# A Sartrean Perspective on Inertia and Alienation in *The Silent Cry* by Kenzaburo Ōe and *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* by Haruki Murakami

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# 1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how Sartre's philosophy can contribute to understanding the way in which the characters experience and deal with inertia and alienation in *The Silent Cry* by Kenzaburo Ōe[1] and *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* by Haruki Murakami. Accordingly, I will first discuss the way in which philosophy can contribute to the understanding of literature, then explain the concepts inertia and alienation in the context of Sartre's existentialist philosophy and subsequently, use my analysis of Sartre to shed light on these issues as they occur in the two novels.

To feel connected to others, to be engaged for causes and to act towards the aims which one considers the most valuable, a continuous effort to overcome inertia and alienation is required. I will argue that understanding how the characters in these novels become aware of ways in which they are inert and alienated and how they make an effort to become engaged and involved, can help to deal with these issues in real life. I have chosen these novels because they portray different reactions to inertia and alienation, issues that are overwhelmingly present in postwar Japanese literature (e.g. Natsue Kirino's *Out*, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*). Ōe and Murakami are appreciated throughout the world, Ōe having received the Nobel price and Murakami being an international best-selling author. They both write about characters who try to come to terms with Japan's imperial past and involvement in the Second World War, while at the same time, the way in which their characters experience and deal with inertia and alienation differs significantly.

The difference can, in part, be attributed to the generational difference between Ōe and Murakami, as they are considered to be, and represented by their publishers as, respectively, typically modern and typically postmodern (Napier, Snyder and Gabriel, Kawakami, Caesar, Hantke). Ōe aligns himself with the post-war generation whose writing is in first instance socially committed ("Nobel Lecture"), and accused the new generation of Japanese writers, explicitly also Haruki Murakami, for its lack of social commitment ("Japan's Dual Identity"). Postmodernism can be seen as a reaction to the modernist social commitment, rejecting its claims to objective truth, particularly in ethics.

[1] In Japanese, the last name always precedes the first name. I will use the western order to avoid confusion. This explains why in the titles of many of the works I cite the name order is reversed.

Sartre and Ōe belong to the same generation of writers whose works are a reaction to the war and a commitment to a better future. Ōe studied French literature at the University of Tokyo and wrote his thesis on Sartre's fiction (Napier 12). Murakami builds on a literary tradition to which Ōe is a major contributor. This thesis will investigate the relevance of Sartre's existentialist perspective for dealing with inertia and alienation as they occur in the postwar novel of Ōe and the postmodern novel of Murakami: different worlds in which different forms of involvement and engagement are possible.

It is not the aim here to discuss the difference between Japanese and Western European society. It is important to note that both Ōe and Murakami have immersed themselves in western culture and theory. Japanese and Western culture in general are inextricably intertwined and modernization in Japan has often been seen as Westernization (see e.g. Washburn). The focus will not be on intercultural differences but on the contribution they have for understanding inertia and alienation.

## 2. Literature and Philosophy

Discussing the relation between philosophical and literary texts is not unproblematic. As Van Stralen points out in his essay "Zelfontplooiing en scepsis," several mistakes are common in texts that discuss the relationship between philosophical works and novels. The most commonly used model for this is the causalistic model, in some philosophical text is claimed to be the source of a literary text. Van Stralen objects that it is nearly impossible to know what the source of a text is: even if it is known that a novelist read a philosophical text, this does not yet prove that it was incorporated in a novel he wrote. Moreover, whether something was used as a source for a novel is only relevant in as far as it serves to explain the novel. Additionally, scholars tend to disregard the differences between the philosophical and the literary work when they use this approach. Lastly, if the philosophical text is considered the source, it should chronologically precede the literary text. However, newer philosophies can serve to explain older texts as well, since not everything in the text has to be understood as such, i.e. within the same theoretical framework, by the author himself.

Another prevalent model criticized by Van Stralen is the analogue model, in which a scholar points out similarities between a philosophical and a literary work. The problem with this approach is that it disregards the differences between the philosophical and literary language systems. Literature does not need to adhere to the rules of logic and philosophy, prove its assumptions or show the steps leading towards ideas. Furthermore, texts using the analogue model often fail to explicate the common ground between the similarities they point out. Such common ground could be the social situation. For example, many of Sartre's and Ōe's works were written as a reaction to their experience of the Second World War.

A further way to discuss Literature and Philosophy is to consider Philosophy as a layer in an autonomous literary text. This only works for certain novels that are explicitly philosophical. The philosophical layer is read as a philosophy. However, literature can rarely stand up to the standard of philosophy, since its aim is not to be consistent and or to argue for a thesis.

Van Stralen therefore suggests a way to discuss literature and philosophy, which he calls the hermeneutical model, that avoids the aforementioned issues. This is to start with a problem in the interpretation of the text, a concrete motive to call on

philosophy to explain something in the text that would otherwise not be understood. One way to do this is to approach the text from the perspective of the contemporary reader, making it comprehensible and helpful to the reader's situation. Another way to explain literature with philosophy is to do this from the perspective of the context in which the text was written, reconstructing its "Lebenswelt." This model serves the clear purpose to improve the readers understanding of the literary text. The relationship between literature and philosophy is not merely mentioned, but made meaningful. A further advantage is that it is freed of chronological restriction and the understanding of older text can be improved by the insights of newer philosophy. Furthermore, literature is appreciated in its own value and not reduced to an implicit philosophy.

However, I do not believe that this is all that can be gained by interpreting literature in the light of a philosophy. In his argument against the analogues model, Van Stralen points out that the model disregards the common ground that philosophy and literature can have. This seems also to be the case when philosophy is merely used to explain what would otherwise remain unclear in literature. If literature and philosophy are considered to have a common ground in the sense that they both express a view on the world and how people can (and often also on how they should) live in it, more can be done than just explaining a passage of a literary work: understanding of the world and of the lives lived in it can be improved. Interpretation of literature does not just aim at fixing gaps in the readers understanding of the text, but it tries to make sense of the text in such a way that it becomes meaningful to the reader, focusing on that which is relevant to the life of the reader and answers questions or clarifies issues that the reader has about life itself.

Martha Nussbaum argues extensively for such a way to look at literature and philosophy in *Love's Knowledge.* She is aware of the pitfall of reducing literature to a less concisely and more enjoyably expressed philosophy, and she argues against views that hold literature to be "instrumental to the communication of truths that could in principle be adequately stated without literature and grasped in that form by a mature mind" (7). According to her, this can be avoided by paying close attention to style, valuing the specific contribution of literary styles. She argues that style and content are inseparable and the different style of literature enables it to say something different concerning the same topics as philosophy could. While philosophy strips issues of their particularity and focuses on what is general or universal about them,

literature (and art in general) show a more rich and elaborate particularity than people are usually able to perceive in everyday life. Nussbaum maintains that it is not possible to conceive of the good life in a merely abstract way, because a good life consists of particulars: all its details contribute to how it is experienced, and being a good person does not only require the application of general rules but also attention to particulars. She compares this to the legal system, in which general rules have to be applied to particular cases and, for this purpose, many particulars of the case need to be taken into account and interpreted in the light of these general rules. For this a 'judicious mind' is needed; it is not a mechanical result. Thus, when looking at a novel from a philosophical perspective, the focus should be on the type of insights that can be gained from the novel which could not be gained from philosophy alone and, in as far as the generals discussed in philosophy can be perceived in literature, the attention should be on the specific situation and circumstances in which they appear. The interpretations of novels she gives in *Love's Knowledge* are not intended to distill the philosophical meaning from them and thereby to replace the actual reading of these novels, but to help readers to see the added value in reading these novels as a whole, in all their details.

Nussbaum's reminder that novels are about life and should be read as such is valuable, but when she claims "novels can be a school for moral sentiments," (240) her view on the ethics of novels becomes problematic. In *Philosophy and Literature*, Ole Martin Skilleås formulates several points of critique on *Love's Knowledge* of which his criticism against Nussbaum's claim that reading novels in itself makes people morally better is the best justified and most worrying.

Nussbaum repeatedly asserts that her ethical view is Aristotelian. Skilleås recaptures Aristotle's philosophy, emphasizing that, according to Aristotle, people learn to be good by following good examples and that, by acting good, people create good habits, which are invaluable, since in everyday life people do not have as much time to deliberate as they do when they write ethical treatise, so that they must have developed a good disposition to choose the right action instantaneously (Skilleås 132). He reminds the reader that Nussbaum thinks of her favorite novels as friends and that people can learn from novels in a way similar to the way in which they learn from friends, by example. Just as people should carefully choose their friends because they will develop according to their example, they should carefully choose their novels.

Understood in this way, novel reading would train people good habits and in this way improve their character. This means that people should only read those novels that teach them good habits, inviting a number of easy criticism, such as made by Richard A. Posner *Against Ethical Criticism*. Just think of all the great works of literature that show bad people and amoral acts. Nussbaum emphasizes the importance of the authorial voice, meaning that readers learn from a morally good author rather than that the characters themselves need to be good. Nonetheless, novels that (in their authorial voice) express the reader's morals most accurately, are by no means the best literature or the literature people want to read.

Expressed by Nussbaum herself, the ethical quality she ascribes to novels as such is more subtle than in the recapitulation of Skilleås and of Posner: novels tend to teach good ways to perceive rather than that they teach the right moral norms, much less the right behavior. She writes,

> We find, as we read novels, that we quite naturally assume the viewpoint of an affectionate and social creature, who looks at all the scenes before him with fond and sympathetic attention, caring for all the people, and caring, too, for the bonds of discourse that hold them all together. Interpreting a novel or play involves one, indeed, in a kind of sympathetic reason-giving that is highly characteristic of morality; for we ask ourselves, as we try to enter into the plot, why the characters do what they do (345-6).

She has a point in claiming that novels can be examples of a richer, more conscious perception and teaches readers to see the world from the viewpoint of others without immediately judging, adopting, for the time in which they read, a worldview other than their own or the one they were raised with. Not all novels have these attributes in the same way, but they are typical of novels, because novels need at least some description and they are always told from the perspective of someone who is different from the reader. What Nussbaum then means is not that it is good when the reader adopts the view of the authorial voice, but rather the manner of perceiving, which is not as easily outdated and not as limited to a specific context. Posner argues against Nussbaum, but ironically, he makes the same point, saying that the aesthetic attitude is itself moral, that it is ethically good to adopt an esthetic attitude.

Nevertheless, Nussbaum certainly does not write that it can also be good to read novels by an evil author and she does not even discuss novels with evil characters. Her favorite novels would presumably teach good habits, certainly in the way in which she presents them, although Skilleås rightfully remarks that her interpretation of Henry James' *The Golden Bowl* pushes the view on the characters as morally good to its limits (135-6). Furthermore, she considers it a good thing to revise the judgment of a novel if the reader learns to perceive them as, for example, anti-feminist (235). While sometimes careful to avoid this, at other times she slides into a moralistic view on literature. [2] A view of literature and philosophy in which novels are considered to teach their readers good behavior would indeed have the effects that Posner fears: it would not lead to selecting the best novels for reading lists, and interpreting all novels in such a way as to see the moral good in them would lead to limited and uniform criticism. Nussbaum argues that a mere aesthetic approach does not do justice to how novels are actually read and to the meaning they have in people's lives, but 'a school for moral sentiments' is not what literature is actually read and appreciated for either. Moreover, Nussbaum fails to acknowledge that, as Posner points out, good literature is often concerned with evil and some great novels offer "awful role models" (Posner 21). These novels are not appreciated in spite of the evil in them, but this evil is an inherent part of their value.
By not acknowledging this, she fails to see literature for what it really is and the value it can really have.

