SARTRE, EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE NATURE OF NEUROSIS

Considering the entire scope of Sartre's work from *Being and Nothingness* to *Saint Genet* it seems quite clear that a phenomenon dealt with time and again is that of what amounts to the neurotic personality. For whether one is concerned with what is by now the famous waiter case from the section of *Being and Nothingness* dealing with bad faith, or the type of behavior exhibited by Mathieu—the anti-hero of Sartre's novel trilogy—or Genet, it is clear that all these characters for Sartre share a number of distinct behavioral traits in common whereby their respective realities can be distorted or avoided. Specifically, all are rigidly identified with their particular roles and each acts as if, to adapt Sartre's terminology from the first case, he has realized or attained the "being-in-itself" of the cafe waiter[1], the volitionless petit bourgeois intellectual, or the writer as thief and paederast. That is, each individual fixates on a role so much so that it is thereby possible to avoid having to directly cope with the broader scope of a reality or contingency which, he himself inchoately fears, would otherwise overwhelm him.[2]

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[1]Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'être et le néant: essai d'ontologie phénoménologique* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1968), p. 100. Henceforth BN. Also *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, translated by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), p. 60. Henceforth BN. I have kept to the English translations except where I felt that changes were necessary. In what follows BN is cited before EN for convenience.

[2]I have discussed this issue in an article entitled "Gestalt Mechanisms and Believing Beliefs: Sartre's Analysis of the Phenomenon of Bad Faith," *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, Vol. 18, No. 3, October, 1987.

Intuitively, it would certainly seem reasonable to call the conduct of such individuals neurotic and concomitantly—given that they typify so much of his characterization of human behavior—note that this type of action therefore plays a central role in Sartre's thought overall. Yet, ironically, in none of his works are we ever given anything like an explicit definition of what exactly is meant by neurosis. The notion of bad faith is of course analyzed in detail and will in fact be seen to form part of the basis on which a fuller analysis of evasive and self-destructive action can be given. But in and of itself this phenomenon simply cannot account for the more complicated scenarios that are especially developed after *Being and Nothingness*. More specifically, this idea simply cannot account for the cyclic variability of mood with accompanying intense and almost manic depressive behavioral changes that Sartre sees as having been characteristic of both Genet and Baudelaire.

What all of the above therefore implies is that it will be necessary to extrapolate beyond what is given to arrive at a definition or precise explanation of neurosis. In addition, given Sartre's protracted criticism of Freud in *Being and Nothingness* and that his approach to depth psychological matters is going to be existential, it follows that any explanation of the idea in question is going to have to deviate strongly from its orthodox psychoanalytic counterpart, minimally given the latter's deterministic implications for human action.

Where therefore are we to turn to start our investigation? A most suitable text for this purpose is *Baudelaire*, for this is one of Sartre's first works explicitly devoted to a depth psychological analysis. Moreover, the precise fact of its being an early work in this genre is advantageous since the theory and principles at stake are stated plainly without the added complications of a later work such as that of *Saint Genet*, where previously nascent moral and political themes are greatly elaborated on. In particular, there are a number of features of Baudelaire's behavior which will be of especial significance for our purposes, viz. the type of extreme displacement of mood noted earlier and a commensurate emphasis on action per se, as opposed to the more mentalistic or cerebral milieu in which orthodox analysis finds its place. For the sake of convenience what follows will be divided into two sections.

SECTION ONE

A good guiding principle for our investigation is the crucially important statement in *Being and Nothingness* that, ". . . the original bond with the Other first arises in connection with the relation between my body and the Other's body. . . ."[3] Not only is this dramatic claim worth following up in and of its own right but, to iterate, it also shows us that any viable Sartrean psychoanalytic procedure is going to have to be able to directly emphasize the role of the body in human conduct, counter to the emphasis on *la vie mentale* or the type of intellectualism characteristic of orthodox Freudian theory.

