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JEAN-PAUL SARTRE: SOME BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES, TO 1944

1905 **June 21:** Jean-Paul-Charles Aymard Sartre born in Paris (13, rue Mignard, XVI)

1908 **January 9:** birth of Simone de Beauvoir.

1920-24, age 15-19 SECONDARY SCHOOL
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1920-22 [age 15-17] **S. at Lycée Henri IV** (Paris), meets Paul Nizan.

1922-24 [age 17-19] **S. and Nizan at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand** to prepare for entry to the *École normale supérieure*. They transfer because the two university-preparatory years - the “hypokhâgne” and “khâgne” - were considered to be better at this school.

1924-29, age 19-24 ÉCOLE NORMALE SUPÉRIEURE
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1924-29 [age 19-24] **S. studies at the *École normale supérieure*** with Raymond Aron, Georges Canguilhem, Nizan, Jean Hyppolite, Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Reads Descartes, Spinoza, Rousseau, Marx, Freud. Reads Rilke's Notebooks of *Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910). Starts a poem “La Chant de la contingence” (“J'apporte l'ennui, j'apporte l'oubli”). S. and Nizan translate Jasper's *General Psychology*.

1925 [age 20] S. meets “Camille” - Simone-Camille Sans, a.k.a. **Simone Jollivet** (or “Toulouse”) -- and has his first serious affaire. (“Anny” of *Nausea* is modeled on her.) A free spirit, she would tell S. about her affaires with the rich men who supported her. (She became the lover of Charles Dullin and had a brilliant career in theater.)

1925-8 [age 20-23] Either (as S reports) ca. 1925-6, in some long letters to “Camille” or (as Aron reports) ca. 1927-8, during a philosophy course with Brunschvicg, S. formulates for the first time his own ideas on **contingency**.

1928 [age 22-3] Virtually flunks the *agrégation* (comes in 50th). Tries unsuccessfully to be engaged to a young woman from the Massif central.

1929 [age 23-4] **February 23-26:** Husserl's lectures at the Sorbonne (later: *Cartesian Meditations*), which S. does not attend. He is ignorant of Husserl at this point **July:** Meets **Simone de Beauvoir** (“It was *un amour nécessaire*; we also had to experience *des amours contingentes: La Force de l'âge*, p. 27-8). They place, respectively, first and second in the *agrégation* at the Sorbonne, the written theme being “Liberté et contingence.” S. applies unsuccessfully for a lectureship in Japan that would begin in October 1931 [cf. *Nausea*, 62].

1929-31 [age 24-25] **November 1929-February 1931:** Two years of military service: meteorologist.

1931-1936, AGE 25-31 LE HAVRE - GERMANY - LE HAVRE

1931-1933
LE HAVRE

- 1931 [age 25-26] **March 1:** S. begins teaching at the lycée in Le Havre. [January, 1934, would constitute roughly “three years at Bouville (= Le Havre)” [*Nausea*, 39].
Lives at the Hôtel Printania, rue Charles Laffite, a noisy place overlooking the railroad yard; later rents a private room. Writes at the Café de la Grande Post, and eats lunch at the Guillaume Tell restaurant.
Begins writing “Factum sur le contingence,” which will become *Nausea*. Beauvoir at Marseilles (1931-2), then at Rouen (Oct. 1932 to 1936).
- 1933 [age 27-28] Through Raymond Aron, S. discovers Husserl and Levinas' *La Théorie de l' intuition*. For some six years thereafter, S. reads virtually nothing in philosophy except Husserl.

1933-34
BERLIN

- 1933 [age 28] **September:** S. trades places with Aron: A. teaches at Le Havre, S. begins a year's fellowship at **L'Institut français in Berlin**, where he reads Husserl. Has an affaire with “Marie Girard.”
- 1934 [age 28-29] Still in Berlin, completes a second draft of “Factum sur la contingence” (now perhaps entitled *Melancholia* eventually *La Nausée*). Writes *La Transcendence de l'Ego* (published 1936).

