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Conclusion: Sartre and the deconstruction of the subject

SOME PRELIMINARY REFERENCE POINTS ON THE SUBJECT

Autonomous, independent, spontaneous foundation of knowledge, understanding, feeling, imagination? Alienating, idealist, bourgeois humanist, phallogocentric delusion? Does the subject lie between these two polar opposite descriptions of it, does it span them and, like a Pascalian paradox, fill all the space between, or does it lie elsewhere entirely, perhaps in a utopia? Is belief in the subject a necessary alienation, an *aliénation heureuse,*[1] a transcendental illusion of the Kantian kind? Is the subject an outmoded peg on which humanism used to hang its credentials and which can be abandoned along with the rest of the humanist paraphernalia? Or, to change metaphor, would such a rejection involve throwing the baby out with the bathwater? Is the concept of the subject necessary to any meditation on ethics, and, if so, need it be more than an "operational concept"?[2] Or should this idea be shunned as a manifestation of the worst kind of paternalism? Contemporary French philosophy returns incessantly to the subject – recent thinking on ethics and politics, and in particular on Auschwitz and on Heidegger, has made the issue a burning one once again – "through flame or ashes, but . . . inevitably,"[3] to use Derrida's concluding words in *De l'Esprit.* Having deposed the subject so firmly and with such apparent haste and delight in the 1960s and 1970s, French philosophers are now seeming to repent at leisure. The "death of man" (Foucault)[4] and the "ends of man" (Derrida)[5] are now seen to have lacked the radical finality with which their celebration endowed them twenty years earlier.

For our purposes, this revision of the subject, this disinterment of the human question, is all to the good, for it enables the interrogation of Sartre's position to be undertaken with seriousness, that is to say, not as a mere piece of historical inquiry, but as a genuine contribution to a vital philosophical debate. And it is in this spirit that the present chapter is conceived.

But before looking at Sartre's own views on the subject, let us consider briefly the bibliographical evidence for a change of attitude toward the subject in France. The published conference proceedings, special issues of journals, and multiple- and single-authored books of the last couple of years include the following:

Penser le sujet aujourd'hui
Sur l'Individu
L'Individu et ses ennemis
Après le sujet, qui vient?
L'Ère de l'individu
L'Individualisme: le grand retour
L'Ultime raison du sujet
Hors Sujet[6]

There are many more. Of course, the individual human being and the subject are not identical, they may even be opposed, though they are often conflated in the notion of the individual subject. The distinction has, however, no single or simple interpretation. The "individual" may be used in contradistinction to the "subject" to avoid the supposed metaphysical overtones of the latter – for example if the "biological individual" is at issue. But conversely, the term "subject" is employed in order to undercut the cozy, immediately familiar connotations that the "individual" may have when it is used to refer to separate, self-identical men and women whose status is self-evident and unproblematic. If the subject is berated as excessively theological, the individual is repudiated as insufficiently social. Both may appear to be attached to a lingering humanist heritage. But the barriers between them are far from clearcut, as is manifest in the fact that a work by the German philosopher Manfred Frank: *Die Unhintergehbarkeit von Individualität* is translated into French as *L'Ultime raison du sujet.* The text begins as follows:

A thesis is currently fashionable: In both theory and practice the "end" of the modern subject has come about, in all its forms, be it "apperception," "human reality," "person" or "individual."[7]

Frank's essay purports to be a refutation of this thesis, and thus provides further fuel for my contention that the subject is once again at the center of contemporary inquiry. Nonetheless, the slogan "a return to the subject" is rejected by both factions: Those held responsible for its so-called death – Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Deleuze, among others – if not now dead themselves, refuse the implications of *volte-face,* revisionism, and regression contained in the notion of a "return." The question of the subject can, for them, be considered only on the basis of its prior decentering or deconstruction. There is no philosophically valid means of undoing or overlooking all the work that has already gone into the dismantling of the subject as a humanist, metaphysical concept. On the other hand, there are those who maintain that the "death of the subject" was itself a myth, so that again there can be no question of a *return:* The subject was never abandoned except as part of a polemical strategy that has finally lost all credibility. These two groups remain, it will be clear, ideologically opposed. But they have in common the aim of a thoroughgoing exegesis of the history of the concept of the subject, from Descartes through Kant and Hegel to Husserl and, for some, Heidegger.

Similarly, there is no current consensus concerning the individual. Indeed, the notion of the individual produces even less agreement than that of the subject. As Ricoeur (following Louis Dumont) argues, it has two very different, even opposed senses: an empirical sense, that of "an indivisible sample," and a moral sense, that of "an independent, autonomous, nonsocial being."[8] Simply equated by some with the individual subject –

We may understand in this context by individual a subject, a being attached to his own identity by self-consciousness or self-knowledge,[9]

"master of himself and marked by a personal history,"[10] incalculable, unstable, varied, irreducible,[11] autonomous, and independent[12] – it represents a stand against absorption by anonymous, faceless, mass-production, and nameless market forces. Alternatively, the individual is celebrated by others precisely as a single element in a

subjectless flux, an atom, a "singularity,"[13] released from the humanist dress of earlier centuries. An undivided residue, without subjectivity or passions, without negation or otherness, an operational concept, unheroic, neutral, and synthetic. In this view, the individual represents precisely the *antithesis* of the subject, it is described even as an empty form, a specter haunting space after the death of the subject.[14] Some "individuals," then, are "subjects" and some are not. And some "subjects" are "individuals," but, similarly, some are not.

Etymologically, of course, the terms subject and individual have very different histories. The individual is undivided, at least with respect to the concept under which it has been individuated, and there is not much more to say about it in linguistic terms. The subject, on the contrary, may be divided, but this is not visible in its verbal formation. What is evident is rather the subject as *subjectum,* underlying ground or foundation (Greek: *hypokeimenon*). As *subjectus,* however, the subject may also be subject *to* something other – to laws, oppression, and so forth, but this is not the sense that the term carries as philosophical subject, though it provides fodder for some word play by certain philosophers.[15] Furthermore, the subject is opposed to the object, not merely in a linguistic sense, but also in the sense of being in contradistinction to the objective world that it perceives, knows, and, at some high points of hubris, paradoxically grounds.

The subject in its "modern" sense is traced back by its historians to Descartes and Kant, but the term is not ever used in this sense by the former, and is not used consistently by the latter. Nonetheless, Descartes is considered father of the modern concept of the subject insofar as he takes the *cogito* as logical foundation for all knowledge of the external world, as well as unifying principle underpinning the diversity of its objects.[16] It is in Descartes that Heidegger, for example, situates the origin of the subject–object split that he, together with other phenomenologists, sets out to heal.[17] The Cartesian subject is a kind of universal singular, common to all and yet specific to each and comparable to Kant's "bare 'I think'." Depending on whether the *Regulae* or the *Meditations* are focused on, Descartes may be seen as founding opposing conceptions of the subject as on the one hand individualist and on the other transindividual or even impersonal.[18] Furthermore, in the context of this chapter, it is also

tempting to see Descartes as having founded a version of the split subject, although this interpretation is evidently open to accusations of anachronism. The mind–body split, at times conceived as a pure dualism, in which the subject is identified with mind, though it happens to be physically embodied,[19] has, at other points in the text, further implications. For Descartes envisages the body as origin of the passions, emotions, and sentiments that go toward the constitution of the "*vrai homme*" (true man).[20] If mind as thinking substance is radically distinct from human emotions, passions, and so on, then the Cartesian subject may be seen as potentially divided in a more far-reaching sense than the mind–body dualism would initially suggest. In any case, what is certain is Descarte's ambivalence with respect to the location of the subject, whether it lies in the "soul" alone or in an intimate union of body and soul.

