

SARTRE'S THINKING OF MARX

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## ABSTRACT

Jean-Paul Sartre's central purpose in writing the Critique of Dialectical Reason was to render intelligible Karl Marx's principle that circumstances make people just as much as people make circumstances. With the intent of complementing Marx's work, Sartre sought to theoretically connect the marxist outline of social process with its constituting parts--individuals. He sought to do this without ascribing to circumstances a superorganic existence, and in terms of the general structure of individual action per se. In place of a super organic being he attributed unintended consequences to all individual action (as well as intended consequences). The actual influence of circumstances upon people he explained by the fact that products bear some trace of the intentions of those who made them. The product becomes a sign, and people construct about them a world of signs.

Within this world of signs people tend to become separated as mediations between constructed things. It is in this sense, that is, in explaining how social relations tend to occur indirectly through the products of praxis, that Sartre sought to justify a rejection of organicism by developing his interpretation of Marx's theory of fetishism.

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## INTRODUCTION

This work is of an expository nature, outlining, organizing and clarifying the various aspects of Jean-Paul Sartre's self-proclaimed marxist work, Critique of Dialectical Reason (hereafter referred to as the Critique). Hence the title, "Sartre's Thinking of Marx". Because Sartre's work is about Marx's work, it is important to note that it is not at all the purpose of this work to assess the fit between Sartre's theory and Karl Marx's. Any references in this work to what Marx himself wrote, therefore, stand only to distinguish Sartre's own interpretations and ideas of Marx's thought.

Sartre's thinking of Marx's work can be summarised very briefly. Sartre's central purpose in the Critique is to render intelligible Marx's principle that circumstances make people just as much as people make circumstances. By "intelligible" Sartre meant to explain how circumstances make people as a result of people making circumstances. According to Sartre, Marx focused upon showing how circumstances make people. To complement Marx's work, Sartre sought to theoretically connect the marxist outline of social process with its basic, constituting parts, i.e., individuals, without ascribing to circumstances a super

organic existence. Sartre sought to explain how circumstances make people, not in terms of any historically specific group actions, but rather in terms of the general structure of individual action per se. With respect, then, to Sartre's general purpose and approach, there are four general concepts of central significance in Sartre's work.

In chapter one, Sartre's dialectical approach itself will be expounded with respect to its theoretical role of making intelligible the influence of circumstances upon persons without reducing either circumstances or persons to the status of the other.

In chapter two, Sartre's conceptualization of the role of human products in social organization will be clarified. Special attention is paid to Sartre's assertion that persons are necessarily alienated to some degree from the products of their labour.

In chapter three, Sartre's concept of scarcity as a perennial condition will be articulated.

The fourth concept of central significance in Sartre's work is that of individual action, or praxis. This concept is first articulated in the first chapter in the section entitled, "Existential Freedom", and later clarified in the third chapter with respect to Sartre's concept of scarcity.



## Chapter 1

### Dialectic, Science and Marxism

#### Biographical Introduction

Jean-Paul Sartre was born in Paris in 1905. He did not vote nor was he active in politics in any way until the year 1940.<sup>1</sup> Before 1940, Sartre lived in Nazi Germany for a year and studied under Heidegger. His first novel, Nausea, was published in 1938, and from the mouth of the main character of the novel came sarcasm of the bourgeoisie. In 1939, Sartre was drafted into the French army. His whole unit was captured in June 1940 at the Maginot Line, and Sartre was a POW from June 1940 to March 1941. By altering his military papers and demonstrating that one of his eyes was almost totally blind, he convinced the German authorities that he was not in the army, but that his capture was a mistake. So Sartre returned to Paris and to teaching at the Lycee Pasteur, but also sought out others, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, with Simone De Beauvoir, by bicycling throughout unoccupied France. They wanted to found a resistance group, but let the idea go when they got no help.

The Communist Party (CP, for short) of the time was suspicious about how Sartre got out of the concentration

camp, and so called him a "German spy". However, once the allies were sure to win the war, the CP tried to form a coalition with resistance organizations in France, and denied ever having called Sartre a spy. In fact, they invited Sartre to help work on the Comité National des Écrivains, which Sartre immediately agreed to.

During the years 1943 to 1944 Sartre produced a major philosophical work, Being and Nothingness, among articles and works of fiction. Indeed, Sartre was the most significant representative of the existential left. Immediately after the war, traditional values of French society were in question, and the tone of anguish and depression in existentialism seemed to resonate with the general mood of France. Just when the world seemed to be swept up in a vast current of technology and war, existentialism was there to empathize with the predicament of individual existence.<sup>2</sup>

Even though in Being and Nothingness (hereafter signified by BN) Sartre propounded that the individual had absolute freedom, he equally propounded that men will continually demonstrate bad faith; that is, that people will tend to pretend that they are objects without freedom. (Aside: throughout this work the terms "men", "persons", and the hypothetical "he" will refer to both females and males. No sexist bias is intended; rather, it is merely convenient given the lack of an androgynous pronoun in the English

language.) This caused the communists, and intellectuals in general, to wonder whether Sartre was really undermining revolutionary action by implying that all is futile in the last analysis, since revolutionary action presupposes that individuals accept their own freedom to act for themselves. Consequently, Sartre and the marxists debated with one another. Marxists criticized Sartre for being in a nebulous realm of the individual problematic which lay somewhere between historical materialism and idealism. In 1945, Sartre defended himself against the criticisms of the communists in a classic lecture called "Existentialism is a Humanism". Here he pointed out that existentialism is not an expression of utter despair, but rather an expression of man's freedom through a lucid account of reality. Furthermore, for Sartre, this freedom was the basis of any revolutionary action. Sartre went on to declare that he would not relinquish this freedom to a group of strangers that constituted a political party he had no control over. Inevitably, then, Sartre and the CP stood in opposition to one another.

In October 1945, the review Les Temps Modernes was founded by Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and others. This review served as a source of literature for existential leftists, and as a stable base for an independent "party".

In 1948, Sartre participated in founding the

Rassemblement Democratique Revolutionnaire--the RDR for short. For Sartre, the RDR was a part of a revolutionary movement rather than a hierarchical structure. Sartre and another leader of the RDR named Rousset held a press conference, and shortly afterwards organized a public meeting in which one thousand people attended. After these two events, the RDR as a whole sponsored a "day of studies", which five thousand people attended; and in January 1949, the RDR passed petitions against the Indo-China War. All during these events, Les Temps Modernes and other journals published articles written by Sartre about the synthesis of existentialism and marxism. But the whole escapade amounted to little more than creating another branch of the French Left.<sup>3</sup>

Rousset eventually took to actively scheming against the CP, and the rest of the RDR was behind him. Sartre disagreed with this sort of tactic, and so officially resigned from the RDR in October 1949. The RDR collapsed shortly thereafter.

Sartre then took sides on the Korean War. He saw the Americans as the real cause, even though the communist North Korean army attacked first and later tried to hide that fact. In Sartre's view, MacArthur taunted the North Korean Army into attacking. This position brought Sartre close to allying with the CP.

Shortly after, in 1952, when the French government

violently smashed a CP demonstration, Sartre wrote in defence of the CP to the point of declaring a necessity for the CP itself. In other words, Sartre informally allied himself with the CP. Indeed, through fellow-travelling with the CP, Sartre lost the friendship of Albert Camus and Merleau-Ponty--other leaders of the French Left.

From 1952 to 1956, Sartre was allied to the CP: he spoke publicly with a CP member, Jacques Duclos; Sartre joined the Soviet-led World Peace Movement; he had positive things to say about his visit to the Soviet Union; and he was an officer of the Franco-Soviet Friendship Association. Sartre's activities were commended by the CP newspaper, that is, until Sartre spoke out against the Soviet Union when they invaded Hungary in 1956. This speaking out marked the beginning of a drastic break with the CP, since they were in favour of the Soviet invasion. Sartre went back to his existential marxism of Les Temps Modernes and eventually had his Critique of Dialectical Reason published in 1960.

After this, rather than produce the proposed second volume of the Critique, Sartre produced the first volume of a biographical study on Flaubert. It was published in 1971 with the title, L'Idiot de la Famille.<sup>4</sup>

With failing health settling in, Sartre travelled around with Simone de Beauvoir during the last years of his life, occasionally giving talks for working class groups, until he died in 1980.

What, therefore, is this freedom of which Sartre spoke? At this early point it is worth defining Sartre's concept of human freedom so that future references to it will be clearly understood. Thus, elements of Sartre's existentialism, as put forth in BN and other early writings, will be discussed. However, it is outside of the scope of this thesis to assess whether or not Sartre has remained true to the existentialism he advocated in his earlier works, particularly in BN.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the following discussion of Sartre's theory of freedom will involve only those concepts which are implied or are consistent with the social theory contained in the Critique. That BN differs from the Critique in some ways, Sartre himself has pointed out.<sup>6</sup> However, as we shall see, the central concepts on the nature of consciousness put forth in BN complement the Critique.

In general, this work is concerned only with Sartre's mature marxist work.

### Existential Freedom

For Sartre, consciousness is a nothingness, utterly devoid of form and content, until it is a consciousness of something. So, all consciousness is consciousness of something.<sup>7</sup> This is one principle of pre-reflective or "primary" consciousness. Pre-reflective consciousness is merely consciousness of some or other object, and not of

"the manner in which the object is given".<sup>8</sup> A second principle of pre-reflective consciousness, is that all consciousness is intentional. (By the term "intentional" it is meant that a particular point of view of an object is perceived, rather than the object itself as a totally unambiguous thing.<sup>9</sup>) A third principle of pre-reflective consciousness is that it is, by definition, self-consciousness. To clarify, when I am aware of some object, such as a chair, I am also naturally aware that I am aware of some object. Only when I intentionally make myself aware of my being aware of some object do I go beyond pre-reflective consciousness to an awareness, not only of the object itself, but also of the particular manner in which I see it. (Sartre gives the following reason why consciousness ought to be conceptualized as simultaneously self-consciousness: "unless we are to fall into a whole reflexive series of willing and willed wills, we must grant that this reflection back upon itself corresponds to the infrastructure of will ... (However,) what is involved here is not knowledge, which supposes object-subject duality, but the translucidity intrinsic to consciousness as its existential condition".<sup>10</sup> In other words, consciousness is only itself as a singular entity, and not a plurality in any sense that may involve a concealment of consciousness from consciousness, since concealment implies duality of one from another. How can one conceal something from oneself without

knowing what it is one is concealing? This logic is also the basis of Sartre's critique of Freud's theory of the human psyche.<sup>11</sup>

However, reflective consciousness is only achieved mediately through the formation of an ego. The ego is not part of consciousness itself. The ego, rather, is the result of consciousness making of itself an object of reflection, freezing a memory of a moment or moments so to speak, thus leaving the ego as an image of consciousness-past. Consciousness can never "catch" itself directly. Consciousness will catch itself when a beam of light can place itself in its own spotlight.

Thus consciousness itself is neither part of the ego nor part of the material world, in an ontological sense. Indeed, consciousness is not even a part of the physical body that seems to possess it. Man begins with an existence without definition or essence. In this sense consciousness is absolutely free. Consciousness "borrows" its being from the world in the way emptiness borrows its existence from the hull of an abandoned ship. Since the objects of consciousness are things, consciousness itself is not a thing. In this sense, consciousness is not what it is and is what it is not.<sup>12</sup> Thus, man determines himself through the mediation of that something of which his consciousness is always consciousness of.

The idea that existence precedes essence implies that



there are no a priori values or standards to live by. Consequently, the individual is condemned to chose his/her own habits and attitude. But determination of self, of course, does not occur in a vacuum. The outside world always supplies the raw content from which we are built. In Search For a Method Sartre develops this notion of self-choice by taking into account childhood development and the influence of one's socio-economic condition. The result is that the individual at some point in life will be in a position to make something out of what he has been made.<sup>13</sup>

In other words, the individual will be in a position to chose his own values and goals in life. To merely adopt one's parent's values is one instance of such a choice of self. But this choice of values and goals necessarily extends, according to Sartre, to also choosing a moral position of what one ought to do that applies to all men.<sup>14</sup> In effect, every individual becomes exemplary of a particular moral system.

These values are expressed by the goals one works toward realizing. One "projects", so to speak. One would not have to work at realizing one's goals, though, if the conception and realization of the goal were virtually simultaneous. As Sheridan Jr. puts it, "if a man could totally succeed, he could not begin".<sup>15</sup> The point is, freedom does not make sense in a world without adversity. A certain "coefficient of adversity" is implied by the notion

of the project. In this sense, as Sheridan Jr. points out, adversity is simultaneously opportunity. But the significant implication of the project as determining adversity is that Sartre's notion of human freedom has never been an affirmation of absolute freedom concretely. Indeed, in BN, the situation was the source of adversity; yet in the Critique the situation escalates in importance by being also a source of external influence. That the individual acts and chooses in a situation that is also acting on him does not mean that human freedom is a powerless entity. Quite the contrary, human freedom is the active source of all this jumbled, mutually influencing activity. In fact, for Sartre, Marx's statement "that circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances"<sup>16</sup> only makes sense if man is conceived of as a being which is not what he is and is what he is not.<sup>17</sup> In other words, historical materialism only makes sense, according to Sartre, if man determines himself through the mediation of that something of which his consciousness is always consciousness of.

What one is conscious of is also other consciousnesses. In BN Sartre advocated that the experience of shame "could only be explained by the notion of being-looked-at" by others.<sup>18</sup> In later writings, the fact of social oppression presupposed a plurality of subjectivities for Sartre, since only subjects can oppress.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, also put forth in BN, is the idea that being-for-others is

constitutive of human reality.<sup>20</sup> The human situation necessarily involved, in BN, either the free submission of other freedoms to one's own, as in sadism, or the free submission of one's own freedom to that of others', as in masochism.<sup>21</sup> The point of these various ideas, taken from both Sartre's existentialist and marxist writings, is that freedoms are necessarily interdependent. It is only a question of how.

This idea of the necessary interdependence of a plurality of freedoms Sartre later stated quite explicitly in "Existentialism is a Humanism":

(Our freedom) depends entirely on the freedom of others and their freedom depends on ours.<sup>22</sup>

Thomas Flynn names this idea the "universal freedom conditional"; it basically means that an individual cannot be free in a concrete sense unless everyone in the same social milieu is similarly free.<sup>23</sup> Sartre explicitly states that to reduce the concept of freedom "to a certain inner freedom that man could retain in any situation ... is a pure idealist hoax",<sup>24</sup> because it involves the separation of thought from action and provides no way of distinguishing the situation of the slave from that of the tyrant. Sartre's notion of human freedom, therefore, is not to be associated with the image of isolated, independent individuals. Even if atomised individuals were abstracted as the ahistorical norm in BN, such is surely not the case

in the Critique. This focus on real practical and social freedom is part of Sartre's shift toward marxism.

### Dialectical Nominalism

Before one can understand a single page of Sartre's Critique, one absolutely must understand Sartre's concept of the dialectic as a philosophy. This philosophy Sartre formally labels "dialectical nominalism", and he begins to explain it in contrast to positivism:

Of course, the determinism of the positivists is necessarily a form of materialism: whatever its subject matter, it endows it with the characteristics of mechanical materiality, namely inertia and exterior causation. But it normally rejects the reinteriorisation of the different moments in a synthetic progression. Where we see the developmental unity of a single process, the positivists will attempt to show several independent, exterior factors of which the event under consideration is the resultant. What the positivists reject is a monism of interpretation.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, where the positivist sees independent and exterior factors the dialectician sees a unity. Moreover, where the positivist would see these factors as causes only, the dialectician would see these aspects of the whole as equally cause and effect.

Sartre distinguished his dialectical approach from the positivist approach in the following ways. One, the positivist, natural science, approach assumes a model of mechanical cause and effect, that is, ultimately, of classical determinism. For Sartre this amounts to a form of

idealism, because it involves a denial of "all real subjectivity in the interests of objectivity".<sup>26</sup>

Two, in the process of scientific investigation, the experimenter, strictly speaking, is not accounted for as a part of the experimental system. Should the experimenter be included as a part of the experimental system, then a theory of consciousness must be developed in order to fully understand the nature of human knowledge. On a wider scale, what is called for "is a theory which situates knowing in the world".<sup>27</sup> In other words, both knowledge and the objects of knowledge are not to be treated as independent, exterior factors.

These two points concerning real subjectivity and the nature of knowledge constitute the bedrock of Sartre's dialectical approach, as well as his critique of positivism.

