Severally Seeking Sartre

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Edited by

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**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

For Eleanor—

always my great friend "Biddy"

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INTRODUCTION

BENEDICT O'DONOHOE

The chapters collected in this volume, with one exception, started life as papers given at the conference of the North American Sartre Society (NASS) at the *Télé-université, Université du Québec à Montréal* (TÉLUQ) in April 2011, and I am indebted to the organisers for their permission to pursue this publication project.[1] Moreover, all but one of these twelve chapters are published here for the first time, representing altogether an original contribution to the critical conversation in Sartre studies.[2]

Recent books from Cambridge Scholars Publishing on Sartre have tended to emphasise not only the breadth of his intellectual enquiry and its many forms, but also its relevance to cultural and political debates in the twenty-first century.[3] The present collection prefers on the whole to take these things as implicit and understood, approaching Sartre from a wide range of perspectives, a number of them new or strikingly refreshed. This fact explains the alliterative title, *Severally Seeking Sartre*. For, the eleven contributors recruited in Montreal (from more than twice that number presenting at the conference) were selected precisely for their unorthodox perspectives on familiar issues in *sartrologie*, and/or for their novel approach to neglected aspects of Sartre's cogitations. Variety of method and technique is evident also in the styles of the authors, partly because some are non-Anglophones, partly because the Anglophones divide between British and North American English, and partly because ages range from twenties to sixties, with at least half under the age of forty. This, then, is a volume composed by a team of scholars whose very

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[1] The NASS 2011 conference was organised by Yan Hamel (TÉLUQ) and Christine Daigle (Brock University, Ontario). The "one exception" is my own chapter 12, an abridged draft of which was given at the UKSS in September 2013. My Montreal paper—a comparison of *Les Mains sales* and *Les Justes*—has appeared in *Sartre Studies International* and *The Journal of Camus Studies*.
[2] The sole exception here is John Ireland's chapter 11, an earlier draft of which has appeared in *Sartre Studies International*.
[3] See O'Donohoe and Elveton (eds.), *Sartre's Second Century* (CSP 2009) and Boulé and O'Donohoe (eds.), *Jean-Paul Sartre: Mind and Body, Word and Deed* (CSP 2011).

heterogeneity already testifies to the scope and enduring relevance of Sartre's work.[4]

In Part I: Aesthetics, the respected Japanese scholar, Nao Sawada, opens the volume with an extended reflection on "Sartre and Photography", which he rightly calls "an almost unknown topos, neglected even, within Sartre studies." On the one hand, this is surprising, given the degree of expert academic interest taken in Sartre's theories of the image, notably by Roland Barthes. But on the other hand, it is unsurprising, given Sartre's own apparent lack of interest in the medium, especially by contrast with his lifelong passion for the cinema. Professor Sawada looks first at Sartre's early philosophical texts (*The Imagination* and *The Imaginary*), then at his works of fiction and autobiography (*The Roads to Freedom*, *Nausea*, *Words*), and finally at "Sartre's only text on photography", the essay "From One China to Another". With this strategy, he sets out both "to shed light upon some of the little-known aspects of Sartre as aesthetician" and "to illuminate his ambiguous relationship with photography." His itinerary leads him to conclude that Sartre's disregard of photography "is strongly connected to his life and his philosophy", inasmuch as his own ugliness, the thingness of the photo-object and the "pastness" of its crystallised moment all combine to challenge the primacy of subjectivity and its future projects in Sartre's thought. To begin by "shedding light" on the writer's relationship with a medium whose very name means "light-writing" seems an apposite way to embark upon our search for Sartre.

Following Sawada's systematic approach to a neglected subject, we have Storm Heter adopting a new angle on the familiar theme of authenticity—or, to be more exact, "fakery". Asserting that "Sartreans, and existentialists more generally, use authenticity as a normative category for evaluating art and life", Heter proposes to "cast the American painter Jackson Pollock as a home-grown existentialist" and to contrast him with Andy Warhol, whom he dubs a "postmodern anti-existentialist". Whereas the existentialist values lucidity and authenticity and deplores fakery, Heter argues, the post-modern ethic and aesthetic value fakery precisely because "everyone is a faker; the only difference is that some people do not know that everyone is a faker." Therefore, in Warhol's world where everything is a matter of style, "the biggest insult from the perspective of Pop aesthetics is not the accusation of inauthenticity, it is the accusation that *one's style is boring*." By then bringing these modern and postmodern exponents of (in-)authenticity into dialogue with Sartre via the latter's

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[4] I have retained American-English spellings (e.g. *favor* for *favour*, *realize* for *realise*, etc.) when original sources using those variants are being quoted.

(again, neglected) study of Baudelaire, Heter achieves his "general purpose in this essay, which has been to take a fresh look at existential authenticity through the prism of some key cases in American art history." Heter's thesis also neatly complements Sawada's reading of the photograph as an essentially inauthentic artefact.

Likewise, Craig Matarrese takes up the theme of authenticity in art, namely music and specifically jazz, alluding to Sartre's 1947 article, "Jazz in America". Proceeding from the premise that "Sartre's enthusiasm for jazz was robust", Matarrese draws our attention also to his preface for Rene Leibowitz's book, *The Artist and His Conscience*, in which Sartre hopes that "music could be one of those cultural practices that offers both self-expressive authenticity and political commitment, while still having popular appeal". Recalling Sartre's "general view that authentic art must be about freedom and addressed to the freedom of others", Matarrese proposes to show how Sartre's "programmatic statements about meaning and commitment artificially narrow his reception of what is going on in jazz." Approaching his subject via Adorno's problematisation of jazz—which is "helpful as a contrast with Sartre's" and because "we need to have a good phenomenological description of this musical experience if we are to ask about its authenticity, meaning, or political engagement"—Matarrese is nevertheless led to conclude that there is scope for "an account of jazz […] that draws on Sartre's *Critique* and offers some possibility of jazz as an authentic and politically committed art." Like Sartre himself, therefore, we have come a long way to the *Critique* (1960) from the recorded jazz tune of *La Nausée* (1938), *Some of these Days*, which became emblematic of the protagonist's inability to get an authentic grip on his place in the world.

