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Subjectivity and Self-Creation in Jean-Paul Sartre

ABSTRACT: Beginning in the fifth decade of the twentieth century, the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, a philosopher-writer who elaborated an original existentialist philosophical theory, aroused great interest for both philosophers and readers of literature. Thanks to the attractive writing, as well as the central place it gives to individual freedom and creative subjectivity through which man can overcome constraining existential situations, Jean Paul-Sartre's work has not lost its relevance even in the 21st century. My paper aims to present a fragment of the intellectual trace conceived by Jean-Paul Sartre as a more or less committed creation, mainly between the publication of the novel *La Nausée* in the same time with *Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions* and the publication of the essay *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*. The message of Sartre's aesthetic-philosophical lesson is that existence can be justified by art and creation. In Sartre, writing has the precise function of putting an end to nausea by relating the "Being-for-Itself" to the "Being-in-itself" and perhaps even to "Being-for-Others" in the text preserved in the immediate and anxious memory of the strangeness of one's own person and placed on the page. The pathological phenomenon called "nausea" signifies, among other interpretations, the taste (and ultimately even the savor) or the feeling of the facticity and contingency of existence. But a tell negative emotion represented in J.-P. Sartre's work the intuition of the redemptive meaning of the frankness of the individual, "transported" into the literary or philosophical text.

KEYWORDS: Individual; Subjectivity; Nausea; Existentialism; Self-creation

1. *Historical concreteness as an autobiographical fact. Several aspects*

The attempt to reconstruct here a short sequence from the overwhelming Sartrean philosophical and literary work (too vast for a single man, which leads the French philosopher to abandon, for example, the second volume of the *Critique de la raison dialectique*, written in 1958 and left unfinished) – represents an echo of admiration aroused by two of the author's novels, books that inspire confidence in the power of style to transcend the philosophical or even ideological orientation that they make visible, lending consistency to it at some point: it is about *La Nausée* (1938) and *Les Mots* (1946).

These illustrate, it can be said, Sartre's aesthetic ideal in the field of literature, and the answer of the writer-philosopher to the question "Why write?" is relevant in this respect:

Each has his reason: for one, art is a flight; for another a means of conquering. But one can flee into a hermitage, into madness, into death. One can conquer by arms. Why does it have to be writing, why does one have to manage one's escapes and conquests by writing? Because, behind the various aims of authors, there is a deeper and more immediate choice, which is common to all of us¹.

This profound choice is explained and summarized by David Caute, both from the perspective of the creator and the receiver, through freedom:

The thesis is clear: literature, properly employed, can be a powerful means of liberating the reader from the kinds of alienation which develop in particular situations. By this process the writer also frees himself and overcomes his own alienation. Sartre argues that literature is alienated when it forgets or ignores its autonomy and places itself at the service of the temporal power, dogma and mystification. It is the writer mission to dispel inertia, ignorance, prejudice and false emotion².

In other words, literature is a specific capacity of the writer to help others to discover the own self and authentic personality, the own identity, by interacting with the writing of the one who thus found himself, which leads to the recognition of the dialogical human essence:

To write is thus both to disclose the world and to offer it as a task to the generosity of the reader. It is to have recourse to the consciousness of others in order to make one's self be recognized as *essential* to the totality of being; it is to wish to live this essentiality by means of interposed persons³.

In these books (i. e. *La Nausée* and *Les Mots*) that can be located phenomenologically between *Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions* (1938) and *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (1946), the historical concreteness is revealed, beyond its totalizing social and political dimensions, as an autobiographical

¹ J.-P. SARTRE, *What is Literature?*, translated by Bernard Frechtman, with an introduction by David Caute, Routledge, London and New York 2010, p. 27.

² D. CAUTE, *Introduction*, in SARTRE, *What is Literature?*, cit., p. X.

³ SARTRE, *What is Literature?*, cit., p. 45.

fact, more precisely as authenticity of living and awareness of existence, as a notation of immediate experience.

In other words, in an existentialist manner, that is, in accordance with a controversial understanding of the human, greeted from the beginning with more or less justified reluctance. The essential reproach addressed to existentialism, recalls Jean Paul Sartre in his philosophical attempt to “defend” it, refers to the custom of those who belong to this current, to «emphasize the ugly side of life»⁴. Thus «ugliness has been assimilated to existentialism»⁵, and to illustrate this finding Sartre gives as an example a lady who, after using a vulgar word, apologizes, explaining her nervousness by stating that she would be a “existentialist” in the making⁶.

