

## The Search for Method (2nd part). An Introduction to Critique of Practical Reason. Jean-Paul Sartre 1960

# II. The Problem of Mediations & Auxillary Disciplines

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WHY THEN, are we not simply Marxists? It is because we take the statements of Engels and Garaudy as guiding principles, as indications of jobs to be done, as problems – not as concrete truths. It is because their assertions seem to us insufficiently defined and, as such, capable of numerous interpretations; in a word, it is because they appear to us as regulative ideas. The contemporary Marxist, on the contrary, finds them clear, precise, and unequivocal; for him they *already* constitute a *knowledge*. We think, on the other hand, that everything remains to be done; we must find the method and constitute the science.

Of course, Marxism allows us to *situate* a speech by Robespierre, the policy of the Montagnards with regard to the *sans-culottes*, the economic regulations and the laws concerning “price ceilings” voted by the Convention, as well as Valery’s *Poems* or *La Legende des siecles*. But just what is this *situating*? If I turn to the works of contemporary Marxists, I see that they mean to determine for the object considered its real place in the total process; they will establish the material conditions of its existence, the class which has produced it, the interests of that class (or of a segment of that class), its movement, the forms of its struggle against the other classes, the

relation of forces to each other, the stakes, etc. The speech, the vote, the political action, or the book will appear then in its objective reality as a certain moment in this conflict. It will be defined in terms of the factors on which it depends and by the real action which it exerts; thereby it will be made to enter – as an exemplary manifestation – into the universality of the ideology or of the policy, which are themselves considered as superstructures. Thus the Girondists will be situated in reference to a bourgeoisie of merchants and shipowners who provoked war out of mercantile imperialism and who almost immediately wanted to stop it because it was injuring foreign trade. Marxists will, on the other hand, see in the Montagnards the representatives of a more recent bourgeoisie, enriched by buying up national properties and furnishing war materials, whose principal interest was consequently to prolong the conflict. Thus they will interpret the acts and discourses of Robespierre in terms of a fundamental economic contradiction: in order to continue the war, this petit bourgeois had to get his support from the people, but the fall of the assignat, monopoly, and the shortage of food supplies led the people to demand an economic control which was injurious to the interests of the Montagnards and repugnant to their liberal ideology. Behind this conflict we discover the most profound contradiction between authoritarian parliamentarianism and direct democracy. Or suppose we want to situate one of today's authors? Idealism is the nourishing soil of all bourgeois productions; it is an active force, since it reflects in its own way the profound contradictions of society. Each of its concepts is a weapon against the rising ideology – the weapon is offensive or defensive according to circumstances; or, better yet, offensive at the start, it subsequently becomes defensive. Thus Lukacs will distinguish between the false calm of the early prewar period, which is expressed by a sort of permanent carnival of fetishised interiority,” and the great penitence, the ebb tide of the postwar period, in which writers seek “the third path” to disguise their idealism.

This method does not satisfy us. It is *a priori*. It does not derive its concepts from experience or at least not from the new experiences which it seeks to interpret. It has already formed its concepts; it is already certain of their truth; it will assign to them the role of constitutive schemata. Its sole purpose is to force the events, the persons,

or the acts considered into prefabricated moulds. Consider Lukacs. For him, Heidegger's existentialism is changed into an activism under the influence of the Nazis; French existentialism, which is liberal and anti-fascist, expresses, on the contrary, the revolt of the *petits bourgeois* who were enslaved during the Occupation. What a beautiful fiction! Unfortunately he overlooks two essential facts. First, there existed in Germany *at least one* existentialist movement which refused all collusion with Hitlerism and which nevertheless survived until the Third Reich – that of Jaspers. Why did this undisciplined movement not conform to the schema imposed upon it? Could it have had, like Pavlov's dog, a "freedom-reflex"? Second, there is one essential factor in philosophy – time. One needs a great deal of it to write a theoretical work. My book *Being and Nothingness*, to which he refers directly, was the result of study begun in 1930. I read Husserl, Scheler, Heidegger, and Jaspers for the first time in 1933 during a year's residence at the French House in Berlin. It was *at this very moment* (when Heidegger should have been at the height of his "activism") that I was subjected to the influence of these writers. Finally, by the winter of 1939-40 I had already worked out my method and my principal conclusions. And what is this "activism" if not a formal, empty concept, permitting one to liquidate all at once a certain number of ideological systems which have only superficial resemblances to one another. Heidegger has never been an "activist – at least not as he has expressed himself in his philosophical works. The very word, vague as it is, testifies to the total inability of the Marxist to comprehend any other thought. Yes, Lukacs has the instruments to understand Heidegger, but he will not understand him; for Lukacs would have to *read* him, to grasp the meaning of the sentences one by one. And there is no longer any Marxist, to my knowledge, who is still capable of doing this. Finally, there has existed a whole dialectic – and a very complex one – from Brentano to Husserl and from Husserl to Heidegger: influences, oppositions, agreements, new oppositions, misunderstandings, distortions, denials, surpassings, etc. All this adds up to what one could call an *area history*. Ought we to consider it a pure epiphenomenon? According to what Lukacs says, yes. Or does there exist some kind of movement of ideas, and does Husserl's phenomenology – as a moment preserved and surpassed – enter into Heidegger's system? In this I case the principles of Marxism are not changed, but the *situation* becomes much more

complex.

In the same way the desire to effect as quickly as possible the reduction of the political to the social has sometimes falsified Guerin's analyses. One can, with some difficulty, grant with him that the revolutionary war became, starting in 1789,<sup>4</sup> a new episode in the commercial rivalry between the British and the French. The bellicosity of the Girondists was essentially political; and doubtless, the Girondists expressed in their policy the class which had produced them and the interests of the milieu which supported them. Their disdainful ideal, their wish to – submit the populace whom they despised to the enlightened elite of the bourgeoisie (that is, to confer upon the bourgeoisie the role of enlightened despot), their verbal radicalism and their practical opportunism, their sensibility, their carelessness – all this bears a trademark. But what is expressed in this way is the intoxication of an intellectual petite bourgeoisie in the process of taking over power rather than the proud and already old-fashioned prudence of shipowners and merchants.

When Brissot threw France into war in order to save the Revolution and to unmask the treason of the king, this naive Machiavellianism expressed perfectly in its turn the Girondist attitude which we have just described. But if we put ourselves back in that period and if we consider what occurred just prior to these events: the king's flight, the massacre of the Republicans at the Champ-de-Mars, the shift to the Right on the part of the moribund Constituent Assembly and the revision of the Constitution, the uncertainty of the masses, who were disgusted with the monarchy and intimidated by repression, the massive abstention on the part of the Parisian bourgeoisie (10,000 voters as compared with 80,000 for the municipal elections), in g word, the breakdown of the Revolution; and if we take into account also the Girondist ambitions, is there really any need to be in a hurry to cancel out *political praxis*? Must we recall the words of Brissot, "We have need of great treasons"? Must we insist on the precautions taken during the year 179Z to keep England out of a war which, according to Guerin, ought to be directed against her? <sup>6</sup> Is it indispensable to consider this enterprise an insubstantial appearance, disguising the conflict of economic interests, when by itself it proclaims its meaning and its goal – through contemporary speeches and writing? A historian even a Marxist – cannot forget that

