

Remembering XPTRE

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Livio Dobrez

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(1905-1980)

edited by

sudeshna chakravarti

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REMEMBERING SARTRE (1905-1980)

Edited by

Sudeshna Chakravarti
Chinnmoy Guha

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I am happy to know that some of the papers presented at the Birth Centenary Seminar on Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) held in December 2005 are now being published in the form of an edited volume. I understand that the Seminar was the first of its kind organised by any university in this part of the world. The book also contains articles by some of the best-known Sartre scholars in the entire world.

Sartre was not only a great novelist, playwright and philosopher but also one of the most influential writers of the last century. He was deeply admired and respected in West Bengal.

I congratulate the Department of English for bringing out this volume. I am confident that the present book will be considered by experts to be a major contribution to research on this fascinating author, who crossed all boundaries to understand the predicament of man.

A. K. Banerjee
(Asis Kumar Banerjee)

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Preface

SARTRE : A CENTENARY APPRAISAL AND TRIBUTE

In 1905, Jean-Paul Sartre was born. In 2005 his birth centenary was celebrated in many parts of the world. The Department of English, University of Calcutta, organized a Seminar on Sartre on the 19th of December, 2005. Though Kolkata had for long been a Sartre city, where Sartre had been read and discussed a good deal and his plays staged frequently, for some reason, the centenary was largely ignored here. Our Department, with perhaps one or two other organizations, alone commemorated the event. The present volume is based on the papers presented in this seminar, while many other articles by noted scholars from different parts of the world have been added.

Sartre was such a mighty and many-sided genius that it is impossible to do justice to his life and work in a single volume, or a dozen volumes, for that matter. Still, attempts have been made to cover a few salient points. It is not our intention to discuss every essay in the collection but a general road map for the reader might be provided. The contributors, who belong to various disciplines, have approached the subject from different angles. Shafali Moitra offers a general introduction to the life and works of Sartre, at the same time, she analyzes certain aspects of his philosophy. Kalyan Sen Gupta and A. Van Den Hoven likewise concentrate on Sartre the philosopher. But of course, in the case of such a man, it is impossible to present philosophy as an academic discipline, detached

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from the real world. Shibnarayan Roy speaks of the "anguished humanism" of Sartre. Christina Howells draws a comparison between Sartre and Derrida, as between two great philosophers of different generations. Today, postmodernism has become something of a buzzword, as existentialism used to be in the fifties and sixties. However, the exact meaning of such terms and the co-relation between them is rarely understood. The above mentioned article is likely to throw some light on the subject. Livio Dobrez compares the two from a Freudian psychological angle.

The political side of Sartre, his complexity, brilliance, passionate conviction and often painful dilemmas, appear in a number of articles. Sobhanlal Dutta Gupta expresses surprise that in an age where postcolonial discourse is so much the fashion, the life long anticolonialism of Sartre should have been largely ignored. He attributes this to a distinction between "oppositional" and "complicit" post colonialism. The essay puts forward a detailed study of Sartre's anticolonialism, both theoretical and practical. In the same context, Sona Roy analyzes the relationship between Sartre and the famous Afro-American writer, Richard Wright, and draws a comparison between some of their works. Subha Chakraborty Dasgupta describes the link between the Sartrean definition of literature and the ethics of commitment. Ronald Aronson tries to examine the famous Sartre-Camus dispute in the present day context. What do these two giants represent, what can they offer mankind, in an era following the fall of the Berlin Wall and 9/11?

Krishna Sen and Dipendu Chakrabarti examine the theatre of Sartre from different angles. Constance Mui and Nabanita Roy discuss the subject from a feminist point of view. Roy examines the lifelong, fruitful relationship between Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, their "necessary" and "contingent" loves and how far these

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reflect a gender hierarchy. J M G Le Clezio and Marie Darrieussecq, noted French writers of today, view Sartre as a predecessor, from whose heritage they can perhaps learn something. Darrieussecq apparently has no high opinion of Sartre. She considers his philosophy mainly plagiarism, his political ideas obsolete, his fiction and drama teenage stuff. We have thought it fit to include a hostile, and, hopefully, minority point of view to make the volume complete.

The anthology is meant to present Sartre in an all round manner, not as a classic to be put on the shelf, but as someone who is still very relevant for our life and time.