What makes such a reaction possible is precisely the popularity of the current: although existentialism is a doctrine strictly intended for the technicians of philosophy, it can be easily defined, according to Sartre. What Christian existentialism (Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel) and atheist existentialism (Heidegger and Sartre himself) have in common is the memorable, though debatable, belief that «existence precedes essence, or, if you will, must start from subjectivity»⁷. And as subjectivity means individuality, as modern philosophy shows, we can say starting from the famous definition above that existence is found in the “historical concreteness” of the life of the individual, limited in terms of time and space, determined by several or fewer commitments. In conjunction with the historical world which is the world of the individual in Sartrean view, Adriana Neacșu asserts:

What really interests Sartre is the concrete history of the individual, from birth to death, the only thing that can reveal the original project of himself, a project that, in turn, gives an account of his entire life, to the most small actions and attitudes, although man, during his existence, by virtue of his total and unpredictable freedom, can change several such projects⁸.

From the perspective of atheist existentialism, represented by Jean Paul Sartre, human reality does not in any way fall within the scope of that

⁴ ID., *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, Les Editions Nagel, Paris 1946, p. 12.

⁵ Ivi, p. 13.

⁶ Ivi, p. 16.

⁷ Ivi, p. 17.

⁸ A. NEACȘU, *Metoda sartreană de cercetare a faptului istoric*, in *Gramsci și Sartre, mari gânditori ai secolului XX* [*The Sartrean Method of Researching the Historical Fact*, in *Gramsci and Sartre, Great Thinkers of the 20th century*], Editura Institutului de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale, București 2007, p. 141.

notion of Kantian resonance according to which there is a human nature that is found in all men, and thanks to which every man is a particular example of a universal concept. This type of existentialism is also opposed to the Christian angle from which it is seen how «the individual man realizes a certain concept that is in the divine plane»⁹.

That is, “existence precedes essence” is translated within the Sartrean philosophical system by the fact that man defines himself after appearing in the world and not according to a pre-existing model. According to the existentialist point of view there is no human nature, much, more, in the beginning “man is nothing” and therefore, the ego becomes definable as it conceives itself, in a seemingly simple way, but complicated when he has to choose between the paths of freedom, especially in situations where the liberty is not a historical, external fact, but internal to the individual: «man is nothing but what he does himself»¹⁰.

In another text, from 1972, namely *Playdoyer pour les intellectuels*, this human self-constructivist conception is somewhat more nuanced, starting from the interpretation of practical knowledge as an invention first, in the exercise of which every man is a project.

This “project” is creative because in the course of it one invents what it is, starting from what it is not yet (as opposed to the situation of creative hermeneutics according to which the world is renewed through a careful look at its virtualities); it is a scientific project given that it will succeed only by establishing with certainty the initial possibilities; it is researching and challenging insofar as the proposed finality, at first abstract, requires the search for concrete means to find what is specific to it and possibly to develop by transforming it. The question that arises in this context is to decide whether the “integral finality”, viewed from the global point of view of life, deserves the magnitude of the energy transformations that achieve it: «For we live in a world of rarity in which any expense arises from a certain point of view as a waste»¹¹. This waste specific to life is also defining for the concrete situation (rarity) of each individual and suggests his aesthetic vocation.

The understanding of the individual as a “rarity”, as an actor of a singular and unrepeatable life motivates the privilege of the active dimension of philosophy. It is the period of the publication «*Les Temps Modernes*»,

⁹ Ivi, p. 20.

¹⁰ Ivi, p. 22.

¹¹ J.-P. SARTRE, *Playdoyer pour les intellectuels*, in ID., *Situations VIII (Autour de 68)*, Gallimard, Paris 1972, p. 380.

when for Sartre the commitment and the militant action are priorities in the discovery and affirmation of the human dignity of the individual subjected to the process of reification and alienation. Freedom ceases to be an inner virtue that gives you the right to detach yourself from the most urgent situations and can be understood as «the power to engage in the present action and build a new life»¹²; even at the risk of wasting the “old” one, or of scattering human unity in pieces of annihilating “historical concreteness”, against the will to make history. Thanks to this belief, Sartre states that man is the expression of “his own project”. But a project that cannot be independent of its concrete position in the world, of the “situation” as a set of individual circumstances, of its own structure of consciousness beyond a “human nature” and equally, of an objective history.

Whereas in the existence of individuals appear moments when the “man” is not similar, for others, to the different inner project from which they claim, it becomes very difficult to “gather” with others. It is not only an expression of difference, but also the extreme individualistic consequence of modern man’s freedom to make history, «making himself»¹³ which Mircea Eliade remarks in *Le Mythe de l’Eternel Retour*, opposing it to the traditional conception that involves “going out” or escape of time and history. Contrary to Marxist existentialism, Mircea Eliade considers that in comparison with the freedom that means historical de-conditioning, «any other modern freedom, no matter how much satisfaction it would bring to the one who possesses it, is powerless to justify history; which, to any man sincere with himself, amounts to the terror of history»¹⁴. In other words, with the phenomenon of emptying historical events of their trans-historical significance, due to man’s conditioning of actions and deeds beyond which one cannot glimpse the divine will, but only the way in which he conceives himself.

