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*Time, Historicity, Art, Culture,  
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BOOK 4  
Phenomenology in the World  
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Husserl

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# NIHILISM AND NOESIS: THE CONTRIBUTION OF PHENOMENOLOGY TO THE SARTREAN ANALYSIS OF FLAUBERT

## I. SARTRE'S POINT OF DEPARTURE: HUSSERL, THE TRANSCENDENTAL EGO, AND THE ORIGIN OF MEANING

Based on principles held in common by Husserl and Sartre, namely, (1) the idea that the only origin of meaning is the activity of consciousness and (2) that consciousness is a relationship with the world, two distinct philosophical projects take form. Insofar as he is a phenomenologist, Sartre takes for granted the possibility of the existence of meaning proceeding from consciousness. However, the moment Sartre conceives of consciousness as trying to project its meaning beyond itself towards the world, he is forced to distance himself from Husserl. Sartre's distancing himself from his master takes place in two stages: the first is the *Transcendence de l'ego*, and the second is the *Cahiers pour une morale*.<sup>1</sup>

### a) *The First Moment of Sartre's Distancing Himself from Husserl. The Transcendence of The Ego, The Impersonal Consciousness*

A structure like that of the cogito leads to a vision of consciousness as being double, that is, multiple. Each layer of consciousness would exist there without maintaining relations with the neighboring layer, or maintaining mechanical relations only, or even an opposition between them. This is a conception one finds in empiricism, but also in psychoanalysis and in Husserl. Sartre does not include Kant in his critique, because for the latter the structure of the cogito exists only *de jure* and not *de facto*:

Le "Je pense" kantien est une condition de possibilité. Le cogito de Descartes et de Husserl est une constatation de fait. On a parlé de la 'nécessité de fait' du Cogito et cette expression me paraît très juste. Or, il est indéniable que le Cogito est personnel. Dans le "Je pense" il y a un *Je* qui pense.<sup>2</sup> . . . L'ego apparaît à la réflexion comme un objet transcendant réalisant la synthèse permanente du psychique. L'ego est *du côté* du psychique . . . Il serait tentant de constituer l'Ego en "pôle-sujet" comme ce "pôle-objet" que Husserl place au centre du noyau noématique. Ce pôle-objet est un X qui supporte les déterminations.<sup>2</sup>

L'Ego est l'unification transcendante spontanée de nos états et de nos actions . . . . L'Ego est créateur de ses états et soutient ses qualités dans l'existence par une sorte de spontanéité conservatrice . . . . Mais cette spontanéité ne doit pas être confondue avec celle de la conscience. En effet, l'Ego, étant objet, est *passif*, Il s'agit donc d'une pseudo-spontanéité qui trouverait ses symboles convenables dans le jaillissement d'une source, d'un geyser, etc. C'est-à-dire qu'il ne s'agit que d'une apparence. La véritable spontanéité doit être parfaitement claire: elle *est* ce qu'elle produit et ne peut être rien d'autre.<sup>3</sup>

If consciousness is not the site of the ego and if the ego is not a subject either, this is because there is no ego in consciousness. This "X" that Sartre speaks of is situated in the empirical world, among things; it is the ego of empirical psychology, in no way a structure of transcendental consciousness. The ego is nonetheless an object, but a transcendental and real object, it is not an intentional product, but a material product of a psychic nature or a psycho-physical nature with which consciousness maintains intentional rapports. No matter how powerful it may be, noesis can neither make the ego exist nor create it *ex nihilo* by means of consciousness' activity. Sartre thus concludes,

Le Champ transcendantal, purifié de toute structure égologique, recouvre sa limpidité première . . . . Nous pouvons donc formuler notre thèse: la conscience transcendante est une spontanéité impersonnelle. Elle se détermine à l'existence à chaque instant, sans que l'on puisse rien concevoir *avant elle*. Ainsi chaque instant de notre vie consciente nous révèle une création *ex nihilo*. Non pas un *arrangement* nouveau, mais une existence nouvelle.<sup>4</sup>

b) *The Second Moment of Sartre's Distancing Himself from Husserl.  
The Reconquest of The Empirical World*

The first stage of Sartre's distancing himself from Husserl is completed by the conquest of a consciousness that is pure spontaneity, by the conquest of liberty. The second stage is the recovery of the empirical world and its engagement with the activity of consciousness. In doing this, Sartre avoids the risk created by the egological structure of consciousness. Effectively, this structure threatens to create a split within itself and, moreover, makes the ego an atom, a monad opposed to worldly objects, themselves monads. The ties between the world and consciousness become problematic. Even if consciousness does not fall

into solipsism, its relationship with the world can only be mechanical, and any question of the world's meaning is emptied of meaning. Consciousness, then, can never be sure of the world's truth or of its existence in the way that Descartes wished.

