

## Communication with the Other in Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'Âge de raison*: A Discourse Analysis

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### Abstract

The article analyses conversation between the main characters, Mathieu and Marcelle, in Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'Âge de raison* (1945). Interpretation of the material involves recent methods of discourse analysis and takes into consideration cognitive schemata and the pragmatic intentions of speech acts. A constant objective is to establish whether the interlocutors manage to attain either a metaphysical or moral liberty when they communicate and whether they are able to maintain this for any length of time. In Sartre's terms, this achievement would mean that each participant keeps his/her reflective quality without becoming an unreflective object for the Other. Communication, in this case, would be considered successful.

The various approaches of discourse analysis and pragmatics in the last twenty to thirty years support the idea that dialogue may be interpreted in two general and compatible ways. Firstly, the 'structure' of discourse above the level of the sentence can be described, including the unwritten 'rules' which people observe in conversation. Secondly, one can explore how utterances are understood in context, giving meanings for them which are different from the sense of the individual sentences which comprise them. The intention of this paper is to show that by understanding the underlying principles of dialogue in a text, we are able to make an accurate appraisal of the relationship between characters, and are equally able to discern a whole philosophical reasoning which explains these examples of social interaction.

The text under study is *L'Âge de raison* (published in 1945), which constitutes the first volume of a planned tetralogy called *Les Chemins de la liberté*. However, Sartre only completed three volumes and published fragments of the fourth in the journal *Les Temps modernes* (November and December 1949). The meanings negotiated by the couple, Mathieu and Marcelle, in *L'Âge de raison* adumbrate a particularly interesting struggle for social power. Various linguistic strategies are employed either to promote the speaker to a position of control, where the *pour-soi* (for-itself) reaches fulfilment, or to reduce the addressee to the *en-soi* (in-itself) quality of objects. Their

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attempts at communication produce recurrent linguistic patterns which convey how the simple virtues of human intercourse become forms of insincerity in Sartre's novel. As Murdoch wrote, '[o]nly reflection and freedom are desired as ends and yet these turn out to be without content'.<sup>1</sup> Since the full meaning of the language of discourse cannot be dealt with on the level of text-internal semantics, I will also turn to the findings of pragmatics which enables sense to be made of the extra-linguistic motivations and cognitive assumptions of language users. These are based on the notion that linguistic expression involves certain deeds, not merely words, and the identification of the functional intention of such speech acts.

Before embarking on an analysis of dialogue in *L'Âge de raison*, it is essential to comprehend the existential conflict deemed by Sartre to be at the heart of human relationships. This centres on what Sartre called *être-pour-autrui* (being-for-others). The only way to become an object for oneself is to cease to be a subject, by losing one's essential character as self-conscious observer; in other words, by losing 'la présence à soi'.<sup>2</sup> Referring summarily to the first part of Sartre's *La Transcendence de l'ego*, it is evident that this philosopher conceives of the self as an *en-soi* entity, outside of consciousness. Only *pour-soi* consciousness is transcendental, free and able to reflect, but it is simultaneously impersonal — a quality which is incompatible with any conception of the 'self'. So if Sartre's *pour-soi* has constant contact with other *pour-soi* in the world, it encounters the problem of recognising the rights and freedom of others: 'ce projet d'unification est source de *conflit* puisque, tandis que je m'éprouve comme objet pour autrui et que je projette de l'assimiler dans et par cette épreuve, autrui me saisit comme objet au milieu du monde et ne projette nullement de m'assimiler à lui. Il serait donc nécessaire [...] d'*agir sur la liberté d'autrui*'.<sup>3</sup> To Sartre's mind, as Aronson points out, 'reflective consciousness, which distinguishes man from the animals', depends upon situations, whether involving communication or action, to build a 'framework within which and in relation to which man can exercise his freedom'.<sup>4</sup> But transcendental freedom is as elusive as other types of freedom in the novels, in view of the fact that the freedom of the Other is incompatible with one's own. Two *pour-soi* entities cannot meet without a collision, since each is free, and each will seek to use its freedom to interpret, define, delineate the Other, who, being free, will resist being interpreted, defined, delineated.

We will now consider how these abstract philosophical notions can be transposed into concrete concepts on the pages of Sartre's novel. The first substantial conversation of *L'Âge de raison* occurs between Mathieu and Marcelle (Folio edition, 1996, pp. 12-25) and provides a suitably dramatic opening: the revelation of Marcelle's unplanned pregnancy could either lead to dissension or cooperation, to the breakdown or survival of a human relationship.

- Qu'est-ce qui ne va pas? demanda-t-il à voix basse.
- Mais ça va, dit Marcelle à voix basse, et toi, mon vieux?
- Je suis sans un; à part ça, ça va. [...]

<sup>1</sup> Murdoch, I., *Sartre. Romantic Realist*, (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Sartre, J-P., *L'Être et le Néant*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), p. 115.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 415.

