are formed for other reasons. For example, a book-trading club is a group that is not born from a mortal threat (CDR 350f).

478 'le groupe se constitue à partir d'un besoin ou d'un danger commun et se définit par l'objectif commun qui détermine sa *praxis* commune' (CDR^F 385).

479 'les possibilités d'autodétermination en groupe viennent au collectif des relations *antagonistiques* qu'il entretient avec un groupe déjà constitué ou une personne comme représentant ce groupe' (CDR^F 394).

480 The fact that a group can only arise in light of another group directly ties in with Sartre's theory of the look and thereby reveals an interesting continuity in his thought concerning intersubjectivity. In *Black Orpheus*, Sartre applies the theory of the look to groups: 'For three thousand years, the white man has enjoyed the privilege of seeing without being seen; he was only a look [...]. Today, these black men are looking at us' (BO 291).

itself. In the group, the structure of alterity that characterized the series is dissolved. The *praxis* of the other people in the group is not merely a similar action directed at the same object, it is immediately recognized as *mine* (CDR 377-379):

I am now my own action in the *praxis* of the group in so far as its objectification belongs to me as a common result. A *common* result: it is new, but it is mine in so far as it is the multiple result of *my action multiplied everywhere*, and everywhere *the same*; at the same time, this multiplied action is a single *praxis* which overflows in everyone and into a totalising result (CDR 378-379)⁴⁸¹.

A group shares in the same *praxis*, and I see my personal *praxis* reflected in this *common praxis*. This does not mean that the freedom of *praxis* is limited. Rather, it is the ‘inversion of alienation’ (CDR 378)⁴⁸². When I am part of a group and someone shouts a command, it is not obeyed. Someone merely voices what everyone is thinking or what immediately furthers the goals of the group. For example, when there is a group fleeing from something and someone shouts, “Stop!”, it is immediately clear that it is not safe to retreat in that particular direction and that stopping furthers their common project (CDR 379-380). This also means that my freedom is not limited but expanded by the group, because not only do the others want the same as I do, we also have more possibilities. The example Sartre gives of this is an individual demonstrator attacking the police. A single individual is bound to fail, but a group can succeed:

Thus when he tries to attack the police, he carries out an action which only the existence and practice of the group make possible; but, at the same time, he produces it as his free practical activity. Thus the action of the group as total *praxis* is not initially other action, in him, or alienation from the totality; it is the action of the whole in so far as it is freely itself (CDR 393)⁴⁸³[.]

Thus, the possibility of forming groups out of gatherings enables people to regain the freedom that was lost in the practico-inert field.

481 ‘je suis ma propre action dans la *praxis* du groupe en tant que son objectivation m’appartient comme résultat commun. Résultat *commun* : il est neuf mais il est mien en tant qu’il est résultat multiple de *mon action multipliée partout* et partout *la même* ; en même temps cette action multipliée est une seule *praxis* se débordant en tous et dans un résultat totalisant.’ (CDR^F 407).

482 le renversement de l’aliénation’ (CDR^F 407).

483 ‘Ainsi quand il tente de charger contre les agents, il accomplit une action que seules l’existence et la pratique du groupe rendent possible ; mais en même temps, il la produit comme sa libre activité pratique.’ (CDR^F 418).

We will return to Sartre's notion of choice and freedom in the final paragraph of this chapter. For now, it suffices to say that this is only the first step of the group-forming process. What we have discussed thus far are groups-in-fusion, which are spontaneous groups in which the goal is immediate and clear, and everyone performs the exact same action. These groups are unorganized, and once organisation begins, the newfound freedom acquires a degree of inertia. The next stage in the process of group formation, which is marked by the slight return of inertia, is the '*pledge*' (CDR 419)⁴⁸⁴.

The group is formed for reasons of survival, but the group itself as a unity and the totalisation of the *praxis* of its members also needs to survive if the group is to persist in its common *praxis*. Therefore, the group requires some kind of permanent element that transcends the immediate circumstances:

[T]he common *praxis* is freedom itself doing violence to necessity. But if circumstances demand the persistence of the group (as an organ of defence, of vigilance, etc.), while people's hearts are untouched by any urgency or hostile violence, which might occasion common *praxis*; if its *praxis*, turning back upon itself, in the form of organisation and differentiation, demands the unity of its members as the pre-existing foundation of all its transformations, then this unity can exist only as an inert synthesis within freedom itself (CDR 418)⁴⁸⁵.

In face of falling back into the gathering and thereby full inertia, a small inert element has to be introduced. This permanent inert element needs to be posited as though it preceded the common *praxis*, and it takes the form of the pledge. The pledge itself can take different forms, for example the swearing of an oath or a rite of passage (CDR 419, 485, 606). It does not matter which form it takes, as long as it gives the members of the group something and alternative means of unification when the urgency of the common *praxis* becomes less apparent. It 'always corresponds to a surviving group's resistance to the divisive tendency of (spatio-temporal) distance and differentiation' (CDR 419)⁴⁸⁶. A pledge cannot be the

484 '*serment*' (CDR^F 439).

485 'la *praxis* commune est la liberté même faisant violence à la nécessité; mais quand les circonstances réclament la persistance du groupe (comme organe de défense, de vigilance, etc.) sans que l'urgence et la violence adverse viennent jusqu'au cœur de chacun susciter la *praxis* commune, quand sa *praxis*, se retournant sur lui-même, sous forme d'organisation et de différenciation, exige l'unité de ses membres comme fondement pré-existant de toutes ses transformations, il faut que cette unité soit comme une synthèse inerte au cœur de la liberté même.' (CDR^F 438).

486 'qu'il corresponde *en tout cas* à la résistance du groupe survivant contre l'action séparatrice de l'éloignement (spatio-temporel) et de la différenciation' (CDR^F 439).

action of a single member, but needs to be the same for everyone.

The pledge is not a subjective or merely verbal determination: it is a real modification of the group by my regulatory action. The inert negation of certain future possibilities is my bond of interiority with the sworn group to which I belong, in the sense that for everyone the same negation is conditioned by mine, in so far as it is *his* behaviour (CDR 422)⁴⁸⁷.

Although some doors are closed by pledging oneself to the group, others are opened. For example, membership of one group may exclude one from others. The pledge guarantees that one stays a member of the group even in uncertain circumstances and allows one to take part in further actions that are only possible as a group. Thus, 'through a pledge, freedom gives itself a practical certainty for cases in which (because circumstances vary) future behaviour is unpredictable' (CDR 425)⁴⁸⁸. The pledge gives them certainty in light of the vicissitudes of the future. The example Sartre gives is that of 'lukewarm Catholics' baptizing their children despite stating that the child is free to choose whether or not it wants to be a Catholic (CDR 485)⁴⁸⁹. 'I thought that total indeterminacy was the true basis of choice. But from the point of view of the group [...] the opposite is true: baptism is a way of creating freedom' (CDR 486)⁴⁹⁰. Being baptized gives the child both the possibility of leading a full Catholic life and the possibility of ignoring the baptism and leaving the group. An unbaptized child would not have the first option. The parents do not know the personal preference of the child, but the pledge grants them the certainty that the child has the possibility of being part of the group even though their own preferences are uncertain.

Although the pledge is necessary for the survival of the group, it is also linked to the initial common *praxis* of the group. The pledge takes the form of an offer of services (CDR 427). For example, I may vow to give my life to achieve the common goal of the group. The pledge 'defines everyone as a *common individual*, not only because it

487 'Le serment n'est ni une détermination subjective ni une simple détermination du discours, c'est une modification réelle du groupe par mon action régulatrice. La négation inerte de certaines possibilités futures est mon lien d'intériorité avec le groupe assermenté dont je fais partie, en ce sens que chez chacun cette même négation en tant qu'elle est *sa* conduite est conditionnée par la mienne.' (CDR^F 441).

488 'par celui-ci, la liberté se donne une certitude pratique pour les cas où la conduite future (les circonstances variant) est imprévisible' (CDR^F 443).

489 'catholiques tièdes' (CDR^F 491f).

490 'Je pensais que l'indétermination totale était la véritable base du choix. Mais du point de vue du groupe [...] c'est le contraire qui est vrai : le baptême est une façon de créer la liberté' (CDR^F 491f).

concerns his being-in-the-group, but also because it is only through the mediation of all that it can take place in everyone' (CDR 443-444)⁴⁹¹. Everyone is equal in light of the pledge because everyone pledges themselves, but pledging oneself is only possible because each member makes the same commitment.

We have now seen two stages of group-formation, the group-in-fusion in which the common *praxis* is immediate and the pledged group in which the absence of the immediate urgency of *praxis* is overcome by introducing a permanent element, the pledge, which turns all members into common individuals and thereby assures the persistence of the group. Even if the group is not currently engaging in its common *praxis*, the common individuals are still pledged to the objective in light of which the group was formed in the first place.

Organisation and institution

The next stage is that of organisation. Once the group is united by a shared pledge and the members become common individuals, they can perform different actions while still being part of the same group. The univocal nature of the pledged is thereby transformed. Members are no longer essentially the same, they can now perform different functions. Although the pledge is supposed to counter immediate differentiation that leads to the immediate disbandment of the group, it paves the way for another kind of differentiation. This is most easily illustrated by the example of a sports team (CDR 450). A sports team is usually not a fused group, as it does not get formed spontaneously. The members are pledged in one way or another, but they are not common individuals as they do not contribute in the same way to the common *praxis*. A goalkeeper does something different than a striker, yet all their tasks contribute to the same goal: winning. With this distribution of tasks, the pledged group becomes an organisation:

Organisation, then, is a distribution of tasks. And it is the common objective (common interest, common danger, common need assigning a common aim) which defines *praxis* negatively and lies at the origin of this differentiation. Organisation, then, is *both* the discovery of practical exigencies in the object *and* a distribution of tasks amongst individuals [...]. In other words, the organising movement settles the relation between men on the basis of the fundamental relation

⁴⁹¹ 'définit chacun comme *individu commun* non seulement parce qu'il concerne son être-dans-le-groupe mais encore parce qu'il ne peut avoir lieu en chacun que par la médiation de tous' (CDR^F 459).

between group and thing (CDR 446)⁴⁹².

In the case of a sports team the relationship of the group to the “thing” is simple. In a game of football, for example, winning requires both scoring goals and preventing the other team from scoring. Both have to do with manipulating the same material object, the ball. The goalkeeper tries to keep the ball from entering the goal, but will also pass the ball towards other players who will try to score at the opposing end. Each player has a different relation to the same ball, which in turn determines the relation between the players. In other words, in an organized group each player has a function (CDR 447). This function is an inert limit of their freedom, it circumscribes the freedom of the individual in accordance with instructions that serve to further the freedom of the group (CDR 449). A function is closely tied to the capacity of an individual member (CDR 462). Someone who is good at certain tasks will often be chosen for a specific function.

Not only can one become part of a group because one has specific capacities, one can also train to have a certain function regardless of the group in which the function will be performed. An example of this is that one can train to become a goalkeeper even if one is not yet part of a team (CDR 450). Thus, functions get a life of their own and, thereby, a degree of objectivity regardless of the specifics of the group, and can be compared to the inert human roles of the practico-inert. It is important, however, to realize that they are not the same, because functions are never fully inert. This is the case because every member of an organized group is aware of the overarching goal of their function and how this contributes to the common *praxis*:

The unification of an organized group [...] is always defined by its objective, which is concrete. The relations between common individuals must, therefore, be constantly created within the limits laid down by a concrete task and solely with a view to the successful completion of this task (CDR 467)⁴⁹³.

492 ‘L’organisation est donc répartition des tâches. Et c’est l’objectif commun (intérêt commun, danger commun, besoin commun assignant une fin commune) qui — en définissant négativement la *praxis* — est à l’origine de cette différenciation. L’organisation est donc à la fois découverte dans l’objet des exigences pratiques et division des tâches entre les individus [...]. Ou, si l’on préfère, le mouvement organisateur décide du rapport entre les hommes en fonction de la relation fondamentale du groupe avec la chose.’ (CDR^F 460).

493 ‘l’union du groupe organisé est toujours définie par son objectif et celui-ci est *concret*. Les rapports entre individus communs doivent donc être inventés sans cesse dans les limites prescrites par une tâche concrète et dans l’unique perspective de mener cette tâche à bien.’ (CDR^F 477).

If this were not the case, the role of an individual would cease to be a function and would be pure inertia. Therefore, Sartre states that '[i]n the organised group, human relations involve their own freely accepted limits' and that these inert limitations are still free because they are part of their freely chosen group *praxis* (CDR 467)⁴⁹⁴.

Nevertheless, the gap between the individual and common *praxis* widens within the organized group. In the group-in-fusion, the individual and common *praxis* are the same, and this is not altered by the pledge. The differentiation of functions within an organisation, however, creates a distinction between one's own actions and that of other members. Even when the goal of the actions is clear, the results are not always immediate to the individual performing the action. In such cases the *praxis* becomes a process (CDR 547). The activity of the group actions is in what Sartre calls '*the evanescent elsewhere*', making the individual action in the "here" more passive (CDR 549)⁴⁹⁵. Therefore, *praxis* as process adds another degree of inertia to the organized group.

The relations between the different functions within a group constitute what Sartre calls a structure (CDR 480). Sartre draws heavily on the work of his critic Lévi-Strauss, particularly the latter's study of kinship, in developing this notion (CDR 479-484).⁴⁹⁶ Although functions cannot exist apart from the *praxis* of the individuals who perform them, they can be studied in their objective form. 'Function as lived *praxis* appears in the study of the group as objectivity in the *objectified* form of structure' (CDR 480)⁴⁹⁷. Hence, structures are 'contradictory tensions of freedom and inertia', as they both organize actions and are organized by actions (CDR 480)⁴⁹⁸. Just like functions, structures cannot be regarded as purely practico-inert, because they cannot be described without describing the actions of the individual functions.

Thus, the organisation is often needed to bring the group closer to its goal. An organized group becomes more efficient in realizing its goals. The same paradox that we saw in the pledge becomes all the more apparent here, however: more possibilities and hence more freedom are the result of the newly introduced inertia, which takes the form of functions and structures. Now, 'we shall find the organised group relapsing into the practico-inert field and dissolving into a

494 'Dans le groupe organisé, la relation humaine comporte ses propres limites librement acceptées' (CDR^F 476).

495 '*l'ailleurs évanescant*' (CDR^F 541).

496 For more information concerning the relation between Sartre and Levi-Strauss, see: (Doran 2013).

497 'La fonction comme *praxis* vécue apparaît dans l'examen du groupe comme objectivité sous la forme *objectivée* de structure' (CDR^F 487).

498 'ces tensions contradictoires — liberté et inertie —' (CDR^F 487).

new inertia' (CDR 454)⁴⁹⁹. This new inertia is that of the institution, the final stage of the circle of group-development.

Organized groups are in danger of separation (CDR 587). Because of the division of functions, one may lose track of the functions of other members of the group. This results in a new form of seriality. The members of the group are still oriented towards the same objective, but now by differentiated means. Although the group arises out of a collective that is founded on seriality, the differentiation of functions necessitated by the organisation of the group risks the group's disintegration and relapse to the practico-inert. Thereby, the collective is at risk of losing the freedom it gained by forming a group. This means that the group has to alter itself yet again 'to combat a re-emergence of seriality' (CDR 591)⁵⁰⁰.

The group reacts to this permanent danger, appearing at the level of organisation, with new practices: it produces itself in the form of an *institutionalised group*; which means that 'organs', functions and powers are transformed into institutions; that, in the framework of institutions, the community tries to acquire a new type of unity by institutionalising sovereignty, and that the common individual transforms himself into an institutional individual (CDR 591)⁵⁰¹.

The re-emergence of seriality would mean the dissolution and hence non-being of the group, hence '[t]he *being of the institution*, as the geometrical locus of intersections of the collective and the common, is the *non-being* of the group, produced as a bond between its members' (CDR 604)⁵⁰². To counter the disbandment of the group, some artificial measures are needed, namely two transformations. The first one is the institutionalisation or reification of functions, the second is the institutionalisation of powers, which produces a specific function: that of the sovereign. This, in turn, transforms the individuals of the group into institutional individuals.

499 'nous verrons le groupe organisé retomber dans le champ practico-inerte et se dissoudre en inertie nouvelle' CDR^F (467).

500 'à combattre une sérialité renaissante' (CDR^F 574).

501 'Contre ce danger permanent qui se découvre au niveau de l'organisation, le groupe réagit par des pratiques nouvelles : il se produit lui-même sous la forme d'un *groupe institutionnalisé* : cela signifie que les « organes », fonctions et pouvoir vont se transformer en institutions ; que, dans le cadre des institutions, la communauté tentera de se donner un nouveau type d'unité en institutionnalisant la souveraineté et que l'individu commun se transforme lui-même en individu institutionnel.' (CDR^F 573).

502 'L'être de l'institution, comme lieu géométrique des intersections du collectif du commun, est le *non-être* du groupe se produisant comme lien entre ses membres' (CDR^F 583).

The requirements for the first transformation are already present in the organisation. We have already seen that functions can get a life of their own, regardless of the group in question. We saw the first iteration of the reification of the function in the example of training to become a goalkeeper. There is a fine line between functions in an organisation and functions in an institution. In an organisation, the capacities of the individuals determine the functions, while in an institution the functions determine which individuals may become part of the group. As Sartre says, 'function, positing itself for itself, and producing individuals who will perpetuate it, becomes an institution'⁵⁰³ (CDR 600). The reification of the function is now complete. In an organisation, the capacity of the member precedes the function, while in an institution the function precedes the capacities of the member (CDR 607). This allows a group to retain its structure, and thereby its coherence, even when it is no longer clear to every member what that structure is.

Sartre's own example of a football team as an organisation is misleading in this regard, because a football team can be both an organisation and an institution. When a group of people decides that they want to play a game of football and determines the positions according to the capacities of the individuals involved, then it is an organisation, as the members precede the functions. A professional football team, in which a coach decides that he wants the team to play in a certain formation and hires players accordingly, is an institution. In this team, the functions precede the specific members.

The second transformation has to do with the aforementioned idea that in a group-in-fusion, every instigated action feels as if it were one's own. Because of this, all actions are free. When a group becomes organized, this is no longer the case as not everyone performs the same action. Yet everyone knows each other's function in an organisation, so the idea that everyone's actions contribute to the objective still allows for a degree of freedom. The idea of an entirely common *praxis* is replaced by the idea of the reciprocal recognition of different functions, that is, the idea that I would do the same as my teammate if I had to perform her function. Yet, when seriality re-emerges, one loses this sense of shared freedom. To counter this, the freedom of the members of the group is transferred to a single member or sub-group: the sovereign (CDR 607). Here we see that the higher degree of inertia brings with it necessity, which diminishes the freedom of most members of the group. The sovereign is the one who holds all the freedom, is allowed to give commands to all members of the group, and ensures that all functions are performed. This last characteristic means that the two

503 'la fonction ; celle-ci, en se posant pour elle-même, et en produisant les individus qui doivent la perpétuer, devient *institution*' (CDR^F 581).

transformations of institutionalisation cannot be viewed separately. Once the function no longer stems from the individual, another individual has to choose who performs it.

These two transformations make the common individual into an institutional individual, who no longer precedes her function and is no longer free. Being an institutional individual is therefore very close to being-outside-oneself in the practico-inert field. The institution itself however, although in the stage of group-formation closest to the practico-inert, is not yet fully inert:

The important point is that – at least as long as it still has its finality – it [the group] can never be entirely assimilated to the practico-inert: its meaning is still that of an action undertaken in the light of a certain objective (CDR 603)⁵⁰⁴.

In order for people to accept the organisational structure and the power of the sovereign, it is important that they identify themselves with their function and take pride in it: ‘The aim is, in effect, to create men who (as common individuals) will define themselves, in their own eyes and amongst themselves, by their fundamental relation [...] with institutions’ (CDR 606)⁵⁰⁵. If one’s sense of identity is rooted in one’s function within a group, one is more likely to accept the fact that the overarching goal of the group is no longer known. If one takes pride in service, one is more likely to accept orders from the sovereign. This brings the institutional individual again closer to the individual that is a thing within the practico-inert, reduced to a tool of the structure of the organisation.

The circle of group-formation is now complete. The first stage, the group-in-fusion, grants the members more freedom because as a group they have significantly more possibilities. In order to retain these possibilities in the future, a small inert element, the pledge, is introduced, bringing the group to the second stage. The third stage, that of organisation, makes the group more efficient and thereby better in attaining its free goals, but at the cost of more inertia and hence more necessity. In the fourth and final stage the group becomes almost fully inert, allowing for only a single element of freedom in the form of a sovereign. As has been noted before, Sartre’s account is purely formal: groups do not pass through the four stages in a

504 ‘Ce qui importe c’est que — au moins tant que sa finalité demeure — elle n’est jamais assimilable tout à fait au practico-inerte : son sens demeure celui d’une action entreprise en fonction d’un objectif’ (CDR^F 583).

505 ‘Le but est, en effet, de créer des hommes tels (en tant qu’individus communs) qu’ils se définissent à leurs propres yeux et entre eux par leur rapport fondamental [...] aux institutions’ (CDR^F 585).

preordained fashion, and they can disband and fall back into the practico-inert field from which they arose at any time. A group can be constituted as an institution from the outset, but in such a case there would always also be a common objective stemming from an external threat, a pledge and functions, which all stem from the three other stages.

Up to this point, we have only discussed groups from the point of view of their members. People who are not members also engage with groups. For these people, the group is not primarily seen in light of its own *praxis*, but appears as a 'group-object, seen in relation to my own aim' (CDR 371)⁵⁰⁶. Sartre gives the example of the postal service (CDR 566-567). When I bring a letter to the post office, I use it for my own aim: 'The post office is *my instrument*, it is an extension of my arm, like a cane, a spade or a broom' (CDR 568)⁵⁰⁷. From my perspective, the postal service appears as a group-object. I often have no insight into how the service works exactly or what the individual *praxis* of every member is. The only thing I know is that when I put a stamp on a letter and post it, the postal service will bring it to the address specified. Another way of saying this is that the group appears as a totality for the outsider, whereas from the inside it appears as a totalisation (CDR 574).