In the question of the historical event and the meaning of history, Jean Paul Sartre also speaks referring to the subjective scale of humanity, in the second volume of *Critique de la raison dialectique*. Here the historical event, whatever it may be, appears as that fact carrying in it the transformation of the individual’s past, because he was not expected, or because, even expected, he is the “unexpected expected”. As in a paradox of classical logic updated existentialist – expected or not sometime, this past reaches a moment and overcoming, “but also the essence created and left behind

¹² ID., *Materialisme et revolution*, in ID., *Situations I*, Gallimard, Paris 1949, pp. 205-206.

¹³ M. ELIADE, *Le Mythe de l’Eternel Retour*, Gallimard, Paris 1969, p. 158.

¹⁴ Ivi, p. 80.

that helps us (as a springboard for overcoming)”. In this paradoxical way, of essence left behind and overtaken in search of a new essence created by man, the past (except in the extreme cases of accident, crime, etc.) can be changed by ourselves, in our own lives, continuously: «The historical fact: Charles Bovary discovering the letters»¹⁵. This bookish and derisory example (compared to the great political, social, cultural events) wants to show that the historical event appears as «the exterior transforming from inside, interiority, but without the necessary action of the exterior on exteriority (praxis-violence) and without the immediate fact of internalization. The event comes *like a thief* (s.a.)»¹⁶. The event takes us by surprise, he comes unexpectedly, I think Sartre wants to say.

Anyone who reads these “cryptic” words naturally asks themselves: What exactly is stealing the event? If it is defined as the unexpected par excellence, we can answer that it steals our peace, inner balance (for the individual), peace (globally, totalizing, socio-political). But the event can also be the opposite of a thief, or a paradoxical, generous “thief”, rather a guest who, although unwelcome, comes loaded with gifts – in short, a fact that brings us something, through his “incarnation and singularity”, to say like Jean Paul Sartre from another paragraph of *Critique de la raison dialectique* II. For, according to him, every singular event totalizes in itself the whole, in the infinite richness of its singularity. Moreover, «if the dialectic must be materialistic, how are we to understand the materiality of praxis and its relation to all other forms of materiality?»¹⁷. Here Jean Paul Sartre answers by recalling that the capital discovery of the “dialectical experience” consists in the “mediation” of man by things, to the same extent that things are “mediated” by man.

This methodical principle is valid in any area of human knowledge, regardless of the spiritual orientation of the actors. On the other hand, «any historical dialectic is based on individual praxis as something already dialectical, that is, insofar as the action is by itself a negative overcoming of a contradiction, determination of a present totalization in the name of a future totality, real and effective work of the matter»¹⁸.

In other words, experience itself provides its own intelligibility, both for the community and for the individual. “I see we are repeating ourselves”, notes Jean Paul Sartre in his childhood novel, *Les Mots*; «but this more

¹⁵ J.-P. SARTRE, *Critique de la raison dialectique*, Gallimard, Paris 1985, tome II, p. 407.

¹⁶ *Ivi*, p. 26.

¹⁷ SARTRE, *Critique de la raison dialectique*, cit., tome I, p. 165.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

recently gained knowledge gnaws at my old records, without dispelling them entirely. My life has some evidence of pride that does nothing but surprise me with the same relapse... My progress today is to understand that I have not progressed. Sometimes I myself have my own testimony to tell»¹⁹. Not a little melancholy in this notation, not the slightest piety or attachment even to one's own past; the only landmark of his own existence remains the very subject of the record: from now on, from here and there, a kind of "Dasein" that refuses the metaphysical charge that was put on him when he was thrown into the world, without wondering how the other individuals could "land" in reasonable conditions, however, if they had not put into operation (and in fiction) in time all the devices that dampen the shock of contact with the unfriendly place of history.

From a less idealistic point of view, this text of *Les mots* deals with the same problem, although otherwise formulated, of human existentiality as a discovery of the being in situation, and especially of self-revelation in extreme situations: sufferings, humiliations, despair of millions of people. But this, we can continue in the spirit of Sartre, represents the beginning of any honest reflection on history, as a complicated process, sometimes progressive, sometimes regressive, sometimes starting even from a minimal, seemingly absurd existence of a certain individual. To exemplify and close this hermeneutic circle, a "flagrant" case in this regard is Antoine de Roquentin, the main character of the novel *La Nausée*, a book that represents the writing of an "Odyssey" of the individual's return to himself.