<sup>4</sup> Aronson, R., *J-P Sartre: Philosophy in the World*, (London: Verso, 1980), p. 88.

- Qu'est-ce que c'est que ça? demanda Mathieu. [...]
- C'est moi, dit Marcelle sans lever la tête. [...]
- Où as-tu trouvé ça?
- Dans un album. Elle date de l'été 28. [...]
- Tu regardes les albums de famille, à présent?
- Non, mais je ne sais pas, aujourd'hui j'ai eu envie de retrouver des choses de ma vie, comment j'étais avant de te connaître, quand j'étais bien portante. Amène-là. [...]
- J'étais marrante, dit-elle. [...]
- Tu le regrettes, ce temps-là?

Marcelle dit sèchement:

- Ce temps-là, non: je regrette la vie que j'aurais pu avoir. [...]
- J'ai grossi, hein?
- Oui. [...]
- Il y a dix ans de ça. [...]
- Qu'est-ce que tu as fait hier? Tu es sortie?

Marcelle eut un geste las et rond:

- Non, j'étais fatiguée. J'ai un peu lu mais maman me dérangeait tout le temps pour le magasin.
- Et aujourd'hui?
- Aujourd'hui, je suis sortie, dit-elle d'un air morose. J'ai senti le besoin de prendre l'air, de coudoyer des gens. Je suis descendue jusqu'à la rue de la Gaîté, ça m'amusait; et puis je voulais voir Andrée.

(pp. 12-14)<sup>5</sup>

Out of Mathieu's first ten speech acts above, eight are questions. It is he who takes the initiative to open up topics and to direct the discussion, thereby exhibiting

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<sup>5</sup> 'What's wrong?' he asked, in a low tone.

'Nothing', said Marcelle under her breath. 'Are you all right, old boy?'

'I'm broke: otherwise all right'. [...]

'What's that?' asked Marcelle, without raising her head. [...]

'Where did you find it?'

'In an album. It was taken in 1928'. [...]

'Do you still look at family albums?'

'No, but I had a sort of feeling today that I'd like to remind myself of those times, and see what I was like before I knew you, and when I was always well.. Bring it here'. [...]

'I was a scream in those days', she said. [...]

'Do you regret those days?'

'No', replied Marcelle acidly: 'but I regret the life I might have had'. [...]

'I've got fatter, haven't I?'

'Yes'. [...]

'That's ten years ago'. [...]

'What did you do yesterday?' he asked her. 'Did you go out?'

Marcelle waved her hand wearily and answered: 'No, I was tired. I read for a bit, but Mother kept on interrupting me about the shop'.

'And today?'

'I did go out today', she said, gloomily. 'I felt I ought to get some air and see some people in the street. So I walked down as far as the Rue de la Gaîté, and enjoyed it; and I wanted to see Andrée'.

some characteristics of a powerful speaker as defined by Wardhaugh,<sup>6</sup> Brown and Yule.<sup>7</sup> Marcelle's questions are dictated by politeness, seeking reciprocal information ('et toi, mon vieux?' p. 12 line 10 ('and how are you, old boy?'), 'Et toi?' (p. 14 line 14) ('and you?') or confirmation ('J'ai grossi, hein?' p. 13 line 26) ('I've got fatter, haven't I?'). Her comments err on the side of distraction, and it is not long before Mathieu acts on these linguistic signals to inquire after the source of her worries: 'Qu'est-ce qui ne va pas?' (p. 12 line 9) ('What's the matter?'). Instead of answering truthfully, Marcelle flouts the maxim of quality by giving a short, insufficient reply and then turns the focus away from herself.<sup>8</sup>

The conversation having taken a nostalgic turn, Mathieu again shows that he is the more powerful speaker this time by embarking upon a less emotional, more neutral subject: how Marcelle spent yesterday. She recounts her activities in enough detail and, in line with the rules of turn-taking, asks about Mathieu's movements.<sup>9</sup> When Mathieu mentions an encounter with Ivich, a rival for his affections, Marcelle is brought out of her inattention and threatens the smooth continuance of the dialogue because she herself feels threatened (pp. 15-16). Indeed, an unexpectedly sharp reaction takes the form of a twelve line harangue on Ivich, including two exclamative sentences and two rhetorical questions. Her nervous state (p. 16 line 13) has propelled her into a stronger position, but this is short-lived because Mathieu regains control through an imperative, 'Regarde-moi' (p. 16 line 19) ('Look at me'), and a frank question, 'Qu'est-ce que tu as?' (p. 16 line 22) ('What's the matter?'). Again Marcelle breaks the maxim of quality by replying untruthfully: 'Je n'ai rien [...] ' (p. 16 line 23) ('Nothing').