The group-object, like any other object, can also create new forms of seriality. For the postal service, the series are the customers (CDR 566). Just like the people who wait for the bus, the people who wait at the post office are doing so in alterity. They do not use the service together, but each have their own letters to send. The only difference being that, in this case, the object is not a purely material object such as a bus, but a group, the postal service. As we have seen, a seriality of people is one of the two prerequisites for forming groups. The other prerequisite is a threat posed by another group. The postal service does not pose a threat, but other group-objects may. We can now give a full account of the nature of group-formation. Groups are formed in the practico-inert and plunge back into it, but they may also cause other groups to arise, which may subsequently collapse back into full inertia and/or cause other new groups to arise. As Sartre puts it:

The group emerges from the more or less complete dissolution of collectives and in the unity of a common *praxis*. And the object of this *praxis* can be defined only in relation to other groups, which may or may not be mediated by series, or to an inert gathering, which may

506 'groupe-objet, saisi en rapport avec ma fin' (CDR^F 402).

507 'La poste est *mon instrument*, elle allonge mon bras, comme une canne, une bêche ou un balai' (CDR^F 556).

or may not be mediated by other groups, or to worked matter, which may or may not be mediated by series and groups (CDR 664)⁵⁰⁸.

This account of multiple groups allows us to grasp Sartre's conception of History. History is ultimately class struggle, which is the struggle between the largest groups that make up a society. The theory of class struggle can be understood as the synthesis of everything Sartre has discussed in the *Critique* thus far. As is the case with *praxis*, the origin of class struggle is scarcity: 'The origin of struggle always lies, in fact, in some concrete antagonism whose material condition is *scarcity*' (CDR 113)⁵⁰⁹. Just as individual organisms have to compete with one another because there is scarcity, so too must concrete groups compete with each other.

As has been said already, classes are the largest regions of people within the practico-inert field. They are by definition the largest gatherings. If they were *only* gatherings, however, they would be passive and thus unable to act. This would also mean that they were timeless and unchanging, and that there would be no historical development. As we have seen, gatherings can become groups and thereby act upon the practico-inert field. 'It is a genuine case of *the class having two forms*' (CDR 680)⁵¹⁰. Sartre does not mean by this that the whole class needs to become a group in order for societies to change:

[T]he transformation of a class into an actualized group has never actually occurred, even in revolutionary periods. But we have seen that seriality is always being eroded by action groups constituted at various levels and pursuing variable objectives (CDR 679)⁵¹¹.

Such an action group is based on a gathering in which the members have their class-being in common. The specific objective of such a group may vary, but if they want to change the situation of their class, they always aim at diminishing the power, influence or status

508 'Le groupe se produit sur la dissolution plus ou moins profonde des collectifs et dans l'unité d'une *praxis* commune. Et l'objet de cette *praxis* ne peut être défini qu'en fonction d'autres groupes médiés ou non par des séries, d'un rassemblement inerte, médié ou non par d'autres groupes, d'une matière ouvrée, médiée ou non par des séries et des groupes.' (CDR^F 632).

509 'En fait, la lutte a pour origine en chaque cas un antagonisme concret qui a la *rareté*' (CDR^F 192).

510 'Il s'agit bien de *la classe* sous deux formes' (CDR^F 644).

511 'la transformation de la classe en groupe actualisé ne s'est jamais réalisée nulle part, même en période révolutionnaire. Nous savons, en fait, que la *sérialité* demeure, perpétuellement rongée par des groupes d'action qui se constituent à des niveaux divers et poursuivent des objectifs variables.' (CDR^F 644).

of another class. This class, threatened in its being by the action-group, can only respond by forming action-groups of its own. One class can never move without provoking a reaction from another. This is what Sartre calls “antagonistic reciprocity”, and it is the driving factor of History:

[T]he unity of two struggling classes is a fact of antagonistic reciprocity and [...] this contradictory unity of each in the Other is occasioned by *praxis* and by *praxis* alone. In other words, it is conceivable – as a pure, formal, logical hypothesis – that there should be a Universe in which practical multiplicities would not form themselves into classes (for example, a Universe where scarcity would not be the basic relation between the practical agent and his environment). But *if classes do exist*, then it is necessary to make a choice: *either* they should be defined in inertia as strata of society with no more unity than the compact inertia revealed by geological sections; *or* their moving, changing, fleeting, ungraspable yet *real* unity comes to them from other classes in so far as each is bound to all the others by a practical reciprocity (CDR 794)⁵¹²[.]⁵¹³

This brings us to the conclusion of the first volume of the *Critique* and Sartre’s regressive inquiry into the dialectical foundation of History:

The conclusion of this investigation is that *the only possible intelligibility* of human relations is dialectical and that this intelligibility, in a concrete history whose true foundation is *scarcity*, can be manifested only as an antagonistic reciprocity. [...] Our History is intelligible to us because it is dialectical and it is dialectical because the class struggle produces us as transcending the inertia

512 ‘l’unité de deux classes en lutte est un fait de réciprocité antagonistique et [...] cette unité contradictoire de chacune en l’Autre est suscitée par la *praxis* et par elle seule. En d’autres termes, il est possible de concevoir comme pure hypothèse logique et formelle un Univers où les multiplicités pratiques ne se constitueraient pas en classes (par exemple, celui dont la *rareté* ne serait pas le rapport fondamental de l’agent pratique et de son environnement). Mais *si les classes existent* il faut choisir : *ou bien* on les définira dans l’inertie comme des strates de la société et sans autre unité que la compacte inertie que nous révèlent les coupes géologiques ; *ou bien* leur unité mouvante, changeante, fuyante, insaisissable et pourtant *réelle*, leur vient des autres classes en tant que chacune est liée à toutes les autres par une réciprocité pratique’ (CDR^f 735-736).

513 Sartre’s reference to geological sections is reminiscent of his criticism of Foucault (RTS 110), where the latter is accused of being a geologist rather than an archeologist because his philosophy cannot account for how historical periods change.

of the collective towards dialectical combat-groups (CDR 805)⁵¹⁴.

The practico-inert produces collectives and the largest collectives, classes, only exist in a struggle, or, in other words, in antagonistic reciprocity. Because there is scarcity, individuals are always competing for their survival. The same is true of classes, which also compete with one another. In order to defend themselves from other classes, people have to unite themselves into a group. When one group that represents a class is formed, however, it cannot do anything but act against another class, which in turn needs to defend itself by forming other groups. This process is dialectical because class struggle is the negation of the inert classes, which are themselves negations of one another. Furthermore, the reciprocal relationship between classes means that History is a totalisation of all other histories because everything takes place within the practico-inert field and only class struggle can change this inertia. Everything is thereby part of the same general movement of History. This process never ends, hence the totality is never achieved.

Sartre ends the critique by remarking that the findings of his inquiry can be tested. If History is truly dialectical, the totalisation should be intelligible within a concrete historical situation. Alas, Sartre never managed to complete his progressive inquiry into History, but some of the ideas presented in the posthumously published fragments of the second volume of the *Critique* will be discussed in the last section of this chapter, when we examine the Self in its temporal narrative dimension.

Preliminary conclusion

We have seen how Sartre rethinks the relationship of subjectivity and objectivity in the form of the organic and the inorganic. The *praxis* of organisms is oriented towards survival and becomes a project that re-arranges inorganic matter. In doing so, inorganic matter is created which in turn makes human beings into things and arranges them into gatherings. Gatherings can in turn become groups, which break free from inertia, only to become more inert over time. The process of classes turning into groups and competing with one another changes society and forms History.

In our inquiry into *praxis*, the practico-inert, groups and History, the topic of selfhood has already come to the surface, especially in

514 'Nous concluons de cette expérience que *la seule intelligibilité possible* des rapports humains est dialectique et que cette intelligibilité, dans une histoire concrète dont le véritable fondement est *la rareté*, ne peut se manifester que comme une réciprocité antagonistique' (CDR^f 744).

the notions of *praxis* as project, being-outside-oneself and having a certain function within a group. However, we should note that the discussion of individuals has up until this point been formal. The *praxis* of an individual is the formal relationship of an organism to its environment: ‘*there is no such thing as an isolated individual (unless isolation is treated as a special structure of sociality)*’ (CDR 677)⁵¹⁵. In the second part of this chapter we will therefore turn to the concrete person and its selfhood within its historical situation.

Part II The Processes of Selfhood

4. Interiorisation

We already touched on the theme of subjective selfhood when we discussed the notion of *praxis*. In the totalizing process of the organism that keeps itself alive, we see the outlines of a subjective process creating unity through time. Yet, as has been stated, this description is abstract. Sartre’s ideas concerning the concrete process of subjective selfhood are developed mostly in the 1961 lecture published as “Marxism and Subjectivity”. Although Sartre does not use the term Self or self-consciousness in this text, it is clear that the notion of subjectivity that he describes amounts to the process of subjective unity and individuality over time. The central notion that need to be elucidated in order to understand Sartre’s line of thought is that of “interiorisation”. Related to this notion is that of “lived experience”, which amounts to the way in which interiorisation takes place in a concrete moment.

Lived experience

Sartre begins “Marxism and Subjectivity” with the familiar statement that subjectivity is an activity rather than a thing:

My topic is not subject and object, but rather subjectivity, or subjectivation, and objectivity or objectivation. The subject is a different, far more complex problem. When I speak of subjectivity, it is as a certain type of internal action, an interior system rather than the simple, immediate relationship of the subject to itself (MS 3)⁵¹⁶.

515 ‘*il n’y a pas d’individu isolé (à moins qu’on ne prenne la solitude comme une structure particulière de la socialité)*’ (CDR^F 642).

516 ‘nous n’allons pas, au début, parler du sujet et de l’objet, mais plutôt de l’objectivité, ou de l’objectivation, et de la subjectivité, ou de subjectivation. Le sujet c’est une autre problème, un problème plus complexe ; mais je voudrais que nous gardions à l’esprit cette idée que lorsqu’on parle de subjectivité on parle d’un certain type, qua nous allons voir, d’action interne, d’un certain type, que nous allons voir, d’action interne, d’un système, d’un système en intériorité, et non pas d’une relation

Although it is interesting that Sartre acknowledges the subject here, he does not seem to give a theory of it. Rather, he continues his line of thought concerning subjectivity, namely that it is solely an activity or process. In order to understand how subjectivity and, ultimately, subjective selfhood *work*, we have to understand *praxis* in its concrete circumstances. In *Search for a Method*, Sartre offers a definition of *praxis* in slightly different terms than the ones that we discussed at the beginning of this chapter:

Praxis, indeed, is a passage from objective to objective through internalisation. The project, as the subjective surpassing 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 (SM 97)⁵¹⁷[.]

The dual objectivity to which he here refers denotes the idea that the organism changes the current state of the material world in light of its project, thereby creating a new state of affairs, and hence a new objectivity. This process happens “through internalisation”. This refers to the fact that the material circumstances are interpreted in light of the project of the organism and subsequently manipulated. In other words, the current state of affairs is internalized by the organism. The possibilities for the organism are discovered and the organism acts accordingly. At the abstract level, if we see *praxis* solely in terms of the organism and its survival, the organism will manipulate its surroundings in such fashion that its chances of survival are higher. At the concrete level, the process becomes more complex.

Apart from the surpassing of these states of material circumstances, we have also seen another meaning of dual objectivity in the form of the body. In order to manipulate the outside world, one also has to manipulate one’s own objectivity. Hence, the body is made into an object, a tool to physically alter the outside world. The concrete version of this abstract process that is found in the process of subjectivity involves the mediation between inner and outer objectivity. Another way to describe objectivity is exteriority: that which is outside. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to interpret the process as a return to an “inner world”, which, as we saw in the first chapter, Sartre criticized as the ‘illusion of immanence’. The objectivity inside is also

immédiate au sujet.’ (MS^F 29).

517 ‘La *praxis*, en effet, est un passage de l’objectif à l’objectif par l’intériorisation ; le projet comme dépassement subjectif de l’objectivité vers l’objectivité, tendu entre les conditions objectives du milieu et les structures objectives du champ des possibles représente *en lui-même* l’unité mouvante de la subjectivité et de l’objectivité’ (SM^F 66).

exterior, meaning that it is not transparent to us. In the case of our physical body this is self-evident, as we have no specific knowledge about the biological processes going on inside us. We will return to the topic of transparency later. For now, let us turn to the definition of interiorisation as the mediation between two types of exteriority that Sartre provides in “Marxism and Subjectivity”:

So, at the outset at least, we can then identify two types of exteriority: first, the exteriority of within or, if you prefer, ‘on this side’ or ‘before’; in other words, a type of exteriority whose crowning feature is organic status, from which death can return us to the inorganic. Second, the exteriority of ‘beyond’ which reflects what this organism finds in front of it as a work object, a need and the means to satisfy it, in order to maintain its status as organism. Thus, we have a dialectic with three terms. This requires us to describe interiorisation of the exterior by the organism, in order to understand its capacity to re-exteriorize in transcendent being, in carrying out an act of work or determining a need. So there is only one moment called *interiority*, which is a kind of mediation between two moments of transcendent being (MS 9)⁵¹⁸.

Thus, subjectivity is the process of mediation between the object we encounter and the object that we are, and, in this mediation, we manipulate both objects: ‘it is at the level of this mediation, which is not itself mediated, that we encounter pure subjectivity’ (MS 9-10)⁵¹⁹.

An important aspect of this process is self-knowledge. According to Sartre, ‘*praxis* [...] is knowledge and action together, action that engenders its own understanding’ (MS 10)⁵²⁰ This is the case because

518 ‘On peut alors distinguer, au moins au départ, – et nous y reviendrons – deux types d’extériorité : l’extériorité du dedans, ou si l’on préfère d’en deçà, d’avant, c’est-à-dire l’extériorité dont le statut est couronné par le statut organique, au-dessous donc de notre statut organique, et auquel la mort peut nous renvoyer, et l’extériorité d’au-delà, qui correspond à ce que cet organisme, pour maintenir son statut d’organisme, trouve en face de lui comme objet de travail, comme moyen du besoin et de l’assouvissement. Nous avons donc, et il ne faudra pas le perdre de vue, une dialectique à trois termes : ce qui impose de décrire l’intériorisation de l’extérieur par l’organisme afin de comprendre sa capacité à ré-extérioriser dans l’être transcendant, occasion d’un acte de travail ou d’une détermination du besoin. Il n’y a donc qu’un moment qui s’appelle l’*intériorité*, et qui est une sorte de médiation, une médiation entre deux moments de l’être transcendant.’ (MS^f 37-38).

519 ‘c’est au niveau de cette médiation, que n’est pas elle-même médiée, que nous rencontrons la subjectivité pure’ (MS^f 38).

520 ‘*praxis* [...] est connaissance en même temps qu’action, qui est action engendrant ses propres lumières’ (MS^f 39).

‘there is a practical surpassing of the situation towards a goal, which implies knowledge of the goal and of the means’ (MS 7)⁵²¹. In the particular situation of using a tool such as a hammer, one knows that one should lift the hammer and bring it down with force on the nail. There are also numerous aspects of this action that are ‘beyond knowledge’, however, such as the exact positions we must adopt, and how our muscles, bones and nerves work. Moreover, knowledge sometimes causes the action to go awry.

Let us take a well-known example: if, as you go downstairs, you become conscious of what you are doing and if consciousness emerges to determine what you do, to intervene in this action, you immediately stumble because the action no longer has the character it should (MS 8)⁵²².

In this example, the explicit knowledge hinders the implicit “know-how”. The act of reflection reveals the twofold nature of selfhood and gives us the subjectivity-object, that which we have called the objective Self and subjectivity itself (MS 14). Nevertheless, as Sartre makes clear, ‘subjectivity is in practice a non-object’ and therefore ‘escapes knowledge’ (MS 10)⁵²³. Our bodily disposition, the “exteriority of within” interacts with the “exteriority of beyond”, that is, the stairs in the above example. If we turn our attention towards this activity, however, it ceases to be an activity and we are left with the objective Self – the exact nature of which we will discuss in the next section.

For now, let us take a closer look at this elusive subjectivity. Although Sartre does not use the term in “Marxism and Subjectivity”, it corresponds with “lived experience”, a notion he employs mostly in *The Family Idiot*. The most elaborate explanation is found in “The Itinerary of a Thought”:

In my present book on Flaubert, I have replaced my earlier notion of consciousness (although I still use the word a lot), with what I call lived experience. I will try to describe in a moment what I mean by this term, which is neither the precautions of the preconscious,

521 ‘il exige l’unité d’un dépassement pratique de la situation vers un fin ; cela suppose des connaissances : la connaissance de but et des moyens’ (MS^F 35).

522 ‘Soit l’exemple connu : si, lorsque vous descendez un escalier, vous prenez connaissance de ce que vous êtes en train de faire et si la conscience apparaît à un certain moment pour déterminer ce que vous faites, pour agir par un certain moyen sur cette action, alors vous trébuchez, car l’action n’a pas la caractère qu’elle doit avoir.’ (MS^F 36).

523 ‘la subjectivité est effectivement le non-objet’ ‘elle échappe comme telle à la connaissance’ (MS^F 39).

nor the unconscious, nor consciousness, but the terrain in which the individual is perpetually overflowed by himself and his riches and consciousness plays the trick of determining itself by forgetfulness (IT 39)⁵²⁴.

Lived experience is the dimension of experiential life of which we are, in a certain sense, unaware, a mindless coping with the world without explicit consciousness of this activity. It is difficult to describe by its very definition; putting things into words often transforms lived experience into consciousness (MS 15). In the example of the person descending the stairs, the individual is overflowing with capabilities for a huge range of actions – keeping one’s balance, guessing where the next step will be without looking, holding the railing etc. Conscious experiences “forgets” these things, however, so that it can focus on the practical goals, for example, the reason that the person is descending the stairs. The “forgotten” information is neither totally unconscious nor totally conscious. The person is not aware that these actions are taking place, but not totally unaware either. If the person is fully aware, the person would not be able to become fully conscious and stumble.⁵²⁵ Sartre still thinks that the self-presence of the consciousness (of) self, which we discussed in the previous chapter, is retained:

[T]he notion of ‘lived experience’ represents an effort to preserve that presence to itself which seems to me indispensable for the existence of any psychic fact, while at the same time this presence is so opaque and blind before itself that it is also an absence from itself. Lived experience is always simultaneously present to itself and absent from itself (IT 42)⁵²⁶.

The idea that all consciousness is conscious of itself is retained. Lived experience is still ‘necessarily accompanied by a non-positional consciousness of itself’, but this consciousness is as non-conceptual

524 ‘Dans le livre que j’écris sur Flaubert, j’ai remplacé mon ancienne notion de *conscience* – bien que j’utilise encore beaucoup le mot – par ce que j’appelle le *vécu*. J’essaierai tout à l’heure d’expliquer ce que j’entends par ce terme, qui ne désigne ni les refuges du préconscient, ni l’inconscient, ni le conscient, mais le terrain sur lequel l’individu est constamment submergé par lui-même, par ses propres richesses, et où la conscience a l’astuce de se déterminer elle-même par l’oubli.’ (IT^F 108).

525 This example is very similar to two that he mentions in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, being absorbed in an activity and absent-mindedly asking questions about what one is doing (TE 23).

526 ‘L’introduction de la notion de vécu représente un effort pour conserver cette « présence à soi » qui me paraît indispensable à l’existence de tout fait psychique, présence en même temps si opaque, si aveugle à elle-même qu’elle est aussi « absence de soi ». Le vécu est toujours, simultanément, présent à soi et absent de soi.’ (IT^F 112).

as can be (F5 38)⁵²⁷. Hence, Sartre himself sees lived experience as a definite change from the theory presented in *Being and Nothingness*:

The conception of ‘lived experience’ marks my change since *L’Être et Le Néant*. My early work was a rationalist philosophy of consciousness. It was all very well for me to dabble in apparently non-rational processes in the individual, the fact remains that *L’Être et Le Néant* is a monument of rationality. But in the end it becomes an irrationalism, because it cannot account rationally for those processes which are ‘below’ consciousness and which are also rational, but lived as irrational. (IT 41-42)⁵²⁸.

The last remark, that the processes of lived experience are rational but lived as irrational, is important with regard to the relation of lived experience to the two exteriorities. Lived experience is the process of interiorisation as it is experienced by someone. The abilities a person has are part of the externality of the inside but stem from the externality of the outside. We constantly pick up habits from our environment, we consciously learn things which become second nature to us. Our bodies have even evolved to increase our chances of survival in a hostile environment. Therefore, this externality is rational, it is in principle possible to give a rational explanation of its workings. This, however, is not how we experience it: remember the example of the muscles that move the hammer. We do not *focus* on how our muscles work, which might even obstruct the act of hammering, but that does not mean that an anatomist could not give a rational description of the process.

Thus, lived experience is the process of interiorisation understood as the mediation between the exteriority inside and the exteriority outside. We have seen how this process works within a given situation. Let us now turn to the question of how it works over a longer period of time.

527 ‘s’accompagne nécessairement d’une conscience non positionnelle d’elle-même’ (F5^F 47).

528 ‘Cette conception du vécu est ce qui marque mon évolution depuis *L’Être et le Néant*. Dans mes premiers écrits, je cherchais à construire une philosophie rationaliste de la conscience. Je pouvais bien écrire des pages et des pages sur des processus apparemment non rationnels du comportement individuel, *L’Être et le Néant* n’en reste pas moins un monument de rationalité. Ce qui le fait tomber, finalement, dans l’irrationalisme, puisqu’il ne peut rendre compte rationnellement des processus intervenant « en dessous » de la conscience, processus également rationnels mais qui sont vécus comme irrationnels.’ (IT^F 112).

Repetition, inventiveness and projection

In order to see how interiorisation works over a longer period of time, we must first take a closer look at the exteriority within. An example Sartre gives in this context is that of an anti-Semite (MS 10-11). The person in question does not regard himself to be an anti-Semite, but openly mistrusts Jewish people nonetheless. Sartre would say that he is an anti-Semite, as he behaves as such, he just does not realize it yet. Just like the workings of his body, the workings of his moral attitudes lie beyond his rational grasp. Being anti-Semitic is part of his exteriority within. What then, apart from our body, must the exteriority within be in order for an attitude such as this to be a part of it?