This stress on the role of the body in understanding human behavior can be immediately elaborated on when Sartre explains how it is that, "[m]y body [can be] designated as alienated."[4] There is, he in effect tells us, a profound difference depending on whether I apprehend myself as an active, lived body, i.e., *Leib*, on the one hand, or mere anatomical entity or *Korper*, on the other.[5] As regards the latter, this is what is experienced when I am object for the Other as subject, but in such a case I, as embodied consciousness, am alienated not only insofar as I am an object for this Other, but also insofar as I can never in principle gain the same perspective he has of me; the one precisely by virtue of which I am an object for him. I can of course intellectually attempt to grasp it:

> But it is on principle out of reach, and all the acts which I perform in order to appropriate it to myself escape me in turn and are fixed at a distance from me as my body-for-the-Other. . . . This is why the effort of the shy man after he has recognized the uselessness of these attempts will be to suppress his body-for-the-Other. When he longs 'not to have a body anymore,' to be 'invisible,' etc., it is not his body-for-himself which he wants to annihilate, but this inapprehensible dimension of the body-alienated.[6]

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[3]Sartre, BN, p 361. (EN, p. 428.)

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 353. (*Ibid.*, p. 420.)

[5]I have discussed these ideas in articles entitled "Sartre on Perception and the World," *The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, Vol. 14, No. 2, May, 1983; and "Sartre, Hodological Space and the Existence of Others," *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. XIV, 1984.

[6]*Ibid.*, p. 353. (*Ibid.*, p. 421.)

This same emphasis on wanting to be rid of my body as object for the Other is also discussed by Laing in *The Divided Self*, a work written from a distinctly Sartrean point of view. The similarity here between Sartre and Laing is interesting, but even more significant for our purposes is the fact that it leads directly to a crucially important definition of neurosis that the latter gives; one which is developed within a specifically existential context and that will be seen to fit perfectly within the former's conceptual frame of reference.

Thus, in a chapter where Laing deals with a characterization of self-consciousness, we are given the following description written by a then twelve-year-old girl who attempted to deal with her anxiety in the following terms:

> I . . . had to walk to my father's shop through a large park which was a long, dreary walk. I suppose, too, that I was rather scared. I didn't like it, especially when it was getting dark. I started to play a game to help to pass the time. You know how as a child you count the stones or stand on the crosses on the pavement—well, I hit on this way of passing the time. *It struck me that if I stared long enough at the environment that I would blend with it and disappear just as if the place was empty and I had disappeared. It is as if you get yourself to feel you don't know who your are or where you are.* To blend into the scenery so to speak. Then, you are scared of it because it begins to come on without encouragement. I would just be walking along and felt that I had blended with the landscape. Then I would get frightened and repeat my name over and over again to bring me back to life, so to speak.[7]

Although in principle the same, this instance is far more extreme than the one discussed by Sartre insofar as the young girl actually attempted to become invisible or even rid herself of her body, unlike the case of the shy man who merely wished for such. But, it may be asked, who is it that she is trying to be invisible from? Noting that the girl is in this case object for an undifferentiated but experientially indisputable presence as subject, the answer here parallels one given by Sartre earlier in *Being and Nothingness*. Thus we can recall a variation of the famous case in which I am frozen by the Other's look on being caught out peering through a key hole—so that here too I become object for the Other as subject. Specifically, in the instance to be considered, I suddenly feel myself being observed in a compromising position. A wave of shame sweeps over me and immediately I wheel round, only to find that I was mistaken and that no one

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[7]R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 110.

is in fact present and looking at me. Far from being assuaged, however, Sartre notes that the Other's presence can still be very real to me so that if I continue peeking:

> . . . I shall feel my heart beat fast, and I shall be alert for the slightest noise, the slightest creaking of the steps. Far from having disappeared with my first alarm the Other is present everywhere, below me, above me, in the neighboring rooms, and I continue to profoundly feel my being-for-the-Other . . . nor do the distances cease to unfold towards me from the stairway where someone 'could' be, from this dark corner where a human presence 'could hide itself.[8]

How therefore are we to account for this aorist but very much distinct presence? That is, who is it that I sense as being everywhere and why is it that I experience this pervasive presence so strongly in spite of clear intellectual awareness of a literal absence?

The answer depends on what Sartre has to say about the development of self awareness and how the child comes to this state as the result of a first explicit experiential schism between what now emerges as self over against or unlike the parent or Other.[9] I have discussed this phenomenon elsewhere[10] but for present purposes it suffices to note that a still inchoate but growing sense of alienation from the parent as a form of Absolute finally erupts with the emergence of a first focussed sense of self. The child's experience, Sartre tells us, is however one which occurs in what can best be thought of as a privative mode, in the sense that there is no emergence of a totally independent entity *de novo*. Rather the experience is one of not being the parent; or put more exactly, the being of this new self is constituted in terms of its not being that of the Absolute now turned absolute Other.

