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Howard Davies

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INTRODUCTION

The origins of *TM* can be traced to the short-lived Resistance group *Socialisme et Liberté*, founded by Sartre after his release from prisoner-of-war camp in 1941. Simone de Beauvoir, Jacques-Laurent Bost, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean Pouillon were members and all were to become prominent in the *TM* team. By 1943, Albert Camus had become associated with the group and the idea of a post-war periodical had taken shape. Specifically, its vocation was to 'fournir à l'après-guerre une idéologie'.¹ In the event, Camus had become too involved with *Combat* by 1945, and the first Editorial Board consisted of Raymond Aron, Beauvoir, Michel Leiris, Merleau-Ponty, Albert Ollivier, Jean Paulhan and Sartre.

It is likely that purchasers of *TM* in October 1945 had little idea of what the review would contain. The name derived, none too obviously, from Chaplin's *Modern Times*, and the presence of Paulhan suggested that here was a publication to take the place of the disgraced *Nouvelle Revue Française*. The published work of Sartre promised a specialist interest in phenomenology and literature, but whether or how this would be translated into a particular political position was hard to predict.

A statement of intent, if not a manifesto, was clearly in order. It was bound to make explicit, as Beauvoir does in her autobiography, the lessons which had been learned in the war. To Sartre she ascribes the discovery of his implication in history,² the experience of solidarity in the Stalag and the realisation that his phenomenological ontology and its associated ethic would somehow have to become compatible with Marxism. These factors come together in the 'Présentation', the leading article of the first number, which urgently requires readers and writers to understand contemporary history and to embark on a programme of anti-capitalist reconstruction.

The editorial intention here is not difficult to appreciate: while

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TM is manifestly to be a literary and political journal, its uniqueness is to reside in the fact that the two designations are to be taken as interdependent if not coterminous. Sartre's aspiration is categorical: he will become an anti-Flaubert, that is to say a writer fully participant in, and avowedly responsible for, the political history of his time.

There is no doubt that the quest for ideological legitimation struck a chord both nationally and internationally:³ 'Nous ne voulons pas avoir honte d'écrire et nous n'avons pas envie de parler pour ne rien dire.'⁴ The formulation was admirably explicit. Perhaps inevitably, however, the passage of forty years has clouded the transparency of this urge to eschew the social status of 'rentier de talent'⁵ and a certain ambivalence has become visible. Gide and Flaubert, for example, who are among those to whom the reproach is addressed, prove to be objects both of antipathy and identification.⁶ I mention this matter here because in three ways it touches on one of the criteria by which *TM* requires itself eventually to be judged – reflexivity. In the first place, the review will categorically ask of ethnographers that they conduct their anthropological fieldwork in full recognition of the extent to which the practice of observation modifies both observer and observed; this stipulation obliges Sartre himself to cultivate an equally critical awareness of his own motivations. Secondly, because the assessment of the proximity of antipathy to identification is the business of psychoanalysis, it is reasonable to expect *TM* to scrutinise Freudian theory with considerable care and to measure how far it assists or inhibits both reflexivity and political activity. Thirdly, and most importantly, it is arguably the principal task of Sartre and *TM* (given that they intend to study and promote conflict) to develop a theory and practice of conflict within which its ontological, psychological, ethical, political and economic specifications are viewed in appropriately dynamic interaction.

A recent controversy shows how interesting the material opened up by these lines of inquiry is. The eminent Jewish philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch asserted in a posthumously published interview⁷ that Sartre became a 'grand homme de gauche' thanks to the guilt that he felt for not having committed himself wholly to the Resistance and for having pursued his intellectual career during the Occupation. Michel Contat (in *Le Monde* of 28 June 1985) endorsed this view at least in respect of 1943. He drew an angry response from Beauvoir, Bost and Pouillon, who stressed the degree of danger inherent in the Resistance activities of 1941.⁸ The

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truth is relevant to a history of *TM* and ought, in view of the premium set on reflexivity, to emerge from it. The question of whether Sartre, in particular, changed his priorities between 1941 and 1943 and whether he did so in a manner likely to induce subsequent remorse is now, however, a matter for a biographer, for *TM* has never tackled it head-on. It certainly had the opportunity in June 1948, when Jankélévitch used it to make the same accusation, thinly veiled.⁹ It is difficult to believe that at the time the editors did not see through the veil; their decision to publish should perhaps be viewed as a tacit acknowledgement at least of the admissibility of Jankélévitch's views, an acknowledgement that offers no comment on their accuracy.