A way to perceive literature from a philosophical point of view, mentioned by Skilleås referring to Richard Eldridge (138-140), in which literature expressing the most diverse kinds of ethical views can be appreciated, is to read literature as a testing ground for different possible ways to understand the world and to live in it. Rather than giving an example of a good life, or searching for the best way to live, novels can experiment with many different ways to live, also such as would be considered outlandish, outrageous or evil according to conventional morality. Fiction can look for the limits of the acceptable, find the bad in the good and the good in the bad, veer into

[2] When Nussbaum claims that the disinterestedness of an aesthetic perspective teaches people to be morally better because this attitude lacks negative feelings such as jealousy, this slippage is dangerous. Nothing is more disastrous for moral goodness than to have the same sentiments about real people as about fictional characters, as Chouliaraki convincingly argues in "The Aestheticization of Suffering on Television" with regard to the aesthetic perception of the news, which motives few people, if any, to act as they would in everyday life when they see others in need.

what is in ordinary life entirely unacceptable territory and see what is lost and gained from that. In fiction, as opposed to life itself, the possibilities that can be tried are endless, since no real harm can be done. It provides an opportunity to free oneself from the limitations in everyday thinking. Liedeke Plate, in *Transforming Memories in Contemporary Women's Rewriting,* addresses the inability that people tend to have "to imagine the future as other than more of the present" (175). To overcome this, she urges female writers not just to deconstruct the myths that they perceive as obstructive, but more importantly, to *remythologize*: to create new myths in order to imagine a future that is truly different from the present. This way to conceive of literature does not have to be limited to women's rewriting: literature and art in general can broaden the scope of what can be thought.

Nussbaum herself also suggest such a way of regarding literature, saying "literature can show us in rich detail, as formal abstract argument cannot, what it is like to live in a certain way" (228). Assuming, as Nussbaum does, that there is no single standard with which all choices can be measured, that values are not commensurable with each other, thus that it is up to the individual to choose a life instead of to merely discover what he ought to choose in order to have the best life, and seeing choices not in isolation but as contributing to certain kind of life rather than another, it is immensely important to be able to imagine various different ways to live in as much detail and specificity as possible.

She appears to prefer novels that show a way to live that corresponds to her idea of the good, which is understandable considering her awareness of the persuasive quality of novels, the influence they can have on people. However, it would be a shame not take advantage of the opportunity that art provides to imagine life as entirely different and to imagine different values, ideas and norms. To recognize that literature can be persuasive and still appreciate a wide range of worldviews and attitudes in literature requires a good deal of faith in the ability of people to reflect independently and choose freely.

An ethical worldview is an interpretation of life. The world of a novel and the lives lived in it can be interpreted by means of a philosophical model that was created to understand the world and life as such. An important difference between the philosophical interpretation of life and of novels is that novels are already an –albeit very different kind of- interpretation of life. The novelist holds, or experiments with, one or more worldviews that shape his novel. For this reason, not every novel is

equally fit to be interpreted by every philosophy. As Van Stralen's cautions have shown, to try to find out what the philosophical view that the author holds is, or to read the novel only to distill this worldview from it, is an objectionable way to interpret a novel from a philosophical point of view.

Instead, a philosophical interpretation of a novel should help to understand the world of the novel and the life of the character as a whole, providing the concepts with which it can be discussed. Philosophy helps to understand what sort of choices the characters make and why. The reasons for characters actions or choices often remain implicit and ethics can help to conceive of possible reasons. This model for using philosophy to interpret literature both profits from the rich particularity of the world of the novel and makes use of philosophical concepts to understand this world. Thinking about literature in this way helps the reader to get a better, more specific idea of the kind of life he would like to live or would like to avoid and what kind of choices contribute to this. Moreover, read in this way, novels help readers to see more possibilities, more alternatives to life as they know it and to the conventions within which they were raised, and to imagine more diverse possible futures from which they can choose.

Novels need not have this effect on life. This depends on the way in which they are read and reflected on. Literature can also be an enjoyable experience in itself, a parallel universe that does not touch on the everyday life of the reader. This is a feature of imagination in general, as shall be more elaborately explained below as part of Sartre's philosophy: imagination is necessary to conceive of alternatives to the past in order to be able to direct one's action towards a preferred future, but it can also be an escape from life itself. Sartre gives the latter side of imagination a negative connotation, but this is by no means necessary. Novels do not have to be read for their significance for life as I do here, it is also a worthy pursuit to appreciate and interpret them merely for their aesthetic features, such as the rhythm of their language or the complexity of their plot, without making a connection to life outside the novel. Nonetheless, the significance of novels to life is not an external feature imposed on the novel but an integral part of what is expressed in the novel.

# 3. Sartre's Existentialism

## 3.1. Freedom of Choice

Sartre's philosophy explains why people experience inertia and alienation and how they can deal with these. According to Sartre's existentialism, people are responsible for all the choices they make, including those choices that will lead them to have unpleasant experiences such as inertia and alienation. With the help of Sartre's philosophy, the inertia of the characters can be understood as means to an end and the attitudes that the characters take towards each other can be understood as attempts to overcome a conflict that is at the foundation of all relationships between people. In order to use Sartre's view on inertia and alienation to illuminate these novels it is necessary to first understand some basic principles of Sartre's philosophy.

Existentialist philosophers present the conviction that in the case of people, existence precedes essence. In the case of objects such as a table, essence precedes existence: The craftsmen then makes the table according to this idea that he has of what a table should be. In Christianity, human beings are understood in the same way, as created by God according to a preexisting essence. According to Sartre, atheist thinkers generally maintain this view, but drawing the full consequences of atheism leads to the realization that for human beings, existence precedes essence. The essence of people is nothing other than what they have chosen to become by their actions. The value of the choice is not inherent in objects, in 'human nature' or God given.

The axiom on which Sartre's philosophy is build is freedom. In *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Sartre provides an ontology of human freedom. He distinguishes 'being-in-itself' ('*en-soi')* and 'being-for-itself ' ('*pour-soi')*. All objects, everything apart from consciousness, are in-itself's. Only consciousness is for-itself. Consciousness is self-reflective: it is conscious of itself. Therefore, it exists for itself as that which it is conscious of. Consciousness is not anything in-itself, it is always directed at something outside itself. Consciousness becomes conscious of itself in as far as it is conscious of something else (Breeur 25). This means that consciousness of nothing is nothing at all: it does not exist. Sartre presents this as an argument against solipsism. With consciousness, 'a nothingness' that separates the for-itself from itself enters into the world. This gives the for-itself the ability to negate, to perceive

something as not present, to imagine things as different from what they are. This way freedom comes into the world. The for-itself is not simply what it is, but it is what it chooses to be, it chooses to be something that it is not yet.

When people choose a certain end, they understand the world in light of this end: objects are perceived as obstacles or advantages with regard to this end. People always have the possibility to choose a different end from the end they pursued thus far, which will change the way in which they perceive the world. In this way, people are always free to choose, even when they are, for example, imprisoned.

Not only objects but also other people can appear as obstacles to someone's end. Other people can stand in the way of one's freedom in a truer sense than objects, because objects only appear as obstacles in the light of a free conscious, whereas other people are free as well and interpret the world in the light of different ends. This will be elaborated in the paragraph on alienation.

Existentialism builds on the insights discovered by phenomenology; it is a type of phenomenology. Phenomenology is based on phenomena as they appear to the first person perspective. It provides an alternative to scientific positivism, which it criticizes for its attempt to present a non-human perspective, which has an alienating effect and moreover, is flawed, since people are not able to perceive the world from a non-human perspective. In scientific positivism there is no place for intentionality, whereas in reality, all human activity and all observations are intentional. Existential phenomenology distinguishes itself from science and proceeds from the starting point of an intentional conscious, regarding human acts as free choices. The only limit to this freedom is freedom itself. This means first of all that people cannot choose *not* to be free. Not to choose is already the choice not to choose.

### 3.2. Bad Faith

Sartre refers to all attempts people make to deny the possibility of freedom with the term 'bad faith' (*mauvaise foi*). People engage in bad faith because they try to avoid feeling angst. Freedom is experienced in angst, because people realize that they are responsible for all their choices and cannot rely on any foundation for these: their choices are ultimately unjustifiable. Furthermore, in angst people experience that they can choose for the present moment, but they cannot in the present control what they will choose in the future (*Being and Nothingness* 598). The absoluteness of human freedom makes it fragile. There is no way to secure oneself against one's future

freedom, since it is not possible to choose not to be free anymore in the future. Furthermore, a person's essence is his past, but he is, as a consciousness, always separated from his essence, from what he has been so far, by a 'nothingness'. This means that people cannot simply stay the same person: they must continually choose to be this person. To prolong states that, originally, were authentic, is a form of bad faith (Van Stralen, *Beschreven Keuzes* 123). Life always requires choice and action. A person's essence and his value are never given, but they must constantly be achieved. In this sense, people are condemned to be free.

People "flee anguish by attempting to apprehend [themselves] from without as an Other or as *a thing*" (*Being and Nothingness* 82), because things have no responsibility. Inertia is a quality of objects not of subjects. Being inert as a human is thus necessarily bad faith. Such attempts to hide angst are never really effective, since to successfully avoid angst, the consciousness must constantly be aware of this angst (82-3).

Rudi Visker points out that bad faith does not have to take the form of pretending not to be free. It can also be the opposite: pretending that freedom is not related to a situation. Freedom is the obligation to create oneself; the obligation to make choices and to make oneself responsible for those choices. It is not just freedom from something, from determinism, but also freedom to do something, that is, to choose (65-6).

It may be objected that nobody would choose to be inert and alienated, and yet people find themselves in these states. Many things in life appear not to be under the individuals control and therefore as standing in the way of it' freedom. Sartre lists "my place, my body, my past, my position in so far as it is already determined by the indication of others, finally my fundamental relation to the Other[3]," (*Being and Nothingness* 629) as aspects of a resisting reality, of the *situation* in which a person finds himself. People choose ends from within and with regard to a certain situation, but they cannot choose not to be in any situation and neither do they choose their starting situation, the situation in which they are born. Sartre also refers to this resisting reality with the term 'facticity.'

[3] Sartre often writes about '*l'Autre'*, 'the Other', with a capital letter. Van Stralen explicates this in Bariona: Het concept 'de Ander' betreft een min of meer anoniem systeem, een geheel van normen en waarden, dat we niet aan het concrete gedrag van een specifiek individu moeten verbinden. Vandaar dat de ander in het Sartriaanse existentialisme vaak met een hoofdletter geschreven wordt: het betreft hier een ongrijpbare macht die het individu in zijn greep houdt.

Sartre does not consider facticity to be limiting people's freedom, but on the contrary, he argues, "there can be a free for-itself only as engaged in a resisting world. Outside this situation the notions of freedom, of determinism, of necessity lose all meaning" (621). Consciousness is a transcendence of the situation, it has the ability to negate the world, to imagine it differently, but this is always a difference from the world *as it is*. Furthermore, limitation is inherent to freedom since "freedom can exist only as *restricted* because freedom is choice. Every choice … supposes elimination and selection; every choice is a choice of finitude" (636).

For each of the aspects of a person's situation that he lists, he proceeds to explain how they can appear as obstacles only in light of one's freedom, since they can be advantages or obstacles only with regard to a freely chosen end in light of which one sees the world. Objects only appear to people as obstacles to the extent that they, in their freedom, have posited an end, and the object stands in the way of this end.

Sartre dismantles the excuses people use to deny their responsibility. Passion is often used as an excuse. Even in court, it is recognized as a factor that diminishes responsibility and therefore punishment. Freedom has often been seen as the opposite of passion, measuring a person's freedom in terms of his ability to 'rise above' his passions (*Being and Nothingness* 569). Sartre argues instead that people *choose* to see the world from the perspective of emotion. He understands the emotions from a teleological point of view, offering an alternative to the more commonly held causalistic model as presented by Freud. In *A Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions,* he argues that emotions should be seen as means to attain ends. He develops his theory on emotions as intentional in explicit opposition to Freud's psychology, denying that emotions would originate in a part of the consciousness that Freud calls the unconscious, which would not be under the subject's control, pointing out the contradictions created by positing an unconscious conscious and showing that it merely relocates issues it claims to solve. According to Sartre, when people do not see any rational way to attain an end, or if they do not want to overcome the obstacles, they may instead try to change the world into an emotional world in which the rules have changed, a world that is magical and in which, for example, those activities that one wants to avoid because they cost too much effort become impossible so that no lack of will has to be admitted, or in which ends that seem unattainable appear as undesirable so that no lack of abilities has to be admitted.