Part II: Philosophy opens with Cam Clayton on the "Emanation of Consciousness in Sartre, Nietzsche and Dennett". Like Sawada, Clayton takes an early work—*The Transcendence of the Ego*—and a fundamental focus of Sartre's thought as his starting points. His argument that "for both Sartre and Nietzsche, affective consciousness and the ego are constituted retrospectively in a structure of emanation", might lead us to suppose that "phenomenal consciousness is but a surface phenomenon that is wholly falsified after the fact". However, he points out that "the validity of Sartre's transcendental argument in *Being and Nothingness* does not depend upon a 'pure' description of an 'original', unmodified experience", but that Sartre enquires rather "into the conditions of possibility of experience, regardless of whether that experience is falsified in some way." He concludes, therefore—via an intriguing excursion into Dennett's analysis of the "phi phenomenon"—that whereas "Sartre's account of the

emanation of consciousness seems to depend upon a retrospective supple-mentation" (which was possibly "inspired by Nietzsche's phenomenology of imaginary causes"), Sartre probably "abandoned this feature of his analysis in *Being and Nothingness*", aware that "this falsification of experience threatens the possibility of a 'pure' reflection". Just as Sawada left us with the disconcerting inauthenticity of the photograph, so Clayton leaves us with the destabilising, and faintly chilling, observation that "nothingness is, nevertheless, a condition of possibility" for the experience of the pre-reflective consciousness of "nothingness in its original self-presence". In a word, whatever the falsifying or magical properties of consciousness in its time-travelling reconstructions of our lived experi-ence, *nothingness is*.

Danielle LaSusa is also implicitly preoccupied by the problem of nothingness, insofar as it stands in polar opposition to the material world that we aspire to possess. She sets out to explore Sartre's claims about our possession of "the non-conscious objects" of our daily lives, according to which "appropriation is an act of embodied engagement in which one strives to be the unique end of the material world". This implies that the will to possess things is "an expression of the bad faith desire to be both a free human consciousness and an inert, self-defined, essence", what Sartre calls the "in-itself-for-itself". LaSusa argues that, since most of our routine activities "place us in a relationship of appropriation with the world" and, for Sartre, "doing is a mode of having and having a mode of being", then doing, having and being are "ontologically linked" within human con-sciousness. Through our contingent yet conscious bodies, we alone impart meaning to the things that we use and possess, and it is in this sense that we become "the unique end" of the object's existence. From here, LaSusa contends that "Sartre's conception of the ontological structure of poss-ession mirrors his description of the ontological structure of the human being in bad faith", that is to say of the "attempt to make oneself into an object, to find identity with the in-itself." She then proceeds to raise practical objections to Sartre's analysis, pointing out that we desire neither to use nor to possess all that falls within our purview (for example, the "garbage" in the street on "trash day"). Indeed, it is doubtful whether even our appropriation of familiar objects says much about our ontological aspirations: "Do I desire to be God simply because I own and make use of my table lamp?" LaSusa concludes that *Being and Nothingness* "is a work devoted to describing *the bad faith attitude* toward the world, rather than the human situation in general." Possession is a project doomed to failure and can never satisfy the "human desire for stability and permanence."

David Lethbridge begins his chapter with some observations on that same human desire, drawn from José Ortega y Gasset, noting their striking similarity to the ontological analyses of both Heidegger and Sartre. These serve as a prelude to his comparison between Sartre's and Ilyenkov's renewals of Marxist thought, for there is, he asserts, "an extraordinary coincidence and similarity between them in the concepts that were central to their individual projects", despite the apparent lack of any mutual influence. He attributes this simultaneity not to the notion that certain ideas were "in the air", but rather to the fact that "historical conditions had become similar over large stretches of the world". The question arises to what extent Sartre's *Critique* was a reflection of this *Zeitgeist*, and to what extent a riposte to the challenge laid down by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. But, in any event, Lethbridge wants to bring out especially the resemblance between Ilyenkov's concept of the "objective ideal" and Sartre's of "praxis". He notes that Ilyenkov defines the ideal in terms that will "resonate with Sartrean existentialists", insofar as he sees it as "deeply dialectical […] that which is not, and yet is", as being which is "equal to not-being". Ilyenkov's analysis leads to the conclusion that ideality is "nothing other than the form of social labour represented and objectified in the object itself". This evident resemblance to Sartre's idea of praxis is complemented by the similarity between Ilyenkov's "dialectics of universal and individual" and Sartre's concept of the "universal singular". Further inter-textual work enables Lethbridge to assert: "Practico-inert or objective ideality: both concepts refer to the same reality." In short, he demonstrates a clear affinity between the two philosophers' "collective but independent" theorisations of these concepts, which look forward to a time when "the practico-inert no longer opposes the human project, but is the result and the condition for real human reciprocity". Following the negative (in more senses than one) purport of the preceding chapters, this is a positive and affirmative note on which to close our section on philosophy.

Part III: Politics opens with Damon Boria's chapter on moral and political authority. Distinguishing ethics ("a matter of finding the ends that should orient our conduct") from politics ("a matter of finding the means that will get us there"), he proposes to mount a "qualified defence of Sartre's view of moral authority" against Richard Sennett's criticism that that it leads to "psychological cannibalism"; but he will also suggest that Sartre's "hostile view of political authority should relax its obstinacy." Drawing upon two of Sartre's most ethically burdened and politically charged plays—*Dirty Hands* and *The Devil and the Good Lord*—Boria protests that Sennett's critique of the "ennobling of victims" erroneously "implicates Sartre in the promotion of the self-destructive psychological

cannibalism that comes with it." Whereas, Sartre's consistent point is rather that "bourgeois morality and charity maintain the status quo." Hence the need for direct democracy as theorised by Sartre in the *Critique*. Here, the "dispersal of authority in the group-in-fusion" is radically different from the customary hierarchies of political authority. Boria cites the so-called Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street movement as examples of the group-in-fusion: just as "the Paris of July 1789 *could never again* be the Paris of June 1789", so Egypt can "never again be the Egypt of December 2010", nor Wall Street "the Wall Street of August 2011." The thrust of Boria's argument is that Sartre is at once too optimistic about the potential of the group-in-fusion, and too pessimistic about the efficacy of institutionalised democratic elections. Contesting Sartre's cynical tirade against the latter—"Elections: A Trap for Fools"—Boria concludes by asking why we should not view elections, "not as an exercise in relinquishing power, but as an additional opportunity for the group-in-fusion to effect lasting change?" Given what we know so far about the Arab Spring in Egypt—its brief experience of democracy leading to a military coup and internecine strife within twelve months—we might be inclined to think that Sartre was indeed over-optimistic about the power of the group-in-fusion, but that he was not, after all, unduly cynical about "democratic" elections.

