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Sartre, Intentionality and *Praxis*

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Abstract: In January, 1939, one year after the death of Edmund Husserl, Sartre published a short essay entitled "Husserl's Central Idea." In the space of a few paragraphs, Sartre rejects the epistemology of Descartes and the neo-Kantians and their view of consciousness's relationship to the world. Consciousness is not related to the world by virtue of a set of mental representations and acts of mental synthesis that combine such representations to provide us with our knowledge of the external world. Husserl's intentional theory of consciousness provides the only acceptable alternative: "Consciousness and the world are immediately given together: the world, essentially external to consciousness, is essentially related to it." The only appropriate image for intentionality and our knowing relationship to the world is that of an "explosion": "to know is to 'explode' toward" an object in the world, an object "beyond oneself, over there...towards that which is not oneself...out of oneself."

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Sartre's Early Descriptive Phenomenology

In January, 1939, one year after the death of Edmund Husserl, Sartre published a short essay entitled "Husserl's Central Idea."¹ In the space of a few paragraphs, Sartre rejects the epistemology of Descartes and the neo-Kantians and their view of consciousness's relationship to the world. Consciousness is not related to the world by virtue of a set of mental representations and acts of mental synthesis that combine such representations to provide us with our knowledge of the external world. Husserl's intentional theory of consciousness provides the only acceptable alternative: "Consciousness and the world are immediately given together: the world, essentially external to consciousness, is essentially related to it."² The only appropriate image for intentionality and our knowing relationship to the world is that of an "explosion": "to know is to 'explode' toward" an object in the world, an object "beyond oneself, over there...towards that which is not oneself...out of oneself."³

Sartre's account captures an important aspect of Husserl's theory of intentionality by insisting upon the *essential* nature of intentionality: consciousness is always a consciousness of an object, be it a real transcendent object, a memory or an emotion.

While the ontological realism of Sartre's account of the nature of consciousness's intentional relationship to the world (the being-in-itself of transcendent objects is not constituted by consciousness) deviates from the form of transcendental idealism Husserl adopts in his major published works, *Ideas I* and *Cartesian Meditations*, Sartre's reading of intentionality is not at all foreign in spirit to the early group of phenomenologists in Munich influenced by Husserl. Rejecting the idealism of Husserl's *Ideas*, for example, philosophers such as Adolph Reinach advocated a form of phenomenology that pursued a radically descriptive approach to the study of consciousness closer in spirit to Husserl's pre-transcendental writings. It is in a similar spirit that Sartre writes the 1936 essay, *La Transcendence de L'Ego: Esquisse d'une description*

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Une Idée Fondamentale de Husserl" in *Situations I* (Gallimard: Paris, 1947). Hereafter referred to as *Husserl* followed by page number.

² *Husserl*, p. 32.

³ *Ibid.*

phénoménologique.¹ In mistranslating the essay's title ("outline of a descriptive phenomenology"), the first English translation of Sartre's text prefers the glory of the phrase "existentialism" to the clear indebtedness Sartre wished to maintain in the original title with respect to his Husserlian roots. According to Sartre, Husserl's mistake, and the error leading to his form of phenomenology as a transcendental idealism, is the failure to understand that Husserl's act of transcendental reflection reifies the intentional nature of experience rather than discloses it. In Sartre's view, Husserlian idealism depends upon a relationship between two consciousnesses: the reflecting consciousness and the consciousness reflected upon. However, for Sartre, reflecting consciousness is incapable of adequately grasping the consciousness reflected upon for it has the latter as its object. The consciousness reflected upon "... must not be posited as an object of a reflection. On the contrary, I must direct my attention to the revived objects, but *without losing sight of the unreflected consciousness*, by joining in a sort of conspiracy with it and by drawing up an inventory of its content in a non-positional manner."²

It is clear that there is a fundamental difference between Husserl and Sartre on the question of the identity of the reflecting and reflected-upon consciousnesses. For Husserl, transcendent objects are constituted by the transcendental ego by means of complex acts of syntheses, beginning with the kinesthetic dimensions of my perceptual experience as an embodied consciousness and advancing to the eidetic structures that make my experience an experience of a tree and not of a table. Husserlian analysis thus discloses the anonymous activity of a spontaneously constituting consciousness and remains responsive to the world just as it is experienced. For Sartre, however, consciousness is a pure spontaneity that does not "act" anonymously in Husserl's sense. I am an unreflected consciousness of "Peter-having-to-be-helped."³ The correct phenomenological description of this event cannot be arrived at by reflectively attending to a prior "unreflected pitying consciousness"⁴ as the anonymous unreflected-upon content of my awareness of Peter. Only the detailed description of Peter as the object of my intentional experience that is more a re-inhabiting of my original experience of Peter just as "having-to-be-helped" than a reflective objectification of this experience offers a genuine phenomenological insight into the nature of intentional consciousness.