The division of the Kantian subject is not merely potential, it is explicit and recognized to be problematic. There are several different possible interpretations of the subject in Kant, ranging at one extreme, perhaps, from a (Humean) bundle of sense perceptions to the transcendental unity of apperception, or from the temporal phenomenal subject to the atemporal noumenal subject. Kant's own recognition of the impossibility of clarifying the relation between the noumenal and phenomenal subject is well known. In his analysis of the paralogisms of rational psychology (that is to say, pure or speculative psychology, which attempts to understand and describe the essence of the self or subject analytically, by rational deduction rather than by empirical observation) he reveals the split at the core of the subject which prevents full self-knowledge, for the "I that thinks," the synthesizing subject, cannot be proved identical to the temporal subject of experience. Cartesian dualism was primarily that of the mind–body split. In Kant, the subject itself is dual. Knowledge for Kant is restricted to the phenomenal world, and the I that thinks is not part of that world, not subject to causal categories but rather responsible for causal structuring. The I that thinks is responsible for the constitution of the spatiotemporal world but is not part of it and cannot be known. The illusions of rational psychology all depend on "treating the subjective conditions of thinking as being knowledge of the object."[21] This tendency to confuse the conditions of representation of the subject with the subject itself leads rational psychologists to believe that the subject is simple, substantial, and

personal. None of these assumptions is, in Kant's view, any more than the product of a false logic. In fact we can know nothing whatsoever about the transcendental subject:

> We do not have and cannot have any knowledge whatsoever of any such subject. Consciousness is, indeed, that which alone makes all representations to be thoughts: and in it therefore, as the transcendental subject, all our perceptions must be found, but beyond this logical meaning of the "I" we have no knowledge of the subject in itself, which as substratum underlies this "I" as it does all thoughts.[22]

We are left with the paradox of an identity presumed between the "I that thinks" and the subject of experience, in the face of the impossibility of self-knowledge, and of the fact that the former is beyond causality, the latter subject to it. The distinction between, and yet identity of, the "I that thinks" and the "I that intuits itself"[23] is one of the great imponderables of the Transcendental Deduction, and one of the areas where, ultimately, in Kant's view, all that can "fairly be asked" of a philosophy that pushes reason to its very limits is that it "comprehend" the "incomprehensibility" of the paradox it has uncovered.[24]

Like Descartes and Kant, Sartre uses a multiplicity of different terms to discuss the vexed question of the subject. Like Kant and Descartes, he starts from the reflexive, thinking subject, and, like them, he wrestles interminably with the ensuing problems of dualism. Mind/body (Descartes), noumenal/phenomenal (Kant), *pour soi/en soi* (Sartre). And like both his predecessors, he makes various ingenious attempts to evade the implications of such a dualism, ultimately ruling the question out of court as metaphysical and irrelevant to phenomenological ontology! (*EN*, p. 719)

But this is not to say that Sartre's position may be assimilated to that of either Descartes or Kant. On the contrary. And his difference from them may become clearer if three figures of the intervening years are mentioned briefly at this stage – Nietzsche, Husserl, and Heidegger. Nietzsche and Husserl, I would suggest, polarize the warring tendencies at work in the subject of their predecessors and each relinquishes one half of the earlier problematic. Heidegger attempts (unsuccessfully?) to go beyond both.

Husserl's approach, expounded most clearly in the *Cartesian Meditations*, is to posit a transcendental ego, a unity underlying our actions, causal not caused. This transcendental ego is a self in a

stronger sense than that of either the Cartesian *cogito* or the Kantian unity of apperception, and, not unexpectedly, Husserl views it as an advance on the subject. Descartes, he claims, mistakenly envisaged the ego as a separate "*substantia cogitans*" (*Méd*, 21), which made him the father of a misguided kind of transcendental realism. Kant's error was to posit the possibility of a noumenal world (p. 72), and to fail to follow through the notion of a "noematic a priori of sensible intuition" in his analyses of time and space in the *Critique of Pure Reason* except "in an extremely limited and unclear fashion" (p. 125). Phenomenology aims to avoid the subject–object cleavage and to close the gap between the abstract, rational, or noumenal subject and its concrete, empirical, phenomenal embodiment. But what in fact is produced is an unsatisfactory collage of the two, which reintroduces the empirical self along with the outside world and other people as "contents" of consciousness. Descartes and Kant both wrestled unsuccessfully with the problems of dualism that their philosophies engendered. Husserl's dismissal of these problems as deriving from misunderstanding merely replaces them with dogmatic simplifications that paper over the cracks rather than mending them. Husserl seems bent on minimizing the difficulty of the problem he is dealing with, as is clear from his affirmation in the *Logical Investigations* that self-consciousness is "an everyday thing presenting no difficulties of understanding."[25] The "methodological twist"[26] of phenomenological reduction then permits him to consider this "unproblematic" immediate self-consciousness as providing philosophical (rather than merely psychological) knowledge of a priori essences. But Husserl is far from having resolved the dilemma of his predecessors. In the first place, it is unclear how a phenomenologist can consider himself as remaining within transcendental philosophy. And furthermore, from the point of view of transcendental philosophy, it would appear that Husserl's attempt to describe the subject separate from its empirical manifestations (the *epoche* brackets off precisely the phenomenal spatiotemporal self in the transcendental reduction), although intended to *avoid* the illusions of rational psychology spelled out by Kant, nonetheless comes perilously close to a quintessential form of them in its conception of the "pure self" of the *Ideen*[27] and the *Meditations* (*Méd*, p. 18). The pure self certainly falls prey to two out of three of the "illusions" – it is simple and personal, though it is not substantial.

At the other extreme, Nietzsche is prepared to forgo the whole idea of selfhood. The paradoxes surrounding the subject in previous philosophy are, for him, mere traces of a language that divides experience into subject and object, giving the illusion of subjectivity and selfhood where in fact only an empty grammar is at work. The subject is a popular prejudice, a (Humean) fiction caused by grammar. It is an epiphenomenon of language. The Cartesian *cogito* proves nothing for Nietzsche other than that there is thinking: Descartes is a substantialist who is a victim of the "grammatical custom that adds a do-er to every deed."[28] And in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche repeats that it is "a falsification of the facts to say that the subject 'I' is the condition of the predicate 'think'."[29] Indeed, in the *Genealogy of Morals* he considers knowledge to be fundamentally flawed by the pernicious effects of a belief in the subject: "Our entire science still lies under the misleading influence of language and has not disposed of that little changeling, the 'subject'."[30] Nietzsche's attack on the subject is fragmentary rather than systematic, but it is clearly related to his critique of individuation, with which it is ultimately combined in the notion of the *Übermensch* who is conceived precisely as a way of going beyond the individual human subject:[31]

> The most cautious people ask today: "How may man still be preserved?" Zarathustra, however, asks as the sole and first one to do so: "How shall man be *overcome*?"[32]

In a sense, Heidegger may be seen as trying to move on from where Nietzsche and Husserl in their very different ways left off. On the one hand he apparently accepts Nietzsche's undermining of selfhood and personal identity, envisaging nonsingular *Dasein* as prior to the individuated self or subject. On the other, in *Being and Time* at least, Heidegger still considers himself engaged in a form of transcendental philosophy,[33] which he wishes to rid of the abstraction he associates with Husserlian phenomenology. If Husserl underplays the problems of transcendental philsophy by founding his description of the transcendental ego on intuition ("blind" without "concepts" in Kant's view), Heidegger ignores them entirely in his quest for a concrete description of *Dasein* that supposedly remains nonempirical. Viewed in this perspective, he could be considered to fall into the trap of rational psychology, in a generalized version that retains the illusions and paralogisms but applied now to a nonindi-

vidual nonpersonal Being (*Dasein.*) Given Heidegger's ambivalence toward the Kantian conception of the subject,[34] and his explicit aim of leaving behind all the metaphysics of subjectivity, it may seem ironic to use Kant to criticize Heidegger. However, the subject is not so easily abandoned, and a Kantian critique of Heidegger already has some respectable antecedents.[35]

SARTRE AND THE SUBJECT

Sartre's views on the subject are necessarily defined in response not only to the paradoxes of Kant and Descartes, but also to the polemics of Nietzsche, Husserl, and Heidegger. And the disaffection with Sartre in the 1960s is clearly related in its turn to his attitude to his German predecessors for, as the purpose of this chapter is to show, Sartre was one of the first French philosophers to think through some of the implications of what has been called the "divided subject" (or the "split subject" for Lacanians). But his writings of the 1930s and 1940s, though highly controversial in their day, have long since been absorbed, at least selectively, into the current philosophical doxa, constituting, indeed, a vital part of the formation of his structuralist and poststructuralist detractors. Rather than recognize Sartre as a forerunner, his immediate successors preferred to return directly to the German thinkers and – in their view at least – to radicalize still further their insights into the deconstruction of the subject. Sartre's own discussions became an embarrassment, coming so close in many ways to the points the philosophers of the 1960s and 1970s wished to make, but without the brutal iconoclasm then in favor. The solution was parricide. Only certain aspects of Sartre's thinking were recognized, his radicalism was almost willfully suppressed, and he was accused of that very bourgeois humanism and individualism he so profoundly and persistently attacked. Twenty years later (1992), Structuralism in its turn is out of favor, and its self-assessment as the farthest-reading critique of individual subjectivity and humanism is being put in question. In a review of a recent book on *Sartre and "Les Temps Modernes,"* a critic writes:

> Certainly the structuralist concern with universals, synchrony and cultural pluralism stamp it as far less radical a philosophy than Sartre's which, with its sophisticated anticipation of the debates around orientalism in the analy-

ses of the political and ideological discourses of colonialism, emerges as a much more far-reaching critique of humanism.[36]

The time is now surely ripe to leave aside competition for the post of chief opponent to humanism, and to try to get beyond the vagaries of intellectual fashion and the swings of the philosophic pendulum, in order to pay some serious attention to Sartre's views on the subject. For our purposes, the primary focuses will be Sartre's rejection of humanist individualism in *La Nausée,* his insistence on the self as an imaginary construct and an unrealizable limit in *The Transcendence of the Ego,* his refusal of human nature in *Being and Nothingness,* and of Man in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason:* "Man does not exist" (*CRD,* p. 131).