As long as a person holds this magical view of the world, he is bound to its conditions, but since he chose this world with its conditions, and since in each instant he could step out of it and regard the world rationally again, this is an expression of, and not a limitation to his freedom. Sartre explains that to regard the world magically through emotion is an 'initial choice'. While maintaining this choice, the emotional situation cannot change. Only "an abrupt metamorphosis of my initial project" (598) will take the person involved out of his emotional state. Such a metamorphoses is always possible.

Another common form of bad faith is relying on the authority of others. If someone relies on an authority to make a decision for him, he is the one who choses to put his trust in *this* authority and not in another, to interpret the authority's advice in a certain way, to follow it or to discard it, so that it remains his own responsibility. Religion can be seen as a type of authority by means of which people try to avoid responsibility. People will claim their decisions are based on religion so that they are relieved from the responsibility for them, but they chose their religion and their interpretation. Van Stralen suggests interpreting Sartre's philosophy not atheistic but anti-theistic, since Sartre argues that relying on faith is bad faith, it is an attempt to escape responsibility ("Bariona" 51).

Freedom for Sartre means freedom of choice and not freedom to obtain what one wants (621). The latter, he explains, is a popular and not a philosophical use of the concept 'freedom'. Choosing a course of action with a certain outcome in mind does not necessarily mean that this outcome will be attained. As Sartre writes, "success is not important to freedom" (621). This means that even though people are free, they may not manage to engage in meaningful activity and in meaningful relationships with others.

It is further important to note that, according to Sartre, action is equal to choice and intention. It is not accurate if someone says that he chooses to do something that he does no do. This is a wish or a dream, but not a choice. If someone claims he cannot obtain an end he has chosen to pursue, this means that this end is not valuable enough for him to overcome the obstacles that stand in the way. The size of the obstacles one is willing to overcome shows the value one gives to an end.

Furthermore, it is not necessary that what has been chosen is experienced in a joyful way. Sartre explains this with regard to the example of an inferiority complex. A person may choose to have an inferiority complex as a preferred means to become

an in-itself, a thing. This is a way to flee the responsibility that is experienced in angst (606-12). The case of inertia is similar. Someone may choose to refrain from action as a form of bad faith. This will not be enjoyable, but it is not a choice for joy, which is only one of the many possible ends that people choose. In being inert, people pursue the end of an easier life, a life free from the angst caused by their freedom.

### 3.3. Existentialist Ethics

Sartre concludes *Being and Nothingness* by stating that this work is ontological and not ethical, but that the ontological conclusions he draws will be the starting point for an ethics that he intends to write later. He worked on this ethics under the title *Cahiers pour une morale* in 1947 and 1948, but he chose not to complete or published this (Kruks 19). However, there does seem to be a strong ethical drive behind his ontological investigations. The examples and expressions he uses are often ethically loaded. The term '*mauvaise foi'* has a clear negative connotation. Even though in the conclusion to *Being and Nothingness* he says that he has not yet argued that it is wrong to live life in bad faith, throughout *Being and Nothingness* he makes clear that nothing positive can be gained by fooling oneself and that it must necessarily ultimately fail. The alternative, to confront the truth of one's freedom and responsibility and make choices in full awareness of one's responsibility, is clearly to be preferred. Indeed, later, in *Search for a Method* (1963) he writes, "every philosophy is practical, even the one which at first appears to be the most contemplative. Its method is a social and political weapon" (5). This is a statement regarding philosophy in general, but can also be applied to his earlier work. He is aware that there is an ethical intention behind his ontological investigation.

In *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946), in which Sartre defends existentialism against its critics, Sartre is more explicit about the ethical implications of an existentialist view. In this work, he clearly shows the full extend of the responsibility he ascribes to people. They are not only entirely responsible for who they are, for their essence, but also for the essence of humanity. Each choice that the individual makes expresses what, according to him, is valuable and what is not. This value judgment does not only apply to himself, but to all other human beings as well (22-5). This responsibility cannot be transferred to anyone else. If people do not wonder with every decision, 'what would happen if everyone would act this way?' they act in bad faith. To make life easier, people deny that their actions have anything

to do with all other human beings, with humanity as such. As long as a person would not choose inertia as an ideal for all of mankind but still remains inert, his inertia can safely be called 'bad faith'.

### 3.4. Inertia

In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre emphasizes that the fear caused by awareness of this responsibility does not lead to passivity. Here he responds to a common criticism on existentialism that it would be so as to make existentialists rest in despair (17). Sartre counters that existentialism is an optimistic philosophy, because people can change any situation to the better (19-20). By emphasizing the responsibility that weighs on people's shoulders and by elaborately describing their bad faith in his philosophical works as well as in his novels, he does not aim at making people desperate, but instead, at pointing out the necessity of engagement. He forces people to see that making choices cannot be avoided and that they must therefore use all their energy to make the best possible choices, instead of using it to uphold their bad faith.

Existentialist literature often has inert, weak, cowardly protagonists. According to Sartre, this appalls people, not because they cannot accept characters with such traits, but because existentialist writers do not provide any justification for these. These bad character traits are not caused by the protagonists' genetic makeup, the environment or the society in which they live (39), as readers are used to from naturalist literature, but they are their own choice and remain fully their responsibility. These characters give the reader a negative example.

Sartre builds on earlier existentialist theory, which is described comprehensively by Otto Friedrich Bollnow in *Existenzphilosophie* (1955) and by Van Stralen in *Beschreven Keuzes* (1996). These works help to clarify some of the issues that have been left implicit in Sartre's writings.

Bollnow describes German existentialism, in which '*Existenz'* is opposed to '*Dasein'*. The term '*Existenz'* designates a life of true engagement, of commitment to choices made and of sincerity, while '*Dasein'* designates living in bad faith, denying responsibility. There is no continuum between these ways of life: to go from one to another requires a a radical shift of perspective, described as a leap by Søren Kierkegaard (*Beschreven Keuzes* 24-5). Bollnow refers to Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), according to whom people are usually in a state in which *Existenz* has slipped away from them. People always have the possibility to *exist*, but usually they do not

actualize this potential and instead of *existing*, they *are* merely *present*. Jaspers often speaks of '*verantwortungsloses Massendasein'* (Bollnow 37), with which he means a life in line with the masses, using the choices of others as justification or regarding the common way to live life as the only possibility, without feeling responsible to make one's individual life valuable. People can only remain in this state by denying the existentialist truth about freedom, responsibility and the brevity of life (36-38). The term '*Dasein* often designates an unreflected everyday life routine.

Both Jaspers and Sartre consider following an everyday life routine to be bad faith, but their emphasis is different. For Jaspers, people have a default way of living and it takes an effort or an event to realize that it does not need to be adhered to, it needs to appear to people as bad enough to change it. Sartre on the other hand, emphasizes that in the case of human beings, as apposed to objects, machines and animals, nothing happens automatically, each instant in which a routine is followed is an action and a choice to continue this routine. Sartre's philosophy does not give much room for concepts such as habits. Following a habit is merely to make the same choice one made previously. An everyday life routine can be called inertia. Everyday life may be filled with bustling activity, people can keep themselves busy at all waking hours, but such a life is still inert if it is not engaged, if this activity is not directed at ends chosen in sincerity. The terms '*Dasein'* and '*Existenz'* designate the same opposition as 'inertia' and 'engagement.'

### 3.5. Limit Situations

From Bollnow's explanation of German existentialism it becomes clear that, to move from *Dasein* to *Existenz*, to overcome inertia, people need to have an 'existential experience,' a moment in which they realize the full extent of their freedom and responsibility and strongly feel the urgency to make life valuable right now. In such an existential experience, all that is *irrelevant* to existence shows itself as such, and all that remains is the core of existence, one's free consciousness. From this insight into what really matters in life, it follows that the only way to make life valuable is 'engagement'.

People often need an eye opener, some important event that makes them realize they cannot avoid responsibility. Jaspers coined the term '*Grenzsituation*,' 'limit situation,' for such events (Van Stralen, *Beschreven Keuzes* 19). A metamorphosis of a person's initial choice is more likely to occur if some event

compels him to rethink life. Although Sartre does not write much about limit situations in his philosophical works, they play an important role in his novels.

Jaspers used the concept mainly for life threatening situations (Van Stralen, *Beschreven Keuzes* 19). As Bollnow explains, in *Dasein*, there is no real awareness of death; life is lived away as if it would continue forever. Death brings tension to life: action cannot be postponed indefinitely; as much as possible has to be accomplish within the given time - and no one knows how much time this is; life may end unexpectedly at any moment.

This should not be confused with hedonistic philosophies in which the aim is to enjoy each moment as much as possible. Since responsibility cannot be avoided, engagement should be as genuine and relevant as possible. Death forces people to choose between life paths, to prioritize between ends, instead of simply following them one after the other (95-103).

Sartre argues against such a view, writing that even if people were immortal, this would essentially change nothing, since freedom necessarily temporalizes itself: people would still have to choose one project before the other (*Being and Nothingness* 698-9). Nonetheless, death can make people acutely aware of the temporality, of the necessity to choose.

Van Stralen points out that in nearly all existentialist novels an event occurs that was not caused by the protagonist, yet fundamentally changes his situation. Due to the threatening character of this event, the protagonist experiences the existential truths in an emotional way. He realizes that he cannot ignore this change and that he cannot rely on any preconceived ways to deal with the situation. This compels him to realize that he must make his own decisions (*Beschreven Keuzes* 57-8). Such an event is a *limit situation*.

Bollnow lists as possible limit situations, in addition to death, situations in which a person is faced with insurmountable obstacles, in which he cannot avoid becoming guilty since every action he can choose will make him guilty in some way, in which he must rely on chance and in which pain and suffering are unavoidable (61). Paradoxically, it appears that situations in which people would normally consider their freedom to be limited are the situations that compel people to realize the true extend of their freedom and responsibility. Limit situations disrupt inertia, because they are such that the person involved cannot tolerate them. Bad faith can no longer be upheld. The insurmountability of obstacles reveals freedom, since they only

appear as insurmountable to someone who expects to be free. If people were determined, all obstacles would be equally insurmountable. In life threatening situations, people cannot pretend that their actions would not be urgent, and when they cannot avoid guilt, pain, and suffering, they realize that they cannot avoid responsibility by remaining inert. Thus, people realize they need to fulfill their potential to act as a free subject in situations in which the necessity for this can no longer be denied. People will avoid such situations as much as possible to remain in a state of *Dasein* and uphold their bad faith, but they cannot avoid *all* such situations (61).

Van Stralen emphasizes the importance of the Other in the limit situation. Others can put the situation under pressure so that it becomes a limit situation, because the Other's freedom is a real limit to the freedom of the self. In the limit situation, the subject realizes that others, by means of their freedom, hold power over the situation: that others are responsible for the existence of this unacceptable situation (*Beschreven Keuzes* 58). People initially tend to follow the appeal of the Other, relying on authorities. Only when this goes amiss and leads to a situation that is perceived as unacceptable, people realize that, ultimately, they cannot rely on anyone and have to bear their complete responsibility alone.

Limit situations are often characterized by negative emotions, particularly angst, but also emotions such as shame and nausea. In these emotions, the subject perceives the situation as unacceptable and is thereby compelled to take responsibility to change the situation. For this reason, these emotions are called existential. Each of the existential emotions helps the subject to become aware of its freedom in a different way. Angst, as Roland Breeur explains, is for Sartre vertigo before one's own freedom (16-34).