As if to escape from the intense matter in hand, from the oppressive 'coquillage'<sup>10</sup> ('sea shell'), Mathieu physically liberates himself through movement, getting up and going to the cupboard, and once more tries to diffuse tension by changing subject. On this occasion meaningful behaviour realised by bodily movements ('kinesic behaviour') combines with a change in topic in an attempt to regain control over the situation. But even this inoffensive anecdote about the tramp encountered on the way to Marcelle's acts as another catalyst for Marcelle who remarks 'Ta vie est pleine d'occasions manquées' (p. 17 line 13) ('Your life is full of missed opportunities'), a blunt observation which constitutes an affront to his positive face.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, in

<sup>6</sup> Wardhaugh, R., *How Conversation Works*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> Brown, P. and Yule, W., *Discourse Analysis*, (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1983).

<sup>8</sup> The maxim of quality consists in saying what one believes is true. It is one of four instances of conversational behaviour observed by H. Paul Grice in the 1970s. The other three are the maxim of quantity, pertaining to the appropriate amount of information being given to the listener; the maxim of relation which demands that the utterance is relevant; and the maxim of manner requires speech to be clear and concise. See Grice, H.P., 'Logic and conversation', in *Syntax and Semantics, III: Speech Acts*, ed. by Cole, P. and Morgan, J.L. (New York: Academic Press, 1975), pp. 41-58.

<sup>9</sup> Turn-taking refers to the sequential nature of conversation. The interaction unfolds as contributions are added by participants. We can therefore see what an utterance is doing by the place it occupies in the conversation. Usually the most powerful speaker has the longest turns and initiates the sub-parts of conversations. Dialogue can be analysed as sequences of connected pairs of contributions, often called 'adjacency pairs', for example: initiation-response, question-answer, greeting-greeting.

<sup>10</sup> The motif of 'coquillage' recurs throughout the novel, and indicates the impenetrable, unchanging nature of a particular situation. In this way, it is a symbolic form of the *en-soi*.

<sup>11</sup> Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson describe the concept of face as one's public self-image. It needs to be maintained in the course of our dealings with others. 'Negative face' is the desire to be

the middle of justifying his non-involvement with the tramp, Mathieu loses conviction and leaves a sentence unfinished: 'Ce qu'il y a ...' (p. 17 line 34) ('The fact is ...'). It is Marcelle who now holds the psychological power over a waylaid, unsure Mathieu, and is able not only to say condescendingly 'Mon pauvre vieux' ('Poor old boy'), but also categorises him, 'Je te connais bien là. Ce que tu as peur du pathétique!' (p. 17 line 39) ('That's very like you. You're so afraid of anything sentimental'), which is the ultimate disempowering act of rendering the Other a quantifiable object.

Again Mathieu alters the tone of the discussion at the height of their irritability. Consciously lowering his status in the conversation, he gives in by agreeing with Marcelle and then appeals to her positive face through the suggestion that she is a determining factor in his actions. Her unconvinced retort (p. 19 lines 5-12) is met with a simple, reasonable statement, but the accusatory tone increases still further in five lines (p. 19 lines 123-127) containing various second person singular pronouns: 'te' x 5, 'toi-meme' ('yourself'), 'ton' ('your') x 2, 'tu' ('you') x 5. Mathieu slows down the pace of verbal assault by repeating something Marcelle said, reflecting upon it, rejecting it, and re-explaining his intention. In a subsequent attempt to hurt the Other, Marcelle attributes to freedom, a concept dear to Mathieu, a negative property: 'c'est ton vice' (p. 19 line 31) ('It's your vice'). This at last has the desired effect of subordinating Mathieu's rationality to the raw emotion of anger: he poses a quasi-threatening question 'Que veux-tu qu'on fasse d'autre?' (p. 19 lines 32-33) ('What else can a man do?').

Even after the crescendo of criticism, Mathieu asks for the third time what is troubling Marcelle and, for the third time, she refuses to elaborate. To create greater intimacy and confidence, he moves closer to Marcelle, persisting in his search for the truth, not as before with an interrogative sentence, but with a declarative: 'tu vas me dire ce qu'il y a' (p. 21 line 7) ('You must tell me what's the matter'). When the revelation is finally made, it is in the simplest of forms, 'Ça y est' ('It has happened'), and when a course of action is needed it is requested directly, 'Qu'est-ce qu'on fait?' (p. 21 line 27) ('And what's to be done?'). Mathieu's automatic suggestion 'on le fait passer, non?' ('Well, I suppose one gets rid of it, eh?') is taken as a definitive indication of his preference, as a conversational implicature. Both characters harbour expectations based on assumptions about a particular situation, that of pregnancy, yet this macrocontext differs from the microcontext of what Mathieu actually says, of the presupposition embedded in his sentence. The tag word 'non?' conveys expectancy and a need to solicit confirmation, but it should be at this point that they seize the opportunity to 'reinvent' their choices, to modify past patterns of thinking and behaviour.

