

**APPROPRIATION AND COUNTER-APPROPRIATION:
THE CASE OF ROQUENTIN**

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As the title suggests, there are two principle aspects of this dissertation. The first concerns a particular notion of appropriation, as well as its reverse, what is termed in this study "counter-appropriation." This first aspect consists of theoretical considerations and draws on a body of information which permits the use of a kind of ontological psychoanalysis. The second aspect of this study is an application of these theoretical views to the character of Roquentin, the existentially-ill protagonist in Jean-Paul Sartre's novel, La Nausée. On the whole, the discourse and behavior of Sartre's character are used to both illustrate and confirm the various facets of the psychoanalytic structure that is proposed in this text -- a dissertation which is, therefore, a study of both theory and literature.

In the first section, the focus is on a particular moment in La Nausée: Roquentin's narration of his inability to pick up a piece of paper which lies on the ground in front of his hotel. His documentation of his usual

fondness for handling, staring at, destroying, and even bringing the trash to his mouth is explicated in great detail.

The main thrust of the second chapter is towards a reading of Freud against Sartre. Although Sartre sees his own work as fundamentally opposed to that of Freud, the positions of the two theorists are used here in a complementary fashion to support a certain notion of desire that is appropriative in nature. Sartre's L'Être et le néant, Lacan's "Signification du phallus," Laplanche's Vie et mort en psychanalyse, and several of Freud's works are considered.

The third and final chapter of this study reveals the importance of Roquentin's interest in handling discarded scraps of paper, and his recent inability to engage in this activity, in relation to the rest of the novel. The concept of appropriation, which is introduced in the preceding chapter, is extended to include "counter-appropriation." In addition, the idea of a "playful" attitude is introduced and juxtaposed with Sartre's esprit de sérieux in an effort to analyze and explain the nature of Roquentin's nausea.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jim LeBlanc was born in Fitchburg, Massachusetts on April 3, 1953. He spent eighteen years in central New England, with his educational pursuits often running second to his interest in carrying a football through a mass of large, angry bodies or trying to hit a baseball on to the roof of his math teacher's house beyond the left field fence. Not having had much success at either athletic venture, he decided to abandon this particular path to self-fulfillment after graduating from Cushing Academy in 1971.

His undergraduate college days were spent mostly along the road marked "Sex, Drugs and Rock and Roll," which was quite a popular thoroughfare at the time. It was not until he had tried six different majors, dropped out of school, and worked in a brake shoe factory in inner-city Boston that he decided that hunting truth in an academic world might be a rewarding quest. He finally graduated from Miami University (the one in Ohio, not the one in Florida) in 1977 with a B.A. in French. He went to graduate school immediately and earned his M.A. from the same institution in 1979.

Now that he is "educated," he has decided to leave truth to her private bath, at least if she is to be found secluded within the walls of the university. He intends to engage in non-academic ventures. He is fully aware that in so doing he might never catch a glimpse of Diana -- but he won't be devoured by his own hounds either.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv

Chapter page
INTRODUCTION 1
I. THE SCRAPS OF PAPER 7
II. TO HAVE AND TO BE 78
III. TO PLAY OR NOT TO PLAY 152
CONCLUSION 246
BIBLIOGRAPHY 250

INTRODUCTION

"Je l'ai, la saleté, la Nausée."¹ The nausea in Sartre's novel is something Roquentin has, or so the protagonist maintains early on in his journal. Later in the text, however, we read: "La Nausée ne m'a pas quitté et je ne crois pas qu'elle me quittera de sitôt; mais je ne la subis plus, ce n'est plus une maladie ni une quinte passagère: c'est moi."² "La Nausée . . . c'est moi"; the nausea in Sartre's novel is something Roquentin is. It is this interrelation of having and being and Roquentin's shifting awareness of the roles of these two predicative modes that will concern us in the following pages. La Nausée, we shall maintain, is a novel about appropriation -- appropriation of material objects, appropriation of the world one experiences, appropriation of oneself. Moreover, this desire for possession is founded on a desire for being -- not just any being, of course, but a specific notion of being (one which, unfortunately, is unattainable). This desired ontological status is what Sartre terms elsewhere the en-soi-pour-soi, the in-itself-for-itself. Consciousness seeks the kind of solid, immutable

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, La Nausée (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), p. 32.

² Ibid., p. 161.

being of the in-itself -- the being of a stone, for example -- while at the same time wishing to remain the continuous creator, the free foundation of its existence: being-for-itself. It is towards this end that an individual engages in appropriative behavior.

In an effort to elucidate this concept of appropriation and its role in Roquentin's diary, we shall need to focus both on theoretical considerations and on Roquentin's discourse itself. Regarding the latter, we shall see that one moment, in particular, in Roquentin's text seems to contain the entire universe of the writer's appropriative behavior, and functions as a dense, microcosmic kernel of psychological factors that serve to inform his journalistic project as a whole. For this reason, we shall spend considerable time examining this crucial point in the text: Roquentin's description of his pastime of picking up scraps of paper from the street, followed immediately by his recounting of his recent inability to pick up a particular sheet of paper. Later we shall turn our attention to the ramifications of our discoveries as they apply to other points in the text. In conjunction with this aspect of our inquiry, we shall need to establish a certain theoretical groundwork on which to base our conclusions. We shall draw from both the theoretical works of Sartre (L'Être et le néant, for the most part) and from Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory (Bache-

lard, Laplanche, Lacan). Although Sartre often claims to be in severe opposition to Freud, we hope to show that the systems of the two thinkers can be utilized in a complementary fashion, in spite of their occasionally glaring points of contention. Sartre's ontological considerations may be made to serve as a beneficial tool for the clarification and elaboration of Freud's psychoanalytic theories, just as Freud's point of view will be shown to provide an interesting perspective from which to extend and highlight the phenomenological conclusions of Sartre's work.

Thus, the scope of the following study will be two-dimensional: (1) "de tenter une psychanalyse des choses,"³ as Sartre describes what he calls "la psychanalyse existentielle," and (2) to propose a psychoanalytic reading of Roquentin's existential anxiety and of the factors which contribute to its arising and ultimate resolution in the mind of Sartre's protagonist.

Roquentin announces early on that his journalistic project will be an attempt to organize his day-to-day life. In fact, he states his resolution with the first words of the "feuilleton sans date": "Le mieux serait d'écrire les événements au jour le jour . . . surtout les

³ Jean-Paul Sartre, L'Être et le néant (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), p. 690. Sartre attributes this notion of a phenomenological psychoanalysis, quite rightly, to Bachelard.

classer."⁴ As the reader discovers, Roquentin's enterprise is more easily resolved than carried out, for the writer has difficulty deciding what is and is not an "event." Among the first "incidents," however, that appear in Roquentin's papers are two which the writer seems inclined to consider the sort of occurrence which requires classification: the episode of the stone and that of the piece of paper. For the time being, we will forego an examination of the former event and concentrate on the latter, for it is through a thorough investigation of Roquentin's quirky interest in handling discarded scraps of paper that his experience with the stone can best be elucidated.

It is one-thirty and Antoine Roquentin is sitting at a table in the Café Mably. "Rien de nouveau," he writes as an introduction to his diary entry of the day.⁵ He later realizes, however, that he was wrong in stating that nothing was new and that such a statement was, more or less, a lie: "Je n'ai pas dit la vérité -- du moins pas toute la vérité."⁶ There is indeed something new in Roquentin's world, but he is not sure what it is, for the newness manifests itself as little more than a vague superfluity. Eyeing his glass of beer, he senses an odd, new quality in the object: "il y a autre chose. Presque

⁴ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 11.

⁵ Ibid., p. 18.

⁶ Ibid., p. 21.

rien."⁷ Moreover, something has happened in the nature of an event. Roquentin's justification of the eventfulness of the event runs as follows. He feels qualms about having written "rien de nouveau": "'Rien de nouveau.' J'admire comme on peut mentir en mettant la raison de son côté."⁸ However, Roquentin is still hesitant to admit what he has tried to deny. The event, as such, appears in the text and its status as an event is promptly questioned: "j'ai voulu et je n'ai pas pu ramasser un papier qui traînait par terre. C'est tout et ce n'est même pas un événement."⁹ Nonetheless, Roquentin cannot deny the impression that the incident has made on him -- an impression that leads him to a somewhat startling conclusion: "j'ai pensé que je n'étais plus libre."¹⁰ This sense of the loss of his freedom haunts Roquentin to the point of being the main impetus behind the writing of his diary entry for the day: "C'est elle [cette idée] qui m'a dicté les pages qui précèdent."¹¹ We note the writer's suggestion that the idea of the loss of freedom is so strongly at work that it is, in fact, responsible for his very discourse. Moreover, any incident with the power to trigger such an idea

⁷ Ibid., emphasis added.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

must be classified as an event, for the classification of events and the decision to write are one and the same project ("Le mieux serait d'écrire les événements au jour le jour . . . et surtout les classer"). Roquentin has finally admitted the eventfulness of his inability to pick up the piece of paper. He can now only make excuses for his reluctance to recount the event in the first place:

Pourquoi n'en ai-je pas parlé? Ça doit être par orgueil, et puis, aussi, un peu par maladresse. Je n'ai pas l'habitude de me raconter ce qui m'arrive, alors je ne trouve pas bien la succession des événements, je ne distingue pas ce qui est important.¹²

Roquentin concludes his apology with abrupt precision:

"Il n'y a pas grand-chose à dire: je n'ai pas pu ramasser le papier, c'est tout."¹³

The unstable nature of Roquentin's ramblings deserves closer scrutiny. Why, for instance, is he impelled to suppress the "event" through the use of a discourse which manifests itself as a kind of stalling tactic -- "dix pages" of parenthetical journalism between the lie ("Rien de nouveau") and the confession ("je n'ai pas dit la vérité")? What does Roquentin find so sinister and threatening about an "event" and about this "event" in particular? These are questions we must eventually answer.

¹² Ibid., emphasis added.

¹³ Ibid.

Chapter I

THE SCRAPS OF PAPER

(L')imagination n'est rien autre que le sujet transporté dans les choses. Les images portent alors la marque du sujet. Et cette marque est si claire que finalement c'est par les images qu'on peut avoir le plus sûr diagnostic des tempéraments [Bachelard, La Terre et les rêves du repos, p. 3].

If our strategy is to "tenter une psychanalyse des choses," perhaps our first question should be: what is the significance, for Roquentin, of the piece of paper? Fortunately, for us, Roquentin answers this question:

J'aime beaucoup ramasser les marrons, les vieilles loques, surtout les papiers. Il m'est agréable de les prendre, de fermer ma main sur eux; pour un peu je les porterais à ma bouche, comme font les enfants. Anny entrainait dans des colères blanches quand je soulevais par un coin des papiers lourds et somptueux, mais probablement salis de merde. En été ou au début de l'automne, on trouve dans les jardins des bouts de journaux que le soleil a cuits, secs et cassants comme des feuilles mortes, si jaunes qu'on peut les croire passés à l'acide picrique. D'autres feuillets, l'hiver, sont pilonnés, broyés, maculés, ils retournent à la terre. D'autres tout neufs et mêmes glacés, tout blancs, tout palpitants, sont posés comme des cygnes, mais déjà la terre les englué par en dessous. Ils se tortent, ils s'arrachent à la boue, mais c'est pour aller s'aplatir un peu plus loin, définitivement. Tout cela est bon à prendre. Quelquefois je les palpe simplement en les regardant de tout près, d'autres fois je les déchire pour entendre leur long crépitement, ou bien, s'ils sont très humides, j'y mets le feu, ce qui ne va pas sans peine; puis j'essuie mes paumes remplies de boue

à un mur ou à un tronc d'arbre.¹⁴

We note from the start that it is not exclusively papers which Roquentin likes to handle; he also enjoys picking up chestnuts and old rags, although he maintains that it is especially papers which he finds appealing. It is not easy to deduce a common categorical denominator for the three objects. All three can be found on the ground and it is tempting to generalize the orientation of Roquentin's pastime in just such a way. But Roquentin does not claim to enjoy picking up "things on the ground." He is quite specific in declaring the objects of his fancy as "les marrons," "les vieilles loques" and "les papiers." What is puzzling is that we find no evidence in Roquentin's text of his gathering anything but "les papiers" (with the exception of the stone, mentioned earlier and which will be examined in a subsequent section of this study). Nonetheless, his mention of chestnuts ("les marrons") is highly suggestive because of its rather obvious prefiguring of the episode of the chestnut tree ("le marronnier"), which plays a crucial role later in the journal.¹⁵ Furthermore, a connection can be drawn between the

¹⁴ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 22-23.

¹⁵ Roquentin finds many of his papers "dans les jardins" and it is in the "Jardin public" that he will later have his celebrated encounter with the "racine du marronnier" (La Nausée, p. 161 ff.). We may infer, then, that it is "dans les jardins" (among other places, perhaps) that Roquentin finds chestnuts, as well as papers, to pick up. Moreover, in the paragraph describing his habit, which we have cited above, it is

old rags and the pieces of paper. The two objects are quite similar in texture and, in fact, can be considered two forms of the same material -- paper is often made from rags. Thus, the fact that Roquentin is fond of picking up both old rags and pieces of paper is understandable and, if the chestnut tree episode should reveal a related textu(r)al theme, we shall be able to understand his practice of handling chestnuts in a categorically similar manner.

Quickly abandoning his interest in chestnuts and old rags, Roquentin elaborates on his habit of fondling paper. He is not a collector. Unlike Robbe-Grillet's Mathieu -- another self-absorbed and neurotic loner who picks up and saves discarded pieces of string and who, in a way, is reminiscent of Roquentin¹⁶-- Sartre's character demonstrates a mere passing interest in the objects of his obsession and does not store them away to be re-examined, re-fondled and re-kindled at another time. He is but a momentary amateur of discarded scraps. He experiences an

noteworthy that the "tronc d'arbre" against which Roquentin wipes his muddy hands may well be the trunk of a "marronnier," especially if the tree is found "dans les jardins [publics]." Thus, a certain spirality appears in the structure of the paragraph: Roquentin begins by picking up chestnuts and ends by feeling the bark of a chestnut tree. This thematic movement is reflected in the plot of Roquentin's philosophical development, as we shall subsequently discover.

¹⁶ Alain Robbe-Grillet, Le Voyeur (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1955). See also Dennis Porter's "Sartre, Robbe-Grillet and the Psychotic Hero," in Modern Fiction Studies 16 (1970): 13-25 for an elaboration of the similarities and differences between the two "psychotic" personalities.

agreeable pleasure in merely grasping the objects and closing his hand around them (Il m'est agréable de les prendre, de fermer ma main sur eux"); to put it differently, we might say that Roquentin likes to have the objects "in his hand." Further, he has the urge to bring the papers to his mouth and, presumably, to put them in "comme font les enfants," but he restrains himself. There is a suggestion that Anny, Roquentin's ex-lover, is at least one of the sources of this restraint, for Roquentin immediately inserts the remark that Anny used to go into "des colères blanches" when he would so much as pick up the corner of one of his prize finds. Often he simply holds the morsels, feels them (up?!) and looks at them very closely. Other times (and here we note how Roquentin is most unlike an obsessive collector), he tears them in order to hear their "crépitement" or sets them afire, with difficulty, if they are very wet. Thus, Roquentin seems to enjoy picking up papers for at least four reasons: he likes to (1) grasp and caress them, (2) look closely at them, (3) put them in his mouth (taking Roquentin at his word, this act is but a fantasy which "pour un peu" he would realize), and (4) destroy them.

It is clear that Roquentin's perception of the papers themselves requires some elucidation before we can speculate on the origins of his behavior towards these objects. A careful examination of the language Roquentin employs in

his description of the objects should provide us with some interesting and helpful data. Let us begin with an analysis of two words, in particular, which seem somewhat striking in their specific contexts: "merde" and "picrique" -- the first because of its colloquiality and scatological significance, and the second because of its technical nature.

Although Roquentin finds some of the papers "somp-tueux," he remarks that they are "probablement salis de merde." Whether they are, in fact, soiled with shit is difficult to determine, for the papers which Roquentin picks up are often quite muddy. We know this because of the final clause of his description of the papers, in which he states: "puis j'essuie mes paumes remplies de boue à un mur ou à un tronc d'arbre" (emphasis added). But regardless of the factual condition of the papers, Roquentin at least thinks it probable that they have been shat on. Thus, we are supplied with a metonymic association on the part of the writer: mud ---> shit.

Another association of Roquentin's, although not nearly as evident as that of "merde" and "boue," yields further information. As we have already noted, it is the papers which are "somp-tueux" that are also "probablement salis de merde." "Somptueux" is an adjective which is often applied to food -- "un repas somptueux," for example -- and this qualifier is quite appropriate for Roquentin's

pieces of paper, for he has already mentioned his urges to bring these objects to his mouth. In general, however, "sompptueux" denotes something "qui a nécessité de grandes dépenses, qui est d'une beauté couteuse, d'un luxe brillant" (Le Petit Robert, emphasis added). Thus, its qualification of an object as "bon à manger" is secondary to the principal use of the adjective "sompptueux," referring to an object which is both valuable and shiny. Like gold? Perhaps. Freud points out that the connection between gold and feces and, more generally, between money (i.e., the very denotation of value) and feces is not unusual.¹⁷ The origin of this unlikely symbolic relation is found in what Freud believes to be the infant's attitude towards its own stool:

They [the contents of the bowels] are treated as part of the infant's own body and represent his first 'gift': by producing them he can express his active compliance with his environment and, by withholding them, his disobedience.¹⁸

Thus, both oral and anal imagery are condensed in the notion of sumptuousness.

In conclusion, we note further that the adjective "sompptueux" is ultimately rooted in the Latin verb sumere, meaning (in French) "prendre" or "employer" (Le Petit Rob-

¹⁷ See especially Freud's "Character and Anal Erotism," in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. IX, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1959).

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works, Vol. VII (London: Hogarth, 1953), p. 186.

ert). Thus, in a rather extensive associative network of eating and excreting, excreting and eating, and valuation of that which has been discarded, "tout cela est bon à prendre," as Roquentin himself insists.

The writer then goes on to describe a certain discoloring of the papers that he picks up during the summer and early fall. Here he particularizes and identifies the objects as "des bouts de journaux" -- "remnants of . . . newspapers," as Alexander puts it,¹⁹ but which could also be rendered as "scraps of journals" (we shall need to turn our attention to this detail later -- see below, p. 237, note #301). The papers have been baked by the sun ("le soleil [les] a cuits") and we note here another occurrence of the alimentary imagery, which began with Roquentin's mention of the urge to put the papers into his mouth and continued with his use of the word "somp tueux." These scraps are "secs et cassants" ("dry and apt to break") and "si jaunes qu'on peut les croire passés à l'acide picrique."

"L'acide picrique," the Littre tells us, is a "matière tinctoriale d'un jaune d'or éclatant et que Lyon emploie présentement d'une manière presque exclusive pour ses soieries." In addition to its use as a dye, picric acid, a "bitter toxic . . . yellow crystalline strong acid" (Webster's Third New International) is utilized in

¹⁹ See Lloyd Alexander's translation of the novel, Nausea (New York: New Directions, 1964), p. 10.

the manufacture of high explosives and as an antiseptic. What is important about Roquentin's use of the term, for our present context, has to do with: (1) its color, and (2) its taste ("picrique," from the Greek pikros, meaning "bitter").

The yellow tint of the papers is attributable both to a fading which comes with age and to the work of sunlight, which serves to hasten this process of aging. The connection appears quite clear, for Roquentin's remark about the cooking of the papers by the sun and his notation of their strong yellow color occur as segments of the same sentence. These two elements are spanned by his mention of the papers' dryness ("secs") and their resemblance to dead leaves ("comme des feuilles mortes") -- the first qualification referring to the sun's heat and the second to its aging effect. But the cause and effect relationship here may not be so clear cut. Roquentin has already noted that there are papers which are "probablement salis de merde." How so? The possibility that these discarded scraps are soiled with human excrement seems unlikely, for the public streets and parks that Roquentin haunts are hardly appropriate places to find used "papiers hygiéniques." We can only presume that, if the papers are indeed "salis de merde," the shit in question must come from dogs. It is not only shit that may be found on discarded pieces of paper, however. A dog will also pee on selected landmarks

in the process of following another dog's scent trail, or perhaps while marking out his own. In other words, if Roquentin finds it probable that these pieces of paper are dirty with shit, then it is also probable that they are dirty with urine, as well. Picric acid, known for its staining capacities and bitter taste, then bears a distinct similarity to urine, and Roquentin's relating, through analogy, of the yellow of the papers to the yellow of the compound suggests another scatological network of associations.

Anny's "colères," then, are not surprising. Her apparent disgust at Roquentin's little habit recalls the angry reaction of a mother who scolds her child for picking up pieces of dirty trash with the usual admonition: "Don't touch that! You don't know where it's been!" It is understood that "where it's been" may be at the end of a yellow stream of dog urine, if the piece of trash does not already betray some kind of excremental history. An even greater anger, admixed with horror, will result if the child makes any kind of gesture to bring the object to his mouth, as children are prone to do ("comme font les enfants").

With the advent of winter comes a corresponding change in the state of Roquentin's dirty scraps. The excremental imagery of the description gives way to a language that betrays a symbolic undercurrent which is quite

violent in nature. Gone are the sun-baked yellow pages of summer and early autumn. In their place are the quickly-decomposing leaves of winter: "D'autres feuillets, l'hiver, sont pilonnés, broyés, maculés, ils retournent à la terre." This description of rot and decay, however, is immediately superseded by the somewhat unexpected image of a quivering, icy swan, desperately trying to escape the clutches of the muddy earth: "D'autres tout neufs et même glacés, tout blancs, tout palpitants, sont posés comme des cygnes, mais déjà la terre les englué par en dessous. Ils se tordent, ils s'arrachent à la boue, mais c'est pour aller s'aplatir un peu plus loin, définitivement."

The image of the dying swans is an interesting one. We see first the figure of a poet who, either from age or as a result of creative impotence, can no longer gracefully produce his elegant song, nor set himself aloft on the pure white wings of his melodic tune.²⁰ Moreover, the metaphor is reinforced by the literality of Roquentin's description, for some of the papers have been written on (the page torn from a student's notebook, for example,

²⁰ This image of the dying swan, which can no longer "prendre l'essor," is reminiscent of Mallarmé's cygne in "Le vierge, le vivace, et le bel aujourd'hui..." -- a figure of the poet who is likewise stuck in the mud:

Tout son col secouera cette blanche agonie/
Par l'espace infligé à l'oiseau qui le nie/
Mais non l'horreur du sol où le plumage est
pris.

See Stéphane Mallarmé, Poésies (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 90.

which is described in Roquentin's next paragraph). There are also the scraps of newspaper, other vehicles for the written word. The ink of these texts, as the winter progresses, will become smudged and faded -- the decline and subsequent disappearance of the poet's written production.

But the appearance of the "cygne" in Roquentin's text points to other associative paths as well (the "cygne" as "signe"). Bachelard, for example, treats the image of the swan in the following manner:

Le cygne, en littérature, est un ersatz de la femme nue. C'est la nudité permise, c'est la blancheur immaculée et cependant ostensible. Au moins, les cygnes se laissent voir! Qui adore le cygne désire la baigneuse.²¹

Thus, the swan image which Roquentin associates with the icy, white papers reveals a somewhat unexpected aspect of the object's symbolic status. In a way, Roquentin sees his papers as nude, innocent women and he enjoys his pastime with a kind of voyeuristic pleasure. Furthermore, we see the relation of the swan-as-poet to the swan-as-baigneuse, for, as Bachelard continues:

L'image du "cygne" . . . est toujours un désir. C'est, dès lors, en tant que désir qu'il chante. Or, il n'y a qu'un seul désir qui chante en mourant, qui meurt en chantant, c'est le désir sexuel. Le chant du cygne, c'est donc le désir sexuel à son point culminant.²²

²¹ Gaston Bachelard, L'Eau et les rêves (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1942), p. 50.

²² Ibid., p. 53.

The swan, then, is both the object of sexual desire -- the baigneuse -- and the desire itself, and, thus, a condensation of two moments into what is necessarily a single drive: that is, there can be no desire without an object, and the sexual drive -- both its component of desire and its object -- is represented by the "cygne." The poet, ceaselessly singing his melancholic song right up until the moment of his death, betrays in his swan song a double focus for his desire as poet/swan, for he desires both the "cygne" (as female sexual object, as baigneuse) and the "signe," and his wish to communicate the world and his relationship to it through the use of language (signes) is proportional to his wish to view a virgin Diana at her bath ("la femme nue," "la baigneuse," le cygne). Suggested in the image of the swan, then, is both the desire to write and the desire of sexual possession, as well as the figure of the subject himself who seeks these goals. It is as if the subject wishes to be that which he desires. As we shall see, Roquentin's selection of the swan metaphor to depict some of the papers he craves is indicative of the fundamental nature of his ideosyncratic preoccupation.

The fate of the quivering paper swans is a cruel one. Unable to free themselves, without great difficulty, from the lethal glue of the muddy winter earth, they twist and turn and finally manage to tear themselves (literally)

from the clutches of their slimy captor, only to be flattened out "définitivement" a short distance away. Later, they will become "pilonnés, broyés, [et] maculés" as they "retournent à la terre." We note the violent nature of the first two participial adjectives: "pilonner -- battre avec un pilon; fouler une étoffe" (Littre) and "broyer -- réduire par l'écrasement en très menues parcelles" (Littre). The papers appear to have been crushed by a pestle or pounded like a piece of cloth which has been fulled. They have, in fact, been "beaten to a pulp" like a book that has been "mis au pilon." A continuation of the swan-as-poet imagery is evident here, for a book which has been sent to the pulp mill has been deemed valueless and has thus been taken out of circulation -- the words of the poet have fallen on deaf ears and his "signes" decompose into valueless (i.e. their exchange value has, for all intents and purposes, dwindled to nothing), inarticulate signifiers. The signifiers have become insignificant. The fact that the "papiers" / "cygnes" / "signes" are "maculés" reinforces this latter interpretation, for the ink on the papers has run and now appears as blotchy stains: a text which is, perhaps, illegible and thus incomprehensible -- a signifier for which there can be no decipherable signified, nor even the possibility of one. The verb "maculer" refers, more precisely, to the blurring of a text which results from a bad printing ("to mackle"). Accord-

ing to the Littre: "maculer -- barbouiller, en parlant de feuilles d'imprimerie et d'estampes. On macule un livre quand on le bat trop fraîchement imprimé." Once again, therefore, we note that Roquentin's choice of words indicates a textual quality of the papers which he likes to pick up. They are not just any papers -- crumpled brown paper bags, sandwich wrappers, etc. -- but papers which have been written or printed on.

But, as Bachelard points out, the swan is also "un ersatz de la femme nue." Viewed from this perspective, the return to the earth of the quivering, white paper swans takes on a tragic connotation. The cold, naked woman struggles in vain to free herself from the grasp of the sticky earth, a muddy creature which possesses her "par en dessous." The woman twists and turns and momentarily frees herself from the clutches of her assailant, only to be crushed, for good, a short distance away. The "blancheur innaculée" of the fresh and innocent "baigneuse" is now replaced by a form which is sullied: "pilonnée," "broyée" and "maculée." She then "returns to the earth," as all corpses do.

This reading of Roquentin's text, following the path of the extended metaphor suggested by Bachelard's swan, as naked woman, is reinforced by a description that occurs later in Roquentin's journal. With his existential crisis in its full fury, Roquentin finds himself unable to write

anything more about the Marquis de Rollebon, the subject of the historical text for which he has come to Bouville to do research. He steps out of his room, battling the madness of the ontological quandry in which he is trapped, and buys a newspaper ("un journal") in which he reads an account of the discovery of the body of a young girl who has been raped and strangled. Roquentin holds the paper and examines it, in much the same way, perhaps, as he examines the discarded papers that he likes to pick up from the ground: "Je roule le journal en boule mes doigts crispés sur le journal."²³ As for the victim: "On a retrouvé son corps, ses doigts crispés dans la boue."²⁴ The body of Lucienne (the young girl) was found on the ground, in the mud, her fingers clenching the earth. Although in this case, it is the victim who is holding the ground, and not the other way around, we are reminded of the paper swans which "la terre . . . englué par en dessous. Ils se tordent, ils s'arrachent à la boue, mais c'est pour aller s'aplatir un peu plus loin, définitivement." What's more, Roquentin, in his panicked hallucinations, imagines one of Lucienne's fingers to be "maculé de boue,"²⁵ thus re-utilizing one of the three adjectives he has earlier associated with the dying paper swans. Finally, we note the

²³ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 130.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 130, emphasis added.

following passage:

Je marche entre les maisons, je suis entre les
maisons, tout droit sur le pavé; le pavé sous
mes pieds existe, les maisons se referment sur
moi, comme l'eau se referme sur moi sur le papi-
er en montagne de cygne, je suis.²⁶

Roquentin feels that the houses are closing in on him --
in much the same way as he closes his fingers on the news-
paper ("sur le journal"), and closes his hand on papers in
general ("fermer ma main sur eux," p. 22) -- and he com-
pares this sensation to that produced by water, in the
shape of a mountainous swan, which engulfs both him and
the paper he is holding. The real paper, once signified
by the metaphorical swan, has been separated from its sig-
nifier. This signifier, which at one time served to de-
pict the paper, disappears, only to return over one hun-
dred pages later to haunt Roquentin, as the image of a
mountainous and engulfing surge of water, itself a meta-
phor for the houses which threaten to close over him. The
"cygne" seems to have taken off in flight; the signifying
component of the "signe" has broken loose from its moor-
ings.

And "tout cela est bon à prendre," declares Roquentin
-- that is, the papers which are "lourds et somptueux,"
those which "le soleil a cuits, secs et cassants" and
which are "si jaunes qu'on peut les croire passés à l'ac-
ide picrique," those which are "pilonnés, broyés, ma-

²⁶ Ibid., emphasis added.

culés," and lastly those "tout neufs . . . glacés, tout blancs, tout palpitants" and "posés comme des cygnes."

"Tout cela est bon à prendre." We have thus far examined in some detail the nature of the "cela." Roquentin sees the papers as dirty, decomposing objects. They are mud-stained, but probably stained with shit (and perhaps urine), as well. They are discarded, discolored and maculated texts. They are white, pristine swans, poets and their works, nude baigneuses on their way to an inglorious and perhaps violent death. There is an undercurrent, in Roquentin's description, of anal and oral imagery, as well as a sexual status for the papers, a sexuality which manifests itself as a voyeurism on the part of Roquentin.

We must now take a glance at the "bon à prendre." If Roquentin regards the papers in the manner we have suggested, why does he want to handle them, bring them to his mouth and set them afire (if they are wet)?

"J'aime beaucoup ramasser les marrons, les vieilles loques, surtout les papiers." It is the verb "ramasser" that Roquentin first uses to describe his activities with the found objects. It is also the verb he uses to denote the action which he no longer feels free to perform, the negative verb which marks the "event" which he has hesitated to mention: "Il n'y a pas grand-chose à dire: je

n'ai pas pu ramasser le papier, c'est tout."²⁷

The Littré provides the following senses for the verb

ramasser:

1. amasser en y mettant soin et peine (seule nuance que mette la particule re entre amasser et ramasser)
2. prendre, relever ce qui est à la terre
3. mettre ensemble ce qui est épars
4. réduire le volume
5. (fig.) réunir, rassembler pour quelque effort ou action
6. s'est dit au commencement du dix-huitième siècle pour faire monter dans son carrosse une personne que l'on rencontre à pied
7. se charger d'une personne qu'on a trouvé dans l'embarras, dans la misère
8. (fig. et pop.) "ramasser quelqu'un," le maltraiter de coups et de paroles

Obviously, the primary sense of the "ramasser" of Roquentin's text is the meaning listed secondly in the Litt
tré. As Roquentin continues, he points out that it is pleasant for him "de les prendre" (emphasis added) and, clearly, the objects are par terre. As is the case with any signifier, however, we might suspect a proliferation of signification that tends to suggest secondary connota-

²⁷ Ibid., p. 22, emphasis added.

tions, as well. We recall, for example, that some of the papers are "pilonnés" and "broyés." Picking up one of these scraps, closing one's hand on it, would result in a kind of gathering together of a fragmentary whole. These papers are disintegrating and may already be in pieces, but Roquentin's fondling, although it may ultimately contribute to the papers' decay, is a temporary salvaging of the papers' individual unities. Thus, the "ramasser" in this particular case suggests the third meaning given in the Littre: "mettre ensemble ce qui est épars." What's more, given the dirty and unhealthy condition of many of the scraps and the quasi-tragic tone with which Roquentin relates the fate of the paper swans, the first, the sixth, and especially the seventh connotations indicated in the Littre seem to slip into the sense of Roquentin's "ramasser" as the paragraph develops. Indeed, Roquentin's attitude towards the flotsam and jetsam that he picks up is, at least for the greater part of the paragraph, more or less benevolent. It is apparent that he must handle the pounded and crushed swan-like detritus with "soin et peine" and that these papers, as dying swans, are certainly "dans l'embarras, dans la misère." When we consider the undercurrent of sexual imagery and the fate of the nude virgin, fallen against the muddy earth, the "misère" of the object which is "ramassé" is exacerbated. We might even speculate that if Roquentin were a well-to-do member

of eighteenth century society, he would want to "ramasser" the rotting pieces with a kind of metaphorical carriage (indicating the sixth denotation in the Littre), much to the chagrin of the regal Anny who would display, no doubt, "des colères blanches" at such patent samaritanism towards such foul and filthy rejects.

But the latent benevolence of Roquentin's description is not consistent, for it gives way rather abruptly to a destructive impulse: "d'autres fois je les déchire pour entendre leur long crépitement [the crackling, melancholic death rattle of the papers' swan song?], ou bien, s'ils sont très humides, j'y mets le feu, ce qui ne va pas sans peine." It is clear that Roquentin harbors an ambivalent attitude towards these objects. Such ambivalence, however, is quite consistent with the semantic shadings of what we have taken as the primary verbal signifier of the paragraph, for "ramasser," as the Littre suggests, is an antithetical word. The eighth entry in the resumé of meanings in the Littre refers to a popular, figurative use of "ramasser": "'ramasser quelqu'un,' le maltraiter de coups et de paroles." Thus, if we consider the verb in its most semantically pregnant form, we discover that in picking up the broken and the miserable, we do so only to beat and insult them later. In other words, Roquentin's pleasure in picking up papers from the ground is indicative of a wish to both caress and mistreat the objects.

The verbs "prendre" and "fermer" demand some consideration, as well, although both these actions are partially subsumed by the connotations of the initial verb, "ramasser." As we have already discovered, the "prendre" in the phrase "il m'est agréable de les prendre" functions primarily as a reinforcement of the apparent sense of "ramasser": "prendre, relever ce qui est à la terre" (the second definition of the Littre). But there is another sense of "prendre" that resounds through Roquentin's whimsical urge to put the papers into his mouth, through the qualifier "somp tueux," and through the phrase "que le soleil a cuits." "On prend un repas," and the papers are certainly, at least in part, objects to be eaten.

As far as the verb "fermer" is concerned ("de fermer ma main sur eux"), we note its apparent function of indicating a "closing over," or an "enclosing." The papers are thus captured -- or protected -- by the action of the hand which separates and closes them off from the outside world. In other words, this maneuver of grasping something firmly ("ferme ment") with the hand and enclosing it securely is, like the action of putting something into one's mouth, a form of incorporation. One takes ("ramasse," "prend") something from the world and places it somehow within oneself, corporeally. Roquentin picks up the papers which he finds in the world in order to hold them in his hand -- in his world, as it is delimited by the body.

But Roquentin's pastime is not restricted to merely picking up and closing his hand around the objects. In addition, he is sometimes on the verge of putting the papers into his mouth (or, at least, touching them to his lips): "pour un peu je les porterais à ma bouche, comme font les enfants." The somewhat disgusting aspect of Roquentin's potential action reinforces the peculiarity of his off-beat habit. If we are to propose an explanation for Roquentin's oral interest in the soiled papers, it will be necessary to begin with an examination of the act itself, as a prototypical mode of behavior, without regard to the specificity of the objects that Roquentin desires. Then we shall better see what role the papers themselves play in the manifestation of Roquentin's oral attitude.

Oral activity, in general, can be traced back to the prototypical scene in which the infant sucks from its mother's breast. This infantile paradigm provides the framework on which a great deal of oral behavior will later be founded. Freud, for instance, describes an early example of the wish to "put things in one's mouth" in terms of an originary moment at the mother's breast.²⁸

²⁸ It is precisely at this moment, moreover, that infantile sexuality (and, thus, sexuality in general) first appears. Freud's formulation of this theory on the origin of sexuality is both crucial and controversial and we should not skirt a discussion of its soundness and implications. We shall postpone, however, any consideration of the pros and cons of Freud's position until the following chapter, which will be devoted extensively to the importance of this moment in Freud's text (and in the infant's development) and its ramifications

Freud's example is that of "sensual sucking" [Wonnesaugen: literally, "bliss-sucking"], in which the infant sucks on its thumb, its big toe, or on any other bodily part that is within reach:

Thumb-sucking [Das Ludeln oder Lutschen] appears already in early infancy and may continue into maturity, or even persist all through life. It consists in the rhythmic repetition of a sucking contact by the mouth (or lips). There is no question of the purpose of this procedure being the taking of nourishment²⁹

Thus, the act of sucking is a repetition of the more primal gesture of taking nourishment from the breast. This re-enactment of a moment of biological satisfaction is pleasurable and is akin to the pleasure-producing structures of all future sexual activity. As Freud points out:

Sensual sucking involves a complete absorption of the attention and leads either to sleep or even to a motor reaction in the nature of an orgasm . . . No one who has seen a baby sinking back satisfied from the breast and falling asleep with flushed cheeks and a blissful smile can escape the reflection that this picture persists as a prototype of the expression of sexual satisfaction in later life.³⁰

The infant normally chooses a part of its own body for the purposes of sensual sucking, and not an extraneous body or object. Not only is it more "convenient" to suck oneself in such a situation, but the choice of himself as object makes the baby "independent of the external world, which

with regard to our analysis of the text of Roquentin.

