

Editorial

Although the articles published in this edition of *Sartre Studies International* were not assembled as part of a themed issue, there is every justification for suggesting that they could be grouped under the heading ‘Sartre Today’. Each of them demonstrates that Sartre’s thinking remains relevant to many of the key issues facing our contemporary world. We know that Sartre moved to a position of ‘engagement’ in the aftermath of the Second World War, and his thoughts about the issues of social and political commitment are clearly still valuable today. However, it is clear that the controversies discussed are not merely ‘academic’ matters, but rather concern highly practical moral and political challenges.

This is poignantly evident since this editorial is being written in the aftermath of the deadly ISIS-inspired terrorist attacks at the Ariana Grande concert in Manchester and on tourists and residents around London Bridge and Borough Market in London, events which have caused shock and revulsion throughout Europe and beyond, and have brought into cruel focus the aims and objectives of ISIS and its jihadist ideals. Maria Russo’s discussion of the legitimacy of such an activity using the criterion of Sartre’s doctrine of counter-violence in the cause of freedom makes the point that it is wrong to apply those categories of freedom and counter-violence to such activities. Deborah Evans, in her response, takes a similar line, and argues that Islamic violence is a movement not *for* freedom but *against* all the freedoms of democracy and civil rights that have been gained over a long period of time, values which it holds in contempt.

Kathleen Lennon deals with another current preoccupation: gender and identity, examining Judith Butler’s thought in the light of the influence of existentialism and phenomenology. Sartre’s imaginary personages make up his account of individual and social identities. He sees identity as a performance of the individual, whereas Butler sees it as emerging within a postmodernist social framework. Lennon’s proposal that Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s thought overcomes the criticisms applied to those accounts by making ‘imaginary form a way of expressively manifesting the possibilities of the real’ is a helpful addition to this discussion.

Catrin Gibson's examination of the theme of the possibility of authentic love within a society still dominated by patriarchal oppression provides a fascinating feminist study of the nature and implications of the relationship between mother and child, in which she argues that authentic love is possible, asserting patriarchy inhibits the possibility of authentic love between adults, a fruitful further line of study. Jean-Pierre Boulé, on the other hand, in his exploration of Sartre's eroticism, looks at desire and sadism, examining the latter's patterns in his sexual relationships, and finding a move towards Simone de Beauvoir's position as expressed in her book on Sade about the 'ambiguous unity' of the sexual relationship.

Freedom, counter-violence, oppression, gender and identity, feminism and the possibility of authentic love in a patriarchal society and the search for a love that can overcome the limitations of sadistic eroticism: these are all, to varying degrees, important and current matters of controversy and debate to which these Sartre specialists have helpfully contributed. One might think that a discussion of the details of Sartre's phenomenological methodology would have less sociopolitical resonance than the topics mentioned above. But Andrew Inkpin argues persuasively for a certain unity across different modes of presentation in Sartre's work: 'Sartre's theoretical and literary writing can be understood as belonging to an integral project, with each retaining a distinct function while contributing to a more complete realization of phenomenological method than one might otherwise expect in Sartre'. In brief, Sartre's methodology, with its concrete illustrations in treatise and novel, shows why and how his field of reference is concerned with a common social and political world and why the continued study of his writings is valuable for understanding our contemporary world.

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