the political reality for the men of 1792 is an absolute, an irreducible. To be sure, they commit the error of ignoring the action of other forces, more muffled, less clearly discernible, infinitely more powerful. But that is exactly what defines these men as the – bourgeois of 1792. Is this any reason to commit the opposite error and to refuse to grant a relative irreducibility to their action and to the political motives which it defines? There is no question here of determining, once and for all, the nature and the force of the resistance which the phenomena of superstructure oppose to all attempts at ruthless reduction; this would be to oppose one idealism to another. What is necessary is simply to reject apriorism. The unprejudiced examination of the historical object will be able by itself to determine in each case whether the action or the work reflects the superstructural motives of groups or of individuals formed by certain basic conditionings, or whether one can explain them only by referring immediately to economic contradictions and to conflicts of material interests. The American Civil War, despite the Puritan idealism of the Northerners, must be interpreted directly in economic terms; the people of that time were themselves aware of it. The French Revolution, on the other hand, although by 1793 it had assumed a very precise economic sense, is not *directly reducible* in 1792 to the age-old conflict of mercantile capitalisms. It must first be made to pass through a process of mediation, one which will bring into play the concrete men who were involved in it, the specific character it took on from its basis conditioning, the ideological instruments it employed, the real environment of the Revolution. Above all we must not forget that the political theory *by itself* had a social and economic meaning since the bourgeoisie was struggling against the bonds of an ancient feudalism which *from within* prevented it from realising its full development. In the same way it is absurd to be *too quick* in reducing all ideological generosity to class interests. One ends up by proving that those anti-Marxists whom today we call “Machiavellians” are right. There is no doubt that, when the Legislative Assembly decided to undertake a war of liberation, it launched itself forward into a complex historical process which would necessarily lead it to waging wars of conquest. But it would be a poor Machiavellian who would reduce the ideology of 1792 to the role of a simple cover-up for bourgeois imperialism. If we do not recognise its objective reality and its efficacy, we fall back into that form of idealism called “economism” – which Marx so often denounced.

Why are we dissatisfied? Why do we react against Guerin's brilliant, false demonstrations? Because Marxism ought to study real men in depth, not dissolve them in a bath of sulphuric acid. Now the rapid, schematic explanation of the war as an operation of *the* commercial bourgeoisie causes those men whom we know well to disappear – Brissot, Guadet, Gensonne, Vergniaud – or else it constitutes them, in the final analysis, as the purely passive instruments of their class. But at the end of 1791 the upper bourgeoisie was in the process of losing control of the Revolution (it recovered it only in 1794). The new men who were rising to power were petits bourgeois, more or less *déclassé*, poor, without too many connections, who had passionately bound up their own destiny with that of the Revolution. To be sure, they were subjected to certain influences; they were caught up by “high society” (the “best people” of Paris, very different from the good society of Bordeaux). But they were never able in any way to express spontaneously the collective reaction of the Bordeaux shipowners and commercial imperialism. They favoured the development of wealth, but the idea of risking the Revolution in a war to assure a profit to certain circles of the grande bourgeoisie was completely alien to them. Moreover, Guerin's theory leads us to this surprising conclusion: the bourgeoisie, which derives its profit from foreign trade, throws France into a war against the Emperor of Austria in order to destroy the power of England; at the same time its delegates in power do everything to keep England out of the war. One year later, when war is finally declared against the British, this same bourgeoisie, discouraged *at the moment of success*, no longer has any desire for war at all; and it is the bourgeoisie of the new landed proprietors (who have no interest in prolonging the conflict) which has to take over the war.

Why this long discussion? To show by the example of one of the best Marxist writers that if one totalises too quickly, if one transforms – without evidence – signification into intention, and result into an objective deliberately aimed at, then the real is lost. Also, that we must at all cost guard against replacing real, perfectly defined groups (*la Gironde*) by insufficiently determined collectivities (*the bourgeoisie* of importers and exporters). The Girondists existed, they pursued definite ends, they made History within a precise situation and on the basis of external conditions. They believed they

were juggling with the Revolution for their own advantage; in fact, they made it more radical and democratic. It is in terms of this *political* contradiction that they must be understood and explained. Of course, someone will tell us that the proclaimed goal of the followers of Brissot is a mask, that these bourgeois revolutionaries considered themselves and presented themselves as illustrious Romans, that it is the objective result which really defines what they did. But we must be careful: the original thought of Marx, as we find it in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte* attempts a difficult synthesis of intention and of result; the contemporary use of that thought is superficial and dishonest. If we push the Marxist metaphor to its limit, in fact, we arrive at a new idea of human action. Imagine an actor who is playing Hamlet and who is caught up in his role. He crosses his mother's room to kill Polonius hidden behind the arras. But that is not *what he is actually doing*. He crosses a stage before an audience and passes from "court side" to "garden side" in order to earn his living, to win fame, and this real activity defines his position in society. But one cannot deny that these *real* results are present in some way in his imaginary act. One cannot deny that the movement of the imaginary prince expresses in a certain indirect and refracted manner the actor's real movement, nor that the very way in which he *takes himself* for Hamlet is his own way of *knowing himself* an actor. To return to our Romans of 1789, their way of calling themselves Cato is their way of *making* themselves bourgeois, members of a class which discovers History and which already wants to stop it, which claims to be universal and which establishes the proud individualism of its members upon a competitive economy – in short, the heirs of a classical culture. Everything is there. It is one and the same thing to declare oneself Roman and to want to *stop* the Revolution. Or rather, the better one can pose as Brutus or Cato, the better one will be able to stop the Revolution. This thought, obscure even to itself, sets up mystical ends which enclose the confused awareness of its objective ends. Thus we may speak simultaneously of a subjective drama (the simple play of appearances which hides nothing, which contains no "unconscious" element) and of an *objective, intentional* organisation of real means with a view to achieving real ends – without any organisation of all this by a consciousness or a premeditated will. Very simply, the truth of the imaginary *praxis* is in the real *praxis*, and the real, to the extent that it takes itself as merely imaginary, includes implicit

references to the imaginary *praxis* as to its interpretation. The bourgeois of 1789 does not pretend to be Cato in order to stop the Revolution by denying History and by substituting virtue for politics; neither does he tell himself that he resembles Brutus in order to give himself a mythical comprehension of an action which he carries out but which escapes him. He does both at the same time. And it is precisely this synthesis which allows us to discover an imaginary action in each one as a doublet and at the same time the matrix of real, objective action.

But if that is what is meant, then the followers of Brissot, at the very core of their ignorance, must be {he responsible authors of the economic war. This external, stratified responsibility must have been internalised as a certain obscure awareness of their political drama. In short, it is men whom we judge and not physical forces. Now, in the name of that intransigent but strictly just conception which regulates the relation of subjective to objectification – a view with which I, for my part, am in complete agreement – we must acquit the Gironde on this count of the indictment; its dramas and its inward dreams do not refer to the future Anglo French conflict any more than does the objective organisation of its acts.

But very often today people reduce this difficult idea to a wretched truism. They willingly admit that Brissot did not know what he was doing, but they insist on the obvious fact that sooner or later the social and political structure of Europe had to become involved in a general war. Therefore, by declaring war on the Princes and on the Emperor, the Legislative Assembly declared it on the King of England. That is what it was doing without knowing it. Now this conception is by no means specifically Marxist; it limits itself to restating what everybody has always known the consequences of our acts always end up by escaping us, since every concerted enterprise, as soon as it is realised, enters into relation with the entire universe, and since this infinite multiplicity of relations goes beyond our intention. If we look at things from this angle, human action is reduced to w that of a physical force whose effect evidently depends upon the system in which it is exercised. But *for this very reason* one can no longer speak of *doing*. It is men who *do*, not avalanches. The bad faith of our Marxists consists in bringing two concepts into play at the same time so as to preserve the benefit of a teleological interpretation while concealing the

abundant, high-handed use which they make of the explanation by finality. They employ the second concept to make it appear to everyone that there is a mechanistic interpretation of History – ends have disappeared. At the same time they make use of the first so as surreptitiously to transform into real objectives of a human activity the necessary but unforeseeable consequences which this activity entails. Hence that tedious vacillation in Marxist explanations. From one sentence to another the historical enterprise is defined implicitly *by goals* (which often are only unforeseen results) or reduced to the diffusion of a physical movement across an inert milieu. A contradiction? No.. Bad faith. One must not confuse the scintillation of ideas with dialectic.

