



SELINUS UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCES AND LITERATURE

**THE POSITION OF THE WRITER
BETWEEN LITERATURE
AND CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY**

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I do hereby attest that I am the sole author of this project/thesis and that its contents are only the result of the readings and research I have done.

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Abstract

A book is an instrument for delivering a message. Its construction has been the business of writers, editors and publishers. Here the hand which determines most resolutely its final form is and has been given the name author.

No author finds a book they have in mind already written, and often the question of having something to say gets in the way of saying something. In other words, a writer mediates not merely between story, plot, character and their encounters, but with his position and that of the anonymous readers. This place, which seemingly presents a situation which may no longer be, to a reader who may not yet be - is the unique location which I have tried to explore under the title 'the position of the writer.'

My thesis here briefly may be described as a meditation on this relationship. I believe such a work is needed to be written, for the appearance of censorship is seemingly universalised - with the closure of public institutions and centres of study amidst the coronavirus pandemic and other disruptions prior to it; writing from India, which has at least since 2014 and the election of the BJP into majority in Parliament, has been grappling with an anti-intellectualism which has permeated from public institutions into neighbourhoods. In these circumstances I wanted to present writers with a repository of instruments, a conceptual vocabulary and accompanying disciplinary apparatus, along with a set of exercises training in their use, designed principally to acquaint them with the consideration that a writer situated between literature and critical philosophy would be required to make.

Were writing itself to be considered a discipline, then what would interest me would be the forms in which it becomes self conscious of its history. This is a history which is in-constructible without the writers that one may choose to identify or highlight, whether as a genre or as an inquiry, each with their own histories and genesis. As this tarrying with a negative is what creates a tradition, or as it were a narrative, style of exposition, or perhaps the critique of an argument or position, and maybe even the formation of a school of thought.

I have chosen to present this in chapters; initially seeking to situate my object of study which I have briefly touched upon. Taking up the conceptual apparatus which I believe the history of philosophy has provided us which assist in such a nexus, often drawing from certain psychoanalytic concepts which I have sought to introduce and clarify while entertaining an interrogation of their formulation and use.

Along the way I take up individual authors who I believe may have faced similar circumstances, namely institutional resistance - and the means they may have deployed in representing and engaging the positions confronted by them. The role of a critic, ironically

does seem to arise immanently from such a position - even if the critic as persona is not a product of the criticism which they may have themselves been subject to. Here, I do take up brief expositions studying Sartre, often in conjunction with Fredric Jameson, Descartes, Pierre Macherey, and Walter Benjamin; each as they engage the task which criticism takes upon itself, and in their response to crucial positions and concepts in the discipline which critical philosophy has laid before us.

You will find two brief interludes, which engage certain conceptual terms which are raised in the course of this inquiry *Das Ding*, and its meaning and use in literary study -; and the question of *value* as seen from classical and Marxian political economy. Wrapping this up is an appraisal on the changing dimensions in narrative as we witness a transition from epic, myth etc. to novelistic form, while also examining the role of the fairy tale in its relief from the epic.

The result of these efforts is the thesis you find before you, which also serves as my doctoral study to earn my PhD in Philosophy from Selinus University.

Chapter 1

From the uses of words to the meaning of names...and back; or the place of the writer

There is a sense in which Fredric Jameson, the American literary theorist, brings attention to the uses of the word in his study of Sartre. In reading what was his doctoral thesis, later published as 'Sartre: The Origins of a Style'¹ a question which arises to my mind in the form of an appearance of a minimal dichotomy, is whether the word is expressive of some content which it describes, or whether it sits like a name, referring with arbitrary exactness the designation which it circumscribes. Someone familiar with theories in linguistics will notice the similarity here to the consideration which Saussure places before himself in his examination of the relationship between the signifier and the signified. However, there is another sense in which such an operation misses the point entirely, for Jameson's focus is not really these two aspects or entities, the thing and the word, or the word and the concept (which to my mind may be the same thing), but the agent which thinks their relation, or in other words - consciousness.

What characterises both Sartre and Jameson, apart from their political and ideological affiliations, is the very writerly nature of their work, stylistically distinct, yet displaying a dedication to the craft of presentation, or should I say representation. There is, in certain circumstances, a kind of struggle which emerges in an attempt to think; in an attempt to think through writing. This act itself involves a minimal displacement, perhaps not unlike speech, between ourselves and the subject of our enunciation. Yet, in the former the subject that is addressed, the accomplice as it were who is introduced to a perspective, from a point of view, is not immediately present. Or, at least not present in the sense of an encounter that we may have with a beautiful stranger on a street, or subway, perhaps in a park. There are indeed inhibitions in such a form of communication; an unshared context perhaps key - and yet there are also advantages, arising from such a difficulty. The cultivation of a consideration, in the writer, of the perspective of the other - when he or she is not there. This, principally is what I believe animates the labours of the mind to introduce to one who may be an unknown stranger; circumstances, perspectives, arguments, and perhaps a narrative - from a place not accessible to him/her, or rather, possible, as in cognizable via an effort whose initiation may have been contingent on one before them, even as such works solicits a reading.

This inscription in the body of a text, of the place of the other - is a misnomer, inasmuch as in its very act it becomes a content which the subject of enunciation is privy to, as reader. In this sense, a writer has, to say anything at all, to be able to place the distance between these two positions, his own and that of the reader, within coordinates which chart the matter being addressed, and hopefully reveal the circumstances of lives, or their animations which bring

¹ Jameson, Fredric, Sartre: The Origins of a Style, 1984, Columbia University Press.

about the possibility of the address conceived as such. The address itself however, may have nothing to do with the circumstances or animations, yet be geared at creating a new possibility for life.

Criticism, perhaps the spine of any study of literature begins in thinking the difficulty of this - for it is only in this effort that the author's perspective reaches a kind of cognisance which allows for an interpretation, and perhaps, through this - an assimilation with our understanding. A critic however, is obliged to compare how the present work fits in or doesn't with similar attempts in the past; or - in drawing from examples speculates whether a collection or set in question can form a genre.

Here, I think Professor Fredric Jameson, does indeed demonstrate a method, so to speak - which can show how a mind may consider - the most commonplace of apparatuses, namely - characters, punctuations, sentences, juxtapositions, comparisons and other such means that a writer may have at their disposal to convey a sense, argument, narrative, or simply a point of view. In the meditation on such means, to convey a context, there is a kind of invisibilization of the context of the writer himself. This, when the matter that is represented is not of the place of writing, or in other words when the subject is not an ethnography, becomes a dimension as it were that requires an effort of discipline by the writer, in resisting interferences, which stretches our consideration, where a jarring noise which shakes us out from the study of a memory, that interrupts an argument, not as an objection or another perspective but as a signification which is not bound by the form of the work which the writer sets before himself. In this sense, it often is not formally inscribed within the work, or at least not formally determined, and yet there are disciplines of thought which have managed to designate it algebraically - as the other, or even the unconscious, in psychoanalysis for instance.

As a tendency, especially when not in any clinical setting, this aspect would subtract from a focus on the subject, for it may be oblivious to the task at hand, the word itself as an instrument may be alien to its aspect; the clanking of plates in the kitchen, the beating of a hammer in an adjacent building being examples. However, in predicating such instances there is a sort of break in the tension which the ambiguity of the term other seeks to create. Which serves not only as a screen so that the intended presentation may proceed, but also as a disciplinary tool, as a *concept* which allows for a focus on the subject and the hermeneutics, or practices of interpretation that a critic's eye would see through; itself a point of view which may seek to be expressed in the work in question. This is perhaps why, Sartre in his existential psychoanalyses does not use the unconscious as an apparatus to think through, but rather refers to a pre-reflexive cogito.

I would like to quote an account of this as stated in '*Sartre: The Origins of a Style*'.

“But the cogito itself is a possibility which is based on a more profound structure of our consciousness; it could only take place if at all times there functioned what Sartre calls a pre-reflexive cogito, a self-consciousness always capable of becoming reflected and thematised by the official cogito but which was not itself reflection. What this means is simply that even within action itself, in the midst of a project where our consciousness is at one with things, there must still persist a kind of self-consciousness (of what we are doing with things) or we would be faced in these moments of action with a consciousness which was not conscious.”

I would like to pause here briefly, ignoring or perhaps taking advantage of the context provided to highlight maybe more directly what my title was aiming at. The cogito, without predication appears as a mere name, a token placed in lieu of a something which we know by synonyms such as consciousness; a reference. What makes it into a concept with the clarity and precision which Descartes bequeaths on it is his work, and in this particular case, an argument known famously through the Latin words ‘cogito, ergo sum’ another name it would appear.

In encountering what may appear to be, a novel field of reference; a reader gropes among the words, grasping what is familiar and apprehending that which is not, seeking to understand it in terms of its utility, in a way that fits in with the map of meaning that the rest of the text presents. This is, in a sense, the difficulty of citation or reference. It points to an impossibility experienced in the present, an impasse if you prefer which prevents the elucidation of the subject matter within the constraints which the author finds him or herself, and in this sense - a reference is a way out. It is not as much an alibi as an index for where a reader may choose to learn more about what may have been unclear. An index, which is never entirely clear to the author alone, for in presenting an argument to a reader, recognition counts on the touching of not so much a common element, as a shared comprehension which is identified by a reader, an overlap if you prefer. This is a situation which undoubtedly has to do with the position of a writer. A position which may have a history. A position which one may have once described as a place of doubt, furthermore - the activity of doubting itself, and at a point of despair, whether I doubt that I am doubting. This Descartes recognised, in however infinitesimal a fashion, as *thinking* and retroactively derived his existence. ‘Cogito, ergo sum’² meaning I think, therefore I am. Let us examine how the French philosopher arrives at such an argument, for I suspect that it may be read as an analogy for the very difficulty a writer faces in his attempt at clearly presenting a situation to a reader. A situation which may be an enunciation, a declaration, a construction, a making, which may have been, which is not present before the reader (or not even the person of the author) - and a reader who too, is not present before the author in question. - Descartes, in his introduction states clearly that his means of doing so is via the proof of the existence of our mind and god. He also notices a separation between the

² Descartes, René. Discourse on method and meditations on first philosophy. Hackett Publishing, 1999.

mind and the body. How he is to prove these propositions remains to be elucidated. I would like to focus here however on the derivation of the cogito; or rather why Descartes was led to epistemic doubt, a point which has been the subject of debate in the history of philosophy.

In ‘Meditation on First Philosophy’ what I find interesting, not unlike how the later history of philosophy has read this moment, is the point where Descartes feels compelled to consider the unreality of the world itself. Beginning with the doubting of his own senses, citing dreams, optical illusions, and error as examples for why they cannot be deemed to be true representations, with certainty. He introduces the idea, that if neither in his sleep, nor waking life - he can trust what his sense perceptions, or even their memories reveal to him - his recourse at such a juncture would lie within the realm of axiomatics. Here, we are of course referring to geometrical axioms, like the ancient Greeks, and the rise of geometry whose intimate relation to philosophy is well known, as are numerical and later algebraic truths. However, Descartes does a little more; he posits a figure that may be responsible for the *discrepancy* of his senses. Why, and how does he posit at such a figure?

To begin with, as is uncustomary in juridical circles and perhaps in bad taste, I would like to highlight the little we may glean of the character of Rene Descartes as inferred from that which appeals to him. “But *reason* now persuades me that I should withhold my assent no less carefully from opinions that are not completely certain and indubitable than I would from those that are patently false. For this reason, it will suffice for the rejection of all of these opinions, if I find in each of them some reason for doubt.” A conservative position to be certain; we are not dealing here, or indeed reading and certainly not yet treating a thinker who is *speculative* per se. For here is one who feels compelled, for the earlier mentioned reasons, if not any others - to doubt epistemically; that is to question the basis upon which he had arrived at his truths. I cannot but hypothesise that only one who is in such a situation, whose earlier truths, whatever they may have been, no longer serve his person - would feel compelled to reach for a systematic reassessment of the basis on which he arrived at them.

Let us read further, “Surely whatever I had admitted until now as most true I received either from the senses or through the senses. However, I have noticed that the senses are sometimes deceptive; and it is a mark of prudence never to place our complete trust in those who have deceived us even once.” I quote this to highlight that Descartes is indeed a *thinker*. I say this because he never confuses sense perception itself with truth or knowledge, but treats them as mediums via which the later may be reached, or perhaps as channels which provide the information necessary for an inference to be made, not unlike seeing lights on the road at night before a bend and inferring that there may be a car which is coming around. And yet, as is still the case today, even in the sciences - we constantly deal with, configure new ways of sharpening, augmenting and recalibrating our sense perception, he notices their deceptions, and in an act of personification - compares them to those who may have deceived him. And,

in an act of prudence - casts doubt on what they may further reveal if their prior testimony was found to be faulty.

This I believe to be a position which ought to be highlighted, not least because the world in which the author lives and works, and him - the person, share a relationship, but also to perhaps underline how they also *don't* share a relationship. Descartes way of showing this to us was by focusing on the errors of our sense perception, an act which very much takes place in the world - but let us examine the construction of his argument.

The self evidence of the place a person finds themselves in, not unlike a writer at a desk - is apparent, as are the hands one uses to write - that they belong to the person are truths which only the mad would question, Descartes asserts. And yet, even here - even among the mad, Descartes cites his dreams; or perhaps moments in them - where he may have made the very same considerations as those who are indeed mad, who think themselves kings, or that their heads are made of clay, or that they are gourds, or made of glass. I think this is an exemplary statement; not least for its attempt to think the commonality of thought between two apparently mutually irreconcilable positions, one of the preliminary gestures of philosophy, but also for the examples he presents us with, of delusions, which to my mind, in the body of the text - may be read as faint personifications, or rather allusions regarding why the hypothesis of sensory deception is raised, and an agent such as an evil demon is cited as a possible agent. Yet, since I am not his biographer, and this is not a biography, I shall refrain from such speculation.

Following his argument, past the consideration of madness, when one is raising a hand, its aspect is apparent to us - how may this be in doubt? It's experience is felt even in one's dreams, within which we are not certain that it is not a dream while dreaming. This distinction is made only after the fact, after the break in not the experience as such, which may yet be recalled, but in the similarity. And yet, there may be another way in which Descartes *stages* the example of his dreams and their deceptiveness to present an allegory so to speak, not unlike Plato's allegory of those in the cave, of the contentment of deception, and the difficulty of reassessment. A 'field theory' as it were, not so much of the unconscious but of our experience of what I may begin to start describing as an *ideology*.

Personally, I appreciate the kind of home that Descartes illuminates in our mind, by way of his examples - how, while even in his dreams he sees himself at his desk, in his gown, while in fact he is indeed naked in bed. They provide a sense of humour while also conveying the extents to which our wishes operate, on us and our thoughts, even when not awake. I invite you to read his stanzas here for they demonstrate the energy and vitality with which he considers the dreams that we may be dreaming, and the difficulty if not the impossibility of a truly novel conception to even be thought in one's dreams, down to at the very least,

presupposing the prior perception of component shapes, parts, and colours from which any new construction, or animal may be put together. They are a literary delight if nought else.

Yet, I stray here - the question I began with was the figure of the evil demon which Descartes posits as a phantom of some kind who deceives his senses. Here, perhaps unlike Derrida, who identifies the moment of madness in Descartes in his act of comparing his own thoughts with those of the mad, I find the admittance of his theistic confession as what leads towards the madness in question; “ Be that as it may, there is fixed in my mind a certain opinion of long standing, namely that there exists a God who is able to do anything and by whom I, such as I am, have been created. How do I know that he did not bring it about that there is no earth at all, no heavens, no extended thing, no shape, no size, no place, and yet bringing it about that all these things appear to me to exist precisely as they do now? Moreover, since I judge that others sometimes make mistakes in matters that they believe they know most perfectly, may I not, in like fashion, be deceived every time I add two and three or count the sides of a square, or perform an even simpler operation, if that can be imagined? But perhaps God has not willed that I be deceived in this way, for he is said to be supremely good.” The difficulty that Descartes faces as a philosopher, is to account for the possibility of deception, of the error of his senses and indeed even logical and mathematical error - if such a god exists.

I'd like to present the extent of cynicism Descartes is brought to consider “Perhaps there are some who would rather deny so powerful a God than believe that everything else is uncertain. Let us not oppose them; rather, let us grant that everything said here about God is fictitious. Now they suppose that I came to be what I am either by fate, or by chance, or by a connected chain of events, or by some other way. But because being deceived and being mistaken appear to be a certain imperfection, the less powerful they take the author of my origin to be, the more probable it will be that I am so imperfect that I am always deceived.” - you will notice, that this is not an argument against Descartes methods or his conclusions or hypothesis, but an argument against his *character* which is used to disqualify the former. I think when the modern academy readily belittles the canon as being privileged old white men; they do themselves disservice by refusing to recognise the antagonism which animated some of their work, a tension - which perhaps is blanketed as anti-intellectualism - a tendency very much alive within the coordinates of the modern academy, so much so that the academy is forced to reinvent itself so as to continue to offer the services it has for so long. However, in returning to the point, we do see now the kind of considerations which lead Descartes, who perhaps find himself in a state of profanation, to withhold assent from those opinions which he regarded to be true, along with those which he regarded to be false, yet how would such a measure allow him to save that which is certain? Perhaps only via providing him the space from which he may consider them further. He isn't however taking the position of a deferring nihilist, for he does see that long standing opinions do return and lay claim to his belief, almost on account of intimacy, and despite his commitment to doubt them, he finds that it is

consonant with reason to believe them, for customs when held in common tend to have a measure of truth to them.

In a predicament such as this, where his own judgement is called into question, by undermining the character of their author, or by the sway of custom - Descartes recognises that he may be better served to lay aside his partial faith in these movements and to begin with doubt alone. He is hence compelled, by his own beliefs not to presuppose a benevolent and good god but a “rather an evil genius, supremely powerful and clever, who has directed his entire effort at deceiving me. I will regard the heavens, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds, and all external things as nothing but the bedevilling hoaxes of my dreams, with which he lays snares for my credulity. I will regard myself as not having hands, or eyes, or flesh, or blood, or any senses, but as nevertheless falsely believing that I possess all these things.”

I think it is helpful to pause here to reflect briefly on the gap between perception and agency, for it is between these two powers that Descartes appears to be struggling and this indeed is a dilemma. On the one hand the authority of his judgement is called into question on accounts of his character, and on the other he has to contend with the return of a customary way of thought that does not consider, or would rather co-opt him as an example for prosaic wisdom. This conundrum marks clearly the very situation that a person confronts; a situation which forces them to philosophise not in wonder, but in a mute epistemic interrogation which cannot rest or indeed begin with conclusions of judgements for it understands or perhaps is beginning to appreciate how the grounds in question may have influenced, or rather been influenced to deliver the verdict before us.

When (if) we return to Hegel in the later chapters, it is perhaps with this perspective that we may appreciate what he was able to do, which from here does appear to have profited from the advantages of a certain monasticism.

Yet, in these brief pages that serve as a beginning of my thesis, I hope I have been able to introduce to a reader - what the place of a writer is; what may be the influences, rather the very worlds between which they mediate, and the kind of considerations one has to make between the genres of literature and critical philosophy.

And here we do reach a conclusion perhaps prematurely formed though unavoidable, that the circumstances of our language may determine the vocabulary we come across; a very materialist interpretation of history and consciousness indeed. And yet, in such flat declarations we may be forgetting that it is the human mind and hand which shapes the

historical dimension we inhabit, and in this very act there remains an agency which works upon a material. This agency evaluates the task at hand, let us say the framing of a sentence, and holds within itself the consideration of its purpose. There is at work here the deliberation of the deed, and an expectation, or rather an anticipation of its consequences. Here the compact between a writer and a reader is tenuous for the writer is forced to consider the obscurity of who his reader may be. Not unlike a father holding a child to teach him or her how to walk, introducing the perspective, the problematic which makes the insight meaningful, the point of view presented is an assessment which draws upon a constructed context in its effort to put forth a problematic. The given, which is history is resisted in any effort to put forth a point of view that is cognizable in a way which releases the tensions of the impasse, whether it may be the existential situation of a person, or the problem in a disciple, a contradiction.

The battle over representation is one which a person, people and indeed a tradition may have been grappling with.