Despite the fluctuations of power between the speakers, each of them in the final sentences seeks assurances from the other: Marcelle needs to know that she is still desirable and lovable as an expectant mother, and Mathieu needs to be told that he

unimpeded in what one does. When one uses polite formulae, one is attending to the negative face needs of one's interlocutor, by trying to avoid or at least minimise the imposition made. 'Positive face' is the desire for approval, the need for at least some wants to be shared by others. In the text, Marcelle is not concerned with demonstrating her regard for Mathieu, or with making him feel at ease - just the opposite in fact. Refer to Brown, P. and Levinson, S., 'Universals in language usage: politeness phenomena', in *Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction*, ed. by Goody, E.N. (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1978), pp. 56-289.

is not to blame for the pregnancy. The balance of conversational power seems to have settled down to an uneasy equality, with each partner able to maintain or destroy the felicity conditions for harmonious speech.<sup>12</sup> Transcendental freedom at this point is on a precarious footing. Mathieu, especially, is skilled at anticipating the perlocutionary effects of his speech acts whether in order to placate the other or to lead her back to reason.<sup>13</sup> However, in their next and last face to face encounter (pp. 335-345), Mathieu behaves in a different way, and at successive stages refuses doggedly to employ positive face strategies. In fact both characters approach the conversation with contrasting script assumptions,<sup>14</sup> that is, they have antithetical ideas about the sequential progression of their dialogue: Marcelle wishes to marry and to keep the child, while Mathieu has acquired the money for an abortion. Being situated on a discourse level other than that of the characters, the reader already knows the minds of Mathieu and Marcelle, has noted the precursory signs of discord, and is prepared for the disappointing and unexpected reception of the maxims of conversational cooperation.

Right from the start of the last dialogue between Mathieu and Marcelle, the felicity conditions are not fulfilled. Marcelle's use of terms of endearment ('mon chéri'/'darling', 'mon vieux'/'old boy', 'mon pauvre vieux'/'my poor old boy'), her emphatic greeting ('Salut, salut!'/ 'hello, hello' p. 336 line 3) and caresses are not returned by Mathieu with warmth or enthusiasm. Her gesture of desired intimacy – drawing Mathieu to sit on the bed – is spoilt by the latter's inappropriate, unromantic remark 'Ce qu'il fait chaud, chez toi' (p. 336 line 30) ('It's very hot in here'). Then Mathieu's wounded hand, belonging to that set of hated things, objects, disrupts Marcelle's conceived set-up. From this moment, she plays at being an attentive wife, seeing to his bandage, light-heartedly scolding him, determining his whereabouts the night before (pp. 337-339).

- C'est une vilaine plaie, comment as-tu fait ton compte? Tu avais un coup dans le nez?
- Mais non. C'est hier soir, au "Sumatra".
- Au "Sumatra"? [...]
- C'est une fantaisie de Boris, répondit-il. Il avait acheté un surin, il m'a mis au défi de me le planter dans la main.
- Et toi, naturellement, tu t'es empressé de le faire. Mais tu es complètement piqué, mon pauvre chéri, tous ces moutards te feront tourner en bourrique. Regardez-moi cette pauvre patte saccagée. [...]
- Tu es bien avec moi? demanda Marcelle.

<sup>12</sup> Felicity conditions are the criteria which have to be fulfilled for a speech act to be successful. Several kinds of felicity conditions have been distinguished, both social and linguistic: for example, speakers have to be sincere when they perform a speech act such as making a promise; asking a question presupposes that the other will answer. On speech acts see especially Searle, J.R., *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1969). Also Brown, P. and Levinson, P. discuss felicity conditions in *Politeness*, (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1987).

<sup>13</sup> Perlocutionary effects are those effects brought about by an utterance in the particular circumstances in which it is uttered.

<sup>14</sup> Schank, R. and Abelson, R. introduce the idea of sequentially and non-sequentially ordered information in *Scripts, Plans, Goals and Understanding: An Enquiry into Human Knowledge Structures*, (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1977), pp. 36-46.

- Mais oui.
- Tu n'en as pas l'air. [...]
- Donne la patte.
- Lèche! [...]
- Qu'est-ce que je vais faire de cette horreur? Quand tu seras parti, j'irai le jeter dans la caisse à ordures. [...]
- Alors, Boris t'a lancé un défi? Et tu t'es massacré la main? Quel grand gosse! Est-ce qu'il s'en est fait autant?
- Ma foi non, dit Mathieu.

