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14 April 2010

Improvisation is the Non-Thetic Outwardness of the Imagination

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Abstract

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By Marshall A. Isseks

“Improvisation is the Non-Thetic Outwardness of the Imagination” attempts to phenomenologically understand the improvisational form of consciousness. We are met at once with a difficulty: if all consciousness is consciousness of something, and all introspection and imagination is met with nothing but facts and the real (insofar as we cannot imagine something with qualities not once in-the-world due to our existence preceding our essence), is it possible to speak of true, legitimate *creation* or is it that the memory of our betters is keeping us on our feet? When one improvises, our imaginations, filled with content strictly tied to the past, is let out into the world through created, worked matter at the same rate of its being conceived; the improvised project exists nowhere outside of itself. Improvisation is therefore the most transparent of praxes. With a corresponding unique form of consciousness that is not only pre-reflexive but is extemporaneous in its intentionality, to improvise is to compose without projection, a phenomenon thus far unaccounted for in Husserlian phenomenology. There is no part of the product of an improvisation that remains yet to be completed because its product is itself unfolded with its subject. And yet, paradoxically, it leads to completion, not simply to an end (*terminus*).

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For my brother.

An Introduction

“To think that there are fools who find consolation in the work of art.”

-Sartre, *Nausea*

Does truth content transcend the work of art or does the work of art contain it within itself? What follows below is a phenomenological investigation of the aesthetic question of lived experience. In three remarkable works,¹ Jean-Paul Sartre has shown that there is no justification for present existence other than its expansion into an indefinitely open future that we can shape through our exploits and projects as modes of transcendence. The thesis of *The Imaginary* is that mental activity is not a product of perception but an attitude with a character of its own. The imaginary makes an object present to us in our imaging consciousness. But that which cures *Nausea*'s protagonist, Roquentin, of his melancholia is that which has no material object: music. Musicians meet in their imaginations, walking from chord to chord, conversing back and forth to one another and to whoever else may be listening in impotence. It is this common praxis which constitutes the group. What the *Critique* adds is that man is mediated by matter to the same extent that matter is mediated by man: *The Imaginary* is correct in postulating that the subject is the relation of consciousness to the object, not the object itself.

The *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, arguably Sartre's most ambitious ontological investigation, is in search of a truth – it chases after one, ultimate history. Yet Sartre leaves us with an unfinished one, giving us the impression that the dialectic can never be absolutely synthesized. This is why, dear reader, as we prepare ourselves for a journey with an unknown conclusion (as we do every day), I think it most worthwhile to pursue the lived experience of that which will transcend itself in *happiness*, that which is most elusive to Roquentin (the for-itself),

¹ *Nausea*, *The Imaginary*, the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*

in order to reproduce such experience in our extended temporality. In an inhuman world of matter which surrounds us, each human project brings with it an immediate past as it still touches the present which flees it: I am my immediate past.

And thus, this investigation is centered on the implications of a consciousness that is dominated by matter, of the fact that the individual is integrated alive in the supreme totalization that is lived experience. Is improvisation, that which is composed extempore, even possible?

Well, let's get on with it:

I. The Imaginary Chapter

“Despite some prejudices, to which we will return,”²

*Some of these days
You'll miss me, honey.*

Roquentin listens to the jazz in the café [as he stops thinking of Anny] and, for a moment, *swings to* the small happiness of Nausea. His body remains seated, utterly paralyzed as he drinks the remainder of his beer,³ but it is not Roquentin's behavior that Sartre is narrating; his mind is the actor. We are given Roquentin's diary instead of his novel, and his thoughts have traveled past his misery to a far away haven “in between two cities,”⁴ though it might as well be in between the above footnote and its companion at the bottom of the page: consciousness is lost with Zeno on its way there. Has anything in his practico-inert⁵ milieu *actually* changed? No: Roquentin is moved and cured of his nausea without moving. Roquentin's existence has severely changed, yet he himself is the only totalizer to notice a difference in his totality; his nausea, the sickness of his excess

² Sartre, *The Imaginary*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 5

³ Or perhaps it was, in reality, an apple martini. Regardless, it is his fault if the [liquid] at the bottom of the glass is warm.

⁴ Sartre, *Nausea* (New York: New Directions, 1948), 170.

⁵ Here is our first encounter with the term “practico-inert.” It will most certainly not be the last. In short, it is the matter which past *praxis* is embodied. That is to say, the practico-inert is the “field” for activity of sedimentation of past, organic individuals to be acted on by organic individuals. It is the evolved in-itself of *Being and Nothingness* for Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. If *praxis* were to have a *Being and Nothingness* archetype, it would have to be *consciousness*.

existence which he knows he must provide meaning for, has transcended into elation. He escapes the perceivable and breaks away from the conceivable. He enters the cosmos of the imagination: idealism's hidden breeding ground and clandestine fortress. But we are not concerned with idealism just yet; let us slowly make our way to such a cloudy land where mind is primary over matter *after conducting a phenomenological psychology of the imagination*⁶. How does the imagination differ from other types of consciousness and how is art, that which takes Roquentin out of his trance, strictly dependent upon the imaginary? "The following remarks essentially concern the existential type of the work of art"⁷... We can at once formulate the principle: the work of art is an *irreality*," (*The Imaginary*, 188). The jazz melody doesn't exist, but simply is.⁸ In this work, we will examine Roquentin's "small happiness of nausea."

Thoughts of my wasted life... There was no music then, I was morose and calm... But now... a glorious little suffering has just been born, an exemplary suffering. Four notes on a saxophone. They come and are gone, they seem to say, "Do as we do, suffer in rhythm." (Nausea, 174)

Such is the distinction between a nauseous, abounding reality and a satisfied cadence. One is an overflowing, muddy lake on the outskirts of *Bouville*;⁹ the other a rhythmic kiss from water to rock in the pitter-patter of a waterfall in the distance.

⁶ Not coincidentally the subtitle of the main work we will be examining in this chapter, *The Imaginary*.

⁷ With particular attention to the jazz that so fascinated the young Sartre.

⁸ "If I were to get up, rip this record from its support, and break it in two, I wouldn't reach it. *It is beyond* – always beyond something, a voice, a violin note. Through thickness and thickness of existence, it unveils itself, slender and steady, and when you want to grasp it, you meet only with existents devoid of meaning... I hear the sounds, the vibrations of the air which unveil it. It does not exist, since there is nothing superfluous about it: it is; everything else is superfluous in relation to it. *It is*," (*Nausea*, 175).

⁹ *Trans*: Mucktown

In an article written for *Frontiers of Jazz*, Sartre begins: “Jazz is like bananas, it has to be consumed on the spot.”¹⁰ The jazz must be live; the music’s spontaneity and ecstasy and veracity rely on it. Jazz, *played well*, has nothing to do with notes on a page or conduct in a concert hall. There is a dialogue of beyond-ness to be chased after, always unsuccessfully, by the musicians as they, with the audience, walk through the open doors of their public chatroom and display the unfolding from their instruments. Even in studio recordings, there is very little “dubbing” of and added splicing with automated sound. In fact, the mysticism of jazz recording is an art in and of itself. But here we are, in the true spirit of jazz, already getting side-tracked: the music must be live because its non-material, ad hoc product is an imaginary object, a failed definition of emotion¹¹ and a story to be told by multiple storytellers. *You’ve got to be where it’s at* in order to know, to feel, to add, to *not miss any of*, the story.

But *where* is this story? The jazz melody doesn’t exist, remember, as the notes come and go before they can be realized, just as one speck of orange in an impressionist painting is meaningless without the similar specks surrounding it. *What* can a non-existent story be about?

The subject is found in our imaginations, as our mental image of an object can take on new qualities based on the individual’s own intention toward that object, is not

¹⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, “Jazz in America” in *Frontiers of Jazz*, ed. Ralph de Toledano (Pelican Publishing Company, 1947), 64. Also translated by M. Contat: “Jazz is like bananas; to get the taste of it you’ve got to be where it’s at.”

¹¹ I call all music a *failed* definition of emotion because no matter how passionately or articulately one states something, the signifier can never be the signified.

the object itself which outside, in-the-world. This subject matter is our analogons.¹² The imaginary makes an object present. Since there is no material *object* of music, just floating, ethereal notes, the musicians can meet, greet, see and converse with each other with their eyes closed. They walk from chord to chord, from being to nothingness, shouting, whispering, letting out a cry, an orgasm, a hope, as they contradict themselves into the night.

A. From the Certain to the Now to the Not Yet: Three characteristics of a phenomenological analysis of imaging consciousness

The same object can be given to us in three distinct ways, as mentioned in our first paragraph: as perceived, conceived, and imagined. We can be certain that perception involves observation of the *object perceived* by means of the senses to the discovery of the existence and properties of the external world after reading Sartre's *Imaginary*. My perception is a certain consciousness and the photograph I see is the object of that consciousness. When I close my eyes and produce the image of the photograph in front of me I no longer perceive the image but rather imagine it, the object of my perception and that of my image being identical until I choose to alter it,¹³ while the object itself is always outside of consciousness. This is also to say that we can be conscious of our imagination's (and as we shall soon see, our ego, or what some inconsistently call our

¹² This is the first time we have happened upon the term *analogon*. It will most certainly not be the last. In order to elucidate such an important bit of Sartrean nomenclature, the analogon is the matter involved, yet not itself, in an imaginative act. This *matter of the mental image* is outside its original intention. It is the "artifact"

¹³ At some level the photograph of my brother ceases being merely colors and shapes on paper and instead stands as a replacement to my absent brother who is in the very world from which the photograph was ripped.

inner-most self) being outside, in-the-world. Thus the image is the relation of consciousness to the object and we step out of the hoop of the illusion of immanence.

In the act of perceiving, knowledge is slowly formed with the aid of conceiving; in the imaginative act knowledge is immediate. With each moment of perception, more of the object is revealed to me. I stare at a photograph of Jack on a cluttered desk. I see the lines on his shirt, the expression on his face, the encyclopedia his picture covers. We perceive image after image, moving towards a comprehension that will never be complete. I close my eyes, imagine Jack and see him in total. I can add certain characteristics, such as a white suit or a beard to his being, but in my imagination he is a totalised totality at each moment. Perception includes an infinite amount of information¹⁴ and although I drop a host of qualities moving from perception to imagination, *I still imagine more than I perceive*, (*The Imaginary*, 120)

I am waiting in a restaurant for my food to come prepared out of the kitchen. Separating the chefs from the dining room is a wooden door with a small window. I can see the chef here and there, working quickly. I imagine my salmon being cooked right now: the chef is sautéing and garnishing the fish. Numerous other things are going on behind the door. There are seven people in the room, the plate is blue, the sous chef is cute, the paprika is located next to the thyme, etc. If I were to peer into the kitchen and see this, that is to say to perceive for myself, I would never be able to fully describe what

¹⁴ That is to say, I can continually describe my surroundings.

is happening – the paper on the table continues to reveal attributes. There is a sense of content unknowing as I imagine the certain matter that I perceived.

We have arrived at this point sniffing our noses a bit, something seeming a bit ludicrous: I must be satisfied by not knowing something, of wishing one way or another, than to subject my consciousness to a more accurate representation, albeit incomplete, of the kitchen in actuality. Is this idealism? The chef could be spitting in my mashed potatoes, but I prefer to imagine him churning them delicately.

We now must discuss the development of an idea based on perception, or in other words a conception, in relation to knowledge. As an idea is developed and reflected upon it is itself an idea and therefore is immediately realized¹⁵. But my imagination does not perceive or understand the perception, it is that which is understood. It is for this very reason that Sartre insists that the ego is outside of man, is a sort of quasi-object of consciousness and is excluded from consciousness, that it is incapable of definition and is therefore in-the-world.

Why should the ego belong to an inner world? If it is an object of consciousness, it is outside; if it is within consciousness, then consciousness ceases to be extra-lucid, to be conscious of itself, in order to confront an object within itself.

Consciousness is outside; there is no “within” of consciousness.¹⁶

¹⁵ This, of course, is nothing new in philosophy. “The sequence of the conceptions is at the same time a sequence of realizations,” says Hegel in *The Philosophy of Right*

¹⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre. “Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre,” in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, ed. Paul Arthur Schlipp (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1981) 11.

It is possible to imagine a boy born in a blank, white room with nothing else around him, sitting there as he ages. It is impossible, however, to realistically imagine that boy with any knowledge of anything until he leaves such a room. Subjectivity is not *in* consciousness; it *is* consciousness.

Imagination implicates and absorbs quasi-observation. That is to say, the object of the imagination is a nothingness; the object of perception on the other hand is real and present in the world. The structure of the image is an intentional phenomenon of consciousness, as we have already seen above, which teaches us nothing after the immediacy of the initial imagined knowledge. “To say, ‘I have an image of Pierre’ is equivalent to saying not only ‘I do not see Pierre,’ but also, ‘I do not see anything at all,’” (*The Imaginary*, 13). At this point, I must pause to clarify: Is it possible to have an image of Pierre while staring at a clock? Can I imagine hearing a Bach Cantata while in a jazz club featuring Herbie Hancock? The answer is complicated, but positive:

The intention [of the mental image]...has always been a question of animating a certain matter to make a *representation* of an absent or nonexistent object.

Our answer is coming:

The matter was never a perfect *analogue* of the object to be represented: some knowledge came to interpret it and to fill in the gaps...The further the matter of imaging consciousness moves away from the matter of perception, the more it is penetrated with knowledge, the more attenuated its resemblance to the object the image becomes. This implies, of course, that the knowledge plays an increasingly important role, to the point of substituting for intuition on the very ground of intuition, (*Imaginary*, 50-51)

All consciousness is a *step back*, understanding comes with the *act* of reflecting.