What is required here by a reader, indeed what is solicited in the person via the problems posed by the text is the capacity for consideration and the analysis of an argument. I would state that these qualities are what would make them capable of reading texts, literary and philosophical - with the capability of appreciating the singularity of the position of the writer, which constitutes the subject of my thesis. The act is, *without* the background of ideology, merely a softer yet more cloying term for history. A history, whose nightmare aside, was yet once a decision which an active conscious and human subject makes. When we reach this conclusion, or rather when we gaze upon it without its mediation in language, we are stupefied - for we lack the very coordinates with which we may form an idea of what it is that we may be encountering. It is in this place, that writer and indeed humans - attempt to construct a language which make our experiences meaningful, tangible and yes - shareable.

Chapter 2

On the literary imagination

Reading, as we are led to understand, rests on the ability of the reader not merely to see characters on a screen, but to understand what a mark, a sound, a combination of these into a word, their organisation in sentences - means. To be able to glean and simultaneously imagine something like a thematic emerging, forming a background as it were in a painting which is still live, unfolding before our eyes. In this, we are called to trace and bear in mind the circumstances of characters, who become (or do not) personae, and - just as we share our concern for friends and family - something akin to a protective impulse keeps their circumstances in mind for us as we witness developments elsewhere in the plot.

Such skills, I would argue are not unlike having to read an instruction manual and finding out the way the parts referred to, fit together - to form a remote control for instance. In this sense, there is a kind of complicity as it were - between author and consumer, or perhaps a manufacturer and customer. An offering makes sense when it can connect some practical use, or real desire in the life of the customer; or perhaps offer a new perspective, a chance at reinvention, a consideration which may not have come to notice - each a welcome to another doorstep beyond which our own lives have not traversed and as such a dislocation from the sense of sanctity that domesticity offers. Or perhaps, which may not have been able to, due to the circumstances and situations which outline and determine the course of our lives. And yet, in this minimal challenge we are forced to confront contours, via the mind of another, and to draw from the semblances presented, a picture of another habitation of a body - a sensibility of which we may only have had an intuition, like a box with a label of whose contents we remain largely speculative about within the ambit of the tag presented.

As the earlier chapter has suggested, there is something akin to the existential position of a writer. This entails a considerations which he has to bear and also those which he must necessarily censor - an attunement to the realities which he inhabits is de facto an act of censure, though mediation is a milder word peddled in some circles, even in its expression. Sartre, not unlike his French compatriot Descartes before him found himself compelled to raise three questions which I believe take up from where we left off. "What is writing? Why does one write? For whom?" - Sartre, 'What is Literature?: and other essays'³

The task that a writer faces is hence, akin to a cartographer, yet what is mapped in such a charting is not land, or rather not necessarily a space demarcated geographically, though it can be. We do see in stanzas such as this - "The speaker is *in a situation* in language; he is invested by words. They are prolongations of his senses, his pincers, his antennae, his

³ Sartre, Jean-Paul. "What is literature?" and other essays. Harvard University Press, 1988.

spectacles. He manoeuvres them from within; he feels them as if they were his body; he is surrounded by a verbal body which he is hardly conscious of and which extends his action upon the world.” what may appear to be a topology of a person, or their personhood as inscribed by their situation in a language. It may be said, that outside of this Sartre also posits a certain distinction in how poetry and prose are deployed.

In a poem, an emotion, hatred or anger for instance is not *expressed* but rather *appears* in its performance, perhaps in a simile where a line frames the contours of our encounter with it. In other words it becomes a kind of thing in itself, where the modality of its encounter, the verse of the poem, and the singularity of the emotive force encapsulate the entirety of what the line has to say. In other words, it approaches a religious register at the price of perhaps not being able to explain itself.

To quote Sartre: “How can one hope the indignation or the political enthusiasm of the reader when the very thing one does is to withdraw him from the human condition and invite him to consider with the eyes of a God a language which has been turned inside out ?”

As apposed to this account of poetry as phenomenon where words, torn from the conventions of their ordinary use, in new rhythms, metres etc. are phenomenon in themselves, prose Sartre emphasises is ultimately utilitarian, yet essentially vital. He likens it to ‘our shell and antennae’ ‘a third eye’ ‘a sixth finger’ ‘a pure function’. The metaphor of it being an extension of one’s body that we reach through, to gain information about and act in the world is what is foregrounded here in these visceral metaphors. An important point to note in the difference between how prose and poetry differ in their mode of expression; while poetry is often learned by heart, repeating the words, the rhythm, metre etc. as this is where its beauty lies, it is possible for us to recall what someone else may have told us about in prose, or prosaic speech, without recalling any of the exact words used.

Continuing - the loss of this faculty, as in aphasia, cripples the possibility of acting, understanding situations, and of having normal relations with the opposite sex.

Yet, Sartre is not really inquiring into the structure of language per se, like a linguistic may in the study of the relation between a word and that which it refers to. As a writer, Sartre brings to our notice that a mere expression of intuition can be accomplished easily enough, even in silence which does aid intuition. There is, in any communicative act, this - “One can doubtless *pin down* the results of intuition, but in this case a few words hastily scrawled on paper will suffice; it will always be enough for the author to recognise what he had in mind. *If the words are assembled into sentences, with a concern for clarity, a decision foreign to the intuition, to the language itself, must intervene, the decision of confiding to others the results obtained.*” This, I believe is what formally sets apart a study of a text per se, from a study of

it as a totality, or in other words, in the context in which it is produced. The text itself, always reaches for, or towards the construction of another. In other words, it has a specific nameable addressee - even as it perhaps constructs the presentation which may invoke or bring alive this person; the reader.

In this sense a writer accomplishes a near impossible function, he conveys via his pen, drawing from a script handed down, an idea, a story, an account, or explanation - from a spatio-temporal location, for any who can read the language. This is not photographic in the sense of it eternalising a moment, for the moment as an image is just that; it's visual, sonorous and tactile immediacy become meaningful to us when we know, or are taught to recognise a certain hue as blue, or a brittleness as identifiable with the word 'hard'; in this practice advances are made in the appreciation of the differences in these senses.

The labels which are used, in the structure of sentences are hence not the things itself, they are interpretations, representations by another individual, who seeks to express what they see in it, in a singularity whose tools and their actions, are manifested in the sentence. These moments of expression may be episodic, or similar to a seasonal narrative; yet the fact that they are representations is essential to grasp if we are to treat what is presented as literature, and not the rock or person themselves, notwithstanding the ability of the word to influence the thing; an aspect of sociality and recognition that we are brought up in, beginning with the recognition of our very name.

I would like to close this section via briefly gathering the problems and possible histories with we seem to have raised here. 1. The relation of a word to the thing, and the place of thought here. This is ultimately a question of consciousness and extentionality; and the grounds of debate are regarding where is the place of thought properly speaking here. 2. The relation of thought to language. This is intimately tied to our conception of thought itself, ie. what do we identify as thinking, and is there a mode of its expression or communication which is non-linguistic? This trajectory considers questions such as how a tone poem may be used to convey a mood, yet here I would say that a mood never really took a position on anything. Painting for instance can depict a scene, augmenting its sheer appearance via strokes of a brush or pencil to convey the experience of an artist in beholding and representing such a picture, bearing with it the singularity of that trace, and such a representation, or perhaps I should say work of art - does convey impressions in us, it may even be expressive of a scene, lets say of bored construction labourers lounging in the afternoon, and this too may convey a sense of the life as is encountered there, but here we are straying from the focus of our discipline. What I would like to highlight, perhaps in a privileged position to all these is the existential situation of the writer.

“Are we not in the habit of putting this basic question to young people who are thinking of writing: 'Do you have anything to say?' Which means: something which is worth the trouble of being communicated. But what do we mean by something which is 'worth the trouble' if it is not by recourse to a system of transcendent values?

Moreover, to consider only this secondary structure of the undertaking, which is what the *verbal moment* is, the serious error of pure stylists is to think that the word is a gentle breeze which plays lightly over the surface of things, grazing them without altering them, and that the speaker is a pure *witness* who sums up with a word his harmless contemplation. To speak is to act; anything which one names is already no longer quite the same; it has lost its innocence.

If you name the behaviour of an individual, you reveal it to him; he sees himself. And since you are at the same time naming it to all others, he knows that he is *seen* at the moment he *sees* himself. The furtive gesture, which he forgot while making it, begins to exist enormously, to exist for everybody; it is integrated into the objective mind; it takes on new dimensions; it is retrieved. After that, how can you expect him to act in the same way? Either he will persist in his behaviour out of obstinacy and with full knowledge of what he is doing, or he will give it up. Thus, by speaking, I reveal the situation by my very intention of changing it; I reveal it to myself and to others *in order* to change it.”⁴

I would like to point out two facets of Sartre’s characterisation of the act of writing here, marked by its choice of subject. a.) Sartre here is explicitly focussed on the character and the representation of the act of another. b.) And this ties in nicely with what appears to be an activist impulse in his writing, the faith that through the inculcation of self-consciousness in one who acts, perhaps via its representation, we may be able to change behaviour.

In this sense Sartre is obviously a political writer, yet political in a sense which perhaps the party form does not entirely encapsulate, for he is not really dealing with organisational matters, a fact which may be reflected in his decision not to join the Communist Party of France, despite his own communist affiliations.

It also points out, why this philosopher drew as extensively on the literary medium. The question of taking up that which is worth being communicated is to his mind one of transcendent values, and hence the novel, play and essay as mediums become repositories for him of demonstrating, animating and charting the drives and ambitions of the characters through which he tells us his stories, which may draw on allegorical construction and historical reference.

⁴ (Ibid)

To conclude, we must pose the question: does this sense of self-consciousness which Sartre points to with insistence emerge in the performance of activities which are not strictly speaking, literary? Or, if such a question bypasses the account of representation, to reframe it, may activities of an entirely prosaic nature bear with them the impulse which however slightly rarefies their performance into a spectacle which the performer him or herself anticipates almost like the meeting of a demand which has been instituted, like a job if not a job exactly?

I would like to provide some evidence for this in the following quote from *Being and Nothingness*⁵ -

‘Take for example this waiter. His gestures are quick and studied, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the customers with too quick a step, he bows with a little too much alacrity, his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too full of solicitude for the client's order, and then here he comes back, trying to imitate in his walking the inflexible rigour of some kind of automaton, carrying his tray with some of the daring of a tightrope walker, setting it constantly in an unstable and ever broken equilibrium that he constantly retrieves with a slight movement of the arm and the hand. His entire conduct looks to us like a game. He is busy trying to link his movements together as if they were mechanisms that set each other in play, his mimicry and his voice itself are like mechanisms; he imitates the alertness and rapidity of things. He's playing, amusing himself. But what is he playing at? You don't have to watch him long to realise: he is playing at being a waiter.’

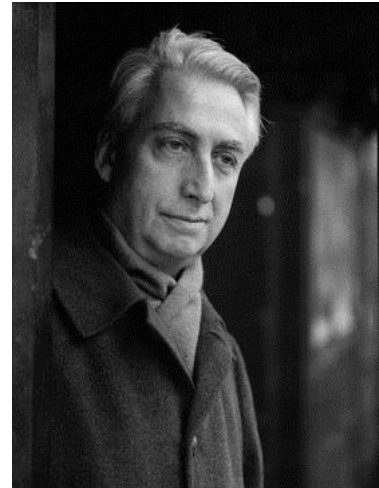
This displacement which is noticed, between the act in question and its performance is precisely the locus of a literary imagination, a facet of our very consciousness which picks up on not merely what is done or what is, but perhaps the question of what it may mean for the person doing so. In this sense, we can perhaps see in retrospect how the inculcation of a certain sensibility in French literature, was already at work in Sartre's seminal texts, prior to the more properly phenomenological explorations which were to follow. I do not venture as far however as to term this a genealogy.

⁵ Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and nothingness: An essay in phenomenological ontology*. Citadel Press, 2001.

Chapter 3

Pleasures of the text

I would like to take up a writer, Roland Barthes, not because he is a more explicitly political figure, engaged with questions concerning a contemporary moment which calls to be named amidst the tussles of history; but because he, in his sentences organised into clever fragments can convey a sense of what is lost by a writer, in the crafting of a language which is adequate to the singularity which history has yet to call out into the light of day.



The title of this chapter derives its name from a famous book by him, ‘The Pleasure of The Text’⁶ (released originally in French, in 1973 and translated into English in 1975) of which it is a study. Before I were to formally begin offering a reading of it however, I would like to foreground the concept of the text and its making of which the author is intimately connected. My earlier efforts have attempted to indicate the kind of self-splitting or censure if you will that is required in the writing of prose which seeks to offer anything other than an ethnography of a place, or rather which resists the construction of its truth in categories which subsume the possibilities that may be expressed. In other words, there is a way in which *prose*, as opposed to any kind of mysticism or poetic diction - is necessarily resistive. This resistance however, acts like a wedge in the door for the focus on a subject which may or may not be present, which may have or have not been - in other words, if not a history or a report, we would be dealing with a hypothesis, a conjuncture, or perhaps a decision. As an example, let us say I am representing a character to you as I read him or her in a poem.

In such a situation, the *pleasure* that a writer derives, which sustains their constructive energies are intimately linked with the text that is being written, through which he hopes to convey something which he believes ought to be said, to a reader. As such, the pleasure that we may receive from a text becomes whole or in my mind, readable - only in consideration of similar works, that an author may have been responding to, abstracting from, or intervening in. As such, it is inseparable from the consideration of a canon, or genre if you will - even if it militates against it.

⁶ Barthes, Roland, and Richard Howard. *The Pleasure Of The Text*. Macmillan, 1975.

As against the artist or author as the producer of a text, its consumption and appreciation take place on slightly different lines. We see in the following lines Barthes attempting to represent in his sentences - the antinomy between pleasure and violence which informs the aspect of a text in the market. "Whence, perhaps, a means of evaluating the works of our modernity: their value would proceed from their duplicity. By which it must be understood that they always have two edges. The subversive edge may seem privileged because it is the edge of violence; but it is not violence which affects pleasure, nor is it destruction which interests it; what pleasure wants is the site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the *dissolve* which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss. Culture thus recurs as an edge: in no matter what form." (The Pleasures of The Text, 1975). What kind of edge is Barthes speaking of here is perhaps a question which calls for interpretation, analyses and indeed judgement to come to terms with how a text may be considered or received among its readership.

This is not always a constructive movement, and subversion or the dismantling of a language is a stratagem utilised by writers, and other artists; a practice which is informed by a politics which seeks to decouple some unsaid yet deemed to be unwanted alliance between silent parties, for such is the nature of a complicity - an aspect which French literature, particularly in its political and polemical form has done much to exploit. I say this with an eye on the publications produced by Tiquun and The Invisible Committee, which have gained an entry into university campuses and radical activist groups in recent years, though the extent to which they actually inform their practice is questionable. Whatever its impact may have been in academia and semi-formalised politics the efforts of the groups in question to chart an ideological and strategic cartography of how movements as diverse as Arab spring and Occupy Wallstreet have been organising, which reveals elements of their motives and drives is admirable, yet an account of their work may be dealt with elsewhere.

There is indeed a pleasure in the delightful and quick prose of Barthes, which in its aphoristic form can capture an observation that a duller critic may have belaboured into dozens of dry paragraphs. Aphorisms, since Nietzsche at least, have excelled in depicting encounters, chance discontinuities and then taking a distance to present an observation which may have escaped both parties. The counterintuitive observation does indeed find a home here, yet at what price? In 'The Pleasures of The Text' could it possibly be narrative itself?

This is a question which perhaps is addressed to theory itself, if I do not make an entry prematurely for this genre which I would like to chart in its historicity. And, in a sense, narrative is instrumental to any introduction; yet we find in Barthes the ability to bring to light that which animates a narrative, which expressed its cadence and impasses, their anticipation and hope in a way in which it may be possible to appreciate what an epic narrative has to offer as an *idea*. Of course, one loses the substance of the story here, but the temptation for a critic,

to present a semblance of what may only be described as the experience of a time, for a readership, presented in emblematic form, is a task which is essential not only to criticism, or theory per se - but to any work of writing. This, I think - brings us nearer to the vicinity of some of the difficulties which Barthes himself is to take up, as a theorist, but at this point it may be best that I don't overreach myself.

It is instructive to introduce the concept of intertextuality here at this juncture, for I think you will notice that we are at the precipice where one can see that through the gaps of a text, in its silences and perhaps even in the turn of its aversions, there are others.

Does it help, as was attempted to be presented earlier - to name this un-present dimension in the text, the unconscious? What would we then make of the assertion that in any incomplete narrative there lies, not dormant but very much alive to any reader (or judiciary for that matter) a narratorial unconscious. Even in a cinema, the cut of a scene to another borrows on the faculty of inference in the viewer to surmise what may have happened in the interim. This latter assertion makes gaps in earlier sequences, the plot so to speak alive with possibilities which murmur for conjecture - this is a voice which the critic does hear, and we are in spite of my earlier reservations already grappling with one of the ways in which any given reading produces a decentering of the author, if only as in the taking of authorial intent as what determines the primacy of our reading.

In returning to the concerns of pleasure however, we can see why Žižek asserts the pressure exerted by late capitalist ideology in today's world is precisely an injunction to enjoy⁷. I make this statement in light of a quotation I'd like to present from 'The Pleasures Of The Text' where you can see, in Barthes attempts to account for the pleasure of reading, a certain resistance to thinking of pleasure itself as physiological need, not to mention as a guiding principle in any pre-ideological level. "Does the text have human form, is it a figure, an anagram of the body? Yes, but of our erotic body. The pleasure of the text is irreducible to physiological need." and in the next fragment - "The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas-for my body does not have the same ideas I do." Obviously, there is here a resorting to the positing of the autonomy of the body from conscious control. The hinge upon which the faculty of our enjoyment oscillates on to become enjoyment, properly speaking; is a release of built up sexual tension, a sexual mechanism as it were. The constraints which hold back, are the very same constraints which create this release - this in germane form was Žižek's insight which he read with remarkable ingenuity in the politico-cultural sphere. The question which we have to pose to ourselves as philosophers here then is what are the constraints, the inhibitions, the impossibilities that prevent not merely the

⁷ Žižek, Slavoj, 'You May', *The London Review of Books*, Vol. 21 No. 6 · 18 March 1999, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v21/n06/slavoj-zizek/you-may!>

realisation of our enjoyment but which form the coordinates of our enjoyment as such. This is the sphere of ideology.

The dismissal that such a position is merely a more barbaric endorsement of hedonism (as may appear in the treatment of the obstacle of the satisfaction of pleasure as a condition for that pleasure as such) is one which *does not* confront the coordinates which allow it to speak of the *difference* between hedonism, or barbarianism, and civilisation in any meaningful sense. This is the position of the disavowed cogito. Barthes, without requiring recourse to such Cartesian terms does however have an intimation of this, and the relation between enjoyment and resistance. He does this principally by asserting two positions 1.) The autonomy of the text from physiological need. This is essential as it is a position that must be held if we are to prevent the subsumption of our truth to any physicalism which seeks to read, in a testimony or account - the mere expression of a biological condition. This is not to invalidate any medical or physiological findings which may be discovered, but to posit that a text (or utterance) is irreducible to the author and his conditions. This I believe is a politics of genre that requires to be firmly established, lest we fall into the illusion that every construction or hypothesis is some kind of knee jerk response of a writer or actor to an immediate environment which he displaces in textual constructions, only for them to reconfigure themselves in sublimated forms in the account produced. I offer this as a criticism of the form of ethnography which has been championed in many anthropology departments and those which are informed by its methods. In seeking out the real, the immediate etc. 'directly' they forget the coordinates of the decision which allows them to approach it as such. And was this not Derrida's insight, when he in 'Structure, Sign and Play: in the discourse of the human sciences'⁸ posits the origins of the anthropological enquiry as rooted in a fundamental orientalism if not a racism, a belief which in its essence amounts to the conviction, prior to evidence that the other in some way is not like us? 2.) The other position that Barthes asserts is simply that there is a conscious decision made by an author to construct libidinal devices, perhaps via a narrative, using situations of suspense, fear, anticipation, longing, memory etc. in the text which informs how the reader apprehends characters and their actions in the plot. This is crucial and is the unsaid of the first position. If we, in our approach to the other cannot take into account, in our study - the coordinates of our appearance to them, let us say as a researcher, or government official, or unemployed etc. coordinates which are necessarily ideological, hence historical, then we will fail in mapping the appearance of the other, however the other or the object of our study chooses to respond to these positions, as an *appearance yielded by our inquiry* - which is finally what any sense of essence comes to rest on.

⁸ Derrida, Jacques. "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." 1967." *Writing and Difference* (2007): 278-93.

