

FROM SERIAL IMPOTENCE TO EFFECTIVE NEGATION: SARTRE AND MARCUSE ON THE CONDITIONS OF POSSIBILITY OF REVOLUTION

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Marcuse and Sartre take up the problem of alienating otherness from a Marxist perspective, Marcuse in One-Dimensional Man and Sartre in his Critique of Dialectical Reason. For Sartre, the "series" is a social relation that places individuals in competition, mediated by the materialized result of past praxis. For Marcuse, the loss of agency results from the productive apparatus determining the needs and aspirations of individuals. The question is how to convert alienating negativity into a negation of the society that negates individuals. For Sartre, this "negation of the whole" can come only from a mortal threat facing all members of the serialized group. For Marcuse, it comes from the individual becoming aware of her alienation, especially through works of art. For both, revolt must be a historically constituted, collective "living contradiction."

Marcuse et Sartre abordent le problème de l'altérité aliénante à partir d'une perspective marxiste, Marcuse dans L'homme unidimensionnel et Sartre dans sa Critique de la raison dialectique. Pour ce dernier, la « série » est une relation sociale qui met les individus en compétition, médiatisée par le résultat matérialisé de la praxis passée. Pour Marcuse, la perte de pouvoir est causée par le dispositif de production qui régule les besoins et les aspirations des individus. La question est ainsi comment transformer la négativité aliénante en une négation de la société qui nie les individus : d'après Sartre, cette « négation du tout » ne peut venir que d'une menace mortelle subie par tous les membres du groupe sérialisé ; si l'on en croit Marcuse, elle vient plutôt du fait qu'un individu prenne conscience de son aliénation, notamment à travers l'œuvre d'art. Pour les deux, la révolte doit être, dans tous les cas, une « contradiction vivante » collective et historiquement constituée.

At the beginning of his Second Meditation, Descartes invokes Archimedes' demand for "just one firm and immovable point in order to shift the entire earth."¹ Ever since Descartes, who claimed to find his Archimedean point in the certainty of the *cogito*, philosophy has sought that firm and immovable point *within* the world, not beyond it. All critique, that is, must be immanent, and it is from within the world that philosophers and others will gain the understanding and knowledge that will allow them to change it. But where in the world can this fulcrum be found? Where, today, are we to find that point which would allow us to "shift the entire earth"?

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) and Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979) were near-contemporaries whose thought was marked by their encounters with the philosophies of Heidegger, Hegel and (although later in Sartre's case) Marx. Both of them tried to think the conditions of the possibility of revolution at a time when the world had stabilized into two antagonistic blocks (dominated by the USSR and the USA) and the official Marxism of the Soviet bloc had become dogmatic in theory and bureaucratic-repressive in practice. Both Sartre and Marcuse, then, found themselves within the wider philosophical movement of "Western Marxism," a post-Stalinist Marxism which placed its emphasis on human transformative action (praxis) and lived experience rather than the metaphysics of "dialectical materialism." In virtue of their emphasis on the emancipatory aims of Marxism—and specifically, the overcoming of alienation—both found their philosophies taken up by the New Left and student movements which emerged in the 1960s, with whom they became allied and—in Marcuse's case—identified.

Alienation can, in a summary and preliminary fashion, be defined as the separation of the human being from her own possibilities for creative development. In this sense, alienation is a negation of the human individual's free creative potential, or of what both Marcuse and Sartre understand as the possibility of leading a life that is truly "one's own" or authentic (*Eigentlich*). Human liberation, the overcoming of alienation, would then be (in Hegel's terms) a negation of the negation. The task for both Sartre and Marcuse, then, is to determine the sources of alienation and, through a critical analysis of those social forces which separate human beings from their own potential, to discover the means of overcoming alienation through Hegel's "tremendous power of the negative." In short, it is a question

¹ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Vol. 2*, (tr.) J. Cottingham, R. Stuthoff, and D. Murdoch (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 16.

of immanent critique: how, through a critique which takes its stand within the existing society, might one determine the revolutionary possibility of negating not this or that aspect of society, but the *whole* apparatus which at present makes human beings “products of their products” instead of beings who determine themselves through their free praxis? This “Great Refusal,” as Marcuse calls it, cannot come from outside society; it can only be articulated and developed in terms of already present tendencies.

In particular, both Marcuse and Sartre see the technological and social developments of modern society as prefiguring a society which has overcome material scarcity and poverty, a society which would allow for “a true intersubjective community in which the only real relations will be those between human beings” as mediated by common praxis rather than by the inert products of praxis (Sartre)², a society where human beings would be free to develop and satisfy needs which arise from their creative potential as sensuous-imaginative beings rather than being determined by the demands of commodity capitalism (Marcuse). Revolution is possible through praxis as a negation of the given or of “that which is,” a negation which opens onto “what *has not yet been*.”³ Such negative transcendence (*dépassement*) is possible only if we allow the possibility of “a certain action of the future as such” on the present⁴, an “ingression of the future”⁵ and of freedom into the present that allows us to transcend our “arrested and denied possibilities” toward “new modes of human existence.”⁶

My focus here will be on Sartre’s *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and on Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man* and *An Essay on Liberation* as analyses of alienation and searches for the Archimedean revolutionary point within those very alienating conditions. As with Heidegger, the starting point of their analyses is modern human

² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique, Tome I: Théorie des ensembles pratiques ; précédé de Questions de méthode* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), 349 n. 1, tr. by A. Sheridan-Smith as *Critique of Dialectical Reason, Vol. 1: Theory of Practical Ensembles*, (ed.) J. Réé (London: Verso, 1982), 307 n. 89. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as CRD. Page references, separated by a slash, will be first to the French original, then to the English translation.

³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, (tr.) H. Barnes (New York: Vintage, 1968), 92.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 92n.

⁵ Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 48, 88–89. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as EL.

⁶ Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), xi–xii. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as ODM.

existence in its everydayness: at work, at home, in the midst of others or in isolation, engaged in toil or relaxing and enjoying life's pleasures.