Bollnow emphasizes the distinction between existential emotions and other emotions. Whereas in 'ordinary' emotions, the subject tries to hide reality from itself so that they are forms of bad faith, existential emotions reveal reality to the subject and signal the abolishment of bad faith. In *A Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions,* Sartre does not yet discuss existential emotions, but is mainly concerned to show emotions as intentional in opposition to positivist accounts of emotions.

Sartre emphasizes in *Being and Nothingness* that a situation in itself can never be sufficient to compel people to change. People must be able to envisage an alternative (561). Thus, although the limit situation is caused by others, the individual

is the one who chooses to use it as an existential experience and an appeal to engagement.

### 3.6. Engagement

In his conclusion, Bollnow raises the problem that existentialist philosophers argue for the importance of engagement, but do not offer an object for engagement. Existentialism cannot designate specific causes for which people should engage themselves, because they consider people to be free to choose such a cause, although, as Bollnow stresses, engagement can only be authentic and responsible when it rests upon believe in a cause (121-31). For this reason, Bollnow considers existentialists who do argue for a specific object for engagement to move beyond existentialism.

Bollnow identifies this lack of content both as strength and as weakness. In opposition to scientific positivism, existentialism is based on the certainty of individual experience. This was important in a time when what had seemed certain vanished in the face of the World Wars (123-8). In an introduction to Sartre, Ruud Welten writes that, ironically, "*het existentialisme dat leert dat er geen enkele houvast is, wordt een houvast voor een nieuwe generatie*." Existentialism teaches that people cannot rely on anything or anyone other than themselves. Choices are not made on any foundation, which is why they are *free*. This means that existentialism can never offer a foundation for people's choices.

Sartre was faced with this problem while writing his ethics, posthumously published under the title *Cahiers pour une morale*. Although there cannot be a foundation for freedom and choices are ultimately unjustifiable, people are fully responsible for their choices and there is nothing more important than the content of these choices. As Sartre becomes involved with Marxism, he starts to doubt the possibility for the individual to change without changing the lives of others as well, focusing increasingly on social structures. While writing his *Cahiers*, Sartre realized that the individualist perspective of existentialism and the historical and social perspective of Marxism, and the freedom of existentialism and the ethics of Marxism, could not be combined in a coherent whole, but would remain contradictory. In his concern for an ethics that specifies what people should choose, Sartre moves away from his existentialism, eventually abandoning it in the preface to his *Critic of Dialectical Reason.*

Simone de Beauvoir accepted the ambiguity inherent in an existentialist ethics and included it in the title of the ethics she wrote based on Sartre's existentialism: *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*.[4] She shows that the ambiguity of an existentialist ethics does not preclude it, or make it less important (Kruks 192), and indeed, Sartre's does not altogether abandon the individual perspective in his *Critique*, it remains the starting point from which he tries to understand different social groups (Welten, "Broederschap en terreur" 118), but he has to change some of his premises to create a bridge from the individual to the social and historical perspective.

Central to an existentialist ethics must be that "*vrijheid is oorsprong en doel van menselijk handelen en vormt de grond van alle waarden*" (Van Stralen, *Beschreven Keuzes* 102). The ideal of such an existentialist ethics is an authentic lifestyle in harmony with the Other (92), in which inertia, bad faith and alienation have been overcome. To accomplish this, people must commit to freeing themselves and others from bad faith.

Whereas in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre emphasizes the power of the individual to transform any situation, later in his life he is increasingly aware of the conditions that enable this and increasingly doubts the ability of the single individual to overcome bad faith (Van Stralen, "Bariona" 57-58). As Welten writes, people appear to be barely capable of accepting their freedom and, most of the time, act in bad faith. Bourgeois society offers endless opportunities to flee anguish in bad faith (*Introduction,* 16). Moreover, it demands of people that they uphold bad faith in order not to endanger the self-deception of others. A detailed description of how people expect each others' insincerity and act in bad faith can be found in Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.* The way people live together must be changed to enable the individual to continuously act in an authentic way[5]. For Sartre, engagement comes to mean political engagement, engagement towards other human beings (Van Stralen, *Beschreven Keuzes* 20).

Sartre's communism is related to his existentialism in the sense that it is the content for the engagement that existentialism demands and Sartre sees it as the

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[4] This problem already emerges in Sartre's novel, Nausea (1938), in which the protagonist, Roquentin realizes the importance of engagement without being able to commit to anything and where he finally abandons his project because he sees it as bad faith to pretend continuity.

[5] Nota bene, it will never be possible to be authentic, this is static, it is a way of making oneself into a thing, so that to claim to be authentic is already bad faith. Nonetheless, it is possible to act in an authentic way, to make decisions without hiding from oneself (Van Stralen, Beschreven Keuzes 102).

preferred method to overcome bourgeois society and free people from its customs of bad faith (Van Stralen, *Beschreven Keuzes* 90). Yet, it can by no means be derived from existentialism and is, in many ways, also in conflict with it, as the problems Sartre encountered while writing the *Cahiers* make clear.

An important conflict between Sartre's earlier and later philosophy is his attitude towards violence. In *Being and Nothingness* he emphasizes that murder is no solution to the alienation caused by the Other. Moreover, murder turns one into a thing permanently. However, as Welten points out, in his *Critic of Dialectical Reason* he argues that murder can be necessary and desirable in order for suppressed people to free themselves and change their situation for the better. This change corresponds to the shift from the perspective of the individual who is free in any situation to the perspective of society that can create different conditions for the individual within it ("Broederschap en terreur").

### 3.7. Alienation

The term 'alienation' is used in different disciplines in a variety of ways. According to Marc Scharbracq and Cary Cooper, there is a social-sciences tradition of conceiving alienation as the result of 'an evil societal influence' (55-6). Particularly in Marxism, 'alienation' means alienation from aspects of human nature. This is seen as the result of capitalism. Additionally, there are certain theories of modernity that distinguish community and society (*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*), who argue that, throughout history, there has been a move away from community, in which individuals regard themselves as integral parts of this community, towards society, in which individuals are alienated from each other (i.e. Tönnies)[6].

The view of early Sartre on alienation differs from these, since he does not see alienation as caused by some specific development, but as an unavoidable aspect of the co-existence of human beings. A further difference from the concept 'alienation' as used in theories of modernity is that in these, the term 'alienation' mainly designates alienation from others, whereas in Sartre it refers in first instance to alienation from the self. As shall become clear, alienation from the self is closely connected to alienation from others, but it is nonetheless important to be aware of this difference. In this sense, Sartre's concept of alienation is closer to the one used in

[6] Another theory of alienation as an aspect of modernity is presented by Arnold Burms and Herman de Dijn in *De rationaliteit en haar grenzen; kritiek en deconstructie.*

Marxism. In Marxism, the work that the worker has done -in Sartre's terms, the result of the activity the for-itself has been engaged in- becomes alienated from the self. However, according to Marx, this is due to specific working circumstances in which the individual does not create a whole product but only performs a step in the process, whereas for Sartre, this is the case for all activity. While engaged in activity, the subject perceives its acts as means towards an end. After the actions have been completed, they start leading a life of their own; they change the way in which the one who performed the acts is perceived. This way they become alienated from the subject.

Sartre explains in *Being and Nothingness* that the for-itself is alienated from itself through the existence of the Other, because the Other perceives the for-itself from the outside, seeing it in a way in which it cannot see itself. Consciousness only exists as a relation to the in-itself (472), which is always accompanied by self-consciousness; consciousness is a way of perceiving the world, namely, in the light of its freely chosen aims. Consciousness is the center of the world, the point from which everything else is perceived.

The Other, like the self, sees himself at the center of his universe. In Sartre's words, "the appearance of the Other in the world corresponds … to a fixed sliding of the whole universe, to a decentralisation of the world which undermines the centralisation which I am simultaneously effecting" (*Being and Nothingness* 343)." In the look of the Other, people experience the Other's perspective and with thta the Other subjectivity and freedom (Van Stralen, *Beschreven Keuzes* 102-3). Experiencing the world as centered around another causes alienation from the self. The for-itself cannot understand another as a for-itself, as a center of the other's world, at the same time as he understands the world as centered around himself. He can apprehend himself as looking at the Other, or as being looked at by the Other, but not both at the same time. This is because the world can be apprehended only from one standpoint at a time (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 347). If the for-itself apprehends another as a for-itself, he knows that for this other, he exists as a part of his world, in which he does not exist as he does to himself, as intention, but as an object.

The only limit to the freedom of consciousness is freedom itself. The for-itself cannot control its own future freedom, and it cannot control the freedom of the other. The Other forms a limit to the freedom of the for-itself because the freedom of the

other cannot be controlled or erased, but even so, the for-itself can choose at each instant whether it sees itself or the other as object, it can choose the attitude that it assumes with regard to the Other. The options that the for-itself can choose for dealing with the other will be discussed below.

A switch between these different ways of apprehending the world is always possible. How this works can be explained with the help of Sartre's famous example of someone who is looking though a keyhole at a scene behind the door. While he is watching the scene, he has no perception of himself; he *is* only perception of the scene. However, when he realizes that someone is standing behind him, watching him, he suddenly apprehends himself as someone who is peering through a keyhole, possibly as a voyeur. He has not foreseen this perspective of the other, but that does not mean he regards it as something external, something that concerns the other, not himself. The shame he feels –or in other cases pride- reveals that he *is* this self that the other sees, even if this self was not present to his consciousness[7]. It is not even necessary for a concrete other to be present. It is enough to imagine what someone else would say (347-50). This profound shift in the way the subject perceives itself, from focus on the outside world to an awareness of the way he is perceived by others, is the shift from being-for-itself to being-for others. These are an entirely different ways to understand the world and the self.

In *The Transcendence of the Ego* (1936), Sartre supports his position that the 'I' does not have to be present in all states of consciousness more elaborately. The pre-reflective consciousness is a consciousness of an end to be accomplished, of obstacles that stand in the way and tools to be used, but the 'I' does not appear in all this. In language, a sentence needs a subject, and instead of 'car to be washed,' people will say, 'I have to wash my car'. However, language is already reflective and additionally, language is used to communicate to the Other, so language is part of being-for-others and not of being-for-itself. Language thus gives people the faulty impression that the 'I' would be present in all states of consciousness. This is not to say that being-for-others has to be reflective, but merely to prove that consciousness is not in itself personal, that it is not the same as the 'I' or ego.

The personal aspect is usually seen as necessary to unify consciousness, but as Sartre explains, it is not personality but intentionality that unifies consciousness.

[7] Shame is always shame of self. Being ashamed of another is always by identification with this other.

Consciousness apprehends the world in terms of ends to be accomplished and not in terms of character traits (46-8). The for-itself engages in activities directed at an end. The Other, who perceives the for-itself from the outside, perceives these actions not as intentions but as attributes. Only when the self is seen as an object, activities appear as attributes instead of as intentions.

According to Sartre, the ego does not exist inside consciousness, but outside, in the world, just as the ego of the other (*The Transcendence of the Ego* 31). The consciousness is not an ego; it is not a thing, but transcendence, a relation to the world. Consciousness creates the ego, the decisions of the consciousness constitute an ego, but consciousness *is* not an ego. Consciousness perceives the body, knowledge and abilities as means to accomplish certain ends, or as obstacles that stand in the way of attaining those ends, but if there were no other people, there would be no reason to regard itself as a whole, as an ego.

However, the for-itself realizes that he exists as an ego for the other. This means that the other has a better access to one's ego than the self does. As Sartre writes, "the Other looks at me and as such he holds the secret of my being, he knows what I am. Thus the profound meaning of my being is outside of me, imprisoned in an absence. The Other has the advantage over me" (*Being and Nothingness* 473). The example of language helps to understand this. The aim of speaking is to convey a message to the Other, but the ultimate meaning of what the speaker has communicated escapes him. He tries to avoid misunderstandings, but the meaning of what he communicates is not determined by his thoughts or his feelings but by the Others interpretation of his actual words (485-7). Consciousness only has access to the ego through the eyes of an (imagined) Other. It is alienated from how it exists as object for the Other. People do not have direct access to who they are; they do not even have a privileged standpoint on who they are. They know that the perspective the other has on them is relevant, yet they can never see the world entirely from the other's point of view, not just because they cannot occupy the exact same position, but more importantly, because the Other is free to choose his point of view in light of his own ends (351). The way they exist for the Other, as well as the way in which the world exists for the Other, escapes them. The for-itself is responsible for the ego it chooses, but the Other has the privileged perspective on the ego, the Other decides in his freedom, in terms of his world, what their ego is. Therefore, "my being-as-object is an unbearable contingency" (475).

