Intellectuals and Revolution: A Study of the Philosophical-Political Trajectory of Jean-Paul Sartre

By Douglas Kellner

Jean-Paul Sartre has continuously reflected on the question of the intellectual and has continuously asked: What is this problematical being the intellectual? What is his/her social function? To what should an intellectual be committed? Through what sort of activity should the intellectual's commitments be carried out? For Sartre the problem of the intellectual is interconnected with the problem of Marxism and revolution. Sartre's reflections on the concept of the intellectual are in fact interconnected with his evolving and tumultuous relation to Marxist philosophy and politics. His philosophical and political commitments to Marxism in recent years have posed new problems for Sartre: what is a Marxist intellectual? How can intellectuals contribute to the revolutionary process? What transformations are necessary in the classical concept of an intellectual to produce the new revolutionary intellectual that Sartre has recently pointed to as the model of the committed (i.e. authentic) intellectual?

Sartre has continuously put himself and his work in radical question in the past decades and has produced some interesting reflections on the problem of the intellectual and revolution. Moreover, Sartre's changes in his concept of the intellectual reflect changes in his ongoing philosophical and political project. Many of Sartre's critics have argued that his philosophy and view of the world really haven't changed much over the years and that the old existentialist Sartre haunts the Marxist militant. An examination of the changes in Sartre's reflections on the problem of the intellectual in relation to his philosophy and politics should overthrow the view of the static Sartre and should reveal that the philosopher of change and liberation of our times has in fact liberated himself from many of his old existentialist ideas and from the classical concept of the intellectual. In this paper I wish to show how Sartre has continuously changed and evolved in his intellectual commitments and political involvements which have increasingly.

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For example, see Wilfrid Desan, The Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre (New York: 1965); George Lichtheim, The Concept of Ideology and Other Essays (New York: 1967); James Sheridan, Sartre: The Radical Conversion (Athens, Ohio: 1969); and Ronald Aronson's studies of Sartre's philosophy in Telos 13 (Fall 1972), Telos 16 (Summer 1973) and Telos 20 (Summer 1974).
merged into a distinctive Sartrian version of Marxism.

Now is the time to begin summing up the magnificent and overwhelming corpus of work that Jean-Paul Sartre, the greatest intellectual of our times, has produced. Sartre's brilliant and surprising itinerary has been generally underrated or barely acknowledged in the English speaking countries. This fact might be related to a fear of Marxism in the bastions of bourgeois hegemony, or ignorance of Sartre's work in the politically "neutral" past years. No doubt it is puzzling and upsetting to conservative anti-Marxist/intellectuals to observe the most brilliant intellectual of our times reject his classes' and social strata's ideology and privileged position, while passionately advocating the overthrow of the established society and socialist revolution. For left intellectual's Sartre's political commitments and tireless solidarity with revolutionary forces from the ghettos of America and Left Bank of Paris to the kasbahs of Algeria and rice-paddies of Indochina should be exemplary. But even on the left there seems to be a myopia which when confronted with the phenomenon Sartre banally criticizes the philosopher or simply accepts the old man as a familiar part of the political landscape who is passé or déjà vu. I myself am convinced that Sartre's work is of central importance both as a cultural phenomenon and as a challenging reflection on intellectuals, philosophy, and revolution. Sartre's work constitutes, in my view, one of the major contributions to neo-marxist theory and practice. Moreover, Sartre represents one of the most powerful challenges to radically question our philosophical and political commitments, as well as our activities qua intellectuals. Unfortunately Sartre's work remains unassimilated and unappreciated.

The Grand Old Man is now preparing a series of television programs for French television that will be a summing up of his life and times. These programs should reveal the remarkable interaction between Sartre and our history. To paraphrase Hegel, Sartre's philosophy is his times reflected in thought. It is often a disturbing picture of the world and history that emerges in Sartre's project but then these are disturbing times, fraught with fear and trembling and glimmering with hope for a better tomorrow. Sartre's philosophy has always been a philosophy of the future and he believes that his concept of a democratic, non-repressive, libertarian socialism holds the best hopes for a better tomorrow. But what can we--intellectuals--do to contribute to the radical social change necessary for abolishing the evils of
capitalism and to sweeping into the wastebasket of history the refuse of bourgeois society? Here Sartre’s work confronts us with a major challenge. Only radical change of our thought, values, life-style and activity can produce the sort of new intellectual necessary to transform intellectuals into a genuinely progressive force for social change and revolution. This paper will elucidate the process of the liberation and transformation of the intellectual envisaged by Sartre through a reflection on Sartre’s writings on the intellectual and his own philosophical-political trajectory. We shall first examine (I) Sartre’s early meditations on the committed intellectual in his existentialist period and period of transition to Marxism. We shall (II) summarise Sartre’s first theory of the intellectual through an examination of the superb essay “A Plea for Intellectuals”. We shall then (III) note the classical Marxist critiques of intellectuals as a social strata and shall see how Sartre himself outs his own concept of the intellectual as well as his own status as an intellectual into radical question during the late 1960’s; in this context we shall examine Sartre’s concept of the new revolutionary intellectual. We shall finally (IV) attempt to come to terms with the phenomenon Sartre and shall try to grasp the specificity of Sartre’s version of Marxism and socialist militantism. Sartre’s increasingly total conversion to Marxism from his decidedly anti-Marxist existentialism surely constitutes one of the most surprising and fascinating intellectual adventures of the century and we shall try to indicate its significance and contribution to radical social theory.

Our project of beginning the summing up and evaluation of Sartre’s work will be aided by a remarkable annotated bibliography of Sartre’s writings, an engaging biography by Francis Jeanson, and two collections of Sartre’s essays just translated into English. Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka’s bibliography The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre (Northwestern: 1974) contains over 600 pages listing Sartre’s works; it provides citations and summaries of his publications, interviews, etc. that renders accessible much unknown or neglected material; this enterprise provides an indispensable aid to study Sartre’s work and is a model of a useful bibliographical apparatus. Francis Jeanson’s biography Sartre dans sa vie (Paris: 1974) supplements Simone de Beauvoir’s account of her relation with Sartre and attempts to provide an overall characterization of Sartre’s life and thought. Jeanson was
an intimate friend and associate of Sartre and provides many fascinating
glimpses into his life, as well as providing large selections of interviews and
material previously inaccessible. The two anthologies The Writings of Jean-Paul
Sartre, Volume II (Northwestern: 1974) and Between Marxism and Existentialism
(New York: 1975) contain many important and interesting works that we shall
refer to in the course of this study.

I shall also draw upon several of Sartre's recent interviews to try to
draw out his own concept of his thought and intellectual practice. The French
journal Le Nouvel Observateur recently published a three part interview with
Sartre in commemoration of his 70th birthday and to render homage to "the
writer who has most distinctly marked our times." In the beginning of the
interview Sartre goes into great detail about his increasing blindness and the
impossibility to continue his work as a writer. Sartre says that he and
Simone de Beauvoir will record some interviews that will attempt to sum up
his life and work, and which will be a continuation of his autobiography
The Words. He will also continue working on a television series. But he does
not now see how he can continue his writing and fears that he will never
finish his Flaubert study, nor write any more books. In this context, the following
study is intended as an overview of Sartre's work that wishes to stimulate
a reading and rereading of Sartre's work to encourage a critical scrutiny of
a corpus of work that is one of the most impressive achievements of our time.

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Cf. the three interviews by Michel Contat in Le Nouvel Observateur,
I. The Adventures and Misadventures of the Committed Intellectual

After World War II Sartre was concerned to develop a concept of the engaged writer-intellectual. His early views on the subject were published in his now classic 1947 study "What is Literature". The writer, Sartre says, is committed above all to freedom. The act of writing presupposes a use of one's freedom and creativity and addresses itself to the freedom of the reader who is free to accept, reject or be indifferent to the writer's product. Since literature presupposes freedom and advances freedom, the writer should be concerned with the freedom of all and should direct his work to an expansion of human freedom. This is in any case the function of all great literature so that the engaged writer who becomes aware of the interconnection of freedom and writing should choose freedom as a value and fight to enlarge the realm of freedom. In this sense writing is "a free person's assumption of his responsibility for the world". Writing thus has a moral and social dimension that the engaged writer becomes aware of and assumes: "it shows simply that man is also a value and that the questions which he poses are always moral".

In Sartre's view freedom involves choice and invention. One is always bombarded with a multitude of possibilities and in making choices one chooses one's self and invents one's world: "man invents himself everyday". One must choose their own way of life and values, and the values in any type of society and human existence, for each choice, Sartre claims, contains a choice of the human being and its world. A crucial choice the writer in our times faces, Sartre argues, is to choose what sort of society he/she wants to live in. This poses political options: "Between the USSR and the anglo-saxon bloc it is true that one must choose. A socialist Europe is not 'to be chosen' because it does not exist: it is 'to be made'... In so far as circumstances will not have changed, the chances of literature are tied to the advent of a socialist Europe, that is, a group of states with a democratic and collective structure."

1 Citations taken from Situations II (Paris: 1948), op. 286-315; my translations.
Cf. The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre Vol. I edited by Contat and Rybalka (hereafter referred to as Writings) for bibliographical information of the many editions and several changes in the text. op. 167-9. The English translation omits much interesting material.
Sartre was aware that translating the writer's moral commitment to freedom and a free society into political action was fraught with ambiguities and problems. At the time, he wholeheartedly subscribed to Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "ambiguity of history". Once we engage in a course of action our own ends elude us. We may have clear intentions, say, to increase human freedom, but our actions (say, support of Stalin) might actually increase human bondage. Moreover, intellectuals who participate in historical actions are likely to get their hands dirty or burned (maybe cut off). The problems of the ambiguity of political commitment and the perilous situation of the intellectual were posed in Sartre's play Dirty Hands. Hugo, the secretary assigned by a leftist group to assassinate the veteran communist Hoederer, represents revolutionary idealism, "the plight of 'a young bourgeois at grips with the contradictions of his class'". Sartre claims he wants to show how "politics requires us to 'get our hands dirty' and this is the way things have to be". Striking is the rather negative picture of the bourgeois intellectual Hugo whose vacillations and plunge into destructive action show the problems that an intellectual faces when he/she tries to act and mixes in the sordid and complex world of politics. This play still poses in a compelling fashion the question of ends-means, revolutionary morality, and intellectuals and revolution.

The dilemma of the intellectual was dealt with further in Sartre's trilogy of novels The Roads to Freedom. Mathieu, Sartre's alter ego, wants, like Sartre and you and I, both to be free and to use our freedom productively, to be engaged and politically active. Mathieu clearly sees the trans of unfreedom but can't see his way to a positive road to freedom. In the novel Troubled Sleep, he engages his freedom in a desperate, violent attempt to act: which takes the form of a suicidal attack on the Nazis. Sartre later sees this act as a paradigm of the free, spontaneous political action that enabled the intellectual to leave the realm of thought for the world of action. But after all Mathieu was killed and his "act" was rather useless. In the incomplete fourth volume of The Roads to Freedom Sartre wanted to revive Mathieu (who we would learn was only wounded) and put himself into a productive course of political action.

1 Writings, p. 293.
2 Ibid, p. 189.
3 In John Gerassi's interview in Oui, 1975, p. 122-3.
4 Writings, pp. 218-9 and 233-4.
The novel was never completed, probably because Sartre did not find the sort of political commitment to which he wanted to commit Mathieu. Mathieu-Sartre's commitment to freedom thus remained idealistic: moral and abstract.