As for Hegel: the owl of Minerva spreads her wings only with the falling of the dusk. The

content given from the imaging act is given not as itself (the image of the chair is the same chair that is perceived but as *irrealized* or as present-absent in the imaging mode). Husserl and Sartre's point here is that the image/imagined chair is *not* some "mini" chair "inside" our minds,¹⁷ but is the aimed at and given content of an absent or nonexistent object; "In the image consciousness we apprehend an *object* as an 'analogon' for another object, (*Ibid*, 52). So while I may look at a clock or listen to bebop, I may imagine (or "see" or "hear") something other than the perceived object.¹⁸ Regarding images and sight, we localize appearances as the matter becomes not the material and location in the practico-inert field, but the location appraised by the eyes in a certain way. We are still talking about actions through the imagination, that is, all consciousness is consciousness of something.

It is at this point where we must discuss relativity and truth. First let us elucidate the difference between immediately certain content and gathered knowledge. We will, for lack of a better word, consider "gathered knowledge" from the world as truth, albeit subjective. While we are immediately certain of an image in front of us (see above), we are not immediately conscious of anything about the object except its relation to the world beyond the mind. It is thought which is conscious of itself that may be imagined to be different and therefore may be understood more completely.

¹⁷ *This* is the illusion of immanence

¹⁸ "The purely psychic content of the mental image cannot escape [the law of analogons]: a consciousness that faces the thing that it aims at is a perceptual consciousness; a consciousness that aims emptily at the thing is a pure sign consciousness," (*The Imaginary*, 53). This is what I take to be the formulation of CM Howells, in *Sartre and the Commitment of Pure Art*, when he transitively posits that "perception can only reach the analogon."

Frank, a color blind man, sees the same clock as a man who sees blue, red and yellow in the background and hands of the clock, yet how different their images must be! Or perhaps a more pertinent example to our study would be a man with an ear infection listening to a piano being played. *That piano sure is out of tune*, he'd think, while those sitting next to him hear perfect harmony. These images, or sounds,¹⁹ are "implicitly assimilated to the material object that it represents...but [the object] is not in consciousness. Not even as an image...The image is the total synthetic organization...or a certain way in which consciousness presents itself to an object," (*Imaginary* 16-17). In other words, it is better to speak of "imaging consciousness" than of "images" as items *in* consciousness. The influence of Husserl is again obvious; consciousness is always consciousness of something. The American in Sartre adds his voice to the discussion: and *from* someone.

Roquentin is left nauseously self-conscious as he reflects on his imagination.

"It has caught us unawares, while we were living our sloppy, easygoing lives. I'm ashamed of myself and of what exists in the presence of this music..."

He is lost in the moment as his head spins with the glorious music. He perceives Bouville no more. He finally gathers enough composure to attempt a report of its composition, the invisible object of his consciousness:

¹⁹ Sartre is very careful, more careful than I have just been, in distinguishing between different characteristics of multiple senses and multitudinous works of art. Upon an adequate amount of glances, *The Imaginary*, along with Husserl's phenomenology itself, is a bit sight-dependent. Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, on the other hand, is a work with no such dependence.

“It does not exist. This is annoying. If I were to get up, rip this record from its support, and break it in two, I wouldn’t reach it²⁰ ... It is behind so much I can’t even hear it: I hear the sounds, the vibrations of the air which unveil it. It does not exist... (*Nausea*, 174)

We are still unsatisfied. *What* “is?” The aesthetic object has a space and time of its own, its body independent from its spirit.

“I think about a clean-shaven American with thick black eyebrows [as] the sky burns above New York²¹ ... He is sitting, in shirtsleeves, in front of his piano; he has a taste of smoke in his mouth and, vaguely, a ghost of a tune in his head... That’s the way it happened. That way or another way, it makes little difference. It was the warn-out body of this Jew with black eyebrows, which it chose to create it. He held the pencil limply, and the drops of sweat fell from his ringed fingers on to the paper. And why not? Why should it need precisely this fat fool full of stale beer and whiskey for the miracle to be consummated?”

The question that Roquentin, that is, Sartre, keeps returning to remains unanswered when he imagines the American creator of the song, which moves him so. The unkept, drunk American has somehow, as a product of his past, intoxicated praxis, created something miraculous (to an other) out of his seemingly shameful existence. How can this *othering*-representation take such a different form than its archetypal representor? There is both too much and not enough in Roquentin’s existential objects around him; the aesthetic (non)object of the melody offers his escape: all perceivable

²⁰ We have now passed by this quote for a second time, and we see it from another perspective. I imagine Roquentin at a jazz club, witnessing this music on the spot: he would not get up and smash the saxophone. He would be consumed by the music, in a *fête*, imagining the spirit of the moment, not desiring to give up his transcendence to reflect just yet. “You will not make love tonight, you will not feel sorry for yourself, you will not even be surfeited, you won’t get real drunk, you won’t even shed blood, and you’ll have undergone a sterile frenzy. You will leave a little worn out, a little drunk, but with a kind of dejected calm, the aftermath of nervous exhaustion,” (*Frontiers of Jazz*, 68)

²¹ Remember, this is Roquentin’s account of the matter involved in the imaginative act brought about by the café’s music, or, in other words, his analogon. This analogon, of course, is what prompts Roquentin to describe himself as the happiest he’s been in the entire novel, with typical Sartrean subtlety: “I felt comfortable, at home,” (*Nausea*, 174).

object's qualities can be imagined as *more* revealing, yet it exists only insofar as *I* know it.²²

I now ask another question and, for the moment, leave it unanswered: Does the American live in a world where alienation has been overcome?

B. The non-place of the Imaginary "In-The World"

"It has often been remarked that:

the evocation of images brought into play by a central associative mechanism of sensory excitations can have the same effects as a direct stimulus. It has already been indicated that the idea of darkness brings with it a papillary dilation, the image of a close object brings with it reflexes of accommodation with convergence and contraction of the pupil, the thought of a disgusting object brings with it the reaction of vomiting and the expectation of a tasty dish when one is hungry brings with it an immediate salivation.

According to the above text – and a mass of others like it – the image, which is to say the irreal object,²³ would quite simply provoke conduct in the way that perception does. Like it or not, this view implies that the image is a detached bit, a piece of the real world," (*The Imaginary*, 136). Intentionality applies to imaging consciousness, too. The image is a *relation* to the perceptual object, yet it is impossible to truly distinguish between real imaging consciousness and the irreal object because the irreal cannot be seen, touched, etc. except irreally, in one's personal imagination.

Our real, individual conduct seems directly related to the irreal, then, for "only a reborn sensation could provoke a perceptible movement."²⁴ It is for this reason that

²² See *The Imaginary*, 132-133.

²³ Along with its noematic correlate, the imaginary

²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 136.

proves practice to be transparent in so far as an unreal object does not act outside of oneself and therefore cannot have any force in itself. Imaging consciousness is never added externally but rather is contained inside of something else. “Hate is always hate *of* someone, love is love *of* someone. James said: remove the psychological manifestations of hate, of indignation and you have no more than abstract judgments, affectivity having vanished....Thus, the feeling of hate is not consciousness of hate. It is consciousness of “Paul²⁵” as hateful, (*Imaginary*, 69).”

The imaginary takes the image, not the object, as *in* consciousness and the essence of the object of the image to be *in* the image coming from an object in-the-world. The imaging consciousness *de-realises* the formerly perceived (same) object now as *irreal*. The act of reflection shows immediately certain content,²⁶ the imaginary makes, as I mentioned above, an object (to the individual) present while being completely elsewhere. Here is the essential characteristic of the (non)place of the mental image: it is a certain way that an object has of being absent within its very presence.

When I listen to a *Brandenburg Concerto*, I never *think* of the eighteenth century, of the austerity of Leipzig, of the puritanical ponderosity of the German princes, of that strange moment in the history of the intellect in which reason, in full possession of its techniques, nevertheless is kept in check by faith, and in which logic of concept is transformed into logic of judgment; but it is all there, in the sounds, just as the Renaissance smiles on the lips of the *Mona Lisa*.²⁷

²⁵ I.e. the physical *Paul* whom one could perceive or imagine or recall..

²⁶ Sartre calls this the *essence* of the image. I see a map of the world, it is immediately known to me that Brazil is to the east of Peru upon this act of reflection.

²⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Situations*, (New York: G. Braziller, 1965), 31.

C. From Presence to Transcendence

We have shown above how it is necessary for the matter of the mental image to already be constituted as an object *for* consciousness. In an ongoing work of art, e.g. a performance art, the analogon can transcend merely representing an external object; it becomes its own entity with possibility of change as the object changes.

Jazz takes this idea, everything which we've said to this point, really, and shatters the fragile framework upon which it stands: there is no overabundance in a practice conceived on the spot. To even call jazz translucent would be meaningless because the intention that you would search for behind the realized practice of the music itself is spontaneous and free: it is the music itself. Whereas the thoughts of Roquentin's "wasted life" were brought about as he was "figuring out his expenses," it is impossible for him to do so while listening to the jazz music because one cannot reflect on the music and imagine a separate analogon for it without missing the next note²⁸. The jazz musician uses his analogons not to give meaning to his last melodic line, but also to create his next one.²⁹

²⁸ "[In the jazz club, the musicians] play. You listen. No one dreams. Chopin makes you dream, but not the jazz at Nick's. It fascinates, you can't get your mind off it...They are speaking to the best part of you, the toughest, the freest, to the part which wants neither melody nor refrain, but the deafening climax of the moment," (*Frontiers of Jazz*, 65-66).

²⁹ The existential emphasis on existence preceding essence and in turn the externality of the ego makes us think twice about the true meaning of *creation*. As we determine our essence by means of choice, that is, to choose to perceive, conceive or imagine this or that, we produce in ourselves that which once existed in the world, independent of our being. Thus our creations, projects are reworked analogons of a *past* praxis. "We have no intuitive knowledge, marking our every act by a kind of impotence," (Aronson, *Sartre's Return to Ontology*, pg. 108)

This phenomenon is not uncommon. Think of a conversation: from one sentence to the next we interiorize sedimented information and push ourselves forward with the words and spirit of the current, and now surpassed, moment.³⁰ Consider how we read literature: we find ourselves lost in the world of words on the page, thinking that we are on the river's edge with Huck Finn or in a new school with Charles Bovary, absent-minded of our sitting on a bench, in a library, etc. "On passing from the imaginary life to real life we forget this abstract, implicit community which rests on nothing."³¹

I recently found myself engaged in a discussion on this topic with a guitar player/friend as we drove through town with the radio on. As much as I was interested and in agreement with what he was saying about the nature of the imagination in relation to music-making, I couldn't help but let my own imagination wander and devote a large amount of attention to a vibraphone solo which was dancing over the airwaves. I told him this after he finished his remarks, and he laughed; he had to admit that he, too, was listening to the radio more than his own thoughts as he spoke.

Does this tell us anything about our imaginations? If anything, it *distracts* us, it takes us away from where we physically *are* while internalizing where we *were*. This is particularly intriguing bearing in mind Sartre's *Frontiers of Jazz* article. Jazz is like bananas, he begins: it must be consumed on the spot. It must be consumed on the spot, I imagine, because the music antithetically takes you elsewhere, anywhere while hearing

³⁰ What this dialogue actually consists of will be the subject of the third chapter of our investigation, storytelling.

³¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press), 201.

only the here and now. But to be in the presence of it, to perceive the magic actually happening in front of you, and (especially in Nick's bar) to actually be a part of the music³² is to be a witness of what dreams may come into the very practico-inert milieu you inhabit. And to consume such music, to add to it, to dance to it, to be *moved* by it, on the spot is to protect the dream.

I no longer think of myself. I think of the man out there who wrote this tune, one day in July, in the black heat of his room. I try to think of him *through* the melody, through the white, acidulated sounds of the saxophone. He made it. He had troubles, everything didn't work out for him the way it should have: bills to pay - and then there surely must have been a woman somewhere who wasn't thinking about him the way he would have liked her to...but when I hear the sound and I think that that man made it, I find this suffering and sweat...moving. (Nausea, 177).

V: From the Imaginary to Individual Praxis

In a word, *improvisation* takes us from the imaginary to individual praxis. Let us take a page out of Hume's notebook: we do not know if/how the next second will resemble the last, but we must act as if we do, acting upon objects and creating relations in our practico-inert milieu. We have seen how the image is the *relation* of consciousness to the object. But again, there is no object in music.³³ We play jazz the way we live our

³² The collective audience's moaning, shouting, etc. adds to the music and is, in part, a periphery member of the fused group at certain moments. To approach the group is already to be a part of it, as we shall see in the following pages.

³³ Could the musician himself be the object? Is he just like the alienated worker who sees his product become other to him at the moment he produces it? Yes and no. "In Nick's bar, it is advisable not to look at [the musicians]," Sartre writes. They are too ugly, too focused on producing sound; that is, free, transcendent sound. Looking good means nothing if you don't sound good. People want to hear the invisible melody clearly and spontaneously, not see a

lives: making it up as we go along in relation to the certain, the already, the past. In the non-material, musical realm, we create and pass the time by an attempt to convert what is in our imagination, or the not-yet of our dreams, into the no-thing sound of the regal trumpet, of the labyrinthine piano. In jazz, as in social ontology, there are only notes and real relations among them. The four notes of the saxophone, passing away blissfully in rhythm, are but four beautiful, impressionist strikes upon a canvas of nothing. Some notes are long, melodic expressions of purity, others high squeaks of pent-up, distant emotion³⁴. I suppose at the mention of emotion, we will stop here to deal with such a term more completely below, for emotion is a subject *within* the imaginary object and work of art to be drawn out by consciousness. I will divulge one characteristic and accuse my excitement for the preview of coming attractions: emotion arises when the world of utilizable vanishes abruptly, and the world of magic appears in its place.³⁵

pretty face muddle with noise over prearranged phrases. Sometimes it takes squeeling, wincing, and a whole lot of sweat to produce such nothing.

The melody of the improvisation itself is the object, to be independently objectified.