According to Heidegger, the inauthenticity of contemporary existence "does not signify any less Being or 'lower' degree of Being," but is completely and existentially concrete, and can be determined through such concrete, particular phenomena as "when busy, when excited, when interested, when ready for enjoyment."⁷ It is precisely in its most concrete everydayness, says Heidegger, that the inauthenticity of modern existence is to be found. The primary reality of the modern individual's existence (in Kierkegaard's terms) is precisely that she is not an individual at all, but "a number, a mass man"⁸—or in Heidegger's famous phrase, "Everyone is the Other and no one is himself" (*Jeder ist der Andere und Keiner er selbst*), insofar as people live as that anonymous "anyone" (*das Man*) who is no one in particular: "As anyone-self, the particular Dasein has been *dispersed* into the 'anyone,' and must first find itself."⁹ Contemporary existence, Kierkegaard notes, surrenders its existential possibilities to what is determined by its membership in that "monstrous abstraction": "the public," that entity which is neither you nor me in our individuality and yet which we all are.¹⁰

It is as members of the public that we watch programs (whether on TV or on-line), listen to music (whether purchased or pirated, broadcast or in concert), follow fashions in dress and hairstyles, consume news, adopt opinions, participate in recreational activities,

⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 15th ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemayer, 1979), 43, tr. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson as *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 68.

⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, (tr.) H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 33–34: "Another kind of despair seems to be to permit itself to be tricked out of its self by 'the others.' Surrounded by hordes of men, absorbed in all sorts of secular matters, more and more shrewd about the ways of the world—such a person forgets himself...does not dare to believe in himself, finds it too hazardous to be himself and far easier and safer to be like the others, to become a copy, a number, a mass man."

⁹ Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 128, 129; *Being and Time*, 165, 167. Translation modified. I have translated the German "*Man*" as "anyone" in place of Macquarrie and Robinson's "they."

¹⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages: The Present Age and the Age of Revolution*, (tr.) H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 84–98, 100–106. Kierkegaard's account of the public as an anonymous agent of "leveling" that substitutes empty chatter and rumour for speech had a clear and direct influence on Heidegger's analysis of inauthentic existence as *das Man*, as has often been noted.

and generally consume goods and services. It is as members of the public that we allow our needs and satisfactions to be determined by a system of economic relations and a productive process that “delivers the goods.”¹¹ As Marcuse puts it, we relax, have fun, behave and consume, love and hate, *as others do* (ODM, 5), recognize ourselves and find our very soul in the commodities which have become “part and parcel of [our] own existence, own ‘actualization’” (EL, 12), allow commodities (news, entertainment, food, lodging) to prescribe our habits, attitudes, and intellectual and emotional reactions. (ODM, 12)

When “satisfying goods also include thoughts, feelings, aspirations, why should [individuals] wish to think, feel, and imagine for themselves?” (ODM, 50) Where there is “an immediate identification of the individual with his society” (ODM, 12), “the ‘inner’ dimension of the mind in which opposition to the status quo can take root” (ODM, 13) is so reduced that “the very notion of alienation is questionable.” (ODM, 9) We live and think as others do under the domination of “a comfortable, smooth, democratic unfreedom” (ODM, 1) that deprives the individual of even the desire “to exert autonomy over a life that would be his own” (ODM, 5), that would be authentic (*Eigentlich*). The result is “the atrophy of the mental organs for grasping the contradictions [within society] and the alternatives” (ODM, 79) for negating and transcending “that which is” through the dissatisfactions of “the unhappy consciousness of... hopes unfulfilled” (ODM, 61) and “negative thinking.”¹²

The others who dominate us are not so much this or that particular person or group, but others who are themselves determined in their actions, thoughts, and feelings by what others do. The totally administered world of public opinion and commodities “absorbs even the administrators,” who are as dominated by the productive apparatus of commodity capitalism as anyone else. (ODM, 169) The result is, as Sartre argues, that everyday life consists in large part of acts without an author, where agency is endlessly displaced and deferred, where everyone acts *passively*, as Other, and never *actively*, as herself—a condition of impotence which Sartre calls “seriality.” If everyone is the slave of another who is in turn the slave of another, *ad infinitum*, because all are determined by the productive apparatus, then it is always “someone else,” somewhere else, who “decides,” which means that no authentic decision is taken and agency is lost.

¹¹ Marcuse develops this point both in *ODM* (xiv, 79) and in *EL* (86).

¹² See also ODM, 76, 209–11, 171; EL, 87.

The clearest and most vivid example Sartre gives of this phenomenon is one he chooses precisely for its banal everydayness: people lined up waiting for a bus. (CRD, 308–17/256–67) Marcuse praises Sartre’s analysis for transcending “the immediate concreteness of the situation...toward the factors which *make* the situation and the behaviour of the people...in that situation.” (ODM, 177) My focus here will be on Sartre’s analysis of the bus queue as a situation in which, in a close echo of Heidegger, Sartre says, “Everyone is the same as the Others in so far as he is Other than himself” (*Chacun est le même que les Autres en tant qu’il est Autre que soi*). (CRD, 311/260)

Picture this: a group of people is standing in line waiting for a bus. The individuals differ in age, class, sex, race, and social background. But they do not pay attention to each other (CRD, 280/221); “they do not care about or speak to each other and...do not look at each other,” and so form “a plurality of solitudes,” “side by side at a bus stop.” (CRD, 308/256) This isolation from each other is something *lived* in behaviours (turning one’s back on one’s neighbour) and attitudes (indifference), and it is the product at one and the same time of big-city life and the integration of the individuals into other groups. (CRD, 308–309/256–57) Here is one such individual now: “It is morning, he has just got up and left his home; he is still thinking of his children, who are ill, etc.; in addition, he is going to his office, he has an oral report to make to his superior, he is worrying about its phrasing, rehearsing it under his breath, etc.” (*Ibid.*) In short, *his mind is elsewhere*, leaving him semi-unaware of the others waiting for the bus. Now he’s reading the morning paper he bought on his way to the bus stop: “To isolate oneself [*s’isoler*] by reading the paper is to make use of the national collectivity” (CRD, 310/258), and ultimately the entire world economic system, in order to separate oneself from however many other people are waiting at the bus stop. And yet, despite this mutual isolation into a plurality of solitudes, he and his fellow commuters are united in the bus queue by their “common interest” in riding the bus. (*Ibid.*)

It is the bus, the transit system, and the wider society which account for people *being in line* and determine their *being* as commuters. In that sense, they are united “from the outside” by the materialized products of past human productive activity or *praxis* (CRD, 310–11/258–59), which Sartre calls the “practico-inert.” As determined by the bus, the transit system, and the rules and local customs governing the behaviour of transit users, the practico-inert designates the commuters as interchangeable and “strictly identical” with each other; their behaviour (waiting in line, buying a fare, riding the bus, etc.) is “*prepared in advance*” by the practico-inert and “*already*

awaiting" them. (CRD, 317/267) Insofar as their futures are already given through the practico-inert, they share not a common freedom (which presupposes an open future determined by praxis) but a common *fate*. The commuters' passively constituted identity with all the others is, at the same time, correlative to each commuter *being-other* (*être-autre*) than the organic individual which "he *is in person*, or which he *exists*" (CRD, 311/259–60): "Everyone is the same as the Others in so far as he is Other than himself."