Marcelle rit:

- Il t'a bien eu! [...]
- Ivich était là?
- Quand je me suis coupé?
- Oui.
- Non. Elle dansait avec Lola. [...]
- La! Ça y est. Vous vous êtes bien amusés?
- Comme ça.
- C'est beau le "Sumatra"? Tu sais ce que je voudrais? Que tu m'y emmenes une fois.
- Mais ça te fatiguerait, dit Mathieu contrarié.
- Oh! pour une fois... On ferait ça en grande pompe, il y a si longtemps que je n'ai bien, on ira cet automne. C'est promis?
- Promis.

Marcelle toussa avec embarras: pas fait de sortie avec toi. [...]

- Tu veux? dit Marcelle.
- Écoute, dit-il, de toute façon, ça ne pourrait pas être avant l'automne: ces temps-ci, il va falloir que tu te réposes sérieusement et puis, ensuite, c'est la fermeture annuelle de la boîte. Lola part en tournée pour l'Afrique du Nord.
- Eh
- Je vois bien que tu m'en veux un peu, dit-elle.
- Moi?
- Oui... J'ai été bien déplaisante avant-hier.
- Mais non. Pourquoi?
- Si. J'étais nerveuse.
- On l'aurait été à moins. Tout est de ma faute, mon pauvre petit.
- Tu n'as rien à te reprocher, dit-elle, dans un cri de confiance. Tu n'as jamais rien eu à te reprocher.

(pp. 337-339)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> 'It's a nasty wound, how did it happen? Have you been fighting?'

'Of course not. It was yesterday evening: at the Sumatra'.

'At the Sumatra?' [...]

'It was some nonsense of Boris's', he repeated. 'He had bought a dagger, and challenged me to stick it in my hand'.

'And you, of course, promptly did so. But you're completely dotty, my poor darling, these rotten friends of yours will make an utter fool of you if you aren't careful. Look at that poor ravaged paw'. [...]

This time Marcelle is the primary actant: out of twelve speech acts when enquiring about the night club soirée, she asks ten questions, gives out three exclamations and utters two imperative sentences. Mathieu, meanwhile, answers succinctly and provides barely enough information to satisfy Marcelle's curiosity. The whole exchange is reminiscent of a domestic scene, an image which is confirmed by Mathieu's thought that a word uttered by Marcelle, 'une sortie' ('an evening out'), possesses conjugal connotations (p. 338 line 39). Eventually, Mathieu's lack of spontaneity in words and actions gives Marcelle the signal that he resents her, so bringing to the surface her old insecurities (p. 339 line 9). He withholds any 'mot tendre' ('word of affection') or 'mot de pardon' ('word of forgiveness') and this act of omission comprises a face threatening act.

Unwilling to bear the emotionally-charged atmosphere, Mathieu produces the scapegoat, the object in the form of money, which in one gesture silences Marcelle, makes her hesitant and disorientated. While she manages only to repeat 'Cinq mille francs' (p. 339 line 37) ('five thousand francs') or construct half a sentence (p. 340 line 7), Mathieu assumes power by telling Marcelle where to have the abortion, to guess the source of the money, and to come out of her silence.

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'Are you loving me?' asked Marcelle.  
'Of course'.  
'You don't look as if you were'. [...]  
'Give me your paw'. [...]  
'Now lick that!' [...]  
'What am I to do with this loathsome object? When you have gone, I'll go and throw it in the rubbish bin'. [...]  
'So Boris challenged you, did he? And you made a mess of your hand. You silly old boy! And did he do the same?'  
'Not he!' said Mathieu.  
Marcelle laughed: 'So he made a pretty sort of fool of you!' [...]  
'Was Ivich there?'  
'When I cut myself?'  
'Yes'.  
'No. She was dancing with Lola'. [...]  
'There. That's all right now. Did you have a good time?'  
'Not bad'.  
'Is the Sumatra a nice place? I do wish you would take me there one of these days'.  
'But it would tire you', said Mathieu rather irritably.  
'Oh, just for once ... we would make an occasion of it, it's so long since I've had an evening out with you anywhere'. [...]  
'Will you?' said Marcelle.  
'Look here', he said, 'it couldn't be before the autumn anyway: you must look after yourself properly just now, and besides the place will soon be closed for the summer break. Lola is going on tour in North Africa'.  
'Well then, we'll go in the autumn. Is that a promise?'  
'Yes'.  
Marcelle coughed with embarrassment. 'I can see you're a bit annoyed with me'.  
'Annoyed?'  
'Yes ... I was very tiresome the day before yesterday'.  
'Not at all. Why?'  
'Indeed I was. I was nervy'.  
'Well, that was natural. It's all my fault, my poor darling'.  
'You're not in the least to blame', she exclaimed cheerfully, 'you never have been'.



