All those Useless Passions: On Sartre, Love, and the Sacred

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In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre describes the human being as a "useless passion", a passion that goes nowhere and is ontologically impossible. This passion is the "reverse of the passion of Christ" It has no reason for being, given that reason can only be granted by being itself, the "*ens causa sui* which religions call God". This passion that is the human being has no justification for existence. Starting from this premise, I will draw connections between "uselessness" and the sacred. Could one of the uses of these useless passions be Sartrean *choice* – the courage that beckons us and our clients towards freedom, responsibility, and self-determination? Drawing on Sartre and partly on Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, we will explore the following questions: Could choice constitute the antidote to the complicit passivity of the present? What are the implications of applying creatively the above themes to the challenges and struggles of the present, personally, relationally, and socially?

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Nowhere fast

In a remarkable passage in *Being and Nothingness* – Part 4, Chapter 3 – Sartre writes:

> Each human reality is at the same time the direct project to metamorphose its own for-itself into an in-itself-for-itself, and the project to appropriate the world as a totality of being-in-itself, in the form of a fundamental quality. (Sartre, 1943/2018, p796, translation modified)

An existentialist mistrusts metaphysics (the *why* of existence) but in the above passage Sartre drafts a version of metaphysics via the notion of an in-itself-for-itself (*en-soi* and *pour-soi*). [i] His version is unusual, only indirectly comparable to Heidegger's, if one reads it as a move from the ontic – everyday reality – to the ontological – the domain of being. Except that being is rendered by Sartre as our *choice* of being.

What does in-itself for-itself mean? For Sartre, being human is a passion, both in the etymological sense of *pathos* (suffering) as well as in the religious sense: *vale of tears* in Christian lore, *balā* in Islamic texts, *dukkha* in Buddhism. Sartre compares religious suffering – Christ's passion *voluntarily* undergone – with the human emotion of love *taking possession* of us. How can the experience of being held captive by love, an experience steeped in our habitual ontic state, ever traverse through to ontology? One answer is that *pour-soi* is also a desire for being: the desire to be a cause in itself.

Being nothing yet being consumed by a thirst to *be*; to flee once and for all the uncertainty of our condition, as Sartre tells us in the next segment:

> Every human-reality is a Passion, in that its project is to lose itself in order to found being and by the same time to constitute the in-itself as escaping contingency by being its own foundation, the *Ens causa sui* [a cause in itself], that the religions know as God. In this way the human being's passion is the opposite of Christ's, because humans lose themselves as humans in order that God should be born. (Sartre, 1943/2018, pp796-97, translation modified)

Only God can be a cause in itself, an *en-soi* and a *pour-soi*, at once an abstraction and a contradiction. We're doomed by fervent yearning and blessed with incidents that briefly pacify our perpetual craving. Those moments when, thirsty, I take the first sip of water and for a few seconds I am both things, *en-soi* and *pour-soi*, conscious of my sense of lack and at the same time fulfilled – both being and conscious of being (Jameson, 2024). But it doesn't last. It can only last in a being such as God, even though "the idea of God is a contradiction". As for us, despite our accidental, near-miraculous grasp of both being and lack of being, "we lose ourselves in vain". The human being, Sartre concludes, is "a useless *passion*". (Sartre, 1943/2018, p797).

This human passion I experience is impossible. It is also a passion *for* the impossible. I am going nowhere fast. Thrown into this world, startled to find myself inside a ship on the jagged waves of contingency, holding tight to a shiny brochure – a catalogue of illustrated certainties

bought in a hurry at a harbour store before departure. I talk excitedly with other passengers, keen to justify my presence here. Then it dawns on me that every passenger has a valid ticket, except me. I have no justification for being here. Will paying a fine justify my presence? I long for penalty and penance as long as it gives me a reason to be. I find it hard to breathe. I hover in pure uncertainty. In the state I find myself in – Heidegger's *Geworfenheit* – I feel entirely *unjustified*. My attempts – in turn bold, anxious, eager, seductive, enraged, amorous, pleading, despairing – to justify my existence as a ticketless traveller are a portfolio of my useless passions. They are vain, in vain, full of hopeless hope. I want to love and be loved, but requited love is an incongruity. For Sartre, love is wanting to be loved and, in that love, to be justified, to be *saved*. Fat chance! Lovers are alone in the world. How could I forget it?