Boria cites Bill Martin in his concluding pages, coincidentally paving the way for the next chapter, concerning the "legacy of French Marxism". Here, Bill Martin sets out to examine Sartre as "no mere humanist", yet a "humanist in the last instance"—stranded chronologically between the different anti-humanisms of Heidegger and Althusser—through the prism of another self-avowed anti-humanist, Alain Badiou, who nevertheless claims influence from both Sartre and Althusser. After prefatory remarks on Derrida's anxiety around the demise of intellectual life and its disconnection from politics, Martin articulates his problematic thus: "What does Sartre still have to give us toward a thinking of the communist project", in light of Badiou's contention that we stand in need of a re-think of the "communist hypothesis"? The answer may well come down, he suggests, to the question whether the "structural anthropology side of his *Critique* project" is compatible with its "humanistic anthropology side", or: "Just to be provocative, the question in 'western' terms is whether Spinoza and Kant can 'get along'." For Martin, it is Badiou who—by virtue of the manner in which he "reframes Sartre's arguments"—will enable us to see how Sartre can "remain in the philosophy and politics of those who still hope to contribute to the communist project." Badiou has argued that the *Critique* is an authentic "philosophical breakthrough", and Martin notes

that his notion of "fidelity" is akin to Sartre's "oath", binding the pledged group, and that crucially both depend upon a real "change that occurs in the world, not simply upon a pure shift in consciousness." In conclusion, Martin outlines a number of synthetic critical projects that remain to be undertaken around the *Critique*. In particular, he asks whether the "objective phenomenology" of Badiou's later work might provide a language in which to recast the "(subjective?) phenomenology in Sartre's structural anthropology". Such big and wide-open questions might well leave us wondering (as Martin does) whether the abstract mathematics of Badiou's "empty-set theory" can ever underpin a praxis that connects with "real human problems and situations".

One "real human problem and situation" in particular is to the fore in Antoine Krieger's chapter on Sartre, Genet and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Following a brief conspectus of critical opinion on the respective stances of Sartre and Genet towards the Palestinian question, Krieger proposes to draw the missing parallel between them, focusing on primary sources. First, his analysis of Sartre's writings and pronouncements on the subject discloses an ambivalent even-handedness which Sartre himself classified as "odd": approving the massacre of Israeli athletes by Palestinian para-militaries at the Munich Olympic Games, for example, whilst upholding Israel's right to retaliate; or stating, as he accepted a doctorate from the Hebraic University in Jerusalem (a rare enough event in itself), that the "more pro-Israeli" he was, the more he was also "pro-Palestinian". By contrast, Genet's positions on the conflict "were certainly less 'odd' than Sartre's." For Genet, "the situation was very clear: the Palestinians were the victims of Zionism, one of the forms of western colonialism." Yet Genet, too, had his self-contradictions and paradoxes, asserting that, whereas he "adhere[d] completely to Palestine in revolt", he doubted whether he could ever "adhere to a Palestine that [was] institution[alised]" by having "become territorially satisfied." Genet evinced a kind of nostalgia for "liberation literally turn[ing] militants into beautiful people", and "provok[ing] a poetic revolution of language itself", so that "Palestine fascinated him as both an aesthetic and a political utopia". But a utopia is, by definition, *nowhere*. Having contrasted "Sartre's benevolent neutrality" with Genet's "deliberately militant tone", Krieger concludes that *both* men "held 'odd' positions [on] the Israeli–Palestinian conflict." One might add that then, as now, they were not alone. From the EU's deafening silence on the Palestinian question to the Gulf States' studious neglect of it—via the Americans' repeated failures to secure a two-state solution—double standards, hypocrisy, ambiguity and downright duplicity are all *de rigueur* on this most vexing and chronic of international political crises.

Liberation by way of rebellion, in various guises, is the theme of this volume's fourth and final part: Revolt. Rebecca Pitt begins by reviewing the role assigned to the revolutionary in *Being and Nothingness*, then goes on to compare that with the revolutionary's representation in other philosophical writings, notably *Materialism and Revolution*, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, and *War Diaries*. She finds that in his analysis of the dialectic "play/seriousness" and its affinity with bad faith in *Being and Nothingness*, "Sartre himself [never] offered an explanation of *why* the revolutionary is *the* exemplar of the serious person." Seeking such an explanation herself, Pitt argues that "Sartre's condonement of a quite different revolutionary in *Materialism and Revolution*" supports her general claim that "Sartre's revolutionary in *Being and Nothingness* is not a condemnation of radical politics, but in fact an example of his developing fusion of philosophical and political concerns." The revolutionary, it seems, has a certain plasticity and is capable of evolving along with Sartre's own trajectory towards a committed political stance. It is not the revolutionary *per se* that he wants to critique, but rather the *esprit de sérieux* that s/he sometimes exhibits: "Sartre's analysis of seriousness can be read as a warning to those who, wittingly or otherwise, seek refuge from the ever-changing terrain of history in ideologies, however radical they may seem." As ever in Sartre, the crucial divide is between doing and being: authentic revolutionaries want to "change the world"; those (playing at) being revolutionaries "fall" into seriousness. Also as ever, much remains inconclusive: "[W]hat are the relationships between the project of trying-to-be-God, seriousness and bad faith? [...] Sartre's writing lacks clarity in this respect." Therefore, the "question remains whether it is possible to resolve the tension that occurs through the complex interplay of these different but interrelated factors." As Pitt rightly observes, adherence to an ideology and obedience to demands made upon one's free commitment do not necessarily vitiate the good faith of the revolutionary *qua* subject. But as we might infer from his plays—in particular, *Dirty Hands*—Sartre undoubtedly struggled to resolve these tensions, both in theory and in practice.