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[8]Sartre, *Ibid.*, p. 277. (*Ibid.*, pp. 336-337.)

[9]So see Jean-Paul Sartre, *Baudelaire* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1985), pp. 18-27. Also *Baudelaire*, translated by Martin Turnell (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1950), pp. 16-23. I have kept to the English translations except where I felt changes were absolutely necessary. In what follows, references will be given first to the French and then the English text.

[10]Adrian Mirvish, "Childhood, Subjectivity and Hodological Space: A Reconstruction of Sartre's View of Existential Psychoanalysis," *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, forthcoming.

If it is however the case that the very genesis of self awareness—always somewhat traumatic according to Sartre[11]—occurs as a direct function of the presence of what is still very much an overwhelming Other, then it is reasonable to expect that this experience remains latent and able to be revived under relatively traumatic circumstances. But what this in turn implies not only for Sartre's keyhole example but for Laing's case of the young girl in the park as well—i.e., both cases in which the I is object for the Other as subject—is that, long after early childhood, I am sometimes able to be confronted with contingency as so confounding or frightening that I am moved to reexperience the phenomenon of privative subjectivity. That is, as adult I am able to be suddenly confronted with forms of contingency which result in a regression to the initial state of privative subjectivity. And it is in this type of regressive state that I once again experience my own presence as a mere function of an overwhelming or absolute Other, whether this Other be literally present or not.

Moreover, there is no reason to think that the shy man of the additional case from *Being and Nothingness* examined earlier would also not, *mutatis mutandis*, have a similar type of experience. Thus recall that Sartre wrote that:

> . . . the effort of the shy man after he has recognized the uselessness of [the attempt to overcome his alienation form the Other] will be to suppress his body-for-the-Other. When he longs 'not to have a body any more,' to be 'invisible,' etc., it is not his body-for-himself which he wants to annihilate, but this inapprehensible dimension of the body-alienated.

That is, there is every reason to suppose that this individual, as in the keyhole example and that of the young girl, will sometimes be possessed by the wish to be invisible even in the case where an intrusive Other is not literally present; where this phenomenon too can be explained in terms of a regressive manifestation of initial subjectivity as private.

The above sketch of the emergence of subjectivity in childhood is important, since—for cases in which I as adult am object for the Other as subject—it is this early experience that enables us to understand how the presence of the Other as either aorist or literal can indeed persist to play a crucial constitutive role in my immediate experience *qua* self. And this whether

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[11]So see, for example, Sartre, *Baudelaire*, p. 23. (p. 20.)

one is dealing with a normal reaction in the keyhole example, a neurotic one vis-à-vis the shy man or even an instance bordering on psychosis in the case of the young girl.

We are as yet however still bereft of a definition of neurosis. Or, to put the matter in more significant terms, it is still not at all clear how on a Sartrean paradigm one is to phenomenologically capture what exactly constitutes neurotic behavior as this is manifest long after the genesis of initial self-awareness. It is important therefore to note that immediately after describing the case of the young girl, Laing continues by noting that, in terms of existential psychoanalysis, the principle at stake here, ". . . is that when the risk is loss of being, the defence is to lapse into a state of non-being. . . ."[12] He then goes on immediately to quote what he takes to be Tillich's exact equivalent formulation according to which, "[n]eurosis is the way of avoiding non-being by avoiding being."[13] What is important here for present purposes is that we thus finally have an explicit definition of neurosis for cases in which, as object for the Other as subject, I am alienated as embodied consciousness. Or, more exactly, insofar as I am alienated in experiencing myself as body-for-the-Other.

Returning to the examples of the shy man and the young girl, it can now be seen how both these individuals are alienated in just the mode described. For it is precisely in the light of being thus alienated as object for an overwhelmingly present Other as subject that there exists for both "the risk of a loss of being." And hence the subsequent defense reactions which go so far as to involve the attempt or wish to lose one's body; i.e., to lose a sense of autonomy and identity by in fact—given that we are embodied creatures—"lapsing into a state of non-being."

Thus as opposed to the mentalism of Freud, we are concerned here with a definition of neurosis which fits perfectly within a Sartrean framework and which in some way clearly centers around the existence of an individual in

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[12]Laing, *The Divided Self*, p. 111. The precise role played by bad faith in the phenomenon of neurosis will be made clear in what is to follow.