This is obviously a vulgarisation of an idea, and the refinement of understanding does require material upon which to reflect on and compare (or debate) with another position, in other words some kind of antinomy, either formed temporally or spatially - yet the above statements I hope serve as a prolegomenon to our enquiry, which here remains the pleasures of the text.

Sartre notes, a certain tastelessness which characterises so much literature that is produced. Yet, he does not stop here - using the lack of predicates in this simple word, taking it to be an exhaustion or failure of perception. Rather, the blankness referred to serves as a medium via which another sense makes its impression upon the sensibilities, in a sort of permeation at the limits of our senses. This is not always a metaphor of depth however.

“I had forgotten this morning that it was Sunday. I went out and walked through the streets as usual. I had *Eugenie Grandet* with me. And then, suddenly, as I pushed open the gate of the park, I had the impression that something was trying to attract my attention. The park was deserted and bare. But ... how can I say this? It didn't look the way it ordinarily does, it was smiling at me. For a moment I didn't move, leaning against the gate, and then abruptly I realised that it was Sunday. There it was, on the trees, on the grass, like a faint smile.” (Nausea, 1938)⁹. The park remains the same here, as does the company, yet the personification is of a moment that seems to signal a pleasant invitation, and demarcate the end of something, sealed in a smile that rises from the assemblage of the trees, grass, gate and other installations that constitute the park; that draw from its commingling to produce a sense of a Sunday, which seems to smile at the observer. There is a personification here, a more properly poetic device, and one which prose rarely resorts to, for here it is not a character which is personified but a situation which invokes the impression of a smile.

⁹ Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Nausea*. Norfolk, Conn: New Directions, 1949.

Chapter 4

Is alienation incomplete sublimation?... A hung question.

Part 1: Formal Considerations

There is, in our pursuits in our private and public lives a sense which allows us to present that which we are doing to one and other. When this process is not interrupted by any traumas or disturbances, it begins to form a story - one which we may share with friends or family, and via such transmissions a sense of our shared cultural identity emerges: a story of a people as it were.

Now, this story would certainly entail questions regarding what it is that we do for our upkeep, for housing, money, utilities, groceries etc. What forms of work do we seek? Whether we live with family or by ourselves, and in these terms is necessarily an economic aspect in a certain baseline reasoning. Clearly however, even here - the kind of economy we are referring to is not that of a set of bills by a cash register, or an accounts book maintained by a clerk. Principally, because we often deal with multiple fronts. The person I purchase my toothbrush from, is not the same as the person who sells groceries. Such functions can easily be institutionalised as they are in the modern supermarket, but the point is simply that as a customer, as a worker, I have, at the very least two fronts on which I would have to make decisions which are of an economic nature. This would be the simplest possible way of representing the box within which the details of our narrative emerge; a gross reductionism to say the least, for the modern marketplace is not a two window office of any sort, it is staffed by clerks, mechanics, shoemakers and advertisers who all claim to be selling 'goods and services', like their bread and butter depends on it. It is important that we remember that there is a way in which what we require remains bodily and yet the body itself is located in conditions entirely manufactured by our industries. We select or are thrown into a given circumstance within which, prodding - we glean the ways of avenues which appear opportune, meeting others, and perhaps avoiding some. In the emptiness from which we apprehend the world at large, and what we may be doing, we are retrospectively informed, perhaps via others, perhaps via ourselves - as to who we may be. The name which Jacques Lacan gave this site is *Das Ding*¹⁰. Yet, before I commit to a study of Lacan's thought I would like to point out one other alternative - the tradition of Habermas and the thinking of discursive intersubjectivity which has been carried on and enriched by the work of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge¹¹: this deserves mention.

¹⁰ Lacan, Jacques. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*. New York: Norton, 1992.

¹¹ Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere (Theory & History of Literature)* by University of Minnesota Press; First edition 1993.

The Thing which is English for 'Das Ding', which to me appears much better described as the situation within which mental functioning or psychical operations as Freud may have put it - is essentially not as much an antagonism as a consideration which occurs between two poles, which themselves are nominal - standing in for tendencies which thought will have to come up against; namely the pleasure principle, and the reality principle.

Do note, that the book that I draw my reading from is titled 'The Ethics of Psychoanalysis' by Lacan, and this is reflective in the conceptual organisation traced, and the questions raised for it. Perhaps none as indicative of the consideration that seems to thematise that domain of the unconscious, even in its act of determining or delimiting it - as the following - "on what theoretically is the control of the pleasure principle exercised?" Here, is where I believe the truly influential, indeed - vital insights of psychoanalysis come out. In Freud's formulation of the primary process, which corresponds to the pleasure principle - the taking of an identity is what perception seeks to establish. In other words - a name, perhaps a sensation, a character etc.

The secondary process or the reality principle however, in a kind of rectifying influence, if not effect seeks to establish the identity of a thought. This measure, which I believe is a better word than mechanism for the movement which thought makes, will eventually allow it to go beyond the immediate objects which it tests in this manner. Objects, I use the word with care - for underlying or perhaps beyond our signifiers is the thing itself, a formulation whose Kantian echoes would be apparent to those familiar with the origins of German idealism.

The point however is not merely this movement beyond an immediate surrounding, or shall I say surface, as crucial as it may be, for thought. Rather, - what is made via such a movement, in relation to the perception identified. The question which I wish to raise here thus is whether in the turn from the intimations of perception, along with the discharges or effort which accompany it, a turn which is understandable in its true sense only in the grasping of a thought - the movement required between the distance, this measure, is what frames the kind of desire or wish-fulfilment which is retrospectively constructed?

The paucity of our knowledge is evident here, but in following the process via which such an effect, or perhaps narrative emerges I hope that we may have a better clearing into the ground which we seek to chart.

To those familiar with recent debates concerning psychoanalysis the name Zizek will be known. I introduce him here for it was his insight, rather his very thrust which sought to identify in the subject, as a free agent, as apposed to a passive figure or statistic - a will to

enjoy the symptom. It may be instructive for our study to think this in terms of displacement, for any movement - however precise requires, indeed entails this.

I would however, like to take this opportunity to make a different, though perhaps not unrelated point. One which I hope the philosophers amongst us may appreciate. For the very identification of a thought to be possible, we would require, as subjects - to take a distance from that which it reflects upon. In this light, I hope that the cruciality of Deleuze's breakthrough becomes a little more apparent to us. His work seeks to posit - in difference itself, the concept through which an ontology is constructed. The Hegelian criticism to this, which if you notice cannot be avoided at this stage - is whether it is the movement of thought itself which makes this distance possible, from perception, upon which it reflects. This, we will return to in a later work.

It is a matter of mild amusement, that Deleuze and Lacan, who were contemporaries living and teaching in Paris in the late 20th century, timed their classes in such a way so that no student could attend the both of them. Whether this is indeed true or fictive is yet to be established by me, but the situation as such remains comical, and as I have been trying to point out - it is in the grasping of such surface effects that perception exercises its movement as thought, a moment of cognition as it were - perception, brute immediacy becoming-thought. This places us at a certain position, not empty or neutral but with holding an active charge vis-a-vis, in this case - the narrative in question. Here, we see how intimately commentary and criticism are situated vis-a-vis the mode of their discursive construction.

Yet if both of these facets rely on not mere appearance, but narrative - for that would be the unstated remainder in the above arrangement - I think we will appreciate that the outlines of a plot are impossible to do without, for any writer; unless he were himself to produce a work of fiction or journalism.

There is a tendency here to glorify the insight of a first report, a novelty as it were; an act which undoubtedly appreciates some new insight in a field or state of affairs, yet here I cannot but take up a now less novel Zizekian maxim, that to truly appreciate that which is new in the 'new' it is essential to be able to look at it from the perspective of what was once thought to be eternal in the old, for here - I think, change really begins to appear to us in some meaningful sense, as apposed to a Heraclitian fragment or a koan etc.

If my attempt in this thesis, is to chart the common ground between literature and philosophy then I think a reader would be able to see the outlines of the argument which are emerging already. A question, or rather - observation, for all questions emerge from premises, does not necessarily have to be profound, for the accusation that the critic is reading too much into a text is as old as the institution of criticism. However, when a novelist posits a character in

relation to others, even if the others are insignificant, lets say in a novel like Camus's Outsider¹² - does not the very process of this differentiation as such reveal a kind of criticism implicit in the text which animates its lines for readers to see? What indifference may mean to an alienated person for instance?

The objection, here - which I do see as a rather dim one, yet immanent to the subject, Meursault - were we to focus on character is this; that in perceiving society and experiencing his distance from it, what matters is not the difference as such, the unease as non-relation that he experiences with those who are around him, but the fact that it is his *experience* which is what we are privy to. I would make two arguments against such a position 1. In its very construction, the novelist Camus, as a writer attempts to thematise a situation in mind, a situation which nonetheless has to be perceived by some character, particularly when the experience in question is as human as that of alienation or outsidersness. 2. Our perceptions, whatever they may be, become tangible, become meaningful, become real - only when they are presented to another. This other, need not necessarily have to be another person, for a thought even when defined and presented to oneself becomes an object which can be reflected on, which calls for or solicits our consideration. I believe that this frames quite nicely my criticism against champions of some hidden or mystical authenticity to be found in the text, in other words a Heideggerian reading. This criticism, points to the fact that perceptions are products of surface effects experienced by the senses, upon which the faculty of our reason makes inferences, via which we use words, concepts, sentences and other conceptual tools to be able to represent these phenomenon to oneself and others. As such they are not some immutable deep seeded immanent impulse which lies dormant within a subject, for such a construction would make the subject themselves dormant.

There is a way in which a juridical language which searches for a motive here may get in the way, for the writing of a text in many cases is predetermined, strongly by the totality of the project which lies unfinished, perhaps only in the form of broken fragments scattered as questions in the memory and maybe notes of an author; yet in the practice of putting it down, something resembling - in the case of the novel, a thematic emerges and, occasionally this is enough to call a beginning.

Is this one way in which the answer to the Freudian question regarding the good of the subject in their antagonism between the pleasure principle and the reality principle can be answered? As an act of creation? In art, maybe a parable of labour? Perhaps, yet I fear that in these formal considerations we may have forgotten the plot, and the central question :-which to my mind remains that of the agency of the subject, a good universally recognised; and perhaps via this an understanding of his politics as a mode of intervention.

¹² Camus, Albert, translated by Stuart Gilbert. The Stranger. New York: Vintage Books, 1954.

Part 2: Theoretical Considerations

My subject however, in its simplicity remains the position of the writer. I believe that today, after reader response theory, after the debacles with the linguistic turn, in other words after so much interpretation if not over interpretation - a meditation on the craft of the writer is what criticism simply can no longer do without. This is not without precedent.



It is fitting that we return to Sartre here (*in picture*), not merely because we began with Jameson's stylistic considerations of his work in the beginning of this thesis, but because it was, or shall I say it is Sartre who most concretely, to use a crude and perhaps soviet sounding word, took up the plights which a writer faces in their simple act of reaching out and conveying something of the challenges which the practice of criticism has to face up to.

There are debates amongst the few remaining departments of philosophy which still take up fundamental questions regarding that of ontology, and I do bring this up at this stage for criticism, or should I say literary criticism has tended to be snided in certain cardboard cutout departments. The word ontology itself is mired in references which seem not to touch upon anything substantive ie. resembling a predicate, if not a property. We hear or read things like 'the nature of being, the interrelatedness of things' - these become phrases when devoid of a consideration of active circumstances. In other words, there is a force which the writer feels, no matter how well established, canonical, indeed enshrined, to be simply contemporary ie. one among those who are living and breathing today in a world which is shared.

This is true even if that which is written off, or indeed spoken is not of a moment which is the present. Entire modes of speech, mourning for instance, or investigation for that matter occur only after a deed is done. Does this make them facile? No; we only know that which no longer is when we can begin to register a loss in some manner - and perhaps, this is as good an entry as any into the question of what an ontology is. Timely too, for the great ontologist of today is Alain Badiou, who counts Sartre as among his teachers - but who takes up the history of philosophy in a way that reaches further into the discipline, at least chronologically, in terms of stalwart figures who have marked and transformed its history irreversibly.

What I wish to convey however is not the subtractive void of ontology, which I confess I may not be as well equipped as Badiou to do. I take up Sartre for he was a philosopher who in however limited a sense yet took up the *existential* position of a writer. Existential not in terms of a posturing expressed vis-a-vis prominent institutions, he was singular, and in 'What is

Literature?'¹³ a text neglected by departments of literature, we are introduced as it were to the succession of criticisms which a writer without the privilege of institutions is bound to have come up against.

This, my above stanza, is a weak description, but let me say that in circumstances where hegemony is the name of the game even among those minds who would count themselves as representing a subaltern tendency, whatever that may be; the consideration of one who does not have recourse to the institutions, be it literary, be it juridical, ultimately political - the state machinery as it were, this is the most concrete and real challenge that any endeavour of thought is stunted by.

I think it is interesting to make a comparison here between the various criticisms briefly touched on with a sensitivity and swiftness whose concision is only apparent upon reading Sartre's prose, and the various moments that consciousness travels through in its path to the absolute in Hegel's Phenomenology. Primarily because of the difference in the prose, brilliant in both cases, but the latter has recourse to a sense of having the wind of history itself on its side. It purveys a movement in becoming as it reflects upon determinations in a 'now' animated by the present which is punctuated in breaks from earlier limitations. The grandeur here is reminiscent of romantic composers, whereas Sartre is more like a solo flautist without an ensemble.

There is something to be said of his notoriety, his refusal of state honours and even literary prizes. Yet more telling is the use to which he places the notoriety and dismissal directed at him, like a spinning wheel conjuring figures who illustrate the various steps at which inertia manifested in established or rather settled opinion, especially in its cynicism confronts the writer in a moment of prematureness to knock them of their path and unsettle their convictions. Rarely does a philosopher tread such ground, and one can really see in Sartre a philosopher who indeed abandons the imperial tongue.

What does that leave him then? Without recourse to the eternal, the ideal, the sovereignty of convictions, the sacredness of ideas - his themes are picked from the brute existentiality of being a writer, facing questions such as 'what is literature?' 'what is writing?' 'and why do we write?'. The unstated, or rather the already too clearly stated matter is that of censorship, but a censorship which doesn't operate merely on the editorial desk. Rather, this is a censorship of the very ideals, aspirations and possibilities that are considered permitted in a world. There is no approach through the maelstrom to the other side, merely a tarrying with the negative, a step by step encounter with the artful detractions, the scornful asides, the simple inconsiderations that make the possibility of entertaining a thought, of projecting a hypothesis - more akin to labour than what Plato once referred to as the dear delight. Make

¹³ Sartre, Jean-Paul. "What is literature?" and other essays. Harvard University Press, 1988.

no mistake, this prose - is a critique of the society Sartre finds himself in. And I suppose you see here a theme of resistance which seems to cloak the figure of the writer as presented in our study. A resistance built so as to open the door for considering possibilities which a present forbids; or perhaps - in the worst of cases, a present which forbids the consideration of any given future, which fears inference itself and would like to place itself beyond the ambit of question, in other words to raise itself to imperium from which to strike with scorn.

The task, or perhaps the role that is left to the writer is as much a work of seduction, for the appreciation of something which is forbidden in the present, which is barred not by a figure but an ensemble requires, if not a pleading to the galleries, perhaps a reminder that pleasures that a society denies itself, for a sense of unity under whatever name - themselves are a doorway so to speak to possibilities that the antinomies presented as such; antagonisms cognised in the ways that they are, place beyond reckoning.

In this sense, the writer in the very formalistic description of their craft, is already a more historical figure than that of the philosopher - who can count on means supposedly beyond history. This was Plato's wager; simply put - ideas are eternal. Forms in an absolute sense, presented before the mind with the clarity of a triangle and the determinateness of its three sides.

This, in its weakest, most paltry sense is the intimation of dialectics, which to my mind, at this stage can only be thought of as the possibilities of understanding. Dialectics, first and foremost, grasps the contours within which an association is made. Perhaps merely so as not to forget that sometimes, the point is not that the grass is freshly cut and green, but that it is within a garden. When you read this, as a critic - as a reader, you sense the metaphor of interiority, or civilisation, through the act of gardening, yet this was not the idea, but you grasp it nonetheless; for if nothing else you still have this circumstance, the pure place of encounter where you may meet or confront something; to remind yourself that an impasse is always situated. This incarnation of the slogan always historicise, sadly today appears to have become a mere spatialisation; as the process via which history itself appears as such, and the experiences which make it meaningful are brushed under the rug, erased from narrative, silenced, or invisibilized in so many ways.

A writer who is a dialectician then seems to have two tasks before them. 1. If they see an antagonism, framed between coordinates, sites of happening, a certain temporality which the language in circulation chooses not to register - to find or create a means of expressing or reconfiguring the problem so that it is indicative of the plight in experience. 2. If a writer is able to express the circumstances of the antagonism, let us say difficult circumstances at home, or strife in a family - the mere act of situating this brings forth to a mind the milieu and ennui's which may be acting on a lived present in consideration. When negation is met with

here, even if presented without any determination, without a shape of why an act, word or gesture was struck down, it is possible to at least place the site of its occurrence and this provides an elementary map of a field, so to speak. A writer, who is a critic is hence informed by a retrieved record of past failures, only when he is able to historicise their projects. This is not to say that we do not require censure. It may be even necessary to censure our dreams; and the institution of criticism, commentary, analysis - do depend on it. The point however is something akin to the consideration of when does an experience become shareable. How does it become meaningful? This is what we have art for.

There is something in art, Sartre reckons, which is akin to the ceremony of the gift. It transmits an experience. I think this holds true for all literature. For does not the writer, in presenting a certain arrangement of the world, through scenarios perceived by characters seek to posit what may only be described as a totality? A sense perception transmitted across an impossible displacement, from a time that is not now, to a reader who is perhaps not yet. This is perhaps a repetition of a trope that I have been developing, but I find it useful to suggest how criticism, even in matters of an immediate import, such as politics or journalism - does not exactly presume the reader that the totality of the work appeals to. By informing him or her, by soliciting considerations to facts, figures, narratives which may not be well known, the text - penned by the author is constitutive of the reader who may understand the meaning of the work, bound with the author, perhaps with several authors - through the act of reading.

Chapter 5

Interlude: Das Ding, Drives, and Literature

In the previous chapter I tried to introduce to you the Lacanian conception of Das Ding. Intimating you to how it operates between the antinomy of the pleasure principle and the reality principle. The satisfaction of our desire however, if this is not too prematurely narcissistic a leap on my part - is not precisely what is concerned via the notion of Das Ding, which rather seems to refer to a *primordial* object cause of desire. I use the word notion here, which to ears that are accustomed to debates in schools of philosophical idealism will ring of slight criticism. It is meant to be that way; and there is a sense in which the reading of das Ding as a precursor to the object *petite a*; a lost object of desire - an ideological kernel if you wish - becomes apparent in the course of development that is witnessed in Lacan's own work.

If however one were to remain with das Ding as a concept, perhaps noticing how it also charts the plane in which ego formation is to take place, we may begin to appreciate that it may have been doing something apart from prefiguring what may later become a fascination that is chased, or hunted, characteristic as it may be of an object of desire - whatever a mode of acquisition may be.

I think you will also notice that regarding the question of sublimation itself however, we did not make much progress - why is that? Perhaps because in my efforts at furnishing its aporias for you, in literature for example; the materiality of bodily drives - what Freud refers to as *triebe* is not foregrounded. This is by no means implicated by necessity however - and narrative, and the understanding which comes with it has a way in which it satisfies a drive, which is admittedly sublimated. Understanding, especially of another, or rather of an Other - requires at the very least correspondence, and of course the practice of reading.

Sublimation at its essence however is a desire for an object which is, perhaps to use a clumsy word which I still repeat faithfully, displaced. To say that sublimation leaves us with, or takes part in the field of the *triebe* - would be an attempt, however feeble, to characterise the intimations that first encounters bear. Mark, that these are not encounters with someone for the first time, nor do they refer to repeated encounters; they refer rather to the order of impressions which we find leaves an imprint which in the last analysis can only be characterised as symbolic.

Why is this?

Well, an encounter with a reader is something that is mediated by a work which an author presents. An author who, given circumstances - draws from a common stratum of signs via

which to frame an impression, sensibility; or if you will - a problem. That which an author may have once, or still does keeps secretly guarded in their bosom may remain, yet; unreflected or, un-presented is perhaps sublimated, that is displaced via the unconscious to be re-channeled into some stronger drive, or simply forgotten, only reappearing where if the impression that gave rise to it was a condition which calls for articulation.