2. *La Nausée, between a theory of emotions and "a humanism"*

La Nausée, which represents the diary of the writing of this novel by the main character, Antoine Roquentin, settled three years ago in Bouville to complete his historical studies of the Marquis de Rollebon, begins with an undated page from January 1932. The views of the central character can be confused with those of the author of the novel and in addition, this true anti-hero resembles, in structure and mentality (apolitical, unemployed, partisan of subjective freedom) with Mathieu Delarue (who was also considered an alter-ego of Sartre) from the novel *Les Chemins de la liberté* (divided into four volumes: *L'Âge de la Raison*; *Le Sursis*; *La Mort dans l'âme*; *La Âge de la raison*; *La dernière chance* – unfinished), published under the title *Drôle d'amitié* in the magazine *Les Temps Modernes* founded

¹⁹ J.-P. SARTRE, *Les mots*, Gallimard, Paris 1964, p. 201.

by Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty in 1951.

The tendency of the author to identify with his own book characters is transparent, as can be seen from a Sartrean transcript “accomplice” with Merleau-Ponty’s confession about giving up writing an autobiography, to write a novel: «Why? Because in the novel I could give an imaginary meaning to those periods in my life that I did not understand»²⁰. Paradoxically, this formulation reminds us of the requirement of Eliadian’s imaginative and creative hermeneutics to “fill” with meaning the empty spaces in the “text” of a religious ritual or a work of art, with the only difference that it is about writing a sequence of life, the restitution of a fragment of a man’s existence. And Sartre does it by constantly remembering and recording a state of maximum existential discomfort. In his perception, the pathological phenomenon called “nausea” means, among other things, the taste or sense and, finally, even the flavor of the facticity and contingency of existence.

“Facticity” means in the Sartrean philosophical system the necessary connection of the “Being for itself” (the one who brings Nothingness into the world and can judge other beings, knowing what is not) with “The Being itself” (what it is), while “contingency” expresses the raw fact of a certain Being for himself in the world. This manifests itself as a perpetual and intractable monotony through which the body appears to consciousness. Against the background of this essentially unpleasant state, all the concrete phenomena of nausea caused by the “sadness” or even the corruption of the flesh occur, which reminds us of the famous lyrics mallarméene: «La chair est triste, hélas! et j’ai lu tous les livres». Sartre himself wrote a book about Mallarmé, whose manuscript was lost. In an interview published in *Le Monde* (May 14, 1971) with the theme *L’idiot de la famille*, reprinted in *Situations X*, Sartre stated that he needed to refer to Mallarmé and symbolism in order to better understand Flaubert, the protagonist of an extensive monograph that the philosopher had dedicated to him.

But why would Sartre have needed Flaubert, in the economy of his work, Flaubert, this bourgeois owner and “reactionary” who insulted the communists, for whom the intellectual turning to the left did not have much sympathy? Answer: because Flaubert is in the vision of the early and great reader Jean-Paul Sartre a model of “second” employment, deeper yet than the political one, through which the writer tries to save his life:

The literary commitment is, in the end, to assume all the world,

²⁰ J.-P. SARTRE, *Situations X, Politique et autobiographie*, Gallimard, Paris 1976, p. 104.

the whole. To take the world as a whole, with man inside it, understanding it from the point of view of nothingness; it is a profound commitment, not simply a literary one, in the sense of making books. As with Mallarmé, who is a descendant of Flaubert, this is a true passion, in the biblical sense²¹.

The passion, as we know, also has the connotation of “suffering”, and nausea itself is a suffering that finds its cure, as we shall see, in a “literary commitment”.

With the publication of the novel *La Nausée* (1938), which had as its original title *Melancholia* (referring to an engraving by Dürer) it can be said (several have said it, of which I mention only St. Elmo Nauman, Jr.) that the first stage of Sartrean thought begins. This is often called the stage of «solipsistic despair»²².

Solipsism is philosophically defined as the attitude of the one who, separating himself from the world, reduces the whole reality to that of his individual self. In this respect, isolated in himself, unable to realize the existence of other people, Antoine Roquentin has contact with the world only through the emotion he calls “nausée”. More precisely, it is manifested by the fixation on one’s own person in his fundamental disgust towards everything around him. Usually, nausea comes and goes. How is the nausea of Antoine Roquentin, Sartre’s alter-ego? Does it leave it at some point, or does it weaken it at all?

Roquentin’s evil is not a circumstantial Hippocratic one, it is not transient sensation, but this feeling bad means a quasi-permanent state, and the description of the phenomenon made by the novelist at a first level, although of an exemplary virtuosity, does not add anything new in content to the known medical symptoms²³. For example, the facticity and

²¹ ID., *Entretiens sur moi-meme*, in *Situations X. Politique et autobiographie*, Gallimard, Paris 1976, pp. 112-113.