Consider, though, that Sartre makes a particular claim about how experimenter and experimental system, knowledge and the object of knowledge, are connected:

Dialectical knowledge ... is knowledge of the dialectic ... It is grounded on a fundamental claim both about the structure of the real and about that of our praxis. We assert simultaneously that the process of knowledge is dialectical, that the movement of the object (whatever it may be) is itself dialectical, and that these two dialectics are one and the same.<sup>28</sup>

In effect, human history is lived dialectically, that is, the process of history has a dialectical structure; at the same time, the way in which individual men, together, understand human history is by a dialectical rationality,

that is, by a grasp of it as a unified whole. In short, it is "one and the same thing to ... live it and to know it".<sup>29</sup>

The implication here about the positivist is that he does not recognize his own dialectical comprehension as dialectical; he severs the conception from the conceiving, and treats the conceived as a thing that exists independent of himself. Sartre describes this alienation of reason from itself with respect to the hypothesis about a dialectic of nature, i.e., dialectical materialism:

The procedure of discovering dialectical rationality in praxis, and then projecting it, as an unconditional law, on to the inorganic world, and then returning to the study of societies and claiming that this opaquely irrational law of nature conditions them, seems to us to be a complete aberration. A human relation, which can be recognised only because we are ourselves human, is encountered, hypostatized, stripped of every human characteristic and, finally, this irrational fabrication is substituted for the genuine relation which was encountered in the first place.<sup>30</sup>

Since for Sartre the world as man knows it is a unified whole, there cannot be a law which conditions human history from the outside. This dialectic of nature would be an external dialectic (law). Moreover, it would be an 'opaquely irrational' and 'unintelligible' law since it would be independent of man. Consequently, it must be one and the same thing to live and to know a dialectical reality; otherwise, the world will be unintelligible. In other words, otherwise it will be the external mystery of which man is no part of, yet subject to like a billiard

ball. (However, there is still the question of an internal law of human development.)

If, then, man is not determined by any external law, the nature of human development becomes something of a paradox. First of all, the nature of human development can then only be grounded upon itself; and, in fact, since it is humans which ground it, it must also ground itself. Sartre states this idea as follows:

If there is such a thing as a dialectical reason, it is revealed and established in and through human praxis, to men in a given society at a particular moment of its development.<sup>31</sup>

What such an assertion raises, though, is the whole question of verification. In other words, how can the dialectic, as the structure of the process of knowledge and the object of knowledge, be proven, established, verified, etc., as really the case, i.e., true? Sartre clarifies this issue for the reader to some degree in the following lines:

No one can discover the dialectic while keeping the point of view of analytical reason; which means, among other things, that no one can discover the dialectic while remaining external to the object under consideration ... The praxis of everyone, as a dialectical movement, must reveal itself to the individual as the necessity of his own praxis ... The dialectic as the living logic of action is invisible to a contemplative reason: it appears in the course of praxis as a necessary moment of it; in other words, it is created anew in each action ... and becomes a theoretical and practical method when action in the course of development begins to give an explanation of itself. In the course of this action, the dialectic appears to the individual as rational transparency in so far

as he produces it.<sup>32</sup>

Here Sartre has revealed his epistemology; he has given away the secret, so to speak, of how others can discover the apodicticity of the dialectic as well. The dialectic is simply self-evident to an individual at work as the general structure of his activity. This transparency of praxis to itself Sartre names "comprehension".<sup>33</sup>

It is worth delving into this concept of comprehension a little further. First of all, it is of the same nature as the automatic self-consciousness of what was referred to above as pre-reflective consciousness: to be conscious is necessarily also to be non-reflectively, or merely naturally, conscious of being conscious (by definition). Comprehension refers to the same principle, only with respect to praxis, where consciousness is but a moment of praxis. What comprehension essentially comprehends is the intentionality of praxis, either in itself or in another praxis (since both are identical in structure).<sup>34</sup> In effect, the teleological structure of activity is "grasped" within the activity itself. Thus, the structure of activity is self-evident, or, as Sartre put it, rationally transparent, to thought, which is a moment of that activity. And if the structure of activity is dialectical, then it follows, as Sartre has asserted, 'that the praxis of everyone, as a dialectical movement, must reveal itself to the individual as the necessity of his own



praxis'. Hence, to make the point absolutely clear, there is no way to justify that action has a dialectical structure in a way suitable to positivist logic; "if thought were to understand itself as a dialectical process, it could not formulate its discovery except as a simple fact";<sup>35</sup> that is, to recognize itself as a dialectical process would be precisely that, a recognition of a fact, not an interpretation of itself.

Through comprehension there can be "intelligibility". Intelligibility refers precisely to intentionality, and that is why "there is no such thing as intelligibility in the sciences of nature":<sup>36</sup> an inert, lifeless thing does not work to realize goals; nor does it define itself by its future. In short, lifeless things do not intend. And this phenomenon of intentionality, which cannot be known other than as a simple fact, is precisely what sets man apart from the purely material world.

Consequently, when the experimenter uses the logic of natural science to explain man, his logic, fashioned after inert things, is inappropriate. To be more specific, the experimenter must fragment the social world into independent parts in order to use the logic. And this "contradicts" the entire dialectical approach, as the following passage from Sartre's essay, "Materialism and Revolution", clarifies:

The mainspring of all dialectics is the idea of totality. In it, phenomena are never isolated appearances. When they occur together, it is always within the high unity

of a whole, and they are bound together by inner relationships, that is, the presence of one modifies the other in its inner nature. ... For ... two phenomena to occur in intimate union and modify one another reciprocally, we should be unable to decide whether we are dealing with two separate terms or with only one.<sup>37</sup>

And here Sartre hits the nail on the head, so to speak. The act of distinguishing itself becomes more visibly an arbitrary, human determination of the world. The dialectician does not say this and that are different, separate, distinct, etc., in the same way as the positivist does. Again, according to Sartre, "what the positivists reject is a monism of interpretation".<sup>38</sup> Thus, when the dialectician speaks of a monism of, say, two social phenomena, the positivist might respond, "But it is still really two". And here the difference between them lies in the word "two", particularly in regard to the associated implication of dependence and independence. "Two" connotes prominent, clearly separate, discrete elements through positivist lenses; the distinction is as clear-cut as true and false is in classical, boolean logic. Yet it is not unreasonable to assume that a range of combinations, mixtures, shades of grey, etc., may exist between these two conceptual extremes. The dialectical point of view does not ignore or rule out this middle ground. In the way that intuitionism (i.e., the principle that  $x$  or not  $x$  is not necessarily true) takes into consideration what is between boolean extremes of true and false, dialectics takes into

account what is between the positivist extremes of voluntarism and determinism.

In fact, in one sense, Sartre's dialectic is a theory of action that does not imply either voluntarism or determinism. The actor is thought of as neither totally determined by his environment nor as completely free to realize whatever end his heart desires. The material environment constitutes a resistance and limitation to practical freedom, it does not determine it. In being the instrument of a practical action, the environment "conditions" the action. There is a dialectical relationship between man and matter: "in the indissoluble couple of 'matter' and 'human undertakings', each term modifies the other".<sup>39</sup> For the dialectician, these two ideas, freedom and necessity, cannot be disentangled as independent. In fact, one does not make sense without the other.

Asserting the dialectical approach over the positivist approach is significant for Sartre, because only on the basis of the dialectical approach can it be understood that man makes history while at the same time history makes man. According to Sartre, positivism is incapable of understanding this mutual influence of persons and conditions without reducing one to the other.

### Totalisation

'In the indissoluble couple' of matter and man each term modifies the other. This relation between matter and human undertakings is conceptualised abstractly as a dialectical circularity between totalisation and totality. Since these terms are quite fundamental to the Critique, some clarification is appropriate.

The term "totalisation" corresponds, as Frederic Jameson (1971) noted, to what Sartre also has referred to as the "project". Both totalisation and project involve an imagined future goal through which to organise present means and strategies. Both involve making of the environment a real whole, that is, a reorganization of things such that a means to an end may be achieved. The project, though, only denotes individual, human action, essential as it is. As a category the project can be thought of as a proper subset of totalisation, since totalisation subsumes the project, and more. The term totalisation may apply indifferently to either understanding, as a result of the experience of action, or to history, as the whole of all human acts.<sup>40</sup> This is because human action itself, as the basis of both understanding and history, Sartre attributed as having a dialectical structure.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, in that totalisation can refer to a multiplicity of individual acts, i.e., to history or to society, it implies that there can be distinct levels of totalisation where some levels are more encompassing than

others.<sup>42</sup>

In essence, totalisation is a process, a description of an interaction or of organised interactions. For Sartre, the totality relates to it as its "regulative principle".<sup>43</sup>

Sartre defines a totality by three characteristics, which are also its principles.<sup>44</sup> One, a totality is distinct from the sum of its parts in the way, say, a watch is distinct from the sum of its cogs and wheels. (But the watch does not thus represent a distinct ontological entity. This is not necessarily implied. Rather, Sartre elaborates upon the relation of the part to the whole as the dominant attribute of the part within the whole. The part retains other suppressed attributes. In this sense, the cog in the watch is potentially a cog for a pulley or some other machine. It will be easier to develop the significance of this point of view when dealing with persons in relation to groups.) The second point is that, as a whole, the totality is present in each one of its parts in one form or another. Lastly, the totality is related to itself either through one or more of its parts or through the relations between some or all of them.<sup>45</sup>

Considered from another angle, the totality is something static and without life of its own. As such it is part of the realm of the in-itself, which means it is simply what it is. The totality is the product or "vestige of a past action (just as the unity of a medallion is the passive

remnant of its being struck)".<sup>46</sup> This aspect of the totality will be discussed in a later section on worked matter.

To return to the conceptual relation between totality and totalisation, the totalisation, in accordance with Sartre's definition of the totality, makes a whole that is distinct from the sum of its parts. Moreover, the totalisation endows each part of the whole with a common attribute, that is, it makes each action an expression of its future end. Also, and in accordance with the third defining characteristic of a totality, the totalisation relates its future end to itself through the mediation of its organised means. What remains after the totalizing activity, as Jameson so aptly put it, are the "husks of dead projects, traces of human action ... long since vanished",<sup>47</sup> i.e., totalities.

### Bonds of Interiority

Considered yet more deeply and abstractly, totalisation is a bond of interiority. Sartre described these bonds in the following passage:

Within a totality ... each partial totality, as a determination of the whole, contains the whole as its fundamental meaning and, consequently, also contains the other partial totalities; the secret of each part therefore lies in the others. In practical terms, this means that each part determines all the others in their relations to the whole, that is to say, in their individual existence. At this level, the truly dialectical type of intelligibility appears, combining the direct conflict between the parts ... with the

constantly shifting hidden conflict which modifies each part from within in response to internal changes in any of the others, and establishing alterity in each part both as what it is and as what it is not, as that which it possesses and as that by which it is possessed. With these remarks I have merely described the form of connection proper to these objects, namely the bond of interiority.<sup>48</sup>

This description can be broken down into what Joachim Israel (1979) formally posits as the five properties of a dialectical relation.

First of all, bonds of interiority, or, in other words, dialectical relations, presuppose that those elements they relate are part of the same whole or totality, that is, bound together within the same organised body.<sup>49</sup> This property is evident in the above cited passage in that Sartre began with the phrase, 'within a totality'.

Second, bonds of interiority imply that those elements they relate are distinct, that is, separate and different. Again, Sartre referred to this formal property in the above passage by having stated that each element has an 'individual existence'. An individual existence merely presupposes unique differences. For him, this individual existence was another way of stating that each part determines all the other parts. He went on to state that there is an 'alterity in each part'. (Alterity, generally, is a relation of separation, as opposed to reciprocity, which is a relation of togetherness and mutuality, though not one of unity). It is through the property of alterity

as endemic to a relation of interiority that Sartre was never forced to conclude that the individual is completely absorbed and lost to the "group". As Aron (1975) put it, "Sartrean consciousness remains permanently condemned to solitude at the same time as it is condemned to freedom: the one implies the other. But this individual solitude does not exclude the community of action".<sup>50</sup>

Three, bonds of interiority presuppose that those elements they relate are interdependent.<sup>51</sup> As Sartre phrased it in the above passage, 'each part determines all the others in their relations to the whole'. He repeated this idea by further stating that each part is 'modified from within in response to internal changes in any of the others'. This property is important, because it diverges from traditional, natural science views of cause and effect.

Four, those elements bound by bonds of interiority are opposed as dialectical opposites.<sup>52</sup> This property suggests the classical, dialectical notation of thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis. For Sartre, the synthesis of thesis and anti-thesis fall under the rubric of the negation of the negation, and we will look into this process in detail further on through Sartre's account of need. In the passage above, though, this property of opposition is referred to as, one, 'the direct conflict between the parts', and, two, as a 'constantly shifting hidden conflict'. On the one hand, conflict occurs as a direct



relation between parts; but, on the other hand, it also occurs as an indirect, mediated relation between parts. Sartre may be anticipating the role of inanimate, worked-upon matter by referring to a hidden, indirect conflict. Thus, this point will be returned to in a latter section on "counter-finality", i.e., the unintended consequences of human action which return to oppose humans in the guise of a force without a human author.

What is also worth noting at this introductory stage is that dialectical opposition between contradictory terms produces "a new reality", a qualitative leap so to speak, where old contradictions are both preserved and transcended in a new differentiation of a whole, which is intelligible in terms of them, yet not reducible to them.<sup>53</sup> Thus, if the whole is indeed a new reality, and not reducible to the contradictory terms which produced it, then dialectical reason itself cannot be used to make predictions. Similarly, "for positivists prediction is possible only to the extent that the current order of succession re-enacts a previous order of succession; and so the future repeats the past".<sup>54</sup>

Fifth, and lastly, all those elements related by bonds of interiority have something in common. For example, if one is referring to a dialectical totality of inert, material things, then all those things will have in common the relational property of being products of human praxis.<sup>55</sup>

For Sartre, 'each partial totality contains the whole as its fundamental meaning'.

In a footnote Sartre defined his particular meaning of the word "whole" as "the unity of the totalizing act in so far as it diversifies itself and embodies itself in totalized diversities".<sup>56</sup> In this sense, the elements of the whole are really actions. As actions, they may be thought of as steps taken or means used in the realization of a future end, because the future end, that is, the result desired by humans as the consequence of their labour, for Sartre, is the unity of the totalizing act. The totalisation itself is a continually developing unification of the practical field making a whole in accordance with the principles of the totality.

#### A Method of Interpretation

In effect, totalisation presupposes dialectical relations (bonds of interiority), given that it operates according to the principles of the totality. In affirmation of this point, Sartre wrote:

If dialectical reason exists, then, from the ontological point of view, it can only be a developing totalisation, occurring where the totalisation occurs, and, from the epistemological point of view, it can only be the accessibility of that totalisation to a knowledge which is itself, in principle, totalizing in its procedures ... Dialectical knowledge must itself be a moment of the totalisation.<sup>57</sup>

In ordinary language, the significance of this statement is

that totalisation presupposes dialectical reason, and dialectical reason presupposes totalisation. Consequently, if Sartre is able to make the social world intelligible in terms of his dialectical logic, then human history itself is a totalizing process, that is, "an orientation towards the future and a totalizing preservation of the past".<sup>58</sup>

Given the above exposition of totalisation and bonds of interiority, the following passage from a footnote in the Critique on the nature of totalisation is unusually explicit and clear:

The whole (as a totalizing act) becomes the relation among the parts. In other words, totalisation is a mediation between the parts ... as a relation of interiority: within and through a totalisation, each part is mediated by all in its relation to each, and each is a mediation between all.<sup>59</sup>

What emerges from such descriptions is a very complex picture of an interactive process where the activity of each part in relation to any other part always involves all the other parts within the totality. Events do not occur in separation, as we might normally think of as a type of independence; rather, separation in a totality is a definite type of relation among parts. To make the picture more complex, these perpetually related parts interact in a way such that each changes in terms of changes occurring in the other part; it is as if both interactants dissolve into one another, in terms of each other, and with respect to the totality of all other parts, and form a qualitatively new

reorganization or synthesis.

This is what the process of totalisation means for Sartre, plus or minus one or two details; and this is the logic with which he will describe individual praxis, group praxes, and history. For him, these things accounted for in this way will make these processes translucent and self-evident to a mind which is in itself totalizing in its procedures, i.e., to the one who reads the Critique.

For Sartre, the "dialectical investigation must supply its own intelligibility";<sup>60</sup> in other words, these formal propositions about the dialectic "need only be established on the basis of a totality (any totality)" in order to be comprehended as apodictic.<sup>61</sup> A perfect example of this "method" of revealing the nature of social reality comes out in Sartre's characterization of need, which will be described in detail in chapter three. Sartre depicts labour as first lack, and then need, and then affirms that they negate one another and thereby produce a new totality of organism and environment; and then he concludes by claiming to have revealed the dialectical character of action.<sup>62</sup> This is Sartre's manner of proof, or method.