In reading Lacan, and in presenting the primacy of the symbolic; and the limitations of the imaginary - the caveat which follows is to state that no symbolisation, however exacting is complete.¹⁴ This statement is meant to convey the simple fact that the real is that which resists symbolisation, which is never totally discharged by it. It is that which symbolisation seeks to represent, to an other and is nothing without it.

What may it mean to refer to *triebe* as a field however, and a field for sublimation at that? This is a question which may have to draw on a body of interpretations that cannot rest with case histories and the clinic, for the subject as constructed here - remains the individual. And while narratives which such an individual may provide us with, such as accounts, descriptions - indeed dreams and hopes, are of value - they would remain partial representations of a panorama that animates them which in itself is not reducible to an individual's interpretation.

There is hence, in the practice of literary criticism, a sieving not merely of the truth value of narratives ie. whether they are actually representative of real or historical tendencies which may be happening. Fantasies for example, are never real - yet why is it that the human imagination has consistently sought to posit a fantasised narrative, with elves and goblins set in a world of magic, beset with danger? The point here is that there is a way in which the answer to such a question cannot be found within the plot itself. For the plot maps a place which the mind of the author creates so as to harbour a plane where relations that are unexpressed, or impossible in reality may find the possibility of articulation. It is perhaps in these relations that we may have to search for clues regarding metonymies, parallels, references, displacements, and sublimations. These would draw not merely from biographical situations but rather situational, or should I say historical allegories. Drawing from these a critic would form criticism of the relations which animate our everyday life, or should I say - the relations of production.

Chapter 6

The taste for debt, capital as a social relation & post-industrial society

As the title suggests, there are a few things I'd like to touch upon in this discussion. If only to open a can of worms in a way that it does not spill and soil the floor, yet bearing in mind that

¹⁴ Lacan, Jacques. *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*. Vol. 2. WW Norton & Company, 1991.

this can does need to be opened. I have used a metaphor, admittedly, obliquely, to raise a question which I believe is central for Marxist theoreticians: **Does language have a use value?**

To begin with, it may help us to recognise that experiences we have no concept for can often be experienced as trauma. By this I mean that were a trauma to be Real in the Lacanian sense, which here - I also use adjectivally, there would be an aspect in the experience which would be resistant to any process of symbolization (Lacan, 1954)¹⁵. This may be only inasmuch as we do not have a handle on what may be causing a particular symptom. However, with some investigation we can come to an understanding of what ails us, even if the initial diagnosis is imprecise. However limited this headway is, it provides us with a way of explaining to someone else what we may be going through, and this is valuable, vitally so. In other words, language allows us to represent our experiences, even to ourselves. So regarding an answer to the question: does language have a use value? I would say yes, language indeed has a use value, yet unlike just about every other commodity, it is one which can only be recognised in its transmission, or dare I say, exchange.

Professor Anwar Shaik, The New School for Social Research



I begin with such a preface because I was recently reading a short chapter ‘Capital as a Social Relation’¹⁶ from the political economist, Professor Anwar Shaik, who teaches at The New School For Social Research. When someone from a background in literature from an Indian university,

like myself, encounters *critiques* of capitalism it is often under the rubrics of objectification, instrumentalization, and reduction. Important facets which do speak of a certain loss encountered in our engagement with our workspaces, reflective of certain *inhumanisations* which affects us – just as we become unconscious or rather immune to their effects. Yet, the advantage of approaching or rather recognising capital in these terms, which professor Shaik’s chapter presents is the simple fact of allowing us to approach this ‘can of worms’ *generically*, hence capital as a social relation. And let us make no mistake, as much as a worker may

¹⁵ Lacan, Jaques, *The Seminar. Book II: The Ego In Freud’s Theory and the Technique of Psychoanalysis*, 1954-55, Translate by Slyvana Tomaselli, New York, Norton, Cambridge University Press, 1988

¹⁶ Shaik, Anway, “Capital as Social Relation”, in *The New Palgrave: Marxian Economics*, Eatwell, John (editor), Palgrave Macmillan, UK, 1990

complain about the conditions of their labor, the fact that they do labor is the aspect of their existence which allows us to recognise them as such. Which leaves the question, what do they labor for?

Here, Shaik provides us with a certain trajectory which, to not sound too instrumentalist, may be described as an assembly line of our apprehensions. Let me draw it for you.

Object —> Tool —> Capitalist Instrument

In a sentence: we see above how in a limited or reduced phenomenology, our apprehension of a common article is scoped or can be seen only from the perspective of capital, if we are to accept our present social organization which requires the division of labor to be guided by and geared towards its acquisition.

We are presented in Marx's *Capital* with the example of a loom which is encountered, perhaps used by a family or a community to make cloth. Such an instrument would first serve primarily for the production and direct consumption of the cloth, to be cut and stitched into clothes. Yet, were the same loom to be encountered in a capitalist factory, what would matter most vis-a-vis the cloth is not its quality or durability, but what it may command as a price in the market.

Our object, the loom has transformed from a tool utilized to make an article and has acquired a second order utility which comes to subsume its very purpose - ie. as an instrument designed to make a *commodity*.

Inasmuch as we desire to use an article in our possession not for our own direct consumption, but to trade, and perhaps to purchase another article; we have in our hands not a simple thing, like a knife or soap – but a commodity which we are willing to part with for the right price. What so-called schools of cultural Marxism have been trying to point out is that in today's world, associations, relationships, alliances, belongings, affiliations, indeed networks acquire this trait. If you think about it, a contract for a job is precisely such a statement. It binds a worker to an employer under certain relations of exchange.

From such a point of view, let us say that of the capitalist, articles such as the loom, the capacity to labor, yarn, money etc. appear to be different facets of the owner's capital. As such, capital no longer appears to be a thing but a set of relations.

Relations, whatever else they may be, are also how we perceive ourselves vis-a-vis something else, or what that may be for us. A language for instance may be alien or native, an activity - habitual or strange. Our familiarity with something often determines how we perceive it, and

a practiced hand or gaze can transform what we see in a task. However there are some relations which remain exploitative, if not openly hazardous.

Without access to money for example, our relation to our means of subsistence i.e., our very capacity to reproduce our labor becomes a matter in which we may be at the mercy of simple exchanges, within a household, no longer mediated by a market and hence removed from society. It is this condition of abject dependence, a relation which is easily exploitable – that has been named colonialism. Admittedly such a concept has more readily been used to express relations characterizing the economic plunder of resources that empires may have exercised vis-a-vis colonies. The relations in question however can easily be mapped onto the domain of the household itself, a space which is also characterized by certain divisions of labor, normative prescriptions, and acceptable and unacceptable uses of language.

This is clearly not a new phenomenon, Victorian England provides us with clear examples of the rearrangements, or rather the emergence of new relations in the household, which reshaped what sociality was to be among the bourgeoisie and aristocracy. The instituting of a governess, for example, who looks after and educates the children, a butler who looks after the house and manages supplies are key figures who indicate that the lords and ladies of the manor felt the need for another person or people in the house to take on delimitable responsibilities, often personal ones, such as cooking and looking after kids.

Literature is replete with examples and novels from the Victorian era, such as *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte for instance would provide anyone curious enough, with the sense of cloistered privacy so treasured in a young girl's diary, or the secrets exchanged among them in a closet.

Corot, Camille. Young Girl Learning To Write



Simultaneously, a growing distance is observed between man and wife – who often sleep in separate rooms, and have relations which are mediated by hired intermediaries.

The middle and upper classes in India are really not very different from such historical features, inasmuch as the employment of domestic labor mediates working relations in the household. I think colonialism, too, is experienced all the more viscerally when a person is able to draw a wage from an activity related to food and cooking, and a dependent may have no direct control over either. The

space of the household in such circumstances can be further distancing when a butler is around to handle chores, and with the professionalization of such intimate tasks we experience our living space as an area which offers itself up for economic gain to agents apart from ourselves, even if it may free us from some drudgery.

Such a presence also marks an intimate front where two cultural horizons meet, and while this may not be map-able in the kind of questions presently pursued, such an encounter may be an aspect which an ethnographer for instance could choose to take up.

These fissions which are experienced within the household itself is what mark what I would describe as an intimate sphere of our alienation, yet since resources are directly involved in relations unmediated by money or exchange at least for one party - colonialism, or if you prefer, neo-colonialism may best characterize the form of subjection in question. In fact, it may be telling that this term has also been used to describe a style of architecture, popular in the new world - consisting of houses with porches, with little pillars holding up a canopy, and so on.

In looking beyond this sphere we find that despite over a century of struggle, capitalism still remains our specific historical form of bringing together the means of production i.e., land, labor, money, machinery, markets etc.

What is the gaze which observes this spectacle? Inasmuch as it is viewed as a factory of production, we would tend to gloss over the specific forms taken by struggles against this

social organization, which is always over the terms and conditions of labor. Here, I can't but think of bad behavior and acting out as resistances to a social order which would rather cast itself in a benevolent light, yet – perhaps not unlike a platform owner on social media; makes use of profiles which appear on site, even if we were to be referring to something as seemingly benign as grazing on their tastes and preferences; perhaps to trade as information with advertisers or other 'competitors'.

Inasmuch as the capacity to labor is retained by a worker, which here includes the capacity to sell their labor, the common ownership of at least this factor of production by individuals and groups bespeaks of an inherent equality among people under capitalism. In this regard it does seem to advance a common cause ahead of social formations such as slavery, which as we are informed were intimately associated with colonial rule, which may be reinvented surreptitiously in the garb of neo-colonialism, in the household, and beyond...

Charting domestic and relatable analogies here, which link households with other close at hand forms of sociality such as social media sites, may allow us to chart such a domain and the kind of associations it enables, yet this may be a task for a later effort. The resources and artifacts required to put a household together are often functions of trade relations between markets. Often in distinct countries, and anyone who would like to trace how they have come to acquire anything, even something as mundane as dishwashing liquid, will see that the chemical factory would be hiring hands under contracts, as would the transportation company, all of them taking a cut for themselves from the labor put in. And this is not to mention the initial extraction of the minerals themselves, which are often forced coups when not simply appropriated by a state and sold or leased to a private company.

In returning to the idea of equality we were referring to earlier however, its appeal rests on the equal ownership of our capacity to labor, and to sell this power, an idea which was very much a darling of the tradition of classical political economy which saw in its conception, a means of forming alliances, and wresting power away from a traditional landed aristocracy. Were this to remain the horizon of the liberal ideology however, it tellingly reveals a shallowness to its struggles, as it presents no reference to the work it does, nor does it present a means of joining it. In other words it forecloses any reference to class. Why is this so? For if the basis of our freedom consists simply in our capacity to sell our labor power, the horizon of this ambition would be to become a wage slave i.e., a person who is granted money, in return for determined activities. This in itself, may not be a bad place, yet it is one which does not see the relations that the activities in question have to other activities which it does not share but yet depends on for the conduct of life as inhabited. This, to my mind - thinking the relations of production, which we depend on, is the only means we have to form a sociality which, in principle, is universalist and emancipatory. It should be noted here that it is to

Anwar Shaik's credit that he is able to present the work of classical political economy while not being blind to its own blindness, it is this which makes him an observant Marxist critic.

What is this blindness which I am referring to however? Well, unlike any form of serfdom, and even in explicit opposition to it, a labourer is free to sell their labor under capitalism. Classical political economy recognises this, born as it was on the tide of the bourgeois democratic revolution. Labour is a component, like capital – yet capital, unlike labor, is something that not everyone may have. In such circumstances, labor remains utilisable by anyone, as the question of exploitation slips out of sight. What is spoken of is a cooperation between labor and capital, with each contributing its corresponding component and receiving a commensurate reward. This wraps up quite nicely, a sanctification of capitalism.

The question which is left here is: what does labor do for capital? Or in existential terms: what may a laborer do for a wage? The agreement upon which such a relation of exchange rests on may be a job contract or some other form of agreement between parties concerned. What interests me however here is an understanding of the position of the capitalist and the worker in the circumstances of the mode of production prevalent today.

An early-Leninist conception of the working class no longer seems coherent inasmuch as this mass does not seem to have a class consciousness which looks beyond its immediate affiliations. Socially, this may be reflected in the weakness of trade union movements. The capitalist, is now increasingly no more the traditional factory owner who can today be increasingly subjected to promissory payments, in the future, and supplies entailing other retailers and banks. This is largely representative of the outsourcing of productive functions necessary for the making of most machinery for example. With the rise of entrepreneurs, the treating of education as a commodity under neoliberalism and the fact that most if not all would be required to pass through some of these qualifications, and to utilize them in working relations, the capitalist today is reinvented in the role of a platform owner or supervisor, and as this is hardly any different from a redundant managerial class of yesteryears – can still bear resemblances which orthodox Marxism sought to identify among a technocracy which serves supervisory and increasingly limited productive functions.

It is to be observed however, that the relation between the capitalist and worker is less analogous to the simple formality of the job contract today than it ever was. The form of this article has been gravely undermined by the removal of the kind of security it once commanded. With companies increasingly in a position to fire employees with impunity.

In this emerging terrain, the capitalist and the worker are perhaps better conceived as moments in a social process which we encounter in their relationality. Perhaps even as determinate encounters which someone like Althusser sought to mark. And representations of these are

replete. I think of photography here for example, and its recent rise and circulation to be the ultimate nominalistic art, with regard to narrative. A composition of objects may make a picture, as might a portrait – yet, what such an essentially spatial configuration invisibilizes is how precisely did the objects get there, and as such are mute representations which may be interpreted at face value, perhaps, even as symbols, but only in relation to their background in the image. Here, however, I do observe a self-expository aspect which some profiles bring to bear, when an activity such as a hike or a dish is embarked upon or prepared for, such gestures seem to bring facets of narrative back into the picture.

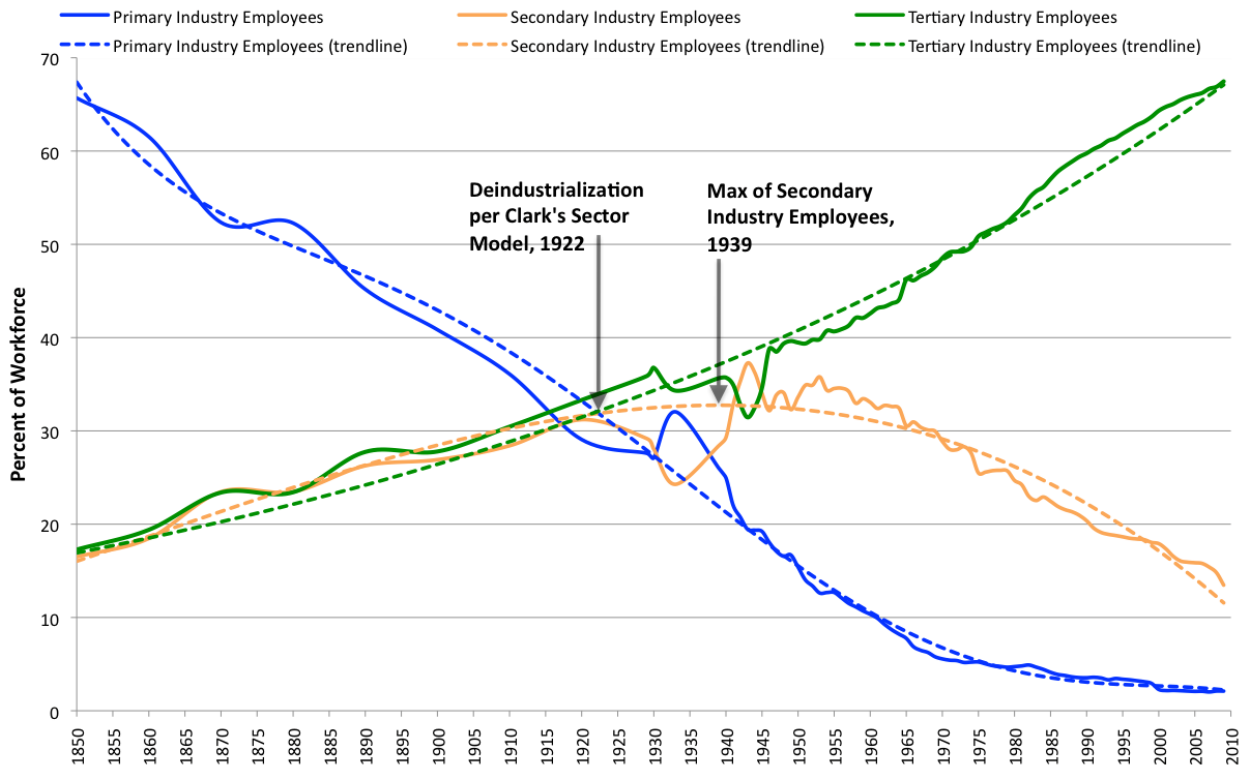
What may these relations come to mean in the purview of the household however, which in its sociality can exist only in relation to other houses and their externalities? Here I mean to refer to the domain they depend on – industry, or the totality of productive relations that constitute society.

The home may once have been a kind of shelter from the world. Indeed, this is what I imagine the first caves to have been. Yet, our domestic requirements hinge upon supply chains and markets which are built upon the organization of exploitation and a structural violence and exclusion, chiefly operative in terms of how surplus value is distributed. An analysis of this aspect is literally impossible without bringing class to bear as an analytic lens and thinking of the relation of one to another, let us say between authors and publishers for example; and here I would highlight the need for sound criticism. In the absence of any sincere effort to do this or mark its outlines what we notice is the proliferation of obfuscatory registers, or if you prefer – ideologies.

Can, for example, the exploitative dimension of capital be redeemed via a religious interpretation like a promissory transfer of the capital itself? Whether it be land, vital resources, money, or perhaps just information, withheld and used strategically? This was the narrative which sold the middle class from the 1970's all the way to the first decade of the 21st century, and perhaps for a generation presented a horizon they may aspire to. The dream of upward mobility. Many still dream this to this day.

Yet, for those of us who do not look to such a narrative with hope would there be another hermeneutic via which to explore the contradictions we face here? In post-industrial society for instance, i.e. in circumstances where manufacturing is not the sector which drives national profits, and where advancements in agricultural technologies reduce the requirements of hands on the field – both these traditional spheres of production, which we still depend on, become more profitable for the owners of the enterprises, who benefit from increased productivity.

Clark's Sector Model, US



The economist Colin Clarke presented a study of national economies and transitions in their employment structure with the advance of industrialization. This graph shows that in the US, from 1939 onward, employment in the secondary sector or manufacturing jobs in the US steadily declined. Concurrently a substantial increase in employment in the tertiary sector was marked.

The activities which actually enable such advances to take place however are often innovations; technological, chemical, organizational, and economic. In other words, activities which can only properly be described as consisting of the field that we now know to be post-industrial society, with roots in traditional research universities, research and development departments, and perhaps in some forms of auditing firms. This is perhaps best thought of as a *milieu* rather than a historical moment in the transition of the economy. A kind of organizational temporality as it were. Yet, also a milieu which is depended on by industry and by the educational sector very strongly. The success story that the middle class cherishes education as a path to upward mobility does seem to rest very much on such apprehensions...irrespective of the realities which are found upon closer investigation.

However, even if we were to be considering nothing more than its myth, I think of such an emergent post-industrial society and the milieu proper to it, perhaps not unlike how a nostalgia for the pastoral was once invoked in romantic literature, to provide a generation exposed to the rapid industrialisation of our world, a glimpse of another kind of temporality; maybe

deeper in its association with the seasons and our natural circadian rhythm. In this respect it seems therapeutic, yet the former looks to the future and is intimately connected to it, whereas the latter lovingly mourns the past. As such they do remain ideologies, though if I may use the blaspheme, functional ideologies which create the possibility of some kind of class narrative – a way in which a people can measure their own success or failure.

Now, where amidst all this is the household? Well, inasmuch as the household remains the site of the reproduction of our labor power, if not as with the ruling class, the site of the reproduction of capitalist relations of production itself – the household in post-industrial society forms something akin to a Victorian microcosm, yet one which is put to work.

For it is my wager today that the household, inasmuch as it once consisted of the domain which brought a family together and allowed parents to raise their young, can, in the world presently, only be thought through such a concept – either explicitly or drawing ideological motifs from *post-industrial society*. For the place of the reproduction of our labor, indeed for the capacity to reproduce it to be advanced, is precisely the domain and expertise which this milieu has been conducting research into since its early structural gestations. More contemporarily, the Swiss economist - Christian Marazzi's work, particularly on the relation between capital and language, inspired by post-fordist scholars is, I believe, a firm demarcation of much of these developments.¹⁷

How may we recognise the signs of this? The specific form of development, which we are witnessing an expansion in today are primarily in the service sector. This may have begun with BPO jobs, expanded into hospitality, and now - cultural capitalism is replete with them. Can we not see in the commodification of lifestyles, the global rise of yoga, the chains which have been established in the service of health and fitness, an overwhelming impetus in advanced economies to seek to monetise aspirations which seem to address desires which can no longer be concretely tied to either manufacturing or agriculture?