Sartre will surpass Husserlian phenomenology in the name of phenomenology itself, and this thanks to the instruments with which it provides him. He continues to assert the spontaneity of consciousness, while reattaching it to the world with certain and ontological relations. If one strips consciousness of its ego, it is reduced to pure intentionality, it becomes a *nothing*. The transcendent ego consists of acts and psychic states that subsist beyond the act that produces them, whereas consciousness, for Sartre, consists of pure acts deprived of permanence. Consciousness is not a substance; it does not subsist beyond its activity; it empties itself in its activity. It could not possibly enclose itself in the cogito because the cogito is not a structure that belongs to it. Consciousness is pure intentionality without ego — that is, it is *rapport* and nothing but *rapport*.

Since any relation implies two poles, the mere existence of consciousness implies the existence of a "something," of an exterior world to which it can relate. This implication does not mean that noesis could create the world; the existence of consciousness does not engender that of concrete things. If the activity of consciousness were to cease, consciousness itself would cease to exist, but no change would be brought to bear upon the world. Sartre thus conquers the certitude of existential, practical, and cognitive relations between consciousness and the world. However, these relations do not yet include semantic ones, Sartre remains convinced that the world does not create meaning; nor may consciousness impose its own meaning upon things without being modified by them. According to Sartre, the world — like the God of Racine and Pascal — does not answer; consciousness knows that the world exists, but does not know its meaning.

Sartre has conquered the empirical world, and the risk of solipsism seems to be parried by the affirmation of the contemporaneity of consciousness and the world. He has attained certitude of the concrete outside of consciousness in addition to the transcendental field that is highlighted by Husserl. Nevertheless, Sartre has yet to acquire the possibility of imparting meaning to this world. The vector of creative intentionality, which brings meaning from consciousness towards the

concrete empirical, manages only with difficulty, in Sartre, to leave its imprint upon the world.

## II. THE CERTITUDE OF THE EXISTENCE OF THE WORLD AS THE CERTITUDE OF NIHILISM

By placing the ego outside the transcendental field, the absence of meaning of the world touches the empirical life of man, inasmuch as he identifies himself with the psycho-physical ego. A transcendental ego has the same avatars as the rest of the world. The transcendence of the ego leads to a dead end road, insofar as one has no means of demonstrating that consciousness is able to give meaning to the concrete outside of it, to the empirical world, for certitude in this world does not suffice to answer the question of *what is the meaning of the world?*

A remarkable intuition of the young Nietzsche was to question not the certitude of the existence of the world, but that of the logos that would claim to seize it, and that of action that would claim to leave its mark on it.<sup>5</sup> What is tragic about Nietzschean thought is the rupture of identification between logos and the world. For Nietzsche there is no equivalence between the rational and the real; they remain two entities without any relationship. Modern reason, except perhaps in Kant, is founded upon a principle of reciprocity, according to which the vector of meaning proceeds from the world towards consciousness, or from consciousness towards the world. In the young Nietzsche, the essential principles of Western philosophy, individuation and causality, serve only to obscure the indistinct unity of the beings of the universe, including man. It would be futile to undertake any action there or to try to know it, because the universe is a nebula of forces against which man can do nothing.

The principles of causality and individuation constitute the a priori condition of possibility for noesis, praxis, and poesis. What activity could one exert, and upon what would one act, if there were no difference between the Me and the Other, between consciousness and the world, between meaning and absence of meaning, and if one's actions always lead to unforeseen results. Indeed, the rejection of the principles of causality and individuation leads to the collapse of any hope of religion, cognitive or political redemption, and of any salvation by technical progress; it leads to the eternal return. In order to make the

suffering provoked by the eternal return tolerable, noesis creates meanings, but these are only appearances that obscure a more profound metaphysical and, in fact, irremediable evil. Western Philosophy must choose between the Cartesian cogito that deprives philosophers of the world to save consciousness, and the certitude of the world which takes away the meaning of the concrete mundane.