³⁴ Consider the painted work of art. Gothic and Byzantine (Pre-Renaissance) painting is often characterized by a flaw when compared to later artwork: not having an equal grasp of depth-perception as their followers, the artist would simply place objects that were behind other objects, that is to say at a further distance from the viewer, higher up on the canvas. It wasn't until around the 13th century that artists realized that by focusing on the depth-relation between objects an object, an object could be depicted more closely to what it *actually* is perceived as: smaller, rounder, etc.

This method of placing objects *in relation* to one another more appropriately is an adequate metaphor for jazz: from one "suffering in rhythm" to the next, the satiating, imaginary object of the melody is internalized and fueled by past, sedimented, equally-doomed subjects. From these independent images new sound emerges from each member of the band.

³⁵ Jean Paul Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 61.

VI: A bit more Perspective

This discussion is hardly new to philosophy. David Hume famously wrote: “Nothing is more dangerous to reason than flights of the imagination, and nothing has been the occasion of more mistakes among philosophers.”³⁶ Kant pushed Hume’s treatise further: he describes the imagination as a “blind but indispensable function of the soul, without which should have no knowledge whatsoever, but of which we are scarcely ever conscious.”³⁷

Sartre says repeatedly in *The Imagination* that the act of imagination is a *magical* act.³⁸ My imagination cares not about how an object exactly behaves from a particular point of view, but rather “my incantation strives to obtain these objects in their entirety, to reproduce their complete existence.” (*Imaginary*, 125)

Therefore, it is understandable how epistemologically-concerned philosophers may assume that all imaginative activity is false or unreal. There are convincing logical accounts of precisely this by Aristotle in his *Poetics* (IV, 1) and Gilbert Ryle’s *The Concept of Mind*. I see the image of the Empire State Building on 34^h Street and 5th Avenue in New York City. I imagine the building covered in green paint. Obviously, such an image is “false” in normal life but a completely feasible phenomenon as a mental

³⁶ *Treatise of Human Nature*, Book I, Part IV, Sec. vii.

³⁷ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 78/ B 103.

³⁸ The imagination’s magic provides for an even more complex form of wizardry, communication, as it is a prerequisite for it. We will deal with this more completely below.

image. Is the imagination not, then, anything but a “dream under our own control?”³⁹ The object and the image of the object are exclusively different things. The physical object, (sound, our *artifact*) is comprehended as perceived. The aesthetic object (the experience of the song) is brought to us as imagined. Whereas we perceive what is literally in front of us,⁴⁰ we can imagine with creativity, for a purpose of representation, unity, or simply for its own delight.

And so Roquentin views another’s attempt successful in going beyond nauseous existence. From suffering and sweat to lost, musical notes suffering in rhythm. Jazz continually refers to other ways of speaking, even as it rejects them, in this attempt; a B-flat minor chord is and always will be a B-flat minor chord, but its relation is much different in Debussy than it is in Coltrane. Antoine Roquentin himself appears to be a man who listens to and copies others’ discourse in order to reconstitute it, half seriously, half comically, in his diary.⁴¹ After all, what else is he going to do to quell his melancholia in a Newtonian universe where every action has an equal and opposite reaction? As if brewing a potion, Roquentin’s antidote fuses *this* and *that* from the realm of his imagination, condemned to be a product of his understanding of reality, as we have shown above, for perception gives us an understanding.

D. The Necessity of our Contingency, and the Contingency of our Necessity

³⁹ Jean Paul Sartre, *Situations II*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1958), 100.

⁴⁰ For the moment we will ignore skeptic claims of sensual deception

⁴¹ Richard Howard, introduction to *Nausea*, by Jean-Paul Sartre (New York: New Directions, 2007), vi.

Roquentin finds a small happiness within the nausea listening to the jazz in the café, yet is still jealous of the notes' existence. In the moment in which our praxis experiences its alienation, an internal and external structure of objectification appears, and this is precisely necessity. The imaginary notes, however, feel no such chasm, alienation. This is what Sartre means when he says the jazz melody doesn't exist: they are content with their contingency and disobey laws of nature insofar as they are not in friction with their milieu. The notes don't think...

“They did not want to exist, but they could not help themselves. So they quietly minded their own business; the sap rose up slowly through the structure, half reluctant, and the roots sank slowly into the earth.” (*Nausea*, 170).

We will now discuss the subjects responsible for these imaginary analogons: jazz group *in fusion*: that is, the dissolution of individual, collective image-consciousnesses synthesized as being-in-the-world into the project, or “lightning stroke” of a common praxis.

II. The Jazz Group In Fusion.

The words I am about to express: They now have their own crowned goddess.

-Epigraph, *Love in the Time of Cholera*

A. From Imaginary Object to the Bond of the Group

What is solidarity?

One can see in the second book of *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* how the group is formed, that is, by the dissolution of the series, insofar as a collectivity of individuals is metamorphosed by a “lightning stroke of a common praxis” in a synthetic transformation occurring from surrounding practico-inert structures stemming from past praxis in response to scarcity. This restructuring originates as a complex event at every layer of materiality as it transcends *itself* into organizing praxis at an arranged level of serial unity. Thus, the reorganization of the group (from gathering to group, etc.) and its very production are conditions for one another and we are led stratifying past praxes of previous syntheses, in this case dialectically stemming from the same synthesis, to the next knowing each is a condition for the next. This new event, the group formation, must, however, create in each individual a unifying structure of objectivity in which the *impossibility* of change within a specific practico-inert milieu is the very object to be

transcended.⁴² “In other words, we have emerged into a vicious circle; the group constitutes itself on the basis of a need or a common danger, and defines itself by the common objective that determines its common *praxis*.”⁴³ This is to say that common, objectified praxis of practical, entropic action unites the series and is itself the object to be transcended in order to unfold further product as time passes and the group continues its project. It goes without saying, if psychoanalysts can lend a helping hand in the matter, that the genesis of the group can reveal its fundamental characteristics and discernable way of being. Yet group formation happens as a *flash, a lightning strike*; in the blink of an eye a gathering of *I*'s becomes a group of *we*'s. But when you reopen your eyes to the formed group, you wonder if lightning perhaps strikes twice, three times, an infinite amount of times: the group suffers a “perpetual threat of relapsing into a collective,” (CDR:I, 348) and avoids such a relapse by its continuous praxis.⁴⁴ How the group is formed, then, is no different than how it continues being *after* “the apocalypse” of the dissolution of serial alterity. The group is always defined by its action and is always in danger of collapsing into what it is not.

⁴² Strange that Sartre, philosopher of the “as-if,” would use the terminology “impossibility of change,” (CDR, 350). The important point here, that group formation is transcended into organizing praxis at the level of seriality, that is to say, that the group rids itself of serial alterity through synthetic movement and action within the practico-inert field, will be more fully dealt with below.

⁴³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason: Volume I* (London: NLB, 1976), 350.

⁴⁴ In English translations of the *Critique*, the first chapter of the second book, that which this paper will primarily focus on, is entitled The Fused Group. I can't help but think that a bit of meaning was lost in translation from the French “*Groupe en Fusion*.” Sartre's group is constantly defined by its action and ability to reshape, reorganize itself, and is thus in a perennial state of fusing real relations of men. “...the group is – simply and primarily – a common praxis, the community of praxis is still expressed in the appearance of a group as the interiorisation of multiplicity and the reorganisation of human relations,” (CDR, 389). The group's unifying structure of objectivity, the group's *goal*, leads us to take the group not only as constantly *in fusion*, but continuously *fusing*.

We may have gotten a bit ahead of ourselves. Let us make clear that the group is a responsive (non)organism created from, in the face of and in opposition to, existing structures of the practico-inert field. In the *Critique's* marriage between dialectical reason, and thus Marxism, existentialism and psychoanalysis, perhaps the doctrines responsible for *The Critique* itself, we see that man is “mediated” by things to the exact extent that things are mediated by man, blurring the distinction even more for us when we attempt to investigate how the group is formed.

The group acts in response to scarcity within their practico-inert surrounding. “The flash of a common praxis obviously originates in a synthetic, and therefore material transformation,” (*CDR:I*, 349) beginning with exteriority. So in phenomenologically examining the group as one would in an attempt at totalization, one must do the impossible: catch, freeze, or *present*, a dialectical moment in which the group is in process, in *praxis*.⁴⁵ When one speaks of the group, one must speak of the group on the spot, *in situation*. We’ve climbed one mountain only to see the peaks of others: “But if there is no dialectical process through which the moment of the anti-dialectic⁴⁶ can

⁴⁵ The sitting-down-silent-motionless-group (or perhaps yoga class) is a group insofar as its individuals share a common praxis, i.e. “the stationary group.” The individual in the group finds the group’s *other* members outside, in-the-world, engaged in lived experience at every moment, just as all the *others* do to our original individual.

⁴⁶ “The ultimate status of the *Critique* [is a] philosophy of praxis par excellence: the philosophy of freedom in *Being and Nothingness* always implied a primacy of activity. Here it takes central stage, with the consequence that the opposite number of praxis, namely the anti-dialectic, the practico-inert, what corrodes human action and projects, what resists collective efforts to overcome the inertias and failures of History, must also necessarily take center stage along with it. Freedom was not accompanied by non-freedom, but rather by *mauvaise foi* (bad faith) and by facticity and contingency. Here, however, we confront a malignant force which is the very motor force of human production absorbed and turned against the latter: a force which becomes more visible in the collective, rather than the individual or existential, dimension,” (Fredric Jameson,

become by itself a mediation between the multiple dialectics of the practical field and the constituted dialectic⁴⁷ as common praxis, does the emergence of the group contain its own intelligibility?" (CDR:I 348) If the group in fusion is constantly the product of its previous praxis, insofar as it consists of an ever-developing multiplicity of individual, common projects, does the group find its meaning in its action or through the collective group member's part-understanding of its actions? Sartre's re-evaluation of the for-itself insures that a complete understanding of History cannot exist as our and the group's action constantly transcends itself, its intelligibility always being retrospective.

Can we have a totalisation without a totaliser? Praxis' transparency, the intelligibility of one's action by an other, albeit partial, allows us to think that the answer could be both yes and no.

CDR, I, xviii). This rethinking of the famous ontology of *Being and Nothingness* gives what Ronald Aronson in *Sartre's Return to Ontology* calls "new meaning" to the drama of the in-itself and for-itself distinction with particular emphasis on biological *need*. The non-human and *outside*, i.e. that which is fondled by the imagination's grasp as we try to make sense of the universe, is that which human actors react to in order to give life meaning, create one's project, and furthermore constitute the group itself. This "re"-action is given to us as our individual subject matter, not the other way around, as we have shown above. But the ontological proof in *Being and Nothingness* of the being of the in-itself, that is, that "consciousness is born *supported by a being which is not itself*," (*Being and Nothingness*, lxi) is not the synthesis Sartre is looking for while investigating the relationships of being and knowledge: "If in L'Etre et le Néant, the world's very givenness to intentional consciousness once guaranteed its reality, Sartre's new emphasis on praxis-process jeopardizes the autonomy on which he based his ontological proof," (Aronson, 107). Our investigation now seeks to physically prod the implications of the frightening fact that our acts are conditioned by an *outside* which we can only understand on a for-itself level, never in fact reaching such inert practicality or leaving our practical fields, through these inhuman sentences of worked matter, written down in a past which transcended itself infinitely into the moment we find ourselves in now which is already gone. The point is, this overflowing of consciousness is shared by men and creates an infinite amount of relations between them.

⁴⁷ The dialectic of group *praxis*.

Now it may be suggested that the struggle in itself, that is to say, the temporalisation of reciprocity, although it creates both dialectical experience and the consciousness of it, may transcend the dialectical comprehension of the agent, observer, or historian. The investigation has shown us the translucent rationality of constituent organic praxis; and it has also revealed that of common praxis (in so far as it is assumed to be objectifying itself in an inert or practico-inert material which passively accepts its determinations). But there is no proof that a praxis of antagonism and reciprocity still has its rationality because each group (or class) signifies in its free praxis the practical freedom of the Other, and vice versa. In other words, it involves a twin-headed temporalisation each moment of which represents not only a praxis, but also its negation by the other praxis, and the beginnings of the transformation of the former in order to outwit the latter and of the latter in order not to be outwitted by the former.⁴⁸

B. The Group vs. the Gathering: Free, Common Praxis

The fundamental characteristic of the fused group is rooted in the freedom of the individual insofar as it is dialectically and rationally coordinated with all of the freedoms of the others of the group. The primacy of individual praxis remains the “real and permanent foundation” (*CDR:I*, 332) for any movement within the practico-inert field. Each individual acts on his own accord towards his project, simultaneously being the aim, or common objective within the group and in the individual, yet being both individually shared and originating.⁴⁹

Upon the formation of the fused group, its members take up a “one for all and all for one” mentality. If alterity is indeed the formula of the series, alterity as necessity seems to be the formula of the group. The very change which would keep those in the series separated is necessary, insofar as it is itself a common praxis, in the group. But the

⁴⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason: Volume II* (London: Verso Books), 805.

⁴⁹ Though “The Cult of Personality” (See *CDR:I*, 656-658) does allow us to consider the counter-argument on the issue.

group has (voluntarily) dissolved the series through past, sedimented, (and above all) *common* praxis; all individuals act with the motivation, or aim, of the group's common objective as if it were their own. It is important to keep in mind a favorite mantra of Sartre's: "there are only individuals and real relations among them."

What makes a group distinct from a gathering of individuals is that every *other* is "me" insofar as our goals and practice are the same.⁵⁰ The bond between individuals is that of alterity as the immediate discovery of oneself in the other. "We are a hundred strong!" the men all shout in front of the Hotel de Ville. This is an important point: The group constitutes itself as a collective of other, third parties who constitute their own existence in *freedom*.