John Ireland considers revolt of a different kind, initially Sartre's against theatre censorship during the Nazi Occupation. Having established that Sartre associated theatre uniquely with the time and place of its production—with what he calls "*presentness* [...] implying both the present and presence, qualities which mean that context trumps any other interpretive process"—Ireland argues that it was "logical for Sartre to turn increasingly to theatre as the preferred genre of committed literature [postwar] because theatrical production not only emphasises but also institutes

the present". In occupied Paris, this threw up complications, to say the least, for the production of Sartre's first public play, *The Flies*, whose performance in an Aryanised theatre, and with the blessing of the German censorship, was highly controversial and remains so even today. Ironically, it was precisely the need to resist and circumvent censorship that provided Sartre's early impetus in the theatre: "The question of context that can potentially kill an archival form of culture, such as film [or narrative literature], is precisely what gives theatre its fullest dimension", Ireland maintains, so that both *Bariona* and *The Flies* "took as their starting point an apparently arresting paradox: the political and ethical imperative to be as current as possible *prevented* Sartre from writing what he was really writing about." Sartre cleverly dealt with this obstacle by "mobilis[ing] myth in the service of history in order to reflect the specific historical experience that could transform his dramatic words into political speech acts." In this way, he reached back to the original orality of theatre as spectacle and event: "*Bariona* brought Sartre as close as he would ever come to the communicative ideal implicit in oral culture." However, such cleverness comports risk; post-war, Sartre had to exchange the "homogeneous audience" of the POW camp for the "hetero-geneous audience" of the bourgeois theatre, who could and did (mis)-construe his meaning as they saw fit: "[F]or Sartre, the great majority of this class remains mystified". Consequently, the dramatist found himself obliged to "illustrate less the possibility of real mass liberation than the existing reality of lower middle-class alienation." Sartre himself lamented this fact in interviews and essays: "The wider the public that the author reaches, […] the less he recognises himself in the influence he has; his thoughts escape him; they become distorted and vulgarised." What was once a revolt against censorship gradually morphed into another form of rebellion against his class of origin, albeit an unexpectedly lucrative one: "[Sartre] assaulted the […] sensibilities of the Théâtre Antoine's normal clientele, while [Simone Berriau] gambled on his notoriety […] for box office success." This may have been some consolation for Sartre, but it is safe to assume that he would have preferred things to be otherwise.

Revolt against his class of origin is central also to the book's last chapter on Sartre's critique of humanism in *La Nausée*. The gist of my essay is that this "humanist in the last instance" (to borrow Bill Martin's felicitous epithet for Sartre) appears both to savage humanism and to sympathise with it, not once but twice, in his first major and seminal novel, *La Nausée*. The Autodidact—an obvious caricature of the classic western humanist, venerating learning for the sake of its supposed elevation of the idealistic concept of "Man"—is ruthlessly derided for his

passive pursuit of self-improvement and his petty-bourgeois manners, until his "humanism" is enacted in, and equated with, a gesture of predatory pederasty. But the evocation of Roquentin too—an avowed self-portrait by Sartre—depicts a directionless academic whose distant travels have led him, at last, to nowhere more exciting than Bouville (for which, read Le Havre). Here, he squanders his time working on the biography of a minor post-revolutionary survivor of the nobility, an avatar of the aristocratic privilege that would subsequently become the bourgeois sense of entitlement. Therefore, it is as if Sartre critiques his own generic (not to say, genetic) humanism in the person of Roquentin, and parodies that of Roquentin in the person of the Autodidact. In the end, each one's ego-centric project in his microcosmic situation is aborted: Roquentin's, by the discovery of his and the world's contingency and his consequent fascination with the necessity of works of art (notably music and literature); and the Autodidact's, by his surrendering to an impulse interpreted as depraved and disgusting, yet which is in one sense "a form of humanism". The fact that, just a few (war-time) years later, Sartre would announce that "existentialism is a humanism"—albeit of a new kind—indicates that the "revolt" to which he gave voice in *La Nausée* was in some ways as conflicted and ambiguous as that which emerges from Pitt's examination of his "revolutionary" or Ireland's of his "resistance" to censorship.

I hope that the foregoing overview of the twelve essays in this volume amply bears out the claim that these several quests for Sartre are evidence of the vigour, dynamism and originality of the critical attention that his uniquely vast work continues to command. And I hope more especially that it has whetted your appetite to read on and consume these essays in full, savouring their novel approaches and/or subjects. For, in their various ways, they clearly demonstrate not only that neglected aspects of Sartre's work remain worthy of analysis, but also that more familiar aspects are still amenable to fresh and illuminating interpretations. In short, each of the following chapters throws new light on the continuing, and no doubt inexhaustible, search for Sartre.