²² ST.E. NAUMAN, JR., *The New Dictionary of Existentialism*, The Citadel Press, New Jersey 1972, p. 152.

²³ And in this sense it is useful, I think, an elementary “anamnesis” made by combining data from pharmaceutical leaflets with some directly participatory observations, regarding the “totalitarian”, at the scale of the species, “nausée”. From the point of view of medical pathology, nausea (which comes from the Latin “grevitia”) is a symptom of “labyrinthine disorders” – and I like to leave in suspense this superb medical “metaphor”. This symptom, as we all know, can say a great deal about the more or less distant nothingness of the sick being – and this is one of the most visible (even quantifiable) places of passage between medicine, philosophy and theology. In benign cases, therapy consists in the administration of pharmaceuticals with antiemetic action for motion sic-

contingency of existence, in a coffee house are defined literary as follows : «[...] I was surrounded, by a slow and colorful whirlwind, by a whirlwind of fog, by twinkles in the mist of smoke, in the mirrors, with the benches shining in the bottom and I could not see why things were happening there, nor why they happened like that»²⁴. As for the intractable monotony through which the body reveals itself to consciousness, we can read: «I was on the threshold of the entrance, I hesitated and then a whirlwind occurred, a shadow passed over the ceiling and I felt as if pushed forward. I was floating, I was dazed by the light hazes that penetrated me from all sides, at the same time»²⁵. In the same context, the writer-philosopher who self-identifies with the character, confesses the persistence of the existential feeling that inspires this novel: «Then I felt nauseous, I let myself fall on the bench, I didn't even know where I was; I could see the colors slowly spinning around me, I felt like throwing up. And here: since then, nausea has not left me, it has persisted»²⁶.

According to A.J. Liebling, the quoted below excerpt from *La Nausée* gives an idea about Existentialism:

Nothing has changed but everything exists differently. I can't describe it; it is like Nausea but it is just the antithesis: finally adventure comes to me and when I ask myself about it, I see that *it has come about that I am I and that I am here*; it is I who cleave the night, I am as happy as the hero of a novel²⁷.

Despite the precision of the details, in the novel, however, it is necessary to look for and find what happens beyond the physical symptoms, which, if we call it metaphysical, would still be an abuse of interpretation. In fact, the question that arises when becoming aware of this phenomenon

kness. This phenomenon occurs due to “chemical, physical or biological stimulation of nerve receptors located in the abdominal organs” is characterized by: dizziness, blurred vision, dry mouth and pharynx, weakness, sometimes hallucinations, lack of appetite, hypotension or vice versa, drowsiness, decreased respiratory function. It is, in other words, a disturbance of the whole being, an earthquake of the flesh as would be invaded by invisible intramuscular parasites. Nausea is not only in the stomach, it is in the hands, feet and brain that you feel useless and pasty. It is the symptom of the fundamental maladaptation in a certain situation, or of the inertia to the world of life as imposed by others.

²⁴ J.-P. SARTRE, *Greața [Nausea]*, translation by Alexandru George, Editura Univers, București 1990, p. 38.

²⁵ Ivi, p. 4.

²⁶ Ivi, p. 5.

²⁷ A.J. LIEBLING, *Jean-Paul Sartre, the Existentialist*, in «The New Yorker», March 8 1946, <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1946/03/16/existentialist>> (accessed on 21.08.2021).

could be formulated as follows: if it is already installed, what does nausea express apart from a state of discomfort? Do its manifestations satisfy our cathartic instinct as spectators of desolation and decay to such an extent that we are no longer interested in the causes and treatment?

I said at the beginning of this essay that we could place *La Nausée*, not in a temporal sense, but theoretically, between *Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions* (1938) and *L'existentialisme est un humanisme. Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions* is an analysis of the roles of fear, pleasure, melancholy and pain in human life, related to the true reality of consciousness and at the same time an application of the phenomenological method learned by Sartre when he studied philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger in Berlin, during 1933-1934.

«This world is difficult», said Sartre²⁸, and the notion of “difficulty” is not a reflexive one, which would imply a relationship with the self, but a quality of the world given in perception. In the same time, this world is also “urgent”, which makes it impossible to “dwell” elsewhere than in concrete and historical place and time. In this context, emotion is the stage of overcoming the state of difficulty of being in the world.