"Everyone is a third party in relation to reciprocal relations between other individuals, and this means that he totalizes this relation in his praxis on the basis of material meanings (*significations*) and indications, uniting the individual terms of the relations as *instruments* serving a partial end... The third party does exist – it is every one of us – as alienated freedom revealing itself in lived alienation as inessential. (*CDR:I*, 366)

There is a melding of human action, and thus, interaction, that we have so far tried to emphasize in the group in fusion. Action and praxis are, and always will be (save hypnosis, perhaps) ultra-individual enterprises as Sartre shows in book one of the *Critique* through the *primacy of praxis*. The "mediator" is not an object, but a praxis: and in *praxis*, there is no Other, only several *myselfes*:

"At any moment a group member is sovereign – he is sovereign, that is to say, he becomes through the change of praxis, the organizer of common praxis. It is not that he wishes it; he simply *becomes it*; his own flight, in effect, realizes the practical unity of all *in him*."

⁵⁰ "But as well as being other, everyone is also a third party; as a third party, he organizes the constellation which surrounds him," (*CDR:I*, 370).

As we have seen, the necessity of the group is not a priori in the gathering. I reiterate this point now to highlight the real possibility of individual sovereignty to leave the group. A gathering of people can soon find, after adequate attempts at congealing, fusing, no common praxis to unite them. The common project amongst all of the thirds, which constitute the group as simple reciprocity gives us group distinction and the actual, alienated product of the group in the practico-inert field. “For in the group...the other third party is not a third party object. He transcends me towards his projects insofar as I transcend him,” (*CDR:I 376*). We go beyond our friends’ work and vice versa in the group’s attempt at satisfaction, success.

C. The Storming of the Bastille

On 12 February 1964 the Miles Davis Quintet was in a state of revolt. The group’s anger had deep causes, but as yet these had affected them only in their common impotence. (Not being paid, internal disagreement about playing for free, disrespect rooted in racial discrimination, playing for an almost entirely white audience, etc. were all suffered either in resignation or in unorganized outbursts, etc.) The concert the group was to play was a benefit for the registration of black voters in Louisiana and Mississippi at Lincoln Center’s Philharmonic Hall in New York City. The five men, George Coleman - tenor saxophone, Ron Carter - bass, Herbie Hancock - piano, Tony Williams - drums, and Miles on trumpet, had played music together before, but this time was different:

Davis wanted to make public his – and his group’s – solidarity with those fighting racism in the South...Davis, who had been an embodiment of “black pride” long before that phrase had become popular, was taking a stand. He not only decided that he would waive his customary fee for the benefit concert, but that his

sidemen would all do likewise. And, characteristically, he wasn't much interested in checking their opinions on the matter.⁵¹

Before being introduced (individually, interestingly enough), the five men were no more a group than any other five people in Lincoln Center that night insofar as they were more separated in their disagreement than united in their actions. "But Davis was adamant; no amount of backstage arguing was going to change his mind. If the others wanted to be a part of his group, they were going to waive their fees willingly *as a group*."⁵² Even behind the introductory remarks of Mort Fega, the four others fiddled and disrupted the speaker to perhaps prove their independence. Their transformation of instrumentality (the exigencies and scarcity of the tool replacing the scarcity of the immediate object of need; or the modifications of the tool, seen in their ascending signification, as necessary modifications of the collective (*CDR:I 352*) was the active unity, as the being-outside-itself-in-freedom, of the inert gathering.

But that night's transformation of sonic, material alienation was not enough: indeed contradiction (i.e. the production, antithesis of the group itself in reaction to its practico-inert milieu) can be transcended and overcome only in action. This is the reason which caused the Parisians to go out on to the streets in the critical hours of the Revolution, and to constitute gatherings, anywhere, anyhow. The Miles Davis Quintet felt cheated (Miles insofar as his band was turning on him and the other four insofar as they didn't want to play for free), and through their action, that is, their music-making,

⁵¹ Chip Deffaa, (1992) Liner Notes in *Miles Davis, The Complete Concert 1964; My Funny Valentine + Four & More* (5), New York: Columbia Records

⁵² *Ibid*, 6.

they dissolved their seriality to fuse a revolutionary group. Miles took the stage, and insofar as the group constitutes itself through its inertia as a multiplicity of individual actors⁵³, *turned his back to the audience ever so slightly* and constituted a new, for-itself group. “When we came out to play,” Miles recalled in his autobiography, “everybody was madder than a motherfucker with each other and so I think that anger created a fire, a tension that got into everybody’s playing, and maybe that’s one of the reasons everybody played with such intensity.” They took each song *up*, some three times as fast as usual. *They didn’t pause once, not even in between songs.* The important point here is that this transformation imposes itself on free individual praxis: objectification becomes production of the object in so far as it posits itself for itself; in this case, the product becomes the man and as such the product, (*CDR:I, 321*).

Each man could have, in his free, individual praxis, chosen not to play and not be part of the group at any time that night. Instead, they chose to work together as part of *The Miles Davis Quintet*.

The point of this example is simply to show how, in the movement of History, an exploiting class, by tightening its bonds against an enemy and by becoming aware of itself as a unity of individuals in *solidarity*, shows the exploited classes their material being as a collective and as a point of departure for a constant effort to establish lived bonds of solidarity between its members. There is nothing surprising about this: in this inert quasi-totality, constantly swept by great movements of counter-finality, the historical collectivity, the dialectical law, is at work: the constitution of a group (on the basis, of course, of real, material conditions) as an ensemble of solidarities has the dialectical consequence of making it the negation of the rest of the social field, and, as a result, of occasioning, in this field in so far as it is defined as *non-grouped*, the conditions for an antagonistic grouping (*on the basis* of scarcity and in divided social systems). (*CDR: I 346*)

⁵³ “The leader is always *me*, there are no others, I am sovereign and *I discover in my own praxis* the orders which come from the other third parties...Thus, at this first stage, there is no leader, or, in other words, the situation may *by accident* be such that a *single third party* designates, signifies and adumbrates the initial action,” (*CDR, 396-97*).

The group chose not to make Miles the individual their enemy but instead their own, material artifact (The *Quintet's* sound) in the face of the non-group, the collective audience ignorant to their plight to be the object to be transcended. "There were as a lot of creative tension happening that night," he noted afterwards, "that people out front didn't know about."

The quicker Tony drummed, the faster Miles played, the more precise and staccato Herbie's chords were, etc. and the more unique the group *became*. "Mystified, alienated and cheated, these free, practical developments, the source of individual, serial impotence, are still actual synthetic actions, and are still capable of unifying – from the individual point of view, admittedly – any multiplicity that appears in the practical field."⁵⁴ Later, when the group has cooled off and become permanent, its members will be *chronically* separated, and the struggle will remain their unity – their only unity – as a praxis. The transformation of soul into sound via worked matter through a piano, a trumpet, etc. is the actual product of the group and collectively the matter to be transcended by the individuals constituting the group *in fusion*.

To the audience, the group appears as an object, as a totalized totality. *My* individual project totalizes *them* through its transcendence. But again, my project, in Miles Davis' project to make music and to play it as quickly as possible at times, is the same, common project as the *other* four band members with me, as we dance along a great group-collective tension of immanence; that is, the group on stage and the collective audience: each constitutes the other.

⁵⁴ (CDR: I, 366). This is the logical, yet troublesome (as far as group intelligibility is concerned) sedimentation of an idea Sartre began eight pages earlier, claiming that "the fused group is still a series, negating itself in re-interiorising exterior negations; in other words, in this moment [of the group in fusion, or as fused], there is no distinction between the positive itself (the group in formation) and this self-negating negation (the series in dissolution)."

The group determines [the non-grouped] in their inorganic inertia through the extent that they conceive its ends and its unity through the free synthesis which is fundamentally the practical temporalization of the organism. (*CDR*: I, 347)

But Sartre is adamant in denying the group as an organism in itself. The band does not have a mind of its own; “the band” is only a name on a program signifying five, thinking men who choose in their every action to accept such a designation. The relation of the group, as the determination of a collective and as a perpetual threat of relapsing into a collective, to its inertia as a multiplicity can never in any way be assimilated to the relation of the organism to the inorganic substances which compose it.

The multiplicity of syntheses cannot be defined in the *practical* group (or the fused group) as the inert co-existence of identical processes, connected by mere relations of exteriority. Nor can it be described as a serial link of alterity uniting the syntheses as others... What actually happens is that the unity of the all is, within each actual synthesis, its bond of reciprocal interiority with any other synthesis of the same group, in so far as it *also* the interiority of this other synthesis. (*CDR*: I, 400)

Praxis as the unification of the practical field objectively tightens the bonds of the object group. Every collective stems from an older one, an older archetype; no group has an a priori existence, none reserve any meaning without a prior, synthetic entity in relation to it. An event which takes hold of a collective must, dialectically, precede the group itself.

“But however universal the event may be, it cannot be lived as its own transcendence towards the unity of all, unless its universality is objective for *everyone*, or unless it creates in everyone a structure of unifying objectivity. Up to this point, in fact — in the dimension of the collective — the real has defined itself by its impossibility. Indeed, what is called the *meaning of realities* is precisely the meaning of that which, in principle, is forbidden. The transformation therefore occurs when impossibility itself becomes impossible, or when the synthetic event reveals that the impossibility of change is an impossibility of life.” (*CDR*: I, 349)

The group fuses together to protect the life and common action the collective actors all individually imagine to be vital for their future community. All groups each have the same non-negotiable for Sartre: to revolt.

D. Towards an Opposition

Sigfried Kracauer put forth a severely different approach to the overall structure and function of the group and its occupation in the historical process in his Weimar Essays. In his 1927 work, *The Mass Ornament*, Kracauer emphasizes group unity through the example of the Tiller Girls, a dance troupe of hundreds of individual girls who would arrange and synchronize their movements to create a larger, mass ornament. With the unfolding of the group's routine, the individual disappears for Kracauer. "The bearer of the ornaments is the *mass* and not the people...they are no longer individual girls, but indissoluble girl clusters whose movements are demonstrations of mathematics."⁵⁵

Sartre arrives at his epistemological conception of the group dialectically whereas Kracauer reiterates that the group "must be understood *rationally, analytically*" (TMO, 77). Sartre maintains that the individual is always, in a group or not, completely free and present. Sartre's "Man" lives in the practico-inert field, or his specific, social milieu, through a continuous, living dialectic, which is the "very structure of concrete reality itself."⁵⁶ Man's mediation of matter and vice versa, along with the nonreciprocity of

⁵⁵ Sigfried Kracauer, *The Mass Ornament* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 77.

⁵⁶ Alexandre Kojève, "Hegel, Marx, et le Christianisme," *Critique I* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1946), 339.

human relationships, facilitates group formation in the face of scarcity and serial alterity among multiple actors. “Sartre interprets the inner synthetic act of unifying a group as a response to the eternally imposed totality of the alien others.” At each stage of group development for Sartre, the individual is present and active and is of course free to respond otherwise. “The development of a group is a social process which can be described as intelligible or ‘rational’ insofar as its stages are discriminable and the intentions of those comprising the group presuppose a consciousness of this directed action.”⁵⁷

Kracauer’s historical process becomes a process of *demythologization*, marked by abstractness and deconstruction of “positions that the natural continually reoccupied,” (TMO, 80). The group members are actors in an arranged and pre-agreed upon formation, but “they are not involved in thinking it through...Organic life [thus] surges from the group” to the ornaments they produce. A magic force accompanies these strange symbols of a hundred bodies: meaning. The ornament, like all art, is ambivalent and for-itself without the analogons of the onlookers (the group member has no such analogon in the example of the Tiller Girls for she is reduced only to a point on a line, a wave or a spiral) to give the work such meaning and significance. But this shift in organic life from the individual to the mass is Kracauer’s separating leap from Sartre: “The human figure enlisted in the mass ornament has begun the *exodus* from lush organic splendor and the constitution of individuality toward the realm of anonymity to which it relinquishes itself when it stands in truth and when the knowledge radiating from the basis of man dissolves the contours of visible natural form,” (TMO, 83). The individual then does not join a

⁵⁷ George J. Stack, “Sartre’s Dialectic of Social Relations” in *Existential Politics and Political Theory* ed. William Leon McBride (New York: Garland Publishing 1997), 161.

group like the Tiller Girls for personal freedom or belief in an ideal that all, free individuals take up in “a flash of common praxis,” but to produce a “truth” by abiding certain rules. The Tiller Girls’ group member, in her fixed, assigned task, has no control of materiality in the practical field insofar as she is not being transformed into her own product.⁵⁸

This resembles Sartre’s concept of *serial* relations which give a false sense of unity and strength to hide each’s *otherness* and impotence (such as the Nazi troops marching into the Olympic Stadium showing *Triumph of the Will*). Both the Tiller Girl and Nazi soldier are far too alienated, that is, interchangeable in a social scene, to be considered a dialectically or otherwise free individual.

The synchronized dance performance of the mass ornament is a set and rigid, unchangeable routine. “Those who have withdrawn from the community and consider themselves to be unique personalities with their own individual souls fail when it comes to forming these new patterns.” A more contradictory idea to an outlining, bold tenor saxophone solo rising above and improvising away from the rhythm section’s chord changes I am hard-pressed to find. “Only as parts of a mass, not as individuals who believe themselves to be formed from within, do people become fractions of a figure.”(TMO, 76)

“The only practical and dialectical reality is *individual action*,” (CDR, 361). The individual action of the Tiller Girl is unlike that of Sartre’s sworn, group member. She has assumedly pledged beforehand to do precisely this and that, sacrificing her freedom

⁵⁸ See CDR:l, 638-639.

for group interest, having no personality within a pre-programmed, automatic group. There is no definite future within *The Critique's* Fused Group: "every freedom of each individual *creates* itself laterally as the totalisation of all freedoms, and totalization comes to it through the others as a lateral dimension of its individuality, in so far as it freely individual for them," (CRD: I 402). But instead of the specified, mechanical tasks of a marching soldier or a synchronized swimmer, in every totalisation of the group (meaning every transcendent moment which the group is alive), the freedoms acknowledge themselves to be the same. The group finds itself 100 strong: "They will fight my fight, with my determination; *over there* is no more than *over here*....thus my own action - even when the conditions of my struggle prevent me from seeing them - is *regulatory of theirs*; it is practical freedom in me which sets its own limits in them; thus in driving my tenacity to the limit, I produce this tenacity everywhere." With the same motives without a known, total plan, the group synthetically transforms itself in each's common practice, and does so *improvisationally*. Kracauer's mass ornament is rehearsed, premeditated and therefore inauthentic; the mass ornament has a finished structure before it has even begun.