This "identity as alterity" is a function not only of the practico-inert, but of *scarcity*: the bus was not built by or for this *particular* grouping of individuals, but *by Others* as a means of transportation for *anyone* in general. Its material limitations entail the possibility that "there is not enough room for everyone." (See CRD, 312–14/260–63) Consequently, the people standing in line are competing for a scarce resource, resulting in an implicitly antagonistic relationship. (CRD, 280–81/221) What unites them lies *outside* the group, in the bus and the transit system, and what differentiates them from each other is the simple materiality of their bodies, which is what allows them both to exist "side by side" in space, external to one another, and to compete with one another for a place on the bus. (CRD, 311/259) "It is internalized scarcity which makes everyone appear to Others as Other" and the practico-inert "which defines human beings as Others" in a negative and antagonistic sense. (CRD, 224/151)

The experience of the people lined up for the bus is thus not a communal one based on common praxis aimed at a common objective, but a series of experiences "lived separately as identical instances of the same act." (CRD, 313/262) They are a grouping (*groupement*), a passively totalized social collectivity (*collectif*), determined by a practico-inert object, but not *a group* acting in concert. (CRD, 308, 319/255, 269) Insofar as what they do is determined by the practico-inert, their praxis is "passive activity, active passivity" (CRD, 252/185) suffered as a kind of common destiny or "passive unity" (CRD, 308/255) rather than experienced as united active freedoms.¹³

This combination of alterity and identity, common-being and separation, is expressed in the *order* of the bus queue which is a purely numerical designation of individuals, with no regard for their intrinsic characteristics: "I am tenth in line." Everyone's fate is determined

¹³ See also Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Idiot de la famille, Tome I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 136: passive activity is determined by the actions of others, through the mediation of an inert material-social field, rather than being self-determining praxis.

by this ordering “as Other *through every Other as Other*”: “I am tenth *through the Others* in so far as they are Other than themselves” to the extent that the reason for their place in line (their ordinal number) “does not lie within them.” (CRD, 312/261) “Each one becomes himself (*as Other than self*) insofar as he is other than the Others” and “the Others are other than him” as determined by their positions in the serial ordering. (CRD, 313/262) In that way, the order and its unity is “always present but always elsewhere,” *i.e.*, in the Other: “*Elsewhere* there is only an Other, always other than self.” (CRD, 317/267)

In the series, as Gertrude Stein says of Oakland, “There is no there there.” There is only an *Elsewhere*, which is never “here,” “in person,” inasmuch as the individuals find their position in the series only as other than themselves. Passively determined by the practico-inert, the praxis of the serialized commuters has been transformed into “a praxis without an author” (CRD, 235/166) and their practical field “is determined on the basis of the *Elsewhere of all Elsewheres*.” (CRD, 363/324) Genuine agency has been lost; individuals find their possibilities “dispersed” in the “Any-one self.”

The bus queue is merely an example of a much wider phenomenon. In much of our social being, we are determined by practico-inert structures and institutions into functionally identical but numerically distinct individuals—as health-care recipients, tax-payers, employees, voters, consumers, and even as would-be agents of social change, all the way down to the most intimate details of our lives as friends, lovers, spouses, parents, and children—insofar as our possibilities for acting come not from us, but from established social practices and institutions. How, then, can agency be regained? What Sartre calls “the group” is constituted “as the negation of the collectivity which engenders and sustains it” (CRD, 307/254) and “the negation of [serial] impotence” (CRD, 325/277) through an action undertaken in common “which tends to turn the group into pure praxis by trying to eliminate all forms of inertia from it.” (CRD, 307/255) In short, in the group, individual praxis is determined through praxis undertaken with others rather than determined through the products of previous praxis (the practico-inert); it is *self-determining* and *sovereign* praxis of which “anyone could be considered the author.”¹⁴ As Sartre suggests, “The essential characteristic

¹⁴ Philippe Gavi, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Pierre Victor, *On a raison de se révolter* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 350: “*On se trouve enfin...devant la liberté elle-même, c'est-à-dire l'idée d'une société où il y aura des hommes libres et qui décident des*

of the group in fusion is the sudden resurrection of freedom" (CRD, 425/401); but this raises a further question: under what conditions do groups arise?

The transformation from series to group, Sartre says, "occurs when impossibility becomes impossible," when *not to change* "that which is" amounts to "the impossibility of living" or the threat of death. (CRD, 384–85/349–50) A group is then "constituted by the liquidation of an inert seriality under the pressure of definite material circumstances" (CRD, 394/361)—in particular, an imminent threat of death which elicits an urgent response; and the danger could arrive *at any moment*. Sartre's famous example is the transformation of the inhabitants of the Quartier St. Antoine in Paris on July 14, 1789 into the revolutionary mob which storms the Bastille prison. (CRD, 386/351ff.) The army of Louis XVI is due to arrive to "keep the peace" and has negatively "totalized" the inhabitants as potential troublemakers to be contained within a confined space (what would now be called "ketteling"). At first, each individual acts in isolation from the others, "running in the streets, shouting, forming gatherings, and burning down the gates of toll houses," motivated by rumours which—as rumours do by their very nature—"circulate" among the crowd.¹⁵ (CRD, 388/353) This is far from a concerted action; everyone is trying to save his own skin, at the expense of others if necessary, and refuses to be a means to anyone else's ends. (See CRD, 192/113) The "common fate" shared by the inhabitants—"a totality of destruction, in so far as individuals are designated by their identical membership in the same city" (CRD, 388/353–54)—does not in itself lead to *solidarity*.

