

B/N = attempt to relate
reality & creation

His inability to grasp his perception
of his synthesis

- ① overcoming discontinuity
- ② integral to imagination

HISTORY and EXISTENTIALISM IN SARTRE, by Leonard Krieger
from THE CRITICAL SPIRIT, ~~1964~~

(p. 239): Existentialism poses both subjective and objective problems for history. As subjects, existentialists espouse positions that are often antithetical to the historical dimension; as objects, they have exhibited ideas and activities that are often opaque to historical knowledge. In Sartre both kinds of problems are joined, and, in what follows, through him a joint solution will be essayed.

(p. 247): The imaginary thus represents at each moment the implicit meaning of the real, that is, the way in which consciousness grasps reality as a whole in order to surpass it.¹⁸ (Sartre, Psychology of Imagination, p. 272)

(p. 249) His inability to demonstrate the movement from historical perception to historical synthesis, moreover, was irremediable so long as he associated historical knowledge with the aesthetic imagination. For he generalized this incompatibility between what the real analogue is and what it represents into an "inherent contradiction" and "ambiguity" of all images.²⁴ (Ibid, pp. 169-71)

(p. 250) The underground connections which he made, willy-nilly, between reality and the aesthetic imagination.²⁵ (On Sartre's early political interests, see Simone de Beauvoir, Memoirs, p. 344) For since the imaginative consciousness must grasp reality in order to deny it, we are left with the apparent paradox that what Sartre calls "human reality" is constituted by the faculty that constitutes the unreal. Since, moreover the imaginary is for Sartre "a fact" and he confers on it the status of existence - "unreal existence" - an unstated generic notion of being underlies this two-dimensional existence.²⁶ (Sartre, Psychology of Imagination, pp. 200, 271-2... It was to resolve the general problem of relating reality and creation that he rounded out his first stage with the writing of *L'Être et le Néant*; in which he articulated the doctrine of history appropriate to this first stage.

(p. 251) He overcame, in *L'Être et le Néant*, the problem of discontinuity and, in the service of this measure of integration, established the elemental basis for history. But he remained, in this work, within the framework of individuality. It was the internal drive to overcome this limitation upon unity that pushed him finally into the second stage of his thought in search that history became central to him.

And so *L'Être et le Néant* becomes, for us, the pivotal work. Not that there is much in it about what we would recognize as history: there is, indeed, very little. It concludes, as I have indicated, the phase of Sartre's philosophy it is crucial for the revelation of the inescapable limits and problems of that thought - limits and problems which created intellectual needs that history was later brought in to fill. Moreover, since Sartre has never departed from the main foundations of his thought,

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Generalization
of aesthetic
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ambiguity

Human
Reality
Creation

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In search
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A

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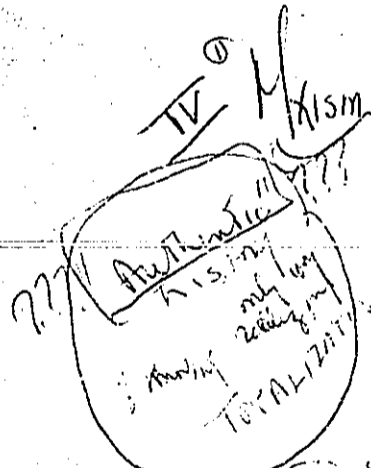
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(p. 265) the instruments of thought by which history is thought, insofar as they are also the practical instruments by which it is made.⁷³ (Ibid. p. 135) Marxism, for Sartre, does indeed reveal the general process through which men make a unity of human reality through history, but for him, too, Marxists do not know how the process works, and more important, contemporary Marxists have lost the sense of the movement, the dialectic, the real history in the process. The role of existentialism within Marxism then, according to Sartre, is precisely to restore authentic history to it as the only means of knowing and ultimately realizing the "totalization" that is history.⁷⁴ (Ibid. pp. 28-59, 152)

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(p. 266) "Our revisionist colleagues are having great sport using the heterogeneity of grass-roots history to dismantle every general truth in sight. All these positions deny a synthetic role for history, either by assuming a pre-existing structure of general truths to be merely particularized in history or by rejecting the relevance of general truths to the historical enterprise, but if Sartre is an even approximately faithful expression of contemporary culture, then these relationships and, with them, the familiar notion of history's function, are anachronisms. If neither logic, nor science, nor art any longer furnish general truths pertinent to human conduct, if their meanings are also utterly fragmented, then history must use the patterns of synchronization and succession of human actions in the common medium of time to link their particular fragments and to construct whatever general truths about man we must have."



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