E. Responsibility: All Relations Are Eye-Level and Voluntary

Let us return our full attention to Sartre's social ontology and initially consider the collective listening to the radio broadcast: if one listener phones in and gives a lengthy critique of the show, his fellow listeners may become agitated and uninterested at the sudden stop in music. If one listener turns the radio off, he ceases being a part of the

series without affecting any of the others tuning in. Solidarity does not appear as an omnipresent reality of seriality because it does not affect everyone in his third-party relations with others. This is serial unity-in-otherness; a kind of dispersion covered by a *pseudo-unity*.

In the jazz ensemble, if a drummer wishes to alter the beat, he changes the group for everyone; the group fuses into something it wasn't five seconds ago. But insofar as the group is the equivalent of freedom as necessity and necessity as freedom, the drummer is encouraged to do so. The music fluctuates to the decisions of the five men who are creating it. The goal of the music group may be to produce sound which is in itself pleasing to those playing it, just as the goal of the football team is to work together to score and win the game. Of course, there are no winners, losers, points or statistics in regards to music. When playing music, and I will limit my example to jazz for the moment, with other people, all members of the group act freely to improve the collective object, the sound itself. The band's product will be something completely their own, only to be lost with the coming of the next moment. Each sound comes as a chosen event from the musician in opposition to the sounds which preceded it and to the silence of the audience or inhuman practico-inert which surrounds him. Thus responsibility, enters the equation.

"There's probably no better example of democracy than a jazz ensemble; individual freedom but with responsibility to the group."⁵⁹ Each musician is essentially aware of the other as he "shoves" his own "voice" into the conversation. Of course, the

⁵⁹ Michelle Obama, *Remarks By The First Lady At The White House Music Series: The Jazz Studio*, (The White House: East Room) 15 June 2009.

jazz group can choose who they converse and play with as they tell each other the same thing in so many notes, chords and moans of accountable worked matter: *be bold and mighty forces will come to your aid*. “I do not attribute inertia — which must constitute the real foundation of the group (as inertia which has been transcended and preserved) — to the active community; on the contrary, it is my *praxis* which, in its unificatory movement takes responsibility for it,” (CDR: I, 347).

The radio listeners are listening to the same content yet it has different meaning to different individuals. Band members are adding to the same content insofar as it is the music that they are collectively producing. There is difference in its meaning, of course, to the different people in the room (not to mention the different people in the band), but that is a distinction to be explained by the very nature of our independent analogons. Harmony escapes from the instrumentalists tools and dances throughout the night; the notes to be played come dialectically to the players as the music itself, improvisationally added to, is the object to be transcended.⁶⁰ “The direct result of [the group] is to make the *impossibility of change* the very object which has to be transcended if life is to continue.” (CDR:I, 350). All men in the group share in creating a meaningful work of art, rendering change during their collective *praxis*, the playing itself, impossible. In every solo, in every melody, there is a storytelling to be unfolded, absorbed and moved beyond.

⁶⁰ Because the music of the jazz ensemble is created spontaneously *from* someone, that is, improvisationally, the music and the musician are one in the same. The horn player, for example, strives *to be* his sound; he alienates himself out into the practico-inert as worked matter of the clear pierce of a trumpet. He is held accountable for every sound he pushes out into the world.

Collectively, the sound which emerges from the five men on stage comes about from a fierce, wordless discussion.

F. The Groups Laws are Under No One's Jurisdiction but their Own

The group is a mode of existence; it is posited for itself as the free milieu of free human relations. Thus, the group makes itself out of free, organic praxis and abides by its own rules of conduct. The group brings with it, for those of whom are members, an end to authority⁶¹ but immense collective responsibility. "My bond within the group (as the link of the other third party) is one of interiority. When I approach it to join it, I am already a part of it," (*CDR:I 376*). This sudden, group involvement may not even be intelligible. "Activity, as spontaneous, unreflecting consciousness, constitutes a certain existential stratum in the world, and that in order to act, there is no need to be conscious of oneself as acting."⁶²

More often than not, the aim of the musicians is to simply stay on their earlier-agreed-upon wavelength, to continue and improve the expression already shouted, quietly harmonized, plucked by finger and/or blown by breath. If the music feels good, it can even tell you what to do. You know the form, an A minor chord is coming up, leading into a G major suspended chord. You may not know the line you'll play yet, but you

⁶¹ See Thomas Flynn's *An End To Authority* in McBride's *Existentialist Politics and Political Theory*.

⁶² *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, 61. We will most definitely return to this first introduction of activity as unreflecting consciousness. I must, however, tease you a bit: unreflecting consciousness is the most elusive and single greatest transcendent act in-the-world.

probably have an impression of the shape it will take. As the structure of the music unfolds and the end of the blues approaches, the band resolves. This is the magic of communication: the *only* way in which a fusing group can unite in common praxis is if their revolt is one in which all agree to in their free, individual praxis. The band revolts against their two, lived beats of A minor with (after a slight detour in D7) four more of G major. To individually keep up with the changes is to choose a collective solidarity and agree with the band's self-imposed laws.

It seems as if the group is bound so tightly together that each one takes the other as part of the practico-inert. The group's object is identical to the individual's object, each is aware yet unconcerned with each other. They know the other's motivations, for they are their own. And in authentic groups,⁶³ this motivation, in the true spirit of jazz, is to act freely with no boundaries or limits. Rules are therefore absent within any group. To act against the common objective of the group, knowingly or not,⁶⁴ is to leave it. It is also worth repeating at this point that the jazz group with such a common object is in itself rooted in transcendence and thus can only be practiced under real, lived conditions, that is to say, the music must be live.

G. The Present Phenomenology of The Jazz Group

We have now arrived at a point, after flirting with the issue adequately enough, where we may ask a question of a more specific kind: What is the social ontology and

⁶³ That is, groups not immediately suspended by law or social factors. (For example, an unhappy, underpaid worker in an on-site meeting acts less freely than the terrifying football goalie, ready to do anything to keep a ball from entering his box)

⁶⁴ For example, playing a major seventh over a dominant chord

epistemologically objective essence of the jazz group? I fear that the answer may be the most condescending one: that there is in fact no such thing;⁶⁵ a dialectical approach may only end with us stepping outside the very circle we chained ourselves to, that is an abandoning of the unanswerable question. “This place of violence, darkness and witchcraft,” Sartre’s poetic description of the practico-inert field, has a dialectical intelligibility, that is, some strict rationality which underlies the strange appearance of this world, making *comprehension* always possible, but ensures us that any dialectical movement of unification has no *intelligibility*.

Only Magic or Fate could explain how individual *praxis*, absorbed in the object, could be the source of a new negation by which it transforms itself into the first moment of a dialectic of collectivity, if we really had to accept the negation of [the practico-inert] field by the group resides in the action of a dialectical forced expressed *through* free *praxis* and developing *through* changes in the field and different kinds of action. The intelligibility of individual *praxis* as translucidity cannot in any way be the same as that of the practico-inert field, and, similarly, it would be absurd or idealistic to imagine that individual *praxis*, inert activity and common action are the three moments of the development *of a single force* conceived as human praxis, for example. (*CDR*: I, 319)

The musicians are only a group while they are playing music insofar as the piano player becomes, or perhaps in other “relative” words our ears hear, the piano being played⁶⁶ and the sound which escapes it. There is no relation amongst the men who constitute the drummer, bassist, saxophonist, etc. within the band other than the very music they produce (their synthetic enrichment of individual praxes as collective, common praxis).

The music each man produces is music in itself, and done properly, could serve as an entertaining solo concert, but everything changes in the group. Individualism and

⁶⁵ The music can go in any direction at any time; that’s part of what makes the music “jazz”

⁶⁶ This brings with it echoes sounding a bit like Marx; to what degree is man only a combination of his tools and his subsequent praxis through the use of them?

interconnectedness are of equal status, as are assertion and openness, freedom and responsibility and creativity and tradition. A five-man group takes these abstracts and breathes physical life into their instruments, into the concert hall. An army of sound emerges, marching to the playbook they spontaneously put together off their own beats.

H. The Unspoken, Atemporal Oath

I, a member of the group-band, take the other members not as a “third-party-object, that is to say, a third party transcendent to me. As an individual, he transcends me towards his projects in so far as I transcend him...in the fused group, the third party is my objectivity interiorized. I do not see it in him as other, but as *mine*,” (CDR, 376-377). The bass player becomes *my* bass player in so far as I become *his* saxophone player. We play off of each other, with each other, *against* each other in dialectic unrestraint.⁶⁷ In an unscripted play, actors rely on each other for movements within dialogue and plot. The same is true in jazz improvisation. If one member of the ensemble wishes to drastically change the plot, the others are all ears, as they put in and take out their thoughts on the matter. The group in fusion is always the product of its common and democratic praxis, in this case meaning always looking towards the future. It is as if to say, *What has happened has happened and could not have happened any other way*. But there is always the possibility that your friends don’t like what you’re saying, that they feel the need to interject and *tell the truth*, that is, to properly state the changes.

I. One.....Two.....One...Two...A-One, Two, Three Four-

⁶⁷ “One is a dialectician when one thinks a totality with lots of contradictory relationships within the whole and an interconnection of the whole that comes from the shifting of all these particular contradictions,” (Schlipp, 19).

The group begins to play. The drummer lays down a beat for the other four men to surf over. The poor drummer, the brunt of most musician's jokes (how hard, after all, is it to hit things with a stick?) may actually be the most important man in the band. He certainly is the backbone of the tempo, the loudest of the group's collective pulses. Just beside him stands your everyman, the underappreciated bass player. There is no more intimate of a relationship amongst the men comprising the band than the drummer, the rhythmic watchman, and bassist, the chordal time-keeper. The bass player plucks at his strings, walking his fingers up and down the strings on his mystically deep, mahogany box and provides the foundation for both a skyscraper or a log cabin.

As the dialogues mesh together, the *building* reorganization of their bodies seem to be their only discernable aim, as if they somehow enjoy this brand of manual labor. Their action is like a Calder mobile: a pure play of movements which have no aim except for our delight. But as the drummer dances in his seat and occasionally hits something, as the bassist walks with his fingers, as the piano player slides down all 88 of his keys, magic accompanies this movement with transcendent sound as we have imagined in the last chapter. The piano and guitar player fill the space provided by the drummer and bassist with hundreds of sounds, combinations of this note and that one, long notes and short ones, major notes and blue notes, layering the practico-inert with fields of green harmony. Then, as if this wasn't enough, with the saxophone comes the key-log of the melody. One line is played in between the four men's complexity underneath like an

equine scout, donned in royal, golden garb, as it blazes in front of a civilization's warriors, streaking into the enemy, the unknown.⁶⁸

⁶⁸“The unity of the fused group lay quite simply in real common action, that is to say, in its own undertaking as much as in that of the enemy, and in the violent, dangerous and sometimes fatal attempt to destroy the common danger,” (CDR, 413). We have arrived, somehow in a lengthy, Sartrean footnote, at perhaps the kernel of our project. Does every group have to have an enemy?

If the answer is yes, we must allow ourselves to envelop the word enemy into scarcity and vice versa. A group of revolutionaries form in response to the Ancien Régime, a rugby team pushes thirteen of its biggest men into the opposing squad (I've been told this ritual is called a *scrum*) so one man may pick up the golden goose-egg of the ball, a family travels together to provide and protect one another, etc. All group projects are collective projects of common praxis insofar as the project could not be done without the multiplicity of individual actors. We find ourselves skirting around the fields of anthropology, thinking a bit like Sartre: things can only get done in groups, *at present*. The *Critique's* Introduction rightfully warned us of this on page 17: “This means that the attempt to establish totalizing movements, reciprocities of conditioning – or, as Gurvitch quite correctly puts it, reciprocities of ‘perspectives’ – etc., is based on past investigations and is *confirmed* by present ones. Generalising this attitude, one might, I think, speak of a neo-positivism which discovers in a given region of anthropology now a dialectical field...and now, if occasion demands, other types of rationality.” Such an anthropology, in its rightful distrust of the a priori, truly makes the dialectic look dogmatic.

The fused group forms in sight of a common project through common praxis in order to achieve something out of *one's* reach. It is this thinking that also places man's ego as external and assures that all consciousness is consciousness of something, as we will focus on in chapter three. Entertainment groups, such as the jazz quintet, form the same way. But their objective is slightly different: the aim of the jazz quintet is to combat practico-inert *time* itself with harmony, beauty and expression in response to our otherwise nauseous existence. We may, conceivably, escape the bonds of alienation due to material scarcity some day in the future, yet that would *still* leave a void: we'd have this huge void to fill, an immense, yet finite, amount of time to live. What would Man do with himself? Marx is ambiguous about what will happen after the Revolution, perhaps because that is precisely what would come of man: he would be ambiguously searching for something *to do*. Thus time is the jazz group in fusion's enemy, the next obstacle to tackle in our evolutionary struggle to completely combat and annihilate scarcity, because there is a difference between nauseous, full temporality that just *aint got that swing* and one where you pray for impossibility: that the next second is like the last. We call such a transcendent celebration a *fête*. So goes the jazz group, *playing* into the night, harnessing and agreeing on time to convert such emptiness into beautiful agreement, *rhythm*. “Four notes on a saxophone. They come and are gone, they seem to say, “Do as we do, suffer in rhythm.”