Marxist formalism is a project of elimination. The method is identical with Terror in its inflexible refusal to *differentiate*; its goal is total assimilation at the least possible effort. The aim is not to integrate what is different as such, while preserving for it a relative autonomy, but rather to suppress it. Thus the perpetual movement *toward identification* reflects the bureaucrats' practice of unifying everything. Specific determinations awaken in the theory the same suspicions as persons do in reality. For the majority of Marxists, to think is to claim to totalise and, under this pretext, to replace particularity by a universal. It is to claim to lead us back to the concrete and thereby present us with fundamental but abstract determinations. Hegel at least allowed the particular to continue to exist as a surpassed particularity; the Marxist would believe that he was wasting his time if, for example, he tried to understand the originality of a bourgeois thought. In his eyes the only thing which matters is to show that the thought is a mode of idealism. Naturally he will recognise that a book written in 1956 does not resemble a book of 1930; this is because the world has changed, and ideology, too, which reflects the world from the point of view of a particular class. The bourgeoisie enters into a period of withdrawal; idealism will then assume another form so as to express this new position, this new tactic. But for the intellectual Marxist, this dialectical movement does not leave the plane of universality; the problem is to define it in its generality and to show that in the work considered, it is expressed in the same way as in all others which appeared at the same date. The Marxist therefore is impelled to take as an appearance the real content of behaviour or

of a thought; when he dissolves the particular in the Universal, he has the satisfaction of believing that he is reducing appearance to truth. Actually, by defining his *subjective* concept of reality, he has only defined himself.

Marx was so far from this false universality that he attempted to generate his knowledge dialectically in man, rising progressively from the broadest determinations to the most precise. In a letter to Lassalle, he defines his method as a pursuit which arises from the abstract to the concrete.” And for him the concrete is the hierarchical totalisation of determinations and of hierarchised realities. For “the population is an abstraction if I omit, for example, the classes from which it is formed; these classes in turn are a word empty of meaning if I ignore the factors on which they are based – for example, work for wages, capital, etc.” But inversely these fundamental determinations would remain abstract if we were to sever them from the realities which support them and which they modify. The population of England in the middle of the nineteenth century is an abstract universal, “a chaotic representation of the aggregate,” so long as it is considered as a simple quantity. But the economic categories are themselves insufficiently determined if we do not first establish that they are applied to the English population; that is, to real men who live and make History in the capitalist country whose industrialisation is most advanced. It is in the name of this totalisation that Marx will be able to show the action of superstructures on substructural facts.

But if it is true that “the population” is an abstract concept so long as we have not defined it by its most fundamental structures (that is, so long as it has not taken its place, as a concept, within the framework of the Marxist interpretation), it is also true that when this framework exists, and for the intellectual who is experienced in the dialectical method, men, their objectifications and their labours, human relations, are finally *what is the most concrete*. A first approximation painlessly puts them at their proper level and discovers their general determinations. Where we already know the direction and character of a society, the development of its productive forces, and its relations of production, there every new fact (a man, an action, a work) appears as *already situated* in its generality; progress consists in clarifying the more profound structures by means of the originality of the established fact in order to be able in turn

to determine this originality by the fundamental structures. There is a double movement. But today's Marxists behave as if Marxism did not exist and as if each one of them, in every intellectual act, reinvented it, finding it each time exactly equal to itself. They behave as if the man or the group or the book appeared to them in the form of "a chaotic representation of the aggregate" (although they know very well that a particular book is by a certain bourgeois author in a certain bourgeois society at a certain moment of its development and that all these qualities have been already established by other Marxists). All this takes place for these theoreticians as if it were absolutely necessary to reduce this so-called abstraction – the political conduct of a particular individual or his literary work – to a "truly" concrete reality (capitalist imperialism, idealism), which in fact is only *in itself* an abstract determination. Thus the *concrete reality* of a philosophical work will be *idealism*; the work represents only a transient mode of it. In itself it is characterised only by deficiency and nothingness; what makes its being is its permanent reducibility to substance – "idealism". Thus a perpetual process of fetishising.

Consider Lukacs. His expression, "the permanent carnival of fetishised interiority," is not only pedantic and vague; its very appearance is suspect. The addition of one violent and concrete word, "carnival," which suggests colour, agitation, noise, is for the obvious purpose of covering up the poverty of the concept and its gratuity. For ultimately either the intention is merely to indicate the literary subjectivism of the period – and this is to state the obvious since the subjectivism was openly *proclaimed* – or else it is to claim that the relation of the author to his subjectivity was necessarily a process of fetishising, and this is said much too quickly. Wilde, Proust, Bergson, Gide, Joyce – there are as many different relations to the subjective as there are names. *On the contrary*, one could show that neither Joyce nor Proust nor Gide fetishises interiority – not Joyce, who wanted to create a mirror of the world, to challenge the common language, and to lay down the foundations of a new linguistic universality; nor Proust, who dissolved the Self in his analyses and whose sole purpose was to use the magic of pure memory so that the real, external object might be reborn in its absolute uniqueness; nor Gide, who kept himself within the tradition of Aristotelian humanism. Lukacs's notion is not derived from experience; it has not

been established by studying the conduct of particular men; its false individuality is a Hegelian idea (like the unhappy Consciousness or the Beautiful Soul), which creates for itself its own instruments.

This lazy Marxism puts everything into everything, makes real men into the symbols of its myths; thus the only philosophy which can really grasp the complexity of the human being is transformed into a paranoiac dream. “To situate,” for Garaudy, means, on the one hand, to link together the universality of a period, of a condition, of a class, and its relations of force with other classes and, on the other hand, the universality of a defensive or offensive attitude (a social practice or an ideological concept). But this system of correspondences between abstract universals is constructed deliberately to suppress the group or the man whom one claims to consider. If I want to understand Valery – that petit bourgeois intellectual, sprung from that historical, concrete group, the French petite bourgeoisie at the end of the last century – then it is better for me not to consult the Marxists. In place of that numerically defined group, they will substitute *the idea* of its material conditions, of its position with respect to other groups (the petit bourgeois is always viewed “*from the one side . . . from the other*”), and of its internal contradictions. We shall go back to the economic category, we shall find petit bourgeois property threatened at the same time by capitalist concentration and by popular demands; here is naturally the basis for the fluctuations of its social attitude . All that is quite correct. This skeleton of universality is truth itself *at its abstract level*. Let us go further: when the questions proposed remain within the domain of the universal, these schematic elements by their combination sometimes enable us to find answers.

But the problem concerns Valery. Our abstract Marxist is not moved in the slightest. He will affirm the constant progress of materialism; then he will describe a certain idealism – analytic, mathematical, slightly tinged with pessimism – which he will finally offer us as a simple riposte, already defensive, to the materialistic rationalism of the rising philosophy. All its characteristics will be determined dialectically in relation to this materialism; it is always the materialism which is presented as the independent variable, which never undergoes any modification. This “thought” of the subject of history, an expression of historical taxis, has the role of an *active* inductor;

in the works and ideas of the bourgeoisie one doesn't want to see anything but *practical* attempts (and always vain ones) to parry more and more violent attacks, to fill the pockets, to stop up the breaches and the fissures, to assimilate hostile infiltrations. The almost total indetermination of ideology thus described will permit the making of an abstract scheme to preside over the composition of contemporary works. At that moment the analysis stops, and the Marxist judges his work finished. As for Valery, he has disappeared.