This perspective seems to have already informed Sartre's earlier celebrated passages in *Nausea* concerning the radically superfluous nature of the world of the in-itself. On such occasions

¹ English translation by Robert Kirkpatrick and Forrest Williams, *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness* (Noonday Press: New York, 1957). Hereafter referred to as *Transcendence* followed by page reference.

² *Transcendence*, p. 46.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

we are overwhelmed by the in-itself and its obscene givenness. The experience of nausea signals the indescribability of the in-itself in its purity. Such experiences can be approached by a kind of thought-experiment. Imagine that things refuse to play the conceptual roles we have assigned them. Imagine not the harmonious flow of our experience in which our attention is directed first to this object and then to another, the harmonious flow of experience that is central to Husserl's account of our experience of the world, but the very inability of our attending to gain traction in the face of the in-itself. What we might be left with is a sense of the radically contingent character of things in the world:

"This moment was extraordinary. I was there, motionless and icy, plunged in a horrible ecstasy. But something fresh had just appeared in the very heart of this ecstasy; I understood the Nausea, I possessed it. To tell the truth, I did not formulate the discoveries to myself. But I think that it would be easy for me to put them in words now. The essential thing is contingency. I mean that one cannot define existence as necessity. To exist is simply to *be there*; those who exist let themselves be encountered."¹

How distant are these elaborations of being-in-itself from Sartre's Husserlian roots? Since synthetic unities of experience are the defining characteristics of the stream of consciousness for Husserl, it would appear that Sartre has transformed Husserlian descriptive phenomenology into its radical opposite. Perhaps Sartre entertained such a transformation of phenomenology with profound delight. We need only recall the opening pages of *Being and Nothingness*, where Sartre painstakingly dissects Husserl's idealism and its identification of transcendent objects with syntheses performed by the transcendental ego in order to replace it by his own phenomenological ontology.

In fact, Sartre could not have known that Husserl himself, in a series of reflections recurring over many years, entertained just the sort of possibility we detect in *Nausea*. Sartre would have been unaware of them for the simple reason that they do not appear in Husserl's published writings and are only now available to us as the editing of Husserl's manuscripts nears completion.

Husserl, too, appears to have been aware of the radical contingency of the world of transcendent objects. In 1907 Husserl wrote:

"Must consciousness be so rationalized that a world is constituted in it? Might it not be the case that everything that emerges in consciousness as elements, self-intuitions, judgements, etc., that...might make up a manifold of consciousness

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea* (New Directions: New York), p. 131.

that would not permit rigorous rationalization...and therefore no nature or science of nature?"¹

It would appear that Husserl's own version of transcendental idealism does not preclude the affirmation of an important contingency in our experience of the world of transcendent objects.

Other episodes in *Nausea* concern the failure of language. Roquentin murmurs "It's a seat."

"But the word stays on my lips; it refuses to go and put itself on the thing...Things are divorced from their names. They are there, grotesque, headstrong, gigantic and it seems ridiculous to call them seats or say anything at all about them: I am in the midst of things, nameless things. Alone, without words, defenceless..."²

Such an account has affinities with the collapse of language that is a primary concern in Hugo von Hoffmannsthal's "The Letter of Lord Chandos."³ While it is suggested by the early Sartre that Husserl's preoccupation with the eidetic structures of experience, structures that prefigure the essential and harmonious horizons of perception and judgment, remains at a distance from an important dimension of intentional consciousness, we shall later note an important revision made by Sartre regarding the centrality and positive "materiality" of language itself. Roquentin's "Chandos" experience will be challenged by the authentically intersubjective nature of human language.

Dialectical Phenomenology

The radical givenness of the in-itself persists as a theme of Sartre's reflections throughout his writings. Yet, whereas for the early Sartre consciousness literally exhausted itself in its intentional relation to the givenness of things, in *Being and Nothingness* the relationship between the in-itself and the for-itself becomes more complex. We might even conclude that, in its details, the complex ontology of *Being and Nothingness* becomes significantly contorted.