PART I:

AESTHETICS

CHAPTER ONE

SARTRE AND PHOTOGRAPHY:
AROUND HIS THEORY OF THE IMAGINARY

NAO SAWADA

Introduction

Although there is ample research devoted to the theme of "Sartre and Art", photography remains, hitherto, an almost unknown topos, neglected even, within Sartre studies.[1] However, this is not without good reason. Certainly, it is not unusual to find reference to the Sartrean theory of the image in relation to photography, the more so as Roland Barthes dedicated his *La Chambre claire: Note sur la photographie* (*The Light Room: A Note on Photography*) to the existentialist philosopher—or, more precisely, "à *L'Imaginaire* de Sartre" ("to Sartre's *The Imaginary*"). Nevertheless, despite this homage, close examination of *L'Imaginaire* reveals at once that mentions of photography are few and far between, and rather brief, in this text sub-titled *Psychologie phénoménologique de l'imagination* (*Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*). Moreover, not only in this work, but also in the entire Sartrean corpus, photography occupies a very insignificant place by comparison with other artistic domains: we all know about Sartre's passion for the cinema, but we know nothing of the sort where photography is concerned. We might even assert that Sartre is hardly interested in photography, although it is the medium, *par excellence*, "of the age of the technical reproducibility of the work of art", to which Walter Benjamin dedicated a profound analysis.[2]

Why such reticence on Sartre's part? What explains this indifference to photography? In order to answer these questions, I propose to analyse Sartre's relationship with photography by drawing up an inventory of references in his body of work. In the first place, we shall review the

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[1] [This chapter has been translated from French by the Editor.]
[2] See Benjamin, "Petite histoire de la photographie", 295 ff.

philosophical texts of the early Sartre, *L'Imagination* and *L'Imaginaire* (*The Imagination* and *The Imaginary*). Next, we shall examine his works of fiction and autobiography: *Les Chemins de la liberté, La Nausée* and *Les Mots* (*The Roads to Freedom*, *Nausea* and *Words*). Finally, we shall analyse "D'une Chine à l'autre" ("From One China to Another"), Sartre's only text on photography. By means of this strategy, we shall try, on the one hand, to shed light upon some of the little-known aspects of Sartre as aesthetician and, on the other hand, to illuminate his ambiguous relationship with photography.

The early Sartre's theory of the image

At the beginning of his career, Sartre published two works focused on the question of the image: *L'Imagination* in 1936, and *L'Imaginaire* in 1940. The first of these, a product of his academic work, consists of a critique of the principal theories of the image, from the "great metaphysical systems" (Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz and Hume) to those of the modern psychologists (Taine, Ribot, Dumas and even Bergson), by demonstrating the superiority of Husserl's phenomenological approach.[3] As for the second—in some sense, a sequel to the first—it is a veritable masterpiece of youth in which the novice philosopher not only marks out several territories (notably that of freedom) that he will explore in *L'Être et le Néant* (*Being and Nothingness*), but also sets out magisterially an innovative conception of the image. This book had such an impact that it was cited, commented upon and criticised as a work of reference by such contemporaries as Emanuel Levinas and Maurice Blanchot.[4]

What is the originality of Sartre's theory on the image? We can summarise it, without oversimplifying, in the following thesis: "The image *is a certain type of consciousness*. The image is an act and not a thing. The

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[3] It was at the behest of Henri Delacroix, his director of studies for the *Diplôme d'études supérieures* (Diploma of Advanced Studies), that Sartre first drafted this work, later published by Alcan in a collection founded by Delacroix himself, *La Nouvelle Encyclopédie philosophique* (*The New Philosophical Encyclopaedia*).

[4] Levinas's article, "Il y a" ("There is"), was published in *Les Temps Modernes* (*Modern Times*) in 1946, and reprinted in *De l'Existence à l'existant* (*From Existence to the Existent*) in 1963. Blanchot's "Les Deux versions de l'imaginaire" ("The Two Versions of the Imaginary") appeared first in 1951, and again in *L'Espace littéraire* (*The Literary Space*) in 1955. It was also later reproduced by Michel Foucault in "Introduction", in Ludwig Binswanger, *Le Rêve et l'Existence,* and in *Dits et écrits*, vol. I, 1994.

image is consciousness *of* something."[5] Thus, Sartre is attempting to show and to demonstrate that—contrary to classical thought—the image is neither a degraded thing, nor a little picture within consciousness, but that it is rather an act or, better still, consciousness itself. In other words, by leaning on the Husserlian theory of intentionality, Sartre gives an altogether new status to representation, insofar as he distinguishes the imaging consciousness from the perceptive consciousness, as well as from the pure consciousness of signification. His definition of the image is quite clear:

> [The] image is an act which focuses upon an absent or non-existent object in its corporeality, via a physical or psychical content which is not given as such, but rather as an "analogical *representative*" of the object focused upon. The specifications will be modelled on the material, since the informative intention remains identical.[6]

However, since I do not propose to embark upon an exhaustive analysis of the theory of the image, we shall focus here on the question of photography. First of all, let us note that Sartre rarely takes photography as an example in *L'Imaginaire*. The first significant mention of photography is to be found in the second chapter, "La Famille de l'image" ("The Family of the Image"), where he indicates that there exist two sorts of image: the material image (reflections in a mirror, pictures, drawings, photographs, imitations, etc.), and the mental image (a representation without material support). His intention, however, is not to distinguish one from the other. Quite to the contrary, he tends to assimilate—or, at the very least, to bring together—the material image and the mental image; and, even if this rapprochement appears to us strange and surprising, it is one of his principal theses.

In fact, it is in the conclusion of *L'Imagination* that Sartre arrives at this thesis after a long examination of the classic theories on the image and the discovery of the primacy of phenomenological theory: "We must also pose the new and delicate question of the relationship of the mental image

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[5] "L'image *est un certain type de conscience*. L'image est un acte et non une chose. L'image est conscience *de* quelque chose." (Sartre, *L'Imagination*, 162.)

[6] "[L]'image est un acte qui vise dans sa corporéité un objet absent ou inexistant, à travers un contenu physique ou psychique qui ne se donne pas en propre, mais à titre de « *représentant* » analogique » de l'objet visé. Les spécifications se feront d'après la matière, puisque l'intention informatrice reste identique." (Sartre, *L'Imaginaire*, 46.)

to the material image (pictures, photos, etc.)."[7] Now, in *L'Imaginaire*, Sartre explains that if we also call portraits, reflections in a mirror, imitations, etc., "images", then this is by no means a matter of simple homonymy, but rather one and the same act of the imaging consciousness. In fact, material images are only "analoga". When an imaging consciousness focuses on an imaginary object, it often does so with the help of a real visual aid which is a "material image". However, the latter is not fixed upon *per se*, but rather as an "analogon" of the imagined object.