[13]*Ibid*. Thus although *The Divided Self* deals with psychosis, we are nevertheless also provided with a definition of neurosis. Laing's point would of course be that there is merely a continuum involved here, and that the usually sharp dichotomy made between neurosis and psychosis is not at all a justifiable one. For purposes of the present discussion, the viability of this contentious claim need not however be an issue of concern.

relation to others *qua* embodied entity or organism. What in more precise terms is however involved in this sense of being embodied? It is this issue that needs to be immediately attended to in the section that follows before further developing the notion of neurosis.

SECTION TWO

There is fortunately a means whereby an analysis of what it means to be embodied can be developed in both rigorous and general terms, if we turn to the notion of hodological space as this was developed by Gestalt psychologist Kurt Lewin. I have shown elsewhere how this idea has profoundly influenced Sartre, both as regards the whole issue of so-called "concrete relations with others" and vis-à-vis its significance for aspects of existential psychoanalysis.[14] For present purposes, though, it suffices to note that on this view there is a dynamic relation that obtains between an agent and its environment. Specifically, the individual is characterized by means of goal directed activity in terms of which a world is partially delineated. Lewin points out that not only can objects functioning as goals—or "valences" as he calls them—be positive, in which case the agent is attracted to them, but also negative, in which case they operate as entities to be avoided. In addition, objects are utilized not as material entities, intellectually apprehended in Cartesian space, but functionally, as tools or utensils. In the process of moving to or away from the valences, moreover, paths or "vectors" are traced out which are a function of direction and strength on the part of the subject. Note however that for any given period of time valences can change in value or indeed can move out of focus altogether, as they shift from figure to ground, depending on the subject's needs. In this way, to the extent that such needs and the means of attaining them, or avoiding negative valences, fluctuate constantly during the normal process of experience, vectors are constantly generated by the subject relative to changing valences. Valences and vectors together constitute what Lewin calls a "field of force," so that the normal subject

[14]See the second of the articles mentioned in footnote 5 and that mentioned in footnote 10.

generates a constantly fluctuating field of force during the course of interacting with his or her environment.[15]

Thus instead of there being absolute or fixed sets of coordinates as in Cartesian space, hodological space is generated relative to each subject and is constantly fluid. Moreover, functionally considered, the subject as embodied is not merely an anatomical or physiological entity—and one thus possessed of clearly delineable boundaries—but rather literally coextensive with its range of possibilities and field of force. This is why Sartre writes:

> My body is everywhere . . . [it] always extends across the tool which it utilizes . . . it is at the end of the cane on which I lean . . . it is at the end of the telescope which shows one the stars; it is . . . in the whole house, for it is my adaption to these tools.[16]

This idea of what Sartre terms "the lived body"[17] not having set boundaries, as would be the case in Cartesian terms, but rather being coextensive with its field of force, can now be seen to be of absolutely fundamental importance for our purposes. Thus recall that both in the neurotic case of the shy man who wishes that his body would disappear and in the far more extreme one of the young girl who actually attempted to make her body disappear, the individual is reacting under the influence of the overwhelming presence of an Other, whether literal or aorist. These phenomena can now however be captured far more accurately in hodological terms if it is noted that being dominated by the presence—which in this instance is to say the field of force—of the Other, does not imply a literal Euclidean covering or a type of set theoretic class inclusion. Rather, what occurs in the two cases in question is that the values of the valences of the individuals' fields of force come to be dominated by the alien presence of an Other, i.e., they become increasingly a function of an Other's presence, so that the experiences of autonomy and identity are both thereby undermined. The reaction to this extreme state of

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[15]This material is discussed by Lewin throughout the course of his text *A Dynamic Theory of Personality: Selected Papers* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1935).

[16]Sartre, BN, p. 325. (EN, p. 389.)

[17]See footnote 5.

affairs is then to escape the impeditive and intrusive presence of what amounts to the look of the Other: either by wishing to become invisible, or by attempting to blend with the landscape and thereby lose one's distinct character as a figure, instead becoming a facet of the undifferentiated ground. That is, in Laing's terms, "the defence is to lapse into a state of non-being."[18]

The notion of hodological space is thus not only illuminating in and of its own right, but in addition can be seen to work well in tandem with the idea of neurosis developed to this point. How well however does this latter idea fare when it is brought to bear on even more complex cases? In particular, when we come to the case of Baudelaire, although psychoanalytically speaking the subject certainly shares certain characteristics with the above two cases, one cannot help also being struck by both the vigor and flamboyance of his actions. That is, Baudelaire was certainly a veritable nineteenth century antidisestablishmentarian. The poet is thus far more complex and bifurcated in his behavior than are the two individuals mentioned above; assuming, that is, that their actions are in general consistent with the vignettes that we have of them. In what follows it will therefore be useful to look at the significance of the extremes of Baudelaire's behavior to determine whether indeed the definition in question is viable, and what its full significance amounts to.