In *Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions*, according to Sartre, emotion is even a “transformation of the world” that occurs as a “dialogue” between consciousness and object, with the attempt to find a way to the closed world because of the dirt roads that have become impassable, from the cause of routine and opacity that blocks the free path, the communication between the individual self and the others, between “inside” and “outside”, which refutes the presence:

All paths are blocked and we must still act. Then we try to change the world, that is, to live it as if the relations of things with their potentialities were not regulated by deterministic processes, but by magic. It must be understood that this is not a game: [...] we throw ourselves into this new attitude with all the strength we have²⁹.

It is a significant example of Sartre's conception of the world as the world of the individual which through its sensitivity and subjectivity, through a way sometimes rational inexplicably in which its consciousness transforms perceptions, can change the situation, i.e., contingency, the objective data of history:

²⁸ J.-P. SARTRE, *Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions*, Hermann, Paris 1965, p. 43.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

Let us also understand that this attempt is not conscious as such, for then it would be the object of reflection. It is above all the observation of new relationships and new demands. Simply the awareness of an object being impossible, or giving birth to an unbearable tension, the consciousness tries to comprehend it in another way, that is, more precisely it transforms itself, in order to transform the object³⁰.

Thus, the itself becomes an “object” that is in front of us. That is, the itself “appears” to the reflection when it unifies the reflected consciousnesses. A pole of reflection is then created, which Sartre calls “le moi transcendant” (the transcendent self), which differs from the imaginary “self”, i.e. from the fiction with which the constituted character is identified, built through a social and family designation, called by Lacan “the stage of the mirror”. This philosophical game of identity is amply exemplified by Sartre through three major volumes about Flaubert’s private life. Here, trying to present the constitution of the personality of the individual Gustave, that is, to overcome the abstract conditionings of family structures in the direction of the concreteness, the interpreter and the biographer discover that Flaubert wanted his ego to be imaginary. In terms of adherence or adhesion to an image that hypostasizes man as his own project, the “imaginary self” can contribute to the realization of self-knowledge, but this is limited, because according to Sartre there are in us things that we consider valid, but which in reality can only be “complacency”. Thus, Sartre highlights the positive role of imagination in the formation of self-awareness, which he analyzes also in *The Imaginary*: “the imaginary represents at each moment the implicit sense of the real” and “imagination, far from appearing as an accidental characteristic of consciousness, is disclosed as an essential and transcendental condition of consciousness”. Much more, «It is absurd to conceive of a consciousness that does not imagine as it is to conceive of a consciousness that cannot effect *the cogito*»³¹.

Beyond this type of “complicit reflection” (with oneself or with a self-identification with another), there is in Sartre’s *L’être et le Néant* (1943) a non-complicit or purifying reflection, a condition of authenticity. This would mark the second stage of Sartre’s thinking, the negative spirit of resistance, the “sublimated” result of the traumatic experience of

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ J.-P. SARTRE, *The Imaginary. A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, with introductions by Arlette Eelkaïm-Sartre and Jonathan Webwe, London and New York, Routledge 2004, p.188.

German imprisonment in 1941, when Sartre discovered on his own skin that freedom means responsibility in total solitude, self-determination of desires, because a captured member of the Resistance is unable to claim his rights. Thus, *L'être et le Neant* is an attempt to reconstruct the Being from the perspective of the Nothingness, in existentialist terms, with a certain individualistic direction: "The being is. The being is in itself. Being is what it is". Here, the first attitude towards others is defined in terms of love, language, masochism. The second attitude consists in indifference, desire, hatred and sadism. The third classification of Being in existentialist terms includes Being in itself, Being for itself, and Being for others³². Therefore the Being includes both the Being in itself and the Being for itself, the second meaning, for Sartre, the "annihilation" of the first. Unlike the Existence characterized by individuality and subjectivity, the Being is all-encompassing and objective³³. Nothingness having no being, but being only "carried" by it, enters the world, as we have already mentioned, through "being for itself" and represents the negative version of the overflow of the self-contained Being, which allows consciousness to exist as such and to manifest as a perception of corporality, facticity and contingency, finally and through the emotion called "nausea".

The commitment of being for himself in the world produces the "situation" ("être en situation"). This is created both by facticity and by the manner of acceptance and action of the Being for itself, according to its facticity. Although the ontology does not formulate moral prescriptions, according to the author of *L'être et le Neant*, it still suggests «what will mean an ethic that will take into account its responsibilities in the face of a human reality in the situation»³⁴.

The relation of the Being for itself with the Being in itself, implying an internal relation between the being that is present and the one towards which it is present, creates the "Presence". This makes "Being itself" to exist as a whole:

As for the totality of the *itself* and the *for itself*, this is characterized by the fact that the *for itself* becomes different in relation to the *itself*, but also by the fact that the *itself* is not at all other than the *for itself* in its being: simply it is. If the relation of *itself* to *for itself* were

³² NAUMAN, JR., *The New Dictionary of Existentialism*, cit, p. 153.