The jazz melody doesn't exist, but simply "is," George Bauer states in *Sartre and The Artist*. The audience's ears pick up the non-material noise and do with it what they like. Such is the true, multi-edged possibility of jazz. The horn player chants the melody, the only predetermined part of the form, twice; after the last note of the melody, all hell breaks loose. Solos are upon us, and the music can and will go in any direction, and the audience gets what it comes to see: Relationships *fusing*, *forming* and *settling*. Arguments, stories, conversations, wonder, emptiness project from one man to another, the only thing to hold onto being that which is already past.

The aesthetic object of the work of art is imaginary and exists nowhere outside of the experience of it. We will now discuss improvisation and storytelling, two concepts which our entire ontological (and especially aesthetic) existence gives custody to.

III. Existentialism is an Improvisationism

“The paradox is that to understand a thing purely in itself, in an immanent way, one must have already seen and known something more than what arises from the thing itself.”

-Lucien Goldmann

A. Improvisation is our imagination's non-thetic outwardness

From Descartes to Sartre, through Husserl oddly enough, we assume that man as a subject is an individual subject whose intentional acts are projected through worked matter in lived experience. If all acts, even unreal ones such as those of imaging consciousness, are intentional, we can dialectically find a previous synthesis for every (now) past praxis. This praxis, as we have mentioned above, is “the real and permanent foundation (in human history up to the present) of all the inhuman sentences which men have passed on men through worked matter” (*CDR*: I, 332) in its becoming inert. This leads to Sartre's most valuable contribution to modern thought: the (correct) placing of man's ego as external, and provides reason to believe that all consciousness and therefore all praxis is transparent. However, the externality of being precariously places man on the same plane as the jazz instrumentalist whose role in the band is not clearly defined. Improvisation's seemingly feature characteristic of that which is produced spontaneously *off-hand* from the individual subject is precisely that which enables the subject, acting

from need, to make itself into its own tool into the world of exteriority. But what can be said of an improvisation that, in its “dialectical freedom,” seems chained to previous syntheses and intentions? Is our initial lure of improvisation, to look the inevitable future in the eye and insist that it must be filled with original creation, lost? Our stance is a simple one: Man is thrown, without consultation, into a world with values and strata that predate him and leave the role of the individual not clearly defined; he is left with nothing to do but improvise.

I would first like to devote a few more words to the externality of the ego and its implications to the work of art. From our first chapter’s study on the intentional act of the imagination, we concluded that consciousness and the world are given together and that the ego is an object close to subjectivity, as it is an object of consciousness (i.e. being aware of oneself). Therefore, subjectivity is not in consciousness, it is consciousness. There can be nothing within subjectivity nor is there a “within” of consciousness.

“I cannot describe here the true dialectic of the subjective and the objective. One would have to demonstrate the joint necessity of the ‘internalization of the external’ and ‘the externalization of the internal.’ Praxis, indeed, is a passage from objective to objective through internalization. The project, as the subjective surpassing of objectivity toward objectivity, and stretched between the objective conditions of the environment and the objective structure of the field of possibles, represents in itself the moving unity of subjectivity and objectivity, those cardinal components of activity...the subjective contains within itself the objective, which it denies and which it surpasses toward a new objectivity; and this new objectivity by virtue of objectification externalizes the internality of the project as an objectified subjectivity.”⁶⁹

Sartre’s near-complete rejection of the subjective and objective towards the end of his life in favor of the idea that everything is objective in so far as the individual interiorizes his past in favor of an exteriorizing of his future through practice is his sidestepping of the pragmatists and relativists.

The idea that the project represents in itself the moving unity of subjectivity and objectivity and is the surpassing of both is vital to our thesis that improvisation is a

⁶⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, (New York: Knopf, 1963), 97.

unique action with a corresponding unique form of consciousness that is not only pre-reflexive but is extemporaneous in its intentionality. To improvise is to compose without projection, a phenomenon thus far unaccounted for in Husserlian phenomenology. Improvisation cannot be a transparent mode of consciousness because it is never an unfulfilled intention. There is no part of the product of an improvisation that remains yet to be completed because its product is itself unfolded with its subject. And yet, paradoxically, it leads to completion, not simply to an end (*terminus*).

As I walk along the street, I decide to treat myself to an ice cream. I walk into the store, order my dessert, etc. All of my actions until my consumption serve as unfulfilled acts on their way to being realized. In the production of an improvisation, the product released by the subject is a pure, non-thetic outwardness of the subject's imagination. I again stress what we found in our first chapter's investigation: when I produce in myself an image of a chair, it is the chair that is the object of my current consciousness. When I produce through myself an improvised solo, it is the solo that is the object of my current consciousness⁷⁰. "This temporal relation between the future and the past, through the present, is none other than the functional relation of the totality to itself; the totality is its own future lying beyond a present of reintegrated disintegration." (*CDR:I*, 82)

Even in the most direct, un-reflexive consciousness of improvisation, that which escapes the individual subject to project itself into his/her surrounding through worked matter is *beyond* oneself insofar as the subject remains while his consciousness is thrown out into the world. In this sense, the musician is a member of the collective audience as well as being the leader in his fused group, as he hears his project as he plays it. Extemporaneously speaking, improvisation is the ultimate form of lived experience, understanding without understanding.

But is improvisation, like all other forms of praxis, transparent? The transparency of consciousness is contrasted with the opacity of the body, with the facticity and finitude

⁷⁰ I also wonder to what extent the *Critique* was improvised, considering the lack of editing of his philosophy and his self-imposed pressure of producing through the use of amphetamines.

of the subject as instantiated in the world⁷¹. We see ourselves as beings-in-the-world on the edge of our perceptions yet remain convinced that we are more than that; our inner dialogue continues to churn the poetry of consciousness produced by that very perception. Whereas Sartre's theory of practical transparency is rooted in scarcity and lack, the scarcity which improvisers act upon is the scarcity of the present, one which lacks the time to edit what is one is trying to project. To be conscious of this moment is to recognize its end, and impossibility of change within (that now) past moment. To act *on top* of that consciousness is to act with only a *moment's notice*. Pure improvisation, then, is the *most* transparent form of consciousness. To improvise is to display your imagination to the world.

B. The Improvisational, Social Ontology of the Jazz Group

The imagination, in its own totalizing, transcending lived experience boldly comes to the aid of the other band members through the immediate, worked matter of improvisation, to which each is reliant.⁷² Yet Sartre's idea of the imaginary is not a romantic one. Where someone like Baudelaire sees the imagination's ability to "create the world," Sartre claims otherwise. Instead, it involves only an "anti-world," as Edward Casey is quick to point out in his essay *Sartre On Imagination*. If Sartrean "imagining is charged with an impoverishment of form and content from which it cannot recover" we are reminded once again that even our created, mental "worlds" are strictly tied to, that is to say our mental imaging is provided with its subject matter from, the anti-dialectic practico-inert that we observe and thus internalize.

The intentional structure of the image along with the extension of temporality through all practical organisms creates an intersubjective community of rational agents

⁷¹ Howells, Cristina, "Sartre and the Deconstruction of the Subject," *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*, 336.

⁷² "There could be no realizing consciousness without imaging consciousness, and vice versa. Thus imagination, far from appearing as an accidental characteristic of consciousness, is disclosed as an essential and transcendental condition of consciousness," (*The Imaginary*, 188).

with knowledge only from that which is conceived, perceived or imagined from a noematic correlate in-the-world. Roy Elveton, in a 30 January 2007 article in *Sens Public*, identifies this change from the Sartre of the Transcendence of the Ego and “its radicalization of Husserlian intentionality” to be “the introduction of a third medium that now embeds the for-itself-in-itself opposition. This medium makes me available to the other in the sense of the omnipresence and priority of an intersubjective community. It is by virtue of our intersubjective praxis that we at present inhabit our future together and redeem our past.”⁷³

Casey considers there to be two aims of Sartre’s reflective method of the imagination which produce its immediate certain content: “first to describe and then to classify essential structures. In this way we come to grasp “the certain,” which is the title of Part I of *The Psychology of the Imagination*. When we abandon reflection and turn to strictly empirical considerations, we have to do with “the probable,” the title of Part II of the book,” (Schlipp, 144).

I have tried to elucidate the idea of improvisation as the lived experience of the imagination. I must repeat my skepticism, however, speaking of truly improvisational, artistic creation. Musicians do not simply *come up* with material as they play continuously into the night, just as writers do not (generally speaking) invent the words they use in their original novels. Jazz, like all conversation, begins with an agreement. What key a tune is in is the equivalent to what language will be spoken, the song itself what topic to be discussed, or at least what topic to start on. The saxophonist’s lines which dance up and around tonality is not an invention, it is an arrangement. He knows what and where the chords, given to his consciousness via the worked matter of the pianist, will be based on their conversation beforehand or the universally accepted practice of a certain situation both are already aware of through past, sedimented praxis manifested in worked matter. It is simply a matter of *keeping up*, of being *in sync*, with

⁷³ Ron Elveton, “Sartre, Intentionality and Praxis,” *Sens Public*, January 30, 2007, 13.

one another. There is a tradition to uphold, a mode of free, spontaneous expression to guard over.

Just as in a conversation, man acts in response to scarcity. If the saxophonist is playing all of the notes under the sun, the piano player may stay silent and allow the horn to tell the entire story. This is nothing new; we've discussed this above. I would, however, like to introduce the idea of a malleable ontology where there is no clear role of any one man in his constant totalizing and transcending and one in which any strict, a priori role whatsoever are absent.

“If totalization is really an ongoing process, it operates everywhere. This means both that there is a dialectical meaning of the practical ensemble – whether it is planetary, or has to become even interplanetary – and that each individual event totalizes in itself this ensemble in the infinite richness of its individuality.” (*CDR: II, 17*)

Improvisers are guardians to a tradition which defies the Freudian unconscious insofar as its intentions are to let all of its secrets out into the practico-inert. To improvise is to tell the world a story through words, notes, actions, etc. that come spontaneously from matter which once was real and in-in the world.

IV: The Situation of the Writer in 2010 And The Philosophy of the Secret

Sero te amavi, pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova, sero te amavi.

-S. Augustine

A. Is the touch from writer to reader a real relation?

You have followed me to this point, my dear reader; I hope your journey has been a rewarding one thus far. There is no more powerful a word than “you” in literature, boldly proclaiming that the words which have found themselves ordered on this page will assuredly be seen by the human eye. How clever a writer is for using such a device: if the words are read, the writer has won his argument; if the book collects dust, no one will ever know his mistake. To become aware of his proclamation, that is, to read his project and make present the dried, arranged ink is to have already proved him right. A book’s secrets lie unrevealed until a brave soul opens its exoskeleton, generations perhaps since they were first uttered. But there is something else (don’t *you* think?) that happens when a writer addresses the mouth he is feeding: there is an empowering, a fulfilling, a reminder of a relation. A piece of humanity shines through the words on a page and for a moment you can see the writer smiling at you.

I know of a writer who lives all by her lonesome, miles from any other human being, in the countryside of Vermont. She pounds tirelessly on her typewriter at all hours of the day; she has closed her door to the misunderstanding world long ago and has given up living in it. She pushes herself day and night, exhilaratingly, to add another page to that very same world that forced her into her hole of a cabin. As I read her I receive the gift of her whole person, her words travel from her 1988 fingertips into my 2010 brain. I make my project hers as I listen to her with my eyes and continue her inquiry, to take interest in her story. I synthesize her language and create my own, free image with them. The language used in writing is never the literary object; it is a silence and an opponent of the word.⁷⁴ The reader must invent them all in a continual exceeding of the written thing.

I know of a man more talented than the Vermont writer. He lives in New York, has endless money from a past life, jogs every morning in the park. His looks are dashing, his penmanship juvenile. He once told me that his passion was eating dinner. To sit alongside a friend in interesting conversation, nothing was more important. Stories gushed out of his mouth at a moment's notice, the rhythm of his tale could replace the beat of a listener's heart, if only for a few minutes. As I sit across from him and surrender to his story, the world of the utilizable vanishes abruptly, and the world of magic appears in its place. The storyteller's language coaxes you to join his words' adventure; the listener's future becomes the story's value.

⁷⁴ See *Why Write?*, Sartre, *What is Literature?*

I know of a man who is more talented than the New York fellow. He's a musician. He reads Einstein in his spare time, he listens to a metronome while walking down the street. He is a poet. He knows exactly when to come in during the bridge of a bebop tune, but claims he hasn't been on time for an appointment in twelve years. To him, sixty beats per minute is a ballad, not a sixty seconds; he refuses to utilize time. His solos are a weaving tale of color, emotion and without. The notes he plays come into and out of existence, only to be caught in the spirit of the moment, beautifully perishing as he gives birth to more. Perhaps more than the others, the musician best understands that "to say "moment" is to say *fatal moment*."⁷⁵

B. Rhythm as Lived-Experience

Whether I read the written word, hear the telling of a tale at a pub, or sit intently as part of an audience in the theater, I do so for each *in rhythm*. That is, it takes time, i.e. lived experience. All require the choice to make listening, reading, imagining their current project.

For the most trivial event to become an adventure, all you have to do is start telling about it. This is what deceives people; a man is always a teller of stories, he lives surrounded by stories and the stories of others, he sees everything which happens to him through these stories; and he tries to live as if it were a story he was telling. But you have to choose: live or tell... While you live, nothing happens. The scenery changes, people come in and go out, that's all. There are no beginnings. Days add on to days without rhyme or reason, an interminable and monotonous addition... But when you tell about a life, everything changes; only it's a change that no one notices: the proof is that people talk about true stories. (*Nausea*, 56)

⁷⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet* (New York: Penguin, 1971), 1.