Thus, as regards the characteristics shared in common with the above two cases, Sartre quotes the poet himself as writing:

> What I feel is an immense discouragement, a sense of unbearable isolation . . . a complete absence of desires, an impossibility of finding any sort of amusement. The strange success of my book and the hatred it aroused interested me for a short time, but after that I sank back into my usual mood.[19]

This mood can be shown to stem from Baudelaire's sense of rejection, which concomitantly is to say from his existing as object for the Other as

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[18]It is important to note that when Laing talks about the neurotic attempting to "lapse into a state of non-being," or Tillich of this individual's "avoiding being," what is clearly meant in both cases is that the neurotic attempts to eschew a life in which he behaves as an active and responsible agent. That is, the claim is not that the neurotic somehow tries to annihilate himself or attain a literal or mystical state of non-being.

[19]Sartre, *Baudelaire*, p. 37. (p. 31.)

subject. So Sartre writes that Baudelaire was only six when his father died. He was always catered to by his mother and reciprocated adoringly, in fact becoming fascinated by her. Indeed, we are told that so powerful an influence did the mother exert that the child came to be guarded from what many others of his age would already have experienced as the vicissitudes of an independent and sometimes seemingly capricious environment. That is, Baudelaire was shielded from, and thereby also denied, the experience of contingency.[20]

Such a blissful state of security, it is noted, was however shattered when in 1828 the mother remarried; a blow compounded by the fact that the new stepfather was a harsh and authoritarian general. Sartre stresses time and again how Baudelaire never recovered from the experience of this profound form of rejection, and hence the former's portrayal of the latter's subsequent and incessant reproach to his mother and the world in general: "When one has a son like me—'like me' was understood—one doesn't remarry."[21] Indeed, it is on the basis of this early rejection that Sartre therefore writes of Baudelaire as an adult:

> . . . we must not regard him as a quietist, but rather as an infinite series of spontaneous enterprises (which were immediately disarmed by [his own] reflective look like a sea of projects that broke the moment they appeared), as a continual waiting, a perpetual desire to be someone else and somewhere else.[22]

Baudelaire, Sartre tells us, was thus thwarted by his own excessively self-critical facility, i.e., by his own look. But the look in this instance reflects not values independently established and fought for by the former, but rather those of the authorities that rejected him. For, says Sartre, Baudelaire always remained a rebel—refusing to transcend his chosen role by becoming a revolutionary[23]—since he was unwilling to break from the world of authority figures and face contingency:

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[20] *Ibid.*, p. 18-19. (pp. 16-17.)

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 20. (p. 17.)

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 38. (p. 32.)

[23] *Ibid* ., p. 62 (pp. 51-52.)

> The great freedom which creates values emerges in the void, and [Baudelaire] was frightened of it. A sense of contingency, unjustifiability and gratuitousness assails the man who tries to bring a new reality into the world and leaves him no respite.[24]

Indeed, it is in this light that Sartre writes of Baudelaire as an adult:

> He was an eternal minor, a middle-aged adolescent who lived in a constant state of rage and hatred, but under the vigilant and reassuring protection of others.[25]

Given this state of affairs—and recalling the cases of the shy man and the young girl examined earlier—it is no wonder then that under the gaze of what amounts to his own self but as Other-to-himself, alienated Baudelaire, as seen above, wished to disappear. For so overwhelming must his look of censure have been, that he experienced inadequacy to the point of becoming incapacitated:

> I am not speaking here only of the innumerable expedients by which he tries hastily and nervously to put off the crash, to extort a few ha'pence from his mother or an advance from Ancelle, but also of the various literary plans which he carried around with him for twenty years—plays, criticism, *Mon coeur mis a nu*—without ever managing to finish them.[26]

That is, as Sartre also notes, Baudelaire's ". . . basic attitude prevented him from carrying out any lengthy undertaking."[27]

An apparently different but in principle fundamentally similar kind of attitude and associated behavior is also exhibited by the poet when he himself writes: "I would have loved to live close to a young giantess. As a voluptuous cat at the feet of a queen."[28] Sartre's comment on this point shows how what amounts to the masochistic element in Baudelaire's personality lets him actually

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[24] *Ibid.*, pp., 61-62 (p. 51.)