George Lichtheim (1963) refers to this method as essentially an "imaginative grasp" of something in all its concreteness. Furthermore, this "imaginative understanding of the single event is the *raison d'etre* of existentialism".<sup>63</sup> Obviously it is an operation that

occurs wholly within the intellectual mind, and is entirely vulnerable to ego-centrism. (Max Weber's method of "verstehen", and the concocting of "ideal types", is a similar method.) Lichtheim criticizes Sartre by saying, "'matter' and 'consciousness', when brought face to face, turn out to be linked only by the tenuous bond of (Sartre's) own speculative construction" .<sup>64</sup> The problem lies, for Lichtheim, in the fact that interpretation--and Sartre's method, as imaginative understanding, is interpretation--is not necessarily apodictic. One logically sound interpretation of reality is as good as another.

Sheridan Jr. takes a different stance with regard to Sartre's method of studying reality. The following passage reveals this stance, as well as inspires questions which demand considerations inappropriate in this work. ~~56~~, Sheridan's position will only be noted here: "Sartre has never abandoned the view formed in his phenomenological period that knowledge is ultimately intuitive, thus, ultimately expressed in description ... If what is intuited is tangled, it must be described as such and dealt with in ways that maintain the features which are intuited. Since, phenomenologically speaking, it is what the phenomenon is which guides inquiry and explanation, rather than the reverse, we cannot permit our predilections to lead us to an explaining which becomes an explaining away ... It is a mistake to regard Sartre's descriptions as illustrations,

and it is also a mistake to consider his plays primarily as devices to exhibit principles or notions already articulated in his philosophical works ... Where description is utilized, it must be treated as such and not as a persuasive device".<sup>65</sup>

The whole issue of Sartre's "methodology" centers on whether he is describing reality or constructing a model with which to fit reality into. Maintaining an earthly basis through seeking the intelligibility of social phenomenon constitutes one strategy for avoiding fitting reality to a preconceived model, but is not an absolute safeguard. "Earthly", intelligible ideas, true for one historically specific situation, may also be erroneously generalised to earlier historically specific situations.

#### The Purpose of the Critique

At many points in the Critique Sartre refers to Marx, and the status of Marx's ideas with respect to his own work. At one point, Sartre referred to Marx's work as a source of inspiration: "my formalism, which is inspired by that of Marx, consists simply in recognising that men make history to precisely the extent that it makes them".<sup>66</sup> More frequently, though, Sartre referred to aspects of Marx's work as unquestionable fact: "the essential discovery of marxism is that labour, as a historical reality and as the utilization of particular tools in an already determined

social and material situation, is the real foundation of the organization of social relations. This discovery can no longer be questioned".<sup>67</sup> But by far the most revealing of these sorts of passages is the following one:

These formal remarks cannot, of course, claim to add anything at all to the certainty of the synthetic reconstruction which Marx carried out in Capital; they are not even intended to be marginal comments on it. By its very certainty, the reconstruction in effect defies commentary. But my remarks, though they are possible only on the basis of this reconstruction ... belong, logically, before this historical reconstruction, at a higher level of greater indeterminacy and generality: in so far as they have fixed certain relations of the practico-inert field in its generality, their purpose is simply to define the type of intelligibility which is involved in the marxist reconstruction.<sup>68</sup>

The purpose of the Critique is to render marxism intelligible. According to Sartre, Marx elaborated certain truths, but those truths are still abstract conceptions. In other words, those truths are still separate from the social world of which they are about. In effect, "marxism ... did not satisfy our need to understand".<sup>69</sup> The role of existentialism is to "allow the individual concrete ... (to) emerge from the background of the general contradictions of productive forces and relations of production".<sup>70</sup> Existentialism is supposed to satisfy the need to understand by defining 'the type of intelligibility which is involved in the Marxist reconstruction'. This intelligibility involves tracing individual action through its various mediations to the way in which it finally appears as a

social phenomenon; "the only concrete basis for the historical dialectic is the dialectical structure of individual action".<sup>71</sup> If the mode of production is not fully intelligible in terms of human action, then it is not fully intelligible. This idea of intelligibility was behind Sartre's endeavour to provide Marx's valid interpretation of history with an existentialist, concrete approach to reality. That marxism lacks concepts with which to analyze "micro" social interactions has been noted by other social theorists.<sup>72</sup>

Questions, though, about Sartre's understanding of marxism have been raised. For instance, Aron (1969) stated that Sartre's acceptance of Marx's ideas is facile: "as regards Marx's economico-historical sociology, Sartre usually takes the view that it consists of established or self-evident truths ... This ... illustrates Sartre's facile acceptance of all those aspects of marxist thought in which he is not particularly interested, but which were the essential things for Marx himself--for instance, the synthetic reconstruction of capitalism".<sup>73</sup> In general, Aron's commentaries on Sartre's work are not very sympathetic. However, Poster (1975), whose commentaries are sympathetic, corroborates this view: "the existentialist accepted the bifurcation of Marx into a young, 'good' Marx and an old, 'bad' Marx without seeking the unity of his thought, and manifested a certain reluctance to come to



grips with capitalism as an economic system. In this way, Sartre left himself open to the charge, probably correct in 1946, that he was not well versed in marxism".<sup>74</sup> In addition, Poster notes that in Search For a Method Sartre wrote that existentialism assumes the "same givens" as marxism "as its point of departure".<sup>75</sup> "Yet this facile 'taking the same givens' as marxism permitted (Sartre) to avoid a rigorous analysis of Marx's concept of the means of production".<sup>76</sup>

True enough. Rather than analyze the mode of production itself, Sartre took the approach of trying to anchor it in an intelligible context. Sartre wrote, "in the context of scarcity all the structures of any given society depend on the mode of production".<sup>77</sup> The concept of scarcity in turn signifies the relationship between man and nature, and therefore points toward intelligibility in so far as man becomes the active factor in the whole scheme. Intelligibility was the purpose of the Critique. Poster does not say why a rigorous analysis of the means of production would have been necessary to Sartre's purpose. However, such an analysis may have prevented Sartre from attempting to ground the mode of production in a bourgeois notion of naturalized scarcity, as if exploitation and poverty were unavoidable. (See chapter three for the discussion of Sartre's theory of scarcity.)

Sartre, though, does claim to find inadequacies in

marxism. In Search For A Method he lists two, which indeed prove to be the inspiration behind the Critique. One, marxism has not ascertained the origins and nature of class or the market:

To be sure, (marxism) shows how 'class interests' impose upon the individual against his individual interests or how the market, at first a simple complex of human relations, tends to become more real than the sellers and their customers; but marxism remains uncertain as to the nature and origin of these 'collectives'. The theory of fetishism, outlined by Marx, has never been developed; furthermore, it could not be extended to cover all social realities. Thus marxism, while rejecting organicism, lacks weapons against it.<sup>78</sup>

Sartre foresaw the development of marxism as being in "the reality of alienated individuals and ... their separation".<sup>79</sup> He asserted that there are constraints in the concrete relations between persons based on given conditions, because of their separation.

Two, and again according to Sartre, marxism has never studied collectives "on all levels of the social life".<sup>80</sup> Marxists thus run the risk of a partial presentation of reality. Sartre used the following example of how some marxists would study various cities, to clarify his point:

Some marxists ... have distinguished agricultural cities from industrial cities, colonial cities, socialist cities, etc. They have shown for each type how the form and the division of labour, at the same time as the relations of production, would engender an organization and a particular distribution of urban functions. But that is not enough to let them catch up with experience. Paris and Rome differ profoundly from each other: Paris

is a typically bourgeois city of the nineteenth century; Rome ... is characterized by a centre of aristocratic structure ... It does not suffice to show that these structural differences correspond to fundamental differences in the economic development of the two countries... It will be altogether impossible for us, by simply determining the relations of production, to bring to light typically Roman attitudes.<sup>81</sup>

For Sartre, there is a social field which the marxists' fail to take account of; that field is a person's entire environment "considered in its most immediate aspect".<sup>82</sup>

Sartre illustrated this point in the following passages:

During the summer months the wealthy (of Rome) dine on cafe sidewalks. This fact--inconceivable in Paris--does not concern individuals only; by itself it speaks volumes on the way in which class relations are lived.<sup>83</sup>

And:

The child experiences more than just his family. He lives also, in part through the family, the collective landscape which surrounds him. It is again the generality of his class which is revealed to him in this individual experience.<sup>84</sup>

Sartre's point is that the 'collective landscape' contains more than an analysis of the mode of production can reveal. Sartre's criticism of marxism is that marxists study reality from something of a narrow perspective by attempting to explain all social phenomena in terms of the dominant mode of production. The marxist framework in its generality, Sartre contended, fails to consider such things as attitudes and the way common concrete conditions are materially lived by individuals. Without this dimension of the collective,

marxism is merely an "abstract skeleton of universality".<sup>85</sup>

Based upon this criticism of marxism, Sartre saw a useful role for existentialism in marxism:

Existentialism ... intends, without being unfaithful to marxist principles, to find mediations which allow the individual concrete ... to emerge from the background of the general contradictions of productive forces and relations of production.<sup>86</sup>

Intelligibility thus takes on a new specification: discerning the root dialectic of individual praxis involves a discovery of mediations between the individual concrete and the historical condition.

The notion of intelligibility, so central to Sartre's Critique, is further clarified by the notion of dialectical circularity. 'Men make history to precisely the extent that it makes them'. This is the central problematic dealt with in the Critique. Intelligibility, on the one hand, involves clarifying how 'men make history'. Sartre's marxism, on the other hand, involves clarifying how history makes men. That one makes the other to precisely the same extent as the other makes the former implies that the existentialist contribution is equal to the marxist contribution.

Formally, though, Sartre packages the Critique as "laying the foundations for 'prolegomena to any future anthropology'".<sup>87</sup> As Sartre makes quite clear, it is not meant to deal with human history, sociology, nor ethnography.<sup>88</sup> Rather, it is meant to lay bare the ontological foundations of social life within the context of

a particular type of relation between humanity and nature. The categories Sartre generates thus through his own imaginative grasp of reality are to be the categories by which any future anthropology will understand man.

### Sartre's Understanding of Marxism

It follows, then, that Sartre was not concerned with any historically specific analyses. Since Sartre's Critique is not couched in marxist terminology, nor intended to be an approach in the study of society equivalent to Marx's approach, comparing these two theories is like comparing the structure of a specific house to the basic materials and means by which any house could be constructed. Thus, the most general criteria of marxism are implied. These criteria Sartre cites himself as 'the same givens', or basic principles, of marxism, and are as follows.

Sartre adopts the marxist premise that material existence is not reducible to knowledge. In addition, Sartre adopts what he interprets to be Marx's premise that knowledge, in turn, is not reducible to material existence.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, knowledge is considered to be a moment of the overall process of action, a process Sartre gives shape to in the form of totalisation.

A second principle is dialectical circularity. In adherence to this principle Sartre states the following: "my formalism, which is inspired by that of Marx, consists

simply in recognizing that men make history to precisely the extent that it makes them".<sup>90</sup> Yet is this not merely an extension of the relation between material existence and knowledge to that between action and environment? Indeed it is: action and environment are two parts of a single, dialectical process. Action affects the environment; and the environment influences action in terms of certain material necessities, whatever they may be.

A third principle is that the human group does not have a metaphysical or superorganic existence. Sartre writes: "we repeat with marxism: there are only men and real relations between men".<sup>91</sup> In effect, society, and history, is "woven out of millions of individual actions".<sup>92</sup> In adhering to this principle, Sartre, as a kind of process philosopher, tries to account for how society can be organised and for how history can have direction without resorting to a notion of a collective subject.

A fourth marxist principle which Sartre adopts is that the forces and relations of production enter into conflict with one another. Sartre states this quite simply: "Marx, who spent a long time studying the French revolution, derived from his study a theoretical principle which we accept: at a certain stage in their development, the productive forces come into conflict with the relations of production".<sup>93</sup> But Sartre does not adopt this contradiction as a sufficient explanation for the real

events which occur within it; rather, he treats it as the framework for those events only:<sup>94</sup> "men make their history on the basis of real, prior conditions ... But it is the men who make it and not the prior conditions".<sup>95</sup> This principle occurs over and over again in Sartre's work.

### Summary

According to Sartre's early existentialism, consciousness is not what it is consciousness of (i.e., 'consciousness is not what it is and is what it is not'). Man shapes himself through the mediation of that something of which his consciousness is always consciousness of. In this sense, particular historical epochs, with specific cultural norms, stereotypes, and icons, form the actual content which individuals use to build and define themselves. One must be absolutely clear on the point, though, that it is the individual which makes himself, not the cultural materials with which he works. But the actor is thought of as completely free no more than he is completely determined by his environment. In fact, both actor and environment form one another. Hence, a man makes himself out of what he is made.

This circularity between man and conditions Sartre articulates in more highly theoretical and abstract terms as the philosophical position of dialectical nominalism. This position rests with full weight upon a view of social

phenomena as all part of some all-encompassing totality, as distinct from the positivistic approach which treats events as results of independent and exterior factors. The dialectical approach confounds the positivistic approach, because, as Sartre puts it, 'for two phenomena to occur in intimate union and modify one another reciprocally, such that the presence of one modifies the other in its inner nature, we should be unable to decide whether we are dealing with two separate terms or with only one'. And this point of view covers the relationship between the observer and the observed, the explainer and the explained. Consequently, with the enquiry into the starting points of dialectical reason begun in this manner, Sartre follows up with more substantive ideas about what exactly a dialectical theory should entail, eventually postulating some general laws about the relationship between men, in terms of labour, referred to as the dialectic, and tools and signs as conditions, referred to as the realm of the anti-dialectic. Within this theoretical framework Sartre creates a whole new set of terms to describe his theory about how men make history while history makes men.

But in so constructing a new dialectical theory, Sartre defined, and took on the task of resolving, certain problems with Marx's ideas. For instance, though marxism rejects organicism, 'it lacks weapons against it'. Sartre sought to justify a rejection of organicism by developing



Marx's theory of fetishism. This becomes a prevalent and most important issue that Sartre repeatedly returns to throughout his work.

## FOOTNOTES

### Chapter 1

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22. Sartre, "Existentialism Is a Humanism," p.307.

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60. Ibid., p.160.
61. Ibid., p.87.
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63. George Lichtheim, "Sartre, Marxism and History," History and Theory 3:2 (1963): 231.
64. Ibid., p.240.
65. Sheridan Jr., Sartre: The Radical Conversion, pp.59-60.
66. This quotation from Sartre's Critique (p.97) does not seem to match exactly Marx and Engels's statement from The German Ideology (p.59): "circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances." The phrase "just as much as" implies that circumstances make men at least as much as men make circumstances, never less, and quite possibly more. Sartre's statement implies that each makes the other to the same extent.
67. At least for Sartre, in the Critique (p.152n), the idea that labour is the foundation of all social relations is certain. But it is not clear to what extent Marx himself assumed this. For instance, with the rise of extensive automation labour loses its primacy in production and therefore its role as a determinant of social relations. Sartre may be guilty of a fetishized concept of labour by interpreting it as a general, rather than an historically specific, principle. (This idea was suggested by Peter Archibald.) But it is not the purpose of this work to evaluate how good a fit Sartre's theory is to Marx's.
68. Sartre, Critique, p.216.

69. Sartre, Search For A Method, pp.21-22.
70. Ibid., p.57.
71. Sartre, Critique, p.220.
72. Anthony Giddens, New Rules of Sociological Method: A Positive Critique of Interpretative Sociologies (Great Britain: The Anchor Press Ltd., 1976), p.100; Ian Taylor and Paul Walton and Jock Young, The New Criminology (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp.220-221.
73. Raymond Aron, Marxism and the Existentialists (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p.167.
74. Poster, Existential Marxism in Postwar France, p.132.
75. Sartre, Search For A Method, p.99; Poster, Existential Marxism in Postwar France, pp.269-270.
76. Poster, Existential Marxism in Postwar France, p.270.
77. Sartre, Critique, p.153n.
78. Sartre, Search For A Method, p.77.
79. Ibid., p.78.
80. Ibid., p.78.
81. Ibid., pp.81-82.
82. Ibid., p.79.
83. Ibid., p.82.
84. Ibid., p.79.
85. Ibid., p.83.
86. Ibid., p.57.
87. Sartre, Critique, p.66.
88. Ibid., p.65.
89. Sartre, Search For A Method, pp.86-87.
90. Sartre, Critique, p.97.

91. Sartre, Search For A Method, p.76.
92. Sartre, Critique, p.36.
93. Sartre, Search For A Method, p.117.
94. Ibid., p.127.
95. Ibid., p.87.

## Chapter 2

### Anti-dialectic, Series and History

#### Introduction

Since pre-reflective consciousness is by definition self-consciousness, the dialectical structure of action appears to the individual as obvious and self-evident in so far as he produces it. However, the product which bears the result of action manifests a certain anti-praxis, anti-dialectic, or counter-finality. This opposition of praxis with itself through the mediation of products makes sense in terms of unforeseen consequences.

According to Sartre, the consequences of our acts always end up by escaping us. This is because there always is an infinity of relations among things, in the sense that there are more contingencies than one can ever anticipate.