### III. FROM PURE CONSCIOUSNESS TO MAN AS CONSCIOUSNESS

It is not enough to assure noesis; it is equally important to assure that noesis may impose its seal upon the world. Sartre will always be haunted by the problem of the polarity that opposes Nietzschean tragedy to solipsism. He attempts to resolve the opposition of the logos and the real in three complementary stages. The first is a phenomenological description of the ontological structures of the being that is consciousness. This stage leads to a definition of man as being-for-self, as liberty opposed to the blind concatenations of the world.<sup>6</sup> The transcendent ego "places" man and consciousness in the world. Thus the relations of consciousness with man imply the relations of consciousness with the ego, which acts in the universe of things.

The second stage is the description of the intermediate world between things and the individual, that is, a question of the history of the human being, of technique and of social groups in action.<sup>7</sup> Sartre concludes that praxis is only possible at the price of the uncertainty of the results which follow.

The third stage is the demonstration, in concrete examples, that the activity of consciousness may leave its imprint upon the world *de facto* and not only *de jure*. The possibility then that man has to leave his seal on things requires a prerequisite condition that this seal may be left on the psychic ego. This condition has been studied by Sartre, in abstract fashion, thanks to the description of the structure of man as being-in-the-world (*être-dans-le-monde*). Sartre did not, however, go on to prove that the activity of consciousness can go beyond its stage of simple possibility to become a fact. The examination of the poesis of Baudelaire, Jean Genet, and Flaubert demonstrates this by showing that noesis is capable of bringing meaning to the worldly ego. This attempt to prove the existence of meaning leads Sartre to undertake the study of concrete examples of consciousness-in-the-world, in particular that of Flaubert, in *L'Idiot de la Famille*.<sup>8</sup> This work will be analyzed in the

next chapter. Sartrean phenomenological ontology thus evolves from the description of the field of purified consciousness to the description of the avatars of the intentional relations of this consciousness to the transcendent ego.

The evolution that takes Sartre from *La Transcendance de l'ego* to *L'Être et le Néant* is realized essentially around two axes. The first is the finding that consciousness is not constitutive of transcendental being. In Sartrean terms, "l'animation du noyau hylétique par les seules intentions qui peuvent trouver leur replissement (Erfüllung) dans cette hylé ne saurait suffire à nous faire sortir de la subjectivité."<sup>9</sup> This is because the world is assumed as a certain something that imposes its alien presence to consciousness in the intuition that consciousness has of itself. The second axis is the anthropologization of consciousness, a task carried out under the influence of Heidegger. After *L'Être et le Néant*, man and consciousness constitute a single reality; their identification is complete. The transcendent ego confirms its role as an exterior object that inserts man into the world. The definition given in *La Transcendance de l'ego* — *consciousness is consciousness-of-something* — becomes, in EN, *man (consciousness) is relation with the world wherein man exists*. Thus, man (consciousness) relates to the world by means of his egological insertion. Two questions are then necessarily posed: "1° Quel est le rapport synthétique que nous nommons l'être-dans-le-monde? 2° Que doivent être l'homme et le monde pour que le rapport soit possible entre eux?"<sup>10</sup>

#### IV. WHY FLAUBERT? WHY *L'IDIOT DE LA FAMILLE*?

In order to refute nihilism and solipsism, it is necessary to show that intentionality reaches the world in order to leave its mark there and all the while to take into account that the "subjectivité[de la conscience] ne saurait sortir de soi pour poser un objet transcendant en lui conférant le plénitude impressionnelle."<sup>11</sup> Sartre, in his analysis of Flaubert, adds two certainties to this constant of phenomenology. The first is the spontaneity of consciousness and of noesis; the second is that the certainty of the world leads to the certainty of its absence of meaning. However, this second conviction is not comparable to Nietzschean nihilism, "World" (*monde*) in Sartre signifies the organization of objects with respect to the center that constitutes each man, that is, the in-self (*en-soi*) organized by a human project. Each time that the question of

leaving a human mark upon the world arises, the question of the in-self also appears as soon as man inhabits it and organizes it with respect to himself.