Kolkata
15 April 2007

SUDESHNA CHAKRAVARTI
CHINMOY GUHA

LAIUS, SARTRE AND DERRIDA INC.

LIVIO DOBREZ

patricide *n.* the murder of one's own father: one who murders his father. - *adj* patricidal (Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary)

father-killer...father-supplanter (*King Oedipus*)

...the beginnings of religion, morals, society and art converge in the Oedipus complex (*Totem and Taboo*)

If Freud, writing in what was his favourite book, is right (he isn't), father-killing is not simply the burden of Oedipus, who encountered Laius on that fated road to Thebes, but of all of us. Certainly the French have shown a special fascination for the story - a point to which I'll return at the end of this article - and nothing illustrates it better than the meeting of still-dominant French intellectuals with Jean-Paul Sartre on, we must assume, any number of Parisian roads. Leaving aside a few specialists and the loyal remnant of a following, Sartre has been comprehensively forgotten, or at least as

forgotten as it is possible to be for someone of such prolonged and worldwide profile. In Anglophone circles poststructuralism of one sort or another is now the *doxa*, notably among literary academics historically unacquainted with French thought and more often than not ignorant of the structuralism which preceded its "post", let alone once influential figures like Sartre who preceded structuralism. Yet little knowledge or reflection is needed to see the tendentiousness of this position. In this article I want to comment on the telling Sartrean residue (borrowing Derridan terminology we may term it "traces") in the work of the most significant figure in philosophical/literary studies of the last few decades. I'm not concerned with statements made on the subject of Sartre by Derrida but with his philosophical debt to him - the underlying irony, and one requiring periodic reminder, being the debt of both to the philosophy of Heidegger. I'll also comment, more briefly, on Foucault and Barthes in this context, bearing in mind that, with Derrida, all of these have been put through a cleansing process of genealogy-revision, that's to say have as it were rejected Sartrean paternity in favour of a new family history, some of it geographically close (Saussure), some more remote (Russian formalism). It has all had the feel of an unseemly rush to revise the immediate past - and indeed structuralism did not escape either (an odd development, given that most of the conceptual shifts popularly attributed to poststructuralism were clearly formulated by structuralism, not least by people who, depending on what aspect of their work we consider, may be termed either structuralists or poststructuralists). In which connection we need only recall Derrida's critique of Lévi-Strauss.

As regards Sartre, I intend to focus on that chart-buster *Being and Nothingness* and not on the later *Critique of Dialectical Reason* in which Sartre tried, depending on one's

point of view, to complement or modify or undo the apparent - and surely real - individualist bias of the earlier work. With respect to Sartre and, later, Derrida, I wear my heart on my sleeve: both are immensely intelligent thinkers, but neither convinces me that what he has to say is true. I am of course mindful of Derrida's offensive against truth (ambivalent, like all his offensives), but can put the matter in no other way. At the risk of appearing patronizing, something I neither wish nor can afford to be, I would add that both are monstrously clever philosophers, specializing in pyrotechnics. But does the system (Derrida would reject this term) work? German philosophy, it seems to me - and for all its supposed esotericism - has kept its feet on the ground in a way its French equivalent has not. Naturally this is a comment about philosophy and not politics. As regards the latter, Heidegger is, as we know, especially vulnerable to criticism. In France, Sartre, with Beauvoir, took philosophy into the political arena, and with notable courage, as for example over the (to the French) sensitive matter of Algeria. When I visited Chinese universities shortly after the end of the Cultural Revolution, Sartre was still the one hot topic everyone wanted to discuss. Of course the Chinese were involved in their own highly sensitive Oedipal activity at the time, having reached the stage of stating that the Chairman, then dead for some seven years, had made "mistakes". Derrida's political interventions have, to my knowledge, been ineffectual: in the Middle East I understand he practised well-meaning undecidability both in Israel and the West Bank. But the question as to whether his, or Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* philosophy, has real application, that is, whether it accurately describes - phenomenologically - things as they actually are, is quite separate from politics. *Being and Nothingness* begins with a premise that is not merely clever but cleverly and amusingly wicked. I'll

come to its wickedness directly, but first note its two-edged homage to the father-Laus of all French thought, Descartes. Descartes divided the world into *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, matter and mind. He divided it so effectively that it was subsequently difficult to know how the two could interact, that is, how (some) matter could think. This led to a philosophy known as Occasionalism in which it was argued that the interaction required outside assistance. On this view, when I wish to write the following words I will my fingers to tap on the computer keyboard, but my will has no power to influence my fingers. Fortunately for the present article, God obligingly intervenes and, just at the point of my willing to move my fingers, moves them for me. Descartes did not go so far, arguing that there was a physiological point - the pineal gland - at which mind and matter meet. Sartre rewrites this scenario with two new protagonists, being and nothingness, and I hope I may be forgiven an outline of the idea for readers new to Sartrean philosophy.

