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*The Reception of Sartre's Thought and Its Narratives:  
An Analysis from a Communication Theory Perspective*

ABSTRACT: Sartrean existentialism has evoked very strong feelings, from fascination to hatred, very atypical for a literary and philosophical movement – and this on all continents of the world inhabited by mankind. This essay attempts to examine the determining factors for this process. What were the messages and narratives that could evoke these feelings? What were the channels of communication and what about failed and distorted messages? What roles did repeaters and noise play in this process? How did they change over time, and what does this analysis contribute to a better understanding of the state of Sartre studies today? The basic framework for this investigation is adapted from communication theory.

KEYWORDS: Reception; Sartre; Communication Theory; Narratives; Marxism

The existentialist tsunami that set off in 1945 and went around the world in the years to come was an event in the history of philosophy that went far beyond what popular philosophers such as William James and John Dewey ever achieved. Sartre dominated the years up to 1970 as the world's leading intellectual. To analyze this development, I will borrow key elements of communication theory as first developed by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver in 1948/49. As Sartre wrote in *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, the writer's major function is "délivrer des messages à ses lecteurs"<sup>1</sup>. And for him, the process of creating a literary oeuvre ends with its reading by the readers<sup>2</sup>. These are two key ideas communication theory shares with Sartre. What communication theory contributes to Sartre's concept is a model of what can go wrong in a communication process. Both Sartre and communication theory agree that what the receiver eventually perceives as

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<sup>1</sup> J.-P. SARTRE, "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?", in ID., *Situations III*, nouv. éd. rev. et augm., Gallimard, Paris 2013, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Ivi, p. 49.

the sender's message is not necessarily a true and fair picture of what the sender had in mind.

Errors can occur during encoding at the sender and decoding at the receiver. The process of forwarding is completed by the fact that, on the one hand, there are repeaters forwarding messages, and on the other hand, there may be noise preventing the messages from being forwarded. Depending on the medium through which a message is forwarded, different channels have to be distinguished. Each channel has its own laws and addresses its own public. This whole process of forwarding and receiving messages depends on what is called the "situation" by Sartre and the "context" by communication theory. Messages may fail to be forwarded or may arrive at the receivers only in a distorted form. As long as only singular messages are affected by failures and distortions, the damage is limited. However, when such failures and distortions occur in a systematic way, as this was the case with Sartre and his thinking, the entire narrative about a person and his thinking may become distorted.

### 1. 1944 to 1950 – *The Existentialist Tsunami*

In the summer of 1944, it was not foreseeable that by the end of the same year Sartre would be considered the leading intellectual of his time in Paris. The publication of his philosophical writings had gone almost unnoticed. As a writer, he had received only the *Prix Populiste* in 1940. There were a few translations into foreign languages – *Le mur* into German, Japanese, and Chinese, *La chambre* into Spanish and Chinese, parts of *La nausée* into Japanese<sup>3</sup> – but this was far from spectacular. That Sartre's role had indeed changed by the end of 1944 is confirmed by the fact that he was already having to defend himself against fierce attacks from the Communists.

Freed from his work as philosophy teacher thanks to a contract with Pathé, Sartre began to publish an enormous number of texts. Between 1945 and 1949, these included three plays, three volumes of his novel, several important essays, the first three volumes of his essays entitled *Situations*, and his first biography. The film *Les jeux sont faits* was released and he

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<sup>3</sup> D. SLAYMAKER, *When Sartre was an Erotic Writer: Body, Nation and Existentialism in Japan after the Asia-Pacific War*, in «Japan Forum», 14, 1/2002, p. 78; CH. ZHANG, *Sartre en Chine 1939-1976. Histoire de sa réception et de son influence*, Le Manuscript, Paris 2008, p. 111.

founded his own journal *Les Temps Modernes*. Sartre published several prefaces to books and even texts on various artists, including ballet, and he inspired the French *Nouvelle vague* in the cinema of the 1950s. He even became the most prominent member of the *Rassemblement démocratique révolutionnaire*, a movement that unsuccessfully tried to bridge the gap between various leftist parties after the Cold War had intensified in 1948.

Very quickly Sartrean existentialism became a social-cultural movement. The “existentialists” had their own fashion and listened to bebop. Saint-Germain-des-Prés became so much the center of existentialist culture that in 1947 the newspaper *Samedi Soir* published a “Petit guide du Village de Saint Germain des Prés” for the tourists in 1947<sup>4</sup>. Christine Cronan even released a 21 pages long *Petit catéchisme de l'existentialisme pour les profanes*.

This “earthquake” in Paris did not go unnoticed abroad. The United States, Great Britain, Italy, and Switzerland were the main centers of reception. Italy was an easy market for Sartre, because the cultural elite traditionally was very fluent in French and very oriented toward Paris. As early as the fall of 1945, *Huis clos* was staged in Rome, directed by Luchino Visconti<sup>5</sup>. And when Sartre was in Italy in June 1946, he met many prominent Italian thinkers, from Primo Levi to Alberto Moravia<sup>6</sup>.

Switzerland was the springboard to Germany and Austria, where the theater and the book market were down until 1948. *Les mouches* premiered in German in Zurich as early as October 1944<sup>7</sup>. In June 1945 Sartre's existentialism was already the subject of a lecture at the annual conference of the *Swiss Philosophical Society*. And in May/June 1946, before he went to Italy, Sartre was on a lecture tour in Switzerland.

As to the United States, existentialism was received primarily by American journalists and soldiers stationed in liberated Paris. They reported back home primarily on the social, cultural, and political aspects of existentialism. As early as October 1944, Sartre's essay *La république de silence* was published in the American magazine *Atlantic Monthly*.<sup>8</sup> On his

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<sup>4</sup> M. CONTAT, *Sartre. L'invention de la liberté*, Éditions Textuel, Paris 2005, p. 98.

<sup>5</sup> R. TESSARI, *Presenza e assenza di Sartre nel teatro italiano*, in O. POMPEO FARACOVÌ, S. TERONI (eds.), *Sartre e l'Italia*, Belforte, Livorno 1987, p. 158.

<sup>6</sup> For the reception in Italy see F. CADDEO, *The Impact in Italy of Sartre and His Thinking*, in A. BETSCHART, J. WERNER (eds.), *Sartre and the International Impact of Existentialism*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2020, pp. 151-166.