Let us set aside the general analysis of the image, because what is important here is that Sartre considers that "the imaging consciousness that we produce in front of a photograph [for example] is an act", and that we "*animate* the photo, in a sense, bringing life to it in order to make an image of it."[8] In other words, although the photograph, considered in itself, is indeed a thing, what we perceive is not this sheet of coloured paper, but the image which is something other than the paper and is not in the same sense real. This thesis—which applies equally to pictures or paintings—reveals the status of the photograph in Sartre's theory of the image. In short, the photograph is not an image in itself, but a material support which assists the act of imagination, in other words an "analogon", a visual aid which sends us back to the image which that photo represents.

Let us recall the famous example of the image of "my friend Pierre". When I look at Pierre's portrait, my consciousness does not focus on the portrait itself, but through that material image it seeks out Pierre in his physical individuality: "The photo is no longer the concrete object furnished by my perception: it serves as a pretext for the image."[9] In this sense, photography is no different from painting or other material images. In other words, Sartre is not concerned with the specificity of photography, far from it. However, if we examine his text more closely, we can also assert that he appreciates photography markedly less than painting or caricature. We might even have the impression that, although Sartre references photography, he does so simply in order to emphasise its defects.

I want to recall the face of my friend, Pierre. I make an effort and I produce a certain imaged consciousness of Pierre. But the object is very

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[7] "Il faudra aussi poser la question nouvelle et délicate des rapports de l'image mentale avec l'image matérielle (tableau, photos, etc.)." (*L'Imagination*, 158.) This is, it would seem, the only mention of photography in this work.

[8] "[L]a conscience imageante que nous produisons devant une photographie est un acte [...]. Nous avons conscience, en quelque sorte, d'*animer* la photo, de lui prêter sa vie pour en faire une image." (*L'Imaginaire*, 55.)

[9] "La photo n'est plus l'objet concret que me fournit la perception: elle sert de matière à l'image." (*L'Imaginaire*, 47.)

imperfectly attained: certain details are missing, others are suspect and the whole effect is pretty vague. There is a certain feeling of sympathy, or unease, that I wanted to revive while contemplating that face, but which has not come back to me. I do not abandon my project; I get up and take a photograph out of the drawer. It is an excellent portrait of Pierre, I find every detail of his face in it, including even some that I had forgotten. But the photo lacks life: it renders the external characteristics of Pierre's face to perfection, but it does not convey his expression. Luckily, I possess a caricature of him, done by a talented artist. This time, the relationship between the different parts of his face is deliberately falsified, the nose is much too long, the cheekbones too prominent, etc. However, something that was lacking in the photograph—life, expression—is clearly manifested in this drawing, and I "rediscover" Pierre.[10]

Thus, whilst being in the first place advanced as an excellent auxiliary mnemonic, photography ends up being disqualified insofar as it lacks life, rendering only the external characteristics, whereas a caricature, despite its wilful deformation of its subject, renders the life and the expression that were missing from the photograph. If that is the case, then the hierarchy of visual aids in Sartre's estimation is clear: photography is a thoroughly inadequate representation, despite the physical resemblance it offers. It does not deliver the real character of its subject. Here, we encounter a classic aesthetic prejudice about Art, according to which a picture represents reality much better than a photograph, a prejudice widely shared by writers and painters in the nineteenth century.

However, we need to be wary. Sartre is not talking about either reality or truth. He is merely saying that a photograph is not strong enough to give us the image of Pierre. In other words, with this photograph, I do not "re-discover" Pierre, whereas with a well-made caricature, I do. This touches upon an apparent but misleading condemnation of photography by Marcel Proust, cited by Roland Barthes: "[T]hose photographs of a person in front of which one remembers that person less well than when one settles for simply thinking of them."[11] Or indeed, the virulent criticism offered by Charles Baudelaire, who considered the photographic industry to be the "refuge of all failed painters": [12]

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[10] See *L'Imaginaire*, 40-41.

[11] "[C]es photographies d'un être devant lesquelles on se le rappelle moins bien qu'en se contentant de penser à lui." (Proust, *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, vol. IV, 464, quoted by Barthes in *La Chambre claire*, 1155.) I say "misleading" because, in fact, Proust is comparing the "sentences of books" with photography.

[12] "[R]efuge de tous les peintres manqués." (Baudelaire, "Salon de 1859", 618.)

> If photography is permitted to support art in some of its functions, it will
> soon have supplanted or corrupted it entirely, thanks to the natural alliance
> it will make with the stupidity of the multitude.[13]

Now we can better understand why the distinction between different
material images hardly interests Sartre; in fact, even the distinction
between material images and mental images is of little concern to him.

For, what interests our author is nothing less than the difference of
modality between the imaging consciousness and the perceptive con-
sciousness; or, indeed, that which characterises the image, namely this
modality which is a fundamental absence. Whether we are concerned with
a material image or a mental image, an image is the presence of an absent
object. Sartre writes:

> Mental representation, photography, caricature: these three very different
> realities appear, in our example, as three stages of the same process, three
> moments of a unique act. From beginning to end, the objective aimed at
> remains identical: namely, to make present to me the face of Pierre, who is
> not there.[14]

This is precisely where Sartre suggests the very particular notion of the
"analogon" that we have already described. It is for this reason also, it
would seem, that an image for Sartre—especially a photograph—has
meaning only in relation to a real object that is represented by that image.
Indeed, he explains that a photograph can sometimes evoke nothing; an
image whose point of reference escapes us might remain completely
meaningless to us:

> On the contrary, if I look at the photos in the newspaper, they might very
> well "mean nothing to me", which is to say that I look at them without
> positing any existing thing. Now, the people whose photograph I see are
> indeed represented through that photograph, but without any existential
> positioning, just like the Horseman and Death who are reached through
> Dürer's engraving, but without my having posited them. We can moreover
> find cases where the photo leaves me in a state of such indifference that I