²⁹ Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, pp. 179-180.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 180, 182 (emphasis added).

he is not yet able to control."³¹ As the infant matures, it will begin to choose its sexual objects -- both oral and otherwise -- from among those which it finds in the external world and, if we may extrapolate from Freud's observation, these later activities will manifest the subject's ability or attempts to control this "external world."

The fundamental oral attitude may continue to manifest itself throughout the subject's life, although not necessarily in the form of the auto-erotic sensual sucking that we have just now discussed. There is, however, an apparent aetiological connection between those children who are especially prone to sensual sucking and those adults who demonstrate what might be called an oral "disposition":

It is not every child who sucks in this way. It may be assumed that those children do so in whom there is a constitutional intensification of the erotogenic significance of the labial region. If that significance persists, these same children when they grow up will become epicures in kissing, will be inclined to perverse kissing, or, if males, will have a powerful motive for drinking and smoking. If, however, repression ensues, they will feel disgust at food and will produce hysterical vomiting. The repression extends to the nutritional instinct owing to the dual purpose served by the labial zone.³²

³¹ Ibid., p. 182.

³² Ibid.

It is clear that a good deal of Roquentin's behavior reflects certain oral tendencies, as Freud describes them. Although he is not a particularly avid drinker, smoker, or eater, it must be admitted that he is "inclined to perverse kissing," as his urge to bring the papers to his mouth indicates. This urge, however, is indeed merely an inclination, for this oral act is never really carried out -- a fact evidenced by Roquentin's use of the conditional tense ("porterais"). Roquentin's observation that such behavior is usually ascribed to children ("comme font les enfants") reinforces rather overtly the structural similarity between his adult inclination and the infantile practice of putting objects into the mouth, a habit which is an obvious correlative of sensual sucking. Moreover, the fact that Roquentin restrains himself from mouthing the papers, coupled with his awareness that such behavior is infantile, indicates that, although tempted, Roquentin does not actually take the dangerous step into regressive mania -- that is, a neurotic return to a time when instinctual satisfaction was not yet governed by the reality principle. His resistance represents a crucial moment of conscious self-control that would tend to confirm any assertion that Roquentin, although eccentric, is not crazy. His fear of disease or fear that his behavior would be socially unacceptable (in Anny's eyes, at least) -- both manifestations of the "reality principle" -- are no doubt

responsible for the lack of the "peu" that would inspire Roquentin to actually bring the dirty papers to his lips and mouth.

It is important to examine, as well, the reverse face of the affective coin which Freud strikes in his summary of the oral disposition. "If . . . repression ensues," Freud says, the individual "will feel disgust at food and will produce hysterical vomiting." Now, Roquentin is not hysterical and does not relate any instances of vomiting during the period in which he is keeping his journal. He does, however, feel nauseated from time to time and, although this nausea is not directly related to a disgust at food, it is important to note that Roquentin's reaction to an unsettling thought, a horrifying revelation, or a viscous object takes the form of a negative oral attitude.³³

The ambivalent tendencies of Roquentin's oral leanings can be further elucidated, if we take into consideration Bachelard's examination of such images in general. For Bachelard, the paradigmatic representation of an oral compulsion is to be found in the Biblical story of Jonah in the belly of the whale; any fascination with images of

³³ We should remark that at a later point in the text, towards the end of his meal with the Autodidact, Roquentin becomes nauseated while eating a piece of bread with cheese. The origin of the nausea, however, is to be found in an amalgam of factors -- the atmosphere of the restaurant, the words and face of the Autodidact, the inanimate objects at the table, the food Roquentin is chewing -- and can be construed as an affective response to the world as it appears from a certain point of view.

swallowing and ingesting through the mouth are, then, constitutive of what Bachelard terms the "Jonah complex": "le complexe de Jonas est un phénomène psychologique de la déglutition."³⁴ It is important to remark that it is only those images which represent something (or someone) being swallowed whole that Bachelard includes under the rubric of the Jonah complex. Chewing plays no part in this particular archetype: "Sous la forme digestive, l'image de Jonas correspond à une avidité d'avaler sans perdre le temps qu'il faut pour mâcher. Il semble que le glouton, animé par des plaisirs inconscients primitifs, retourne à la période du sucking."³⁵ This distinction between chewing and sucking appears in Freud's text, as well, and serves to mark the definitive break between the nutritional instinct and the oral sexual drive: "The need for repeating the sexual satisfaction . . . becomes detached from the need to take nourishment -- a separation which becomes inevitable when the teeth appear and food is no longer taken in only by sucking, but is also chewed up."³⁶ Thus we see that Bachelard's Jonah complex, which "on pourrait considérer . . . comme un cas particulier de sevrage,"³⁷ is roughly equivalent to what Freud might term an oral fix-

³⁴ Gaston Bachelard, La Terre et les rêveries du repos (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1948), p. 144.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 155.

³⁶ Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, p. 182.

³⁷ Bachelard, La Terre et les rêveries du repos, p. 144.

ation: a disposition which concentrates itself on the mouth and lips as an erotogenic zone.

Now, the wording in Roquentin's text does not permit us to ascertain whether he would kiss, suck, swallow, or chew the papers once he has brought them to his mouth. But, once again, the suggestive addendum "comme font les enfants" seems to label the activity as one which is based on an infantile paradigm. Moreover, Roquentin's journal as a whole seems to confirm the existence of a Jonah complex in the psyche of the writer, for its repeated instances of nausea (the result of a repression of the oral drive, says Freud) serve to advertize the strength of the oral fixation, albeit a fixation which is unconscious. Bachelard, in fact, treats La Nausée as a kind of exemplary case of a proliferation of Jonah-in-the-whale imagery. Calling particular attention to Roquentin's nauseous crisis in the tramway -- a scene in which a car seat takes on a rather imposing existence in the eyes of Roquentin, who sees it as the upturned belly of a dead donkey³⁸-- Bachelard maintains:

Ce livre [La Nausée] porte le signe d'une fidélité remarquable aux puissances inconscientes, même lorsqu'il présente son héros Roquentin dans le décousu des impressions conscientes. Ainsi, même pour un nauséeux, pour un être qui ne veut rien avaler, pour un être qui souffre "d'un anti-Jonas," il y a des ventres partout.³⁹

³⁸ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 159.

³⁹ Bachelard, La Terre et les rêveries du repos, p. 169.

With Bachelard's closing words, we are reminded of the newspaper scene in which Roquentin reads the account of the rape of Lucienne. Houses threaten to close over both him and the paper like a mountainous, engulfing swan (see above, p. 22). The paper swan which he used to hold now threatens to hold him, to "se referme sur [lui]" in an image which is decidedly Jonah-esque: Roquentin is in danger of finding himself in the belly of a swan! Thus, the dialectical movement of the metaphoric swallowing / swallowed, which is indicative of the so-called "Jonah complex," presents itself once again, this time in a latently sexual framework, for the swan, as we have pointed out, appears in Roquentin's discourse in the role of a tragically sexual figure to be possessed ("incorporated," if you will).

In summary, then, we might say that Roquentin's urge to bring the papers to his mouth indicates an oral disposition on his part. This disposition is confirmed by its negative opposite: the nausea in which his anxiety is usually couched. Moreover, this disposition is, at least on one level, sexual in nature -- a point of view that is reinforced by the swan imagery which appears a few lines later in Roquentin's description of his habit. Thus, the papers can be seen as sexual objects in an activity which mimics the ordinary sexual act. The papers are sumptuous breasts which, "pour un peu," Roquentin would bring to his mouth "comme font les enfants."

Before abandoning this discussion of Roquentin's oral relationship to the dirty scraps that he gathers, we might point out a possible connection between the oral aspect of the writer's disposition and his interest in "picking up" things in the first place. Returning to Freud's text, we note the following in regard to sensual sucking:

A portion of the lip itself, the tongue, or any other part of the skin within reach -- even the big toe -- may be taken as the object upon which this sucking is carried out. In this connection a grasping-instinct [Greiftrieb] may appear and may manifest itself as a simultaneous rhythmic tugging at the lobes of the ears or a catching hold of some part of another (as a rule the ear) for the same purpose.⁴⁰

Thus, although most of the time we grasp things for a particular purpose -- that is, in order to "use" an object in the context of a task to be performed, or for some other specified end -- grasping as a kind of aimless pastime with no apparent motive or meaning may, in general, be related to this primal Greiftrieb to which Freud refers.

After mentioning Anny's angry reaction to his filthy habit, Roquentin embarks on the season-by-season description of the papers that we have already examined. He then returns to his own behavior vis-à-vis the objects: "Quelquefois je les palpe simplement en les regardant de tout près . . ." Although we may be tempted to regard the verb palper as more or less a synonym for toucher, it is important to bear in mind the precise sense of the word. As

⁴⁰ Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, p. 180.

the Littre gives it, palper denotes: "Toucher avec la main, dans l'intention de connaître" (emphasis added). The verb, therefore, indicates more than a mere touching and may be rendered most effectively in English by something like "to examine with the hands."⁴¹ We see, then, that both Roquentin's touching and his looking at the objects signal a tendency to inquire about the nature or state of the papers that he holds, for both an examining with the hands "dans l'intention de connaître" and a close looking with the eyes suggest a sensual (i.e., "with the senses") investigation of the object in question.

Freud speaks very little about the psychological aspects of touching. There is, of course, his mention of the "grasping-instinct" which we have cited above and, at an earlier point in the same text, he notes the role that touching plays in fore-pleasure:

A certain amount of touching is indispensable (at all events among human beings) before the normal sexual aim can be attained. And everyone knows what a source of pleasure on the one hand and what an influx of fresh excitation on the other is afforded by tactile sensations of the skin of the sexual object. So that lingering over the stage of touching can scarcely be counted a perversion, provided that in the long run the sexual act is carried further.⁴²

⁴¹ Alexander translates "je les palpe" by "I . . . feel them," a rendition which is obviously sorely lacking the richness of the French phrase (see Nausea, p. 10).

⁴² Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, p. 156.

The sexual stimulus provided by the tactile sensations is, no doubt, ultimately related to the sensual arousal of the lips, which was originally triggered by the mother's nipple and the flow of milk into the infant's mouth. Freud does not make this connection clear, however, but rather moves on immediately to the question of the visual: "The same holds true of seeing -- an activity that is ultimately derived from touching."⁴³ Once again, Freud is not explicit about the mechanics of this derivation, but a close examination of the lines which follow reveals a rather interesting possibility. Freud maintains that it is the wish to see that which is concealed of the other's body that prevents human sexual curiosity from becoming dormant: "The progressive concealment of the body which goes along with civilization keeps sexual curiosity awake. This curiosity seeks to complete the sexual object by revealing its hidden parts."⁴⁴ Thus, one of the ways in which the sexual drive manifests itself is through the desire to have the object's body revealed to the eyes of the subject who looks. The eyes are an erotogenic zone that is stimulated by the visual "touch" of the secret parts of the other's body. We might say, consequently, that sexual curiosity which takes the form of looking is "toucher avec les yeux, dans l'intention de connaître," a visual count-

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

erpart to the tactile palper.

This sense of inquiry which Freud attaches to the activity of seeing is elaborated further in the Three Essays. In small children, sexual curiosity appears as the desire to see the genitals of another: a drive which Freud terms "scopophilia" [Schaulust]. Now, although it is understood that some children will engage in certain I'll-show-you-mine-if-you'll-show-me-yours games (serving the dual function of providing satisfaction for both the scopophilic and exhibitionistic desires which are common to young children), the only outlet for many children's voyeuristic urges is to be found at toilet time:

Since opportunities for satisfying curiosity of this kind usually occur only in the course of satisfying the two kinds of needs for excretion, children of this kind turn into voyeurs, eager spectators of the processes of micturition and defaecation. When repression of these inclinations sets in, the desire to see other people's genitals (whether of their own or the opposite sex) persists as a tormenting compulsion, which in some cases of neurosis later affords the strongest motive force for the formation of symptoms.⁴⁵

The excremental staining of the objects Roquentin collects is assumedly not human, but the associative similarities between dog turds and human excrement are apparent enough to provoke a kind of psychological oversight on the observer's part. Now, Roquentin declares that sometimes "je les palpe simplement en les regardant de tout près." The inquiring activity of touching and looking

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 192.

closely at objects which might be soiled with excrement, coupled with the image of the papers as swans and, consequently, their associative status as nude women, suggests a metaphorical re-enactment of the childhood scopophilic moment as it is presented by Freud. Roquentin looks closely at the papers, as if they were nude women in the process of satisfying their excremental needs, in an effort to discover the nature of the female genitals. His inquisitive touching of the papers further substantiates this contention that Roquentin is mimicking a child doing sexual research. Although his pastime can hardly be termed a "tormenting compulsion," its possible connection with the childhood moment seems nonetheless evident.

Moreover, Roquentin's inquisitive activities with the papers can be regarded in the light of a notion that is even more general than that of the sensual / sexual researches of children. Continuing his discussion of infantile sexuality, Freud introduces the "instinct for knowledge or research" [Wiss- oder Forschertrieb]:

This instinct cannot be counted among the elementary instinctual components, nor can it be classed as exclusively belonging to sexuality. Its activity corresponds on the one hand to a sublimated manner of obtaining mastery, while on the other hand it makes use of the energy of scopophilia.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 194.

Thus, although sexual curiosity seems to enjoy a somewhat privileged status in Freud's thought, it is clear that there is also a drive to know and understand the world that can manifest itself independently of a sexual context.⁴⁷ This drive (the Wisstrieb), Freud explains as an attempt to obtain mastery (of the subject's own immediate environment and condition, we should assume).

If we return for a moment to the idea of a grasping-instinct [Greiftrieb], we discover still another relation between the verbs palper and regarder. This urge to grasp things, we recall, may originate during the period of sensual sucking. The infant, in an effort to satisfy what has become a sexual desire for its mother's breast, takes a portion of its own body to replace the absent object of its desire. Freud suggests that "in this connection a grasping-instinct may appear" and that the infant's "rhythmic tugging" of its own bodily parts is part of this same effort to re-create, with its own body, the pleasure which it formerly enjoyed at the breast. Thus, we see that both sensual sucking and the grasping-instinct are attempts to master a situation. The child wants the satisfaction of nursing, but there is no breast to suck on. Rather than remaining unsatisfied, the child tries to in-

⁴⁷ This is not to say that the Wisstrieb is totally independent of Schaulust (for the former finds its "energy" in the latter), but that the drive to know is indicative of other informing factors, as well, and is thus not completely subsumed by the notion of scopophilia.

vent a scheme, on his own, to obtain what his environment seems to be denying him.

Now, if the grasping-instinct can be construed as a manner of obtaining mastery, then a structural relation between it and the instinct for knowledge appears: both are attempts to master and both are related to the sexual drive. Furthermore, there is a linguistic relation between the Greiftrieb and the Wisstriebe, as well. The first element of Freud's neologistic compound noun, Greiftrieb, stems from the verb greifen, meaning "to grasp," "to seize," "to take hold of." But in former times, this sense of the verb was stretched figuratively to mean "to comprehend," "to understand." This now archaic meaning of greifen is preserved in modern German in the word begreifen, a non-separable prefix verb in which echoes of the grasping, gripping greifen can be heard.⁴⁸ Moreover, we note the slang term Greifer (detective, sleuth), which indicates one who grasps in the sense of solving an investigative puzzle through penetrating acumen and clever understanding. Thus, we see that a Wisstriebe is also a (Be)greiftrieb and that the notion of seizing something with the hand provides a figurative base for the more ab-

⁴⁸ A similar relation exists between the terms fassen and erfassen. In fact, the verb fassen itself can still mean both "to take hold of" and "to understand." The French verbs prendre and comprendre, and the double sense of the English "to grasp" suggest that this relation between physical grasping and intellectual grasping may be a more or less universal notion.

stract notion of seizing something with the mind.

Roquentin seems to be running a gamut of verbal modes with regard to his activities with the papers, and these modes are apparently all related to the more primal act of taking the breast (if we take Freud's point of view to be correct). Roquentin suppresses his urge to put the papers into his mouth (which would be a clear re-enactment of the breast-feeding moment), but does pick them up in the first place (the grasping-instinct?). Sometimes he examines them with his hands and eyes with the intention of discovering something about their nature, an activity which may be considered both as an off-shoot of sensual sucking (an attempt to master) and as a manifestation of the instinct for knowledge (a relative of the grasping-instinct). Up until this point, then, Roquentin's activity is, at least on one level, a multi-faceted endeavor to master a situation in which something is lacking: the milk from his mother's breast.

As an addendum to these findings, we might note two other points of interest. First of all, there is the etymology of the verb palper. As we have already remarked, this verb denotes more than a mere touching; rather, it conveys the sense of an inquiring tâtonnement with the hands. Its root is in the Latin verb palpare, meaning "to stroke or touch gently" and, in the figurative sense, "to coax, flatter or wheedle" (Cassell's New Latin Dic-

tionary). It is clear that the modern French verb has veered somewhat in meaning from its Latinate ancestor. No longer does the word carry its connotation of coaxing and flattering, nor has it remained immune from semantic development of its own. The inquisitive aspect of the French palper was not present in the Latin verb, and the familiar palper de l'argent ("to finger money") is certainly a modern innovation.⁴⁹ What is interesting, however, is the relation between the verbs palper and palpiter, with regard to their Latin origins. The Latin palpitare, the root of the French palpiter, was used both in the expected sense of "to move quickly, to tremble, to throb," but also as a frequentative of palpare (Cassell's New Latin Dictionary). Thus, at their origin, the two French verbs can convey similar notions.

"Quelquefois," as Roquentin maintains, "je les palpe," and some of these papers, as we recall, are "tout palpitants" and "posés comme des cygnes." The palpitating papers want to touch too, and we reminded of Roquentin's later remark that the "objets, cela ne devrait pas

⁴⁹ This second meaning, by the way, points to another sense of Roquentin's occasional handling of the papers with his hands. The objects, which are "probablement salis de merde," take on a certain value for him due to his unusual interest in them, and this sense of value, coupled with Freud's contention that excrement and money are related, suggests that Roquentin "palpe les papiers" like he would "palpe de l'argent" (he fingers the papers like he would finger money).

toucher."⁵⁰ Part of Roquentin's dilemma, it seems, both with regard to his inability to pick up a certain piece of paper and with regard to his uneasy state in general, has to do with the peculiar way in which objects seem to want to touch back. The papers-as-swans, "tout palpitants," threaten to "palper Roquentin (simplement!)," and later, after reading about the rape of Lucienne, Roquentin becomes terrifyingly aware of the metaphorical power of the swan, which threatens to engulf the "anti-Jonas," as he earlier would have "pour un peu" put the paper swans into his mouth.

Finally, there are Bachelard's remarks on "la curiosité agressive" to consider. Aggressive curiosity is the term which Bachelard uses to define "la volonté de regarder à l'intérieur des choses."⁵¹ This visual curiosity corresponds, on the sexual level, to scopophilia and, on the intellectual level, to Freud's Wissstrieb. According to Bachelard, the wish to see the inside of things "rend la vue perçante, la vue pénétrante. Elle fait de la vision une violence. Elle décèle la faille, la fente, la fêlure par laquelle on peut violer le secret des choses cachées."⁵² The sexual innuendo that underscores Bachelard's descriptive language is unmistakable, if not downright ex-

⁵⁰ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 23.

⁵¹ Bachelard, La Terre et les rêveries du repos, p. 7.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 7-8.

plicit. "La curiosité agressive" is posited as a kind of visual rape, a looking which uncovers a fault, a slit, a crack through which the hidden secret of things can be violated. And Bachelard, like Freud, presents a paradigmatic infantile scene to illustrate his proposition: "Et voilà la curiosité de l'enfant qui détruit son jouet pour aller voir ce qu'il y a dedans."⁵³

Consequently, we see that Roquentin's scrutiny of the papers, at close range, may not be as innocuous as it appears at first glance. The violent fate of the papers-as-swans, as we maintained earlier, can be regarded as a prefiguring of the later scene of the newspaper description of Lucienne's rape and of Roquentin's subsequent hallucinations (see above, pp. 21-22). Roquentin's visual examination of the already "raped" papers -- his "curiosité agressive" -- not only adds to the violent aspect of the description, but also places Roquentin in the position of an interested witness to a rape, a heartless voyeur whose perverse pleasure creates a complicity between himself and the rapist. If we return once again to the scene of the newspaper description, we note that Roquentin seems to be well aware of a personal complicity in the rape of Lucienne, although there is nothing in the journal as a whole which would confirm that he had anything to do with the real crime. Roquentin's position with regard to the vio-

⁵³ Ibid., p. 8.

lated Lucienne is that of an onlooker: he reads the account of the crime on a piece of paper. Moreover, when the dying paper swan of the earlier scene takes its revenge as the mountainous, watery swan of the later scene ("l'eau se referme sur moi . . . en montagne de cygne"), Roquentin finds himself identifying with the victim of the rape, as well as with the rapist -- a dual role which is strikingly presented in the lines: "Je suis, l'ignoble individu a pris la fuite, son corps violé. Elle a senti cette autre chair qui se glissait dans la sienne. Je . . . voilà que je . . . Violée."⁵⁴

As for Bachelard's scenario of the child who breaks his toy in order to find out what's inside, we need only continue our examination of Roquentin's various activities with his scavenged papers in order to discover similar behavior on his part. "Quelquefois je les palpe simplement en les regardant de tout près," is followed immediately by "d'autres fois je les déchire pour entendre leur long crépitement, ou bien, s'ils sont très humides, j'y mets le feu, ce qui ne va pas sans peine." Sometimes Roquentin is not content with a mere visual and tactile examination of the papers. He destroys them either by tearing them or by setting fire to them. Now, it is certainly not clear whether Roquentin breaks his "toys" in an effort to inquire into their inner nature, or whether he harbors other

⁵⁴ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 130.

motives for his rather peculiar behavior. However, given Bachelard's remarks on "La curiosité agressive" and his example of the destructive child, and given the juxtaposition in Roquentin's text of the two inquiring activities (the palper and the regarder) with the two destructive ones (the déchirer and the mettre le feu), it is certainly possible that Roquentin's destruction of the papers constitutes a somewhat bizarre manifestation of an aggressive Wisstrieb.

According to Roquentin, it is in order to hear their "long crépitement" that he tears the papers. This enigmatic wish to hear the papers crackle seems, at first glance, a bit difficult to explain. However, the auricular satisfaction that Roquentin derives from tearing the papers does seem to fit, in some manner, into at least two associative chains of signification, which we are able to explicate.

First of all, we note that the primary sense of the verb déchirer, as it is used by Roquentin, corresponds to the most common sense of the word as it is given in the Littre: "Mettre en pièces sans se servir d'un instrument tranchant." There are two other meanings of déchirer, however, that may be surreptitiously contaminating the apparent sense of Roquentin's act. We note that the verb can also be used in the sense of "déchirer quelqu'un à belles dents," -- that is, "en médire outrageusement"

(Littre). This verbally abrasive tearing recalls the figurative splinter meaning of the verb ramasser that introduces the paragraph: "'ramasser quelqu'un,' le maltraiter de coups et de paroles" (emphasis added). As we pointed out earlier (see above, p. 26), the antithetical sense of ramasser announces the ambivalent nature of Roquentin's subsequent treatment of the papers, and the déchirer which appears in the latter part of the paragraph echoes this semantic prefiguring rather closely, at least on the level of the secondary figurative meanings of the two verbs which slip into the paragraph's apparent context. And, what's more, this figurative echoing is precisely one of a meaning which functions on an audible level, for to mistreat someone with words and to slander (médire) someone are both attacks which can only work if they are heard (or, at least, understood -- both rendered by entendu). Thus, we note a possible source for Roquentin's desire "[d']entendre leur long crépitement," a "crépitement" which results from his tearing them ("son déchirement").

Secondly, it is important to take into consideration another sense of déchirer: "Causer une vive douleur physique" (Littre). Now, although such a meaning generally manifests itself on the figurative level (in an expression such as "ça me déchire le coeur"), the Littre lists the usage "déchirer une blessure, la rouvrir, la rendre plus grande" -- an apparent conflation of the primary and fig-

urative meanings of the word. Recalling Bachelard's remarks concerning the violence of vision, an aggressive curiosity which "décèle la faille, la fente, la fêlure par laquelle on peut violer le secret des choses cachées," and, furthermore, recalling the entire allegorical framework which seems to underlie the paragraph -- that is, the papers as sexual objects which are violently assaulted -- we discover that Roquentin's tearing of the papers functions as another mode of symbolic rape. The déchirement that Roquentin performs can be construed as a tearing of the hymen of a virginal victim, the rape of a swan (as nude, innocent woman), an act which, of course, causes a "vive douleur physique." Furthermore, this sexual déchirement is, in a sense, the re-opening of a wound, for the already present slit of the vagina is pulled open and blood from the ruptured hymen flows from the "wound."⁵⁵ In this case, the rupture is performed "sans se servir d'un instrument tranchant," for the real rape with a "trenchant" penis has been replaced by a symbolic rape in which Roquentin merely tears the papers with his hands.

⁵⁵ This notion of the vagina as wound is suggested by Freud when he speaks of an attitude resulting from the castration complex -- a theory according to which the female genitals are regarded as a "mutilated organ." See Sigmund Freud, "On the Sexual Theories of Children," in The Standard Edition, Vol. IX (London: Hogarth, 1959), p. 217.

As far as the "long crépitement" is concerned, once again, we can only understand it in the very general sense of the sound that is emitted by the object being torn. If we refer, however, to the later scene of Roquentin's reaction to the newspaper description of the rape of Lucienne, we discover that such a general consideration of the "crépitement," as something audible, contains some exegetical validity. Roquentin tears the papers "pour entendre leur long crépitement." Later, when Roquentin's identification with the rapist gives way to a dual identification with both the rapist and his victim, we find the following: "Un doux désir sanglant de viol me prend par derrière, tout doux, derrière les oreilles, les oreilles filent derrière moi."⁵⁶ It is as if Roquentin hears the desire to rape somewhere behind him, like an echo of the "crépitement" which sounded the moment of his "rape" of the papers. But it is also as if Roquentin is being raped, from behind, by the ears that race behind him. For Roquentin, the paper-tearer, the ears become an erotogenic zone. Later, it is the ears which punish him in his hallucinatory reversal of the rape situation.

But we have been overlooking the specific sense of the term crépitement, and a glance at the Litttré reveals something that is a bit peculiar. The entry for crépitement reads: "Action de crépiter, de produire une crépita-

⁵⁶ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 130.

tion." Cross-referencing, we see that crépiter denotes: "Faire un bruit comme de pétilllement," the verb having its origin in the Latin crepitare, a frequentative of crepare meaning "to creak, rattle, rustle, crack" (Cassell's New Latin Dictionary). So far not so good -- we have discovered little more than a general crackling. But crépitement is actually a bit more specific, for a crépitation is a "bruit réitéré d'une flamme qui pétille, ou de certains sels projetés sur le feu" (Litttré). Thus, it seems that the paradigmatic sense of the noun crépitement refers to the sound produced by a crackling flame. The crépitement of the papers being torn, therefore, resembles that of the papers being burned and, in fact, seems to announce this forthcoming activity. What's more, if Roquentin tears the papers "pour entendre leur long crépitement," perhaps it is because of the auditory similarity between the results of the two means of destruction -- the tearing and the burning. Perhaps the tearing is a mere kindling of the more explosive situation which results when he lights the papers: a sort of fiery foreplay.

And what about Roquentin's use of fire? Isn't it odd that the only papers he sets on fire are precisely those which are water-soaked ("très humides")? It is hardly surprising that such an endeavor "ne va pas sans peine." Why does he engage in such a difficult enterprise which consists in both drying up and then destroying a damp, discarded object?

The idea of fighting water with fire rings false. It is a reversal of the commonly accepted (and scientifically logical) practice of fighting fire with water, a technique whose inversion leaves us with an apparently absurd proposition. But we must not hasten to write off Roquentin's eccentric habit as patently absurd. Its absurdity may only be manifest, for, as Freud points out, such reversals and shifting of terms are hardly foreign to dreams and to those psychological activities which akin to the dream mode (i.e., fantasies, obsessions, and the like).⁵⁷ Nor are they foreign to myths, and here it may be good to cite a mythic precedent for Roquentin's case.

The myth is that of Heracles and the Lernaean hydra. The latter was a monstrous creature -- a kind of water-dragon -- with several heads, one of which was said to be immortal. Heracles fought the hydra with his sword, cutting off its heads one by one, but was unable to overcome the creature, since the hydra simply regenerated each of its severed heads. It was only by setting fire to the head that was believed to be immortal that Heracles succeeded in vanquishing his threatening adversary. Thus, the creature of water is subdued by fire. Freud cites this myth in conjunction with another Greek tale: the legend of Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods in or-

⁵⁷ See, for example, the section devoted to absurd dreams in Freud's Interpretation of Dreams (New York: Avon, 1965), pp. 461-481.

der to bring it down to earth for the benefit of man. There is more than a thematic relation between the two myths, for, as Freud notes, it was Heracles who rescued Prometheus from his punishment of being chained to a boulder while a vulture constantly pecked away at his liver.

The Prometheus legend and the myth of the Lernaean hydra are discussed in one of Freud's later essays, "The Acquisition and Control of Fire." Freud maintains that "in order to gain control over fire, men had to renounce the homosexually-tinged desire to put it out with a stream of urine."⁵⁸ Whether this presupposition is valid or not is subject to debate. Nonetheless, the ensuing analysis of the Prometheus myth provides some interesting and, perhaps, important considerations with regard to the interaction of fire and water and their symbolic relation to aspects of human sexuality. At the risk of entering into a lengthy digression, it may be worth our while to examine the fundamental elements of Freud's analysis of the two myths, for the bizarre nature of Roquentin's pyromaniacal interest in water-soaked papers will require a somewhat extended and carefully considered exegesis.

⁵⁸ Sigmund Freud, "The Acquisition and Control of Fire," in The Standard Edition, Vol. XXIII (London: Hogarth, 1964), p. 187.

Freud's hypothesis concerning man's overcoming the desire to urinate on flames can be confirmed, says Freud, through an interpretation of the Prometheus legend. In the myth, there are three elements in particular which draw Freud's attention: "the manner in which Prometheus transported the fire, the character of his act (an outrage, a theft, a defrauding of the gods) and the meaning of his punishment."⁵⁹ It seems unusual, first of all, that Prometheus transports the pilfered flames in a hollow stick. The "fennel-stalk" is an obvious paradigmatic representation of the hero's own penis, in which one would expect to find urine -- a means of quenching fire. But Freud points out that if "we remember the procedure of reversal, of turning into the opposite, of inverting relationships, which is so common in dreams and which so often conceals their meaning from us," then such a contradiction is quite understandable.⁶⁰ Secondly, it is important to note that through this theft, Prometheus steals something from the gods and this defrauding, in analytical terms, can be seen as a crime against the instincts: "the id . . . is the god who is defrauded when the quenching of fire is renounced."⁶¹ Thirdly, Freud remarks that the nature of Prometheus' punishment betrays another inversion,

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 188.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 189.

or reversal. The liver was, in ancient times, regarded as the corporeal source of passion and desire. What better punishment, then, for a perpetrator of a crime of passion than to have his liver consumed relentlessly by a hungry pecker?! Of course, according to Freud, Prometheus' crime consists in precisely the opposite -- his is a crime of renunciation of an instinct. Why, then, the reversal?

Well, if, through all its distortions, it [the Prometheus legend] barely allows us to get a glimpse of the fact that the acquisition of control over fire presupposes an instinctual renunciation, at least it makes no secret of the resentment which the culture-hero could not fail to arouse in men driven by their instincts. And this is in accordance with what we know and expect. We know that a demand for a renunciation of instinct, and the enforcement of that demand, call out hostility and aggressiveness, which is only transformed into a sense of guilt in a later phase of psychical development.⁶²

Freud goes on to observe that the heat generated by a fire recalls the sensation one feels when in a state of sexual excitation; moreover, the shape and movement of the flames suggests "a phallus in activity." Freud concludes:

One of the presuppositions on which we based our account of the myth of the acquisition of fire was, indeed, that to primal man the attempt to quench fire with his own water had the meaning of a pleasurable struggle with another phallus.⁶³

Thus, the instinct which is renounced in man's acquisition and control of fire is a homosexual one.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 189-190.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 190.

It is important to note the slippery nature of Freud's argument, for, in fact, his conclusion is the result of what may be sleight-of-hand. Although Freud's hypothesis is not inconceivable and may indeed be valid, our attention is drawn to the second element of the Prometheus myth. Freud maintains that the "god who is defrauded when the quenching of fire is renounced" is instinctual life itself: the id. Working, however, in this symbolic realm of interpretation, we cannot help but notice the omission of a quite common analogy -- that of god as father. Using Freud's own terminology, we might agree that if primitive man did indeed have to overcome an instinctual urge to urinate on flames in order to control fire, then to him "the attempt to quench fire with his own water had the meaning of a . . . struggle with another phallus." This struggle may not necessarily have been "pleasurable," however, as Freud maintains, even though it was instinctually motivated. Couldn't we also theorize that for Prometheus, the appropriation of the flames of the gods for his own use and for the benefit of his fellow men, and the subsequent concealment of those flames in his own phallus, represent a power struggle between father and son for certain "watering" rights?

With the introduction of the tale of the hydra into his text, and with a concluding comment about the relationship between the urinary and sexual functions of the

penis, Freud's analysis points the way to an elaboration of this alternative reading of the Prometheus myth which we are suggesting. This reading runs roughly as follows. What Prometheus stole from the gods was fire -- an archetypal representation of the phallus. This fire he stored in a hollow stick -- his own penis. Prometheus was punished for his transgression against the gods (and against Zeus, in particular -- the giver of the law, the Father) by having his liver, the Seat of Passions, eaten away by a bird of prey. Nonetheless, Prometheus had managed to bring fire down to earth and it could then be utilized by mortals for their own benefit, in spite of the gods. Now in possession of stolen property, man must be on the alert for subsequent threats to his phallic fire, in the form of a kind of symbolic castration by the original owner of the pilfered flames.

It is at this point that the myth of the Lernaean hydra comes into play, a myth that, according to Freud, "seems to correspond to a reaction of a later epoch of civilization [i.e., post-Promethean] to the events of the acquisition of power over fire."⁶⁴ The hydra, having "countless flickering serpent's heads," displays an overwhelming, phallic status. At the same time, being a creature of the water, the monster is a castrating figure, for it has the power to extinguish fire (the phallus). In a

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 192.

way, then, we may regard the presence of the hydra as the revenge of the gods, who threaten to douse the very fire which has been stolen from them. The threat is overcome, however, and the monster is subdued through an inversion of the normal extinguishing capacity of water over fire: Heracles wields his phallic fire, more powerful than the sword, and eliminates his watery threat. In the style of Bachelard, we shall term such manifestations of the overcoming of water by fire the hydra complex.

Finally, we note that "Heracles was also the deliverer of Prometheus and slew the bird which devoured his [Prometheus'] liver."⁶⁵ Thus, Prometheus is freed from the duty of expiating his crime through the strength of Heracles and of those others who now have the power of fire under control. It is evidently this pardoning of Prometheus which constitutes the fundamental "reaction of a later epoch of civilization to the events of the acquisition of power over fire," the result of a growing "sense of guilt" (as Freud puts it) on the part of man, the myth-maker, for his earlier punishment of Prometheus.

Now, although Freud posits a homosexual instinct as that which is renounced in man's acquisition of fire, another instinctual renunciation seems more likely. For if the theft of fire by Prometheus can be connected with the overcoming of the desire to put out the fire with a stream

⁶⁵ Ibid.

of urine, and if this mortal crime against Zeus is regarded as a crime of passion, then mustn't the instinct in question ultimately be sexual and the crime in question ultimately be one that is forbidden by the father?

As Freud points out in Totem and Taboo, the scenario which depicts both a crime against the father and the renunciation of an instinct is that of the primal horde. At a certain mythical point in the history of man, a group of brothers rises up and murders the father who, until then, had exercised exclusive property rights over all the women in the clan. But the crime having been perpetrated, the brothers must renounce the satisfaction of their sexual urges, which they are now free to pursue. This restriction of their instinctual freedom is a result of a certain identification which they have come to have with the murdered father. Because of this identification, the brothers: (1) feel guilty about their crime and have qualms about possessing their booty, and (2) realize that they cannot all take the place of the father and must therefore devise and observe a system of restrictions for their sexual urges.⁶⁶

How is it, then, that man's acquisition and control of fire recalls the behavior of the primal horde? Returning to Freud's essay on Prometheus, urine, and fire, we note the following observation in the article's concluding

⁶⁶ Sigmund Freud, Totem and Taboo, in The Standard Edition, Vol. XIII (London: Hogarth, 1958), pp. 141 ff.

paragraph:

The sexual organ of the male has two functions . . . It serves for the evacuation of the bladder, and it carries out the act of love which sets the cravings of the genital libido at rest. The child still believes that he can unite the two functions. According to a theory of his, babies are made by the man urinating into the woman's body.⁶⁷

The structural similarity between urination and ejaculation, reinforced by the unconscious impetus provided by a childhood intuition, indicates that the instinct which is renounced in the acquisition of fire is not a "homosexually-tinged desire to put it out with a stream of urine," but the symbolic equivalent of the desire to urinate: the desire to ejaculate. Man steals the phallus from the gods -- from the Father -- and must subsequently renounce the spoils of his crime by allowing his own fire to burn without being quenched. Man acquires control of fire because of his desire to murder the Father and the resulting feelings of guilt which are bound up with this wish.

Before returning to Roquentin's text, it may be propitious to turn our attention for a moment to Bachelard's remarks on the Prometheus myth, a point of view which both reinforces and extends our own reading of the tale.