1934-36
LE HAVRE AGAIN

- 1934 [age 29] **October:** S. resumes his teaching at Le Havre (to 1936) begins an affaire with **Olga Kosakiewicz**, a former student of Beauvoir's.
- 1935 [age 29-30] As part of researching *L'Imagination* (published in 1936), S. Takes mescaline, resulting in six months of depression with hallucinations.
- 1936 [age 30-31] Publishes *L'Imagination*. Submits the ms.of *Melancholia* (eventually *La Nausée*) to the publishing house of Gallimard, which rejects it
Spring: S. does not vote, but supports the Popular Front government.

1936-1939, age 31-33
BETWEEN LE HAVRE AND THE WAR

- 1936 [age 31] **July:** Beginning of the Spanish Civil War.
Summer: S. and B. visit Venice where S's hallucinations finally cease.
October: S. takes a teaching position at Laon, B. at the Lycée Molière (Paris).
- 1937 [age 31-32] **Publishes *La Transcendence de l'Ego* (*The Transcendence of the Ego*).** Thanks to the interventions of Dullin and Pierre Bost, Gaston Gallimard finally accepts *Melancholia* --which he suggests renaming *La Nausée*.
July: S. publishes "Le Mur" ("The Wall").
October: S. appointed to teach at the Lycée Pasteur, Neuilly. Lives at the Mistral Hôtel, 24, rue Cels, XIV until 1940.
- 1938 [age 32] **April: Publishes *La Nausée* (*Nausea*).**
- 1939 [age 32-33] **March:** publishes *L'Imaginaire* (*The Psychology of the Imagination*).
Spring: begins reading **Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*)**. S. and B. begin to frequent the Café Flore.

1939-1944, age 33-38
THE WAR YEARS

- 1939 **September 2:** S. recalled to the French army, eventually stationed in Alsace. S. gives various lectures on Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and (as known through Hyppolite) Hegel.
December: publishes *Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions* (*Outline of a Theory of the Emotions*).
- 1940 [age 33-34] **May:** France defeated by Nazi Germany. S. in a POW camp in Triers/Trèves until mid-March, 1941. Continues reading Heidegger, writes *L'Âge de raison*.
- 1941 [age 34-35] **March:** Uses false papers to get out of the POW camp. With Merleau-Ponty forms a short-lived resistance group, "Socialisme et liberté," in Paris.
April/May: gets a teaching position at Lycée Pasteur, Paris.
October: appointed professor of khâgne at the Lycée Condorcet, where he will teach until 1944.
- 1942 [age 35-36] Writes *L'Être et le Néant* (*Being and Nothingness*) and *Les Mouches* (*The Flies*).
- 1943 [age 36-37] **January:** Joins the Comité national des écrivains (C.N.E.), part of the Conseil national de la Résistance.
April: publishes *Les Mouches* (*The Flies*).
June: publishes *L'Être et le Néant*, (*Being and Nothingness*). Gabriel Marcel popularizes the term "*existentialisme*."
- 1944 [age 37-38] **July-August:** S., who has been writing for the underground *Combat*, flees Paris to avoid arrest by the Nazis.
August 22/25: Liberation of Paris. S, member of the Comité national de théâtre, is part of the group that occupies the Théâtre-Français.

SARTRE'S SUMMARY OF NAUSEA

After lengthy travels, Antoine Roquentin has settled in Bouville among ferociously good people. He lives near the railway station in a hotel for traveling salesmen and is writing a thesis in history about an eighteenth-century adventurer, M. de Rollebon. His work takes him frequently to the municipal library, where his friend the Autodidact, a humanist, is instructing himself by reading the books in alphabetical order. In the evening, Roquentin goes and sits at a table in the Railwaymen's Café and listens to a record – always the same one – “Some of These Days.” And sometimes he goes upstairs with the woman who runs the place.

Anny, the woman he loves, left four years ago. She always wanted there to be “perfect moments,” and she constantly exhausted herself in minute and vain attempts to reconstruct the world around herself. She and Roquentin broke up. Now Roquentin is losing his past drop by drop; every day he sinks more deeply into a strange and suspicious present. His life itself no longer makes any sense; he thought he had had great adventures; but there aren't any adventures, there are only “stories.” He clings to M. de Rollebon: death is to justify life.