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 80. (p. 66.)

[26] *Ibid.* (*Ibid.*)

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 43. (p. 36.)

[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 68. (p. 56.)

revel in his subservient, object status vis-à-vis the Other as subject. Thus he notes:

> His dearest wish was to attract the attention of a giantess, to see himself through her eyes like a domestic animal, to lead the easy-going, sensual, perverse life of a cat, in an aristocratic society where giants, where men-gods, decided on the meaning of the universe, and on the final end of his own life for him, without his even being consulted. He wanted to enjoy the limited independence of a *bete de luxe*, idle and useless, whose games were protected by the seriousness of its masters.[29]

We are thus confronted with two apparently discrepant sets of attitudes and behaviors. For, on the one hand, Baudelaire, on the basis of being object for the Other as subject, is often immured in an all pervasive mood of despondency or discouragement, one which gives rise to "a perpetual desire to be someone else and somewhere else." Yet, on the other hand, there is also the Baudelaire who luxuriates in his subservient status. Any such differences notwithstanding, what both these cases however share in common is the individual's absolute and unequivocal acceptance of his status as being object for the Other as subject.

Such acceptance on the poet's part is, however, constantly offset and countered by two contrary behavioral patterns. The first of these is pride. For Baudelaire, says Sartre, is driven by a pride which makes him forever both eulogize and hypostatize his experience of privative subjectivity. It is in this light that we are then told:

> And [Baudelaire] will say to his school fellows and the street urchins who persecute him: "I'm someone else, someone different from all of you who are responsible for my sufferings. You can persecute my body, but you can't touch my 'otherness'." This assertion is both a claim and a gesture of defiance. He is someone else and because he is someone else he is out of reach and already almost revenged on his oppressors. He prefers himself to everyone else because everyone else abandons him. . . . It is heroic, an aggressive choice. . . . It has a name and its name is pride.[30]

Such pride is however obviously incompatible with Baudelaire's masochistic acceptance of his object status, and hence we have not only a cause

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[29]*Ibid.*, pp. 68-69. (p. 56.)

[30]*Ibid.*, pp. 24-25. (p. 21.)

for his self-hatred, but also an understanding of why it is that he rebels so furiously in sporadic attempts to obviate or extirpate such a form of acceptance.

This counter reaction, however, is also fueled and motivated by something other than mere pride. For, all his faults notwithstanding, Sartre sees in Baudelaire a degree of ". . . nobility and . . . greatness as a man. . . ."[31] Beyond the fact that it gave him a "horror of drift,"[32] however, very little is directly said about what amounts to this authentic aspect of the latter's existence. It is though in this light that we must understand Sartre when he writes:

> The form of *creation* which he lauded to the skies was the opposite of parturition. It did not involve one in compromise . . . one must not create with too great an abundance under pain of *rapprochement* with nature. . . . If he wrote little, it was not on account of his impotence. His poems would have seemed less rare to him if they had not been the product of exceptional acts of the mind. Their small number like their perfection was intended to underline their supernatural character. . . .[33]

What the ideas of rarity and being exceptional thus illustrate is that in his writing Baudelaire refused to make any compromises. He strove for perfection, to create works that were each quite unique and matchless. This kind of activity however lent a degree of purpose and dedication to Baudelaire's life *qua* writer—and hence his "horror of drift"—thereby concomitantly involving him in a type of transcendent quest. It is this striving for a creative goal then which can be said to have constituted the authentic element of the poet's life. Baudelaire himself partially expresses this attitude in his own terms, when in his *Intimate Journals* he decries what he sees as the lack of vitality and purpose in the contemporary existence:

> The world is about to end. Its sole reason for continuance is that it exists. . . . I do not say that [it] will be reduced to the clownish shifts and disorders of a South American republic, or even that we shall perhaps return to a state of nature and roam the grassy ruins of our civilization, gun in hand, seeking our food. No; for these

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[31] *Ibid.*, p. 169. (p. 134.)