Sartre attempted to discover/invent a viable political option in the late 1940's by joining/forming various left independent groups outside of the leftist parties, but these attempts were condemned to failure. ¹ Sartre then became a "critical fellow-traveler" who inched, painfully and tortuously, toward Marxism and the Communist Party. After the War he had defended his existentialism against the French communists and their Marxism, and in a 1956 essay "Materialism and Revolution" he makes his first attempt to come to grips with Marxist theory and practice. Sartre accepts the revolutionary practice of the French communist party as genuinely representing the interests of the working class, but rejects their Marxist philosophy as being hopelessly crude and materialistic. At the time, Sartre hadn't studied much Marxism and seemed to have gained his concept of the Marxist philosophy from Stalinist hacks. Sartre then devoted his incredible intellectual energies to studying the Marxist classics and makes his first real confrontation with Marxism in an important and neglected 1950 essay, "Faux Savants ou Faux Libres".² The essay deals with Yugoslavian socialism, but penetrates into the foundation of socialist theory and practice and contains many brilliant critiques of Stalinism. The essay on the whole is extremely sympathetic to Marxism and is full of citations from Marx, Engels, Lenin, Luxembourg, and Lukács. Sartre has been doing his Marxist homework and is on his way to undergoing one of the more interesting intellectual conversions of modern times. Sartre's polemics in the essay are brilliant and he has hardly ever worked out such a detailed and interesting defense of the role of subjectivity in genuine Marxist theory and practice and critique of objectivist Marxism as a form of reification or crude determinism. Sartre was obviously trying to reconcile his existentialist positions with Marxism and to see to what extent a philosophical reproachment with his political allies was possible. At the close of his essay he states, "We have to rethink Marxism; we have to rethink man".³—which is

¹The best account of Sartre's political activity is Michel-Antoine Burnier's Choice of Action (New York: 1968); cf. also Writings 177-181, 204-16, and 230 for accounts of Sartre's 1940's political activity.

²Published in Situations VI (Paris: 1964); cf. Writings 436-7.

³Situations VI p. 66.
exactly what Sartre has been doing with his prodigious intellectual acuity and talent.

Sartre’s most ardent support of French Communist Party politics and the Soviet Union came in the white hot polemics *The Communists and the Peace.* Sartre had been working with the French CP in the Henri Martin affair where he and the Party defended a young communist sailor who refused to fight in the Indochina war. In a May 28th demonstration supported by the Communists against the American General Ridgeway’s arrival in Paris to assume the NATO command, the police brutally broke up the demonstration and arrested some Communist leaders. A June 4th strike to protest the brutality arrests failed and the bourgeois press crowed with glee at the Communist defeat. Sartre exploded with rage, concluding “an anti-communist is a dog” and sat down in a heated fury to pen a violent attack on “vicious rats” who were anti-communists. He defended in painstaking detail the Soviet Union and Communist Party on almost every major issue and attacked various critics of the CP and USSR. Sartre clearly chose his Cold War position and broke with Merleau-Ponty who reversed his earlier positions and sided against communism and the USSR. In *The Adventures of the Dialectic* (Paris: 1955), Merleau accused Sartre of “ultra-bolshevism” and himself took refuge in the ambiguity of history.

Part of the price Sartre’s impassioned commitment and fervent desire to participate in the major social-political struggles of the day was breaking with Camus and Merleau-Ponty, two of the only figures of his generation who approached his intellectual level. In France ideas and politics are taken seriously and in Paris controversies of the day take on mythical portions, hence Sartre’s debates with Camus and Merleau were central intellectual happenings of the 1950’s. Unfortunately for the level of debate which might have taken place in France, Nizan died too young, Camus drove too fast, and Merleau passed away too soon, leaving Sartre and Simone

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1. Published in *Situations VI:* in English New York: 1968. Burnier’s *Choice of Action* provides information on Sartre’s relation to the French Communists, op. 78-95.

2. The background for this event is found in Burnier’s study and Sartre published a book *L’affaire Henri Martin* (Paris: 1953) to publicize the event.

3. Burnier goes into great detail on the complex and tortured relations between Sartre and Camus and Merleau.
relatively alone in their Montparnasse haunts. 1 Perhaps Alvin Gouldner is right that "the victors are those who live longer and eat at La Coupole" (February 13, 1975 letter to me). Although I do not want to open up old debates, I doubt that Camus and Merleau could have kept up with Sartre in the following decades and believe that History will preserve Sartre as the intellectual giant of his generation who was associated with a philosopher of some talent (Merleau) and a talented writer who became confused when dealing with philosophy and politics (Camus). I may, however, be wrong.

Sartre's perplexities qua political intellectual are expressed in his play The Devil and the Good Lord. The main character Goetz is forced to overcome his illusions and "neutrality" and to plunge into a course of action that may involve violence and may not turn out successful. "There is this war to be fought and I shall have to fight it", Goetz-Sartre declares at the end of the play. But Sartre himself wasn't at all clear how the war was to be fought and what Sartre/an intellectual could do to help fight it. 2 Paradoxically, although Simone de Beauvoir claims that Sartre wanted in this play to "confront the vanity of morality with the efficacy of praxis", 3 only an ambiguous moral imperative to fight the good fight emerges from the play. Hence at this point in his itinerary Sartre's concept of the relation between the intellectual and revolution remains rather abstract and moralistic.

In fact, in his period of closest sympathy with establishment communists, Sartre's intellectual-political commitments took an increasingly moralistic tone. His disappointments in politics and the seemingly solid checkmate of communism by the capitalist "democracies" limited viable political options. Sartre responded by working on a still unpublished philosophical Ethics, promised at the end of Being and Nothingness, and discussed in interviews throughout the 1950's and '60's. 4 Sartre wrote literally thousands of pages on this mammoth project but never reached a point where he felt he could publish it. Interestingly, a brief part of it that was published dealt with revolutionary violence. 5 Sartre offers various explanations of why it was never finished and it is most likely that he couldn't resolve

1 Sartre offers generous tributes to Heian, Camus, and Merleau in Situations, (New York: 1965).
2 The play is discussed in Writings pp. 246-257.
4 Ibid, pp. 222-3, 1930, 251-3, 295, 373, 138, and 119-29; as late as 1969 Sartre claimed he was ready to sit down and get his Ethics ready for publication.
5 Ibid
tensions between his individualistic approach to ethics in his existentialist works and his desire for a social and political ethics and practice that haunted him from the 1950's to the present day. In fact Sartre has continued to work on developing an ethical theory and seems later in the midst of his political activism with the French New Left in the 1970's he continued to try to develop an ethical theory consistent with revolutionary practices.*

Sartre's concept of the intellectual in the 1950's becomes increasingly moralistic. Again and again he talks of the duty (devoir) of the intellectual in quasi-Kantian terms. For instance, he says of his uncompleted novel, "The Last Chance", it "has an almost Kantian starting point (if I may dare to put myself in the shadow of the greatest of the greats)." 1 In 1953 he attended and spoke at the Vienna Conference for Peace which he said was one of the most extraordinary experiences of his life. 2 When the Algerian problem surfaced in France in the 1950's, Sartre's initial stands were rather moralistic. His first published response was that, "the function of the intellectual is to ceaselessly show that the colonial regime is wicked, and that it has become harmful to the French national interest." 3 Over and over in this period he pronounced that "the duty of the intellectual is to denounce injustice wherever it occurs." 4

In this conception the sphere and arena of the intellectual is the word: writing and talking. The function of the intellectual is critical and negative: to describe and denounce. Throughout the 1950's Sartre saw the function of his journal *Les Temps Modernes* as to bear witness, to analyze, expose, and clarify. 5 Vis-à-vis the Algerian war its function was to provide information on such things as French torture in Algeria. 6 In a 1955 interview, Sartre declares he wants to limit himself to writing and thus will keep *Les Temps Modernes* from advocating political action that would bring down government censorship. 7 Thus Sartre seems to separate his activity and concept of

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1 *The Last Chance*, p. 267.
2 *ibid*, p. 274.
3 *ibid*, p. 282.
4 *ibid*, p. 285, 457, passim.
5 *ibid*, p. 282.
6 *ibid*, p. 351.
7 *ibid*, pp. 308 and 298-9.
the intellectual from political action and militancy, as if the intellectual's sword was his pen. We shall see that this is one of the ideas that Sartre had the most trouble in liberating himself from.

Sartre's activity during the 1950's and response to the Algerian war (France's Vietnam) might be contrasted with his friend and collaborator Francis Jeanson. Jeanson worked with Les Temps Modernes for many years and it was his attack on Camus's The Rebel that provoked Sartre's final break with Camus. With the intensification of the Algerian war Jeanson went underground and organized a resistance network of Algerians and their French supporters in France who were to provide material and moral support in the Algerian struggle. In a fascinating account in his Sartre biography, Jeanson tells how Sartre was willing to do anything possible to aid the pro-Algerian underground late in the War, but as we have seen Sartre's concept of the intellectual and his own public activity was limited to the classical function of writing. True sure, Sartre's positions on the Algerian war earned him the enmity of the French political establishment and reactionary bourgeoisie, resulting in the bombing of his apartment and in repeated threats on his life (In the film The Battle of Algiers, the French occupation General asks, "What is Sartre up to now in Paris"). Nonetheless, Sartre seems not to have undertaken or urged any concrete line of action in this context and in fact he didn't see that an intellectual could or should do much more than wield his pen and open his mouth on the right (that is the left) side. This would change after May 1968.

During the same period in the 1950's Sartre almost simultaneously made a clear turn to Marxist philosophy and effected a decisive break with the USSR and French Communist Party. He declared in an interesting and neglected 1956 article, "Le Réformisme et les Fétiches" that "although Marxism has been since the death of bourgeois thought our only culture, since it alone enables us to understand men, works, and events....Marxism in France has come to a halt". Shortly thereafter he develops this position in "Questions de Méthode" where he states that "Marxism

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1 Jeanson gives his side of "L'affaire Camus" in Sartre dans sa vie, pp. 183-8.

2 Ibid., pp. 212-220.

3 Situations VII; Writings p. 323.
is the living philosophy of our time." In an East-West conference in Venice in 1956 that contains a fascinating dialogue between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, Sartre declares that the intellectual’s milieu is that of ideology and the intellectual must situate himself within ideology and vis-a-vis politics.2

Sartre was situating himself philosophically as a Marxist and as a resolute opponent of bourgeois ideology and philosophy. Politically he was situating himself as an ally/fellow traveler of the Communist bloc: pro-Soviet and pro-French CP. However, his political alliance with the leading Communist powers was to be rudely shattered by the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. Sartre didn’t equivocate or hesitate on this issue and immediately denounced the Soviet action: "What the Hungarian people are showing us with their blood is the complete bankruptcy of socialism as imported Russian merchandise."3 The critique of the Soviet Union and Stalinism was developed and intensified in the 1957 polemic "The Ghost of Stalin" where Sartre breaks with the Soviet Union and French CP.4 Sartre never renounced this critique and repeated it after the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, concluding "this imperialist dictatorship had nothing in common with normal relations of socialist countries between themselves".5

Sartre’s break with the Communists forced him to elaborate a new political position. He stated that his hope now rested in "a new kind of Popular Front whose mediating element could be the New Left."6—a New Left that Sartre was one of the first to envisage and that he would enthusiastically support when it finally emerged in the 1960’s. Sartre’s break with the Communist Establishment and search for a not-yet-existent New Left caused a tremendous strain on him told in painful detail in Jeanson’s biography.7 The question of the status and function of the intellectual again surfaced as a burning problem. It was apparently not possible for a genuine

1Writings, p.36. Translated in English as Search for a Method (New York: 1963).

2The exchange between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty is reproduced in Writings, pp.327-

3Ibid, p. 333.


5On a raison de se revoler (Paris: 1974), p. 38. On this issue cf. Sartre’s brilli-

6ent essay, “The Socialism that Came in from the Cold” in Between Marxism and

7Existentialism (cf. cf. id).