<sup>7</sup> B. BERNARDI, *Jean-Paul Sartre e la Svizzera*, Giampiero Casagrande, Lugano 2014, pp. 58-67.

<sup>8</sup> G. COTKIN, *Existential America*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2003, p. 94.

second American tour in 1945/46, he was already a prominent person, lecturing at various universities. Reception in theater and philosophy was delayed, however, *Les mouches* did not premiere until 1947. In the same year, William Barrett published the first major philosophical text dealing with existentialism.

The British reception of Sartre's thought largely paralleled the American one. The major exception is A. J. Ayer's very early publication on Sartre in *Horizon* in 1945. Sweden became the hub for the reception of existentialism in Scandinavia with four translations in 1946: *Les mouches*, *Huis clos*, *Le mur*, and *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*. The most notable event in the reception of Sartre's philosophical work, however, was the first translation of *L'être et le néant* into a foreign language, into Spanish in Argentina in 1948.

### 1.1 *The Existentialist Narrative and Its Core Messages*

In search of the reasons for Sartre's success, we must analyze the (meta-)messages received by Sartre's public. Sartre's first message was "You Are Free, Therefore Choose!" After fifteen years of economic crisis and repression, the intellectual elite felt an incredible need to free themselves from the chains they had to wear during those years. The major texts that conveyed this message were *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* and *Les mouches*. Its main pillar was the criticism of any kind of an objective value ethics as represented by the various religions, ideologies, and tradition. To no surprise, his critics, the communists, the bourgeois establishment, and the churches, called Sartre's philosophy a representative of decadence and nihilism.

This first message of "You Are Free, Therefore Choose!" did not reach the receivers without distortions. The erroneous view of human beings as absolutely free can still be found today. Sartre's statement in *Liberté cartésienne* that being free does not mean being able to do what one wants, but wanting what one can do, was never received<sup>9</sup>.

Sartre's second important message was "Commit Yourself!" Its first major text was *Présentation (des Temps Modernes)*, an expanded version of *The Case for Responsible Literature* first published in the British journal *Horizon* and in the American *Partisan Review*. Another highly influential text was *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?*, which was quickly translated into

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<sup>9</sup> J.-P. SARTRE, *La liberté cartésienne*, in ID., *Situations*, II, nouv. ed., Gallimard, Paris 2012, p. 291.

English, German, and Spanish<sup>10</sup>, followed by *La nationalisation de la littérature*, which appeared in Arabic already a month after its French publication.

This second message was well received by many writers. After being condemned to silence for ten and more years, they eagerly took it up. This was especially true for writers in formerly fascist countries such as Germany and Italy. Sartre's idea of *littérature engagée* was one of the godparents of the *Gruppe 47*, which later included Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass.

With the *Temps Modernes* and his involvement in the *Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire* R.D.R., Sartre himself lived up to his proclaimed message. As a result, the idea of *littérature engagée* became largely a concept associated with politically progressive ideas. Sartre was so successful that there were only three camps among intellectuals in Germany: that of Karl Marx, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Jesus Christ<sup>11</sup>. Not surprisingly, opposition to Sartre was strong. The communists, in particular, saw him as a competitor in the struggle for progressive intellectuals and students.

The third message, "No Discrimination!" was directed primarily at disadvantaged groups in society. It was Beauvoir who focused on the oppression of women, Sartre, however, supported her. Their joint life became a model for several couples, even in Islamic countries, as the examples of Suhayl Idris and Aida Matraji in Lebanon and Liliane und Lufti al-Khuli in Egypt show. Important existentialist female scholars like Iris Murdoch, Marjorie Grene, Hazel Barnes, and Mary Warnock stand for the attractiveness of existentialism for women.

Sartre's own attention was primarily focused on Jews, blacks, and homosexuals. His *Réflexions sur la question juive* was the first theoretical book published by a major European intellectual against antisemitism. *Présence noire* and *Orphée noir* played a similar role for black writers. And there was the antiracist play *La putain respectueuse*. Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Frantz Fanon, later Steve Biko, Stockley Carmichael, Angela Davis, and Gilberto Gil and Gaetano Veloso, the founders of Brazilian *tropicalismo*, read Sartre.

Sartre spoke out in favor of homosexuals on several occasions, from his support for Jean Genet to the discussions in *On a raison de se révolter*. In his literary works, he presented homosexuality, which had been a taboo

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<sup>10</sup> Translations of non-literary texts into Italian were often delayed – not because of a lack of interest in Sartre in Italy, but because of the good knowledge of French among Italian intellectuals.

<sup>11</sup> M. RAHNER, "Tout est neuf ici, tout est à recommencer ...", Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 1993, p. 209.

until 1980, as a normal part of life. On the one hand, this earned him the support of gay intellectuals, from André Gide to Oreste Pucciani in the United States and Hubert Fichte in Germany. On the other hand, some of his works were banned, such as *Huis clos* in the U.K. and *L'enfance d'un chef* in the German Democratic Republic.

### 1.2 *Distorted and Failed Messages*

Not only the idea of absolute freedom suffered from a distorted reception. The same happened with Sartre's most famous sentence "L'enfer, c'est les autres". It is still understood today as a misanthropic statement about the relationship between human beings, whereas it actually represents the second part of his early ethics. Human beings are not only free to choose their values as stated in *Les mouches*, but they must also assume responsibility for their choices.

One of the important messages Sartre failed to convey to his receivers concerns his existential psychoanalysis. His version of psychoanalysis, which later became the progressive part of his regressive-progressive method, was never able to prevail against the alternatives presented by Alfred Adler, Ludwig Binswanger, Viktor Frankl, and the representatives of a humanistic psychotherapy in the United States. Even Heidegger, who resisted any attempt to interpret *Sein und Zeit* psychologically until the 1960s, became more successful when Medard Boss developed his *Daseinsanalyse*.

A small success can be attributed to Sartre's existential psychoanalysis at least in the field of psychiatry—more precisely, antipsychiatry. Two leading antipsychiatrists of the 1960s, the British/South African David Cooper and Ronald D. Laing, were influenced by Sartre. Sartre also met Franco Basaglia, a leading Italian antipsychiatrist.

Another important area where Sartre's message did not meet the intended reception by readers was ethics. Sartre never published the book on ethics he had promised at the end of *L'être et le néant*. The *Cahiers pour une morale*, written in 1947/48, were published only in 1983. However, several approaches to ethics can be found in the works he published. The first one, going back to *L'être et le néant*, focused on authenticity.