While anxiously considering my fate – ontological uncertainty and certain death – I realize with grim satisfaction that there is no justification for existence, and that there is no justification whatsoever for *my* existence. I try hard to disprove it but realize that my life is merely a faint derivative of groundless existence. I confess that this grim realization produces in me a strange delight, similar perhaps to what one may feel when seeing through one's delusions, even though seeing through one's delusions results in heartache.

But I can't afford to stop here. That would mean giving in to shabby pessimism and parroting mainstream culture's mistake of equating existentialism to nihilism. In the end, it would amount to advocating passivity instead of affectability or *passibility* (Lyotard, 2000), a pure possibility of being affected, of undergoing pathos, something that presupposes active giving.

> If we are in a state of passibility, it's that something is happening to us, and when this passibility has a fundamental status, the donation itself is something fundamental, originary. (Lyotard, 1991, pp110-111)

Passibility implies *activating* a response, a giving of myself that may lead to transformation. Conversely, refusing to admit the groundlessness of my existence is a form of complicity with the grim realities of the present: narcotic art, moronic sex, murderous politics, managerial psychotherapy, genocidal impunity – all the rotting constellations of *necroliberalism*. (Bazzano, 2025). There *are* alternatives, however. There *must* be. As the useless passion that we are, to pursue useless passions by giving ourselves over to transformative art, emancipatory politics, intelligent psychotherapy, genuine love, non-escapist spirituality. Giving ourselves over. Taking refuge in the dust. Not betraying our blind knowledge (Marcel,

1965) of contingency and ontological uncertainty; tending flowers whose seeds push up from the underworld, from the multitude of the dead who walked before us on the crust of this earth-household. An active response. A *choice*.

Subjectivism and the melody of our inner life

Published in 1943, *Being and Nothingness* revitalized philosophy. We know now that this ground-breaking work was not indebted to Heidegger at it was thought at the time, a point already made in the early 1960s by Deleuze in his generous tribute to Sartre a month after his refusal of the Nobel prize. For Deleuze, Sartre's contribution was unique. Not only because of his innovative notions of bad faith, the Other, his theory of liberty, and his idea of the *project* (equivalent to what Deleuze calls *desire*). In Sartre's existential psychoanalysis, one crucially finds "the foundational choices of an individual at the heart of their concrete life" (Deleuze, 2004, p79).

Being is not an abstraction for Sartre. It is the *choice* of being. *Nous sommes nos choix:* we are our choices, he famously asserted (1948/1973). We come into being by choosing. Who and what we are is shaped by the choices we make. Deciding not to choose is a choice. Saying *I had no choice* is a choice. This notion of choice is groundbreaking now as it was when Sartre first formulated it. It is vital to an existential therapy inspired by those "existential atheists", who share the belief that "*existence* comes before essence" (Sartre 1973, p26), an elaboration on Thomas Aquinas' theology. If this axiom is true, then "the human being is responsible for what he/she is" (ibid, p29, translation modified). *Subjectivism* is the name Sartre gives to this courageous stance, without which one would relapse into metaphysics. Sartre's subjectivism gestures towards *singularity* rather than individuality, a medicine for contemporary subjectivism, steeped in "the vulgarest delusion of vanity" and a "barbaric conception of personal identity" (Peirce, 1998 pp2-3).

Contemporary subjectivism is barbaric because it converts eventness into substance; because it digs up a crude notion of personhood from becoming; because it places a naïve, rigid notion of who one is on an illusory bedrock of personhood. In the words of Henri Bergson:

> The truth is that there is neither a rigid, immovable substratum nor distinct states passing over it like actors on a stage. There is simply the continuous melody of our inner life – a melody which is going on and will go on, indivisible, from the beginning to the end of our conscious existence. Our personality is precisely that. (2007, p159)

Deaf to the continuous melody, present-day subjectivism is steeped in "the piety of the personal", a stance whose disturbed refrain is *I feel,* a catchphrase trumpeted as a non-negotiable demand.