The meaning of the world is not immediately given the intuition that consciousness has of itself. Sartre needs only to describe *one* case in which noesis has left its imprint on the world in order to prove that science, praxis and poesis are founded with respect to man. This process is based on the passage of the ontic towards the ontological. After this passage, every ontic manifestation of man reveals his ontological structure, his existence. It would thus suffice to show man leaving the seal of noesis in one of his empirical manifestations in order to have the right to draw conclusions concerning the being of the human being. If the being of a man is capable of bringing meaning to the world, then sense exists empirically, and the bridge that connects the meaning produced by the consciousness to the transcendent real is re-established for all humanity. Sartre nevertheless goes neither from the particular to the general nor from the a priori to the empirical. He moves instead from the ontic to the ontological and deduces the possibility of the meaning of the world from the meaning that an individual imparts to his own transcendent ego.

Why does Sartre choose to examine a writer and not just any man in order to realize his refutation of nihilism? It is because Sartre remains a prisoner of logocentrism, and thus for him writing is the *voie royale* to the production of meaning. The activity of writing has the goal of "saying," of creating a meaning; it is never simply a game or a diversion.<sup>12</sup> In literary activity, man is apparently more the master of the results than in any other form of praxis. Writing seems to be, by definition, the organization of signs and significations in a meta-signification. The objectified noesis, which may be difficult to locate in other aspects of the transcendent ego, seems to show itself in all its purity in literature. A piece of writing is thus the location where meaning — if it exists — must manifest itself most explicitly. But, if it were discovered that it were possible to write about meaning, or that a work of art is not the product of the forces of its author, it would be necessary to completely renounce any intentional relationship of consciousness with the world. Nihilism and solipsism would dominate, once and for all, over poesis. Moreover, insofar as poesis is an ontical manifestation of consciousness, the whole ontological structure of man and noesis would collapse in impotence.



This explains Sartre's interest in showing noesis in an extreme case in which it has apparently disappeared completely: the case of Flaubert. Why this writer rather than another? Because Flaubert, given his psychic and his egological constitution, represents for Sartre the incapacity to signify. His worldly ego seems to be pure passivity; he does not manifest the presence of any intentionality; Flaubert seems to be the denial of the intentional vector that connects consciousness and world, a denial that lets him be dominated by nihilism.<sup>13</sup> More than a theoretician of the absence of meaning, Flaubert is himself this absence; his transcendent ego is the ideal of passivity, and consequently, the location where spontaneity seems to collapse.

#### V. BEING-IN-LANGUAGE, THE ANTINOMIES OF THE CASE OF FLAUBERT

##### a) *Noesis, Praxis, Poiesis, Cogito, Being-in-the-World as Being-in-Language*

A few distinctions are indispensable. We will call *poiesis* the noesis proper to the creation of literary works, and in a general fashion, to artistic production. We will thus distinguish *poiesis* from *praxis*, or the noesis proper to the enterprises carried out in the social, natural, or technical world. From here on *cogito*, signifies a *poiesis* that maintains the unity of consciousness by producing itself in time. These distinctions, which are ours and not Sartre's, do not concern the nature of noesis. Noesis, as the generic name of the activity of consciousness, is always one and the same, even if it focuses simultaneously on diverse objects.

An intentional object cannot become transcendent without running the risk of erasing the differences and all distance between consciousness and the world. To avoid this danger, artistic *poiesis* must not be conceived as simple romantic inspiration, nor as *creatio ex nihilo*. To avoid solipsism, it is indispensable that *poiesis* be an intention directed at transcendental material, at the in-self. Account must also be taken of the fact that the egological incarnation of consciousness, its being-in-the-world, is an incarnation in language, i.e., in psycho-linguistic and socio-linguistic conditions. Given that the significations of this language are social significations, trans-individual ones, literary *poiesis* is an intention of consciousness that is related to the socio-linguistic world-

liness of the ego. By means of the linguistic incarnation of the ego, consciousness is thus related to an individual and, at the same time to social significations that this individual did not choose.

### b) *The Being-in-the-Language of Flaubert as Passivity*

Relying on the testimony of Flaubert's sister and of his niece, Sartre writes that the author of *Mme. Bovary* has

de mauvais rapports avec les mots . . . l'enfant comprend sans pouvoir assimiler [. . .] il croit d'abord tout ce qu'on lui dit; par stupeur devant l'objet verbal, par amour dévot des adultes.<sup>14</sup>

[Flaubert] voit plutôt des impératifs que des affirmations: elles s'imposent d'elles-mêmes et puis il *faut y croire* puisqu'elles sont le don gracieux que lui font ses parents.<sup>15</sup>