And is this not apparent today, in these dare I say – apocalyptic times, more than ever? When, for instance, we have a global epidemic such as coronavirus forcing traditional workspaces closed, society is *forced* to adapt and learn to work from home. This politicized the site of the home in new ways, foregrounding how it cannot lay easily as a domain of rest and relaxation but also requires or may call for an effort made on our part to make it habitable, even when we are serving interests beyond it. This is an effort I would deem something akin to the Marxian concept of necessary labor, though applied in the intimate front of the reproduction of familial or domestic relations. A labor necessary to keep this domain, the hidden abode of reproduction as it were, industrially competitive.

¹⁷ Marrazi, Christian, *Capital and Affects: The Politics of the Language Economy*, Semiotext(e), 2011

This may mean a manager learning how to work from home, saving his company office space, and the public from one more car clogging the artery of our roads. He may do this in the company of a wife who could be moonlighting as a secretary in the evening, while she looks after a child during the day. The child may have to learn to take online classes – a fascinating new format despite its many present limitations, for the possibilities it holds for the future of education. The examples are merely that, and the specific division of labor which may be operative in a household are manifold, yet I hope to indicate what new forms of consideration and cooperation may be required in the household if they are to provide the shelter and care necessary for us, as we simply cannot keep bemoaning the ‘capitalization’ of our intimate lives while turning a blind eye to its advantages, and yes – indeed liberations.

Now, having charted such a milieu what may be its exteriority so to speak? Well, conceptually I believe we stand on firm ground for such a thesis would be reinforced by the presence of elements which have remained outside the domain of industrialisation per se, such as domestic labor – an issue which we began with. And, as such the concept of post-industrial society would not necessarily have to draw on a prehistory which can only be brought to light under the rubric of industrialisation, however much such a force may have literally shaped the infrastructure for it. As such I believe this exposition to be a practice of immanent critique to a problem, if not a crisis experienced in close quarters, by precisely those who were least empowered in them, as such I hope that it may be disseminated.

Chapter 7

The sacrality of language in consideration of the other; & the place of profanation

The Other, were I to persist with my Lacanian reading, is not a descriptive category. It is obscure, algebraic even serving as a placeholder for that entity or symbolic order which may be before consideration. Communication here, the exchange of a message seems to carry with it an elicitation of a response, yet this is not really the place to consider a deity or an intimacy.

In confronting the other, we may be tempted for example to read this later inscription with a small 'o' as a derivative, or a subset in a Platonic manifestation of the Idea of the Other as that which is radically alterior. Yet, as readers of literature it is always of good practice to be able to observe examples which have already been constructed, and laid out before us by novelists for example, however much it may be possible to write reviews of books which were never written, consuming their very idea as it were - as Stanislav Lem once did¹⁸.

In studies of literature, much ink has been spilled over debates on method. How do we interpret that which is before us? Do we have the courage to declare our readings? Where in our practice is a consideration for that which we deem dear? And how would we identify or recognise this in a text, amidst a land, or people who are wholly alterior to us? This in many ways is the question of the foreigner, but also of the neighbour. It is an issue of trust, which is ultimately built on the practice, or rather the living of our lives, where our pursuits are often met with resistances. It is about finding allies, and forging bonds, reciprocity but also circumspection.

This phenomenology of the other, to be possible within our discourse requires us to provide a name, a term, or a place for this alterity to be considered so that we may see, hear and experience with whatever senses possible whether the face we discern at a distance bears a disposition of kindness towards us or not. In this sense, I see it as akin to Louis Althusser's philosophy of the encounter¹⁹, and it is telling that Lacan and him shared a correspondence which we may have the opportunity to examine²⁰.

We must recognise however, that in community, in relationship, communication and indeed in literature, irony, sarcasm, inconsistency and profanations often feature as figures of speech. Here, the work of reading lies in attuning the understanding to the insincerity of these

¹⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanislaw_Lem%27s_fictitious_criticism_of_nonexistent_books

¹⁹ Louis Althusser, translated by G. M. Goshgarian, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings*, London, New York, 1978 - 87,

²⁰ Louis Althusser, Translated by Jeffrey Mehlman, *Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan*, Columbia University Press, New York, originally published in 1993, translation published in 1996.

positions, whose realisation may allow for the possibility of humour or at least clarify how the parties in question may be positioned vis-a-vis each other.

Yet, I am not inclined to consider the use of profanation itself as evil - though it must be said that its practice is by definition obfuscatory. Children tell riddles for instance, stories too, and adults relate old yarns. Often an imagery drawn from myth infuses these, from religion, from folk tale, and from national allegories. The communication of such tales inflect for a child, and for many adult a like how they practice interpretation, in other words - how they think appearance as such.

Can I be deceitful in what I say to convey a truth which in its enunciation in explicit terms may defeat the purpose of saying it? Such a means of conveying something betrays two things, a weakness in one's position regarding what can be declared, but also, and more importantly a confidence in whom is taken into the fold, so to speak.

Were you to listen to a prayer for example and hear words or phrases which seem to bear a piece of advice, or an enunciation of experience which is pertinent to you, and you alone despite the address being public, you should consider what such a message is conveyed for. Human kindness is dear, and in conditions of strife, in underdeveloped economies, and in situations of poverty - should be treasured. Yet understanding is not a one way channel. It requires a relation, and these I have learned are hinged on correspondences.

We live in a world where correspondence, despite its seeming ubiquity - is rare. How many platforms for instance, would you trust with your name. Is this fundamentally different from a question which considers whether to approach a stranger and introduce oneself? As different as they may be, we have all had to do this, and perhaps will continue to.

In this scene, privacy seems to command a premium, and the supreme court of India has recently declared privacy to be a fundamental right²¹. And, indeed - privacy is a quality of ambience a writer does require. A sense, or the lack of thereof that reading does need. Privacy however, when practiced in the collective dimension of our public lives is also what strangles literature of the vital resources and life blood it draws its debt from to paint the canvas of a possible future, and something like a language in becoming. Yet, it is - the spell that is, broken as easily as with a whisper that may float through a window carried by a voice that may seem both divine and benevolent in the evening, after stinging with ferocity in the tropical afternoon sun. Race, language and class, when cognition in sentences break down - dissolve and smudge

²¹ Mehab Quereshi, Kazim Rizvi, The Evolution of the Right to Privacy in India, <https://www.thequint.com/tech-and-auto/the-evolution-of-right-to-privacy-a-look-at-the-past-present-and-the-future#:~:text=On%2024%20August%202017%2C%20a,of%20the%20Constitution%20of%20India,23rd%20November,2021.>

each other creating colours and contours which become increasingly less discernible, clouding a mind and creating an effect not unlike the death of silence with nothing but an agonised memory, and an uncertain present.

Privacy alone is insufficient to protect the interests, even of an individual in meditation; and harmony the orient proves, has always been too much to hope for. Convictions are defeated, just when they seem on the brink of seizing that moment of lightning on pines which Nietzsche envisions; *einfall* - for the gestation of an idea, unlike a plant in not always a gradual maturation, a drinking of nutrients from fertile soil. There is, in the idea a moment perhaps not unlike violence, inasmuch as a reordering of possibilities, maps and dimensions suddenly presents itself to us which reconfigure a situation, character or plot - opening it up as it were, a release, yes - and when a plot or dare I say a narrative is carefully constructed this produces a becoming in the reader which may just be stylistically unique.

Privacy. How private can a writer afford to be? Mortal as he is and hanging by his very breath, words and fingertips to the whim of one who may not be before him, yet for who he persists in this sorry allegory of a religious or agricultural metaphor that the history of the concept of a field is yet tinged with.

The very word speaks of the idea of guarding that which one holds dear, an instinct as primordial to a species as what its present manifestation in our fallen commercial age has become.

Sartre speaks of a romance which was associated to travel for writers of another generation. It must be said that in the new world, something of this romance might still have been alive in the work of the Beat generation. It was in 57' that *On The Road*²² by Kerouac was written - contemporary with much of Sartre's earlier work, yet animated by that blessed immensity of frontier which still lingered in an emerging American modernity which was recovering, and prospering on the dirt of its industry after the war.

Yet, travel - as Sartre himself had found was unmistakably touched by access. "We very soon had to realize that the travelling of our elders, their sumptuous voyages abroad, and the whole ceremonial of travel on the grand scale, was an illusion. Everywhere they went they carried France with them. They travelled because France had won the war and the exchange was favourable. They followed the franc. Like the franc, they had more access to Seville and Palermo than to Zurich and Amsterdam."²³

²² Jack Kerouac, *On The Road*, Viking Press, USA, 1957.

²³ Jean Paul Sartre, 'What is Literature?': and other essays, Harward University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1988.

The spirit of a philosopher, in such circumstances turns inwards. It is from experience that I quote a European, indeed a Frenchman who had come to India to study philosophy after having done some college education in the US. Regarding my interest in German idealism, he said to me with some disdain and disappointment that he could not imagine how Kant knew the world - if he had never stepped foot out of Königsberg. He was certainly not an anthropologist, and did live in an age prior to commercial air travel.

In raising the question of the sacrality of language in consideration of the other - we cannot but hit the nail on the head, and raise the issue of evil.

Evil is never, sadly - unlike Eden in its infancy, met outside of history. And in history, it is never merely evil as such. A writer however, is a political animal and as such carries with him a history which his craft has borne witness to. A history which even in the modern world, has had to contend with anti-intellectualism, not to mention book burnings and yes, piracy.

In writing these pages as I do in India, 2022 - there is a customary pressure felt to say something about the present ruling dispensation, about the circumstances in education etc. My choice in pursuing a PhD from Selinus is not divested of such considerations. In fact, it may be representative of them in terms of the kind of questions it may and may not be possible to raise in public institutions of learning.

There is something like a departmental ideology which animates what lines of inquiry can and cannot be pursued. A historian of thought may learn from the books, of chief influences, founders of schools - and the political happenings at the time which may have shaped the orientation, the direction, and the material which such centres of study chose to take up.

If we live as we do on the dying tide of an identity politics, which has seemed to be to have been always on its way out, always at the verge of gaining some kind of maturity which would allow it to see through or above denominations of race, and perhaps the even stronger denomination of language, I recognise that it still does, for many address a question which acts not so much as an inquiry as a wedge in the door, so to speak. This is the question of representation.

Is it telling for instance, that someone of the stature of Sartre is willingly ignored from undergraduate curriculum in universities in Delhi, which still continue to patronise Shakespeare, who is yet enshrined in the school system. However much I may appreciate drama, and as rich a vein of English and continental relations may be tapped into when we explore the navigating of interrelations between the nobility and the rising bourgeois class which we encounter in Shakespearean drama - I believe that for a writer, a student, a professor

- and for any who found their means of representation seized from them, reading the existential and Marxist philosopher may have held greater promise.

The question of representation has always been political. But when a decision can no longer justify itself. When a teacher or professor can no longer provide an account or reason for why she or he were to invoke the work of someone, why she may choose to cite, or even imitate an argument - then we know that we stand before someone, who perhaps like us in such a moment is dumbfound and is very much the plaything of circumstance, but with a veneer of respectability so prized by the petit bourgeoisie which the vendor on the street may not have seen through.

Education of course is changing, and the place of the classroom, like much of public institutions can now no longer ignore the aspect of a student which does resemble a paying customer, who in these shoes - does have the right to demand the services which have been paid for. Was this not the case earlier? Well, inasmuch as education was - at least in India primarily driven by the state, subsidised and in some ways more cloistered from other facets of industry than it is now, it wasn't - and there may still be representatives of such faction who occupy certain halls in those institutions which have a historical tinge which lingers on them, such as Jawahar Lal Nehru University.

No institution however is immune to its political environment, even if it claims to influence it - and the events of Occupy UGC in 2016 did demonstrate in some measure an effort to push back for institutional autonomy from the state and central planning, just as scholarships were being cut²⁴.

I site these moorings not out of attachment, but merely to chart some of the happenings I have been privy to, and perhaps to point out how in our global and interconnected age, resistances as seemingly trivial as the selection of a committee that is to frame the guidelines of curriculum, can have telling consequences for generations of students in the future. The need for revision, and re-evaluation here would always be a live question.

But amidst this seemingly politicisation of education, which somewhere along the way became a bad word, have we forgotten the other, and whatever sense of sacrality which we may enshrine their expression with? There is much evidence to suggest that yes, we have.

This is not the place to cite names of those who have fallen victim to practices of contempt and discrimination which have been permitted on campuses, nor are students in Hyderabad,

²⁴ Occupy UGC Movement: Protesters call for all-universities strike on Feb 18, India Today, <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/news/story/occupy-ugc-strike-304345-2016-01-18>, 18th January, 2016.

Delhi or Kolkata, in this regard - very different from those who would be attending universities in the great cities of the world. Yet, here - I cannot claim to speak from first hand experience, though I do not attribute insincerity to the accounts that I do encounter. I still recognise however that questions of identity animate how representation seems to be framed, abroad as here - and hence the idea, if it is one, of race and linguistic differences cannot be ignored.

Prejudice is real. And contempt and the expression of hatred often arise in us in ignorance of the circumstances in which we encounter the other. Their unique location in the mode of production which constitutes and animates the world as we live in it, and here - there is something to be said of the damage which privacy as an ideal has wrought, however much we may need it and it may serve us. Yet, somehow this question was underwritten in the very beginning when I raised that of representation - which is also, not entirely disconnected from who a writer writes for.

What does it mean for instance, for a deeply political writer such as Sartre, to look at the forebears of French literature in a moment such as 1948 France? Europe would not be the same, and in some ways this text is his act of mourning. Is there a corollary between this invocation or rather reappraisal of a literary tradition which Sartre undertakes and the likes of what Marx seeks to highlight in drawing on symbols from the past in his recounting of the Civil War in France following the French Revolution? I think so, inasmuch as both seek to present before a reader a way of seeing the becoming of a historical moment as it seeks to create a tradition for itself in a moment where one could not, or did not receive a legitimate acceptance. It may be tempting to recount Sartre own service for the French in WWII and his subsequent capture, but he does not dwell on this. Instead, I think it is a deeper sense of what may have been shaping the thought of his works that he recounts Auguste Comte, among the first positivist sociologists in his attempt at providing a conception adequate to the emerging reality in another moment of historical rupture - among the early moorings of the movement which came to be known as the enlightenment. And, perhaps this would be the place to note that the idea of progress as the development of an order is also cited, however caricatured as an attempt made by Comte and his followers, their personal spiritual exercise as Sartre puts it.

In considering sacrality in language regarding the question of the other - the idea of evil cannot remain untouched. I have earlier sought to depict, via the example of Descartes, as to what may prompt a writer to think the possibility, or in the case of Descartes, record the actuality of radical, epistemic evil. I would like to present a quote here, which seeks to emphasise the point, particularly as how it may appear to an idealistic humanism which was in many ways also consonant with the enlightenment.

“ We have been taught to take it seriously. It is neither our fault nor our merit if we lived in a time when torture was a daily fact. Chateaubriand, Oradour, the Rue des Saussaies, Tulle, Dachau, and Auschwitz have all demonstrated to us that Evil is not an appearance, that knowing its cause does not dispel it, that it is not opposed to Good as a confused idea is to a clear one, that it is not the effects of passions which might be cured, of a fear which might be overcome, of a passing aberration which might be excused, of an ignorance which might be enlightened, that it can in no way be diverted, brought back, reduced, and incorporated into idealistic humanism, like that shade of which Leibnitz has written that it is necessary for the glare of daylight.”

There is no torture, the deliberate inflictment of pain on an other without the requirement for an element of debasement to seemingly justify the proceedings to the one undertaking them. This is a sad, yet powerful idea - and it appears that in the decade of the close of the second world war, Sartre seems willing and indeed felt it necessary to spell this out, about twenty seven years before the publication of ‘Discipline and Punish’ by Foucault, whose first chapter waxes on this subject.

Yet, I stray. Torture, is first and foremost a matter of debasement. The victim is the person, who is forced under duress to talk, -

“Whatever the sufferings which have been endured, it is the victim who decides, as a last resort, what the moment is when they are unbearable and when he must talk. The supreme irony of torture is that the sufferer, if he breaks down and talks, applies his will as a man to denying that he is a man, makes himself the accomplice of his executioners and, by his own movement, throws himself into abjection. The executioner is aware of this; he watches for this weakness, not only because he will obtain the information he desires, but because it will prove to him once again that he is right in using torture and that man is an animal who must be led with a whip. Thus, he attempts to destroy the humanity in his fellow-creature.”²⁵

There is an acknowledgement in this work, ‘What is Literature?’ of a certain irreducibility to evil. A way in which, in its recognition as a ‘fruit of a free and sovereign will’ cannot be re-encompassed via understanding into an idea of the good, perhaps because unlike Kant it did not suppose, much less presuppose morality, to ground its act of freedom, or perhaps it did not consider its act in these terms at all.

There is much made presently about the capacity of religion, culture etc. to form resources of resistance in times of political evil, and you may argue works of literature such as the one being examined by Sartre are an example of such. If however the idea that he puts forth that

²⁵ Jean Paul Sartre, ‘What is Literature?’: and other essays, Harward University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1988.

existence has to take primacy prior to essence has any meaning to those who are alienated from metaphysics, it is to be found in passages such as these - “But, on the other hand, most of the resisters, though beaten, burned, blinded, and broken, did not speak. They broke the circle of Evil and reaffirmed the human—for themselves, for us, and for their very torturers. *They did it without witness, without help, without hope, often even without faith. For them it was not a matter of believing in man but of wanting to.* (Ibid)”

The position of resistance, in its positing of a non-immanence of desire, of recognising that the conditions it requires for the possibility of anything resembling a life are not present - is perhaps the very ground where a radical solidarity is forged.

In times where work discipline can seemingly domesticate a human into something resembling a mocking puppet, an appraisal of seemingly medieval notions regarding good and evil does not seem out of place. Indeed, in recognising them - the metaphysician or should I say the anti-metaphysician that is Sartre recognises the fallibles inherent in any such evaluation. Fallible not because the singularity of their idea and the relations with other notions a person may have is not charted in their interrelatedness. But because their very act of enunciation bears with them the mark of a self-recognising compromise. “Those who had immediately preceded us in the world, who had bequeathed us their culture, their wisdom, their customs, and their proverbs, who had built the houses that we lived in and who had marked the roads with the statues of their great men* practised modest virtues and remained in the moderate regions. Their faults never caused them to fall so low that they did not find others beneath them who were more guilty, nor did their merits cause them to rise so high that they did not see other souls above them whose merit was greater.”

This is a metaphysics of performance which understands that in the position of an appraiser or a denigrater, we implicate the very ideals we wish to enshrine - that has always been at stake, yet it is the only way any idea of an ideal can be upheld - whether good or evil.

I would like to take a moment to highlight just how sober a thinker with mystical and rabbinic inclinations may still be in facing the question of evil. Here, I do believe Walter Benjamin stands alone.

In his essay ‘On Language as such and on the language of Man’²⁶ Benjamin grapples with the difficulty of how we express ourselves, the very gap where the devil’s greatest gift makes its felicity known. When we name something, let us say an object, person or relation - do we

²⁶ Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street, and Other Writings*, ‘On Language as such and on the language of man’, NLB, 1979

express ourselves in the word we offer or in our bond to that word? This seems to me to be what he is asking, and it is important that we take cognisance of this question, and the difficulty it grapples with and seems to be trying to express.

Evil, as a word such as this may be used to stand in for - a metaphysical principle embodying malevolence - may not have to reject the word we offer, to strike it down as such. Indeed, a far more pernicious operation, a de-sacralization as it were may be effectuated by subverting how we consider or posit that which we deem to be holy. And this may even be a strategy deployed by younger generations, and those outside a fold in their apprehensions of what they may recognise to be needless, ceremony, ritual, or painstaking nothingness that so much prayer, meditation, study or discipline may appear as to one who may not recognise what they are for.

