(a testament to our shared sympathy toward Marxism). That said, his suspicion that legal practices, arguments and institutions common to liberal democracies carry the potential for immense violence and destruction needs to be constantly balanced against the reminder that fierce battles were fought within, beyond and against the law and that our current predicament is the result of concrete defeats as much as it is the culmination of immanent tendencies.

Ntina Tzouvala

Existential crisis

Terry Pinkard, *Practice, Power, and Forms of Life: Sartre's Appropriation of Hegel and Marx* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022). 200pp., £28.00 hb., 978 0 22681 324 0

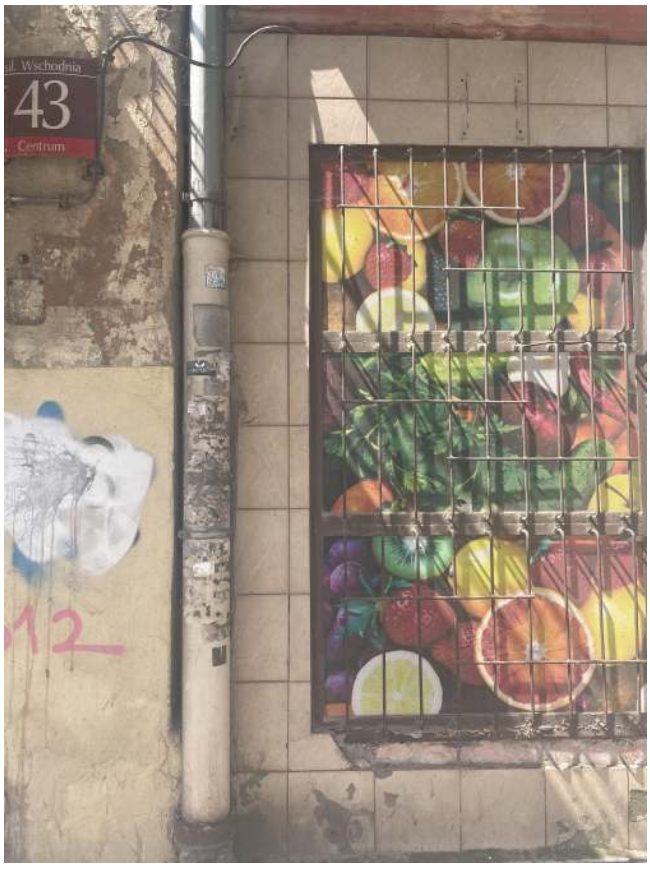
In the space of just three chapters and a 'dénouement,' Terry Pinkard's *Practice, Power, and Forms of Life: Sartre's Appropriation of Hegel and Marx* explicates Jean-Paul Sartre's late work, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), and along the way enters into the most controversial of the debates surrounding the *Critique*'s reception. The novel argument that Pinkard unfolds tracks the continuity and change in the development in Sartre's thought in the fifteen years leading up to the *Critique*. Key to this development was Sartre's newly found appreciation in the postwar years for the Hegelian side of Marxism, coloured as it was by Kojève and Hyppolite. This forced Sartre to rethink the theoretical assumptions that he relied upon earlier in his career, while still holding fast to many of them, incorporating elements of Hegel 'while maintaining his distance from what he understood the Hegelian position to be'. The figure keeping Sartre from leaning fully into Hegel is Heidegger: in the *Critique*, one finds 'reappropriation of some facets of Hegelianism', Pinkard says, but 'all the while firmly committing himself to what he understood to be an anti-Hegelian view' because of his appropriation of Heidegger's thought.

There are two common treatments of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*: either it is read as Sartre's attempt to render his early existentialism and some form of Marxism compatible, or Marxism is conspicuously absent, and the work is treated as a theoretical exploration of neo-anarchism. This is not, however, how Sartre himself described the project of the *Critique*. Sartre at the time considered himself a participant in leftist politics, and this was the context that motivated him to pen the work. Pinkard avoids reducing the *Critique* to pure propaganda – in other words, reading in the *Critique* a clean identity between a shabby practical program and its equally poor theoretical buttressing – while also not disregarding Sartre's politics altogether and treating the *Critique* as detached entirely from Sartre's place in history. This is nowhere more true than in the original and perceptive discussion of Sartre and violence at the midpoint of the book.