All this adds up to a moral and political problem of the sort that *TM* would recognise as the object of its continued reflection: should an honest appraisal of a particular situation be made if the appraisal itself reduces the moral credibility of the well-intentioned appraisers? In terms of the Sartrean avatar of the puritan ethic, it is a question of whether a possibly dubious motivation is purified by the achievement that it maximises: as far as the history of *TM* is concerned, all parties to the recent exchanges, Jankélévitch included, answer in the affirmative.

My intention at this stage is to reserve judgement. It is worth stressing, however, that the concern for *authenticité* is something that outlasts the vogue of existentialism; indeed, *TM* is established and flourishes very much as a regime that looks positively on the practice of *autocritique*. This is implied in the 'Présentation' when Sartre announces that 'nous concevons sans difficulté qu'un homme, encore que sa situation le conditionne totalement, puisse être un centre d'indétermination irréductible'.¹⁰ We are born context-bound and everywhere we are free. It is from the platform of this paradox that *TM* takes off in 1945: 'Notre revue voudrait contribuer, pour sa modeste part, à la constitution d'une anthropologie synthétique. Mais il ne s'agit pas seulement [. . .] de préparer un progrès dans le domaine de la connaissance pure: le but lointain que nous nous fixons est une libération.'¹¹

It is apparent from the allusiveness of the preceding remarks that Sartre's definitions are prospective. This is certainly true of the 'synthetic anthropology'. It is nonetheless worth pausing at both terms, for each has a certain Sartrean specification prior to 1945. 'Anthropology', to take the easier term first, is characterised by him very early as 'une discipline qui viserait à définir l'essence

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d'homme et la condition humaine';¹² rather than a branch of social science, in other words, it designates his own philosophical project.¹³ The phenomenological ethic which he envisages will address itself to aspects of human experience – institutionalised reciprocity, for example – already studied by French academic anthropologists. Accordingly, the ontological and epistemological theories will be required to investigate the validity of academic anthropology as a body of knowledge. Sartre will never be shaken in his conviction that it is science that must seek its justification in philosophy and not the other way round. What is projected, in short, is a supra-disciplinary venture which, when invested with its full ethical force, will accomplish not only the fusion of literary and political activity but also the twin tasks set by Marx – the interpretation and the transformation of the world.

The notion of 'synthesis', however, is much harder to circumscribe. It recurs with great frequency, in conjunction sometimes with analysis, sometimes with thesis and antithesis, and derives from the work of antecedent philosophers, notably Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Comte, Bergson and Husserl.

Although the *cogito* does not go unquestioned, Descartes remains a great influence. The investigative method which *TM* is to promote at the end of the 1950s retains a Cartesian shape: diphasic, consisting of moments of regressive deduction and of progressive reconstruction, it will be presented as a procedure designed to complement analysis with synthesis. For Sartre, however, the second movement will be much more than one of verification, and its applicability will be not to mathematics but to the object of study of the social sciences.

From Kant Sartre inherits a great deal. Of broader significance than the categorical imperative, which is subsequently abandoned, is the ethical motivation itself. As was the case for Kant, the Sartrean ethic is to be based on logical conditions of possibility which are not those of the sciences. In other words, its power will lie in the fact that its prescriptions will remain out of reach of assertions validated by scientific method. In this connection, Sartre seems to deploy Kant's notion of synthesis – a dynamic one, inasmuch as it is applied to the unification of sense data by rational judgement – to counter what he regards as the apodicticity, or non-dialectical character, of Descartes's *cogito*. In Sartre's view, Descartes rendered, or surrendered, to God the crucial prerogative of humanity – the creativity of consciousness which is vested in its powers of negation.¹⁴

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This dynamic sense of synthesis is obviously reinforced by the influence of Hegel, who divorced it from analysis, placing it at the apex of a ternary structure in which it is generated dialectically by tension between thesis and antithesis, then in its turn becoming thesis in a relentless forward movement.¹⁵ It was Marx, of course, who stood this Hegelian model on its head, or on its feet, inverting the relative importance given within it to the material and the ideal. One significance of synthesis for Sartre is that he is in the historical and political position, subsequently at least, of being able to represent himself as the synthesis of Hegel and Marx. It is legitimate to see the development of *TM* in this light.