³³ J.-P. SARTRE, *Being and Nothingness. Key to special terminology*, translated and Introduction by Hazel E. Barnes, GramereyBooks with, New York 1994.

³⁴ J.-P. SARTRE, *L'être et le néant. Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*, Gallimard, Paris 1943, p. 720.

the reciprocal of the relation of *for itself* to *itself*, we would return to the case of being to the other³⁵.

To close this circle on the circumference of which could be located the philosophical essay that begins and ends like a novel, i.e. *La Nausée*, between the point of a “theory of emotions” and that of an existentialist humanism, we must remember that the third stage of Sartre’s work is considered the optimistic humanism of *L’existentialisme est un humanisme* where is launched the famous formula “Existence precedes the essence – or, if you will, we must start from subjectivity”. The debatable formula that we have already mentioned here, in fact, can pass as the “logo” of the Sartrean writings whose *La Nausée* is the transparent existentialist foundation. Somehow, here it is shown how the existence of a sensitive individual like Antoine Roquentin is more revealing for the quality of the human species (in its calm drift and degradation), than conceptualized human essence, present in discourses whose normative principle makes almost imperceptible (at least for the existentialist) the real cases of its realization in an existence that could be shaped by essence.

“Nausea” reveals the gravity, weight, difficulty, “urgency” of the situation of being in the world, being the concept of an intuition of the contingent.

Therefore, Sartre from the period of writing the novel *La Nausée* is more “human” than the one from the period of the left option. Because a man concerned with his tuft of reddish hair and the inexpressiveness of his own figure, is more “graceful” than one concerned with the good of mankind, which in the name of this good as conceived by some ideologues, does not exclude the need to liquidate opponents. The gain in the “humanization” of philosophy, due to equal attention to the splendor of a metaphysics worthy of a god’s brain and to the most unexpected human weaknesses, is thus reconstituted over the long periods of history. Besides, Gheorghe Vlăduțescu recalls about Sartre original philosophy: «He had once believed that existentialism is a humanism and had tried to establish it metaphysically. Abstract, being ideologies, humanisms rather put people in the middle in view of a goal»³⁶.

In his famous novel, the philosopher gathers a whole collection of vanities and their derivatives, delicate situations, signs of the nothingness

³⁵ Ivi, p. 718.

³⁶ GH. VLĂDUȚESCU, *Sartre între literatură și filosofie* [*Sartre between Literature and Philosophy*], in A. Neacșu (ed.), *Sartre în gândirea Contemporană* [*Sartre in Contemporary Thinking*], Editura Universitaria, Craiova 2008, p. 9.

of human existence seen by the existentialist, but which at some point also serve as a clue to a possible salvation. Sartre's "nausea" is graceful because it is established simply, naturally, unspeakably ("I don't know how it was installed") beyond any external stimulus and especially because in this state of excessive self-feeling, which I would call a teenage stage of existence there is also a "little happiness" and an intuition of meaning at the end of it: «I feel something touch me in passing, shyly, and I dare not move because I am afraid it will go away. Something we did not know: a kind of joy [...] Then can we justify our existence?»³⁷. This unexpectedly rhetorical question targets the state of total discomfort caused by the lack of awareness of the search for one's own identity in the midst of "nothingness", due to transformations, "growth crises", and especially to undigested existence – to keep us in the tone of the title *La Nausée*. But this state improves and may even cease from the moment the protagonist (individual) thinks of legitimizing his existence creatively, namely by writing a book where «behind the printed words, behind the pages, the reader guesses something there would be no one who would be above words», a thing «that would make people ashamed of their own existence»³⁸, a thing probably bearing an approximation of Being, in spite of Nothingness. Even if this will not be achieved by proposing a superior model, for example through a history book, because «one existing cannot justify the existence of another existing»³⁹, but rather through the indiscretion and complicated nudity of the self-portrait, the role of such a work is that of balancing, of reconciliation with oneself and with the world, of remembering life «without repulsion»⁴⁰.

Thus, this terrible state of nausea, physically rather than metaphysically, has a purpose: to discover the therapeutic virtue of writing (discovered explicitly, at the time, also by Emil Cioran). In Sartre, writing has the precise function of putting an end to nausea by relating "for the self" to "in the self" and perhaps even to "for the other" in the text preserved in the immediate and anxious memory of the strangeness of one's own person and placed on the page. But this release of nausea as an existential metaphor comes with writing, in some cases, not by regurgitating the overflow, not even the overcrowded, but of the emptiness or existential poverty.