We are told in *Being and Nothingness* that the for-itself is the negation of the objects of consciousness' awareness. Yet *Being and Nothingness* treats several dimensions of experience in which consciousness' intentional object has the capacity to modify the very substance of the for-itself. This result hardly appears to be compatible with the nature of the for-itself as "being what it

¹ D 13 XXI, p. 137/38.n

² *Nausea*, p. 125.

³ "(...) The abstract terms of which the tongue must avail itself as a matter of course in order to voice a judgment – these terms crumbled in my mouth like moldy fungi." Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *Selected Prose* (Pantheon Books: New York, 1952) p. 133f.

is not," a formula that would appear to be impermeable to the more particular natures of the in-itself that form the object and content of consciousness' experience.

The shadow of Hegel looms heavily over Sartre's philosophical shoulder. At whatever level we engage the Hegelian system, we encounter a complicity between the in-itself and the for-itself that answers to the fact that neither can be understood apart from the other. Moreover, their apparent dialectical independence must be surpassed by their dialectical resolution. For Sartre, the dialectical irreducibility of the in-itself to the for-itself requires a dialectical relationship that is unending and not synthetically resolvable.

The for-itself cannot exist without the in-itself, but neither can it be synthetically conjoined with it. This, of course, yields an endless alteration of dialectical scenarios. Let us consider, for example, the dialectic of the in-itself and the Other. In Sartre's account of "the look," the Other objectifies me. Initially, my world is given as centered about me: it is my field of consciousness and I constitute its center. The arrival of the Other disintegrates the unity of this perceptual field. I now surrender my perceptual center of gravity to the other. I become an object perceived within the Other's perceptual field. As a result, my own being escapes me. Imprisoned within the look of the Other, my projects of existence are arrested, my freedom is lost and the original orientation of my being as an in-itself becomes dis-oriented and dis-placed. I experience my own disparity.

There is reason to ask why this is so. Surely my being as something for-itself intentionally directs me toward the objects of my experience. Indeed, as *Nausea* suggests, I can surrender myself to the "other" in a sort of total abandon and *still not lose myself in the other*. For what I am is just this transcending toward the other. However, *Being and Nothingness* adds a critically new element to this dialectical structure. The otherness of the other should reveal to me a new dimension of the in-itselfness of the in-itself (for example, its "intersubjective" nature). And so it does. The "look" reveals to me the givenness of another consciousness within the world. Yet Sartre's dialectic of the self and other cannot rest with this givenness. Just as the other's freedom constitutes not only a threat but a successful elimination of my own, so, in turn, I must be able to imprison the other in my "look."

Modifications of the being of two consciousnesses emerge that echoes the life and death struggle in Hegel's *Phenomenology*. However, more significantly, they dramatically exceed the relationship of self and other outlined in Sartre's initial delineation of Husserl's idea of intentionality. If, originally, my intentional being consisted solely in my (negative) relation to the object of my awareness, now this relationship is itself understood as being within the power of the object of which I am aware because it is subject to an essential modification by the other.

A reasonable inference from this experience of the other's look is that the ontology of intentionality conceals aspects beyond my intentional relationship to some transcendent object.

Despite the language of the ontological phenomenology of *Being and Nothingness*, the nothingness that is the for-itself has "being" just in the sense that it is subject to essential modifications. The "purity" of the for-itself (the purity of its not-being what it is) is a misleading abstraction.

Sartre's own language betrays this dilemma. In the experience of the look of the other "I am suddenly affected in my being (which means that) essential modifications appear in my structure – reflections which I can apprehend and fix conceptually by means of the reflective *cogito*."¹ One of these "essential" modifications is revealed in the experience of "shame." If the other looks at me, freezing me into a shameful situation, then I also experience my identity with my shameful situation. "I *am* this (shamed) being. I do not for an instant think of denying it; my shame is a confession."² Sartre's text is quite clear on this point. There is something of the in-itself in my very being ("Behold, now I *am* somebody."³). The centrality of a "reflective cogito" in my experience of the Other's look also signals an important departure from Sartre's earliest work.