The actual influence of the tool on praxis occurs as a result of the tool imposing certain necessities to be contended with in harnessing it as a power. As the realm of tools grows into a dominant mode of production, 'the 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'. The freedom of choice evolves into the rigor of system. When people act collectively, they must adapt to material circumstances produced by others and themselves, and only in certain ways, because they limit their choices by virtue of social commitment.

### Dialectic to Anti-dialectic

From the foregoing chapter it is clear that the dialectic applies in many different senses. So far it has been discussed primarily as a point of view distinct from positivism. In that sense it is a dialectical reason. As such it is a logic of totalization; but it is so only because the totalization itself is of a dialectical structure. As Sartre put it, 'if dialectical reason exists, then ... it can only be the accessibility of that totalization to a knowledge which is itself ... totalizing in its procedures'. In effect, thought, as a totalization itself, is a moment of yet a larger totalization, praxis, both individual and collective. Thus, in a second sense, the dialectic is totalizing action itself, that is, the very movement itself of the object of knowledge. This is how we are to understand the statement, "dialectical knowledge ... is knowledge of the dialectic".<sup>1</sup>

Given that the dialectic is simultaneously both the process of knowledge and the movement of the object of

knowledge, 'the dialectic appears to the individual as rational transparency in so far as he produces it'. The dialectic is thus a simple fact in the same way as one knows that one is reading while one reads. It is the very structure of activity.

Conversely, though, the dialectic would not necessarily be immediately evident in so far as someone else produces it, or in so far as one is not in the act of immediately producing it. To remain in abstract terms, let us consider that praxis finds its limit of comprehension within its own work as the point is reached where labour is transformed into a product, and where the idea has become a thing.

Of course this point is really the process of objectification. In Capital Marx described this process: "while the laborer is at work, his labour constantly undergoes a transformation: from being motion, it becomes an object without motion; from being the laborer working, it becomes the thing produced".<sup>2</sup> Sartre described this process also, but in a different way: "every praxis is primarily an instrumentalization of material reality. It envelops the inanimate thing in a totalizing project which gives it a pseudo-organic unity ... If the unity persists, it does so through material inertia (as the) passive reflection of praxis".<sup>3</sup> The emphasis here is not so much on the process itself as the result of the process: the thing bears the

stamp of a project and becomes a humanised materiality; "every thing maintains with all its inertia the particular unity which a long forgotten action imposed upon it".<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, Sartre goes to the point of describing the worked thing as this "vampire object" which "constantly absorbs human action", like blood, and "finally lives in symbiosis with (man)".<sup>5</sup> In this sense, "the material object ... becomes a strange and living being with its own customs and its own movement".<sup>6</sup> Now, Sartre does not mean that the worked thing is really alive in the sense that a person is, but rather that, within society, as a constant reference point for human relations, the worked thing comes to be related to the world of other worked things through the mediation of men. The economy is a perfect example of the "life" of a thing.

According to Sartre, though, the more things become animated, the more do human relations become petrified. He states that, "worked matter reflects our activity back to us as inertia, and our inertia as activity, our interiority with the group as exteriority and our exteriority as a determination of interiority".<sup>7</sup> The fundamental relation of interiority among persons, in other words, in a world of worked things, appears to those persons as a relation of exteriority. That is, a kind of inversion takes place, a mirror reflection: "everything changes its sign when we enter the domain of the negative; from the point of view of

this new logic, the unity of men through matter can only be their separation".<sup>8</sup> In addition, the separation of things through men can only be their unity. In effect, things relate through bonds of interiority, as if they were persons, while persons relate through bonds of exteriority, as if they were things. Marx came up with the same kind of conclusion in a discussion on commodity fetishism: "the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things".<sup>9</sup> (To elaborate, the commodity embodies exchange-value, where exchange-value is a purely social property. This value of commodities was said to be mysterious, and not recognized for what it is, because the abstract labour that is common to diverse material products is fundamentally rooted in specific forms of concrete labour that as such could never be seen as equivalent or common among themselves. Hence, a social relation between persons fundamentally rooted in use-values is subtly transformed through a particular organization of labour into a relation between those products produced. Capital, therefore, tends to appear as a social power, not the capitalist.) Thus, if what Sartre wrote in Search For a Method can be used as a guide (that 'the theory of fetishism outlined by Marx has never been developed', and that 'marxism, while rejecting

organicism, lacks weapons against it'), then this central theory of the inversion of social relations through things is Sartre's attempt to develop Marx's theory of fetishism, particularly through establishing the origin and nature of those material-social realities of class and market.

Sartre's terminology subsumes commodity fetishism within a wide framework of the basic relations between man and his tools. In so doing Sartre prepares a basis upon which to explain the "type of passive action which materiality as such exerts on man".<sup>10</sup> According to Sartre, this sort of explanation has never been attempted before.<sup>11</sup> More specifically, "we will try to grasp the intelligible bond of exteriority and of interiority in real life ... Observing how ... in the case of man as the product of his product, ... human praxis (is transformed) into anti-praxis, that is to say, into a praxis without an author, transcending the given towards rigid ends, whose hidden meaning is counter-finality".<sup>12</sup> This claimed new development will be examined at a more appropriate point further on in this chapter.

Sartre establishes the nature of those reified collectives, class and market, on the basis of product-producing praxis: where the dialectic appears to the individual as rational transparency in so far as he produces it, it is opaque and unintelligible in so far as he does not; according to Sartre, there is an inevitable

equivalence between alienated praxis and worked inertia, the domain of which he calls the "practico-inert".<sup>13</sup> This domain marks the transformation of the dialectic (as the logic of labour) to the anti-dialectic as the logic of praxis-turned-against-itself in so far as it is in the form of worked inertia. This transformation from dialectic to anti-dialectic is Sartre's explanation for why and how an inversion can take place between man and his tools, such that men can be dominated by things, without, that is, invoking an element of organicism.

#### Dialectical Circularity

According to Sartre, 'men make history to precisely the extent that it makes them'. This is his principle of dialectical circularity.<sup>14</sup> The phrase, 'to precisely the extent', strongly suggests that circumstances and men always exert an equal influence upon one another, and that history is a perfectly balanced synthesis of subject and object. This interpretation is further supported by Sartre's more concrete illustrations of dialectical circularity, as in the following passage:

In his excellent book, Mumford says: 'since the steam engine requires constant care on the part of the stoker and engineer, steam power was more efficient in large units than in small ones ... Thus steam power fostered the tendency toward large industrial plants ...' I do not wish to question the soundness of these observations, but simply to note the strange language--language which has been ours since Marx and which we have no difficulty in

understanding--in which ... it is impossible to tell any longer whether it is man or machine which is a practical project.<sup>15</sup>

Sartre is here implicitly posing the question of whether it was the nature of coal that demanded large industrial plants, or the industrialist, in the context of a coal-based economy.

Rather than treat the question as a case of "either/or" and sow the seeds of either materialism or voluntarism, Sartre states that "it is precisely at this level that a dialectical investigation must supply its own intelligibility".<sup>16</sup> And, according to Sartre, "it is in praxis itself, in so far as it objectifies itself, that we will find the new moment of dialectical intelligibility".<sup>17</sup> What is so crucial about praxis in so far as it objectifies itself will be the topic of the next section. Here we merely note the perfect symmetry corroborated in the principle that "at any moment of history things are human precisely to the extent that men are things".<sup>18</sup> But it must also be kept in mind that Sartre's concern is to investigate "the general, dialectical conditions which produce a determinate inversion in the relations of men and matter"; that is, the domination of man by matter and of matter by man.<sup>19</sup> The question thus arises concerning how to interpret Sartre's principle of dialectical circularity given that both subject and object are capable of dominating one another, since, if one can dominate the other, how can

they be thought of to always be exerting an equal influence upon one another?

An alternate interpretation of Sartre's formal dictum centers on the meaning of the phrase, 'to the extent'. That things are human precisely to the extent that men are things does not necessarily mean that things must be half human and men half thing. The dictum could still make sense if, say, things were two thirds human and men one third thing. The meaning would then simply be that the condition of things reflect the condition of men, and vice versa, as in the way one knows that a glass is two thirds empty if told it is one third full: the glass is empty precisely to the extent that it is full. (Clarity has been sacrificed for the simplicity of a concise, single statement.) By this interpretation, Sartre's formal dictum would express his re-working of Marx's theory of fetishism perfectly: the more things become animated, the more do human relations become petrified, and vice versa. (The apparent tautological form of this principle gives way to a cause and effect relation when stated in a more empirical, concrete way. Empirically, then, the principle would translate into the following statement: in so far as persons ignore the communal nature of human labour, and allow the natural interrelations of labours to occur as if orchestrated by "invisible hands", they are estranged from its overall manifestations and tend to be conditioned by it rather than have control over it.



Thus, lack of solidarity causes there to be room for the mode of production to develop in ways not intended by its human authors.)

This second interpretation makes more sense with respect to the other ideas in the Critique. In terms of a dialectical model, men and things refer to the dialectic and anti-dialectic respectively, both being dialectical opposites which make sense only with reference to one another. True to classical, dialectical form, these opposites, though aspects of the same totality, are in a contradictory relationship. For Sartre, a "contradiction is the counter-finality which develops within an ensemble, in so far as it opposes the process which produces it".<sup>20</sup> In more substantial terms, praxis produces worked matter, and counter-finality expresses the way worked matter opposes praxis. To this process we now turn.

### The Practico-inert

This process whereby worked matter opposes the praxis which produced it establishes the nature of those hypostatized collectives of class and market for Sartre. But at this level praxis is necessarily alienated from itself through the medium of matter. In other words, praxis is not being treated as the visible act of labour, but rather as the invisible social aspect of the human product.

By way of an example, Sartre begins to explain one

crucial way in which worked-upon materiality influences man. He uses the example of the deforestation of China, and the severe flooding of the whole land that resulted from the rather innocent practice of the Chinese peasants of uprooting the scrub, trees, etc., for their own basic needs. The Chinese peasants caused their own disaster unwittingly.

Sartre remarks:

If some enemy of mankind had wanted to persecute the peasants of China as a whole, he would have ordered mercenary troops to deforest the mountains systematically. The positive system of agriculture was transformed into an infernal machine. But the enemy who introduced the loess, the river, the gravity, the whole of hydrodynamics, into this destructive apparatus was the peasant himself. Yet, taken in the moment of its living development, his action does not include this rebound, either intentionally or in reality.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed not: the peasants were not even in an organized relation so as to cooperate to destroy their own land. This "rebound" of action, as Sartre refers to it above, occurs as if "adumbrated by a kind of disposition of matter".<sup>22</sup> This is the first characteristic of the phenomenon of "counter-finality", i.e., the rebound of action through the medium of worked materiality.<sup>23</sup> There are two other characteristics of counter-finality. One, it occurs as if being carried out systematically. That is, it does not occur randomly, destroying a little here and a little there, thereby leaving a stretch untouched in between. All the trees and shrubs were eliminated, causing a complete, wide-scale flooding of the lands. This is why

counter-finalities always appear as if some diabolical intelligence were behind them.

Lastly, counter-finality is always the result of many individual actions. In this sense it is a tangible indication of the fact that persons are always connected, if only through the environment they cannot help but share.

There is a basic natural condition that enables counter-finality to occur. That condition is the infinity of relations among things. In the case of the deforestation of China, the particular natural relations involved, which the peasants were unaware of, were those of the hydrodynamic system. Such a consideration puts praxis within an entirely new light, as the following passage from Search For a Method clarifies:

The consequences of our acts always end up by escaping us, since every concerted enterprise, as soon as it is realized, enters into relation with the entire universe, and since this infinite multiplicity of relations goes beyond our intention. If we look at things from this angle, human action is reduced to that of a physical force whose effect evidently depends upon the system in which it is exercised.<sup>24</sup>

If human action is exercised in a mostly natural system, as with the deforestation of China, then the unforeseeable relations with which the results of those actions enter into are probably going to be natural relations, such as ecological laws, chemical laws, or laws regarding time and space. If, moreover, human action is exercised in a sufficiently social system, then the unforeseeable relations

with which the results of those actions are going to enter into are probably going to be with other social constructions, but through the mediation of social practice. This is the basic intelligibility of how one material object may influence at a distance another material object.<sup>25</sup>

In McLellan's work (1971), there is a clear discussion of Marx's notion of historical materialism, showing how Marx saw history "as the--mostly unconscious--creation of men subject to observable laws".<sup>26</sup> Sartre's infinity of relations among things roughly corresponds to Marx's unobserved, though potentially observable, laws, except that Marx saw a historical process while for Sartre the ontological state of being is itself ahistorical. Marx saw that humans organized themselves cooperatively such as to avoid atomization, even though there is room for unintended consequences to occur. Stack (1977) notes in this connection that "as Marx describes this process by which an individual is alienated from the product of his labour, he does so in language which seems to have been appropriated in Sartre's conception of the counterfinalities of human action".<sup>27</sup> Then Stack includes, from The German Ideology, the passage from Marx he had in mind: "this crystallization of social activity ... this consolidation of what we ourselves produce into an objective power above us, growing out of our control, thwarting our expectations, bringing to naught our calculations, is one of

the chief factors in historical development".<sup>28</sup> Stack could also have added the following passage from the Communist Manifesto to corroborate his point: "modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells".<sup>29</sup> This nether world to which Marx alludes is painted in terms of an anti-dialectic by Sartre.

But where Marx posited this objective power as 'one of the chief factors in historical development', Sartre posited it as the single factor of historical development. This is because Sartre postulates that 'the consequences of our acts always end up by escaping us'.<sup>30</sup> There must always be unintended consequences. And from a very abstract point of view, this may well be true; but there is the very significant questions of degree and of whether those unintended consequences must be counter to man's intentions.

To illustrate the world of relations among human constructions, Sartre describes the dependency of late eighteenth and nineteenth century society upon the coal and iron complex.<sup>31</sup> For instance, with the advent of coal came the steam ship, the locomotive, gas-lighting, new means for working iron, etc. In other words, coal enabled wide-spread progress in human technology (at least in certain nations).

Gas-lighting, in particular, enabled the working day to be stretched to fifteen and sixteen hours. Also, the steamship could bring Argentinian corn to England within a few days time, thereby threatening to replace the farming in England. In addition, locomotives, because they were poor at climbing inclines, had to follow water-courses and valleys. But, since these regions are usually the populated ones, the locomotive tended to drain away the populations of the hinterland, and deposit them in the industrial centres where an alternative to farming could be found. One last example involves the increased demand for coal, which, of course, needed to be mined. Sartre writes:

In so far as a mine is 'capital' which is progressively destroyed, and in so far as its owner is forced by the exigency of the object to open up new galleries, the net cost of the mineral extracted must increase ... To reduce costs, water had to be removed from the deep galleries; and the labour of men and beasts was not sufficient for this ... In other words, the exigency of matter working through its men ended by nominating the material object it required. Papin and Newcomen had defined that particular exigency, and had thereby established the schemata and general principles of the invention before it was made ... A (steam) pump had to be made as quickly as possible.<sup>32</sup>

The idea that the mine would occasion in industrialists the need for a steam pump returns one to wondering whether it is man or machine which is a practical project.

But this is not the only paradoxical reflection one may draw from this example of the dependency of late eighteenth and nineteenth century society upon the coal and

iron complex. A second paradox is that workers were subject to extreme exploitation in factories while, through technical progress, a growth in the wealth of mankind occurred.<sup>33</sup> According to Sartre, this kind of objective contradiction between the forces and relations of production indicates the influence of counter-finality at the level of the practico-inert.<sup>34</sup> Coal itself prescribed the ways it could be used. From there, machines that were based on coal prescribed the ways of their most efficient use. In effect, the forces of production demanded certain relations of production, and those relations were necessary in so far as those tools were at the base of production. But, "the over-industrialization of a country is a counter-finality for the rural classes who become proletarianised to precisely the extent that it is a finality for the richest landowners because it enables them to increase their own productivity".<sup>35</sup> That is, the richest landowners could not have increased their own wealth within the coal and iron complex without forcing the peasants into the cities to operate their factories. Thus, the proletarianization of the peasants was, from the standpoint of productivity, necessary to some degree, according to Sartre.