Bachelard finds it difficult to believe that man "discovered" fire through a proto-scientific process by which the primitive inventor reasoned that, if two sticks or flints were rubbed together for an adequate period of -----

⁶⁷ Freud, "The Acquisition and Control of Fire," p. 192.

time, a spark would be produced. Nor does Bachelard think it likely that man would have attempted to harness the violent blazes of "natural" fire (e.g., the fire produced by a tree which has been struck by lightning, or the spectacular flames of an erupting volcano) in an effort to preserve this phenomenon for his own use. In the face of these natural manifestations of the element of fire, it is more likely that primitive man fled in terror. No, according to Bachelard, the "two stick theory" of man's acquisition of fire is the more promising, but not, however, for the scientific reasons which have often been postulated. In the words of Bachelard: "il faut reconnaître que le frottement est une expérience fortement sexualisée."⁶⁸ Thus, the scenario of the primitive man / genius, in the throes of a utilitarian compulsion to improve the lot of mankind, sitting in a field and patiently rubbing one stick against the other in the far-fetched hope that he might be able to light a spark and consequently acquire the means to produce, by and for himself, a fire in front of which to warm himself and his family, over which to cook food and dry his clothes, and to put to who knows what other marvelous uses . . . this scenario of a poor, but industrious neanderthal who was no doubt ridiculed by his fellow clansmen and scorned by the clanswomen (except for the one patient and compassionate cavelady who stood

⁶⁸ Gaston Bachelard, La Psychanalyse du feu (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), p. 53.

by him and loved him in spite of his apparent insanity) must give way to the less ennobling scene of a primitive man sliding one stick up and down in the groove of another, lost in the bliss of a sexual reverie, and playing out the mechanics of his fantasy by reproducing the frot-tage of one body against the other, generating an arousing heat through a friction reminiscent of that produced during intercourse and, finally, creating a fire-producing spark at the climactic conclusion of the frictional fore-play. Man's acquisition of fire, then, is the result of a simple toy and the childish game of reproducing metaphorically that which is lacking to him at the time. The practice is essentially onanistic, although evidently an extension of previous sexual experiences with others.

Bachelard concludes: "Prométhée est un amant vigoureux plutôt qu'un philosophe intelligent et la vengeance des dieux est une vengeance de jaloux."⁶⁹

On closer examination of his text, however, we discover that Bachelard has altered somewhat his position on the status of Prometheus. It is, in fact, in his initial chapter that Bachelard posits the notion of "le complexe de Prométhée." It is not uncommon for a child to encounter a rather strong prohibition against playing with matches and with fire in general: "Le feu est donc initialement l'objet d'une interdiction générale d'où cette

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 54.

conclusion: l'interdiction sociale est notre première connaissance générale sur le feu. Ce qu'on connaît d'abord du feu c'est qu'on ne doit pas le toucher."⁷⁰ The parental admonition, "Don't touch that fire!" then provides a kind of archetypal structure for the more general "Don't touch that!" In fact, as the child gets older, a transgression of any social taboo is likely to meet with the threat of a short- or long-range punishment by fire (and brimstone): "Don't touch (do) that! You'll be burned (in hell)!"

Bachelard continues:

Dès lors, puisque les inhibitions sont de prime abord des interdictions sociales, le problème de la connaissance personnelle du feu est le problème de la désobéissance adroite. L'enfant veut faire comme son père, loin de son père, et de même qu'un petit Prométhée, il dérobe des allumettes. Il court alors dans les champs et, au creux d'un ravin, aidé de ses compagnons, il fonde le foyer de l'école buissonnière.⁷¹

This strategy of a "clever disobedience" of the father's law in an effort to achieve a personal knowledge of that which the father forbids, this desire to "faire comme son père," is what Bachelard terms the Prometheus complex. Almost immediately, however, Bachelard warns his reader not to jump too quickly to a sexual reading of his scenario: "Il ne faut d'ailleurs pas se hâter de confondre ce complexe de Prométhée et le complexe d'Oedipe de la psy-

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 29.

chanalyse classique."⁷² Bachelard assures the reader that he will undertake an examination of the sexuality of fire in a later chapter (the one, apparently, in which he discusses man's acquisition of fire), but he is, at this point, careful to maintain that the Prometheus legend is fundamentally a myth of man's "volonté d'intellectualité":

Nous proposons donc de ranger sous le nom de complexe de Prométhée toutes les tendances qui nous poussent à savoir autant que nos pères, plus que nos pères, autant que nos maîtres, plus que nos maîtres . . . Si l'intellectualité pure est exceptionnelle, elle n'en est pas moins très caractéristique d'une évolution spécifiquement humaine. Le complexe de Prométhée est le complexe d'Oedipe de la vie intellectuelle.⁷³

Thus, Bachelard leaves unexposed the sexual undertones of his scenario of the "little Prometheus," in which the child steals what his father has forbidden him to touch, takes it to the hollow of a valley and, presumably, plays with it ("aidé de ses compagnons"), while he plays hooky from his formal education in order to establish a private school "in the bushes" where he pursues another kind of knowledge -- that of fire . . . and of sexuality.

Bachelard's conflation of the sexual drive and the "volonté d'intellectualité" (the Wissstrieb) under the rubric of the "complexe de Prométhée" is not surprising. As we discovered earlier, there seems to be a clear relationship between sexual curiosity on the part of the child,

⁷² Ibid., pp. 29-30.

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 30-31.

the grasping-instinct, and intellectual curiosity. The common denominator of these three modes of inquiry (examination through the eyes, examination with the hands, and examination by the mind) is their shared context of being attempts at mastery of a situation. Furthermore, we note that Bachelard's second Promethean scenario -- the one depicting primitive man playing with a pair of sticks -- also suggests a desire to master a situation. The caveman wishes to reproduce a sexual experience metaphorically, because (we might presume) the conditions of repeating literally the sexual experience are lacking to him at the time. Thus, he invents a kind of sexual novelty item with which he can pacify himself: an adult toy. The fire he produces is an analagon of the fire in his loins. The flame, for him, signifies sexual desire. It is a phallus.

"S'ils sont très humides, j'y mets le feu, ce qui ne va pas sans peine." Ending our circuitous digression, we return to Roquentin's text with a re-stocked arsenal of analytic material. Those papers that will not emit a "long crépitement" when torn -- that is, those which are "très humides" -- are set afire by Roquentin, "ce qui ne va pas sans peine." Roquentin struggles to light the soggy scraps that do not tear properly (in an auditory sense). We are reminded of Heracles' struggle with the Lernaean hydra, in which the cutting power of the sword had to be replaced with the burning power of a flame be-

fore the watery creature could be subdued. Roquentin's "hydra complex" indicates an aggressive emancipation of his Promethean urges from the threat of a fizzling, watery dousing (we recall that it was Heracles who freed Prometheus from his punishment). But what threat do these wet papers pose for Roquentin, the Promethean?

What Roquentin does, essentially, is play with fire. His attitude towards the papers and his activities with them serve no utilitarian ends. Like Bachelard's primitive man with the two sticks, Roquentin is re-enacting a sexual situation through the metaphorical medium of the flaming matches. Such an interpretation, moreover, is consistent with our reading of the sexual undertones that pervade the rest of Roquentin's description of his activities with the papers. As we have discovered, the papers as quivering, icy swans are the objects of Roquentin's oral desires, palpating, scopophilic scrutiny and subsequent metaphorical rape. Now Roquentin is sparking a hot flame with which to heat and eventually violate the structural sanctity of the wet papers. Furthermore, we detect traces of Bachelard's "petit Prométhée" in Roquentin's pyromania. "Comme font les enfants," Roquentin likes to pick up dirty, discarded objects which, with a little encouragement, he would bring to his mouth. This behavior, as we remarked earlier (see above, p. 15), is in violation of the parental warning: "Don't touch / play with that! You

don't know where it's been!" Bachelard suggests that the child's curiosity about fire provides the basis for future curiosity which will also meet with a threatening prohibition: "Don't touch / play with that! You'll be burned!" Thus, Roquentin is re-enacting the childhood scenario of the little Prometheus who steals fire from the father in order to examine and question its nature, and subsequently play with it, "aidé de ses compagnons." In spite of the parental prohibitions concerning dirty scraps of paper and matches (and one's own sexual organ), Roquentin will handle these objects nonetheless, for his paper-picking habit is a manifestation of both a general curiosity and a sexual curiosity, as well. "Le complexe de Prométhée est le complexe d'Oedipe de la vie intellectuelle," as Bachelard maintains.

But Roquentin's transgression of the prohibition concerning the touching of dirty things and his playing with matches -- the violation of another childhood taboo -- are not isolated incidents. They are interrelated, because Roquentin sets fire to the thing which is forbidden (if it is wet). They are, in fact, interrelated in a structurally similar manner to the way in which the Prometheus myth and the story of the hydra are related. We recall that the myth of the Lernaean hydra is a tale in which the emancipating hero, Heracles, combats and subdues the creature which embodies the gods' retaliation for the crime of

Prometheus. And what might this retaliation be, in general, for the subject who manifests a Prometheus complex, who touches that thing which is forbidden him, who steals the phallus from the father?

Castration, of course. As Freud points out, male children are often threatened with this horrifying punishment if they do not renounce the urge to touch and play with their penises, their "fire," as it were -- their phallus:

The effect of this 'threat of castration' is proportionate to the value set upon that organ and is quite extraordinarily deep and persistent. Legends and myths testify to the upheaval in the child's emotional life and to the horror which is linked to the castration complex -- a complex which is subsequently remembered by consciousness with corresponding reluctance.⁷⁴

For this reason, the male child will often refuse to admit the total absence of a penis in the female genitalia, maintaining that the little girl does have a penis, but that it is "still quite small."⁷⁵ But regardless of this comforting theory, the sight of the female genitals and their conspicuously absent penis still constitutes a terrifying reminder that what the little boy has to play with can be taken away if he is not good.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Freud, "On the Sexual Theories of Children," p. 217.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 216.

⁷⁶ Freud deals extensively with castration in two case histories, in particular. See the "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy," in The Standard Edition, Vol. X (London: Hogarth, 1953), pp. 3-149, as well as "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis," in The

But what is there specifically in the image of the hydra which suggests that the threat in question is that of castration? On a simple level, we might propose that the hydra, being a creature of the water, menaces the wielder of fire with its extinguishing power. If we throw water onto a flame, the flame disappears; metaphorically speaking, if we throw water onto the flame as phallus, the phallus disappears. Such an analysis, however, although it explains the nature of the threat, does not explain how it is that a watery threat can be overcome by fire. How is it that water is "doused" by Heracles' fire?

At this point, it will be helpful to recall another study of Freud's -- that concerning the Medusa's head -- in an effort to neutralize the paralyzing effects of the apparent absurdity of the hydra complex. In this short essay, Freud remarks, first of all, that the head of the Medusa has been separated from its body and that there is an obvious structural similarity between decapitation and castration.⁷⁷ Thus, the sight of the Medusa's head recalls the female genitals and their apparently missing penis; consequently, the Medusa's head is horrifying because its mere physical appearance reminds the onlooker of the threat of castration. The meaning of the Medusa's head is

Standard Edition, Vol. XVII (London: Hogarth, 1955), pp. 3-124.

⁷⁷ Sigmund Freud, "Medusa's Head," in The Standard Edition, Vol. XVIII (London: Hogarth, 1955), pp. 273-274.

complicated, however, by the hair, which is usually represented in the form of snakes. If we take the head to be a figuration of the female genitals, then the Medusa's hair will be regarded as pubic and surrounding the area which is marked by the absent penis. But the snakes lead Freud to an interpretation that denotes both presence and absence in the vaginal symbol:

It is a remarkable fact that, however frightening they [the snakes] may be in themselves, they nevertheless serve actually as a mitigation of the horror, for they replace the penis, the absence of which is the cause of the horror. This is a confirmation of the technical rule according to which a multiplication of penis symbols signifies castration.⁷⁸

Furthermore, what is to be feared, literally, in regard to the Medusa's head is its capacity to turn whoever looks upon it to stone. Once again, Freud notes the reassuring phallic imagery of the myth, for "becoming stiff means an erection."⁷⁹ The myth, then, is a tale in which a subject is threatened with castration at the sight of the female genitalia. The threat is countered, however, when the subject "stands up" to the threat through a proliferation of phalluses, as well as through his own stiffening.

There is a strong resemblance between the head of the Medusa and the Lernaean hydra. The Medusa's decapitated state and its hairy appearance suggest the female genitals; the hydra's watery environment and consequent threat

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 273.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

to the phallus as fire make this monster a creature of the vagina. The Medusa's hair, as snakes, mitigates the terror of the observer by displaying itself as so many penises at what is precisely the locus of the phallic absence; the hydra's "countless, flickering serpent's heads" serve the same function. In turning to stone, the observer stands up to the Medusa; in wielding fire -- another phallic image -- Heracles overcomes the threat of the hydra.

Roquentin's hydra complex is, thus, a means of reassurance against the threat of castration. The papers bear little resemblance to a hydra, nor do they appear at all like a Medusa, but they are wet, they probably emit a musty odor because of their indefinite period of soggy decay against the earth and, what's more, they represent women whose genitalia are exposed (i.e., the papers as swans / as baigneuses). In other words, the wet scraps constitute a vaginal image, rather than a phallic one. Unlike the hydra and the Medusa, however, there seems to be no detectable multiplication of phallic images associated with the papers, which would serve to create an affective ambivalence with regard to the object and, thus, neutralize its threat. Roquentin's only defense seems to be the flame with which he lights the objects of his scavenging urges.

We might add one last observation concerning this menace of castration, which the papers seem to pose. Ear-

lier we concluded that Roquentin's close visual examination of the scraps recalls the prototypical childhood scopophilic moment: the youngster sneaking a peak at a member of the opposite sex who is urinating or defecating (see above, pp. 39-40). The papers' occasional status as swans / nude women, in addition to the probability that some of the papers are soiled with piss or shit, suggested such a hypothesis. Now, if in fact Roquentin's interested scrutiny of these objects recreates this instance of scopophilia, then it is likely that a fear of castration will arise as well, for if Roquentin is mimicking this form of childhood sexual inquiry, then what he must discover first and foremost about the nude woman's body is the absence of a penis. He strikes the match in self-defense.

"Puis j'essuie mes paumes remplies de boue à un mur où à un tronc d'arbre." There is nothing unusual about Roquentin's final act. After handling the dirty scraps that are the objects of his eccentric pastime, Roquentin wipes off his hands before turning his attention back to more mundane activities. As we remarked earlier (see above, footnote 15, pp. 8-9), the fact that he sometimes chooses "un tronc d'arbre" against which to wipe his palms provides the paragraph with a certain spiral structure, because, we recall, it is with chestnuts ("les marrons") that Roquentin commences his description, only to abandon these objects almost immediately in his text. The tree

that appears at the end of the paragraph, then, could very well be a chestnut tree, if we assume that Roquentin stalks chestnuts in the same area where he picks up papers.⁸⁰

The meaning of the wiping, itself, seems rather straight-forward, although there is at least one flickering connotation which shadows the verb's primary sense, given the specific context of "j'essuie mes paumes." The Littré furnishes us with the following entries for ESSUYER:

1. ôter l'eau, l'humidité, etc. en frottant
2. sécher, en parlant de l'action du soleil, du vent
3. ôter une tache, un enduit
4. subir, supporter, souffrir

Roquentin's palms are "remplies de boue" and it is ostensibly for this reason that he is wiping them: a conflation of the first and third meanings in the Littré. But this act of cleaning one's hands is reminiscent of Pilate's washing of the hands -- a scene so mythically important that its sense survives even today in both the French and English expressions: "se laver les mains de quelque

⁸⁰ The "mur," as well, seems to have some significance, but its interest lies outside the frame of our present considerations. We might remark in passing, however, that a wall -- like the chestnut tree in La Nausée -- is destined to play a primary role in the literary world of the novelist, Sartre, as both the title of a short story and the name of the collection of tales in which the story appears. It is against these objects that Sartre's heroes will attempt to clean "their dirty hands" ("leurs mains sales") of existential guilt.

chose," "to wash one's hands of something." Roquentin removes his spots of mud, the marks of sin on his hands, for, if our understanding of his pastime is at all correct, he cannot help but experience some feeling of guilt with regard to his handling of the papers. As we have seen, Roquentin's description of his habit functions as a metaphoric prefiguring of the scene in which he reads the journalistic account of the rape of little Lucienne, a moment at which he is seemingly punished by the same swan he used to covet as a discarded scrap. Furthermore, Roquentin is re-enacting a childhood transgression of a parental prohibition, a breaking of the Father's law, and a corresponding sense of guilt must manifest itself. Thus, the fourth definition of essuyer -- "subir, supporter, souffrir" -- echoes through Roquentin's text, but in an up-ended form. Roquentin suffers a guilt which sullies his being in much the same way that the mud dirties his hands. In cleaning his hands ("en s'essuyant les mains"), he attempts to unburden himself of the guilt which he suffers ("la culpabilité qu'il essuie"), but, as the series of meanings of the verb suggests, the cleaning and the suffering may not be completely separable and we wonder whether Roquentin's contrition may not resurface elsewhere in his journal. As we shall see, it does.

We have now completed the first stage of our examination of Roquentin's eccentric behavior with dirty scraps of paper. This seemingly marginal moment in Roquentin's two hundred pages of journal writing is quite rich in analytical material and provides a productive clue to the puzzle which is the writer's psycho-ontological dilemma. We have undertaken a kind of "psychanalyse des choses," drawing more or less on Freudian theory to expose what may be the psychological undercurrents of Roquentin's actions. The papers are marked with mud, shit, and perhaps urine. They suggest both poetry and rape, and they are, for Roquentin, toys to be played with. "Comme font les enfants," Roquentin is trying to master a world of situations which are somehow just out of reach of his grasp, his understanding. Picking up the papers, he can hold the world in his hands, feel it out, gaze at it, and even destroy it. But the dirty papers are, of course, nothing more than a childish substitute for that which is only too real and which is lacking. It is a game of to-have and to-have-not that Roquentin is playing.

In order to classify the role which the paper game plays in Roquentin's personality as a whole and in his struggle with a real, contingent world over which he is losing control, we shall need to take a glance at the phenomenological facet of "existential psychoanalysis" and its relation to the Freudian point of view which has, so

far, been so enlightening. An intermingling of the two theoretical stances -- Freud's and Sartre's -- will provide us with a kind of psychoanalytic ontology with which to re-examine Roquentin's unusual practice of handling discarded papers, as well as the second moment of his description: his inability to pick up a particular scrap of paper -- a fragment of a written text, a weather-beaten page which re-announces the theme of the swan / poet and the fate of the writer. We turn now to the problem of being and desire.

Chapter II

TO HAVE AND TO BE

Although Roquentin's scavenging does not result in the actual collection and storage of the detritus he gleans from Bouville's streets and parks, the diarist's peculiar penchant for dirty paper can be regarded nonetheless as a kind of appropriation, or at least an attempt at one. The scraps are thus, in a sense, the objects of Roquentin's desire, objects to be possessed. The ramifications, as well as the very validity of this hypothesis, are not readily apparent. It is clear that, in closing his hand over the object, Roquentin is mimicking a corporeal appropriation of the thing he is holding -- that is, although he is not actually incorporating the object, he is at least making a gesture along those lines by taking the object into the hollow of his hand. Swallowing the object, an act he might perform with a little encouragement, would be a more effective and true means for Roquentin to appropriate the papers. It is not at all clear, however, how Roquentin's mere handling of the objects, his gazing at them, and, finally, his destroying them can be construed as acts of attempted appropriation, or more specifically, as gestures that mimic corporeal appropriation.

Moreover, the general sense of the notion of appropriation -- the taking or using of an object as one's own -- does not seem to apply in this case, except in a rather marginal way. Although it is true that Roquentin "uses" the objects, his attitude towards them is hardly one that a propriétaire takes towards his property. As we have already pointed out, Roquentin is not a collector. What, then, is this idea of appropriation to which we are referring?

Sartre himself furnishes us with a wealth of thought with regard to the notion of appropriation. His position is fundamentally phenomenological and ontological and not at all psychoanalytical, although, as we hope to demonstrate, the latter point of view tends to substantiate and extend Sartre's ontological conclusions. Conversely, we shall try to show that Sartre's speculations tend to provide a further groundwork of data for the theoretical considerations of Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis.

We shall not attempt any kind of long and careful exegesis of Sartre's presentation and discussion of the notion of Being and its relation to Nothingness, which precedes his examination of appropriation and its role in ontologically-grounded desire. Such endeavors have already been undertaken in works devoted exclusively to Sartre's principal philosophical text itself, and these sec-

ondary works should be consulted for further elucidation of the rather lengthy and complex considerations put forth in L'Être et le néant.⁸¹ Our own resumé of the lengthy propaedeutic that comprises the greater part of L'Être et le néant, and which culminates in a discussion of the ontological gesture of appropriation, would necessarily be sketchy and insufficient. We shall thus limit our scope to the key conclusive moments in Sartre's work which are most useful for the present study.

As we maintained in the preceding pages, Roquentin's relation to his papers can be understood in the sense of four modes of activity: touching, seeing, eating and destroying. Furthermore, these four categories can be subsumed under the rubric of playing and, as we shall demonstrate in the following pages, under the more general rubric of appropriation. Let us begin with a consideration of the act of touching.

"Les caresses," Sartre maintains, "sont appropriation du corps d'Autrui."⁸² The caress, a sensual touch, appropriates the body of the Other. Although the objects that Roquentin fondles are not "Others" per se, given that they are inanimate and have no consciousness, they do seem at

⁸¹ See, for example: Joseph Catalano, A Commentary of Jean-Paul Sartre's "Being and Nothingness" (New York: Harper and Row, 1974) and Wilfrid Desan, The Tragic Finale (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), both of which provide straight-forward and intelligent readings of Sartre's main arguments.

⁸² Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 459.

least to perform a symbolic role for him as swans, poets, nude women. We shall thus begin with an examination of the concept of the caress, and then demonstrate its possible extension from the flesh of Others to the surface of non-conscious things: a connection which Sartre does not make directly, but one that is certainly implied and rendered possible when we take into consideration some of his general observations regarding appropriative strategies.

How and in what sense is the caress an appropriation of the Other's body? First, it is important to keep in mind that "les caresses" do not constitute a "simple contact" with the Other's body. They are purposeful acts with a certain end in mind: "C'est que la caresse n'est pas simple effleurement: elle est façonnement. En caressant autrui, je fais naître sa chair par ma caresse, sous mes doigts. La caresse est l'ensemble des cérémonies qui incarnent Autrui."⁸³ Thus, the caress as façonnement is a kind of crafting, a shaping, an act which is creative and akin to the making of a work of art. The finished product in this case is the flesh qua flesh of the Other, for in response to the objection that the Other's body is already incarnated ("in the flesh"), without the intercession of the lover's caress, Sartre points out that this assertion is not exactly true:

83 Ibid.

La chair d'autrui n'existait pas explicitement pour moi, puisque je saisissais le corps d'Autrui en situation; elle n'existait pas non plus pour lui puisqu'il la transcendait vers ses possibilités et vers l'objet. La caresse fait naître Autrui comme chair pour moi et pour lui-même.⁸⁴

That is, for myself as well as for the Other, as consciousnesses, the flesh as in-itself of the Other is not revealed as such except through the caress, because prior to the caress the Other, as he/she appears in situation (that is, as an object that is relevant to my projects, that plays an active role in the drama which is my conscious life), is revealed as being-for-itself, the being of consciousness.⁸⁵ Sartre continues:

. . . la caresse révèle la chair en déshabillant le corps de son action, en le scindant des possibilités qui l'entourent: elle est faite pour découvrir sous l'acte la trame d'inertie -- c'est-à-dire le pur "être-là" -- qui le soutient.⁸⁶

Thus, the caress is an attempt to realize the Other as pure, untranscended being: an attempt to grasp the Other as being-in-itself through an "ensemble des cérémonies qui incarnent Autrui." The subject-who-caresses plays the role of an Anti-Pygmalion who shapes and fashions an Other, who is already conscious, in an effort to create a

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ To be precise, it is not only by means of a caress that the body, as flesh (as the facticity of consciousness), is revealed to the for-itself. Pain, for instance, results in a similar revelation.

⁸⁶ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 459.

statuesque being that will be no more than a mere fleshy object.

But for what reason does this anti-Pygmalion desire to strip the Other of his freedom through the creative, incarnating gesture of the caress? We should note that the tactile caress is a "façonnement" that is undertaken through the contact of the subject's flesh with that of the Other:

Ainsi la révélation de la chair d'autrui se fait par ma propre chair; dans le désir et dans la caresse qui l'exprime, je m'incarne pour réaliser l'incarnation d'autrui; et la caresse en réalisant l'incarnation de l'Autre me découvre ma propre incarnation; c'est-à-dire que je me fais chair pour entraîner l'Autre à réaliser pour soi et pour moi sa propre chair et mes caresses font naître pour moi ma chair en tant qu'elle est, pour autrui, chair le faisant naître à la chair.⁸⁷

In other words, the desire to caress the Other -- the desire for the Other as it expressed through the caress -- is a wish for the incarnation of the Other in order that the subject realize his own incarnation. Possession, then, in the sexual sense, must be seen as a "double incarnation réciproque," and this double reduction of both Self and Other to mere corporeal materiality is the aim of a desire which would reify consciousness itself: "Ainsi, dans le désir, il y a tentative d'incarnation de la conscience."⁸⁸ The anti-Pygmalion wants to sculpt a woman

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 460.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

into an inert, fleshy statue in an effort to freely reduce his own being to an effigy stripped of freedom.

Desire, then, at least as it is manifested through the caress, is a wish to appropriate the Other's body in order that this appropriation reveal to the subject his own body as flesh. Furthermore, this revelation of one's own body as flesh, says Sartre, reflects an attempt to incarnate, to reify consciousness itself -- both one's own and that of the Other.

Touching, of course, is not the only means by which one can caress the Other. Sartre also speaks about a caress with the eyes and, in fact, seems to posit both touching and sight as privileged modes with regard to the various empirical tendencies which manifest desire. We note the following comparison between grasping with the hand and caressing with the eyes:

. . . en prenant et en caressant la main de l'Autre, je découvre, sous la préhension que cette main est d'abord, une étendue de chair et d'os qui peut être prise; et, pareillement mon regard caresse lorsqu'il découvre, sous ce bondissement que sont d'abord les jambes de la danseuse, l'étendue lunaire des cuisses. Ainsi la caresse n'est aucunement distincte du désir: caresser des yeux ou désirer ne font qu'un.⁸⁹

When the subject perceives the flesh of the dancer's thigh, the Other, who until this point has appeared as being-in-situation (viz., as being a dancer), now appears as body through a visual revelation of her flesh qua flesh.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 459.

She is at this moment, for the perceiving subject, no longer a person dancing, but flesh to be caressed. The subject becomes aware of his own body as flesh, and the troubled state which accompanies this awareness -- which, in fact, is this awareness -- is described by Sartre as an "empâtement de la conscience,"⁹⁰ a kind of pasty consciousness which is indicative of the fluid freedom of the for-itself, now oozing through the thick facticity of the body, which consciousness has to exist.⁹¹ The in-itself invades the for-itself. How such an ontological condition is to be construed as desire is a question we shall deal with later in this section.

Of course, Roquentin is in fact fondling and ogling discarded paper and not the flesh of an other. In standing by our earlier analysis of his interest in the scraps, we can submit that the papers represent the flesh of an other, but this assertion is admittedly a bit shaky when we try to relate the handling of paper to the caressing of a human body (the game of pretend to the real activity). There is something in common, however, between Roquentin's urge to touch inanimate objects and the desire which manifests itself in the caress of the Other. Both acts can be

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 460.

⁹¹ Sartre uses the verb exister transitively to indicate the manner in which consciousness encounters its facticity -- that is, the body. Consciousness, as être-pour-soi, finds its free and limitless capacity to transcend phenomena hampered by the solid, palpable en-soi to which it finds itself "attached."

understood as attempts to possess, and both the papers and the Other are then seen as objects-to-be-possessed. This structural connection between the two acts is further elucidated, if we recall that through the caress the subject tries to incarnate the Other, to strip the Other of his/her possibilities by neutralizing the transcendent force of the Other's consciousness, by reducing its freedom in situation, and thereby causing the Other to appear as mere flesh, being-in-itself. Furthermore, this act is carried out in an effort to realize one's own Self as en-soi through the cutaneous mediation of the Other. The inanimate object, on the other hand, is already in-itself and it is not necessary for the subject to try to undermine any transcendence on the part of the object in order for that object to be revealed as being-in-itself beneath the subject's touch. The inanimate object can be possessed as is, without the ontological conflict between two consciousnesses that invariably grounds the aim of the caress. Thus, we can conclude that the subject strives towards the same goal -- an appropriation of the object as being-in-itself -- whether he chooses to caress the body of the Other or to handle an inanimate object in the manner of a caress (that is, in handling the object for the sole purpose of handling it, and not in an effort to transcend the mere being-there [être-là] of the object towards some utilitarian possibility: the grasping of a hammer in

order to pound a nail into a wall, for instance, can hardly be construed as a "caress" of the hammer).⁹² Roquentin's touching of the papers, as well as his looking at them, can thus be understood as variants of the caress.

Before setting aside our discussion of the caress, we should note that Sartre himself makes the leap between the desire for the Other through possession and the desire to possess an inanimate object. This equating of the two drives, although not carried out in terms of the caress, is at least maintained in terms of appropriation in general:

Il se fait à propos de toute possession la synthèse cristallisatrice que Stendhal a décrite pour le seul cas de l'amour. Chaque objet possédé, qui s'enlève sur fond de monde, manifeste le monde tout entier, comme la femme aimée manifeste le ciel, la plage, la mer qui l'entouraient lorsqu'elle est apparue. S'approprier cet objet, c'est donc s'approprier le monde symboliquement.⁹³

Stendhal's notion of cristallisation (which confers on the beloved the power to transform the lover's pre-amorous perception of the world into one in which the beloved becomes its informing center) can be extended to all objects

⁹² This distinction on the basis of the object's utility, in so far as our projects are concerned, is echoed in the Heideggerian distinction between the ready-to-hand (Zuhanden) and the present-at-hand (vorhanden): the former is applied to an object that is perceived as equipment (Zeug), the latter refers to an object that is perceived as merely being there (as an in-itself). For more on the example of the hammer, see Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 98.

⁹³ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 686.

possessed, announces Sartre. In appropriating an object, the subject appropriates the world as it is signified (symbolized) by the subject's relation to that object.

Thus, it remains for us to determine how it is that the subject's attempt to realize himself as flesh by means of the visual and tactile caress is related to this attempt to "s'appropriier le monde symboliquement" of which Sartre speaks. It is towards an understanding of this latter endeavor that our examination of Roquentin's behavior now proceeds.

We have already observed how the predicates "regarder" and "palper" are both informed by a certain "drive to know." This Wiss- oder Forschertrieb, according to Freud, is powered by "the energy of scopophilia" and is, at the same time, a "sublimated manner of obtaining mastery" (see above, Ch. I, p. 40). The interest in acquiring sexual knowledge, an urge which can be understood as the paradigmatic case of the more general Wisstrieb, is mainly manifested in the form par excellence of satisfying sexual curiosity: scopophilia (Schaulust), the wish to see the body of an other "in the flesh." Thus, the drive to know is intimately related to sight, and sight, in turn, is "an activity that is ultimately derived from touching" (see above, Ch. I, pp. 40-41). Furthermore, the "drive to grasp" (Greiftrieb) -- denoting, in the Freudian corpus, the infantile urge to grab things (especially parts of the

infant's own body) -- reveals both another "manner of obtaining mastery," as well as the semantic shading of the drive to grasp / understand / comprehend. Consequently, the Greiftrieb is structurally parallel to the Wissttrieb (see above, Ch. I, pp. 42-43). We concluded, therefore, that both "regarder" and "palper" are subsumed by the more general verbal category of "connaître," and that this knowing itself is an empirical manifestation of the more primary desire to obtain mastery over a situation: a situation which is always characterized by the absence of the mother's breast (see above, Ch. I, p. 43). In conclusion, then, we can add that the desire to know indicates a certain hunger on the part of the subject, and that eating, like seeing and touching, not only plays a functional role in the overall strategy that expresses an attempt at mastery, but also occupies a privileged position in this plan, for it is the need to take nourishment as a newborn infant that is at the origin of the subject's subsequent ventures to master a given situation.

For Sartre, knowing is a form of appropriation. To understand such an assertion, it is first of all necessary to observe that the rather general predicative mode of faire (both "to do" and "to make") is always reducible to another "catégorie cardinale de la réalité humaine":

avoir.⁹⁴ As an example of this relation, Sartre remarks

⁹⁴ It should be pointed out that Sartre sees three principal verbal "categories" as constitutive of human reali-

that one might make a cane by cutting a branch from a tree and then fashioning it into the proper shape and size. But clearly, I make a cane ("je fais une canne") in order to have it ("pour avoir cette canne"): "Le 'faire' se réduit à un moyen d'avoir."⁹⁵ Such an example illustrates how the making or altering of a concrete object can be regarded as appropriation, for the creative gesture of "making" the cane consists in rendering the object "appropriate" for a certain usage on my part.⁹⁶ However, the reduction of faire to avoir may not always appear possible in other cases in which a utilitarian intention is not presupposed. This objection can be overruled, though, if we consider the following:

Elle [mon activité] peut sembler gratuite comme dans le cas de la recherche scientifique, du sport, de la création esthétique. Pourtant, dans ces différents cas, le faire n'est pas non plus irréductible. Si je crée un tableau, un drame, une mélodie, c'est pour être à l'origine d'une existence concrète. Et cette existence ne m'intéresse que dans la mesure où le lien de

ty: "avoir," "faire," and "être" (L'Être et le néant, p. 507).

⁹⁵ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 665. This argument, establishing the rapport between shaping the world through labor and consciousness' desire to appropriate, finds its roots in Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind, Ch. IV. See G.W.F. Hegel, The Phenomenology of Mind, trans. J.B. Baillie (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), especially pp. 238-239.

⁹⁶ It may be wise at this point to note the two fundamental senses of appropriation, as they are given in Robert: "(1) Action d'approprier à un usage, à une destination, (2) Action de s'approprier une chose, d'en faire sa propriété." Both variants of the term are obviously present in the example of the cane.

création que j'établis entre elle et moi me donne sur elle un droit de propriété particulier. Il ne s'agit pas seulement que tel tableau, dont j'ai l'idée, existe; il faut encore qu'elle existe par moi.⁹⁷

Thus, even with regard to such activities as scientific research, sports and art, the goal of the enterprise is to make something that will be mine. It is important to note that the object in such cases reveals itself to be something that "se distingue radicalement de moi-même": the bit of discovered data, the goal that is scored as the result of the ball being struck by my foot, the text that I write -- all events which are not me. But, at the same time, it is my doing (faire) that somehow sustains the existence of these objects in the sense that they are my discovery, my goal, my thesis. Speaking in terms of the work of art specifically, Sartre remarks that it is the artist's thought which sustains the work of art, as if a mind were perpetually conceiving the work even after the piece's concrete achievement. This is the work's meaning (signification). Sartre continues:

Je suis donc avec elle [cette pensée, cette signification] dans le double rapport de la conscience qui la conçoit et de la conscience qui la rencontre. C'est précisément ce double rapport que j'exprime en disant qu'elle est mienne. Nous en verrons le sens, lorsque nous aurons précisé la signification de la catégorie "avoir." Et c'est pour entretenir ce double rapport dans la synthèse d'appropriation que je crée mon oeuvre.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 665.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

It is, then, a synthesis of self and not-self that characterizes appropriation in the Sartrean sense: "intimité, translucidité de la pensée," on the one hand, and "opacité, indifférence de l'en-soi," on the other.⁹⁹ As we shall see, this relation holds true for all appropriated objects, even if they are ready-made and in no way one's "creation." In fact, it is the creation of the rapport itself (i.e., the synthesis of self and not-self) that is of primary importance.

It is in this way that knowledge is a form of appropriation. If a facet of the world is revealed to me, it is through me that this awareness of the world comes into being. In thinking the thought -- which is this awareness -- I sustain its being by means of my own consciousness; I create it, as it were. However, there is a certain materiality of the thought by which the thought exists independently of my being. The thought may be mine, but it is not me. Thus, my knowledge of the world, my awareness of the way in which the world reveals itself to me, constitutes a certain appropriation of the world. Clearly, it is not the physical world itself that I appropriate, but its revelation. Nonetheless, we can see the similarity between the appropriation of the cane, that of the work of art, and that of knowledge: it is towards a synthesis of self and not-self, of consciousness and being-in-itself,

⁹⁹ Ibid.

that appropriation aims.

Furthermore, the notions of discovery and revelation, which are bound up with the urge to know, suggest the paramount role of sight in the pursuit of knowledge. This conclusion can hardly be disputed, for, in addition to the predominantly visual orientation of the terms "discovery" and "revelation," we note that one often says "I see" (je vois) to indicate "I understand" (je comprends). We have already discussed sight in relation to the caress (see above, pp. 84-85), but it is not readily apparent how the urge to know is related to the spectator's troubled stare at the flesh of the dancer's thigh. The two ideas are related, however, and Sartre does not hesitate to make a quick and incisive leap into the realm of sexuality: "La vue est jouissance, voir c'est déflorer."¹⁰⁰ Thus, in one graceful swoop, Sartre establishes a connection between the visual caress of the Other's flesh and the viewing of any concrete object or abstract concept whatsoever. In fact, the apparent recklessness of Sartre's introduction of a certain "sexuality" of understanding (especially in the light of his polemic against Freud for the latter's stance regarding the primacy of sexuality) could provoke a well-founded scepticism in the reader, if it were not for the canny theoretical flight which follows in Sartre's

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 666.

text.¹⁰¹

Sartre continues:

Si l'on examine les comparaisons ordinairement utilisées pour exprimer le rapport du connaissant au connu, on voit que beaucoup d'entre elles se présentent comme un certain viol par la vue. L'objet non connu est donné comme immaculé, comme vierge, comparable à une blancheur. Il n'a pas encore "livré" son secret, l'homme ne le lui a pas encore "arraché."¹⁰²

The object to-be-seen reveals itself as an immaculate, virgin whiteness to-be-violated in order to tear from it its secret. We are strikingly reminded of Bachelard's "curiosité agressive," a tendency that is illustrated in the example of the child who destroys a toy in order to see what there is inside (see above, Ch. I, pp. 45-46). This "curiosité agressive" demonstrates the violence of an inquiring vision which "décèle . . . la fêlure par laquelle on peut violier le secret des choses cachées."¹⁰³ Moreover, we are reminded as well of Bachelard's analysis of the image of the swan as naked woman, as baigneuse, as "la blancheur immaculée et cependant ostensible . . . les cygnes [qui] se laissent voir" (emphasis added).¹⁰⁴ This

¹⁰¹ It is important to understand this moment in Sartre's text as a sudden and surprising introduction of a point of view that would seem to undermine the integrity of Sartre's strong reluctance to accept the importance of sexuality as a crucial factor in human reality. It is on the basis of just such a moment that our reading of Freud against Sartre hinges.