It is then that his real adventure begins – an insinuating, softly horrible metamorphosis of all his sensations. It is Nausea. It grabs you from behind, and then you drift in a tepid sea of time. Is it Roquentin who has changed? Is it the world? Walls, gardens, cafes are abruptly overcome by nausea. Another time he wakes up to a baleful day: something is rotten in the air, the light, people's gestures. M. de Rollebon dies a second time: the dead can never justify the living. Roquentin wanders the streets, voluminous and unjustifiable. And then, on the first day of spring [sic! February 21], he grasps the meaning of his adventure: Nausea is existence revealing itself – and existence is not pleasant to see.

Roquentin still clings to a feeble hope: Anny has written to him; he is going to see her again. But Anny has become a sedentary woman, fat and desperate. She too, in her own way, has discovered existence. The two of them have nothing more to say to one another.

Roquentin goes back to his solitude at the depths of this enormous Nature that is oozing suffocation on the town and that he senses will soon be rent by cataclysmic upheavals. What is to be done? Call to other people for help? But the others are good people: they tip their hats to one another without knowing they exist. He is going to leave Bouville; he goes to the Railwaymen's Café to listen one last time to “Some of These Days,” and while the record is playing, he catches sight of a chance, a slim chance of accepting himself.

From Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, *Les Écrits de Sartre. Chronologie, bibliographie commentée*, Paris, Gallimard, 1970, p. 61, E.T., Michel Contat and Michel Rybalka, trans. Richard C. McCleary, *The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre*, Volume 1 “A Bibliographical Life,” Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974, pp. 52-3.

ANTOINE ROQUENTIN: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

BIRTH:

1904/5 Roquentin born. In 1934 he is “At the age of 30” [245].

HIS EARLY STUDIES (age 20):

1924 age 20 Studying Rollebon (1750-1825) [12]
Spring: He says over and over again: “I don't know how Anny manages to fill up her envelopes: there's never anything inside.” [60]

VARIOUS TRAVELS (1924-1930, age 20-26):

1924-30 age 20-26 Six years of traveling [5] “through Central Europe, North Africa, and the Far East” [1]. North Africa: Morocco (Meknes): 32.

1927 age 23 April 7, 1927: Anny sent him a postcard from Portsmouth,

1928 age 24 Anny and R separate, R goes to Tokyo. [Either she left him [7c, 64a], or they separated by mutual agreement “six years ago” [62], i.e., 1928.

1928 age 24 Tokyo [62], after separation from Anny

1930 age 26 Hanoi [5, 36], Saigon [64]
In Indo-China he suddenly awakens from a six-year slumber [5, 36]:
He was standing with Mercier in the office of a French functionary.
Mercier is trying to get R to accompany him to Bengal on an archeological mission. Staring at a Khmer statuette, R smells M's scented beard and suddenly “awakens.” Two days later he is on a boat back to Marseilles.

1930 age 26 R returns from Indo-China.

1930-34 age 26-30 Has not seen Anny for four years [137]. Wonders what she has been doing for the last six years, 1928-1934 [81]

BOUVILLE

1930-34 age 26-30 It is now ten years since he began his travels (37c) and four years since he was in Hanoi and saw THE IDEA (36, 38).
Having returned from six years of travelling, R. settles in Bouville for three years [1, 39] because many of Rollebon's papers are in the Bouville library [12]. Annual salary, 14,400 francs [173].

1933-34 age 29-30 From May, 1933 (when the curator of the Rouen library wrote him: 60]), until February 13, 1934 (Anny's letter), R. received no letters. On February 13 a letter from Anny asks him to come to Paris, Hotel d'Espagne, on Tuesday, Feb. 20. He plans to go on Thursday Feb. 22 [70] but leaves on Friday, Feb. 23 [135].