We will look first at the 1936 essay on the *Transcendence of the Ego* in which Sartre is attacking the Husserlian notion of the subject as a transcendental ego. For Sartre there is no inner self or ego, source of action, feeling, thought, will, and emotion. The self is an imaginary construct, outside consciousness, object not subject of consciousness, a continuous creation held in being by belief. The self or ego, the "I" and the "me" are synthetic products of consciousness, unified not unifying, transcendent not immanent. Sartre is arguing against Husserl that the ego is transcendent, not transcendental. A *transcendental* ego would be a personal core of consciousness, an original unitary subject, source of meaning, center of personality, interior foundation for my sense of self. For Sartre only consciousness is transcendental, and it is, properly speaking, originally impersonal or at least prepersonal (*TE,* pp. 19, 79). (In his later writings Sartre will drop the term "transcendental" entirely, possibly because of its Kantian overtones.) A *transcendent* ego, on the other hand, is external to consciousness, an ideal totality of states, qualities, and actions, a construct that I tend to imagine as a source of my feelings and behavior but which is in fact a synthesis. In the terms of *Being and Nothingness,* the ego is *en soi* (*EN,* p. 147; *TE,* p. 55). For this reason a transcendental ego would be a "center of opacity" (*TE,* p. 25) in consciousness, and would entail "the death of consciousness" (p. 23).

The "I," in Sartre's account, is not a unifying force; it is rather consciousness that makes the unity and personality of the "I" possible (*TE,* p. 23). Not only is the ego external to consciousness, it is not even permanently present to consciousness. Sartre's essay starts by

agreeing with Kant that "it must be possible for the 'I think' to accompany all my representations" (p. 13),[37] which he interprets as meaning that consciousness can always become reflexive, or in other words that self-consciousness is a constant possibility, and is the condition of possibility of experience. But it is the reflexive act itself that, for Sartre, brings the ego into being: "There is no *I* on the non-reflexive level" (p. 32); when I am reading or running for a train I am conscious of the book or the train to be caught, not of myself reading or running, though I may become self-conscious at any moment. Consciousness is always intentional, that is to say it always has an object; much of the time its object is the outside world, but occasionally I will turn my attention on myself. If this is momentary or incidental ("What are you doing?" – "I'm reading") the ego will appear fleetingly in the act of reflection. But if I want to capture that ego and analyze it I am doomed to disappointment. The self may be an object in the world, but unlike other objects it can be perceived only obliquely; I cannot ever observe my own ego at work: "The Ego appears only when we are not looking at it . . . by its nature, the Ego is fleeting" (p. 70). Since my self is not *in* consciousness, I cannot discover it by looking inward – introspection meets only a frustrating emptiness and opacity. By attempting to focus on the ego, consciousness passes necessarily from the simple reflexive mode in which the ego appears ("I'm reading") to a complex but nonetheless *non*reflexive mode that tries vainly to concentrate on an object that has already disappeared. This means that I can never *know myself* in any real sense (p. 69); I have no privileged knowledge of myself: My self-knowledge is similar to my knowledge of other people – that is to say, a result of observation and interpretation of behavior. And to take an external view of myself is necessarily to take a false perspective, to try to believe in a self that I have myself created: "so the intuition of the Ego is a perpetually deceptive mirage" (p. 69).

Independently produced as a conference paper in 1936, and first published thirteen years later, is Lacan's essay on the *mirror stage*. The similarity between the psychoanalyst's conception of the ego and that of Sartre is striking and its implications are manifold. In his essay, Lacan argues that the ego is an imaginary synthesis initially elaborated by the infant between six and eighteen months in response to his reflection in a mirror. The bodily unity and control that is visible in the mirror though not yet achieved by the young

baby is identified by the infant with itself (*E*, p. 94). This impression of stable selfhood has two major implications: Firstly, it is imaginary, and second, it involves an alienation insofar as it depends on an identification with *another,* that is, the image of itself as other:

> It is sufficient to understand the mirror-stage *as an identification* in the strong sense which the term has in analysis: that is the transformation produced in the subject when he assumes an image.
>
> The jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child at the *infans* stage, still stuck in his motor incapacity and nursling dependence, would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject. (*E*, 94)

The self of the mirror stage is forever a fiction, a source of discordance and alienation that precedes language and social determinants. We may note that there is as yet no *subject* proper for this comes into being with and through language.

The mirror phase initiates and symbolizes for Lacan the "mental permanence of the 'I' " and its "alienating destiny" (*E*, p. 95). It anticipates the "eventual armor of an alienating identity" (p. 97) that the subject will assume. It is a *méconnaissance* (pp. 109, 832), a misrecognition; it is described as a "capture" by the image (pp. 113, 832), and it will come between the subject and his attempts at self-realization because of its "irreducible inertia" (p. 109). It is also the mirror phase that explains aggressivity in Lacan's view, rather than the "struggle for survival" of the classical Freudian picture, evoked in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (p. 344). In the specular image I am alienated from myself, constituted by internal tension and division (p. 113), by inner conflict (p. 344). What is more, the mirror image is more controlled, unified, and coordinated than the infant's own experience at this early stage, and one of his reactions is aggression toward his apparently superior rival self. Aggressivity toward others, rivalry, identification with others, ambivalence, all are *preceded* by the structure of my own relationship with myself: "The notion of aggressivity corresponds . . . to the division of the subject against itself" (p. 344). The child who identifies with another child, and cries when the other is hurt, for example, is merely manifesting his own previous constituted identification with an

other, the other of his own self-image (pp. 113, 117, 181). Lacan remarks that Sartre described in striking terms the negativity and aggressivity underlying all human relations, even the most apparently loving and charitable, but that he was misled by an illusory notion of individual autonomous selfhood, and did not recognize the roots of such aggressivity as lying in the internally divided nature of the self (pp. 98–9). This is not quite an accurate view of Sartre who, as we have just seen, shares Lacan's conception of the ego as a fictional synthesis, but it is true that he does not consider this as the root of aggressivity toward others. Rather, as Juliette Simont shows in her essay in the present volume, Sartre attributes mutual oppression and aggressivity to the ordinary alienation of freedom in a material world that distorts it. But this archeology of alienation comes ten years after the *Transcendence of the Ego*, where Sartre's focus is purely on the necessity to view the ego as a synthetic construct.

If the ego is an imaginary construct, Lacan's opposition to ego psychology should come as no surprise. Ego psychology aims to strengthen the ego, to enable it to bring troublesome unconscious forces and instincts under control. Now, the unconscious has, for Lacan, nothing to do with instincts, and the ego is an illusion of identity, rather than a stable center that can be reinforced. The *subject* is riven, dislocated, and a strong ego can only involve it in an ever more inescapable alienation within a fixed objectification of itself in which it will be irremediably trapped. Ego psychology gives its blessing, unwittingly, to what Lacan calls the "formal stagnation" of "a permanent, substantial, self-identical entity" (*E*, p. 111). It sanctifies the series of ideal identifications in which the subject is ensnared (p. 178): "The ego . . . is frustration in its very essence" (p. 250). Ego psychology confuses the senses of ego – it deals not with the subject but with his *alter ego* (p. 374), and its attempts to help him toward social integration and adaptation are merely further stones on the grave of his chances of ever disentangling himself from his social (alienated) persona (cf. p. 399). Ego psychology has set itself not so much an impossible aim as a thoroughly *undesirable* one:

> Certainly (Lacan writes), the reintegration of the subject with his ego is conceivable – all the more so because, contrary to an *idée reçue* of contem-

porary psychoanalysis, the ego (*moi*) is far from being weak . . . But this aim would itself be an error, because it can only lead the subject to a further alienation of his desire. (p. 453)

Ego psychology involves a total misunderstanding of analysis, it is contradictory and retrograde (p. 454).

Lacan's explicit contrasting of the ego and the subject – to which we will return – leads us back to the initial question of the nature of the subject for Sartre. The *Transcendence of the Ego* gives only a *negative* picture of the subject by demonstrating what it is not, namely a transcendental ego that is *en soi* (*TE*, p. 55; *EN*, p. 147). Indeed, the subject is almost entirely absent from the text, since Sartre's argument is that "absolute consciousness, when it is purified of the 'I', has nothing of a subject about it" (*TE*, p. 87).