Yet are we hoping for too much here? Indeed, were the only offerings we were to have would be means, why should we suppose that our ends superintend over those which are sought by others? And in their act of mimicry were they to pursue those, via other - perhaps influenced means, would we have a claim to the products which they offer? The idea of influence, and inspiration is one that was once held with pride, among a literary tradition for instance which sought to posit not so much a lineage but something akin to a shared understanding, an agreement as it were to translate terms and experiences into a language which another may be familiar with, a bond of trust as it were - often sealed by a proper name. Benjamin's own commitments to Marx being an example.

Chapter 8

Literary criticism as theoretical investigation; the case of Pierre Macherey

“The *condition* is not the empirical cause of a process, preceding it in a relationship of cause to effect; it is in fact the principle without which this process could not become an object of knowledge. This, the knowledge of the conditions of a process, is the true programme of a theoretical investigation - the demonstration that change and simultaneity (the terms of the question) are not incompatible, but are in a necessary alliance.” - Pierre Macherey, ‘A Theory of Literary Production’, 1966.

Macherey is an astounding literary critic, and one who - as is clear from the quote above, presenting the intimations of a distinction between the conditions of an inquiry and the inquiry itself, to the extent which his focus is to treat the question itself as the object, not of criticism itself, which may be vulgar - but regarding how the inquiry reconstitutes itself in the unfolding of its study.

He at this juncture however, is strongly resistant to a phenomenology as seen deployed by Hegel who he deems treats theory itself empirically, a line of thought which may require our felicity with how Macherey considers the difference between Hegel and Spinoza, a matter for a later date. Yet, it is instructive to notice why this French literary critic seems resistant to what he along with his fellow Althusserians may call an expressive causality which is immanent to the kind of thinking demonstrated in the Phenomenology for example. It may be said that this allows us to focus on the explicitly textual or narratorial elements in the argument. Yet, I think it would be more instructive to actually glean at which point an operation relies upon a certain technique necessary for its fulfilment, let us say the delivery of a letter; while keeping in mind what such an operation was for - an aspect uniquely dependent on the character considering it in question. This seems to be the kind of reading technique at least which can be discernible in his later work such as ‘The Productive Subject’, which we will return to shortly.

We have, in ‘A Theory of Literary Production²⁷’ a prescription regarding what a critical reading could be. A prescription which is presented in terms of a critique of what it would mean to treat reading as merely an act of consumption. Were it merely to be a descriptive endeavour which seeks to reproduce elements in the composition it would fail at explaining what the laws of its production would be, and relegate itself to a matter of taste - this really is the key which is to be grasped in the recognition of criticism as a theoretical endeavour which can explain not merely the occurrence and perceptions presented in literature, but also the condition of its presentation. This does seem to be similar to tracing the formation of a genre for instance, yet it is less clear whether we may be able to formulate this into any sort of *laws*,

²⁷ Pierre Macherey, *Theory of Literary Production*, translated by Geoffrey Wall, Routledge, London, 1978.

unless what we mean by this is a charting of historical conditions necessary for the emergence of even a specific kind of narrative. Westerns, as in cowboy movies for example may be periodised into when the frontiersmen were exploring an ever expanding horizon, on native soil often, and in search of gold - to when the railroads were made and we see the formation of gangs and train robberies. A fairly well documented historical development that Hollywood has profited from.

Amidst these observations we also glean from Macherey's notes the advantages of a critical reading, a term which I should say is occasionally used interchangeably with a notion of self-reflexivity in departments of literature in the subcontinent. When compared to the narrative per se - a critical reading serves in terms of its ability to formulate a position of analyses from where an interchangeability of terms, a translatability of texts, and perhaps a mutual interrogation as it were becomes accessible; often without having to advance the story to crucial points which would affect the plot or the present state of it in investigation.

To do this, criticism, intimately associated as it is with the more classical domain of aesthetics often has to rely upon, if not creatively produce a prescriptive aesthetics. One which may be used as a normative ruler via which to read the text; a model as it were, used not for imitation - for that would be impossible, the schism between theory and literature being stressed, but to offer the possibility of an interpretation, or simply a reading of the text, or why not, the situation - which may not have been possible without the model constructed as such.²⁸

My own interest in the work of Macherey however stems partly from the fact that he is a direct disciple of Althusser, who as a Marxist drawing from the tradition of ideological critique, confronts the novel ways in which power had been attempted to be reformulated by Foucault. This, appears to be the central attempt in his article 'The Productive Subject', for Viewpoint Magazine in 2015²⁹.

You would notice that he sees clearly how both Foucault and Marx attempt to tether an understanding of power closer to the real economy and away from a stratification into politics which in its institutional settings has alienated various parties. Here, it is important to emphasise that power as a concept is akin to the idea of labour power, yet this is expanded on given the kind of capabilities which Foucault notices in positions within a network which enable possibilities that can only be accounted for in terms of the relations which facilitate them, and I should clarify here I refer to explicitly the relations of production. This article therefore is perhaps a culmination of an unfinished or missed encounter in the 20th century

²⁸ This seems similar to what Fredric Jameson seeks to illustrate as making history appear; in *Valences of the Dialectic*. My familiarity with this text is limited and I may offer a reading of the section subsequently.

²⁹ Macherey, Pierre, The Productive Subject, <https://viewpointmag.com/2015/10/31/the-productive-subject/>, 31st October, 2015.

between Foucault and Althusser, who though contemporary and in the same country seemed to operate in very different circles.

In discussing the work of Foucault in relation to the economy and power we require to foreground the body as a site of analysis. This becomes unavoidable in approaching his work, whether this be in forms of subjection that the very subjectivity of an individual is entailed in, when confronted by forms of punitive measures, such as in the first chapter - *The Body of The Condemned* in 'Discipline and Punish'³⁰; or in its relation to the capabilities that a body exhibits, which in any case seems to be emerging as a new frontier, of affects and performances that the service sector is driving us into, not to mention its disciplinary predecessors in care work and the hospitality industry.

In terms of Macherey's own position here, we are intimated of what may be a post-Marxian, or rather a post revolutionary reading of Marx, inasmuch as the object of the study which Foucault presents, is explicitly bourgeois power, or drawing from Marx's terms as presented in *Capital*, the production of relative surplus value.

Yet, as a theoretician and not a political economist, Macherey's object of inquiry is not the production of surplus value per se, or profits for that matter - but how this sphere of economic activity creates the conditions in which we understand or come to influence power. It is explicitly stated here - "how is it possible to draw the elements of a theory of power from the explanation of the process of the production of relative surplus value, without falling into overinterpretation, since the problem of power, if not completely extraneous to this explanation, is only posed at its margins?" This is in many ways the same problematic that Althusser was dealing with in his effort to posit an autonomous ground for philosophy as it were, or theory more strictly as seen in the hypothesis of the relative autonomy of the superstructure from the base.

Yet this issue here, or the turn which seems to mark Foucault's own orientation towards Marx is regarding not relatively autonomous symptoms of the mode of production such as the economy or politics, as Jameson once characterised them³¹, but Marx's insistence to chart relations of production in terms of their employment of labour-power. This is indeed the point where the 'insertion of bodies into machinery' their disciplining, education, and subjection whether religious or social becomes knotted to the mode of production presently in operation.

His analyses of the condition of wage labour for instance a mode which the labourer willingly partakes in, leasing their labour power under designated contractual conditions, allows for a means to think the conditions of relations among salaried employees. While immensely productive as a hermeneutical position, this does not explicitly take up the mass of

³⁰ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Duke University Press, 2007.

³¹ Jameson, Fredric, *The Aesthetics of Singularity: Time and Event in the Conditions of Post-Modernity*, Georg Forester Lecture, 9th May, 2012, Research Centre for Social and Cultural Studies, Mainz.

unemployed, or underemployed - whose own resistances and searches for waged contracts would appear from within this register to only constitute externalities, or as a threat, as Lenin once characterised the reserve army of labour, which can be used as a disciplining mechanism by Capital in the flexibility it affords in terms of letting go of present employees.

At such a conjuncture it would still be of interest to a critic to see what is it that Macherey may mean by the laws he mentions, if they are indeed laws of literary production, and how he distinguishes them from rules.

This is not as easy as it may appear, as while Macherey concedes rules to be normative, when broaching the issue of laws of literary production, he operates by negation. Further, the book in question has a division of chapters which are arranged thematically; on certain operations to be sure, such as questions, and answers, depth and complexity, yet at least by glancing through the contents page a reader would be led to believe that this is a text which deals with composition per se, rather than any deriving of laws, whether historical or formal which may be determining of the narrative, or should I say, using Macherey's term - literary production. Is there something that he may be referring to, let us say - an observation regarding the pact between a writer and a reader which his work seeks to draw attention to? Something which escapes the usual classification and analyses of plot, narrative, character, point of view etc.?

In terms of the position which Macherey makes for criticism vis-a-vis literature, particularly of the doctrinal kind, or rather a form of discourse which presents itself to having already ready made answers; an understanding of the problematic they are trying to address is essential. And, a conviction in ready made answers may here actually hide or obfuscate the questions. In fact, there is a belaboured point regarding the singularity of the question which Macherey seeks to identify as a generic task which criticism unearths, while sieving from it historical debris. There is indeed a cynicism vis-a-vis history apparent in an interpretation which exclaims that a theory or principle of one, which would allow us to explain history as a text, or to produce it does not exist. It would be hard to ignore the circumstances of the French Communist Parties opposition to Stalinism at this historical juncture, and Fredric Jameson does indicate that often, the reaction by Althusserians against a coded Hegel was in fact a mask they used to refer to Stalin³². Were this cynicism to be carried forth in explicitly political texts, in collaboration with Althusser, such as 'Reading Capital'; we may attribute a consistent position - though I do not believe this to be the case, for which I will offer some evidence.

In the essay in 'Reading Capital', The Process of Exposition of Capital (The Work Of Concepts)³³, we see a distinction which is made between the process of exposition and the

³² Jameson, Fredric, *The Political Unconscious*, Routledge, London, 1981.

³³ Althusser, Macherey, Balibar, Establet, Rancierre, *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition*, Verso, London, New York, 2015.

process of investigation, echoing his assertions regarding how criticism is to be treated in making a reading.

Indeed, this seems to be the focus entirely of the essay in consideration; the manner via which a reader encounters a text - always premeditated in the act of its construction, an understanding as it were taken up by the author in introducing to the reader, not merely an exposition but a means via which it may be possible to follow the thinking at work in it.

A critic, is not merely a reader of a work - but the task of the critic, has increasingly been to notice how a text, artistic, amorous, scientific, or political is read. In other words a critic is someone who compares the exposition of a text, the mode or should I say the rhetorical technique and form of its delivery, with the norms of validity operating in a readership. This is something, that Pierre Macherey in collaborating with Althusser, Establet, Ranchiere and Balibar in 1965, amidst the Cold War in Europe understood well.

Yet, amidst these political considerations, regarding how the French Communist Party is to position itself vis a vis Stalin, Macherey also offers us something of a definition of the task that philosophy takes up 'philosophy as the condition of intelligibility of the very objects of science', and from here posits a possible role as a historian of scientific theories, a familiar enough position today, but also as the theoretician of such a history. Here, I believe there may be something of the Hegel, not haunted by the spectre from the east which still is inflecting an Althusserian, in attempt if not in spirit.

As a writer, Macherey is sensitive to the problems which make a field of inquiry, an innovation or discovery even possible, an unknowing as it were that forces the innovations of methods which may be able to grasp it, of a discourse which may be able to characterise it, making that which is beyond a periphery of perception intelligible. The fear, or rather the threat of ideology which he identifies is in the too ready willingness to provide an answer without gathering what the history of an inquiry may be attempting to respond to. Such a gesture does not resolve, but suppresses the classic problems of logic.

Regarding the question of method, we find the clearest statements made when Macherey seeks to characterise the process of exposition as seen in *Capital*. He remarks that the effort is to eliminate everything which may allow for a confusion between the real and the thought. Not a fusion of the two, not one deduced from the other, or thought being the ideal representing mirror of the real. But, an understanding that cognition is an effect of a process of reality, and here I am tempted to use the word real in its Lacanian sense.

What Macherey advocates in his essay in *Reading Capital* is indeed an examination of the unconscious assumptions we make in our act of reading itself, by way of allegories or rather imagistic metaphors that seek to elucidate the mechanism of interrelation that makes our act of comprehension possible. A quote may serve to demonstrate this - "We read as if words

were holes in the page through which reality surfaces; or again, skylights through which the real process can be studied in a kind of speculative voyeurism. This corresponds quite well, moreover, to the spontaneous scientific attitude, for which the only attraction of the concept is as a substitute for the thing itself.” We see here intimations of an analysis of the signifier surfacing, yet what marks a difference between the attempt that Macherey undertakes and something resembling a logic of the signifier is that Macherey remains focussed on the process of its exposition itself, exposition here read not merely as the form of presentation which an author may utilise, but the means which we utilise, perhaps unconsciously in our reading, and which may be necessary for our comprehension, particularly if we are not to fall into old traps.

In representing what the practice of its exposition consists of we are brought to notice the idea of a reading which does not consist of merely reading beyond the text, into its background as it were, as a traditional critic may be trained to, nor to read between the lines, which so much new criticism indulges in, listening as it were to hidden voices or gleaning marginal notes; rather we are taught to read the elucidation of the concepts themselves, charting their interrelations retroactively when the construction of a new name for a situation is possible having elaborated the impasse that was being presented and confronted. Here, we see Macherey trying to teach us to read not mere words, propositions and arguments, but a means of seeing something akin to what drives them yet remains irreducible to a narrative, for a concept punctuates of breaks in at moments when the plot as such can no longer continue to remain what it is, hence influencing what a character may have to do then. In other words, what Macherey presents to us is a way of reading what Althusser sought to mark in the history of science or sciences, as epistemic breaks - within narratives itself. As a writer however, and not a mere journalist, or should I say as a philosopher, he is attuned to the act of representation that a writer undertakes and notices, and seeks to highlight those moments when what we have been mentioning as the process of exposition itself is forced to change, whether to accommodate a new content or to account for a development which cannot be reduced to an immanence that an exposition was presenting earlier. In other words, breaks in style.

Yet this is not taken up at the expense of forgetting what Marx’s central theses were at the beginning of *Capital*³⁴. We are introduced to the notion of wealth being the elementary unity of analysis in an economy. And the form in which wealth expresses itself most commonly being a commodity. Value hence emerges when we notice the relations of exchange between at least two different commodities.

³⁴ Marx, Karl, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume 1, Penguin, England, 1990.

Chapter 9

Interlude: Value in exchange and use, the genealogy of a concept

It would help to specify that value is not an aspect which appears immediately on the surface of an article. A thing for instance, that you don't want to trade ie. exchange is not a commodity. An article becomes a commodity when it is tradable. In trade its value in exchange is realized. Pierre Macherey puts it thus “– the thing is the form of the commodity – the exchange of commodities is the form of value – the thing is the material support of value.”

In being able to trace an equivalence between two commodities, via their act of exchange - we see or rather demonstrate what exchange value is. In essence, such a gesture is a real abstraction, for no two commodities are the same, or equal. Hence, it is necessary to wait till the thing in question presents itself as a commodity before we ascribe a tradable equivalence between it and another. This of course can be peculiar today, given the fact that a photograph and a sack of stones, can both be and are sold as commodities, yet this is not to say that a relation of exchange cannot be established.

Expressing equivalence hence, is really one of the hardest things to do via the use of simple propositions. Difficult that is because when we say that I would give you a sack of stones for a photography that is dear to me, it performs an equivalence inspite of the brute asymmetry of the products in question. Value here, is essentially a matter of exchange, yes - but an exchange which is establisheable only between parties with asymmetric desires. Value in other words is not a mirror that reflects the real image of a product back on to itself.

In an act of exchange, we see a relation which emerges not merely between two commodities, but a relation which is also an equivalence of determinable magnitudes. In other words, in exchange, I can never merely state that tea = coffee for example. It must always also be a relation which specifies the magnitudes these commodities are traded in. Such a relation is of course, ultimately contingent on the parties conducting the transaction. In other words, in offering what I can, in exchange for what someone else may have, I by necessity submit it to appreciation via another norm, a norm which may indeed be of a different nature. This, I believe is a useful material way of conceiving the Other which philosophy and psychoanalysis invoke and I believe strong precedents for this have already been laid out in the work of Alfred Sohn Rethel. Žizek, in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* - drawing from Rethel, goes as far as to assert that this is what constitutes the unconscious of the transcendental subject³⁵.

³⁵ Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object Of Ideology*. Verso Books, London, 2019.

Indeed, in coming to and defining how one may construct a concept of value we see a homology in the initial distinction made between the process of exposition and the contents of the exposition, or as some rhetoricians may have arranged it in yesteryears, between style and substance. This is because while value itself may require the process of exchange for it to appear, and while it may be an aspect related to either the use or exchange of a commodity, its form of expression in the expanded relations in these moments does not determine its appearance, or rather its determination as value as such, as that which is distinct from the commodity or from exchange.

This may be observed in marking the step between an equivalence of the magnitudes of two distinct commodities, and the mediation of this relation by a third thing. Inasmuch as the two commodities may be expressed in terms of an exchange value, they would have to be expressed in relation to this third thing independently of each other. This is the only way we may arrive at any quantifiable form of equivalence, even if such a representation is not reflective of the use value of either of the commodities.

What is the relation of value to the two commodities then? In some way, at the very least in relations of their exchange - it would be present in each of them. Yet, for it to be a value, it would not inhere in them, but exist independently. Ontologically, value is not an object of the same kind as the commodities in question. It is an object of another kind - a concept, or as Macherey puts it, an object of another nature.

A concept however, as we have seen is not the relation expressed via the exchange of commodities, even if this is a kind of movement necessary for its appearance. We are presented the example of geometrical shapes, which may have formalisable areas. The fact that they have such a property is not contingent on the reducibility of their composition to areas, and the fact that their specific magnitude of such a measure is not derivable from a notion of area.

I would like to hold such a pair of propositions up for analyses for they demonstrate the strength of a logic which is actually made from what the Althusserians would call epistemic breaks. What is presented here by Macherey is the irreducibility of the concept to either a form of derivation from an observable property or a form of appearance that surfaces upon a process of exchange or exposition. He asserts that the concept is a reality, or to be more clear the particular reality which allows the accounting of reality.

The construction of the concept of value as Pierre Macherey constructs it here however, does entail a sense in which it becomes intransmissible. Just as the area of a triangle does not have to be presented in the form of a triangle, just as the idea of a circle need not have either centre or circumference, in the same way the notion of value, despite being constructed or rather

observed on the basis of an exchange, need not be exchanged. Macherey here uses a more definitive language by stating that it is *not* exchangeable, and here it would help to foreground the fact that he is referring to its notion, however carefully presented.

We also see in the demonstration here how the analysis or rather the expression of value as a concept is not dialectical in the Hegelian sense, involving a perception, antagonism, synthesis and formulation of a plot. It rather involves breaks, discontinuities, and questioning - 'of the objects, method and means of exposition.' It may be argued however that this may be an expression of the Hegelian tarrying with the negative, yet where the negative is opened up spatially instead of its classical temporal organisation in memory, responding as it were to some variation of an ontologized other.

This emphasis on the singularity of each concept in particular in its adequation to each object taken in itself is where a materialist epistemology, following Macherey may seek to place an implicit critique of Hegelianism. The concept here, such as that of area for example is indicated via its mediation, in figures, via comparisons and in the expression of formulas - it itself however is not dependent on any of them.

I feel compelled to point out that in such a gesture, an elucidation of a simple enough conception, we really do see Macherey actually making a finer point which may be aligned with yet beyond the Althusserian hypothesis of the relative autonomy of the superstructure from the base. Yet, this is a question which touches the heart of philosophy itself, in opening up in a new way the old rivalry between empiricism and rationalism; which here - in his critique of Hegel, Macherey explicitly seems to be taking the side of empiricism.

What kind of empiricism is this however? An empiricism that understands that after the completion of a construction, after the exchange of a commodity - the product, no - further, its concept, bears an autonomy irreducible to its conception. This seems almost an epistemological critique of debt, yet a critique which does not rest with the mere negation of a neighbouring implicature, but seeks to create a ground for the newly emerging entities.

It is to be noted how seriously Macherey takes up the construction of a materialist epistemology. For instance, were we to try and posit the concept as something common, inherent to two objects, prior to their exchange or comparison, we would do so at the price of spatialising the objects in question, which may help visualise them but would negate the possibility of observing temporal changes between them, particularly those facilitated by relations of exchange and reflection - hence facing our inability to notice when our concept of the object is inadequate to our practice, or to the object itself. This means of engaging with the apparatus of our cognition itself, via the construction of concepts, which we have characterised as a materialist epistemology - seeks at every turn to extract perception from illusion, a phrase Macherey uses to describe its characteristics.