8Writings, p. 334. 9Jeanson, op. 206-212.
intellectual to merge into a Party like the French CP or to support a communist
country like the Soviet Union. Cut off from daily politics, the communist powers,
the masses who supported the party, Sartre found the position of the left intellectual—
his position—increasingly problematical. This situation is brilliantly expressed in
his preface to André Gorz's The Traitor where Sartre in effect states that the intellec-
tual must accept his intelligence and live out its drama.¹ In the play The Condemnation
of Altona, Sartre dealt with the drama of a person closed in upon himself and his
immediate surroundings, cut off from history, yet setting himself up as a judge of
history. The French title Les Sequestrés expressed Sartre's own experience of being
sequestered in the contradictions of the intellectual and reflect his feeling of
solitude, guilt, and failure.²

Sartre underwent at this time an overpowering conclusion to clarify his relation
to Marxism and to provide a philosophical foundation for Marxism that he felt was
lacking in The Critique of Dialectical Reason—Sartre's most ponderous and problematical
work.³ Sartre wishes at once in this monumental treatise to develop a philosophi-
methodology, a structural anthropology, a social ontology, and a theory of history.
He wishes to liberate Marxism from its dogmatic orthodoxy and to infuse it with
new life with some of his former existentialist notions and a new series of
categories and analyses. He is also concerned to develop a metaphysics of
revolution and theory of revolutionary violence. But the work is far too abstrac-
turgid, and confusing with its melange of his former existentialist concepts,
classical Marxist concepts often given a new twist and flavor, and his attempt to
develop a new philosophical perspective. Hence the Critique remains, for the
most part, unappreciated and unassimilated: a challenge and question mark lying
at the heart of Sartre's project. Jeanson characterizes the Critique as "the most
profound reflection that our century has yet produced up until now on the relation
to the other in so far as it it the tissue of the history of men".⁴ Sartre
continues to ascribe a high importance to this work and we shall later note the
relevance its ideas took on after the events of May 1968.

¹Situations IV and Writings p.3478.
²Cf. Jeanson’s study of Sartre’s drama in Sartre par lui-même (Paris: 1967) and in Magazine Littéraire 59.
³For the story of the pressures under which Sartre wrote the Critique cf. Jeanson's biography pp. 135ff.
In the 1960's Sartre emerges from his dilemmas and sufferings with a blaze of new energy and storm of political involvement. His work increasingly focuses on a precise object of criticism: bourgeois society and its contradictions and imperialist crimes. Moreover, the emerges a new commitment to socialist society and socialist revolution. He visits Cuba and enthusiastically supports Castro and the Cuban Revolution, becomes a supporter of China, and an unflinching advocate of the Indochinese and other third world revolutions. He sides with all ultra-leftist forces in the capitalist countries and greets the advent of the New Left with total support. Sartre assumed many important political responsibilities at the time, like his participation in the Bertrand Russell War Crimes Tribunal and impassioned opposition to America's imperialist policy in Vietnam. He stated that "The true labor of the committed writer...is to show, demonstrate, demystify, and dissolve myths and fetishes in a little bath of critical acid", and his own critical acid becomes more corrosive and burning than ever. ¹

In his autobiography The Words, 1963, Sartre explains how a concept of literature as salvation and tendency rooted in childhood to take refuge from the world in his imagination kept him from politics and action. He tries to see how this writer's fetish and fetishistic concept of the writer was rooted in his childhood experiences and conditioning by bourgeois ideology and the environment. His refusal of the Nobel Prize in 1964 is best interpreted as a refusal of the concept of the writer as a mythic hero and cultural deity. He hasn't yet formulated his rejection of the classical intellectual, nor has he formulated an alternative concept but his uneasiness with his condition qua writer-intellectual and contesting it was highlighted in a sensational way in his refusal of the most prestigious honor in the world of literature.

Much of the old Sartrian pessimism surfaced at times in the 1960's. Upon occasion Sartre would remark that the best the writer can do is "to keep the worst from happening".² He increasingly saw the intellectual and his own activity as a basically scandalous one whose function was awaken and provoke a complacent and apathetic public: "What I want to do is to give people a bad conscience".³ He

¹ Writings p. 375 For accounts of his 1960 political activities cf. also pp. 395-405, 416-426, 484-492, and 497-550.
² ibid pp. 387 and 401.
³ ibid. p. 457.
happily saw himself as a traitor to both his class and his generation and his often identified the intellectual with the traitor, the actor, the saint and martyr. At this time, Sartre became increasingly aware of and concerned with the tensions and contradictions of that problematical being that he was—the intellectual. The result was a brilliant reflection on the position of the intellectuals in bourgeois society and a plea for intellectuals to assume their social and political responsibilities—that is, to become genuine intellectuals.

II. SARTRE'S PLEA FOR INTELLECTUALS

In 1966 Sartre summed up his long reflections on the concept of the committed intellectual in a series of lectures delivered in Japan and published as "A Plea for Intellectuals". Sartre begins by posing the question: What is an intellectual? He notes that intellectuals move between serving a conservative and a critical function. On one hand, intellectuals have traditionally been assigned the task of preserving and transmitting culture—thus often legitimating and fortifying the dominant ideologies. In present day society intellectuals are increasingly "technicians of practical knowledge who serve the technocratic function of devising efficient means to secure society's ends. In this sense, intellectuals serve an instrumental role of providing means, ideas, technologies, etc. that will strengthen and streamline the established society. But although intellectuals serve these crucial social functions they are often looked upon with distrust by the authorities. Intellectuals are often taken to be critical and negative types who ceaselessly make things difficult for the authorities by spreading the seeds of criticism, dissent, possibly subversion. Thus the intellectual is reproached as "someone who meddles in what is not his business and claims to question both received truths and the accepted behavior inspired by them" (230).

The substantive noun "intellectual" in its quasi-pejorative sense derives from the Dreyfus affair. On June 14, 1898 the "manifeste des intellectuels" was published in l'Aurore and the term was henceforth given a critical, negative connotation in France and was associated with the Left. The dreyfusards who challenged the Writings, p. 465; cf. in this context his play Kean and study of Jean Genet, Saint Genet: Martyr and Actor (Paris: 1959); translated New York: 1969.

Situation VIII; translated in Between Existentialism and Marxism (op. cit); page numbers of this edition will be given in parentheses.
military tribune's accusations against Dreyfus and insisted on his innocence were said by the anti-Dreyfusards to be meddling and interfering with "a domain that was outside their competence" (239). Sartre sees a certain irony in the charge that intellectuals "mislead the people", since once the intellectuals desert from cultural conservatism and serving the system, they are intrinsically weak in that they are putting themselves outside of, against, the system without a power basis, without property or wealth, and without, in most cases, popular support. The social-political powerlessness of the critical intellectual accounts, Sartre suggests, for the intellectual's traditional moralism and idealism (229).

Sartre brilliantly describes the ascendency of the intellectuals in the clerical hierarchy in the middle ages and the rise of the bourgeois intelligentsia with the triumph of capitalism and the bourgeoisie (232-7). Every society needs an ideology and spawns intellectuals who will produce, defend, and fortify that ideology. The division of labor in modern society creates new functions and roles for the intelligentsia and gives rise to "specialists of practical knowledge" (237). The ends of the society are determined by the ruling class and are realized by the working class; the study of means to realize the ends is the job of a "tertiary sector" who generally are not manual laborers or the ruling authorities. Within this group intellectuals arise. Intellectuals today have a subordinate and ambiguous status in the social hierarchy. The ruling class defines society's priorities, allocating so much money and resources for education, law, engineers, doctors, etc. and thus designates the number of jobs and sort of position that will be distributed to the intellectuals. Thus both the intellectual's position and salary are dependent on the ruling class. In a capitalist society, "The ruling class determines the number of technicians of practical knowledge in accordance with the dictates of profit, which is its supreme end" (23)). Today, for instance, the needs of the advertising industry require growing numbers of applied psychologists, copy-writers, statisticians, computer operators, etc. The increased specialization and technological imperatives of late capitalism require increased numbers of technicians, scientists, etc. and less philosophers, historians, and workers in the humanities. The intellectuals, like everyone and everything else, are thus subject to the laws of capitalist accumulation, although
they are often the last to see this, thinking they operate in a realm above economics and material interests. Intellectuals are thus often the dupes of capital when they are not actually serving it by choice.

Intellectuals are formed and educated by a selective and competitive system that tries to get them to accept its values and ideologies so that they in turn will propagate them. They are taught to be specialists in research and custodians of tradition. They are hence entrusted with the role of transmitting traditional values and attacking subversive ones: "At this level they are agents of an ideological particularization, which is sometimes openly admitted (the aggressive nationalism of the Nazi theoreticians) and sometimes concealed (liberal humanism with its false universality)" (238). At this point a contradiction emerges. Intellectuals are in theory technicians of practical knowledge who develop techniques that can be applied by all for the good of all; i.e., medicine, law, physics, philosophy, art, etc. are to serve mankind: they are universal goods and values. But in a class society, knowledge and techniques are not used for the good of all. Only wealthy people in a certain class can afford a certain sort of medical care, can afford the best lawyers, can take advantage of travel possibilities, etc. Only those with a certain level of education can read philosophy and appreciate modern art; only those with a certain amount of leisure can enjoy culture. Thus certain groups and individuals monopolize the knowledge and techniques of the intellectual: they use the intellectual's production to increase and enhance ruling class domination and privileges. Thus a contradiction emerges between the universality of intellectual labor (the search for universal truth and the good of all) and the particularity of the interests served. The intellectual who becomes aware of this contradiction sees himself/herself as a tool of the ruling class (and indirectly oppressor of the working class). Divorced from the working classes, serving the ruling classes, the intellectual "is a middle man, a middling man, a middle class man. The general ends toward which his activities lead are not his ends" (239). The intellectual thus is haunted by a series of contradictions that society and its education thrust upon them. Let us more closely examine these contradictions.

The intellectual receives a humanist education which asserts all men are equal and that freedom, justice, and human rights are the province of all mankind. But the intellectual is living proof that all men are not equal. They are superior to the
working class and possesses a monopoly of knowledge which gives them a relatively privileged status. Yet they are inferior to the ruling class whose monopoly of wealth and power reduce the intellectuals to instrumental functions. The intellectual is thus in a good position to see the real inequalities of the society, as well as the contradictions a class society thrusts upon its pawns and servants. In this way, the intellectual suffers a contradiction between a humanist-equalitarian ideology and the inhumanism of an unequalitarian society.

Moreover, the intellectual is also a universalist by profession and training. Their science and knowledge is universal in its form and is geared, in theory, toward human universal/ends. Yet the intellectual often discovers that their knowledge and techniques are surreptitiously particularist: subservient to the ends of the state, ruling class, corporations, etc. They may see that their ideas and research are used by the government, corporations, military, etc. for purposes that are foreign to their humanist ends and values: "At that moment in their very research, they discover alienation: they become aware that they are the instruments of ends which remain foreign to them and which they are forbidden to question" (240). Take, for example, the medical researcher who discovers a cure for the agonies of kidney stones and finds it cannot be marketed because of special medical-pharmaceutical interests which oppose it and block its use. Or the researcher in atomic physics who discovers his research is used to commit genocide in Vietnam. Or the psychologist whose research in human motivation is used by advertisers or politicians to manipulate the public. Or the sociologist whose study is used as a means of social control. The intellectual is thus forced to suffer the contradiction between their humanist values and the anti-human ends of the society.

A further contradiction results from the fact that intellectuals are by training independent beings who put a high value on freedom, autonomy, unfettered research and the search for truth—qualities necessary for their education and work. But in an late capitalist society intellectuals are increasingly dependent on the state and private enterprise for their livelihood in a society controlled by profit, scarcity, and competition. Thus the contradiction develops between the free, independent spirit of research which is necessary for intellectual and social progress and their material dependence and control by the ruling powers.
Wrenched by all these contradictions and the alienation and oppression which they contain, the intellectual often becomes restive, critical, even rebellious. For the authorities, this unstable being, the intellectual, is therefore suspect (213). The authorities must up to a point humor their intellectuals who serve an indispensable social function, but they must keep a close watch on them and try to control their research. They try to impose an ideology of universality, liberty, affluence, progress, etc. on their intellectuals to give them the impression their work is serving universal and beneficent ends. They try also to blind their intellectuals to class-conflict, poverty, oppression, and the inequalities which their society perpetuates (211). If the intellectuals see through this mystification, they are subject to discipline, punishment, loss of salary and job, and perhaps worse. "Thus the researcher is simultaneously indispensable and yet suspect in the eyes of the dominant class. He cannot fail to experience and interiorize this suspicion, and to become suspect from the outset in his own eyes" (214).