What I "am" in the face of another for-itself involves at least two important dimensions. First, since what I "am" is my being-seen by the other, I can only be "seen" because I am an *embodied* consciousness (just as the other is only able to *look* at me by virtue of the other's embodiment). Hence, part of what I am in the look of the other is "my body." Second, the other not only sees my body, but sees my body as *situated*. In my freedom, my situation is a *gestalt* within which I freely project myself toward my possibilities. Under the other's look, however, this *gestalt* of freedom becomes the alienation of my possibilities. "A given synthesis is there of which I am the essential structure, and this structure at once possesses both ecstatic cohesion and the character of the in-itself."⁴ The "ecstatic cohesion" is the result of the other's seeing my purpose within the context of my situation (I caught you spying on Pierre!) and the character of the in-itself refers to the inert death of my projects when they are simply defined by my situation as perceived by the other.

As we shall see, Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* witnesses to Sartre's effort to remove the abstractness of this account of the self and Other. Something will have to be added to the pre-reflective spontaneity of being-for-itself in order to make it possible for the for-itself to become mutually engaged by and with the other rather than simply oppositionally juxtaposed.

Finally, an additional comparison with Husserl sheds useful light on this portion of *Being and Nothingness*. In addition to the thoughts of Hegel and Heidegger on the nature of the Other,

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (Philosophical Library: New York, 1956), p. 260. Hereafter referred to as BN followed by page reference.

² BN 261.

³ BN 263.

⁴ BN 266.

Sartre criticizes Husserl's account of the other as presented in Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*. Husserl's adoption of a form of transcendental subjectivity commits him, in Sartre's view, to a "transcendental solipsism" that precludes relationships such as the Other-as-a-look between different transcendental egos. For Sartre, the Husserl of the *Fifth Cartesian Meditations* and its "deduction" of the existence of the Other, based as it is upon Husserl's reliance upon the infamous phenomenological reduction, relates only to the subject's "knowledge" of the Other.¹ Sartre acknowledges that for Husserl the other is always "with" me and is immediately given within the very structure of my perception of the world.² But this basis is inadequate to account for the Other-as-a-look, for this phenomenon cannot be "derived" from me "...for it is neither a knowledge nor a projection of my being nor a form of unification nor a category."³ However, Husserl's account of intersubjectivity, the "otherness" and "alienness" of the Other is more complex than Sartre's account. Merleau-Ponty, acquainted, as Sartre was not, with Husserl's extended reflections on the phenomenological account of the other (such as *Ideas II*), will later elaborate in detail a more positive account of intersubjectivity and the alien nature of the Other in the spirit of Husserl.⁴ It must suffice here to note that for Husserl the horizon of the Other's alienness can only be unfolded as a possibility within the horizon of "co-subjectivity." This is the possibility of "empathy," in which the "...Other and his primordial being..." is given to me.⁵ It seems clear that apart from a richer explication of the various dimensions of intersubjectivity itself, Sartre's attempt to appeal to a radically simple immediate link between the for-itself and the Other-as-a-look strains his own ontological phenomenology. As we shall see, Sartre's later works abandon the earlier abstract ontology of *Being and Nothingness* for the sake of just such an enriched understanding of intersubjectivity.

While Sartre has little to say about the historicity of being-for-itself in *Being and Nothingness*, a theme that will become central for the later *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, he does have a great deal to say about time. Following Heidegger, Sartre defines time "ecstatically" as the for-itself's relationship to the past, present and future. The past is the mode of being-for-itself as a "no longer having to be the past that I was." The future is the mode of being-for-itself as "...what I

¹ BN 233.

² BN 272.

³ BN 272.

⁴ For a recent discussion that criticizes Sartre's account of the nature of alterity from the perspectives of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, see Chapter 9, "The Person, The Body and the Other," in Dan Zahavi, *Self-Awareness and Alterity: A Phenomenological Investigation* (Northwestern University: Evanston, 1999), esp. Chapter.

⁵ Edmund Husserl, *Zur Phanomenologie der Intersubjectivitat: Dritter Teil* (Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague, 1973), p. 501.

have to be insofar as I cannot be it."¹ Thus, both the past and the future are viewed as belonging to the province of being-in-itself. As instances of the in-itself they are subject to the negative relation that defines the for-itself in relation to the in-itself. What, then, is the present? The present is the *presence* of the for-itself to something in the mode of being its own "witness" to the coexistence of itself and being-in-itself.² It is also the present that turns my past into the past. But even if I am now not my past, it is still *my past* that has been transformed in this way, just as it was revealed to have been *my situation* that is transcended and negated by the other. Time allows me to become the other to myself. Given the essential modifications of my being brought about by temporality, I appear to be involved with a substantive modification my self that represents something no less substantive than the modification of my being brought about by the other. Similar considerations apply to my dialectical relationship to my future.