At some point, however, individuals discover being absent from a group—not uniting with others in a common praxis—as a real and immediate risk of death. (CRD, 401/369) However, if each individual joins a group of ninety-nine, then each becomes the *hundredth* member through whom all the others become the hundredth member as well, and "being a hundred" qualifies the whole group and is grasped as a *means*: "We are a hundred strong." (CRD, 424/400) At this

choses dont chacun pourrait être considéré comme l'auteur." It is Sartre who is speaking here.

¹⁵ See CRD, 343/300: Rumour is a passively constituted process which "derives its strength from the fact that no one thinks it"—*i.e.*, it is not "a conscious moment of praxis" but a "practico-inert object," the strength of which "derives from its ubiquity of absence," from its being a praxis without an author or an agent. Also see CRD, 342/298: "Neither the person who receives the rumour nor the person who transmits it could have or can verify it," and so rumour "is transmitted by the Other insofar as he is Other."

moment, serial flight (*sauve qui peut*) is transformed into “common praxis in response to a common danger” which “allows me to find myself in the Other *as myself*” (CRD 418/392)—that is, as that organic being which I am and which I *exist*, and as *my own freedom* externalized in the Others, rather than finding myself in the Other as *other* than myself. Thus, on that revolutionary July day, “Everyone reacted in a new way: not as an individual, nor as an Other, but as an individual incarnation of the common person” (CRD, 390–91/357), that is, the *agent* actively determined by a common praxis.

In this situation, what mediates relations among individuals is “not an object, but a praxis,” the meaning of which I comprehend immediately through my own praxis (CRD, 406/377) insofar as “comprehension is simply the transparency of praxis to itself” (CRD, 160/74) and praxis is self-elucidating (*se donne ses lumières*). (CRD, 286n/228n) In group praxis, “It is not that I am myself in the Other: it is that in praxis, there is no *Other*, there are only several *myselfs*.” (CRD, 420/394–95) Wherever a group member acts, I also act; every *there*, everywhere *elsewhere* occupied by another group member, is another *here, now*, another “myself approaching me through my neighbour” (CRD 418/392), in contrast to the series, which is “nowhere, always elsewhere.” (CRD, 419/394) We are all doing the *same* thing—not in the serial form in which each person’s praxis is determined by an Other which is always Other than itself (“identity in alterity”), but in the sense that each of us takes up, moves forward, and helps organize a common praxis toward a common objective, such that this is indeed a *common* doing and a *common* experience guided by a *pure* non-alienated reciprocity.¹⁶ (CRD, 207–208/131–32) “My praxis,” Sartre adds, “is in itself the praxis of the group totalized here by me in so far as every other myself totalizes it in another here which is the same.” (CRD, 419/394)

Far from the individuals being completely dissolved in the group, the numerical strength and efficacy of the group depends on the enduring alterity and numerical distinctness of its members. Instead of a relation of indifference and simple exteriority (being “side by side,” “tenth in line”), numerical distinctness, through the group action, is produced as a means, and so reabsorbed “in the free development of praxis as invention” as a *quality* of that praxis—namely, its strength: “we are a hundred strong.” (CRD, 424/400) This is not a mere change of perception or a matter of wishing and wanting, but “a real change...from inert activity into collective action” (CRD,

¹⁶ See Sartre, *L’Idiot de la famille*, 816: “la relation fondamentale entre les hommes, masquée, déviée, aliénée, réifiée tant qu’on voudra—est la réciprocité.”

401/370) in which each individual becomes the sovereign organizer of a common praxis.¹⁷

In sum, the condition of the possibility of revolutionary action—of what Sartre calls the fusing of individuals into a group under “high temperatures” (CRD, 394/361)—is an imminent threat of death which can be countered only by individuals uniting together in a common defensive action, and in which the success of the individual acting alone is simply impossible. The easiest analogy—and one which Sartre himself uses—is a football (soccer) team: no team member wins unless the whole team wins. In the case of revolution, though, the “team” is not playing to win a match, but to save the very lives of its members. Genuine agency, both for a group and its individual members, arises in response to the group being negatively totalized by the imminent danger of death and the absolute necessity of countering that threat in a *timely* and urgent manner. It is then that individuals are no longer lost and dispersed in the Anyone-self of an anonymous public whose attitudes and behaviours are prescribed by the practico-inert, whether in the form of means and implements designed to serve anyone, or in the form of practices, regulations, codes, laws, and customs. In the face of death, individuals are able to reclaim and reappropriate their existential possibilities—particularly their own free praxis as the creative negation of the given ends, and the invention of means serving those ends, which those individuals have chosen for themselves in light of their genuine vital needs. (CRD, 370–71/333) It is then that they achieve an existence that is truly *their own* or is authentic. Instead of the impotence of being determined by an Other who is always *elsewhere*, individuals in the group in fusion are—at last, and contrary to our everyday public existence—*here, now*, as genuine agents of change. It is not hard to see Heidegger’s analyses of the individuating character of anxiety in the face of death leading to the “decisive moment” in the background of Sartre’s account.

Marcuse, in a similar vein, writes that revolutionary and qualitative change of the totality of social and productive relations would

¹⁷ My analysis of the group in fusion has been guided by the following works by Thomas R. Flynn: “Mediated Reciprocity and the Genius of the Third,” in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, Library of Living Philosophers, Vol. XVI, (ed.) P. A. Schlipp (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1981), 345–370; *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism: The Test Case of Collective Responsibility* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984); *Sartre, Foucault and Historical Reason, Vol. 1: Toward an Existentialist Theory of History* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997); *Sartre: A Philosophical Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

require “that the labouring classes are alienated from this universe in their very existence [objectively], that their consciousness [subjectively] is that of the *total impossibility to continue to exist in this universe*, so that the need for qualitative change is *a matter of life and death*.” (ODM, 23; my emphasis) Unfortunately, in advanced technological capitalism, the working class “no longer appears to be the living contradiction to the established society” (ODM, 31); insofar as it benefits from a system which “delivers the goods,” it identifies its interests with those of the system, however exploited its members are: “As long as these conditions prevail, it makes sense to say that the general will is always wrong.” (EL, 65) The subjective and objective conditions for revolution no longer coincide: industrial workers “are well integrated and well rewarded” (EL, 55), and their aspirations are so dominated by the productive apparatus that they actively work to perpetuate it, thereby pursuing their own subjection and becoming a conservative, even reactionary force. (EL, 53–55) Despite the numerical weight of the working class and its key role in the productive process (EL, 16), it has relinquished its former role as “the subject of history” insofar as it no longer embodies the conscious and felt *vital need* for change.