Consciousness is described as impersonal (p. 87), even if individuated (p. 78). But as Leo Fretz shows in his essay in this volume, there has been at least a shift of emphasis by the time of *Being and Nothingness*. Here we see that although Sartre still believes that the notion of a transcendental subject is "useless" and "harmful" (*EN*, p. 291), and maintains that consciousness is a "transcendental field without a subject" (p. 291), this is not so much a denial of any kind of subject as a consequence of his refutation of Husserl's identification of the subject with a transcendental ego. Sartre is clearly well aware that a version of Husserl's view of the subject is commonplace, and indeed firmly inscribed in everyday (inauthentic) human relations and social and legal institutions:

It is as Egos that we are subjects in fact and subjects in law, active and passive, voluntary agents, possible objects of judgments of value and responsibility. (*EN*, p. 209)

But in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre is for the first time prepared to define what he himself understands by *subject* and *subjectivity*. Subjectivity is defined as "consciousness (of) consciousness" (*EN*, p. 29), and the "instantaneous *cogito*" (p. 83). This means that subjectivity is an immediate, untheorized (self) awareness, neither positional nor thetic. Subjectivity is the spontaneous reflexivity of consciousness when it is directed toward something other than itself. And it is precisely this reflexivity that stops consciousness remaining a "transcendental field without a subject" (p. 291). It is the reflex-

ivity of consciousness, its presence to itself, which constitutes the *pour soi*, and which thereby personalizes it (p. 148). Consciousness becomes personal because it is reflexive, present to itself. Only a false hypostatization reverses cause and effect and transforms the *product* of reflexivity into some kind of essential core of selfhood. Clearly the *soi* cannot preexist consciousness if it comes into being through the reflexive nature of consciousness.

It is this reflexivity, consciousness as it is for itself, as *pour soi*, that constitutes the subject for Sartre. The *soi* is grammatically a reflexive term, it indicates a relationship of the subject to itself, but the subject cannot *be soi* or there would be no reflexivity and the *soi* itself would disappear in self-identity and self-coincidence (*EN*, p. 119). The *soi* cannot inhabit consciousness, it is an ideal, a limit (p. 148). So the *pour soi* is only *soi* in an unrealizable sense: "over there," "out of reach" (p. 148), "in the form of lack," as a "detotalized totality" (pp. 229, 718). It cannot have a "deep self" (a "*moi profond*," p. 520). It is a relationship. The *pour soi* of consciousness is fundamentally riven. It is present *to* itself and therefore always separated *from* itself. "If it is present to itself, that means it is not entirely itself" (p. 120). "Its being is always at a distance" (p. 167).

We must pause for a moment to look more closely at this idea of the self-presence of the *pour soi*, for it provided Derrida with one of the weapons to attack Sartre as part of the metaphysical tradition that rests on an identification of being and presence. First of all it is evident that *being* in the sense of the *en soi* is not "present" for Sartre – indeed, in his view, "the *en soi* cannot be present" (*EN*, p. 165), "to be *there* is not to be *present*" (p. 166), "the present is precisely this negation of being, this escape from being insofar as being is *there* as something one escapes" (p. 167). We need not examine the refusal of presence to the *en soi* in this context. But what of the *pour soi*? We have just seen the self-presence of the *pour soi* used to deny its self-identity: "The *Pour-soi* has no being because its being is always at a distance" (p. 167). *Présence à soi* is defined as "a way of not coinciding with oneself, of escaping identity" (p. 119). It is not plenitude, not "the highest dignity of being" (p. 119). Sartre cites Husserl as evidence that even the most determined philosopher of presence cannot overcome entirely the reflexivity implicit in all consciousness. Presence is precisely what prevents identity. "The

subject cannot be itself (*soi*). If it is present to itself, that means it is not completely itself" (p. 120). Consciousness is always elsewhere, "at a distance from itself" (p. 120). "The *pour soi* is obliged never to exist except as an elsewhere in relation to itself" (p. 121). It is "*diasporique*" (p. 182), dispersed.

Sartre's analysis of the self-presence of the *pour soi* anticipates Derrida's deconstruction of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* in *La Voix et le phénomène* (1967). Derrida also sets out to demonstrate that Husserl's own analyses undermine his insistence on the notion of self-identity: "The identity of lived experience instantaneously present to itself" (*VP*, p. 67). To this end, Derrida concentrates on Husserl's discussions of time and interior monologue and concludes that the phenomenologist cannot maintain consistently the self-coincidence of the present in either sphere:

> If the present of self-presence is not *simple*, if it is constituted in an originary irreducible synthesis, then all Husserl's argument is threatened in its principle. (p. 68)

This is precisely Sartre's argument in the first chapter of Part II of *Being and Nothingness*. And even in the conclusion to *Being and Nothingness* where he is anxious to avoid an insurmountable dualism of *en soi* and *pour soi* and considers the question of the "being" of the *pour soi* insofar as it is nihilation (*néantisation*, *EN*, p. 716), the paradoxical nature of the formulations problematizes Being in a way far removed from Derrida's assertion that for Sartre "being in itself and being for itself were both *being*" (*M*, p. 137). The *pour soi* is not Being in any recognizable sense of the term: "the *pour soi* has no other reality than being the nihilation of being" (*EN*, pp. 711–12); it is like "a hole in being at the heart of Being" (p. 711), "it is perpetually founding its nothingness-of-being" (p. 713).

> Its being is never *given* . . . since it is always separated from itself by the nothingness of otherness; the *pour soi* is always in abeyance, because its being is a perpetual deferring. (p. 713)

Sartre ultimately refuses to answer the question of whether it is "more profitable to knowledge" (p. 719) to consider Being as having two dimensions (*pour soi* and *en soi*) or if the old duality (consciousness/being) is preferable. Such questions, he argues, are metaphysi-

cal, not ontological. Nonetheless, the whole intention of the work is to insist "against Hegel . . . that being *is* and nothingness *is not*" (p. 51).

Derrida of course acknowledges that metaphysical discourse is inescapable even by those who attempt to deconstruct it. Of Heidegger, for example, he writes: "The fact remains that the being (*être*) which is nothing, which is not a being (*étant*), cannot be spoken of, cannot speak itself, except in the ontic metaphor" (*M*, p. 157). But in the case of Sartre, Derrida focuses on selected terminology of existentialism and contrives to ignore its real emphasis on negation. His rejection of Sartre's humanism relegates Sartre's own critique of humanism in *La Nausée* to a footnote (p. 138). Such a representation of his predecessor's thinking brings in its wake a refusal to recognize basic analogies between Sartre's philosophy and his own. I have argued elsewhere[38] that Derrida's notion of *différance* (with an *a*), while being radically impersonal and intended as a means of deconstructing consciousness – that cornerstone of humanism – is in fact clearly related to consciousness in the Sartrean sense. The relationship can be traced through at least three of the meanings of *différance:* first as a deferring and a noncoincidence, second as differentiation, and third as producer of differences and ultimately of meaning. In a fourth sense, that of ontico-ontological difference, *différance* could also be seen as analogous to consciousness insofar as it makes possible the difference between *l'Être* and *l'étant*, Being and beings. *Différance* may be intended as part of a radical deconstruction of the conscious subject, but its function at times appears remarkably similar. We shall return to the question of Derrida's attitude to the subject at the end of this chapter.

Sartre, then, from his earliest writings problematizes any easy understanding of the subject, casting doubt on all attempts at identifying it other than as self-divided and self-negating. And, as we have already seen to be the case for Lacan also, this lack of self-identity is less a curse to be disguised than an escape route from a noxious fixity. Lacan's intense opposition to ego psychology may be compared here to Sartre's analysis of role playing and bad faith in *Being and Nothingness*, in that both thinkers reject the alienation ensuant on any identification with a defined role. Even sincerity is a form of bad faith for Sartre since it involves an attempt to be true to what

you really *are* (*EN*, p. 103). One might say that the drawback of ego psychology lies precisely in its "sincerity"! Sartre would concur with Lacan when he writes – perhaps in his most "existential" mood – of "the happy fault of life, where man, in being distinct from his essence, discovers his existence" (*E*, p. 345). Ultimately, Lacan may seem on this score more pessimistic than Sartre, for he envisages the possibility of a "devastating reintegration of the subject with his ego" in a "further alienation" (p. 453). In Sartre's terms, the equivalent integration of *pour soi* and *en soi* is impossible. Freedom cannot ever be combined with identity. This may make our yearning for selfhood a "useless passion," but it simultaneously protects us from the worst ravages of alienating self-identity.

But if Lacan and Sartre are in agreement in seeing man's original state as *dereliction, déchirement, lézarde* (split, *E*, p. 124), *manque à être* (*E*, p. 613), lack of being, flight from self (*EN*, p. 722), they remain irreconcilable in the 1940s over the question of the transparency of the subject itself. Sartre's rejection of the unconscious leaves him with a subject that can never *grasp* itself purely because it has no *self* to grasp, not because its truth might lie elsewhere. To use Lacan's image of the mirror – for Sartre, too, the self observable in a mirror is a mirage, an illusory and alienating synthesis. Consciousness is transparent and therefore not accessible to perception. But whereas, for Sartre, what consciousness may observe in an unalienated state is merely the outside world (and, in a sense, the past self), for Lacan matters are more complex. Consciousness may be transparent, the self may be a construct, but the truth of the subject lies elsewhere, in some other realm, *behind* the mirror, so to speak, in the unconscious.