First of all, an important part of our exteriority within is our 'character' (SM 101)⁵²⁹. Character is the way in which we interiorize our social background. Sartre frequently refers to this background with the term 'Objective Spirit', which 'is nothing more than culture as practico-inert' (F5 35)⁵³⁰. The process of interiorizing the Objective Spirit takes place mostly during childhood. As Sartre puts in the *Search for a Method*: '[W]e must remember that we live our childhood as our *future*. Our childhood determines gestures and roles in the perspective of what is to come' (SM 105)⁵³¹. Sartre emphasizes gesture quite a lot in this regard. Although our physiological body changes, the way we move our body is more constant. Furthermore, gestures are also class specific, as we can distinguish between bourgeois and socialist ones (SM 101). The roles have to do with how one is expected to behave and thereby how one needs to act within the world. This relates to the example of the anti-Semite. Not only has he interiorized certain moral beliefs from his background, namely anti-Semitism, but he also has interiorized how he should behave accordingly: mistrust Jewish people, but never admit that you mistrust them because they are Jewish. Sartre gives a lengthier example of bourgeois respectability in the *Critique* (CDR 770-776). Here Sartre relates the stiff posture and distaste for physical bodies of the bourgeois to their relationship to the working class:

[H]e sees his class totalising itself in the form of culture and rejecting physical bodies from itself in the very movement by which it makes the workers keep their distance. And in any such attitude, he discovers and produces the following total determination: my body is simply one of my workers, and each of my workers is no

529 'caractère' (SM^F 68).

530 'l'Esprit objectif' 'n'est autre que la Culture comme practico-inerte'. (F5^F 44).

531 'nous vivons notre enfance comme notre futur. Elle détermine gestes et rôles dans une perspective à venir' (SM^F 71).

more than a body (CDR 775)⁵³².

The example is especially interesting because it shows that both the body and distaste for one's body (and other bodies) can be part of the exteriority of within at the same time. As one is not aware of one's character, contradictions within it do not matter as they too are unknown to us (unless an act of reflection makes them known). Although character stems from one's social and cultural background, it is not the same for everyone, as our positions within this background can vary greatly. In the case of Flaubert, for example, his position as a "second son" is thought to have been detrimental for his character (F1 306–307). As Sartre states in *The Family Idiot*: 'the structures of this family are interiorized as attitudes and re-exteriorized as actions by which the child makes himself into what others made him' (F2 3)⁵³³. It is important to note that the family structures also reflect the political structures of the time, as a family-unity is only one kind of subgroup and can only exist within the larger framework of class-struggle, as we have discussed in the first part of this chapter.

It must be noted that Sartre also emphasizes that our character is not fully passive, it also entails our first attempts to break away from our social background: 'At this level also are the traces left by our first revolts, our desperate attempts to go beyond a stifling reality, and the resulting deviations and distortions' (SM 101)⁵³⁴.

Thus, we interiorize our background and form a character accordingly. For this reason, Sartre states that 'social subjectivity is the very definition of subjectivity' (MS 73)⁵³⁵. Subjectivity consists of different ways in which this interiorized background interacts with the world: '[f]or human beings there are several dimensions to subjectivity—subjectivity itself being ultimately their totalisation' (MS 25)⁵³⁶. Sartre ultimately distinguishes three dimensions in "Marxism and Subjectivity": repetition, inventiveness and projection (MS 26). Repetition denotes the fact that if circumstances remain relatively identical, our actions will remain the same. We will keep on reacting in the same manner to the things that happen

532 'il saisit sa classe comme se totalisant sous forme de culture et rejetant d'elle-même les corps dans le mouvement même qui tient à distance les ouvriers ; en chacune, il découvre et produit cette détermination totale : mon corps n'est rien que l'un de mes ouvriers, chacun de mes ouvriers n'est rien d'autre qu'un corps.' (CDR^F 720).

533 'les structures de cette famille sont intériorisées en attitudes et réextériorisées en pratiques par quoi l'enfant se fait être ce qu'on l'a fait' (F2^F 653).

534 'A ce niveau aussi, les traces qu'ont laissées nos premières révoltes, nos tentatives désespérées pour dépasser une réalité qui étouffe, et les déviations, les torsions qui en résultent' (SM^F 68).

535 'subjectivité sociale est la définition même de la subjectivité' (MS^F 120).

536 'Pour l'homme, il y a plusieurs dimensions de la subjectivité, celle-ci étant au fond la totalisation de ces dimensions' (MS^F 62).

to us. If the circumstances change, we will need to adapt ourselves accordingly. This explains the dimension of inventiveness. We have to find new ways to relate our exteriority within to the exteriority beyond. Once again, the anti-Semite proves to be a good example. No longer surrounded by bourgeois people, his continued mistrust of Jews compels him to invent excuses, telling Jewish people that he “just does not like them” and other things in this vein. He finds new ways to express his anti-Semitic sentiments in a new environment, one in which anti-Semitism is frowned upon. Note that this is still a dimension of lived experience and it is thereby not known to the person himself. Once he is confronted and realizes that he is anti-Semitic, his subjectivity becomes an object and ceases to be lived experience. When such reflection occurs, the exteriority within is altered, which is something different than finding new ways to express this exteriority.

The last dimension of subjectivity also has to do with the way we view the world around us: ‘repetition-innovation within a particular, immediate relation, always transcendent to external being, is called projection’ (MS 26)⁵³⁷. As an example of projection, Sartre refers to the well-known Rorschach test, a psychological test in which the patient is presented with abstract ink shapes. Everyone sees something different depicted, thus “projecting” their own exteriority of within onto the pictures. This is another example of lived experience without knowledge, as we do not know, for instance, why one person see cabbage leaves while another sees human figures.⁵³⁸ Although the test is fairly abstract, we can easily apply the same reasoning to the example of the anti-Semite: he says he “just does not like someone” because Jewish people appear in a negative way to him.

To sum up, Sartre characterizes subjectivity as the mediation between a largely unknown exteriority within and the world. In the moment, this manifests itself as lived experience; over time, as repetition, innovation and projection. Sartre focuses less on the unity of subjective selfhood and more on individuality. The unity of the subjective process is based solely on the fact that it mediates between the same exteriorities. What is more important here is how our interiorized social background influences the way we perceive the world and how we act. In order to show that subjectivity is not a thing, but an activity or process, Sartre resorts to showing us how it works rather than what it is.

537 ‘répétition-invention dans un rapport donné, immédiat, toujours transcendent à l’être d’extériorité, s’appelle la projection’ (MS^F 64).

538 The example is reminiscent of Sartre’s own example of the ‘psychoanalysis of things’ and the analysis of viscosity in *Being and Nothingness* (BN 777, 781-797).

5. Personalisation

The example of the anti-Semite teaches us about subjective selfhood, but also about the limits of subjectivity. Sartre continues the example to the point where the person is confronted with his behaviour. Once this happens, the unknown anti-Semitism becomes known and subjectivity loses its primary characteristic, namely non-knowledge. There is no longer a mere mediation between the exteriority within and the exteriority beyond, but a confrontation between the exteriority within and itself as an object. Yet this confrontation also alters the exteriority within. In so far as previously unknown aspects of oneself come to the surface, they are no longer unwittingly operative features of our character: '[s]o we can see that the appearance of the subjectivity-object to the subject himself lead to its transformation' (MS 14)⁵³⁹. Over the course of a lifetime, such moments of reflection change the exteriority within. Another level of mediation between the two exteriorities is added, in which the exteriority within relates to itself as object: a 're-exteriorisation of the interiorized' (F2 9)⁵⁴⁰. This process is what constitutes a full-fledged '*person*, a permanent mediation between the subjective and the objective.' (F2 9)⁵⁴¹. However, as this is a process rather than a thing, it is better to speak of "personalisation":

[T]his totalisation which is endlessly detotalized and retotalized is *personalisation*. The *person*, in effect, is neither completely suffered nor completely constructed; furthermore, the person *does not exist* or, if you will, is always the *surpassed* result of the whole mass of totalizing operations by which we continually try to assimilate the nonassimilable – primarily our childhood – indicating that the person represents the abstract and endlessly retouched product of personalisation, the only real – that is, *experienced* activity – of the living being. In other words, it is experience itself conceived as unification and endlessly returning to the original determinations on the occasion of more recent ones in order to integrate what cannot be integrated (F2 6)⁵⁴²[.]

539 'Aussi voyons-nous que l'apparition de la subjectivité-objet entraîne pour la personne elle-même sa transformation' (MS^F 44).

540 'réexteriorisation de l'intériorisé' (F2^F 659).

541 'la *personne* [...], médiation permanente entre le subjectif et l'objectif' (F2^F 659).

542 'cette totalisation sans cesse détotaillée et retotalisante c'est *personnalisation*. La *personne*, en effet, n'est ni tout à fait subie, ni tout à fait construite : au reste, elle n'est point ou, si l'on veut, elle n'est à chaque instant que le résultat *dépassé* de l'ensemble des procédés totalisateurs par lesquels nous tentons continuellement d'assimiler l'inassimilable, c'est-à-dire au premier chef notre enfance : ce qui signifie qu'elle représente le produit abstrait et sans cesse retouché de la personnalisation, seule activité réelle – c'est-à-dire *vécue* – du vivant. Ou plutôt c'est le vécu lui-même

Personalisation refers to the full process of selfhood, the subjective dimension, the occasional confrontation with the objective dimension and how this object is again interiorized into the subjective. As such, it is both the surpassing and preservation of our constitution:

In any event, personalisation in the individual is nothing more than the surpassing and preservation (assumption and inner negation) at the core of a project to totalize what the world has – made and continues to make – of us (F2 7)⁵⁴³.

This process of personalisation is described in most detail in *The Family Idiot*. This work is very complex. Written in the form of a biography of Flaubert, Sartre has also said that ‘the study of Flaubert represents, to me, a sequel to one of my first books, *L’Imaginaire*’ and that it can be considered ‘a true novel’ (IT 46, 49)⁵⁴⁴. Moreover, it reflects on literature in general, and the fifth volume, in particular, could be considered a work of political analysis. For our purpose, however, it is interesting that the extremes of Flaubert’s life can help us to understand how the personalisation of most ordinary people operates. The case of Flaubert is a peculiar one in that his life does not exemplify a normal process of personalisation. As Sartre states:

[M]y ideal would be that the reader simultaneously feels, comprehends and knows the personality of Flaubert, totally as an individual and yet totally as an expression of his time. In other words, Flaubert can only be understood by his difference from his neighbours (IT 43)⁵⁴⁵.

In light of our ends, we will reverse the strategy Sartre deploys in *The Family Idiot*. We will first discuss how Sartre describes personalisation and the “subjectivity-object” in ordinary cases and turn to Flaubert afterwards.

conçu comme unification et revenant sans cesse sur les déterminations originelles à l’occasion de déterminations plus récentes pour intégrer l’inintégré’ (F2^F 656).

543 ‘De tout manière, la personnalisation n’est rien d’autre chez l’individu que le dépassement et la conservation (assomption et négation intime) au sein d’un projet totalisateur de ce que le monde a fait – et continue à faire – de lui.’ (F2^F 657).

544 ‘l’étude de Flaubert représente, pour moi, une suite à l’un de mes premiers livres, *L’Imaginaire*’ ‘un vrai roman’ (IT^F 118, 123).

545 ‘Mon idéal serait qu’il puisse tout à la fois sentir, comprendre et connaître la personnalité de Flaubert, comme totalement individuelle mais aussi comme totalement représentative de son époque. Autrement dit, Flaubert ne peut être compris que par ce qui le distingue de ses contemporains.’ (IT^F 116).

The quasi object

We have seen that the process of subjectivity is unhindered most of the time. At times, this process is interrupted and one becomes aware of one's own exteriority within as a "subjectivity-object". Nevertheless, this object does not correspond to the exteriority within in its entirety. The exteriority within is both one's body and the physico-chemical processes that constitute it, and one's upbringing and cultural background, although one never becomes aware of all of this. In the example of the person descending the stairs, one becomes aware of one's bodily position and ability to walk, but not of one's cultural background per se. In the example of the anti-Semite, it is the other way around: one becomes aware of certain facets of one's cultural background but not of one's body. The subjectivity-object is therefore not the exteriority within, but another object based upon aspects of the exteriority. This object is what Sartre identifies with the Self (or the ego):

You know how I conceive of the self – I haven't changed – it is an object before us. That is to say, the self appears to our reflection when it unifies the reflected consciousnesses. Thus there is a pole of reflection that I call the self, the transcendent self, which is a quasi object. (OTF 117-118)⁵⁴⁶.

In non-reflexive thought, I never encounter the ego, my ego; I encounter that of others. Non-reflexive consciousness is absolutely rid of the ego, which appears only in reflexive consciousness—or rather in reflected consciousness, because reflected consciousness is already a quasi-object for reflexive consciousness. Behind reflected consciousness, like a sort of identity shared by all the states that have come after reflected consciousness, lies an object that we will call "ego" (IRP 11)⁵⁴⁷.

546 'Vous savez comment je conçois le moi – je n'ai pas changé : c'est un objet qui est devant nous. C'est-à-dire que le moi apparaît à la réflexion quand elle unifie les consciences réfléchies : il y a alors un pôle de la réflexion que j'appelle le moi, le moi transcendant, et qui est un quasi-objet.' (OTF^F 100). It should be noted here that Sartre used the term 'moi' rather than 'soi' too refer to the Self. In the context of the interview, it does not seem that he is referring to the I/Me distinction.

547 'Dans la pensée non réflexive, je ne rencontre jamais l'ego, le mien, je rencontre celui des autres. La conscience non réflexive est absolument débarrassée de l'ego qui n'apparaît que dans la conscience réflexive ou plutôt dans la conscience réfléchie, parce que la conscience réfléchie est déjà un quasi-objet pour la conscience réflexive. Derrière la conscience réfléchie, comme une sorte d'identité commune à tous les états qui ont succédé à une conscience réfléchie, il y a cet objet que l'on appellera ego.' (IRP^F 42).

The idea that the act of reflection unifies the reflected consciousnesses means that the unity is given to the Self by the act of reflection and that it is therefore constituted by the act of reflection. The anti-Semite has become aware of his lived attitude towards Jewish people, turns his gaze inwards and sees two aspects of his life: he is against bourgeois ideology, on the one hand, but expresses this ideology, on the other. He unites the two aspects into a single Self, which reveals the contradiction and evokes the need for a change in attitude.

Sartre says that he has not changed his views on selfhood, which as we have seen contradicts other statements he has made concerning the evolution in his thought. We will return to this comparison in the conclusion of this work. What is clear, however, is that Sartre either still adheres to or has returned to his early view, that of *The Transcendence of the Ego*: the Self is a pole of reflection which only appears when it is reflected upon. It is in a certain sense created, as it only appears to reflection, yet it is not imagined. It is present to us as an abstraction based upon real experiences. Hence, it is a quasi-object. In *The Family Idiot*, this return to the transcendent Ego of the early period becomes explicit:

[I]f we establish that this quasi-object is unique, whom does it designate? In what circumstances does one say “I” and “Me”? In principle, as I have shown elsewhere, the ego appears to the reflexive consciousness as pole X of the reflected, or, if you will, as the transcendent unity of feelings, states, and acts. The “I” does not set itself against the ego; on the contrary, it is part of it and binds itself more particularly to the ipseity, properly speaking, than to the diverse areas of praxis. The “I” and the “Me” have the same content since the question is one of different designations of the same ego. In fact, we are *project*, that is, *the surpassing of what is suffered*; as a consequence, according to the circumstances and our particular intentions, it is permissible to consider ourselves *in our passivity* (and in this case, the project itself reveals *its passive mode*: it is flight conditioned by a certain given) or in our *activity* [...] In the first attitude the ego is revealed as “Me,” in the second as “I.” (F3 186-187)⁵⁴⁸.

548 ‘pourtant nous établissons que ce quasi-objet est unique, qui désigne-t-il ? à quelle instance dira-t-on *Je* et *Moi* ? En principe, je l’ai montré ailleurs, l’Ego apparaît à la conscience réflexive comme le pôle X du réfléchi ou, si l’on préfère, comme l’unité transcendante des sentiments, des états et des actes. Le *Je* ne s’oppose pas à l’Ego, il en fait partie, au contraire, et se rapporte plus particulièrement à l’ipséité proprement dite ainsi qu’aux divers secteurs de la praxis. Le *Je* et le *Moi* ont le même contenu puisqu’il s’agit de désignations différentes du même Ego. De fait, nous sommes *projet*, c’est-à-dire *dépassement du subi* ; en conséquence, selon les

Here, Sartre also reverts to the terminology of *The Transcendence of the Ego*, referring to the objective Self as the ego and using the Jamesian I/Me distinction. Furthermore, he recapitulates two important ideas from the earlier work: the unity of different kinds of reflected experiences and the fact that the I and the Me are two sides of the same coin. What is peculiar, however, is that Sartre mentions ipseity here. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the notion of ipseity marks a departure from Sartre's position in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, as it is related to the personal rather than impersonal nature of consciousness. As we have already discussed, ipseity amounts to the fact that we experience our possibilities as our own, thereby projecting ourselves into the future. In the quote about internalisation at the beginning of the previous section, Sartre also speaks about the "field of possibles". He even explicitly states that ipseity is part of our lived experience: 'ipseity, that is, lived experience as a perpetual *return-to-the-self* through time and space' (F3 188)⁵⁴⁹.

Indeed, any organism's project for survival entails the recognition of possibilities as its own: it is possible for me to cross this river to find food, it is possible for me to climb this ledge, etc. Furthermore, it is important that the organism identifies itself with its future Self, because it is the future Self as a totality that is the goal of the totalisation that is the struggle for survival. Hence, the notion of ipseity fits seamlessly with the general ideas of Sartre's later works. The phrasing in the previous quote contrasts ipseity with *praxis*, but this seems to be merely a restatement of the distinction between lived experience and *praxis vis-à-vis* knowledge. In *praxis* we are explicitly aware of both what our goal is and what the possibilities relating to this goal are. Ipseity, on the other hand, is the implicit and prereflective recognition of possibilities, and it is therefore a part of lived experience and, hence, not explicitly known.

In another interview, however, Sartre also stresses a different dimension of ipseity, which is not explicitly addressed in *Being and Nothingness* or the *War Diaries*. Here he comments on his idea that the Self appears as a thing:

Not as a thing, but almost. It is just like a thing. It lies before consciousness. It does not at all lie behind it, as does the "ego" of Husserl for example. I think that an "ipseity" of consciousness exists, which is not identical

circonstances et nos intentions particulières, il nous est loisible de nous considérer dans notre *passivité* (et dans ce cas, le projet lui-même révèle *son passif*: il est fuite conditionnée par un certain donné) ou dans notre *activité* [...]. Dans la première attitude l'Ego se révèle comme *Moi*, dans la seconde comme *Je*.' (F3^F 1294).

549 'l'ipséité, c'est-à-dire le vécu comme perpétuel *renvoi-à-soi*, à travers le temps et l'espace' (F3^F 1295-1296).

with the self, which is a relation to the self, a sort of “in-itself”-being, which brings it about that consciousness can recognize itself, can turn towards the past, etc. But the self – in the proper sense of the word – that lies outside (IF 230).

Just as there needs to be a “selfness” in order to account for the link between the present and future Self, there also needs to be such a link between the present and past Self. Because the Self is an object, we have in principle the same access to the Selves of other people. Yet, we do recognize our own Self when we reflect on it, not least because it is our own exteriority within bending backwards on itself. The idea – from *The Transcendence of the Ego* – that the Self appears as a Self of “another” is thereby altered, allowing Sartre to account for the fact that I can distinguish my own Self from that of others in the sense that I have a “more intimate” relation to it. Nevertheless, this distinction does not imply any *epistemological* difference, precisely because of the objective nature of the Self: ‘In fact, the known is an *object*: how, therefore, could one know *oneself* except as the object that one is for others?’ (F3 428)⁵⁵⁰. Although ipseity enables us to reflect upon ourselves in a technical sense, it is cultural learning that determines which aspects of ourselves we will tend to focus on in such reflection:

In ever collectivity, individuals share a certain representation of the human character that is born of institutions, customs, and history and defines what they are by what they ought to be, and what they ought to be by what they are (F2 155)⁵⁵¹.

Although reflection is always triggered by changing circumstances, as we saw in the example of the anti-Semite, it is still the interiorized social background that reflects. This means that reflection is never *pure*, it is always learned. We learn to play our roles prereflectively and hence conform to this representation, but we also interiorize how we should see ourselves. It is for this reason that we can be shocked to discover who we are when circumstances change, as was seen in the example of the anti-Semite: the image we have interiorized of ourselves in the past does not correspond anymore to the Self we have become. Hence, we have a closer relation to the quasi-object compared to the position of *The Transcendence of the Ego*,

550 ‘De fait, le connu est un *objet* : comment donc pourrait-on *se* connaître sinon comme l’objet qu’on est pour les autres’ (F3^F 1542).

551 ‘Dans toute collectivité, les individus ont en commun une certaine représentation de la personne humaine qui naît des institutions, des mœurs et de l’histoire et qui définit ce qu’ils sont par ce qu’ils doivent être et ce qu’ils doivent être par ce qu’ils sont.’ (F2^F 811).

as it is rooted in ipseity rather than impersonal consciousness. Yet, it can also be considered to be less “intimate”, as reflection is something learned rather than simply being an innate ability of consciousness.

Derealisation and passive activity

The notion of the person as the abstract limit of personalisation bears resemblance to the Self that appears on the horizon of our choices, which was discussed in the previous chapter. It is an ideal, never fully attained in life, and, as an ideal totality, it is imaginary. The notion of person does not seem to play a large role in our lives and can be equated with a formal representation of a lifetime. As we have seen in previous examples, however, the Self as quasi-object does play a large role in life in the pivotal moments of reflection. Given that the idea of the Self as quasi-object is primarily rooted in Sartre’s own past theory as it is presented in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, we can assume that he will still also maintain, now as before, that the Self is *real*. Although it only appears as a result of reflection, it is rooted in the real aspects of our exteriority within.