Because of the exclusivity of subjectivity, "conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others" (475). Since the look of the other produces people's ego, they experience being-for-others as being possessed by the other. Nonetheless, this possession is important and valuable, since it is that which a person has to control in order to be his own foundation.

Unlike inertia, alienation is not a state that can be overcome through existential awareness. People try to overcome alienation and take control over their ego by influencing the way in which the other perceives them, or by trying to eliminate the other's standpoint. However, the perception of the other cannot be controlled, because the other is free and the perspective of another in general can never be eliminated, since it is enough to imagine someone else looking at you to be alienated from yourself. There will always be an outside perspective the for-itself that it cannot know or control. Thus, the mere existence of the other already causes alienation.

In his article on *Bariona*, Van Stralen specifies the similarities between Sartre's philosophy and Christianity. Sartre converted those aspects of Christianity that he considered important to retain into an atheistic worldview in which humans each stand on their own and have no God to rely on. Both Christianity and existentialism aim at freeing people from alienation. People have to deal with living in an imperfect world due to the Other's use of their freedom for evil, in Christianity expressed in the fall from paradise. Sartre understands that people intend to find peace in God but he beliefs this is doomed to fail. In both Christianity and Sartre's philosophy people are free and must choose between an authentic and an inauthentic path. Both worldviews doubt the possibility that people can follow the authentic path on their own, in Christianity help is provided by God, whereas in Sartre literature, limit situations compel people to realize their potential to act authentically. Bad faith as a common mode of existence takes the place of original sin. Another similarity with the original sin situation in Sartre's philosophy is that for Sartre too people cannot avoid becoming guilty. The choice to the benefit of some others can be to the detriment of others. Choices must be made within situations and, also because of the mistakes or crimes of others, situations occur in which no possible action will not make the subject guilty. Futhermore, from a new and unexpected viewpoint, what first seemed a good choice can appear to be bad in the light of other ends.

## 3.8. Attitudes towards the Other

Although alienation as such cannot be avoided, this does not mean that any way to deal with this issue amounts to the same. The various attitudes that people can adopt towards each other each have their own character and result in entirely different relationships. Sartre discusses the basic possible attitudes in *Being and Nothingness*.

The attitudes that people assume towards the other should be understood in the light of people's striving for an impossible ideal, an ideal that God represents. This ideal is to be an in-itself, being instead of having to be, while at the same time able to execute his will, thus, being in-itself and for-itself at the same time (Van Stralen, *Beschreven Keuzes* 100).

Sartre's view on interpersonal relationships as, originally, relationships of conflict, is uncommon. Even those who see most relationships as adversarial tend to see love as an exception, a way to overcome the conflict between people, a way in which two subjectivities can merge into a harmonious unity. This is not how Sartre describes love. For him, a person who loves wants to "possess a freedom as freedom" (*Being and Nothingness* 478). He wants to overcome the unbearable truth, that the other in his freedom determines his ego, by possessing the others freedom. He wants his loved one to limit her freedom on his behave, to freely choose him above all else. The lover wants to be the center of the world for the loved one, the end to which everything else stands as a means, he wants to be the absolute value (480-1).

Love is not only a way to influence the ego by means of the other's freedom, it is also a way to make people feel their existence is justified instead of gratuitous, since it is willed, to the tiniest detail, by loved-ones (484). "The for-itself is a flight toward the in-itself," (472) a flight towards simply being instead of the constant obligation to have to be. For this reason, the for-itself tries to see itself from the point of view of the other. This makes it see itself as an in-itself. Lovers try to see themselves from the loving point of view of the other as an endlessly valuable loved object.

There are several reasons why loves enterprise is bound to fail. Firstly, the lover demands that the other limits his freedom and perceives the world as a world of love, but the lover can at any time choose to do otherwise. The others freedom remains free and there is no way to prevent the loved other from seeing her lover as a means among means (490). Furthermore, the lovers can only pretend for a while to be

the only two people in the world, but in the end, they always know that this is at most an illusion. When a third person looks at the lovers, they become an object in his world and the aim of love is no longer accomplished (409-91). Thirdly, love is an infinite regression (491), since both lovers want to possess a freedom, both want to be an object to the freedom of the other, but when the world is seen as centered around the one, it cannot at the same time be centered around the other. Love is thus a failed attempt to loose oneself in objectivity.

When the lover realizes this, he can instead attempt to become wholly object for the other through masochism. The masochist tries to deny his freedom and subjectivity. In masochism, the subject tries to be wholly object for the other, who is wholly subject and free to do with him as he pleases, but since he demands of the other that he should play exactly this role, in truth, the masochist makes the other into an object. In a way, the masochist is indifferent to the other, since he is only interested in the other in as far as the other enables him to become pure object (491-3).

Indifference to the Other is a futher a way to deal with alienation. An indifferent person tries to avoid alienation by ignoring the Other's subjectivity and the Other's view on him. Instead of as subjects, the indifferent person perceives others in the functions they have for him, such as 'waiter' or 'librarian.' As Sartre explains, trying to be nothing other than one's function is a form of bad faith, it is a method that people use to become purely object. The indifferent person makes use of this tendency in people.

Indifference is in bad faith. While the indifferent person ignores the other, he knows that the other still sees him as part of his world. By disregarding this as much as possible, he loses his only means to influence his being-for-others, his ego. In as far as the indifferent person succeeds in constituting the other as an object and the other considers himself looked at, this strategy works, but (as in love) the indifferent person cannot control the others freedom. If the other looks at the indifferent person and the indifferent person continues to regard the other as an object, he is "in danger without knowing it … endangered behind [his] back" (497). What the indifferent person truly wants is to determine his being-for-others in freedom. By regarding others as objects, he denies that they determine his being-for-others in their freedom, and he loses the ability to determine his own being-for-others. He no longer even understands what he was aiming at in the first place, because, since he does not see others as subjects, he fails to understand his being-for-others at all. This inability is

experienced in irritation. Furthermore, by denying the others subjectivity, the indifferent person loses a means to deny his own responsibility in bad faith. Although others cannot make him into something he does not wish to be, he has all responsibility to create himself (494-7).

In desire, people attempt to avoid their responsibility, while at the same time to protect themselves from the other's freedom. When a person desires, he wants the other to make him into nothing other than a body, in order to relieve himself of his responsibility to be a subject, but at the same time, he wants to make the other into nothing other than a body, to render the other's subjectivity harmless. These two desires are contradictory, because while being able to influence the others subjectivity a person is always responsible. Furthermore, if a person looks at the other, he does this because he wants to act on the other as a freedom, but by looking at the other as a body, the other is rendered a mere object. Just as in indifference, in desire the subject forgets the meaning of his attempt. He wanted to act on a consciousness that was limited to being mere body, but as soon as he succeeds, it is no longer a consciousness but only a body that he acts on and he no longer knows what to do with it (498-512). As in emotion, desire aims at an enchanted world, a world in which the other's consciousness cannot be anything other than body-awareness. The person who desires wants to destroy the others possibilities, but for this, he must make both of them exist in this enchanted world in which only their bodies exist and with this he also eliminate his own freedom (512-3). Desire is not a deliberate process: "as soon as [a person wishes] to put aside [the others] acts and his functions so as to touch him in his flesh," he make himself into a mere body as well, because only with his consciousness trapped in his flesh can he touch the other's consciousness trapped in the other's flesh. Desire must appear to people as purely biological, as mere facticity, as involuntary, because this way people can convince themselves that -in desire- they are passive objects and avoid their sense of responsibility (515). Pleasure only appears as the aim of desire and not in desire itself, because it eliminates desire, since in pleasure, awareness of the other fades (516).

The sadist, just as the person who desires another, wants to possess a consciousness by trapping it in the body, so that by touching the body, he touches the others consciousness. The sadist uses more drastic measures, keeping the other consciousness in his body by means of pain instead of enchantment. The sadist cannot or does not want to make himself into a body. He makes the other into a body, while

himself remaining pure subject. A way to do this is by changing the graceful into the obscene. A graceful body is a body that fluently expresses transcendence, while an obscene body reveals the facticity and absurdness of the body. By making the other obscene, the sadist makes the other into an object. The more graceful the other initially was the more rewarding, because the sadist does not want to have another as object, but he wants to control the other's subjectivity (518-21). To ensure himself that what he is kneading and bending is not just a body, he requires confirmation of the other's subjectivity, in the form of the other's initial grace and by forcing the other to humiliate himself, to make the other choose to comply. Even under coercion the subject remains free, because even when he has to give in he still decides when he gives in.

Sadism tries to make the other unimportant, but the whole sadist project reveals the immense importance of the other. Moreover, the roles can be changed at any point if the sadists subject looks at him and sees him as a an object: a sadist. Furthermore, just as in desire, when the sadist accomplishes his aim, his aim is lost: when the other is no longer free, for example, when the other is unconscious, the sadist fails to take control over the other's freedom. In a desperate attempt, a person can try to take control over the others freedom by killing him. However, by killing the other, the sadist will only lose the possibility to ever change his being-being-for-this-other (521-7).

Alienation from the self is closely related to alienation from others, because, as has become clear, the alienating effect that the other has on the self results in attitudes that alienate the self from the other. The attitudes described above are variants of the basic conflict between people: both sides of the relationship want to choose how the other objectifies them, so as to undo the alienation from their ego caused by the look of the other.

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre opposes Heidegger, arguing that *Mitsein* -a 'we' in which nobody is object but all are subject, a 'we' with common actions or perceptions- is not an original attitude towards others but merely a negation: not being another group (535, 551). A 'we-subject' can be formed when several people are concentrated on something else, for example, when people watch a theatre performance they become an audience, but this 'we-subject' disappears as soon as the individuals no longer concentrate on the same, as during the breaks of a theater performance (535). The sociologists 'collective consciousness' is only a metaphor, not

a reality. Subjectivities remain individual and separated. They can only happen to have the same content, but they are never shared (536). Rhythm is often considered an expression of a collective conscious, but according to Sartre, in rhythm, bodies are united, not subjectivities (550).

The other possibility for a *Mitsein* is a 'we' as object. This occurs when a group of people or a community is looked at by a third person or by an anonymous 'they' (537). This is not an original attitude either, because for this to occur, the individual must first freely adopt the same ends as the group (550). Furthermore, for an individual to experience a sense of 'we,' it is not necessary that the others should experience themselves as part of that same 'we,' only that this seems so to the individual, so that the 'we-object' can be an illusion.

The experience of a 'we' is psychological, not ontological (549). *Mitsein* is not an original attitude, since every 'we' is unstable; at any moment it can break apart into separate individuals. A 'we' only exists as an incidental, coincidental, unstable and possibly imaginary construct. Whether doing the same activity as others makes a person experience a 'we' is a purely subjective impression, which engages only the person in question (551).

As Welten explains, later in his life Sartre investigates the possibility of a true connection between people, of the fraternity ideal pursued in the French Revolution (*Broederschap en Terreur*). In *Being and Nothingness* he starts from the position of the individual on its own, while in the Critique, he emphasizes that, in practice, there is no such starting point. People are from the outset part of a community and their aims lie within this community (115). According to Welten, the *Critique* should be seen as a supplement to *Being and Nothingness* and not as a replacement, since, unlike most sociological theories, it investigates how the individual forms a part of a group and does not discuss a 'collective consciousness' (117-8).