> You don't know, you are not me, you have no right to speak about it. it's my experience and because it's mine, only mine, it's the truth, the bedrock truth, because I felt it to be. 'Honour' it or begone. End of argument". (Massumi, 2025, p76).

I've heard self-titled existential therapists describing the core of the existential stance in precisely those terms. This is the triumph of narcissistic subjectivism. It has nothing to do with existential therapy and existential thought. It does not stand up to scrutiny even in terms of the rudimentary principles of psychology as conveyed by William James (1950):

> If we could say in English, 'it thinks' as we say 'it rains' … we should be stating the fact most simply and with the minimum of assumption. As we cannot, we must simply say that *thought goes on* (pp. 224-225, emphasis in the original).

Far from being a heroic, existential/individualistic stance, saying that I am responsible for myself implies that I am responsible for everyone. The "deeper meaning of existentialism" implies that "in choosing for oneself one chooses for everyone" (Sartre, 1948/1973, p29, translation modified).

To choose is to become a heretic

This existential stance alone, conveyed by *choice*, takes secularism to its logical consequences". Being able to choose is, etymologically speaking, to become a heretic, from the Greek *hairetikos*. Conversely, being swept away by a pseudo-sacred non-event is to engage in pantomimes of surrender from our stale catalogue of repetition compulsions. To be passively swept away is to exhume the dead god and find in the derangement of sensations caused by the momentary exhalation of its carcass something to hold on to – an utterly dead 'higher power' to which we attach the first available tag.

In Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* this tag is 'love' – as lived by two of the novel's protagonists, Karenina and Vronsky: a narcissistic love, a viscous shadow of god ultimately manifesting as bland indifference and shallow, manipulative pseudo-connections with others (Symington, 1993). Most of us don't travel to the bitter end of narcissistic love, preferring to lounge contentedly on astro turf. Either way, ontological insecurity is not appeased but exacerbated.

"The existentialist – Sartre tells us – is strongly opposed to a certain type of secular moralism which seeks to suppress God at the least possible expense" (1948/1973, p33). To do away with God, to be able to say with Nietzsche *God is dead* and truly mean it – that is a risky proposition. Not only are we abandoning the notion of a creator (any Tom, Dick Dawkins, and Sam Harris can do that). What we are forsaking are also the *shadows of God*: anything that supplies us with an artificial ground for existence. We must vanquish the shadows of God too, Nietzsche reminds us in his delightful and groundbreaking *Gay Science* (1882/1974). To say 'God is dead' affirms the groundlessness of existence: aim, unity and purpose are not part of existence but attempts to make life liveable. Only then secularism takes on its full deconstructive power.

One could stretch Sartre's courageous affirmation of choice to include Nietzsche's light-footed provocation to love our destiny, what he calls (amending Spinoza's *amor dei*) *amor fati* (1882/1974):

> I want to learn more and more to see as beautiful what is necessary in things; then I shall be one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*: let that be my love henceforth! I do not want to wage war against what is ugly. I do not want to accuse; I do not even want to accuse those who accuse. Looking away shall be my only negation. And all in all and on the whole: someday I wish to be only a Yes-sayer (p276).

Standard interpretations of Nietzsche's shadows of God refer to moral institutions, traditional religion, and western metaphysics. This reading does not include those insidious ideological constructs which despite their allure, peddle the same old suburban metaphysics, be they mind-numbing Mills and Boon, Fifty-shades-of-Gray-type 'transgressions', or indolent regurgitations of pseudo-existential cliches.

Love and the ideology of love

Reading again *Anna Karenina* after many years – a surprise gift from my friend and existential therapist Devang Vaidya – was like reading an altogether different book. As a younger man, I revelled in the high drama of Karenina and Vronsky's doomed love affair. In comparison, one of the other narratives present in the novel, the happy union of Levin and Kitty, seemed unremarkable. This may be the established view, given that in several adaptations Levin and Kitty are relegated to the background. The kernel of their relationship is love, not drama. But it's the drama rollercoaster that grabs our attention.