As in the case of Sartre's analysis of intersubjectivity, we must ask whether temporality also points to a dimension of human experience that reveals something essential about the very nature of being-for-itself beyond "pure nothingness." The analysis of temporality as a mode in which the for-itself simply transforms the dimensions of past and future into surrogates of being-in-itself appears to slight the underlying stream of consciousness and its radical temporality. It might be the case that, in declining to follow Heidegger in privileging the future over the past and the present, Sartre's privileging of the present suggests something like a leveling down of the temporal flow of our experience of the world. That consciousness is essentially temporal, as both Husserl and Heidegger claim, points toward a dynamic structure that a pure nothingness as the negation of being-in-itself is unable to fully grasp.

Praxis and History

Early interpretations of Heidegger's *Being and Time* closely associated the work with the "existentialist" writings of Sartre. "Authentic" Dasein was understood as another version of Sartre's account of the free projection of the for-itself into the future. Heidegger's formula, the "essence" of Dasein is its "existence," made it indeed appear as if Sartre and Heidegger were pursuing a shared program, an impression strengthened by Sartre's own

respect for the Heidegger of *Being and Time*. Sartre's later turn to Marx constitutes a repudiation of this earlier existentialist affiliation with Heidegger's work. In this concluding section, I will suggest that the Sartre of *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* is much closer to the Heidegger of *Being and Time* than one might first imagine. *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* involves

¹ BN 125.

² BN 121.

themes that occupy an increasingly central position in today's philosophical discussions. It is less the existentialist Heidegger that preoccupies our attention today. Rather it is the Heidegger whose analyses of social, institutional and pragmatic structures now makes it possible for us to begin to grapple with the important implications of Sartre's later thought.

In *Search for a Method*, Sartre identifies a new reading of the relationship between being-in-itself and being-for-itself.

"I cannot describe here the true dialectic of the subjective and the objective. One would have to demonstrate the joint necessity of the 'internalization of the external' and 'the externalization of the internal.' *Praxis*, indeed, is a passage from objective to objective through internalization. The project, as the subjective surpassing of objectivity toward objectivity, and stretched between the objective conditions of the environment and the objective structure of the field of possibles, represents *in itself* the moving unity of subjectivity and objectivity, those cardinal components of activity...the subjective contains within itself the objective, which it denies and which it surpasses toward a new objectivity; and this new objectivity by virtue of *objectification* externalizes the internality of the project as an objectified subjectivity."¹

The view of human agency as the externalization of an "objectified subject" is clearly adopted from the Marx of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*. It is also a dramatically different formula from that expressing the human subject as a nihilating transcendence of being-in-itself. We must now grasp the human subject in its historically determined situation as a radically embedded spontaneity that is interfused with its world in its self-projection, an embedded spontaneity whose objectification understood as "...the objectified subjective must be considered as the only truth of the subjective."²

It is clearly beyond the scope of this paper to treat the various nuances in Sartre's writings on the "objectified subjective," spanning, as they do, recently published materials as well as major late works such as *Search for a Method* (1960), *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960) and the multi-volume work on Flaubert, *The Family Idiot*. However, an insightful and compelling path into Sartre's later thought is provided by an example that Sartre himself offered in 1966,³ an example that supplements our age's almost obsessive preoccupation with language.

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method* (Knopf: New York, 1963), p. 97f. Hereafter referred to as *Search* followed by page reference.

² *Search* 98.

³ *Sartre Aujourd'hui*, *L'Arc*, no. 30 [1966] p. 88. Cited in Peter Caws, "Sartrean Structuralism?" in Christina Howells, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre* (Cambridge: Cambridge UK, 1992), p. 299.

"There was a time when thought was defined independently of language, as something intangible and ineffable that pre-exists expression. Today people fall into the opposite error. They would have us believe that thought is only language, as if language itself were not spoken. In reality, there are two levels. On the first level, language presents itself, in effect, as an autonomous system, which reflects social unification. Language is an element of the 'practico-inert,' a sonorous substance unified by a set of practices. The linguist takes this totality of relations as an object of study, and he has a right to do this because it is already constituted. This is the stage of structure, in which the totality appears as a thing without man...But this thing without man is at the same time matter worked by man, bearing the trace of man...If you admit the existence of such a system, you must also admit that language exists only as spoken, in other words in act. Each element of the system refers to a whole, but this whole is dead if nobody takes it up for his own purposes, makes it work."