Sartre's later rapprochement with Freud (through Lacan) and with Marx transformed his notions of consciousness and subjectivity to the point where he could say, in 1969, that he had replaced his old notion of consciousness with that of the *vécu* (lived experience), which is characterized by *oubli* (forgetting), opacity, unselfconsciousness, and lack of self-knowledge (*Sit* IX, p. 108). The subject, for the later Sartre, can no longer be unequivocally identified with the *pour soi* of consciousness. Let us see how Sartre arrived at this revised view and assess the significance of the change.

In his early philosophical works Sartre insists on the transparency of consciousness, but consciousness is not separable from its embodi-

ment or its world. The transparency of consciousness is contrasted with the opacity of the body, with the facticity and finitude of the subject as instantiated in the world. The body represents "the facticity of the *pour soi*" (*EN*, p. 371). And when Sartre attempts to make clear the major differences and similarities between his views and those of Freud, he stresses that his own notion of consciousness includes the nonrational. Consciousness cannot be equated with knowledge. The subject may not understand himself, *despite* the self-transparency of consciousness.

> It is not a matter of an unsolved riddle, as the Freudians believe: Everything is there, in the light, reflection has access to everything, grasps everything. But this "mystery in broad daylight" comes rather from the fact that the access enjoyed is deprived of the means which usually permit *analysis* and *conceptualization*. (*EN*, p. 658)

(Self-)consciousness is no guarantee whatsoever of self-knowledge, and for several reasons. The first is that the self is a construct not equatable with consciousness or the subject. The second is that the self is nonetheless *experienced* as innate and internal, and this provides a further hurdle to understanding – in the natural attitude, not reconstructed by purifying reflection, I reverse the order of cause and effect and attribute my behavior to my self rather than envisaging my self as a product, at least in part, of my behavior. Similarly, the "insights" of introspection are necessarily false since they are looking inward for a self who is an object in the external world (*TE*, p. 69). And finally, even purifying reflection cannot guarantee full self-knowledge and understanding: on the one hand, because there is no reason why I should have any privileged understanding of the world or of other people who have formed so large a part of my personal history; and on the other hand, because existential awareness always risks tipping me over into the reversed position from the *esprit de sérieux* so that I may fail to recognize the degree to which I am bound by the self I have constituted throughout my past life, and by the expectations others have come to place on me and I have come to place on myself (see *EN*, pp. 530, 542). Freedom does not enable me to escape finitude or facticity (p. 576). On the contrary: "Finitude is an ontological structure of the *pour soi* which determines freedom" (p. 631).

All this is already a far cry from the popular view of Sartre as a

philosopher of unrestricted freedom and lucidity. But the Sartrean subject is to be further eroded by the alliance with Marx and Freud. The *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, *Words*, and the *Idiot of the Family* all extend the implications of Sartre's deconstruction of the subject as he reinterprets his philosophy within a Marxist framework. And Sartre's increasing sympathy for Freud and Lacan also encourages him to reduce the slender autonomy of the individual subject as the transparency and lucidity of consciousness are muddied by the murkier waters of the *vécu* or "lived experience," somewhat enigmatically described by Sartre as "the equivalent of conscious – unconscious" (*Sit* IX, pp. 110–11). The notion of the *vécu* demonstrates forcibly and paradoxically the impossibility for the subject of being *fully* self-conscious, or *fully* self-knowing, for the *vécu* is a "constant totalization" of the "dialectical process of psychic life" (p. 111), but one which – by the law of the hermeneutic circle – cannot include its own totalizing process in the totalization it effects. In this sense the *vécu* reveals the ultimately impossible regression of reflexive self-knowledge.

> The *vécu* designates neither the refuges of the preconscious, nor the unconscious, nor the conscious, but the area in which the individual is constantly submerged by himself, by his own riches, and where consciousness is shrewd enough to determine itself by forgetting. . . . What I call the *vécu* is precisely the whole of the dialectical process of psychic life, a process that remains necessarily opaque to itself for it is a constant totalization, and a totalization *that cannot be conscious of what it is*. One may be conscious, in fact, of an external totalization, but not of a totalization that also totalizes consciousness. (pp. 108, 111)

In the same interview, Sartre claims to accept the Lacanian interpretation of the unconscious as the "discourse of the Other," a further threat to the autonomy of the subject who is determined and alienated by intentions other than his own:

> As far as I'm concerned, Lacan has clarified the unconscious as a discourse which separates through language or, if you prefer, as a counterfinality of speech: Verbal structures are organized as a structure of the practico-inert through the act of speaking. These structures express or constitute intentions that determine me without being mine. (p. 97)

Sartre recognizes in Lacan's view of language elements that are compatible with his own, in particular the idea that we speak the lan-

guage of others, that our speech is "stolen" from us, that it is second-hand, that we are born into a language that precedes us, alienates us, and determines us in ways of which we are often unaware. The essays of *Situations I* (especially that on Brice Parain), *Nausea*, *Saint Genet*, and the *Idiot of the Family* reveal this as a constant theme in Sartre's thinking, and I have discussed it extensively elsewhere.[39] Nonetheless, Sartre's agreement is in fact with the Lacan of the 1940s and possibly early 1950s, not with the more radical views of the later Lacan. Sartre might well accept the 1953 definition of the Unconscious as "that part of concrete discourse, insofar as it is transindividual, which is not available to the subject for him to reestablish the continuity of his conscious discourse" (*E*, p. 258). But already by 1956, the degree of human autonomy in Lacan's picture has been diminished to an extent Sartre would find unacceptable. The omission marks in the following quotation probably correspond to the point at which Sartre parts company with Lacan:

> Man is, from before birth and beyond his death, taken up in the symbolic chain. . . . He is a pawn in the play of the signifier. (*E*, p. 468)

For Sartre this is only half the picture:

> Man can only "be spoken" to the extent that he speaks – and vice versa. (*IF*, II, p. 1977)

The determinism apparent in the following passage is arguably the critical sticking point for Sartre's rapprochement with (Lacan's) Freud:

> What Freud discovered was that . . . the displacement of the signifier determines the subjects in their acts, in their destiny, in their refusals, in their blindnesses, in their end and in their fate . . . and that, willingly or not, everything that might be considered the stuff of psychology . . . will follow the path of the signifier. (*E*, p. 30)

However, this view of the subject is perhaps best considered as part of the "reversal phase" of Lacanian theory, for its radical determinism is tempered by other of Lacan's discussions that show evidence rather of a "circular" determination of subject by signifier and signifier by subject (see *E*, p. 806). Nonetheless, this remains the vital issue on which Sartre and radical Structuralism are opposed: the question of determinism. For however fragile the Sartrean subject

may appear, however far from the creative, self-determining humanist ideal, a subject of sorts still remains: be it alienated or non–self-identical, its very fissures and cracks are what lets it *escape* the deterministic process.[40]

It is true that in the 1960s and 1970s Sartre conceives of the subject as predominantly formed by the opaque forces of family destiny and historical process. In the *Idiot of the Family* he describes how the infant internalizes the attentions of his mother, and is literally structured by her care, or the lack of it:

> To begin with, the baby internalizes the maternal rhythms and tasks as the lived qualities of his own body. . . . His own mother, engulfed in the depths of his body, becomes the pathetic structure of his affectivity. (*IF*, I, pp. 57–8)
>
> The prehistoric past comes back to the child like Destiny. (p. 55)

Personal characteristics that Sartre would previously have represented as part of a freely chosen project are now interpreted as ineradicable structures of the infant's facticity: apathy, for example, "is in the first place the family experienced at the most elementary psychosomatic level – that of breathing, sucking, the digestive functions, the sphincters – by a *protected* organism" (p. 54). But such structures form the basis of individual evolution and transformation; they orient personal development rather than determine character:

> Gustave assumes [his apathy] to make it into a more highly developed form of behavior and give it a new function: Passive action becomes a tactic. Preserved, overcome, traversed by new and complex meanings, its sense cannot fail to change. (p. 54)

The relation between freedom and conditioning is described in terms of a dialectic of chance and necessity: As individuals we make ourselves on the basis of structures and circumstances that we experience as the natural texture of our existence, rather than envisaging them as limitations to a freedom that would otherwise be both unsituated and disembodied:

> This dialectic of chance and necessity comes about freely without troubling anyone in the pure existence of each of us. . . . What we are seeking here is the child of chance, the meeting of a certain body and a certain mother . . . these elementary determinants, far from being added together or affecting each other externally, are immediately inscribed in the synthetic field of a living totalization. (pp. 60–1)

Gustave's original determinants "are *no more* at the outset than the internalization of the family environment in an objective situation that conditions them externally and *before* his conception as a singularity" (p. 61). And it is this "living totalization," this process of internalization of the outside world through the family that ultimately forms the subject for the later Sartre, just as it is the subject's reexternalization of what he has internalized that constitutes his praxis. In reply to the question of what has become of freedom, Sartre answers in 1969 that he now sees it as lying in the *difference* between conditioning and behavior:

> That is the definition I would give today of freedom: the little movement that makes of a totally conditioned social being a person who does not reproduce in its entirety what he received from his conditioning. (*Sit* IX, pp. 101–2)