The topic of real and imaginary identity plays a crucial role in *The Family Idiot*, as it is related to Flaubert’s main pathology. In the interview quoted above, Sartre states that ‘there is a pole of reflection that I call the self, the transcendent self, which is a quasi-object’, to which he immediately adds, ‘Flaubert *wants* his self to be imaginary’ (OTF 118)⁵⁵². Most people would not want their Selves to be imaginary, and the different ways in which Flaubert tried to render his Self imaginary is the guiding principle of the biography. Sartre also calls the affliction ‘derealisation’ (F2 14)⁵⁵³. Sartre’s description of Flaubert’s condition is long and elaborate. It describes a long process that entails many “conversions” in order to render his Self more and more imaginary. This was a reaction to the fact that Flaubert had no “real” place in his family. As the second son of a bourgeois physician, he stood in the shadow of his elder brother. Although he could have pursued another respectable career, he was inhibited from doing so by the fact that he was seen as unintelligent by his father due to his difficulties learning to read. Hence Sartre’s title, *The Family Idiot*. Because he had no place in reality, he found escape in the imaginary, pursuing at first acting and, ultimately, different styles of writing. His pathological commitment to the imaginary would ultimately lead him to “invent” the idea of “art for art’s sake”, that is, art which is completely detached from reality – and hence fully imaginary (OTF 118-119).

552 ‘il y a alors un pôle de la réflexion que j’appelle le moi, le moi transcendant, et qui est un quasi-objet’ ‘Flaubert, lui, *veut* que son moi soit imaginaire’ (OTF^f 100).

553 ‘déréalisation’ (F2^f 665).

Although Sartre describes Flaubert's story as the 'failure of an entire life', his writings did acquire modest success (OTF 112)⁵⁵⁴. The fact that Flaubert succeeds in spite of his failure is understood to be rooted in the political context of the time. In the fifth volume, Sartre zooms out to survey this political context. Flaubert's success is rooted in the general failure of the revolution of 1848 for the bourgeoisie. In February of that year, the bourgeoisie together with the lower class revolted against the increasingly conservative government under which only landowners were allowed to vote. This revolt led to a provisional government largely led by the bourgeoisie, which instigated universal male voting rights and workshops that provided jobs for the many unemployed. However, in order to finance these workshops, new taxes were applied to land. The disenfranchised landowners would not pay these taxes, leading to the closure of the workshops. In June, this led to a second revolt of the working classes against the provisional government. Thus, in the eyes of the bourgeoisie, the first revolt had failed. Although the product of his particular inability to conform to the norms of his milieu, Flaubert's pessimistic view of man and History corresponded to the general pessimistic spirit of his peers:

Gustave and his reader were united by their pessimistic view of history; and this was a result not of their doctrinaire positions but of the fact that they lived their histories in profound unease, Gustave his anecdotal history, his reader the history of French society (F5 397-398)⁵⁵⁵[.]

The subjective fact that Flaubert had no place in his class corresponds to the objective fact that this class had no place in society after 1848, which Sartre calls the objective neurosis of the members of this class. Thus, the subjective and the objective neurosis reflect one another:

[T]he purpose of Flaubert's subjective neurosis is the same as that of the objective neurosis (demanded by the exigencies of the Objective Spirit). We can even say that the imperatives of the objective neurosis universalize and objectify what remained singular and subjective in him: the failure of the man (of his bourgeois self) involves the denial of the real and naked bourgeoisie, and the creation of an imaginary *consolidated* man. He alone can conceive of art for art's sake and realize a work

554 'l'échec de toute une vie' (OTF^F 94).

555 'Gustave et son lecteur sont unis par leur vision pessimiste de l'Histoire : et cela ne vient pas, chez eux, de partis pris doctrinaires mais de ce qu'ils ont vécu, le premier son histoire anecdotique, le second celle de la société française dans un profond malaise' (F5^F 430).

as its own end (F5 619)⁵⁵⁶.

However, we should not understand the correspondence between these pessimistic worldviews to be coincidental. Rather, Flaubert's failure to meet the expectations of his social milieu is representative of the failure of this milieu itself, and the two failures are dialectically related. We will discuss the relation between History in general and the lives of individuals in the next section.

For now, let us take a closer look at Flaubert's derealisation. An important aspect of his condition is that of passive activity. When we discussed the notion of the practico-inert in the second section of the first part of this chapter, we already encountered this notion. In the *Critique* Sartre attributes it to practico-inert things which exert their power over humans, thus instigating actions that are carried out in fact by humans. Even though these humans are acting, they do not posit their own ends and are therefore also passive. Although this state of the practico-inert is definitely an aspect of human reality, we have also seen that human agency is later recovered in the dialectic of the *Critique* through the possibilities afforded by groups. Flaubert, however, has not recuperated his agency in this manner and remains a passive agent: 'from early childhood Gustave can neither surface comfortably in the medium of human praxis nor let himself sink completely into the unconsciousness of the inanimate world' (F1 38)⁵⁵⁷. This condition is a pathological inability to act: 'passive activity, a kind of nervous weakness in the depths of his physical organism that makes surrender *easier*' (F1 35)⁵⁵⁸. Flaubert's condition is related to the fact that the objective selfhood imposed on him by others in childhood does not allow him to 'consent and revolt' (F1 387)⁵⁵⁹. His tactic for dealing with his situation is to become a passive agent:

It is a complex tactic by which he attempts to recover an impossible subjectivity by exaggerating the alienation that first makes him conscious of himself as object. In the present case the tactic consists of borrowing

556 'le but de la névrose subjective de Flaubert est le même qui celui de la névrose objective (réclamée par les exigences de l'Esprit objectif). Tout au plus peut-on dire que les impératifs de celle-ci universalisent et objectivent ce qui demeurerait singulier et subjectif chez lui : il s'agit par l'échec de l'homme (du bourgeois qu'il est) de refuser la bourgeoisie réelle et nue et de créer un homme imaginaire *consolidé*. C'est, en effet, celui-là, seul, qui peut concevoir l'Art pour l'Art et réaliser une œuvre étant sa propre fin.' (F5^F 663).

557 'que Gustave, dès la petite enfance, ne peut ni affleurer à la praxis humaine ni se laisser couler tout à fait dans l'inconscience de la chose inanimée' (F1^F 48).

558 'd'activité passive, dans la profondeur de l'organisme, une sorte de frayage nerveux qui rend l'abandon *plus facile*' (F1^F 46).

559 'le consentement et la révolte' (F1^F 399).

the force of the other through passive obedience and turning it against him; by turning himself into the pure means of realizing the alien ends imposed on him, the resentful man lets them reveal their own inconsistency and, by their unavoidable consequences, their malignity (F1 387)⁵⁶⁰.

An important aspect of Flaubert's passive activity is the hope that by channelling different ends imposed on him, he may reveal their inconsistencies. Thereby, he may revolt against them in a certain manner without actually having to revolt. Hence, he is not fully passive, as he still hopes to attain the goal of exposing the contradictory nature of the ends imposed on him. Thus, with regard to the things imposed on Flaubert, Sartre states: 'All he could do was set them against one another and let them expose their own contradictions in the hope that they would destroy one another; this is the very essence of passive activity' (F1 619)⁵⁶¹.

Like the example of the house in the *Critique* discussed above, Sartre compares Flaubert's condition to a vampire, feeding on the ends imposed on him by others:

A system of vampire-imperatives, nourished by his subjective life, bind him to the praxis of another, who condemns him and claims to endow him with relative-being; the single result is the ipseity's vampirization of its own occupant. It is fitting to dwell a while on this parasitic form of praxis because it defines Flaubert's essential attitude (F1 394)⁵⁶²[.]

Flaubert seems to lack his own real project and hence does not experience his own possibilities projected upon the world in his circuit of ipseity, but rather projects the ends of others on the world.

560 'c'est une tactique complexe par laquelle il tente de récupérer l'impossible subjectivité en renchérisant sur l'aliénation que le dévoile d'abord à soi-même comme objet ; dans le cas présent c'est emprunter par l'obéissance passive la force de l'autre et la retourner contre lui : en se faisant le pur moyen de réaliser les fins étrangères qu'on lui impose, l'homme du ressentiment les laisse dévoiler par elles-mêmes leur inconsistance et, par les conséquences qu'elles ne manqueront pas d'avoir leur malignité.' (F1^F 399-400).

561 'Tout ce qu'il peut faire, c'est de les opposer pour qu'ils montrent d'eux-mêmes leurs contradictions et dans l'espoir qu'ils se détruiront les uns les autres : c'est le type même de l'activité passive' (F1^F 639).

562 'Un système d'impératifs-vampires, nourri de sa vie subjective, l'aliène à la *praxis* d'un autre que le condamne et prétend l'affecter d'un être-relatif : la seule issue pour l'*ipseité*, c'est de vampiriser son propre occupant. Il convient de s'arrêter un peu sur cette forme parasitaire de la *praxis* car elle définit l'attitude fondamentale de Flaubert' (F1^F 407).

Again, this brings his attitude close to that of practico-inert objects, which are created by the *praxis* of human beings but channel this practice back upon the world which allows them to act passively.

Passive activity is also linked to the imaginary. As a child, Flaubert gave his derealisation form through acting:

An imaginary actor, the child imagined—before the public performances—that his voice would make itself heard by the audience; he took their ears in order to listen to himself, he borrowed their eyes to see himself—in short, imagination was governed by passive activity (F2 252)⁵⁶³.

Acting for Flaubert was a means of obtaining an imaginary identity, namely that of the roles he played. He would only acquire his identity through the roles he performed. As we have discussed in the first chapter, the imaginary needs to be constituted by an act of consciousness. Hence, he was in need of some other agency that could bring forth the imaginary, and he found it in others. His imaginary identity is constituted by other agents, namely the audience.

The same interplay of passive activity and the imaginary is also an important factor in Flaubert's conception of literature: 'literature from the outset seems to him a passive activity' (F2 210)⁵⁶⁴. This is one of the reasons he invented art for art's sake: the voice of the author himself did not properly exist before the work of art was realized: 'Gustave thereby reveals a conception of Art more adapted to his constituted character: it is a passive activity. One must do nothing, want nothing, solicit nothing, be unaware even of this expectation, then it can happen' (F4 301-302)⁵⁶⁵. Literature becomes fully imaginary because it is no longer the product of an author who invents it as an agent, but rather emerges from one who passively acts by channelling ideas that come from the world itself into words. Thus, Flaubert's passive activity is ultimately what allows him to render himself imaginary.⁵⁶⁶

What is important about Flaubert's condition of derealisation for the question of selfhood is that it further stresses that the Self

563 'Acteur imaginaire, l'enfant imaginait – avant les représentations publiques – sa voix comme se faisant entendre aux spectateurs, il se donnait leurs oreilles pour s'écouter ; il empruntait leurs yeux pour se voir : bref l'imagination était commandée par l'activité passive.' (F2^F 912).

564 'la littérature lui apparaît, dès le départ, comme une activité passive' (F2^F 868).

565 'Par là, Gustave révèle une conception d'Art plus adaptée à son caractère constitué : c'est une activité passive. Il faut ne rien faire, ne rien vouloir, ne rien solliciter, ignorer jusqu'à cette attente, alors il se peut' (F4^F 2078).

566 For a more detailed account of passive activity see: (Dufourcq 2014).

is not an imaginary but a real – albeit quasi – object. One of the consequences of Flaubert’s condition, for instance, is that he loses the “intimacy” of selfhood, that is, he does not see the difference between his own Self and that of other people. At one point in his development, Flaubert sees his Self as no more than a role that he plays. Therefore, he does not feel that it is rooted in the very real aspects of one’s exteriority within. As has been said, the Self is an object which is in principle the same for me as it is for other people. Because Flaubert’s identity is rooted in the roles he plays *for others*, the balance shifts: ‘in the object he is for others he recognizes [...] an ontological primacy over the subject he is for himself.’ (F2 21)⁵⁶⁷.

This is reminiscent of Sartre’s description of bad faith in *Being and Nothingness*. In bad faith, as has been seen in the previous chapter, there is also a primacy of the way others see us over the way we see ourselves, which leads us to mistake the Self for a thing. In Flaubert’s condition, however, it is the fact that he *does not* see himself as an object that causes him to regard the way others see him as primary. Hence, derealisation can be described as inverted bad faith: in bad faith one illegitimately regards oneself as a real object rather than as a project to be realized, in derealisation one regards oneself to be merely imaginary, instead of an object rooted in one’s body and one’s social and historical circumstances.

This does not mean however that bad faith loses its existential significance. Sartre describes Flaubert’s condition as ‘a desire to be *radically an object*’ (F2 189)⁵⁶⁸. If we consider the example of the anti-Semite once again we can see what this entails. When the man is confronted with the fact of his anti-Semitism, it leads automatically to change. As has been said, first there was a person who did not know about his own moral stance towards Jewish people, then there is a person who knows. This knowledge creates a choice: one can either positively identify as an anti-Semite or change one’s attitude. It is precisely this choice that bad faith denies: I am anti-Semitic because of my social background *and there is nothing I can do about that*. To be radically a thing is to be radically passive and hence incapable of change and action. This is also the reason that Flaubert’s behaviour is often characterized as passive activity, which as we have seen is the way in which practico-inert objects act. They exert and obey exigencies, but true actions need to be carried out by organic agents. In the case of Flaubert, Sartre characterizes passive activity as ‘a kind of nervous weakness in the depths of his physical organism that makes surrender *easier*’ (F1 35)⁵⁶⁹.

567 ‘à cet objet qu’il est pour les autres il reconnaît [...] la primauté ontologique sur le sujet qu’il est pour soi’ (F2^F 672).

568 ‘en désir d’être *radicalement objet*’ (F2^F 846).

569 ‘dans la profondeur de l’organisme, une sorte de frayage nerveux qui rend l’abandon

Another way of describing bad faith would be to say that it is a condition wherein one mistakes the totalisation that is personalisation for a totality. Flaubert considers his Self to be imaginary and his personalisation to be a totality. One's identity is a process that extends throughout one's lifetime, and the Self which appears in reflection plays an integral part in this process. But the process is never completed in life, and the person as totality has no bearing on one's existence because of this. It is the objective Self that is one's identity at a specific moment, and its appearance makes change possible rather than fixing who one is for the future. In other words, selfhood is both a transcendent object and projective process of personalisation. One cannot exist without the other.

To sum up, the Self in this period of Sartre's oeuvre is in the first case an object, marking a definitive return to the position of his earliest works. The Self appears in a moment of reflection and consists of highlighted aspects of the exteriority within. There are, however, some elements from *Being and Nothingness* and the *War Diaries* that are also retained, the most prominent of which is the notion of ipseity. Furthermore, the looming Self of *Being and Nothingness* is retained in the notion of the person as the ideal limit of the process of personalisation. This notion plays no significant role in how we experience our own life, however. Thus, although the imaginary totality of the person remains, the objective Self that we consider someone to be marks a definitive return to the real.

6. Predestination

We have seen how a person develops throughout their lifetime through a process of interiorisation and personalisation. We have discussed this mainly from the point of view of the person as they go through this process, that is, in the present. The question remains as to how this process is seen retrospectively, when it is recounted. The topic of narrative identity is mainly addressed by Sartre in the light of the question of History. How can a historian understand the actions of people? In order to understand Sartre's ideas concerning narrative identity in this period, we have to understand the notion mentioned at the very beginning of this chapter: the singular universal. As Sartre states at the beginning of *The Family Idiot*:

For a man is never an individual; it would be more fitting to call him a *singular universal*. Summed up and for this reason universalized by his epoch, he in turn resumes it by reproducing himself in it as singularity. Universal by the singular universality of human history, singular by

the universalizing singularity of his projects (F1 ix)⁵⁷⁰[.]

In order to understand historical epochs, we have to understand the people who live in them. In so far as people have interiorized the Objective Spirit of their age, however, we have to understand the epoch to understand the people. In other words, man is universal in the sense that he is an interiorisation of universal influences, but he is singular in so far as he interiorizes these in his own particular way and may act in ways which in turn influence the epoch itself.

The question of how we can understand a man as singular universal runs through the many pages of *The Family Idiot*, but it is addressed in a more direct and concise fashion in a 1964 lecture in which the case study is not Flaubert, but Kierkegaard: “Kierkegaard: The Singular Universal”. In this lecture, Sartre does not aim to do justice to Kierkegaard from a biographical point of view, but uses his life as a case study for the more general question of how we can understand a life in retrospect. We will examine this lecture in order to see how the life story of a singular individual can be understood in light of the story of universal History. Related to this question is that of freedom and, more precisely, the tension between choices that are yet to be made and those that have been made, and, hence, how the free individual is to be understood in light of the necessity of History.

The holes in History

Kierkegaard’s case is a peculiar one because he was a philosopher mostly known for his thought concerning subjectivity. When we try to understand him, however, we only know him as an object. On the one hand, this is inevitable because, as we have seen, we can never *know* subjectivity as such. This becomes even more problematic when the person is dead because we can no longer infer the subjective process from witnessing the person reporting on his lived experience or seeing the process of interiorisation in action. Hence, we only know Kierkegaard, ‘the knight of subjectivity’, as an object (SU 404)⁵⁷¹.

In principle, a historian can recount an epoch while bypassing subjectivity altogether. As subjectivity is nothing but the interiorisation of the two externalities which exist in objectivity, the historian can just describe these exteriorities. This would result,

570 ‘C’est qu’un homme n’est jamais un individu ; il vaudrait mieux l’appeler un *universel singulier* : totalisé et, par là même, universalisé par son époque, il la retotalise en se reproduisant en elle comme singularité. Universel par l’universalité singulière de l’histoire humaine, singulier par la singularité universalisante de ses projets’ (F1^F 7).

571 ‘chevalier de la subjectivité’ (SU^F 153).

however, in a description that cannot do justice to History as the dialectical development of groups, which consist of subjective members, as it cannot properly describe what *praxis* is. The clearest example of such an “exterior” description of history is found in Sartre’s discussion of science fiction in the second volume of the *Critique* (CDR2 319–322). Suppose an alien life form were to study humanity, how would they describe us?

The differences in our respective physiological constitutions, histories, levels of development, etc., assuredly do not prevent him from comprehending us in our practical reality as individuals who are making a history in common. But the particular goals we pursue will, in a whole number of cases, remain alien to him: our aesthetic pleasures, for example, if he has different senses from ours. So he will define our goals in exteriority, without stripping them of their character as goals, but without being able to share them. He will merely note that the inhabitants of this underdeveloped planet have certain behavioural patterns orientated towards certain objectives; and that certain systems of social options or values condition the hierarchy of our preferences. Being unable to share some particular goal, he will grasp our *praxis* in a given case as *hexis* (CDR2 320)⁵⁷².

Although Sartre does not elaborate on what he means exactly by *hexis* in this context, the word is associated with habit or routine. This means that we do the things we do not because we have conscious projects, but simply because we are drawn towards our goals automatically. This is of course a very widespread idea in deterministic philosophies. What is very important here is that Sartre distinguishes two kinds of goals. A goal associated with a *hexis* can only be verified in positivity. In other words, we can only see the behaviour and what it results in. Hence, the alien could say that humans are drawn towards alcohol, but he can never understand that people drink to drown their sorrows, as this is not observable.⁵⁷³

572 ‘Les différences des constitutions physiologiques, des histoires, du degré de développement, etc., n’empêchent certes pas qu’il nous comprenne dans notre réalité pratique comme des individus qui font en commun une histoire, mais les fins particulières que nous poursuivons en nombre de cas lui demeureront étrangères - nos plaisirs esthétiques, par exemple, s’il a des sens différents des nôtres. Ainsi définira-t-il nos fins en extériorité sans leur ôter leur caractère de fins mais sans pouvoir les partager : il notera simplement que les habitants de cette planète sous-développée ont certaines conduites orientées vers certains objectifs et que certains systèmes d’options sociales ou de valeurs conditionnent la hiérarchie de nos préférences. Faute de partager telle fin particulière, il saisit notre *praxis* en tel ou tel cas comme *exis*’ (CDR2^f 331).

573 The same theme can be found in Sartre’s play *The Condemned of Altona*. The character

The goals of *praxis*, however, are determined negatively. They are the things that could be attained, but are not yet in the given situation. Therefore, they cannot be described purely by what is empirically verifiable. In order to understand History, we have to understand these goals, because without such goals we cannot understand failure – and failure plays a key role in History. The example Sartre gives of this is the Battle of Waterloo (SU 413, CDR2 321). Napoleon's general, Grouchy, failed to send his troops to the battle in time. This can only be described negatively: there was a goal which was *not* attained. Sartre stresses that this is not the same as other negative statements about History. The Battle of Waterloo was not lost because of a lack of fighter planes, but because the goals set by certain individuals in it were not attained.⁵⁷⁴ We are able to understand History because we can understand the goals of historical agents from the inside, as it were. Thus, Sartre concludes: 'subjectivity constitutes *nothing* for objective knowledge since it is a non-knowledge, and yet failure demonstrates that it has an absolute existence' (SU 413)⁵⁷⁵. Kierkegaard failed in uniting his theories about subjectivity with his religious beliefs (SU 412). Flaubert initially failed to meet the expectations of his family and social milieu (F1 4, OTF 112).

Another interesting conclusion is drawn from the idea of failure. The fact that we can fail means that we have options in attaining our goals and can choose the wrong ones. Even having our goals obstructed by external factors can only be considered failure if we had had the option to somehow avoid these factors. Otherwise, it could only be considered bad luck, but not personal failure. Hence, Sartre states that 'the foundation of History is freedom in *each man*' (SU 423)⁵⁷⁶.⁵⁷⁷ Although this freedom plays a key role in understanding human beings and understanding History, it is very minimal. In a slightly different context in the *Critique*, Sartre explains this notion

Franz hallucinates that crabs from the future want to judge his epoch, but these creatures cannot experience nothingness. When he points a gun at another character, he says to the crabs: 'You'll see nothing but the blaze there, poor Crustaceans. You took our eyes to examine what exists, while we, living in man's epoch, have seen with those same eyes what does not exist' (CA 78).

574 The argument is similar to the one articulated in *Being and Nothingness* concerning the absence of famous writers (BN 42-43), which we have discussed in the previous chapter.

575 'la subjectivité n'est *rien* pour le savoir objectif puisqu'elle est non-savoir, et pourtant l'échec montre qu'elle existe absolument' (SU^F 166).

576 'la liberté *en chaque homme* est fondement de l'Histoire' (SU^F 179).