A second alternative brought him close to Kantian ethics. In search for an ultimate ethical criterion that excludes at least certain behaviors, Sartre and Beauvoir developed a concept according to which acting morally presupposes respecting the freedom of others. When Sartre described the ethics of the *Cahiers* mystified, he had most probably this approach in mind. Indeed, the next two works Sartre and Beauvoir published after

abandoning the *Cahiers* were *Saint Genet* and *Faut-il burler Sade?*, works dealing with two persons who definitely did not fit the criteria Sartre had envisioned in his *Cahiers*.

The third approach focused on the question of the relationship between ends and means. Sartre addressed this issue several times, from *Le mur* to *Le diable et le bon dieu*. The dispute over this problem between Camus on the one hand and Sartre and Beauvoir on the other contributed greatly to their falling out in 1952. But as the commentaries on *Les mains sales* showed, their message about the ethical relationship between ends and means—ends and means have to be regarded as unity—never reached the public.

### 1.3 *Noise and Repeaters*

The most effective form of noise<sup>12</sup> came from the communist side. As early as 1945, the French communists deployed their best intellectual battle horses in their fight against Sartre: Henri Lefebvre, Roger Garaudy, and Claude Morgan. By August 1948, the communist criticism had reached the international scene when Aleksandr Fadeev, the Secretary General of the Union of Soviet Writers, rode an all-out attack on Sartre and called him a hyena and a jackal. Publication of Sartre's work was unthinkable on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain until Stalin's death.

The other powerful organization producing much "noise" was the Roman Catholic Church. The French Catholic journal *La Croix* called Sartre's atheist existentialism more dangerous than the rationalism of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the positivism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1948, the Vatican put Sartre's entire work on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. This decision severely restricted the dissemination of Sartre's thought in countries like Spain and in many Catholic schools.

Just as powerful as the Communist movement and the Catholic Church were social taboos. *Samedi Soir* described Sartre as someone seducing young women with smelly Camembert. François Mauriac called existentialism an "excrementalism". In the United States, Sartre was often blamed for his "bohemian tendency", a code word that implied sexual adventures. For John Lackey Brown, in a 1947 feature story in the *New York Times Magazine*, even nude sunbathing justified this qualification<sup>13</sup>. Promoters of Sartre's oeuvre such as Walter Kaufmann and Alfred Stern

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<sup>12</sup> "Noise" refers to interferences like government regulations, religious norms, and social taboos that prevent or make it very difficult to relay messages.

<sup>13</sup> A. FULTON, *Apostles of Sartre*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1999, p. 32.

later described *L'être et le néant* as outstripping *Lady Chatterly's Lover* and partly pornographic<sup>14</sup>.

Sartre could have never achieved the success he had without the help of many repeaters<sup>15</sup>. Early on, successful and lasting partnerships were established with excellent publishers, Gallimard in France, Alfred A. Knopf in the United States, and Hamish Hamilton, what later became part of Penguin, in Great Britain. It was his publisher, Bompiani, who organized Sartre's first tour of Italy in 1946. And after the recovery of the book market in Germany, Rowohlt, famous for its paperbacks, became his publisher of choice.

More important than books for the reception of Sartre's thoughts were the newspapers and especially the magazines. J.-R. Debrix described the situation in France in December 1945 as follows: "[...] la firme Sartre et Cie domine le marché, toute concurrence écrasée [...] Chaque jour les camions de l'absurde sortent en files serrées des fabriques existentialistes"<sup>16</sup>. Because of the delay in translating Sartre's literary and philosophical oeuvre, journals were of particular importance abroad. *Partisan Review*, *The New Republic*, *The New Yorker*, and *The Nation* were important repeaters that spread Sartre's thought in America. An important journal in Sartre's new global world was Victoria Ocampo's *Sur* in Argentina, which published several of Sartre's works.

As for the newspapers, their influence cannot be overestimated. All the "scandals" around Sartre provided them with plenty of material with which to feed their readers in their home countries. In the United States, the newspapers were particularly influential. War correspondents in Paris eagerly picked up the latest news about Sartre. The image they spread, however, was more one of bohemian decadence; by doing so they often indirectly supported actions to limit the influence of existentialism.

The most influential channel<sup>17</sup>, especially in the early years on the Old Continent, was theater. The significance of Sartre's play can best be seen

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<sup>14</sup> W. KAUFMANN, *Existentialism and from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, New American Library, New York 1975, p. 45; A. STERN, *Sartre. His Philosophy and Existential Psychoanalysis*, Dell, New York 1967, p. 250.

<sup>15</sup> The term "repeaters" refers to persons forwarding messages, such as translators, stage and film directors, publishers and producers, journalists and critics, as well as professors and teachers at universities and schools.

<sup>16</sup> R. WILCOCKS, *Jean-Paul Sartre. A Bibliography of International Criticism*, Univ. Of Alberta Press, Edmonton 1975, p. 204.

<sup>17</sup> "Channels" are ways of communication. Sartre became famous for his communication through a multitude of channels: visits/lectures, books of philosophical and literary con-



in the prominent directors who staged Sartre's plays in the postwar years. Visconti staged *Huis clos* in Rome, Peter Brook *Huis clos*, *Morts sans sépulture*, and *La putain respectueuse* in London, and Gustav Gründgen and Jürgen Fehling *Les mouches* in Germany.

As overwhelming as the reception was in the theater, as reserved was it among Sartre's colleagues in philosophy. The Stalinists Roger Garaudy, Henri Lefebvre, Henri Mougin, and Georg Lukács criticized Sartre as a false prophet and a Nazi in disguise. Marginally better were the comments by non-Stalinist communists such as the Trotskyite Pierre Naville and Herbert Marcuse. Sartre's existentialism found its critics among bourgeois professors, too. One prominent member was the liberal-socialist Italian philosopher Norberto Bobbio who equated Sartre's existentialism with decadentism and amoralism.

Among those who commented on Sartre's philosophy were also his "fellow" existentialists. Heidegger's *Brief über den Humanismus* was a sharp critique of Sartre's psychologistic thinking. Jaspers criticized in his essay *Was ist Existentialismus?* Sartre's amoralist attitude and the "bad" influence he had, especially on adolescents and other young people. Sartre's philosophy found interest also among adherents to related philosophies, like the Christian existentialists Gabriel Marcel and Nikolay Berdyaev, the personalist Emmanuel Mounier, and Otto Friedrich Bollnow, a representative of the German *Lebensphilosophie*. However, interest did not mean support. Those who endorsed him included only a few, Jean Wahl being the most prominent.