For our part, we too hold that *the idealism is an object*. The proof is that we give a name to it, we teach it, we adopt it or fight against it; it has a history, and it does not cease to evolve. It was once a living philosophy, it is now a dead philosophy. It testified to a certain relation among men; today it manifests non-human relations (among bourgeois intellectuals, for example). But precisely for this reason, we refuse to make of it an *a priori* transparent to the mind; this does not mean that in our view this philosophy is a *thing*. No. We simply consider it to be a special type of reality – an idea – object. This reality belongs to the category of “collectives,” which we shall attempt to examine a little later. For us, its existence is real and we shall never apprehend anything of it except by means of experiment, observation, phenomenological description, understanding, and specialised works. This *real* object appears to us to be a determination of the objective culture; it was once the vigorous, critical thought of a rising class; it became for the middle classes a certain mode of conservative thought (there are others of these and, in particular a, certain scientific materialism which, according to the occasion, seeks to legitimise utilitarianism or racism). This “collective apparatus,” in our view, offers a totally different reality from, for example, a Gothic church, but it possesses, just as much as the church, actual *presence* and historical *depth*. Many Marxists claim to see in it only the common signification of thoughts scattered across the world; we are more realists than they are. Here is one more reason why we refuse to invert the terms, to make a fetish out of the apparatus and to take idealist intellectuals for its manifestations. We see Valery's ideology as the concrete, unique product of an existent who is characterised *in part* by his *relations with* idealism but who must be interpreted in his particularity and first of all in terms of the concrete group from which he has sprung.

This in no way means that his relations do not include those of his environment, of his class, etc., but only that we grasp them a posteriori by observation and in our attempt to totalise the sum of possible knowledge on this question. Valery is a petit bourgeois intellectual, no doubt about it. But not every petit bourgeois intellectual is Valery. The heuristic inadequacy of contemporary Marxism is contained in these two sentences. Marxism lacks any hierarchy of mediations which would permit it to grasp the process which produces the person and his product inside a class and within a given society at a given historical moment. Characterising Valery as a petit bourgeois and his work as idealist, the Marxist will find in both alike only what he has put there. It is because of this deficiency that he ends up getting rid of the particular by defining it as the simple effect of chance. Engels writes:

That such a man, and precisely this man, arises at a determined period and in a given country is naturally pure chance. But, lacking Napoleon, another man would have filled his place.... The same is true of all chance events and of all that appears to be chance in history. The farther removed the province which we are exploring is from economy, and the more it cloaks itself in an abstract ideological character, the more chance we find in its development.... But trace the middle axis of the curve.... This axis tends to become parallel to that of the economic development.

In other words, the concrete character of *this* man is, for Engels, an “abstract ideological character”. Only the middle axis of the curve (of a life, of a history, of a party, or of a social group) has anything real or intelligible, and this moment of universality corresponds to another universality (economics proper). Existentialism considers Engels’s statement an arbitrary limitation of the dialectical movement, an arresting of thought, a refusal to understand. Existentialism refuses to abandon the real life to the unthinkable chances of birth for the sake of contemplating a universality limited to reflecting indefinitely upon itself. It intends, without being unfaithful to Marxist principles, to find mediations which allow the individual concrete – the particular life, the real and dated conflict, the person – to emerge from the background of the *general* contradictions of productive forces and relations of production.

Contemporary Marxism shows, for example, as Flaubert’s realism offers a kind of

reciprocal symbolisation in relation to the social and political evolution of the petite bourgeoisie of the Second Empire. But it never shows the genesis of this reciprocity of perspective. We do not know why Flaubert preferred literature to everything else, nor why he lived like an anchorite, nor why he wrote *these* books rather than those of Duranty or the Goncourt brothers. Marxism situates but no longer ever discovers anything. It allows other disciplines, without principles, to establish the exact circumstances of the life and of the person, and it arrives finally at demonstrating that its schemata have been once more verified. Things being what they are, the class struggle having assumed this or that form, Flaubert, who belonged to the bourgeoisie, had to live as he lived and to write as he wrote. What is passed over in silence is the signification of these four words, “belonged to the bourgeoisie”. For it is neither his rental income nor the strictly intellectual nature of his work which first makes Flaubert a bourgeois. He *belongs* to the bourgeoisie because he was born in it; that is, because he appeared in the midst of a family *already bourgeois*, the head of which, a surgeon at Rouen, was carried along by the ascending movement of his class. If Flaubert reasons and feels as a bourgeois, this is because he has been made such at a period when he could not even comprehend the meaning of the gestures and the roles which were imposed upon him. Like all families, this family was particular. The mother was related to the nobility, the father was the son of a village veterinarian; Gustave’s older brother, superficially more gifted, became very early the object of Gustave’s hatred. It is, then, inside the particularity of a history, through the peculiar contradictions of *this* family, that Gustave Flaubert unwittingly served his class apprenticeship. Chance does not exist or, at least, not in the way that is generally believed. The child becomes this or that because he lives the universal as particular. This child lived, *in the particular*, the conflict between the religious ceremonies of a monarchist regime which was claiming a renaissance and the irreligion of his father, a petit bourgeois intellectual and son of the French Revolution.

Considered in general terms, this conflict expressed the struggle of the former landowners against the purchasers of national property and the industrial bourgeoisie. This contradiction (masked, however, under the Restoration, by a temporary equilibrium) Flaubert lived for himself alone and by himself. His aspirations toward

nobility and especially toward faith were continually beaten down by the analytical mind of his father. Consequently there was set up *inside him* this overwhelming father who did not cease, even after death, to destroy God, his principal adversary, nor to reduce the impulses of his son to bodily humours. The small Flaubert, however, lived all this through in darkness – that is, without gaining any real awareness, but in panic, flight, bewilderment, and within the limits of his material circumstances as a bourgeois child, well nourished, well cared for, but helpless and separated from the world. It was *as a child* that he lived his future condition through the professions which would be offered to him. His hatred of his older brother, a brilliant student at the Faculte de Medecine, barred the path to the Sciences; that is, Gustave neither wished nor dared to become a part of the “petit bourgeois” elite. There remained the Law. Through these professions, which he regarded as inferior, he had a horror of his own class; and this very horror was at once an attainment of awareness and a definitive alienation from the petite bourgeoisie. He lived also the bourgeois death, that solitude which accompanies us from the moment of birth, but he lived it by means of the family structures: the garden where he played with his sister was next to the laboratory in which his father practiced dissection; death, corpses, his young sister who was soon to die, his father’s science and irreligion all had to be unified in a complex and very particular attitude. The explosive mixture of naive scientism and religion without God which constituted Flaubert, and which he tried to overcome by his love of formal art, can be explained if we understand that everything took place *in childhood*; that is, in a condition radically distinct from the adult condition. It is childhood which sets up unsurpassable prejudices, it is childhood which, in the violence of training and the frenzy of the tamed beast, makes us experience the fact of our belonging to our environment *as a unique event*.

