

# Editorial

## Thinking with Sartre

One could be forgiven for asserting that Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism has become fashionable again, a worldview fitting for our time. How else can we interpret last year's publication of *Surfing with Sartre* by Adam James, with existential freedom compared to the controlled manipulation of the surfing board?

On the other hand, Sartre and his intellectual milieu have been the subject of nostalgia for the heyday of existentialism in the 1940s and 1950s, exemplified by articles such as 'From Left Bank to Left Behind: Where Have the Great French Intellectuals Gone?' in *The Guardian* (13 June 2015), 'I Think Therefore I Am Glum: The Fall of French Intellectuals' in *The Sunday Times* (12 July 2015) or more serious studies such as Sarah Bakewell's *At The Existentialist Café* (2017) and Agnès Poirier's *Left Bank: Art, Passion and the Rebirth of Paris 1940–1950* (2018).

However, the continued existence of this journal (now in its twenty-fourth year), the quality of scholarship it displays and the range of international contributors it attracts are testimony to the fact that the thought and art of Sartre transcend his time, as well as the categories of the fashionable and the nostalgic. He is a thinker who must be taken account of, whether you agree with him or not. His writings have had continued relevance and have attracted sustained critical engagement over the past eighty years, an attention that shows no sign of abating. Sartre's preoccupation with and fierce commitment to freedom and its possibilities and his concern for justice characterise the modern age. To this you must add the range of his writing: in addition to his philosophical treatises, there are his novels, short stories, plays, literary criticism and essays on political theory. This breadth and diversity are reflected in the articles of this issue, which consider the theory of the novel, fantasy and literature, phenomenology and perception, politics, women's rights and existentialist thinking in general.

Adrian van den Hoven examines Sartre's Le Havre lectures on the theory of the novel in the early 1930s, which demonstrate his awareness of new developments in the English, Irish and American novel,

as well as the influence of the classical tradition, Gide, Alain and Ramon Fernandez. Van den Hoven outlines how they affected Sartre's own novel writing as he sought to depict individual liberty, and the difficulties that he encountered.

Jo Bogaerts focuses on Sartre's early literary criticism, its interaction with the contemporary world and his committed political involvement. In doing so, Sartre shows his tactical awareness in defining his position in relation to other thinkers and philosophies, linking the literary, the political, the philosophical and the polemical. Bogaerts underlines the importance of Sartre's examination of the metaphysical perspectives of other contemporary writers and his political positioning within contemporary existentialism, for instance in distancing himself from Camus's view of the absurd and his influences from the classical tradition. Particularly interesting is the secularised view of fantasy that Sartre sees in Kafka and the reverse transcendence of a world turned upside down.

By contrast, Clare Mac Cumhaill, in 'Absential Locations and the Figureless Ground', provides us with a detailed phenomenological analysis of the concept of absence in relation to perception. In a tightly argued piece, she vindicates Sartre's description of Pierre's absence in *Being and Nothingness*, maintaining that perceptual looking sustains the absence of Pierre as intentional look.

Kimberly Engels examines Sartre's transition from the in-itself to the practico-inert, outlines his social and political development and suggests that a revised view of the practico-inert could enhance the progress of social freedom. She takes a more optimistic view than Sartre in relation to the limitations of the practico-inert in *La Critique de la raison dialectique*, maintaining that he could have shown the potential for the practico-inert not merely to limit but to *enhance* freedom, drawing on *Plaidoyer pour les intellectuels* along the way.

Finally Angela Shepherd, writing about Simone de Beauvoir's concern for feminist liberation, argues that her existentialist philosophy of liberty was not merely derivative of Sartre's thinking, but was developed alongside and in counter-distinction to his views. In particular, she shows that de Beauvoir's analysis of women's alienated situation was influenced by Marx's historical materialism in advance of Sartre's engagement with Marxist categories in *Critique de la raison dialectique* and provides an original concept of freedom that requires a change for both sexes in conscious human interaction, as well as a change in society's structures so that there will be freedom for all.

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