At the outset of the *Critique*, Sartre is seeking a dialectical theory of subjectivity that can account for group formation and a sense of first-person plurality. Sartre had argued in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) against the coherence of a collective subject. Groups, metaphysically speaking, are illusions that we have because we fail to appreciate our radical individuality. This precludes any meaningful social or political action. Through his engagement with Hegel, Sartre reconsiders the relation between the first person singular and the first-person plural, or, borrowing from his Hegelian reading, 'the "I" that is a "We," and the "We" that is an "I".' In earlier works, Sartre had rejected the Hegelian subject-object dialectic as one that relies on the presupposition that only individuals are real: groups are merely additive agglomerations of individuals. But, according to Pinkard, Sartre came to see a deep problem in this undialectical conception. *Practice, Power, and Forms of Life* traces Sartre's efforts to dialectically relate the 'I' to the 'We' without subsuming one under the other.

To achieve a robust self-consciousness, Pinkard reminds us that the subject 'confronts his own facticity in acting – including his physical makeup and the institutions and norms of where he finds himself.' This

facticity determines what actions are possible. In this confrontation, the subject has the choice between activity ('spontaneity') and passivity ('inertia'), between appropriating the conditions for oneself by taking responsibility for one's freedom and being buffeted by 'inert' exterior forces without resistance. So far, this maps onto the Being-in-Itself versus Being-for-Itself distinction found in *Being and Nothingness*. What Pinkard brings out with considerable brilliance is the historical dimension of the new term of art, the 'practico-inert', or the inertia *that we create for ourselves* over and above the natural, given facticity of our lives, but that we *do not recognize as self-created*. 'This', Pinkard recounts, 'is the foundation of alienation.'



Agents too often think of themselves not as engaged subjects but as detached objects, machine-like and prey to external forces, and certainly not in a mutual project shared with other subjects. This otherness ('alterity') is our reaction to the fact of scarcity in our world, where we enter into antagonistic relations with others and risk becoming superfluous. In this world, 'each may be the "extra" one who can be dispensed with.' This scarcity, however artificial and liable to transcendence, 'marks each member of the group both as a possible survivor and as a dispensable surplus member.' Given Pinkard's reminder of our imminent replaceability in capitalism, the resonance of Sartre's concerns with Marx's is clear, but Pinkard does not explore the dissonances. Whereas Marx saw this crisis in our social relations as a contradiction that points beyond itself, Sartre considers the chance that 'the possibility of antagonism' is permanent in any 'structure of plural human activity'. Arguably this scarcity is contingent and is liable to be overcome in a classless society (Pinkard points out that there is no contradiction in thinking of a world without scarcity), but even if the classless society were realised, Pinkard suggests that Sartre would assume that 'the inertia generated by the practico-inert … would clash with spontaneity to generate yet another breakdown, and yet again it too would be "overtaken" by another.' For Marx, the contradiction is not in human activity *per se* in some transhistorical sense, but only human activity under specific conditions that constantly demonstrate their historical mutability. For Sartre, the contradiction threatens to take on permanent metaphysical significance: it 'never goes away'.

Sartre's intervention into this antagonism is to emphasise our 'monstrous spontaneity', or the terrifying capacity we have to strike a new beginning through resistance to such inertia. However, a difficulty arises when we exercise our spontaneity, making it 'monstrous' to Sartre. It involves a curious dialectical twist whereby one process or activity transforms into its opposite which then undermines it. Actions – individually or collectively – often result in ends that are at odds with the original plans of action ('counter-finality'). Pinkard notes that while for Marx this would have been experienced with more enthusiasm, for Sartre this is a 'tragic conception of dialectic' because it comes with the discovery of a fate that subjects 'have brought on themselves by their own free actions' for which 'they are driven to assume responsibility' despite not 'being in harmony with their world.' Pinkard summarises the point thus:

> The contingent material conditions of one's time and one's place, of where and to whom one is born, are contingent but generate in most circumstances a destiny that can also become a fatality … Thus, for Sartre, history ultimately has tragedy written into it. Sartrean tragedy was based on human freedom and the traps that pure contingency and counter-finality can lead such freedom to lay

> down for itself. By the time of the *Critique* and afterward, it was based on the way in which freedom is exercised to create a destiny and even to create an unwanted fatality. One stakes everything on some view of the 'totality', and there is no way to see whether in fact the 'totality' measures up to anything at all. This is not a matter of our being subject to natural forces beyond our control (which is certainly true of us) but of our freely producing a kind of inertia that leads us into consequences we find horrible and for which we have to take responsibility, since it is we who did it.

The open-ended possibilities to create more and other than we set out to create are experienced by Sartre as terrifying, especially given the mounting disasters of the twentieth century through which he was living. After all, the world socialist revolution had degenerated into its opposite. But Sartre's terror does contrast with the earlier optimism of the nineteenth century. From the classical Marxist view, such disasters are, at bottom, the negative manifestations of our own freedom alienated from us, and this runaway freedom needs to be harnessed through revolution – a view Sartre increasingly rejected.

The critique Sartre offers of the 'Marxist approach of his own time' is a well-rehearsed one: Marxism saw subjects as 'merely swept along by historical forces' in a deterministic logic. Pinkard recounts that 'the problems of Stalinism' were to treat history as 'just an inexorable process of vast social forces working its way to a satisfactory end on its own', when for Sartre, history 'always involved spontaneity' and was a process where individuals made 'their own way through it in conditions that they have never chosen for themselves.' Pinkard writes, 'historical agents cannot eschew responsibility and leave everything up to capital *H* History.' But what is not found in his discussion is a consideration of the extent to which Sartre's reaction to historical fatalism is an equally one-sided voluntarism, a dialectical reminder one finds stressed in Adorno or early Lukács. Sartre thinks that in the face of a reified world, one naturally wants to break out, and one does that as an act of one's will. Sartre hoped for decades to develop an ethics of action, of 'pure spontaneity', and he got nearly five hundred pages into that project before dropping it in frustration. A target of Sartre's *Critique*, Pinkard says, is anyone who would downplay agency in history by smothering spontaneity, and 'he was always unrelenting in his criticism of dogmatic Marxism for having no real place for such agency.' Pinkard, however, does not speculate on how anti-totalitarianism itself contains elements of totalitarianism. A generation earlier, the Marxism of the Second International had degenerated into a naive progressive view that assumed history was on its side and would inevitably march towards emancipation. With such staid Marxism entering into crisis during World War I, it prompted then-socialists like Mussolini to develop fascism as what they conceived to be a more radical way of dealing with the crisis. Sartre's actionist ethics are a result of the same historical pressures to act in the face of the practico-inert.

According to Pinkard, Sartre never broke with what he took 'the promise of Marxism' to be: 'a conception of history as mapping a course to … a classless society', but, with the inevitability subtracted. What Sartre 'did not have and what he gave up on' was much of a sense of how to fashion such a revolutionary movement, especially after he had given up the mature Marx's idea of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' (dismissed as 'absurd') and after 'he abandoned any idea that a Marxist "party" … could play that role.' Pinkard records a striking late confession from Sartre on the party question: 'While I recognize the need of an organization, I must confess that I don't see how the problems which confront any stabilized structure could be resolved.' Brief flirtations with anarchism and libertarian socialism did not satisfy him. Towards the end of his life as an ageing observer of the New Left, he looked to the new 'social movements and practice-oriented underpinnings' as hopeful signs of breaking through the practico-inert. Pinkard's own New Leftism shines forth in the descriptions of Sartre's late preoccupations. Having come of age in the sixties, Pinkard claims that 'what Marxism itself had trouble doing' was adapting to a world where 'class struggle … cannot be the whole story'; it failed to incorporate 'race, gender, sexual orientation, and generalized ideals of subordination', not to mention 'the "super-exploitation" of the indigenous peoples practiced by European colonialism' and other 'systems of oppression'. On Pinkard's reading, Marxism was unable 'to produce a satisfactory account of the whole of history as culminating in the classless society' according to Sartre, and so alternative paths must be sought. But is it the theoretical account that was unsatisfactory, or the practical attempt to realise it?