In the *Critique* too, the 'we' is considered inherently unstable. Sartre investigates the possibilities of making a 'we' stable and concludes that this is only possible by means of terror: in order to continue the sense of solidarity that arose from having a common aim, the members of a group consider each other bound to this aim and when anyone leaves it behind he is considered a traitor. Being afraid of the other group members holds the group together (Welten 120). This is necessary to protect the group against the 'they' against which the group rebels. There is always such a group to rebel against, because the 'we' of the group is always a we-subject or a we-

object with regard to another. At the moment when the individuals realize they have a common aim, their adherence to the group is authentic, but to solidify the group, the adherence must be maintained and becomes bad faith. In the last decade of his life, Sartre is concerned with fraternity and develops new ideas about this without developing them into a systematic philosophy. His focus is moved to 'hope', which, as Welten points out, starts where philosophy ends (124). Thus, in his philosophy, the bridge from the individual to the group cannot be made in both a durable and an authentic way.

People are responsible for their ego; they must try to influence it by means of the Other, even though they can never succeed in this entirely, because the other will remain free. The impossibility of the task does not relieve people from their responsibility for it. Van Stralen speaks of reducing alienation to endurable proportions ("*vervreemding tot leefbare proporties terug te brengen"*) (*Beschreven Keuzes* 39). This is indeed all that can be expected of people, the best possible result for their efforts. So, even though each attitude towards others is flawed, contradictory or in bad faith, people must nevertheless adopt these attitudes and accept responsibility for their consequences.

### 3.9. Engagement and Involvement

According to Marc Scharbracq and Cary Cooper, alienation is often seen as opposite to "engagement, commitment and involvement" (55). They do not mean alienation from the self but from other. Nonetheless, their claim helps to understand the link between inertia and alienation as discussed here. Both concern a stagnated, passive position. They are the failures to be engaged, committed and involved. According to the Oxford American Dictionary, alienation is "the state or experience of being isolated from a group or an activity to which one should belong or in which one should be involved." Alienation from others is thus the opposite of belonging and being involved. People have to try to overcome alienation by influencing the way others see them. Refusing to do this is a form of bad faith, since remaining uninvolved in one's ego means denying one's responsibility for it. Additionally, it is a lack of engagement towards others and with the effect that one's choices have on others.

Sartre's existentialism requires people to try to overcome inertia and alienation, without offering specific means to accomplish this. It does not offer a cause to which people should commit, nor a type of relationship in which people can

resolve the basic interpersonal conflict. Nonetheless, people must be as engaged as possible and must ensure that their being-for-others is morally right. An important point in Sartre's philosophy is that it is not possible to avoid becoming guilty. In the case of inertia, not involving themselves in the issues of those around them can never be used as an excuse. For example, trying not to become involved in a war does not relieve a person from his responsibility for this war. Similarly, guilt cannot be avoided by refraining from engaging in any relationships, since indifference is no less problematic than the other attitudes that people can have towards others. Furthermore, in interpersonal relationships, guilt cannot be avoided, because, as Van Stralen point out, "wat men voor de een doet gaat ten koste van de ander" (*Beschreven Keuzes* 95): existing in time always means making choices at the cost of all alternatives.

In the chapter on literature and philosophy above, literature was discussed as a way to imagine different ways to live. Even if there is no ultimate justification for a choice, imagination helps to choose nonetheless for one life rather than another. Literature can thus be a way out of the impasse. Sartre seems to have seen this the same way, writing novels such as *Les Chemins de la Liberté*. The problem of providing an aim to engage for by means of existentialist philosophy and the impossibility of a non-alienating relationship that became clear in theory are also problems that the characters in the here discussed novels struggle with. Analyzing the different ways the characters in these two novels deal with these problems will lead back to the problem of an existentialist ethics, which ultimately remains up to the individual to choose. The choices that the characters make are possible ways for an individual to give content to the abstract requirements of existentialism. By approaching the novels with Sartre's existentialism as a hermeneutic model, the characters actions become meaningful as attempts to overcome inertia and alienation.

# 4. *The Silent Cry* by Kenzaburo Ōe

## 4.1. Kenzaburo Ōe

In several essays and interview, Ōe describes his own writing as a way to deal with the tragedies in his life, particularly two events that occurred in 1963: the birth of his deformed and severally mentally handicapped son Hakiri and a visit to Hiroshima in which he was confronted with the possibility of atomic annihilation. Because of this, his novels are highly self-referential and knowing his oeuvre helps to understand each individual novel better. His earliest works deal mainly with a small village in Shikoku, similar to the one where he lived until he commenced his studies at the university of Tokyo, and the relationships between two brothers, while later works, written after the events of 1963, deal with the birth of a handicapped child and the threat of atomic war in increasingly complex ways. *The Silent Cry* is one of the first works in which Ōe tries to come to terms with the birth of Hakiri. In this novel, the themes of his later works are interwoven with his earlier themes.

Sartre is often cited as an important influence on Ōe, as Ōe wrote his master thesis on Sartre's fiction (Napier, 12) and studied in Paris in the 1960ies. Ōe repeatedly states that he is an engaged writer, one of the last writers of the postwar generation that, according to Ōe, is acutely aware of the need for engagement because of its experience with war, but, notwithstanding the horror of what happened, has hope for a rebirth from the ashes (Ōe, "Nobel Lecture"). Not only does he intent to move people beyond their inertia with his writings, he also finds it insufficient to merely write novels and engages himself in everyday life, particularly for nuclear disarmament, the protection of the environment and against discrimination, and by taking care of Hakiri as well as he can.

Ōe is famous for rejecting the later developments in literature. In his Nobel lecture he says, "I am one of the writers who wish to create serious works of literature which dissociate themselves from those novels which are mere reflections of the vast consumer cultures of Tokyo and the subcultures of the world at large." From his other interviews it is clear that he means writers such as Haruki Murakami. He laments the loss of 'serious literature,' a Japanese concept that cannot simply be equated to American concepts such as highbrow literature, since the concept does not only refer to complexity, but also to authenticity, and for writers such as Ōe to social

commitment. To what extend Murakami's *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* is indeed a mere reflection without a critical stance will be discussed in the next chapter.

Ōe's fame and popularity increased dramatically after he received the Nobel Prize. As Napier writes, "a writer whose career had been marked by literary resistance … was officially installed as an icon of mainstream mass culture" (1). Paradoxically, this writer who defines himself as writing from the margins becomes a spokesperson for Japan as a whole. It is important to note that *The Silent Cry* was written before he received the Noble Prize. While Ming Yan Lai in her essay "The anxiety of ambiguity: Nation and Identity in Ōe's *Man'en gannet no futtoboru*" reads the novel as an attempt to define Japan's identity, Ōe himself considers it a discussion of the margins of Japanese society. Lai claims the village is allegorical for Japan as a whole (397). Indeed, the historical events in the country are all reflected in village life, but rather than being allegorical for the country as a whole, Ōe points out the different effect that these events have on the margins and the different viewpoint of the margins on these events. In the village that forms the setting for many of his novels, including *The Silent Cry*, "the villagers viewed their history as outside, and even in confrontation with, the authoritarian politics of imperial Japan" (Napier 11). According to Stephen Snyder and Phillip Gabriel, his rejection of the 'Order of Culture' prize that he was offered subsequently by the emperor of Japan confirms his "commitment to his role as a social conscience" (1).

## 4.2. Mitsu's Intertia

Inertia is overwhelmingly present in *The Silent* Cry. Especially the beginning of the novel is permeated with descriptions and signs of inertia, displayed in various ways by the different characters. The novel starts with the protagonist, Mitsasoburo Nedokoro, usually called Mitsu, waking up with a terrible hangover.

> I grope among the anguished remnants of dreams that linger in my consciousness, in search of some ardent sense of expectation [but instead he finds] an endless nothing … A dull pain in my consciousness as it backs reluctantly into the light. With a sense of resignation, I take upon me once more the heavy flesh, dully aching in every part and disintegrated though it is. I've been sleeping with my arms and legs askew, in the posture of a man

> reluctant to be reminded either of his nature or of the situation in which he finds himself (1).

From the first page on it is clear that Mitsu is in a stagnated position, symbolized by the pit in which he climbs in an effort to sleep through his hangover. He searches for 'some ardent sense of expectation', translated by Ming-Yan Lai for her essay about *The Silent Cry* in much stronger terms, as 'a lost sense of passionate hope' (386). In his dream he seems to have had a cause to engage for, but now, waking up in real life, he lacks anything to engage himself for, he has no aim to motivate his choices. In the same stream of consciousness followed upon his awaking he first says that instead of hope he finds fear, but instead of constituting an existential experience, it changes quickly into indifference (Ōe, *The Silent Cry* 3). This is one of a number of passages in which Mitsu is said to prevent a train of thought to continue and constitute 'an experience.'

The reader later finds out that, at the start of the novel, Mitsu has already been confronted with his limit situations: the grotesque suicide of his friend and the birth of his retarded child. Drinking himself into a stupor was a reaction to these events, his way to avoid being 'reminded of either his nature or of the situation.' An existentialist interpretation of this is that he does not want to be reminded of his 'nature' as a freedom and 'a nothingness,' and of his 'situation,' which compels him to take responsibility for his life choices. At this point in the novel, he still tries to avoid drawing conclusions from and dealing with the consequences of his limit situations.

Mitsu's only friend committed suicide by hanging himself, naked, with his face painted crimson and with a cucumber in his anus. Mitsu's wife, Natsumi, tells him that she is scared that there should be people who kill themselves in such a way, because it makes her realize that he could do something similar (8). As Ōe says, he employs the technique described by Bakhtin as 'grotesque realism' (Nobel Lecture). This is a method to break the bad faith in which everything appears comfortably as a part of everyday life routine. As Susan Napier writes, Ōe searches for 'the sublime' in his work, a way to represent reality so that it becomes uncanny (15). In this way he tries to appeal to the reader and make the reader see the world from the perspective of *Existenz* instead of *Dasein*.

This suicide confronts Natsumi with the radical freedom of the Other, even to do something as grotesque and bizarre as that. She hopes to find a confirmation of a

basic difference between the two men in his friend's masochism. Without saying this out loud so as not to disconcert her, Mitsu thinks to himself that this distinction is not justified, because masochism is not the cause, but just one of the symptoms of what he calls his friends madness.

Mitsu recognizes that the cause of his friend's suicide, the madness inside him, is also present in himself. He sees the suicide as his own possibility and experiences angst for his own possibility. He describes how he deliberately avoids that this notion becomes an 'experience' to him, an existentialist experience that is: by remaining silent about it and by waiting till it passes "without damaging the walls of the brain," (Ōe, *The Silent Cry* 10) meaning, without letting his realization that this situation confronts him with the reality of his own freedom damage the construct of bad faith that he has build up in his brain.

Mitsu describes his friend's madness as "something grotesque and really frightening coiled up in the depths of the personality. There was some enormous, uncontrollable, crazy motive force lurking in the depths of his soul … and I [Mitsu] too have the seeds of that same, incurable madness" (10). At first sight, this notion seems to be essentialist, but it can also be interpreted in an existentialist way, as the absurdity of human freedom: people's choices are based only on *nothingness*, that is, freedom. They need not even understand themselves why they would choose to do something.

His friend's madness, expressed mainly by his masochism, can also be interpreted as a desperate way to attempt to overcome alienation. The reaction that he describes to this is not in first instance sexual. He says it makes him feel "as though my body was completely disassembled … without any sensation at all. But my mind was floating somewhere way up above, completely cut off from my body" (10). Here masochism is not the variety of masochism that Sartre describes, a way to become entirely object for another and to believe that the other makes the decisions for him, but rather making use of the effect of physical pain as a way to dissolve himself from his situation, to become a free-floating subjectivity with no responsibility to change a specific situation. Both are forms of bad faith, with the same result of feeling relieved from responsibility, while in fact remaining responsible for choosing this situation.