A CALENDAR FOR SARTRE'S NAUSEA

1934

January	S	M	T	W	Th	F	S	
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	
Week 1	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	February
Week 2	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Week 3	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
Week 4	18	19	20	<u>21</u>	22	23	24	
Week 5	25	26	27	28				

The fictional “Editor’s Note” [1] says that the first, undated page of the diary is from the beginning of January, 1932, at the latest. However, the dates and days-of-the-week in the diary fit 1934 rather than 1932. [In January of 1934 Sartre himself was in Germany.]

SOME PLACES AND CHARACTERS IN NAUSEA

PLACES

CHARACTERS

BOUVILLE

Hôtel Printania, rue des Mutilés,
across from the railway yard

Lucie, the cleaning lady [11-12; 27]
The man from Rouen [3]

Café Mably

M. Fasquelle, the manager
Madame Florent, the red-haired cashier [53]

Rendez-vous des Cheminots
(Railroadmen's Rendezvous)
Boulevard Victor-Noir

Françoise, the woman who runs the
Rendezvous. ("Jeanne" at 172!) (She is also
Roquentin's prostitute)
Madeleine, the waitress (172)

Camille's Restaurant
(rue des Horlogers)

Mr. Camille, the manager, ("a hard man")
Jeanne, the fat waitress
Mr. Achille: a "kindred nauseous spirit"
Dr. Rogé, doctor, avoiding death

The Library

Ogier P., a bailiff's clerk: the Autodictact
(or "Self-Taught Man")

Brasserie Vézélise
rue Tournebride

Mariette, the waitress, et al.

PARIS

Hôtel d'Espagne

Anny

T. Sheehan

A CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF SARTRE'S NAUSEA
French, 1938. E.T. by Lloyd Alexander, 1959, 1964.

Dedication: "au Castor" ("To the Beaver")

Motto: "*C'est un garçon sans importance collective, c'est tout juste un individu.*"

["He's a fellow without any collective significance, barely an individual."]]

Céline, *L'Église*.

[These pages were found among Roquentin's papers. Is he then dead?]

Date and Time	Location, etc.	Pages
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<p>"UNDATED PAGES" Before Monday, January 29, 1934</p>
--

"I've been in Bouville for three years." (p. 39)

Before the journal begins:

Jan. 6, 13, or 20, Sat.

R picks up a stone, "the origin of this whole business" [p 130] as children skip stones over the water ("ducks and drakes").

1-2

"The day before yesterday"

"I was afraid or had some other feeling" due to a complicated series of coincidences and misunderstandings.

The journal begins:

Undated

R's room? He recalls the above two events.

1-2

Next day? 10:30 PM

Room.

Jan. 27, Sat. 4:30 PM

(Cf. Jan. 30:) Near railroad yard, everything comes unglued.

7-8

<p>FIRST WEEK January 28 -- February 3, 1934</p>
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Jan. 29, Mon. 8:15 AM

Hôtel Printania, rue des Mutilés, Bouville (Le Havre).

4-6

Jan. 30, Tues. 1:30 PM

Café Mably. Lunch, writes. Had worked at the library in the morning. Recalls Jan 27 (cf. above). Recalls: leaving the hotel (8:30 A.M.), he couldn't pick up a piece of paper.

6-11

Feb. 1, Thur. morning

Library

11-12

afternoon

?

12-14

Feb. 2, Fri. 3:00 PM

Room.

14-18

5:30 PM

Rendez-vous des Cheminots (Railroadmen's Rendezvous)

18-24

7:30 PM

Town

24-27

SECOND WEEK
February 4 -10, 1934

Feb. 4, Sun.	---	[Recalled:] R.. “detected everywhere a sort of conspiratorial air.” [123a: Nausea in a park on a Sunday.]	130
Feb. 8, Thurs.	11:30 AM	Library	27-29
	3:00 PM	Library	29-30
Feb. 9, Fri.	3:00 to 6:00 PM	R's Room. A visit from the Self-Taught Man	29-30
Feb. 10, Sat.	Noon	?	38-40