It is in this sense that Sartre posits counter-finality as a property of the practico-inert field: because it is inevitable; because man "cannot construct his tools ... without introducing partial determinations into

the unified environment".<sup>36</sup> The consequence of this assertion is that man will always be both constructive and disruptive for himself. (In this sense, all objective tragedy--even Voltaire's Lisbon Earthquake--is the mediated consequence of partially informed actions.) Sartre begins to justify the inevitability of counter-finality by describing exactly how material objects influence human actions:

Within praxis ... there is a dialectical movement and a dialectical relation between action as the negation of matter ... and matter ... as the negation of action. And this negation of action--which has nothing in common with obstruction--can be expressed in action only in terms of action itself; that is to say, its positive results, in so far as they are inscribed in the object, are turned against and into it in the form of objective, negative exigencies.<sup>37</sup>

In this sense, matter negates action by imposing upon living action certain necessities for its use. Exigency implies necessity. It is not up to the living being to decide how steam power, for instance, will be a most efficient energy source; steam power is more efficient in large units than in small ones. This is an unalterable fact to which early industrialists had to adapt themselves, or, rather, adapt other aspects of production to. But, "the very praxis of individuals or groups is altered in so far as it ceases to be the free organization of the practical field and becomes the re-organization of one sector of inert materiality in accordance with the exigencies of another sector of



materiality".<sup>38</sup>

As the organization of tools expands into a dominant mode of production (each sector operating with respect to all the other sectors) and the realm of the practico-inert grows larger, "praxis gradually reduces the number of possibilities to one and, in the end, eliminates itself, as dialectical unfolding and as work, in favour of a result inscribed in things".<sup>39</sup> Gila Hayim describes this process quite eloquently:

... The consequences of human praxis which contribute to the building up of the practico-inert will side with the method of materiality, thus diminishing human choice and freedom. This conclusion is remarkably similar to Ellul's work in Technological Society. Because of technique and the practico-inert, the human agent diminishes through his products and begins to trail behind what he objectifies through his praxis. The results of his action become other than what he himself intends and desires. Hence, necessity appears not as an exterior force, as something that opposes praxis, but is the objective result of the free praxis of the human actor. And, ironically, it is precisely when we are most rational and responsible that we discover such necessity as ineluctable.<sup>40</sup>

Man becomes "trapped" within a totality of his own making, tending towards the notoriously ordered and static worlds of bureaucracy captured so well in the literary works of Franz Kafka. But what is important at this point in the discussion is the fact that counter-finality necessarily implies that objectification must lead to alienation. And, where alienation is a constant characteristic of objectification, it follows that there will always be

counter-finalities along with finalities, unintended consequences along with intended consequences, or, simply, systems that do not reflect man's intentions perfectly.

### Alienation/Objectification

Rather than invoke an element of organicism, Sartre relies upon the properties of the practico-inert field to transform labour into counter-finalities. Essential to this process is the notion of praxis-turned-against-itself, or "anti-praxis", in the form of worked things, as a kind of alienation. Sartre asserts this point in the following passage:

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 other. This primitive type of alienation occurs within other forms of alienation, but it is independent of them, and, in fact, is their foundation. In other words, we shall reveal, through it, that a permanent anti-praxis is a new and necessary moment of praxis. If we do not try to define this moment, historical intelligibility ... loses one of its essential moments and is transformed into unintelligibility.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, for Sartre, history is intelligible only if one follows praxis beyond labour and into the ways it is modified through the medium of materiality. But praxis in this sense is always a form of alienation.

Pietro Chiodi, commenting on Sartre's notion of alienation as coincident with objectification, argues that since the principle corollary of Marx's reformulation of the

Hegelian concept of the subject-object relation "is the denial of the coincidence of the relation with alienation", Sartre "is not in a position to supercede Hegelianism in a way consistent with marxism".<sup>42</sup> Chiodi elaborates upon this thesis in the following passage:

In other words, Sartre has not taken into account the fact that the task of replacing dogmatic marxism, as yet imprisoned in idealism, demands the aid of an existentialism which has in turn freed itself of idealist presuppositions and can thus validate its insistence upon the ineliminable nature of the (subject-object) relation without appeal to the idealistic premise of the coincidence between that relation and alienation ....<sup>43</sup>

Chiodi's assumption here is that the coincidence of alienation with the subject-object relation is idealistic.

Based upon "contractualist, Hegelian, existentialist and marxist theory", Chiodi proceeds to define alienation in terms of "preliminary specifications ... (which) cannot be charged with being methodically unjustified assumptions".<sup>44</sup> (No precise citation is given as to the source of these specifications). These preliminary specifications, in turn, Chiodi states, can be 're-read' in the "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 where Marx summarises his denunciation of the 'mystificatory' nature of the Hegelian theory of alienation".<sup>45</sup> In the end, Chiodi defines alienation as "the negative process by which a subject makes himself other than himself by virtue of a constraint which is capable of being removed on the initiative of the subject himself".<sup>46</sup>

Now, it is true that if a so called 'subject' 'makes himself other than himself', as Chiodi put it, then he ought also to be able to not do this. Therefore, alienation need not be a necessary aspect of human life. But, the subject may not want to remove his alienation if removing it means the loss of certain advantages, such as those gained from a division of labour and mass production. Here choice takes on the character of necessity.

Sartre explains this process of choice turning into necessity quite aptly (as described in the above section). It is not the case, for Sartre, that control over alienation is relegated to a position beyond the 'initiative of the subject himself', as Chiodi would assert; rather, Sartre describes how alienation, in the form of necessity, evolves out of the initiative of the subject himself. As Hayim put it above, 'it is precisely when we are most rational and responsible that we discover necessity as ineluctable'.

William Leon McBride argues against Chiodi's thesis as well. For McBride, the crucial point is that there are different senses of the word alienation, and Sartre, when he speaks of alienation as natural to objectification, is distinguishing a new form of alienation:

Sartre is in fact distinguishing two different senses of the word 'alienation', and apparently is not dissenting from the marxian view that alienation in the narrower sense, 'exploitation', conceivably could be abolished.<sup>47</sup>

(Note that what McBride has here referred to as a 'marxian

view' is not necessarily Marx's view.) McBride supports his interpretation of Sartre's ideas by pointing out a footnote where Sartre asks, "must the disappearance of capitalist forms of alienation mean the elimination of all forms of alienation?"<sup>48</sup>

Series: The Atomised Mode

Who would deliberately withdraw from the flock and its comfortable precepts to take up with that mutilated freedom whose bleeding stumps are writhing in the dust?<sup>49</sup>

It is important to point out how closely related, or dialectically circular, persons and their tools are, that objects are shaped within a culture (which has a material form itself) and have no meaning when considered apart from that culture. "One grasps the world ... through a technology, a culture, a condition; and, in its turn, the world thus apprehended yields itself up as human and refers back to human nature".<sup>50</sup> This intimate relation between persons and things is so much a part of everyday life that it is taken for granted. It eludes observation by its very omnipresence. Yet the signifying aspect of worked things is constant. Sartre writes:

Among these significations there are some which refer us to a lived situation, to specific behaviour, to a collective event. This would be the case ... with those shattered glasses which, on the (cinema) screen, are charged with retracing for us the story of an evening's orgy. Others are simple

indications--such as an arrow on the wall in a subway corridor. Some refer to "collectives". Some are symbols; the reality signified is present in them as the nation is in the flag. Some are statements of utility ... Still others, which we apprehend ... by means of the visible, immediate behaviour of real men, are quite simply ends.<sup>51</sup>

Signifying objects, gestures, phrases, surround the social creature, man; but "in order to incorporate this set of indications into a general theory of signs, one would have to say that the tool is a signifier and that man here is a signified".<sup>52</sup> In this sense, Sartre's account of the domination of man by his humanised environment temporarily parallels the structuralist tradition, in so far as the meaning of action emanates from a pre-existing structure. For Sartre, under the reign of the practico-inert, persons express the meanings sedimented within materiality. A person's activity "is occasioned in him, from the outside, by worked matter as the practical exigency of the inanimate object".<sup>53</sup> Sartre develops this idea through a notion of "serial" interhuman relations. With respect to a serial mode of group relations, the relationship between the individual and society appears equivalent to that of the structuralist approach, because individuals participate in an "external unity". (However, Sartre would argue that it only appears so, because the act of obeying a command presupposes that he/she who obeys must be first able to 'grasp the meaning of things and to execute the commands which they imply'.<sup>54</sup> This argument is reminiscent of

Sartre's point that a slave must be first a man before he can be thought of as enslaved.) For instance, persons waiting at a bus stop are united externally by the bus they each wait for and by the bus sign that designates that particular place as a pick-up point. They each have an identical interest in the bus, because of its function.<sup>55</sup> They are united, but not integrated: there is no "oneness", or group spirit, shared by a gathering of strangers who happen to be standing at the same bus stop. Indeed, their relation is one of separation and anonymity, which Sartre labels "alterity", and describes in the following passage:

This man (at the bus stop) is isolated not only by his body as such, but also by the fact that he turns his back on his neighbor--who moreover, has not even noticed him.<sup>56</sup>

The separation is maintained, because each is in a project of isolation, that can be better achieved by having a newspaper or book to read during the wait.

Implicit to this idea of separation is the distinction between an identical and a common goal. Each person in a series, in one respect at least, is engaged in the same project: in the bus queue each person intends to ride the bus. But it is each person's goal, and therefore plural, rather than a group goal, considered as a singular.<sup>57</sup>

Persons at the bus stop do not help one another; they merely happen to be doing the same thing at the same place. To make the jump from each to all, or from I to we, involves

cooperative action, as in a football team or a militia unit. It involves, as opposed to an external unity, an "internal unity". This internal unity is precisely the collective goal (as in the way an individual's goal unifies all his actions as means to an end).

In the absence of an internal unity, persons are externally unified by the signifying realm of the practico-inert. In other words, worked matter is treated as a means to which a person submits, either alone or in the presence of others. In that each person uses it, it is an inert part of the social system. The bus, the buildings, the newspaper, all of it is part of the inert social system, exerting a passive influence upon its users in the form of what Sartre refers to as "exigency".

Exigency simply refers to the general idea of practical necessity: for example, in order to open a door a certain amount of force must be applied against it. ~~Arnon~~ put it very well: "... man in society obeys the machine in the same way that he eats in order to live".<sup>58</sup> In the series, persons allow themselves to be governed by the rules embodied within the worked environment. The bus arrives, and persons get on in a first come, first served, mechanical order. If it so happens that there are not enough seats for everybody, then those not yet served must await another bus. It is not the case that a person will tend to find her or his name inscribed upon the seat of a bus. This is one of



the distinguishing characteristics of exigency: that it is impersonal; that it signifies anyone and no one in particular (as in so much abstract labour power). The other principal characteristic is, of course, that it is experienced as unalterable fact, and as the untranscendable way it is. In this sense it is a source of command in an otherwise undetermined human system.<sup>59</sup>

So, in the series, it is not that individuals have no freedom to act of their own accord. They do act of their own accord really; rather, in the series persons are being acted upon more so than acting themselves upon the environment. (One might refer to this as the phenomenon of routinization.) Thus when one commentator writes, "this field of existing institutions conditions and shapes the praxis of individuals and groups, but does not, and can not, alter the existence of human freedom", he is correct.<sup>60</sup> Sartre made of freedom an ontological constant. And, though Sartre allowed for there to be practical limits on freedom, even to the point of its total negation, he never renounced it as an absolute quality.<sup>61</sup> Thus it is both a universal constant as well as an historically specific variable.

When the quality of freedom is exercised, another mode of interhuman relations is in operation. Sartre refers to this other mode, which is conceptually opposed to the series, as the "group-in-fusion", or simply the "group".<sup>62</sup> The group is defined principally by a common, collective

goal, where the group members cooperate to realize it.

Oddly enough though, a group fuses in response to, and on the basis of, a serial condition. The series "furnishes the elementary conditions of the possibility that its members should constitute a group"<sup>63</sup> and "groups constitute themselves as determinations and negations of (the series)".<sup>64</sup> (Sartre does not, however, claim that the series must necessarily be temporally prior to the group.<sup>65</sup>) An external threat of some form is a necessary precondition for a group to fuse (where the term "group" denotes a particular kind of social bond, as opposed to the exteriority of serial alterity). Through factors intrinsic to its very development, though, the group cannot help but solidify back into a series. That is, through the necessity for a pledge upon the part of the members to sustain the group, a division of labour, and ultimately leadership, group relations solidify into exteriority, and the bureaucracy evolves from the institution, which evolves from the fused group. According to Sartre, the fused group always evolves back into an ossified, serial structure, because of the rules and hierarchy of command that must be instituted in order to preserve the group. (Though, historically, social movements tend to become institutionalized, it remains open as to whether this must always be the case. However, this is another topic, and outside the scope of this work.) Thus Sartre's social

ontology is a perpetual cycle of series to groups and of groups to series. The action of counter-finality inevitably occurs within the series through worked matter, inevitably threatening some or all.<sup>66</sup> Thus Sartre states, "in this sense, counter-finality simply reproduces the class struggle".<sup>67</sup>

This point of "class struggle" occurring at the level of the practico-inert clarifies and is clarified by the following point Sartre makes about the relation between interests and social conflict:<sup>68</sup> "conflicts of interest are defined at the level of relations of production, or rather, they are these relations themselves: they appear as directly caused by the movement of worked matter, or rather as this matter itself in its exigencies and movement, in so far as each group (or person) struggles to regain control of it".<sup>69</sup> For Sartre, the idea that 'everyone follows his own interest' implies that divisions between men are natural.<sup>70</sup> But this would imply a kind of biological materialism and determinism, not historical materialism. The alternative is that divisions between men result from the mode of production.<sup>71</sup> But, "in this sense, it is not diversity of interests which gives rise to conflicts, but conflicts which produce interests" in so far as interests (i.e., capital, private property) are embodied in worked matter.<sup>72</sup> This is Sartre's view: conflicts of interest stem from the mode of production, not from sheer diversity of interests.

The question that Odajnyk asks, then, is how does individual freedom stand with respect to this massive process:

When history is defined as the constant movement of groups arising out of seriality, evolving into complex institutions and then retiring into inert seriality, then truly there remains very little for the individual to do ... This clearly indicates how far Sartre has moved away from the totally sovereign individual who stood alone and above society and history. The only remnant of that existentialist individual is Sartre's claim that at each moment of this evolution the individual is still free to escape and stand outside of it. But that would only place him back in the inert and passive seriality ... The freedom that Sartre has salvaged for the individual is truly an empty one.<sup>73</sup>

If the individual cannot stand alone, totally sovereign, then, according to Odajnyk, Sartre has not salvaged his early existentialist notion of freedom. And Sartre's "redefinition of freedom as ... the recognition of necessity" only makes him "vulnerable to the usual critiques of marxism on the points of determinism and freedom";<sup>74</sup> namely, that the question of freedom from necessity is "senseless" in so far as necessity is unavoidable.<sup>75</sup> Freedom as the recognition of necessity, moreover, simply suggests an awareness of slavery, not a break from it. Thus, Odajnyk concludes that Sartre has salvaged an empty freedom for the individual.

What Odajnyk is not taking into account is the marxist principle, which Sartre adopts, specifying that men can only be free together. (This principle will be looked

at in greater detail in the next chapter within the context of the group-in-fusion.) This principle presupposes that the individual is an abstraction. Therefore, it is not surprising that Sartre attributes to the individual (qua individual) little practical freedom.

Groups, such as counter-cultures, revolutionaries, community organizations, and other social movements in general, which fuse on the basis of an existing serial order, are considered to exercise a certain amount of influence (or freedom) upon the social totality. And of course, the process of group formation presupposes decision and choice because it depends upon the activity of individuals.<sup>76</sup> Thus, a rationale is implied where it no longer makes sense to speak of freedom apart from the whole to which it belongs. In other words, it no longer makes sense to speak of individual freedom as a predetermined quantity. Only in the context of a diachronic analysis, in terms of historically specific events, can the proportions of freedom and necessity (which is the form of alienation corresponding to objectification) be ascertained for a given moment in time. As Poster put it, though Sartre allowed for there to be practical limits on freedom, even to the point of its total negation, he never renounced it as an absolute quality.<sup>77</sup>

### History as Totalization

The question of an historical subject is relevant to Sartre's work, because Sartre posits history as one grand totalization;<sup>78</sup> and a totalization, any totalization, presupposes a subject directing the process. Now, the question of an historical subject may be approached in more than one way.

One may seek an historical subject in Sartre's work in terms of a revolutionary fused-group. The problem here is that all fused-groups necessarily change back into serial structures (see above) and therefore the fused-group cannot bridge various historical epochs; whenever there is a group-in-the-process-of-fusing it is like a new birth; it occurs anew, though the goal may be a recurrence.

On the other hand, one may seek an historical subject in Sartre's work in terms of the practico-inert. In this sense, historical progress occurs in terms of the development of the forces of production--a good, old fashioned historical materialism. But can an ensemble of lifeless machinery really be considered an historical subject? Not ontologically anyway. The practico-inert is not itself an historical subject, but rather the "embodiment" of the work of all individual subjects.

In this sense, the practico-inert is a kind of synthetic resultant of all influences upon it. Individuals and groups project themselves in and through matter, because

they must; as Yovel, one Sartrean commentator, clearly stated it: "if men unite and set up common projects, it is not because their inherent rationality prescribes this, but because they share a common externality which each must interiorize".<sup>79</sup> And through matter they may either complement or oppose one another. What determines cooperation or opposition, though, is not random chance. And this suggests another way of approaching the question of an historical subject: in what ways can history be seen as anything other than an arbitrary chaos of inter-blocking projects?