Today psychoanalysis alone enables us to study the process by which a child, groping in the dark, is going to attempt to play, without understanding it, the social role which adults impose upon him. Only psychoanalysis will show us whether he stifles in his role, whether he seeks to escape it, or is entirely assimilated into it. Psychoanalysis alone allows us to discover the whole man in the adult; that is, not only his present determinations but also the weight of his history. And one would be entirely wrong in

supposing that this discipline is opposed to dialectical materialism. To be sure, amateurs in the West have constructed “analytical” theories of society or of History which indeed end up in idealism. How many times has someone attempted the feat of psychoanalysing Robespierre for us without even understanding that the contradictions in his behaviour were conditioned by the objective contradictions of the situation. When one has understood how the bourgeoisie of *Thermidor*, paralysed by the democratic regime, found itself forced by practical necessity to demand a military dictatorship, then it is most annoying to read from the pen of a psychiatrist that Napoleon is explained by his “will to fail.” De Man, the Belgian socialist, went still further when he tried to explain class conflicts by “the Proletariat’s inferiority complex” Inversely, Marxism, once it became a universal Knowledge, wanted to integrate psychoanalysis into itself by first twisting its neck. Marxism made of it a dead idea which quite naturally found its place in a desiccated system; it was idealism returning in disguise, an avatar of the fetishism of interiority. In the one case as in the other a method has been transformed into dogmatism: the philosophers of psychoanalysis find their justification in the Marxist “schematisers” and vice versa. The fact is that dialectical materialism cannot deprive itself much longer of the one privileged mediation which permits it to pass from general and abstract determinations to particular traits of the single individual. Psychoanalysis has no principles, it has no theoretical foundation; and this is quite all right if it accompanies as in the work of Jung and in certain works of Freud – a completely innocuous mythology. In fact, it is a method which is primarily concerned with establishing the way in which the child lives his family relations inside a given society. And this does not mean that it raises any doubts as to the priority of institutions. Quite the contrary, its object itself depends on the structure of a particular family, and this is only a certain individual manifestation of the family structure appropriate to such and such a class under such and such conditions. Thus psychoanalytic monographs – if it were always possible to have them – would by themselves throw light upon the evolution of the French family between the eighteenth and the twentieth century, which in its turn would express in its own way the general evolution of the relations of production.

Today’s Marxists are concerned only with adults; reading them, one would believe

that we are born at the age when we earn our first wages. They have forgotten their own childhoods. As we read them, everything seems to happen as if men experienced their alienation and their reification *first in their own work*, whereas in actuality each one lives it *first*, as a child, *in his parents' work*. Dead set against interpretations too exclusively sexual, Marxists make use of them in order to condemn a method of interpretation which claims only to put History in place of nature in each person. They have not yet understood that sexuality is only one way of living the totality of our condition – at a certain level and within the perspective of a certain individual venture. Existentialism, on the contrary, believes that it can integrate the psychoanalytic method which discovers point of insertion for man and his class – that is, the particular family – as a mediation between the universal, class and the individual. The family in fact is constituted by and in the general movement of History, but is experienced, on the other hand, as an absolute in the depth and opaqueness of childhood.

The Flaubert family was of the semi-domestic type; it was a little behind the industrial families which the father Flaubert cared for or visited. The father Flaubert, who felt that he was “wronged” by his “patron” Dupuytren, terrorised everyone with his own worth and ability, his Voltairian irony, his terrible angers and fits of melancholy. We will also easily understand that the bond between the small Gustave and his mother was never determining; she was only a reflection of the terrible doctor. Thus we have before us an almost tangible cleavage which will often separate Flaubert from his contemporaries; in a century when the conjugal family is the type current among the wealthy bourgeoisie, when Du Camp and Le Poittevin represent children freed from the *patria potestas*, Flaubert is characterised by a “fixation” on his father. Baudelaire, on the other hand, born the same year, will be fixed all his life on his mother. And this difference is explained by the difference in their respective environments. Flaubert’s bourgeoisie is harsh, new. (His mother, vaguely connected with the nobility, represents a class of landowners in process of liquidation; the father comes straight out of a village and wears strange, peasant clothing even at Rouen – a goatskin in winter.) This bourgeoisie comes from the country; and it returns there, too, since it uses its gradually won wealth to buy land. Baudelaire’s family,

bourgeois, urban for many years already considers itself in some small way belonging to the new nobility (*la noblesse de robe*); it owns stocks and bonds. Sometimes, between two masters, the mother appeared all alone in the glory of her independence. Later it was all in vain for Aupick to play at being the “boss”; Mme Aupick, stupid and rather vain, but charming and favoured by her period, never ceased to exist *in her own right*.

But we must be careful. Each one lives his first years, distracted or bewildered, as a profound and solitary reality. Here the internalisation of the external is an irreducible fact. The “flaw” of the small Baudelaire is, to be sure, the widowhood and remarriage of a very pretty mother; but it is also a peculiar quality of his own life, a disequilibrium, an unhappiness which will pursue him until his death. Flaubert’s “fixation” on his father is the expression of a group structure, and it is his hatred of the bourgeois, his “hysterical” crises, his monastic vocation. Psychoanalysis, working within a dialectical totalisation, refers on the one side to objective structures, to material conditions, and on the other to the action upon our adult life of the childhood we never wholly surpass. Henceforth it becomes impossible to connect *Madame Bovary* directly to the political-social structure and to the evolution of the petite bourgeoisie; the book will have to be referred back to contemporary reality insofar as it was lived by Flaubert through his childhood. There results from this a certain discrepancy, to be sure; there is a sort of hysteresis on the part of the work in relation to the very period in which it appears; this is because it must unite within itself a number of contemporary significations and certain others which express a state recent but already surpassed by society. This *hysteresis*, always neglected by the Marxists, accounts in turn for the veritable social reality in – which *contemporary* events, products, and acts are characterised by the extraordinary diversity of their temporal depth. There will come a moment at which Flaubert will appear to be *in advance* of his period (at the time of *Madame Bovary*) because he is *behind it*, because his book, in disguised form, expresses to a generation disgusted with romanticism the post-romantic despairs of a student of 1830. The objective meaning of the book – which the Marxists, as good disciples of Taine, take simply as conditioned by the moment represented in the author – is the result of a compromise between what this new

generation of readers claims in terms of its own history and what the author can offer to it from his own; that is, it realises the paradoxical union of two past moments of this intellectual petite bourgeoisie (1830 and 1845). It is in these terms that one will be able to use the book in a new perspective as a weapon against a class or a government. But Marxism has nothing to fear from these new methods; they simply reinstate concrete regions of the real, and the individual person's distress takes on its true meaning when one recalls that it expresses concretely the alienation of man. Existentialism, aided by psychoanalysis, can study today only situations in which man has been lost since childhood, for there are no others in a society founded on exploitation.

We have not finished with *mediations*. At the level of the relations of production and at that of political-social structures, the unique person is found conditioned by his *human relations*. No doubt this conditioning, in its first, general truth, refers to "the conflict of productive forces with the relations of production." But all this is not *lived* so simply. Or rather the question is to know whether *reduction* is possible. The person lives and knows his condition more or less clearly through the groups he belongs to. The majority of these groups are local, definite, immediately given. It is clear, in fact, that the factory worker is subject to the pressure of his "production group," but if, as is the case at Paris, he lives rather far from his place of work, he is equally subject to the pressure of his "residential group." Now these groups exert various actions upon their members; sometimes, even, the particular "block", the "housing project," the "neighbourhood," checks in each person the impetus given by the factory or the shop. The problem is to know whether Marxism will dissolve the residential group into its elements or whether it will recognise in it a relative autonomy and a power of mediation. The decision is not so easy. On one side, in fact, one easily sees that the 'lag' between the residential group and the production group, along with the "retardation" which the former exerts on the latter, only helps to verify the fundamental analyses of Marxism. In one sense there is nothing new here; and the Communist Party itself has shown since its birth that it is aware of this contradiction; wherever possible it organises cells based on working locations rather than residential districts. On the other side, it is everywhere apparent that the employer, when he

attempts to “modernise” his methods, favours the constitution of extra-political groups as a check, the effect of which in France is certainly to remove the young from union and political activity.