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[13] "S'il est permis à la photographie de suppléer l'art dans quelques-unes de ses
fonctions, elle l'aura bientôt supplanté ou corrompu tout à fait, grâce à l'alliance
naturelle qu'elle trouvera dans la sottise de la multitude." (Ibid.)
[14] "Représentation mentale, photographie, caricature : ces trois réalités si diffé-
rentes apparaissent, dans notre exemple, comme trois stades d'un même processus,
trois moments d'un acte unique. Du commencement à la fin, le but visé demeure
identique : il s'agit de me rendre présent le visage de Pierre, qui n'est pas là."
(Sartre, *L'Imaginaire,* 41.)

do not even enact the "image-formation". The photograph is vaguely constituted as an object, and the characters which feature in it are indeed constituted as characters, but only because of their resemblance to human beings, without any particular intentionality. They float between the banks of perception, sign and image, without ever landing on any of them.[15]

This passage shows paradoxically that Sartre considers a photograph as above all a trace of reality. This conception will be more explicitly developed in Barthes's *La Chambre claire*: "This has been." However, when Barthes does indeed quote this passage, he does so in order to draw a different conclusion from Sartre's.[16] For the semiologist, it is rather this kind of photograph that animates him, and he animates it reciprocally. The attraction of a photograph for him consists in its animation, whereas Sartre is more or less indifferent to that "adventure".

We might wonder whether Sartre's reticence vis-à-vis photography stems from the phenomenological approach. Probably not: Husserl, for instance, illustrates the image consciousness, in a posthumously published text, by giving the example of a photograph which features a child;[17] and Heidegger develops a precise analysis of the image in *Kant and the*

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[15] "Au contraire, si je regarde les photos du journal, elles peuvent très bien « ne rien me dire », c'est-à-dire que je les regarde sans faire de position d'existence. Alors les personnes dont je vois la photographie sont bien atteintes à travers cette photographie, mais sans position existentielle, tout juste comme le Chevalier et la Mort, qui sont atteints à travers la gravure de Dürer, mais sans que je les pose. On peut d'ailleurs trouver des cas où la photo me laisse dans un tel état d'indifférence que je n'effectue même pas la « mise en image ». La photographie est vaguement constituée en objet, et les personnages qui y figurent sont bien constitués en personnages, mais seulement à cause de leur ressemblance avec des êtres humains, sans intentionnalité particulière. Ils flottent entre le rivage de la perception, celui du signe et celui de l'image, sans aborder jamais à aucun d'eux." (Ibid., 54.)

[16] This is to be found already in texts by Barthes dating from the 1960s. It is indisputable that Barthes's first theory is based on the Sartrean theory of the image—including the difference between the image and the sign—with the use of the term "analogon". Nevertheless, the semiologist changes the meaning of the term slightly when he writes this: "The image is not the real: but it is at least the perfect *analogon*, and it is precisely this analogical perfection which, in common-sense terms, defines photography." ("L'image n'est pas le réel : mais elle en est du moins l'*analogon* parfait, et c'est précisément cette perfection analogique qui, devant le sens commun, définit la photographie." Roland Barthes, "Le message photographique", in *Œuvres complètes,* vol. I, 939.)

[17] See Edmund Husserl, *Ding und Raum: Vorlesungen 1907* (*Thing and Space: 1907 Lectures*): as it was first published in German in 1973, and in French in 1989, Sartre would very probably not have read this text.

Problem of Metaphysics, section 20 of which appeals explicitly to the example of photography.[18] But let us leave to one side texts such as these which Sartre did not consult. What we can say, at least, is that his lack of curiosity, or reticence, in the face of photography stems rather from his personal tendency than from any methodological question.

This conspectus of the philosophical texts enables us to identify the principal characteristics of the Sartrean concept of the photograph. First, a photograph has no meaning other than in relation to a very specific point of reference: in other words, it is defined by reference to the real, which marks the origin or the truth of perception; in this sense, his concept remains quite conventional in its relation to the reference.[19] Second, a photograph, even while indicating to us an absent object, is still a presence or a quasi-presence of an absent object: this does not mean that this presence has less value than the original, but rather that an image is an incarnation of absence.

Photography in Sartre's literary works

Although photography has so little presence in Sartre's philosophical texts, it is less absent in his literary texts. What, then, are the role and representation of photography in these works? Here too, we note at first glance the same kind of indifference or uninterest, even contempt, in respect of photography. Sartre the novelist rarely uses photos as a plot accessory. This lack of interest in photography seems to me all the more surprising and significant by contrast with the cases of Proust and André Breton, two authors whom Sartre admired and considered as rivals, without actually saying so explicitly. Indeed, for Proust, photos often play important roles, prompting a scene, a memory or a reflection, and one can find numerous extremely interesting photographic metaphors in the pages of *A la Recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Time Past*)—so much so that several studies have been devoted to the subject.[20] As for Breton, his fascination with photography and his experimentation with a new form of poetic narrative, are well known: the unprecedented use of photographs in

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[18] See Martin Heidegger, *Kant et le problème de la métaphysique.*

[19] This point was criticised by the young Michel Foucault: "Indeed, we must enquire whether the image is really, as Sartre claims, designation—even a negative one and in the mode of the unreal—of the real itself." ("En effet, il faut nous demander si l'image est bien, comme le veut Sartre, désignation—même négative et sur le mode de l'irréel—du réel lui-même." Foucault, "Introduction", in *Le Rêve et l'existence*, 110.)

[20] See, for example, Jean-François Chevrier, *Proust et la photographie.*

Nadja, a "novel" literally illustrated by photos, and again in *L'Amour fou* (*Mad Love*). We find nothing of the sort in Sartre's work: as a literary writer, no more than as a philosopher, he is scarcely interested in this art of reproduction. Nevertheless, I will try to analyse the functions of photography in his literary works.