THIRD WEEK
February 11 - 17, 1934

Feb. 11, Sun.	10:30 PM	Town	40-46
	1 PM	Brasserie Vézélise	46-50
	3 PM	Town. Cafe Mably. Town	50-56
Feb. 12, Mon.	---	?	56-57
	7 PM	?	57-58
	11 PM	Rendez-vous des Cheminots	59
Feb. 13, Tues.	11 AM -- 2PM	Camille's Restaurant [Shrove Tuesday]	59-70
Feb. 14, Wed.	---	“I must not be afraid.” [Ash Wednesday]	70
Feb. 15, Thurs.	---	?	70
Feb. 16, Fri.	10 AM	Café Mably,	70-81
	11 AM- 1:45 PM	Library	
	Later	Café and Library	
Feb. 17, Sat.	AM PM	Café Mably The museum	81-94

FOURTH WEEK February 18 - 24, 1934

Feb. 19, Mon.	3:00 to 5:30 PM	Room	94-100
	5:30 PM	Town	100-103
Feb. 20, Tues.	---	“Nothing. Existed.”	103
Feb. 21, Wed.	noon	Lunch with Autodictact. Rendez-vous des Cheminots?	103-123
	afternoon	Town. <u>The park: The vision.</u>	123-126
	6:00 PM	<u>Room.</u>	126-135
	night	Room.	135
Feb. 23, Fri.	4:40 PM	Rendez-vous des Cheminots, waiting for the train.	135
Feb. 24, Sat.	---	Paris with Anny: Hôtel d'Espagne	135-154

FIFTH WEEK February 25 -- 28, 1934

Feb. 25, Sun.	evening	Paris. “Will be back in Paris before the end of the week.”	154-155
Feb. 27, Tues.	evening	On a hill overlooking Bouville.	156-160
Feb. 28, Wed.	5:00 PM	Café Mably. Flashback to library.	160-169
	6:00 PM	Rendez-vous des Cheminots.	169-178

INSTANCES/INTIMATIONS OF NAUSEA

the page	the experience
1	The stone; “nausea in the hands” (11)
7-8	A blonde woman bumps into an African man
8	“I am gently slipping into the water's depths, towards fear.”
9	Picking up the paper, he felt he was no longer free.
18-24	No Françoise
24-27	Nothingness
40	“...when opening the gate of the public park I got the impression that something was signalling to me.”
55	The Thing waits for him
50-56	“I split the night”
59	Adumbrated in a dream: “This park smells of vomit!”
59-70	Mr. Achille, the kindred nauseous spirit, waiting
69-70	Dr. Rogé, hiding his death from himself
70; 98-100	Robellon: the only justification of R's existence; R gives him up.
74-75; 75-77	Nausea strikes again; the world awaits it
84	“I had no right to exist”
96	A seeming attack of nausea
123-6	Things come unstuck from their names
126-135	The experience described
156-160	“ “ “ “
169-178	“ “ “ “

MARTIN HEIDEGGER

WHAT IS METAPHYSICS?

Inaugural lecture at Freiburg University, July 24, 1929

A selection, in a paraphrastic translation.

Complete translation in Martin Heidegger, *Pathmarks*.

Towards an experience of nothingness via the mood of “dread”

Within human openness [“Dasein”] does there ever occur a mood in which we confront nothingness itself?

Yes, although rarely and only for a moment, this can and does occur in the fundamental mood of dread. By “dread” I do not mean the altogether common experience of anxiety, which all too readily overtakes us and which is ultimately reducible to fear. Dread is fundamentally different from fear. In fear, what we become afraid of is always a specific thing that threatens us in this or that particular respect. Moreover, fear of something is always fear for something specific. Because fear has these traits of “fear of” and “fear for,” whenever we experience fear, whenever we are afraid, we are held captive by whatever it is that affects us. In trying to save ourselves from this specific thing, we become unsure about everything, and we get panicky.