A very special category of philosophers interested in Sartre's existentialism were philosophers that had fled the Germans and emigrated to the United States or Britain, many of them Jewish. They were familiar with continental philosophy, particularly with Heidegger and Jaspers. The publicity Sartre had gained right after the war helped them in their careers. Some of them played an important role as repeaters, e.g. Fritz Heinemann, Walter Kaufmann, Henri Peyre, and Alfred Stern. Peyre, not philosopher but professor of French literature, taught at Yale and was responsible for the dissemination of Sartre's thought in the U.S. via *Yale French Studies*.

This list of names cannot hide the fact that philosophical academia showed little interest in Sartre's thinking. Ayer, aged thirty-five, was an exception. Academia regarded Sartre's philosophy as "café philosophy"<sup>18</sup>. A second moment concerned the many references to Husserl, Heidegger,

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tent, films, essays/interviews in journals, newspapers, TV and radio broadcasts.

<sup>18</sup> FULTON, *Apostles of Sartre*, cit., p. 22.

and Hegel in *L'être et le néant*. Before the war, Sartre had moved primarily in circles that promoted exchanges between French and German philosophers, e.g. those of the journal *Recherches philosophiques*. After the war, the interest in German philosophy had waned considerably.

The third and most important point was that philosophy in the Anglo-Saxon and German worlds had developed completely differently from French philosophy since around 1900. Sartre and most of the French philosophy until 1970 still followed the scientific model that philosophy had to be based on sciences, be it primarily psychology, history, sociology, and/or biology. Around 1900, the neo-Kantians, the founders of analytic philosophy, as well as Husserl and Heidegger criticized this approach, and psychologism in particular, and advocated a concept of “pure philosophy”. While the scientific concepts of philosophy were still very popular outside academia, they had few supporters in the ivory tower of the universities.

## 2. 1950 to 1960 – *The Ebbing of the Existentialist Tsunami — From Philosophy and Literature to Politics*

1950 was a turning point for Sartre. He gave up reading philosophy almost completely and even most of literature. He concentrated instead on reading books on history, sociology, and ethnology. Over the next ten years, he published four dramas, a film scenario, a biography, and *Questions de méthode*, a major, albeit small, philosophical work. Sartre’s output, however, increasingly belonged to the category of political essays, although Sartre was never really interested in political ideologies. He judged political actions primarily from an ethical point of view, from his four major “No!” statement, to which he adhered from his early years: no to colonialism, to discrimination, to the militarization of the society, and to the bourgeois morality of authority and honor, family, heteronormativity, and money. This complex relationship with politics was further complicated by Merleau-Ponty’s departure in 1950. François Noudelmann’s book *Un tout autre Sartre* lets us hear Sartre’s frustration who wrote to his girlfriend during the time of cooperation with the Communists: “mon article sur les communistes est une merde [...] Si tu savais comme ça m’emmerde” and “la politique m’emmerde”<sup>19</sup>. However, Sartre continued to speak out on political issues because, according to his philosophical ethics, keeping silent is tantamount to supporting the status quo.

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<sup>19</sup> F. NOUDELNANN, *Un tout autre Sartre*, Gallimard, Paris 2020, pp. 28-29, 59.

During the Cold War, when France was fighting colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria, it was very difficult to remain silent. The Cold War made him rediscover an old value: the unity of Europe<sup>20</sup> on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Together with his anticolonialist attitude, this led him to his commitment to the cause of Henri Martin, his visit to the USSR after Stalin's death, his support for Algerian independence, but also his condemnation of the Soviet repression of the Hungarian uprising and the break with the Communists in 1956. After 1956, his contacts to Communists were limited to Poland, where de-Stalinization continued after 1956, and to Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia permitted the publication of at least a part of Sartre's literary work in the 1950s. The leading country in Eastern Europe in terms of Sartre's existentialism, however, became Poland, where not only the first version of *Questions de méthode* was published, but also several of his other philosophical texts.

The new message Sartre sent throughout the decade was consistently "Against colonialism, against a divided Europe". The message received, however, was quite different: "Sartre, the Communist (fellow-traveler)". Sartre's clashes with the Communists in the 1940s and to some extent during the period of cooperation in 1952/54-56, his break with the Communists in 1956 did not help to improve his reputation. For most of the non-Communist public on our side of the Iron Curtain, Sartre remained a Communist to the end of his life. Books like *L'opium des intellectuels* by Aron and *Les aventures de la dialectique* by Merleau-Ponty reinforced this image.

The reception of much of his work published in the 1950s was distorted. Although 95% of *Questions de méthode* were devoted to declaring that the state of Marxist philosophy was stale and that Marxism cannot be saved unless it adopts existentialism, only the statement at the beginning of the book that Marxism was the philosophy of that time was received. Thus, the message "Sartre, the communist" gained much weight compared to the existentialist narrative of the 1940s.

However, the existentialist narrative continued to prove very strong, especially in literature and art. In the U.S., influences can be found in the hipster and beatnik movements. In Britain, the philosopher and writer Iris Murdoch was strongly influenced by Sartre. Colin Wilson's *The Outsider*

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<sup>20</sup> Already in the first major text published by him, Sartre had written: «[...] l'Europe [...] le sur-Etat [...] réunirait des États dépourvus de la personnalité agressive» (J.-P. SARTRE, *La théorie de l'État dans la pensée Française d'aujourd'hui*, in «Revue Universitaire Internationale», 1, January 1927, pp. 36-37).

was another book that helped existentialism gain great influence among young Britons<sup>21</sup>. *The Cavern Club* in Liverpool, where the Beatles gave their first concert in 1961, was originally a place frequented especially by young existentialists.

An existentialist youth movement, called “Exis”, was also strong in Germany, particularly among high school students. In Italy, the influence of Sartre’s existentialism was notable in the field of film. Directors such as Michelangelo Antonioni and Federico Fellini were among those influenced by Sartre. In France, several of Sartre’s plays were made into films in the 1950s.