¹⁰² Sartre, L'Etre et le néant, pp. 666-667.

¹⁰³ Bachelard, La Terre et les rêveries du repos, p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ Bachelard, L'Eau et les rêves, p. 50 -- this passage

connection between the two moments in Bachelard's corpus -- two moments which actually occur in two separate volumes of the psychologist's work -- is dramatically underscored by what follows in Sartre's text:

Toutes les images [celles de l'objet immaculé, vierge, blanc, etc.] insistent sur l'ignorance où est l'objet des recherches et des instruments qui le visent: il est inconscient d'être connu, il vague à ses affaires sans s'apercevoir du regard qui l'épie comme une femme qu'un passant surprend à son bain.¹⁰⁵

Thus, scopophilia and the Wiestrieb are linked in Sartre, as well as in Freud, although we note that in Sartre the two are related through a metaphorical structure, which the writer uses to clarify his position on the drive to know, whereas in Freud the two drives appear at a single stroke at the moment of childhood Schaulust. Moreover, the two urges in Freud are not related in terms of the figurative "comme" (i.e., on the metaphoric level), but rather in terms of a symbolic structure in which one drive is an elaboration and extension of the other (i.e., on the metonymic level).

This choice of metaphor on Sartre's part is not at all gratuitous, however, and his use of the image of the spied-upon bather to illustrate the appropriative context of knowledge betrays a position which is more in line with Freud's thinking than Sartre would perhaps care to admit.

is quoted above, Ch. I, p. 17.

¹⁰⁵ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 667.

Sartre's use of paradigmatic imagery to elucidate psychological facets of what he would call the subject's "choice of being" is, in fact, quite similar to the technique of Bachelard, a representative of what we might consider a middle ground between Sartrean existentialism and Freudian psychoanalysis, since he builds his argument on a combination of ontological and libidinal theory. Furthermore, as we have just discovered, our reading of two seemingly unrelated instances in Bachelard's writing is clearly and precisely echoed in the text of Sartre.

A few lines after his introduction of the image of the baigneuse, Sartre provides us with an even more interesting piece of analysis:

. . . toute recherche comprend toujours l'idée d'une nudité qu'on met à l'air en écartant les obstacles qui la couvrent, comme Actéon écarte les branches pour mieux voir Diane au bain. Et d'ailleurs la connaissance est une chasse. Baccon la nomme chasse de Pan. Le savant est le chasseur qui surprend une nudité blanche et qui la viole de son regard. Aussi l'ensemble de ces images nous révèle-t-il quelque chose que nous nommerons le complexe d'Actéon.¹⁰⁶

In the style of Bachelard, Sartre terms the ensemble of images that reveal to us the nature of the urge to know the "Actaeon complex."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ The scene of Actaeon glimpsing the nude Diana at her bath is an image which is central in one of Lacan's essays as well. In "La Chose freudienne," Lacan depicts Freud as "un Actéon perpétuellement lâché par des chiens dès l'abord dépistés et qu'il s'acharne à relancer à sa poursuite, sans pouvoir ralentir la course où seule sa passion pour la déesse le mène."

What is important for us to conclude at this juncture is that, in his discussion of the appropriative nature of connaître, Sartre seems to underwrite our own observations concerning the symbiotic relationship between such urges as the Greiftrieb, the Wisstrieb, and Schaulust -- tendencies which appear to suggest a strong bond between a drive to understand the world and a sexual drive. Moreover, we have maintained that these urges seem to constitute an attempt on the part of the subject to master a situation; in Sartre's terms, the caress, the glance, and the Actaeon complex reveal an attempt on the part of the subject to "s'appropriier le monde symboliquement."

Furthermore, we have suggested that the situation to-be-mastered by both the Greiftrieb and the Wisstrieb may, at its origin, be the absence of the mother's breast. Such a conclusion we made on the basis of the role of sensual sucking (Wonnesaugen) in the development of the subject (see above, Ch. I, pp. 41-42). Consequently, eating must be considered as somehow at the heart of the aforementioned attempts at mastery -- as a kind of informing factor.

These hounds that are off the track are other analysts who, despite the single-minded purpose and acumen of their master, have strayed from the path to Diana's riverside grotto. See Jacques Lacan, "La Chose freudienne," in Écrits I (Paris: Seuil, 1966), p. 221 (also p. 248).

Not surprisingly, then, Sartre goes on to introduce the activity of eating into the web of appropriative tendencies he has thus far been weaving. After his postulation of "le complexe d'Actéon," Sartre continues:

En prenant d'ailleurs cette idée de chasse pour fil conducteur, nous découvrons un autre symbole d'appropriation, peut-être plus primitif encore: car on chasse pour manger. La curiosité animale est toujours sexuelle ou alimentaire. Connaître, c'est manger des yeux.¹⁰⁸

The "fil conducteur" that Sartre is following now provides a binding axis for another "symbole d'appropriation," which "nous découvrons" (that is, which we "remove the cover from" in order to render it visible). Curiosity -- the desire to know -- is either sexual or alimentary, and the inquiring stare with which we discover an object is, consequently, either sexually or alimentarily inspired, the latter source of the drive being "plus primitif."

Although he maintains that "la curiosité animale" is always either sexual or alimentary, we should remark that the "either . . . or" construction, which Sartre utilizes to describe the relation between the two qualifiers, could easily be replaced by the more precise "both . . . and." Sartre points out that the rapport between the known object and the knower is similar to that between the work of art and its creator. The creator's mind is continually creating the work of art, because the art object's meaning is forever linked to the creative activity of the artist;

¹⁰⁸ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 667.

at the same time, however, the work of art has an existence of its own, in-the-world, which is entirely independent of the being of the artist. In this sense, the artist's act is structurally parallel to the caress, through which the subject "shapes" the flesh of the other while the other nonetheless pursues an existence of his / her own in-the-world. Thus is construed the sexuality of the creative act and, by extension, the sexuality of knowledge. But, Sartre notes, this relation of knowing subject to object known, in terms of the caress, "n'exclut pas son inverse": "dans le connaître, la conscience attire à soi son objet et se l'incorpore; la connaissance est assimilation."¹⁰⁹ The rapport between the knower and the known is therefore one in which the object remains forever outside the subject, while, at the same time, the object is assimilated, incorporated by the subject, as if actually eaten. This seemingly paradoxical double relation is somewhat elucidated by Sartre in his description of the "devouring" of the known object:

Le connu se transforme en moi, devient ma pensée et par là même accepte de recevoir son existence de moi seul. Mais ce mouvement de dissolution se fige du fait que le connu demeure à la même place, indéfiniment absorbé, mangé et indéfiniment intact, tout entier digéré et cependant tout entier dehors, indigeste comme un caillou.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

In other words, although it might be said that curiosity is a wish to devour, it is a wish to incorporate the object in a very specific way: "un rêve d'assimilation non destructrice," as Sartre goes on to call it, a wish both to digest and to eat without digesting the desired object.

This wish, however, can be nothing more than "un rêve," as Sartre has already suggested, for the subject obviously cannot appropriate an object which is at the same time to-be-digested and not-to-be-digested:

Le malheur est que -- comme le notait Hegel -- le désir détruit son objet. (En ce sens, disait-il, le désir est désir de manger.) En réaction contre cette nécessité dialectique, le Pour-soi rêve d'un objet qui serait entièrement assimilé par moi, qui serait moi, sans se dissoudre en moi, en gardant sa structure d'en-soi, car, justement ce que je désire, c'est cet objet et, si je le mange, je ne l'ai plus, je ne ren-contre plus que moi.¹¹¹

This search for an object which can be eaten while at the same time remaining intact is termed by Sartre "le complexe de Jonas." Whether Sartre is actually the originator of the term is unclear, but his first published use of it precedes Bachelard's by some four years.¹¹² The identity of the term's originator is of little importance, however. What is important is that Sartre and Bachelard are once again pursuing similar lines with regard to behavior. We should recall that, in Bachelard, "le complexe

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 668.

¹¹² L'Être et le néant was first published in 1944, La Terre et les rêveries du repos in 1948.

de Jonas" refers to the urge to swallow an object whole, without chewing. Furthermore, Bachelard considers the Jonah complex "comme un cas particulier de sevrage" in which the infant's eating strategy changes from sucking to chewing, a moment at which Freud signals the inevitability of the detachment of the sexual drive from the nutritional instinct (see above, Ch. I, p. 33).

The fact that Sartre goes on to say that "cette synthèse impossible de l'assimilation et de l'intégrité conservée de l'assimilé se rejoint, dans ses racines les plus profondes, avec les tendances fondamentales de la sexualité,"¹¹³ is, then, not surprising. Although Sartre never mentions the role of the breast in the development of infantile sexuality, the connection can nonetheless be read between the lines of his text when he relates eating and the Jonah complex to sexuality and the Actaeon complex through the mediating term of appropriation. Having suggested the similarity between scientific research and the lover's caress, Sartre concludes his examination of the verb "to know" with the following summary, which, in the interest of clarity, we shall quote in full:

On voit les courants sexuels et alimentaires qui se fondent et s'interpénètrent, pour constituer le complexe d'Actéon et le complexe de Jonas, on voit les racines digestives et sensuelles qui se réunissent pour donner naissance au désir de connaître. La connaissance est à la fois pénétration et caresse de surface, digestion et contemplation à distance d'un objet indéformable,

¹¹³ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 668.

production d'une pensée par création continuée et constatation de la totale indépendance objective de cette pensée. L'objet connu, c'est ma pensée comme chose. Et c'est précisément ce que je désire profondément lorsque je me mets en quête: saisir ma pensée comme chose et la chose comme pensée. Le rapport syncrétique qui fond ensemble des tendances si diverses ne saurait être qu'un rapport d'appropriation. C'est pourquoi le désir de connaître est, si désintéressé qu'il puisse paraître, un rapport d'appropriation. Le connaître est une des formes que peut prendre l'avoir.¹¹⁴

The désir de connaître is informed by both sexual and alimentary drives and is the desire to possess an object in the "double rapport" of mine / but not-me. It is the desire to appropriate one's thought as a thing.

Thus, we see that Roquentin's gathering of the discarded papers, his temptation to put them in his mouth, the fact that he feels them inquiringly ("il les palpe") and likes to look closely at them can all be subsumed under the more general verbal category of "to have," in terms of a certain understanding of "appropriation" (or appropriation of understanding). In so far as his pastime is inquisitive, we might conclude that what Roquentin desires is a certain reification of thought. Regarding the sexual undertones of his acts that we proposed in the preceding section of this study, we might conclude that what Roquentin desires is a revelation of his Self as flesh, a reification of consciousness itself. And finally, as far as the urge to put the trash into his mouth is concerned,

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 668-669.

Roquentin has a notion to undertake a strategy of appropriation that is "peut-être plus primitif encore" -- to actually make the papers a part of himself. The common denominator that is derived from these three points of view, the avoir, is still, however, a slightly mysterious term. Why should one desire a reified thought, a reified consciousness, a food which refuses to be digested? What is it in the nature of this desire and its objects, this desire which is inseparable from its objects, that allows it to appear in the first place? We must now examine these questions before concluding our analysis of Roquentin's symptomatic gestures, attempts at appropriation which point to an even more fundamental phenomenological dilemma. For this reason, we shall defer our examination of Roquentin's destruction of the objects, behavior which can be more easily elucidated following the next step in our theoretical inquiry.

We have shown, through a paraphrase of Sartre's work, how faire can ultimately be reduced to avoir. It is now necessary to understand how avoir must, in the end, be understood as a manifestation of être.

In any psychoanalytic study there is a need to invoke Freud, either directly or indirectly, and we shall continue to do so in spite of Sartre's ardent protest against the legitimacy of some of Freud's most crucial postula-

tions. In fact, there are only two main points of contention (albeit important ones) between Sartre's position and that of Freud: the notion of the unconscious and the libido theory. We shall not attempt a complete resolution of these fundamental differences between the two systems of thought, for even allowing for terminological disagreement and a possible misunderstanding on Sartre's part, it remains evident that we must deal with two radically distinct points of view.

Regarding our presentation and elaboration of Freud's position, we shall draw to some extent on the interpretations of Jacques Lacan and Jean Laplanche, the primary spokesmen of the so-called "French Freudian" school. This strategy, although somewhat indirect, should yield clearer and more extensive results, for, especially in terms of the aims and origins of desire, Freud's French interpreters have clarified some of the ambiguity in the translations of Freud's work, as well as extended his arguments in a systematic and perspicacious manner, without having lost sight of the all-important role of language in the psychoanalytic method and the need to read Freud à la lettre.

It is in the strange, arabesque jargon of the dream -- a series of images and connections which are ornate in detail and mysterious in content -- that the most profound insights of the Freudian discovery find their fertile

source. For the dream is a symptom and its language that of the unconscious, and it is through a translation or deciphering of the dream's rebus-like structure -- a kind of language of pictograms -- that the analyst unlocks (or leads the patient to unlock) the truth of the dreamer's subjectivity. Moreover, it is not only in the dream's pictorial dialect that the patient's unconscious reveals itself. The patient's discourse as a whole -- his memories, his relation to the analyst, his descriptions of what he had or did not have for dinner -- provides the material through which the unconscious allows access to the perspicacious reader / analyst. Thus, what is most fundamental in Freud's contribution to the art of psychoanalysis is the notion of the unconscious, a structure which manifests itself through language.

This emphasis on the language and speech of the "talking cure" is what Freud's French interpreters (especially Lacan) have so well preserved of the Freudian method. And this reiterating of the importance of language as the crucial material of the Freudian technique is much in keeping with what Sartre only sketchily outlines in his plan for the development of a "psychanalyse existentielle": "Il ne convient pas seulement, en effet, de dresser la liste des conduites, des tendances et des inclinations, il faut encore les déchiffrer, c'est-à-dire il faut

savoir les interroger."¹¹⁵ That is, the goal of the analysis that Sartre is proposing is the breaking of a code, the solving of the cipher which is the patient's behavior, through the technique of asking the proper questions and (we must imagine) receiving informative responses. Thus, this enterprise of déchiffrage, like the paradigmatic analytic situation in Freud, is one that necessarily plays itself out on the plane of language, in the exchange of signs between analyst and analysand. What's more, this constantly signifying va-et-vient of both speaker and listener in a theatre of discourse is a notion that is fundamental to the for-itself's relations with others, as Sartre understands them. In fact, it is constitutive of them. Speaking about being-for-others (l'être-pour-autrui), that aspect of the for-itself that presupposes the existence of the Other as another free upsurge of being in the world (i.e., another consciousness), Sartre maintains:

Le langage n'est pas un phénomène surajouté à l'être-pour-autrui: il est originellement l'être-pour-autrui, c'est-à-dire le fait qu'une subjectivité s'éprouve comme objet pour l'autre. Dans un univers de purs objets, le langage ne saurait en aucun cas être "inventé", puisqu'il suppose originellement un rapport à un autre sujet; et dans l'intersubjectivité des pour-autrui, il n'est pas nécessaire de l'inventer, car il est déjà donné dans la reconnaissance de l'autre. Du seul fait que, quoi que je fasse, mes actes librement conçus et exécutés, mes projets vers mes possibilités ont dehors un sens qui m'échappe et que j'éprouve, je suis langage.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 656.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 440.

Language is not a trait of our being-for-others, it is our being-for-others, and insofar as we recognize that we are in a world where there are other consciousnesses, we are the language that we speak. In other words, language is the manifest content of our latent being-for-others in much the same way as the discourse of the dream, in Freud's work, is the manifest content of our latent unconscious structures. For both Freud and Sartre, then, we are what we say.

Consequently, if Sartre is intent on developing a psychoanalysis which would be ontologically grounded (as he suggests from time to time), then the crucial importance of language must be stressed, for the "material" of one's being-for-others is language, and it is the nature of this being that must be questioned.

But before turning our gaze to the problematic of desire, we should consider at some length the principal theoretical distinctions between the systems of Freud and Sartre, in order to ascertain our terminological bearings before attempting to map one text on to the other.

La psychanalyse empirique part . . . du postulat de l'existence d'un psychisme inconscient qui se dérobe par principe à l'intuition du sujet. La psychanalyse existentielle rejette le postulat de l'inconscient: le fait psychique est, pour elle, coextensif à la conscience.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 658.

With clear and unambivalent terseness, Sartre categorically dismisses the concept of an unconscious, which he ascribes to the school of "empirical psychoanalysis" (i.e., that of Freud). But we must be careful here not to misunderstand Sartre's use of the term conscience. Anticipating the probable objection to the casually dropped bombshell he has just detonated before us, Sartre continues: "Mais si le projet fondamental est pleinement vécu par le sujet et, comme tel, totalement conscient, cela ne signifie nullement qu'il doive être du même coup connu par lui, tout au contraire."¹¹⁸ The distinction, in Sartre's text, between consciousness and knowledge is a crucial one. Put in another way, this distinction can be construed as the separating out of two "kinds" of consciousness. There is what Sartre terms a "thetic" aspect of consciousness (la conscience thétique), which is a derivation of Husserl's phenomenological maxim: "Consciousness is consciousness of something." Thetic consciousness (also known as "reflective" consciousness, la conscience réfléchie) refers to that process of cognition by which we are aware of an object for consciousness. Through the thetic property of consciousness we possess knowledge (la connaissance), whether it be construed as perception, memory, reason or otherwise. When the known object of consciousness is oneself, we have what Sartre terms "posi-

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

tional self-consciousness" (la conscience positionnelle de soi), in which the self is posited as a mere object-in-the-world for a transcending consciousness.¹¹⁹ It is at this juncture that Sartre parts company with Husserl, for he points out that it is not at all necessary to posit oneself as an object in order to be conscious (of) oneself.¹²⁰ There is also the "non-thetic" aspect of consciousness to be considered. La conscience non-thétique (also known as "unreflective consciousness," "non-positional consciousness," and the "pre-reflective cogito") reveals no knowledge per se of the Self, but only "an implicit consciousness of being conscious of an object."¹²¹

¹¹⁹ This "positing" of an object by consciousness is what gives rise to the term "positionnelle," a usage that refers more to the revelation of the object than to any situation in space of consciousness.

¹²⁰ Sartre brackets the preposition in the phrase conscience (de) soi, when he is speaking of non-thetic self-consciousness, in order to indicate that the Self is not really an object for consciousness at that moment. We might also mention that Sartre's case against Husserl is presented mainly in the text La Transcendance de l'Ego, in which he contends that the Ego, rather than being a transcendent conscious entity (as Husserl claims), is actually transcended by consciousness and is the self which is posited as an object for thetic consciousness: ". . . l'Ego n'est ni formellement ni matériellement dans la conscience: il est dehors, dans le monde c'est un être du monde, comme l'Ego d'autrui" -- Jean-Paul Sartre, La Transcendance de l'Ego (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1966), p. 13. In other words, the Ego is what the subject thinks himself to be, a construct of thetic consciousness.

¹²¹ We are borrowing this definition from Hazel Barnes' terminological key which appears at the end of her translation of L'Etre et le néant, Being and Nothingness (New York: Quokka, 1956), p. 801.

Thus, if I am at this moment thinking about what I'd like to have for supper, I am both positionally conscious of my anticipated meal and non-positionally conscious of my consciousness: "toute conscience positionnelle d'objet est en même temps conscience non-positionnelle d'elle-même."¹²² It is important to note, then, that these are not exactly two "kinds" of consciousness, as we first suggested, but more precisely two facets of the same transcendence which manifest themselves at a single stroke.

Thus, "l'interprétation psychanalytique ne lui [au sujet] fait pas prendre conscience de ce qu'il est: elle lui en fait prendre connaissance."¹²³ Sartre does not deny that there are two levels of a sort which make up the psyche of a subject and that one of these levels is well camouflaged and resistant to the subject's capacity for awareness. But, he points out: "nous n'établissons pas entre les deux plans considérés la différence de l'inconscient et du conscient, mais celle qui sépare la conscience irréfléchie et fondamentale de la conscience réfléchie qui en est tributaire."¹²⁴ Sartre replaces the concept of the unconscious with the pre-reflective cogito and repression by what he calls "bad faith" (la mauvaise foi) -- put simply, "a lie to oneself within the unity of a single con-

¹²² Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 19.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 662.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 552.

sciousness,"¹²⁵ a denial by reflective consciousness of what is grasped pre-reflectively, but of which the subject has no knowledge.

But if it is important for us to precisely understand Sartre's use of the term "consciousness" (la conscience), it is equally important for us not to misconstrue the Freudian concept of "the unconscious" (das Unbewusste). Both Freud and Sartre share "the position that to require that whatever goes on in the mind must also be known to consciousness [auch dem Bewusstsein bekannt werden müsse] is to make an untenable claim."¹²⁶ If, however, something is not "known to consciousness," is it necessarily unconscious? Freud would undoubtedly answer in the affirmative, but this response requires some qualification.

Freud understands the psychic apparatus as made up of three "systems," which he terms consciousness (das Bewusstsein), the unconscious (das Unbewusste), and the pre-conscious (das Vorbewusste).¹²⁷ Roughly speaking, consciousness is that system which includes all that is known. The other two systems contain psychic elements which are not known, and these elements can be considered unconscious. The unconscious as a system however, com-

¹²⁵ Barnes, Being and Nothingness, p. 800.

¹²⁶ Sigmund Freud, "The Unconscious," in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works, Vol. XIV (London: Hogarth, 1953), p. 167, emphasis added.

¹²⁷ Freud's original German will be included from time to time in the following pages for the sake of precision.

prises that which is not only unknown to consciousness, but which also can not be known to consciousness. We can easily see the ambiguity that arises with regard to the term "unconscious." If used in a descriptive sense, the word refers to something that is not, at least for the moment, available to consciousness (it may or may not be capable of becoming conscious). On the other hand, if "unconscious" is used in the systematic sense, it refers to something that is permanently barred from consciousness and must remain unconscious (in the descriptive sense). In an effort to eliminate this ambiguity, at least in his writing, Freud proposes the use of the abbreviations Cs (Bw) for consciousness, Ucs (Ubw) for the unconscious, and Pcs (Vbw) for the preconscious when speaking in the systematic sense.¹²⁸

Thus it is that we must be quite careful to read some of Freud's apparently clear and basic statements with an eye towards their immediate, as well as their more marginal contexts. The metapsychological paper on the unconscious, for example, which we have just cited, begins with an introduction to both the notion of the unconscious and that of repression. Freud states:

¹²⁸ Freud, "The Unconscious," pp. 172-173. It should be pointed out that "preconscious" cannot be used in the descriptive sense, and thus is terminologically unambiguous, since that which comprises the system Pcs is, by definition, unconscious (in the descriptive sense).

Everything that is repressed must remain unconscious; but let us state at the very outset that the repressed does not cover everything that is unconscious. The unconscious has the wider compass: the repressed is a part of the unconscious [das Verdrängte ist ein Teil des Unbewussten].¹²⁹

We must be alert to two considerations: first of all, that Freud may be speaking of the unconscious in either the descriptive sense or the systematic sense (a distinction that is not elaborated until a few pages later in the essay) and, second, that such concepts as "the repressed" (das Verdrängte) may undergo significant qualification as the essay proceeds.

Is it true that "everything that is repressed must remain unconscious," and, if so, how are we to understand this statement? Does Freud simply mean that whatever is repressed must remain unconscious only so long as it repressed? Or can he mean that whatever is repressed is permanently closed out from consciousness, banished to the unconscious -- that is, to the system Ucs, which Freud will presently introduce into the essay? Or is the ambiguity of the term "unconscious" at play here; in other words, does he mean both?

Further along in the essay we find the following passage in which Freud is pointing out the difficulties of bringing to light those thoughts of which the patient is unconscious:

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 166.

Actually there is no lifting of the repression [Aufhebung der Verdrängung] until the conscious idea [die bewusste Vorstellung],¹³⁰ after the resistances have been overcome, has entered into connection with the unconscious memory-trace. It is only through the making conscious [das Bewusstmachen] of the latter itself that success is achieved.¹³¹

Here we note a strong indication that the work of the censorship is not permanent. Although stubborn, the repression can be "lifted" (aufgehoben) through the mutual efforts of both the analyst and the analysand, and the unconscious memory-trace, through a union with the conscious idea, can find its way to consciousness. Repression, it seems, is not permanent.

But what of the system Ucs, the eternal graveyard of that which has been exiled from conscious life? Is Freud suggesting in the passage quoted above that the analyst possesses the magical key by which all the captives of the system Ucs can in the end be freed from behind the bars of the rigorous censorship? Hardly, for this would lead the development of his theory into an irresolvable contradiction.

It is in the notion of the "making conscious" of the unconscious memory-trace that the dilemma is resolved. First of all, let us remark that the "thought" -- conscious or unconscious -- considered in its most general

¹³⁰ That is, the idea which has been suggested by the analyst regarding what is being repressed by the patient -- an idea of which the patient is thus unconscious.

¹³¹ Freud, "The Unconscious," pp. 175-176.

sense (as a dynamic force of some kind in the psychic mechanism), can take on many forms. Among these forms are ideas, emotions, feelings and instinctual impulses. Freud maintains that there are both conscious and unconscious ideas (Vorstellungen). He does not, however, understand such phenomena as instinctual impulses (Triebregungen) as having this same bi-systematic character:

I am . . . of the opinion that the antithesis of conscious and unconscious is not applicable to instincts [hat auf den Trieb keine Anwendung]. An instinct can never become an object of consciousness -- only the idea [die Vorstellung] that represents the instinct can. Even in the unconscious, moreover, an instinct cannot be represented otherwise than by an idea. If the instinct did not attach itself to an idea or manifest itself as an affective state, we would know nothing about it.¹³²

Thus, there are certain elements that are destined to remain unconscious, elements from which the repression cannot be lifted. In a way, however, even instincts (Triebe) can somehow find their way into consciousness, but only as something else. The text of the system Ucs must first be "translated" into the language of the systems Cs or Pcs before its existence can be named:

How are we to arrive at a knowledge of the unconscious? It is of course only as something conscious that we know it, after it has undergone transformation or translation [Umsetzung oder Übersetzung] into something conscious.¹³³

¹³² Ibid., p. 177.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 166.

It may be well to say a few words about the mechanism of repression before moving on to other considerations. First of all, it is important to note that, according to Freud, there are two censorships. There is, of course, the barrier between the systems Ucs and Pcs through which only derivatives of the repressed material can pass.¹³⁴ But there is also a second censorship which is situated at the dynamic boundary between the systems Pcs and Cs. Unlike the primary censor, which closes off the Ucs, this second censor can be overcome:

In psycho-analytic treatment the existence of the second censorship, located between the systems Pcs and Cs, is proved beyond question. We require the patient to form numerous derivatives of the Ucs, we make him pledge himself to overcome the objections of the censorship to these preconscious formations becoming conscious, and by overthrowing this censorship [durch die Besiegung dieser Zensur], we open up the way to abrogating the repression [bahnen uns . . . den Weg zur Aufhebung der Verdrwngung] accomplished by the earlier one.¹³⁵

The repressive mechanism that controls the border between the Pcs and the Cs systems can be defeated without any transformation or translation of the psychic material involved. The overcoming of this censor is termed by Freud "die Besiegung dieser Zensur," indicating a defeat, a conquest, a surmounting of the barrier. On the other hand,

¹³⁴ To be more precise, we might say "around which" or "over which," instead of "through which," when referring to the crossing of the wall of repression: Freud's terms, as we have just noted, are "Um-setzung" and "Über-setzung."

¹³⁵ Freud, "The Unconscious," pp. 193-194.

when speaking of the primary censorship, Freud utilizes the term "Aufhebung." Now, although Strachey renders this overcoming as an "abrogation," something is most certainly lost in the translation. Freud's use of the term Aufhebung, like Hegel's, presents some difficulties for the translator, since the word suggests both a preserving, as well as a doing away with. In addition, the literal sense of Aufhebung is a lifting (up), a raising. Thus, we can see that the censor which bars the way to the Ucs is not really "abrogated," since it is at the same time preserved. This dialectical movement with regard to the evasion of the primary censorship is in line with what we have argued above. Certain unconscious material (such as instinctual impulses) must be repressed; in this sense, the censorship is preserved. But these impulses can be, and are, represented by ideas (Vorstellungen), which are capable of becoming conscious; in this sense is the way opened for the "abrogation" of the primary censorship.

We see, then, that there are some cardinal conceptual differences between the theoretical models of the psychic apparatus that are presented by Freud and Sartre. What Freud explains by means of the descriptive and systematic unconscious, Sartre seems to relegate more or less to the pre-reflexive cogito -- a consciousness. However, if instead of dividing the mind into a conscious and an unconscious, orthetic and non-thetic consciousness, we simply

regard the universe of mental processes as awareness or non-awareness, we discover that -- point of view and terminological worrying aside -- there is a shared ground between Freud and Sartre. The subject is aware of many things about himself and the world. There are other things, however, of which he is unaware, but which are somehow represented and at work in his mind and must be considered part of his mental life. In many cases, the repression can be overcome (besiegt); the subject confesses to himself the lie which has constituted his bad faith. But what about the censor that stands guard at the gates of the system Ucs? This repression can be "abrogated" (aufgehoben) through a translation of the language of the Ucs, but it cannot be unconditionally vanquished. Is there an instance of bad faith in Sartre's model of the psyche which cannot be overcome, except through a kind of translation -- an originary bad faith that forever prevents the thinking subject from becoming whole to himself?

For the moment, we shall suspend judgment on this proposition and postpone further discussion of an "originary" bad faith until we have begun our examination of the second major point at which Sartre's psychoanalytic theory diverges from Freud's.

This second point of contention concerns the libido theory -- more specifically, the libido itself. Put quite simply: "Libido is a term used in the theory of instincts

for describing the dynamic manifestation of sexuality."¹³⁶
Now, in his "theory of instincts," Freud differentiates
between the "libidinal, sexual or life instincts" and the
so-called "death instincts." The latter are:

those which follow the aim of leading the living
creature to death and therefore deserve to be
called the 'death instincts'; these would be di-
rected outwards as the result of the combination
of numbers of unicellular elementary organisms,
and would manifest themselves as destructive or
aggressive impulses.¹³⁷

Elsewhere Freud describes such a tendency as "an urge in-
herent in organic life to restore an earlier state of
things."¹³⁸ The former set of instincts, which Freud
places under the rubric of Eros, have as their aim "to
form living substance into ever greater unities, so that
life may be prolonged and brought to higher develop-
ment."¹³⁹ These instincts are thus sexual in nature and
have as their ultimate purpose the proliferation of the
species: reproduction. Freud concludes that life "would
consist in the manifestation of the conflict or interac-
tion between the two classes of instincts."¹⁴⁰ Thus, human
reality can hardly be reduced to one grandiose libidinal

¹³⁶ Sigmund Freud, "The Libido Theory," in The Standard Edition, Vol. XVIII (London: Hogarth, 1955), p. 255.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 258.

¹³⁸ Sigmund Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), p. 30.

¹³⁹ Freud, "The Libido Theory," p. 258.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 259.

manifestation, as Sartre seems to understand Freud's position. Leaving this rather glaring oversight aside, however, at least for the time being, let us note that Sartre's case against the notion of the libido consists mainly in his supposition that sexuality is not a fundamental structure of human reality.

If Sartre does not see sexuality as fundamental, how does he understand it? At first glance, we might conclude that (in spite of himself, perhaps) Sartre does place sexuality in a prominent role in his phenomenological description of the subject's relation to others. We note, for example, his claim that "l'attitude sexuelle était un comportement primitif envers Autrui,"¹⁴¹ and further, "le Pour-soi est sexuel dans son surgissement même en face d'Autrui et que, par lui, la sexualité vient au monde."¹⁴² If the for-itself is sexual in its very upsurge in the face of the Other, then it can hardly be denied that sexuality is a primary relation of the for-itself to others. But the rather self-evident correlate of this hypothesis -- that there can be no sexuality without the appearance of the Other -- is one that Sartre does not want overlooked:

Que ce comportement [primitif envers Autrui] enveloppe nécessairement en lui la contingence originelle de l'être-pour-autrui et celle de notre facticité propre, cela va sans dire. Mais

¹⁴¹ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 477.

¹⁴² Ibid.

qu'il soit soumis dès l'origine à une constitution physiologique et empirique, c'est ce que nous ne saurions admettre. Dès qu'il "y a" le corps et qu'il "y a" l'Autre, nous réagissons par le désir, par l'Amour et par les attitudes dérivées que nous avons mentionnées.¹⁴³

In other words, the subject is not born with a sexual "constitution" (not to be confused with a sex -- i.e., male or female), but develops such attitudes upon encountering the Other. Consequently, sexuality is not primary, since it is a drive which characterizes the subject's relation towards others and not towards the world. As Stern puts it: "He [Sartre] . . . designates it [sexuality] as a 'fundamental structure,' but only of our being-for-others and not of our being-in-the-world, which is our very existence."¹⁴⁴ Thus, sexuality functions as the "skeleton" of all relations between the for-itself and the Other:

Et cela non pas à cause de l'existence d'une certaine "libido" qui se glisserait partout, mais simplement parce que les attitudes que nous avons décrites sont les projets fondamentaux par quoi le Pour-soi réalise son être-pour-autrui et tente de transcender cette situation de fait.¹⁴⁵

But if sexuality is not the fundamental structure in Sartre's understanding of human reality, then what is? The nature of this structure has already been hinted at in the preceding pages, but there are several instances where Sartre is quite succinct about what is primarily at stake

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Alfred Stern, Sartre: His Philosophy and Existential Psychoanalysis (New York: Delacorte, 1967), p. 158.

¹⁴⁵ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, pp. 477-478.

for the Pour-soi: "Nous avons vu que la réalité humaine, bien avant de pouvoir être décrite comme libido ou volonté de puissance,¹⁴⁶ est choix d'être, soit directement, soit par appropriation du monde."¹⁴⁷ We might note, in passing, that Sartre goes on to describe the orientation of existential psychoanalysis -- a psychoanalysis of things and the matter of which they are made -- as an attempt to understand:

la façon dont chaque chose est le symbole objectif de l'être et du rapport de la réalité humaine à cet être. Nous ne nions pas qu'il faille découvrir, par après, tout un symbolisme sexuel dans la nature, mais c'est une couche secondaire et réductible qui suppose d'abord une psychanalyse des structures présexuelles.¹⁴⁸

Now, if we recall Sartre's discussion of the role of language with regard to the subject's being-for-others and, in particular, the fact that "le langage . . . est originellement l'être-pour-autrui" (see above, p. 106), and if we recall as well his later contention that "le Pour-soi est sexuel dans son surgissement même en face d'Autrui" (see above, p. 120), then it becomes difficult to understand how things, as objective symbols of being, can be seen in a non-sexual light. It seems that either this particular process of symbolization must be construed as

¹⁴⁶ "Volonté de puissance" or "will to power": a concept which Sartre ascribes to Adler, but which is found earlier in Nietzsche, as well.

¹⁴⁷ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 693.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 693-694.

somehow pre-linguistic, or else one must presuppose that an intuitive interpretation of the meaning of objects can somehow take place before the encounter with the Other and (once again) the inception of language. Sartre seems to be implying a very delicate paradox. Although he suggests that a network of sexual symbolism will invariably accompany the analysis of things and their relation to the subject's choice of being, he must strain nonetheless to privilege an order, other than the sexual, in the realm of psychoanalysis -- the "talking cure."

The danger of this paradox is neutralized somewhat when we consider what Sartre means by a choice of being (le choix d'être) under which such secondary concepts as the libido and the will to power are subsumed. The following passage is worthy of consideration:

Le projet originel qui s'exprime dans chacune de nos tendances empiriquement observables est donc le projet d'être où si l'on préfère, chaque tendance empirique est avec le projet originel d'être dans un rapport d'expression et d'assouvissement symbolique, comme les tendances conscientes, chez Freud, par rapport aux complexes et à la libido originelle. Ce n'est point d'ailleurs que le désir d'être soit d'abord pour se faire exprimer ensuite par les désirs à posteriori; mais il n'est rien en dehors de l'expression symbolique qu'il trouve dans les désirs concrets. Il n'y a pas d'abord un désir d'être, puis mille sentiments particuliers, mais le désir d'être n'existe et ne se manifeste que dans et par la jalousie, l'avarice, l'amour de l'art, la lâcheté, le courage, les mille expressions contingentes et empiriques qui font que la réalité humaine ne nous apparaît jamais que manifestée par un tel homme, par une personne sin-

gulière.¹⁴⁹

It is clear that Sartre does not intend the "désir d'être" to come before (in a strictly temporal sense) the sexual, or any other drive. Thus, his references to pre-sexual structures can only be construed as an attempt to privilege ontological over sexual considerations and has little to do with the subject's early infantile history. Put another way, we might state that Sartre sees the desire to be as a primary drive, which is at the heart of all other drives, and which shows itself only in the guise of libidinal urges, the will to power, or any other fundamental attitude that characterizes human reality.

We must now ask the question: how is it that the ontological choice can provide a dynamic force? In other words, what is it about the nature of human reality, human "being," that can constitute a drive to become what one is (at first glance, a very passive and static project)?