If the need for change is to be experienced as “a matter of life and death,” “when impossibility becomes impossible,” then it can only be found in those who are *conscious* of their alienation and of their negation by the system, and by those who consciously experience the *impossibility* of continuing to exist in the existing society. “The negation exists *prior* to the change itself” as a new consciousness which is capable of saying “no” to the status quo and imagine “a qualitatively different universe of discourse and action” (ODM, 23); “the slaves must be *free for* their liberation before they can become free” (ODM, 41) by first becoming conscious of their servitude. (ODM, 7) The resulting question, then, is where in the existing society we might find real groups of people who experience the need for change and for refusing and negating “that which is” as a matter of life and death.

Such mortal threats exist, but people are not *conscious* of them. Marcuse wrote *One-Dimensional Man* at a time when the NATO and Warsaw Pact pointed nuclear arsenals at each other, hence threatening the total destruction of human life on the planet. And yet this totalizing negation did not produce a revolutionary group in fusion. On the contrary, the threat of total annihilation was normalized, made tolerable and even a source of enjoyment and fun: “luxury bomb shelters,” “war games,” etc. (ODM, 80) Today, in addition to the still existing (nay, greatly increased) nuclear arsenals, humanity faces threats coming from many directions: climate change, the

exhaustion of the soil and water needed for agriculture, pollution, sectarian and ideological conflicts, Russia's re-emergence as a rival superpower to the US, new forms of anti-biotic resistant disease...the list goes on. These threats negate us without our being conscious of being negated, just as, through the satisfaction of false needs, we are unaware of (and alienated from) our alienation and heteronomy.

The first condition of revolution is to become conscious of being negated, conscious of being threatened in our vital being, conscious of our alienation and lack of freedom. In a sense, to make the threat of death a condition of revolutionary praxis is to ask both too much—for surely something less than the threat of annihilation can give rise to experiencing the *impossibility* of continuing to exist in atomistic isolation—and too little, inasmuch as there needs to be consciousness of the threat not as something remote and theoretical, but as something urgent and immediate which could befall us “at any minute.”

Marcuse seeks the power of negative thinking outside of this anxiety in the face of potential mass destruction. For Marcuse, the consciousness of servitude and of the impossibility of living in current conditions, and the felt need to negate and transcend “that which is,” lies first and foremost in “the Great Refusal” of “that which is” in modern literature and art. (See ODM, 57–64) Modern art—Picasso in painting, Schoenberg in music, Woolf and Joyce in literature—subverts the governing conventions and disconcerts the person who tries to understand it, bringing that person's everyday assumptions and beliefs into question. During the onset of modernity in the 19th century, “the oppositional, alien and transcendent elements in the higher culture” constituted “*another dimension* of reality” (ODM, 57), beyond and in opposition to the everyday reality: the aesthetic dimension.¹⁸ Literature, art, and music “were essentially alienation, sustaining and protecting...the unhappy consciousness of the divided world, the defeated possibilities, the hopes unfulfilled, and the promises betrayed” (ODM, 61); “*artistic alienation* is the conscious transcendence of the alienated existence,” alienation aware of itself. (ODM, 60) Even at its most affirmative, art transcends and negates the existing world and points to a world beyond, in the name of which this world is judged and found wanting. (ODM, 63) However, this beyond is not that of religion (which functions as an apology for that which is), but a new form of human existence, in which the productive power of modern society overcomes scarcity and makes possible work that is creative and artistic, where “for the first time in

¹⁸ See Herbert Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

history, men would act freely and collectively under and against the necessity which limits their freedom and their humanity" (ODM, 45), and where reality is formed by an aesthetic sensibility in which sensibility, imagination, and reason function in harmonious free play. (See EL, 21, 31–32, 45–46; ODM, 16–18, 37, 42, 240–41)

It is the felt lack of and need for this "new Form of life" (EL, 88) which stands as the basis of the Great Refusal of that which is. (See ODM, 62, 70; EL, 5) Art does take on the function of transcendence formerly accorded to religion—it is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the spirit of spiritless conditions—but it does so in the name of a new world and a new life that would emerge *within* the world, developing out of actually existing tendencies in this world, which, although they have been arrested and denied in this world, endure in the subversive remembrance of past aspirations and unrealized possibilities. (See EL, 3, 33–34; ODM, xi–xii, 98) Through a remembrance of "an imaginary *temps perdu*," hope for a revolutionary future arises (EL, 33–34), and it is from this "untimely" past-future perspective that the present is condemned. (EL, 90) Art embodies this untimely transcendence. Even if art is a merely imaginary transcendence of the given, at a time when political action seems blocked, "where else than in the *radical imagination*, as refusal of reality, can the rebellion, and its uncompromised goals be remembered?" (EL, 44–45; my emphasis)

Yet Marcuse was well aware that the oppositional and subversive nature of art has long been tamed and integrated into commodity capitalism. The most subversive works of early and high modernism have now taken on the value of "classics," cultural commodities enjoyed by ever wider segments of the public, such that "the most contradictory works and truths peacefully coexist in indifference" (ODM, 61), providing entertainment without troubling anyone's conscience. (ODM, 70) The "contradiction [between the given and the possible] is now flattened out," Marcuse notes, and these works have been deprived "of the estrangement which was the very dimension of their truth." (ODM, 64) Art has lost its power to disturb us or call into question our current mode of existence. "The Great Refusal is in turn refused" (*ibid.*) because people have been so thoroughly conditioned by schooling, advertising, and mass media that they are no longer receptive to the possibilities of genuine change or revolt presented by great art, instead settling for mere gestures of rebellion in the form of passively consumed commodities (paintings, performances, musical recordings).¹⁹

¹⁹ Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension*, 34.