577 Furthermore, Sartre says in the context of the practico-inert field: 'It would be quite wrong to interpret me as saying that man is free in all situations, as the Stoics claimed. I mean the exact opposite: all men are slaves in so far as their life unfolds in the practico-inert field and in so far as this field is always conditioned by scarcity' (CDR 331). As we have discussed, however, this moment in the dialectical development of the book is still abstract and does not take group-formation and History sufficiently into account.

of choice:

It would be completely wrong to give the word ‘choice’ here an existential interpretation. It is really a matter of the concrete choices which present themselves to, for example, an airline pilot trying to save the passengers in his plane, two of whose four engines are out of action, which is losing fuel, etc. It would be taking Pavlovian obstinacy to the point of total blindness if one denied the specificity and irreducibility of these choices. The part played by routine is undeniable, but in cases of danger it is not sufficient; it is necessary to innovate or to take risks (CDR 453)⁵⁷⁸.

The fact that we have choices relates to the fact that the practical environment holds different possibilities. The options that are available to us as such are conditioned by our cultural environment, and, in this manner, we are determined by Objective Spirit. Sartre articulates this quite explicitly in his description of Flaubert: ‘Everything was played out in advance: options remained for Gustave, but they were conditional options’ (OTF 117)⁵⁷⁹. This does not mean that Sartre completely denies us our freedom, just that its power is greatly diminished:

I believe that a man can always make something out of what is made of him. This is the limit I would today accord to freedom: the small movement which makes of a totally conditioned social being someone who do not render back completely what his conditioning has given him (IT 35)⁵⁸⁰.

Choices are not existential in the sense that we can freely choose who we are, and yet Sartre still uses the term ‘fundamental choice’ (F1 359)⁵⁸¹. For Flaubert, this choice is to become imaginary, and this

578 ‘Qu’on n’aille surtout pas prendre ici le mot de « choix » dans sa signification existentielle. Il s’agit réellement des choix concrets qui se proposent, par exemple, au pilote de ligne qui veut sauver ses passagers dans un avion dont deux moteurs sur quatre ne tournent plus, dont l’essence fuit, etc. Il faudrait pousser l’obstination pavlovienne jusqu’à l’aveuglement total pour nier la spécificité et l’irréductibilité de ces choix. La part de la routine est indéniable mais en cas de danger elle ne suffit pas : il faut inventer ou oser la manœuvre.’ (CDR^F 466).

579 ‘Tout est joué d’avance : il reste à Gustave des options, mais des options conditionnées’ (OTF^F 99)

580 ‘Je crois qu’un homme peut toujours faire quelque chose de ce qu’on a fait de lui. C’est la définition que je donnerais aujourd’hui de la liberté : ce petit mouvement qui fait d’un être social totalement conditionné une personne qui ne restitue pas la totalité de ce qu’elle a reçu de son conditionnement’ (IT^F 101-102).

581 ‘choix fondamentale’ (F1^F 371).

is a choice that is more fundamental and original in the sense that it determined other choices he would make. Yet it is not absolutely free: the choice to flee into the imaginary was determined by his social situation. Furthermore, as we saw in the example of riots earlier in this chapter, group-formation may allow us to enlarge the number of possibilities open to us. Nevertheless, more possibilities do not automatically mean that these are any less determined beforehand. This leads Sartre to formulate a position that is neither a total determinism in which choices can be described without taking subjectivity into account, nor one of radical freedom:

In a certain sense, all our lives are predestined from the moment we are born. We are destined for a certain type of action from the beginning by the situation of the family and the society at any given moment. [...] Predestination is what replaces determinism for me. I believe we are not free – at least not these days, not for the moment – because we are all alienated. We are lost during childhood. Methods of education, the parent-child relationship, and so on, are what create the self, but it's a lost self. [...] I do not mean to say that this sort of predestination precludes all choice, but one knows that in choosing, one will not attain what one has chosen (OTF 116)⁵⁸².

Predestination is the idea that our possibilities are determined beforehand to a very large extent, but it allows for the idea that choices give meaning to situations. We should not understand this notion in the traditional sense of some kind of higher being having planned our future in advance, but rather that the circumstances themselves greatly limit the extent of our choices. We have already discussed the notion of destiny on the abstract level of the pure practico-inert, but it is retained on the concrete level by Sartre when he says that we are predestined to a limited set of choices.⁵⁸³

582 'D'une certaine façon nous naissons tous prédestinés. Nous sommes voués à un certain type d'action dès l'origine par la situation où se trouvent la famille et la société à un moment donné. [...] La prédestination, c'est ce qui remplace chez moi le déterminisme : je considère que nous ne sommes pas libres - tout au moins provisoirement, aujourd'hui puisque nous sommes aliénés. On se perd toujours dans l'enfance : les méthodes d'éducation, le rapport parents-enfant, l'enseignement, etc., tout cela donne un moi, mais un, moi perdu. [...] Cela ne veut pas dire que cette prédestination ne comporte aucun choix, mais on sait qu'en choisissant on ne réalisera pas ce qu'on a choisi' (OTF^F 99).

583 It must be noted that Sartre already hints at this idea of predestination in the *War Diaries*, for example when he says: 'I can rediscover Heidegger's assumption of his destiny as a German, in that wretched Germany of the postwar years, in order to help me assume my destiny as a Frenchman in the France of '40' (WD 187). Furthermore, he uses the term "destiny" frequently in *The Words*, but seems to do so more in a

Thus, to sum up, Sartre's statement that 'History is full of holes' can be understood in two ways (SU 403)⁵⁸⁴ On the one hand, we do not know everything that has happened, because we do not have access to the lived experience of the people who moved History, and, on the other hand, the access that we do have is due to the fact that we can understand the holes in History, that is, the negativities that play an integral part in its meaning.

Singular adventure

Because possibilities are to a large extent predetermined, it is possible for a historian to view a given unfolding of historical events as a necessity. We can study the historical circumstances and see why a person has chosen what she has chosen. Even if we cannot take freedom out of the equation in order to account for meaning, we can still describe the past as a series of necessary causes and effects. This does not, however, affect the cornerstone of Sartre's thinking concerning narrative identity. Although a historian may write the story of my life in such a way after my death, I cannot live my life as a series of predetermined events. In order to describe this, Sartre uses a notion similar to that of the biographical illusion he introduced in the *War Diaries*, namely the notion of the "retrospective illusion":

Nothing is more specious than retrospective illusion. And one is all too inclined to conclude from the fact that Shakespeare wrote masterpieces that he was born to write them. In short, we read his life in reverse (F3 482)⁵⁸⁵[.]

This was something Flaubert fell prey to, the idea that he would somehow know that he was writing a masterpiece while in the process of writing it. As with the biographical illusion that the young Sartre entertained, this only led to frustration.⁵⁸⁶ Masterpieces are only masterpieces because they are regarded as such in hindsight. We cannot live our lives as though we already know the future, and we cannot live our lives as though they are predetermined. Not only because we lack the knowledge, but because there is a dialectical relationship between our subjective freedom and the objectivity of our historical circumstances. Although they determine us, they can only do so because we give them meaning. In this sense, a similar

literary than a systematical fashion.

584 'L'Histoire est trouée' (SU^F 153).

585 'Rien n'est plus spécieux que l'illusion rétrospective. Et de ce que Shakespeare a fait des chefs-d'œuvre, on incline vite à conclure qu'il était né pour en écrire. Bref, on lit sa vie à l'envers' (F3^F 1598).

586 In *The Words*, Sartre uses the term retrospective illusion to refer to his own biographical illusion of becoming a famous writer (W 199).

interplay between *praxis* and the practico-inert can be seen at the level of the individual. In order to describe the interplay between the universality of History and the particularity of individual lives, Sartre reinstates one of his earliest notions, namely that of adventure:

They discover themselves as a particular adventure, whose point of departure is a set of socioeconomic, cultural, moral, religious and other relations, which proceeds with whatever means are to hand, that is to say within the limits of these relations, and which gradually becomes inscribed in the same set (SU 416)⁵⁸⁷.

This reintroduced notion of adventure has similarities and differences to the original one used in *Nausea*. As we have discussed in the first chapter, Sartre's original notion of adventure meant a series of events and experiences which have meaning in light of a certain goal. But he now sees life itself as a single adventure: 'he is launched by his birth into a singular adventure that must end with death, an adventure whose style and form were fashioned by his earliest years' (F3 401).^{588 589} We have argued in the first chapter that Sartre's notion of adventure, expanded upon with the notion of the biographical illusion, can be applied to a whole lifetime. Therefore, the notion of adventure is similar to that of his early works: every event is meaningful. Through our meaningful singular adventures, we in turn give meaning to History:

History, universalized by things – the bearers of the seal of our action – becomes, through each new birth of man, a singular adventure within which it enfolds its universality (SU 429-430)⁵⁹⁰.

As has been discussed, although History can be described at the level of the universal in an external empirical way, we lose its

587 'Ils se découvrent comme une certaine aventure dont le point de départ est un ensemble de relations économique-sociales, culturelles, morales, religieuses, etc., qui se poursuivra avec les moyens du bord, c'est-à-dire en fonction de ces mêmes relations et qui s'inscrira progressivement dans ce même ensemble.' (SU^F 170).

588 'il est lancé par sa naissance dans une aventure singulière qui doit s'achever par le mort' (F3^F 1515).

589 Sartre uses the term adventure in a similar way once in *Being and Nothingness*: 'The for-itself does not exist first in order to think the universal, and to determine itself according to concepts: it is its choice and its choice cannot be abstract; otherwise the for-itself's very being would be abstract. The for-itself's being is an individual adventure, and its choice must be the individual choice of a concrete being' (BN 775).

590 'l'Histoire, universalisée par les choses, porteuses du sceau de notre action, devient, par chaque nouvelle naissance de l'homme, aventure singulière et replie en elle son universalité' (SU^F 188).

meaning if we do not account for the fact that History is formed by people for whom Historical events have meaning. In this sense, the singular and the universal work in a manner similar to *praxis* and the practico-inert: although the practico-inert ultimately determines people and makes them into things, it can only do so because the material in question is the product of human labour in the first place. In the same way, the universal movements of History can only be understood if we see that they are formed by individuals who make History, even if their possibilities to do so are highly restricted by the historical circumstances in which they find themselves. In the case of Flaubert, Sartre wants to understand both his singularity and his universality, the latter of which he focuses on in the last of the published volumes:

The question is, therefore, to understand how Flaubert's individual and protohistorical determinations can correspond to the practico-inert transformations of the objective spirit rigorously enough to allow *his* neurosis to be developed—without ceasing to be his singular adventure (F5 394)⁵⁹¹.

The idea that a person is both singular and universal in this regard allows us to understand the notion of narrative identity that comes with it:

By virtue of the fact that the individual expresses the universal in singular terms, he singularizes the whole of History which becomes at once *necessity*, through the very way in which objective situations take charge of themselves, and *adventure*, because History is forever the general experienced and instituted as a particularity (SU 425)⁵⁹²[.]

The objective universal circumstances dictate the field of possibilities of an individual. Because everyone's life is predestined by a limited range of options, there is a certain level of necessity involved in a lifetime. This allows us to see a life as a strictly necessary course of events in retrospect. We can certainly see why Flaubert, for instance, has chosen the things he has chosen within the particular

591 'Il s'agit donc de comprendre comment les déterminations individuelles et préhistoriques ou protohistoriques de Flaubert peuvent correspondre aux transformations practico-inertes de l'Esprit objectif assez rigoureusement pour que *sa* névrose se développe – sans cesser d'être son aventure singulière' (F5^F 426).

592 'Parle fait qu'elle exprime singulièrement l'universel elle singularise l'Histoire entière qui devient à la fois *nécessité* – par la façon même dont les situations objectives se commandent – et *aventure* parce qu'elle est toujours le général ressenti et institué comme particularité' (SU^F 181).

circumstances of his time.⁵⁹³ But, as has been said, before one has chosen, the situation still allows for a degree of freedom. Because we live in the present, we experience this freedom and experience our choices as meaningful.

This means that the idea that a life lived and a life recounted differ greatly is retained by Sartre. Even when circumstances greatly limit our possibilities, we still have to live our life as a meaningful and free “adventure”. Although the notion does not have the same exact meaning as it does in the earliest works, the distinction between a lived and narrated life is retained. The reasoning behind this distinction has become vastly different, however: Sartre argues in his earliest works that adventures do not exist because life is not a pre-ordained course of events. In the period discussed here, life *is*, to a large extent, a predestined course of events, which have to be lived as if they are not. This does not mean that freedom is an illusion – as has been discussed, there is a minimal freedom of choice and this freedom is what gives *meaning* to History. It does mean, however, that although one may experience the choices one has to make within a given situation as difficult, in hindsight the path one has taken can appear more obvious and necessary.

Conclusion

The works from the last period of Sartre’s oeuvre deviate a lot from the prior periods in style and philosophical affiliation. He has traded much of his phenomenological framework for a more dialectical approach, and the emphasis on the radical freedom of people is replaced by a greater emphasis on the force that things exert upon them.

Concerning selfhood, Sartre’s notions are mostly closely related to those of his earlier works. The most important new notion seems to be that of lived experience, which replaces consciousness. This notion focuses on the fact that we do not always know what is going on in our experience and that a lot of the ways we engage with the world exceed our own understanding. He retains his main idea concerning subjective selfhood, however, namely that subjectivity is a process rather than a thing, and he provides an even more extensive account of how this process works, namely as the interiorisation of two exteriorities.

His thought concerning objective selfhood can be seen as a synthesis of the other two periods, though more emphasis is given to the earliest works. Thus, unlike his position in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre re-adopts the view that the Self is a real – albeit quasi – object.

593 For more information on Flaubert’s destiny, see: (Mueller 2014).

However, in combining this notion with one of the central notions of *Being and Nothingness*, ipseity, he also takes the lessons of this work into account. These lessons are further reflected by the fact that he emphasizes the primacy of Others and deploys the related notion of bad faith in this period.

Concerning narrative identity, Sartre retains the main idea that a life lived and a life recounted differ fundamentally, but the reason he gives for this in his later work seems diametrically opposed to that of the earlier work. In his earliest works, he argued that it may seem as though there is a certain course in our lives, a certain way it develops towards certain goals, but that this is ultimately an illusion. In this last period, however, he argues that while life seems free to us, it unfolds in a predetermined manner, though we have to live it as a meaningful adventure nonetheless.

All of Sartre's ideas concerning selfhood can be seen in light of his own turn towards the "force of circumstances". Ultimately, people are singular universals: singular instances of a universal state of affairs. The notion of interiorisation as the mediation between an identity largely constructed during childhood and the everchanging world, the idea that the Self is an object rather than an ideal structure, and the idea that our choices are predestined, all refer back to the new emphasis he places on how the world shapes us, rather than how we shape the world. Sartre, however, remains a thinker of subjectivity, one who emphasizes that historical determination only takes place because we give history meaning through our activity both as an organism inscribing itself in matter through *praxis* and as an agent whose choices inscribe themselves in History through adventure.

Conclusion

The main aim of this dissertation was to gain a better understanding of Sartre's philosophy of subjectivity and selfhood. The choice of these related topics was not arbitrary: they are not only central to Sartre's work but also – as became clear in the introductory chapter – central to the criticism and positive reception of his philosophy. As we have seen, subjectivity and selfhood do not exist in isolation, which is why we have also focused on the things that surround subjective being. Indeed, the main idea of our investigation is that the Self is a thing among things. This concluding chapter serves to map the ideas we have uncovered, compare them, and see how they relate to the reception of Sartre's philosophy that we discussed in the introductory chapter.

We will begin this conclusion with a presentation of our findings concerning subjectivity and selfhood. A comparison of the ideas from each of the periods of Sartre's oeuvre will enable us to draw some general conclusions about Sartre's thought on these topics. This comparison will follow the bipartite structure of the chapters, which means we will first compare our findings on the themes of subjectivity, objectivity and negativity, and then do the same for the three types of selfhood that have been discussed. In a subsequent section, we will use our findings to shed light on the criticism of Sartre's philosophy from within the continental tradition and his reception within analytic philosophy. This will be followed by a more general conclusion on subjectivity and selfhood.

1. Findings

As was made clear in the introductory chapter, the division of Sartre's oeuvre into three periods mainly served as a heuristic device. There are no hard breaks in his thought, only developments. Our aim in the following comparisons is to make these evolutions in his thinking explicit, which will entail focusing on both those aspects that remain the same and those aspects that change.

Subjectivity, objectivity and negativity

Concerning the theme of subjectivity, the central notions for the three successive periods of Sartre's oeuvre are intentionality, the for-itself and *praxis*, respectively. The first two notions certainly overlap, as the for-itself is articulated as the ontological mode of Being of intentional consciousness. The third notion, *praxis*, is oriented

towards a more practical understanding of what it means to engage with the world. This, however, shows how all these notions are related to one another: all claim that subjectivity is in its most basic form a *relation* with things in the world. There is not first a Subject which subsequently enters into a relationship with an object, rather subjectivity is itself this relation. For the notion of intentionality, as Sartre develops it in his early period, this almost goes without saying. "All consciousness is consciousness of something" is his motto, and this captures exactly the fact that consciousness should not be understood as some kind of container. To understand it in such a way would be to commit to the digestive philosophy of immanence that Sartre argues against so fiercely. Things are not exhausted by intentionality, however, as they cannot be reduced to our relation to them. They are superfluous, perpetually overflowing the experiences we have of them. This means that they can always show themselves in different ways and that everything outside of us is an object. There is no essential difference between the *kinds* of real things that appear to us. Sartre so vividly captures this when he says that there is no difference between a park, a tree, a branch or a movement of a branch: all of them are equally things. The only real dichotomy of objects is that between real and non-real objects, between things and no-things. Sartre's project of ejecting all contents from consciousness leads him to argue that not even "nothing" can reside there. Hence, he even argues that imaginary objects transcend consciousness.

A lot of these ideas resurface in the two later periods. In the middle period, the for-itself is also understood as a relation to an in-itself. The basic scheme of subjectivity being a relation to an object which it can never fully exhaust is retained. Also, the role of negativity becomes even more prominent than it was in the early works. Sartre had argued in the early works that non-real objects are negations of the world in general and actively need to be posited by a consciousness in order to appear. The idea of nothingness being transcendent to consciousness is surpassed in the notion of negatities, which are also non-existent objects, but ones that can be encountered in specific places in the world. These negatities are still dependent on the for-itself, however, and they are grounded in the fact that the for-itself contains within itself its own nothingness. Thereby, Sartre not only expands his conception of nothingness on the side of objects, but also on the side of subjectivity. The for-itself is what it is not and is not what it is, it is presence to itself but does not coincide with itself. This fundamental indeterminateness is also what makes it radically free. While freedom did not play a big role in the early works, it now takes centre stage. The world gets its meaning only in light of the free projects of subjectivity, and, in concrete situations, it becomes impossible to disentangle the "intrinsic" properties of objects from the ones they gain because of the meaning we project on them. Thus, the middle period of Sartre's work can be seen to retain the basic

scheme of the early works, but to expand the role of negativity and thereby articulate that radical freedom which is such a notorious part of Sartre's existentialism.

The last period of Sartre's work places a much greater emphasis on the force things exert on us. The main characterization of subjectivity, *praxis*, is still a relation we have to the things around us, but this pure practical relation only exists at an abstract level. Our actions crystallize in matter and become the practico-inert, which, as we have seen, is the field of reality in which the objects first given shape by human *praxis* turn on humans and exert power over them. In the practico-inert field, objects act by instrumentalizing human beings in order to manipulate other objects. Although human freedom seems completely diminished in the practico-inert field, it can be regained at the level of the group. It might seem that the individual human is in thrall to the practico-inert, but this is because the description of reality is still abstract. In reality, human beings are part of groups with different levels of agency. We have discussed at length Sartre's stadial account of group formations, from the maximal freedom made possible by the group-in-fusion stage to the inertia that approximates the practico-inert that arises at the stage of the institution. The last period, put briefly, sees an increase in the power of things and a decrease in individual freedom. The basic understanding of subjectivity as a relation towards things is nevertheless retained, and the freedom denied at the level of the individual is largely regained at the level of the group, albeit never in the radical sense that Sartre claimed for it in the previous period.

Subjective, objective, and narrative selfhood

The topic of subjective selfhood is also driven by Sartre's project of banishing all contents from consciousness. As the title of his quintessential book on this topic, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, suggests, he aims to show that the idea of a transcendental Self that inhabits consciousness, and therewith unifies and individuates it, is unnecessary. Instead, the stream unifies itself through a process of inner time-consciousness. We have explained this process by using the metaphor of a chain that consists of multiple interlocking links, where no single link connects all of them. Not only is the assumption of a Self within consciousness philosophically unnecessary, it is also phenomenologically unsound. By utilizing examples of someone being absorbed in activities, Sartre shows that consciousness is at its most basic level impersonal. This leads to a critique of the cogito, in which the "I" of the "I think" is dropped so that it becomes nothing more than the activity of thinking.

This idea of impersonal consciousness is not retained by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*. Although he retains the idea that there is no

inhabitant of consciousness, his new conception of consciousness is not devoid of selfhood. It is characterized by what Sartre calls ipseity. The notion of ipseity denotes the fact that consciousness entails the experience of possibilities and that it thereby links its present Self to its future Self. The process in which the Self projects itself into the future is what Sartre calls the “circuit of ipseity”. It is not a thing that resides within consciousness that renders it personal, but this process of association with one’s future Self. Sartre also says that ipseity is what makes reflection possible, and it thereby fills a gap in the theory of *The Transcendence of the Ego*. This gap occurs because earlier account does not explain *why* my own Self is more intimate to me than that of others. My past experiences occurred in a field of possibilities created by my projects and may still affect my present possibilities. Although Sartre does not emphasize this dimension in *Being and Nothingness*, the dimension of ipseity does not only link my present to my future, but also my present to my past.