A brief sketch of Sartre's ontological universe is in order. The principal focus of Sartre's text is, of course, the distinction between being-in-itself (être-en-soi) and being-for-itself (être-pour-soi). At the risk of being somewhat reductive (especially with regard to the latter concept), we must nonetheless establish a working distinction between these two ontological modes. The in-itself is the being of the phenomenon, the full being of

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 652.

the world, brute existence. The only thing that can be really said about being-in-itself is that it simply is. The for-itself, on the other hand, is the being of consciousness. This mode of being is actually grounded in nothingness. It is a nothingness through which being-in-itself is "nihilated" (néanti) and, thus, is not, in a strict sense. As Hazel Barnes puts it:

Being-for-itself (être-pour-soi). The nihilation of Being-in-itself; consciousness conceived as a lack of Being, a desire for Being, a relation to Being. By bringing Nothingness into the world the For-itself can stand out from Being and judge other beings by knowing what it is not. Each For-itself is the nihilation of a particular Being.¹⁵⁰

The notion of the for-itself is, then, somewhat complicated, since one must deal with an entity which is precisely a lack of being, an empty entity which nonetheless manifests itself as human reality. The role of nothingness in the relation of the thinking subject to the world is expressed by Sartre in the chapter entitled "Les Structures Immédiates du Pour-soi." He states:

La réalité humaine, par quoi le manque apparaît dans le monde, doit être elle-même un manque. Car le manque ne peut venir de l'être que par le manque, l'en-soi ne peut être occasion de manque à l'en-soi. En d'autres termes, pour que l'être soit manquant ou manqué, il faut qu'un être se fasse son propre manque; seul un être qui manque peut dépasser l'être vers le manqué.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ From Hazel Barnes' terminological key in Being and Nothingness, p. 800.

¹⁵¹ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 130.

This surpassing (dépassement) of the plenitude of being-in-itself by the for-itself constitutes the upsurge of desire as a dynamic tendency in human reality. What's more, it is to the appearance of desire in the world that Sartre appeals for a confirmation of his claim that consciousness is a lack, a hole in being: "Que la réalité humaine soit manque, l'existence du désir comme fait humain suffirait à le prouver."¹⁵² Thus, Sartre succeeds in pointing to the nothingness that grounds human reality by calling into evidence the dynamic force (le désir) which results from its non-being.

Furthermore, human reality is seen as a continuous sequence of choices -- as freedom: "Le Pour-soi choisit parce qu'il est manque, la liberté ne fait qu'un avec le manque, elle est le mode d'être concret du manque d'être."¹⁵³ The for-itself strives relentlessly to complete itself, to achieve the plenitude of being of the in-itself, to be what it is while serving as its own grounding: an obviously impossible goal since the for-itself cannot be in-itself and free at the same time. Thus, the for-itself cannot escape this endless need to choose its being, from which it is forever separated, and the result of this necessity to pursue something it can never attain means that the for-itself constructs its world in a fantasmatic

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 652.

manner: the objects that it chooses only function in an unsubstantial and illusory way as unsatisfying substitutes for what it really wants. Like the greyhound chasing the mechanical rabbit, the for-itself is forever in pursuit of an object which it wishes to incorporate and, moreover, there is no hope of its ever devouring the real object, a real rabbit. The for-itself, consciousness, freedom and human reality are all separate terms used to describe the same (non-)entity: that being which wants to be in-itself, but must necessarily be for-itself.

Thus, the origin of desire presents itself as ontological: the for-itself wants to be. Desire is then manifested through choice. The choice of an object, which is always, at its origin, the elusive in-itself, constitutes a fundamental mode of being-for-itself: doing. But since choice is always choice of something, the object of the choice is never separated from the process itself, but forms an integral part of it. Since the original project of the for-itself as lack is to be what it is (that is, to be something which is not nothingness), it can be seen that the for-itself is always choosing to fill its own lack, to achieve a plenitude like that of the in-itself. The for-itself wants to have itself and, since it is itself lack, it must choose itself from what is always outside it. In other words, since the for-itself is a lack of being, it cannot possess a being by possessing itself.

It must look for being elsewhere. Thus, it is only by appropriating a being which is outside itself and claiming this being as its own that the for-itself can choose itself.

There is a complicated connection, therefore, between being (être), doing (faire) and having (avoir). The for-itself wants to be in-itself (être) and must therefore choose itself through the mediation of an object in the world (faire) so that it can have itself (avoir): "Ainsi la réalité humaine est désir d' être-en-soi,"¹⁵⁴ "tout ce qui est mien . . . m'apprend à moi-même mon choix, c'est-à-dire mon être,"¹⁵⁵ and "la situation [i.e., toute situation] est mienne . . . parce qu'elle est l'image de mon libre choix de moi-même et tout ce qu'elle me présente est mien en ce que cela me représente et me symbolise."¹⁵⁶ Doing and having are bound up in the same drive, which is grounded on the desire to be.

"Grounded on the desire to be": the originary desire and its manifestation in human reality are part of the same system. "Le projet originel d'un pour-soi ne peut viser que son être,"¹⁵⁷ but since the for-itself is itself lack and can only choose itself outside itself, the being

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 653.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 541.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 639.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 651.

which it chooses is never the being of its original aim. Although the object of the for-itself's choice is always somehow determined by the aim of the original project, this object of the manifest drive is always fantasmatic: it is a representation, a surrogate for the real object (the for-itself-in-itself), a metaphor for that which is permanently foreclosed to the for-itself. For example, in his discussion of love and jealousy in Proust, Sartre maintains:

[Ces émotions] ne sauraient se réduire au strict désir de posséder une femme, mais . . . visent à s'emparer à travers la femme du monde tout entier . . . [L'amour] apparaît . . . comme un rapport fondamental du pour-soi au monde et à soi-même (ipséité) à travers telle femme particulière; le femme ne représente [emphasis added] qu'un corps conducteur qui est placé dans le circuit.¹⁵⁸

Thus, the object in love is a representation of the ultimate object in the for-itself's fundamental project: the desire to be.

Sartre's ontological examination of desire yields, then, as he points out, a structure that is roughly parallel to that generated by Freud's psychological analysis. In a passage quoted earlier (see above, p. 123), the philosopher's comparison of Freudian thought to his own can be seen as follows:

(In Sartre)	(In Freud)
EMPIRICAL : ORIGINAL PROJECT	:: MANIFEST : COMPLEXES/
TENDENCY OF BEING	DRIVE ORIGINAL LIBIDO

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 649.

Moreover, according to Sartre, "le désir d'être [le projet originel d'être] . . . n'est rien en dehors de l'expression symbolique qu'il trouve dans les désirs concrets."¹⁵⁹ Since the desire to be is grounded in nothingness and cannot be apprehended except through its manifestation in a symbolic sense, it must be latent, giving the impetus to a conscious tendency while at the same time being re-presented, metaphorized into something which it is not. The fundamental project can thus be understood as a kind of originary bad faith, for the subject must, of necessity, always be denied a direct knowledge of his desire to be -- a desire which can only be apprehended in a symbolized, representational and translated mode.¹⁶⁰

Thus, although Sartre does not use the word, it is not impossible to apply the term "latent" at this point in his argument, whether one admits of an unconscious, in the systematic sense, or not. It is also clear that the complexes and original libido are latent, according to the Freudian system. Sartre's equation, then, seems to bal-

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 652.

¹⁶⁰ It might be helpful to note at this point that the various terms which Sartre uses to describe the role of the object in the empirical tendency -- representation, symbol, metaphor, etc. -- should all be understood as a kind of translation from an inconceivable, unattainable mode (the for-itself-in-itself) to one that is both conceivable and attainable. Thus, the represented, symbolized, metaphorized object of the for-itself's original project can only be manifested through a kind of "surrogate" object which stands in the place of the inaccessible object.

ance except for one more consideration: the desire to be is originary for Sartre; is the libido originary for Freud? Sexuality is an empirical tendency, a metaphor, as far as Sartre is concerned; what is the status of sexuality in Freud's system?

The Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality contain what is probably the principal elaboration of Freud's study of drives. Rather than examine this text directly, it may be well to draw on Jean Laplanche's commentary on drives in Freud, for in Laplanche's text, Vie et mort en psychanalyse, the subtle differences between the instinct (Instinkt) and the drive (Trieb) are examined with a terminological rigor that even Freud himself, as a result of years of revising, had difficulty maintaining.

Both mechanisms, the instinct and the drive, can be dismantled into four roughly separate units: the impetus (la poussée), the aim (le but), the object (l'objet), and the source (la source). The impetus is the essence of the mechanism, the force which is the instinct / drive itself; the aim is the act towards which the mechanism is driven, and the thing by means of which the aim of the instinct / drive can be accomplished is the object in the mechanistic system; the source of the mechanism's driving force depends on the nature of the particular mechanism. The source of the instinct is "that somatic process in an organ or part of the body from which there results a stimu-

lus represented in mental life by a drive."¹⁶¹ The source of the drive is the instinct itself.

In short, there is only one instinct -- that of self-preservation. The example, par excellence selected by Freud to illustrate the instinct at work is that of the hungry infant. The mechanistic source of the self-preservative process is, in this case, somatic. The various parts of the baby's body tell the infant that it is hungry. Hunger is the impetus for the motor response which will be, of course, eating. The aim of the instinct is self-preservation, but more particularly, the baby wants to eliminate the physical tension which has arisen as a result of its lack of nourishment. The nourishment itself, then -- the milk -- since it is the thing through which the instinct's aim can be achieved, is the object of the instinct. Consequently, when given the breast, the baby sucks on it, and the action of the infant at its mother's breast is the manifestation of the instinct. Already, as we shall see, the baby has entered (willy-nilly) into the symbolic plane of consciousness through the empirical tendency to suck, which must be regarded as a manifestation of the instinct.

¹⁶¹ Sigmund Freud, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," in The Standard Edition Vol. XIV (London: Hogarth, 1953), p. 123. This description is cited by Laplanche in his Vie et mort en psychanalyse (Paris: Flammarion, 1970), p. 25.

Although the two mechanisms, instinct and drive, function in a similar fashion, it must be noted that there is an important difference between the two: the instinct is somatic, the drive is psychical. The drive is "proped" on the instinct. In addition to the satisfaction of its hunger that the baby achieves through the ingestion of the milk, the child is also experiencing a pleasurable stimulation of the lips and mouth through the action of sucking at the nipple and the movement of warm milk into the body. This stimulation provides the infant with a sensual pleasure that will henceforth be associated with the satisfaction of the instinct, and later, as the child discovers more erotogenic zones, will be desired in itself as sexuality. Sexual pleasure is thus grounded on instinctual satisfaction, and this secondary pleasure, which constitutes the aim of the drive, can be seen as an offshoot of the instinct. This is, in essence, Laplanche's notion of propping (étayage, Anlehnung). Although the instinct is primary and does not constitute, in itself, a psychological structure, it does not exist "d'abord pour se faire exprimer ensuite par les désirs à posteriori" (to borrow some words of Sartre's). The instinct is bound up with its manifestation as drive and can even be regarded as the source of the drive:

Quelle est finalement la source de la pulsion?
Dans cette perspective, on peut dire que c'est
l'instinct tout entier. L'instinct tout entier
avec lui-même sa "source," sa "poussée," son
"but" et son "objet" tels que nous les avons dé-

finis, l'instinct, armes et bagages avec ses quatre facteurs, est à son tour source du processus qui le mime, le déplace et le dénature: la pulsion.¹⁶²

Thus, the drive is a mimetic process: a re-presentation of the instinctual mechanism.¹⁶³

¹⁶² Laplanche, Vie et mort en psychanalyse, p. 41.

¹⁶³ At this point, we should reconsider Freud's statement with regard to the systematic unconscious and Triebe. On page 115, we cited the following:

I am . . . of the opinion that the antithesis of conscious and unconscious is not applicable to instincts [hat auf den Trieb keine Anwendung]. An instinct can never become an object of consciousness -- only the idea [die Vorstellung] that represents the instinct can. Even in the unconscious, moreover, an instinct cannot be represented otherwise than by an idea. If the instinct did not attach itself to an idea or manifest itself as an affective state, we could know nothing about it ("The Unconscious," p. 177).

Is Freud talking about pulsion or instinct here? Laplanche's suggestion that the drive (pulsion, Trieb) is a derivative, a representation of the instinct (instinct, Instinkt) seems to be muddled by the passage we have just cited, in which the drive seems to be primary and mimed by a representation (Vorstellung). Either the use of the term Trieb in this case is a divergence from terminological rigor on Freud's part or Laplanche's analysis is somewhat less than conclusive.

A third possible interpretation presents itself, however. Continuing our reading of the passage, we note the following (both the English and German versions are given for the sake of precision):

When we nevertheless speak of an unconscious instinctual impulse or of a repressed instinctual impulse, the looseness of phraseology is a harmless one. We can only mean an instinctual impulse the ideational representative of which is unconscious, for nothing else comes into consideration ("The Unconscious," p. 177).

Sexuality, "qui représente le modèle de toute pulsion et probablement la seule pulsion au sens propre du terme,"¹⁶⁴ and its power source, the reservoir of libido, is not originary desire. At this point it must be maintained that the instinct of self-preservation is at least more primary than the sexual drive. Sartre's equation becomes unbalanced, and the comparison should be rewritten:

Wenn wir aber doch von einer unbewussten Triebregung oder einer verdrängten Triebre-
gung reden, so ist dies eine harmlose Nach-
lässigkeit des Ausdrucks. Wir können nichts
anderes meinen als eine Triebre-
gung, deren
Vorstellungsrepräsentanz unbewusst ist, denn
etwas anderes kommt nicht in Betracht (Das
Unbewusste," in the Gesammelte Werke, Vol. X
[London: Imago, 1946], p. 276).

Freud seems to sense a possible confusion on the part of the reader, for he refers to his "looseness of phraseology." In clarifying his point, however, we note that he shifts from Trieb to Triebre-
gung to describe the repressed that can only achieve conscious-
ness through a representation. Indeed it is both, and Freud's discarding of one term for another in an effort to "tighten" his phraseology, as well as Laplanche's effort to distinguish between Trieb and Instinkt, help us to understand why. The Triebre-
gung -- the stirring, moving impulse of the drive -- can be understood as the Instinkt, for, as Laplanche points out, it is the force of the instinct that props the drive (that is, it is the source [Quelle] of the libido). Since this is the case, the drive itself -- the Trieb in its entirety -- cannot become conscious, except through its manifestation as aim (Ziel) and object (Objekt). The impetus (Drang) may become conscious as an affective state (Affektzustand), but the source (the Triebre-
gung) as such, being the instinct in its entirety, is forever banished from conscious life.

Thus, the Trieb is a reproduction of the instinct (Instinkt), and the Trieb itself can only become conscious through its manifestation, its appearance as an empirical tendency.

¹⁶⁴ Laplanche, Vie et mort en psychanalyse, p. 18.

(In Sartre)	(In Freud/Laplanche)
EMPIRICAL: ORIGINAL PROJECT	:: MANIFEST: INSTINCT OF
TENDENCY OF BEING	DRIVE SELF-PRESERVATION

Sexuality drops out of the equation as merely another link in the symbolic chain, an "empirical tendency."

Of course, it may be misleading to declare that sexuality is "merely" another link; it is more precisely the first link, the link which joins the symbolic with the real. It is the "model of every drive," as Laplanche points out, and no one can deny that Eros plays a predominant role in Freud's thought. This proliferation of discourse on sexuality is, without a doubt, the source of Sartre's misunderstanding of desire in Freud. Leaving this discrepancy aside, however, we note some remarkable support of one argument by the other. In the example of the baby nursing, it can be seen that orality is the attitude par excellence which marks the point of articulation between the instinct and the drive:

l'oralité, pour prendre le premier exemple pulsionnel, implique à la fois un certain mode de relation, disons: l'incorporation, et un certain type d'objet, l'objet qui est précisément susceptible d'être avalé, incorporé.¹⁶⁵

It is evident that this description of orality can apply to either the instinct or the drive. In fact, it applies to both in a rather complex fashion:

Le but sexuel . . . est dans une position tout à fait spéciale par rapport au but de la fonction alimentaire; il est à la fois le même et différent. Le but de l'alimentation était

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 22.

l'ingestion; or, en psychanalyse nous parlons de l'incorporation. Les termes peuvent paraître bien proches, et pourtant ils sont décalés l'un par rapport à l'autre. Avec l'incorporation, le but est devenu scénario d'un fantasme.¹⁶⁶

The primary manifestation of originary desire -- eating, swallowing, incorporation -- finds support in Sartre's text. Since the fundamental project of being-for-itself is the desire to be in-itself while remaining for-itself, the aim of this project is a kind of self-possession: the for-itself wants to incorporate itself -- an impossible task. Taking another look at an important passage cited, in part, earlier in this study (see above, p. 100), we read:

Le malheur est que -- comme le notait Hegel -- le désir détruit son objet. (En ce sens, disait-il, le désir est désir de manger [emphasis added].) En réaction contre cette nécessité dialectique, le Pour-soi rêve d'un objet qui serait entièrement assimilé par moi, qui serait moi, sans se dissoudre en moi, en gardant sa structure d'en-soi, car, justement ce que je désire, c'est ce objet et, si je le mange, je ne l'ai plus, je ne rencontre plus que moi. Cette synthèse impossible de l'assimilation et de l'intégrité conservée de l'assimilé se rejoint, dans ses racines les plus profondes, avec les tendances fondamentales de la sexualité.¹⁶⁷

This object of which the for-itself dreams is, then, by necessity, fantasmatic, and this dialectical process of desire has "deep-rooted connections with the fundamental tendencies of sexuality [i.e., the sexual drive]." In fact, as Laplanche demonstrates, the original fantasmatic

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁶⁷ Sartre, L'Etre et le néant, p. 668.

object is the breast or, more specifically, the nipple -- an object which is symbolically connected by contiguity with the real object of instinctual life, milk:

Comprenons bien que l'objet réel, le lait, était l'objet de la fonction [i.e., the biological, instinctual function], celle-ci étant comme pré-ordonnée au monde de la satisfaction. C'est cet objet réel qui a été perdu, mais l'objet qui est lié au rebroussement auto-érotique, le sein -- devenu sein fantasmatique -- est, lui, l'objet de la pulsion sexuelle. Ainsi l'objet sexuel n'est pas identique à l'objet de la fonction, il est déplacé par rapport à lui, il est dans un rapport de contiguïté tout à fait essentiel qui nous fait glisser insensiblement de l'un à l'autre, du lait au sein comme son symbole.¹⁶⁸

Although the preceding discussion demonstrates that sexuality, being a drive rather than an instinct, is not the originary source of desire, but rather a symbolic manifestation of a more primary mechanism of desire, the instinct of self-preservation, it is clear that Freud's system is still not in accord with Sartrean logic. The origin of desire for Sartre, as we remarked earlier, is ontological. It is the rift between being-for-itself and being-in-itself which precipitates the fundamental state of dissatisfaction in the subject. The biological nature of the origin of desire, as it is construed by Laplanche, must somehow give way to a phenomenological argument which focuses on that same moment of consciousness -- that of the point of articulation between the instinct and the drive -- if an ontological resolution is to be formulated

¹⁶⁸ Laplanche, Vie et mort en psychanalyse, p. 37.

which is appropriate to human reality. The origin of desire must be discovered in the upsurge of consciousness -- that is, in the upsurge of the for-itself, the appearance of nothingness and the opening of the ontological rift.

Psychoanalytically speaking, this moment is marked by the phallus -- that signifier which serves to originally designate, as a primary link in a signifying chain, the effect of the nothingness that is signified. In an effort to clarify some of the obscurity surrounding the role of the phallus, we shall now take a glance at Jacques Lacan's essay regarding this concept, "La Signification du phallus," in which he examines the point of articulation between the instinct and the drive as the origin of desire.

Speaking of the rift from which desire emerges, Lacan draws on a passage from Freud's Beyond the Pleasure Principle. Freud maintains:

No substitutive or reaction formations will suffice to remove the repressed instinct's persisting tension; and it is the difference in the amount between the pleasure of satisfaction which is demanded and that which is actually achieved that provides the driving factor which will permit of no halting at any position attained, but, in the poet's words, "presses ever forward unsubdued" [Mephistopheles in Goethe's Faust, Part I].¹⁶⁹

This moment in Freud is interesting for at least two reasons. First of all, it demonstrates the quirk in Strachey's translating project that Laplanche has sought to straighten out by means of the rigorous attention he pays

¹⁶⁹ Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, p. 36.

to the German text. "The repressed instinct" is actually "the repressed drive" (der verdrängte Trieb) in the original text and this correction should be kept in mind in the present context, in which Laplanche's argument plays a principal role. Secondly, this sentence in Freud is the basis for the following paraphrase in Lacan's text:

le désir n'est ni l'appétit de la satisfaction, ni la demande d'amour, mais la différence qui résulte de la soustraction du premier à la seconde, le phénomène même de leur refente (Spaltung).¹⁷⁰

Lacan, like Freud, describes the advent of desire in pseudo-arithmetical terms. Desire is initiated through the subtraction of the appetite for satisfaction (l'appétit de la satisfaction) from the demand for love (la demande d'amour). Clearly, the first term refers to the instinctual function, hunger, and the second term carries an erotic connotation and thus points to the sexual drive. It is important to note that desire is neither one nor the other, but rather the relationship between the two terms. Moreover, this remainder can actually be seen as an absolute value, for it makes little difference whether one regards the first term or the second as the minuend or the subtrahend. A positive difference ("le phénomène même de leur refente") is derived no matter which direction the process takes. In the appetite for satisfaction, there is no conscious choice; the infant is merely hungry and as

¹⁷⁰ Jacques Lacan, "La Signification du phallus," in Écrits II (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1971), p. 110.

long as the physical tension is relieved, the organism will not die. In the demand for love, on the other hand, as the term implies, the infant must ask for satisfaction. It is evident that this second notion implies the consciousness of a need. This need is, at its origin, nourishment, but with the giving of the breast (the response to the demand, at least as far as the infant is concerned), the aim is metaphorized as sexuality emerges (see the discussion above of Laplanche's argument). Seen from another perspective, once consciousness of the need arises, the object of the instinct is re-presented in a fantasmatic scenario and becomes a weak substitute for the desired object of biological satisfaction. What the infant really wants, then, is biological satisfaction with no strings attached. It wants to be able to demand and receive the real object which consciousness has somehow destroyed (phenomenologically speaking, this object has been nihilated [néantisé]). Thus, the fantasmatic object leaves something to be desired for the infant, and the difference between the appetite for satisfaction as minuend and the demand for love as subtrahend is obviously positive:

If REAL OBJECT > FANTASMATIC OBJECT,
then APPETITE FOR SATISFACTION - DEMAND FOR LOVE > 0.

The position of the terms can be reversed, however, for the infant wants to be able to ask for and receive both the fantasmatic and the real object. In other words, the

baby wants to have both the object of consciousness and the object which consciousness prevents him from ever really having. Thus, the object of the aim of the drive is doubled, and consequently:

FANTASMATIC OBJECT > REAL OBJECT,
then DEMAND FOR LOVE - APPETITE FOR SATISFACTION > 0.

The combining of these two points of view yields:

|APPETITE FOR SATISFACTION - DEMAND FOR LOVE| > 0.

"It seems, then, that an instinct [ein Trieb, a drive] is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things."¹⁷¹ Freud's assertion can be interpreted in two ways. First, as Freud seems to intend, the human organism still wants to behave as if it were a non-conscious, one-celled organism. Secondly, the human organism simply wants to return to a pre-conscious (i.e., prior to consciousness) state in which it does not have to think, for consciousness transforms real into fantasmatic, and fantasy is never as satisfying as the real thing. Thus, obtaining the object of a drive is like purchasing a hotel on Park Place in a game of Monopoly: the player is temporarily satisfied with his long-dreamed-of financial success, but the revenues from the symbolic, plastic structure will never enable him to pay the gas bill for his real apartment.

¹⁷¹ Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, p. 30.

The "earlier state of things" can, of course, be restored and, in all cases, eventually is restored. As Freud so succinctly remarks: "The aim of all life is death."¹⁷² The death drive exists in conjunction with Eros and both these impetuses are metaphors for the same originary impulse. Human reality strives constantly to close the opening between its own phenomenological nothingness (consciousness) and the non-fantasmatic universe. Desire is desire for this closure and the goal of the drive can be achieved temporarily through sexual objects or permanently through death. Unfortunately, the permanent closure provided by death is not really a solution to the problem of dissatisfaction, for with the termination of life, human reality becomes a meaningless term.

Sartre's ontological schema demonstrates quite clearly the inadequacy of death as a real object and suggests, if the preceding discussion is taken into consideration, that the desire for death can only be the desire for a fantasmatic object -- that is, death as conceived by consciousness: a permanent elimination of tension which would not, however, result in a loss of consciousness.¹⁷³ The

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁷³ Neil Hertz points out that the account of old Featherstone's fantasy of survival after death in Eliot's Middlemarch is an apt illustration of this dilemma. Before his death, the miser had written a detailed plan for his funeral -- a plan destined to annoy those in attendance. In Chapter 34, we read:

We are all of us imaginative in some form or

desire for death cannot, then, be an instinct; it can only be a drive. Once again, speaking of the original project of the for-itself, Sartre explains:

Le pour-soi surgit comme néantisation de l'en-soi et cette néantisation se définit comme projet vers l'en-soi: entre l'en-soi néanti et l'en-soi projeté, le pour-soi est néant. Ainsi le but et la fin de la néantisation que je suis, c'est l'en-soi. Ainsi la réalité humaine est désir d'être-en-soi . . . L'Etre qui fait l'objet du désir du pour-soi est donc un en-soi qui serait à lui-même son propre fondement . . . la valeur fondamentale, qui préside à ce projet est justement l'en-soi-pour-soi, c'est-à-dire l'idéal d'une conscience qui serait fondement de son propre être-en-soi par la pure conscience qu'elle prendrait d'elle-même. C'est cet idéal qu'on peut nommer Dieu. Ainsi peut-on dire que ce qui rend le mieux concevable le projet fondamental de la réalité humaine, c'est que l'homme est l'être qui projette d'être Dieu.¹⁷⁴

The subject, in wanting to become God, wants to become immortal, for what he seeks is a sort of self-possession of which he can remain conscious. "La mort nous rejoint à

other, for images are the brood of desire; and poor old Featherstone, who laughed much at the way others cajoled themselves, did not escape the fellowship of illusion. In writing the programme for his burial he certainly did not make clear to himself that his pleasure in the little drama of which it formed a part was confined to anticipation. In chuckling over the vexations he could inflict by the rigid clutch of his dead hand, he inevitably mingled his consciousness with that livid stagnant presence, and so far as he was preoccupied with a future life, it was one of gratification inside his coffin (George Eliot, Middlemarch [New York: Norton, 1977], p. 222).

¹⁷⁴ Sartre, L'Etre et le néant, pp. 652-653.

nous-même,"¹⁷⁵ but death is precisely the death of consciousness.

Thus, in human reality the aim of being is to have itself: "Le projet originel d'un pour-soi ne peut viser que son être." In fact, being and having are virtually inseparable as modes of consciousness:

Un désir ne peut être, en son fond, que désir d'être ou désir d'avoir.¹⁷⁶

Le désir d'avoir est au fond réductible au désir d'être par rapport à un certain objet dans une certaine relation d'être.¹⁷⁷

La totalité de mes possessions réfléchit la totalité de mon être. Je suis ce que j'ai.¹⁷⁸

In psychoanalytic terms, what the subject wants is to have the phallus, a project which, as noted by Lacan, refers to the closure of the originary ontological rift which is opened as desire. But the phallus is merely a signifier and, what's more, a signifier for nothingness. Thus, originary desire can only be symbolically satisfied by incorporating or appropriating objects which are metonymically related to the real object -- that is, the for-itself can only appropriate partial objects. Appropriation is, therefore, the symbol of the attainment of the ideal of the for-itself -- "un en-soi qui, en tant que

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 159.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 670.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 678.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 680.

pour-soi, serait son propre fondement"¹⁷⁹ -- and this relation of the for-itself possessing and the in-itself possessed can only be symbolic: "on ne saurait trop insister sur le fait que cette relation est symbolique et idéale. Je ne satisfais pas . . . mon désir originel d'être à moi-même mon propre fondement . . . par l'appropriation."¹⁸⁰

The balance that weighs Sartre's and Freud's theories of desire can now be calibrated in a more precise fashion:

(In Sartre)	(In Freud/Lacan)
EMPIRICAL : ORIGINAL PROJECT	:: MANIFEST : DESIRE FOR
TENDENCY OF BEING	DRIVE THE PHALLUS

Our reading of Freud against Sartre draws to a close. We have discovered that at the two moments when Sartre seems most at odds with the Freudian system, the divergence between Freud's depth psychology and Sartre's phenomenological ontology is not really so great as it appears at first glance. Sartre denies the notion of a systematic unconscious, but posits a kind of "originary bad faith" (our term) by which the original ontological project can only be known through its manifestation as empirical tendencies -- a project which is doomed to failure, although the subject cannot help but place a positive value on the consciousness which manifests it. Regarding the libido theory, we have observed that sexuality does not earn the

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 682.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

originary status in Freud that Sartre claims. It is "propped" on an instinctual force and, if the notion of the phallus as signifier is employed as a mediating term, we can conclude that human reality -- for both Sartre and Freud -- arises through a nothingness at the heart of being.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, we have seen that, once beyond the primary ontological considerations with which he is concerned, sexuality plays a cardinal role in Sartre's system as well. In fact, he maintains that the for-itself is sexual in its very upsurge into the world of the Other.

We might conclude, therefore, that although Freud and Sartre are not in complete accord, they seem to present for the most part two points of view which complement and supplement one another. Keeping in mind the importance of the originary ontological dilemma (that the for-itself strives to be its own foundation and achieve a plenitude of being -- a project the goal of which is foreclosed to human reality due to the very nature of the for-itself), we can utilize a more or less Freudian approach toward a psychanalyse des choses, for the subject's attitude vis-à-vis the world and its objects will manifest what is primarily a choice of being, but, given its appearance as manifestation, will be fundamentally sexual in structure.

¹⁸¹ Sartre, in fact, comes very close to developing his own notion of étayage. He writes: "Le désir est manque d'être, nous l'avons vu. En tant que tel, il est directement porté sur l'être dont il est manque" (L'Être et le néant, p. 664, Sartre's emphasis).

Sexuality is the child of Being and Nothingness.

We are now in a position to respond to the question: "Why should one desire a reified thought, a reified consciousness, a food which refuses to be digested?" The urge to possess concrete objects, or to concretize abstract, nebulous forces, is an off-shoot of the for-itself's fundamental project: to have itself as in-itself. As we have observed, the mode avoir is basically ontological and appropriation represents an attempt to achieve a particular manner of being. Moreover, each manifest object of one's desire must be understood as a displaced object with regard to the originary ontological urge. Thus we see that such goals as the reification of thought and consciousness (virtually one and the same enterprise) and the ingestion of a food which will somehow not be consumed are modes of appropriation which merely symbolize the for-itself's real goal: to be in-itself as a free foundation, to be God.

As Sartre notes, the for-itself's fundamental project, due to its necessarily symbolic and ideal status, is doomed to failure. Roquentin's inquiring stare, his restless fondling of trash in the street, and his Jonah complex are all charades which manifest a more fundamental, but forever latent and unutterable tendency of his being. It is not surprising, then, that there are times when he

goes so far as to destroy the papers by tearing or burning them, for, as Sartre points out, the urge to destroy a desired object is a logical and appealing consequence of the failure to find satisfaction in its possession:

C'est précisément la reconnaissance de l'impossibilité qu'il y a à posséder un objet qui entraîne pour le pour-soi une violente envie de le détruire. Détruire, c'est résorber en moi, c'est entretenir avec l'être-en-soi de l'objet détruit un rapport aussi profond que dans la création. Les flammes qui brûlent la ferme à laquelle j'ai mis le feu réalisent peu à peu la fusion de la ferme avec moi-même: en s'anéantissant, elle se change en moi. Du coup, je retrouve la relation d'être de la création, mais inversée: je suis le fondement de la grange qui brûle; je suis cette grange, puisque je détruis son être. La destruction réalise -- peut-être plus finement que la création -- l'appropriation, car l'objet détruit n'est plus là pour se montrer impénétrable. Il a l'impénétrabilité et la suffisance d'être de l'en-soi qu'il a été mais, en même temps, il a l'invisibilité et la translucidité du néant que je suis, puisqu'il n'est plus.¹⁸²

Thus, through this "creation in reverse," the subject attempts to produce an object which will resemble the ideal object of his ontological desire: one that will manifest both the impenetrability and plenitude of being in itself and the translucency of the for-itself, an object that, as emanation of the subject's consciousness, will be its own foundation while remaining in-itself. Of course, this strategy of appropriation is condemned to failure as well, for, like other empirical tendencies, it functions in a symbolic mode. The object destroyed merely represents the

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 683.

real aim of the for-itself's urge. What's more, once the object is destroyed, it no longer exists as a concrete plenitude to be possessed -- except in the past; in the present, it exists merely as the translucency of memory.

We see, then, that Roquentin's habit of picking up discarded scraps of paper represents, in its detailed structure, an effort to have the phallus, to be what he is. Through a lengthy analysis of his description of the papers and the manner in which he treats them, we have uncovered an expansive network of data which contributes to our understanding of the individual consciousness -- Roquentin's -- as this particular for-itself manifests the outward signs of its universal signifying project. Although one can say that the fundamental project of all consciousnesses is to become God, the specific strategy that each consciousness employs towards the free realization of this goal is unique in its specificity. It is at this level that one can begin to speak about personality and complexes.

It is clear that Roquentin's descriptive preamble to his relating of an "event," a fragment which is situated in the entry of "mardi 30 janvier," is a dense and revealing piece of discourse. As we have shown, several aspects of Roquentin's psychic leanings seem to surface in this passage. If this is so, then our analysis should reveal something about the rest of the journal -- Roquentin's psychological crisis and his decision to write a novel.

We suggested earlier that what Roquentin does, essentially, is "play with fire." How are we to understand this notion of playing, its relation to avoir and être and, on the other hand, the intense seriousness with which Roquentin views his existential dilemma -- a situation which, in part, gives rise to his sudden and apparently inexplicable incapacity to pick up a piece of lined school stationery from the sidewalk in front of the Hôtel Printania?

Chapter III

TO PLAY OR NOT TO PLAY

C'est, somme toute, une image assez ressemblante de la vie. Chacun de nous, sans autre but que de jouer (quels que soient les beaux prétextes qu'il se donne), assemble, selon son caprice, selon ses capacités, les éléments que lui fournit l'existence, les cubes multicolores qu'il trouve autour de lui en naissant. Les plus doués cherchent à faire de leur vie une construction compliquée, une véritable oeuvre d'art. Il faut tâcher d'être parmi ceux-là, pour que la récréation soit aussi amusante que possible... (Martin du Gard, Les Thibault, Vol. 7, p. 283).

We have remarked that the various facets of Roquentin's behavior with regard to the paper he picks up from the street -- his touching, his staring, his mouthing and his destroying -- in some way constitute an activity that must be considered play. "Comme font les enfants," Roquentin adopts a pattern of behavior that mimicks, that re-enacts actions of what we shall call a more "serious" form. As our psychoanalytic inquiry has revealed, the underlying significance of Roquentin's rather off-beat interest is couched in the relation of this interest to a combination of paradigmatic childhood events, mythical or otherwise, which serve as a framework for a later structure in which these childhood moments are re-created metaphorically. In addition to the infantile tendency to put

found objects into his mouth (a reproduction of the breast-feeding scenario), Roquentin also shows us evidence of the Actaeon complex, a structure that, as we have demonstrated, is related to the scopophilic moment par excellence in which the child discovers the fundamental anatomical difference between the sexes while peeping on a member of the opposite sex, who is perhaps urinating or defecating. In Roquentin's hydra complex, we noted (by following a thread left by Freud) an extension of the Prometheus complex, a mode of behavior whose early prototype is the scene of the child's theft of matches, in spite of parental prohibition, in order to play with fire with his/her friends in some secluded spot. Thus, the Jonah, Actaeon, Prometheus and hydra complexes, as well as the activity which Bachelard terms "la curiosité agressive," can all be understood as forms of repetition of a childhood moment of some import, a repeating "comme font les enfants": play. We shall now turn our attention to an examination of this behavioral strategy, the playful element of which is sometimes readily apparent, but often times not.

After completing his discussion of the Actaeon and Jonah complexes and the appropriative nature of knowledge, Sartre acknowledges that the apparent gratuity of play and sport present a stumbling block to the progress of his

universal reduction of human activity to having, and ultimately to being. In what sense can le jeu be construed as a form of appropriation?

First of all, Sartre notes:

le jeu, en s'opposant à l'esprit de sérieux, semble l'attitude la moins possessive, il enlève au réel sa réalité. Il y a sérieux quand on part du monde et qu'on attribue plus de réalité au monde qu'à soi-même, à tout le moins quand on se confère une réalité dans la mesure où on appartient au monde.¹⁸³

An opposition is constructed between le jeu and the esprit de sérieux. The drawback inherent in the latter is its tendency to confuse the brute, contingent reality of the world with aspects of the for-itself. The esprit de sérieux views freely chosen attitudes as contingent necessity and, in so doing, manages to ignore the freedom with which he/she participates in a given situation. It is as if the world were dictating an attitude to the esprit de sérieux, furnishing not only a playing surface for the for-itself's projects, but also imposing the rules of the game. Such is not really the case, however, for the esprit de sérieux has, at bottom, merely chosen this perspective. Furthermore, this is hardly a game, in the Sartrean sense of le jeu, for the "serious mind" acts out of what it feels is necessity -- it is following orders. The attitude of the esprit de sérieux, then, is not one of play, but rather one of work -- slave labor, in fact. It is also in bad

¹⁸³ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 669.

faith, because, as Sartre points out: "l'homme sérieux enfouit au fond de lui-même la conscience de sa liberté."¹⁸⁴

But how are we to understand Sartre's postulation that the esprit de sérieux manifests itself when "on attribue plus de réalité au monde qu'à soi-même," if we keep in mind that such a perspective is also characterized by a furtive denial of one's ontological freedom? In other words, is freedom somehow more real than the world? Or do freedom and brute contingency promote reality as a kind of fifty-fifty enterprise, with each factor more or less sharing the responsibility for establishing the parameters and factual ramifications of a given situation?