Prior to 1945, however, *L'Être et le néant* offers the spectacle of Sartre as the synthesis of Hegel and Kierkegaard.¹⁶ Following the latter, it assigns primacy to the ontologically insecure individual, in defiance of Hegel's assimilation of the intelligibility of history to the perfectibility of the transcendental mind. What Sartre takes up with enthusiasm, on the other hand, is the notion of the *pour-autrui*, which he introduces as the quantum of individual identity that is forever in the hands of the Other. This particular synthesis yields the interpersonal context in which the ethic becomes necessary. Kant is still needed, for Hegel is deemed quite wrong to conclude that the degree of reciprocity implied in interpersonal perception is sufficient to obviate the need for the ethic. The objection is one that will be extended to Husserl.

Despite the reservations, Hegel's conception of synthesis has much to recommend it to Sartre. It signifies a forward movement towards unity, resolving tension as it goes – and it is the relationship of partial elements to the ongoing totality which is important. The identification of the parts cannot be analytic if analysis means isolating allegedly discrete phenomena linked only by external chains of cause and effect; on this point, in the field of psychology, Sartre agrees with Bergson. Synthesis becomes possible precisely because each element implies and partakes of all the others: reality is far greater than the sum of its parts. And *TM* likewise, one might add.

Sartre is only being consistent when he insists that the philosopher should acknowledge the same degree of inherence in the object of study. His denunciation of Hegel's 'optimisme ontologique'¹⁷ – the illusion that the accomplishment of history can be observed in practice from a position outside it – produces a further sense of 'synthesis'. Specifically, it is the emphatic refusal of the overview and of the *conscience de survol* which aspires to uncon-

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ditional and context-free truth. When Sartre poses his fundamental question, 'Quel est le rapport synthétique que nous nommons l'être-dans-le-monde?',¹⁸ he may thus be said to be using Hegel against Hegel.

The historical and academic pre-eminence of Descartes and Kant, together with the late discovery of Hegel, tend to push into the background the Comtean notion of synthesis. This is as it should be, for in Sartre's early writings on psychology the terms 'positivist' and 'synthetic' are taken to be mutually exclusive. The former carries strong negative connotations and is associated with 'mechanistic', 'atomistic' and 'analytic' when these are used to characterise what Sartre identifies as bourgeois ideology. Comtean synthesis is useful to Sartre only in the sense that it implies the integration of disparate bodies of knowledge at a higher level.

Perhaps it is the Husserlian notion of synthesis that is the closest ancestor of the synthetic anthropology.¹⁹ Husserl initiated the return to the Cartesian *cogito* and its radicalisation. As a result, Sartre found himself with a philosophical method which set reflexivity at a premium and which did so in a manner incompatible with the ontological optimism of Hegel. Phenomenology, which is committed to the effective study of consciousness by provisionally placing in parenthesis (by *epoché*) the objective world, generates absolute knowledge only in respect of consciousness itself.

The operation of the *epoché*, the phenomenological reduction, reveals consciousness to be a continuously attentive (or intending) activity constituting the self. The *ego* conducts its *cogito* while addressing itself to *cogitata*. Not only is each movement one of recurrence, requiring integration if it is not to disassemble into a sequence of discrete consciential instants, but each has to be harmonised with the other in order to constitute the *ego* as agent of cogitation. To this perpetual bonding Husserl ascribes major importance: 'Only elucidation of the peculiarity we call synthesis makes fruitful the exhibition of the *cogito* (the intentional subjective process) as consciousness-of [. . .] and actually lays open the method for a descriptive transcendental-philosophical theory of consciousness (and naturally also for a corresponding psychological theory).'²⁰

Synthesis, then, has now become the *sine qua non* of consciousness. Perhaps this is merely to say that Sartre's synthetic anthropology is a phenomenological anthropology. Indeed, it would be possible to stop here if it were not that his endorsement of Husserl is not at all unconditional. Husserl may be said to be Cartesian in

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that his philosophy claims not only to be the foundation of all future sciences, but also that it is in itself scientific. Sartre's ambitions for philosophy are not so self-effacing; he does not consider that the task of rendering the sciences philosophically acceptable is the same as conferring scientificity on philosophy. The reasons why the latter course is impossible are Kantian and Kierkegaardian.