Faute de la réciprocité [. . .] qu'établit une compréhension entière, avec toutes ses structures, la parole de l'Autre lui semble *parole donnée* [. . .] Dire [pour Flaubert] n'est pas *énoncer*.<sup>16</sup>

Le petit garçon [Gustave Flaubert] est mal visé [sic] dans l'univers du discours. Le mot n'est jamais *sien*, tantôt l'hébétude engloutit le verbe et tantôt celui-ci, tombé du ciel le tyrannise. Dans ce dernier cas, jusque dans l'intériorité profonde, il reste extérieur . . . A l'âge où tout le monde parle, il lest encore à *imiter* les parleurs . . . Il n'y a pas de commune mesure entre l'existence subjective de Gustave et l'univers des significations.<sup>17</sup>

Dehors et dedans, il voit les mots à l'envers, dans leur étrangeté sensuelle, il tient les lieux communs pour des impératifs gravés dans la matière verbale et que chaque individu a la mission de reproduire par les inflexions de sa voix; il persiste à penser que le verbe le ronge et ne pourra jamais le désigner tout à fait. Dans son cas, la difficulté d'apprendre à lire vient d'un trouble général et plus ancien, la difficulté de parler.<sup>18</sup>

Culture, pour lui, c'est le vol [. . .] le mot est chose; introduit dans une âme, il la résorbe dans sa propre généralité; il s'agit d'une véritable métamorphose.<sup>19</sup>

### c) *The Antinomies of The Case of Flaubert*

#### i) *The First Part of The Antinomy: Flaubert Confuses "La Langue" with "Le Langage"*

All in Flaubert is egological passivity. His consciousness seems to founder when faced with its being-in-language. Flaubert never manages to make the distinction made evident by Saussure between "langue" and "langage"; the author of *Mme. Bovary* uses the "langue" as if it were the "langage." Nowhere in his work does one find poiesis seeking transcendent signs to organize them humanly; nevertheless, he is spoken or as a great writer, as an artist. Flaubert seems to surrender to the nihilism of solipsism. The author of *Mme. Bovary* would be the ontic

manifestation of an ontological structure of the human being. This structure would determine man in his incapacity to leave his mark upon things, not even on his own worldly ego, on his psyche. If it were true that following Flaubert that there is no difference between "langue" and "langage," nihilism and/or solipsism would be inscribed in the existence of man. These would constitute the possibility proper to being-in-language; they would be part of the ontological structure of man. In this case, Flaubert, misanthrope and nihilist — as his correspondance shows him to be from 1838<sup>20</sup> — would become the ontic manifestation of what has formerly been a mere possibility of man.

ii) *The Second Part of The Antinomy: Flaubert is a Great Creator*

A second fact opposes the first: Flaubert wrote during his entire life, from the age of eleven. He acted; he had a praxis that, as an artistic one, is a poesis. To deny poesis to him would be to contend that the works that are normally attributed to Flaubert should be attributed instead to the sickness of the author, to his social class, or to a language destitute of a subject — all of which would have determined that he write. Here is a contradiction that cannot be resolved at the empirical level and that demands the use of a transcendental phenomenological method. Indeed, it is impossible to accept that Flaubert, as a consciousness-in-the-world, one with serious linguistic troubles, both did not exercise poesis *and* was also one the greatest French novelists. This is a Kantian problem, which can be referred to the third and the fourth antinomies of pure reason. It is not possible that a being be empirically free and not free at the same time; a choice must be made between natural causality and an extra-natural beginning called "liberty."

VI. GOING BEYOND THE ANTINOMIES:  
LIBERTY, "LANGUE," AND "LANGAGE"

Sartre goes beyond the antinomy by showing that Flaubertian poesis consists of transforming an initial confusion, produced at the level of the transcendent ego, between "langue" and "langage," into a confusion *aimed* at by his consciousness. Sartre does not accept the recourse to Descartes' continual creation or to a *creatio ex nihilo* with respect to noesis. Since consciousness is *not*, since it is not an object, it is an empty interiority whose existence consists of objectivizing itself through

praxis. That which consciousness objectivizes by means of its own activity cannot be the consciousness itself, because consciousness is not. Thus, it could not possibly objectivize the world, because the world is an object unconcerned with consciousness. What consciousness does objectivize is the lived (*vécu*), that is, not the world in its totality, but the world inasmuch as consciousness relates to it, inasmuch as consciousness goes beyond it. This is why Sartre, speaking of *L'Idiot de la Famille*, reminds that his goal in the book is "d'abord tout en dénombrant les conditions objectives et en les organisant, de les montrer maintenues et dépassées vers l'objectivation par le moment subjectif."<sup>21</sup>