As we remarked above, the esprit de sérieux tends to confuse aspects of the for-itself with those of the in-itself. This is not to say that, for the thinking subject, there is a radical separation between the for-itself and the in-itself whereby phenomena must be classified on one side or the other. Rather, phenomena represent for the subject an interaction of the for-itself with the in-itself. The world is . . . in-itself. Consciousness, through its very upsurge, brings nothingness into the world and along with this phenomenological void its baggage: negation, freedom, choice, value, meaning. One attributes more reality to the world than to oneself when

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

one neglects the input of this nihilating program, when one credits the in-itself for directing an enterprise that only the for-itself could manage. This project of the for-itself is accomplished through the work of the for-itself's manifestation as freedom on the raw material of the world. Attributing such aspects as value and meaning to the world in-itself is to deny the input of consciousness with regard to a given project.

An example is perhaps in order here. In speaking of "le coefficient d'adversité" -- that is, the degree to which things appear as obstacles in the various paths of human endeavor -- Sartre remarks: "Le coefficient d'adversité des choses, en particulier, ne saurait être un argument contre notre liberté, car c'est par nous, c'est-à-dire par la position préalable d'une fin que surgit ce coefficient d'adversité."¹⁸⁵ He then points out that a crag (un rocher) would present itself as a powerful obstacle to one who has decided to try to displace it; but, on the other hand, the same crag would be of great use to one who is in search of an elevated vantage point. Consequently: "En lui-même -- s'il est même possible d'envisager ce qu'il peut être en lui-même -- il est neutre, c'est-à-dire qu'il attend d'être éclairé par une fin pour se manifester comme adversaire ou comme auxiliaire."¹⁸⁶ Fur-

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 562.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

thermore, if one were to try to climb the crag, the rocky promontory would be constituted as an obstacle only in terms of the very project to climb it. Thus, if a climber fails to reach a crag's summit, it can hardly be said that he is defeated by the rock in-itself, but rather by circumstances which are the direct consequences of his initial project to climb the crag: "c'est donc notre liberté qui constitue les limites, qu'elle rencontrera par la suite."¹⁸⁷ It is not, then, the world in-itself that defeats us, or allows us to succeed. The world merely supplies us with the raw material through which we can defeat ourselves, or arrange for our own success. The esprit de sérieux refuses to comprehend this.

Taking into consideration the foregoing remarks, we can now understand how it is that the esprit de sérieux functions as a mode of appropriation. By conferring consequentiality and meaning on the world in-itself, the esprit de sérieux seeks to deny the freedom which is constitutive of its very consciousness (of) that world. The serious mind wants to make the for-itself a mere chip in the ante of the game which it feels the world is playing. Thus, as we have cited above, "on se confère une réalité dans la mesure où on appartient au monde." Moreover, in this attempt to deny its freedom, the esprit de sérieux wishes to constitute itself as an object, as in-itself:

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

"l'homme est sérieux quand il se prend pour un objet."¹⁸⁸
It is in this desire for objectification that we recognize the appropriative tendency of the esprit de sérieux, for the subject wishes to reify his consciousness, to become an in-itself that would be its own foundation (for he must a priori choose this attitude, make of the for-itself an in-itself).

Play, on the other hand, consists in not taking things seriously. It is an attitude that is fundamentally aware of itself as freedom:

Dès qu'un homme se saisit comme libre et veut user de sa liberté, quelle que puisse être d'ailleurs son angoisse, son activité est de jeu: il en est, en effet, le premier principe, il échappe à la nature naturée, il pose lui-même la valeur et les règles de ses actes et ne consent à payer que selon les règles qu'il a lui-même posées et définies.¹⁸⁹

It is important to bear in mind that one who is at play does not write off the world as inconsequential -- or worse, as unreal. Rather, the "esprit de jeu" (a term that is not Sartre's, but one that we shall propose to describe that attitude which seems in opposition to the esprit de sérieux) understands the world in terms of its contingency and the freedom brought to bear upon it by the for-itself. Meaning, value, and consequences are understood in terms of the for-itself's project and not, as in the case of the esprit de sérieux, as qualities inherent

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 669.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

to the in-itself. Nor does the esprit de jeu take itself as an object to be manipulated by the circumstances of its situation, for the esprit de jeu comprehends itself as a free subjectivity through which the circumstances themselves are infused with their value qua circumstance. It is precisely in this focus on its existential freedom that the esprit de jeu appears to escape the appropriative tendency which is fundamental to the various attitudes we have thus far examined in this study. The playful consciousness seems to be little concerned with possessing itself as in-itself: "Il semble donc que l'homme qui joue, appliqué à se découvrir comme libre dans son action elle-même, ne saurait aucunement se soucier de posséder un être au monde."¹⁹⁰

At this juncture, however, we must raise the question of how we are to understand the for-itself's project-as-play in terms of the conclusions drawn earlier from such claims of Sartre's as: "le projet originel d'un pour-soi ne peut viser que son être."¹⁹¹ If the original project is appropriative, how can the esprit de jeu escape this ordinary bias.

The fact of the matter is that it does not. First of all, we note that in his exposition of his notion of le jeu, Sartre goes on to say: "Son but [i.e., the goal of he

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 669-670.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 651 (quoted above, Ch. II, p. 128).

who plays], qu'il le vise à travers les sports ou le mime ou les jeux proprement dits, est de s'atteindre lui-même comme un certain être, précisément l'être qui est en question dans son être."¹⁹² Thus, the project of the esprit de jeu has being as its aim, as is the case with the other attitudes we have thus far presented. The nature of this being towards which the esprit de jeu strives is distinctly different, however, from the ontological objective of the esprit de sérieux. The being which the esprit de jeu wants to attain is not precisely "un être au monde" -- a being by which the subject can exist in the world as an object -- but rather a being "qui est en question dans son être": the for-itself as relentlessly free subjectivity and chosen as such (i.e., as non-être). If the esprit de sérieux seeks to constitute itself as an object, which it is not, in order that it might have itself, the esprit de jeu seeks to accept itself as the free subjectivity, which it is, in order that it might not be had. In this sense, because it refuses to deny its responsibility for its attitudes towards the world, the playful consciousness can be said to be in "better" faith than the esprit de sérieux.

Second of all, although the notion of play carries with it the sense of an action which is gratuitous, non-acquisitive, and non-serious, the apparent irreducibility

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 670.

of faire to avoir, with regard to the playful attitude, does not hold up under closer scrutiny. As Sartre observes: "il est rare que le jeu soit pur de toute tendance appropriative."¹⁹³ Drawing from the realm of sports for his examples (although expanding the pool of examples to include all playful activities in general would do nothing to undermine the foundation of the argument which he is in the process of developing), Sartre points out that the desire to perform well in competition, to win, to break a record, or even the wish to be considered sportif all manifest the desire to appropriate oneself objectively through one's being-for-others. Of course, it could be contended that all forms of le jeu do not betray these supplementary qualities. Nonetheless, there is no manner of play which is free from at least one appropriative component: "Le sport est en effet libre transformation d'un milieu du monde en élément de soutien de l'action. De ce fait, comme l'art, il est créateur."¹⁹⁴ The solitary dart player, although he/she may have little or no interest in competitive dart throwing and may not care one way or another what others think about this activity, is still engaged in an enterprise by which the world and the objects in it are transformed according to the actions of his/her

¹⁹³ Ibid. Although he states that such an activity is "rare," the remarks that follow would seem to suggest that a form of play that would not include an appropriative aspect is more than rare, it is impossible.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

throwing hand. As we pointed out earlier, games, along with such activities as scientific research and art, manifest the for-itself's attempt to achieve a synthesis of self and not-self through which consciousness' relation to an object can be characterized as possessive (see above, Ch. II, pp. 90-91). While the object of such creative activity (that is, the brute reality of the world, which is to be transformed) retains the "opacité" and "indifférence" of the en-soi, the role of the pour-soi in shaping and sustaining the meaning of this "milieu du monde" allows consciousness to enter into a "double rapport" with the situation in question: consciousness both conceives the situation and encounters it.¹⁹⁵

Thus, le jeu is creative in that it transforms the world into a backdrop which receives its qualitative facets from the free project of the for-itself. The for-itself uses its freedom to shape the world and, for this reason, play must be considered a gesture of appropriation.

It is easy to see, then, how the playful attitude -- like all the other tendencies we have thus far investigated -- is an attempt on the part of the subject to "s'approprier le monde symboliquement." Consciousness cannot possess the world as in-itself, but, through its investing of meaning and value into the world, it can possess the

¹⁹⁵ See L'Etre et le néant, p. 665 (also above, Ch. II, pp. 90-91).

world as situation, as representation, as a symbolic manifestation of itself. Consequently, the esprit de jeu, like other fundamental attitudes, constitutes an attempt on the part of the subject to master the situation in which he finds himself: a situation which is both within his grasp -- because it is through consciousness that meaning comes into the world -- and beyond him -- because the for-itself cannot sidestep the contingent factors presented by the world in-itself, nor those presented by the body which it "has to exist" (see note #91, p. 85), nor those presented by the for-itself's own facticity (i.e., the inescapable necessity for consciousness to be free to choose).

Leaving Sartre's ontology to one side for a moment, let us once again turn our attention to Freudian considerations.

In Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud undertakes what is perhaps his most extensive examination of the esprit de jeu in its most "normal" manifestation: children's play. As an example of such an activity, he cites the case of a small boy of one and a half who often threw one or another of his toys across the room, into a corner or under the bed while emitting the drawn-out syllable "o-o-o-o." This sound was thought by the boy's mother to be the baby talk equivalent of the word fort (gone, away). Her theory was confirmed by a later, more extensive ver-

sion of the child's game in which he used a bobbin with a string tied around it to play "gone." The child would fling the reel over the edge of his bed, thus making it disappear, and would accompany this practice with the usual "o-o-o-o." Then he would pull the object back into sight by means of the attached string and would welcome the bobbin's reappearance with the sound "da" (there). Thus, the game's complete cycle encompassed the polar values fort-da, disappearance and return.¹⁹⁶

It is important to note that, as a rule, the child only played the game through its first stage, that is, without retrieving the cast away object. It was evident, however, that the second stage, announced by the gleeful da, provided the boy with the greater pleasure. Freud points out that, in general, the boy was quite well-behaved and that he was very attached to his mother, who had breast-fed him herself and who had more or less taken care of him by herself with little outside help. It is thus a somewhat remarkable fact that the boy never cried when his mother departed for a few hours. These considerations lead Freud to the following conclusion:

¹⁹⁶ The fort-da game and its role in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, as a whole, is an informing factor for much of the work of both Laplanche and Lacan. In addition, it is examined extensively in Jacques Derrida's La Carte postale: de Socrate à Freud et au-delà (Paris: Flammarion, 1980). See also Julia Kristeva's La Révolution du langage poétique: L'avant-garde à la fin du dix-neuvième siècle, Lautréamont et Mallarmé (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1974), A, II, 3 ("La Négativité transversale au jugement thétique").

The interpretation of the game then became obvious. It was related to the child's greatest cultural achievement -- the instinctual renunciation (that is, the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction) which he had made in allowing his mother to go away without protesting. He compensated for this, as it were, by himself staging the disappearance and return of the objects within his reach.¹⁹⁷

This re-enactment of the scene of the disappearance and subsequent return of the mother is carried out by the child through the use of the bobbin. One might wonder why the child would wish to re-produce the distressing circumstances of his mother's absence. If the explanation is ventured that the throwing away of the bobbin must necessarily precede the joyful moment of its retrieval, this interpretation can be countered with the observation that the game is often played through the first stage only -- the fort stage in which the child re-enacts the mother's disappearance without attempting to make her return. Consequently, the question remains: why does the child wish to repeat an experience which must surely have caused him displeasure?

Although he is aware that it is difficult to draw convincing universal conclusions from an isolated example such as the fort-da game, Freud nonetheless uses this case as a kind of paradigmatic manifestation of the effects of what he will call a "compulsion to repeat" (Wiederholungszwang). He begins his development of this notion by

¹⁹⁷ Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, p. 9.

pointing out three possible interpretations of the small boy's behavior. First of all, Freud notes that the fort-da game constitutes a repetition of an earlier event in which the child played a passive role. By repeating the experience on his own terms, the boy succeeds in transforming his initially passive part into an active one. This strategy, Freud claims, "might be put down to an instinct for mastery that was acting independently of whether the memory was in itself pleasurable or not."¹⁹⁸ The idea that such behavior might be related to an "instinct for mastery" (Bemächtigungstrieb) is reinforced when we recall Freud's initial analysis of the fort-da game: the child's play compensates for the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction -- his failure to protest his mother's absence -- in that he, himself, stages the disappearance and return of "objects within his reach" (erreichbaren Gegenständen). We are reminded of the Greiftrieb, that urge in the child which drives him to reach out and grab things, an attempt to master a situation which is, as we discussed previously, at its origin the primordial ontological rift on which desire lays its foundation (see above, Ch. I, pp. 41-42). Thus, the absence of the mother, a situation the significance of which is highly charged owing to the mother's role as one of the original objects of the baby's drives, is easily understood as an instigating

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

factor in the manifestation of the Greiftrieb, given this drive's dependence on the more inclusive Bemächtigungstrieb.

Secondly, Freud hazards the hypothesis that the game might represent for the child a means of expressing the same hostile impulse that he suppressed in refraining from emitting a direct protest in regard to his mother's absence. The fort-da game, or more precisely the fort- only version of the game, would then function as a kind of symbolic revenge on the part of the player: "In that case it [the game] would have a defiant meaning: 'All right, then, go away! I don't need you. I'm sending you away myself'."¹⁹⁹ Consequently, the apparent paradox that the child would derive enjoyment from the repetition of an unpleasant experience is resolved, because given the vengeful implications of the tossing about of his toys, "the repetition carried along with it a yield of pleasure of another sort but none the less a direct one."²⁰⁰

The third consideration which Freud calls to mind is one that comes to bear not only on the specific example of fort-da (which in fact seems to be only marginally informed by such a motif), but on children's play as a genre of activity. Children wish to be grown-up and, consequently, often play at being an adult. Although Freud

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

does not make the connection, one might attribute this wish to the instinct for mastery as well, because, in a child's eyes, it is the adult who seems to be in control of the world in which the child finds himself playing a passive role. This aspect of children's games, in which the child imitates the behavior of the adult, is only indirectly manifested in the throwing away of his toys by the small boy in Freud's example. It is, however, strikingly present in another version of the game to which Freud alludes in a footnote:

One day the child's mother had been away for several hours and on her return was met with the words 'Baby o-o-o-o!' which was at first incomprehensible. It soon turned out, however, that during this long period of solitude the child had found a method of making himself disappear. He had discovered his reflection in a full-length mirror which did not quite reach the ground, so that by crouching down he could make his mirror-image 'gone.'²⁰¹

The child imitates his mother's disappearance by disappearing from himself. The game does not yield the distressing consequences of the real event, however, since the child is in full control of the circumstances of his reappearance.

All three of the above considerations, at work either together or independently of one another, serve to illuminate the general motivation of all playful behavior, if we call to mind the elements of Freud's theoretical discussion of the pleasure principle and what is "beyond." A

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 9.

brief sketch of these mechanisms is in order.

The mental apparatus, Freud contends, is under the dominance of the pleasure principle and its "subsidiary," the reality principle. The pleasure principle (das Lustprinzip) can best be understood as an economic pre-disposition of the psyche to constantly endeavor to reduce the amount of freely-floating energy in the apparatus by releasing it. This release of energy is accomplished through instinctual satisfaction or wish-fulfillment, the accomplishment of the aim of a desire which finds its roots in the unconscious. This strategy, otherwise known as the "primary process," is thus a rather primitive procedure by which drives are satisfied without reflection or concern for the consequences of this satisfaction. In their simplest form, then, unpleasure (Unlust) corresponds to an increase or overabundance of mental excitation, and pleasure (Lust) corresponds to a reduction or stabilizing of mental excitation -- a state usually achieved, at least as far as the pleasure principle is concerned, through the satisfaction of an unconscious instinct or drive.

The pleasure principle is not the whole story, however, for, as Freud points out: "If such dominance existed, the immense majority of our mental processes would have to be accompanied by pleasure or to lead to pleasure, whereas universal experience completely contradicts any

such conclusion."²⁰² Consequently, it is important to understand the pleasure principle as a tendency in mental life, rather than as an omnipotent force. In support of this limitation of the pleasure principle's dominance, Freud cites the effects of what he terms the "reality principle" (das Realitätsprinzip), a mechanism which actually functions in the service of the pleasure principle:

This . . . principle does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure, but it nevertheless demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure.²⁰³

The reality principle is thus a reflective gesture, a move by consciousness to control and direct the blind recklessness of the primary process in view of the data received and interpreted by the system Cs. This second principle, also known as the "secondary process," therefore appears as a function of conscious life and thus has little to do with the control or mastery of those drives which are repressed. Obviously, we have still not rendered the whole tale with regard to the Lustprinzip.

What is beyond the pleasure principle is the compulsion to repeat. First of all, let us note that the freely-flowing energy in the unconscious cannot always achieve discharge because of the barrier of repression which dams

²⁰² Ibid., p. 3.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 4.

its path. Consequently, these unconscious impulses which seek resolution can only pass through the censorship through symbolic transformation -- representation by way of such mechanisms as displacement and condensation. If the energy attached to a particular unconscious idea is strong enough, it will become absolutely necessary for it to pass through the censorship in one way or another, because of the unhealthy quantity of unpleasure generated through the struggle of the repressive mechanism (which requires a certain level of energy of its own to effect its task) and the instinctual impulse which seeks discharge. The free charge of the unconscious idea must be "bound" in some way, controlled before it is allowed to pass the censorship and subsequently mastered in its altered conscious form. This binding and mastering of the overly-charged impulse comprises both the displaced and condensed representation of the impulse (its symbolization), as well as the compulsion to repeat -- for the impulse can only temporarily be mastered and will continue to strive for discharge. The importance of this procedure cannot be overlooked:

A failure to effect this binding would provoke a disturbance analogous to a traumatic neurosis; and only after the binding has been accomplished would it be possible for the dominance of the pleasure principle (and of its modification, the reality principle) to proceed unhindered. Till then the other task of the mental apparatus, the task of mastering or binding excitations, would have precedence -- not, indeed, in opposition to the pleasure principle, but independently of it

and to some extent in disregard of it.²⁰⁴

Thus we see that the repetitive aspect common to children's play is in two senses an indication of the player's attempt to control the level of mental excitation to which he is subject. First, there is the repetition of an activity for purely pleasurable reasons -- an attempt to control freely-flowing energy through its discharge, thus reducing the quantity of unpleasure in the mental apparatus which results from a surfeit of unbound impulses. Second, there is the repetition of an activity that one would normally consider unpleasurable (Freud's case of the young boy repeating his mother's departure, kids playing doctor, etc.). In this second case, the child attempts to master the unconscious impulse through binding and repetition in an effort to neutralize the unpleasurable effects of the repressed excitation. This enterprise is carried out, as we suggested above, through the symbolic realization of the aim of the impulse.

Finally, we might mention a few comments of Lacan which are pertinent to the foregoing considerations of the fort-da game and of children's play in general. In his "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse," Lacan remarks that in the exemplary case cited by Freud: "le sujet n'y maîtrise pas seulement sa privation en l'assumant, mais . . . il y élève son désir à une puis-

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p.29.

sance seconde."²⁰⁵ In its simplest sense, the raising of the subject's drive to a second power can be understood as the replacement of one drive by another, with the latter desire dependent on its more primary manifestation for the driving force of its impulse. In terms of fort-da, the boy has replaced the desire for his absent mother (D^1) with the desire to play the game (D^2), an interest of a second degree which nevertheless remains informed by the first degree, or primary urge: to instigate the return of the mother. We are reminded here of Laplanche's notion of propping, in which the source, impetus, aim and object of the instinct provide the source for the drive -- desire raised to the second power, as it were (see above, Ch. II, p. 131). In fact, the fort-da game, being a play of presence and absence, of have and have-not, repeats the original moment at which desire appears as a wish for closure, a leaping of the ontological gap that was opened with the emergence of consciousness.

But the ramifications of this squaring of the original variable are more complex and extensive than the mere supplementing of one desire for another. Lacan continues:

Car son action [i.e., the action of the player of fort-da] détruit l'objet qu'elle fait apparaître dans la provocation anticipante de son absence et de sa présence. Elle négative ainsi le champ de forces du désir pour devenir à

²⁰⁵ Jacques Lacan, "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse," in Ecrits I (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1966), p. 203.

elle-même son propre objet.²⁰⁶

If the first power drive (D^1) -- source, impetus, aim, and object -- provides the source for the second power drive (D^2), it can also be said that the aim-object package of D^1 (the return of the mother) serves as the informing object of D^2 . That is, the bobbin and its disappearance and retrieval (the object and aim, respectively) in the system D^2 appear only as incidental parts in a mechanism which has, as its actual function, the return of the mother. The game becomes an object of desire in itself ("pour devenir elle-même son propre objet"), because (1) it nihilates the object of its informing drive by replacing it with a symbolic object, and (2) it neutralizes the attraction of the bobbin as object, for it is precisely in the presence and absence of this object that the aim of D^2 is found. In this way, the player's action "négative ainsi le champ de forces du désir" in binding the anxiety-provoking, free-flowing energy of D^1 , a process that Freud terms, as we have just seen, the Wiederholungszwang, the compulsion to repeat.

At this point, we can trace a path from Lacan back to Sartre. If the symbolization of an object lacking to the subject in some way "destroys" this object in the raising of desire to a second power, then a connection appears between the two appropriative strategies, creation and de-

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

struction. The young boy who plays the fort-da game is engaged in a creative act, for (whether the game was invented by the player himself or learned) this "sport" is "en effet libre transformation d'un milieu du monde en élément de soutien de l'action. De ce fait, comme l'art, il est créateur."²⁰⁷ The boy's desire is foiled by the absence of his mother, a situation whose coefficient of adversity is understandably quite strong, given his profound attachment to her. The youngster wiggles out of the clutches of this anxiety-provoking reality, however, by re-shaping the world according to the demands of his own freedom. In playing fort-da, it is he who initiates the comings and goings of the object of his desire and, through the utilization and affirmation of this creative freedom, he gets the sense of escaping the prison that is the world in-itself and the freedom of the other (a limit on the subject's own freedom).

Of course, this maneuver succeeds only through the destruction of the original object, a violence which is carried out through the metaphorization of the original desire and the symbolization of the original object. Referring back to Lacan's essay, we note further: "le symbole se manifeste d'abord comme meurtre de la chose, et cette mort constitue dans le sujet l'éternisation de son

²⁰⁷ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 670 (see above, p. 161).

désir."²⁰⁸ The original desire, rather than achieving satisfaction, is merely neutralized through the subject's creative destruction of the object which is lacking to him. Thus, the activity provides relief only while it is being performed and it must therefore be relentlessly repeated according to the demands of the Wiederholungszwang, the product of "l'éternisation de son désir."

The esprit de jeu, then, as an attempt to appropriate for itself the world symboliquement, fails, as do other means, to satisfy the for-itself's fundamental urge to be its own foundation. In not taking "things" seriously, the for-itself only plays at appropriating, at devouring, at becoming in-itself. The esprit de jeu constitutes a sort of acceptance, as it were, of the necessity of the for-itself's freedom. Realizing the limitations of the opaque and contingent being-in-itself of things which refuse to be incorporated, realizing the limitations imposed upon it by the other's freedom which refuses to be controlled, the esprit de jeu freely creates its own game, its own rules, its own attitude towards the things which can potentially defeat it and, in so doing, becomes to itself its own master.

²⁰⁸ Lacan, "Fonction et champ de la parole et du langage en psychanalyse," p. 204.

At this point, we shall propose that Roquentin's ideosyncratic use of the scraps of paper he picks up from the ground constitutes a game that he plays "comme font les enfants." It is, thus, not only a tendency to bring the objects to his mouth that can be considered a gesture of the esprit de jeu, but also his handling, scrutinizing, and destroying of the trash. We might say that Roquentin's game is a somewhat more elaborate, less clear-cut rendition of fort-da. Drawing on our earlier analysis of the qualities of the objects and the nature of his actions, we note that the hypothetical informing factors of Roquentin's behavior -- the Greiftrieb, the complexe de Jonas, Schaulust and the Wisstrieb, as well as the Prometheus and hydra complexes -- all suggest highly-charged, potentially anxiety-ridden moments that call for temporary, but repeatable resolution through the Wiederholungszwang. These paradigmatic instances of childhood attempts to master freely-flowing instinctual impulses, even in their earliest manifestations, reveal a structure which is reminiscent of fort-da: gone / there, have not / have, unpleasure / pleasure, an instinctual impulse driving for release / instinctual satisfaction. They are desire raised to a second power through a transformation of the originary urge to one which is metaphoric and appropriative in nature. Roquentin's repetition of a host of these D² paradigms in a game with a single object thus appears

as a re-transformation of the original impulse, a re-creation of the childhood structure, an adult version of the fort-da game, if you will. We see then that Roquentin's activity is an attempt to master a situation, to "s'appro-prier le monde symboliquement," to give more reality to the use of his freedom than to the world in-itself.

But if the notion of play is so all-encompassing, if it can be applied to an activity which is at heart appropriative, which is based on a childhood paradigm, and which is ultimately an attempt to satisfy a primordial desire (to be for-itself-in-itself), then what kind of behavior is not play?

We need only recall our discussion of the esprit de sérieux to shed light on this potentially shadowy area. The esprit de sérieux and the esprit de jeu are attitudes, not particular modes of behavior. When one is acting on the grounds that what one does is the result, is the very choice of one's freedom to transform the medium of the world in-itself into a "meaning-full" construct which is the product and responsibility of the for-itself's own endeavor, then one is at play. If, on the other hand, one is acting on the grounds that one has no choice in the matter, that the world is dictating the rules by which meaning and value appear as such, then the subject is abandoning all responsibility for and consideration of the role which his freedom is playing in his choice not to choose. This is the esprit de sérieux.

It is with this difference of attitude in mind that we shall now speculate on the importance of the paragraph we have extensively dissected in relation to Roquentin's existential anguish, the nausea which appears as the central concern of the novel.

The journal entry of "mardi, 30 janvier" continues with the relating of the so-called "événement" which Roquentin was so reluctant to mention earlier on in his piece of writing for that day. It is 8:15 in the morning and, while exiting from the Hôtel Printania where he currently resides, Roquentin spies the boots of a military officer. His narration of the event runs as follows:

Donc, aujourd'hui, je regardais les bottes fauves d'un officier de cavalerie, qui sortait de la caserne. En les suivant du regard, j'ai vu un papier qui gisait à côté d'une flaque. J'ai cru que l'officier allait, de son talon, écraser le papier dans la boue, mais non: il a enjambé, d'un seul pas, le papier et la flaque. Je me suis approché: c'était une page réglée, arrachée sans doute à un cahier d'école. La pluie l'avait trempée et tordue, elle était couverte de cloques et de boursoufflures, comme une main brûlée. Le trait rouge de la marge avait déteint en une buée rose; l'encre avait coulé par endroits. Le bas de la page disparaissait sous une croûte de boue. Je me suis baissé, je me réjouissais déjà de toucher cette pâte tendre et fraîche qui se roulerait sous mes doigts en boulettes grises... Je n'ai pas pu.

Je me suis resté courbé, une seconde, j'ai lu "Dictée: le Hibou blanc," puis je me suis relevé, les mains vides. Je ne suis plus libre, je ne peux plus faire ce que je veux.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 23.

Perhaps the most logical question we might ask is: what, if anything, is different about this particular situation, about this particular scrap of paper, about Roquentin's state of mind at this particular moment, that renders the simple act of picking up a piece of paper (albeit in Roquentin's case, as we have demonstrated, such an act is not really so "simple") impossible? First of all, let us proceed by highlighting those aspects of Roquentin's description of the event which seem most pertinent.

We note first (as does Roquentin) the "botte fauves" of the cavalryman. There seems to be no relation between these tawny boots and the piece of lined paper, except for the fact that the path of the boots' movement serves to point out the scrap of paper in the first place. Thus, Roquentin's perception of the soldier's boots gives way immediately (that is, without mediation) to his perception of the object of his unusual interest. The boots themselves recall a seemingly unrelated reference, which occurs earlier in the journal entry for "30 janvier," to an old man who used to sit in a sentry-box in the Luxembourg gardens when Roquentin used to play there as a child. The old man frightened the young Roquentin and his friends, because they sensed he was alone ("nous sentions qu'il était seul") and also "qu'il formait dans sa tête des pensées de crabe et de langouste."²¹⁰ At one point, he is de-

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

scribed as having "une pantoufle" on one foot and "une bottine" on the other.

As for the position and surroundings of the paper, we detect nothing of major significance. It is lying in the street "à côté d'une flaque," a spot which should be of little or no concern to Roquentin who likes to handle papers whether they are dry enough to crumble or wet enough that burning them "ne va pas sans peine." Moreover, whether they are yellowed, mud-stained, or new and white as swans is equally of little importance to Roquentin, as we have seen. Along this same vein, we are hard-pressed to discover any importance in the fact that the soldier strides over both the paper and the puddle, and therefore avoids crushing the morsel with the heel of his fawn-colored boot. Roquentin enjoys his prizes whether they are intact, or crushed and crumbling.

The paper itself is a lined sheet, "arrachée sans doute à un cahier d'école." It has been rained on and is currently "trempée" and "tordue." None of these details suggest an attitude other than Roquentin's formerly playful attraction to pieces of paper on the street. The fact that this particular sheet is "trempée" and "tordue" seems to make it a prime candidate for torching or inquisitive staring. Roquentin compares it to "une main brûlée" because of the blistered appearance and puffiness of the sheet's surface, and because of the pink tint which

splotches it as a result of the running of the red ink of the page's margin. The ink (of the student's writing, we must presume) has run also. The bottom of the page is hidden "sous une croûte de boue," a condition which, one suspects, can only add to the appeal of the sheet to Roquentin. In fact, he is already rejoicing in anticipation of the prospect of touching this tender and fresh "pâte" ("paste" or "batter"), of rolling it into gray "boulettes" ("little balls" or "meatballs" -- note the food imagery in Roquentin's delectable vision, a description of qualities which, "pour un peu," would in the past have tempted Roquentin to put the scraps into his mouth), when he is suddenly unable to carry out the act: "Je n'ai pas pu."

One final aspect of the lined sheet draws our attention -- the title of the pupil's written exercise is still legible: "Dictée: le Hibou blanc." Is there something about the topic that somehow relegates this particular piece of paper to the category of those scraps which, for Roquentin, are untouchable? If we focus our attention on the image of the owl, we note first that this creature is a "oiseau rapace, nocturne, portant des aigrettes" (Le Petit Robert). An "hibou blanc" is most likely a snowy owl (Nyctea scandiaca), a member of a species of large white owls found on the Arctic tundra. In ancient Greece, according to Collier's, "the owl was associated with Athena, the goddess of wisdom, and the bird came to symbolize wis-

dom."²¹¹ Drawing from such seemingly innocuous trivia, Catherine Savage Brosman, in her study of the zoological imagery in La Nausée, reaches the rather hesitant conclusion: "Might the white owl suggest wisdom? purity? night watching?"²¹² Perhaps, but one would be hard-pressed to discover the origin of Roquentin's existential paralysis in such an interpretation.

Another observation, however, casts a faint glimmer of light into this obscure cul-de-sac (where, no doubt, only such species as the owl can see without difficulty): the term "hibou," in a now out-dated, figurative sense, denotes an "homme triste, solitaire" (Le Petit Robert). Whether Roquentin is exactly "triste" or not is something which is open to debate, but he is certainly "solitaire": "Moi, je vis seul, entièrement seul. Je ne parle à personne, jamais; je ne reçois rien, je ne donne rien. L'Autodidacte ne compte pas."²¹³ Neither, apparently does Françoise, the woman who runs the Rendez-vous des Cheminots and with whom he occasionally has sexual relations. If, then, the owl reminds Roquentin of himself, so be it -- we are still unable to find a way beyond the dead end which bars us from the answer to our question: why can't

²¹¹ Herbert Deignan, "Owls," in Collier's Encyclopedia, Vol. 18 (New York: Macmillan, 1973), p. 262.

²¹² Catherine Savage Brosman, "Sartre's Nature: Animal Images in La Nausée," in Symposium 31, p. 124 (footnote #33).

²¹³ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 18.

Roquentin pick up the paper?²¹⁴

Roquentin describes his inability to carry out this simple act -- a gesture which is, moreover, normally a pleasurable one -- as a loss of freedom: "Je ne suis plus libre," je ne peux plus faire ce que je veux." This loss of freedom (or, more precisely, this sense of a loss of freedom) seems to be related in some way to Roquentin's perception of inanimate objects on the morning in question. He continues:

Les objets, cela ne devrait pas toucher, puisque cela ne vit pas. On s'en sert, on les remet en place, on vit au milieu d'eux: ils sont utiles, rien de plus. Et moi, ils me touchent, c'est insupportable. J'ai peur d'entrer en contact avec eux tout comme s'ils étaient des bêtes vivantes.

Maintenant je vois, je me rappelle mieux ce que j'ai senti l'autre jour, au bord de la mer, quand je tenais ce galet. C'était une espèce

²¹⁴ Although we have failed to discover the source of Roquentin's existential paralysis in the preceding observations concerning owls, there is, however, an owl at one of the sources of Sartre's existential philosophy. In Hegel's preface to his Philosophy of Right, we read: "The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk" (G.W.F. Hegel, The Philosophy of Right, trans. T.M. Knox. London: Oxford, 1942, p. 13). Hegel is referring to his earlier assertion that "philosophy . . . always comes on to the scene too late to give it" (p. 12). In other words, philosophic wisdom always appears only after actuality has been well-established. If indeed Hegel's preface is an informing factor in Sartre's text (masking as the text of Roquentin), its connection can only be seen as a reference to the incapacity of thought to keep pace with the world, ofthetic consciousness to master the in-itself. This realization that the thinking individual can never become master of the world (in a "serious" sense) does reinforce the interpretation that Roquentin is being menaced by "counter-appropriation" on the part of the en-soi, an interpretation we are about to put forth.

d'écoeurement douceâtre. Que c'était donc dés-
agréable! Et cela venait du galet, j'en suis
sûr, cela passait du galet dans mes mains. Oui,
c'est cela, c'est bien cela: une sorte de nausée
dans les mains.²¹⁵

Roquentin feels that objects have begun to touch back. It is not clear whether he is repelled by the very idea of picking up the piece of composition paper just before he grasps it, or whether he actually touches it, experiences its counter-caress and immediately lets it go, although no evidence is available to indicate the latter and, what's more, his statement, "J'ai peur d'entrer en contact avec eux," suggests the former.

This "fear" of a double contact is not mere whimsy, however, for, as Roquentin goes on to explain, he had just such an experience some days earlier while handling a small stone at the seashore. His narration of this incident appears in the "feuillet sans date." After remarking that in the "histoires de samedi et d'avant-hier . . . il n'y a rien eu de ce qu'on appelle à l'ordinaire un événement"²¹⁶ -- an apology which anticipates the nearly identical disclaimer that appears in the entry of "30 janvier," just before Roquentin's recounting of the paper incident -- the text reads:

Samedi les gamins jouaient aux ricochets, et je
voulais lancer comme eux un caillou dans la mer.
A ce moment-là, je me suis arrêté, j'ai laissé
tomber le caillou et je suis parti . . . Voilà

²¹⁵ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 23.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 11, emphasis added.

pour l'extérieur. Ce qui s'est passé en moi n'a pas laissé de traces claires. Il y avait quelque chose que j'ai vu et qui m'a dégoûté, mais je ne sais plus si je regardais la mer ou le galet. Le galet était plat, sec sur tout un côté, humide et boueux sur l'autre. Je le tenais par les bords, avec les doigts très écartés, pour éviter de me salir.²¹⁷

At a glance, we note nothing about this incident that should cause Roquentin any displeasure, much less an "écoeurement." Although stones are not mentioned among the small objects that he likes to pick up and handle, the rock's condition, similar to that of the "Hibou blanc" fragment, should in no way daunt Roquentin, who admits to having enjoyed, in the past at least, the look and feel of some pretty disgusting bits of trash.

Thus, the "écoeurement douceâtre" and the "nausée dans les mains" constitute a relatively recent reaction to objects which formerly gave Roquentin pleasure. Something indeed has changed, either in the objects or in Roquentin. So ends the entry of "mardi, 30 janvier."

As one might suspect, a good bit of commentary has appeared in which the nature and origin of this nausea is examined. Leaving aside, for the moment, Sartre's own phenomenological theory of this condition, let us glance at a few of the more informative readings which concern themselves with Roquentin's illness.

²¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 11-12.

In the essay by Catherine Savage Brosman, which we have already mentioned, the author examines the function and effect of "some 77 similes and metaphors in which an object or the human body -- usually the latter -- is compared in part or in whole to an animal or part of an animal."²¹⁸ Her discussion is both applicable and revelatory in the present instance, not only because of the title of the schoolchild's dictation exercise which serves to name the object and place it in a zoological category, but also because Roquentin often sees his desired papers as "cygnes" (another bird), and he regards the terrifying scrap of January 30th as one of those objects which seem like "bêtes vivantes" to the touch. Brosman notes that the use of the zoological analogy, which is so prevalent in Sartre's novel, is for the most part pejorative and "in short, animal imagery is used to convey a feeling of nausea inspired in part by the very existence of the organic."²¹⁹ This conclusion hinges on the opposition between that which is hard, unmoving, non-changing, and inorganic -- that is, en-soi -- and that which is soft, flabby, slippery, protean, and organic -- not exactly the pour-soi, which is "empty, free and 'néant'," but rather the human body. The body is problematic, because, although it exists as a thing-in-the-world, en-soi, it is also that

²¹⁸ Brosman, "Sartre's Nature: Animal Images in La Nausée," p. 107.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 110.

substance which consciousness has to "exist" (see above, Ch. II, p. 85, footnote #91) and is therefore neither totally opaque and hard, nor totally transparent and intangible for the consciousness which has to inhabit it. Thus, according to Brosman's argument, those images of the organic (and especially those of animals) serve to remind the perceiver of "existence at its most physiological: pure, viscous flesh, without even the possibility of revolt against protoplasmic identity."²²⁰ This restriction by the physiological, although Brosman does not put it in so many words, refers to a real or imagined limitation on one's existential freedom that is imposed by one's own body, and, for this reason, such a perception of the organic is experienced as unpleasurable, even nauseating, by the perceiver.