Dread never allows such confusion to occur. Quite the contrary, dread is suffused with a peculiar kind of calm. Yes, dread is dread of. . . , but not of this or that thing. And yes, dread of. . . is always dread for. . . , but again, not for this or that thing. What we are in dread of and for is undefinable -- not because we are unable to define it, but because it itself is incapable of definition. Such undefinability is shown by a familiar phrase:

During the experience of dread we might say: “It feels so strange!” But what is the “it,” and “who” feels it? We cannot say what feels strange. It is simply that way -- as a whole -- for “someone.” All things, and we along with them, sink into meaninglessness -- but not in the sense of simply disappearing. Rather, as things slip away from us, they also turn towards us. The slipping away of things from our world of meaning presses in upon us in the mood of dread and oppresses us. There is nothing to hold on to. As beings slip out of meaning, only this “nothing” remains, and it overwhelms us.

Dread reveals the nothing.

We “hover” in dread. More precisely, dread leaves us hanging insofar as it lets things slip out of our world of meaning. This implies that, right there in the midst of things, we ourselves -- we who are in being -- also slip away from ourselves. In the final analysis, therefore, it is not “you” or “I” who feel strange; rather, it is this way for some “one.” In this unnerving state of being left hanging, with nothing to hold on to, all that remains is our own pure openness.

Dread robs us of speech. Things slip out of our world of meaning, and only the nothing is left to crowd in around us -- and as a result, in the face of this nothing, all utterance of "is" falls silent. True, amidst the strangeness of dread, we often do try to shatter the empty stillness with compulsive talk -- but that only proves the presence of the nothing. And after dread has dissolved, we ourselves directly demonstrate that dread has shown us the nothing: In the lucid vision sustained by fresh remembrance, we are compelled to say that what we were in dread of, and what we had dread for, was, properly speaking -- nothing. And that is exactly right: The nothing itself had shown up.

With this basic mood of dread we come to that event in human openness where the nothing shows up. It is from out of this experience that we have to ask about the nothing.

So, how is it with the nothing?

What we have achieved thus far -- along with a cautionary remark

We have now found the essential answer, the only one that works for our purposes. Or at least that will be the case if we take care to really keep the question about nothing alive. That requires that we actively transform our human being into its own openness -- this is the transformation that dread itself brings about in us -- so that we can understand the nothing that shows up in dread exactly as it shows up. It also requires that we rigorously refrain from characterizing the nothing in any way that does not arise from an experience of the nothing.

What the nothing is and is not: some preliminaries

The nothing shows up in dread -- but not as some thing, not as a being. The nothing does not show up as an object. And dread is certainly not a "grasping" of the nothing. Still, the nothing does show up in and through dread -- but (to repeat) it does not show up as detached from or "next to" the things that are present, in all their strangeness, within our world of meaning. Rather, we said that in dread we encounter the nothing as one with whatever is present in our world of meaning. What do we mean by this "one with"?

In dread all the things within our world of meaning become superfluous. How so? Dread does not annihilate those things, so that only the nothing is left over. Things cannot be annihilated by dread, precisely because dread finds itself utterly powerless before the things of our world. Rather, we come to know the nothing along with things and in them -- but only when we experience those things slipping out of our world of meaning.

In dread there occurs no annihilation of the totality of things. Nor do we propositionally negate whatever there is in our world of meaning in order to arrive at the nothing for the first time. Anything like the outright performance of a negative assertion is entirely foreign to dread. Even apart from that fact, any such propositional negation -- which would supposedly "produce the nothing" -- would always arrive too late to do the job. We already encounter the nothing before any such negative assertions. As we said, we encounter the nothing as "one with" the things that are slipping away from our world of meaning.

The nothing functions by relegating us to things as meaningful

In dread we pull back. But this pulling-back is not flight; rather, it is the calmness of wonder. This movement of “back from” is initiated by the nothing. The nothing does not attract you to itself; rather, its essence is to push you back from itself. This pushing-back lets things slip out of your world of meaning; but as the nothing pushes you back, it also directs you towards those very things that are slipping out of meaning. This business of pushing you back and directing you towards whatever is slipping out of your world is the very essence of the nothing -- it is the functioning of the nothing. This is the way the nothing presses in upon your openness during the mood of dread. The nothing does not annihilate things, and it does not come from propositional negation. The functioning of the nothing cannot be rationalized in terms of annihilation and negation. The nothing just “nothings.”