Sartre’s partial collaboration with the Communists opened at least some doors for existentialism in Communist Europe. *La putain respectueuse* was shown in Moscow in 1955. At the Soviets’ request, the play’s ending was changed to a positive one, like in Marcello Pagliero’s film. The situation in East Germany (GDR) was particular. Since books could still flow freely from Western to Eastern Germany, the GDR publishing house Aufbau-Verlag released a small volume of three plays in 1956, *Les mouches*, *La putain respectueuse*, and *Nekrassov*. In the same year, *Les sorcières de Salem* was produced as a French-GDR co-production.

Sartre’s success in the Middle East was remarkable. Cairo, Beirut, and Baghdad became centers of Arab existentialism, with representatives such as Taha Huseyn (from Egypt), Suhayl Idris who founded the magazine *al-Adab* modeled on *Les Temps Modernes* (from Lebanon), and Husayn Mardan (from Iraq)<sup>22</sup>. Arab existentialism was heavily influenced by Sartre’s second message “Commit Yourself”. A bohemian existentialist lifestyle developed especially in Baghdad. Half century later, the Iraqi writer Ali Badr described this atmosphere in his novel *Papa Sartre* (2001).

Latin America was another region where Sartre’s existentialism found wide reception in the 1950s. Argentina was again the forerunner on this continent. From 1953 to 1959, with *Contorno*, founded by Ismael Viñas, a new journal was on the market that appealed primarily to young intellectuals and focused on Sartre’s message of *engagement*<sup>23</sup>. One of the young

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<sup>21</sup> M. WOESSNER, *Angst Across the Channel*, in J. JUDAKEN, R. BERNASCONI (eds.), *Situating Existentialism*, Columbia Univ. Press, New York 2012, pp. 155-169.

<sup>22</sup> See Y. DI-CAPUA, *Arab Existentialism. An Invisible Chapter in the Intellectual History of Decolonization*, in «The American Historical Review», vol. 117, n. 4, 2012, pp. 1061-1091.

<sup>23</sup> A. P. SAVIGNANO, *A Brief History of the Reception of Sartre in Argentina*, in BETSCHART, WERNER, *Sartre and the International Impact of Existentialism*, cit., pp. 307-325.

Argentinians who eagerly read Sartre was Che Guevara<sup>24</sup>. Another young intellectual very much into Sartre's literary oeuvre was the Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa<sup>25</sup>. A third one was the Mexican Octavio Paz, who met Sartre when studying in Paris after the war. And finally, there was Colombian *nadaísmo* (nothing-ism), founded in 1958 by Gonzalo Arango, with its anti-establishment stance.

Existentialism made further progress in Far East Asia, too. Kuno Osamu and Tsurumi Shunsuke wrote in their 1956 book *Gendai Nihon no shiso* (*Contemporary Japanese Thought*) that the four major currents in modern Japanese thought were existentialism, materialism, nationalism, and pragmatism<sup>26</sup>. Among the writers close to Sartre's thought was Ōe Kenzaburō.

With the Communists coming to power in China in 1949, developments there more or less paralleled those in the Soviet Union. Although Mao refused to initiate a process of de-Stalinization, *La putain respectueuse* was translated into Chinese after Sartre's visit to China in 1955. However, it was the only work of Sartre's to receive this honor, and only with the same ending as in the Soviet Union.

While North Vietnam was almost fully closed to Sartre's thought – see Tran Duc Thao's sad fate –, the South offered more opportunities to spread Sartre's thought. Two of the major intellectual magazines, *Dai hoc* (*Higher learning*; Hue) and *Bach khoa* (*Encyclopedia*; Saigon) participated in this development. Nguyen Van Trung even attempted a synthesis between Sartre's existentialism and Buddhism.

Although Liliane Gaschet still published a book on Saint-Germain-des-Prés entitled *Ces gens de Sartre-Ville*, Sartre's dominance in France was no longer undisputed. The break with Merleau-Ponty and Camus and criticism by Aron were not the only signs of a change in intellectual tendency. Paul Nimier founded the literary movement *Les Hussards* in 1950, which clearly opposed Sartrean existentialism. Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Nouveau Roman* quickly developed into a literary movement critical of

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<sup>24</sup> Hilda Gadea, Guevara's wife 1955-1959, in her book *Ernesto*, cited in D.R. CAREFOOT, *Che Guevara. Existentialist*, diss., Florida State University, Tallahassee 1990, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup> M. VARGAS LLOSA, *The Mandarin*, in ID., *Making Waves (Contra viento y marea)*, Faber & Faber, London 1996, pp. 131-143.

<sup>26</sup> S. MÜLLER, *Begriffsverständnis und Rezeption der Existenzphilosophie in Japan unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Sartreschen Existentialismus*, in R.C. STEINECK, E.L. LANGE, P. KAUFMANN (eds.), *Begriff und Bild der modernen japanischen Philosophie*, Frommann-Holzboog, Stuttgart 2014, p. 235.

Sartrean existentialism. And last but not least, Claude Lévi-Strauss became the first important representative of structuralism.

Noise was very loud not only in the Communist and Catholic countries, but in the West in general. At the forefront of the international struggle against Sartre was the Congress for Cultural Freedom, an anticommunist propaganda group strongly supported by the CIA, with its various journals such as *Encounter*, *Preuves*, *Der Monat*, *Tempo Presente*, and *Cuadernos*.

As to philosophy, the situation was mixed. On the one hand, the 1950s was the decade of the translation of *L'être et le néant* into other languages. The Spanish translation in Argentina in 1948 was followed by those into German in 1952, English and Japanese in 1956. The discussion about Sartre's first major philosophical work intensified outside France. Enzo Paci in Italy and Leo Gabriel and Justus Streller in Austria and Germany took on important roles. In the United States and Britain, there were many women and foreigners: Barnes, Maxine Greene, Marjorie Grene, Wahl, Kaufmann, Stern, and Heinemann, but also Wilfrid Desan. Important introductions to Sartre's philosophy were published in Japan by Takeuchi Yoshirō, the translator of *L'être et le néant*, and in Argentina by Rafael Virasoro. In France, Roger Garaudy deserves special mention with his *Perspectives de l'homme*.

The main innovation in *Questions de méthode* was the regressive-progressive method. Drawing on Jaspers's distinction between explaining and understanding, Sartre declared that it is up to the sciences – psychoanalysis, Western sociology, and Marxism – to explain the individuals and up to philosophy to understand them by applying Sartre's existentialist psychoanalysis. This message, so important for the discussion of the role of philosophy in our society, unfortunately completely failed to reach its receivers.