Mathieu has the opportunity to reassure Marcelle, but he again fails to give it and indeed confirms that he no longer loves her (p. 343 line 37). In a reversal of the beginning of the conversation, Marcelle rejects Mathieu's touch and, as though she has acquired clear-sightedness through this harsh knowledge of the truth, she becomes more powerful, giving the orders 'Va-t'en' ('Go'), four times, and 'Reprends ton argent' (p. 344 line 39) ('Take your money with you'). Mathieu, due to guilty feelings and surprise, is the passive participant, allowing his sentences to be left uncompleted or interrupted by Marcelle (p. 344 line 12 to p. 345 line 3). It is interesting from the viewpoint of social intercourse that Mathieu, who initially occupied a position of power through money over the desperate, dependent, pregnant girlfriend, is the one turned away at the end, though it cannot be said that Marcelle in any way controls her 'destiny'.

The relationship between Mathieu and Marcelle breaks down in spite of several endeavours to minimise face threatening acts, to succumb to the Other's transcendental freedom which enslaves oneself. The desire to mean something, to have an essence, to possess the tranquillity of a Thing, led them both at particular stages of the two dialogues to permit the Other to solidify them, to fix them as an *en-soi*. Moreover, by feigning to 'se dire tout' ('tell each other everything'), they only avoid talking about nothing. Speech represents here a manner of keeping quiet which is more subtle, yet less sincere, than silence. In the words of Simone de Beauvoir:

Même au cas où les mots renseignent, ils n'ont pas le pouvoir de supprimer, dépasser, désarmer la réalité: ils servent à l'affronter. Si deux interlocuteurs se persuadent mutuellement qu'ils dominent les événements et les gens sur lesquels ils échangent des confidences, sous prétexte de pratiquer la sincérité, ils se dupent.<sup>16</sup>

In summary, the interactants fail to constantly ensure both the transcendental freedom of the self and effective communication which does not break down. Mathieu and Marcelle often resort to positive face strategies where one deliberately becomes an object for the other, in order to prevent the eruption of resentment which is part of the conversational undercurrent. Their exchanges are thus not entirely open or honest, and both feel trapped, whether through pregnancy or the thought of impending marriage. For want of space, I have not addressed here Marcelle's and Mathieu's respective relationships with Daniel, a third major character in the novel who decides to commit what he considers the ultimate liberating act for a homosexual, marrying Marcelle. But having studied the linguistic aspects of their encounters elsewhere,<sup>17</sup> it is evident that alliances with Daniel do not fare well. He is a character whose sadistic tendency wills him to dominate others. Indeed, the model which restricts the liberty of the Other the most is that of Marcelle and Daniel, the latter dominating the former by means of multifarious linguistic tactics such as topic control, use of assumptions, and

<sup>16</sup> De Beauvoir, S., *La Force de l'Âge*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 29. 'Even in a case where words do convey information, they lack the power to suppress, sidetrack, or neutralize reality; their function is to confront it. If two people manage to convince themselves that they possess any power over the events or people which form the subject of their mutual confidences, then they are deceiving themselves'.

<sup>17</sup> In the fifth chapter of my PhD thesis, entitled 'Language and Philosophy in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Chemins de la liberté*'.

appeals to her positive face. With Mathieu and Daniel there is a propensity for negative face strategies where frankness is sought without much thought for the other person's feelings. Both endeavour to maintain a state of conscious reflectiveness, but this results only in hatred and the impression that the other is free rather than oneself.

The Sartrean character seems to be in an impossible position: no communication or silence cannot be a practical or desirable solution for life in society; a perpetual reflective state is unattainable for man, being reserved only for God; and to practise successful communication, one must win the collaboration of one's fellow conversationalist by safeguarding the individual's face, their public social value or self-image, whilst not forfeiting one's own subjectivity. The best that can be hoped for, if a conclusion is to be drawn from *L'Âge de raison*, is an improved version of the model of relationship between Mathieu and Marcelle, involving a *pour-soi* which flickers on and off. The implication is that one may have to accept, at times, the unreflective identification with some contingent Thing, so that the Other can in turn assert their power of transcendental consciousness and aspire through the medium of human interaction towards a temporary *pour-soi* condition. Although this resolution may not be wholeheartedly Sartrean, falling occasionally into self-deception, it comprises the only vaguely positive interpretation that relationships in *L'Âge de raison* offer.

In his theory of language, Sartre stated that social commitment through writing constitutes an action which is capable of preserving the autonomy of the *pour-soi*, and creates meaning in the world which does not involve the enchaining of another *pour-soi*: 'dans une collectivité qui se reprend sans cesse et se juge et se métamorphose, l'œuvre écrite peut être une condition essentielle de l'action, c'est-à-dire le moment de la conscience réflexive'.<sup>18</sup> Yet nowhere in *L'Âge de raison*, does Sartre demonstrate this relationship between individuals in society, commuting this programme instead to an abstract relationship between a conscious self and society as a whole. After Mathieu leaves Marcelle on hostile terms, renews his suspicions about Daniel's motives, realises that his courtship of Ivich is in vain and his attraction to Odette futile, he finds he cannot even depend on relationships with people representing sectors of society. He does not find total affinity with family in the shape of his brother, sanctimonious Jacques, or his long-time friend Brunet, a member of the Communist Party, or Boris, one of his student corps. What is left is an affiliation with society in general. The dialogues in *L'Âge de raison* show that the legitimate pursuit of one's own face needs, of one's reflective consciousness, often leads the characters to perform speech acts that by their very nature threaten the face needs and transcendental freedom of the Other. The true existentialist character thus sacrifices relationships with individuals for the rare collective benefit of the whole society, where the self can remain both transcendental and free.