Remember Roquentin's "crazy" adventure with that Erna girl he didn't trust: after a few days of spontaneity and then adequate reflection on his escapades, he felt grounded in the nausea of the interminable once again. Sartre offers only this on his sudden change of heart: "I began telling myself what had happened since I had landed...[and afterwards] I had to begin living again and the feeling of an adventure was fading," (*Nausea*, 56-59).

The story survives on its own; it is the best we can do to replicate a past that has already come and gone or tell of and mold a present that is behind us with each word. The written word outlives its author, its very subject reveals itself ever so slowly through the reader's pace with no regard for time outside of its pages. This is the goal of the musician, too, strangely enough: to let something, an emotion, a moral, a secret *out*, to tell the world what is inside of you. The hymn behaves similarly; it is a groove in defiance of the repetition of everyday still life. The oral tale, too, is perhaps the most courageous of stories: there seems at first to be nothing to hold onto but the breath of its narrator. But these last two intrepidly return the gaze of the future and propel the present to conform to agreed upon standards over top of lived experience. In other words, the story itself, as told by the musician and the storyteller, is not only a transcendent object, it is the object to be transcended.

Remember my experience of obtaining an ice cream: As I walk along the street I find myself in an adventure. I walk to the ice cream stand, see the pretty girl from the building next to mine, order my chosen flavors, etc. In each step of the way, and subsequently in each step of my story, I was on my way to something else. My present continually transcended itself into my created, free project which, of course, I aim to realize in an indefinitely open future. Each sentence of the tale is an act done five minutes

ago. It is like Anny's *perfect moment*, continually reaching out toward other liberties to which I have aimed. But now I have finished my short story and must find another project.

C. It Don't Mean a Thing if it Aint Got That Swing

Our perspective is that of existentialist ethics. Every subject plays his part as such specifically through exploits or projects that serve as a mode of transcendence; he achieves liberty only through a continual reaching out toward other liberties. There is no justification for present existence other than its expansion into an indefinitely open future. Every time transcendence falls back into immanence, stagnation, there is a degradation of existence into the "en-soi" – the brutish life of subjection to given conditions – and of liberty into constraint and contingency. This downfall represents a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if it is inflicted upon him, it spells frustration and oppression. In both cases it is an absolute evil.⁷⁶

The origin of this risk [of bad faith] is the fact that the nature of consciousness simultaneously is to be what it is not and not to be what it is.⁷⁷

Sartre says on page 106 of The Transcendence of the Ego that "the phenomenologists have plunged man back in the world, have given full weight to his anguish, his sufferings, and to his revolts. [But] as long as the I remains a structure of absolute consciousness, phenomenology can still be reproached for providing an escapist doctrine, for drawing a piece of man out of the world, and thereby turning our attention away from real problems." This last paragraph of the work teaches us that man's

⁷⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (New York: Knopf, 1953), 28-29.

⁷⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, (New York: Pocket Books, 1956), 70.

existence has the same essential characteristics as the world which he finds himself in. As man pulls a part himself out of the world in this reflection, he realizes that “the world has not created the Me, the Me has not created the world.” They are two objects for the absolute, impersonal consciousness, and it is by this consciousness that they are linked together. These are what Michel Kain calls “the beginnings of [Sartre’s] materialist program unburdened of any deterministic dimensions” in his essay “Beauvoir, Sartre, and the Problem of Alterity.” He claims: “The subject, existing in the world, could not possibly be determined by an exteriority acting mysteriously on its own interiority...Intentionality materializes as the *relationship* between Subject and Object.” For our study’s purposes, this means that the audience gives meaning to the viewed. But here is precisely where the Critique sprints past *Being and Nothingness* as it allows for multiplicities: the audience only gives meaning to the viewed serially as it is the group’s alienating other. The group themselves give their own project meaning collectively as they are each other’s mediating thirds in *constantly* sharing their common self.

We are, even now, moving past this moment; we are always detotalized totalities, fated to be in search of something *more*. The fact that there will be another measure, or that there will be a future at all, is the only prerequisite for rhythm, man’s manipulation of existence. The story is only a substantial unity of its being yet is always more than itself, that is, more than the words on a page, sounds of a voice, etc. insofar as its object is realized outside of its product and after the unfolding of that very product. Rhythm molds time so nauseously described as an excess into transcendence.

This integration of transcendence into the Subject, that is, the need⁷⁸ of the individual to move outside himself into the world, extends this idea of a useful present in pushing forward into an undetermined future even further. In a told story, words erupt from the speaker's lips to tell a miraculous, that is, communicative, tale until he deems the story adequately finished.

There is an aspect of development in a story that is the complete antithesis of lived experience while it tries to retell it. "[Reading] presents itself as a task to be discharged; from the very beginning it places itself on the level of the categorical imperative. You are perfectly free to leave that book on the table. But if you open it, you assume responsibility for it," (*What is Literature?*, 34). But the book is not an agenda. It is a finished project in itself; the reader merely has the freedom to follow the author further and further down the rabbit hole.⁷⁹ Fiction is taken as distrustful at the outset, yet we read on for one reason or another. It is an act of faith, a submission to the magical.

⁷⁸ "But not only does the "future" unify and direct present praxis, it also reveals "scarcity" and its correlate "need" for what they are. Recall that material scarcity, in Sartre's eyes, accounts for the violence that mars human history as we have experienced it. Dialectically, he characterizes scarcity as negation and need as 'negation of negation,'" (Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault and Historical Reason*, pg. 130). In short, this transcendence is a *need* because if one does not transcend oneself, the person is dead.

⁷⁹ "The author writes in order to address himself to the freedom of readers, and he requires it in order to make his work exist. But he does not stop there; he also requires that they return this confidence which he has given them, that they recognize his creative freedom, and that they in turn solicit it by a symmetrical and inverse appeal. Here there appears the other dialectical paradox of reading; the more we experience our freedom, the more we recognize that of the other; the more he demands of us, the more we demand of him," *What is Literature*, pg. 35.

We know the magician's act is rigged, a quarter could not have come from my left ear, yet we are entertained; the deceptive journey intrigues us.

What separates my New York friend from my Vermont acquaintance is daring. It is the difference between a classical violinist and a jazz trumpeter. The Vermont writer weaves a tale to perfection on her typewriter, working it over a hundred times before letting anyone see it. The New Yorker has told the same story one thousand times. He has forgotten to whom he has told certain ones to, telling both good and bad versions of it. He's lost a few women at the bar for both reasons. What the New Yorker does that the Vermonter does not is improvise. But if the walls of the practice room could tell us the secrets which they and they alone have custody to, they would whisper to us the "improvised" lines rehearsed one thousand times over and over again which will soon come out at the player's command.

There can be two ways in which ideas can be apprehended, it is a gift or it is taken. That is, they can be heard or they can be read. There is a searching and an obtaining of the practico-inert field in reading; the written word must be discovered, a story told to you is often beyond your control. The spoken word, on the contrary, is always free to utter anything. If existentialism teaches us anything, it is that the possibility of choice is the central fact of human nature. The storyteller can, on the spot, choose this word or that one, tell this part first or another. In jazz, there are certain parameters that the musicians place on themselves for communication's purposes while

creating their own laws *from* those of the past. Certain laws must be obeyed: the initial melody, for example, must be phrased a certain way depending on the song, *almost* always twice. Chord changes must, on certain tunes, be this or that, etc.⁸⁰ Of course, in jazz, spontaneity always rules the day; exceptions for style⁸¹ can always be made. It is how the artist subtly breaks the rules already in place which creates a player like Monk out of ideas from Ellington. But once a statement is made for style, it is too late to take back. Like time, the storyteller of any medium is boundless and has no “delete” button. He takes his only tool, his intellect, that is, his technique, and finds a way to tell his tale on the spot.

Is temporality a prerequisite for both organic and inorganic existence? Does the sealed preserve fall victim to time, as Thomas Mann asks in *The Magic Mountain*? Is it prey, like us, to the forward march of age and change? Yes: at any moment the outside world can knock it loose from its perch, dance for two seconds in the float of fall, and crash. It may take thirty years, one hundred, one hundred thousand, but that strawberry preserve is forever one second away from a confrontation with time. This is pertinent when considering the reader: at any moment can he pull his eyes from the book and leave its conclusion until tomorrow. At any moment a book can be stolen from the shelf,

⁸⁰ To play a melody is to bow one’s head in deference to the history which came before him. The melody assuredly is, albeit inert, a totality before and after the musician turns such past praxis into his own, worked matter. Only after the melody is stated can one can get a bit farther away from our fathers. But because certain tunes *require* an almost classical-approach in their rigidity in order to be played respectfully and correctly, the melody is the only part of the jazz tune (for example we can know what Chopin’s Sonatas are supposed to sound like before hearing them) that gives opportunity to our analogons.

⁸¹ In philosophy, a word must signify a concept and that one only. Style is a certain relation of words among themselves which refers back to a meaning, a meaning that cannot be obtained by merely adding up the words.

opened, violated and subjected to the biased eyes of another time period. Though a story is technically finished before its reader can finish it, our initial inquiry (you, remember, don't you, my dear reader?) proved that words do not come to life without a consciousness to synthesize them.⁸²

The storyteller informs you of the details necessary for comprehension, but “it is the absence of words, the undifferentiated and lived silence of inspiration, which the word will particularize, whereas the silence produced by the reader is an object. And at the very interior of this object there are more silences – which the author does not mention” (*What is Literature*, 31). The epoché can again be of use to us now: each listener, reader, audience member internalizes every word told to him and must make sense of it in his own way. Analogons may change, but the subject matter of course stays the same. The listener is conscious of himself listening before he is aware of the content the storyteller bestows upon him.⁸³ This makes life for the live musician or conversationalist a bit harder: he must communicate in real time. If he chooses to stay silent for a few seconds, it is implied as intended for the audience to relish the silent nothingness and is thus just as important as if he were speaking.

Now the aim of the arts of movement is to give the irreversibility of time – the knowledge of which we gain from science, but the feeling of which we would be unable to bear if it inwardly accompanied all of our actions – an outward expression, awesome but still beautiful, in things themselves. There is something fatal in melody. The notes composing it crowd in upon and govern one another with a strict necessity. Similarly, our tragedy presents itself as a forced march

⁸² Time cannot exist without a soul (to count it). – Aristotle

⁸³ *The Imaginary* teaches us that distinguishing the act from the object is difficult. The matter is not the spot it is the spot surveyed by the eyes in a certain way.

toward catastrophe. Nothing in it can turn back: each line, each word, sweeps things a little farther on in this race to the abyss. There is no hesitation, no delay, no hollow phrase which gives a bit of rest; all the characters, no matter what they say or do, advance toward their end. Thus these lost voyagers who have set foot in the swamp's quicksand may struggle as much as they wish; each movement sinks them in a little deeper till they disappear completely.⁸⁴

In "Theater and Cinema," Sartre sees the live aspect of both theatre and the jam session as its differentiating factors. Whereas in a film we have actors and action ready-canned, so to speak, theater is a true event, a jam session, an event at once ordinary and unique.

D. The Median Point Between Praxis and The Practico-Inert: Relations

But the most important reality of the temporality which we find ourselves in is the fact that we are in such *with others*. Without instruction, with actors at every turn, we are left to, quite simply, "get on with it." There are only men and real relations among them, Sartre reiterates in the *Critique*. We find ourselves standing amongst each other, each a bit different than we were a minute ago,⁸⁵ able to deliver a joke, tell a story, or produce changing sound.

Our identity and knowledge form from the politics of interaction. We can imagine a world where we sit in an empty, white room, but we cannot imagine our minds filled with anything in such a place. A similar path of questioning leads Michel Kail to ultimately argue that identity is no longer conceivable without alterity. Ontologically

⁸⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Motion Picture Art" in *Essays In Aesthetics* (New York: Citadel Press, 1963), 56.

⁸⁵ By the time I recognize this moment, this moment will be gone. Perhaps temporality, then, leads to Newton's First Law: energy cannot be created or destroyed. There are the same amount of atoms in any step of a chemical reaction, the form of the compound or solution merely changes over time.

speaking, the group, society, etc. precedes the human being, and thus the Other precedes the Subject. As we communicate, Man stands witness to time's continuous marathon as it pushes forward without a finish line. Of course, time outlasts its spectators as different men see different parts of the race.

Consider the worker ant in a child's playground. All day he frantically moves one dirt pile to another, determined to build his colony's skyscraper of sand. *It is to serve as the culmination of my people's storied history*, he whistles to himself as he works with pride. Back and forth he goes, so myopic that he can't see the truth: he's not creating material, he is simply *changing* form. Only moving material four small steps away, he transfers one pile of dirt to another again and again. Still, his action is a *powerful* one: the ant's generation is adding to its story by acting upon a creative idea. Back and forth, back and forth, he goes. And the child never causes him any harm, for the ant never changes the amount of dirt in his sandbox.

“Every situation exists in the world; it is not of the same order as being. It is, in fact, essentially constituted out of Others; its objectivity is conditioned by the meaning that other subjectivities cast on being.”⁸⁶ One is always exotic to another, and it is never more apparent than while telling a story. The storyteller or performer not only is constantly being *othered* by his audience, he becomes another's center of attention and thus transcendent. One only needs to let out a *squeak* during a ballad to hear how a storyteller's actions affect one's audience. The notes of a melody, the phrases of a fairy

⁸⁶ Michel Kail, “Beauvoir, Sartre, and the Problem of Alterity” in *Beauvoir & Sartre: The Riddle Of Influence*, ed. Christine Daigle and Jacob Golomb (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 144.

tale are lived within their listeners. A storyteller, like *The Imaginary's* fake Maurice Chevalier, is one *possessed*. He allows for ultimate transparency, his project is another's subject.