Yovel construes a reason for why Sartre is not quite successful in accounting for historical totalization by combining elements from the above mentioned approaches. First of all he recognises that the practico-inert cannot itself be an historical subject, or "for-itself". From there he directly concludes that history cannot thus be identified with a "single totalizing project or intention".<sup>80</sup> This step in his reasoning is crucial, because it implies that history cannot be seen as wholly unified, or as oriented toward one, fundamental end point, as in the way an individual biography can. Yovel explains his reasoning:

In the sphere of the individual, Sartre introduced in BN the concept of a 'fundamental project', to serve as the basis for unifying a person's various particular projects within the framework of a single individuum. It is the 'fundamental project' which accounts,

among other things, for the occurrence of regularities and discernable patterns in the behaviour of the individual ... But, obviously, the same solution cannot be applied to the sphere of history, where no comprehensive individuum can be recognised.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, while the individual biography possesses continuity in terms of a fundamental, most encompassing project, historical continuity is left unaccounted for.<sup>82</sup> Yovel argues that Sartre does not provide the historical totalization with a teleological direction, and therefore leaves the direction of history to a kind of chance rooted in the margin of spontaneity individuals tend to possess in a given historical totality.

And it is primarily the absence of a single, comprehensive individuum that bars the attribution of a fundamental project to history according to Yovel, not the absence itself of such a project in Sartre's work. Because, as point of fact, Sartre does attribute history, at least up to the present era, with a kind of fundamental project. Sartre refers to this project in the following quotation:

The human labour of the individual, and, consequently, of the group, is conditioned in its aim ... by man's fundamental project, for himself or for the group, of transcending scarcity ... .<sup>83</sup>

Yet Sartre does not proceed from this project to the idea of a comprehensive individuum. Rather, he sees scarcity as, on the one hand, being expressed in worked matter, and, on the other hand, "returning to men through matter".<sup>84</sup> In other words, the question of an historical subject he "dissolves"



into a dialectical circularity between men and things. The practico-inert, as a result, becomes the tangible mark of an otherwise ephemeral, diffuse action of all, everywhere, within a common, shared externality. Thus, the question of an historical subject becomes "the problem of totalization without a totalizer".<sup>85</sup>

The question Sartre must answer then, short of propounding sheer contradiction, is "how can individual acts result in ordered structures, and not a tangled labyrinth?".<sup>86</sup> This question, reminiscent of structuralism, was asked over and over again by an interviewer, printed in "The Itinerary of a Thought". (Since Sartre does not really tackle the question of totalization without a totalizer in the first volume of the Critique, but rather leaves it to the never completed second volume, this interview with Sartre proves valuable.) Sartre is asked how social structures "happen to have a rigorous structure", such as language and relations of production, given that "these structures are never intentional objects".<sup>87</sup> To clarify what he means, the interviewer provides an example from anthropological research: "a tribe can speak a language for centuries and then be discovered by an anthropologist who can decipher its phonological laws, which have been forever unknown to the totality of the subjects speaking the language".<sup>88</sup> Thus, where do these phonological laws come from? Sartre replies that social structures are "the reply

of worked matter to the agents who work it".<sup>89</sup> More specifically, Sartre speaks of "collective objects".

He recounts those ideas in the first volume of the Critique, which explain how institutions (i.e., collective objects) are always both the product of men and the producers of men. Implicit in this reference is the central concept of counter-finality, which stands as a possible explanation for how social structures can have unintended order--indeed an order against men. Then he anticipates the never completed second volume, and refers to his intention to show the basic unity of objects existing in a society "completely rent asunder by class struggle".<sup>90</sup> Even in such a severely divided society, Sartre maintains that "there is an institutional order which is necessarily ... the product of masses of men constituting a social unity and which at the same time is radically distinct from all of them".<sup>91</sup> But the second volume was never completed.

Ronald Aronson (1980), commenting upon the unfinished manuscript, writes, "we see the intelligibility of oppositions developing with a single unifying praxis directed by a sovereign individual (i.e., Stalin) ... But (Sartre) never begins his account of how a multiplicity of hostile or unrelated praxes cohere".<sup>92</sup> And, according to Aronson, Sartre lacked the intellectual tools for completing the second volume, because "the premisses of the second volume were those of the first", namely, an emphasis on

individualism in the absence of an entity called society.<sup>93</sup> Aronson would argue that Sartre, rather than focus upon how masses of individual men constitute a social unity, should have posed the problem as, 'how to bring under social control the already socialized process of production'.<sup>94</sup> This is why Sartre never got to accounting for how a multiplicity of hostile or unrelated praxes cohere; because a process of co-operation must be assumed to underlie all social relations, no matter how antagonistic.<sup>95</sup>

Yet Sartre does presuppose a social unity from the beginning, at least formally. For one, his dialectical approach assumes a constant interrelatedness and dynamic relation among all parts. Every part is a differentiation of the same whole. Two, Sartre discusses class as "the inorganic common materiality of all the members of a given ensemble";<sup>96</sup> it is "a type of collective being (which is) the basis of all individual reality".<sup>97</sup> For, on the philosophic level, to say that such and such are different necessarily implies that they have something in common, since otherwise it would be a trivial statement.<sup>98</sup> Thus, "everyone merges together in a particular common being ... precisely to the extent that they are not individual organisms";<sup>99</sup> that is, "class as collective being is in everyone to the extent that everyone is in it".<sup>100</sup> And for Sartre, this homogeneity of an ensemble of individuals ("somewhat vaguely haunted by a supra-individual

consciousness which ... a discredited organicism still tries to find in the rough"<sup>101</sup>) exists as a congealed reality in the form of worked materiality.

However, in Sartre's work, this is precisely the point at which the trail of the historical subject dissolves: in the realm of inorganic matter there is no possibility of there being an ontologically satisfactory subject. Sartre refers to this realm of human history as a level of non-human history in the following passage:

The inert totality of worked matter ... is the only factor in any given social field which allows every particular historical situation to be transcended by the total process of history ... It is necessary, as we shall soon see, that human history should be lived, at this level of the investigation, as non-human history ....<sup>102</sup>

This level of the investigation is precisely that of the anti-dialectic, the practico-inert, counter-finality, and, ultimately, exigency, where the basic intelligibility of men mediating the relations between things lies in a mutual social isolation supported and maintained by the inert object around which persons gather. (Of course, this view stands in contrast to the social consensus assumed, by structural functionalists, to underlie society.<sup>103</sup>) At this level, institutions become peculiar mixtures of both natural and social properties, and 'the material object becomes a strange and living being with its own customs and its own movement'. But these are the concepts with which this chapter began, and has been devoted to. There is very

definitely a complex, dialectical order to social change in Sartre's work; there is, also, definitely no historical subject posited at the centre of this order.

If anything, history evolves, according to Sartre, in the way one marxian commentator, George Markus (1978), claims it evolves according to Marx: it evolves in terms of actual life relations, socio-economic conditions, and in terms of those forms of activity which evolve out of those previous relations and conditions.<sup>104</sup> In this sense, the general direction of history can be glimpsed only in practical, concrete, historically specific terms; "neither the actual course of history nor the developmental tendencies of its particular epochs can be comprehended through some sort of abstract formula".<sup>105</sup> At best, then, history can be seen as an interrelated totality-totalization, and where it is mostly (a unified) totalization it is also mostly collectively controlled. But also, when people act collectively, they must adapt to material circumstances produced by others and themselves, and only in certain ways, because they limit their choices by virtue of social commitment. The end point of history therefore lies in the constraints of social commitment.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter 2

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, Critique of Dialectical Reason, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London, USA: Verso Editions, 1982), p.20 (hereafter cited as Sartre, Critique).

2. Karl Marx, "Capital," in Karl Marx: Selected Writings, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.464.

3. Sartre, Critique, p.161.

4. Ibid., p.101.

5. Ibid., p.169.

6. Ibid., p.169.

7. Ibid., p.179.

8. Ibid., p.221.

9. Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. 1: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production, ed. Frederick Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: International Publishers Co., Inc., 1979), p.73.

10. Sartre, Critique, p.124.

11. Ibid., p.124.

12. Ibid., p.166.

13. Ibid., p.67.

14. Ibid., p.79 and 97.

15. Ibid., pp.159-160.

16. Ibid., p.160.

17. Ibid., p.160.

18. Ibid., p.180.

19. Ibid., p.152.
20. Ibid., p.193.
21. Ibid., p.162.
22. Ibid., pp.162-163.
23. Ibid., pp.162-163.
24. Jean-Paul Sartre, Search For A Method, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1963), p.47.
25. For further reference to this idea of there always being infinitely more than one sees from any one point of view, see Jean-Paul Sartre, The Psychology of Imagination, trans. Bernard Frechtman (Secaucus, New Jersey: The Citadell Press, 1972), pp.5-8, and Sartre, Critique, p.161.
26. David McLellan, The Thought of Karl Marx: An Introduction (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p.124.
27. George J. Stack, Sartre's Philosophy of Social Existence (St. Louis, Missouri, USA: Warren H. Green, Inc., 1977), p.113n.
28. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The German Ideology, ed. C. J. Arthur, trans. Lawrence & Wishart (New York: International Publishers, 1981), pp.22-24.
29. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party, trans. Samuel Moore (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1952), p.49.
30. There are, of course, intended consequences for Sartre as well. Unintended and intended consequences are both aspects of praxis, as Sartre makes quite clear in his Critique (p.226).
31. Sartre, Critique, pp.154-160,185,191-196.
32. Ibid., pp.191-192.
33. Ibid., p.154.
34. Ibid., p.193.
35. Ibid., p.193.

36. Ibid., p.89.
37. Ibid., p.159.
38. Ibid., p.191.
39. Ibid., p.226.
40. Gila J. Hayim, The Existential Sociology of Jean-Paul Sartre (Amherst, USA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), p.80.
41. Sartre, Critique, pp.124-125.
42. Pietro Chiodi, Sartre and Marxism, trans. Kate Soper (Great Britain: The Harvester Press, 1976), pp.x-xi.
43. Ibid., p.xi.
44. Ibid., p.79.
45. Ibid., p.80.
46. Ibid., p.80.
47. William Leon McBride, "Sartre and Marxism," in The Library of Living Philosophers, Vol. XVI: The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Co., 1981), p.624.
48. Sartre, Critique, p.307n.
49. Jean-Paul Sartre, Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr, trans. unknown (New York: George Braziller, Inc., Plume Books, 1963), p.28.
50. Jean-Paul Sartre, The War Diaries of Jean-Paul Sartre: November 1939/ March 1940, trans. Quintin Hoare (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p.107.
51. Sartre, Search For A Method, p.156.
52. Sartre, Critique, p.161; see also pp.321-323.
53. Ibid., p.185.
54. Walter Odajnyk, Marxism and Existentialism (New York: Anchor Books, 1965), p.162.
55. Sartre, Critique, pp.258-259.
56. Ibid., p.256.



57. Raymond Aron, History and the Dialectic of Violence: An Analysis of Sartre's "Critique de la Raison Dialectique," trans. Barry Cooper (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), pp.55-56.

58. Ibid., p.46.

59. Ibid., p.46.

60. George Snedeker, "Sartre, Althusser and the Ontology of Everyday Life," Dialectical Anthropology 8:4 (April 1984): 283.

61. Mark Poster, Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p.167.

62. Sartre, Critique, pp.170-173.

63. Ibid., p.345.

64. Sartre, Critique, p.348; see also Aron, History and the Dialectic of Violence, p.57; Odajnyk, Marxism and Existentialism, p.150; Stack, Sartre's Philosophy of Social Existence, p.116.

65. Sartre, Critique, p.348.

66. Ibid., pp.183,193-194.

67. Ibid., p.194.

68. See further on in the text for Sartre's definition of class. Struggle among classes more appropriately refers to the fused group.

69. Sartre, Critique, p.218.

70. Ibid., p.216.

71. Ibid., p.216.

72. Ibid., p.218.

73. Odajnyk, Marxism and Existentialism, pp.160-161.

74. Ibid., pp.162 and 163.

75. Ibid., p.4.

76. Stack, Sartre's Philosophy of Social Existence, p.117.

77. Poster, Existential Marxism in Postwar France, p.167.
78. Sartre, Critique, pp.64-74, esp. p.74.
79. Yirmiahu Yovel, "Existentialism and Historical Dialectic," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 39:4 (June 1979): 492.
80. Ibid., p.490.
81. Ibid., p.490.
82. Ibid., p.493.
83. Sartre, Critique, pp.137 and 123.
84. Ibid., p.123.
85. Ibid., p.817.
86. Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Itinerary of a Thought," in Between Existentialism and Marxism, ed. Jean-Paul Sartre, trans. John Methews (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), p.55.
87. Ibid., pp.54-55.
88. Ibid., p.54.
89. Ibid., p.55.
90. Ibid., p.56.
91. Ibid., p.56.
92. Ronald Aronson, Jean-Paul Sartre--Philosophy in the World (London, USA: Verso Editions, 1980), p.285.
93. Ibid., pp.286 and 270.
94. Ibid., p.270.
95. Ibid., p.268.
96. Sartre, Critique, p.251.
97. Ibid., p.250.
98. This is the principle of identification, and is described in Joachim Israel, The Language of Dialectics and the Dialectics of Language (Great Britain, Sussex: The Harvester Press Ltd., 1979), pp.109-110.

99. Sartre, Critique, pp.251-252.
100. Ibid., p.252.
101. Ibid., p.251.
102. Ibid., pp.122-123.
103. Wilfrid Desan, The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), p.116.
104. George Markus, Marxism and Anthropology: The Concept of 'Human Essence' in the Philosophy of Marx, trans. E. De Laczay and George Markus (The Netherlands: Van Gorcum Assen, 1978), pp.54-56.
105. Ibid., p.54.

### Chapter 3

#### Scarcity, Praxis and the Group-In-Fusion

##### Introduction

Sartre finds the idea of struggle being borne out of the cooperative labour of a primeval village community with surplus-value not plausible. To Sartre, the negative fact of class struggle does not make sense in a society that produces a little more than subsistence amounts. Therefore, Sartre presupposes an original condition of scarcity, not of cooperative labour and a process of production out of communal control, but more like Hobbes's state of nature. Specifically, Sartre posits scarcity as a natural fact of poverty beyond social control (at least up to the present year), and with no connection to the distribution of goods.

Scarcity originates, conceptually, for Sartre, in his concept of need, where it constitutes the first moment of this fundamental dialectic between man and man's environment. But in so far as need is as variable as those things one is capable of being conscious of, it is not fixed. Yet scarcity of goods for some or all is an objective fact according to Sartre.

What scarcity does to social organisation is

condition it negatively. Where the dominance of social system separates and atomizes individuals as mediators between different sectors of materiality, scarcity tends to transform that separation into mutual fear and hostility. This separation and antagonism is broken only by the insurgence of a fused-group that acts for itself in response to some collective, external threat. Individual freedom comes to the fore here, and is really an aspect of collective freedom. Only together can people realize a concrete freedom.

#### A Naturalized Scarcity

Though Sartre's conception of scarcity is difficult to specify exactly, due to the many senses in which he uses it in the Critique, it is most importantly an absolute, material fact presupposed as the context best able to explain why the development of the division of labour should transform into class struggle. Sartre argued that if we assume, as Marx and Engels imply, that members of a society produce a surplus of goods, then the transformation does not make sense; but that if we assume that not enough is produced for all, then the transformation does make sense as the impossibility of the co-existence of a collectivity of individuals. Consequently, scarcity necessarily demands a numerical reduction or limit to the population. In this context, social relations are necessarily struggle and the

mode of production is the dominant institution. And scarcity is treated as a natural phenomenon rather than a socially imposed condition. Let us consider Sartre's position in more detail.

Sartre claimed that for Marx, "in the capitalist period the mode of production itself produces scarcity ... because it comes into contradiction with the relations of production",<sup>1</sup> where the mode would refer to forces of production. Sartre states quite explicitly in a footnote: "it must be understood here that the rediscovery of scarcity in this investigation makes absolutely no claim either to oppose marxist theory, or to complete it. It is of a different order".<sup>2</sup> The order it is of devolves upon explaining how it is possible for the forces of production to come into conflict with the relations of production in the first place. According to Sartre, Marx argued that they do, and Sartre himself sought to explain how it is possible that they can.