Sartre also revises his critique of the Cartesian cogito. Without the idea of impersonal consciousness, the force of his earlier criticism seems to be jeopardized. In his middle period, Sartre introduces the notion of a prereflective cogito, which is the idea that all conscious experiences are also conscious of themselves and hence transparent through and through. As we have seen, however, this idea is defended in his early works in connection with the looming infinite regress of self-consciousness. Hence, the prereflective cogito does not imply a break with his earlier theories of Self-consciousness, though it does imply a shift in emphasis. We have aimed to show that Sartre’s turn towards the cogito is rooted in his methodology, which seeks to emulate the apodicticity of the Cartesian cogito. Sartre’s aim is to build an ontological system founded on transphenomenal grounds. The prereflective cogito is such a ground and thereby has a similar status to Descartes’ cogito, namely that of a “first truth”. For Sartre however, there is more than one of these absolute grounds, and this subjective one is supplemented by its objective counterpart: being-in-itself.

Sartre’s last period introduces the notion of lived experience. Although it is meant to replace consciousness as the focal point for the theory of subjectivity, we have discussed it in the context of subjective selfhood for various reasons. This is chiefly because it is closely tied to the process of interiorization over time and thereby has to do with the unity and individuality of a person over time. Lived experience is characterized by what Sartre calls “forgetfulness”. This denotes the fact that we experience the world in a certain manner, influenced our upbringing and socio-historical context, but are not aware of how this background influences our experience. Hence, our experience is not transparent to the degree that it is in *Being and Nothingness*. This should not be understood as a return to the

impersonal consciousness of *The Transcendence of the Ego*, however. Not only does Sartre retain the idea that all consciousness is self-consciousness, he also, more importantly, retains the idea of ipseity, focusing again on the possibilities we perceive. It seems that the notion of lived experience is primarily intended to mark a departure from the idea of the fundamental project in *Being and Nothingness*. All our actions during a certain period in our life are grounded in such a project and this project is known by us. Sartre's notion of lived experience departs from this, with it he claims that the way we perceive the world is not only governed by our freely chosen projects, but also by our background. We are not always aware of the way our social environment influences how we perceive the world, which was made clear by our extensive explication of Sartre's illuminating example of the anti-Semite.

What remains constant in Sartre's thought concerning subjective identity is that there is *never* a Self inside of consciousness or, if you will, inside our experience. Subjectivity is united through the temporal process"—i.e. that time itself is the process of unification. It is never in need of something inside of it to guarantee this unity. This does not mean, however, that there is no objective Self. When we reflect on ourselves, we do encounter an object which we may call our Self. This Self is, however, always transcendent and never immanent to consciousness.

In the early works, more specifically *The Transcendence of the Ego*, Sartre defends the idea that this objective Self is something that appears in hindsight through reflection. Although our consciousness is impersonal in the present, reflection reveals a Self that appears to lie behind our actions. Although it is nothing but the virtual centre of unity of our reflected experiences, it is still a real object. As such, we have no fundamentally different relationship to it than we have to the Self of other people, as we may also reflect upon their experiences.

Sartre deviates significantly from this view in *Being and Nothingness*. Here, the objective Self is not so much associated with our past experience as with our future possibilities. As we have already reiterated above, in the process of the circuit of ipseity we recognize our possibilities as our own, and they are thereby have a dimension of "selfness". On the horizon of all these future moments is an ideal Self the Self we project as the ultimate result of our choices. This Self is not revealed to us in reflection per se, but is implicitly posited in all our choices. This is an ideal, however, which means it is in principle unattainable. Just as the Self of *The Transcendence of the Ego* is the transcendent pole of reflected experiences, the Self of the middle works is the transcendent pole of possibilities. There is an essential difference between these two: whereas reflected experiences concern

events that have happened, possibilities are events that have not yet happened. Hence, the Self is more closely tied to nothingness than it is to Being. It is not a merely abstract being, one could call it a fundamental *not yet*. Although Sartre's position switches from a real objective Self to an unreal objective Self, the fact that we continually act *as if* the Self were a thing is the subject of much more discussion *Being and Nothingness* than the ideal Self is. In bad faith, we act as if the Self were a thing, but this attitude belies the kind of beings we really are. Bad faith is also closely related to the fact that we appear as an object in the eyes of the Other. In the eyes of another subjectivity an image is formed about what we are. The word image can be regarded misleading in this context, as our being-for-the-Other is far from imaginary. Rather, the fact that we can appear as an object in the eyes of others is a real dimension of our Being and truly affects us. We too can take the perspective of the Other and turn this gaze towards ourselves, but to think that this is all we are would be symptomatic of bad faith. Hence, where Sartre argued that the relationship we have towards our own Self is not different than the one we have towards other Selves in the early works, he now argues that there is a fundamental difference: the Other appears as an object to me, or I appear as an object to the Other. My own ideal, unattainable Self is inaccessible to the Other, as they cannot experience the possibilities that appear in my circuit of ipseity, which only appear in light of my projected ends.

With regard to objective selfhood, the last period of Sartre's work can be considered a return to the early period, albeit one that incorporates many of the insights of the middle period. The most important idea that Sartre returns to is that the Self is indeed a kind of thing. Explicitly referring to *The Transcendence of the Ego* multiple times throughout this period, he returns to the position that holds the Self to be a (quasi-)object that is revealed through reflection. The Self of the middle period also makes a return in his account of the process of personalization, but in the later period this has to do with a description of someone from an external point of view and is not something that plays a role in how we see our own lives. He also retains the idea of ipseity, which is closely tied to *praxis*: in order to act in a meaningful way, we have to recognize our possibilities as *our* possibilities. This also changes the role of the Other in selfhood: reflection is not simply something we do, it is a learned behaviour. We learn to form a certain image of ourselves, although this image may change when our circumstances change. Thus, although the image Other people have of us is detrimental for our self-understanding, we are still more closely tied to our own Selves than to that of others because the objective Self is tied to our circuit of ipseity. These points are further emphasized in Sartre's examination of Flaubert, whose process of personalization is viewed as having been far from ordinary, but which nonetheless reveals what an ordinary process

would look like. Flaubert found it impossible to regard his Self as an actual thing, and he therefore fled into the imaginary. This process of derealization serves as the counterpart of bad faith: Sartre argued in *Being and Nothingness* that the Self is an unattainable ideal and hence a form of nothingness. We flee from this fact by acting as if the Self is a thing, and this is precisely bad faith. Derealization is premised on Sartre's later conception of the Self as a real thing, but that certain individuals, such as Flaubert, flee from this fact by acting like it is imaginary, and hence a "nothingness".

The last dimension of selfhood that needs to be discussed is narrativity. Our objective Self gives us a bearing on who we are at a certain moment in time and accounts for the permanent aspects of our selfhood. The narrative dimension adds a more dynamic aspect, which takes the form of a life story. How did we become the person we are today? In the first period, Sartre's thought concerning this topic is mostly revealed in *Nausea* through the idea that there is no such thing as an adventure. An adventure is characterized as an episode of life in which all events intrinsically lead to a certain goal. Although it is definitely possible to have the feeling of being on an adventure, a feeling that life is leading you towards such a goal, this is rooted in an illusion. Because we continually tell stories about our lives from a retrospective perspective, we project the plot-driven nature of storytelling onto our lives. However, this structure can only be applied in hindsight, when the end of the story is already known. Hence, narrative identity is misleading because a life lived and a life recounted do not have the same structure. When we live our lives as if a story was unfolding, we entertain a false teleological belief. Sartre expands on this notion in the *War Diaries* when he talks about the biographical illusion, which is a notion similar to that of adventure, but refers not to episodes in a life but to one's life story as a whole. We cannot live our life as if it were a biography, which can only be written after the fact.

Although narrative identity is not as explicit a theme in the middle period of Sartre's work as it is in the early works, we have identified Sartre's thoughts concerning existential psychoanalysis as also involving a theory of narrative identity. This is mainly due to the fact that Sartre introduces it as a method that could be used to write biographies. The ideas concerning narrative selfhood from this period are problematic, however, mainly due to the fact that Sartre's presentation of the theory in *Being and Nothingness* differs greatly from the actual use he would make of it in the biographies he went on to write later in this period. The main idea that guides the theory of existential psychoanalysis is that our fundamental projects are rooted in an original project which stays the same throughout the course of our lives. As we have discussed, our choices within a given period of our lives fit together to constitute a fundamental project, which

means that they are not gratuitous but coherent. This fundamental project itself is not chosen at a specific moment, but *is* the way our choices fit together. While we can only live a single fundamental project at a time, this project may change during the course of our lives. Sartre's description of how fundamental projects change into one another is close to his description of adventure in *Nausea*. They have definite beginnings and endings, and one could say that every choice within the fundamental project gains its significance in light of the end of the project. However, there are at least three important differences with the theory of adventure described in *Nausea*. First of all, it is not explicitly stated by Sartre that the goal of the project must be attained, for it could also be abandoned in light of changing circumstances. Second, fundamental projects are always freely chosen, which is a claim he never makes about adventures. The illusion of adventure can come upon us, regardless of whether we choose to or not. Third, it is unclear whether we explicitly know the beginning and endings of our fundamental projects, and, hence, whether they are experienced as perfect moments, or whether it is only in hindsight that such moments are judged to be the end of one and the beginning of another fundamental project. Sartre does not go into too much detail concerning how exactly fundamental projects change, and, for that reason, we cannot adequately clarify this aspect of his account. What is clear, however, is that although we can have different fundamental projects in our lives, they are always variations of an even more fundamental project: the original project or choice. In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre is very clear about the fact that we can only know these projects in hindsight. Still, they do not seem to be *projected* onto the past as adventures are, but are rather uncovered as the "true" structure of events that have happened. Furthermore, we do not have privileged access to our own original project, but always approach it as if it were that of someone else. In *Being and Nothingness*, the original project relates to fundamental projects the same way that fundamental projects relate to ordinary projects. This means that they do not reflect a deliberate choice made at a definite moment but are nothing but the way our choices fit together over our lifetime. This is itself quite problematic. If our fundamental choices are nothing but the way our choices fit together, then what is the philosophical value of the notion of an original project? It does not seem that we can give a definite answer to this question based on the theory provided in *Being and Nothingness*. In the biographies of Baudelaire and Genet, the meaning of the notion shifts. In both cases the original choice refers to a specific moment in their respective childhoods. Fundamental projects then become periods in which a specific way in which the original choice is lived can be identified. It seems one cannot but see this idea as a kind of determinism of choice, where the original choice determines all the subsequent choices in a certain sense. Sartre even equates the notion with destiny, thus invoking a certain fatalism. We should keep in

mind, however, that although our choices may be determined by our original choice, we do not know what this choice is. In any case, a life is lived freely, and, therefore, the fundamental distinction between a life lived and life recounted is retained.

The later period of Sartre's oeuvre sees the return of the notion of adventure, although Sartre adopts a radically different stance towards it. The force of circumstances greatly diminishes the freedom of the individual. Sartre's theory of radical freedom has been replaced by one he calls predestination. Our social circumstances determine the scope of our possibilities to such an extent that we cannot but say that our destinies are determined in advance. Yet, this does not mean that Sartre promotes a crude determinism that reduces our experience of freedom into a mere epiphenomenon and hence an illusion. Instead, while there are historical circumstances that determine our actions, these circumstances only acquire the meaning that they have because of the actions of individuals who experience those actions as free. Sartre illustrates this by turning to the practice of historiography, which provides a thematic link with narrative identity. From the point of view of the historian, all our choices are determined by our circumstances. Hence, we seem to be able to tell a life story without any appeal to human freedom. This would not do any justice to the meaning of History, however, because if we are to understand historical events properly, then we have to understand things that *did not* happen. The main aspect of this that Sartre highlights is historical failure, an example of which is an army failing to win a battle. This involves a subjective individual projecting a certain goal onto the world and not attaining the goal. A more positive description of history that ignores the subjective point of view could not account for this, as it could not account for nothingness. The same logic can be applied to life stories: one could think of Flaubert as someone who failed at being an ordinary bourgeois son. In short, although the possibilities are determined by our circumstances, these circumstances still get their meaning from our projected choices. While the idea that freedom is greatly diminished is a definitive break with the period that precedes this, the idea that meaning arises comes from our projects shows significant continuity. In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre also defended the idea that obstacles are only obstacles in light of our free projects. Yet, there he also defended the idea that we can always relate to our circumstances and are always free. Now, our choices are to a significant extent predetermined in advance, but we still have to experience them as free in order for this predestination to be possible. In other words, if we understand History in hindsight, we live our lives as a destiny, but when we make History, we live our lives as an adventure. Sartre's later use of this notion differs slightly from its earlier deployment because, in his later work, events do not automatically lead to their goal, but instead greatly depend on our choices to do so. An adventure is still a series

of events that are meaningful with regard to one another, but they only have this meaning by being *lived* by a person.

Thus, to sum up, Sartre's thought concerning narrative identity greatly shifts throughout his work. In the first period, he argues that our practice of telling stories about our life is misleading and gives us the false idea that life is directed towards goals as if it were a plot-driven story. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre's view becomes more nuanced: it is now said that we can identify life-stories retroactively through the idea of an original choice that binds all our choices together. The later works go a step further, seeing our whole life as predestined to turn out in a certain way. This does not mean, however, that we know our own destiny. Hence, Sartre's thinking undergoes a complete reversal, shifting from the idea that life does not have a fixed narrative structure and only seems to have one after the fact, to the claim that, though it seems like we are free to "create our own story", we are in truth predestined to play out a plot prescribed by History. What remains constant throughout all three periods, however, is the idea that a life lived and life recounted differ greatly.

2. Sartre's Criticism and Positive Reception Revisited

Now that we have finished our investigation into Sartre's philosophy and presented our findings, it is time to turn to the criticism and positive reception of his position that were discussed in the introduction. We will not discuss each critic individually but will instead focus on the major arguments made against Sartre. It is important to note, at the outset, that Sartre did heed some of his critics. For example, many of his critics argued that he failed to take History into account in *Being and Nothingness*, and this theme then becomes central to his arguments in the *Critique*. Hence, one could argue that such criticism led Sartre to revise, expand upon or sharpen his earlier ideas in the later period. We have also seen that the much-criticized humanism of *Existentialism is a Humanism* is only a very minor part of Sartre's philosophy and by no means reflects his thought in general.

We have not focused on the historical development of Sartre's philosophy, and thus we will only examine how his ideas *in general* relate to the criticism *in general*. As we have seen, most of the criticism he received centres around the idea that Sartre grants too big a role to subjectivity. As we have seen, this is true to a certain extent, but he nonetheless uses his own account of subjectivity to argue against a more traditional view of subjectivity – a view his critics seem to think he endorses.

Let us begin with the charge of idealism. Sartre never defends any form of epistemological or ontological idealism. At the core of his

account of intentionality is the idea that it puts us in contact with the real world. Sartre's philosophy is thoroughly realist, in the sense that the things we experience exist independently from our experience of them. It is only their meaning that we contribute, whether it is the meaning given through projects in *Being and Nothingness* or the crystalized *praxis* of the practico-inert in the *Critique*. These meanings, however, are always ascribed to real things. The only kind of idealism Sartre can be accused of is the tendency to replace an analysis of concrete and complex situations with abstract idealized concepts. This is true to a certain extent of *Being and Nothingness*, as Sartre himself would later acknowledge. It has to be said, however, that the phenomenological analyses presented in the work do focus on concrete situations. Nevertheless, the conclusion he draws from these analyses are abstract due to their place within the broader ontological project of the work. This also relates to the criticism Sartre received for his radical notion of freedom, which he subsequently revised in his later works.

The Cartesian nature of Sartre's philosophy is much more intricate. Although he gives a clear argument against Descartes' account of the cogito in his early works, his turn towards his own version of the cogito in *Being and Nothingness* is problematic. The notion of the prereflective cogito bears some structural resemblances to Descartes' thinking substance. Both are rooted in the idea that self-consciousness is the cornerstone of subjectivity. Nevertheless, for Sartre this cogito is merely functional, it describes how consciousness works. He never adopts the *res cogitans* as a thing that thinks, for this would undermine his relational account of subjectivity. Indeed, as we have discussed, he criticizes Descartes for this very move throughout *Being and Nothingness*. We have argued that despite his own criticism of Descartes, Sartre is drawn to a version of the cogito because it affords his system an apodictic basis. Just as Descartes bases his ontological position on the indubitability of the cogito, Sartre grounds his ontology on the transphenomenality of prereflective self-consciousness.

This brings us to the criticism that Sartre is too metaphysical, which is most prominently articulated by Heidegger and Derrida. It is true that Sartre is concerned with a metaphysical quest for a unifying reason or ground. In contrast to most classical metaphysical positions, however, he never clearly identifies a *singular* ground. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre's quest for the Being of the phenomenon leads him to identify two grounds that are irreducible to each other: being-for-itself and being-in-itself. It could be argued that later in the book he adds a third one, the being-for-the-Other. In so far as he embarks on the quest for a ground, however, he can be seen to adhere to a fairly classic metaphysical methodology. In the *Critique* this is not different: Sartre wants to ground dialectical thinking in

praxis. He wants to show that the most basic relationship between subjectivity and objectivity is dialectal in order to *ground* dialectical thought, thereby granting it apodicticity. In this regard, the *Critique* is just as Cartesian as *Being and Nothingness*: Sartre searches for an “indubitable” ground for his theories which he finds in something related to subjectivity. However, just as Sartre finds not one but multiple grounds in *Being and Nothingness*, he grounds his later system not in subjectivity *per se*, but in its relational nature, in the way it acts upon matter. Thus, although Sartre may adopt a traditional methodology, the outcome is not so traditional, as there is never just one ground.

This, in turn, sheds an interesting light on the more recent criticism of Sartre from the speculative realists. As was noted in the introductory chapter, they regard their philosophy to be a return to a more traditional way of doing metaphysics – Harman calls it a ‘guerrilla metaphysics’ because of the general hostility to metaphysics in the current philosophical climate (Harman 2005, 1). Although their approach is in many regards very different to that of Sartre, the very fact that they are both proponents of systematic metaphysics shows that they may have more in common than is often presumed. For example, both Harman and Sartre root their respective accounts of objects in a criticism of Heidegger’s analysis of tools (Harman 2002, IPB 70). We would stray too much off topic if we got into the details here.⁵⁹⁴ It suffices to say that the way in which Sartre’s philosophy can both be considered a traditional metaphysics as well as a conception of metaphysics that is ahead of its time.

Sartre’s methodology is also significant in light of both the critiques of his position offered by subsequent generations of French philosophers and the claims of the “New Sartre”-school, who argue that Sartre is closer to these later thinkers than is often assumed. While his critics vehemently attacked the role of subjectivity in his work, defenders of the “New Sartre” claim that his account of subjectivity actually decentres the subject. Fox argued that there are two sides to Sartre, one that corresponds to the picture painted by his critics, and one that reveals Sartre’s philosophy to be closer to his post-structuralist adversaries. Our investigation allows us to see how these two sides are present in Sartre’s philosophy. Methodologically Sartre is very much a traditional philosopher of the subject who takes subjectivity as the starting point for his inquiry. The outcome of his method is less traditional, however, and goes against traditional accounts of the Subject. For this very reason, it is possible to object to Sartre’s subjective methodology while still adhering to the criticism of the Subject that results from this method.

594 For a further comparison between Sartre and Harman, see: (Kleinherenbrink & Gusman 2018).

The recent analytic reception of Sartre approaches Sartre in the opposite way: Sartre's subjective methodology is appreciated while his critical approach towards traditional accounts of the Subject is seemingly ignored. These respective tendencies are most apparent in the work of Zahavi and in his notion of the experiential Self. The experiential Self is rooted in the consciousness (of) self as Sartre defends it in *Being and Nothingness*. However, as we have seen, one of the most important themes in Sartre's philosophy of selfhood is the idea that there is no Self in consciousness. If one isolates Sartre's account of subjective selfhood from his accounts of objective and narrative selfhood, then one risks using notions from Sartre's work in a way that contradicts the more general spirit of his work. If one takes ideas from Sartre that are meant to show that consciousness does not need a subjective Self and identifies them with an account of the (experiential) Self, one undermines the reason these ideas were developed in the first place. Again, our current focus does not allow us to delve too much into the details of this issue. It suffices to say that in the reception of Sartre in recent analytic philosophy of mind, only his account of subjective selfhood is used, while his accounts of objective and narrative selfhood are not. If these were taken into account, then Sartre's philosophy would seem much closer to those philosophers associated with critique of subjectivity. The most prominent example of this is perhaps Ryle, with whom Sartre has been compared by some (Ricoeur 1981, Gusman 2016). In the philosophy of both Sartre and Ryle, the idea that subjectivity is not a place or a container of mental contents plays a prominent role. Other examples of thinkers in this category with whom Sartre has been compared include Wittgenstein (Wider 1991) and Dennett (Gusman 2015, 11).

3. Subjectivity and selfhood: a general conclusion

The preceding discussion of the development of Sartre's ideas over the course of his career and of the criticisms these ideas faced allows us to see what the underlying tendencies of his philosophy are. As we proposed in the introduction, one might say that Sartre is a thinker of subjectivity who argues against traditional notions of the Subject "from the inside out".

Methodologically, Sartre always gives subjectivity centre stage. In the first two periods, this stems from his use of a phenomenological methodology. He makes use of descriptions of subjective experiences in order to show that it is not what philosophers have often thought it to be. The central idea in this regard is that subjectivity is neither a thing nor a place, it is nothing but a relation towards an object. Hence, it is not something that exists in isolation and then subsequently makes contact with something else. In the last period of his work, Sartre's approach is less focused on subjectivity than it was before,

but he still thinks that one cannot think the regressive without the progressive, or, in other words, that one needs to take the subjective point of view into account in order to give a full account of reality. Moreover, the central argument in the *Critique* takes *praxis* as its starting point, a notion which he regards as the fundamental relation between the subjective and objective. In all these cases, Sartre starts from the point of view of subjectivity only to immediately break out of subjectivity, to show just how minimal it is and how it can only exist in relation to the things around it – whether this is as an empty intentional consciousness or as a practical relationship to matter.

Sartre's minimal account of subjectivity is intrinsically tied to his account of selfhood. The Self, as that which gives the subjective entity its unity and individuality, can no longer reside "inside" of consciousness. Hence, Sartre continually argues against the idea that the Self is an inhabitant of consciousness. This means that the Self must exist outside of consciousness. We have taken the following idea as our guiding thread: the Self is a thing among things. Not a *res cogitans*, a subjective thing, but a genuine object, existing in the world of objects. Although the exact nature of how Sartre sees this object changes throughout his work, the main idea of the Self as something transcendent rather than immanent is always defended.