The intellectuals--these "men-in-contradiction"--can respond to their contradictory situation in two ways. They can conform, submit to the authorities, accept the dominant ideology; they can practice self-censorship, adapt, become apolitical--in a word, they can capitulate: "In this case, his rulers typically say with satisfaction of a man, 'he is no intellectual!'" (213). However, if the technician of practical knowledge becomes aware of the contradictions between the particularism of the dominant ideology and the interests it serves contrasted with his humanist ideology and its universal ends, if he refuses to be an agent of the ruling class, if he finds the ends and rulers he serves intolerable, if he becomes aware of his lack of real independence, then "the agent of practical knowledge becomes a monster, that is to say an intellectual: someone who attends to what concerns him (in exteriority--the principles which guide the conduct of his life; and in interiority--his lived experience in society) and whom others refer to a man who interferes in what does not concern him" (214).

Thus every "technician of knowledge is a potential intellectual" (214), but not every technician will become an intellectual. The act of assuming one's
contradictions and trying to resolve them—becoming a genuine intellectual—requires conversion: one must choose to oppose the ruling class and its ideology if it is in contradiction to human ends; one must choose to be a critical spirit, to oppose, to refuse, to militate. Whether the technician of practical knowledge will or will not become a genuine intellectual depends on the state of society and their own personal history. Society can try to buy off potential intellectuals through high-paying jobs or highly competitive positions which render their recipients grateful and compliant. Society can attempt to manage its and the intellectual's contradictions so that they don't become explosive. They can try to keep their intellectuals in line through repression or scare tactics. Perhaps, however, the society cannot offer its technicians of practical knowledge enough jobs, enough security, high enough wages, enough power and prestige. Perhaps the contradictions will be so blatant that they cannot be concealed. Perhaps a wave of social unrest and rebellion will radicalize the students and a segment of the intellectual sphere. In short, perhaps society will—against its aims and interests—produce genuine intellectuals. Hence society produces its intellectuals and probably gets what it deserves (246).

Sartre is defining here the intellectual as a being who sees into its own contradictions and those of its society, who has interiorized these contradictions, and who seeks to resolve them. This means the genuine intellectual at least in a class-conscious society will be oppositional, critical, negative. The intellectual opposes the ruling ideology in the spirit of the search for theoretical and practical truth; they oppose society's inhumanities, inequalities, and unfreedom in the name of humanity, equality, and freedom. They reveal the untruth of the dominant ideology in the name of truth, which means for Sartre that they unmask, "the fundamental contradictions of the society: that is to say, the struggle between classes and within the dominant class itself; the organic conflict between the truth the latter needs for its own purposes and the myths, values, and traditions with which it seeks to infect other classes in order to ensure its hegemony" (246).
"a monstrous product of a monstrous society" (247) who embodies many of society's contradictions.

Sartre's intellectual is also a solitary monster. In his view the intellectual is an outsider supported by no class or social group. He receives no mandate from anyone and is everywhere suspect and disquieting. The intellectual is thus "the most disarmed of men" (247). Their only power is that they are in a privileged position to understand their and society's contradictions:

the envelopment of truth by myth have made him essentially an investigator. He investigates himself first of all in order to transform the contradictory being assigned to him into a harmonious totality. But this cannot be his only object, since to find his inner secret and resolve his organic contradiction, he must proceed to apply the rigorous methods he uses as a specialist technician of practical knowledge to the society of which he is a product—to its ideology, its structures, its emotions and its praxis...

The intellectual will both seek to understand himself within society, in so far as he is a product of society, and at the same time to study the total society which produces, at a certain point in time, intellectuals like himself. The result is a perpetual reversal of perspectives: the self is referred to the world and the world is referred to the self (217-8).

The genuine intellectual is thus by nature a dialectician and demystifier.

They see the relation between their own contradictions and problems and those of their society; they see through the ideology and illusions which mask these contradictions. Through "a rigorous investigation of the 'incomparable monster' that is his self" he discerns that his contradictions and the possibility of developing a unified, non-alienated self requires a different sort of society (249). In Sartre's terms, the intellectual's quest for knowledge and the universal discloses that universality and humanity does not exist, that a free, equalitarian society and non-alienated human being remain to be achieved, that a fully human being and a human society remain a task to be performed (250).

The genuine intellectual thus chooses to overcome contradictions and alienations to engender a more human state of affairs. In Sartre's terms, the intellectual strives "to realize the practical subject and to discover the principles of a society capable of engendering and sustaining such a subject" (250). The intellectual thus aims at suppressing all alienations and oppressions in both external social prohibitions dictated by the class structure and all internal inhibitions and self-censorship dictated by the ruling authorities. This undertaking requires that
the intellectual ceaselessly battle against falling into the trap of ideology, which means ceaselessly fighting against the ruling ideas of their own class. Overcoming the class ideology that has deeply conditioned him requires that the intellectual modify both sensibility and consciousness, both needs and ideas. Further, one must be ready to battle the genuine intellectual's most immediate enemy "the false intellectual" or what Nizzan calls "the watch dog" (252). In Sartre's view this battle against the false intellectual, who is a defender of the established ideology and society though he sometimes appears to be a "critic", radicalizes the authentic intellectual. For discussion and critique of the false intellectual's reformism or defense of the status quo discloses the spuriousness of a reformism that really serves the system and the dominant class and the hypocrisy or illusions of the pseudo-intellectual who is seen to be but a pawn or dupe of the system.

Above all, Sartre insists, the genuine intellectual must see that "his contestation is merely a negative moment of a process which he is incapable of undertaking alone, a praxis which can only be brought to fruition by the totality of the oppressed and exploited classes, and whose positive meaning—even if he can only glimpse it—is the advent in a distant future of a society of free men" (251). The intellectual must thus leave the realm of ideas and see that social change can only come through mass action and that they themselves must work on the level of action and events (and not merely ideas). The ideology they are battling is incarnated in the form of particular events, as when imperialism takes the form of the bombing of Hanoi, and must be opposed on the level of action (demonstrations, mobilizing popular opposition to the war, acts of civil disobedience as protest, etc).

In order to engage in efficacious social action the intellectuals must ally themselves with the masses who most directly suffer from society's contradictions and negativities, which the intellectual is coming to understand and choosing to combat. To understand oppression and how it can be overcome, the intellectual must "adopt the point of view of society's most underprivileged members" (255). The underprivileged embody the oppression and alienation of the society and their
struggles against alienated particularity (class domination) makes them the agents of a future universality (a classless society). "The only way the intellectual can really distance himself from the official ideology decreed from above is by placing himself alongside those whose very existence contradicts it" (256). Understanding the deprivations and sufferings of the vast majority of the people of the world gives the intellectuals insights into the brutality and inhumanity that pervades everyday life and provides "the one and only radical perspective" on society.

This objective perspective gives rise to a popular mode of thought, which spontaneously views society from its foundations upwards, starting with the lowest level of the social hierarchy that is most susceptible to radicalization. This popular vision captures the dominant classes and their allies as in a tilt shot angled from below, in which they appear not as cultural elites but as enormous statues whose pedestals press down with all their weight on the classes which reproduce the life of the society. Here there is no mutual recognition, courtesy or non-violence (as between bourgeois who look into each other's eyes at the same height), but a panorama of violence endured, labor alienated and elementary needs denied. If the intellectual can adopt this simple and radical perspective, he would see himself as he really is, from below—rejecting his class and yet doubly conditioned by it (born into it as a psycho-social background and reinserted into it as a technician of knowledge), weighing on the popular classes as a charge on the surplus-value they produce. He would then clearly perceive the ambiguity of his position and, if he applied the rigorous methods of the dialectic to these fundamental truths, he would learn in and through the popular classes the true nature of bourgeois society. He would abandon what few reformist illusions he has left, and would become a revolutionary. He would understand that the masses must imperatively break the idols that crush them. His new task would then be to combat the perpetual reemergence within the people of ideologies which paralyse them. (256-7).

If intellectuals can adopt this radical perspective they can see into the true nature of society, and its brutalizing effects on the oppressed classes.

But if the intellectual chooses to ally himself/herself with the suffering masses and engage in struggles to change society, then new contradictions arise. Since by virtue of its class background and specialized training the intellectual is not "organic" to the working class, the intellectual will always, and Sartre says "justifiably", encounter distrust from the people they wish to serve. Sartre is denying, in effect, the possibility of an intellectual being what Gramsci calls "an organic intellectual of the proletariat". If petty-bourgeois intellectuals are led by their own contradictions to align themselves with the working class, they will serve it at their risk and peril; they may act as theorists but never
as organic intellectuals of the proletariat, and this contradiction, no matter how well it may be understood, will never be resolved. Thus our axiom is confirmed that intellectuals cannot receive a mandate from anyone" (259).

Nonetheless, Sartre believes that intellectuals can serve the people if they become aware of their own and society's contradictions and genuinely want to put their knowledge in the service of radical social change. The intellectual who becomes conscious of his situated position can help the working class to become aware of their situated position (as exploited, alienated, oppressed by class domination, etc.). Here Sartre seems to come close to Lenin's position that the intellectuals are to bring class-consciousness to the proletariat from outside (cf. What is to be done?). Sartre, however, is not, like Lenin, claiming that the intellectual's knowledge entitles them to leadership positions, nor is he claiming that intellectuals are the revolutionary vanguard. Rather, intellectuals are to serve the people and to contribute their specialized knowledge and techniques to the revolutionary process. Further, Sartre argues that if the intellectuals want to serve the people and enter their struggles, they must follow two maxims: 1) practice "perpetual self-criticism": To avoid reproducing bourgeois ideology, the radical intellectual must remain aware of their class origins and that they will be constantly tempted to renourish the thoughts of their class. Hence, "the intellectual must forever struggle against the ideology which forever rises anew within him, perpetually recreated in novel forms by his original situation and formation" (260). Perhaps even more important 2) the intellectual must enter into "A concrete and unconditioned alignment with the action of the underprivileged classes" (261). Not only must the intellectual survey the field of the possible and offer a theory and ideas for practice, but the intellectual must enter into action with the people.

The role of the intellectual is thus not to judge an action before it has begun, nor to urge that it be undertaken, nor to supervise its development. On the contrary, it is to join it in mid-course in its elemental forms (a wild-cat strike, or a stoppage that has already been canalized by a trade union), to integrate himself in it, participate in it physically, allow himself to be captured and borne along by it and only then, to the extent that he judges it necessary, to decipher its nature and illuminate its meaning and possibilities (261).
Here Sartre comes close to abolishing the classical intellectual who was primarily a man of theory and words whose practice existed in the realm of ideas. At this point Sartre has reached the limits and perhaps gone beyond the concept of the classical intellectual. The militant intellectual can Sartre suggests 1) help the popular classes struggle against a rebirth of ideology in their midst by exercising their critical function; 2) help develop a critical consciousness and culture (and thus raise the level of culture); 3) help form technicians of practical knowledge who will be organic intellectuals of the working class; 4) point out and clarify the ends of the struggle; 5) radicalize the ends, and 6) examine the means used (262-3).

Entering into the revolutionary process in this fashion, Sartre suggests, creates new contradictions and dilemmas for the revolutionary intellectual. For although they immerse themselves in a common practice with the oppressed people, they are nonetheless different and can never be completely assimilated or integrated. But this very distance from the consciousness and conditions of the oppressed classes puts the intellectual in a better position to criticize what is happening from a critical distance and to challenge, question, contest. Here, however, a new contradiction arises: the contradiction between the discipline needed for an efficacious organization and practice, and the criticism and questioning which is the intellectual's special service to the people. But this contradiction, says Sartre, "is the natural element of the combatant intellectual, which he will live, in tension, with more or less success" (263). Hence the intellectual must at once be loyal and committed to the revolutionary movements and goals and critical of the practice and actions which are to attain these goals. A critical loyalty thus becomes the mark of the militant intellectual engaged in revolutionary struggles.