The world divides into what is - and what isn't. It seems reasonable, even without the evident debt to Heidegger's ontology, to point to things of which it may be said that they "are". The Himalayas are, Kolkata is, tables and chairs are. Events, thoughts and emotions are. In fact it's difficult to think of anything that "isn't". What about a unicorn or a Garuda bird? Well, once thought, these certainly "are". Once thought, even a square circle "is". Still more radically, once thought, even an honest politician is - only as thought, of course. Being, including the Himalayas, the honest prime minister of Australia and my sneeze - and this is Sartre's wicked part - are entirely comparable to the Christian concept of God. Like God, my sneeze, once it has happened, simply is. It needs no justification, no Big Bang theory. Indeed, optically speaking, there's no more to be said. What is, is self-sufficient. Likewise it is necessarily and totally passive,

one might say - another dig at Christian theology - quite inert. But what else can there be, other than what is? Of course nothing at all: apart from what is, there can be nothing whatsoever. Which is precisely Sartre's logic: in addition to being, there's nothingness. Nothingness, in the celebrated formulation, cannot be, but it can "exist". It exists in the form of consciousness. So the being/consciousness pair correspond, without actually corresponding, to the Cartesian dualism. There is also, as ever, a perversely Oedipal twist on Heidegger, who first formulated the distinction between being and existence, but with quite other conclusions.

But how can consciousness exist as nothing at all? As active subject which denies any connection with any passive object. When I enter my office I am conscious of my office. This means I am not my office. I am not its walls and ceiling, nor its computer bursting with unwanted e-mail, nor its table, chairs, windows, books and papers etc. All these are, so, since I am not any of them, I am not. Consciousness is a city-dweller, perhaps a Parisian: unlike the placid deity, being, it is frenetically active, creative, always doing something or other. But this doing is always negation. To be conscious *of* is to say I am *not* - whatever is object of my consciousness. By the same token, consciousness is self-negating, though the one in action, the one *doing* the negating, must remain out of reach. I am the subject who perpetually escapes objectification. If I think of this "I", I turn it into "me", I objectify it, that is, make it an object of my consciousness. But the subject thinking this now-objectified earlier subject has slipped behind it: *it* and not the other one is the current subject and, however much I try to be conscious of it, it mocks me with its regressive play. Thus I am not and can never be myself, self-identical. Nothingness can no more be itself than it can be its office table and chairs etc.

Of course in distinguishing itself from the office, my consciousness likewise negates the self-sufficient and monolithic state of being, that is, of the office. Even as it says "I am not the office", it adds "the office walls are not the ceiling which is not the windows which are not the computer which is not the books" etc. In short, consciousness contaminates being with its nothingness, it makes "holes" in being and, in so doing, differentiates a world. It's a nice parody of Heideggerian "worlding". Additionally and self-evidently, this momentous act makes no difference whatsoever to being in itself (*en soi*), which continues placidly uncontaminated as before. The more desperately and urgently consciousness tries to do this and that, to "make a difference" to things, i.e. to affect being, to infiltrate it, in short to *be*, the more it is doomed to failure and frustration. Nothingness cannot be - it can only "exist", precariously, as parasitical on being, just as a hole in a sheet of paper exists and even has a specific, individual character by virtue of the edge of the paper which defines it. Putting it another way, my consciousness "is" to, and only to, the extent I fill it up with objects of consciousness - which of course are distinguished from it. This thesis is premised on the Husserlian dictum that you cannot be conscious without consciousness *of* - something. Perhaps Indian meditation disproves it. At any rate, in Sartre's system, subject and object, doing and being, consciousness and its world, cannot coincide. Leaving aside Hegelian and Marxian alienation, this is another perversely Oedipal variation on Heidegger's existence/being, *Dasein/Sein* distinction and, specifically, on *Dasein's* reliance on *Sein*. As part of his project, Heidegger sought (and this was emulated by Derrida) to obliterate the old subject-object dichotomy. Inspired in no small part by Heidegger, Sartre does the opposite: he accentuates it. It is by definition impossible to be and to know it at the same time, that is, to know one's being.