The thing-like nature of the Self also changes how we must think about it. The Self can no longer be conceived of as an unchanging thinking substance or an eternal soul. Instead, like other things in the world, it is subject to change, it is dubitable and it is resilient. This means that we may also have an effect on these changes ourselves. The existentialist motto "existence precedes essence" can be interpreted to mean just that: first there is the process of subjectivity and subsequently our Self is created. In the middle period, especially, Sartre does seem to uphold the autonomy ascribed to the traditional Subject. On the one hand, the radical conception of freedom that he defends in the middle period is highly problematic from a social and political perspective. On the other hand, however, we must stress that although he argues that we are free, this notion of freedom is not rooted in an autonomous Subject, it rather describes *how* subjectivity relates to the world as a process. We should also keep in mind that although Sartre is most famous for his work from this period, it represents a relatively small part of his oeuvre as a whole. In the last period of his work, Sartre provides a much more grounded theory of freedom, which avoids succumbing to a reductive determinism. Such a theory is still very much in line with his overall project of balancing subjectivity and objectivity.

The narrative dimension of Sartre's theories of selfhood is an important reason that his philosophy should not be regarded as *written off*. As was noted in the introduction, the idea of narrative

selfhood is widespread amongst contemporary philosophers in many different fields and a serious contender for the title of a new “official doctrine” of selfhood. This dimension of Sartre’s thought is often understated, though it is all the more interesting in light of current debates.

Thus, if we were to put Sartre’s thought concerning subjectivity and selfhood in a nutshell, we could say that it dethrones the traditional account of the Subject, where it is seen as something isolated, unitary and autonomous, from the point of view of subjectivity itself. Much of the criticism and appreciation of Sartre is rooted in the dual nature of his philosophy: a philosophy which is grounded in human subjectivity and which is often methodologically rigid, on the one hand, but which also shows that the Self of a subjective entity is not in any way immanent to subjectivity, but transcends it and is part of the world of objects, on the other. Sartre’s philosophy lets subjectivity dethrone itself – and its Self. Hence, to come full circle and end where we began:

We are delivered from [...] the “internal life”: in vain would we seek the caresses and fondlings of our intimate selves, [...] like a child who kisses his own shoulder, since everything is finally outside, everything, even ourselves. Outside, in the world, among others. It is not in some hiding-place that we will discover ourselves; it is on the road, in the town, in the midst of the crowd, a thing among things, a human among humans (I 5)⁵⁹⁵.

595 ‘Nous voilà délivrés de [...] la « vie intérieure » : en vain chercherions-nous, [...] comme une enfant qui s’embrasse l’épaule, les caresses, les dorlotements de notre intimité, puisque tout est dehors, tout, jusqu’à nous-mêmes : dehors, dans le monde, parmi les autres. Ce n’est pas dans je ne sais quelle retraite que nous nous découvrirons : c’est sur la route, dans la ville, au milieu de la foule, chose parmi les choses, homme parmi les hommes’ (I^e 89).

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Summary

(in Dutch)

De Franse filosoof Jean-Paul Sartre geldt als één van de beroemdste en tegelijkertijd één van de meest bekritiseerde uit de 20^{ste} eeuw. Buiten academisch filosofische kringen was hij vooral bekend vanwege zijn literaire werk en sociale engagement. Onder filosofen is de perceptie van zijn filosofie bijna uitsluitend negatief geweest. Vooral de grote rol die in zijn gedachtegoed is weggelegd voor menselijke subjectiviteit geldt als een steen des aanstoets voor andere filosofen in de continentale traditie. De algemene tendens in het denken van Sartres critici is dat juist het centraal stellen van de menselijke subjectiviteit gedateerd is en dat we eerder moeten kijken hoe de mens tot stand komt dan denken vanuit de mens zelf.

In dit proefschrift laat ik zien dat in Sartres gedachtegoed juist deze twee vragen samenkomen. Hij probeert de vraag hoe de mens tot stand komt, juist te bekijken vanuit de menselijke ervaring zelf.

Die menselijke ervaring is gegrond in subjectiviteit die bestaat ten opzichte van objectiviteit. De wereld bestaat grotendeels uit dingen die los van onze ervaring ervan bestaan. Een steen, koffiekopje of vulkaan bestaat, ook als wij er niets mee te maken hebben. In die zin hebben ze een bepaalde mate van objectiviteit. Wij zeggen bijvoorbeeld dat een journalist objectief is als hij de werkelijkheid los van onze standpunten en meningen erover beschrijft. Daartegenover staat subjectiviteit. Een subjectief wezen is iemand met een perspectief op de objecten. Die objecten krijgen daardoor bepaalde betekenissen. Voor ons verschijnt een koffiekopje immers niet zomaar, maar met bepaalde betekenissen. Het is bijvoorbeeld het kopje dat van mijn oma geweest is, of waar ik net mijn mond aan heb verbrand. Dit zijn allemaal eigenschappen die niet louter objectief tot het kopje behoren maar tot stand komen in mijn subjectieve verhouding tot het kopje.

Deze spanning tussen subjectiviteit enerzijds en objectiviteit anderzijds brengt een hoop filosofische problemen met zich mee. In het uitdenken van deze relatie ligt het gevaar op de loer dat er wordt doorgeschooten naar twee uiterste posities. Eén daarvan is het wegcijferen van subjectiviteit. Dit wordt ook wel reductionisme genoemd: het reduceren van subjectiviteit tot de objectieve werkelijkheid. Een goed voorbeeld hiervan is het reduceren van

bewustzijn tot hersenactiviteit, zoals de stelling dat liefde een stofje in je hersenen is. Hoewel de ervaring van liefde gepaard gaat met activiteit in het brein, gaat dit feit compleet voorbij aan hoe het *is* om liefde te ervaren. Een louter objectieve beschrijving kan nooit recht doen aan dit soort fenomenen, die bestaan per gratie van de subjectieve beleving ervan.

Het tegenovergestelde uiterste is het overdrijven van subjectiviteit. Dit onnodig op een voetstuk plaatsen van subjectiviteit wordt wel Cartesianisme genoemd, naar de 17^{de}-eeuwse filosoof René Descartes. Hij was op zoek naar een fundament voor kennis en stelde dat je overal aan kunt twijfelen behalve aan het twijfelen zelf. Aangezien twijfelen een soort van denken is, moet het denken zelf wel bestaan. 'Ik denk, dus ik ben' concludeerde hij. Zo maakte hij van het menselijke subject een denkend ding, dat het fundament is van alle kennis en los bestaat van de betwijfelbare dingen in de wereld. De brug tussen subjectiviteit en objectiviteit wordt daardoor bijna onoverbrugbaar en de mens wordt losgezongen van haar objectieve omstandigheden. Daardoor wordt het moeilijk om de invloed van deze omstandigheden op de mens te denken, en te spreken van een gedeelde objectieve wereld. Verder doorgevoerde varianten van dit subjectiviteitsdenken stellen zelfs dat er niets is buiten de menselijke ervaring.

Hieraan gerelateerd is het tweede thema van deze dissertatie, dat van het Zelf. Als we de menselijke subjectiviteit niet willen denken als een soort van denkend ding, dan moeten we op een andere manier recht doen aan de continuïteit, eenheid en individualiteit van de subjectiviteit. Wat maakt een subjectief perspectief hetzelfde door de tijd heen? Waarin verschilt de subjectiviteit van de een van dat van de ander? Dit soort vragen komen neer op de vraag naar wat een persoon zichzelf maakt, oftewel naar wat het Zelf is.

Ook het Zelf heeft een subjectieve en objectieve kant. De subjectieve kant van het Zelf ligt vooral in hoe wij onszelf ervaren. We ervaren op zekere hoogte dat we dezelfde persoon zijn door de tijd heen en de betekenissen die wij in de wereld om ons heen ervaren hangen samen met wie we zelf zijn door de tijd heen. Het koffiekopje kan bijvoorbeeld enkel ervaren worden als dat van mijn oma als ik een herinnering aan haar heb en het idee heb dat ik dezelfde persoon ben op het moment dat ik het koffiekopje kreeg. Kortom, het subjectieve Zelf gaat uit van het idee dat *ik* het ben die mijn subjectieve ervaring ervaart en mijn handelingen verricht.

Het objectieve Zelf daarentegen heeft niet zo zeer te maken met hoe wij onszelf ervaren, maar veeleer met de eigenschappen die wij aan onszelf en anderen toeschrijven *als ware het een object*. Ik ben op een bepaalde plek geboren, heb een bepaalde lengte, dit proefschrift

geschreven, et cetera. Al deze eigenschappen kunnen aan mij worden toegeschreven los van het feit of ik ze ervaar of niet. Ze hebben een bepaalde mate van objectiviteit.

Deze tegenstelling tussen het subjectieve en objectieve Zelf kan worden aangevuld met een derde vorm, namelijk narratieve identiteit. Dit is een benadering van het vraagstuk die breed gedragen wordt door filosofen uit allerlei verschillende hoeken en behelst het idee (of veronderstelling) dat ons Zelf te maken heeft met de verhalen die wij over onszelf en anderen vertellen. Verhalen staan ergens tussen subjectiviteit en objectiviteit in: ze beschrijven in zekere zin onze objectieve omstandigheden, maar moeten door een subjectief wezen verteld worden. Toch kan een verhaal een eigen leven gaan leiden en bestaat het zo in zekere mate los van de vertellers ervan. Echter, als er niemand meer is die het verhaal kent en kan vertellen, houdt het weer op met bestaan. Kortom, de narratieve dimensie van onze identiteit valt tussen subjectiviteit en objectiviteit in.

De thematiek van subjectiviteit en het Zelf is inherent verbonden met het werk van Jean-Paul Sartre. Enerzijds is het zo dat hij sterk bekritiseerd is door zijn tijdgenoten omdat ze hem verwijten een Cartesiaan te zijn die te veel nadruk legt op subjectiviteit. Anderzijds blijkt dat vooral zijn denken over subjectiviteit en het subjectieve Zelf dat daarmee samenhangt juist de laatste jaren van grote waarde blijkt te zijn in debatten in de analytische filosofie. Hierin wordt het denken van Sartre en andere fenomenologen juist gebruikt om een tegenwicht te bieden aan bepaalde vormen van reductionisme. Zowel de kritiek op Sartre als de positieve receptie van zijn gedachtegoed vinden dus vooral plaats in discussies rond de thema's die wij zojuist bespraken.

Tegen de achtergrond van deze receptie en door de drie fasen van zijn oeuvre heen, heb ik gedetailleerd gekeken naar hoe concepten van subjectiviteit en Het Zelf zich ontwikkelen. Ieder hoofdstuk bestaat uit twee delen; een deel over de driehoek subjectiviteit, objectiviteit en negativiteit en een deel over de driehoek van het subjectieve, objectieve en narratieve Zelf. De dimensie van negativiteit is specifiek aan het werk van Sartre. Behalve de dingen in de wereld en ons perspectief daarop legt hij de nadruk op hetgeen niet is. In onze beleving van de wereld spelen dingen die niet bestaan ook een cruciale rol. Het gaat daarbij bijvoorbeeld om verzinsels, afwezige vrienden en lege ruimtes. Ook kunnen wij onszelf beschouwen in termen van wat we niet zijn: zo kunnen we stellen dat we een bepaald levensdoel hebben dat we nog *niet* bereikt hebben, of in zekere zin *niet* meer dezelfde persoon zijn die we vroeger waren.

Het eerste hoofdstuk gaat over de werken van Sartre tot aan de tweede wereldoorlog. De centrale werken uit deze periode zijn de

twee werken over verbeelding, het artikel *Het ik is een ding* en de roman *De walging*. In deze periode is hij vooral bezig met het idee van intentionaliteit. Dit begrip houdt in dat bewustzijn niet zelf iets is dat vervolgens in relatie treedt met het object waar het bewust van is, maar zelf deze relatie is. Bewustzijn is een verhouding tot iets dat buiten het bewustzijn is, maar is zelf niet iets waar bepaalde eigenschappen *in* kunnen zitten. Onze subjectieve beleving wordt daar door compleet leeg. Sartre geeft het voorbeeld van iemand die een masker eng vindt. Het feit dat het masker aan die persoon verschijnt als angstaanjagend is een eigenschap van dat masker, en niet iets dat zich louter in 'het hoofd' van die persoon afspeelt. Dat betekent niet dat het masker aan iedereen als angstaanjagend verschijnt, maar dat deze eigenschap in de wisselwerking tussen het bewustzijn en het masker tot stand komt *als eigenschap van het masker*. Sartre legt zowel de subjectieve als objectieve eigenschappen van de dingen in die dingen zelf.

Dit betekent echter niet dat we de dingen in de wereld volledig kunnen reduceren tot hoe we ze ervaren. Als dat zo was, dan zouden ze zich juist in ons bewustzijn bevinden. Hoewel alle aspecten van een object aan het object toebehoren, toont het volledige object zich nooit aan onze ervaring. We kunnen immers altijd nieuwe aspecten van een object ontdekken. Als er niets in ons eigen bewustzijn zit, dan betekent dit dat deze aspecten in de dingen zelf zitten. Sartre noemt de dingen dan ook *te veel*. Ze zijn op een fundamentele manier 'overtollig', een onuitputtelijke bron van nieuwe manieren waarop ze aan ons kunnen verschijnen en daarmee nooit tot hun verschijnen terug te brengen.

Het project van Sartre om het bewustzijn leeg te maken en alle eigenschappen van dingen in de wereld onder te brengen wordt problematisch als we dingen die niet bestaan in ogenschouw nemen. Een wijdverbreide opvatting is dat de dingen die wij ons inbeelden 'in ons hoofd bestaan'. Als ik een paard zie, dan bestaat dat paard in de wereld buiten mij, maar als ik me vervolgens omdraai en me het paard inbeeld, dan ben ik me bewust van een idee in mijn hoofd. Tussen die ideeën in mijn hoofd kunnen ook dingen ontstaan die helemaal geen evenknie in de werkelijkheid hebben, zoals een centaur. Dit beeld strookt niet met Sartres opvatting: als het bewustzijn leeg is, kunnen er ook geen mentale beelden in bestaan. Daarom komt Sartre met een nieuwe theorie van verbeelding. Hoewel hij verschillende eigenschappen van mentale beelden geeft, is één idee het belangrijkste in het licht van zijn filosofie als geheel. Het idee dat mentale beelden in ons hoofd bestaan doet geen recht aan het feit dat de dingen die voorgesteld worden nou juist *niet* bestaan. Hier zien we de dimensie van negativiteit die zo belangrijk is in het denken van Sartre. Of ik nou denk aan iets dat op dit moment niet voor me is, of iets dat in zijn geheel niet bestaat, het zijn allemaal voorbeelden

van niet-zijnden. Mentale beelden zijn dus verhoudingen tot een bepaald 'niets', dat net als dingen buiten het bewustzijn plaatsvindt.

Het lege bewustzijn is de hoeksteen van Sartres denken over het Zelf. In *Het ik is een ding* laat hij zien dat aan onze ervaring geen Zelf ten grondslag ligt. Dat wil zeggen, onze constante bewustzijnsstroom heeft niets nodig om een eenheid te zijn. Het maakt zichzelf tot eenheid door de manier waarop het betekenissen vormt door de tijd heen. Als ik bijvoorbeeld langs een laan met bomen fiets en deze tel, dan verschijnt iedere boom in het licht van de vorige als de volgende in de serie. Een boom kan alleen als de derde boom verschijnen in het licht van een eerdere ervaring van een tweede boom en wellicht in anticipatie op een vierde boom. Zo haken onze ervaringen in elkaar door de tijd heen, als ware het schakels van een ketting. Net zoals een schakelketting geen overkoepelende draad nodig heeft om een eenheid te vormen, heeft ook onze subjectieve bewustzijnsstroom geen Zelf nodig dat de eenheid garandeert. Bovendien, zo laat Sartre zien, ervaren we helemaal geen Zelf in onze ervaring. Als we op gaan in de dingen die we aan het doen zijn, dan zijn we ons alleen bewust van de dingen, en niet van onszelf. Dat gebeurt pas als we expliciet stil staan op wat we aan het doen zijn, als we reflecteren en stellen: ik ben het die dit boek aan het lezen ben, bijvoorbeeld.

Sartre ontkent dus het bestaan van een subjectief Zelf. Het Zelf zoals we dat ervaren als we reflecteren is dan ook niets anders dan ons objectieve Zelf. Het maakt niet uit of we objectieve eigenschappen aan onszelf toeschrijven of subjectieve eigenschappen, het Zelf blijft een object dat voor ons bewustzijn verschijnt en zelf geen deel is van dat bewustzijn. Als ik bijvoorbeeld reflecteer op het feit dat ik een boek aan het lezen ben, dan verschijnt mijn Zelf als 'degene die aan het lezen is'.

Wat betreft narratieve identiteit maakt Sartre een belangrijk onderscheid tussen hoe we over onze levens vertellen en hoe we onze levens leven. Als we achteraf over onze levens vertellen, dan lijkt het alsof er een bepaalde structuur in zit. Dit komt doordat we de afloop van een verhaal weten en daarom het verhaal zo kunnen vertellen dat alle gebeurtenissen leiden tot die afloop. Zo krijgen alle gebeurtenissen een betekenis. Een dergelijke structuur noemt Sartre een avontuur. Echter, volgens Sartre kunnen we helemaal geen avonturen beleven, omdat we de afloop van de gebeurtenissen in ons eigen leven niet kennen. Doordat we op een bepaalde manier over onze levens vertellen, krijgen we het idee dat onze levens ook automatisch naar een afloop toewerken, waarin uiteindelijk alles betekenisvol blijkt te zijn. Sartre ziet het narratieve Zelf dan ook vooral als iets misleidends, omdat het achteraf een structuur in onze levens aanbrengt die het leven van zichzelf niet heeft.

Sartres theorieën over het Zelf in zijn vroege werken komen dus voort uit zijn opvatting dat het bewustzijn geen inhoud heeft. Er is geen subjectief zelf, en het Zelf dat we ‘ontdekken’ als we reflecteren, verschijnt enkel achteraf als object van reflectie. Ook de narratieve structuren van onze levensverhalen kunnen we pas achteraf aanbrengen en zijn niet aanwezig in het moment van beleven zelf.

De tweede periode van Sartres werk is die van de tweede wereldoorlog tot begin jaren '50. Deze periode wordt gedomineerd door Sartres existentialistische filosofie en zijn hoofdwerk *Het zijn en het niet*. Vooral in dit werk heeft Sartre een sterk systematische ontologische inslag. Hij wil een ontologisch systeem opbouwen vanuit het eerdergenoemde idee dat bewustzijn niets anders is dan bewustzijn van iets anders. Uit dit idee leidt hij twee absolute vormen van bestaan af: het zijn op-zich en het zijn voor-zich, die respectievelijk het zijn van de dingen en het zijn van het bewustzijn behelzen.

Als wij een ding waarnemen, kunnen we een ontelbare hoeveelheid indrukken van het object hebben. We kunnen er omheen lopen om de achterkant te bekijken, het in een ander licht zien of op een ander moment. Toch blijft het verschijnen als hetzelfde object. Er moet dus iets zijn dat de verschillende indrukken van een object samenbrengt. Dit kan niet een ander ding zijn, een soort ‘echt’ ding achter het object zoals het verschijnt. Als dit zo zou zijn, dan zouden we de vraag enkel opschuiven en ons moeten afvragen hoe dit object dan bestaat. Dingen moeten dus los bestaan van hoe ze verschijnen om te verklaren dat ze als een eenheid verschijnen, maar er kan niet iets anders achter de schermen zitten. Daarom stelt Sartre dat dingen simpelweg op-zichzelf moeten bestaan – noch afhankelijk van onze waarneming, noch afhankelijk van een andere bron van bestaan. We kunnen verder weinig zeggen over dit bestaan, want als het zou verschijnen zou deze verschijning zelf weer een bestaan moeten hebben.

Het verschijnen van dingen impliceert ook iets waaraan het verschijnt. Het bewustzijn bestaat volgens Sartre als zelfbewustzijn: hoewel het niets anders is dan bewustzijn van een object, moet het ook impliciet van zichzelf bewust zijn. Als dit niet zo zou zijn, zou er een tweede staat van bewustzijn nodig zijn die de eerste als object zou hebben, en om daar bewust van te worden weer een derde, tot in het oneindige. Om deze regressie tegen te gaan moeten we een ‘pre-reflectief zelfbewustzijn’ aannemen, en Sartre noemt dit ook wel het ‘pre-reflectieve cogito’. Dit ‘Ik denk’ is geen denkend ding, maar refereert naar de manier waarop bewustzijn werkt. Echter, net als het cogito van Descartes vormt het wel een uitgangspunt voor zekere kennis en daarmee vertoont het toch een belangrijke gelijkenis met het Cartesiaanse begrip. Het bewustzijn is zich dus altijd bewust van zichzelf en wordt vandaar ook het voor-zich genoemd.

Zo heeft Sartre de twee basismanieren van bestaan blootgelegd. Om een compleet beeld van de realiteit te geven is er ook Niets. Sartre laat zien dat in onze wereld ook een hoop objecten zijn die geen bestaande dingen zijn, maar niet-bestaande 'negatiteiten'. Hij beschrijft dit in een uitvoerige analyse van een vriend die niet aanwezig is in een café terwijl je met hem afgesproken hebt. Hoewel de afwezigheid van de persoon alleen maar kan plaatsvinden in het licht van het feit dat je verwacht dat hij er zou zijn, is zijn afwezigheid niet te reduceren tot een louter subjectief oordeel. Er is een verschil tussen een afwezigheid die plaatsvindt in de wereld om je heen, en eentje die louter bedacht is. Ik kan bijvoorbeeld stellen dat Rutger Hauer niet in het café is, maar dat is een louter subjectief oordeel aangezien er niets in de objectieve werkelijkheid is dat het waarschijnlijk zou maken dat hij er zou zijn. Als ik afgesproken heb, zorgt mijn subjectieve dispositie er echter voor dat er objectief iets gebeurt in het café. Het Niets is daarom een categorie van de werkelijkheid die een objectieve component kent in de vorm van dergelijke negatiteiten.