963 pages of the novel are neatly encapsulated within that celebrated opening: “All happy families resemble each other; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way” (Tolstoy, 2010, p1). The unhappy family makes a good story. High drama, suffering, and reactivity make for a gripping story, and many of us appear identify a life truly lived with intensity. But there is no choice in high drama – hence no freedom. The person is swept over their feet, bewitched, ensnared. In tragedy, the ancient Greeks taught us, the protagonists struggle with fate, something that can’t be altered. There was no distinction at the time between fate and *destiny*, whose meaning is direction and whose ethos is choice. A mechanical understanding of the unconscious would confirm the sorry state of the person dominated by fate, but such an understanding is deterministic. It ignores the fact that while we cannot fully know the motivations for our actions, there is always a crucial element of choice at work. Choice makes possible the actualization of destiny – which is why Sartre is central to this investigation. The same may be said by an insight articulated by Christopher Bollas (1996):

> A person who is fated, who is fundamentally interred in an internal world of self and object representations that endlessly repeat the same scenarios, has very little sense of a future that is at all different from the internal environment they carry around with them. The sense of fate is a feeling of despair to influence the course of one's life. A sense of destiny, however, is a different state, when the person feels he is moving in a personality progression that gives him a sense of steering his course (p..41).

The protagonists of ancient tragedy reach a moment of understanding of who they are when their trajectory painfully accords with the dictates of fate. For the ancients, freedom and necessity coincide. Even the Gods feared the *Moirai*, the sister goddesses *Moira*, *Tychē*, *Anankē*, impersonating respectively pure fate, chance, and necessity. But this is not the case with us today. Our gods are rumoured dead even though their shadows persist. For us moderns when fate takes over it may be because we have chosen not to choose out of chronic weakness of the will. To the present-day fatalist, things just happen. Something else takes over – less numinous than trivial, less graceful than banal despite the dress up. *We had no choice*! – we say, fancying ourselves as the protagonists of some romantic novel. But even though we are buffeted by the tidal waves of high drama, even when we hear the sirens’ song – a song of distance and unquenchable longing, we remain tied to the mast of our false self.

When we choose not to choose, we are swamped by the exhilarating, utterly false feeling of stepping beyond good and evil. I know because I've done it many times, driven by foolishness, and I have seen others do it, some of my clients included. Spirited away by narcissistic love, fancying I had moved into the sublime, past good and evil. I had no choice. Good and evil firmly belong to the domain of *choice*, which is for Sartre the domain of freedom. Deciding to be swept over by events is the zenith of delusion. *Anna Karenina* elucidates this point with astonishing clarity.

I am not singing a paean to dullness. Far from it. There is tremendous ecstasy in non-narcissistic love, but its exultations are of a different order. Wide awake at 3am during a Zen retreat recently, I sat up in bed reading through tears of joy turning to laughter turning to tears the section known as Levin's 3 days of ecstasy. It strongly reverberated through my heart and limbs and what touched me the most was the fact that Levin's joy, the joy of a man in love, extends to everyone and everything he encounters.

> What seemed remarkable to Levin was that they were all perfectly transparent to him that day, and that by means of little signs … he recognized the soul of each and clearly saw that they were all kind … That was evident from the way they spoke to him, and the tenderness and affection with which they all, even strangers, looked at him. (Tolstoy, 2010, p473)

> What he then saw he never saw again. Two children going to school, some pigeons that flew down from the roof, and a few loaves put outside a baker's window by an invisible hand touched him particularly. These loaves, the pigeons, and the two boys seemed creatures not of this earth. It all happened at the same time; one of the boys ran after a pigeon and looked smilingly at Levin; the pigeon flapped its wings and fluttered up, glittering in the sunshine amid the snowdust that trembled in the air; from the window came the scent of fresh-baked bread and the loaves were put out. All these things were so unusually beautiful that Levin laughed and cried with joy (p476).