At Annecy, for example, which is being industrialised very rapidly and which pushes tourists and vacationers over to those sections which border on the lake, researchers report that there is a proliferation of small groups (culture societies, sports groups, amateur radio clubs, etc.) whose character is very ambiguous. There is no doubt that they raise the cultural level of their members which in any event will remain an acquisition of the proletariat – but it is certain that they are obstacles to emancipation. Furthermore, it would be necessary to consider whether in these societies (which in many cases the employers have shrewdly left completely autonomous) culture is not *necessarily* oriented (that is, in the direction of bourgeois ideology; statistics show that the books most often requested by workers are the bourgeois – best-sellers). These considerations tend to make of the “relation to the group” a reality that is lived for itself and which possesses a particular efficacy. In the case which concerns us, for example, there is no doubt that it is interposed as a screen between the individual and the general interests of his class. This group consistency (which must not be confused with any sort of collective consciousness) would by itself justify what the Americans call “micro-sociology.” Even more, sociology in the United States is developed because of its very efficiency. To those who may be tempted to see in sociology only a mode of idealist, static knowing, the sole function of which is to conceal history, I would recall the fact that in the United States it is the employer who favours this discipline and who in particular sponsors the research which studies restricted groups as the totalisation of human contacts in a defined situation. Moreover, American neo-paternalism and Human Engineering are based almost exclusively on the work of sociologists. But one must not make those factors an excuse for adopting immediately the reverse attitude and summarily rejecting sociology on the ground that it is “a class weapon in the hands of the capitalists.” If it is an effective weapon – and it has proved that it is one – this is because it contains some truth; and if it is “in the hands of the capitalists,” this is one more reason for snatching it away from the capitalists and turning it back against them.

No doubt the principle of sociological research is often a disguised idealism. In the work of Lewin, for example (as with all Gestaltists), there is a fetishism of totalisation; instead of seeing in it the real movement of History, Lewin hypostasises it and *realises* it in *already made* totalities. He writes: “It is necessary to consider the situation, with all its social and cultural implications, *as a dynamic, concrete whole.*” Or again: “The structural properties of a dynamic totality are not the same as those of its parts.” On the one hand, we are presented with a synthesis of externality, and to this given totality the sociologist himself remains external. He wants to hold on to the benefits of teleology while at the same time maintaining the attitude of *positivism* – that is, while suppressing or disguising the ends of human activity. At this point sociology is posited for itself and is opposed to Marxism, not by affirming the provisional autonomy of its method – which would, on the contrary, provide the means for integrating it – but by affirming the radical autonomy of its object. First, it is an *ontological autonomy*. No matter what precaution one takes, one cannot prevent the group, thus conceived, from being a substantial unity – *even* and *especially* if, out of a desire for empiricism, one defines its existence by its simple function. Second, it is a *methodological autonomy*. In place of the movement of dialectical totalisation, one substitutes actual totalities. This step naturally implies a refusal of dialectic and of history exactly because dialectic is at the start only the real movement of a unity in process of being made and not the study, not even the “functional” and “dynamic” study, of a unity already made. For Lewin, every law is a structural law and expresses a function or a functional relation between the parts of a whole. Precisely for this reason, he deliberately confines himself to the study of what Lefebvre called “horizontal complexity.” He studies neither the history of the individual (psychoanalysis) nor that of the group. Lewin is the most open to Lefebvre’s criticism, which we quoted earlier. His method claims to establish the functional characteristics of a rural community in the United States; but it will interpret all of them in relation to the variations of the totality. For this very reason, therefore, his method will be lacking in any history since it prohibits itself, for example, from explaining the remarkable religious homogeneity of a group of Protestant farmers. It is of little importance to Lewin to know that the total susceptibility of rural communities to urban models arises in the United States from the fact that the country

was formed with the existing city in mind, by men who were already in possession of relatively advanced industrial techniques. Lewin would consider this explanation – to use his terminology – an Aristotelian causalism. But this means precisely that he is incapable of understanding the synthesis in the form of a dialectic; for him it would have to be given. Finally, it is a *reciprocal autonomy* of the experimenter and of the experimental group. The sociologist is not situated; or if he is, concrete precautions will suffice to desituate him. It may be that he tries to integrate himself into the group, but this integration is temporary; he knows that he will disengage himself, that he will record his observations objectively. In short, he resembles those detectives whom the movies often present to us as models, who win the confidence of a gang so as to be better able to trap it. Even if the sociologist and the detective participate in a collective action, it is evident that they put their act between parentheses, that they make these gestures for the benefit of a “higher interest.”

We could make the same objections to the notion of “basic personality” which Kardiner attempts to introduce into American neo-culturalism. If we try to see in this only a certain way in which the person totalises society in and by himself, the notion is useless, as we shall soon discover. It would be absurd and futile to speak, for example, of the “basic personality” of the French Proletarian if we have at our disposal a method enabling us to understand how the worker projects himself toward his own self-objectification in terms of material, historical conditions. If, on the contrary, we consider this personality to be an objective reality imposing itself on the members of the group, even if in the form of “their basic personality,” this is a fetish. We posit man before man, and we re-establish the bond of causation. Kardiner situates his basic personality “halfway between the primary institutions (which express the action of the environment upon the individual) and the secondary institutions (which express the individual’s reaction upon the environment).” In spite of everything, “circularity” remains static; moreover, nothing demonstrates better than this “halfway” position the uselessness of the notion proposed. It is true that the individual is conditioned by the social environment and that he turns back upon it to condition it in turn; it is this – and nothing else – which makes his reality. But if we can determine the primary institutions and follow the movement by which the

individual makes himself by surpassing them, why do we need to put on these ready-made clothes along the way? The “basic personality” fluctuates between abstract universality a posteriori and concrete substance as a completely *made totality*. If we take it as some sort of *whole, pre-existing* the person about to be born, then either it stops History and reduces it to a discontinuity of types and styles of life, or it is itself going to be shattered by the continuous movement of History.

This sociological attitude is in its turn explained *historically*. Hyper-empiricism – which on principle neglects connections with the past – could arise only in a country whose History is relatively short. The wish to put the sociologist out of the experimental field expresses simultaneously a bourgeois “objectivism” and the sociologist’s own experience of being excluded. Lewin, exiled from Germany and persecuted by the Nazis, improvises himself as a sociologist in order to find practical means to restore the German community which he considers destroyed by Hitler. But *for him*, exiled, powerless, and against a great part of the Germans, this restoration can be obtained only by external methods, by an action exerted with the co-operation of the Allies. It is this closed-off, distant Germany which, by excluding him, furnishes him with the theme of the dynamic totality. (In order to make Germany democratic, it would be necessary, he said, to give her other leaders, but these leaders would be obeyed only if the entire group were modified in such a way as to accept them.) It is noteworthy that this uprooted bourgeois does not take into consideration either the real contradictions which brought on Nazism or a class struggle which he has ceased to live on his own account. The cleavages in a society, its internal divisions – these are what a German worker could live in Germany, and these factors could give him an entirely different idea of the real conditions of de-Nazification. The sociologist, in het, is an object of history; the sociology of “primitive peoples” is established on the basis of a more profound relation which may be, for example, colonialism. Research is a living relation between men (it is this same relation in its totality which Leiris has tried to describe in his admirable book *L’Afrique fantôme*). Indeed, the sociologist and his “object” form a couple, each one of which is to be interpreted by the other; the *relationship* between them must be itself interpreted as a moment of history.