Sartre's rationale for scarcity originates in a consideration of why the division of labour should transform into the basis for class struggle. Sartre begins this consideration in terms of the historically interpretative works of Marx and Engels. Engels, for instance, noted that private property increased with the increase in trade. Some primeval village communities, though, did not transform into villages of small-holding peasants. For example, Engels

noted that Asiatic communes "managed to resist everything except the entirely modern competition of large-scale industry".<sup>3</sup> Sartre points out that Engels could not explain why some villages incorporated extensive private property, while other villages did not. (The implication here is that those villages not in a condition of scarcity had no impetus to change.) Engels attributed commodity production, as an expression of private property, to be the source of inequalities of wealth, though not as the source of class. Engels asserted that the division of labour was the basis of the division of classes.<sup>4</sup> Though, as Debra Bergoffen (1982) put it, "Sartre objects to this argument, however, because it involves our acknowledging an original period of cooperative labour which is somehow transformed into a history of class conflict. The somehow, according to Sartre is not explained by Marx and Engels and cannot be explained unless scarcity is placed at the origin of history in such a way as to account for an original negation of human beings by each other".<sup>5</sup> She then makes the following interesting comment: "it is curious that Sartre does not see that the concept of alienated praxis ... could account for the vague 'somehow' of Marx and Engels but insists that the intelligibility of history is grounded in the givenness of scarcity".<sup>6</sup> In other words, 'why did Sartre not use the concepts of alienated praxis and counter-finality, instead of scarcity, to account for the fragmentation of the

cooperative labour of a particular mode of production?' This question suggests the approach which Stack states that Sartre should have taken: how is the already socialized process of production to be brought under social control? To explain the fragmentation of cooperative labour in terms of alienated praxis would presuppose an original condition of cooperative labour rather than the struggle of scarcity. It seems that Sartre was against such a presupposition. It seems moreover that Sartre has adopted the old, bourgeois notions of original scarcity and the necessity of vicious competition, reminiscent of the social contract theorists, such as Hobbes. Sartre phrases his concern on this relation between labour and class in the following passage:

In Engels, we see workers creating their administrators; and in Marx, we see the direct co-operation of individuals around a mode of production which determines its conditions. But why must these direct transformations ... inevitably become antagonisms? Why should the social division of labour, which is a positive differentiation, be transformed into class struggle, that is, into a negative differentiation?<sup>7</sup>

And he answers in the following way:

The only possible answer ... is that negation must be given in the first instance in the original indifferenciation (i.e., before the social division of labour itself) ....<sup>8</sup>

The negation that occurs before the division of labour itself, occurring in the very relationship of man to nature, is the negation of man by matter, which is to say, "the necessity for society (to form a group by which) to choose



its dead and its underfed".<sup>9</sup> The point is that the positive fact of the division of labour transforming into the negative fact of class struggle does not make sense in a society that produces a little more than subsistence amounts. Sartre sees no reason why those few freed from directly productive labour would not "share out the surplus", and why the situation of the primeval village community, for example, should ever have changed in the absence of scarcity.<sup>10</sup> Thus Sartre reasons, independent of any anthropological verification, that the coincidence of the division of labour with class divisions makes sense "if we assume that differentiation occurs in a society whose members always produce a little less than everyone needs".<sup>11</sup> In effect, then, rather than assume the formation of classes to be based on the production of surplus value, Sartre saw class antagonism as making sense only in terms of an original condition of absolute scarcity, prior to the occurrence of the phenomenon of class itself.<sup>12</sup>

That this view diverges from that of Marx is made quite clear in the following passage:

The historical interpretations of Marx and Engels, taken literally, would have us believe that societies always have enough of what is necessary ... And that it is the mode of production which ... produces the social scarcity of its product, that is to say, class inequality.<sup>13</sup>

Hence, Sartre is asserting that he is not presenting an exactly marxist view.<sup>14</sup> One is thus put in the position of

subscribing to one view, surplus value as the condition of class antagonism, or the other, scarcity as the condition of class antagonism.

Sartre spoke of scarcity in other contexts. He spoke of it as absolute scarcity when he wrote, "the fact is that after thousands of years of history, three quarters of the world's population are undernourished".<sup>15</sup> This assertion in itself does not imply what the causes of undernourishment are: is undernourishment the result of an objective insufficiency, or is it the result of socially imposed relations of production? (The same indifferentiation is implied by Sartre's treatment of "relative scarcity".) In another regard, Sartre defined scarcity as the permanent possibility that human relations can be fixed in terms of externally modifying material conditions.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, in an interview Sartre defined scarcity in the following way: "inasmuch as a cause, any cause whatsoever, makes us need a certain object, that object is not given in the proportion that we need it: that is scarcity".<sup>17</sup> None of these definitions serve here, and one might thus say that there is a scarcity of definitions. Fortunately, though, in the same above mentioned interview, Sartre is pressed to discuss scarcity in terms of being either an absolute, nature-given or socially imposed condition. He answered thus:

Sartre: (scarcity) is always a fact of social oppression. But there are other scarcities that arise solely from the relation of man's demand--a free demand, in no way imposed by someone else--to the quantity of what is given.

Interviewer: could one generalize and say that need is natural whereas scarcity is social?

Sartre: need is natural, but that does not mean that the object of our desires is there. Scarcity is social to the extent that the desired object is scarce for a given society. But strictly speaking, scarcity is not social. Society comes after scarcity. The latter is an original phenomenon of the relation between man and nature. Nature does not sufficiently contain the objects that man demands in order that man's life should not include either work, which is struggle against scarcity, or combat.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, by the way he answered, Sartre is not allowing scarcity to be simply either a created or a given condition. It is both; but it is first a given condition rooted in the relation between man and nature. Yet at this level (of the relation between man and nature) scarcity is co-constituted by both man and the natural environment. And here variability, or the arbitrariness of human choice, enters into the equation. The critical question thus becomes, "To what extent, and how, does man determine scarcity?" Sartre's answer to this question is to be found in his discussion of need as a dialectic of negated negation.

#### Scarcity as a Moment of Need

Need, specifically the basic need of material sustenance, Sartre depicted in terms of a human organism

amidst the natural environment--reminiscent of Hobbes's state of nature. We may well imagine a primitive human animal, hungry, using its brain instead of its physical prowess to stay alive. But this would be wholly a projection, since Sartre is not speaking of a concrete historical instance, and he does not treat the herd aspect of early man in his discussion of need. Indeed the illustration of man in conflict with nature is depicted as an isolated event to show the basic character of praxis or human action itself, by itself, for every human organism. "We must ... see what is the real rationality of action, at the level of individual praxis (ignoring for the moment the collective constraints which give rise to it, limit it or make it ineffective)".<sup>19</sup> The organism itself is considered a given totality that is self-perpetuating and semi-autonomous. Since its material sustenance, one, exists outside of itself in inanimate matter, and, two, is rarely immediately available, its self-perpetuation is interrupted and therein characterized first by an experience of lack, or in this case hunger. Lack is the initial negation, and as such is the "initial contradiction between the organic and the inorganic".<sup>20</sup>

Need, in turn, is the negation of lack "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 ... From this point of

view, the negation of this negation is achieved through the transcendence of the organic towards the inorganic".<sup>21</sup> In other words, the organism acts as a whole in eliminating a lack within it. In so doing it constitutes the material environment as a field of possible satisfactions, in the sense that its being lies outside itself in inanimate matter, and one way of many possible ways must be chosen as a means to maintaining the unity of itself. In so far as the organism will disintegrate if it does not maintain itself, "the living body is therefore in danger in the universe, and the universe harbours the possibility of the non-being of the organism".<sup>22</sup> Need, as the negation of hunger and as the transcendence of the organic-inorganic contradiction is this projection of self into the environment as action.

Scarcity in this sense, then, is the exigency of nature through biology occasioning within the human organism a goal of survival. The human organism, for his part, chooses or creates a particular means of achieving that goal. Since the outside world, though, is materiality, the living body must reduce itself to a material force in order to act on it. In this sense, in that the individual must of necessity reduce himself to an object in order to act on other objects, the seed of dehumanization is embedded in the basic relationship between man and matter.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, dehumanization becomes a permanent possibility

of human reality.

But what is more basic to this discussion is that "at this ambiguous level the dialectical transition from function to action can be seen".<sup>24</sup> First and foremost the organism posits itself as its own end. Consequently, the exteriority of the strictly material universe is transcended towards interiority through a strictly dialectical relation between the living body and its environment. The environment is constituted as a field of possible satisfactions within the end given by the organism, and the organism is reduced to the level of instrumentality in order to realize satisfaction through the environment. This is one sense in which "man is 'mediated' by things to the same extent as things are 'mediated' by man".<sup>25</sup> Praxis, in this sense, is a relation between the organism itself as an exterior and future end to be achieved, and the organism itself as a totality presently under threat, as mediated by matter.<sup>26</sup> It is not a means in preserving the environment in and for itself; rather, praxis is a relation of the organism to itself through the environment with the aim of preserving itself.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, in so far as the biological functions of the body are experienced as need, and need gives rise to a labour that "is in fact the lived revelation of a goal to aim at",<sup>28</sup> the praxis by which man reproduces himself is dialectical. And this is what Sartre sought to show by his discussion of need, as the following passage verifies:

To consider an individual at work is a complete abstraction, since in reality labour is as much a relation between men as a relation between man and the material world. I do not claim to have revealed the historically primary moment of the dialectic: I have merely tried to show that our most everyday experience, which is surely labour, considered at the most abstract level, that is as the action of an isolated individual, immediately reveals the dialectical character of action.<sup>29</sup>

Hopefully the immediate character of action as dialectical is as immediate to the reader as it was to Sartre (since, as it was pointed out in the first chapter, Sartre has hereby attempted a kind of phenomenological proof).

G.N.Izenberg (1976), however, focuses upon how important a role scarcity, or the initial experience of lack, plays in Sartre's account of human action. Izenberg points out how scarcity seems to be the principal defining factor in human action:

(In the Critique Sartre) spoke of man as a being of need, suffering from a lack that forced him into activity in order to overcome it ... The need to survive physically was the fundamental project of man toward the surrounding world, and the fact of material scarcity defined his relationships to other men, which were predominately those of conflict over available resources ... Sartre was now interested, not with how men related to their own purposes and values ... but with their ability to realize one very concrete, specific desire (--to survive physically).<sup>30</sup>

And Izenberg is quite correct on this matter, except in separating the need to survive physically from how men relate to their own purposes and values (which ignores Sartre's dialectical nominalism). But he carries his point

too far when he asserts that Sartre has construed a "crudely biological" theory of motivation in the Critique,<sup>31</sup> as if Sartre's concept of scarcity has really reduced human action to mere function.

Simply because scarcity imposes upon individuals the fundamental need to survive physically does not necessarily imply that all motivation is crudely biological. For Sartre, this fundamental project is still carried out by the organism, acting for itself rather than for the environment. Moreover, Sartre also writes, "the labourer's ... manner of producing himself conditions not only the satisfaction of his need, but also the need itself".<sup>32</sup> And so, once the fundamental need of subsistence is satisfied in a direct way, scarcity recedes as a background condition, giving way to the development of new needs within it. (Though, in the Critique, Sartre does not explicitly mention a hierarchy of needs, it is implied here. In fact, it seems that this marxist notion of new needs growing out of the satisfaction of old needs is a principle Sartre considers beyond question. He merely takes it from marxism, and thrusts it into his own work, without really elaborating upon it or looking at its various ramifications.)

Parallel to Izenberg's argument, Melvin Rader cites Marx (of The German Ideology) as stating that natural, biological needs are essentials of all human life. But then Rader points out, as if anticipating Izenberg's kind of



argument, that "we would mistake Marx's intent if we were to suppose that he wanted to scale life down to these necessities".<sup>33</sup> Similarly, we would mistake Sartre's intent as well if we were to suppose he has construed a crudely biological theory of motivation.

Action, for Sartre, really, was not determined in any such crude way. Initially life may be a mere struggle to survive, and this might be interpreted as a kind of determinism, but with the satisfaction of old needs come new needs, as if man could never stop desiring more. ~~Of~~ course all new needs generate in terms of what is already there; but, beyond the bare necessities, it is up to a creative being to determine what is lacking from the given environment. In this sense, man is a force unto himself. And indeed, if one recalls the above discussion of Sartre's existential freedom, where existence precedes essence, and will is not determined in any way externally, but rather operates in terms of given conditions, then one may be apt to interpret Sartre's notion of praxis, in contrast to Izenberg's position, as a stark dialectic between an utterly spontaneous will and a thick, indifferent, passive environment.

This is precisely how George Lichtheim has interpreted Sartre's concept of praxis. In a book entitled, Marxism in Modern France (1966), Lichtheim poses his own argument as follows:

The subject-object relation appeared in (Sartre's) writings ... as a confrontation between the individual ego and an external situation which receives its meaning from and through the ego. In this way he set up a counterpoint to the determinism of the orthodox marxists, but only at the cost of dispensing with the real historical process altogether. The sartrean dialectic is that of a spontaneous will pitted against the inert resistance of the material world. Sartre's libertarianism is absolute because the objective relation has been suppressed ... (History) comes about because it is willed.<sup>34</sup>

Lichtheim asserts that the objective relation has been "suppressed", meaning that the influence of object on subject has been neglected. Of course this is false, since Lichtheim has neglected to consider Sartre's theory of the anti-dialectic, or the basic notion that persons shape themselves within a context that has already shaped them.

One might consider, though, that even when Sartre does assert, 'a man must make something out of what he has already been made', there is an implicit hint of separation between the being of the man, as that which has already been made, and the doing of the man, as if it were not quite the man himself who is to execute the remodeling: the man seems to have suddenly broken free of himself in some psychological way. Pierre Bourdieu corroborates this view of Sartre's concept of praxis in the following passage where Bourdieu speaks of "durable dispositions" as missing from Sartre's work (which may be thought of as habits or predispositions toward acting only in certain ways):

Refusing to recognize anything resembling

durable dispositions, Sartre makes each action a sort of unprecedented confrontation between the subject and the world.<sup>35</sup>

Bourdieu goes on to say that such a conception tends toward radical voluntarism, where things are as willed, and for no other reason:

If the world of action is nothing other than this universe of interchangeable possibles, entirely dependent on the decrees of the consciousness which creates it and hence totally devoid of objectivity, if it is moving because the subject chooses to be moved, revolting because he chooses to be revolted, then emotions, passions, and actions are merely games of bad faith.<sup>36</sup>

Again we have the same criticism as that made by Lichtheim, but with the suggestion, in addition, of what might be missing from Sartre's concept of praxis, i.e., durable dispositions.

But, according to Bourdieu, the only limits to the individual's freedom in Sartre's theory "is that which freedom sets itself by the free abdication of a pledge (to the group) or the surrender of bad faith, the Sartrian name for alienation ...".<sup>37</sup> Bourdieu does not take into consideration the constant exigency of worked matter pressing against separated individuals within the serial mode of social relations, and explicitly refers to Sartre's "dialectical discourse" as mere "appearance".<sup>38</sup>

Of course Bourdieu is implying that well worn cartesian critique of Sartre's ontology as a dualism of mind and matter. Poster, in contradistinction, points out that

"it must be maintained that the dualism of human beings and things serves in the Critique as a support for the subject-object dialectic, not as a method of reintroducing the ontology of BN. Furthermore, the emphasis in the duality of human beings and things falls on their mediation, not on their opposition".<sup>39</sup>

Though Bourdieu is correct to note that something resembling durable dispositions is missing from Sartre's theory of praxis, he is wrong to leap from this point to a verdict that Sartre's theory of praxis is too voluntaristic, because of the role played by the practico-inert. The counter argument may be applied again that Bourdieu has not considered Sartre's theory of praxis in relation to the whole philosophy of which it is but one component.

In the end, then, Sartre's view of individual praxis is neither crudely biological, despite the heavy context of scarcity Sartre surrounds it with, nor rashly voluntaristic. To answer the original question of how, and to what extent, men determine scarcity, it can be said that scarcity is originally a given condition. However, the labourer's manner of satisfying subsistence needs conditions those needs themselves. Thus, new needs evolve on the basis of a particular mode of production; scarcity becomes a relative condition, and the new needs can no longer be seen as completely given by nature.

In effect, the line between determinism and

voluntarism varies about a midpoint, the exact position of which can be assessed only by a concrete study of a particular, frozen moment in time. This, of course, would constitute an historically specific analysis. It is because such a kind of analysis, or approach, is lacking from this work of Sartre's that certain theoretical gaps stand out in Sartre's analysis of need. For instance, Sartre never takes into consideration individual differences; he only speaks of man as an abstract, undifferentiated individual. Hence, if man is always a social being (which is, as Sartre asserts, a necessary prerequisite for any notion of individuality), then any satisfaction of needs, however much determined by nature and biology, occurs in an already socially differentiated context where some individuals have more power to shape themselves within a context that has already shaped them.<sup>40</sup> In short, a concept of power is completely lacking from Sartre's social philosophy, whereas for Marx it was a crucial conception which took away from nature phenomena caused by social organization, such as scarcity.

A second gap in Sartre's analysis of need concerns the marxist idea of new needs growing out of the satisfaction of old needs. Needs in this sense are left totally undifferentiated, and unaccounted for. For instance, no hierarchy of needs, which is implied, is discussed. Neither is the question of production, as conditioning the need itself, discussed, where the

conditioning of the need is a distinct topic from the conditioning of the manner of the satisfaction of need.<sup>41</sup> If production conditions the need itself, need must itself be examined in the social context, and not posited as some purely natural spring board given by biology powering the historical machine. In other words, need cannot be treated as a starting point of investigation, but rather it must be treated as a phenomenon intimately tied up in the thick of a circular process. Sartre simply posits need as the ahistorical and common dialectic of individual action without any regard for its social aspects.