Such is the situation in the first two volumes of *Les Chemins de la liberté*, where relationships are centred around Mathieu. In the second half of *La Mort dans l'âme* and in the unfinished *Drôle d'amitié*, Brunet's friendships come under scrutiny in a substitution of protagonist, which Olmeta refers to as one of the transformations char-

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<sup>18</sup> Sartre, J.-P., *Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 195.

acteristic of the cycle's 'cannibalisme littéraire'<sup>19</sup> ('literary cannibalism'). Moreover, Olmeta is not the first commentator to remark upon the mostly positive presentation of relationships with others in the fourth novel, contrasting with the preceding works. Brunet, realising the despair and false hopes of his comrades, manages to reinforce principles which initially lift morale: 'Le P.C. est votre parti, il existe pour vous et par vous, il n'a pas d'autre but que de libérer les travailleurs, il n'a pas d'autre volonté que la volonté des masses. C'est pour ça qu'il ne se trompe jamais. Jamais! Jamais!'<sup>20</sup> ('The C.P. is your party, it exists for and because of you, its only aim is to free workers, its only will is the will of the masses. For that reason it is never wrong. Never! Never!') It would thus be relevant to our understanding of Sartre's view of language and social action conveyed in dialogue to turn to briefly *Drôle d'amitié*.

Speech acts in *Les Chemins de la liberté* have the potential to produce two perlocutionary effects, meaning the effects brought about by an utterance in the particular circumstances in which it is uttered. The performative acts of promising, committing, refusing, judging, defending, threatening, lying – as Sartre set down in his 1944 lecture on 'Le Style dramatique'<sup>21</sup> – go beyond the normal, even trivial, sense in which dialogue furthers the action of a play, to achieve certain intended (liberating or oppressive) effects on the addressee-character. Verbal actions, like physical actions, are above all instrumental: they are actions which transcend the *donné* ('given') towards a chosen end.<sup>22</sup> The first type of perlocutionary effect ensures 'everyday' freedom. It consists in rejecting speech acts which are motivated by external constraints, specific traits of character or unconscious drives. So when Mathieu knows he should say 'Je t'aime' ('I love you') to Marcelle in *L'Âge de raison* but actually does not express love, he ignores what is expected of him, what middle-class decency determines, and instead asserts through language an immediate, 'everyday' freedom. Similarly, his indifferent attitude to imminent war in a scene with Jacques in *Le Sursis*, elicits no words of engagement, but implies he does not care if the existing world of bourgeois values is destroyed. Brunet argues with Schneider in *La Mort dans l'âme* about the efficacy of Soviet Communism, expressing his doubts as a free and independent thinker rather than toeing the Party line. And when he continues to see the Party from the outside in *Drôle d'amitié*, unsettling possibilities come to mind in simple statements, such as 'l'U.R.S.S. sera battue' (p. 1513) ('the U.S.S.R. will be beaten') and 'si le Parti a raison, je suis plus seul qu'un fou; s'il a tort, tous les hommes sont seuls et le monde est foutu' (p. 1515) ('if the Party is right, I'm lonelier than a madman; if it is wrong, everyone is on their own and the world is done for'). These attest again to his individualistic interpretation. All four novels of the cycle appear to achieve this first perlocutionary effect, where characters perform speech acts resulting

<sup>19</sup> Olmeta, M., 'Le cannibalisme littéraire dans *Les Chemins de la liberté*', in *Études sartriennes* VI, Université de Paris X, (1995), p. 114.

<sup>20</sup> Sartre, J-P. *Drôle d'amitié* in *Œuvres romanesques*, ed. Contat, M. and Rybalka, M., (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), p. 1509. First appeared in *Les Temps modernes* in Oct/Nov 1949.

<sup>21</sup> Reprinted in *Un Théâtre de situations*, ed. by Contat, M. and Rybalka, M., (Paris: Folio essais, 1992), p. 35.

<sup>22</sup> Sartre, J-P., *L'Être et le Néant*, (Paris: Tel Gallimard, 1998), p. 560. First published by Gallimard, 1943.

in personal, momentary freedom but which do not necessarily lead to the freedom of the Other.