A similar experience –clarified, rectified, amplified – takes place in Levin's heart towards the end of the novel when his genuine, agonizing search for meaning, having witnessed the death of one of his beloved brothers, having read and re-read Plato, Spinoza, Kant, Schelling, Hegel, and Schopenhauer, reaches a stirring resolution. It is occasioned by a conversation with Theodore, one of the peasants who worked for him and who had given a straightforward answer to Levin's abstract questions about morality and religion by

saying that while some live to stuff their own belly, others live by their soul and remember God. At that moment, Levin was ready to hear it, and it broke his heart open. As in Zen stories when a pebble strikes a bamboo shoot, or in overhearing a line from the *Heart Sutra* being chanted nearby, someone's heart/mind is hit by a thunderbolt. Walking excitedly in long strides, later sitting quietly away from the heat, Levin comes to understand that he knew this all along:

> I sought for miracles … a physical miracle would have tempted me. But here is a miracle, the one possible, everlasting miracle, all around me, and I did not notice it! (Tolstoy, 2010, p937).

Levin and Kitty are swimming in the *silver river of life*. While its course is not always smooth, their sincere affection for one another is able to contain sorrows alongside joys and it has the capacity to include others. They *press on*, able to weather life's tribulations thanks to their deep trust in life and in their benevolence for one another.

By contrast, Anna and Vronsky descend into a whirlpool of misery born of self-centredness, pride, and fatuous drama. Their lavishly uncreative existence needs constant propping up, each excitement concealing an unappeasable need that is never satisfied – what in Buddhist lore we call the life of a hungry ghost.

In my life I have known both and learned the hard way which one is to be cherished and which must be avoided like the plague.

Intensity revisited

We believe what we want to believe and there is little one can do to rectify misinterpretations. I am referring to the shrinking of often rich layers of meaning to a lower denominator shaped by fashionable views.

For instance, I brought out in some writings my lifelong love of Nietzsche (e.g., Bazzano, 2006, 2010, 2013, 2016, 2018, 2019), trying to show that he is far from the caricature of the late-romantic immoralist full of unruly bluster. I tried to show that he was a true ascetic with a much higher sense of morality than the socially conditioned, blind obeisance to the set of ethical rules we are normally acquainted with. I spelt out that there are 'developmental' phases to his Dionysus; that the only Dionysus our culture is able to grasp is trapped in sex and circuses; that Dionysian energies are not reducible to

so-called archetypes, and that their mature manifestations narrow down to the *will to create*, via sublimation or spiritualization; that Nietzsche is not a destroyer but a painstaking deconstructor of false certainties, including the false certainty of dull hedonism; that he is not an apostle of chaos but a lover of *askesis*, the only thing that fosters a degree of freedom; that freedom does not mean doing what one pleases but is wedded to response-ability; that his atheism is imbued with the deepest spirituality; that his profound thinking is suffused with gracefulness, impertinence, and infinite subtlety; with the spur-of-the-moment, the off-the-cuff, the light-hearted, and the improvisational.

Freedom, De Beauvoir (1947/2015) taught us, is *ambiguous*, entailing the ability to be other than what we are, to affirm what matters to us through active commitment. At the same time, freedom is *situated*; it is social and material, empowered and inhibited in equal measure by others and the world. This notion of existential freedom is a powerful antidote to the current hegemony of licence perpetuated by neoliberal ideology, our false freedom as entrepreneurs/consumers to renew our enslavement to the market and our own narrow agendas as neoliberal subjects.

Dismayed as I might be when my use of language becomes warped when reaching others, I agree that this is one of the constitutive factors of what Sartre calls the *sacred* aspect of language. We so want to fascinate the other with our language, Sartre tells us. We want to become an *object* to the other. In so doing, I become vulnerable to the sorcery of the other's capacity to randomly agree, manipulate, and refute my meaning, and this ends up displacing my words. "Hell is other people!" – the final sentence of Sartre's play *No Exit* (1989, p45). In this context the 'we', is an illusion, Sartre tells us and provides very little ground for building the celebrated intersubjectivity beloved of many humanistic/existential colleagues.