Nothing, at first glance, is of excess in a novel – its covers bound together its universe, a little world of escape sitting patiently, waiting for a lost soul to get lost in it. The oral novel, however, is alive, growing and spontaneous. The song, the anthem, the spoken riddle has no word minimum, no typos. Words dance freely from lip to ear, walking across a tight rope, reading only the lines from the internal. Bound are the words inside *Madame Bovary*, the eighth notes in the album version of *Milestones*. Boundless is the orator, the soloist. The musician and the orator, then, are always faced with a decision: where does one go next? The rhythm section laughs at this question, for they've already agreed on the changes. "Oh, it's right here," they confidently state with their respective instruments, and the band thrusts itself into the groove.

As we touched upon at the very outset of this chapter, anything can be turned into a story.

The word is perpetually serializing and institutional as I give it *its* meaning because Others give it that meaning...The verbal institution is the serialized third party, yet of itself, it is an...inertia...The written word would never have been invented (a material object, a depiction on clay or stone) if the spoken word had not *already been written*...Hence, a transcendent, practico-inert word is designated and designates.(*CDR*: II, 426)

Yet we know the notes must end, the only solo that goes on forever is time itself. Our experience of the arts suggests that Sartre's little tune in *La Nausée* sends a true if tedious message: *Il faut souffrir en mesure*. *Mesure* is rhythm, and rhythm implies

continuities through organization and ends. If anything exists, it must be in rhythm, even the isotope manufactured in the laboratory for a mere 1/100th of a second.

E. The Sense of an Ending

A successful story does two things: it begins with a scandal and ends. That is, it pulls man into and out of the grasp of the story-world. “We hunger for ends and for crises,” Frank Kermode mentions on page 55 of *The Sense of an Ending*. Such an escape is difficult to come by. This differs greatly from the notion of lived experience (*le Vécu*, Erlebnis) Sartre developed towards the end of his life, which more or less replaced his earlier notion of consciousness. Lived experience is life aware of itself – to listen to a story is to become hypnotized by it, to become part of it. His study of Flaubert, in particular his priority of spoken over written language is useful here: “With Flaubert, experience is when he speaks of the illuminations he has had which then leave him in the dark, so that he can’t find his way. He is in the dark before and after, but there is a moment in which he has seen or understood something about himself.”⁸⁷ The story provides lived-experience, and thus can be revelatory.

“[Flaubert] said: “There are no words to render the beauty of a woman or the aroma of a plum pudding...but he postulates nevertheless the incommunicability of experience.” Sartre is not surprised at this: it is, after all, one of the major themes of the nineteenth and twentieth century bourgeoisie, leading to important works, stemming from boredom and disappointment. Once we start to talk about what we’re doing, we’ve

⁸⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Life/Situations: Essays Written and Spoken*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 127-128.

stopped doing and started talking. See? Our tense just turned passive. Our communication will still always be other to us and using a word is still a praxis. This complicates the issue a bit. The linguists want to treat language as exteriority and the structuralists who come out of linguistics also treat totality as exteriority, (*Life/Situations*, 127).

We have been flirting with the idea of the ontological status of the *uncatchable* present for some time now, and how the live artist must work with, that is, improvise, amidst such a forward moving world. “We already know that a practical organism, engaged in a field of scarcity in the midst of a universe of exteriority...makes itself into exteriority in order to condition the exterior and communicate to it, through passive syntheses, an inert finality: the inert concern to preserve life.” Sartre goes on to say that action, as a mediation between the organic and the inorganic, is both at once; the actor is defined by his action and by the passive synthesis given as its objectification. A history has now formed: the dialectic appears as that which is truly irreducible in the action: between the inert synthesis and the functional integration, it asserts its ontological status as a temporalizing synthesis, which unifies itself by unifying, and in order to unify itself.

What my New York friend and my musician acquaintance have in common is that they both carry with them their entire skill set. With the Vermont writer, you’d never know she was an author unless she carried all fifteen of her published books with her at all times. The musician and the storyteller rely on only themselves to speak of their genius, are forever enslaved to proving themselves time and time again. The Vermont

writer's novels are and always will be works of art, her words are sedimented into the pages of history. But a writer does not only live in her books.

“I know several among us [writers], and not the least, who have thus taken the precaution of giving their lives a turn and an allure both typical and exemplary, so that if their genius remains doubtful in their books, it might at least shine forth in their behavior,” (*What is Lit.*, 127). When does the writer become the storyteller, when does the musician become the performer? Where is the boundary between the concert and vernacular? The professional and leisure life? Is there an intersection?

Thus far, towards the end of our investigation, our meandering has hopefully merged together the concepts of storytelling and improvisation to that of history. That which is communicated becomes, through a transcendent present, the past we so cling to in education, entertainment and otherwise.

A desire to *use* the past denotes, we are told, an evolutionary phase already quite advanced. To find patterns in historical time – a time free of the repetitions of ritual, and indifferent to the ecstasies of the shaman – is yet another stage...History, so considered, is a fictive substitute for authority and tradition, a maker of concords between past, present, and future, a provider of significance to mere chronicity. Everything is relevant if its relevance can be invented, even the scattered informations of the morning newspaper.⁸⁸

Introspection, of oneself and of mankind, is met only with facts. It goes without saying that we have failed to move past Husserlian intentionality.

This integration of transcendence into the Subject, that is, the *need* of the individual to move outside himself into the world, emphasizes a useful present in pushing

⁸⁸ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 56.

forward into an uncertain future. Man's only escape is when he forgets his intention and improvises without concern. "I don't do nothing," Count Basie once said, "But it sure sounds good." This *festival* is an ardent apotheosis of the present in the face of the inevitable concern of the future. The most beautiful part of the fete⁸⁹ is also the saddest, its ending. The moment has passed, and we look around for instruction on what to do next. We soon find no such instruction, only equally clueless actors. But we can agree on the changes and give meaning to and matter to our inert milieu. There is a sliver of optimism in the idealism aesthetics leaves room for: the apocalyptic present is here and gone again, the future remains our future. We can do with it what we want. We can improvise.

⁸⁹ The moment becomes larger than you. It burns brightly, you leap into it, and you are consumed. You nauseate yourself at your enslavement to the epoché: I see the plant. I hear this. I say this. The last paragraph of *The Transcendence of the Ego* teaches us: The subject-object dualism realizes two objects for the absolute, impersonal consciousness, and it is by this consciousness that they are linked together. The absolute, then, no longer has anything of a subject. This is the long reproduction of *Being and Nothingness' pour-sois*, the for-itself. But the fête disregards all that: there is a moment when you lose sight of it all: the musician becomes his solo, the dancer internalizes the beat she moves to. Describing it is as difficult as getting there, however. "There is even a moment, in the very beginning, when you have to jump across a precipice: if you think about it you don't do it. I know I'll never jump again," (*Nausea*, 145).

He was eating lunch with her again. The president had done most of the talking so far, his old friend struggled to keep up. At this particular moment, she had an excuse not to listen to him; she was eavesdropping on the man and woman behind her.

“We lived together for two, three years, decided to get married.” She leaned back ever so slightly, more curious. “Then she went on a business trip for a week in California. Came back, and we went to Baton Rouge, Louisiana for my ten year high school reunion. On the trip to Louisiana, she told me she met someone on the business trip and didn’t want to be married anymore.”

She gulped, and went back to listening to the man across from her. He spoke quickly, as if his intended words sat roasting on his blazing tongue, with the words loud enough to suspect that he was trying to heat the far corners of the air. The president continued his comments, thinking his staring-mate to be engaged following his every radiating word.

“It is not expected of storytellers as it is of writers that they should principally help us make sense of our lives; they are bound instead to attempt the greater feat of providing the subject of lived experience to later be made sense of. The writer, for better or for worse, has all day to produce a page, years to find the perfect combination of words. The storyteller lives in real time, engages herself in a waltz with father time; she syncopates her verbal jibs and jabs in the swing of rhythm, her pages only appearing as the tick-tock of the clock, her tongue her pen. And as the storyteller breathes out her product into the world and the writer puts her book on the shelf, the consuming critic awaits. Whether it be the *Times* columnist, the outcast child, the voracious reader, the

tabloid. It is not expected of critics as it is of poets that they should help us to make sense of our lives; they are bound only to attempt the lesser feat of making sense of the ways we try to make sense of our lives.”⁹⁰

She cringed every time the president used “she” as the proverbial third person universal instead of “man” or “he”. He had spoken like that colloquially for all of the years that she knew him; doing it, so he would tell you at length, to expose our traditional linguistic prejudices. She found it annoying.

“If the storyteller indeed is an entertainer of sorts – please allow me to put words in your mouth – that is, his tale is to be enjoyed on the spot but to be made sense of later, is he a philosopher or a poet?”

“One of the differences between doing philosophy and writing poetry is that in the former activity you defeat your object if you imitate the confusion inherent in an unsystematic view of your subject, whereas in the second you must in some measure imitate what is extreme and scattering bright, or else lose touch with that feeling of bright confusion.”⁹¹ Regardless, we storytellers are neither philosopher nor poet. We are only men, and our product is ourselves, given unto our audience in real time, in real life. When we visit great European cities like Paris and London, we notice how people on trains take books out of their bags or their pockets and retreat into solitary worlds. Each time the book comes out it is like a sign held up. *Leave me alone, I am reading*, says the sign. *What I am reading is more interesting than you could possibly be...* The African novel,

⁹⁰ Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p. 3.

⁹¹ *Sense*, 81.

the true African novel, is an oral novel. On the page it is inert, only half alive; it wakes up when the voice, from deep in the body, breathes life into the words, speaks them aloud.”⁹²

He was getting ahead of himself, preaching instead of having a conversation again. Both of them had finished their lunches. Neither seemed like they wanted to look at each other any longer, and he was about to be late for an appointment with his daughter’s classmate whom he had been mentoring. He gathered his things and walked out of the cafeteria, through the hall and back to his office. A boy was waiting for him, sitting in the chair across from his pristine desk, writing in his journal. The boy had a nauseous look about him; he looked *elsewhere*. Before sitting down, the president’s eyes accidentally happened upon the last thing the boy had written:

I know you love me

A Conclusion

This investigation began by examining a diary, one of the more famous in literary history, and ended by introducing another. In between Roquentin and the unknown boy's spilling of their souls onto inert, silent pages stands a sketch for a theory of lived, aesthetic experience. I felt it important to begin the expedition attending to the diary-as-philosophical-medium not only because Sartre has said that *Nausea* was the best thing he’d ever written, but because it is precisely in a diary that man can sense his reflection of that lived experience with his eyes, ears and touch as he freely spills out his ultra-personal imagination to alienate himself for once. Sartre wrote *Nausea*, he claimed, to make people ashamed of their existence, for them to realize their contingency. Oftentimes it takes the reading of one’s own work to do this. “I am my immediate

⁹²J.M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, (New York: Viking Books, 2003), 35.

past,” says our introduction. The improviser knows this fact well. I reiterate now in conclusion, using different words to signify the same idea: “I am not what I think, but what I do.” The diary is ignorant to such a claim because it claims otherwise in arrogance without a real relation to ground it.

Undoubtedly, the work which you have just read is an inquiry into Being. Any thought that does not lead to an inquiry into being, Sartre says in the opening to his interview with appears in Schlipp’s *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, is not valid...One must either begin with being or go back to it, like Heidegger. We began with our *certain* content of the imagination, its double condition for consciousness: it must be able to posit the world in its synthetic totality and, at the same time, it must be able to posit the imagined object as out of reach in relation to that synthetic whole (to posit the world as a Nothingness in relation to the [Being of the] image)⁹³. But we quickly encountered intrigue and perhaps opposition. Our study, provided with a framework for the intentional structure of imaging consciousness, seeks to elucidate that which is seeming unintentional: improvisation.

If all consciousness is consciousness of something, and all introspection and imagination is met with nothing but facts and the real (insofar as we cannot imagine something with qualities not once in-the-world due to our existence preceding our essence), is it possible to speak of true, legitimate *creation* or is it that the memory of our betters is keeping us on our feet? Our imaginations, filled with content strictly tied to the past, is let out into the world through created, worked matter at the same rate of its being conceived when one improvises; the improvised project exists nowhere outside of itself. Improvisation is therefore the most transparent of praxes, being the non-thetic outwardness of the imagination.

⁹³ *The Imaginary*, 184.

Our structure of thought went something like this: What does it mean to imagine in solitary peace, to then take that very imagined consciousness based on a prior synthesis and propel it into action, to then be amongst other actors engaged in a common praxis and thus similar consciousnesses, to then blend the personal imaginary with group solidarity and investigate a group fusing on the material level with only an unreal, imagined consciousness acting freely and spontaneously amongst its actors in order to finally (in our ultimate chapter) compare such a human interaction of improvisational imperfection with the inhuman sentence. What I have consciously spent relatively little time discussing is an ethics, hoping that its implications would be understood tacitly by the reader, for there are many of them.

Responsibility is paramount in all four of our chapters: all consciousness is an act and therefore a choice, there is no better example of democracy than the jazz ensemble: individual freedom with responsibility to the group, intersubjectivity of praxis enables us to inhabit our future together and redeem our past, and there is no justification for present existence other than its expansion into an indefinitely open future that we can shape through exploits or projects as modes of transcendence. When all is said and done, the improvised message is a soul which is made object. To play this note or that one is our choice: we must take responsibility for them and live with the consequences. Perhaps, then, one can come to terms with morality because certain music *swings* and some does not.

What I have tried to elucidate throughout is that the implications of Sartre's early philosophy of *The Imaginary* (really the precursor to *Being and Nothingness*), meshed with arguably his most ambitious ontological endeavor, the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, are such that our practico-inert milieu, acted upon and shaped by past, sedimented, free praxis, and that very (transcendent) praxis which is projected in response to scarcity, resemble each other. Our perception, conception, and imagination of the practico-inert viciously shapes our proclivities and actions, yet it is a tree of life to all who hold it fast. We return to being, ontologically examining

the ego to be external. I must now try to explain the last sentence in our last chapter: if one craves to take a stab at a driving force behind such a vicious circle, our action resulting from external need ad infinitum, I consider he, like Roquentin, a dreamer: the man who does everything for a woman.

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