The second kind of perlocutionary effect produces a metaphysical and moral liberty which depends on the freedom of the Other, and this seems to be restricted to the final volume. In *Drôle d'amitié*, Brunet can be seen abandoning a predisposing complex of traditionally recognisable motives (orthodox Marxism) for 'free' acts of speech, involving pure reflection which reveals a new structure of *motifs* ('causes'), *mobiles* ('motives') and values. Chalais, a stalwart of the P.C., notices that comrades in the camp are repeating a collection of assertions contrary to Party teaching. He locates the source of these with Brunet:

- Ils m'en ont dit de belles.
- Quoi par exemple?
- La guerre n'est pas terminée, l'U.R.S.S. écrasera l'Allemagne, les travailleurs ont le devoir de refuser l'armistice, la défaite de l'Axe sera une victoire pour le prolétariat.  
Il s'arrête pour observer Brunet. Brunet ne dit rien. Chalais ajoute en forçant un peu son rire:
- Il y en a même un qui m'a demandé si les ouvriers parisiens s'étaient mis en grève et si l'on tirait sur les Allemands dans les rues de Paris. Brunet ne dit toujours rien. Chalais se penche vers lui et lui demande doucement:
- C'est toi qui leur as mis ces idées en tête?
- Pas sous cette forme, dit Brunet.
- Sous cette forme ou sous une autre, c'est toi?  
Brunet allume sa pipe. Quelque chose est en train d'arriver.
- Oui, dit-il. C'est moi.

(p. 1489)<sup>23</sup>

Later Brunet even assumes the responsibility of showing an alternative open to his fellow men – escape – thereby attenuating both his and their freedom, even though Schneider is shot in the attempt. This is consistent with the connection Sartre presents in *L'Être et le Néant* between the sphere of action (verbal/political/social action), 'la vie morale' ('moral life') and 'le terrain du droit' ('the domain of law'). There, Sartre

<sup>23</sup> 'They told me corks'.

'What for instance?'

'The war isn't over, the U.S.S.R. will conquer Germany, the workers have the right to refuse the armistice, the defeat of the Axis will be a victory for the proletariat'.

He stopped to look at Brunet. Brunet said nothing. Chalais continued, putting on a slightly forced smile:

'One of them even asked me if the Parisian workers had gone on strike and if Germans were being shot in the streets of Paris'.

Brunet still said nothing. Chalais leant towards him and asked gently:

'Was it you who put these ideas into their heads?'

'Not in that form', said Brunet.

'In that form or another, was it you?'

Brunet lit his pipe. Something was happening.

'Yes', he said. 'It was me'.

defines 'authentic' action as a 'pure transcendence qui porte sa justification dans son existence meme, puisque son etre est choix'<sup>24</sup> ('pure transcendence which carries its justification in its very existence since its being is a choice'). This assertion of one's rights through choice attains a social role as soon as the individual comes into contact with others. It is from the point of view of other people that an action is an 'objet donné d'appréciation morale'<sup>25</sup> ('a given object of moral evaluation'). The Sartrean understanding of transcendence differs from Kant's definition, given that 'situation et motivation ne font qu'un'<sup>26</sup> for Sartre. That is to say, *motif* ('cause'), *mobile* ('motive') and *situation* ('situation') are integrated into acts which, rather than following on from a prior system of values (Kant), themselves decide the fragile values comprising 'ce vers quoi un etre dépasse son etre' ('that toward which a being surpasses its being') or 'le sens et l'au-dela de tout dépassement'<sup>27</sup> ('the meaning and the beyond of all surpassing'). The relationship between Brunet and Schneider in the fourth volume, as Murdoch suggests, is the closest any of the characters get to an experience of human companionship, 'un drôle d'amitié'<sup>28</sup> ('a funny sort of friendship'). Language, fundamentally constituted in our *etre-pour-autrui*, is experiential and affective rather than cognitive in the last volume, until the death of Schneider at least. For Brunet, the source of meaning lies beyond himself, in Schneider: 'Autrui est toujours là, présent et éprouvé comme ce qui donne au langage son sens. Chaque expression, chaque geste, chaque mot est, de mon côté, épreuve concrete de la réalité aliénante d'autrui'.<sup>29</sup> Communication with the Other is, fleetingly in *Drôle d'amitié*, the essential mode in which the subject seeks to captivate and assimilate the freedom of the Other in order to effectuate the (impossible) project of founding its own freedom.

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<sup>24</sup> Sartre, J-P., *L'Être et le Néant*, 1998, p. 572.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 533.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>28</sup> Murdoch, I., *Sartre, Romantic Realist*, 1980, p. 63.

<sup>29</sup> Sartre, J-P., *L'Être et le Néant*, 1998, p. 414. 'The Other is always there, present and experienced as the one who gives to language its meaning. Each expression, each gesture, each word is on my side a concrete proof of the alienating reality of the Other'.