Sartre concludes that contradiction, dissension, discord, and tension are the lot of that unhappy consciousness condemned to be an intellectual. No matter, Sartre says, "thought progresses by contradictions" (263). Moreover, the intellectual's contradictions are everybody's contradictions for our ends escape all of us: our functions, activities, roles are dictated to us from above and imposed upon us by the system and its agents. Although we may have our own
subjective ends, values, or objectives, the logic of the system absorbs them, transforms them, or negates them in its own interests. Moreover, all the people are torn between objective thought and ideology, between true and false consciousness: all of us see social reality and mystify it, use theory and fall prey to myths. The intellectual works on these problems and makes its career their clarification and perhaps resolution. "The intellectual because of his own contradictions is drawn to make this effort for himself and consequently for everyone—and it is this that becomes his function" (265). Although the intellectual is suspected by all and trusted by no one, "he makes an effort to achieve consciousness for all" (265). Moreover, "through the intellectual's struggle against his own contradictions inside him and outside him, a historical society gains a perspective...on itself" (266). The intellectual can put in question the society and its ends from its own critical and global point of view. In judging and criticizing society, the intellectual preserves and defends certain historical values and ideals and thus becomes "a guardian of fundamental ends (the emancipation, universalization, and hence humanization of man)" (266). Further, Sartre claims, the intellectual "tends to be a guardian of democracy" (267): committed to equality, freedom, justice and human rights, the intellectual should attack inequality, injustice, and oppression wherever it appears. Thus "as long as he can write and speak, the intellectual must defend the popular classes against the hegemony of the dominant class and against the opportunism of popular apparatuses" (266).

Let us note in conclusion that the intellectual who Sartre is pleading for is a very problematic being. On one hand, the genuine intellectual for Sartre is a witness, defender of the truth, crusader, and champion of the people and oppressed. But on the other hand, the intellectual is a misfit, an outsider and thoroughly contradictory being. Sartre manages at once to formulate what is perhaps the most extravagant evaluation of the capacity of the intellectual to serve the revolution in recent times and to ruthlessly ferret out the intellectual's vulnerabilities and weaknesses. He seems to make the most rigorous and heroic demands on the intellectual conceivable, and yet condemns the intellectual to ultimate powerlessness and isolation. Particularly problematic and interesting are the claims that
Sartre makes in assigning the intellectual revolutionary tasks. To be a genuine intellectual involves for Sartre defending truth and universality and committing oneself to freedom, equality, justice, and the liberation of humanity. The demand for universality and human liberation places the intellectual on the side of society’s least favored and most oppressed people whose struggles aim at the realization of the values the genuine intellectual cherishes. The genuine intellectual thus becomes a revolutionary: this is the crux of Sartre’s argument. Sartre, we have seen, talks about the militant intellectual who he assigns many valuable roles and functions in the revolutionary process. But we must raise the following questions: can the revolutionary intellectual really fulfill these functions qua intellectual? can they qua intellectuals serve the people? can an intellectual become a revolutionary and remain an intellectual? Or is there a contradiction between intellectuals as classically conceived and as envisaged by Sartre—and revolution? If so, how can the revolutionary intellectual overcome these contradictions? To try to answer these questions, let us examine again the question of the intellectuals and revolution. We shall first note some classic Marxist positions on the intellectual vis-a-vis revolution and shall then examine Sartre’s concept of the new revolutionary intellectual.

III. THE NEW REVOLUTIONARY INTELLECTUAL

There is a certain ambiguity in the Marxist camp vis-a-vis intellectuals. On the one hand, the great icons of the socialist pantheon were intellectuals: Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Mao, Ho, Fidel, etc. all came from bourgeois homes, were well educated, wrote copious books and speeches, and served as educators of the people as well as revolutionary leaders. The blending of theory and practice has been the distinctive feature of Marxist revolutionary heroes and has been the goal of the Marxist revolutionary movement from the beginning. Nonetheless, Marxist parties and revolutions have been generally hostile to intellectuals. Kautsky, for instance, in a well-known passage subsequently taken up by Lenin, argues that intellectuals are a social strata antagonistic to the proletariat in their

Lenin agreed and added, "no one would dare to deny that intellectuals as a particular group can be generally characterized in contemporary capitalist societies by exactly their individualism and inactivity for organization... It is this fact, among other things, which distinguishes disadvantageously this social group from the proletariat; this also explains the flabbiness and instability of the intellectual person which the proletariat so often resents. And this particularity of intellectuals is intimately linked to the ordinary conditions of their life, to their conditions of gain which approaches the relations of the conditions of existence of the petty-bourgeoisie (individual work or in small groups, etc.)."\footnote{Lenin, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward" in Selected Works, in three volumes, Vol. I, pp. 366-7. Earlier Lenin, we recall, assigned revolutionary intellectuals a vanguard position in What is to be done? It would be interesting to trace Lenin’s positions on the intellectuals and revolution.} Lenin thus assigns a very suspicious and hostile attitude toward those vacillating refugees from the petty-bourgeoisie who see themselves as, or are seen as, intellectuals.

Gramsci, who before Sartre, had carried out the most penetrating inquiries into the relation between intellectuals and revolution saw intellectuals as a part of the bourgeoisie produced by capitalism and industrialism who took on the function of producing and defending bourgeois ideology. Intellectuals were thus seen as "functionaries of the superstructure" whose social function was to ensure/strengthen bourgeois hegemony through control of consciousness, ideas, ideology. Bourgeois intellectuals were just ideologues in this view: mystifiers, producers of false consciousness who corrupted and misled the proletariat from seeing into the true conditions of their life and the necessity for socialist revolution. Bourgeois intellectuals were thus seen as lackeys of the ruling class, agents of ideological oppression, whereas of the spirit subsidized by capitalist cliques. Moreover, intellectuals who sold their wares at a high or low price to a mystified and often select clientele corrupted those who entered into intercourse with these prostituted ideologues. Or to use another metaphor to illustrate Gramsci’s
conception, bourgeois intellectuals play the same role in the realm of ideas that the police play in social life; hence, Nizan's concept of the watch-dog intellectual who visciously protects the bourgeoisie's interests, using the same cunning, tactics, and sometimes violence that the police use in protecting bourgeois property interests. Moreover, the intellectuals of the dominant class are the dominant intellectuals: supported, financed, rewarded by the state and its functionaries, bourgeois intellectuals are carefully screened, scrutinized, and weeded out so that the safe and housebroken ideologues are given the key strategic intellectual posts and even sometimes given access to power (vide Rostow, Mownihan, Kissinger, Galbraith, etc.).

Gramsci wished to oppose to the ideological protectors of bourgeois hegemony, organic intellectuals of the proletariat who would develop a working class philosophy that could combat the bourgeoisie's ideology in the life-and-death struggle for ideological supremacy in the class struggle. Gramsci saw the importance of ideological struggle (as did all Marxist intellectuals like Marx, Lenin, Mao, etc.) and urged the proletariat to develop organic intellectuals who could provide ideological troopers to battle the bourgeoisie. But who are these "organic intellectuals of the proletariat"? How can those middle-class petty-bourgeois types who are leftist intellectuals assimilate themselves to the proletariat and be "organic" to the thoughts, aspirations, hopes of this oppressed class? How can a mystified, intellectually impoverished, under-educated proletariat develop intellectuals capable of battling and defeating their bourgeois enemies on the ideological terrain? The status of the revolutionary intellectual thus remains problematical in Gramsci's conception despite his undisputed contributions to the problem of the intellectual. However, I fear that Sartre's critique of the "organic intellectual" that we have noted is compelling. Can there, then, by "revolutionary intellectuals" or is this concept a contradiction in terms?
Marx and Engels thought that under certain conditions intellectuals would become genuine revolutionaries. In a well-known passage in The Communist Manifesto, they wrote: "At the moment when the class struggle approaches the decisive hour, the process of the decomposition of the dominant class and all of the old society, takes on a character so violent and so harsh that a small faction of the dominant class detaches itself from this class and rallies to the side of the revolutionary class, to the class which carries in itself the future. Just as formerly part of the nobility passed to the bourgeoisie, in our days, a part of the bourgeoisie passes to the proletariat and, notably, this part of the bourgeois ideologues are raised to the theoretical intelligence of the ensemble of the historical movement". But this passage does not explain exactly why intellectuals choose to rally to the cause of the proletariat, and what their role is once they get there. In my view, Sartre in "A Plea for Intellectuals" offers the most interesting analysis of how the intellectuals' very profession and contradictions lead them to the side of the oppressed. Moreover, within the framework of the classical concept of the intellectual, Sartre goes about as far as one can in ascribing the intellectual tasks and significance in the revolution.

In a 1968 article "Intellectuals and Revolution", Sartre makes one final effort to see how the classical intellectual can become a revolutionary before, under the pressure of May 1968, radically questioning the very concept of the classical intellectual. Sartre repeats the classical notion that "The intellectual's main job in the developed countries of the West is to do the job of critical analysis". The intellectual, says Sartre, should set forth principles like uniting the left around a common program, rather than proposing the program itself. They should take the most radical stand on every question and at once develop a radical critique of the present society and present radical demands to the given society. Intellectual radicalism, however, runs the risk of being "leftism": "the immediate spontaneous demand for instantaneous realization". This ultra-leftist temptation must be checked by (1) "the constant evaluation of the field of possibilities".

1 Ibid., p.
2 Ibid., p.
3 Ibid., p.
and (2) discipline and self-criticism. For the last time in this conception, Sartre conceives of the intellectual's function in the revolution in terms of the function of the genuine classical intellectual whose role is to criticize, set out principles, analyze, etc—operating in the realm of theory and words.

Sartre first expounds his concept of the new revolutionary intellectual in an interview "A Friend of the People" published in 1970.\(^1\) Whereas the classical intellectual perpetually contests society, the new intellectual contests himself and his status as intellectual. Sartre notes how May 1968 forced him to put himself and his concept of the intellectual in question; after many months of reflective and militant political practice he came to formulate a concept of the new revolutionary intellectual. The revolutionary intellectual, Sartre claims, comes to see that the very form of the classical intellectual's knowledge is elitist and a source of class privilege. The classical intellectual thus becomes the guardian of a particularist culture inaccessible to the masses. The proof of this, Sartre claims, can be seen by reflecting on the elitism of the intellectual's language: specialized, jargonized, accessible only to those initiated into the rites of its esoteric mysteries and cabalistic formulas. To overcome this elitist particularism, re-education of the intellectuals is needed. This means that the intellectual "must first of all suppress himself as an intellectual... (and) must put his techniques at the service of the masses".\(^2\). Doing collective work in mixed cells with workers, testing one's ideas in practice, learning the humble art of self-criticism, polishing and analyzing one's ideas and those of one's comrades, can help the intellectual to overcome the particularism of his culture and training and can help him to genuinely enter into the life and struggles of the people.

As an example of the sort of thing Sartre had in mind, I might note his practice with some leftist French groups and newspapers. Sartre worked for a couple of years with *La Cause du Peuple* and *J'accuse*, participating in all facets of the collective work of the journal from serving as publisher to hawking the newspapers in the streets.\(^2\) In 1973 Sartre helped found *Liberation*, the first

\(^{\text{Published in Between Marxism and Existentialism (op. cit.).}}\)

\(^{\text{2For a detailed information on Sartre's political activities with French leftist groups in the 1970's cf. Writings pp. 551-568.}}\)
independent leftist daily newspaper. Now in 1975 Sartre is preparing a series of television programs with his leftist friends to present a Marxist interpretation of the last 75 years of history (spanning Sartre's life) and to urge that today's problems can only be solved through constructing a new type of socialist society: "Our plan is to show that the world has a future only if we head toward a humanitarian, decentralized, socialist, collectivist society". As early as 1947 Sartre conceived of using the media as a political tool for spreading leftist ideas. A propos of a radio series he was then planning with the staff of Les Temps Modernes (which after three programs was cancelled by the government), Sartre wrote, "committed writers must get into these relay station arts, the movies and the radio". Since television is now the most powerful of the media, the new revolutionary intellectual should learn how to use this media for political purposes.