This subjective moment is irreducible;<sup>22</sup> it is distinguished, then, from the simple transcendent material base where the poesis of Flaubert is exercised. This moment, which introduces the mediation of consciousness in every rapport that man has with things, cannot be a simple copy of the psycho-linguistic structure that belongs to the transcendent world. In other words, subjectivization does not consist of a copy reproduced from the exterior and introduced into the consciousness. Literary poesis is "langage," just as it manifests the impossibility of copying or reproducing the "langage" in its totality. However, if it is impossible to reproduce the "langue" in its totality, Flaubert's identification with the "langue" becomes equally impossible, because any linguistic performance must necessarily be "langage."

Is Flaubert's empirical and linguistic project condemned to failure? Yes, from the empirical point of view; no, from the transcendental one. Flaubert's identification with the "langue" reveals a transcendental intention of consciousness focused on the "langue," a vectorial relation of consciousness *vis-à-vis* the semantic world where it exists. Since the "langue" is a social ensemble of significations, it cannot be grasped in its entirety by an individual. The adult Flaubert knows that the "langue" exceeds any exhaustive apprenticeship, that it is something that an individual can use only partially and faultily. When a linguistic performance takes place, this faultiness makes "langue" become "langage." In other words, the "langue" becomes the individual's rapport with the semantic totality, which always remains partially alien to him.

Flaubert seeks, without ever attaining it, the *dégré zéro* of writing and "langage," where his work would be so "perfect" that it would not be differentiated from the "langue." All his effort and much of his greatness lie in a quest after the depersonalization of both himself and of art, so that nothing shows, in the texts, of the point of view of an indi-

vidual's poesis that created them. "L'art n'a rien à démêler avec l'artiste"; "Je veux qu'il n'y ait pas dans mon livre *un seul* mouvement, ni *une seule* réflexion de l'auteur," avows Flaubert to his mistress, Louise Colet, when he is writing *Mme. Bovary*.<sup>23</sup> Flaubertian poesis is anti-poetic; it consists of hiding the poesis of the artist and tends to situate it in the point of view of everyone and no-one. Flaubert wishes to attain what no artist has understood as well as he has, he wishes to accomplish what the aesthetic reason and the objective spirit of his period demand: to surpass (*dépasser*) romanticism.

Flaubert, the idiot incapable of situating himself in the "langage," embraces this "disease" as his own, to transform it into a virtue and to become himself the artist he always wanted to be. He will speak as others speak in order to distinguish himself from them by becoming the person whom no one can recognize as different; he will dissimulate his own "langage" under the veil of "langue."<sup>24</sup> The composition of his works must be so sublime that it be impossible to notice the work behind them, so subtle that his writings not seem written, that they seem the simple manifestations of an idea, a model. Flaubert wishes, according to Sartre, that his work become like "*un être naturel, comme un arbre, comme un paysage, que les générations nouvelles acceptent [Mme. Bovary] au même titre que les choses du monde urbain ou rural et que les institutions.*"<sup>25</sup>

## VII. CONCLUSION

Beginning with the certainty of the spontaneity of noesis and the certainty of the existence of the world, Sartre attempts to prove that noesis does not remain closed in the interiority of consciousness. To attain this goal is to prove that noesis can leave its imprint on the world. The analysis of Flaubert permits Sartre to show how this individual, who apparently embodies denial of any spontaneity, must maintain a constant *activity* of denial. Flaubert must construct, must invent a "langage" that resembles the "langue"; he must adopt the point of view of "langage," of consciousness, to become "langue," Sartre shows that for the author of *Mme. Bovary* the confusion of the "langue" with "langage" conceals a poesis originating from the spontaneity of consciousness, an extra-empirical causality. In Flaubert, a transcendental personalization of his empirical impersonality takes place. This personalization, which is the product of poesis, consists of pushing the

will-to-be—"langue" to the point that such an enterprise manifests its impossibility. This impossibility is the idiocy of Flaubert, and it manifests the seal of the singular consciousness of the artist on his ego, a writer by vocation if not by profession.