Subjectivity is similarly defined:

> So, in *Being and Nothingness,* what you might call "subjectivity" is not what it would be for me today: the little gap in an operation by which what has been internalized is reexternalized as an act. Today, in any case, the notions of "subjectivity" and "objectivity" seem to me entirely useless. Of course, I may happen to use the term "objectivity" but only in order to emphasize that everything is objective. The individual internalizes his social determinants: He internalizes the relations of production, the family of his childhood, the historical past, contemporary institutions, then he reexternalizes all that in acts and choices that necessarily refer us to everything that has been internalized. (pp. 102–3)

So the subject seems to have been reduced to the play (the slight movement, the little gap) in the input–output process. What is more, the "output" is not clearly recognizable as my own:

> The man who looks at his work, who recognizes himself in it, who, at the same time, does not recognize himself in it at all . . . is the man who grasps . . . necessity as the destiny of freedom externalized. (*CRD,* p. 285)

If man can never recognize himself fully in his actions and products (his objectification) this is because of the very nature of externalization: A subject can never identify with an object even if it is entirely of his own making; this is part of the radical split between consciousness and world, or between nothingness and being. "Each of us spends his life engraving on things his baleful image, which fascinates him

and leads him astray if he tries to understand himself *through it*" (p. 285). The *project* is now defined as a "mediation between two moments of objectivity" (pp. 67–8) and praxis as "a passage from the objective to the objective through internalization" (p. 66) doomed to become part of the dead structures of the practico-inert.

> There is no doubt that man . . . discovers himself as *Other* in the world of objectivity; totalized matter, as an inert objectification that perpetuates itself by inertia, is in effect a non-man, and even, if you like, a *counter-man*. (p. 285)

But if human agency is radically undermined in the *Critique* where Sartre writes of "acts without an author," "constructions without a constructor" (pp. 152, 754), nonetheless the subject has not been abandoned: "Only the project as mediation between two moments of objectivity can account for history, that is, for human creativity" (pp. 67–8). Subjectivity may be *nothing*, but it still retains a paradoxical absolute existence:

> Subjectivity is *nothing* for objective knowledge since it is a non-knowledge, and yet failure shows that it exists absolutely. (*Sit*, IX, p. 166)

Sartre is not espousing Kierkegaardian irrationalism, but rather wrestling with the paradoxes attendant upon his attempt to maintain a working model of the subject within a nondeterminist materialism. And the subject is defined precisely in opposition to the "classical" subject of bourgeois humanism, forcibly rejected in texts as diverse as *Nausea* and the *Critique:* "Humanism is the counterpart of racism: It is a practice of exclusion" (*CRD*, p. 702). But this rejection of humanism is a complex matter. The preface to the *Critique* made clear that one of the primary questions to which the work would address itself was "Is there a Truth of man?" (p. 10). And *man* certainly remains Sartre's major preoccupation insofar as he wishes to affirm "the true humanism of man" (p. 102) in the face of "the dehumanization of man" (p. 58) brought about by neo-Marxist idealism and determinism. But this does not make Sartre a humanist in the traditional sense. Indeed, long before Foucault and the structuralists, Sartre argued that "Man does not exist" (p. 131);[41] the concept of man is described as a "singular universal" forged by history and "[with] no meaning outside *this* singular adventure" (p. 140). "The concept of man is an abstraction" (p. 183); "man is a material being in the midst

of a material world" (p. 196); "the history of man is an adventure of nature" (p. 158). However, Sartre is equally far from dissolving man into the structures that traverse him. His aim is to maintain *both* poles of "the perpetually resolved and perpetually renewed contradiction between man-as-producer and man-as-product, in each individual and at the heart of each multiplicity" (p. 158). Furthermore, just as his use of the notion of *man* is far from making him a humanist, so his use of the notion of the *individual* is far from making him an individualist. He maintains several times in the *Critique* that "there is no isolated individual" (p. 642):

> The individual disappears from historical categories . . . the individual – questioned questioner – *is I*, and is no one . . . we can see clearly how *I* am dissolved practically in the human adventure. (pp. 142–3)

The paradox of "*I* am dissolved" ("je *me dissous*") is close to that of the *Transcendence of the Ego*, "I is an other" ("*Je est un autre*" *TE*, p. 78). Marx has taken over from Rimbaud as master of alienation. But Sartre is still resolutely refusing to slip into an easy acceptance of either thesis or antithesis – and his dialectic seems to remain permanently in tension without synthesis. The subject may be deferred, dissolved, and deconstructed, but it is not relinquished.

SOME REMARKS ON THE SUBJECT SINCE SARTRE

It would appear, then, that Sartre's constant tussle with the paradoxes endemic in the subject and the complexities of his evolving views might well have been of interest to those other philosophers who wished, in their various different ways, to deconstruct the classical humanist subject. But the polarization of French intellectual life led to a very different situation, in which Sartre's views were disregarded or dismissed by defiantly iconoclastic structuralists. This drove Sartre, in turn, to make polemical statements, at least in interviews, opposing Structuralism more strongly than his own philosophical positions should properly have allowed. In the same year (1966) that he commends Lacan for clarifying the linguistic nature of the unconscious (*Sit* IX, p. 97), he attacks him in an interview with *L'Arc*, condemning the constructed nature of the Lacanian ego, and apparently rejecting out of hand the structuralist "decentering of the subject" according to which "man does not think,

he is thought, as he is spoken for certain linguists."[42] The attack was, however, made almost inevitable by the explicit purpose of the interview itself, in which Sartre was invited to counter the structuralists who were allegedly luring his followers from him. Sartre's real attitude to Lacan is in fact more positive than he reveals in the 1966 interview, just as Lacan's real position is more subtle than the presentation that Sartre gives of it in *L'Arc.* And in a less aggressive interview in *Le Monde* in 1971, Sartre recognizes that his own description of the *moi* of Flaubert corresponds fairly closely to Lacan's notion of the *moi* as "an imaginary construction, a fiction with which one identifies afterward" (*Sit,* IX, p. 99). We have already seen that this has been Sartre's consistent position since the *Transcendence of the Ego* in 1936. The fact is that Sartre welcomes Structuralism to the extent that its anti-individualism is part of an attack on bourgeois humanism, but he considers it one-sided:

> There is no doubt that structure produces behavior. But what is wrong with radical Structuralism . . . is that the reverse side of the dialectic is passed over in silence, and History is never shown producing structures. (*Sit,* IX, p. 86)

Furthermore, Sartre's critique of Structuralism is readily comprehensible given the common structuralist misrepresentation of his own positions. In *La Pensée Sauvage* of 1962, for example, Lévi-Strauss launches into an attack on Sartre's conception of the subject that he provocatively assimilates to the most facile notion of personal identity:

> He who begins by steeping himself in the allegedly self-evident truths of introspection never emerges from them. Knowledge of men sometimes seems easier to those who allow themselves to be caught in the snare of personal identity. But they thus shut the door on knowledge of man. . . . Sartre in fact becomes the prisoner of the Cogito; Descartes made it possible to attain universality, but conditionally on remaining psychological and individual; by sociologizing the Cogito, Sartre merely exchanges one prison for another. (*PS,* p. 249)

Later in the same chapter, Lévi-Strauss takes over from existentialism a theory of discontinuity of self, and uses to it to combat a notion of self-totalization that he wrongly attributes to Sartre:

There would be plenty to say about this supposed totalizing continuity of the self which seems to me to be an illusion sustained by the demands of social life and consequently a reflection of the external on the internal – rather than the object of an apodictic experience. (pp. 339–40)

Somewhat perversely, Lévi-Strauss combines his attack on the Sartrean subject – willfully distorted out of all recognition – with the notion of a *universal human mind*, envisaged as a hypothesis necessary to explain the recurrence of identical structures through different societies. Such structures are the product of "the unconscious activity of the human mind" (p. 329). This was presumably what Paul Ricoeur was referring to when he described Lévi-Strauss's ideas as "kantism without a transcendental subject."[43]

But if Lévi-Strauss retained the human mind while evacuating the human subject, there has since been a striking resurgence of interest in the subject in France that we will now examine briefly in an attempt to assess what relation it bears to Sartre's own positions as analyzed thus far.

In 1966 Foucault in *Les Mots et les choses* writes somewhat apocalyptically of "the disappearance of man" (*MC*, p. 397); Derrida, in 1968, refers in similar eschatalogical tone to "the ends of man" and "the shadows of humanist metaphysics" (*M*, p. 141); Lacan in his *Écrits* (1966) explicitly decenters the humanist subject, stating categorically that "the true center of the human being is no longer in the same place" (*E*, p. 401); Deleuze and Guattari in *L'Anti Oedipe* of 1972 replace the *je* (I, ego) with the *ça* (id, that), and the "I think, I speak" with "it shits" – the subject is decimated in the "desiring machines" of schizophrenic capitalism.[44]

But this is not the end of the subject. We have seen that Lacan, for example, never abandons the notion of subject, which, in a form of paradoxical *loser wins*, is constituted through a symbiosis with language, itself dependent on a *lack* of self-identity and an alienation to the imaginary:

Without that gaping lack that alienates man to his own image, the symbiosis with the symbolic, in which he is constituted as a mortal subject, could not have been produced. (*E*, p. 552)

Lacan's subject may be in exile, but its exile is what saves it from absorption into its imaginary identifications.