One of the most direct statements of Sartre's concept of the new revolutionary intellectual that gives some idea of the changes Sartre was going through is found in an interview with John Gerassi published in The New York Times Magazine, Oct. 17, 1971. Sartre urges that the intellectual should write with the masses and through them and deal with problems that are not his own. Intellectuals must become aware that they owe their living and their knowledge to the masses of toiling people and should choose to serve the people to repay their debt. This involves putting one's skills at the disposal of the people and demystifying language, creating "a language that explains the necessary political realities in a way that everyone can understand" (116). Most important, the new revolutionary intellectual must participate in mass actions and struggle with and alongside of the people. "In my view, the intellectual who does all his fighting from an office is counterrevolutionary today—no matter what he writes," Sartre argues, and then urges American intellectuals to take a more active role in struggling against the Vietnam war, in defending political prisoners, the Black Panthers, etc. (116). Further,

Interview with John Gerassi in Oui, May 1975, pp. 69-70.

2 Writings p, 177. For a description of the content of Les Temps Modernes radio series cf. pp. 177-180.

"The intellectual who does not question body as well as his mind on the line against the system is fundamentally supporting the system and should be judged accordingly" (p. 118). The intellectual should see, Sartre suggests, "that there are only two types of people: the innocent or the guilty, or as your Black Panthers have also said: 'If we're not part of the solution, we're part of the problem" (p. 118).

Perhaps the best and most detailed statement on Sartre's current political position and his concept of the new revolutionary intellectual is his 1974 book *On a raison de se reובלter*. In this book, Sartre and two of his New Left comrades Pierre Victor, a former leader of the Maoist movement and Phillipe Gavi, a young journalist-writer, discuss new concepts of socialism and revolution, and critique Old Left positions. Their conception of the new revolutionary with new goals, strategy, and organization marks a radical break with orthodox communist ideas and formulates the concept of the new revolutionary intellectual Sartre has been concerned to develop. The new intellectuals will not get their picture of the world from books, from theories, but from practice, from their involvement in social problems and struggles and the activity of social change. The new intellectual will not only write and lecture but will engage in group discussion and militant action. They will not merely write and speak about books and abstract ideas but will be dealing with people and their problems; they will thus be concerned with forms of social oppression and actions to abolish them. Their politics will be a democratic politics of discussion and communication with the people involved in political action and social struggles. The new revolutionaries will immerse themselves in the people's problems and struggles and will be open and receptive to ideas that flow from the people themselves. Their theories and ideas will hence be rooted in actual practice and struggles and they themselves will participate in these struggles.

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2 In his July 7, 1975 interview in *Le Nouvel Observateur* Sartre says of Pierre Victor
The revolutionary intellectual will also have ideological tasks to perform. They should engage in "permanent ideological insurrection against the old rotten ideas, the social norms". The revolutionary intellectual challenges in thought and action all the given institutions, ideas, and social practices of the repressive, authoritarian, hierarchical society that they wish to abolish. The revolutionary intellectual should help create new radical alternatives to oppose against the dominant system of bourgeois institutions, culture, and ideology. This requires developing a revolutionary ideology, a formulation of shared revolutionary goals and a program that could unite a divided Left. It also involves developing a set of counter-institutions and a counterculture to begin posing here and now a living alternative to the dying culture and system that the new revolutionary wishes to abolish. In this way, the new intellectual begins the revolution now for in Victor's words, "in preparing the revolution, one is making the revolution".

In conclusion I should note that the new revolutionary intellectual envisaged by Sartre and his friends is a process-in-becoming that is still open-ended and will be defined by the tasks and struggles in the evolving historical situation, for the actions to be undertaken and the theory to be developed will depend on the situation in which the new revolutionaries find themselves. The revolutionary intellectual envisaged can not be totally defined for he/she will evolve a new liberated life-style and ways of being and will attempt to construct a new non-repressive liberated society that will be a product of their invention and creativity and that will be qualitatively different from the present society. The new revolutionary intellectual should work to overcome the contradictions thrust on both the intellectuals and everybody else in the current society and should begin now the struggle for a new society.

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2. Ibid, p. 220.
IV. THE PHENOMENON SARTRE

How are we to understand and explain the phenomenon Sartre? What induced the most productive and possibly the most famous intellectual of our time to reject his status and activity as a classical intellectual and choose at an advanced age to undertake a new form of radical thought and action? Why did Sartre afford such extreme and ultraradical philosophical and political positions? How do these positions relate to classical Marxism? What is the specificity of Sartre's Marxism? What status does Sartre's radical conversion to Marxism leave his existentialism? How can we best characterize and sum up Sartre's lifework? What is its importance and significance? Thinking through and attempting to answer these (difficult) questions should help us come to terms with the phenomenon Sartre.

Since freedom, choice, liberation, and radical conversion have been the key concepts of Sartre's philosophy from its beginning, it should not be surprising that Sartre himself has put in question, developed, and transformed his thought over the last few decades. Although I don't like rigid periodizations, which in any case can only approximately illuminate Sartre's complex and protean works, one could say that Sartre's works can be divided into three periods: 1) an early existentialist-phenomenologist period from the 1930's through 1952; 2) a transitional period in which his former existentialist ideas co-habit uneasily with his Marxist ideas. This unique merger of Marxism and existentialism characterizes his philosophy from his first serious confrontation with Marxism in the early 1950's and produced a series of tensions and contradictions in his philosophy and politics that he sought to resolve in a radical fashion after May 1968; 3) Sartre's latest period in which Marxism seems to have attained the dominant position. However, a careful study of the development of Sartre's philosophy indicates a continually ambiguous and problematical relationship between Sartre's Marxism and existentialism. In 1959 in Questions de méthode he declared that Marxism was the unsurpassable philosophy of our time and that existentialism was but an ideology within the Marxist project. Nonetheless, many of his existentialist concepts remain in a dominant position in this period so that in The Critique of Dialectical Reason, for instance, it is not clear to me whether his old existentialist ideas or new Marxist concepts are primary. During the period from May 1968 through 1974 Sartre most radically put into question his existentialist concepts of the individual, morality, the self-other relation, freedom, and the question of the engaged intellectual: in On a raison de se révolter? Sartre appears to have
overcome and abandoned many of his former existentialist positions. Past loves and early works do not easily fade away and often return to haunt the present which would like to become a new future. Hence in a 1975 interview with John Gerassi Sartre reaffirms the primacy of Marxism in his work but refuses to completely abandon his old existentialism:

the philosophy of our times is Marxism. Both on an international scale--the poor Third World countries against the wealthy nations--and within each country, the class struggle is impossible to understand without using Marxist glasses. Marxism is the philosophy that reflects our times. Of course, it has serious shortcomings. Marxist philosophers have not tried to update their system since Marx himself. That is what I've tried to do. I've tried not only to rejuvenate the dialectical method by which one analyzes events but also to turn it around, so that it can begin with the subjective, with the 'I', with each one of us in his own situation. I remain a Marxist philosopher. And, like Marxism, my philosophy is relevant now because history is still the enactment of the class struggle. Once that stops being the case, once we live in an ideal Socialist state, in which there is only one class, my philosophy will no longer be valid. But man will always need to explain his own subjectivity--his needs, his feelings, his sensations--in an objective world. He will always need to understand his very particular relationship to the world. That's why I've said that there will always be philosophers, whose tasks will be to explain man in the world, explain the historical process.

Oui: And you feel that only Marxism explains that process today?

Sartre: Objectively, yes, because that process is the class struggle. Subjectively, however, it is man's struggle against alienation. Hence, the subjective philosophy of our times is the description of man's affirmation of his freedom--existentialism. But the subjective is part of the objective. It's a point of view, an ideology. Existentialism is an ideology of Marxism.¹

¹Interview with John Gerassi in Oui, May 1975, pp. 70 and 122.
More surprising, in his 70th birthday interview with Le Nouvel Observateur, Sartre reluctantly accepts the label "existentialist" as preferable to "Marxist" thus revealing a thoroughly ambiguous position vis-a-vis Marxism and existentialism—since he has been identifying himself as a Marxist the last twenty years or so (cf. the just cited Oui interview which took place but a few months before the Nouvel Observateur interview):

Question: Do you still maintain today the autonomy of existentialism within the heart of Marxism as you put it in 1957?

Jean-Paul Sartre: Yes, completely (tout à fait).

Q. Thus do you still accept the label (étiquette) of existentialist?

J-P.S. The word is idiotic. Besides its not I, as you know, who has chosen it: they stuck it on me and I accepted it. Today I no longer accept it. But no one today calls me an existentialist any longer, except in manuals—which doesn't mean anything.

Q. Label for label, would you prefer that of 'existentialist' or that of 'marxist'?

J-P.S. If one absolutely had to have a label I would prefer existentialist. I think that there are essential aspects of marxism which remain: class struggle, surplus value, etc...I consider today, as I tried briefly to say in On a raison de se révolter, that we need another thinking, a thinking which takes Marxism into account in order to surpass it, to reject it and re-seize it, to envelop it in itself. That is the condition to arrive at a true socialism.

I believe that I have, along with many others who think today, indicated ways for this surpassing (dépassement). It is in this sense that I want to work today but I am too old to do it. All that I wish is that my work be taken up by others.¹

The wish to surpass existentialism and Marxism revives Sartre's concern with transcendence, surpassing, attaining a higher synthesis. He admits that he has not himself definitively surpassed Marxism and his amazing remark that if he has to be labelled at all he would prefer to be called an existentialist (!) indicates that the relationship between existentialism and Marxism in Sartre's project remains a difficult problem to clarify and is in the last analysis the enigma of a man whose philosophical fecundity surpasses all systems and labels.

Hence I wish to stress the continual development, putting in question, critique, and surpassing of earlier, deficient positions that best characterize the philosophical project of Sartre. What is important to grasp is that Sartre has consistently throughout his life questioned and developed both his philosophy.

¹Interview with Michael Contat in Le Nouvel Observateur 7-13 Juillet
and his political position. Francis Jeanson points out that on the level of his philosophical labors and on the level of historical events, Sartre would always "interrogate himself, contest himself in order to think and to engage himself against himself". Further, Jeanson suggests that "this form of tearing himself away from his self (arrachement à soi) constitutes his most fundamental mode of functioning". In Being and Nothingness Sartre argued that the way to authenticity involved a "purifying reflection" that involved an enterprise of "dépouillement de soi"—a stripping off and discarding obsolete ideas, positions, and postures. Sartre continually talks of how he likes to "think against himself". This means to continually question one's past and present self, the sum total of accretions from one's socialization and life-history. This involves a continual putting in question and constant process of liberation from bourgeois ideology and a wrenching oneself away from former ideas, values, behavior, and friends toward a new liberated consciousness and commitment to radical social change. This activity exemplifies the process described by the early Sartre as launching oneself off onto the project of constituting an authentic self. These Sartrian concepts offer, I believe, a privileged and accurate view of Sartre's own philosophical trajectory. Sartre, the philosopher of our time who has made the most heroic steps and gestures in the dual struggle for personal authenticity and social revolution, Sartre's theory and practice help us to understand the nature and consequences of individual authenticity and social engagement. Unlike many leftist philosopher Sartre's theory and practice coalesce in the unity of a revolutionary project.

Sartre, in a response to Jeanson's first book Le Problème moral et la Pensée de Sartre, called his own thought "une pensée inachevée, en mouvement" constantly moving toward future perspectives. Indeed, Sartre's thought has been constantly in movement, striving for completion, overcoming internal conflicts, interacting with a historical environment—and hence undergoing radical changes. His thought has suffered many confusions and oscillations but has aimed at resolution and dialectical synthesis while remaining open to further changes and in movement. Sartre's thought has always enjoyed a close relationship to

1 Jeanson, Sartre dans sa vie, op. cit., p. 181.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Particularly striking are oscillations and confusions vis-a-vis Marxism and Communism in Sartre's transitional period. Simone de Beauvoir has recorded some of Sartre's dilemmas and têtes-à-tête, cf. Jeanson op. cit., p. 200.
its historical situation and has responded to "the force of circumstances". Sartre slowly became aware of the power of society and history and adjusted his thought to take account of these realities; the changes in his social-historical situation then required changes in his philosophy and politics. A study of Sartre’s project that strove for the level of his study of Flaubert would investigate the changes and transitions in his philosophy/politics in terms of his interaction with his social-historical environment. Here, I shall limit myself to describing the decisive impact of the events of May 1968 on Sartre’s project in an attempt to characterize the radicalization of his thought and to define his current position.