Peter Caws writes that "...the (concept of the) practico-inert strikes me as one of the most useful additions to the conceptual repertoire of social philosophy in the last century..."¹ This may well be true. For the moment, I will suggest that Sartre's various comments on spoken language, today largely unappreciated, yield valuable insights into the meaning and significance of the "practico-inert."

The hegemony of Chomsky's form of linguistics and its emphasis upon the formal aspects of the grammars of natural languages stops short, in Chomsky's own words, before the mystery of the creative use of language. Even before Chomsky, the philosophical writings of Frege, Russell, the early Wittgenstein and Davidson focused upon language as a formal, logical system. However, we are beginning to see the collapse of the hegemony of the formalization of written language versus the centrality of speech. Although writing with specific reference to Saussure and Chomsky, Pierre Bourdieu, hardly one of Sartre's ardent defenders, conveniently restates Sartre's insight into the importance of spoken language:

"To posit, as Saussure does, that the true medium of communication is not speech, a datum immediately considered in its observable materiality, but language, as system of objective relations that makes possible both the production and decoding of discourse, is to perform a complete reversal of appearances by subordinating the very substance of communication, which presents itself as the most visible and real aspect, to a pure construct of which there is no sense experience.[...]It would be no doubt worthwhile to try to set out the whole set of theoretical postulates implied in adopting this viewpoint, such as the primacy of logic and structure, apprehended synchronically, over individual

¹ Peter Caws, "Sartrean Structuralism?" in *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1992), p. 309.

and collective history (that is, the learning of the language and, as Marx might have said, 'the historical movement that gave birth to it')..."¹

Sartre would certainly agree, not only that language is a material object, but that it also has a history and that speech has its historical embeddedness. As dimensions of the practico-inert, language and culture clearly pre-exist the speaking individual. By infusing this pre-existent universe with the individual's own purposive action and creativity, the Sartrean subject achieves an objectification that, no sooner than it is achieved, reintroduces the subject into the material flow of human purpose, action and intersubjectivity. The subject inhabits language without being exhausted by it. If there is a transcendence of language, it is not the adoption of the "impartial spectator" view of language rejected by Bourdieu, but the subject's existing in the "further" and future of the world of others and practical tasks (the horizon of the future). Sartre's discursive task is to maintain a perilous balance between the subject's dynamics of transcendence and the world of the ready-made that constitutes the individual's historical embodiment. The notion of the practico-inert signifies a unity of the subject and the subject's world that can never be collapsed into an inert totality or identity.

"Words are matter. They carry the projects of the Other into me and they carry my projects into the Other. Language might well be studied along the same lines as money: as a circulating, inert materiality, which unifies dispersal [...] There can be no doubt that *in one sense* language is an inert materiality. But this materiality is also a constantly developing organic totalisation...it is obvious that a person's every word must depend, in its present meaning, on its references to the total system of interiority and that it must be the object of an incommunicable comprehension. But this incommunicability – in so far as it exists- can have meaning only in terms of a more fundamental communication , that is to say, when based on mutual recognition and on a permanent project to communicate [...] Every word is in fact *unique*, external to everyone; it lives *outside*, as a public institution; and speaking does not consist in inserting a vocable into a brain through an ear, but in using sounds to direct the interlocutors's attention to this vocable as public exterior property...To speak is to modify each vocable by all the others against the common background of the word; language contains every word and every word is to be understood in terms of language as a whole; it contains the whole of language and reaffirms it...language as the practical relation of one man to another is *praxis*, and *praxis* is always language...Languages are the product of History; as such they have all the exteriority and unity of separation."²

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 30f.

How distant is this from the Sartre of the *Transcendence of the Ego* and its radicalization of Husserlian intentionality? What persists is the dialectical relationship of the inseparable moments of an indissoluble relationship. What has changed is the introduction of a third medium that now embeds the for-itself-in-itself opposition. This medium *makes me available to the other* in the sense of the omnipresence and priority of an intersubjective community. It is by virtue of our intersubjective *praxis* that we at present inhabit our future together and redeem our past.