Only God can do that and, consequently, God is by definition impossible. The only time my consciousness rests in peace, reunited with being, is when I am dead, at which point I *am*, but can't know it.

I should add that Sartre's presentation of nothingness amounts to a further theological parody. Medieval European philosophers distinguished between what they termed Affirmative, Negative and Superlative Theology. According to the first of these I may say of God - let's think of Krishna - that he is blue. According to the second, I must deny any attribute of God, including blueness: God is Other, no human terminology applies to him. According to the third, I say that God is blue, but not in the way that sky, sea or any known blue thing is blue; he is blue in a way transcending all known blueness. The acknowledged master of Negative Theology, associated with the *via negativa*, the ascetic way of denial, was the author of *The Divine Names* and *The Mystical Theology*, a fifth-century Christian or perhaps neoplatonic writer known as Dionysius the Areopagite or the pseudo-Dionysius - "pseudo" because he was in fact not the Areopagite. The pseudo-Dionysius called into question the attribution of any created quality to uncreated God: God is dazzling darkness, not knowing but unknowing, not namable but unnamable. One might say of him, as Heidegger says of Being - the Being which grounds existence, i.e. specific beings - that its presence is a form of absence, that (leaving Derrida on "presence" aside for a moment) Being is in fact indistinguishable from Nothing. Sartre reverses this conclusion, but, like Heidegger (though, unlike Heidegger, paradoxically), he has nothingness exhibit all the characteristics of an absent, negative deity. While God may be a logical impossibility, he certainly exists, and negative-theologically - as that hole in being, human consciousness. Incidentally, it occurs to me by way of an addendum, that Indian thought has its own version of

Negative Theology in the *na iti na iti* of the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*—and doubtless in many other texts and traditions.

A final point, for the time being, on Sartrean consciousness, the lively, unsatisfied entity incapable of resting in itself (*en soi*), but forever active for itself (*pour soi*). Heidegger's major work was entitled *Being and Time* and Sartre borrows the idea of the centrality of time in his ontology. If consciousness is a perambulating void, it must project itself temporally. It cannot "be" in its present, which is precisely void, not presence but negating absence. Nor can it "be" in its past. My past is objectified, no longer myself. It is fixed, in short has turned into being. That leaves only the future as a suitable site for consciousness. I exist as a futural project, living out not what I am but what I intend to be. Ultimately of course my wanting to be and my being will never coincide. Still, existing as a project into the future allows me to be free. Even if past events determine my actions (something Sartre will deny), futurity cannot possibly do so, even if it shapes and directs them. But of course the idea of freedom was already implicit from the start in that of nothingness, and it is here that the primary case for it is made. How could consciousness, as nothing, be anything other than free - to be whatever it likes, except, naturally, being? In other words, failing "being" anything, to "do" anything it likes? The only thing that might influence, i.e. determine, nothingness would be being. But how could a something influence a nothing? For this reason past events, set in ontic concrete as it were, cannot act to determine present ones. I am what I am not because of my past but because of my future. Likewise one consciousness cannot influence the freedom of another consciousness. How could a nothing influence another nothing?

There is a caveat in all of this, unsurprisingly. The old theologians used to posit the human will as free to choose,

but within and not outside God's larger choice - thus reconciling the otherwise disparate notions of free will and predestination. Sartre, following Heidegger's definition of humans as being-there (*Da-sein*), i.e. as beings in a world, squares the circle of freedom and determinism much as did the Stoics of European antiquity. Even in chains, I remain free in my mind; if they torture me to say Yes when I think No, I do not give free assent. Rather I choose to stop the pain in the best way possible (by saying Yes) and, like the wretches at Guantanamo, recant my fake confession at the first opportunity. Sartre puts it in the context of what he terms "situation". Just as the hole in the sheet of paper is defined by what it is not - the paper edge - so the freedom of consciousness is defined, but not determined by, its situation. I am free, but in a given situation. Free to e-mail this article to the University of Calcutta but not (in my case) to relay it telepathically. I am free to fly to Kolkata in an aeroplane, and have done so, but not on my own wings. For that I need to wait until biological evolution gives me the option - to be freely taken up or not. For Sartre this is not a limitation on freedom but simply the condition of its possibility - since if, like God, I were absolutely free, my *fiat* or willing would be its own act and the notion of freedom would lose any meaning. It goes without saying that Sartre's elaboration of this position, with its assumption of human responsibility, provides a philosophical ground for political activism. The difficulty, to which I'll return, is the implication of that impasse between being and doing - though some might say that the aim of political action is not to bring rest (read being) to human consciousness but simply a more just and creative state of unrest.