Foucault's relegation of "man" to the last years of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth makes it quite clear that *Les Mots et les choses* is analyzing a very specific and historically restricted conception of man (see *MC*, p. 319), that is to say the "empirico-transcendental doublet" of the "analytic of finitude" (p. 329), in short, man as we know him since Kant. But if man is a "recent invention" (398), "in the process of dying," "a figure between two modes of language" (p. 397), in this specific, narrow, historical sense, then his demise is hardly surprising, though the alleged brevity of the Kantian form of man is open to question. Concepts of man, like concepts of the subject, are necessarily historically variable and evolving. And it is this that gave Foucault some credibility in his later attempts to interpret his earlier texts as part of a "history of the subject."[45] His presentation of his views in the 1960s was part of a polemical antihumanist strategy. As early as 1976, he expressed interest in the knowledge of the subject that had been accumulated through the centuries:

> A knowledge of the subject; a knowledge not so much of its form, but of what splits it; of what determines it, perhaps, but especially of what makes it escape itself.[46]

And in an essay that appeared in 1982, he proposed the fostering of certain forms of subjectivity:

> We must promote new forms of subjectivity while refusing the type of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries.[47]

Indeed, his aim in the 1980s was to explain how individuals, through their experience of desire, come to recognize themselves as subjects.[48] Foucault's 1982 lecture course at the Collège de France was entitled "*Herméneutique du sujet.*" However, the title of the written résumé was changed to "*Herméneutique de soi.*"[49] Foucault was evidently attempting to find a way around the centuries-old connotations of autonomy and unity (or, indeed, subjection?) that the term "subject" evokes, and to escape the personal, bourgeois implications of the "individual." The third person reflexive pronoun *soi* is not, in French, open to the same objections of totality and so forth associated with the English "self." Foucault shows convincingly how the Greek formation of the *soi* is radically opposed to the "self" of some modern philosophies. It is *other-* not *self*-centered. In his terms it is

exoteric.[50] However, in its constructed nature, as something to be constituted, the *soi,* despite its name, is closer to the Sartrean ego than to the *pour soi,* which, as we have seen, is precisely *not soi.*[51]

Deleuze and Lyotard are more resistant to a revival of the subject, though for different reasons. Deleuze wants to get beyond the debate in its entirety, to reach the point where it becomes irrelevant whether the term "I", for example, is still used.[52] The question at issue is not to decide whether "desiring machines" are still subjects; this is simply to pour good new wine into bad old bottles. Deleuze envisages the history of the subject as part of the history of philosophy, to be spoken of in the past tense. The subject *served* the dual purposes of universalization and individuation, through the *je universel* and the *moi individuel.* It is, in his view, doubtless still of interest to examine how these are linked, or in conflict, and to approach the "subject" as it was conceived by Hume, Kant, Husserl, and others. But there is little sense in a contemporary critique of the subject. What is now of interest is what has replaced the concept. For Deleuze we are *eccéités* rather than *moi,* and the "subject" is less interesting than what he calls "preindividual singularities" and "nonpersonal individuations."[53] For Deleuze individuals are not necessarily persons, let alone subjects, and singular entities are not necessarily individuals. Individuals, persons, singular entities, and so forth all have to be distinguished. In the essay on Francis Bacon he maintains that "the form of representation expresses firstly the organic life of man as a subject."[54] The abandonment of the "subject" thus entails the rejection of artistic representation, and the dissolution of "figuration" in favor of "figurality" (to use Lyotard's terms[55]). Bacon's "portraits," which "dehumanize" man, by presenting, for example, a series of studies of "heads" rather than "faces,"[56] exemplify Deleuze's own vision of modernity in terms of forces, rhythms, and bodies that lack the unity of the organism.[57] The "body without organs" is not easily reconcilable with even the most fragmented, decentered form of subjecthood.

Starting from phenomenology, Lyotard was slower than many to relinquish the subject in the first place, and now seems all the more determined to oppose its resurrection. Nonetheless, his recent preoccupation, in *L'Inhumain,* has been to distinguish between the "inhumanity" of the technological system in which we live, and another "inhumanity" that represents what, paradoxically, constitutes the

essence of our humanity, and where, in Lyotard's terms, "the soul is at stake."[58] In a series of Pascalian paradoxes, Lyotard argues that childhood represents both our "initial poverty" (*misère*) and yet also what is "eminently human" in us, whereas educated adulthood is (merely?) a "second nature." However, it is tempting to use Pascal, together with Rousseau and Lacan, to attempt a deconstruction of Lyotard's human–inhuman model. Furthermore, it is only as subjects, indeed speaking subjects, that we can formulate the aim of a return to the prehuman *infans* stage from which, culturally at least, we have now emerged. Lyotard's essay reads as a somewhat unhappy blend of postmodernism and sentimentality. It is not so much a question of aesthetics, as Lyotard wants to claim, as of *pathos*.

Derrida, too, shifted position between the 1960s and the 1980s, from "the ends of man" to "the rights of man."[59] In 1968, having attacked Sartre for taking over Corbin's "monstrous translation" of Heidegger's *Dasein* as "human reality," he moves on to criticize Heidegger himself for his closet humanism, for "*Dasein*, if it is not man, is nonetheless nothing other than man" (*M*, p. 151). But Derrida's deconstruction of man and the subject has turned out to be something very different from the radical dissolution that it appeared in 1968. Already in *L'Écriture et la différence*, on the subject of writing, his position was complex:

> The "subject" of writing does not exist if we understand by it some sovereign solitude of the writer. The subject of writing is a *system* of relationships between the layers in the magic writing pad, the mind, society, the world. Within this scene the "punctual" simplicity of the classical subject cannot be found. (*ED*, p. 335)

And when he was questioned about this by Guy Scarpetta in an interview published in *Positions* in 1972, he insisted that he had never maintained that there was *no* "subject of writing" any more than he had maintained there was no subject. He proposed that the whole operation of subjectivity needed to be reconsidered, by looking at it as an element in a relationship rather than as an original source. In 1980 the Cerisy Colloque *Les Fins de l'homme* took the phrase in a rather different sense from that of the 1968 article, and attempted to rethink the question of man, not ontologically (What is man?) but rather in terms of Heidegger's ethical reformulation of the question, "Who is man?" One of the explicit intentions of the confer-

ence was to reopen a question whose closure seemed likely to result merely in the reintroduction of a naive, reactive humanism:

> Between a "disappearance of man," too well known today not to be badly known, a general critique of humanism too commonly accepted not to be, in its turn, worth questioning, and the shamefaced, naive, or reactive humanism on which so many discourses fall back in the end. . . . it may well be the case that the question of "man" needs to be asked afresh today, in a philosophical as well as literary, ethical, or political sense – and that it needs to be asked as a question of *ends*.[60]

Since then Derrida has frequently foregrounded the subject as focus for his thinking, in particular in *Psyche* and *De l'Esprit*. Their engagement with the humanist subject and their fascinating and self-avowed ambivalence toward it may be briefly glimpsed from the concluding pages of the essay on Heidegger:

> I do not intend to criticize this humanist teleology. It is certainly more urgent to remember that despite all our refusals and avoidances of it, it has remained up till now . . . the price to pay for the ethical and political denunciation of biologism, racism and naturalism, etc. If I am analyzing this "logic," the aporias and limits, the presuppositions and axiomatic decisions, the inversions and contaminations especially, in which we see it trap itself, it is rather in order to reveal and formalize the terrifying mechanisms of this program, all the double constraints that structure it. Is it a matter of fatality? Can we escape it? . . . Can we transform the program? I don't know. In any case, we can't simply avoid it.[61]

Most recently and explicitly, in an interview with Jean-Luc Nancy for the issue of *Confrontation* entitled *Après le sujet qui vient?* (1989), Derrida takes Nancy to task for contending that the subject was ever "liquidated," insisting that it has rather been "reinterpreted":

> For these three discourses (Lacan, Althusser, Foucault), for some of the thinking that they privilege (Freud, Marx, Nietzsche), the subject is perhaps reintepreted, resituated, reinscribed, it is certainly not liquidated. (*AS*, 92)

Furthermore, Derrida declares himself interested by a certain approach to the question:

> The relation to oneself can only be one of *différance*, that is to say of alterity or trace. Not only does this in no way attenuate obligation, but on the contrary it constitutes its only possibility, which is neither subjective nor human. Which does not mean that it is inhuman or subjectless, but that it is

starting from this dislocated *affirmation* . . . that something like the subject, man, or whoever it may be, can be figured. (p. 95)