But it is the promise of a different life in which individuals would enjoy a whole and harmonious existence, and not rebellious gestures, that makes art into something oppositional, and this promise is embodied in artistic form: the overall composition of the work that renders every detail of the work necessary to what it expresses. Even “anti-art” (such as Dada), which calls into question all classical notions of art and aims to disrupt and resist being consumed and enjoyed, remains *art* in virtue of its form; no one would mistake it for anything else. Marcel Duchamp’s *L. H. O. O. Q.*, in which he draws a mustache on the *Mona Lisa*, remains an artistic image belonging to the world of high culture; a Tristan Tzara poem, however bizarre or illogical, is still recognizably a poem, not a scientific article or advertising prose. Artistic form by its very nature *reconciles* oppositions, including the opposition between *the given* and *the possible*. Form is the mastery of disorder, violence, and suffering; they are transmuted and transcended by form’s harmonious unity. “This ‘redeeming,’ reconciling power seems inherent in art” (EL, 43), and so even works which present disorder, violence, and suffering still exhibit “their own form, their own order,” such that in the end, “everything is in order.” (EL, 38–44) The most sublime and dreadful works of art, the most rebellious and disturbing, are still *works of art*, and appreciated, valued, and enjoyed as such.

The positive counterpart to artistic form’s reconciling power, though, is its transcendence of the given toward an unattained and promised harmony. The very form which reconciles through its mastery of the formless and its imposition of order on disorder constitutes a harmonious union of disparate elements, or beauty; and beauty, says Marcuse (following Nietzsche, following Stendhal), is *une promesse de bonheur*, a promise which indicts existing reality as “mutilated and false.” (ODM, 62) Art presents us with the harmonious play of the faculties (sense, reason, and imagination) denied to us by reality. In this way, the creative imagination expressed in art, despite its absorption into the culture industry, can summon up “the great, real, transcending force...rebellion against the whole of existing society, the rebellion for the total transvaluation of values” (EL, 22), “a break with the familiar, the routine ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, understanding things.” (EL, 5) Thus, Marcuse argues, “the awareness of the transcendent possibilities of freedom must become a driving power in the consciousness and the imagination which prepare the soil for this revolution.” (EL, 23)

Art, which expresses the harmonious interplay of the faculties, affirms creativity, spontaneity, play, imagination and sensuousness, outlines a new sensibility and a new form of life, “a revolution in

perception, for a new sensorium.” (EL, 35–37) This revolution in perception, this “radical change of experience” (EL, 45), is essential to the total opposition to “the commodity form of men and things” (EL, 51), the form which characterizes the actually existing society. Artistic form, as *une promesse de bonheur*, is the negation of the commodity form and its production of false needs, the satisfaction of which leads to “euphoria in unhappiness” (ODM, 5), that “repressive satisfaction” (ODM, 7) which denies and negates all those freely developed needs which, in order to be satisfied, would require the total transformation of society. (ODM, 23) It is art that reminds us of the denied promise of a non-repressive happiness that would not depend on the desire to possess and consume, which is produced by an exploitative economic system sustained by the wasteful production of unnecessary and harmful goods and the perpetuation of stupefying work and leisure.²⁰ Art expresses that “unhappy consciousness of a *divided world* in which ‘that which is’ falls short of, and even denies, ‘that which can be.’” (ODM, 209; my emphasis) It reveals “the irrational character of the established rationality” (ODM, 227) and awakens us to the fact that it is not the poets and artists, but everyday reality, with its acceptance of the possibility of annihilation and its violent repressive practices, which is truly insane. (ODM, 190–92)

How, though, can this purely subjective and individual revolt (see ODM, xiii, 9) be translated into a social movement which would not merely tinker with the margins of social reality but break the chain of exploitation at its strongest link, thus undermining “the internal structure and cohesion of the capitalist system”? (EL, 82) Unless “the absolute need for breaking out of this whole” is embodied in “the driving force of a historical practice” (ODM, 253), unless there are “demonstrable agents and agencies of social change” (ODM, xiii) whose “basic needs” are for a non-exploitative society, the artistic “unhappy consciousness” remains a powerless subjective protest. The turn to art and the artistic life, a “revolt into style,” all too easily becomes another commodity, “turning rebellion into money”²¹, whatever the intention of the artist or the aesthete.

Marcuse knows this, and in place of the “revolt into style,” calls for *a style into revolt*: genuine revolt animated by a new aesthetic sensibility, “mixing the barricade and the dance floor.” (EL, 26) He saw the protest movements of the 1960s—especially the student

²⁰ Marcuse develops this point both in *ODM* (3–5, 7) and in *EL* (5, 11, 18–19).

²¹ The Clash, (*White Man*) *In Hammersmith Palais* (CBS Records, 1978), MP3 audio.

movement—as political protests animated by a new sensibility which sought to liberate the faculties of sense and imagination from the domination of a repressive and instrumental form of reason. (EL, 30) This would amount to a transposition of the previously apolitical aesthetic dimension into politics, forming a new style of politics itself. Although this *subjective* revolt on the part of “militant minorities” ran into opposition from the conservative “objective basis” of revolutionary change (*i.e.*, the working class), the displacement of the opposition from a mass-based working class to relatively small activist groups could, thought Marcuse (in 1969), lead to a “new base,” a new subject of history. (EL, 52ff.)

Here Marcuse’s thought links up with Sartre’s. For Sartre, it is clear that it is relatively small and spontaneously formed groups who constitute the real subjects of history; classes, by contrast, are characterized by inertia, and an individual’s class-being is merely an aspect of dispersal into the mass of the alienated and reified Anyone-self. (See CRD, 286–305/228–52) One’s class-being always comes from “outside,” from the practico-inert, and designates the worker as a product of his product—*i.e.*, as determined by the productive apparatus and the existing totality of social and productive relations, and to that extent, unfree. (See ODM, 32–33, 207; EL, 90–91) But a purely individual and subjective revolt, in the absence of others who “in the practice of freeing themselves “shape their life in solidarity” (EL, 46), remains stuck in serialized impotence, where “it is the Other as Other who will decide whether my action will remain an individual, mad initiative, and throw me back into abstract isolation, or whether it is to become the common action of the group.” (CRD, 325/277)