Mitsu sees this madness as something specific to him and his friend, and not as something common to all people. This could be because Mitsu and his friend as intellectuals who deeply analyze their lives are more aware of the absurdity of human

life. They refrain from most of the activities that others use as bad faith; they do not fill the emptiness with anything they truly believe in, such as a busy everyday life routine. His friends dissociation from his body by means of masochism is much more deliberate than common cases of bad faith such as Sartre describes them, it is an effect rather than a belief. Mitsu ignores his awareness of existential truth, but it is constantly shown to lurk at the brim of his consciousness, making him closer to it than most people. However, his intellectual understanding does not constitute a strong enough experience to be transformed into engaged action: mere intellectual understanding cannot serve as a limit situation in this novel[8].

### 4.3. Taka as a Man of Violence: Identity as Bad Faith

Mitsu is contrasted with his brother Taka Nedokoro, also called Taka, who, instead of contemplating without acting, acts without contemplating. Mitsu is an intellectual, while Taka is, throughout the novel, repeatedly called a 'man of violence'. In an interview, Ōe says that they represent his own 'two divided selves,' the observer and the activist ("An Attempt" 9). Van Stralen demonstrates in *Beschreven Keuzes* that such classifications of ways to live are typical for existentialist literature. Using characters to represent different attitudes towards life helps to see the advantages and disadvantages of such attitudes (70).

Unlike Mitsu, Taka gives his all to his aims, which, during the present of the novel, is a rebellion against the supermarket that economically controls the village. However, this cannot be called engagement, because Taka does not care about the economic situation, he merely uses this argument for the sake of creating a violent situation in order to confirm his identity. Taka identifies himself as a 'man of violence,' in this way making himself into an object and pretending that, because he once acted in a certain way, he will inevitably continue to do so in the future. This cannot be called engagement, since engagement is the choice made from the standpoint of the existential experience, thus engagement and bad faith exclude each other and it is not possible to be engaged in bad faith.

The constructed nature of this identity as a man of violence is a point of contention between Mitsu on the one hand and Taka and his friends on the other hand.

[8] In this sense, Mitsu is similar to Roquentin in Sartre's *Nausea*, who realizes that futility of the village people's pursuits without being able to replace them with anything less futile.

Mitsu recounts to one of Taka's friends that, as a child, Taka always claimed, "he felt fear neither of violence, nor of any form of pain, nor of death itself" (Ōe, *The Silent Cry* 24). To test him they made a 'tiny wound' in Taka's finger drawing a drop of blood, whereupon Taka vomited and fainted.

Oddly, Taka's friends as well as Mitsu's wife agree that courage and violence are virtues. In this novel, Ōe lets his characters return to their native village in a valley of Shikoku, in this way making an imaginative return to his own native village, which has many of the same characteristics. He draws from his "childhood experiences in an ultra nationalistic society during the Pacific War" (Ōe "An Attempt" 7), when Japan attempted to acquire domination over the other Asian countries by waging an aggressive war. This could explain the characters strange admiration for violence.

A psychological explanation, supplementing the cultural explanation, refers back to an incident to which Taka himself attributes a pivotal role in his life. When Taka was 17, he had an incestuous relationship with his retarded sister. He confesses this to Mitsu shortly before he commits suicide. He had convinced his sister, who is never given a name throughout the novel, that having intercourse with him was 'alright' as long as no one else knew about it and that this way, he would not have to marry someone else and leave her. When the sister became pregnant, Taka commanded her to say that she was raped. The uncle with whom they lived rook her to the hospital for an abortion and sterilization. Upset from the operation as well as from the noise of the city –she was extremely sensitive to noise- she tried to find comfort in their habit of having intercourse. He rejected her, and when she insisted, he hit her. In response she sayd, 'It wasn't true what you said, Taka. It was wrong, even though we kept it secret'" (Ōe, *The Silent Cry* 239). The next morning she commited suicide.

Taka feels guilty for the shameful death of this delicate and innocent human being whom he, in his perverted way, truly loved. He says, "she was the one feminine thing in my life, I felt I had to keep her safe," (236) something at which he miserably failed. His desire to punish himself is a form of bad faith, because it is a way to avoid responsibility. His self-punishment does not improve anything for others. Instead he should make up for his actions and make better decisions in the future. His desire for punishment only causes more harm.

He explains to Mitsu that this incident caused a split in his personality. He says, "I've been torn all along between a desire to justify myself as a man of violence

and the urge to punish myself for it" (211). He does not only feel guilty, he also believes that this is not a mere incident but constitutes his identity, ‘a man of violence.’ After his sister’s suicide, Taka sees himself as the perpetrator instead of as the victim of violence that he was as a small child. Although this was not his intention towards his sister, it was the position that he had always wanted to occupy with regard to violence. When Taka was still a small child, his other brother, who is throughout the novel only called S, was beaten to death. This made him aware of the power of the Other. From this moment on, Taka became obsessed with violence. He tries to convince Mitsu that he is not afraid of violence, so as to convince himself that it has no hold over him. As their ‘little game’ shows, at that point, he had not mastered his fear yet. He responded ‘magically’, as Sartre would explain it, by vomiting and fainting, losing consciousness, instead of facing that he can easily be harmed.

To confirm his position as a perpetrator and not a victim of violence, he chose to change camps during the student demonstration from the students to the government. He says, "I chose to ally myself with unjust violence, whatever its purpose … I wanted to go on accepting myself as I am, to justify myself as a man of violence without having to change" (211). Taka’s causes are not situations he intends to improve but only ways to confirm his identity.

He strengthens his idea of himself as a man of violence by interpreting his family history that it becomes a continuation, an inherited character trait. His mother always emphasized that there were two types of men in their family: the mad type such as their great-grandfathers younger brother who started a farmers rebellion against his own family, and great-grandfather who single handedly, aided only by his gun, defended the storehouse against the rioters. Taka has become convinced that he is of the ‘mad’ type. Following the family tradition as related by the stories of his mother, he starts a riot against the ‘emperor of the supermarkets’

### 4.4. Violence as a Limit Situation revealing the threat of the Other

Violence, particularly what appears to the victim as random acts of senseless violence, can be seen as the ultimate limit situation not only for Taka, but also in the novel as a whole. ‘Others,’ in their freedom, define the subject’s ‘being-for-others,’ and they are free to define others in such a way that they feel justified in attacking and even killing them, while the victims and those who love them may never understand.

Mitsu's friend describes such a case of violence, which from his perspective was senseless violence, as the cause of his madness that eventually led to his suicide. During a student demonstration, a policeman hit him on the head so that his skull cracked, while he was not even taking part in the demonstration, much less in any violent activities, but merely searching for his wife.

The reason why S was beaten to death is not clear to Mitsu and Taka as adults and it was certainly not clear to Taka as a child. Taka remembers:

> By sucking my candy so carefully I was really hoping to make my consciousness burrow down inside my body, turning its back completely on the violence outside, much as a wound buries itself deep in swelling flesh. It was then that I thought up my piece of magic. If things went well - in other words, if I managed not to dribble a single drop - I'd escape the awful violence that hung about me" (143).

This is exactly the sort of process that Sartre describes in *A Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*. Instead of improving the situation, which Taka cannot do because his brother is already dead and because he is still too young, Taka avoids fully realizing the danger of violence and opts instead for a magical view of the world in which he can do something that is within his control too keep himself save. Adults can be prone to just the same self-deception, pretending that if they do everything right, for example, keep the house clean, then the evil and senseless violence that they hear about cannot harm them.

A further case of senseless violence caused Mitsu to lose sight in one of his eyes: a group of primary school children attacked him, throwing stones at him for no apparent reason. He says he is afraid of understanding the meaning of this incident: another instance in which he deliberately avoids existential insights. As mentioned above, only the Other constitutes a real threat to one's freedom, since he does not merely create a situation but a different interpretation of the situation.

Mitsu feels this threat strongly when, laying in the pit at the start of the novel, feeling alone in the world and without anyone to observe him, ("the dog has no eyes. Nor have I eyes in my indifference" (Ōe, *The Silent Cry* 3)) he suddenly realizes, "someone unknown was peering down at [him]" (19). To his consciousness, it appears as if "the outside world sprang to life once more" (19). He changes from

being-for-himself to being-for-others. This causes him to feel shame. "I sat, heedless of the dirt covering me, in a position more degraded than that of any normal inhabitant of that morning city …assailed by an overwhelming cold from without and a burning shame from within" (19). At this point he is no longer heedless of the dirt covering him but painfully aware that he had been heedless of it before. He does not only feel shame at being seen by the other in what he sees as the most degraded position, he also feels fear at being at the mercy of the other.

> The dog went wild and I was paralyzed with fear and shame. A clattering of innumerable glass objects wafted down into the pit like a flurry of hail. I strained my eyes in an effort to make out the features of the giant who peered down godlike at me … 'What's the dogs name?' said the giant. The question was so remote from all the possible remarks against which I'd been arming myself. Hauled safe, in an instant, onto everyday shores, I felt an immense, relaxing sense of relief. No doubt the gossip would spread around the neighborhood through this man, but it would be a scandal that in no sense stepped outside the everyday: not the kind that a moment earlier I'd contemplated with such fear and embarrassment; … the kind that would brutally and aggressively scatter everything human to the winds (19).

Angst and shame are existential emotions. In this translation, Mitsu is said to be "paralyzed with fear and shame," not 'angst and shame'. Nonetheless, what is meant here is angst. The difference between angst and fear in existentialist theory is that fear is directed at something specific, while angst is an existential emotion, in which people are aware of the bottomlessness of their existence (*Beschreven Keuzes* 24). Angst is not commonly used in the English language. Mitsu feels angst against the Other who appears godlike to him. As soon as he realizes he deals with a concrete other person, the milkman, his angst dissolves. Mitsu is in this situation on the verge of realizing the power of the Other and his need to use his freedom to oppose the will of the Other. But in this case, it is the man's question that brings him from existential angst and shame to the comfort of *Dasein*. As mentioned, Sartre writes that only an instant is needed to change from a perspective of 'bad faith' or 'magic' to an authentic perspective. The opposite is true as well; it only takes an instant to slide back into the old comfortable habits of bad faith.

The unknown man whom Mitsu looks up to lying in the pit, who later turns out to be just the milkman, appears to Mitsu from that particular perspective as 'godlike'. In some ways, in Sartre's thought, the Other occupies the place that, in a Christian worldview, is attributed to God. In Sartre's existentialism, a person's responsibility is towards the Other instead of God, the Other passes judgment and the Other takes the place of God as the unknowable force that can at any time disrupt a person's life (Van Stralen, *Beschreven Keuzes* e.g. 20, 69-70, 123). God is said to work in mysterious ways. The same can be said about the Other, as the self never has access to the consciousness of the Other. This does not only concern the Other as a concrete other, but the Other as an anonymous power, as in the phrase 'what would others think,' that makes a person into a being-for-Others. The angst that Mitsu feels for the other peering at him in the pit is angst of being at the mercy of the Others freedom.

The riot against the supermarket can be seen as a limit situation for the village as a whole. From this perspective, Taka is the Other who calls Mitsu and the villagers to action. As Ōe says in his Nobel Lecture, Mikhail Bakhtin disclosed to him "the overlapping of death and passions for rebirth." The destruction that Taka causes by looting the supermarket and (as he claims himself but Mitsu does not believe) by raping and murdering a girl, ironically brings the villagers out of their inertia. He stops the youths from watching television and picking fights and brings them to practice football instead. He revives the tradition of the Nembutsu dance, which is a source of energy for the people and gives them a historical conscious that is not a simple repetition of what happened in the past but an imagination of a past that enables them to envisage and choose a future.

The positive outcomes of his actions do not make his actions socially engaged. Taka has a type of bad faith that is different from the bad faith of the villagers. He can break their bad faith of hiding from responsibility by following traditions and routines because his own bad faith is of such a different kind. Because of his experiences with violence he does acknowledge the danger that the Other's freedom presents to him. Nonetheless, his type of bad faith, adopting the identity of a man of violvence, is no solution, but results in his shameful death.