As important the 1950s were for the spread of existentialism in the world, the content of its reception of his new messages was abysmal. It was a decade of distorted and failed messages. Sartre's message "Against colonialism, against a divided Europe" was received by the public in a completely distorted form: "Sartre, the Communist (fellow-traveler)". And the one great message so central to Sartre's thinking about the core objective of philosophy was not received at all.

### 3. 1960 to 1975 – Political Activism in a Competitive Time

The 1960s started with the first volume of *Critique de la raison dialectique* and *Les mots*. Apart from the release of the *Flaubert*, the other publications that saw the light of day in these fifteen years between 1960

and 1975 were predominantly political writings. Sartre's political message, at least in the first ten years, remained the same: "Against (neo-)colonialism, against a divided Europe". His fight against the Algerian War and the Vietnam War (as executive president of the Russell Tribunal) is still remembered today. His visits to Cuba and Brazil in 1960 were spectacular events. In his struggle against a divided Europe, Sartre became vice president of COMES, the *Comunità Europea degli scrittori*, an association of European writers dominated mainly by Italian writers.

In Cuba, Sartre spoke with Fidel Castro and Guevara. The book *Sartre on Cuba*, a special edition of Sartre's essays on Cuba published for the United States, was a hot seller on the tables of students' rallies in America. Another text that found great favor with radical American students was Sartre's preface to Fanon's *Les damnés de la terre*. The more violent the student protests became around 1968–1970, the more followers Sartre had.

The main theme that dominated the 1960s until 1968 was Sartre's relationship to Marxism. Among the important contributors to the discussion were Pietro Chiodi with *Sartre e il marxismo* and Aron particularly with *Histoire et dialectique de la violence*. The representative of the Communists, including Garaudy, criticized Sartre because his conception of the class as a series and his emphasis on the concept of scarcity undermined central concepts of Marxist theory. However, not only the orthodox Marxists denied Sartre being a Marxist, but also the heterodox, e.g. the Polish philosopher Adam Schaff, the Croatian Danilo Pejović, and a French collective in the journal *La Nouvelle critique* led by André Gisselbrecht<sup>27</sup>. Regardless of the fact that orthodox and heterodox communists denied Sartre's qualification as a Marxist, this discourse strengthened the narrative of "Sartre, the Communist (fellow-traveler)".

Until the second half of the 1960s, the reception of Sartre's thought still made significant progress in certain countries. From 1961 onward, a veritable wave of translations hit Turkey<sup>28</sup>. *L'être et le néant* was translated into Arabic in 1965. With Lutfi al-Khuli in Egypt, Simha Flapan in Israel, and Ali Shariati in Iran, Sartrean existentialism was able to broaden its footprint in the Middle East. All three – like the Vietnamese Tran Duc Thao and the Mexican Octavio Paz – belonged to a special group of repeaters, to those who had once lived in Paris and later spread at least a part of

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<sup>27</sup> A. BETSCHART, *Sartre was Not a Marxist*, in «Sartre Studies International», vol. 25, n. 2, 2019, pp. 77-78.

<sup>28</sup> See A. CENGİZ, *The Journey of Sartrean Existentialism into Turkey*, in BETSCHART, WERNER, *Sartre and the International Impact of Existentialism*, cit., pp. 231-235.

the existentialist messages in their native countries. In Moscow in 1967, a volume was printed that contained all but two of Sartre's plays. *Huis clos* was still considered too anti-social and *Les mains sales* too anti-communist. *Les mains sales*, however, was printed in Czechoslovakia in 1967. In the period leading up to the Prague Spring, many of Sartre's books were published there. After 1968, Sartre was banned again as he had been in 1948 after the publication of two volumes of *Les chemins de la liberté*. Another country where existentialism made significant progress in the 1960s was Japan. Sartre's 1966 trip to Japan gave it a great boost, particularly because of the discussion about the responsibility of the intellectual<sup>29</sup>.

The dominant position of existentialism in the early 1960s quickly eroded. Sartre, who until then had not felt challenged by structuralism, had to clarify his position in an interview with *L'Arc* in 1966. Even in remote corners of the world, philosophers were suddenly more interested in structuralism than existentialism. By the first half of the 1970s, structuralism had ousted existentialism as the philosophy of reference in Paris.

Another major threat to Sartre's existentialist philosophy was Marxism. Ten years after *Questions de méthode*, Marxism was livelier than ever before in the previous thirty years. Althusser in France, Marcuse in America, and Adorno in Germany had more influence on the leaders of the '68 generation than Sartre. Many of them had started off with reading Sartre in high school, but in their rebellious years at the university they were much closer to Marxism. The existentialist culture with jazz and black clothing that was still popular among college students in the early 1960s, yielded to hippie culture and pop/psychedelic music.

Very dramatic was Sartre's loss of the Middle East. In March '67, Sartre was still able to visit Egypt and Israel to try to restart discussion between Arabs and Israelis. After the Six-Day War, Sartre's existentialist thought lost most of its ground to Arab nationalism and Marxism/Soviet communism<sup>30</sup>. Marxism also gained the upper hand in other regions of the world. This was especially true in Latin America where Castro's revolution sparked a whole series of revolutionary movements.

In the years between 1968 and 1970, Sartre had fallen into a void. In *Itinerary of a thought*, an interview with the Marxist *New Left Review* from London, he attempted to at least partially close the gap with Marxism. Meanwhile Sartre had already moved closer to a more Camusian position

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<sup>29</sup> M. SUZUKI, N. SAWADA, *An Intellectual Star Remembered*, in J.-P. BOULÉ, B. O'DONOHUE (eds.), *Jean-Paul Sartre*, Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle 2011, pp. 157-179.

<sup>30</sup> Y. DI-CAPUA, *No Exit*, Univ of Chicago Press, Chicago 2018, pp. 229-249.



in his notes for the Cornell lectures, when he accepted “ethical radicalism” as an acceptable alternative to his earlier, more compromising stand on the problem of ends and means. From his defense of Joseph Brodsky to his joint action in favor of the Boat people in 1979, Sartre became more and more a defender of individual human rights. Even his commitment to the extreme left was, at its core, an *engagement* for their right to publish their opinion. What defined the image of Sartre in the early 1970s, however, was not his advocacy of human rights, but the iconic image of Sartre standing on a drum talking to the Renault workers at Billancourt. “Sartre, the Communist” now became “Sartre, the Maoist” for many of his critics.