The functioning of the nothing is no ordinary occurrence. Rather, while it is pushing you back and directing you towards the things that are slipping out of meaning, it reveals those things, for the first time, as being meaningful: it shows them in their complete strangeness (a heretofore hidden strangeness) and shows them as being radically other -- other than nothingness.

In the clear night of the nothing, which is experienced in dread, there emerges the original meaningfulness of things as such: we see that they are in being -- instead of nothing. But this phrase -- “instead of nothing” -- is not an afterthought. Rather, it is the prior issue that makes it possible for anything to show up and have meaning at all. The original essence of the functioning of the nothing lies in bringing you face-to-face, for the first time, with things as meaningful.

Only if we experience the nothing can we take approach things and understand them. Our essence, as human openness, is to relate meaningfully to beings (both to the being that each of us is and to the beings that we are not). But in so doing, we are always already returning from an experience of the nothing.

Human openness means: being held out into the nothing.

Held out into the nothing, we are always already beyond things and in touch with their meaning. The name I give this “being-beyond-things” is “transcendence.” If human openness were not essentially transcendence -- that is: if we were not already held out into the nothing -- then we could never relate meaningfully to things, not even to ourselves.

Without the original revelation of the nothing, no selfhood and no freedom.

With this we have the answer to our question about the nothing. The nothing is not an object, and it is no thing at all. The nothing does not show up for itself, nor does it show up “next to” things as if it were attached to them. Rather, the nothing is what makes it possible for anything to be meaningfully present within our human openness. The nothing is not merely the opposite idea to things; instead and in the most original way, it is why things can be meaningful at all. The operation of the nothing is inseparable from the meaning of things, i.e., the very being of things.

Jean-Paul Sartre

INTENTIONALITY:

A FUNDAMENTAL IDEA OF HUSSERL'S PHENOMENOLOGY¹

(January 1939)

“He devoured her with his eyes.” This expression and many other signs point to the illusion common to both realism and idealism: to know is to eat. After a hundred years of academicism, French philosophy remains at that point. We have all read Brunschvicg, Lalande, and Meyerson,² we have all believed that the spidery mind trapped things in its web, covered them with a white spit and slowly swallowed them, reducing them to its own substance. What is a table, a rock, a house? Answer: a certain assemblage of “contents of consciousness,” a class of such contents. Oh digestive philosophy! Yet nothing seemed more obvious: is not the table the actual content of my perception? Is not my perception the present state of my consciousness? Nutrition, assimilation! Assimilation, Lalande said, of things to ideas, of ideas by ideas, of minds by minds. The corpulent skeletons of the world were picked clean by these diligent diastases: assimilation, unification, identification. The simplest and plainest among us vainly looked for something solid, something not just mental, but would encounter everywhere only a soft and very genteel mist: themselves.

Against the digestive philosophy of empirico-criticism, of neo-Kantianism, against all “psychologism,” Husserl persistently affirmed that one cannot dissolve things in consciousness. You see this tree, to be sure. But you see it just where it is: at the side of the road, in the midst of the dust, alone and writhing in the heat, eight miles from the Mediterranean coast. It could not enter into your consciousness, for it is not of the same nature as consciousness. One is perhaps reminded of Bergson and the first chapter of *Matter and Memory*.³ But Husserl is not a realist: this tree on its bit of parched earth is not an absolute that would subsequently enter into communication with me. Consciousness and the world are given at one stroke: essentially external to consciousness, the world is nevertheless essentially relative to consciousness. Husserl sees consciousness as an irreducible fact that no physical image can account for. Except perhaps the quick, obscure image of

¹ “Une idée fondamentale de la phénoménologie de Husserl: l'intentionnalité,” in *Situations I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), translation by Joseph P. Fell.

² Léon Brunschvicg (1869-1944), author of *Le progrès de la conscience dans la philosophie occidentale* (1927) and *De la connaissance de soi* (1931). André Lalande (1867-1963), author of *La psychologie des jugements de valeur*, 1928 and *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie* (originally 1926). Émile Meyerson (1859-1933), author of *Identité et réalité* (1912) and *Du cheminement de la pensée* (1931).