It is useful to remember that the etymology of the word "idiot" stems from *ιδιωτες* (*idiotes*) which signifies both the private singular, as opposed to the universal of the state, and ignorance.<sup>26</sup> What characterizes the semantic point of view of Flaubert's infancy is his empirical ignorance of his own linguistic singularity. What characterizes his literary life, his poesis, is the quest after impersonality that raises him above his social class and distinguishes his aesthetic from the romantic one. Beside the anthropological and moral thrust in *L'Idiot de la famille*, one can find therein the outline of theory of the semantic-being-in-the-world. This involves questions of the rapport between language and liberty, and that between languages and noesis — rapports that are little analyzed in the earlier works of Sartre. There remains, however, an ambiguity that is damaging to Sartre's work on Flaubert. The limits between what is termed "consciousness" (*conscience*) and what constitutes the "lived" (*vécu*) are unclear. At times these terms seem synonymous; at others the psychologizing aspect of the word "lived" prevents it from being understood as being identical with consciousness.

The Flaubert study confirms the Husserlian influence in Sartre beyond the enriching influences of Marxism and psychoanalysis. These latter theories show Sartre the necessity of realizing the phenomenology of a concrete example of liberty in the world by going beyond the description of the ontological structures of man to examine the ontic manifestation of this liberty. The problem of the meaning or sense of the world is Nietzschean in origin; that of action is Kantian and Marxist. By moving beyond noesis towards praxis, Sartre uses the phenomenological method to concern himself with questions that were not explicitly addressed by Husserl. In doing this, the theory of consciousness is opened upon morality. The latter opens the door towards a literary aesthetic where the examination of the writing — that is to say, the work itself — becomes as important as the examination of the will-to-be of the artist's consciousness.

We have not evoked the progressive-regressive method, nor the existential psychoanalysis that Sartre uses to analyze Flaubert. These would each merit an entire article. The method of *L'Idiot de la famille*

could not be examined without the complement of its semantic and its ontology. Also, we have considered the author of *Mme. Bovary* in his infancy, and then, without transition, at the age of thirty-one. Our analysis lacks the historical and social aspects of phenomenology that transform the idiot into an artist. We do not deny their importance. In this article, we have emphasized phenomenological semantics and aesthetics, as well as the phenomenological foundations of the being-in-the-world-of-language. These three aspects of Sartre's thought have only rarely been discussed by the specialist and the collaborators of the philosopher.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. P. Sartre, *La Transcendence de l'ego* (Paris: Jean Vrin, 1985) (hereinafter, TE), and J. P. Sartre, *Cahiers pour une morale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Sartre, *La Transcendence de l'ego*, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 59 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. F. Nietzsche, *La Naissance de la tragédie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978); and on Nietzsche, cf. Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. J. P. Sartre, *L'Etre et le Néant* (hereinafter, EN) (Paris: Gallimard, 1980) (hereinafter EN).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Sartre, *Cahiers pour une morale*, *op. cit.*, and *La Critique de la Raison Dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. J. P. Sartre, *Baudelaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), *Saint-Genet, commédien et martyr* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985); and *L'Idiot de la Famille* (Paris: Gallimard 1970, 1973) (hereinafter, LIF).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Sartre, EN, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Simone de Beauvoir, *La Cérémonie des adieux*, pp. 289–294 (Paris: Gallimard, 1987); and *Autoportrait à soixante-dix-ans*, in *Situations X* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976).

<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche never read Flaubert's correspondence where Flaubert develops his aesthetics and his pessimistic conception of the world. There are surprising analogies between these two men who hated their century and democracy, who considered scientific progress to be an illusion and who worked out a theory of the impersonalism of art. This analogy is limited, however; the aesthetics of Flaubert and that of Nietzsche are very different from one another.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Sartre, LIF, *op. cit.*, pp. 23–24.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Idem.*

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. G. Flaubert, *Correspondance*, Vols. I and II (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1973).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Sartre, LIF, *op. cit.*, p. 1787.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 1787.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Flaubert, *op. cit.*, letters of 26—7—52 and 8—2—52.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. G. Flaubert, *Dictionnaire d'idées reçues*, Bouvard et Pécuchet, in *Oeuvres de Flaubert*, Vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, la Pléiade, 1968).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Sartre, LIF, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 29.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Manfred Franck, *Idiot ou individu*, *L'intuition embryonnaire du "Flaubert"*, *Etudes Sartriennes*, II—III, in *Cahiers de Sémiotique textuelle*, Université de Paris X, Nanterre, 1986.