As well, nausea can also be a sign of an exacerbated self-awareness of the writer, a symptom of a noble graphomaniac asthenia, an overwork caused

³⁷ SARTRE, *Greața [Nausea]*, cit., p. 228.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ Ivi, p. 229.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

by the "vision" of nothingness. In other words, one of the diseases that "imprints" the creative act of writing, as we can deduce (on a certain level) from the *Preface* at the Romanian edition of 1990 of the novel about the phenomenon described as "nausea", in which Irina Mavrodin concludes:

The transition from non-text to text (literary) is the transition from the automatic, routine perception of existence to a new perception of it, to the poetic evidence called Nausea. We could say, therefore [...] that *making the text is nausea*. From a purely philosophical point of view, as has been received, Sartre's concept of «nausea» can become very operative in any attempt to describe the phenomenology of the production of the artistic text⁴¹.

This is a graceful decryption of the term and maybe even the existentialist state of nausea, and the pirouette of the text will enjoy the aesthetic attribute of grace that designates overcoming the difficulty of completing a project and the naturalness of its execution. By this writing about Sartre's disgusted revolt against the situation of the individual in the world, situated by analysts sometimes in the category of the "philosophical essay" that announces the great existentialist problem, sometimes on the crest of the first wave of the new French novel, the writer is placed, in terms of the issues addressed, near Camus. Although from the point of view of the novelty of the writing he "sits" next to Nathalie Sarraute, with *Portrait d'un inconnu* designated in *Preface* by Sartre himself as "anti-novel".

About this famous novel, in the article dedicated to Jean-Paul Sartre in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, in the chapter "Art and Philosophy", Thomas Flynn states:

Sartre's early work *Nausea* (1938) is the very model of a philosophical novel. Its protagonist, Roquentin, works through many of the major themes of *Being and Nothingness* that will appear five years later. It can be read as an extended meditation on the contingency of our existence and on the psychosomatic experience that captures that phenomenon. In his famous meditation on a tree root, Roquentin experiences the brute facticity of its existence and of his own: both are simply there, without justification, in excess (*de trop*)⁴².

We can add that written testimony is the treatment of nausea pro-

⁴¹ I. MAVRODIN, *Facerea textului* [*Making the text*], in Sartre, *Greața* [*Nausea*], cit., p. 161.

⁴² TH. FLYNN, *Jean-Paul Sartre*, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sartre/>> (accessed on 21.08.2021).

posed by Jean Paul Sartre, and this treatment, with or without his will, tends to eliminate the cause of the disease caused by limited existence in small time, individually, in the historical concrete and exceeds, through aesthetic value, the strictly existentialist value of such an experience.

Conclusion

What makes from Sartre's writings an open work for the 21st century is under the sign of his own confessions: «[...] I did not say everything I wanted to say or in the manner in which I wanted to say»⁴³.

Sartre's testamentary wish was that the "new generation" to remember from his work «*Les Situations, Saint-Genet, La Critique de la raison dialectique* and *Le diable et le Bon Dieu ...* And then, *La Nausée*, too»⁴⁴.

As for the complex personality of the French author analyzed and interpreted here, Monica Lovinescu noticed that Sartre made from the commitment a second breath of the intellectual, although he was obvious and something else, it was infinitely more than his commitments. Even if neither the writer nor the philosopher Sartre can be separated from his militancies, he can be to the intellectuals the most perfect companion to make the transition to the current stage of de-ideologisation and de-Marxization, because from the leftism of 1968, Sartre passed, «accompanied by a new philosopher like André Glucksmann who dreamed of reconciling him with Raymond Aron, to defend dissidents, to condemn the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan»⁴⁵.

These considerations are relevant to Sartre's actuality as a philosopher-writer and intellectual who cannot remain indifferent to the problems of his time, beyond cultivating his own individuality and expressing his own subjectivity, self-constructed through his writings.

As Marin Aiftincă summarizes, «A prolific and versatile personality, Sartre dominated the last century, along with other remarkable spirits, arousing a major interest that crossed the borders of his homeland and Europe»⁴⁶.

⁴³ Interview with Benny-Lévy, in *Libération*, édition spéciale Sartre, 1980, apud VLĂDUȚESCU, *Sartre between literature and philosophy*, cit., p. 9.

⁴⁴ Interview with Michel Contat, in *ivi*, p. 8.

⁴⁵ M. LOVINESCU, *La moartea lui Sartre [At the Death of Sartre]*, in EAD., *Etica neuitării [Ethics of Unforgetfulness]*, Antologie și prefață de Vladimir Tismăneanu, Humanitas, Bucharest 2008, p. 194.

⁴⁶ M. AIFTINCĂ, *Freedom in axiological perspective in Sartre*, in Neacșu (ed.), *Sartre în gândirea Contemporană*, cit., p. 73.