³ Henri Bergson (1859-1941), *Matière et mémoire: essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit* (1896, E. T. 1988).

a burst. To know is to “burst toward,” to tear oneself out of the moist gastric intimacy, veering out there beyond oneself, out there near the tree and yet beyond it, for the tree escapes me and repulses me, and I can no more lose myself in the tree than it can dissolve itself in me. I am beyond it; it is beyond me.

Do you recognize in this description your own circumstances and your own impression? You certainly knew that the tree was not you, that you could not make it enter your dark stomach and that knowledge could not, without dishonesty, be compared to possession. All at once consciousness is purified, it is clear as a strong wind. There is nothing in it but a movement of fleeing itself, a sliding beyond itself. If, impossible though it may be, you could enter “into” a consciousness, you would be seized by a whirlwind and thrown back outside, in the thick of the dust, near the tree, for consciousness has no “inside.” Precisely this being-beyond-itself, this absolute flight, this refusal to be a substance is what makes it be a consciousness.

Imagine for a moment a connected series of bursts that tear us out of ourselves, that do not even allow to an “ourselves” the leisure of composing ourselves behind them, but that instead throw us beyond them into the dry dust of the world, on to the plain earth, amidst things. Imagine us thus rejected and abandoned by our own nature in an indifferent, hostile, and restive world -- you will then grasp the profound meaning of the discovery that Husserl expresses in his famous phrase, “All consciousness is consciousness of something.” No more is necessary to dispose of the effete philosophy of immanence, where everything happens by compromise, by protoplasmic transformations, by a tepid cellular chemistry. The philosophy of transcendence thrown us on to the highway, in the midst of dangers, under a dazzling light.

Our own being, says Heidegger, is being-in-the-world. One must understand this “being-in” as movement. To be is to fly out into the world, to spring from the nothingness of the world and of consciousness in order suddenly to burst out as consciousness-in-the-world. When consciousness tries to recoup itself, to coincide with itself once and for all, closeted off all warm and cozy, it destroys itself. This necessity for consciousness to exist as consciousness of something other than itself is what Husserl calls “intentionality.”

I have spoken primarily of knowledge in order to make myself better understood: the French philosophy that has molded us understands little besides epistemology. But for Husserl and the phenomenologists our consciousness of things is by no means limited to our knowledge of them. Knowledge, or pure “representation,” is only one of the possible forms of my consciousness “of” this tree; I can also love it, fear it, hate it; and this surpassing of consciousness by itself -- i.e., intentionality -- finds itself again in fear, hatred, and love. Hating another is just a way of bursting forth toward him; it is finding oneself suddenly confronted by a stranger in whom one lives, in whom, from the very first, one lives through the objective quality of “hatred.”

So all at once hatred, love, fear, sympathy -- all those famous “subjective” reactions that were floating in the malodorous brine of the mind -- are pulled out. They are simply ways of discovering the world. Things are what abruptly unveil themselves to us as hateful, sympathetic, horrible, lovable. Being dreadful is a property of this Japanese mask: an inexhaustible and irreducible property that constitutes its very nature -- and not the sum of our subjective reactions to a piece of sculptured wood.

Husserl has restored to things their horror and their charm. He has restored to us the world of artists and prophets: frightening, hostile, dangerous, and with its havens of mercy and love. He has cleared the way for a new treatise on the passions that would be inspired by this simple truth, so utterly ignored by the refined among us: if we love a woman, it is because she is lovable. We are delivered from Proust. We are likewise delivered from the “internal life”: in vain would we seek the caresses and fondlings of our intimate selves, like Amiel,⁴ or like a child who kisses his own shoulder -- for everything is finally outside: everything, even ourselves. Outside, in the world, among others. It is not in some hiding-place that we will discover ourselves; it is on the road, in the town, in the midst of the crowd, a thing among things, a human among humans.

⁴ Henri Frédéric Amiel (1821-1881), Swiss philosopher and author of *Journal intime* (1861), E. T., *Amiel's Journal*, trans. Humphry Ward (London and New York: Macmillan, 1891).