Thomas Flynn, in part quoting Sartre, emphasizes an important feature of the Sartre of the *Critique*:

"When two or more for-itselfs enter into relationship, Sartre argues, there is a reciprocity that is an *existential modification* of each. Exhibiting the kinds of thinking that will remain through the *Critique*, Sartre urges that such reciprocity... *presumes a prior unity*. '(Sartre asks, is there not)...an existence proper to the reciprocal existentialist modification, an existence that would pose itself in terms neither of the for-itself nor of the for-others'. (*War Diaries*, p. 252). The answer, he implies, lies in *that special in-itself of the for-others*, which he will soon call the 'event' (p. 363). This would be the locus of historical facticity. [...]Consider a conversation between two people. Besides the respective fact that each happens to be talking, there is the mutuality that we call the *conversation itself* that exists beyond the being-for-itself of each participant, though not independent of the individuals involved."¹

Sartre alludes to two aspects of language that are of increasing interest in present discussions of language. Spoken language, involving the speakers' co-presence and interaction, "define a property that can be called *situatedness* – the closeness language has to the immediate physical and social situation in which it is produced and received. The nature of conversational language and conversational consciousness is dependent on their situatedness."² In addition to this dimension of *situatedness* or *historical facticity*, situated discourse is framed by structures of intersubjectivity. At this point, Sartre's thought in the *Critique* comes closer to Husserl's and Merleau-Ponty's reflections on the encompassing structures of intersubjectivity in the experience of the world.

²Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason: Volume One* (Verso: London, 2004), p. 98. Hereafter referred to as *Critique* followed by page reference.

¹Thomas R. Flynn, "Sartre and the Poetics of History", in Christina Howells, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1992), p. 216f.

²Wallace Chafe, *Discourse, Consciousness and Time: The Flow and Displacement of Conscious Experience in Speaking and Writing* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1994), p. 44f.

"The most important factor to be stressed is that community is not a mere collection of individuals and that communal existence and common achievements are not simply collections of individual lives and individual achievements. On the contrary, all individual existence and individual life is thoroughly informed by a unity of existence, grounded, to be sure, in individual lives, but a unity penetrating and transcending the private worlds of individuals..."¹

Although Husserl goes on to make reference to "forms of life, work and cultural configurations" and their corresponding "norms," his analyses are composed of largely unfinished projects. I have elsewhere referred to these and other aspects of Husserl's views of intersubjectivity and the relevance of perceptual, embodied experience to the understanding of language as "envoiced subjectivity."²

The concept of the envoiced subject involves two dimensions. The first is the general framework of the embodied, experiencing subject designated by Husserl as structures of the lifeworld. In part, these structures involve aspects of kinesthetic processes, horizon consciousness and the communalization of experience. The first refers to the fact that even perceptual consciousness is a matter of an embodied "I do" and "I move" belonging to what Husserl terms the "living body." The second refers to the fact that all perception involves the experience of two perceptual "fields": an internal horizon of possible perceptions of one and the same object and an external horizon as a thing belonging to a "field of things." Finally, the communalization of experience refers to the fact that even "straightforwardly perceptual experience" is a matter of taking part in the life of others.

Within the framework of the lifeworld, envoiced subjectivity is understood as reflecting these and related structures. For example, in the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty has focused upon the expressive dimension of the body and speech. His notion of "emotional expressiveness" encompasses both aspects and leads Merleau-Ponty to speak of the function of words as ways not of simply "representing" the world, but of "singing" the world by extracting the emotional essence of things. Spoken language here has a distinctive priority. Related to such claims is the possibility that speech contains meanings that are directly perceived rather than cognitively "inferred."

The *Phenomenology of Perception* also emphasizes the phonological materiality of spoken language, a dimension of language not discussed by Husserl. Merleau-Ponty argues that there is a level of meaning directly given in the sounds of words and in the interplay between the words of a given language. Words may have representational content, but they also have an "immanent,"

¹ Husserl, *Aufsätze und Vorträge*, p. 48.

² See my "Tolerance, Envoiced Subjectivity and the Lifeworld" in *Interpretando la experiencia de la tolerancia* (forthcoming).

“gestural” and “affective” meaning by virtue of the irreducible ways in which a single word is related to all the other words of the language. Further more, perceptual experience and its corresponding structures (embodiment, contingency and its open-ended nature) also serve as the basis for moral, cultural and political phenomena. These features, which are also aspects of spoken language, afford the basis for a generalization of perception and perceptual meaning to the full range of human *praxis*.