Before I turn to Derrida, this may be the place to state the obvious: that Heidegger could not approve of Sartre's adaption of his philosophy. After the latter's admittedly popularizing presentation of the ideas found

in *Being and Nothingness* in the pocket-size *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (translated less pointedly as *Existentialism and Humanism*), Heidegger countered with the *Letter on Humanism*. It's not my purpose to go into this here, except for the further observation that the German thinker would no more have approved of Derrida's different but equally transformative adaption of his work. But by then, in Sartrean terminology, Heidegger's nothingness had returned to being: Heidegger no longer had the freedom to write letters to his unruly philosophical progeny.

Surprisingly - or not, since, as I once said to a sceptical Anhui University audience, "Australia is in Asia" - the only time I encountered Derrida in the flesh was when, on January 24, 1997, I heard him lecture, rather engagingly, at the Delhi School of Economics. Shortly after, in Kolkata, I learned that, with Cixous, he had presided over the book fair that ended in a conflagration. Derrida plunders both Sartre and Heidegger, the latter, I think, with greater respect. I intend to focus on a few especially significant points of contact which Derrida might characterize as *brisure* or hinge, that mechanism which joins in order to separate and separates in order to join. I am of course talking about a door. At any rate Derrida elaborates his version of a negative theology. I can afford to be pithy here, since everyone is currently more or less familiar with the basics of Derridan deconstruction - which of course one is not to call "basics". *Of Grammatology* puts the famous case for a reversal of the speech (read 'presence') and writing (read 'absence') binary. The great Romantics (using this term in broad-brush fashion), from William Blake and Hegel to their Marxist offspring, argued that Without Contraries is no Progression, but Derrida reads dialectics as textual violence, the, in some sense political, prioritizing of one term of a binary. Inevitably, the critique of presence has

Heidegger as a starting point, in particular his critique of the history of European philosophy as a metaphysics of presence. Heidegger's Being and its avatars - truth, for example - cannot not be reduced philosophically to something like an item among other items. Rather, Being, truth and so on are presupposed in, and prior to, our speech. Putting it more forcefully: we do not speak them but they speak us. Theologically, this derives from the proposition that we are chosen by God before we choose God (John: 15.16). And here Derrida echoes Sartre's parodic play with religion. But his anti-instrumentalism (thoroughly anti-Sartrean, of course) has a structuralist linguistics pedigree, as well as a -distorted- Heideggerian one. From Heidegger: we don't speak, but are spoken (by Being). From linguistics: *langue* generates *parole*; language speaks us before we speak it. Once again, the nineteenth century accepted binaries as non-vicious hermeneutic circles. Friedrich Schleiermacher, the founder of modern interpretation theory, envisaged language as a system generating, and in turn generated by, specific utterance. But Derrida opts to follow Saussure's emphasis on language as a system. More than that: a system based on differentials. What makes language possible is not the similarities between elements of the system but the differences. Actually Saussure allowed himself a little leeway on this point, something now generally glossed over. Moreover there are problems with the stress on structure before all else. Even if thought is linguistic - an interesting but unproven, probably unprovable, thesis - language is not necessarily best understood solely in the systemic terms proposed by structuralist linguistics. Still, Derrida, along with most of his contemporaries, accepts the structuralist premise as fact.