If we take these precautions – that is, if we reintegrate the sociological moment into

the historical totalisation – is there, despite all, a relative independence for sociology? For our part, we do not doubt it. While Kardiner's theories are open to criticism, some of his reported research is of undeniable interest, in particular the study he has made of the Marquesas Islands. He points up a latent anxiety in the Islands' inhabitants, the origin of which is found in certain objective conditions – the threat of famine and the scarcity of women (100 women to 250 men) . He derives both embalming and cannibalism from famine, as two contradictory reactions which are conditioned by their mutual opposition. He shows that homosexuality is the result of the scarcity of women (and of polyandry), but he goes further and is able to demonstrate, as the result of his investigation, that homosexuality is not simply a satisfaction of the sexual need but a form of revenge against the woman. Finally, the result of this state of affairs is a genuine indifference in the woman and a great gentleness on the part of the father in his relations with the children (the child grows up in the midst of *his* fathers) – hence the free development of the children and their precociousness. Precocity, homosexuality as a revenge against the woman who is hard and without tenderness, a latent anxiety expressing itself in various behaviour patterns: those are irreducible notions, since they refer us to what has had to be *lived*. It matters little that Kardiner employs psychoanalytical concepts to describe them; the fact is that sociology can *establish* these characteristics as real relations among men. Kardiner's research does not contradict dialectical materialism, even if Kardiner's *ideas* remain opposed to it. We can learn in his study how the material fact of the scarcity of women is lived as a certain aspect of the relations between the sexes and of the males with each other. We are guided to a certain level of the concrete which contemporary Marxism systematically neglects.

American sociologists conclude from such reports that “the economic is not entirely determining.” But this sentence is neither true nor false, since dialectic is not a determinism. If it is true that the Eskimos are “individualists” and the Dakotas cooperative, and true too that they resemble each other in “the way in which they produce their life,” we should not conclude from this that there is a definitive insufficiency in the Marxist method but merely that it has been insufficiency developed. This means that sociology in its investigation of defined groups achieves,

*because of its empiricism, known information which is capable of developing the dialectical method by compelling it to push its totalisation to include this information. The Eskimos' "individualism," if it exists, must be conditioned by factors of the same order as those which were studied in the Marquesan communities. In itself it is a fact (or, to use Kardiner's term, a "style of life") which has nothing to do with "subjectivity" and which is disclosed in the behaviour of individuals within the group and in relation to the daily realities of life (habitat, meals, festivals, etc.) and even of work. But, to the extent that sociology is by itself a *prospective attention* directing itself on this kind of facts, it is a heuristic method and it compels Marxism to become one. It reveals, indeed, new relations and it demands that they be attached to new conditions. The "scarcity of women," for example, is a genuine material condition; it is economic *at least* to the extent that economy is defined by scarcity; it is a quantitative relation which strictly conditions a need. But in addition, Kardiner forgets what Levi Strauss has so well demonstrated in his book *Les Structures elementaires de la parente*; that is, that marriage is a form of total commitment. A woman is not only a companion for the bed; she is a worker, a productive force. "At the most primitive levels where the harsh geographical environment and the rudimentary state of techniques make gardening and hunting, the gathering and picking of food equally hazardous, existence would be almost impossible for an individual abandoned to himself.... It is no exaggeration to say that for such societies marriage holds a vital importance for each individual . . . interested (first) in finding . . . a mate but also in preventing the occurrence among his group of those two calamities of primitive society: celibacy and orphanhood" (pp. 48 9).*

This means that we must never yield to simplifications based wholly on techniques or consider social conditions to be conditioned by techniques and tools in a context peculiar to themselves alone. Aside from the fact that traditions and history (Lefebvre's vertical complexity) intervene at the same level as work and needs, there exist other material conditions (the scarcity of women is one of them) which reciprocally condition techniques and the real level of life. Thus the numerical relation between the sexes assumes more importance for production and for suprastructural relations when famine is more of a threat and instruments more

rudimentary. The point is to subordinate nothing *a priori*. It would be to no purpose to say that the scarcity of women is a simple natural fact (contrasting it with the institutional character of techniques), since this scarcity never appears except inside a community. On these terms nobody can any longer criticise the Marxist interpretation as being incompletely “determining”; it is sufficient in fact that the regressive-progressive method take into account *at the same time* the circularity of the material conditions and the mutual conditioning of the human relations established on that basis. (The immediately real connection, *on its own level*, bringing together the hardness of the women, the indulgence of the fathers, the resentment which results in homosexual tendencies, and the precocity of the children, is founded on polyandry, which is – on its own ground – itself a group’s reaction to scarcity. But these various characteristics are not already contained *in* the polyandry like eggs in a basket; by their reciprocal action, they are enriched as a *way of living* the polyandry by perpetually going beyond it.) In this prospective form, with its absence of theoretical foundation and the precision of its auxiliary method – research, tests, statistics, etc. – sociology, a temporary moment of the historical totalisation, discovers new mediations between concrete men and the material conditions of their life, between human relations and the relations of production, between persons and classes (or some totally different sort of grouping) .

We willingly grant that the *group* never has and never can have the type of metaphysical existence which people try to give to it. We repeat with Marxism: there are only men and real relations between men. From this point of view, the group is in one sense only a multiplicity of relations and of relations among those relations. And this certitude derives precisely from what we consider the reciprocal relation between the sociologist and his object; the researcher can be “outside” a group only to the degree that he is “inside” another group – except in limited cases in which this exile is the reverse side of a real act of exclusion. These diverse perspectives demonstrate to the inquirer that the community as such escapes him on all sides.

Yet this must not allow him to dispense with determining the type of reality and efficacy appropriate to the collective objects which people our social field and which may be conveniently called the intermundane. An anglers’ club is neither a small

stone nor a supraconsciousness nor a simple verbal rubric to indicate concrete, particular relations among its members. It has its bylaws, its officers, its budget, its procedure for recruiting, its function; it is upon these terms that its members have set up among themselves a certain type of reciprocal relation. When we say there are only men and real relations between men (for Merleau-Ponty I add things also, and animals, etc.), we mean only that we must expect to find the support of collective objects in the concrete activity of individuals. We do not intend to *deny* the reality of these objects, but we claim that it is *parasitical*.

Marxism is not far removed from our conception. But in its present state, we may, from this point of view, make two essential criticisms. To be sure, it shows how “class interests” impose upon the individual against his individual interests or how the market, at first a simple complex of human relations, tends to become more real than the sellers and their customers; but Marxism remains uncertain as to the nature and origin of these “collectives.” The theory of fetishism, outlined by Marx, has never been developed; furthermore, it could not be extended to cover all social realities. Thus Marxism, while rejecting organicism, lacks weapons against it. Marxism considers the market a *thing* and holds that its inexorable laws contribute to reifying the relations among men. But when suddenly – to use Henri Lefebvre’s terms – a dialectical conjuring trick shows us this monstrous abstraction as the veritable concrete (we are speaking, naturally, of an alienated society) while individuals (e.g., the worker submitted to Lassalle’s law of wages) fall into abstraction, then we believe that we are returned to Hegelian idealism. For the *dependence* of the worker who comes to sell his working strength cannot under any circumstance signify that this worker has fallen into an abstract existence. Quite the contrary, the reality of the market, no matter how inexorable its laws may be, and even in its concrete appearance, rests on the reality of alienated individuals and on their separation. It is necessary to take up the study of collectives again from the beginning and to demonstrate that these objects, far from being characterised by the direct unity of a *consensus*, represent perspectives of flight. This is because, upon the basis of given conditions, the direct relations between persons depend upon other particular relations, and these on still others, and so on in succession, because there is an