Value however, or exchange value properly speaking manifests itself only in the act of suppressing or reducing all the other qualities. It does this to facilitate or isolate a proportion which is always called into question in an act of exchange. In the act of exchange, value can be expressed only in a quantitative and not a qualitative diversity.

Yet, in our act of exchange - even in determinable proportions, the concept, that which makes such an occurrence adequate to reality, is not merged with proportion, as has been emphasised earlier - even if the exchange were to be facilitated via and in those proportions.

It is to be noted too, that in our act of abstracting, not merely from a thing itself - but to its use, and further as a commodity we willingly notice that the concept of value is not apparent or self given in the object, but is a product of knowledge. And, as a product of knowledge it serves a specific function, one of which Macherey claims is the 'driving out of phantoms' that may cloud how we perceive what a thing is in this world. Might we take this to be an invisibilization of a debt? Yes, inasmuch as the concept of value, to be expressive of what it may be as seen in a commodity, its production diminishes or becomes increasingly marginal in terms of its relations to the dearness of other commodities that it may be traded for. Its appearance as value hence becomes visible when we critique the original *concept* we have of the thing and of exchange.

In considering the concept of a commodity as such, we are required to consider them as not the product of an individual producer, but in their conception and in the exchange which makes them a commodity, products of a single power, the 'combined labour of the whole society'. This is Macherey's explanation. Another aspect which is stressed is the separation between use value and exchange value, between which we cannot trace any analogous relation. In fact, in the analysis of commodity production as apposed to a subsistence based economy it would be necessary for a commodity producer to be able to make this distinction or cut. It would be necessary for how value itself is thought of is radically different when we make an article for our own consumption, as apposed to when we make it in order to trade.

I would again like to highlight the process of exposition at work here, which in many ways is analogous to the process of development or transitions in an economy. The accounting of these steps involve conceptual relations which are not reducible to a narrative. This is because the reconsideration of the thing, to its use, to the possibility of its exchange, to considering how it may trade vis-a-vis other commodities, even if it were not to change the thing itself, would reconfigure the modality in which we see it relating to ourselves and other elements, or commodities.

Further, in our analysis of what may be described as elementary stages of an economy we see, what may be referred to as a teleology of a kind. In the sense that there is an *order of*

exposition, as Macherey puts it, in the concepts used to account for the changes we have been describing. It is necessary for us to posit a thing, before we may think of it as a commodity, it however would not be possible to posit a commodity without accounting for a thing, for such an exposition would not be able to account for how the economy arrived at the stage of the exchange of commodities.

To present my own exposition of the forms of these equations - “Marx points out the emergence and *interplay between use and exchange value as products of human labour*. Twenty yards of linen for example may be used to be woven into a coat. Let us write this as [20l = 1c]. The form of the equivalence expressed here is the simple use value of twenty yards of linen in terms of what it may be possible to do with it in being subject to human labour; ‘The linen expresses its value in the coat; the coat serves as the material in which the value is expressed’. To be able to appreciate what such a beginning enables it is essential to cognize how any such equation is an expression of equivalent *magnitudes (as products of human labour)* as it predicates *how much* of linen is *transformed* (by human labour) to make a coat or, what may be the necessary magnitude of linen required for its *use value* to be equivalent of a coat. Marx calls this the ‘*Elementary form of value*’ as the form of equivalence entailed in such an equation predicates the simple use value of materials to human labour, in their transformation by it.

In *such* an expression which predicates *magnitudes* however *there is a necessity entailed of it being subject to every change in the productiveness of weaving or tailoring* (as processes of production they are autonomous of each other). If for example, as Marx points out due to the infertility of soil, the *labour time* necessary for the production of linen is doubled, the *value* of the linen will also be doubled’; in which case the equation would be changed from [20l = 1c] to [20l = 2c]. And, the *form of equivalence* entailed in such an equation has changed from an expression of *simple use value* of magnitudes of materials *to* human labour, to the *relative exchange values* of materials or commodities *for* human labour. This is called (by Marx) the ‘*Quantitative determination of Relative value*’ and the *movement* of the transmutation of equivalences as noted above, from the ‘Elementary form of value’ to the ‘Quantitative determination of Relative value’ is representative of the *form* of Marx’s scientific exposition.”³⁶

³⁶ K. S Arsh, Revisiting Structure Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences via Capital, Academia.edu, 2013.
https://www.academia.edu/28482589/Revisiting_Structure_Sign_and_Play_in_the_Discourse_of_the_Human_Sciences_via_Capital

Chapter 10

Novelistic form in and comparisons: observations by Benjamin

Walter Benjamin, perhaps the foremost literary critic from mainland Europe in the interwar period provides us with a fascinating account not merely of the novel as a form, but also the changing social situation, urbanity, the rise of the first shopping malls, and their association with earlier forms of community which come together to find expression in a form which for the most part is largely the product of an individual author, though perhaps in production, mediated via an editor and publisher.

I think his insights on the novelistic form find their clearest expression in his examination of the work of Nikolai Leskov, a Russian diplomat, who wrote literature of practical counsel, prior to fiction after the age of twenty nine.

The rise of a novel as a form is interpreted by him in a way which bemoans the loss of the epic side of truth, as seen in the epic for instance which is often passed orally. And in the conglomeration of the process of writing a novel, a writer often is not in a position to offer counsel of the kind which may have been expected from a moral or maxim. Which is not to say that we may not find them there, yet that is not their purpose.

Yet, in drawing on what a novel may share in terms of its characteristics with the fairy tale, the epic and the novella - we should note that it remains a form of storytelling. And, as a narrative it yet seeks to do what the others accomplish, present a way of sharing human experience.

It helps to keep in mind that Europe was rapidly industrialising in the interwar years. Recovering from one major military engagement and unbeknownst to it, preparing for another one. In the Arcades Project, Benjamin carefully accounts for how for instance hawkers on the side of the street were gradually replaced by small shops lining the cobblestone, and eventually by the first arcades in Paris, the precursors of the modern shopping malls. Signs if there ever were one, of the diminishing of an earlier form of social organisation and the emergence of a new one, perhaps today more readily recognisable with what we see in the metropolis.

Yet, what touches me about his observations regarding Leskov and storytelling is his attempt to place him within his own moorings of traditional storytellers in Germany, such as Hebbel and Gotthelf. He observes that with changes that drastically alter the social formations and skyline leave alone its fabric - and amidst the changes witnessed in Europe in those years, the communicability of experience had fallen in value.

The desire, perhaps even the possibility of offering a story had diminished in a society which perhaps did not have a means of representing a narrative of themselves. And, in these circumstances - it helps a critic to see how those in the past tried to put a yarn together, and whether there were certain patterns still discernible.

And, as yarns go - it will be observed that we may broadly classify them into tales that come from two groups. The trading seaman who, having travelled in far of lands, and perhaps transported exotic goods may bring with them insights of times and places beyond. The tiller of the soil, or perhaps resident blacksmith would know the local customs and be familiar with the history of a settlement.

Indeed, we are informed that in the Medieval guild system, these two types of people often worked in the same rooms. - “ The resident master craftsman and the traveling journeymen worked together in the same rooms; and every master had been a traveling journeyman before he settled down in 'his home town or somewhere else. If peasants and seamen were past masters of storytelling, the artisan class was its university. In it was combined the lore of faraway places, such as a much-traveled man brings home, with the lore of the past, as it best reveals itself to natives of a place.”

The form which seems most adequate in taking into account the microcosm of individual lives and portraying them against the macrocosm of societal developments is the Bildungsroman, which had often even used situations, allegories and encounters in private lives, often of important people as emblems or foreshadows of emerging historical possibilities reflected in the plot. Victorian literature was replete with this.

Indeed the novel as a social form, as a commodity and a kind of narration emerged historically at that moment in history where the majority of the men on earth could no longer depend on earning a living from the soil. This came with the withering of the nobility, as tithes granted by royalty began to be discontinued with rebellions against the crown, starting in France.

The coming bifurcation in storytelling between the epic, and the novel is hence best embodied - in terms of its customers at least in the rising middle class, who were and are bourgeoisie, principally traders and seeking legitimacy in the eyes of the old order, to further their status and to establish their own monetary holdings which constitute their present position in the social hierarchy.

In thinking the historicity of a form, as is proper for any Marxist critic - Benjamin notices that with the rise of the bourgeoisie came another institution which was to shape the contours of modernity - and indeed serve as the handmaiden of this emerging class; the press. Now the

press, like the novel did seek to challenge the space which the epic and earlier forms of storytelling sought to posit, yet this new institution also offered a new form of communication to the marketplace and our homes which was to permeate our forms of communication, this is information.

What would characterise the difference between information and narrative in its earlier moments? Well, Benjamin mentions that when a tale comes to us from afar - perhaps across the seas, or is handed down to us from generations, it carries with it an authority which is not subject to immediate scrutiny, perhaps only because we take it that it has passed from others before us, who may have accepted it and chosen to pass it along. Perhaps emblematically, the subject of such narratives tend to be interpreted as archetypes, and the tales themselves often read allegorically. Information however presses for an immediacy in terms of its referent which was not witnessed earlier.

Here, I think it is singularly interesting to note that a critic such as Benjamin notes that there are changes in epic forms as well, yet they occur perhaps more slowly.

The difference between information and the tales, or - as the critic puts it, intelligence that comes from afar is precisely the claims of verifiability. Tales are not easy to verify, whereas information as a rule is, as it is required to be understandable in itself. This is an important point, yet it may be prompt to point out that often what makes a configuration understandable, indeed what makes an object meaningful is when we have a sense of what it is for, or perhaps the milieu in which it was produced, or further the background which animates the ideas that an installation may have been animated by.

It is with some irony that I would like to add, that stories of the kind which epics and novels may have presented and held, which they perhaps continue to do - rarely required explanation, and I do say this as a critic. Information however is 'shot through with explanation' and this is a situation which philosophy, or perhaps more tellingly the history of philosophy is not alien to.

A critic is indeed someone who is uniquely acquainted with this problematic, and the position would not have been lost on Walter Benjamin. For as we seek to explain a story, as fascinating, indeed illuminating - its purposes and relations may have been, in their explanatory potential, we subtract a little from the tale itself which perhaps loses a touch of the illusion which may sustain the engagement with the narrative. Indeed, later philosophers will come, such as Žižek himself, who having spotted this tendency and will seek to highlight the truth which the narrative itself sustains for a reader - and such a use of ideology is important to acknowledge.

In presenting the schema, or set of associations - perhaps psychological, perhaps social which enable a story to engage the readers as it does, which draws or rather solicits their sensibilities, something akin to an unmasking does occur, if that metaphor is of any use to us anymore. It is dated, for the position of a critic too has to account for the history of the place she or he speaks from, and those who may have made or had had to have made similar considerations. We are reminded here of the marvel which Benjamin saw in Leskov as a writer, who was able to narrate the most marvellous events without forcing the psychological connections. The reader is allowed to interpret the events, and hence they in their reading - or rather, the narrative achieves an amplitude which information lacks.

The art of narrating a story, it may be said actually requires a restraint on account of the storyteller, not to prefigure the events or overlay them with psychological shading. This is what allows for a reader to integrate them into their own experience, and may induce them to share it with another. Such traits, or rather observations are what while not remarkable, singularly characterise Benjamin's appreciation of the craft in question. I think it is telling that he begins his introduction to this piece - 'The Storyteller'³⁷ by bringing our notice to what a certain angle of vision, when inculcated, allows us to see a hidden pattern in what may otherwise have been mere undergrowth or mud, a moment of recognition as it were - like a human face on a rock.

Listening to a story is not an activity that is solitary in itself, in its individuality - yet was often accompanied such as in the situations when a journeyman and a master shared the same room, with accompanying activities, often artisanal and perhaps even mundane, which characterise the routines of life. These associations, and their embeddedness in the listening of stories, allowed for their retelling in a way which was a part of the life of the listener and hence constitutive of a tradition which did not seek to express an essence to the tale which was in some way beyond the fray of a person who may hear, read and hence understand them. I think it is important that Benjamin emphasises this side of storytelling, even as he defends or rather mourns the loss of the 'epic side' of truth for it allows us to think the act of narration in a way which can be witnessed alongside people doing dishes for example, or perhaps in an old newspaper office - making pages for tomorrow's paper. The integration of an activity into a routine does not hide some hidden essence into it, but allows rather for the other activities to express themselves in the tale, perhaps as odd references or jokes - and while this may detract from the purity of the form of the tale, it makes recounting incidences easier, even if this is displeasurable. Were one to see a kind of essence in a tale, we as critics at some point may remind such a prospector that such a positing would be indeed their own.

³⁷ Walter Benjamin translated by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, Schocken Books, New York, 1968.

Yet, I do think there is another dimension to Benjamin's own criticism which we may be missing here, which may indeed be escaping himself. He mentions that storytelling, or rather the form of its incarnation is changing; from the epic, to the novel, to information. Does this not bring to the forefront an emerging temporality as it were, perhaps characterised by a loss of historicity. Or perhaps a form adequate to the unique moment of historicity it represents? We are told that finitude is something that modern storytelling is unable to grasp or represent; as fact it becomes incidental, distant, doesn't touch us, and lacks authority. Yet, is there not - in the novel in particular a way in which the historicity specific to a temporal milieu is represented for a reader? A milieu as it were, whose representation and the struggles it occasionally entails, I have done something to represent in this thesis. And this is not to say that a writer is bound by such struggles, for indeed - were he to use them creatively he may well present clever allegories, or metaphors for situations and characters, even if they are bitter as in the case of Sartre, in acts of critique and resistance.

There is a quote cited by Paul Valery "It is almost as if the decline of the idea of eternity coincided with the increasing aversion to sustained effort." An idea of the eternal, we may say is what the tradition of storytelling embodied in the epic sought to transmit. It is an idea which is constituted via the cultural assemblages, artefacts, historical events and trajectories that lives live. On a grimmer note - Benjamin adds "The idea of eternity has ever had its strongest source in death. If this idea declines, so we reason, the face of death must have changed. It turns out that this change is identical with the one that has diminished the communicability of experience to the same extent as the art of story-telling has declined." Without exploring this idea much further, I would like to observe that it does seem to present an alternative to the idea of *jouissance* being the goal of all communication which a vulgarised psychoanalysis may seek to convey, and does emphasise the sense that the narrating of a tale carries with it counsel, an aspect which information seems to gloss over, even if it may inform us of immediate dangers and pressing concerns.

Yet, since I did venture to present, drawing from Pierre Macherey - a materialist epistemology in the previous chapter, allow me to point out a counter observation made by Benjamin which isn't directly associated with the novel. He posits, that were we to consider the function of the epic as a form of storytelling, we may have to think of historiography as an essential hermeneutical function which such a form, perhaps unconsciously, perhaps traditionally, imparted instruction in. I think this would be evident particularly if we were to raise issues such as different tribes having their own reading of a given epic, even if it is common to them. And from here, he does venture a daring hypothesis; would not historiography, or rather an initiation into it form a common function shared by forms of epics? This, I think is an

observation which will ring true, and you would glean it from some of his more celebrated texts such as 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'³⁸.

In the composition of a work such as the novel, and in gauging its relationship with other earlier forms of storytelling such as the epic; we find that the novelist makes a more sustained demand on the memory of the reader. Why is this?

When a tale is handed down, embedded in a community of artisanal production, from master to apprentice, or let us say amidst the domestic labours of a household - the anchors and hinges of such a recollection abound within the ambit of its narration. A novel, Benjamin notes, citing Georg Lukacs is an embodiment of a form of 'transcendental homelessness'³⁹.

Indeed, Benjamin's debt to Lukacs is significant in his conception of the kind of intervention the novelistic form provides in the ambit of a modernity which still hasn't lost the edge of its rupture from the fabric of an earlier settled community, and these social configuration are expressed as it were in the formal consideration made by Lukacs, which I reproduce from Benjamin's essay here -

"Time," he says in his *Theory of the Novel*, "can become constitutive only when connection with the transcendental home has been lost. Only in the novel are meaning and life, and thus the essential and the temporal, separated; one can almost say that the whole inner action of a novel is nothing else but a struggle against the power of time.... And from this.... arise the genuinely epic experiences of time: hope and memory.... Only in the novel.... does there occur a creative memory which transfixes the object and transforms it... The duality of inwardness and outside world can here be overcome for the subject 'only' when he sees the ... unity of his entire life ... out of the past life-stream which is compressed in memory.... The insight which grasps this unity.... becomes the divinatory-intuitive grasping of the unattained and therefore inexpressible meaning of life."

I would like to draw attention here to two aspects which I believe are not a reflection of each other, even as they may be constitutive of a certain moment which the novels of European modernity sought to depict. The idea of a homelessness which is transcendental; begs the question, as what may be the dimension in which this homelessness is transcendental properly speaking? Is it like, when a new peoples assemble around a tenement seeking to understand the motives and principles which bind each other - are forced to reinvent their old legends to be able to take account of new or recurring characters? Or, is it like an idea which has not yet

³⁸ (Ibid)

³⁹ Lukács, Georg. *The theory of the novel: A historico-philosophical essay on the forms of great epic literature*. MIT press, 1974.

found its home, a letter whose address has yet to be reached? This would be of particular literary interest and I do hope that scholars, readers and critics after me, in their readings of the works they take up are able to picture something of the visage that such a text may be evocative of if not explicitly addressed to.

The second aspect which seems to be constitutive, as in an ingredient in the form of the novel as such is a sense of an effort to make meaning of one's life, and an appreciation of the insight, dare I say the concept, which can knot or perhaps stitch two disparate threads. In this sense, we see an effort to create for oneself - a narrative, and it would be observed that a sense of personhood would be missing without it. This, I would claim - would hold true, even if the personhood in question is textual or literary.

Benjamin seems able, or rather willing to posit something akin to a procession of historical ideals, in his placing before us the moral of the epic and the search for the meaning in the novel. These ideals, as it were - values if you prefer, confront each other. This is not merely a metaphysical hypotheses, but an antagonism observable in the forms of narration, which history and the classes which make it have produced and are discernible for our inspection. A study of the historicity of forms is something which he seems to draw from, constructively from Lukacs, and the bond which ties the thinkers of the Frankfurt School, even those who may not have officially held a position there is palpable.

Of the members of this esteemed group, I would like to say that Benjamin may have been the most poetically inclined thinker, and I use the word loosely here, with some sadness, not only because the history of metaphysics must be mourned in philosophy, seemingly - but also because he was properly speaking a philosopher and a critic. There is however, even here - the exception of Ernst Bloch, who is perhaps more enigmatic and aphoristic in his delivery, and Adorno whose writing is insightful into the art of listening and its diminishing with the rise of mechanically reproducible music. Benjamin however is the writer who likens a reader to a fire consuming the logs of narration which another life represents in the pages of a novel, warming their bodies in the glow of an experience whose ends illuminate other worlds from within a form as familiar as the humble book.

In accounting for the myth, and the seeming slide of the so called epic side of truth which the novel at the cusp of modernity seeks to account for, Benjamin also acknowledges an interrelationship between the myth and the fairy tale; which though belonging to a similar temporal plane, as in beyond history, and often narrated in infancy - serve different indeed determinately dissimilar and counterpoised purposes. In fact, we are even presented with the hypothesis that the fairly tale acts as an antidote to the demands placed on one's chest by the myth.

Indeed, Benjamin even traces the surfacing of an antagonism between the forces of myth and those embodied in the fairy tale. Drawing a parable from it, he asserts that the wisest thing which fairytales have taught mankind is to meet the forces of the mythical world with cunning and high spirits. These being qualities he identifies, which the fairy tale divides courage into.

An analysis and indeed an association with moods and their relations to systems of belief such as antinomianism for instance is an aspect he singles out in Leskov and compares with the outlook brought forth by Doestoevsky. In both cases, strife seems to form a bridge to saintliness, yet here I believe I am venturing into metaphysical propositions and would encourage anyone who may want to pursue this thread to read the original by Benjamin.

Chapter 11

The dialectic of Hegel

It is only fair here, that after the trenchant structuralist critiques of dialectical thinking which Macherey, following the Althusserians presents, against a coded Hegel, a Hegel who stands in for Stalin - a reading of Hegel all the same, we present the philosopher's own thinking on account of the consistency of our own proper understanding.

This is of course an introduction which cannot be made in ignorance of the various ways in which Hegel has been appropriated and re-appropriated, not merely by Marxists of various dispositions but also by the politics of genre, and what some following the break in metaphysics which critical philosophy seeks to identify, have presented as a schism in the discipline itself - between philosophy and theory.