Pinkard ends the book by reconstructing what these alternative paths to Marxism must be for Sartre. These

future directions for a social and political *ethos* echo traditional ones. The 'man to come', for Sartre, is designated by 'liberty, equality and fraternity'. Pinkard argues that Sartre would have seen his own project as 'the realization of the (originally bourgeois) goals of the 1789 revolution' that could only be actualised in a post-capitalist order. Like Hegel and Marx, Sartre did not wish merely to 'cancel' but to 'cancel and preserve'. Trust the words of a renowned Hegel scholar like Pinkard when he says that 'Sartre ended up with an unfinished version of a kind of somewhat naturalized left-Hegelianism … shorn of many of Hegel's own commitments' (and Marx's too, I might add). Pinkard ends *Practice, Power, and Forms of Life* with the following note: 'Foucault's quip about Sartre's "pathetic" use of the nineteenth century to probe the problems of the twentieth might have a lot more truth to it after all – even for the twenty-first century.' Pinkard makes us consider symptomatic self-contradictory misrecognitions of the crisis of capitalism that falsifies such attempts to avoid the problem through fidelity to prior liberal-democratic bourgeois thought. Given Sartre's return to a left-Hegelian liberalism out of his rejection of Marxism, readers familiar with Sartre should wonder to what extent Sartre is implicated by his own critique that he articulated in the orphaned introduction to the *Critique* called *Search for a Method*. There, Sartre writes, 'I have often remarked on the fact that an "anti-Marxist" argument is only the apparent rejuvenation of a pre-Marxist idea. A so-called "going beyond" Marxism will be at worst only a return to pre-Marxism; at best, only the rediscovery of a thought already contained in the philosophy which one believes he has gone beyond.'

Ethan Linehan

Symptoms of the image

Emmanuel Alloa, *Looking Through Images. A Phenomenology of Visual Media*, trans. Nils F. Schott (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021). 391pp., £121.00 hb., £30.00 pb., 978 0 23118 792 3 hb., 978 0 23118 793 0 pb.

Emmanuel Alloa's *Looking Through Images* is an exceptionally ambitious book that attempts nothing less than rethinking the fundamental questions of image theory. Originally published in German more than a decade ago, the book weaves together two very different strands of thought. It is primarily a 'phenomenology of visual media', as the subtitle itself declares. Secondly, the phenomenological strand is linked to a historical approach, which Alloa calls an 'archaeology of the Western engagement with images'. The interplay between these two approaches – phenomenology and archaeology – is motivated by Alloa's intention to forestall a traditional criticism of phenomenological analyses: 'bracketing questions of causality and provenance must not mean the absence of reflection on the provenance of one's own categories'.

The book is structured around five long chapters. Each chapter is divided into ten sections and accompanied by so-called 'Illuminations': short, dazzling descriptions of artworks that shed light on the theoretical discussion from a lateral viewpoint. While the first three chapters are entirely devoted to an archaeological reconstruction of the philosophical discourse about images, in the fourth chapter the discussion shifts to key phenomenological authors, before reaching the most original conclusions in Chapter Five. Nils F. Schott deserves much credit for translating Alloa's prose into eloquent English that allows the nuances of the German original to shine through without impairing readability.

The sheer number of topics dealt with in this book may leave the reader – let alone the reviewer – with a sense of inadequacy. But overall Alloa manages to spin the many threads of the book into a cohesive and compelling narrative. The author's primary objective is to articulate a definition of images that encapsulates their unique way of serving as a *medium*. Alloa defines the medium as a being that 'takes on the form of some other being, without being this being'. The image is a medium because it is something *through* which we are able to see something else, although not in the sense of pure transparency, as when we look at a landscape through a window. The book delves into the specific 'logic of this