This opposition between hard and soft, and its nauseating effect on Sartre's protagonist, is discussed at length in an earlier piece by Jean Pellegrin, an essay which is influential in Brosman's article, as well as in some studies by other writers.²²¹ The gist of Pellegrin's argument is that Roquentin's malaise is provoked by vari-

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 108, emphasis added.

²²¹ Among these are Georgiana Colville's "Eléments surréalistes dans La Nausée: Une hypothèse de l'écriture," in L'Esprit Créateur 17(1977): pp. 19-28, and Gerald Prince's "L'Odeur de la nausée," also in L'Esprit Créateur 17(1977): pp. 29-35, as well as his "La Main et la menace de l'en-soi dans l'oeuvre romanesque de Sartre," in Romance Notes 10(1968): pp. 7-10 (discussed below).

ous objects which he experiences as "double-faced." The first symptom of this "maladie étrange" is, of course, the incident with the flat stone; the second is Roquentin's inability to grasp the piece of paper. Relating the two, Pellegrin notes:

L'analogie entre le feuillet et le galet est évidente: objets à deux faces, l'une sèche, lisse, luisante, l'autre sombre, mouillée, souillée. Le feuillet nous apporte en outre un renseignement nouveau: la face inférieure est inséparable de l'autre, elle est constitutive de l'objet. S'il est possible, en effet, de nettoyer le galet, au contraire le papier sali, le papier-boue ne peut -- "ce qui ne va pas sans peine" -- qu'être brûlé et détruit entièrement.²²²

Sometimes the two faces of the object are inseparable and unalterable, other times it is possible "en effet" to improve the condition of that side which is "sombre, mouillée, souillée." Other objects which fall into this two-faced category are, for example, the sea, a hand, certain city streets, and a bench on the tramway -- all highlights in Pellegrin's analysis, which lead the writer to a more general description of the nature of the two sides of the objects in question:

En l'occurrence, l'une des substances sera solide, minérale, métallique, sèche et lisse au toucher, éclatante et nette pour la vue, ou transparente, éclatante encore, éventuellement, pour l'ouïe. L'autre, liquide, mais d'une liquidité menacée de solidification, végétale, sombre, et, selon le mode de perception,

²²² Jean Pellegrin, "L'Objet à deux faces dans "Le Nau-sée," in Revue des sciences humaines #113 (1964), p. 87.

gluante, fade, floue.²²³

These two groups of traits Pellegrin labels "compact" and "visqueux," respectively, drawing on the terminology of L'Etre et le néant. He points out that at times "le visqueux se livre contre le compact," and at others, the reverse is true.²²⁴ He also remarks that the general terms "compact" and "visqueux" can be understood in terms of other dichotomies: stasis / movement, appearance / reality, value / antivalue.²²⁵ All this is quite interesting and, as we shall see presently, indicative. There are, however, two difficulties in Pellegrin's argument that we must be careful to keep in mind. First of all, Pellegrin tends to equate the compact with things, the en-soi; he views the other "face," the viscous, as representative of consciousness, the pour-soi. Now, as Brosman later points out (without, however, mentioning Pellegrin's inexactitude), Sartre's notion of consciousness depicts the pour-soi as a transparent, transcending nothingness, a kind of intangible clarity. This being can hardly be construed as viscous. Pellegrin's deduction that "la conscience est visqueuse" stems from his reading of the line: "Les pensées, c'est ce qu'il y a de plus fade. Plus fade encore que de la chair." Thought, as Roquentin reflects on it,

²²³ Ibid., p. 89.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 91.

²²⁵ Ibid., pp. 91 ff.

may at its horizon be the pre-reflective cogito, transcendent consciousness, but in its present context of being reflected-on, it is posited as an object for consciousness, almost en-soi, as it were. It is "plus fade encore que de la chair," for it lacks the flesh's material presence while, at the same time, it lacks the for-itself's sharp translucency. Thus, "les pensées" can indeed be seen as "visqueuses," but not completely as pour-soi, since the reflective nature of Roquentin's meditation indicates an interplay of both the for-itself and être-pour-autrui, which, to be sure, is a kind of subspecies of the pour-soi, but nonetheless a dimension that radically clouds consciousness' crystal clarity.²²⁶ Without this qualification of Pellegrin's statement, we risk a serious misunderstanding of the relationship between the oppositions that he sets up.

Secondly, Pellegrin fails to inform us as to why an acute awareness of double-faced objects, of the viscous as opposed to the compact, should suddenly render Roquentin

²²⁶ We mention the role of being-for-others here, even though this dimension of the for-itself may not seem to be directly at work in Roquentin's statement. It is, however, the very mechanism which allows the subject to reflect on himself at all, since he must take a position as other in order to secure a point of view on himself. Thus, self-reflexivity presupposes an awareness of the existence of the Other and, consequently, a being-for-others.

This speculation on our part, however, does not totally resolve the question of the quality of being of the viscous and its phenomenological ramifications, as Sartre sees them -- an analysis we shall examine a bit later (see below, pp. 202 ff.).

existentially ill. Slime can make someone nauseated, true enough, but why after repeatedly enjoying shit- and mud-stained, perhaps peed-on, decomposing, worthless scraps of junk that he finds in the street, does Sartre's protagonist suddenly lose his stomach for such endeavors?

Before moving on to try to answer this question, we should mention two more bits of critical data supplied amidst the wealth of commentary on the novel, information which bears on the preceding resumé of Brosman and Pellegrin. In an article entitled "The Use of Colour in La Nausée," D.J. Fletcher proposes a "lecture colorée" of the objects and images in the text. He maintains that deep, dark colors such as black and blood-red have a stabilizing effect on Roquentin, while pastels -- and pink, especially -- are upsetting.²²⁷ Gerald Prince, in his "La Main et la menace de l'en-soi dans l'oeuvre romanesque de Sartre," points out that "la main est la seule partie du corps qui soit 'à deux faces'," for "la main peut se présenter comme paume ou comme surface convexe, elle est osseuse, dure et sèche d'un côté, et charnue, molle et moite de l'autre."²²⁸ One might object that this exclusivity of the hand is not entirely valid, because there are other body parts that manifest this same kind of two-sidedness: the

²²⁷ D.J. Fletcher, "The Use of Colour in La Nausée," in Modern Language Review 63(1968): pp. 370-380.

²²⁸ Prince, "La Main et la menace de l'en-soi dans l'oeuvre romanesque de Sartre," p. 10.

foot, for example. Such an objection would be correct and justifiable if it were not for the ontological significance of the "objet à deux faces" and for the particular way in which the hand manifests this value.

Prince points out that, according to Sartre, the body:

. . . est la facticité du pour-soi -- naissance, race, nationalité, structure physiologique, passé -- et, par ses affinités avec l'en-soi, il représente un piège redoutable pour la conscience, menaçant à chaque instant de l'empâter, de l'engloutir, si elle ne le dépasse pas par l'acte libre.²²⁹

Now, it is just such a trap into which the pour-soi might fall that is suggested by both the animal imagery in the text and the theme of the "objet à deux faces": the en-soi threatening to invade, as it were, consciousness itself and engulfing it, transforming it into something which is neither material nor free, but a soft, flabby, pasty muck. Such a state can be surpassed, through the utilization of one's freedom, one's capacity to freely choose an attitude towards one's facticity (the body, for example). But it is at this point that we discover the cogency of Prince's argument, for the hand, while appearing as an "objet à deux faces," while being in fact a part of the body, is at the same time that part of the body which is capable of the greatest degree of instrumentality. As Prince puts it:

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 7.

. . . la main est d'habitude admirablement humaine et expressive, toute proche d'un instrument perfectionné, parce que loin d'être chose parmi les choses, elle aide l'homme à découvrir les choses. La menace que représente l'en-soi est alors d'autant mieux mise en valeur qu'elle se manifeste là où on l'attend le moins, dans la partie la plus spirituelle -- ou presque -- du corps humain.²³⁰

Thus, the hand, by which we can normally surpass the facticity of our consciousness through an "acte libre," reveals itself to be not only the very flesh that we wish to neutralize, but also, as an "objet à deux faces," an image, a reminder of this two-faced situation itself. Hence, the exacerbated horror provoked by images of the hand.

These last two critical points of view bear directly on our consideration of the "Hibou blanc" scrap. In addition to the general information they supply us with regard to the "objet à deux faces," which we now understand to be a kind of instigating factor for Roquentin's malaise, they also supply us with two observations vis-à-vis the sheet of paper that Roquentin cannot bring himself to play with. The red margin on the sheet has both run and faded and now appears as "une buée rose." Moreover, the "cloques" and "boursouflures" that cover the scrap give it the appearance of "une main brûlée." Thus, the "Hibou blanc" page is not only an "objet à deux faces" itself, but its weathered condition also reminds Roquentin of the double-faced

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

object par excellence, the hand, and its pink tint suggests another intermediate zone between the bright, durability of red and the clear emptiness-of-color with which the red of the margin has been combined.

We have discussed at length the appropriative nature of Roquentin's occasional interest in playing with paper debris, and how his attempt to appropriate these objects is, at heart, based on a universal human urge for consciousness to become its own foundation: the for-itself-in-itself. We have also remarked that, because the double rapport of the possessive relationship -- that is, the perceived status of the object as both mine and not-me -- does not in any real and lasting fashion satisfy the wishes of that being whose desire is to become God, the appropriative project is doomed to failure. The object of the for-itself's desire is only related in a symbolic sense to the real object of this drive to achieve a closure of being: an object, unfortunately, that is intangible, inconceivable, and forever absent from the for-itself's realm of possibilities. Thus, any appropriative strategy on the part of the subject produces only a limited satisfaction in an allegorical mode, much like the results of wish fulfillment in a dream:

Toutefois, on ne saurait trop insister sur le fait que cette relation est symbolique et idéale. Je ne satisfais pas plus mon désir originel d'être à moi-même mon propre fondement, par l'appropriation que le malade de Freud ne satisfait son complexe d'Oedipe lorsqu'il rêve qu'un

soldat tue le Tsar (c'est-à-dire son père).²³¹

The inability to realize the desired form of ontological appropriation can result in four main forms of failure. First of all, the object-to-be-possessed is never discovered to be unsatisfactory for the aims of the for-itself's fundamental project, since the symbolic object itself is never appropriated: for example, the sparkling-new, white Cadillac El Dorado that the migrant farm worker wishes to own. In this case, the object remains so radically intact and outside of the for-itself's engulfing tactics that it does not in any way become a part of the appropriative relationship as it has been defined. Secondly, there is the frustrated wish of the Jonah complex that seeks an object that would remain intact even after it has been devoured. Such a failure is best exhibited through the subject's desire to consume (food, drink, Charmin bathroom tissues, etc.). We note that in both these cases the object is eliminated from the appropriative relationship, either from the start or along the way.

The third and fourth forms of failure are a bit more poignant. There is the case of the subject who begins to feel possessed by his objects. The middle-class, white-collar worker overspends himself, succeeds in owning a sparkling-new, white Cadillac El Dorado, and then must take on a second job, scrimp and save and worry, risk a

²³¹ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 682.

collapse of his family life -- all in order to support this glimmering piece of steel, glass and rubber. The object has gotten uppity. And there is finally the case of appropriation in which the object is indeed owned, kept intact and causes no problems whatsoever for the possessor. A young executive purchases a sparkling-new, white Cadillac El Dorado and, as time passes, the initial thrill of possession gives way to a more matter-of-fact, somewhat discontented point of view regarding the meaning of the object: "Yeah, it's a nice enough car, but now what?" The object begins to lose the magical qualities through which the object's possessor confers upon it its value. The effect of the meaning-producing aspect of the for-itself has reduced the car to a rather trivial significance, for the value initially given to the Cadillac has only a marginal connection with the thing in-itself (status, success [i.e., the meaning of owning the car] <---> a piece of expensive painted steel, glass and rubber). As the meaning / value of the object becomes more familiar and commonplace to its owner, the object's thingness once again begins to display its bared fangs.

These examples, which focus on appropriation in terms of material ownership, may seem, at first glance, out of place in a discussion of Antoine Roquentin's rather abstractly defined relationship with the objects in his world. He is, of course, hardly a materialist:

. . . je ne demande qu'à m'apitoyer sur les ennuis des autres, cela me changera. Je n'ai pas d'ennuis, j'ai de l'argent comme un rentier, pas de chef, pas de femme ni d'enfants; j'existe, c'est tout. Et c'est si vague, si métaphysique, cet ennui-là, que j'en ai honte.²³²

Nonetheless, the concrete nature of such examples may help us to clarify why it is that the objects in Roquentin's world seem to touch back. It is particularly in the third and fourth instances of the failure of appropriation that such a perception is likely to occur. Indeed, it is precisely an intensified awareness of these last two aspects that is at work in La Nausée, for in both circumstances we note a kind of invasion of consciousness by the hard, mineral, immutable in-itself, which the for-itself is trying to possess. This change, then, that Roquentin attributes at first to the objects themselves, is actually a result of his intended relationship to these objects. The unpleasant sensations, the nausea, seem to emanate from the objects only because they are revealing themselves / are being revealed (se révèlent) in their thingness, which consciousness struggles to overrule as a result of its tendency to bring meaning into the world.

What suddenly triggers these sensations for Roquentin is difficult to determine precisely, although his experience with the stone -- given that it is the first instance that is brought up in the Journal -- marks the onset of the crisis that would perhaps have begun with the "Hibou

²³² Sartre, La Nausée, p. 136.

blanc" scrap had Roquentin never tried to skim stones with the kids at the beach (in other words, Roquentin's crisis begins with a realization about "objets à deux faces" in general, and not with the discovery of a quality which is peculiar to a given object in particular). The onset and development of this condition, which the diarist terms "écoeurement," as well as "nausée," can be understood as a kind of two-staged satori. The first "kick in the eye"²³³ on his way to existential enlightenment occurs when Roquentin handles the partially muddy, partially clean stone. His nausea signals an awareness of the radical distinction between the en-soi and the relentless urging of the dreadful freedom that defines all the parameters of human reality. The initial epiphany, however, takes place on a pre-relexive level -- that is, Roquentin is conscious of his realization (if we may risk a tautology) without actually knowing what it is he realizes.²³⁴ Because Roquentin fails to understand, to grasp (and, thus, to master to some extent) the nature of this ontological insight, the source of his anguish; he is kicked over and over again through his perception of apparently demonic objects: the glass of beer, the Autodidact's hand, the

²³³ At least according to Jack Kerouac, this is a valid rendition of the Japanese term for this kind of sudden illumination. See his Satori in Paris (New York: Grove Press, 1966), p. 7.

²³⁴ The point of distinction between non-thetic and thetic consciousness -- see above, Ch. II, pp. 108-110.

piece of paper, Adolphe's suspenders. The second stage of Roquentin's satori occurs in the park, on a bench, with the celebrated chestnut tree root at his feet. This second epiphany, in which Roquentin gains an understanding of what he has only sensed intuitively signals a turning point, as it were, in his struggle to overcome his fear of objects. This knowledge will eventually lead Roquentin to his decision to write a novel, the culmination of the particular series of appropriative gestures which serve to map out the terrain that is Roquentin's life story.

Before moving on, we should pause to note Sartre's own contribution to the notion of la nausée and to the idea of the "objet à deux faces," with regard to the failure of the tactics of appropriation.

In the section of L'Être et le néant that is devoted to the role of le corps in Sartre's phenomenological ontology, we read the following:

Cette saisie perpétuelle par mon pour-soi d'un goût fade et sans distance qui m'accompagne jusque dans mes efforts pour m'en délivrer et qui est mon goût, c'est ce que nous avons décrit ailleurs sous le nom de Nausée. Une nausée discrète et insurmontable révèle perpétuellement mon corps à ma conscience: il peut arriver que nous recherchions l'agréable ou la douleur physique pour nous en délivrer, mais dès que la douleur ou l'agréable sont existés par la conscience, ils manifestent à leur tour sa facticité et sa contingence et c'est sur fond de nausée qu'ils se dévoilent.²³⁵

²³⁵ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 404.

Nausea is a taste that we have ("qui est mon goût"), and it is the direct, unmediated apprehension of the body, as it is "existed" by consciousness. In other words, nausea is the revelation of one aspect of the facticity of consciousness: its necessary connection with the en-soi -- the body.²³⁶ The fact that consciousness must "exist" the body constitutes a limit, as it were, on the for-itself's radically free posture (see above, Ch. II, p. 85, footnote #91); more precisely, we should say that consciousness remains free in spite of the body, which posits it, for others, as an object in the world. Sartre is clearly making a direct reference to his novel here ("ce que nous avons décrit ailleurs sous le nom de Nausée"), and we note a connection of this reference to Brosman's essay, in which she understands the extensive use of animal imagery in La Nausée to be a reminder of the role of "viscous flesh" as revelatory of the facticity of consciousness.²³⁷

But as the arguments of other commentators, as well as those of our own investigation have intimated, it is not merely those organic substances, which are directly suggestive of one's own flesh, that can potentially instigate the perceiver's nauseous apprehensions. There are also those "objets à deux faces," those objects that are

²³⁶ The other aspect being the impossibility for consciousness not to be free.

²³⁷ Brosman, "Sartre's Nature: Animal Images in La Nausée," p. 108.

both hard and mushy, that can reveal the for-itself's facticity of freedom to the apprehending consciousness and, consequently, result in nausea.

It is not so much the hard, dry durability of the upper side of the object that causes discomfort for its perceiver, but rather the sudden contact or apprehension of the object's mushy, or otherwise sluggishly inconsistent flip side. Sartre's paradigmatic example of the substance of such an object's "underbelly" is le visqueux, the viscous, or slime.

It is important to understand, first of all, that in his existential analysis of objective qualities as revelatory of certain states or concepts of being, Sartre sees the solid state as normally suggestive of brute existence, the en-soi. Consciousness, on the other hand, contrary to the reading Pellegrin gives us of the visqueux (see above, pp. 190-191), is symbolized most precisely by a clear, unclouded liquid -- water, for example: "l'eau est le symbole de la conscience: son mouvement, sa fluidité, cette solidarité non solidaire de son être, sa fuite perpétuelle, etc., tout en elle me rappelle le Pour-soi."²³⁸ Midway between these two extremes of solid and liquid is a no-man's land of viscosity: slime.

²³⁸ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 702.

"Le visqueux est l'agonie de l'eau," says Sartre, who continues:

. . . il [le visqueux] se donne lui-même comme un phénomène en devenir, il n'a pas la permanence dans le changement de l'eau, mais au contraire il représente comme une coupe opérée dans le changement d'état. Cette instabilité figée du visqueux décourage la possession. L'eau est plus fuyante, mais on peut la posséder dans sa fuite même, en tant que fuyante.²³⁹

Slime²⁴⁰ is thus a becoming: a becoming which never becomes. It is neither the fleeing fluidity of liquid (the constant becoming of the for-itself), nor is it the hard, unchanging stability of solids (the brute contingency of the in-itself). It is a substantive quality that by its very nature "décourage la possession."

This unsuitability of the viscous object as an object to-be-appropriated can be explained as follows. The for-itself's original project, as we have seen, is an appropriative enterprise: the for-itself wants to be its own foundation, to create and subsequently have itself, as it were. Given this a priori consideration, Sartre describes the encounter with the viscous in the following manner:

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 699.

²⁴⁰ We shall make liberal use of Hazel Barnes' translation of le visqueux as "slime" or "the slimy," for at times it seems to communicate the sense of Sartre's term in a more striking and, indeed, palpable way . . . an effect that is preferable to the rarer and more abstract "viscous," as the term is usually rendered (quite correctly, of course, since Sartre himself chooses the abstract term in lieu of the more oozily concrete visse). At other times, however, we shall go with the term "viscous" if the quality in question is something other than the slimy per se.

. . . le surgissement du pour-soi à l'être étant appropriatif, le visqueux perçu est "visqueux à posséder," c'est-à-dire que le lien originel du moi au visqueux est que je projette d'être fondement de son être, en tant qu'il est moi-même idéalement.²⁴¹

The for-itself is an appropriative being in its very upsurge and, consequently, sees the world and those objects in it as possible foundations for its own being -- on an ideal level, of course, since the for-itself must somehow project an image of itself into the object and play at becoming this object without ever really achieving this impossible ontological goal. Thus, the temptation to appropriate the slimy is irresistible for the pour-soi, since there is no other manner in which it can, at heart, treat an object. Sartre describes this encounter with the visqueux and its overall effect:

Cette viscosité est donc déjà -- dès l'apparition première du visqueux -- réponse à une demande, déjà don du soi; le visqueux paraît comme déjà l'ébauche d'une fusion du monde avec moi; et ce qu'il m'apprend de lui, son caractère de ventouse qui m'aspire, c'est déjà une réplique à une interrogation concrète; il répond avec son être même, avec sa manière d'être, avec toute sa matière.²⁴²

I seek my ideal being in the slimy, an attempt to "m'approprier le monde symboliquement" through the intercession of the object of my attention, but lo and behold, the demon object sucks at my soul like a leech, exacting prepayment for my wild, presumptuous wish, which, in the end,

²⁴¹ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 697.

²⁴² Ibid., pp. 697-698.

it will never grant:

Le visqueux est docile. Seulement, au moment même où je crois le posséder, voilà que, par un curieux renversement, c'est lui qui me possède . . . voici que le visqueux renverse les termes: le Pour-soi est soudain compromis. J'écarte les mains, je veux lâcher le visqueux et il adhère à moi, il me pompe, il m'aspire.²⁴³

Thus it is that le visqueux "décourage la possession," because of the threat of counter-possession. "Le visqueux, c'est la revanche de l'En-soi."²⁴⁴

Nonetheless, "il y a comme une fascination tactile du visqueux."²⁴⁵ Like the tempting lure of the snake, which both attracts and repulses the consciousness that encounters it, le visqueux provokes a certain unease in the perceiver, who perhaps views the object with such distaste only in proportion to the attraction he/she experiences towards the oozing goo.²⁴⁶ The subject undergoes a kind of vertigo vis-à-vis the viscous: "il [le visqueux] m'attire en lui comme le fond d'un précipice pourrait m'attirer."²⁴⁷

²⁴³ Ibid., p. 700.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ We might point out that a person's fear of snakes is often characterized by the illusion that the skin of the snake is slimy to the touch.

²⁴⁷ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p.700.

Sartre continues: "Je ne suis plus le maître d'arrêter le processus d'appropriation."²⁴⁸ What is at stake, then, in one's encounter with le visqueux is the individual's freedom. The appropriative situation, as an attempt at mastery on the subject's part, seems to be turned topsy-turvy by objects of questionable consistency. The fear of the viscous is the fear that consciousness might be dissolved in it, that freedom itself might cease to remain the perpetual flight that it is and become more or less imprisoned by limits which are ill-defined. Le visqueux menaces the overly acquisitive for-itself with a being, the dimensions of which are muddied and slowly shifting. Time oozes, space is a blob.

But like the for-itself's fantasy that appropriation of the world through a particular object will satisfy its originary urge to be its own foundation, the threat (or insidious attraction) of the viscous suggests a being that is equally unattainable:

C'est la crainte non de la mort, non de l'En-soi pur, non du néant, mais d'un type d'être particulier, qui n'existe pas plus que l'En-soi-Pour-soi et qui est seulement représenté par le visqueux. Un être idéal que je réprouve de toutes mes forces et qui me hante comme la valeur me hante dans mon être: un être idéal où l'En-soi non fondé a priorité sur le Pour-soi et que nous nommerons une Antivaleur.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 703.

In striving to be its own foundation (in-itself-for-itself), the for-itself brings value into the world, putting a premium of meaning on that which it encounters and, necessarily, tries to appropriate. To be its own foundation, value par excellence, is thus the endlessly elusive goal of the for-itself as freedom. Antivalue is the opposite extreme: it is an ideal being in which the foundationless in-itself ("l'En-soi non fondé") takes control of the for-itself. The for-itself becomes stymied by this invasion of the in-itself and, as a result of this neutralizing of the foundational aspect of the for-itself (its creative force), consciousness is no longer free. Thus, at the positive extreme, there is both foundation (freedom) and being; at the negative extreme, there is being without foundation; in between these two ideal states, there is foundation and non-being (the being of consciousness).²⁵⁰

We see, then, that what is at stake in the encounter with le visqueux is not really the for-itself's freedom, but only an illusion of this loss of freedom.

²⁵⁰ In case this notion of consciousness is not yet altogether clear with regard to this study, we include at this point Hazel Barnes' working definition of Being-for-itself:

The nihilation of being-in-itself; consciousness conceived as a lack of being, a desire for Being, a relation to Being. By bringing nothingness into the world the For-itself can stand out from Being and judge other beings by knowing what it is not. Each For-itself is the nihilation of a particular being (Being and Nothingness, p. 800).

Nausea arises, therefore, as an intuitive or knowing awareness of one of two contingent existants that pose a threat to the for-itself's freedom. There is one's own body, an in-itself which consciousness has to "exist," and there is the viscous, an object which by its very qualities threatens to engulf the consciousness that encounters it. In summary, we might say that it is the threat of the pour-soi being bogged down by the en-soi that causes this particular brand of existential sickness.

But, one might object, this revulsion in the face of the slimy is hardly universal. Kids play with slimy things, don't they? Mudpies, frogs in the pocket, faintly disguised delight at things that are "gross"? True enough . . . and, furthermore, adults manifest a whole gamut of reactions and attitudes towards the viscous. What kind of person are you if you like the slimy?

If you give in to the "demonic" attraction of an object with an unstable consistency, you are "comme font les enfants" engaged in playful activity. In much the same way as the esprit de jeu refuses to concede more reality to the world than it does to itself when faced with a solid, stable object -- an object which attracts with the lame and unsubstantiated promise of ideal appropriation, value par excellence -- this attitude refuses as well to be ensnared by the false possibility of the appropriative nightmare: antivalue. The esprit de jeu realizes its

freedom (perhaps not without an occasional flinch) in both situations, since it does not consider being-in-itself as a limit on this freedom, but instead as raw material for the undertaking of a creative act. Now, in response to the question of why someone likes the slimy and chooses it over some other object for playful appropriation (a ball or a stick, for example), we should recall that play, like other modes of appropriative behavior, represents an attempt to master a situation. The selection of an oozing object for tactile playfulness would indicate a strategy to overcome the very threat posed by the visqueux -- the invasion of the pour-soi by the en-soi. The subject, feeling menaced by circumstances in which his freedom is apparently in jeopardy, uses this freedom to re-create the situation, but in such a way that, in repeating allegorically the dangerous circumstances, he re-affirms the efficacy of his freedom to pursue the course of his original project.

It is just such a situation in which Roquentin finds himself. Originally, such games as ducks and drakes and the fondling of chestnuts, rags and paper were played with a certain amount of pleasure, a surpassing of the objects themselves through a creative use of freedom, a striving towards the metaphoric satisfaction of a drive, the original object of which is unknowable for consciousness. But at a certain point, Roquentin's attitude changes. He be-

gins to see objects as they are -- contingent pieces of non-conscious world, being-in-itself, existants which are a priori void of meaning. Suddenly, the metaphor collapses, signification is vaporized. Roquentin can no longer appropriate the objects, symbolically or otherwise, since the objects have become more real to Roquentin than his own perspective on them. The objects seem to touch back in a plot of counter-possession, an insurgency of the en-soi. Roquentin finds himself in a crisis of paranoia brought on by his willingness to adopt the esprit de sérieux.

This is why Sartre's character writes with horror: "Je ne suis plus libre, je ne peux plus faire ce que je veux." It is bad faith to believe that the contingency of the en-soi constitutes a real limit on one's existential freedom. But it is easy to see that, if I adopt the attitude that objects take priority over the pour-soi, my reflective consciousness (la conscience théorique) would mistakenly apprehend that I am trapped by the world.²⁵¹

Roquentin is afraid of being absorbed by the en-soi. He is denying his freedom. He is in bad faith, for he is attributing more reality to the world than to conscious-

²⁵¹ Once again, we should point out that the world can indeed limit us physically -- that is, it can impose limitations on our bodies, which we are condemned to exist. It imposes no real limitations on our attitudes, however, nor on our ability, our necessity, to constantly choose ourselves in terms of the world in which we find ourselves.

ness.

We shall now look at what happens when Roquentin's game is turned into a vomitous nightmare . . . when his toys come to life.

Earlier, we described how Roquentin's handling of the papers is a kind of elaborated bastardization of the paradigmatic children's sport of fort-da (see above, p. 177). We noted how the playing out of Roquentin's various complexes through his childish habit was a repeated attempt to master freely-flowing instinctual impulses -- the complexes themselves, which arise as a result of the course taken by an individual consciousness' original project to become in-itself-for-itself through a symbolic appropriation of the world. At this point, we can add that if the subject begins to sense that the world is turning on him, is engaged in a campaign of counter-possession, his strategy of play breaks down. His complexes, as defenses, as freely created networks to insure the subject's capacity to continuously transcend the contingency of the en-soi towards the fulfillment of his originary desire, do not hold the fort. The in-itself seems to take their very structure and invert it.

For instance, we have noted how Roquentin's pleasure in touching the papers manifests an off-shoot of an infantile Greiftrieb. As Roquentin's playful attitude towards objects yields to the esprit de sérieux, however, it is the objects that begin to grasp him:

Les objets, cela ne devrait pas toucher, puisque cela ne vit pas. On s'en sert, on les remet en place, on vit au milieu d'eux: ils sont utiles, rien de plus. Et moi, ils me touchent, c'est insupportable.²⁵²

Roquentin feels that he is no longer free, because the very existence of objects seems to prevent him from freely transcending their contingency towards a project supported by their utility.

In like manner, we would suspect a reversal of the terms of Roquentin's Jonah complex, his desire to realize self-appropriation through the swallowing and incorporating of an object that will remain intact even after being devoured. We find evidence of an opposing reaction to this drive in the fact that Roquentin describes his revulsion to what he perceives as changes in the objects he encounters as a nausea: normally, the urge to regurgitate. Moreover, in the later scene in which Roquentin is walking in the street with a (news-)paper in his hands, having just given up working on his book on Rollebon and read the account of a young girl's being raped, he suddenly fears being engulfed by the houses that surround him as he might be engulfed by a mountainous wave of water in the shape of a swan: "les maisons se referment sur moi sur le papier en montagne de cygne."²⁵³ As we pointed out earlier (see above, Ch. I, pp. 22, 46-47), this scene bears a strong

²⁵² Sartre, La Nausée, p. 23.

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 130.

connection with Roquentin's description of his paper gathering, both because there is a paper in his hands at the time of the hallucination and because of the recurring image of the swan. The later scene, then, can be construed as another manifestation of the en-soi's apparent turning of the tables on Roquentin. This fear of being devoured by a colossal, watery swan -- a species of "water monster" -- also underscores the inefficacy of Roquentin's hydra complex in neutralizing the threat of the in-itself's invasion. He does not, at this point, arrogantly set fire to the watery image, but flees it in terror. Thus, Roquentin's change in fundamental attitude results in a reversal of the hydra complex as well.

The threat posed by the hydra, like that of the Medusa's head, is one of castration (see above, Ch. I, pp. 71-72). From a somewhat elementary and purely sexual point of view, the castration complex in men centers around the discovery that women lack a penis, or at least that the one they have is very small.²⁵⁴ Consequently, the view of the female genitalia, the domain of the absent penis, functions as a trigger mechanism for an onset of castration anxiety. The resemblance of the head of the Medusa to a hair-encompassed vagina is clear enough; the connection of the hydra to the castration complex is a bit

²⁵⁴ See especially Freud's "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year Old Boy," in The Standard Edition, Vol. X (London: Hogarth, 1953), pp. 3-149.

more abstract and hinges on the hydra's role as avenging angel for man's stealing of the phallus from the fatherly Zeus. But the fact that the hydra is a creature of the water, and thus (we might expect) wet and somewhat slimy, suggests a tactile relation of the viscous hydra to the vaginal surfaces.

Indeed, at one moment in his theoretical presentation of the notion of le visqueux, Sartre speaks of the threat of the slimy in these terms: "son mode d'être . . . c'est une activité molle, baveuse et féminine d'aspiration, il vit obscurément sous mes doigts," and a few lines further, "c'est la revanche de l'En-soi. Revanche douceâtre et féminine."²⁵⁵ This image of a soft and slobbery, sucking surface, which menaces the pour-soi with engulfment, can also apply to the mouth, but the repeated qualification of the viscous as particularly feminine points elsewhere in the anatomy. If the fundamental ontological representation of the threat of the in-itself is the visqueux, then the fundamental sexual representation of this threat is the vagina.

By extension, we see how Roquentin's Wisstreib is also jeopardized. If the Wisstreib is rooted in sexual curiosity, and if sexual curiosity finds its paradigmatic strategy in childhood Schaulust, then the Wisstreib (the "drive to know") is always potentially threatened with a

²⁵⁵ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, pp. 700, 701 (emphasis added).

reminder of the primary discovery of Schaulust: the anatomical distinction between the sexes. Thus, the Wis-
striebe/Schaulust aspect of Roquentin's attempt to appropriate objects backfires, if the viscous begins to look
back.

Sartre's description of the mode of being of the viscous as "une activité molle, baveuse et féminine d'aspiration," which lives obscurely "sous mes doigts," is broadly encompassed in the scene of Roquentin's reading of the newspaper account of Lucienne's rape. We have already signaled some of the more significant passages, for our purposes, in this scene's recounting, but a few more pieces of Roquentin's description are worthy of attention.

Roquentin's sensation of the hyper-existence of objects reaches him through the newspaper that is "sous ses doigts":

L'enfant a été violée. On a retrouvé son corps, ses doigts crispés dans la boue. Je roule le journal en boule mes doigts crispés sur le journal: odeur d'encre; mon Dieu, comme les choses existent fort aujourd'hui.²⁵⁶

The viscosity of the object is not readily apparent and, indeed, it is probably Roquentin's overly-aroused sensitivity to objects in general (a condition which was initiated by the viscous at such moments as that of his handling of the stone and his fear of picking up the "Hibou blanc" scrap) that is at work here. But what viscosity is

²⁵⁶ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 130.

lacking in the newspaper, Roquentin supplies with his tell-tale description of and reaction to the rag. It seems as if his contact with the object itself sends Roquentin off into a nightmarish identification with the raped girl. His hands clutch the paper as hers clutch the earth. Moreover, the critical locus of the violent attack is undoubtedly the child's vagina, the soft and viscous feminine surface. If we may call attention to the hand of Sartre behind the hand of Roquentin for a moment, we note that the viscous term baveux, whose feminine form Sartre uses in the passage we last quoted from L'Être et le néant, was also employed as a slang substantive, during the period of the First World War, to mean "newspaper."²⁵⁷ The object's attack of counter-appropriation begins to reveal its tactical bias.

The extent of Roquentin's identification with the violated girl becomes more and more evident as his narrative goes on: "Elle a senti cette autre chair qui se glissait dans la sienne. Je . . . voilà que je . . . Violée."²⁵⁸ The girl's flesh is invaded by another being and Roquentin begins to sense his implication in the event. It is not clear yet whether he feels himself to be in the place of the violator or the violated: both are suggested. "Je

²⁵⁷ Joseph Marks, Harrap's French-English Dictionary of Slang and Colloquialisms (London: Harrap, 1970), p. 25.

²⁵⁸ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 130.

lâche ce journal. La maison jaillit, elle existe."²⁵⁹ He can no longer hold the paper, appropriate it; things begin to mount an overwhelming attack. The engulfing water-swan houses threaten; they spurt with existence. Roquentin defends himself with desperate phallic insistence, but his very counter-attack leads him deeper and deeper into the overpowering folds of the feminine viscous:

Est-ce que je vais... caresser dans l'épanouissement des draps blancs la chair blanche épanouie qui retombe douce, toucher les moiteurs fleuries des aisselles, les élixirs et les liqueurs et les florescences de la chair, entrer dans l'existence de l'autre, dans les muqueuses rouges à la lourde, douce, douce odeur d'existence, me sentir exister entre les douces lèvres mouillées, les lèvres rouges de sang pâle, les lèvres palpitantes qui bâillent toutes mouillées d'existence, toutes mouillées d'un pus clair, entre les lèvres mouillées sucrées qui larmoient comme des yeux?²⁶⁰

No, this caressing, phallic, possessive entry into the viscous -- the terms of Roquentin's counter-attack against the invading en-soi -- fails, and he makes up his mind to flee the world's sweet encompassing, only to be caught by the in-itself "from behind":

. . . l'existence prend mes pensées par derrière et doucement les épanouit par derrière; on me prend par derrière, on me force par derrière de penser, donc d'être quelque chose.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 131.

²⁶¹ Ibid., p. 132.

Roquentin has his worst fears realized during these sexual hallucinations. He is being overcome by the viscous and is, consequently, becoming himself visqueux ("Toucher au visqueux, c'est risquer de se diluer en viscosité"²⁶²). He has become a victim of a rape by the en-soi, has become like little Lucienne's soft, mucous-coated, bloodied vagina -- penetrated by the hard, unyielding in-itself. Roquentin imagines his consciousness violated like a woman under attack, a hole which is penetrated. In Roquentin's case, as a male, this hole must be the so-called "democratic" orifice, the gap in his derrière . . . raped from behind by existence, the for-itself as anus.²⁶³

As an addendum to our discussion of the souring of Roquentin's pleasure in handling paper objects, let us point out that the mud, which is often caked on to the surface of these morsels, as well as the urine and excrement that are occasionally found there, also serve to qualify these scraps as "objets à deux faces." The viscosity of mud and excrement are readily apparent, and the fading yellow tint of dried urine can be classified as one of the "viscous" colors in the spectrum of Fletcher's

²⁶² Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 702.

²⁶³ An extensive and intelligent reading of this scene appears in Alexander Argyros' unpublished thesis, "The Question of Truth in Sartre, Heidegger and Derrida," Diss. Cornell University, 1977; see especially pp. 28-32.

lecture colorée.²⁶⁴ Moreover, urine and excrement, as "gifts" of the child to its surrounding environment, as a "don du soi," return hauntingly as counter-possessive beings to the ontologically paranoid esprit de sérieux, as detached parts of a body, as things-in-the-world untranscended by consciousness and, as slimy objects, with a bestowal of a being which is viscosity itself. Roquentin's recounting of the surprising terror tactics of the stone on the shore, his uneasy narration of the struggle now involved in the simple, appropriative game he used to play with objects in the street, and his violent, horrifying description of the hallucinations provoked by the newspaper account of the rape of a young girl, all serve to encapsulate the symptomatic universe of the first stage of Roquentin's existential crisis.