What follows is a revised Heideggerian deconstruction: the attack on logocentrism, the erasure of presence and its avatars, the notion of linguistic deferral of meaning,

the consequence of trace and the supplement (which, adding to a deficit, does not add at all), the undecidability principle, working at the margins etc. All of this, however couched it may be in structuralist-derived terms and expressed in the tantalizingly oblique way of Heidegger (with the addition of a sense of fun, be it said), nonetheless reveals, indeed cannot hide, a substantial unacknowledged borrowing from Sartre. That "difference" proposed in a famous essay, that de-centred, absent structuring core proposed in "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences", that metaphysical term under erasure, that meaning absently there as deferred, as trace, as the non-addition of supplement - it might all be sourced, were Derrida to allow for sourcing - to the *pour soi*, Sartre's negative consciousness. Obviously, since it equally borrows from Heidegger on the one hand and linguistics on the other, Derrida's is not consciousness philosophy. But there are too many negatives in this new anti-theology - parodic, moreover, like Sartre's and unlike Heidegger's - *not* to evoke the suspicious absence of Sartre. Sartre too puts being under an erasure of sorts once it is translated into consciousness; he sees the negating void of consciousness infecting all it touches, much as linguistic deferral infects reality (read presence) with discursive absence - or, looking at it the other way, much as the supplement adds in order to make no addition, adding, in short, nothing.

To elaborate a little on the above-mentioned issue of instrumentality or agency, that's to say the issue of freedom. Here, following, as ever, the most unlikely bedfellows, both Heidegger and (Lévi-Strauss) structuralism, Derrida completely rejects Sartre. Quoting Kierkegaard out of context we could say that instead of Sartre's subject/object either/or, Derrida opts for both/and. Or rather he refuses decision, as already noted - not least at the end of the "Structure, Sign and Play" essay. "Play"

means just that, the rule of what the Greeks called Chaos, that which precedes Structure. And here I think we are far from Sartre, not least from the option of a Sartrean or any other kind of politics. If well-inclined towards Derrida, we may refer to this as a respectable political anarchy (one thinks of Foucault here as well) and contrast it to Sartre's allegiance to Marx. If ill-inclined, we may say that its radicalism has been exhausted by merely textual revolution. But Derrida's anti-Sartrean position, as extreme in its assertion of undecidability as Sartre's was in the assertion of choice, and coming as it does on Sartre's heels, is itself telling. Perhaps debt is as much revealed in contradiction, if that is sufficiently extreme, as in imitation. Perhaps extreme contradiction is a form of imitation. It seems to me that Derrida's debt, the Sartrean trace in Derrida's thought, is not unlike that elusive difference/différance, both invisible and, once we readjust our sight, perfectly visible. This in the (at this point more and more suspicious) context of an assertion of the death of Origins.

So far I have not mentioned the implications of the Sartrean dualism for human relations. As usual, the logic is as impeccable as it is annihilating. If subjects meet, as they must, in the only act open to humans, namely negation, then two consciousnesses can never merge, but are perpetually condemned to conflict. There can be no intersubjectivity. Ranajit and Dipesh can only relate as subject to object, the only question being who will take, or have to take, the one or other position. Either Ranajit retains his subjectivity while objectifying Dipesh or the reverse. There are tactical variations on the model: what Sartre terms *le regard*, the objectifying Look, may be dealt with in a number of ways. But all boil down either to fighting back, i.e. to the assertion of one's subjectivity against the other's objectifying gaze, or to the acceptance of object-status and the other's superiority. Women - the

point taken up by Beauvoir - have historically been allocated the second role. Thus Gayatri, unless her position is very strong, is more likely to be object to Dipesh's subject than to objectify Dipesh. In which case her revenge will be to accept object-status while maximizing its advantages, since objects, though trapped in the subject's Look, are not without the power of seduction. The relation of all this to Sartre's Marxism is, naturally, problematic. If we transpose, as Sartre certainly did, the subject/object model to group rather than individual interaction, it may be made to serve the thesis of class conflict. But a difficulty, perhaps not insurmountable and touched on above, remains: Sartre's system allows no final way out, only continuing conflict. Of course group action was tackled in Sartre's later work. Still, it is hard to see the bleakness of the *Being and Nothingness* model encouraging anyone to revolution. Be that as it may, an outline of Sartrean thought on human relationships leads me to brief comments on Foucault.