The fact that Sartre, especially in *On a raison de se révolter*, distanced himself from Benny Lévy’s communist view that the political struggle was one between bourgeoisie and proletariat, and that he supported the struggle of feminists, gays, ethnic minorities, regionalists, and even the first ecologists did not matter. *On a raison de se révolter* was hardly read. By the first half of the 1970s, the reception of Sartre’s thought was at an all-time low since 1945. When Sartre’s most voluminous work, the *Flaubert/L’Idiot de la famille*, was published, there was very little response.

In France, Sartre’s existentialist philosophy has been under strong pressure since the mid-1960s, first from structuralism, then from Marxism, and since the early 1970s from poststructuralist, postmodernist philosophy with Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Gilles Deleuze, and Jean Baudrillard. The French-speaking Sartre scholars produced less and less philosophical texts of interest. André Gorz, who in the 1960s looked like Sartre’s potential successor, drifted away and became an important contributor to the new ecological movement. As the failed plan for a TV series with Antenne 2 under the title *Sartre dans le siècle* shows, Sartre had again become a target of considerable pressure from the bourgeois right.

On the other hand, Sartre became more and more the object of historiography. The leading figures in this respect were Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka. They published *Les écrits de Sartre* and *Un théâtre de situations*. And there was Contat’s masterful interview with Sartre *Autoportrait à soixante-dix ans*: interesting as it was, it attracted little public notice.

The reception of Sartre’s work was not negative everywhere. In Italy, where Sartre maintained good contacts to the communist dissidents of *Il Manifesto* and particularly with Rossana Rossanda, the impact was less adverse. There were even some countries where Sartre’s thinking gained a new foothold. When Sartre traveled to Portugal after the Carnation Revolution, his visit received extensive coverage although Sartre had been taboo until then. Even in Australia, a country that had not previously

taken much interest in existentialism, ABC, the national TV network, broadcast a series on existentialism that included interviews with Sartre.

The major exception to this rapidly declining interest in Sartre's thought with regard to philosophy was Great Britain and especially the United States. The British philosopher Mary Warnock published *The Philosophy of Sartre and Existentialist Ethics*, Hazel Barnes, the American translator of *L'être et le néant*, a book with a similar title: *An Existentialist Ethics*. In these years leading up to 1975, we can already learn the names of several U.S. contributors who became famous Sartre scholars after Sartre's death in 1980: Ron Aronson, William L. McBride, and Ronald Santoni.

As for the state of reception of Sartre's thought in 1975, after thirty years as public intellectual, the findings are mixed. In its first five years, the existentialist narrative was launched with the force of an earthquake, which caused a tsunami that reached the remotest corners of our globe only in the early 1980s. Since the first half of the 1950s, however, the narrative of Sartre as a Communist gained more and more in importance. Sartre failed in conveying new positive messages. There were several reasons for this: He devoted more time to politics; what he wrote was partly poorly written (e.g. the *Critique*); he did not finish his writings (*Critique II*, his ethics of the 1960s). The result was that by 1975 Sartre was still a person fit for a newspaper headline, but the interest in his thought had become very low.

#### 4. 1975 to 1990 – Historiography and Marxist Existentialism

In 1973, Sartre suffered a stroke and went almost completely blind. Because of this health problems, interviews were the only means available to him for communicating his ideas. Some of the interviews received wide attention, e.g. *Sartre. Un film*, produced by Astruc and Contat, and *L'espoir maintenant*. The latter even caused a major uproar. Oliver Todd called it a "détournement d'un vieillard". It was not new that Sartre, who did not like to contradict others, responded to Lévy mainly in ways that minimized friction with him. However, this does not fully explain the reactions; apparently many of the critics were not aware of what Sartre had said in the five years before his death.

In fact, many of the important interviews given by Sartre in his last years were originally published in languages other than French. One of the major interviews was the one given for the book *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* in the Schilpp series. Sartre presented his views on the relation-

ship between philosophy and psychology and between his *Critique* and Marxism, answers that contradict much of what many Sartre scholars still say today<sup>31</sup>. Since most of Sartre's interviews between 1973 and 1980 were not read, neither the Sartre community nor the general public noticed his change from a "Marxist" to a self-avowed anarchist<sup>32</sup>.

After Sartre's death in 1980, Sartre scholarship again focused on historiography and the posthumous publication of Sartre's texts. Within five years, several important texts were published: a long interview Beauvoir conducted with Sartre in Rome in 1974, Sartre's war diary of 1939–1940, his *Cahiers pour une morale* of 1947/48, the Freud scenario, and the second volume of the *Critique*. A milestone in the field of historiography was Annie Cohen-Solal's biography *Sartre* of 1985.

And congresses were held and organizations founded. While Sartre was still alive, a colloque entitled "Sartre aujourd'hui" was organized in Cérisy. The *Groupe d'études sartriennes* was founded in the wake of this congress and registered as an association in 1985. Related to it are two important publications, the *Études sartriennes* (published since 1984) and *L'année sartrienne* (published since 1987, first as *Bulletin d'information du Groupe d'Études Sartriennes*). In the United States, the North American Sartre Society was founded in 1985. In Germany, Traugott König, the most important German translator and editor of Sartre's works, organized an international congress held at the Goethe University Frankfurt in 1987. Over one thousand persons attended it, more than twice as many as at the 1983 Adorno congress.

Some of the newly published texts by Sartre were quickly translated, especially Sartre's letters to Beauvoir, his war diaries, and *Freud*. Sartre's death and the publication of unknown texts revived the interest in Sartre. Rowohlt of Germany had several books retranslated and by 2000 was able to present Sartre's oeuvre on a par with Gallimard. In Yugoslavia, Sartre's collected works were released in ten volumes in 1981. And there was even a new name on the list of countries reached by the existentialist tsunami: China. After the Communist Party had condemned the Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976, a real "Sartre fever"<sup>33</sup> broke out. Although the

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<sup>31</sup> J.-P. SARTRE, *An Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre* (1975), in P.A. SCHILPP (ed.), *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, Open Court, La Salle 1991, p. XX.

<sup>32</sup> See A. BETSCHART, *From Marxist to Anarchist. Sartre 1972–1980*, <<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/alfred-betschart-from-marxist-to-anarchist>> (last accessed: 10.08.2023).

<sup>33</sup> SH.-M. SHIH, *Is the Post- in Postsocialism the Post- in Posthumanism?*, in «Social Text», vol. 30, n. 110, 1/2012, pp. 39–40.

Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign of 1983, which attacked bourgeois decadence involving pornography, Sartre, and Western dress, had a brief negative impact, the “Sartre fever” continued until the 1989 suppression of the Tiananmen Square democracy movement.

As for the narratives, these still were the existentialist one of the second half of the 1940s and the communist one of the 1950s. However, the period from the mid-1970s to 1990 also brought us a new narrative, the narrative of “Marxist existentialism”. The main authors were Mark Poster with *Existential Marxism in Postwar France* and Thomas Flynn with *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism*. Poster introduced us to Sartre as an important member of a network of philosophers who sought to combine Marxism with the individual’s existential view. Flynn, in turn, presented us Sartre’s Marxist existentialism as “an authentic, though ‘revisionist’ Marxism”<sup>34</sup>, emphasizing in particular the role of the collective subject. As interesting as this Marxist-existentialist narrative was initially, its prospects became very limited with the collapse of the Soviet-style system in 1989/91.

##### 5. After 1990 – Looking for a New Narrative

After the collapse of the Soviet system, the reputation of having been a Communist became a mark of Cain. Sartre was one its main victims. He was “banned” from areas where a neutral observer would expect him at least to be mentioned: in theories about conscience, the lived body (*Leib*), the mind-body problem, in social ontology, and radical democracy theory. The difficult situation of Sartrean existentialism today is confirmed by the fact that Gallimard stopped publishing *Les Temps Modernes* in 2018. We find ourselves in a situation where Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, Camus, even the Nazi Heidegger are more respected than Sartre.

Today’s negative attitude toward Sartre is astonishing. With his three messages of the existentialist narrative – “You Are Free, Therefore Choose!,” “Commit Yourself!,” and “No Discrimination!” – Sartre anticipated the spirit of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in a way no other philosopher did. In a society where self-actualization is a general tendency, where people show a lot of commitment and where discrimination against women, LGBTQI+ and BIPOC is fought against, one would expect Sartre to be one of the

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<sup>34</sup> T.R. FLYNN, *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism*, Univ. of Chicago Press, Chicago 1984, p. XIII.

most renowned philosophers. Obviously the fourth message “Sartre, the Communist (fellow-traveler)” was stronger.

The French/Belgian community of Sartre scholars responded to this difficult situation the same way as in the previous fifteen years by publishing posthumous works and issuing very useful publications that help Sartre scholars in their daily work. Among the most important posthumous works were *Écrits de jeunesse*, two texts about the ethics of the 1960s – *Morale et histoire* and *Les racines de l'éthique* –, two important film scenarios, Sartre's master thesis of 1927, and, last but not least, the anthology *Les Mots et autres écrits autobiographiques*. Additionally, important resources were published such as the *Dictionnaire Sartre* and the list of books Sartre borrowed from the ENS library 1924-1928.

The 1990s were still, at least in part, a period of expansion. The U.K. Sartre Society, the Sartre Society in Germany, and the Italian *Gruppo Ricerca Sartre* were founded. Similar activities were also seen in Japan, Argentina, and Brazil. With «Sartre Studies International» (founded in 1995) and «Studi Sartriani» (in digital form since 2018), there are two journals open to international publications. However, we must also note that several Sartre societies fell into a crisis and that the number of books on Sartre has been declining for at least the last decade. Unfortunately, most of the Sartre texts published after 1990 have not been translated.

Sartre's success was due in no small part to the fact that he communicated through multiple channels. Today, with the exception of Germany, where Sartre's theater is still popular, communication is limited mainly to the channel of books. Publications of interest to a broader intellectual public, such as Sarah Bakewell's *At the Existentialist Café*, are an exception. Today, it is not helpful to a young philosopher's academic career to focus on Sartre. His “scientific” approach and preference for philosophizing about the people's daily life are not in line with prevailing academic standards. The communist narrative has turned into a social taboo that, like most other taboos, is rarely questioned. To get young philosophers back to Sartre, we obviously need a new narrative.

In the last thirty years, numerous attempts have been made to develop a new narrative. In France and Belgium, Jean-Marc Mouillie and Vincent de Coorebyter published books on Sartre and phenomenology. Alexandre Feron's recent book *Le Moment marxiste de la phénoménologie française* complements them. Others who paid special attention to Sartre before 1940 and especially outside phenomenology were Coorebyter with *Sartre avant la phénoménologie*, Alain Flajoliet with *La première philosophie de Sartre*, and more recently Grégory Cormann with his anthology *Sartre*.

*Une anthropologie politique 1920-1980*. A more radical approach was taken by François Noudelmann in his book *Un tout autre Sartre*, in which he attacks several of the conventional certainties about Sartre.

Without the burden of editing posthumous texts, Anglo-Saxon Sartre scholars were able to devote more time to developing existing narratives and exploring new ones. Aronson, Flynn, and Elizabeth C. Butterfield (*Sartre and Posthumanist Humanism*) worked on the narrative of a Marxist existentialism. McBride's *Sartre's Political Theory* also deserves mention in this context.

Existentialist ethics has a long tradition in the discussion of Sartre's philosophy in the United States and the United Kingdom. David Detmer, in his work *Freedom as a Value*, attempted to link Sartre's ethics to an objective value ethics. Thomas C. Anderson's *Sartre's Two Ethics* took a similar line. T. Storm Heter in *Sartre's Ethics of Engagement* and Jonathan Webber in *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre* argued for virtue ethics, with Heter additionally proposing mutual recognition as the main criterion and Webber advocating a Sartrean theory of character.

In the last thirty years, several other possible narratives have seen the light of day. George Pattison and Kate Kirkpatrick have attempted to connect Sartre with religion (in *The Mystical Sources of Existentialist Thought*). Authors like Lewis R. Gordon, Jonathan Judaken, and Robert Bernasconi produced several interesting texts about Sartre and Black existentialism, the Jewish question, and antiracism. Matthew Ally's book *Ecology and Existence* (2019) sought to combine Sartre and ecology.

As diverse as the various approaches to Sartre are, no new narrative has emerged that could inspire Sartre studies and lead new, young scholars to engage more with Sartre and his thought. However, the numerous new publications of previously unpublished Sartre texts by French and Belgian scholars have laid promising foundation for a new narrative, a new narrative Sartre studies so desperately need<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> See A. BETSCHART, *Deconstructing Sartre*, in «Sartre Studies International», 1, 2022, pp. 99-101.