The second stage of this nauseatingly paranoid encounter with the en-soi occurs at the moment of his epiphany in the park, at the moment when "le voile se déchire" and he glimpses the in-itself stripped clean of words and meaning. Along the way leading up to this turning point in Roquentin's condition, the reader encounters other moments of nausea, other moments of uneasiness in the face of the threatening in-itself. There is the sinister glass of beer in the Café Mably, Adolphe's suspenders, the foggy morning and M. Fasquelle's flu, to name a

²⁶⁴ Fletcher, "The Use of Colour in La Nausée."

few of these instances. But an analysis of these scenes would yield very little new information for our purposes, and we shall therefore dispense with their study in the present work. Our contention is that the stone and the papers, and Roquentin's rapport with them, mark the whole gamut of psychological data needed to shed light on Roquentin's dilemma and identify it as one of a certain failure of appropriation, and we shall limit ourselves to the demands of this hypothesis.

The chestnut root episode is immediately preceded by a full-scale bout with nausea. Roquentin is having lunch with the slimily humanistic Autodidact, whose soft, sucking attitudes threaten to reduce one's ideas to "une lymphe blanche et mousseuse," if "on joue son jeu."²⁶⁵ The restaurant is filled with people of one kind or another, a fact that is of little comfort to the already uneasy Roquentin, who imagines one of the diners to be a traveling salesman dealing in "la pâte dentifrice Swan"²⁶⁶ (i.e., white, pasty swans). A combination of the Autodidact's oozing banter, Roquentin's perception of his surroundings, and the look and taste of his "poulet froid" and "camembert crayeux" lead the diarist to the point of vomiting:

Une belle crise: ça me secoue du haut en bas.
Il y a une heure que je la voyais venir, seulement je ne voulais pas me l'avouer. Ce goût de fromage dans ma bouche . . . L'Autodidacte

²⁶⁵ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 151.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 143.

babille et sa voix bourdonne doucement à mes oreilles.²⁶⁷

We note that one of the points attacked in Roquentin's battle with the world is once again his ears (recalling "Un doux désir sanglant de viol me prend par derrière, tout doux, derrière les oreilles, les oreilles filent derrière moi"²⁶⁸). Roquentin grasps the knife that flanks his plate and senses its meaningless, unpresuming existence in-itself: "à quoi bon toucher quelque chose? Les objets ne sont pas faits pour qu'on les touche. Il vaut bien mieux se glisser entre eux."²⁶⁹ Objects cannot be appropriated; they are not there to be appropriated; they are merely there. Roquentin drops the knife and, in a narrative prelude to the momentous disclosure of Being soon to come, we read:

C'est donc ça la Nausée: cette aveuglante évidence? Me suis-je creusé la tête! En ai-je écrit! Maintenant je sais: J'existe -- le monde existe -- et je sais que le monde existe. C'est tout . . . C'est depuis ce fameux jour où je voulais faire des ricochets. J'allais lancer ce galet, je l'ai regardé et c'est alors que tout a commencé: j'ai senti qu'il existait. Et puis après ça, il y a eu d'autres Nausées, de temps en temps les objets se mettent à vous exister dans la main.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 155.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 130.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 155-156.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 156.

Roquentin leaves the restaurant without giving any explanation to his dinner companion for his odd, preoccupied behavior. He boards a tram, only to have the world's stark existence continue to exhibit itself before him: "J'appuie ma main sur la banquette, mais je la retire précipitamment: ça existe."²⁷¹ He tries to master the seat's arrogant is-ness through a new tactic: an appropriation by means of language, an attempt to neutralize the object's alien menace by naming it, and thus rendering it meaningful and knowable and fit for appropriation. Like the enunciated "fort/da" of the playful child, Roquentin begins to name names in order to condemn, and hopefully convict and have incarcerated, the horrifying being which has run amok: "Je murmure: c'est une banquette, un peu comme un exorcisme."²⁷² The tramway seat's demonic reality is too great, however, for Roquentin's serious mind and, unlike the gambit of the fort-da player who derives at least temporary satisfaction from his creative gestures, Roquentin's stab at magical incantation fails: "Mais le mot reste sur mes lèvres: il refuse d'aller se poser sur la chose."²⁷³

²⁷¹ Ibid., p. 159.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

Roquentin's image of the seat is one of a viscous animal, dead bloated flesh, a dead donkey: "Cet énorme ventre tourné en l'air, sanglant, ballonné -- boursoufflé avec toutes ses pattes mortes, ventre qui flotte dans cette boîte, dans ce ciel gris, ce n'est pas une banquette. Ça pourrait tout aussi bien être un âne mort."²⁷⁴ What Roquentin is seeing hardly resembles a "banquette," that is, the name of the thing. The word fails to define and delimit what is slowly overflowing the seat, the oozing blob of existence. Attempts to appropriate the thing fail and Roquentin's fear of being possessed himself by the threatening object, of being invaded and dissolved by the rotting belly of the ass corpse, of the pour-soi becoming viscous, is exacerbated. We note that this vision of the bloated stomach, an example of a Jonah image, indicates through its now threatening appearance the reversal of Roquentin's earlier appropriative complexe de Jonas; what, at this point, Bachelard terms l'anti-Jonas.²⁷⁵ Moreover, there are aspects of the Medusa image present in Roquentin's vision of the seat: "Elle reste ce qu'elle est, avec sa peluche rouge, milliers de petites pattes rouges, en l'air, toutes raides, de petites pattes mortes."²⁷⁶ The fleecy, red shag, made up of thousands of stiff paws,

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Bachelard, La Terre et les rêveries du repos, p. 169.

²⁷⁶ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 159.

calls to mind the structure of the Medusa's head -- a hairy and, in this case, bleeding vagina, around which the reassuring presence of thousands of erect penises is manifested. But this multiplicity of phallic presence is not enough to allay Roquentin's primordial fear in the face of the banquette.

The description of the tramway bench serves as a prelude to the second moment of the protagonist's "sudden illumination," his satori. Roquentin bounds off the tram, but cannot escape the sensation of counter-appropriation. It is not just the banquette that threatens to pervade his freedom, but être-en-soi in general:

. . . l'existence me pénètre de partout, par les yeux, par le nez, par la bouche . . .
Et tout d'un coup, d'un seul coup, le voile se déchire, j'ai compris, j'ai vu.²⁷⁷

The "racine du marronnier" itself presents us with nothing new in the way of significant information pertaining to Roquentin's crisis. It is a somewhat viscous object, although, like the tramway seat, far more solid than Roquentin's other nemeses. To Roquentin, it resembles a "grosse patte rugueuse," this metaphor suggesting a mobile, animal nature, one that grasps back. The root is capable of fascinating, as well, and we are reminded of the compelling nature of the viscous' sly threat of counter-possession (see above, p. 205): "Noueuse, inerte, sans nom, elle me fascinait, m'emplissent les yeux, me ramenait sans cesse à

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 160.

sa propre existence."²⁷⁸ The root seems to take over Roquentin's eyes with its own very being. He tries a counter-attack of appropriative mumbo-jumbo, but, as in the case of the banquette, he cannot exorcise the ontological demon: "J'avais beau répéter: 'C'est une racine' -- ça ne prenait plus"²⁷⁹ -- "that no longer worked / no longer took hold (prenait)."²⁸⁰ Even the black color of the root, a hue which is normally reassuring for Roquentin,²⁸⁰ loses its stability at the height of his visionary rambling:

Ça ressemblait à une couleur mais aussi . . . à une meurtrissure ou encore à une sécrétion, à un suint -- et à autre chose, à une odeur par exemple, ça se fondait en odeur de terre mouillée, de bois tiède et mouillé, en odeur noire étendue comme un vernis sur ce bois nerveux, en saveur de fibre mâchée, sucrée.²⁸¹

The wet ("mouillé"), luke-warm ("tiède") ooze ("suint") of the blackness of the wood unmistakably qualifies the root as a potentially hard, stable object that is "varnished" with slime: an "objet à deux faces." Moreover, this viscous odor of the wood,²⁸² as well as what Roquentin su-

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 164.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ On the stabilizing function of black, see Fletcher's "The Use of Colour in La Nausée" and Pellegrin's "L'Objet à deux faces dans 'La Nausée'."

²⁸¹ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 166.

²⁸² Odors in general are seen as "objets à deux faces" by Gerald Prince, who in the wake of Pellegrin's analysis writes:

L'odeur aussi est à deux faces. L'odeur est métamorphose. C'est une présence absente,

spects to be its sweet taste,²⁸³ reinforce the multi-sensory, threatening messages emitted from the object.

But there is something different about this encounter that distinguishes it from other run-ins Roquentin has had with beastly objects. Roquentin has caught a glimmer of the in-itself's contingent nature: "Exister, c'est être-là simplement."²⁸⁴ He feels that he now understands the implications of the world's simply being there, that existence is prior to essence, and that without essence (the quality of being that is brought into the world by consciousness), there is no difference, no distinguishing factor or factors that would serve to define things as

qui change en se répandant, qui flotte dans l'air tout en se posant lourdement sur les choses, qui adhère à l'objet tout en s'en détachant. Elle n'a pas de limites, elle ne les connaît pas, elle les défie. Volée, flasque, informe et qu'on ne saurait contenir, son origine et sa fin se confondent avec l'air qu'elle parcourt et qu'elle alourdit (Gerald Prince, "L'Odeur de la nausée," p. 35).

²⁸³ The relation of taste to the slimy occurs precisely in this notion of sweetness, according to Sartre. After describing the visqueux as the "revanche de l'En-soi" and a "revanche douceâtre et féminine," he goes on to say that this revenge

. . . se symbolisera sur un autre plan par la qualité de sucré. C'est pourquoi le sucré comme douceur au goût -- douceur indélébile, qui demeure indéfiniment dans la bouche et survit à la déglutition -- complète parfaitement l'essence du visqueux. Le visqueux sucré est l'idéal du visqueux (L'Être et le néant, p. 701).

²⁸⁴ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 166.

such. Existence is plenitude of being, the undifferentiated, overflowing is-ness of matter which, for the existential visionary, threatens from time to time to flood the nothingness which is consciousness:

L'existence n'est pas quelque chose qui se laisse penser de loin; il faut que ça vous envahisse brusquement, que ça s'arrête sur vous, que ça pèse lourd sur votre coeur comme une grosse bête immobile -- ou alors il n'y a plus rien du tout.²⁸⁵

Roquentin cannot sustain this intuited intimacy with the en-soi for very long. The spell of the ontological rape is broken as quickly as it attacked his imagination in the first place: "Il n'y avait plus rien du tout, j'avais les yeux vides et je m'enchantais de ma délivrance."²⁸⁶ It is primarily through the eyes that the root's invasion takes place, for in contrast to the "yeux vides" which signal the withdrawal of the onerous en-soi, we recall the "yeux emplis" of Roquentin's initial fascination. In this episode, Roquentin confronts his reversed scopophilia, his recent scopo-phobia, and stares the Medusa down. He is temporarily overcome, but his viscous attacker suddenly withdraws harmlessly.

This "kick in the eye" by the en-soi has left Roquentin with a further understanding of the nausea -- an insight pertaining to the notion of appropriation: "je com-

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 167.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

prenais la Nausée, je la possédais."²⁸⁷ If we recall that appropriation is a relation between the for-itself and an object, in which I search for support for my being in an object that is mine, but not me, we can well understand how this strategy is insufficient for the realization of the pour-soi's fundamental appropriative project: to have itself in the sense of being its own foundation. But Roquentin remarks in his preamble to the narration of the chestnut root incident that "La Nausée ne m'a pas quitté et je ne crois pas qu'elle me quittera de sitôt; mais je ne la subis plus, ce n'est pas une maladie ni une quinte passagère: c'est moi."²⁸⁸ Has Roquentin succeeded in founding his own being in the nausea that he possesses? Can he revise the Cartesian cogito to read: "Je vomis, donc je suis"?

In response to these questions, we should first of all recall the two points of view on this existential sickness that we examined earlier. There is the nauseous response to the viscous, the horror of the "objet à deux faces" that seems all of a sudden to touch back, and there is the nausea which Sartre describes as "Cette saisie perpétuelle par mon pour-soi d'un goût fade et sans distance qui m'accompagne jusque dans mes efforts pour m'en

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 166.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 161, emphasis added.

délivrer et qui est mon goût."²⁸⁹ The former is actually related to the latter in that the true terror of the viscous as antivalue is that it reminds one of one's own flesh, the en-soi which cannot be escaped. Thus, the disgusting taste of the sweet viscous, the horrifying feel of the slimy viscous, and the unpleasant sight of the oozing instability of the two-faced object, all provoke a non-thetic consciousness of the body: the insipid taste of saliva, the feel of one's soft, moist, meaningless mouth, the sight of one's hand as a contingent appendage. Roquentin seems to no longer be threatened or frightened by the root itself. Once he feels that he possesses the nausea, he discovers that existence is something "qui [ne] se laisse [pas] penser de loin" ("un goût fade et sans distance"), which "s'arrête sur vous . . . comme une grosse bête" ("qui m'accompagne"), and which eventually releases its grip ("je m'enchantais de ma délivrance" / "mes efforts pour m'en délivrer"). The object has apparently released its hold on Roquentin, but the nausea, which is his consciousness (of) his own facticity, remains.

Thus, this intuition of existence, as a sense of invasion by the undifferentiated in-itself, includes that element of the en-soi that one does possess in a way, that one is always related to in a context of mine, but not-me: the body. Although I can say that my body is me, it is

²⁸⁹ Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 404 (quoted above, p. 200).

certainly not me from the point of view of the pour-soi which must "exist" the body as a contingent being-in-the-world. For the pour-soi, the body is something it has. Consequently, the statements "la Nausée, je la possédais" and "La Nausée . . . c'est moi" indicate an understanding of a highly intimate relation of appropriation. The for-itself finds a foundation in the in-itself, which is its body. This is still not the ideal appropriation of which the for-itself dreams, however, for in having a body that is both mine and not me (in a sense), I am still not my own freely constructed foundation -- that is, I do not create my ideal pour-soi-en-soi. My body is not my own creation; it is a given, as contingent as the racine du marronnier:

. . . aucun être nécessaire ne peut expliquer l'existence: la contingence n'est pas un faux semblant, une apparence qu'on peut dissiper; c'est l'absolu, par conséquent la gratuité parfaite. Tout est gratuit, ce jardin, cette ville et moi-même.²⁹⁰

We note that, although Roquentin has now achieved a relieving insight into the origins of his distress, his attitude is still one that reflects the esprit de sérieux.

At one point we read:

Je raclai mon talon contre cette griffe noire: j'aurai voulu l'écorcher un peu. Pour rien, par défi, pour faire apparaître sur le cuir tanné le rose absurde d'une éraflure: pour jouer avec l'absurdité du monde. Mais, quand je retirai mon pied, je vis que l'écorce était restée

²⁹⁰ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 166.

noire.²⁹¹

Roquentin's feeble attempt to play with the world's absurdity leads him to the tacit conclusion that this tree root cannot be played with. But if the success of the game is measured by the extent to which the root's bark can be peeled -- an end that Roquentin seems to imply -- then any child with a pocket knife would have no trouble disproving Roquentin's contention that you cannot play with existence. Roquentin has yet to adopt an attitude by which he can counter-attack the threat of the en-soi with his creative freedom.

His counter-offensive is not long in coming, however. We note that his mastery of the threatening situation through an understanding of the object is first accomplished intuitively, then otherwise: "A vrai dire je ne me formulais pas mes découvertes. Mais je crois qu'à présent [i.e., at the moment of writing] il me serait facile de les mettre en mots"²⁹² . . . which brings us to a mode of appropriation that is peculiar to Roquentin, as well as to those others who engage in such logging of the course of their investigative self-reflection.

Roquentin decides to keep a journal, we are told in the "feuillet sans date," in order to see clearly, to understand the changes which seem to have taken place in the

²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 165, Roquentin's emphasis.

²⁹² Ibid., p. 166.

objects he encounters:

Le mieux serait d'écrire les événements au jour le jour. Tenir un journal pour y voir clair . . . Il faut dire comment je vois cette table, la rue, les gens, mon paquet de tabac, puisque c'est cela qui a changé. Il faut déterminer exactement l'étendue et la nature de ce changement.²⁹³

He announces his intention to describe "events" as they occur from day to day, as well as the objects themselves, in order to measure quantitatively and qualitatively how his world has changed. It is quite surprising, then, that in the entry of "30 janvier" Roquentin hems and haws at the prospect of writing about the piece of paper he could not pick up. Such an odd occurrence, especially given its similarity to the incident on the beach with the two-faced stone, seems quite worthy of narration. But "ce n'est même pas un événement,"²⁹⁴ Roquentin maintains, in much the same way as he disclaimed the eventfulness of the stone episode in the "feuilleton sans date":

Naturellement je ne peux pas plus rien écrire de net sur ces histoires de samedi et d'avant-hier [a story we are, in fact, never given], j'en suis déjà trop éloigné; ce que je peux dire seulement, c'est que, ni dans l'un ni dans l'autre cas, il n'y a rien eu de ce qu'on appelle à l'ordinaire un événement.²⁹⁵

²⁹³ Ibid., p. 211.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 11.

This exclusion of his encounters with the en-soi on the basis of their uneventfulness seems paradoxical in the light of Roquentin's anxious confrontation with the world, for it is precisely these incidents (if not events) of nausea that he is trying to order and classify through his writing project. But here, in the heart of the paradox, lies the key to its resolution. One writes or speaks of events; they are not lived except through reflection. As Roquentin points out in a later entry: ". . . il faut choisir: vivre ou raconter."²⁹⁶ Events do not exist in themselves, but are the product of some kind of narration from a certain temporal and reflective distance established by consciousness. If it is existence itself that Roquentin is trying to come to terms with, then we can understand the difficulty he has in describing the object of his paranoia, if existence "n'est pas quelque chose qui se laisse penser de loin." Thus, the narratability of such an occurrence is problematic. A threatened invasion by the en-soi is not an event, because one of the terms of the encounter is radically unthinkable, and therefore unnamable. The en-soi is simply there and naming it serves to mask its contingency.

Of course, Roquentin could narrate the incidents, and he does in fact, after a good deal of hesitation. His reluctance to appropriate the non-event through writing (the

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 57.

rendering of eventfulness to the epiphany) can perhaps be explained by the esprit de sérieux. Why should Roquentin want to repeat a situation in which the threat to his being appeared so real? Here we are reminded of one of the objections to Freud's interpretation of the fort-da game: why should the child want to repeat an incident which caused him unpleasure in the first place? The answer is in the compulsion to repeat, the technique of re-playing the incident again and again in a metaphorized or regressive (i.e., hallucinated or dreamed) fashion in an effort to bind the strong unconscious impulses pressing for discharge. The use of this psychological tactic implies the presupposition of the narratability of the unpleasurable situation. In Roquentin's case, what is happening to him is taking place beyond the range of narratability, and he senses, even at the inception of his writing project, that the relating of these encounters somehow betrays their very nature. Roquentin is unwilling to master the threatening situation, to assume the esprit de jeu, because he is overwhelmed by his pre-reflective awareness of the en-soi, a manifestation of being to which he gives more reality than to his freedom to recount, interpret, and thus transcend the objects' être-là. It is through appropriate action, however temporarily efficacious it may be, that the threat of the en-soi can be countered.

Roquentin's esprit de sérieux is manifested in his very notion of the purpose of his writing project. He is on the verge of being at play, since he shifts mediums in order to appropriate that which is lacking to him -- that is, he intends to move from living to relating in order to get a hold on the world, much like the child uses the bobbin and the vocables "fort/da" to metaphorize and thus temporarily harness his instinctual energy and master the situation in which the lack is exposed. But Roquentin is not content with mere symbolization. He strives for an impossible precision in which signifiers express exactly corresponding signifieds. His refusal to recount (and thus appropriate) the threats of the en-soi as "événements" is indicative of this attitude. One wonders how Roquentin manages to write anything at all while haunted by beings which balk at signification.²⁹⁷ He is reluctant to allow any free-play in his narration and his project seems doomed.

This desire for signification that would rigidly reproduce a signified, a wish of the esprit de sérieux, does condemn to failure Roquentin's book on Rollebon. We note early on in the journal Roquentin's abhorrence of his own appropriative tendencies with regard to the history of the marquis:

²⁹⁷ Indeed, some days he is very nearly paralyzed by his serious attitude. The entry for the Tuesday after Mardi Gras, for example, reads: "Rien. Existé" (La Nausée, p. 133).

Eh bien, oui: il a pu faire tout ça, mais ce n'est pas prouvé: je commence à croire qu'on ne peut jamais rien prouver. Ce sont des hypothèses honnêtes et qui rendent compte des faits: mais je sens si bien qu'elles viennent de moi, qu'elles sont tout simplement une manière d'unifier mes connaissances. Pas une lueur ne vient du côté de Rollebon. Lents, paresseux, maussades, les faits s'accommodent à la rigueur de l'ordre que je veux leur donner; mais il leur reste extérieur. J'ai l'impression de faire un travail de pure imagination. Encore suis-je bien sûr que des personnages de roman auraient l'air plus vrais, seraient, en tout cas, plus plaisants.²⁹⁸

Roquentin sees his desire to write and, by extension, his wish to write a book on the Marquis de Rollebon, as an attempt to "unifier (s)es connaissances." As a result of our theoretical study, we can conclude that this unification of what he knows is a goal supported on the wish to possess oneself through one's knowledge, the underlying, originary foundation of the Wisstriebe and its informing Schaulust. But as Roquentin observes so perspicaciously, the manifestation of this drive -- the history that he is writing -- does not reproduce the truth of Rollebon's life, or rather, it reproduces only the truth of the already narrated facts about Rollebon's life. It is a history of the signification of Rollebon's life, an ordering and classifying of signifiers. The signified has been excluded; the en-soi, of which Roquentin has become overly aware, does not raise its hydra's head against the backdrop of Rollebon's documented past.

²⁹⁸ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 27.

It is not until a bit later that Roquentin's esprit de sérieux allows the en-soi to completely overwhelm his Rollebon project. On the Monday following his visit to the Bouville museum, Roquentin succumbs to existential paralysis, a numbing of his drives, and undergoes an extensive attack of nausea. The diary entry begins with a declaration of resignation: "Je n'écris plus mon livre sur Rollebon; c'est fini, je ne peux plus l'écrire."²⁹⁹ Reminiscent of his recounting of the "Hibou blanc" incident, Roquentin's present statement reflects his impotence in the face of the en-soi (in this case, Rollebon's past) which seems to resist appropriation. But this laying down of his arms exposes Roquentin to the very threat of counter-possession that he fears so much. He stops writing, holds his pen in the air, in retreat, and stares at the sheet of paper before him:

. . . comme il était dur et voyant, comme il était présent. Il n'y avait rien en lui que du présent. Les lettres que je venais d'y tracer n'étaient pas encore sèches et déjà elles ne m'appartenaient plus.³⁰⁰

The paper itself has begun to take over his words, his means of appropriation.³⁰¹ He is being disarmed. What's

²⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 123.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 124.

³⁰¹ This particular illusion is not new to Roquentin, the writer. We recall that in his hesitation over recording the "Hibou blanc" incident, he notes that the idea that he is no longer free -- the manifestation of his fear of being possessed by the en soi -- "[lui] a dicté les pages qui précèdent" (La Nausée, p. 22). In

more, Roquentin suddenly finds himself in a very dangerous position:

Je pris ses lettres dans mes mains, je les palpai avec une espèce de désespoir . . . ces mots [de Rollebon] n'avaient plus de sens. Rien d'autre n'existait plus qu'une liasse de feuilles jaunes que je pressais dans mes mains.³⁰²

Roquentin is holding yellowed papers, caressing them inquiringly, repeating the formerly pleasurable, appropriative gestures he used to make with an esprit de jeu. He is no longer playing, however, and he grows afraid of the papers' imposing being. He tries to play dead: "Surtout ne pas bouger, ne pas bouger . . . Ah! Ce mouvement d'épaules, je n'ai pas pu le retenir."³⁰³ The in-itself has spied him and attacks like a viscous beast of prey:

La chose, qui attendait, s'est alertée, elle a fondu sur moi, elle se coule en moi, j'en suis plein. -- Ce n'est rien: la Chose, c'est moi.

other words, it is Roquentin's idea that he is being appropriated by objects that dictated to him the pages during which he resists the narration (and thus an attempt to appropriate) his confrontation with the threatening scrap. Thus, it is as if Roquentin's journal writing is being taken over by the very world that he is trying to order through this form of documentation.

We might also note at this point that, in his initial description of the objects that he likes to pick up, Roquentin mentions his interest in "des bouts de journaux," translated by Alexander as "remnants of . . . newspapers," but which could also be understood as "scraps of journals." Now that objects seem to have turned on Roquentin, we see that the journal itself may become a threatening object in much the same way that old papers in the street have gone from attractive morsels to counter-appropriative figures.

³⁰² Sartre, La Nausée, p. 125, emphasis added.

³⁰³ Ibid., p. 127.

L'existence, libérée, déagée, reflue sur moi.
J'existe.³⁰⁴

Once again, it is a revelation of the body, which the for-itself must exist, that is provoked by the apparent counter-possession on the part of the object. We note Roquentin's description of the corporeal sensations which follow:

Tout doux, tout doux, il y a de l'eau mousseuse dans ma bouche. Je l'avale, elle glisse dans ma gorge, elle me caresse -- et la voilà qui renaît dans ma bouche, j'ai dans la bouche à perpétuité une petite mare d'eau blanchâtre -- discrète -- qui frôle ma langue. Et cette mare, c'est encore moi. Et la langue. Et la gorge, c'est moi.³⁰⁵

The threat of counter-appropriation by the papers gives way to a sense of counter-appropriation by the body. Roquentin has the nauseating "goût d'existence" in his mouth: "Ma salive est sucrée . . . je me sens fade," he remarks a few lines later.³⁰⁶ He glances down at his hand, which suddenly resembles a crab lying on its back, a zoological "objet à deux faces" with a hard carapace and a soft belly (now exposed).³⁰⁷ In an effort to make a

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 129.

³⁰⁷ Images of crabs and other crustaceans abound in Sartre's fiction and usually suggest threats of counter-appropriation on the part of the en-soi. See, for example, Marie-Denise Boros' study, "La Métaphore du crabe dans l'oeuvre littéraire de Jean-Paul Sartre," PMLA, lxxxi, pp. 446-450, in which she summarizes several of these instances and concludes:

change, to fight back against his own insipidness, Roquentin seizes the pocket knife that is lying on the table beside his writing paper and stabs the palm of his crab-like hand. We can understand this self-inflicted wound as a very un-metaphoric reaction to his fear of being overcome by the en-soi, which, at the moment, manifests itself in the creepiness of his hand. But Kenneth Douglas points out another consideration which should not be overlooked. Roquentin's act is one of "stigmatization," a self-inflicting of stigmata in an attempt to redeem himself. At the same time, the stabbing is a gesture of self-penetration, of self-possession in the sexual sense. Thus, Roquentin's self-mutilation can be understood as an effort to dispel the nausea by becoming his own ens causa sui,

Cette allusion au crabe semble toujours ramener l'homme au monde de la Physis, que le véritable héros sartrien tient en horreur, à la facticité qui entrave l'élan de sa liberté, à l'opacité massive de l'En-soi (p. 447).

This interpretation of the crustacean metaphor suggests a possible connection between the old man who used to frighten young Antoine and his friends in the Luxembourg Gardens and the adult Roquentin's inability to pick up the "Hibou blanc" scrap. Earlier, we maintained that these episodes in Roquentin's narration seem to be connected through the boot which appears in both instances (see above, p. 180). This apparently gratuitous connection takes on a certain amount of significance, if we see the "pensées de crabe et de langouste" of the old man as what Roquentin fears will happen to him, if he allows the en-soi to counter-appropriate. In other words, the appearance of the boot next to the lined paper reminds Roquentin of the very fear which objects have begun to provoke in him: the fear of his thoughts becoming viscous.

the foundation of his own being, God. It is an attempt to be both possessor and possessed.³⁰⁸

Roquentin rests his hand against the whiteness of the blank page before him, and watches as blood flows from his self-inflicted wound and forms a small pool on the predominantly unwritten page. "Il faudra que j'écrive au-dessous 'Ce jour-là, j'ai renoncé à faire mon livre sur le marquis de Rolleston.'"³⁰⁹ He announces his idea to underwrite the residue of the stabbing, immortalizing the act with eventfulness by narrating what is de nouveau ("Oh, nothing . . . but I've stopped writing my book on Rolleston"), having already sealed his act with the mark of the en-soi, the stain of his blood. This is Roquentin's intention, but he makes no mention of carrying out this idea.

Instead, he rises from his table, leaves his room, and enters the street, buying a newspaper as he walks along. As he holds the paper ("tandis qu'il tient le journal"), Roquentin reads the account of the rape of Lucienne and the cornucopia of nightmarish associations begins to spill over him. The paper itself, the smell of its ink, Roquentin's vision of the rape, the blood, the watery swans, all point back to his love of handling discarded paper, the "Hibou blanc" scrap (a bleeding hand, a

³⁰⁸ Kenneth Douglas, "Sartre and the Self-Inflicted Wound," in Yale French Studies 9(1952): pp. 123-131.

³⁰⁹ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 129.

tableau he has just reproduced in his room by allowing his hand to bleed on to the lined paper before him) and Roquentin's writing project -- possession through writing.³¹⁰ The blitz of counter-appropriation that Roquentin undergoes is precisely the battle he wishes to fight with his diary, the very reason for which he is keeping a journal ("pour laquelle il tient un journal") in the first place.

As we suggested earlier, the tide begins to turn for Roquentin after his encounter with the root. The fact that "à présent il me serait facile de les [mes découvertes] mettre en mots" signals the realization of the announced goal of Roquentin's journalistic project, as he expressed it in the "feuillet sans date." He is now willing to recount these ontological events, to appropriate them through writing, to play with them. Roquentin's attitude is changing, sliding from the esprit de sérieux towards the esprit de jeu. One might argue that this transformation is not at all conscious, not at all intentional, and Roquentin's sudden decision that he can signify that which defies precise signification is a result of mauvaise foi or repression. This objection does not hold, however, for we recall that Roquentin, in the second stage of his

³¹⁰ Alexander Argyros provides a splendid account and analysis of the metaphoric and metonymic progressions of the images that haunt Roquentin's project: the ink, mud, blood, hand progression, in particular. See his "The Question of Truth in Sartre, Heidegger, and Derrida."

satori, has seen, has understood the radical, unnamable being of the en-soi and, consequently, has intuited the distinction between the en-soi and pour-soi, between brute contingency and freedom. Putting his discovery into words does not constitute a pure, transparent translation of the in-itself's counter-appropriative threat. It is the raising of this encounter to a second power, the metaphorization of a drive through the Wiederholungszwang, the transformation of an encounter with the world into an event. This project is not in bad faith, for Roquentin now understands the difference between the world and its recounting. His putting into words of his conscious life represents an existence for him, which is beyond the contingency of the body. He has not been swallowed up by the en-soi, only threatened. The storm has passed.

Roquentin decides to write a novel, logically enough, to utilize his re-discovered freedom. He can once again pick up (writing-)paper and act out his various appropriative strategies in a creative way, through a fiction, a raising of his everyday encounters and ideas to a second power, to the status of events. There is no need for truth in the telling, for words will never be adequate to relate the experiences that one has lived or that someone else (Rollebon, for example) has lived: "des personnages de roman auraient l'air plus vrais, seraient, en tout cas, plus plaisants." Roquentin wants to play, as the pianist/

composer of "Some of These Days" played, as the singer who renders the song on the old, scratchy disk played. It is not a question of transcribing reality, but of creating reality through a medium which does not touch back, is not slimy, is not two-faced. It is a use of freedom in the face of a threatening world of being-in-itself, a wielding of a fiery consciousness which cannot be extinguished by the viscous. Roquentin wants to create a being that will be "dure comme de l'acier,"³¹¹ phallic as can be! It is once again he who will "s'appropriier le monde symboliquement," and not the other way around.

Thus, in the end, Roquentin's hydra complex wins out. He will overcome the hydra and avenge Prometheus by playing with fire, by playing at being God himself. He will create his own world, a new world, with words and, through his creation, try to found himself in an object that he will possess in the double rapport of "mine, but not me." This project, like other appropriative enterprises, is doomed to failure, as we have demonstrated extensively in this study. But it is a failure that is inescapable, another facticity, as it were, of the pour-soi. "L'homme est une passion inutile," as Sartre states near the conclusion of L'Être et le néant,³¹² but if we are condemned to be existentially free and, consequently, to fail in our

³¹¹ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 222.

³¹² Sartre, L'Être et le néant, p. 708.

gestures of appropriation (our acts themselves), then we might just as well act in our best symbolic interest -- that is, in creating a being for ourselves which will lead to the neutralizing of unpleasure, the binding of our over-zealous instinctual energy, a mastery of ourselves and the world. It is better to play games with the world than to be paralyzed by its immutability and silence. Roquentin is better off (i.e., "healthier") playing with dirty scraps of paper, than allowing himself to be haunted by them. The small child is better off playing fort-da, than catatonically suffering his mother's absence.

"Quand un avion pique du nez, il vaut mieux être le pilote qui essaie de le redresser qu'un passager terrorisé"³¹³ . . . even if one only pretends to know how to fly the plane.

³¹³ Henri, in Simone de Beauvoir's Les Mandarins (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), p. 571.

CONCLUSION

Much has been made of Roquentin's proposal that one might be able to justify one's existence through a creative project. As the final strains of the final playing of "Some of These Days" resound in his ears, Roquentin wonders if perhaps art is not a possible means to achieve existential salvation: "La Négrresse chante. Alors on peut justifier son existence? Un tout petit peu? . . . Est-ce que je ne pourrais pas essayer?"³¹⁴ The main focus of the critical debate concerning the novel's conclusion is aimed at the viability of the "creative solution." Maurice Cranston and Hazel Barnes, for instance, find Roquentin's sudden artistic commitment a splendid cure for what ails this waif of being.³¹⁵ Others, such as Iris Murdoch, George Bauer and Richard Kamber, find this "solution" to be a mere pipe-dream and predict, hypothetically, Roquentin's forthcoming realization of his project's failure.³¹⁶ What is primarily in question in all of these

³¹⁴ Sartre, La Nausée, p. 221.

³¹⁵ Maurice Cranston, Sartre (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), pp. 20-21. Hazel Barnes, Humanistic Existentialism: The Literature of Possibility (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959), pp. 193-206.

³¹⁶ Iris Murdoch, Sartre: Romantic Rationalist (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), pp. 7-14. George Bauer, Sartre and the Artist (Chicago: University of Chicago

works is whether existence, for Roquentin, can be justified or not.

But to what "problem" is Roquentin's proposed creative enterprise a "solution"? Has Roquentin been unable to justify his existence, try as he may, throughout the earlier pages of his journal, only to stumble on to the key to existential success as he is about to board the train for Paris?

In the foregoing pages, we have examined Roquentin's sickness as a condition based on an infection which is essentially appropriative in nature. Roquentin, like anyone else, leads his life by engaging in one appropriative venture after another. We investigated the grasping, oral, scopophilic, and destructive aspects of Roquentin's particular appropriative tendencies, and we discovered, through a reading of Freud against Sartre, that such manifestations of desire are symptoms of a universal human psychology. Roquentin's peculiar habit of picking up papers is, at its root, not so unusual and hardly a reason to call the man "sick."

Roquentin is sick, however -- he has bouts with nausea. This illness, as we have shown, in the manner of earlier readers, results from Roquentin's sense that the

Press, 1969), p. 43. Richard Kamber, "The Creative Solution in Nausea," in Susquehanna University Studies 9 (1974): pp. 227-242. The Kamber article contains an excellent recapitulation of the debate on the viability of the creative solution for Roquentin, a summary from which our own summary is drawn.

objects of his appropriative urges have begun to touch back. This "revenge of the en-soi" we termed counter-appropriation, and we attributed this fear of being engulfed by the in-itself to a change in Roquentin's attitude. It is his esprit de sérieux that permits this imagined invasion of his being, an attitude in which one allows more reality to the world than to one's own freedom to transcend the being-of-the-world. The esprit de jeu, on the other hand, is an attitude which is based on a point of view that is just the opposite of that of the "serious" mind. With the esprit de jeu, the for-itself seeks to appropriate itself through the use of its freedom, in terms of its freedom -- a freedom which brings value into the world and simply will not permit the world to bring anti-value into consciousness. Roquentin's "problem," then, lies in his serious attitude. The "solution" to this dilemma appears with his adoption of the esprit de jeu.

Whether Roquentin's existence is justifiable or not becomes a superfluous consideration. The very fact that Roquentin thinks he can justify it, seeks to justify it, even pretends to justify it, indicates that he is giving more reality to his consciousness than to the world. If we are to ask the question of whether Roquentin's project to write a novel will satisfy those vague, but persistent yearnings of his fundamental desire to be in-itself-for-itself, then our answer will be a categorical: "No." But

the salvation that Roquentin is seeking is not akin to such an impossible goal of ontological self-becoming, but rather a state in which he can "accept himself," if only in the past. His goal is to have himself through the bringing into the world of an object which he possesses in the double rapport of "mine, but not me." His goal is to once again fondle, gaze at, inquire into, be tempted to swallow, and set ablaze a world which is there to be possessed. The fact that this aim appears to Roquentin as a project of creative writing reveals the specificity of this endeavor to his own psychological bias. But, for others, such a resolution may wear the guise of other appropriative projects. What is important in any case is that the esprit de sérieux is overcome, that the counter-appropriative attack is repulsed, and that the subject does not deny his / her own freedom -- even if the appropriative strategy that one pursues is constantly doomed to failure. This is the solution to Roquentin's problem.

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