Although Sartre warmly applauds Husserl for having placed philosophy in contact with the real world, his enthusiasm succeeds in shifting the emphasis of Husserl's work. The phenomenological reduction is crucial because, by refusing a naive acceptance of reality, it allows the opportunity of describing such acceptance in terms of consciential activity. It would seem, however, that Sartre is much more eager to suspend the *epoché* than is Husserl, much more anxious to delete the parenthesis in order then to be able to distinguish first of all between image and percept.²¹ For Sartre, the crossing of the boundary between philosophy and psychology is a step that celebrates the subordination of the latter to the former. Husserl, less Kantian in this respect, sees the two as more consubstantial. The problem is that his philosophical argument from *cogito* to real world assumes that the Other is apprehended in an empathetic and non-agonistic manner; this, as is made abundantly clear in *L'Être et le néant*, is an intuition incompatible with that of Sartre, who builds on a basis of Kierkegaardian anguish.

A glance at Husserl's venture into ethnographic territory reveals the significance of this for *TM*'s synthetic anthropology. 'To me and to those who share in my culture,' says Husserl, 'an alien culture is accessible only by a kind of "experience of someone else", a kind of "empathy", by which we project ourselves into the alien cultural community and its culture.'²² The phenomenological terms of reference lead Sartre, on the other hand, to require that ethnographic science conform to overriding moral imperatives, without which it risks lapsing into the racialism consistently combated by *TM*. This is to say that because there is no inter-subjectivity that is pre-ethically non-agonistic, and because one cannot argue from science to ethics, one has instead to argue from ethics to science.

The importance that Sartre assigns to ethics thus impels him to seek contact with the real world and to found the sciences instead of foundering on them. He wishes to emerge from parenthesis into contingency, in order there to be able to tell the difference between percept and image, between what is and what yet might be, between *être* and *devoir-être*. The frontier between *epoché* and the real world is located, therefore, not between philosophy and

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science, but within philosophy – in the ethic that must inform all scientific activity.

It is this set of presuppositions that underpins the 'Présentation', giving it its evangelical fervour. It derives very much from *L'Être et le néant*, rather than from the pre-war texts. In 1936 *La Transcendance de l'Ego* featured positions that would nowadays be described as close to those of Lacan. It argued against Husserl in favour of an *ego* which is not coextensive with consciousness but which is created by it on the basis of identifications that Sartre called 'poetic' because of their imaginary character. Here would seem to be a category of interpersonal transactions that pre-exist the embattled selfhood whose scenarios are described in *L'Être et le néant*.

I do not suggest that Husserlian empathy is the same thing as identification, merely that in the pre-war period Sartre was presenting an apparently less conflictual ontological theory. I suggest this, not to pre-empt the debates that follow, but in order to show that there is something further that *TM* must be expected to synthesise, particularly as Sartre seemed – in his last years – to return to his earlier position, wishing, for example, to investigate the role of the maternal smile in the constitution of the individual.²³ *TM* is thus in a position to resolve the tension between the two models of human relations, the positivity of which is viewed alternately as pre-ethical and as dependent on the ethic. It is certainly a question that the historian has to bear in mind, even if, in the short term, the latter view dominates.

Having attempted to outline the scope and ethos of the synthetic anthropology projected by Sartre, I propose to assess briefly his proximity to academic anthropology in the years prior to 1945. The stage will then be set for a detailed study of all that unites and separates the two ventures.

I have mentioned already the dual status of Gide: the *rentier* and the man of goodwill. In the 'Présentation' he is invoked in a manner that establishes him as a committed intellectual to be ranked with Voltaire and Zola. 'L'administration du Congo était-ce l'affaire de Gide?',²⁴ asks Sartre, and this rhetorical question signals the sealing of what is virtually a contract, for the most consistent of *TM*'s positions are those that it adopts against colonialism, imperialism and racialism.

The historical conjuncture plays an important part in this. The colonial troops who had fought alongside the metropolitan Allied

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forces in the Second World War had been fighting for freedom; the establishment of the Union Française in 1946 was thus merely the prelude to acts of decolonisation undertaken, either by consent or under duress, by successive French governments. Indeed, the Resistance itself had been represented as an anti-colonialist struggle: Beauvoir offers a contemporary view in her fiction²⁵ and Sartre, speaking to the Russell Tribunal in 1967,²⁶ a retrospective one.