[32] *Ibid.* (*Ibid.*)

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 135. (pp. 107-108.)

adventures would require a certain remnant of vital energy, an echo of earlier ages.[34]

It then however also follows that this authentic element, in addition to pride, is what helps to explain why Baudelaire reacted so strongly against his own acceptance of object status in the face of the other. The issue here can be well explained in hodological terms if it is recalled that for me to be object for the Other as subject is to be dominated by the latter's field of force.[35] To the extent, however, that the Other's influence becomes increasingly stronger, an increasingly pervasive influence is exerted on my field of force which thus becomes less and less unique or autonomous, and more a function or reflexion of this Other. The natural limit of such process would therefore be the eventual disappearance or implosion of my field of force. But what this then means, in the specific case of Baudelaire, is that his masochism or acceptance of object status would have been countered not only by pride, but by the above-mentioned authentic component of his personality as well; one which would have desperately fought against the possibility of its disappearance or implosion in the face of the threatening presence, and all-pervasive influence, of the Other.

Baudelaire's completely acting out on the basis of his masochistic tendencies thus never occurs. For such a movement is always countered by the opposing forces of pride and authenticity. If such on the one hand is however the case, then it also follows that a movement in the opposite direction—i.e., one in which Baudelaire fully exercises his freedom and creativity by moving beyond the sphere of influence of the Other's authority—is also never fully realized. The reason for this is again twofold. For in the first place, such a reaction would be countered by the above mentioned masochistic tendency. In addition, however, a factor of pride would enter, but this time as ally. For although somewhat supportive of the move to transcendence, it is also a type of pride which is in fact responsible for allowing the poet to maintain his status as a rebel. Thus it will be recalled that having suffered the experience of private subjectivity, Baudelaire neither attempted to deny nor totally accepted it. On the

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[34]Charles Baudelaire, *Intimate Journals*, translated by Christopher Isherwood (San Francisco: City Lights, 1983), pp. 45-46.

[35]See beginning of this section.

contrary, he hypostasized this bitter experience in order to be one, *qua* rebel, who proudly refused to allow others to see him as an outcast. Thus Sartre says of his isolation that, "he embraced it with fury . . ."[36] and that:

> Abandoned and rejected, Baudelaire wanted to take up his isolation in his own terms. He laid claim to his solitude in order that at least it issued from himself, and that he would not have to be subjected to it.[37]

As already seen, however, it is precisely by means of being a rebel and not a revolutionary that Baudelaire was able to avoid having to face contingency and remain within the sphere of influence of the Other as authority. Thus any movement too strong or away from the acceptance of his object status would have been checked not only by masochism but by pride as well. For this served to maintain his dependent ontological status, and so although creative, the poet was by no means ever truly free and hence genuinely authentic. If, hodologically speaking, Baudelaire's life was therefore bounded by a fear of implosion on one end of the spectrum, it can also now be seen that it was equally bounded by a fear of explosion or dispersion on the other. For neither masochism nor pride would have been able to exist without the constraint of an external authority.

Thus it can be seen that the poet's life can in fact be well described, by analogy, in terms of its being like a convergent sequence, oscillating and always fixed between two limits.[38] For pride and an underlying sense of authenticity react to the possibility of implosion of self—i.e., the acceptance of one's object status—by moving in the direction of freedom and transcendence of external authority's sanction: only then however to be brought up short by masochism and pride reacting equally as strongly to the possibility of explosion or dispersion of this self in the face of the lack of sanctions imposed by this same authority. Thus, total acceptance of—or abdication to—the level of object status,

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[36]Sartre, *Baudelaire*, p. 20. (p. 18.)

[37]*Ibid.*, p. 21. (p. 18.) Although capturing Sartre's meaning overall, Turnell's translation moves too far from the original text.

[38]This is not of course to suggest that Baudelaire literally vacillates from one moment to the next, nor that counter or conflicting tendencies do not exist at one and the same time in some of his actions.

on the one hand, and transcending authority's boundaries, on the other, are limits which Baudelaire approaches or veers towards, but never literally attains. In fact, to continue with the above theme, it could be said that given his constantly being checked by opposing forces, in the case of the former limit there always exists an upper lower bound beyond which Baudelaire's masochism does not proceed; while in the case of the latter limit, there always exists a lower upper bound beyond which his still muted authenticity can never pass.