The concept of the envoiced subject can also include features not touched upon by either Husserl or Merleau-Ponty. Such features bear upon the relationship of the syntactical structure of natural languages to deeper-laying structures of language and cognition that are more reflective of lifeworld features than is possible within the framework of, for example, a Chomskian view of syntax. Finally, the concept of the envoiced subject can also provide a stimulus to examine more closely how the dimensions of lived time and lived space and the lifeworld horizons of openness become incorporated in both grammatical syntax and linguistic expressions more broadly construed.

Entirely apart from the question of what contributions Sartre’s later work can make to the further understanding of such an “envoiced subjectivity,” Sartre’s references to language provide a useful insight into his notion of the “practico-inert.” Peter Caws’ comment on the importance of Sartre’s later work for social philosophy holds out the possibility that Sartre’s importance will increase with respect to current discussions of “institutional minds,” social cognition, cognitive anthropology and the relationship between thought, language and culture.

Much of the current discussion of these questions stem from a renewed interest in Hegelian or neo-Hegelian accounts of mind and truth as “communal,” as in the recent work of Michael Forster and Terry Pinkard. They are also reflected in the work of Robert Brandom and his concern with institutional discursive structures and in his and John Haugeland’s neo-pragmatic interpretation of the work of Heidegger, whose *Being and Time* is treated not as an existentialist treatise, but as an important statement of an institutional and social theory of mind and language. Concern with the work of the later Wittgenstein, especially in the interpretations of Meredith Williams¹, also contributes to this renewed interest in understanding mind and language as social, public and “material.” Ian Hacking’s recent *Historical Ontology*² and its indebtedness to Foucault is a further example of views of mind as “public” and “historical.” Finally, we must note the intense interest in

¹ Meredith Williams, *Wittgenstein, Mind and Meaning: Toward a Social Conception of Mind* (Routledge: New York, 1999).

² Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge Mass., 2002).

this question shown by many in the cognitive sciences who are pursuing theories of the mind as “embodied” and culturally “embedded.”¹

It was Noam Chomsky who wrote that a central goal of the study of language “is to determine the meaning of a word...in a ‘shared public’ language, a notion that remains to be formulated in some coherent terms.”² We are perhaps only beginning to understand the importance of Sartre’s thought in addressing this question. Perhaps Sartre’s most important legacy in this regard is an understanding that language as public can only be understood within the context of a more encompassing view of human action, history and the spontaneity of the “for-itself.” Although Sartre may have reinterpreted in Marxist terms Hegel’s dictum that true history is the history of freedom, Sartre’s conception of free *praxis* represents his continuing legacy as a philosopher of freedom, a dimension that is frequently overlooked in today’s discussions of mind as public and social referred to above. As Sartre states in language borrowed from his first encounter with Heidegger: “Possibility...lies at the very heart of the particular action, (it is) the presence of the future as that which is lacking and that which, by its very absence, reveals reality.”³ Although arguably a philosopher of the social and material world, Sartre remains to the end a metaphysician of the individual as well.

In the end, Sartre affirms the priority of the future and in doing so he returns to the Heidegger of *Being and Time* and to the Husserl who identifies the horizon of world experience as the harmonious (but never total) advent of the future. Against the background of his early invocation of Husserl’s “basic idea” and his extended critique of Husserl in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre’s thought evolves into more of an unwitting endorsement of a Husserlian perspective than Sartre could have envisaged. However, Sartre’s conception of praxis and the practico-inert also challenges the essentially perception-oriented Husserlian perspective, with the possibility of affording us a more detailed understanding of the intentional structure of cultural artifacts than Sartre’s phenomenological predecessors had been able to achieve. Sartre’s philosophy of embedded freedom projects a detailed analysis of the structures of embedded freedom we have only begun to properly assess.

Perhaps Nietzsche deserves the last word.

“What does commonness really mean? Words are acoustic signs for concepts, concepts, however, are more or less precise figurative signs for frequently

¹ For a useful analysis and survey, see Robert A. Wilson, *Boundaries of the Mind: The Individual in the Fragile Sciences – Cognition* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge UK, 2004).

² Noam Chomsky, *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge UK, 2000), p. 148.

³ *Search* 94.

recurring and simultaneous sensations, for groups of sensations. Using the same words is not enough to ensure mutual understanding: we must also use the same words for the same category of inner experiences; ultimately, we must have the same experiences in *common*...when people have lived for a long time under similar conditions (of climate, soil, danger, necessity, work), then something *comes into being* as a result, something that 'goes without saying'..."¹

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (Oxford University Press: Oxford UK, 1998), p. 148.