Les Chemins de la liberté

Although in *Les Chemins de la liberté* (*The Roads to Freedom*) photographs play only incidental and negative roles, it is nonetheless useful to consider them in order to interpret certain scenes.[21] First of all, a photograph—in this case the portrait of a person—has a personal and intimate function, the private locus of memory, so to speak. In the first volume of the novel cycle, *L'Age de raison* (*The Age of Reason*), for example, a photograph of Marcelle—the protagonist Mathieu Delarue's mistress—in her youth is twice used to indicate a certain bitter nostalgia and regret in respect of "the life she might have had". Chronically sick, she now leads the life of a virtual invalid, shut up in her apartment, whereas in former years she was a tom-boyish young woman, a little shy, no doubt, but less fearful. One evening, as he enters Marcelle's bedroom, Mathieu finds on the mantelpiece a photograph that he does not know:

> He approached and saw a skinny young woman, with a boy's haircut and a shy, uneasy smile. She was wearing a man's jacket and flat shoes.
> "That's me", said Marcelle, without raising her head. […]
> "Where did you find it?"
> "In an album. It dates from summer 1928."[22]

Admittedly, the photograph is ten years old, but Mathieu—Sartre's alter ego—does not even recognise his mistress and, worse, he remains indifferent to the photo as well as to her feelings about it. He is too preoccupied by the pregnancy that she has just announced, and is no doubt equally irritated by her nostalgia when he asks her: "So, you're looking at family albums now?" Then, as if to correct himself, he asks her if she misses

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[21] See Sartre, *Œuvres romanesques*, hereafter cited OR.
[22] "Il s'approcha et vit une jeune fille maigre et coiffée en garçon qui riait d'un air dur et timide. Elle portait un veston d'homme et des souliers à talons plats. / « C'est moi », dit Marcelle sans lever la tête. […] / « Où as-tu trouvé ça ? » / « Dans un album. Elle date de l'été 28. »" (OR, 397.)

those times, to which she replies: "Those times, no. I miss the life I might have had."[23]

The next day, Marcelle shows the same photo to Daniel, a friend of Mathieu's and a hypocritical homosexual who visits her regularly whilst making sure that Mathieu knows nothing of their meetings. Being mani-pulative, Daniel conducts himself with greater gentlemanliness towards Marcelle than does Mathieu. Indeed, although in reality just as indifferent to the photo as Mathieu, Daniel shows interest and comments: "You were charming, [and] you have scarcely changed." He even adds: "I like you better now."[24]

There is nothing more banal than that an old photo should provoke feelings of regret for the past. And the author is fully conscious of that banality. What is at stake in these scenes is not, then, the photo as an evocative element, but rather the attitudes of the two men, two potential rivals faced with this photo, given that at the end of the first volume, Daniel will marry Marcelle, pregnant with Mathieu's child, despite his homosexuality. Thus, Sartre uses the photograph of Marcelle merely to underline the contrast between the (pseudo-)sincerity of Mathieu and the hypocrisy of Daniel. That said, neither of the two men is really interested in this photograph of the former Marcelle: her past does not concern them, this photograph concerns her alone; Marcelle is closed up on herself and this photograph symbolises her closedness, her self-sequestration.

Of course, a photograph can also have a public function: when it is connected with a newspaper, it becomes a thing of openness towards the world. Press and radio were the foremost media of the age, and the newspaper transmitted images just as the radio transmitted sounds. Sartre uses both these media to very good effect in this novel—the radio, for example, when he describes the speeches of Hitler resonating across Europe via that medium. In the press, a photographic report, opening up the public space, invites the reader to step out of his own little world. This is the case for Mathieu when he sees images of the Civil War in Spain:

> [Mathieu] looked at the last page of *The Excelsior*: photos from our special
> correspondent. Bodies laid out on the pavement beside a wall. In the
> middle of the roadway, a chubby housewife, lying on her back, her skirts

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[23] "« Tu regardes les albums de famille, à présent ? ». […] « Ce temps-là non : je regrette la vie que j'aurais pu avoir. »" (Ibid.)

[24] "« Vous étiez charmante, [et] vous n'avez guère changé. » […] « Je vous aime mieux à présent »." (OR, 561.)

up around her thighs, she no longer had a head. Mathieu folded the paper and threw it in the gutter.[25]

If we find this sort of scene in the second volume, *Le Sursis* (*The Reprieve*), it is because what is at stake there is the relationship between the individual and History, as it unfolds. And photographs appear to us as an underpinning of news or information. For example, Godesberg Castle is not part of the general knowledge of the militant working-man, Maurice, but thanks to a photograph in the paper *Paris-Soir*, he is able to imagine the place where Chamberlain met Hitler:

> [Maurice] turned the page and [he and Zézette] saw a dark photograph representing a sort of castle, a thing from the Middle Ages, on top of a hill, with turrets, bell-towers and hundreds of windows.[26]

Thus, a newspaper photo is a magic window which puts us in touch with a distant place, just like television after the Second World War, or the Internet today.

It is through these cut-out images of reality that people try to imagine or to realise the gravity of the situation. Maurice, who has never seen Russia in real life, can imagine it thanks to photography, for he had "seen photos of the Nevsky Prospect: the working class had taken possession of this luxurious avenue, they strolled along it, no longer cowed by its palaces and great stone bridges."[27] That is why the work of the photo-journalist is important; Sartre even depicts the photographer of *L'Humanité* (the official organ of the French Communist Party), a certain Dumur, with "his Kodak" at the aerodrome where French Prime Minister, Édouard Daladier, had just landed in Germany.[28]

But that is not all, for a photograph can still be something else besides: it can equally be the thing which reveals a hidden reality, camouflaged by

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[25] "[Mathieu] regarda la dernière page d'*Excelsior* : photos de l'Envoyé spécial. Des corps allongés sur le trottoir le long d'un mur. Au milieu de la chaussée, une grosse commère, couchée sur le dos, les jupes relevées sur ses cuisses, elle n'avait plus de tête. Mathieu replia le journal et le jeta dans le ruisseau." (OR, 515.)

[26] "[Maurice] tourna la page et [lui et Zézette] virent une photo sombre qui représentait une espèce de château, un truc comme au Moyen Age, au sommet d'une colline, avec des tours, des clochetons et des centaines de fenêtres." (OR, 736.)

[27] "Maurice avait vu des photos de la perspective Nevski ; les prolétaires avaient pris possession de cette avenue de luxe, ils s'y promenaient, les palais et les grands ponts de pierre ne les épataient plus." (OR, 744.)

[28] See OR, 996.