Echter, zo vraagt Sartre zich af, hoe komt het dat het bewustzijn deze negatiteiten kan voortbrengen? Dat komt omdat het voor-zich een manier van bestaan is die haar eigen Niets in zich draagt. Een ding dat op-zich bestaat valt met zichzelf samen. Een steen is simpelweg een steen. Bewustzijn van een steen echter, dat op-zich bestaat, valt niet met zichzelf samen. Dat wil zeggen, het is niets ander dan bewustzijn van de steen en kan niet los van haar object bestaan, maar toch is het ook niet te reduceren tot de steen zelf. Omdat het bewustzijn dus *niet* met zichzelf samenvalt kan het een bron van Niets zijn.

Omdat bewustzijn niet samenvalt met de dingen in de wereld, wordt het ook niet volledig bepaald door deze wereld, maar is het op een fundamentele manier vrij. Dat wil zeggen, het vindt altijd plaats in de wereld maar kan zich op verschillende manieren tot deze wereld verhouden. Iedere handeling die wij als bewuste wezens uitvoeren wordt dan ook een vrije handeling: ze worden altijd bepaald aan de hand van doelen die wij onszelf stellen. Doordat wij doelen op de werkelijkheid projecteren overstijgen we de werkelijkheid zoals deze is en werken we toe naar een werkelijkheid zoals deze nog niet is. De dingen in de wereld verschijnen vervolgens in het licht van deze doelen. Onze vrijheid resulteert daarmee in wat Sartre 'de situatie' noemt: de vervlechting van subjectiviteit en objectiviteit waarin het bewustzijn doelen projecteert aan de hand van de dingen, en de dingen vervolgens verschijnen in het licht van die doelen.

Tot zover de manier waarop subjectiviteit, objectiviteit en negativiteit in deze periode samenhangen. Sartres ideeën over het Zelf zijn op dezelfde leest gestoeld. Wat betreft subjectieve identiteit wijkt hij

af van de ideeën die hij in zijn vroeger werken naar voren heeft gebracht. Waar hij eerder stelde dat het bewustzijn in eerste instantie onpersoonlijk is en er pas op een moment van reflectie een Zelf in verschijnt, stelt hij nu dat bewustzijn een dimensie van 'zelfheid' heeft. Dit hangt samen met zijn opvattingen over vrijheid. Als wij inderdaad altijd doelen projecteren in de werkelijkheid, dan nemen wij continu mogelijkheden waar. Deze mogelijkheden moeten ons pre-reflectief toeschijnen als *onze* mogelijkheden en we moeten dus een continuïteit ervaren in degene die we zijn. We anticiperen niet alleen op dingen in de volgende momenten, maar in de vorm van deze mogelijkheden ook dingen die er nog niet zijn. Daarom ervaren we de volgende momenten in de schakel als momenten die samenhangen met onze identiteit. Dit continu projecteren van mogelijkheden op ieder moment in de tijd noemt Sartre de 'cirkel van zelfheid' en deze cirkel is wat ons bewustzijn persoonlijk maakt. Hoewel hij dus wel vasthoudt aan een functioneel cogito is dit cogito niet gelijk aan een subjectief Zelf dat een soort eenheid is. Er is nog steeds geen 'inwoner' van het bewustzijn, maar subjectieve zelfheid is eerder een proces dat wij doorleven.

Met dit proces komt er ook een nieuwe vorm van het objectieve Zelf om de hoek kijken. Omdat we altijd doelen projecteren en daarmee zelf een project zijn, projecteren we altijd een Zelf aan de horizon van alle komende momenten. Dit is een ideëel Zelf dat we nooit echt kunnen verwezenlijken: aangezien we een projecterend wezen zijn kunnen we niet zeggen dat ons project ooit 'af' is, dan zouden we ophouden met bestaan. Waar Sartre dus in zijn vroege werk vooral beargumenteerde dat we achteraf een Zelf in onze handelingen kunnen opmerken, zet hij nu in op een Zelf dat altijd in de toekomst ligt.

Hoewel ons objectieve Zelf dus een niet te bereiken punt in de toekomst is, en daarmee een soort 'niets', doen we toch vaak alsof we wel een vaststaande identiteit hebben. Dit fenomeen noemt Sartre 'kwade trouw'. Kwade trouw is het ontkennen van onze vrijheid. Als we zeggen dat we de dingen doen omdat we niet anders kunnen, dan maken we ons eraan schuldig. Bijvoorbeeld iemand die eigenlijk vroeg op wil staan om een productieve dag te hebben en diekeer op keer in bed blijft liggen, kan zeggen: 'Ik ben nou eenmaal lui'. Dan doet zo iemand volgens Sartre alsof hij een ding is met de eigenschap luiheid. Hoewel we dus eigenlijk geen vaststaande identiteit hebben, doen we vaak van wel.

Een andere dimensie van ons objectief Zelf heeft te maken met hoe anderen ons ervaren. Hoewel we vrije projecten zijn, kunnen andere mensen ons wel als objecten ervaren. Als ik een ander persoon denk te zien, dan is het waarschijnlijk dat diegene ook een vrij project is en niet bijvoorbeeld een geavanceerde robot. Dit is een eeuwenoud

filosofisch probleem: hoe weet ik nou echt dat een ander subjectief wezen ook een subjectief wezen is, terwijl ik nooit volledig toegang heb tot de subjectieve belevingswereld van diegene? Sartre heeft hier een oplossing voor. Hij zoekt dit in de omgekeerde situatie, namelijk als de Ander naar mij kijkt. Als ik bijvoorbeeld ergens naar sta te gluren en ik wordt plotseling betrap, dan doet dit iets met me. In de ogen van de ander ben ik opeens een soort ding, een 'gluurder'. Ik besef dat ik niet alleen 'voor-zich' besta, maar ook 'voor-de-Ander'. Dat wil zeggen, ik heb een soort buitenkant, een manier waarop ik bekeken kan worden. Ik val er niet volledig mee samen, maar het gaat me toch aan. Onze objectieve identiteit zit dus zowel in het ideële Zelf dat we projecteren en de buitenkant die we zijn in de ogen van de ander.

De dimensie van narratieve identiteit wordt minder expliciet behandeld door Sartre in deze periode, maar kan desalniettemin gevonden worden in de theorie die hij 'existentiële psychoanalyse' noemt. Deze theorie heeft vooral te maken met de manier waarop onze keuzes samenhangen. Hoewel al onze handelingen vrij zijn, zijn we niet altijd onze keuzes aan het overwegen. De meeste handelingen komen voort uit bredere projecten die weer voortkomen uit bredere keuzes. Ik kies er niet voor om mijn been vooruit te zetten, maar ik kies er bijvoorbeeld wel voor om een bepaalde studie te gaan doen. Andere handelingen stromen dan voort uit deze keuze, maar zijn daarom niet minder vrij. Onze handelingen zijn ook niet willekeurig: ik doe niet zomaar het ene moment het ene, en het andere moment het andere. Daarom stelt Sartre dat we op ieder moment een fundamentele keuze *zijn*. Deze fundamentele keuze is niet een keuze is die we op een bepaald moment bewust maken maar de samenhang tussen onze keuzes. Hoewel deze fundamentele keuze door ons leven heen wel kan veranderen, zijn ook de veranderingen niet willekeurig maar hangen samen met plotseling veranderende omstandigheden. Volgens Sartre moet het zo zijn dat ook deze fundamentele keuzes weer met elkaar samenhangen door ons leven heen. Er is daarom ook sprake van een 'originele keuze', een keuze die we niet op een bepaald moment maken maar die de samenhang door al onze andere keuzes heen garandeert. Doormiddel van existentiële psychoanalyse kunnen we de keuzes die iemand gemaakt heeft, vergelijken en zo de originele keuze achterhalen. Hoewel dit in eerste instantie niet zo zeer te maken lijkt te hebben met narratieve identiteit stelt Sartre dat deze methode bij uitstek geschikt is voor het schrijven van biografieën. Hij heeft de methode dan ook zelf toegepast in studies naar Baudelaire en Genet.

Deze existentiële psychoanalyse hangt ook samen met Sartres vermaarde humanisme, zoals hij dat verdedigt in de lezing *Existentialisme is een humanisme*. In *Het zijn en het niet* stelt Sartre dat existentiële psychoanalyse mogelijk is omdat we zelf allemaal

weten hoe het is om een mens te zijn, en daarmee hoe het is om een originele keuze te hebben. Hoewel dit idee hier louter descriptief is, maakt hij het in de eerdergenoemde lezing normatief: hij stelt dat wij in al onze handelingen een voorbeeld stellen voor hoe iedereen zou moeten handelen en daarmee een soort essentie van de mens poneren.

Hiermee zijn we aan het einde gekomen van deze periode van Sartres werk, die zich kenmerkt door een grote nadruk op vrijheid. Waar Sartre eerst nog vooral bezig was met het afbreken van het Zelf door te laten zien dat het enkel achteraf kan bestaan, stelt hij er hier ideeën voor in de plaats die in plaats van een robuust Zelf te maken hebben met het vrije project dat we zijn. Dat is voor subjectieve identiteit de 'cirkel van zelfheid', voor objectieve identiteit het ideële Zelf aan de horizon van onze handelingen en voor narratieve identiteit de originele keuze die onze keuzes samenbrengt tot een kloppend verhaal.

De laatste periode van Sartres werk kenmerkt zich door een minder grote nadruk op vrijheid, maar een grotere nadruk op de druk die onze omstandigheden op ons uitoefenen. Zijn politieke engagement en grotere interesse in het Marxisme zorgen er voor dat hij zijn eerdere existentiële ideeën combineert met materialistische ideeën over onze omstandigheden. Zijn hoofdwerk uit deze periode is de *Kritiek van de Dialectische Rede*. Hoewel hij nog steeds af en toe gebruik maakt van de term bewustzijn, wordt de focus van subjectiviteit *praxis*: de praktische manier waarop wij ons tot onze omstandigheden verhouden. Omdat we in de kern organismen zijn die willen overleven zijn we altijd op zoek naar manieren om onszelf in leven te houden, zoals voedsel, veiligheid en warmte. Om dit te doen delen we de wereld om ons heen in in bepaalde zones: we maken van een veld landbouwgrond en we maken van stenen een huis. De wereld zo indelen in bepaalde gebieden die het voor ons het makkelijkst maken om te overleven, is de kern van onze *praxis*.

Echter, omdat alle mensen deze *praxis* uitvoeren zijn er vaak onvoorziene gevolgen. Een voorbeeld hiervan is ontbossing: als iemand een paar bomen omhakt om een huis te maken, dan zal deze persoon makkelijker overleven. Echter, als een grote groep mensen de bomen omhakt, kan er erosie optreden die vervolgens leidt tot overstroming en de huizen wegspoelt. De onvoorziene gevolgen van *praxis* sedimenteren zo zelf in de materie. Dit noemt Sartre het 'practico-inerte', de centrale term om Sartres denken over objectiviteit in deze periode te begrijpen. De practico-inerte laag van de werkelijkheid wordt gevormd door menselijke *praxis* maar gaat vervolgens een eigen leven leiden. Als we bijvoorbeeld een huis bouwen, dan gaat een huis ook dingen van ons verwachten zoals onderhoud. Zo manipuleren wij het huis en het huis op zijn

beurt weer ons. Als we dit doortrekken dan kunnen we zien hoe verschillende delen van het practico-inerte elkaar beïnvloeden door mensen te gebruiken. Stoomenergie heeft er bijvoorbeeld voor gezorgd dat wij grote fabriekshallen voor treinen moesten gaan bouwen. Tot slot doet het practico-inerte ook wat wij met onze omstandigheden doen: ons indelen in zones. Zodra er fabriekshallen zijn, zijn er arbeiders en eigenaren. Zo worden we ingedeeld in wat Sartre collectieven noemt.

Er is echter een manier om onze vrijheid terug te winnen ten opzichte van de practico-inerte werkelijkheid en dat is groepsvorming. Waar een collectief altijd gecreëerd wordt door de dingen, ontstaat een groep altijd door gedeelde doelen van de leden van een groep. Zodra een groep mensen door omstandigheden een gezamenlijk doel krijgt, worden ze wat Sartre een groep-in-fusie noemt. Een dergelijke groep kan een enorme impact maken. Hij gebruikt zelf de bestorming van de Bastille tijdens de Franse revolutie als voorbeeld: een collectief van onderdrukte mensen wordt een groep door samen een gebouw te bestormen en zo ontketenen ze een revolutie.

Een groep-in-fusie bestaat echter maar voor een tijdje. Wil een groep langer bestaan dan moeten ze een deel van hun spontaniteit opgeven en weer een inert element inbrengen. Het volgende stadium van groepsvorming is de 'bezworen groep'. Hierbij worden leden op wat voor manier dan ook tot de groep toegelaten door een symbolische handeling zoals een eed. Iemand kan in principe nog steeds bij het project van de groep horen als diegene bezworen is.

Daarna komen nog twee stadia die beide een nog grotere mate van inertie hebben: de organisatie en de institutie. Bij een organisatie krijgen individuele leden bepaalde taken. Het is niet meer zo dat iedereen precies hetzelfde project deelt, maar dat er een overkoepelend project is waarin iedereen een eigen functie heeft. Een goed voorbeeld is een vriendengroep die gaat voetballen en besluit dat één iemand de keeper is en iemand anders de spits, omdat dat past bij waar ze goed in zijn. Een organisatie draait de volgorde om: hier worden eerst functies bepaald en worden daarna leden van de groep in deze functies benoemd (of gezet). Een voorbeeld is een bedrijf waarbij eerst een functie bestaat waar daarna een vacature voor wordt uitgeschreven.

Collectieven die de verschillende vormen van groepen vormen zijn uiteindelijk de motor van de geschiedenis. De grootste collectieven van een samenleving, de klassen, zijn continu in beweging door het vormen van groepen. Zo wordt de geschiedenis een klassenstrijd. Door deze nadruk op groepsvorming brengt Sartre een extra dimensie aan in zijn denken over subjectiviteit en objectiviteit. Subjectieve handelingen sedimenteren in de objectieve werkelijkheid, maar de

subjectieve wezens worden door deze objectieve werkelijkheid weer tot objecten gemaakt. Door groepsvorming kunnen subjectieve wezens hun handelingsmogelijkheden terug krijgen, maar moeten deze weer opgeven als de groepen langer moeten kunnen bestaan.

Dit is echter een vrij abstracte beschrijving van de werkelijkheid. Wij worden allemaal geboren in een wereld waarin al talloze collectieven en groepen bestaan. Sartres denken over het Zelf hangt dan ook vooral samen met hoe wijzelf gevormd worden binnen deze geschiedenis.

Subjectieve identiteit wordt beschreven door wat Sartre het proces van interiorisatie noemt, vooral beschreven in de lezing *Marxisme en Subjectiviteit*. Het onderscheid tussen een subjectieve binnenwereld en een objectieve buitenwereld, waar Sartre al vanaf zijn vroegste werken tegen ageert, wordt ditmaal op een andere manier op losse schroeven gezet. Waar Sartre eerst benadrukte dat bewustzijn leeg is en niets kan bevatten en alles in de objectieve buitenwereld plaatst, maakt hij nu een driedig onderscheid. Subjectiviteit is zelf nog steeds geen wereld, maar de mediatie tussen de binnenwereld en de buitenwereld. Deze binnenwereld is echter niet subjectief maar objectief: het is bijvoorbeeld ons lichaam, onze gewoonten, onze overtuigingen: alle dingen die wij zijn zonder ons daar per se altijd bewust van te zijn. Subjectiviteit bemiddelt tussen deze binnenwereld en de buitenwereld door te reageren op omstandigheden zoals de binnenwereld dat voorschrijft om elementen van de buitenwereld tot zich te nemen. We zijn ons echter niet altijd bewust van hoe dit gebeurt. Een voorbeeld dat Sartre hiervan geeft is traplopen: de meesten van ons kunnen gedachteloos een trap aflopen, maar als we op een gegeven moment hier bewust van worden en bewust onze voeten op een bepaalde manier neerzetten dan wordt het opeens moeilijker. Dit type ervaring, die niet per se onbewust is maar ook niet volledig bewust, noemt Sartre 'geleefde ervaring' en deze geleefde ervaring is dan ook hoe wij in een gegeven situatie bemiddelen tussen onze binnen- en buitenwereld.

De momenten waarbij we wel expliciet bij onze binnenwereld stilstaan, vormen de basis voor objectieve identiteit, in een proces dat Sartre personalisatie noemt. Hoewel het voorbeeld van het traplopen vrij onschuldig is, kunnen we andere voorbeelden bedenken waarbij we gedwongen worden stil te staan bij hoe we eigenlijk in elkaar steken. Sartre geeft het voorbeeld van iemand die pretendeert niet antisemitisch te zijn, maar toch continu zijn afkeer voor Joden laat blijken. Op een gegeven moment wordt die persoon met dit gedrag geconfronteerd en beseft hij zich dat zijn gedachten over Joden in hem zijn geslopen door zijn sociale milieu. Doordat hij gedwongen wordt hierover na te denken kan hij zijn gedachtegoed echt veranderen. In dit soort momenten verschijnt ons Zelf als een

object en Sartre grijpt dan ook expliciet terug op zijn eerdere werken waarin ook de reflectieve aard van het Zelf beschreven wordt. Door ons leven heen hebben we een aantal van dit soort momenten die ons Zelf als object doen verschijnen en uiteindelijk vormgeven.

Narratieve identiteit wordt door Sartre vooral behandeld in het licht van geschiedschrijving. Zijn vrijheidsdenken maakt plaats voor een bepaalde vorm van voorbestemmingsdenken: ons milieu vormt onze binnenwereld en bepaalt het aantal mogelijkheden waar we uit kunnen kiezen. Omdat dit veld van mogelijkheden veel kleiner is, kunnen we achteraf onze levens beschrijven alsof al onze handelingen bepaald worden door onze omstandigheden. Echter, als we de geschiedenis volledig willen begrijpen, dan kunnen we het subjectieve perspectief niet uitsluiten. Dit komt omdat wij door onze keuzes de geschiedenis van betekenis voorzien. We kunnen bijvoorbeeld een verloren veldslag alleen begrijpen als er mensen zijn die als doel hadden gesteld om de veldslag te winnen en daarin gefaald hebben. Dit veronderstelt negativiteit en die bestaat alleen per gratie van subjectiviteit. Een louter objectieve beschrijving van de geschiedenis schiet daarom fundamenteel tekort. Sartre grijpt hierin terug op het vocabulaire uit zijn eerste werken. Hij stelt dat onze levens achteraf altijd noodzakelijk zo verlopen lijken te zijn, maar geleefd moeten worden als avonturen, waarin al onze keuzes wel als vrij ervaren worden en toewerken naar onze doelen. Waar hij dus eerst uiteenzette dat avonturen alleen retrospectief bestaan en onze levens nooit zo geleefd kunnen worden, zegt hij nu dat juist onze levens als avonturen geleefd moeten worden.

Sartres denken over het Zelf in deze laatste periode heeft dus vooral te maken met de manier waarop omstandigheden ons vorm geven. Hij verliest echter nooit uit het oog dat subjectiviteit hier een belangrijke rol in speelt en dat we zonder subjectiviteit deze objectieve omstandigheden nooit kunnen begrijpen.

We zien zo dat Sartre door zijn werk heen verandert in zijn denken over subjectiviteit en het Zelf, maar tevens dat een aantal tendensen hetzelfde blijven. Een van die tendensen is het afbreken van het subjectieve Zelf als gegeven eenheid door te benadrukken dat subjectieve identiteit altijd een proces is dat alleen in de objectieve wereld plaats kan vinden. Ons daadwerkelijke Zelf is altijd een ding onder dingen, iets dat niet in ons zit, maar iets dat aan ons verschijnt. In de eerste en laatste periode is het echt een ding en in de middelste periode is het veeleer een niet te bereiken ideaal en daarmee een niets. Toch is het Zelf nooit een subjectief ding zoals de traditionele Cartesiaanse opvatting behelst. Wat betreft narratieve identiteit is Sartres denken minder continu. In zijn vroege werk zegt hij dat we continu over ons leven vertellen maar dat ons leven geen narratieve structuur heeft. In het middelste werk zegt hij dat ons leven wel een

structuur heeft die we in een biografie kunnen vastleggen, maar dat we deze enkel achteraf kunnen bepalen doormiddel van existentiële psychoanalyse. Wat hier belangrijk bij is, is dat deze structuur vormgegeven wordt door onze keuzes. In de laatste periode zegt hij dat de narratieve structuur van onze levens van te voren vastligt, maar dat we ons leven desalniettemin niet kunnen leven alsof het verhaal al geschreven is. Een belangrijk element van Sartres denken over narrativiteit blijft behouden: een geleefd leven en een verteld leven verschillen fundamenteel van elkaar.

Zo heb ik laten zien hoe Sartres denken over subjectiviteit en het Zelf inderdaad bestaat uit het minimaliseren van subjectiviteit ten faveure van objectiviteit, maar dat hij dit altijd doet door onze subjectieve beleving op de voorgrond te zetten. Daarmee bewandelt Sartre een bijzonder pad tussen de gevaren Cartesianisme en reductionisme, waarin hij zo veel mogelijk recht probeert te doen aan zowel de subjectieve als objectieve laag van de werkelijkheid – en de subjectieve en objectieve laag van onszelf.

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(in Dutch)

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Curriculum Vitae

Simon Gusman was born in 1990 in Utrecht, the Netherlands. He received a bachelor's and master's degree in Philosophy from Radboud University in 2011 and in 2013 respectively, both *cum laude*. He started work on his dissertation in 2014, funded by an NWO 'promoties in de geesteswetenschappen' grant. During this project he has published several peer-reviewed articles in journals such as the *Journal for the British Society for Phenomenology* and *Open Philosophy*. He spent a period as a guest researcher at the Center for Subjectivity Research at the University of Copenhagen from August to September 2016. In 2018 he published *Avonturen bestaan niet* together with Arjen Kleinherenbrink, a book that investigates notions of adventure in contemporary popular culture. During the last years of his PhD, he has been the secretary of the Center for Contemporary European Philosophy in the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies in Radboud University.