Let us first note that there is a remarkable congruence between the events of May 1968 in France and Sartre’s basic philosophical positions—a congruence that made it easy for Sartre to immediately support the May actions and that provided a solid base for further collaboration with the young revolutionaries who were acting out Sartre’s ideas. May '68 confirmed embodied many of Sartre’s ideas in La Critique de la raison dialectique. In that work Sartre described the many passive and anonymous forms of alienation that the individual suffered in a society underpinned by scarcity (i.e., domination by the practico-inert, seriality, conflict, etc.)—exactly the situation of the French students and workers were suffering. In the Critique, Sartre describes how a group can break the passivity-seriality-alienation by fusing individuals into a group through spontaneous revolutionary activity—exactly what happened in May 1968! The problem is then to keep the group fused in a revolutionary crucible from either disintegrating or degenerating into new forms of domination and alienation—exactly the problem in France after May 1968!! Hence some of Sartre’s most basic philosophical ideas took on a new actuality and relevance. In fact, Sartre’s influence had already permeated the student-cultural milieu in France. Cohn-Bendit, for instance, testifies: "They wanted to chuck Marcuse as our model. Joke. None of us had read Marcuse. Some read Marx, maybe Bakunin and, among contemporary authors, Althusser, Mao, Guevara, Lefebvre. Almost all the political militants of the March 22 movement read Sartre."² A writer in Le Monde suggests that Sartre was perhaps the major influence on May '68: "May 1968 is the historical upsurge of a 'wild flowering' force of negation. It is the inroad of a 'Sartrian' freedom, not that of the isolated individual, but the creative freedom of a group".¹

Sartre immediately supported all student and worker actions and got swept along in the excitement that was shaking the foundations of the French society and consciousness.\(^1\) He was able to immediately defend the violence contained in some student/workers actions because he had already worked out a defense of revolutionary violence as a response to the system's violence in his preface to Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* and in his writings on the Liberation struggles in Algeria, Indochina, the Third World, etc. Thus he defended the May actions as "counterviolence" to the police violence which did not express disorder but a yearning for a "new order".\(^2\)

Moreover, the events of May 1968 instantiated some of Sartre's basic philosophical ideas, like his theory of consciousness and freedom. For Sartre, the human being is characterized by a radical spontaneity: an ability to question, negate, and change. This spontaneity is the central feature of human consciousness on Sartre's theory, and finds its embodiment in radical action that attempts to overcome obstacles or "coefficients of adversity". The spontaneity and radicality of the May 1968 actions thus spontaneously confirmed Sartre's theory of the spontaneity of consciousness and led him to defend political spontaneism.

Further, one of the most cited slogans of May 1968, "Power to the Imagination", exemplified another of Sartre's most basic philosophical concepts. Sartre had long been a champion of the Imagination and continuously liked to stress how the imagination projected images that were a form of non-being which became a real active force by projecting future possibilities toward which individuals projected themselves.\(^3\) Sartre stated in an interview with Cohn-Bendit:

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\(^1\) A summary of Sartre's statements and positions on the events of May-June 1968 can be found in *Writings*, pp. 523-534. An example of his position is contained in his May 12 interview with Radio Luxemborg:

\(^2\) *Writings*, p. 528.

\(^3\) Cf. Sartre's early phenomenological works *The Imagination* and *The Psychology of the Imagination*.

The influential French thinker Lacan acknowledges the import of Sartre's concept of the imagination on his own studies of imagination and symbolism which in turn had a major impact on French thinking and practice.
Sartre had always been a champion of the possible arguing that possibility had priority over "reality" and "necessity", and that one could always liberate oneself from the actual and chose from a field of possibilities that could give new substance and structure to one's life. Sartre believes the great contribution of May 1968 was that of evolving new possibilities for thought and action and thus enlarging the concept of the possible. Finally, the term that became the by-word for the new French student attitudes, contestation, contesting, challenging, confronting—also had a very Sartrian flavor. For Sartre the first moment of freedom had long been contestation, withdrawing from the given, questioning it, and then acting to overcome the obstacles and difficulties in the given situation. Long before Marcuse, Sartre had made the "great refusal" a central feature of authentic human action. In an interview in June 1968, Sartre reaffirmed an old view: "A man is nothing if he isn't a contestor". ¹

Although there was an amazing congruence between May 1968 and Sartre's philosophy which endowed many of his ideas with new life and vitality—which seems to have been transfused to the philosopher himself!—there is nonetheless a radicalization of both his philosophical and political ideas and the concept of the new revolutionary intellectual which we have examined. The radicalization of former positions and radically new ones enables us to claim that Sartre has evolved a position which in the context of his whole project takes on the features of a radical conversion to his own version of Marxism—a radicalization and change of his political and philosophical positions that we shall attempt to clarify in the remainder of this study.

On the level of politics, 1968 brought on a decisive and final break with the Communist Party and the so-called Old Left (Marxist "orthodoxy"). Sartre held the Old Left organizations and leaders responsible for the failure of the events of May–June to evolve into a more far-reaching revolutionary process, arguing that the "communists are afraid of revolution" and helped extinguish what could have been a genuinely revolutionary situation. The French Communist Party, Sartre argued, "adopted an attitude which was in no way revolutionary or even reformist". ² The Communist and Socialist Parties did not want to, or were not ready, to seize power and revealed themselves in Sartre's view to be part of a moribund establishment that did not provide real revolutionary alternatives. Hence the need for a new revolutionary movement independent of the Old Left parties.

¹*Writings*, p. 529.
²*Writings*
Nonetheless, Sartre believed that May 1968 disconfirmed Marcuse's "revolutionary pessimism" and produced an irrevocable politicization throughout society. He believed that the ties established between students and workers could eventually fuse into new revolutionary forms. I lived in France in 1971-2 and have visited Paris in the summers of 1970, 1974 and 1975: almost everyone I met and talked to at any length would tell me of how 1968 had changed their lives. French society has been thoroughly politicized and as I type this essay over 100 factories in France are on strike and many are occupied by workers, French workers are refusing to deliver right-wing newspapers, the "lads" who exercise racing horses are organizing and striking, and even French prostitutes have been striking and beginning to organize. Sartre has consistently affirmed his solidarity with these struggles and has supported the actions, papers, and organizations of New Left groups both materially and morally; he has participated in their demonstrations, popular tribunals, debates, and actions to the extent to which his age and health would permit. During the post 1968 period Sartre has been concerned to develop a revolutionary theory, organization, strategy, and theory of the new revolutionary militant which would enable the New Left to become a real political force that could be the vanguard of a revolutionary and libertarian socialism. Sartre's break with the Old Left was sealed with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 and since then he has been a dedicated supporter of New Left politics and a critic of the Old Left.

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1cf. Writings, p. I might note that Marcuse's views were also altered by May 1968 and similar events in Europe and the United States: I outline in detail the changes in Marcuse's positions from One-Dimensional Man (1964) through An Essay on Liberation and Counterrevolution and Revolt in my forthcoming study Liberation and Revolution in the Philosophy of Herbert Marcuse.

2These changes have resulted in a vast sociological literature. For example, cf. the films and interviews of Jean-Luc Godard, the interviews in the journal La Naf.

3An examination of Le Monde, L'Humanite, Liberation, and Le Nouvel Observateur in June-July 1975 will provide information on and analysis of these events.

4A summary of Sartre's political activities in this period can be found in Writings pp. 539-598.

5Cf. for example the important interview "The Masses, Spontaneity, and the People" now collected in Between Existentialism and Marxism, the interview "On Maoism" in Telos and, most important, On a raison de se révolter where Sartre and his friends address themselves in detail to these issues.
On the philosophical level Sartre has, since 1968, rejected definitively his old existentialist concept of total freedom, of individual morality, of being-for-others as conflict (thus ruling out the possibility of solidarity), and has repudiated the perspective of radical individualism which so deeply colors his existentialist writings. This evolution has helped Sartre to resolve some of the problems and contradictions in his transitional stage. For example, in an important interview "The Itinerary of a Thought" Sartre rejects his former existentialist view of total freedom and in his Flaubert study L'Idiot de la Famille Sartre continues to reflect on the social and environmental factors that mold an individual's behavior and life and thus render the existentialist notion of absolute freedom a hopeless myth. In the 1975 Nouvel Observateur interview Sartre writes: "I think that a theory of freedom should at the same time explain what are the alienations of freedom, in which measure freedom can allow itself to be manipulated, deviated, returned against itself. A theory that does not do this can very cruelly deceive someone who does not understand all that freedom involves and who believes that freedom is everywhere."  

In On a raison de se révolter Sartre argues that he is primarily interested in group freedom, social morality, and human solidarity, and that "the individual as such does not interest me". Thus Sartre strives to overcome his earlier obsession with the freedom of the individual, individual morality, and his notion of the individual's hopelessly hostile relation to the other, group and society—positions which stood in contradiction to the political positions he was evolving. In On a raison de se révolter Sartre focuses on the group's efforts to evolve a social morality, describing how people bound together in a common situation and in revolutionary struggle can create shared social values. A much more detailed study of the break with some of his

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2 The interview first appeared in New Left Review and is collected in Between Existentialism and Marxism.

3 Interview by Michel Contat in Le Nouvel Observateur, 7-13 Juillet, p. 74.

4 op. cit., p. 174, et passim.

5 op. cit., pp. 137-9, et passim.
former existentialist notions is needed to clarify the incredibly complex and
difficult development of Sartre's philosophy, but I believe that Sartre has
radically changed his philosophical perspectives and positions and has liberate
himself from many constricting existentialist notions. Hence I feel that
those interpretations of the static Sartre which have not benefited from a
careful reading of his post 1968 works are obsolete and irrelevant. Therefore
I cannot accept the notion, advanced by many of his critics that Sartre is
Sartre is Sartre and that he really hasn't changed. This itself is a bourgeois
notion that nothing really changes, that one is born and determined to be the
person one is and that radical change really isn't possible. It would, indeed,
be highly peculiar if a philosopher of liberation and radical change hadn't
liberated himself or changed at all! Any interpretation that attempts to
grasp the movement and development of Sartre's thought must be able to conceive
the changes in the Sartrian project in its interaction with its social-
intellectual situation.

In my view, Sartre's itinerary can now be seen as a surprising and com-
plicated radical conversion to his own distinct version of Marxism—which our
philosopher now sees as an attempt to surpass Marxism itself. How, then,
can we define the specificity of Sartre's neo-Marxism in both its political
and philosophical dimensions? Sartre informs us "from 1940 to 1968 I was a
left-wing intellectual" (une intellectual de gauche) and from 1968 I became
a leftist intellectual (un intellectual gauchiste)." This impossible to
translate and simply define term gauchiste provides a starting point for
reflections on the specificity of Sartre's ultra-leftist Marxism. A gauchiste
affirms the primacy of revolutionary practice (over organization, theory, etc)
and emphasizes activism, spontaneity, violence, illegality and dedicating oneself
completely to overthrowing the system (revolutionary morality). This position
in France is often characterized as Maoism. In a preface to a 1972 book
Les Mao en France, Sartre begins by stating he is not a Maoist and then
states that the three central ideas that define a maoist are "violence, spontaneity, and morality"—concepts that are of central importance for
his own philosophical position.

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1 Cf. the 1971 New York Times Magazine interview with John Gerassi (op.
cit. p.107).