objective constraint in concrete relations. It is not the presence of others but their absence which establishes this constraint; it is not their union but their separation. For us the reality of the collective object rests on *recurrence*. It demonstrates that the totalisation is never achieved and that the totality exists at best only in the form of a *detotalised totality*. As such these collectives exist. They are revealed immediately in action and in perception. In each one of them we shall always find a concrete materiality (a movement, the head office, a building, a word, etc.) which supports and manifests a flight which eats it away. I need only open my window: I see a church, a bank, a cafe – three collectives. This thousand-franc bill is another; still another is the newspaper I have just bought. The second criticism which can be leveled against Marxism is the fact that it has never been concerned to study these objects for themselves; that is, on all levels of the social life. Now it is in terms of his relation with collectives – that is, in his “social field” considered in its most immediate aspect – that man learns to know his condition. Here again the particular connections are one mode of realising and of living the universal in its materiality. Here again this particularity has its peculiar opaqueness which does not allow us to dissolve it in fundamental determinations. This means that the “milieu” of our life, with its institutions, its monuments, its instruments, its cultural “infinities” (real like the Idea of Nature, or imaginary like Julien Sorel or Don Juan), its fetishes, its social temporality and its “hodological” space – this also must be made the object of our study. These various realities, whose being is directly proportional to the non-being of humanity, sustain among themselves, through the intermediary of human relations, and with us a multiplicity of relations which can and must be studied in themselves. A product of his product, fashioned by his work and by the social conditions of production, man *at the same time* exists in the milieu of his products and furnishes the substance of the “collectives” which consume him. At each phase of life a short circuit is set up, a horizontal experience which contributes to change him upon the basis of the material conditions from which he has sprung. The child *experiences more than* just his family. He lives also in part through the family – the collective landscape which surrounds him. It is again the generality of his class which is revealed to him in this individual experience.

The aim then is to construct horizontal syntheses in which the objects considered will develop freely their own structures and their laws. In relation to the vertical synthesis, this transversal totalisation affirms both its dependence and its relative autonomy. By itself it is neither sufficient nor inconsistent. It is no use to try to throw “collectives” over to the side of pure appearance. Of course, we must not judge them by the awareness which contemporaries have of them, but we would lose their originality if we looked at them only from the point of view of their ultimate meanings. A person wishing to study one of those culture groups which we find in certain factories, will not be quit of them by resorting to the old remark – the workers *believe that they are reading* (therefore the collective object is cultural), but in actuality they are only retarding their own attainment of self-awareness and delaying the emancipation of the Proletariat. *For it is very true* that they are delaying the moment of their new awareness, but *it is very true* also that they read and that their reading is effected at the center of a community which favours it and which is developed by means of it.

To use only one object, as an example, everyone will agree that a *city* is a material and social organisation which derives its reality from the ubiquity of its absence. It is present in each one of its streets *insofar as* it is always elsewhere, and the myth of the capital with its *mysteries* demonstrates well that the opaqueness of direct human relations comes from this fact, that they are always conditioned by all others. *The Mysteries of Paris* stem from the absolute interdependence of spots connected by their radical compartmentalisation. Each urban collective has its own physiognomy. Some Marxists have drawn up felicitous classifications. Even from the point of view of economic evolution, they have distinguished agricultural cities from industrial cities, colonial cities, socialist cities, etc. They have shown for each type how the form and the division of labor, at the same time as the relations of production, would engender an organisation and a particular distribution of urban functions. But that is not enough to let them catch up with experience. Paris and Rome differ profoundly from each other: Paris is a typically bourgeois city of the nineteenth century; Rome, at once both behind and ahead of the other city, is characterised by a center of aristocratic structure (poor and rich live on the same property, as in our capital before 1830), surrounded by modern sections which are inspired by American urbanism. It

does not suffice to show that these structural differences correspond to fundamental differences in the economic development of the two countries and that Marxism, equipped as it is today, can account for them. It is necessary to see also that the *constitutions* of these two cities immediately condition the concrete relations of their inhabitants. In the promiscuity of wealth and poverty, the Romans live in epitome the evolution of their national economy, but this promiscuity is *by itself* an immediate given of the social life. It manifests itself through human relations of a particular type; it presupposes that each one is rooted in the urban past, that there is a concrete bond between men and the ruins (which depends much less than one might believe on the kind of work or class, since, after all these ruins are inhabited and utilised by all – even more, perhaps, by the people than by the upper bourgeois), a certain organisation of space – that is, roads which lead men toward other men or toward work. If we do not have the instruments necessary for studying the structure and the influence of this “social field,” it will be altogether impossible for us, by simply determining the relations of production, to bring to light typically Roman attitudes. Some expensive restaurants are found in the poorest quarters. During the summer months the wealthy dine on cafe sidewalks. This fact – inconceivable in Paris – does not concern individuals only; by itself it speaks volumes on the way in which class relations are lived.

The more sociology is presented as a hyper-empiricism, the easier is its integration into Marxism. Alone it would congeal in essentialism and discontinuity. Recovered – as the *moment* of a closely watched empiricism – in the movement of historical totalisation, it will find again its profundity and its life. It will be sociology which will maintain the relative irreducibility of social fields, which will bring out – at the heart of the general movement – the resistances, the checks, the ambiguities, the uncertainties. Furthermore, there is no question of adding a method onto Marxism. The very development of the dialectical philosophy must lead it to produce – in a single act – the horizontal synthesis and the totalisation in depth. So long as Marxism refuses to do it, others will attempt the coup in its place.

In other words, we reproach contemporary Marxism for throwing over to the side of chance all the concrete determinations of human life and for not preserving anything

of historical totalisation except its abstract skeleton of universality. The result is that it has entirely lost the meaning of what it is to be a man; to fill in the gaps, it has only the absurd psychology of Pavlov. Against the idealisation of philosophy and the dehumanisation of man, we assert that the part of chance can and must be reduced to the minimum. When they tell us: “Napoleon as an individual was only an accident; what was necessary was the military dictatorship as the liquidating regime of the Revolution,” we are hardly interested; for we had always known that. What we intend to show is that *this* Napoleon was necessary, that the development of the Revolution forged at once the necessity of the dictatorship and the entire personality of the one who was to administer it, and that the historical process provided *General Bonaparte personally* with preliminary powers and with the occasions which allowed him – and him alone – to hasten this liquidation. In short, we are not dealing with an abstract universal, with a situation so poorly defined that several Bonapartes were *possible*, but with a concrete totalisation in which *this* real bourgeoisie, made up of real, living men, was to liquidate *this* Revolution and in which *this* Revolution created its own liquidator in the person of Bonaparte, in himself and for himself – that is, for those bourgeois and in his own eyes. Our intention is not, as is too often claimed, to “give the irrational its due,” but, on the contrary, to reduce the part of indetermination and non-knowledge, not to reject Marxism in the name of a third path or of an idealist humanism, but to reconquer man within Marxism.

We have just shown that dialectical materialism is reduced to its own skeleton if it does not integrate into itself certain Western disciplines; but this is only a negative demonstration. Our examples have revealed at the heart of this philosophy a lack of any concrete anthropology. But, without a movement, without a real effort at totalisation, the givens of sociology and of psychoanalysis will sleep side by side and will not be integrated into “Knowledge.” The default of Marxism has led us to attempt this integration ourselves, with the means at our disposal; that is, by definite operations and according to principles which give to our ideology its unique character, principles which we are now going to set forth.

**next section**

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