If we recall Laing's definition of neurosis, viz., "that when the risk is loss of being, the defence is to lapse into a state of non-being. . . .," Baudelaire's actions can now certainly be seen to fit perfectly with this idea. For what he fears vis-à-vis the former limit is the implosion of self, which is to say a loss of being; whereas in the case of the latter he fears an explosion or dispersion of self, which again is to say a loss of being. The defense or neurotic solution, it can thus be concluded, is to attempt to obviate this two-ended risk by always remaining as a rebel within the sphere of the authority of the Other. But such repetitive recalcitrance, or lifelong and stubborn adherence to a role, means that Baudelaire effectively sets himself up to be an object for the Other as a subject. And it is to this extent, *qua* role-object set between the two limits in question, that he is able to "lapse into a state of non-being."

It should now be recalled that bad faith was earlier seen to involve an individual's fixating on desirable aspects of a role in order thereby to avoid having to come to terms with the broader scope of a reality by which he inchoately fears being overwhelmed.[39] But what this then shows us about Baudelaire, is that by choosing to fixate or become fascinated with the role of a rebel, he precipitates himself into a set of neurotic conflicts and thereby vacillates between the limits of implosion and explosion relative to his field of force; i.e., in more traditional terms, between the limits of complete immanence and absolute transcendence.

Moreover, although it is beyond the scope of the present article, exactly this same analysis can be seen to apply in principle to the case of *Saint Genet*. Thus for present purposes it is sufficient to note that in the same way that Baudelaire became fixated on maintaining the role of rebel, so similarly Genet consistently and neurotically reaffirmed his role as thief:

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[39]See beginning of this article.

> An accident riveted him to a childhood memory, and this memory became sacred. . . . What matters is that Genet lives and continues to relive this period of his life [when he was initially caught and branded a thief] as if it lasted only an instant.[40]

Furthermore, on Sartre's account Genet exhibits the same tendency and movement toward transcendence, on the one hand, and yet also toward immanence, on the other. So in a passage describing the latter—one whose counterpart we have seen mirrored precisely in *Baudelaire*—Sartre writes that:

> The necessity of bearing adversity suddenly raises [Genet] to the point of pure will. He *wants to will*, he *wants to act*. But suddenly he relapses into his obsession: he wants to act in order to be, to steal in order to be a thief, to do Evil in order to be the evildoer.[41]

That is, in the same way that Baudelaire, in fury, rebelliously approaches the limit of transcendence only to pull himself up short because of countervailing pride and masochistic tendencies, so similarly Genet—who sometimes acts in order to perpetuate evil in and of itself—is pulled up short by corresponding tendencies which in turn make him move towards the limit of complete and utter acquiescence to the censure and condemnation of the Other; and hence his "relapse" into the secure "obsession" of being a thief. As might be expected, however, such a state of affairs should lead one to expect that when Genet moves in precisely this direction countervailing sadistic tendencies would pull him up short, so that in this fashion, *a la* Baudelaire, a neurotic vacillation would result between the limits of transcendence, on the one hand, and being, on the other. And such indeed is precisely the case, as can be seen when Sartre writes:

> We are . . . beginning to understand the extreme complexity of his attitude. At times he changes himself into a pure and unconditionally evil will—he then does Evil for Evil's sake, in all sovereignty, in all gratuitousness—and at times the presence within

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[40]Jean-Paul Sartre, *Saint Genet: Comédien et Martyr* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1952), p. 9. *Also Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, translated by Bernard Frechtman (New York: George Braziller, 1963), pp. 1-2.

[41]*Ibid.*, p. 87. (*Ibid.*, p. 71.)

> him of his ontological obsession taints his will to Evil, degrades it, transforms it into pure play acting and changes his acts into gestures. Like the mad needle of a compass, he oscillates perpetually from act to gesture, from doing to being, from freedom to nature, without ever stopping.[42]

The similarity between the behaviors of Baudelaire and Genet is obviously striking. And it can hence be seen that on Sartre's account there indeed exists what amounts to an explanatory congruence vis-à-vis these two figures, one which can be understood in terms of the analysis of neurosis presented above.

Hence, to conclude, it can be noted that by using material from Laing it has been possible to arrive at an explicit definition, within an existential context, of the nature of neurosis. Concomitantly, as can be seen from the hodological analyses given above—and counter to the intellectualism of Freud—this has the advantage of reflecting Sartre's dictum noted earlier according to which, "the original bond with the Other first arises in connection with the relation between my body and the Other's body." The definition, moreover, is clearly able to capture not only the relatively straightforward cases initially examined but also the far more complex ones such as that exemplified by the vacillation within determinable limits of Baudelaire and Genet.

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[42] *Ibid.*, p. 88. (*Ibid.*, p. 72.)