Andrew Cole, is one such proponent and he identifies this break - as has become customary to be located precisely between Kant and Hegel, which is why the so called analytic and continental divide seem to have its border at precisely this moment. Which is also why there seemed a rise of departments focusing on post-Kantian thought especially in Europe, however much it is precisely this tendency which is underrepresented in departments of philosophy itself.

Simultaneously, there has been a large scale incorporation - if not of German idealism, critiques inspired by or critical of it, in departments of literature, cultural studies, sociology, psychology and psychoanalysis, and even linguistics. This seems to present a conundrum. Philosophy, was once thought of as a discipline which may provide the hermeneutical lens, or interpretative faculty which may allow us to see not merely the developments in a field, but to trace its chief influences, and to glean via comparisons whether other ideas and products of the time - bore any underlying semblance in the thinking which went into such productions. The Foucauldian name for such a concept, seemingly period defining - is episteme.

Yet, were we to entertain this historicist interpretative mechanism, and as is customary with dialectical thought - to seek to chart itself vis-a-vis principle oppositions, hence marking its affinity for perhaps a kind of structuralism, even if it was Hegel who first wrote a phenomenology, it would be fitting that we take up today a comparison between this mode of thinking, reflection and presentation; and that other great philosopher of the epoch whose work would come to characterise so much of contemporary French thought and what has come to be known via Foucault and his followers as the genealogical method - Nietzsche.

Nietzsche, is perhaps the philosopher who is easiest to misread for he is easier to appropriate. And, as with all appropriations the consistency of an interpretation often seems to rest more on the use that an adherent, artist, politician or indeed philosopher, may put an aphorism to, than on its configuration within the unity of Nietzsche's thought.

Writing, in a still rural, feudal and in parts aristocratic Germany - with the romantic composer, Wagner as an inspiration, in the shadow of the pessimistic Schopenhauer, and often living in isolation in the mountains of Basel - Nietzsche was a philosopher who, clearly saw - despite his own classical training in philology, what the impetus, rather dare I say the task of philosophy was for - the re-evaluation of all values.

This, he declares to be in some ways the centrepiece of his project - as presented in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*⁴⁰. I would add, that Nietzsche is not a mere formalistic thinker - but produces in a prose whose depth is rarely matched by any verse, parables which demonstrate the encounters, antagonisms, loss and hopes he charts in dramatic concision. In this sense, one may say that he puts the concept of character to better use than some sense of a pure phenomenology which seeks to dwell upon the content of perception and our grasp of it for the understanding, which may be a characterisation of how Hegel's phenomenology begins.

Yet, were one to compare their bodies of work side by side, a reader will notice that Hegel does provide, what is recalled famously by some today - what the archetype of the battle over overlordship has come to be represented through. I am referring here to the famous section on the master-slave dialectics, or as has been written by some as the dialectic of lord and bondsman.

I would like to add, briefly - before presenting my own reading, how much I appreciate an attempt to read Hegel and Nietzsche together. Were the future to be accepted as unmistakably colouring how we perceive the past to be, a future which from this moment in philosophical history cannot but be seen to prefigure later French philosophers who claim a Nietzschean inspiration, then I think it is imperative that we today, as philosophers offer accounts of the singularity of Nietzsche's break. His assault against and early moorings in Christianity, his invocation of pre-socratic forms, and his presentation of early Greek tragedy, offer nothing less than a re-grounding for philosophy away from the medieval dialectic which Andrew Cole identifies Hegel drawing from in the presentation of his thinking.

However, having said this - can we not recognise in the engagement with antagonism per se, not just strife, but conceptual antagonism - which is grasped in the process of the production of categories as seemingly elementary as perception, and trying to articulate what makes it

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, Friedrich. "Thus Spoke Zarathustra, trans. RJ Hollingdale." *London and New York: Penguin*, 1969.

relatable to other apparently spontaneous reflections, such as 'now', or 'this' (first section of the phenomenology) - something akin to the *relational* antagonism that Nietzsche tries to frame in snapshots of encounters between contesting characters or ideals? It is in such a dialogicity of Nietzsche's prose that professor Cole offers us an appreciation of the *dialectical* in Nietzsche's prose, even if he were to reject or outright attack the dialectic per se.

To present the similarities which one may see here, I offer the following reading:-

The slave encounters his own finitude in confronting the master, yet inasmuch as the master exercises his dominion or sovereignty over his property, the finitude which the slave encounters is determinate. And, as determinate is temporal. This is a temporality which excludes the slave whose power is categorically removed from the dominion exercised by the master, which may include the slave's own capacities.

Were the slave to tarry in such a position, it may be said that there is something akin to a re-evaluation of his own values which he may be forced to repeatedly confront.

The master in his stead, were he to only be a master inasmuch as he is not required to present his own finitude to the slave, the famous 'emperor is naked moment' - is able to learn from the determinations of the finitude presented to him, for finitude, his own like other's is always determinate.

In obscurity, he hides his being in the security that its presentation would prosper from the labour of negativity, which seeks to prize away a portion of the property commanded by the master (this may be read as analogous to the production of relative surplus value which the Marxists speak of, but I think a more productive interpretation may also be extended to an aesthetic register which could properly appreciate the interplay of likeness and differentiation which emerges here).

Yet, inasmuch as this is how the being of sovereignty were to present itself, it is indistinguishable from the nothingness of the slave (perhaps drawing in the question or comparison between being and nothingness itself, which among others Sartre takes up).

To approach this from another vantage, the master as sovereign is at liberty to undertake that great Nietzschean task: the re-evaluation of all values. In simple parlance, in his dominion he can determine what is what, and what it may be worth to him.

He does so however, in his own being, his own order; subject to his own causality and succession.

Were he to decide tomorrow that he likes an egg-drop spinach soup more than the chocolate it would mark a change in his own evaluation. As such, in re-evaluating values, he also overcomes them, a valuation or assessment in himself.

These portrayals may be read as schemas of the dialectic as witnessed in distinct moments in the work of Hegel and Nietzsche, respectively. Placed in adjacent alternation to allow for a comparison which is not often made.

Yet, were we to persist with Žižek's reading we would notice that in confronting the history of desire in its Lacanian dimension of drive, what holds the coherence, the very force of a desire together is nothing other than its obstacles, hence comes the urge to make a point beyond a limit, analogous in many ways to the logic of capital in Marx⁴¹.

Were the master to gain a self-consciousness over this process: of that which is overcome in himself, as he overcomes or rather comes to determine his relations to other objects, it is not merely his sovereignty which is called into question, or his position vis-a-vis the slave; but that of his very identity, forcing a moment where a new conceptual schema would be required to frame his own determinations. There seem to be two moments here in my presentation whose expression appear to be in the way of each other. 1) There is nothing beyond the experience of finite reality apart from the immanent process of its self overcoming, a Žizekian characterisation of Hegel which speaks from a locus which could so easily be identified as Nietzsche's. 2) In re-evaluating values, or the world we transform /overcome ourselves; a Nietzschean *metamorphosis of spirit* as it were in which it would be instructive, to be able to distinguish properly from a Hegelian dialectical sublation.

It should be noticed however that these pairs of propositions do seem to form a double bind. It would be interesting to note however, where amidst these metaphysical speculations of transformation of self and re-evaluation of values are questions of resistance and agency?

Indeed, such a question would be helpful to raise given the fact that earlier I had pointed out that Macherey himself seemed to place a distance between his own reading which was decidedly anti-Hegelian in a sense which invokes the dialectic in any narratorial sense, even as it deploys in the form of epistemic breaks in paired propositions, whose remainder reveals a kind of latency or historicity which the task of thinking yet yields, even if such a process is shorn of a plot. A presentation which though craft fully constructed leaves the question of criteria and hence of agency obscure.

What would then his claim be when he says that Hegel treats theory itself empirically and how may it be different from how Hegel is read by a critic such as Jameson today? Principally

⁴¹ Marx, Karl, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, England, 1993.

I think it is important that we note that Fredric Jameson, who perhaps holds affinities for the Frankfurt School dearer than French Structuralists, is a far more engaged archiver, practitioner and indeed a re-inventer of the dialectic, if this last assertion is not superfluous and ingrained in the term itself.

Immediacy, the instant, that which is before us, articulated in the form of prepositions perhaps - above, below, between etc. and their mediation via predicates which actually gives content to such sheer surface phenomenon or placeholders - is the kind of interplay which the practice of writing a dialectic has traditionally involved.

Etymologically arising from the dialogue, it is a structure often readily found in them - yet, we may perhaps more productively discern outlines of such an insight, even if it were to take some study, in narratives and here I do mean non-dialogical moments in them, or rather those sequences where the subject may not be aware of a repetition or a change that they may have enunciated in the plot, even were they to be the subject of a prior precedent.

The classic Freudian example for instance is a seemingly pathological relationship which he identifies in certain familial structures where sexual inhibitions become wound with a traumatic relationship vis-a-vis the maternal figure. This indeed, is a point which Freud would raise himself, and its relation - if any to the fetish a la commodity fetishism in Marx is a semblance if nothing else which Jameson does allude to⁴², though here it would be useful to also point out Freud's study of the maturation of the drive which serve as an important supplement to our figurations.

Regarding Jameson's accounting of the dialectic, a study which spans the better part of half a century, I think it is befitting that we bring to light analogies which he constructs between a tradition which, while tracing its origins in dialogues, or debate, and perhaps being reinvented in decidedly scriptural fashions in the medieval ages, can perhaps best be expressed to a mind in the 21st century via comparison to musical composition, as in concert pieces which I have shown how Jameson does very nicely⁴³.

It is perhaps even further instructive, particularly from our point of view - to be able to assess the legacy of the dialectic from the perspective of two fierce though divergent critics, Deleuze and Derrida. And, here is where some of Jameson's summarising allow us to grasp conceptual struggles which demonstrate where these relatively contemporary French philosophers may have sought to augment or confront a dialectical thinking in ways which may be described as un-Hegelian. A brief quote serves as an example; "Derrida's replay of long sections of Hegel might well stand comparison with Stravinsky's classical borrowings and deformations; while

⁴² Jameson, Fredric. *Valences of the Dialectic*. London: Verso, 2009.

⁴³ 'Fredric Jameson on concert music', <https://vocal.media/beat/fredric-jameson-on-concert-music>, 2021.

Deleuze—but now it seems appropriate to compare whole modes of the fine arts themselves, rather than composers as such—deals with each concept as though it were a new kind of colour and indeed a new kind of space (indeed, the two philosophers seem to stand to each other as anti-narrative versus a kind of non-figurative play with multiple narrative centres, respectively)⁴⁴.”

If you notice, I think this would pre-figure the kind of problems which the practice of reading would encounter quite precisely today - and it must be said that their presentations as well as the concise recapitulation of their positions vis-a-vis narrative does spell this out quite nicely, in a way that would be thematically productive for a philosopher.

Deleuze, we notice with his emphasised use of the proposition ‘and’ and his thinking of productive differentials within an encounter between the actual and the virtual, or as he sometimes describes it, as a line of flight literally prefigures the space in which a thinking occurs. It has been said that such is a mode of thought akin to and stimulative of practices which involve kinds of craftsmanship, and we do have examples such as innovations presented by origami practitioners. Indeed the concept of the fold is elevated into a thematic prism via which the movement which we now recognise to be Baroque, in architecture and music may be interpreted as a way in which an assimilation which cognises the singularity of differences may be incorporated into a larger or perhaps more totalising work.

Derrida, on the other hand is something akin to a covert thinker of the unexpressed singularity - and readers from north America would recognise this in his first presentation on the continent in Johns Hopkins in 1966, particularly in its final lines which in some ways echo Althusser’s productivization of philosophy from a discipline which provided old answers to one which could pose new questions. Yet, we also recognise in his work an effort made, to critique the dialectic, perhaps most significantly when diagonal and subterranean readings are deployed which seek to join discrete registers, such as the personal, familial and processes of maturation or discovery which protagonists may encounter as they find themselves in the world at large. A more radical reading would also be sensitive to how Derrida, perhaps in some ways like Levinas, is also able to focus on the articulation of an externality of a system of thought, which is yet produced immanently - that is within a system of metaphysics. Yet, it is with some regret that I say that this externality is only referred to in amorphous and unclear predicates, and here we are often left with the question as to whether such a juncture for a thinker who took some effort to explicate aporias is not itself a stylistic incorporation of what such a trope may be, elevated to the place of a cliffhanger or dramatic climax if you like.

In fact, Jameson does more to be able to present the insight that an ontology of difference brings with it, as opposed to traditional ontologies, even those of Plotinus and Hegel which

⁴⁴ Jameson, Fredric. *Valences of the Dialectic*. London: Verso, 2009.

see in the process of self-differentiation itself the development of perception, thought, memory and other such universals (though admittedly my formulation is a more contemporary reading). We will return to the reading he offers of Deleuze in at a later date.

Yet, in returning to Hegel - and here I would always recommend that one begin their reading of him with the phenomenology; I would like to make a few preliminary assertions which are called for given the history of interpretations which his work has drawn.

1. There may be a requirement today to be able to read Hegel as a materialist. But what does this mean? Were he not considered to be the highpoint of the movement identified later to be German idealism? Yes, and one way in which it may be possible to answer this question is via the conception of property we may derive from a reading - and ironically, it is here that we may also gather traces of his debts to the great Kantian moment in philosophy which broke novel ground in a fabled debate between Bishop Berkley, John Locke and David Hume.
2. Central to any such reading is an understanding of what is a universal, and the unique Hegelian moment which is a criticism of Kant's formulation or rather fundamental division between human perception and things in themselves or noumenon. Crucial here is the work of negation in the formulation of the simplest of universals.

How may we demonstrate this? Consider what is it that makes memory possible? A moment which is in the past for example, is no longer present. It may be morning and you may have a photograph of a particular morning somewhere in your closet. It may no longer be that morning, it may be afternoon - and yet the memory of that morning may remain in its composition as preserved. The experience which you carry however is not what is the present, and yet for yourself in tarring with it, arrive at a reflection and chronologically witness the transition from it. This, in its most elementary aspect is what negation is, yet for negation itself to be realized requires the recollection of that morning - hence the centrality of the photograph, or any such representation. In this sense, one may say that a negation, inasmuch as it demarcates what something is not, remains a kind of aporia. The aporetic moment however, would be determinate, not merely within the practice of photography for example, given how newer cameras may be able to frame panoramas, colours and multiple points of focus in a way that earlier ones could not, but principally in their relation for the subject - who may have certain associations with a picture, as a memory and who is witness to the changing of his or her own relations in the present. When 'now' can be thought of not in itself, but along with the wealth of experience which has passed through such a moment for an individual - we may have the bearings, via traces of what an experience of a universal may be. Such a description does indicate why Hegel was so often thought to be a historian of philosophy - and the primacy of place he gives to such a study is to be recognised. For were

we to entertain the notion that the history of philosophy is the map as it were for how the discipline is to be re-invented in a present; what remains unsaid would be the relation of such a history to the world. The world however does not remain a mere 'externality' which lies dormant and expectant upon the palpitations of discrete individuals yet, in association, in artefacts, among dwellings leaves and bequeaths unmistakeable traces which it has been our kind fortune to discover, and in unearthing some of these, learning something about our past, yet here I use the world 'our' in a somewhat expanded sense than what its meaning may have earlier been referring to - and perhaps such a gesture would be the basic enterprise which a study of the history of philosophy seems to be getting at, even if it is not presently our object of study.

In leaving aside our brief appraisal of Hegel for a moment, and I do think it would be an unseemly gesture of any philosophy of the universal as it were not to lay an emphasis on the singularity of a position from which an exposition is visible - I would like to draw attention to, for what in lack of a better word - let us call a *homology* in Deleuze, that may be noticed in the prior recollection of the dialectic and how we may read a thematic dramatisation of it in Nietzsche - between the Apollonian and Dionysian principles.

"In general there are two ways of evoking "necessary destructions": that of the poet, who speaks in the name of a creative power capable of overthrowing all the orders and representations in order to affirm Difference as the condition of the permanent revolution of the eternal return; that of the politician, concerned at first to negate what "differs" in order to conserve or prolong an order already established in history or to establish a historical order which already entreats the world for the forms of its representation."⁴⁵

I think it may be possible to read these positions themselves, as perhaps allegories of repetitions that a sensitive reader will no doubt encounter within society, whether in the public sphere to which they refer to, or within the household. In fact were the dialectic to be thought of in terms of its scholastic instructivity, it would be precisely this sense in which the exposition from a position can be seen to have a similar valence to another, and thinking this form of correspondence - whether it be between individuals or between societal units such as families, schools, etc is a practice which any spatialisation of the dialectic would be coming to terms with. What I would like to emphasise here however is an observation made by Andrew Cole, in his appraisal of the chief antagonist to this form of thinking who has traditionally been taken up by scholars in later years, including the likes of Deleuze and Foucault, and here we have to mention Nietzsche. Cole identifies, in his first major work - *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, not a taking up of the dialectic per se, whether spatial or temporal but rather a *dialectical* treatment of mutually distinct forms, positing a

⁴⁵ Deleuze, Giles, *Difference and Repetition*, translated by Paul Patton, Bloomsbury Academic, Great Britain, 2014.

hypothesis of the emergence of one from the nebulous centres of the other. And this may be read as another kind of treatment which may be possible in the recuperation or interpretation of a certain work of art for example, to enrich its intelligibility and indeed a practice which Nietzsche does make rather striking use of.

In returning to Hegel himself and his dialectic - any given appreciation must be able to take into account what it is that makes the negation of the negation possible, and here we must speak about determinate negation, or what may be known in other schools of philosophy - perhaps for other purposes, by the name of the problem of inherence.

An object, let us say a lamp consists of properties which are distinct to it. It is a source of illumination, it has extension in space, and mass, weight etc. Were an engineer be seeking to design a lamp he would not be putting together all of these properties together in a soup, but seek to identify which component best serves the assemblage presently available. Were a better base to be available for instance, providing greater stability - it would be chosen as opposed to a flimsier one. My point here is that while a product is a composite of properties - these properties themselves exist independently of each other. There is a way in which hardness is not colour is not sonority is not extension even when they inhere and describe the very same object in question.

To understand the determinacy of a negation we would require to be able to form a proposition which explicates the relation of one such property to the composite as a whole, and be able to describe the relation it has to it. That which is distinctive and catches the eye may be a singular feature, such as the graphics of a video game and may draw someone to the product, even if the gameplay or story were to let the package down and not invite a replay. However, in understanding how the interface were made to appear the way it did, its results may be learned from and, possibly reproduced in another product. This of course is a grossly material example yet I think it is useful to be able to present what determinate negation has come to mean for a subject in the history of philosophy in terms which may be understandable, even if some of these problems may have been formalised in other ways.

Central to the Hegelian critique of the Kantian distinction between the experience of the world for human perception, ie. phenomenon - and the world in itself, or noumenon is the inaccessibility of the later for consciousness in any sensible or rationalizable sense. This is where I think we may observe a breakthrough which Hegel demonstrates with patience for us. In his exposition on consciousness in the first section of his phenomenology - he posits that in the act of perception, in our very experience of a determinate and definite phenomenon - such as the hardness of a pitcher and the fact that it may be green - we in our very act of cognition fail to take into account other properties or characteristics which may have to be a

part of that object for the former properties to inhere in it. For instance, were it to be a pitcher it would have to be hollow, have curvature etc. Allow me to quote the section for you to examine. “Our experience, then, is this, that the Thing exhibits *itself for the consciousness apprehending it*, in a specific manner, but is *at the same time* reflected out of the way in which it presents itself to consciousness and back into itself; in other words, it contains in its own self an opposite truth [to that which it has for the apprehending consciousness].” - It would be instructive here to point out that Hegel does insist, near the beginning of the phenomenology, in the introduction that the medium or instrument of perception does frame the contents of our insight in ways which inhere entirely in the medium itself, and this may be read as individual sense perceptions whose own nature and functioning are relatively autonomous of each other.

Crucial to grasp here however is the implicit critique which may be drawn from this for the Kantian differentiation between the world as available for human perception and the ‘thing-in-itself’. In entertaining the doubt that our perception of an object in some ways is an incomplete presentation of what the object may be in itself - what we are really placing in doubt is not the object but the faculty of our perception. Further, it is within this faculty that we may examine, not individual senses, or even within the same sense, isolated perceptions but heterogeneous compositions, of the object in question which mutually inform each other through our insight.

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