### Collective Action

In certain circumstances, a group emerges 'hot' and acts where previously there was only gatherings.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, individual action and scarcity have been discussed. In this final section Sartre's theory of collective action comes to the fore. There will be a number of questions to look at in relation to this final topic. The most basic question is how cooperative, collective action differs from individual action. From the answer to this question one can gauge whether or not Sartre employs a "collective subject". The next question, given that no collective entity is found, is, "How is social action organised outside of serial conditioning?" The answer to

this question has relevance to Sartre's conceptualization of social change, as well as to the paradox of historical totalisation without a totaliser. A third question to which an answer will be sought in this section is that of individual freedom outside the series. In this connection we must see how Sartre builds on the idea of communal labour and on the corresponding principle that persons can only be free together.

All of these questions rest upon the concepts Sartre introduces as elements of a social ontology. Those concepts are, "reciprocity", as the basic human relation, and the "third party", or "ternary relation", as the basic social unit. Detailed explanation will follow. First, it is important to situate these conceptions within the proper context. Reciprocity, for instance, does not refer to an a priori good will of the human soul, but rather to "the way in which an individual can exist at all".<sup>43</sup> As Sartre put it, reciprocity "is really only the actualization of a relation which is given as having always existed, as the concrete and historical reality of the couple which has been just formed".<sup>44</sup> It is because the bond of reciprocity is the natural development of the individual's realisation of his projects that reciprocity is the actualization of 'a relation which is given as having always existed'; where the project is the basic, abstract structure of all individual action, reciprocity is the basic, abstract structure of all

joint human endeavors. And therefore, reciprocity is repeatedly recreated anew with the interaction of praxes, just as each moment of life can be seen as totally new. For Sartre, human relations could not be otherwise given the structure of praxis. But, keep in mind that, while reciprocity, like praxis, is ahistorical as a constant abstract structure (of a process), it is historical in its variable incarnations.

Sartre defines this abstract notion of reciprocity, to begin with, in the positive, and in terms of means and ends. The definition is as follows:

Reciprocity implies, first, that the other is a means to the extent that I myself am a means, that is to say, that the other is the means of a transcendent end and not my means; second, that I recognise the other as praxis, that is to say, as a developing totalisation, at the same time as integrating him as an object into my totalising project; third, that I recognise his movement towards his own ends in the same movement by which I project myself towards mine; and fourth, that I discover myself as an object and instrument of his ends through the same act which constitutes him an objective instrument of my ends.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, each person in positive reciprocity allows himself to be a means within the project of the other to the extent that the other is also a means within his own project; each member of the dyadic relation also possesses their own end, or reason for being in the relation; finally, each recognizes the other as a project, because each knows himself as a project. (Negative reciprocity would refer to



struggle, and, for instance, the refusal of one or both to be a means for the other, etc.)

Sartre depicts this sense of positive reciprocity perfectly in the following passage; one need only imagine two men performing a certain task together, such as chopping down a tree, to appreciate the depth of Sartre's technical imagination:

Two men are performing a certain task together. Each adapts his behavior to that of the other, each approaches or withdraws according to the requirements of the moment, each makes his body into the other's instrument to the extent that he makes the other into his, each anticipates the other's movement in his body, and integrates it into his own movement as a transcended means; and in this way each of them acts in such a way as to become integrated as a means into the other's movement.<sup>46</sup>

This unity, or coordination, of movement is described so gracefully, like the intimacy of lovers copulating, or the coordination of dolphins shooting into the air in parallel arcs. It is as much a bodily readiness as a mental readiness to synchronize behaviors.

But, according to Sartre, this coordination of positive reciprocity is not, strictly speaking, a unity: "however far the two integrations are carried, they respect one another, there will always be two of them, each integrating the entire universe".<sup>47</sup> In other words, the dividing factor of the reciprocal relation is precisely the double-end, as opposed to a single, transcendent hyper-centre; this reciprocity can never be a total

integration, because each has his own end, regardless of the mutual respect: there will always be an element of disintegration. Each will possess a distinctive goal, which the other will know only as something there for his partner. And each will be a means within the other's project: therefore, since being-an-object for another implies alienation for Sartre, it follows that unmediated reciprocity must be a relation of separation.<sup>48</sup> Though keep in mind that Sartre is not analyzing the reciprocity we see in the street, when, say, two men carry a heavy desk across the road; rather, he is analyzing the abstract reciprocity of two men on an otherwise deserted island, or, more accurately put, in a social vacuum. There would be no one there to see them carry a desk across the island. There would only be two of them.

It is on the basis of this somewhat peculiar designation of the dyad as necessarily 'lived in separation' that Sartre establishes the necessity of a third party for social unity. As Sartre himself puts it, "the only possible unity of these epicentres is a transcendent hyper-centre. In other words, the unity of a dyad can be realised only within a totalisation performed from outside by a third party".<sup>49</sup> Sartre provides some examples of how the unity of a dyad can be realised within a totalisation performed from outside by a third party.

One example is of a timekeeper in some typical

factory situation as he times two labourers: "his aim is to regulate a particular event: he sees each movement in its objectivity in terms of a certain objective purpose, namely, increasing productivity".<sup>50</sup> The workers are but a means in the timekeeper's task. "The two reciprocal actions together constitute the object of his inquiry".<sup>51</sup> And, as integral to his own task as their productive labour is, their reciprocity as a "double heterogeneity is relegated to another level" where it becomes "a single praxis whose end lies outside itself".<sup>52</sup> Thus Sartre concludes that "objectively, and through the third party, the independence of the end (given by the third) turns reciprocity into a binding together of movement ... It transforms a double action into a single event".<sup>53</sup>

But in this example, the third party, though totalising the dyad, objectifies it as well. This is because the timekeeper merely acts as an appendage of the factory system as a whole, conferring an external unity upon a plurality of individuals. Also, and most importantly, the third's goal is not the same as either of the workers' goals.

The third party that unifies without objectifying shares in the praxis of the dyad. What this means is that there is a common goal, that the goal of each individual is the same. Hence, there is a collective goal, a cause as it were, about which individuals can join together in their

efforts and organize themselves. It can be said, then, that each individual mediates in the praxis of every other member of the group (because they act as means for one another, reciprocally, towards a common goal): "the members of the group are third parties, which means that each of them totalises the reciprocities of others".<sup>54</sup>

Such group cohesion occurs, according to Sartre, when the practico-inert situation poses a common danger to all within it, such as with unsafe nuclear power stations, or a population under threat of being exterminated. In a sense, under such kinds of dire circumstance, persons are temporarily free of the exigency of the environment, precisely because they are persons and not machines. The elimination of the threat provides a common goal. This is the basis of the evolution of a serial gathering into a fused-group. 'Everyone, as a third party, becomes incapable of distinguishing his own safety from that of the others'.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, "insofar as I become a third party, I perceive the panic as the adaptation of a totality to a total threat. It is neither Others, nor a few individuals, who flee: instead, flight, conceived as a common praxis reacting to a common threat, becomes flight as an active totality".<sup>56</sup> The point is that this change in the mode of social relations, this sudden freedom in response to a threatening environment, is real in a concrete sense only if everyone is similarly affected. As Sartre will show, the freedom of one depends

on the freedom of all the others, for each one, since they are powerless individually.

It is important to account for how this changing of the mode of social relations occurs in terms of individual points of view. Sartre uses the example of the storming of the Bastille by the French populace of the Quarter Saint-Antoine district in Paris on the 14th of July, 1789. They stormed the Bastille, which was a fort, to obtain arms so as to protect themselves from the French army itself in a period of civil unrest. Sartre, though, focuses upon the way those people must have thought in order to have organised themselves on their own into a combat group; civilians organised themselves against a military establishment.

They thought, Sartre tells us, that they were in danger of being surrounded and possibly attacked by incoming troupes. In an initial state of panic, people went out into the streets, in particular "to a public place in the knowledge that they would find a lot of other people there who had come under the same conditions and whose objective was otherwise indeterminate".<sup>57</sup> No one in the district could simply withdraw from the situation, close the door and return to a good book so to speak; that was to risk death. So, individuals ran into the street, conglomerated at some or another area, all with this same burden of distress upon their shoulders.

In this context, people "joined" together, and, Sartre asserts, this occurred as the manifestation of an "action" that developed in everyone simultaneously. There was something to the effect of a "group mind", because everyone was thinking about the same thing with vital urgency. Sartre explains further:

the synthetic movement which starts from him (and everybody else individually) ... designates his integration as a task to be done ... It is not that he wishes it; he simply becomes it; his own flight, in effect, realises the practical unity of all in him.<sup>58</sup>

This is the case, because his goal, not being other than the other's goal, is the same. Through descriptive language Sartre brings the reader for a moment into what he imagines it was like to be there:

Just now, he was fleeing because everyone else was fleeing. Now he shouts, 'Stop!', because he is stopping and because stopping and giving the order to stop are identical in that the action develops in him and in everyone through the imperative organisation of its moments.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, there is, as Sartre puts it, "something resembling one object fleeing on these hundred pairs of legs".<sup>60</sup>

But the group only resembles something like an undifferentiated oneness of all, because each individual, though he can totalize the movements of all by the imperative of such and such an action through himself, as in synthesizing the marching of everyone through one's own marching, he cannot totalize himself as part of what he totalizes, just as a knife cannot cut itself.<sup>61</sup> The group,

rather than express this single objectness, "is the common structure of (one's own) action ... Its flight, in it and in me, is the same";<sup>62</sup> "it is the multiple result of my action multiplied everywhere, and everywhere the same".<sup>63</sup> Thus, for Sartre, the group is a praxis, not of one being, but rather a common praxis. Through cooperative action, which is itself rooted in there being a common goal, the mode of social relations changes from "I" to "Us".

Any undifferentiated objectness or static being of the group exists only in the future as the result of its action, inscribed in matter. In itself group praxis is no different from individual praxis; individual praxis differs from group praxis in the same way that the action of a single soldier differs from the action of a regiment of soldiers: there is more power, but they are both actions, and nothing else.

From this account of how the group fuses out of an atomised seriality, the questions set forth at the beginning of this section can be answered. One, there is no collective subject, at least as ontologically distinct from the individual subject. Group action centers on a common goal, around which individuals willingly organize themselves. Such action, though, must first be elicited by a threat, or counter-finality, from the environment. The fused group eventually evolves back into an ossified, serial structure because of the rules and heirarchy of command that

must be instituted in order to preserve the group, and the cycle merely repeats. The historical continuity emanates from the fact that these changes occur on the shoulders of one another, in an evolution of negation upon negation upon negation, of matter by man, of man by matter, matter by man, etc.



## FOOTNOTES

### Chapter 3

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, Critique of Dialectical Reason, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (London, USA: Verso Editions 1982), p.148 (hereafter cited as Sartre, Critique).

2. Ibid., p.152n.

3. Ibid., p.143.

4. Ibid., p.144.

5. Debra Bergoffen, "Sartre and the Myth of Natural Scarcity," The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology 13 (January 1982): 16.

6. Ibid., p.16.

7. Sartre, Critique, p.146.

8. Ibid., p.147.

9. Ibid., p.147.

10. Ibid., p.149.

11. Ibid., p.149.

12. For an interesting elaboration upon how unsatisfactory Sartre's concept of scarcity is in explaining social conflict, see George J. Stack, Sartre's Philosophy of Social Existence (St. Louis, USA: Warren H. Green, Inc., 1977), pp.110-112.

13. Sartre, Critique, p.146.

14. Stack, in writing on this issue in Sartre's Philosophy of Social Existence (pp.109-110), is therefore not correct to say that "Sartre seems to believe that he has presented a marxist view ... It is on the antagonism between groups in society that Sartre seems to misunderstand a fundamental principle of marxism." Sartre does not claim to present a marxist view, yet he claims that his view does

not oppose marxist theory either.

15. Sartre, Critique, p.123.

16 .Ibid., p.152n.

17. Jean-Paul Sartre, interviewed by Michel Rybalka, Oreste F. Pucciani and Susan Gruenheck, in The Library of Living Philosophers, Vol. XVI: The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp, trans. Michel Rybalka and Oreste F. Pucciani (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Co., 1981), p.31.

18. Ibid., pp.31-32. (Not consecutive quotations.)

19. Sartre, Critique, p.80.

20. Ibid., p.80.

21. Ibid., p.80.

22. Ibid., pp.81-82.

23. Frederic Jameson, Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971), p.237.

24. Sartre, Critique, p.83.

25. Ibid., p.79.

26. Ibid., p.83.

27. Ibid., p.90.

28. Ibid., p.90.

29. Ibid., p.91.

30. Gerald N. Izenberg, The Existentialist Critique of Freud: The Crisis of Autonomy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp.320-321.

31. Ibid., pp.320-321.

32. Sartre, Critique, p.95.

33. Melvin Rader, Marx's Interpretation of History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp.207-208.

34. George Lichtheim, Marxism in Modern France (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), pp.98-99.

35. Pierre Bourdieu, Outline of A Theory of Practice, trans. Richard Nire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p.73.

36. Ibid., p.74.

37. Ibid., p.75.

38. Ibid., p.76.

39. Mark Poster, Sartre's Marxism (London, Great Britain: Pluto Press Limited, 1979), p.51.

40. This idea was suggested by Graham Knight.

41. For an elaboration of the point of view of need as caused by production, rather than vice versa, see Jean Baudrillard, The Mirror of Production, trans. Mark Poster (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975).

42. Sartre, Critique, p.382.

43. Glen Mazis, "The Third: Development in Sartre's Characterization of the Self's Relation to Others," Philosophy Today 24 (Fall 1980): 256.

44. Sartre, Critique, p.109.

45. Ibid., pp.112-113.

46. Ibid., p.114.

47. Ibid., p.114.

48. Sartre, Critique, p.115; Thomas R. Flynn, "Mediated Reciprocity and the Genius of the Third," in The Library of Living Philosophers, Vol. XVI: The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Co., 1981), p.351.

49. Sartre, Critique, p.115.

50. Ibid., p.116.

51. Ibid., p.116.

52. Ibid., p.117.

53. Ibid., pp.117-118.

54. Ibid., p.374.
55. Ibid., pp.367-368.
56. Ibid., p.370.
57. Ibid., p.369n.
58. Ibid., pp.370-371.
59. Ibid., p.371.
60. Ibid., p.372.
61. Sartre, Critique, pp.372-373; Flynn, "Mediated Reciprocity and the Genius of the Third," pp.354-355.
62. Sartre, Critique, p.373.
63. Ibid., p.379.

## CONCLUSION

A basic model can be distilled from Sartre's work. Point one: relations between persons, conditioned by the context of scarcity, tend to be characterized by separation and mutual suspicion. This state of affairs Sartre depicted as the serial mode of group relations. Point two: while persons are separate, and relate through bonds of exteriority, a unity persists among them nevertheless, but in the realm of tools and the mode of production. Tools, on the one hand, resist change, because they are fixed elements of an inert system; on the other hand, tools can give rise to counter-finalities. Collectively threatened, a group can fuse from where previously there was only a series. On the basis of this free mode of group relations which can arise, people take control over the threatening practico-inert ensemble of tools and systems, and reshape conditions in accordance with a new purpose. But eventually this directing group ossifies, and changes back into a serial mode, as a system is erected within the group for the purpose of continuity.

Sartre's interpretations and ideas of Marx's thought are contained in this model. For instance, the reciprocal relationship between a people and their environment is

central to this model. People are conditioned by their environment, formed so to speak, but always potentially able to influence the environment as well, collectively. Two of Sartre's interpretations of Marx's thought are contained here: one, circumstances and people mutually influence one another; and two, that humans are social animals, which means in particular that an individual cannot be free in a concrete sense unless everyone in the same social milieu is similarly free.

Another interpretation of Marx's thought that Sartre founds his social model upon is that labour is the real foundation of social relations. In this sense, Sartre offered an explanation for how the practico-inert can dominate people without attributing to the practico-inert a superorganic existence. The practico-inert does not think and intend; it merely acts back upon man as the dumb movement of an imperfect machine (much the way a computer will do unintended things if it is not programmed correctly).

Problems with Sartre's model revolve primarily around his concept of scarcity. For instance, though he posits praxis as formally free, he allows it to be severely negated by scarcity, and moreover by a scarcity independent of human praxis. For Sartre, this natural scarcity accounts for the lack of social cohesion among distinct groups; and it accounts for the "coldness" of separation in the series.

Within this context of scarcity Sartre considered all praxes equally, as if power were not an important aspect of social differentiation. Any kind of treatment of social power is missing from Sartre's work, and this is because the concept of scarcity has been used to explain the social differentiation that power might be used to explain.

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