Neither individuals *as such* or classes *as such*, then, can be agents of change, but only *groups* motivated by an urgent, real and vital need to transcend the impossible and repressive conditions which they experience as a *living death*. (See EL, 55, 60) The threat that motivates individuals to fuse into groups need not be physical annihilation; it can be, and most often is, the denial of possibilities of life that have been glimpsed (through art or other means) but are denied by the existing society, and specifically in situations where this denial is felt as intolerable. Moreover, it is not enough for them to transcend the given in imagination, however radical that imagination may be (see EL, 44–45); real change, and real solidarity, can only be brought about through group praxis, not through wishing and hoping, however essential revolutionary hope is to the process. (See EL, 60, 70–71) It is only in group praxis and solidarity that passive activity and repressive satisfaction give way to sovereign, self-

determining agency and genuine autonomy, in which the individual achieves “*an existence of his own*”: *authentic* existence. (See CRD, 401/370; ODM, 243–45)

This brings me back to my starting point: where in the world is such revolutionary agency to be found? Even in 1969, Marcuse held that in the societies of late capitalism, the old model of a revolutionary avant-garde leading a *mass* revolt was out-dated, as was the possibility of a spontaneous popular revolt. As long as the system delivers the satisfaction of the needs which it has itself produced, then most people (including the working class) will have a stake in preserving it, in which case “the general will is always wrong.” (EL, 65) Neither popular revolts nor revolutionary avant-garde parties, then, will provide the fulcrum which can lift up the entire world. The alternative would seem to be groups united by a limited common objective under the pressure of a vital and immediate need for social change, with each group seeking its own liberation, such that these efforts in aggregate would bring about a total transformation of society: the sort of thing Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call “molecular revolution.”²² However, the alternative between mass-based and group movements poses a dilemma.

On the one hand, resistance and revolution to our current total system must itself be total: a rejection of the Whole, the Great Refusal. Such a Great Refusal would, it seems, have to be carried out and embodied by a large group motivated by a common aim: “the” Movement (in the 1960s), the working class (at one time), a “living contradiction.” Such a group would have to embody in its very existence, and in the lived experience of its members, the total refusal of the whole repressive system; and, in virtue of its position within the productive apparatus, would need to be capable of striking at the strongest link in the chain. The problem with this prospect is that no such mass movement currently exists: the working class (to borrow a phrase from Marcuse and Adorno) “missed its moment,” or perhaps the moment missed it. In the 2016 U. S. Presidential election, large numbers of working class voters cast their ballots for a right-wing demagogue who thrived on a politics that pitted working class Americans against each other: whites against other races, native-born against immigrants, men against women, Christians (and sometimes Jews) against Muslims (and sometimes Jews). Divisions within

²² Félix Guattari, *Révolution moléculaire*, revised and expanded edition (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions 10| 18, 1980); Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, (tr.) B. Massumi (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1986).

the American working class certainly existed before the advent of Donald Trump, but Trump succeeded in making many (mostly male, mostly white) workers regard other members of their economic class as greater enemies than the capitalist system that oppresses and exploits them. Rather than seeing each other as united by the same aims, many American workers stand to each other in the same relation as people queued up for the bus: competitors for scarce resources distributed according to a practico-inert social and economic system, divided by their common needs through socially produced scarcity (“there is not enough for everyone”). Seriality, in which each is other to the other, predominates.

On the other hand, there are particularized movements of resistance with more limited aims, but which have achieved real gains. For example, the school district of Vancouver just passed a measure allowing trans-gender students to use the washroom appropriate to the gender by which they designate themselves. Women's movements, anti-racist and civil rights movements, movements on behalf of the disabled, LGBTQ groups, and so on, have achieved real gains in human and civil rights and have made our society, for the most part, far more open, tolerant, and diverse than it was fifty years ago. That is real, transformative agency. But these various “molecular revolutions” have not resulted in a global or total revolution through a confluence of liberating tendencies. Instead, the various groups seem to be satisfied to participate in consumer capitalism on an equal footing with anyone else, enjoying their fair share of repressive satisfaction. There are groups constituted through genuine solidarity but there is no genuine solidarity *between* groups. Worse, some groups are experiencing divisions that pit some people against others and raise the question of who has a “right” to belong—*e.g.*, women of colour pitted against white women, or cis-gender women pitted against trans women within the feminist movement. The liberation sought by particular groups has not struck at the strongest link in the chain or translated into a “new base,” a new “living contradiction” that would totally negate the whole system; each can see its aims as having the possibility of being realized without the goals of other groups also being achieved. Nor can we any longer, as Marcuse and Sartre did in the 1960s, look to Third World liberation struggles as the embodiment of revolutionary hope. The lustre of anti-colonial revolution—in Algeria, Cuba, China, South Africa—has dimmed as the post-colonial states find themselves mired in inert and repressive bureaucracies (Algeria) or corruption (South Africa), or have effectively gone over to capitalism (China).

Where, then, are we to find the fulcrum that would lift up and overturn the system as a whole? Is that prospect out of reach?

There is reason to believe that such a pessimistic conclusion is premature. A new model is emerging: particular groups with particular aims, but which form alliances with other groups in order to move toward more global objectives. The Occupy movement, rooted in the occupation of Zuccotti Park in New York City from September to November 2011, strove to be an inclusive and global challenge not only to wealth inequality, but to the capitalist system that engenders it. Although the movement was short-lived, it brought together a wide array of oppositional groups—environmentalist, feminist, socialist, anti-racist, anti-consumerist—and sought to operate by consensus and open dialogue. Its influence lives on through other movements that take inspiration from it, such as Occupy Democrats, a movement to make the U. S. Democratic Party into a more oppositional and left-wing party, less dominated by the traditional party hierarchy and more open and inclusive. The great weakness of Occupy, however, was that for most of its participants, overthrowing the present system was not felt as a pressing and immediate need, but more as an aspiration and an ideal.