Derrida insists that it is naive to speak of "the Subject" as if it were a mythical entity that has now been abandoned. Moreover, the "subjects" of Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Husserl are not themselves simple but involve paradoxes and aporias that deserve renewed consideration. Derrida would like to "de-homogenize" the subject. Nobody, he maintains, ever seriously believed in the so-called classical humanist subject, autonomous, self-sufficient, spontaneous. "The subject has never existed for anyone . . . the subject is a fable" (p. 97). Furthermore, current work on the subject may well form part of a deconstructive enterprise:

We were speaking of dehiscence, of intrinsic dislocation, of *différance*, . . . etc. . . . Some might say: but precisely, what we mean by "subject" is not absolute origin, pure will, self-identity or the self-presence of consciousness, but rather this noncoincidence with self. Here is a response to which we should return. By what right may this be called a subject? Conversely, by what right may we forbid this to be called a "subject"? I am thinking of those who want to reconstruct, today, a discourse on the subject that no longer has the form of self-mastery, of self-adequation, center and origin of the world, etc., but which would rather define the subject as the finite experience of non-self-identity, of the inderivable interpellation that comes from the other, from the trace of the other. . . . We will come back to this train of thought later. (p. 98)

Unfortunately, Derrida does not return to this aspect of the subject in the interview, but in the light of our analysis of the Sartrean subject it is extraordinary to see what could well be a description of the subject of *Being and Nothingness* envisaged as a possible attempt to come to terms with the subject in a way that does not fall short of the work already carried out by deconstruction. As I have indicated, *Voice and Phenomenon* repeated in part, and probably unwittingly, Sartre's own deconstruction of the Husserlian subject. Twenty years later, Derrida still seems unwilling to acknowledge that Sartre is not merely a forerunner but a real originator of much of what Deconstruction has to say on the subject. I have attempted to show here that Sartre, like Descartes, Kant, and perhaps Husserl, actually made a valiant attempt to grapple with the problems inherent in any theory of subjectivity – those of freedom/determinism,

praxis/structure, self/other, and so on, rather than merely acknowledging that such work is necessary, or even inevitable. The present climate of thinking about the subject may now perhaps enable us to reread Sartre and not merely take him as read.

NOTES

Translations are my own except in the case of Lévi-Strauss and Lacan, p. 94. For details, see Bibliography.

1 A happy, or fortunate alienation. A term taken from Sartre's discussion of mother-love, and the illusion of necessity it bestows on the child (*IF*, I, pp. 140–3).
2 See Jean Baudrillard, "*Le Sujet et son double*," in *Magazine littéraire* [henceforth: *Mag. litt.*], *L'Individualisme: le grand retour*, no. 264 (April 1989): 19–23.
3 *De l'Esprit*, p. 184.
4 *Les Mots et les choses*, pp. 396–8.
5 "*Les Fins de l'homme*," in *Marges de la philosophie*, pp. 129–64.
6 For full details of publication, see the Bibliography.
7 M. Frank, *L'Ultime raison du sujet*, p. 7.
8 Paul Ricoeur, "*Individu et identité personnelle*," in *Sur l'Individu*, p. 54.
9 Paul Veyne, "*L'Individu atteint au coeur par la puissance publique*," in *Sur l'Individu*, p. 7.
10 Serge Moscovici, "*L'Individu et ses représentations*," *Mag. litt.*, no. 263 (1988): 30.
11 Philippe Sollers, "*Lettre sur l'individualité littéraire*," *Mag. litt.*, no. 264 (April 1989): 34.
12 Alain *Laurent*, "*L'Edifiante histoire de l'individualisme*," *Mag. litt.*, no. 264 (April 1989): 36.
13 Gilles Deleuze, "*Un Concept philosophique*," in *Confrontations*, no. 20 *Après le sujet qui vient* (1989), p. 90.
14 "Baudrillard: *le sujet et son double*," interview in *Mag. litt.*, no. 264 (April 1989): p. 19.
15 See Etienne Balibar, "*Citoyen Sujet*," in *Confrontations*, no. 20 (1989), pp. 23–47, esp. 23–7. See also J. Derrida, *De L'Esprit*, p. 34.
16 See Frédéric de Buzon, "*L'Individu et le sujet*," in *Penser le sujet aujourd'hui*, pp. 17–29.
17 See Allan Megill, *Prophets of Extremity*, p. 139, referring to Heidegger's "The Age of the World Picture" (1938, 1952) and *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: 1977).

18 Buzon, *L'individu et le sujet*, p. 21 (*Regulae*, 1628; *Méditations*, 1641).
19 R. Descartes, *Discours de la Méthode*, collected in *Œuvres et Lettres* (Paris: Pléiade, 1952), p. 148.
20 Ibid., p. 166.
21 *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 361 (A, 396).
22 Ibid., 334 (A, 350).
23 Ibid., p. 167 (B, 155).
24 *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, tr. H. J. Paton in *The Moral Law*, p. 123.
25 See Frank, *L'Ultime raison de sujet*, p. 44.
26 See Rüdiger Bubner, *Modern German Philosophy*, p. 19.
27 *Ideen* (1913), I, §80, p. 160. (See E. Levinas, *Hors Sujet*, p. 231.)
28 *The Will to Power*, fragment 484, p. 268.
29 *Beyond Good and Evil*, §17, p. 28. See Frank, *L'Ultime raison de sujet*, p. 9.
30 *The Genealogy of Morals*, first essay, §13, p. 179.
31 See G. Deleuze, *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, p. 108. See also J. Derrida, "*Les fins de l'homme*," in *Marges de la philosophie*, p. 163
32 *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, p. 297.
33 See Bubner, *Modern German Philosophy*, p. 24.
34 See Alain Renaut, "*Les Subjectivités: pour une histoire du concept de sujet*," in *Penser le sujet aujourd'hui*, p. 64.
35 For example Bubner, cited above, and A. Renaut, *L'ère de l'individu*.
36 Margaret Atack, reviewing Howard Davies in *Radical Philosophy*, 50 (Autumn 1988): 49.
37 The reference in the English edition is to *The Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. N. K. Smith, 1980, p. 152.
38 See "Sartre and Derrida: *Qui perd gagne*," *JBSP*, 13, no. 1 (1982). Reprinted in *Sartre: The Necessity of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
39 See my *Sartre's Theory of Literature*, MHRA, 1979.
40 See my "Sartre and Negative Theology," *Modern Language Review*, 74, no. 3 (1979).
41 See also *Les Mots*, where Sartre declares that "Man is impossible" (p. 211).
42 "Jean-Paul Sartre *répond*" in *L'Arc*, 30 (1966): 91–2.
43 See *Le Cru et le Cuit*, p. 19. Vincent Descombes, in *Le Même et L'Autre*, p. 95, attributes the origin of the notion to Sartre's *Transcendence of the Ego*. He also points out in respect of Althusser and Hegel that the absence of a personal subject is not equatable with the absence of a subject altogether, and derides Althusser for overlooking the Hegelian *Geist* in his characterization of Hegel as the first to see history as a process

without a subject. Lévi-Strauss's *Esprit*, with its unconscious, seems to be just as problematic.

44 *L'Anti Oedipe*, pp. 7–8.

45 See his interview in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*, June 28–July 5, 1984.

46 *La Volonté de savoir*, p. 93

47 "*Deux essais sur le pouvoir et le sujet*," in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault, un parcours philosophique*, p. 308.

48 *L'Usage des plaisirs*, p. 10.

49 See W. Schmid, "Foucault: *la forme de l'individu*," in *Mag. litt*, no. 264, p. 55.

50 See Schmid, ibid., p. 56

51 Alain Renaut and Luc Ferry in *La Pensée 68* are less inclined to give Foucault the benefit of the doubt. They describe him as wanting to have his cake and eat it – as playing on the multiple meaning of the term "subject" in order to appear to be contributing to contemporary theories of the subject while at the same time attacking most modern forms of it. I am not sure myself whether such apparent ambivalence is avoidable. And in any case, Foucault's use of *soi* seems precisely part of an attempt to avoid the pitfalls of the *subject*. (See J. F. Lyotard in *La Condition Postmoderne*, p. 30. "*Ce* soi *est peu.*") Peter Dews, in *Radical Philosophy*, 51, "The return of the subject in late Foucault" also deems Foucault's later stance to be ultimately a failure, but he treats the attempt with more philosophical seriousness (pp. 47–51).

52 *Mille Plateaux*, p. 9.

53 "*Un concept philosophique*," in *Confrontations*, 20, p. 90. cf; *TE*, p.78.

54 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon, Logigue de la sensation*, p. 81.

55 In *Discours Figure*. See *Francis Bacon*, p. 9.

56 Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, p. 19.

57 Ibid., p. 33.

58 *L'Inhumain*, p. 10.

59 See discussion in *La Pensée 68*, p. 35.

60 *Les Fins de l'homme*, p. 20.

61 *De L'Esprit*, pp. 87–8.