Is there a majoritarian theme at work, dictated by popular taste, that veers by default towards a perversion of meaning and reduce meaning to established banalities?

The general reception *Anna Karenina* received over decades will assist us here. Trapped in romantic thinking and at times using familiar existential tropes, it misreads what Tolstoy is saying. The misreading goes something like this: Anna is one of the few characters in the entire novel who is not driven by bad faith. Unlike the whole of St Petersburg's Society, she is incapable of keeping her affair secret. Anna and Vronsky are

obeying fate in their authentic and exclusive pursuit of love. The reverberations of pain caused to others don't matter because the magnitude of their love exalts them beyond reproach. They embrace intense feelings, which is a more authentic way to live, because authentic life is intensity. Nothing else matters but the intensity of subjective emotions. The first objection is that their own very subjective perspective, magnified to a high degree, bends the neutral intensity of life (a.k.a. *affect*) at the service of their delusion. A more serious problem is that in this mode of being the future is passively encapsulated, and it becomes populated with delusional premonitions that bolster the presumed significance of the self. The accident at St Petersburg's station at the beginning of the novel when a railwayman is crushed by a train is interpreted by Anna as a bad omen – *for her.* Another word for fatalism is overblown narcissism. My fate is sealed, and by obeying fate my life becomes adventurous. But premonition under the rubric of fate is not adventure. The future is *foreshadowed*, it will not bring anything new but the mere unfolding of fate or, in psychoanalytic terms, the perpetual re-enactment of compulsive familiar/familial scenarios.

As a spatial representation of time, foreshadowing indicates the shadow preceding the object that we may encounter while approaching a bend in the path (Morson, 2015). The future is not open, as in *ad-venture* (something *to-come*, unforeseeable), but already given, and perceived as independent of our choices in the present.

Anna's sensitivity and heightened perception, even her love for Vronsky, revolves around herself, and her capacity to feel intensely. The other person is absent, except as an exclusive imaginary object invested with the power and the curse to make her happy – what we would nowadays call co-dependence.

These traits apply to Anna only. With his limitations, emotional immaturity, and zealous self-regard, Vronsky is more akin to a typical normotic CEOs or financial speculator than a romantic lover. Anna's loss of will is consciously willed. She chooses to tell herself that she has no choice, that resistance is futile. In Sartrean terms, her fatalism and passivity are a *choice*, For Sartre, we can surrender or resist at will. In this resides the dignity of existential choice, and in its wake arises our responsibility, or readiness (*ability*) to *respond* to the effect our choice have on others.

Immanence and the sacred

In *Theory of Religion*, Georges Bataille (1989) links the sacred to the *festival*, described as "the fusion of human life" (p54). Whether centred on ritual sacrifices to deities and spirits so as to propitiate the harvest or, as in Zen, burning incense and bowing to the altar to symbolize the aspiration to give one's life for the benefit of all beings, or on the momentary suspension of social roles and hierarchies in the carnival, festivals and rituals give us a glimpse of the sacred. Even though finite, the ritual points to infinity. Even though incorporated in a concatenation of useful works which make up our human life as we know it, it regales us with a glimpse of a 'useless' domain – the domain proper to the sacred. It briefly restores us to immanence, a rare dimension of *continuity* with the world – through bacchic rituals or religious rites that suspend the inherent discontinuity of human existence. Ultimately, "the festival is not a true return to immanence, but rather an amicable reconciliation, full of anguish, between the incompatible necessities" (Bataille, 1989, p55). Closely linked to the sacred and the festival is *sacrifice*. Contemporary sensibilities shun the very notion of sacrifice as unsound, but the Latin etymology of sacrifice simply means to make (*facere*) sacred (*sacer*). Bataille's merit is to have expanded on the narrower anthropological/sociological classical views (Hubert & Mauss, 1981) and to re-describe sacrifice as pure expenditure (*dépense*).