2 Les Mao en France, edited by Annie (Gallimard: 1972); forward
by John-Paul Sartre p.15.
One might wonder how and why Sartre chose to advocate such extremist and ultra-radical positions culminating in his constantly reiterated defenses of revolutionary violence and violent revolution. These extreme leftists positions are rooted, I believe, deeply in Sartre’s personality and life-experience. From his early writings such as Nausea one discerns a profound hatred of the bourgeoisie, and beginning with his post-War works there is an increasingly passionate sympathy for the oppressed. World War II and the Nazi occupation of France created a violent hatred for fascism that has continued to this day and gave him in the resistance his first experience of collective action and the necessity of counterviolence to overthrow reactionary violence. The Liberation of France from Nazi domination gave Sartre a powerful experience of the efficacy of resistance and collective activity. During France’s and America’s colonialist/neo-colonialist adventures in Indochina and Algeria, Sartre’s repulsion against imperialism and counterrevolutionary violence reached epic proportions, inducing Sartre to become one of the first independent leftists to wholeheartedly support Third World Liberation struggles and to defend revolutionary violence. Somewhere Sartre has written that he grew up in a milieu of violence, that his first experiences of history were the first World War and the Russian Revolution; hence violence almost seemed the natural milieu of bourgeois society.

Further, Sartre has long been attracted by the image of the Adventurer, the man of action, and both in his philosophy and politics has stressed radical action. In a sympathetic introduction to Roger Stephane’s Portrait of the Adventurer, Sartre contrasts the adventurer, militant, and intellectual;  

In this context his new revolutionary intellectual is a synthesis of these three personality types in which the priority is perhaps given to Sartre’s old image-idol the man of action, the adventurer. Sartre’s existentialism always stressed the primacy of action, and his novels The Roads to Freedom seemed to posit the radical act as the authentic meaning of freedom and liberation. When Sartre turned to Marxism he put primary emphasis on revolutionary praxis as the core of Marxism and thus developed an activist version of Marxism that defends revolutionary violence as the liberating core of revolutionary practice.

It would be a mistake, however, to label Sartre an irrationalist or a mindless champion of violence and action for their own sake, for in fact Sartre is perhaps one of the last great rationalists. In the introduction

1 Printed in Situations VI.
to his Flaubert book, Sartre announces the ultra-rationalist aim of attempting to understand Flaubert totally. "My aim", he writes, "is to totally understand a man". Moreover, Sartre is scrupulously concerned to distinguish between revolutionary and counterrevolutionary violence and to provide a rational defense and legitimation for revolutionary violence; hence the title of Laing and Cooper's book *Reason and Violence* grasps the components of the political dialectic at the heart of Sartre's project. Violence for Sartre is a situation phenomenon and one's total conception of man and society determines whether a given case of violence is or is not justified, and should or should not be militantly opposed. For instance, scanning the references to violence in Contat-Rybalka's *Writings* one sees that Sartre condemns the "latent violence in the United States" (122), wishes to demystify (and thus opposes) "military violence" (361), thoroughly opposes imperialist violence, and consistently condemns the violence of the advanced capitalist system (525-531). On the other hand, he defends the violence used by the Resistance to liberate France from Nazi oppression (126), provides one of the first uncompromising defenses of revolutionary violence in Algeria (391, 415-6), and generalizes this defense to legitimate all liberation movement violence on both political grounds and the moral grounds that violence alone as a reaction against oppression enables the doers of violence to transform themselves from an object to a subject, and to thus attain human dignity through revolt. Later, he was to defend student/worker violence in May 1968 (525-31) and to defend various forms of violence in revolutionary struggles in France and throughout the capitalist world (549, 557-9, 574, 587).

Sartre continuously claims that revolutionary violence is the problem for ethics which must specify: under what conditions is violence justified? What sort of violence should be condemned? How does one oppose reactionary violence? How can violence best be reduced/eliminated? Sartre has not thoroughly resolved these problems which were to be a major theme in his unpublished *Ethics* but he has concerned himself with these problems and thus to establish a rational foundation for his claim that revolutionary violence is a liberating response to the violence of the system if it aims at a new society without violence, oppression, and exploitation. Hence Sartre's

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2 Cf. the Preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* in *Situations*

extreme defense of revolutionary violence is not an irrational emotive reaction but is a basic component of his philosophical/political project for which he has attempted to erect a rational defense and foundation.

In conclusion I would suggest that the concept that characterizes Sartre's project is his concept of freedom and that his political/philosophical significance lies in his linking his concept of freedom with socialism and revolutionary practice. Sartre himself makes this point:

SARTRE: Everything that I have tried to write or do in my life was meant to stress the importance of freedom. In our society, despite all the rhetoric about freedom, the traditional forces, both political and philosophical, try to limit us, try to suppress us as free agents. Man is controlled by economics and politics, but he is alienated by doctrine and by his fellow men. To combat alienation, we have to be able to think clearly about what we really want and what we really feel. There are lots of people talking about freedom but in an abstract manner. Even Marxists, who talk of man's liberation, describe man as determined by his circumstances. They say that man will be free when his determinism comes from within himself—that is, when there are no outside coercions on him. But that's not freedom. Freedom is being able to make choices, admitting to oneself the needs and feelings on the basis of which these choices are made and accepting one's responsibility for making them. Freedom has to have authenticity within the circumstances of one's life, whatever those circumstances are. If I've helped spread this notion, I've been useful.

Sartre's philosophy can be seen as an attempt to think freedom into the heart of Marxism and socialist revolution. From the beginning he had an aversion to the sort of Marxism that took human beings as things inserted into a mechanistic and deterministic framework. Sartre came to see this as a perversion of genuine Marxism and undertook to create a libertarian version of Marxism/socialism. Reflection on the relation between freedom and revolutionary socialism helped merge his philosophy and politics into a conception that stressed the interdependence of socialism and freedom. In June 1968 he suggested "what is being formed is a new conception of a society based on full democracy, a linking up of socialism and liberty." The theme of socialism and freedom—of socialism as providing the model and basis for a free society—became the center of the conversations in On a raison de se révolter where Sartre continuously relates freedom to revolt and socialism. The standpoint of freedom, Sartre argues, is the only viable position a revolutionary can take.

1cf. the Gerassi interview in Oui, op. cit., p. 70.
2Writings, p. 526.
Sartre stresses that each individual is profoundly conditioned by his social environment, but what this conditioning involves is an oppression and alienatic of human freedom. "You can only oppress or exploit those who are in principle free, but whose freedom you deflect or alienate. Alienating exploitation suppresses freedom; that is the only dialectic which can account for this phrase, never determinism". Sartre is thus denying his earlier existentialist notion of total and pure freedom: "nothing is pure, you know. Even freedom is from its origin deviated and alienated by a history". Hence Sartre has been increasingly moving toward a dialectical notion of freedom-in-situation, in which his analysis of the situation and the real constraints on human freedom are conceived as the obstacles to freedom and the chains to be broken in the practice of liberation.

Further, Sartre has concretized and enlarged his concept of freedom by rooting freedom in the phenomena of revolt and political struggle. He claims now that freedom is the foundation of a truly liberating socialism, the presupposition that makes revolutionary struggle intelligible, and is the goal and motor of socialist revolution. "What the masses want first of all", he writes, "is freedom: they do not refuse work but imposed work, the speed for example, this is established as a function of profit, never as a function of the worker. It is this elementary demand for freedom which transformed the occupation of factories in 1936 and the locking in of bosses in 1967-71 into festivals....These things show that this aspiration for freedom is not at all idealist but is always finds its source in the concrete and material conditions of production". In the discussions On a raison de se révolter, Victor notes that the LIP workers who took over their factory talked of the "sentiment of liberation" that was growing in them and of their new "independence of mind". Moreover, in discussing the basic issues and demands, they demanded "their dignity, their freedom, their independence of mind". Sartre responded, "It is impossible to conceive of the LIP movement without thinking, I repeat to you, of freedom; that is, without seeing that behind socialism there is perhaps a value yet more important which is precisely freedom". It is exactly this thought of freedom as the vase of revolution, Sartre suggest that must be reflected on and developed. In his view, "one can only explain

1 On a raison de se révolter, p. 100.
4 On a raison de se révolter, p. 257.
the history of the working class if it has a certain consciousness of freedom. If men resemble things, as the Marxists once considered them, the worker's struggles don't have have more sense.\(^1\) To elucidate his concept of freedom in the context of revolution, Sartre argues:

In a certain situation something appears which is not contained in the anterior givens and which implies the intervention of a subjectivity. The concept of revolution is not clearly given in the reality; there is a reality and the revolution consists in changing it; this change is not produced simply by the subjectivity, but by a freedom which is peculiar to the human being....I consider that revolution, if it should take place, can only be the access of men to freedom, and I think that in a sense all the revolutions have had the same meaning, even Lenin's.\(^2\)

In this Sartrian conception, liberation is the goal of revolutionary practice, the foundation of socialism. Revolution aims at an increase in freedom and fights all obstacles to freedom, struggling against all forms of oppression and domination. People in revolt and struggle gain an experience of, a feeling of their freedom and the possibility of action, of change. Revolt and revolutionary struggle thus provides a confirmation of the reality of human freedom. When one is oppressed, when one's freedom is restricted and stultified, individuals become aware they are free to rebel, to change, to break with the past. One sees that there is another way to live, alternative possibilities, that one doesn't have to accept this oppression, that one can change one's life, one's society, one's world—that one is a free subject of praxis. This transcendence of the present toward a new future, this rejection of the present way of life for a different way is the movement of liberation that presupposes freedom. "To act in the function of that which does not yet exist is precisely to be free", Sartre argues.\(^3\) Freedom, he claims, is not a class-determined concept, although certainly there are class restrictions on freedom and class conditioning of it. Behind all alienations and oppressions, there lies a human freedom which belongs to everyone and is common to all that the revolutionary must awaken and set in motion. All political action addresses itself to this freedom and the movement toward liberation is an unending struggle toward the abolition of all shackles and obstacles to freedom: "This movement and its end constitutes the base of each man. Socialism only has sense in truth as the dreamed of state, but as yet badly conceived, where men will be free. What men search for who want socialism, whether they say it or not, is the state of freedom. Consequently, the revolutionary of whom we have spoken is someone

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\(^1\) op. cit., p. 259
\(^2\) op. cit., p. 260.
\(^3\) op. cit., p. 341.
who conceives freedom as the veritable reality of an ulterior and socialist society". ¹

On this analysis, the revolutionary is someone who wants freedom and who wants all people to be free. The revolutionary seeks to enlarge freedom in the destruction of oppression and alienation, and seeks a society where freedom without alienation, freedom for all, is the goal. This requires a "society where power will be exercised by all equally, or where there will be no more representatives of powers, but where there will be free men who decide things of which each one could be considered the author. At this moment we shall have a socialist society". ²

The fundamental question in the Sartrian universe and the fundamental concern of Sartre's whole life is the challenge: what can I do with my freedom? Sartre, the philosopher of freedom in our time, has continually engaged his freedom on the side of those who are fighting to enlarge the freedom of every one. Taking the side of the oppressed in their struggles for liberation and preserving the heritage of socialist revolution, Sartre has chosen to engage his freedom in the political struggle. "Fighting for freedom is the most logical and most worthy way to engage one's freedom and Sartre has drawn the logical consequence of his philosophy of freedom: if freedom is the primary reality of human existence and the source of human value, then engagement on the side of freedom and struggle for a socialist society that is the best possibility of enlarging range of freedom for all is the most viable and justifiable use of one's freedom. The chance that socialist revolution will succeed and will then create a free society is only a possibility, and Sartre the philosopher of possibility is aware of this. But it is a possibility for which some of the best men and women of the century have struggled and died and is an authentic possibility for those who value human freedom and human life. Thinking freedom into the heart of socialism is the best guarantee against socialist tyranny and the best hope that a truly free society will one day exist. Sartre's commitment to freedom and socialism represents the core of his project and is his enduring legacy to radical social theory.

¹ op. cit., p. 347.
² op. cit., p. 350.