This is significant, not only as far as future contributors to *TM* are concerned – Tran Duc Thao, Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon, Régis Debray – but also because the anti-colonialist struggle seeks to achieve lasting economic, political and social change in precisely those territories traditionally favoured by academic anthropology for its fieldwork. One of the main tensions between the two anthropologies, the synthetic and the academic, bears upon the shadowy identity of the latter, variously perceived as the liberator, the preserver, the administrator or the destroyer of colonised cultures.

In contrast with what is to come, the exclusiveness of Sartre's philosophical preoccupations in the pre-war years caused him to have little more than passing acquaintance with those anthropologists who were his contemporaries. While future authorities such as Roger Caillois, Leiris, Lévi-Strauss and Alfred Métraux moved in the outer circles of the surrealist movement as the result of a shared interest in non-Western cultures, Sartre's resistance to Freud kept him clear of this particular sphere of influence.²⁷

The closest contact was Leiris, ethnographer, survivor of another short-lived Resistance group based in the Musée de l'Homme, and future editor of *TM*. Leiris had also participated in Georges Bataille's Collège de Sociologie, which had been active in the late 1930s. Denis Hollier's edition of the papers of the Collège²⁸ shows that, unlike Métraux,²⁹ he did not wholly share Bataille's position. The Collège nevertheless merits mention here. Bataille's wish was to radicalise the sociologists and the anthropologists of the French tradition, the students of Durkheim and Mauss. He urged them to become 'sorcerer's apprentices', to break with their own society and to live out the more meaningful experience of the sacred and the dangerous that they had identified in supposedly less alienated cultures. Sartre was not particularly tolerant of this. As far as he could see, the reflexivity of Bataille went no further than analytical observation of the Other followed by analogical reference to the self.³⁰ Of all the members of the Collège, only Leiris really escaped

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this judgement; his ethnography of *L'Afrique fantôme*,³¹ in which the observer is neither denied, nor reduced to the status of mechanical objectifier, retains an exemplary value throughout the life of *TM*.

The Bataille connection takes the historian of *TM* back to the controversial work of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl.³² Strange to say, both Gide's respected *Voyage au Congo* of 1927 and the young Sartre set some store by Lévy-Bruhl's theory of the 'pre-logical mentality', but whereas Gide sought evidence of it in French Equatorial Africa, Sartre strove to do likewise 'dans notre monde civilisé'.³³

In the early part of the century, cultures lying outside the Western rationalist tradition were objects of great curiosity. To some extent, they became battlegrounds in which psychoanalysts, philosophers of various persuasions and sociologists like Lévy-Bruhl and Mauss all vied with each other in claims to greater descriptive and explanatory power. Themes of magic, sacrifice and possession, together with terms like 'mana', 'taboo' and 'totem' became common currency. The rise of nationalist irrationalisms no doubt stimulated this research. Lévy-Bruhl's particular contribution was to postulate two heterogeneous and geographically distinct types of dominant thought process. The prevailing mode in the '*sociétés inférieures*' was, curiously enough, described as 'synthetic' – that is to say it functioned with a high tolerance of contradiction and obeyed the 'law of participation', which prevented efficient differentiation of the constituent elements of reality. All thought was synthetic, according to Lévy-Bruhl, but pre-logical thought was characterised in particular by the fact that its syntheses were undertaken on the basis of no prior analytic intellection; there was no labour of definition, categorisation, abstraction or delimitation.

Sartre's use of 'synthesis' was not carried over directly from Lévy-Bruhl. On the contrary, as I have indicated, there were many more powerful influences. What is striking is the domestication, as it were, of the pre-logical mentality. In the long term, *TM* will pick up this intuition and give it a specific political context, but in the short term Sartre responded to the pre-logical mentality much as he did to the Freudian unconscious: both were to be incorporated into the phenomenological perspective as aspects of *mauvaise foi*. The process is best visible in the *Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions* of 1938. In this text the concept of magic was deployed to describe emotion as wishful thinking and as a believed denial of reality. A regime of magic was said to be instituted whenever consciousness