Sartre was critical of Bataille's work but also appreciated it for belonging, alongside Rousseau's *Confessions*, Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, and most significantly Pascal's *Pensée*, to what he calls "passionate geometries" (Sartre, 2013, p49). To these unconventional works I would add some of Kierkegaard's, especially those penned with the pseudonyms *Johannes the Seducer*, *Procul*, and *Inter et Inter*. What unites all these works is their intensely personal, off-the-record, and often anguished expression. They attain a mesmeric fusion of intellectual rigour and ecstatic rapture, unheard of in conventional philosophy, a domain where reason and passion are usually held at a hygienic distance with the calamitous effect that each is lured into monochrome paths: reason degenerating into rationalization, passion collapsing into irrationality. With the sole exception of Rousseau, what unites the above works is their complicity in the sacred.

Sartre was indifferent to the sacred, and when labelling Bataille a "new mystic", he used the term disparagingly (2013). Nevertheless, in a section of *Being and Nothingness* titled "Concrete relations with the other", he writes of the first dimension of language as *sacred*:

> The Other is always there, present and experienced as that which gives language its meaning. Each expression, each gesture, each word is, on my side, a particular trial of the Other's alienating reality. The psychiatric patient is not alone in being able to say – as, for example, in psychotic delusions of control – 'Someone is stealing my thoughts'. Rather, the very fact of expression is a theft of one's thought since the thought needs the help of an alienating freedom in order to constitute itself as an object. That is why this first dimension of language – insofar as I make use of it for the other – is *sacred*. A sacred object is, in effect, an object in the world that points to a transcendence beyond the world. Language reveals to me the freedom of the person silently listening to me, i.e., his transcendence. (Sartre, 2018/1943, p495).

Sartre has been understood as one who foreswears immanence in the name of a subjectivist and rationalist stance. Both his first book, *The Transcendence of the Ego* (1937/1991) and *Being and Nothingness* (1943/2018) confirm that view. It is not implausible, however, to suggest that Sartre anticipates future thinkers of immanence such as Deleuze and Foucault by coming close to drafting an ontology of pure immanence (Gilliam, 2017). An essential characteristic of the philosopher of immanence is evident in one aspect of Sartre's philosophical and political stance, described by Deleuze as *totalization*: "a totalization in which politics, the imagination, sexuality, the unconscious, and the will are all united in the rights of human totality". This quality is even more desirable at a time when "we continue to live on like so many scattered limbs". (Deleuze, 2004, p79).

Immanence means "remaining within" this phenomenal world, and it implies that the subject is conditioned by, as well as inextricably embedded in the world like water in water (Bazzano, 2017). This notion is pivotal within *Affect Therapy*, a composite approach in the making which capitalizes on Spinoza, Nietzsche, and post-existentialist thinkers, presenting the subject (the 'I') as semblance, as well as *a life* (Deleuze, 2001): a subjectivity without a subject, a coalition of pre-personal and pre-individual currents immanent to the phenomenal world. The objective is "to reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I" (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p3).

Conclusion

Sartre would not agree with the view that a mode of being where it is no longer important to say 'I' edges close to the domain of the sacred. My claim is that my own psychodrama of greed, aversion, and delusion is nevertheless attenuated when the 'I' is attenuated, and that

this provides me with a scent of the sacred, a 'domain' whose main characteristic is 'uselessness' – outside the bounds of gain and transaction. Associating the sacred with uselessness turns it into one of the useless passions that we – useless passions ourselves in Sartre's compelling turn of phrase – pursue alongside love and work. It also links the sacred to *play*. Nietzsche would agree, as he valued play as the highest way of being in the world (1993). And so would Winnicott (1971) for whom play is itself a form of therapy.

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[i] Shortly before passing away in 2021, my friend, the existential therapist and Sartrean scholar Richard Pearce. sent me a box with Sartre's entire philosophical oeuvre. I was thankful for his generosity but also felt daunted. Studying Sartre was not a priority at the time. 4 years have gone by, and Sartrean thought suddenly appears to me as urgent as ever. Richard understood my work. He knew, I like to think, that I would get round to Sartre's writings eventually. He was right, and I am very grateful to him.