In the case of Black Lives Matter, by contrast, the acute feeling that the current system is intolerable was precisely what led to its founding. In the wake of the 2013 acquittal of a white man for shooting a young black man, Trayvon Martin, and subsequent police killings of African-Americans in Ferguson, New York City, Charleston, Baltimore, and elsewhere, BLM was created to defend the lives of black people and to expose and combat the racial injustices inherent in the American police and justice system. Here, the need was vital, the aim precise, and the movement was able to forge alliances with other oppositional groups. However, it has not all been smooth sailing. Individual chapters of BLM enjoy a great deal of autonomy, meaning that the movement sometimes lacks a unified message, and some local chapters have found themselves in opposition to other liberation movements, as when the Toronto BLM's demand that police be excluded from the Gay Pride Parade created a rift within the Toronto LGBTQ+ community. There have also been reported rifts between the largely young BLM activists and the older generation of Civil Rights activists.²³ This is not yet a movement in which the success of one group can come only through the success of all others.

²³ See Elizabeth Day, “#BlackLivesMatter: The Birth of a New Civil Rights Movement,” *The Guardian (The Observer)* (July 19, 2015), [<https://www.theguardian.com>].

The question is whether there could be a movement reflecting the felt urgency of Black Lives Matter but enjoying the wide scope of the Occupy Movement, and how such a movement could be brought about. Again, recent developments point toward some possible models of oppositional movements that would be both a “global refusal” and yet rooted in specific, felt, and vital needs for change. Protests against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline began under the leadership of Lakota Sioux of the Standing Rock reservation, but over the course of the year attracted thousands of environmentalists and other activists concerned about indigenous rights, the safety of the Lakota’s water supply, and global warming. What seemed a local matter brought in some 300 Native American tribes and thousands of non-native allies from across the United States, including members of Black Lives Matter, who all perceived and felt the connection between Native concerns, anti-racism, and the protection of the environment. They maintained solidarity in the face of attack dogs, pepper spray, and arrests, not to mention the logistical problems of supplying and maintaining a large encampment in an isolated setting. Only the harsh winter conditions sent most of the campers home in December, by which time the issue of indigenous land rights had been addressed at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, and new alliances had been forged among left-opposition groups. An acutely felt local issue, endangering the health and sovereignty of the Standing Rock Sioux, had led to laying the ground for a global refusal.

Something similar has occurred since Donald Trump’s inauguration in February 2017. Notably, the Women’s March in Washington, D. C., on the day after the inauguration, drew between 440,000 and 500,000 participants.²⁴ This was likely the largest one-day march in U. S. history, and with simultaneous marches around the world, the total number of participants was possibly as high as 5 million. It would be easy to dismiss the march as a spectacle made to capture the attention of the media, but in the course of it, people met, expressed support for each other, and sometimes exchanged contact information. Just as importantly, local organizations (Project Now

com/world/2015/jul/19/blacklivesmatter-birth-civil-rights-movement], accessed 18 August 2017.

²⁴ Tim Wallace and Alicia Parlapiano, “Crowd Scientists Say Women’s March in Washington Had 3 Times as Many People as Trump’s Inauguration,” *New York Times* (January 22, 2017); John Hamilton, “Politics Aside, Counting Crowds is Tricky,” *NPR* (January 23, 2017), [<https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwoway/2017/01/23/511267138/politics-aside-counting-crowds-is-tricky>].

New Mexico, the Texas Organizing Project) and new national groups (Indivisible) are mobilizing resistance to the Trump presidency. How effective this resistance will be, and whether it will move from resistance to revolution, remains to be seen, of course. But the crucial point is that the Trump presidency has given a fresh urgency to opposition movements; the threat from the existing order, particularly in the wake of the racist and neo-Nazi demonstrations in Charlottesville, Virginia (tacitly condoned by President Trump) has become all too real and perceptible.

What can be drawn from these recent developments is this: there is no need for a totalizing and unified global movement or a revolutionary class in order to mount total resistance. The fulcrum that will enable us to lift the whole world does not need to be a unitary point. Instead, it is a matter of networks forming spontaneously in the face of threats perceived as existential—if not as a threat to physical existence, then as a threat to cherished forms of life, a foreclosure of human possibilities that is felt as intolerable and calls for immediate response. Local pools of resistance can make connections with each other, and as the channels between movements deepen and widen in the face of the prospect of the total negation of vital possibilities, local pools become streams, and streams become rivers—much as happened at Standing Rock.

What unites all these groups is not so much a single aim or cause, but a sensibility: a feeling that things cannot continue as they are, that the current state of things is, practically and existentially, *impossible*. Faced with an imminent and total threat, individuals and groups understand that they have to cease pursuing strategies through which one of them can succeed without all the others also succeeding and move to a strategy which recognizes that one group can succeed only if all of them do. At this point, differences of particular aims are not subsumed into one totalizing aim, according to the classical revolutionary model. Instead, there is a metaphorical linking of arms, and difference and multiplicity become a strength—we *are a hundred strong*. Just as within a single movement there is strength in the separateness and difference that founds numerical multiplicity, so too differences between groups and movements can produce its own strength. As long as the threat is common to all, the struggle will be fought in common, although with different ultimate goals arising from different particular concerns and using different strategies. The indigenous rights activists and the environmentalists, the environmentalists and the Black Lives Matter activists: each was activated by different concerns, but coalesced in the face of a common threat, and even as “fused” into a common struggle; the differ-

ences among them and their concerns did not vanish into some sort of homogeneity or unanimity.

Although the reasons for feeling that the prevailing state of things is intolerable will differ among different groups, it is the feeling itself (of anger, of disgust, of sorrow, of compassion for the suffering and oppressed) that is common to all. This new sensibility may come in part from high culture and art, as Marcuse would have wanted it, but it also comes from alternative popular art (music, film, graphic novels) and social media. All of these present possibilities for human life as it could be, such that life as it is now lived, in contrast, is found wanting.²⁵ For those with this new sensibility, oppression and injustice simply do not make sense; they arouse a strong, negative affective response, a felt “no” that motivates people to take action.

Marcuse and Sartre, then, are both right, in their own ways. Marcuse is right that what is needed is to create space for the unhappy consciousness—the awareness that all is not right in the world—and that art and the aesthetic dimension are key means of bringing about that *prise de conscience*. Sartre is right that, in order for each of us to cease being the *other of the other*, and the other of oneself, it is necessary to grasp a threat to one’s life or one’s vital possibilities as being such that the only way to save oneself is to join with others in a common struggle. Revolution may not be what it used to be, but it may be all the better for it.

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²⁵ See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, (tr.) C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 340.