Some years ago I heard the American Heidegger specialist, Hubert Dreyfus, put a convincing case for a Foucauldian debt to Heidegger. I'm not sure a comparable case can be made with respect to Sartre. Unlike Derrida, Foucault develops no philosophy around an absent centre directly or circuitously in kinship with Sartre's *pour soi*, consciousness-as-void. And yet his entire project, outlined most coherently in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, is to write a history of absence, the never-spoken ground of discursive formations, glimpsed intermittently in the discontinuities, ruptures, slippages of systems. This coy absence is, of course, power. And it is easy enough to source the Foucault discourse to structuralist antecedents. He does so himself, at the end of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, assuring us all the while, in the best tradition of negative anti-theology, that the search for sources is futile and that what most matters cannot be named, in

this case for the reason that it does not want to be and makes damn sure it isn't. At any critical point, hegemonic force prefers silence. All this, in the Foucault version, is not in the least like Sartre. And yet the Sartrean echoes, however distorted - as, after all, in Derrida's work - are unmistakable. Foucault writes history without a subject, a sound structuralist undertaking. Yet it is Sartre who, arguably, radically and originally destabilizes that subject. What could be more destabilizing than a subject which is defined as nothing at all? Foucault rejects logic, Sartre's inexorable discourse, in favour of the Nietzschean discourse of power, demonstrating, among other things, that logic is power. But it is Sartre who, in his own fashion, insists on a sado-masochistic power relation as the basis of human interaction. There is a profound similarity, a familial tie, of what I would term theological temper. Both Sartre and Foucault seem to me secular French Jansenists. The Jansenists, notably defended by Pascal, had a bleak view of Fallen humanity, utterly reliant on divine Grace. Sartre, in that oft-quoted last line of the play *Huis Clos* (usually rendered as *No Exit*) summed it up: *'l'enfer c'est les autres*, hell is other people. In the equally sombre formulation of *Being and Nothingness*: *'l'homme est une passion inutile*, man is a useless passion. "Passion" in the sense of commitment, certainly, but also in the sense of a road to Calvary; "useless" because, in Sartre's words, the human project is a "short-circuit". We are returned to the primal rupture of, on the one hand, unfeeling, unsuffering being and, on the other, angst-tormented, forever-unsatisfied consciousness. Foucault's version of this is tailor-made for paranoia: a post-Enlightenment, bourgeois structure - riding on the back of discourse - of increasingly sophisticated all-encompassing, all-pervading social control. It may of course be true: the man in *Catch 22* who thought "they" wanted to kill him wasn't wrong.

I shall conclude with a footnote in connection with

another major post-Sartrean in France. Barthes probably has a number of points of contact with Sartre. I'll mention one, for the reason that it gives me an opportunity of alluding to a Sartrean text so far not mentioned: *What is Literature?* In his lively and well-known essay on the death of the author, Barthes, like Foucault and Derrida, relied on the structuralist critique of the subject (in which critique he of course actively participated). He gloried in the replacement of *parole* by *langue* as a hermeneutic tool and in the triumph, following the banishment of the author, of that new point of reference, the reader. But it had been said more philosophically cogently and in equally lively prose by Sartre, French Reception Theory, while never as properly thought out as the German (and, with Ingarden, Polish) version, still has its founding document in *What is Literature?*

While others may have a deal to add to the above argument, enough has been said to substantiate some claim for Sartre's intellectual longevity, his continuing impact, even in a climate of ideas frequently hostile to him. I see no necessary scandal in hostility. The intellectually dubious Lacan, for example, loathed Sartre for his line on psychoanalysis, presumably not least the devastating original statement in *Being and Nothingness* that there's no such animal as the unconscious. What is scandalous is the way in which Sartre's legacy has been stifled by a conspiracy of silence. In his seminal essay, "The Structural Study of Myth", Lévi-Strauss nicely used Oedipus as his test case, illustrating both a characteristic myth and his own death-of-origin methodology. In fact the French have a curious way of returning to the altar-grave of Freud's slain father-figure, source of totemic thinking and sacred site of taboo. In the recent sphere of ideas, theoretical and practical, Sartre, more than most, is that sacrificed patriarch. Of course he himself - and Beauvoir - had no children.

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ean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) was not only a major novelist, playwright and philosopher, he was arguably one of the most influential authors of the last century.

The present volume is a collection of some of the papers presented at the Sartre Birth Centenary Seminar organized by the Department of English, University of Calcutta in December 2005. It contains articles by some of the best-known Sartre scholars in the world like Sibnarayan Ray, Van Den Hoven, Ronald Aronson, Christina Howells, Constance Mui and Ivio Dobrez, as well as reflections by two important post-Sartre French novelists J M G Le Clézio and Marie Perle.

The book takes a fresh look at the contribution of someone who crossed all boundaries to understand the predicament of man. The anthology is meant to present him in an all round manner, not as a classic to be put on the shelf, but as someone who is still very relevant for our life and time.

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