## 4.5. Alienation Caused by Fear from the Other

In *The Silent Cry,* the attitudes that characters take towards others are most often ways to avoid the power of the Other, so that indifference, sadism and hate play more important roles than attitudes such as love or desire. The strongest expression of the danger of the Other's freedom is the Other's ability to harm and kill, elaborately discussed above, but the force of the Other's judgment plays an important role as well. Natsumi holds Mitsu responsible for the shamefulness of Taka's death, since he showed him no mercy. She says, "I don't believe you actually drove him to suicide, but I do think you imposed on him the most beastly and shameful kind of death … you kept moving him down into his shame " (258). She says he lets people live without hope. He is an intellectual who passes judgment without leaving any space for hope.

In the beginning of the novel, Mitsu has a dream in which he encounters his baby and his dead friend. He cries out, not only in his dream, but also in reality: "I have deserted you!" (32). He interprets this as having deserted his friend and his child, "by never having been hanged myself in their stead, with my head painted crimson; by never having been put in an institution and left to degenerate into something like the young of a wild beast" (32). When they visit the baby in the institution, they feel even more alienated from it than before, they feel as if all humanity has left the baby. Therefore, they decide to leave the baby in the institution instead of take it back home with them, as they had planned. Mitsu considers this decision 'quite unjustifiable' and feels disgusted with himself and his wife (121). He considers the doctor's advice that a change in the environment would harm the baby only an excuse; they do not consider it possible for the baby to be harmed more than it is. Mitsu does not allow himself the comfort of the bad faith of following an authority. He sees his desertion as a lack of empathy: a failure to feel connected to his son. His wife however, gives a slight but significant spin on his interpretation: she sees it as his lack of willingness to improve their situation by giving her and the baby love and hope. When Taka asked Mitsu why he had always hated him, she thinks he should have told him that he loved him. What Mitsu feels he ought to is being stagnated in the past with them, while his wife urges him to create a better and new future instead. She desperately clings to Taka, because she believes that what he offers is change, a new life.

Mitsu's attitude towards others is mainly indifference. Initially, he does not use the names of his wife and of his baby, but refers to them only in their role as wife and baby, in this way making himself immune to their judgment. He says he feels closer to his death friend's body than to the body of his drunken wife and handicapped baby (11). According to the description, the baby is close to an in-itself, but his wife is a free human being. Only when she starts bonding with Taka's group and eventually has sexual intercourse with Taka, he start to see her as an independent being and thinks of her as 'Natsumi' increasingly often (271).

Mitsu is called a 'rat' several times and starts to identify himself as a rat increasingly. This appears to be connected with considering himself to be on a downward slope. This way, he allows others to make him into an object. The rat is a Chinese zodiac, but since the meaning of this nickname is so negative, it seems that here the western meaning of a rat as a 'traitor' is meant. Taka compares Mitsu to a philosopher he met in America with the nickname 'rat,' who he considered to be on the same type of downward slope. Up to this point, Mitsu has mostly avoided objectifying himself in such a way. He struggles with his lack of an ego or identity and fails to see this as the opportunity that it constitutes. Here he starts to see his lack of identity as a type of identity. While his being-for-others in the village is defined by his family relations, he cannot see himself that way, since he is unable to establish a meaningful connection with the people that should be most important to him: his child, his wife, his brother and his native village community. When he returns to his native village for the first time in years, it seems to him as if the river accuses him of being a rat, of not being the same person he was when he lived there, having lost his connection to the village (58). When he bows down to drink from the river, he thinks:

> The 'I' bending down there now was not the child who had once bent his bare knees there, that there was no continuity, no consistency between the two 'I's,' that the 'I' now bending down there was a remote stranger. The present 'I' had lost all true identity. Nothing, either within me or without, offered any hope of recovery. I could hear the transparent ripples on the pool tinkling, accusing me of being no better than a rat (58).

Mitsu feels like a 'remote stranger,' an outsider to the village, while he should be an insider. As Van Stralen shows in *Beschreven Keuzes*, there is a type which he calls the

‘authentic stranger’ (*authentieke buitenstaander*) that often occurs in existentialist literature. Through his position as a stranger, which is not merely a matter of fact but a self-definition, this type is not bound up in the same *Dasein*, the same everyday life routine of bad faith as the others, but is more aware of the existentialist truths (i.a. 66, 121). For Mitsu, being an outsider means that he has no true identity. In Sartre’s philosophy, this is a positive insight (even though it is experienced in angst): it is an existential truth that needs to be acknowledged in order to become truly engaged. This insight should lead to the conclusion that he is free to choose his identity at any moment. Mitsu however, fails to see his lack of identity as an opportunity and experiences it as a betrayal to what he should be, to what is expected of him.

When Mitsu finds out that Takashi tricked him into selling the storehouse without getting the true profit for it he is not angry with Takashi, but dissociates himself emotionally from the situation. He decides that the money, his family home, their former nurse who still lives there with her family and has no other place to go, are not of concern to him. He already decided to dissociate himself form the village before he found out about Takashi’s trickery. This was after Takashi saved a child from the river in which it fell thereby endangering his own life. Mitsu feels certain that the village community would have lynched Taka if he had failed and let the child slip away. Initially, Mitsu fears for Taka’s life, then he is relieved that Taka managed to save the child and himself, but very soon his emotion changes to anger, he is angry with Taka for endangering himself. To protect himself against the fear caused by Taka’s decisions in which he risks his own life, and against the fear for the judgment of the villagers had he failed, Mitsu tries to make himself entirely indifferent to him, and not only to him, but to the entire village. At that moment, he no longer minds being a rat, he believes that being a rat is an identity too (135).

He feels indifferent enough to his wife to allow her to sleep in the main building with Taka and his friends while he sleeps alone in the storehouse. Only when he hears from Taka’s friend Hoshi that Taka and Natsumi had sexual intercourse he cannot remain indifferent. At first he only feels embarrassment at Hoshi seeing him in this state, as the cuckold. He realizes it is in Natsumi’s power to make him into a chuckold, an object. He asks Hoshi to tell him all the details, because he fails to feel what he considers an appropriate response. Hoshio is indeed angry and hopelessly disappointed with Mitsu’s failure to be truly angry. However, he only fails to see Natsumi’s infidelity from his own perspective because he is observed by Hoshio,

making him into an object for Hoshio. When he is unobserved for the first time after he learned about the adultery, he at first fails to even remember how she looks, but then, "jealousy … was gradually becoming a positive fact, sticking hot and rough in my bronchial tubes as though I'd inhaled poison gas" (218). He cannot maintain his indifference. According to *A Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, jealousy would also be bad faith. It is of course no solution, it is not a way to take responsibility and improve the situation. Nonetheless, his jealousy helps to break the bad faith of indifference. The adultery is the limit situation that makes him aware of Natsumi as an independent person. As Sartre explains, the indifferent person prefers to see other people as confined in their roles. Natsumi's adultery forces him to see that she *is* not a wife in the manner of a thing, but she chose to be his wife while she can also choose differently.

Due to his indifferent attitude Mitsu fails to see Taka's trickery and his Nurse looses her home. Taka plans a rebellion with the sole aim of confirm his identity as a man of violence. Mitsu knows Taka far better than anyone else and he is the only one who could prevent the damage that Taka is about to cause, but he has decided to be indifferent to the village and not oppose any of Taka's evil plans. When he sees two old men fighting so that one looses a tooth and a piece of gum he is shocked and appalled. He is confronted with the harm that people can do to each other, even older men who should know better. What he is most stunned at is that everyone stands by and watches and no one interferes. He insists that in the old days in the village, people would have interfered immediately. He is outraged with others for doing exactly what he was doing himself. He can maintain his indifference as long as he does not see any real violence, but as soon as he sees people getting hurt it is revealed as bad faith.

Mitsu's inertia is closely connected to his alienation: It is not possible to be engaged to help others without feeling involved with them. Mitsu comes to the realization that refraining from action, remaining inert, deceiving himself into believing he is not involved with others, the bad faith of indifference, in no way protect him from being responsible for the suffering of others. His indifference makes it impossible for him to have access to the minds of others such as Taka so that he looses his only means to influence the freedom of the Other, thereby only protecting himself from fear for the freedom of the Other's, but actually being at the mercy of the Other.

## 4.6. Taka's Thatched Hut: Imagination as Bad Faith

The Nedokoro brothers use a 'thatched hut' as an expression of a dream disconnected from their real situation. Taka tells Mitsu: "remember how sister and I built a thatched hut and lived there for a while? We were starting a new life, trying to get away from the smell of mortality. It was just after S was beaten to death" (35). Takashi describes the period in which he lived with his sister as lovers as the happiest he has ever been, the closest he ever came to this dream of a thatched hut. In their 'thatched hut', the rest of the world did not matter.

Because she was retarded, his sister did not criticize his unrealistic dreams, as his brother continually does. Mitsu constantly points out how Taka's memory and imagination differ from reality. As Mitsu says, "I found a perverse pleasure in waiting for the fresh flaws that my corrections lured from Taka's memory and shooting them down as they appeared" (74).

The meaning of this dream of a 'thatched hut' in *The Silent Cry* can be elucidated with the help of Sartre's analysis of the imagination. As explained above, imagination is part of freedom. Because people are separated from their future by a Nothingness, they can act according to their imagination of a future different from the present. On the other hand, imagining a different life can be a compensation for accomplishing nothing in real life and in that case it is a flight in bad faith (Van Stralen, *Beschreven Keuzes* 97). The thatched hut in *The Silent Cry* can be seen as an example of flight into the imagination as bad faith.

At the same time, for Mitsu, who does not know the awful meaning that this expression has for Taka, this expression designates a cause for engagement. Taka convinces Mitsu to move to the village in order to find a new life and a thatched hut. While doubting the possibility for this, Mitsu is strongly aware of his lack of 'passionate hope,' in other words, he lacks a cause to engage himself for. He senses that Taka does have such hope and follows him. Only later on he realizes that Taka's causes are empty, that they do not contain hope for improvement but merely confirm the identity that he has created for himself. Thus, the 'thatched hut,' holds the promise of being a cause for engagement, but appears to be a flight from the situation. In this way, it displays the opportunity as well as the danger of the imagination.

### *4.7.* Engagement and Involvement

The novel ends ambiguously with Mitsu's decision to accept a job offer for which he will go to Africa as a translator on an expedition to catch wild animals for Japanese zoos: "it occurred to him that going to Africa wasn't going to solve everything" (Ōe, *The Silent Cry* 272). He learned that he is not able to stay indifferent towards others and that he cannot avoid responsibility by refraining from action. Yet, he has not found any purpose in life either (269). He decides to raise his handicapped child as well as the child born from Natsumi's adultery, but he will do so only by recognizing them as his own and by giving them financial support, not by making his everyday life evolve around them. This way he may act responsibly towards them, but he will not be able to overcome his sense of alienation from them.

Natsumi encourages him to accept the job offer so that he can start leading a life of action, a life in which he takes risks and in which he is responsible for others. Until now he has worked as a translator and a university lecturer "without a single student who pinned any serious hopes on his classes" (249). As a translator in an expedition, other people will depend on him. This is a side of him that, acoording to Natsumi, he has so far ignored, because he perceived himself in opposition to his brother. Mitsu imagines that in Africa he will be too busy to consider what was going on inside him (274). Taka was the one who acted with no purpose; it seems that now Mitsu will explore this possibility. Mitsu says, "It was the beginning of a new life. It would be easier there, at least, to built myself that thatched hut" (274). He is still looking for a dream dissolved from his situation. Nonetheless, he might use his insights and life a more engaged and involved life in Africa.

More than any other living character in the novel, Natsumi rids herself of her inertia to become engaged. She quits drinking, no longer relies on the authority of either Mitsu or Taka as she did before and decides, even before she knows she has Mitsu's support, to take care of both children. She will take care of them herself, sending her husband to Africa, where she believes he will have the best opportunity to improve himself. Initially appearing as one of the weakest characters in her terrible alcoholism and dependence, she finally overcomes her inertia and, through her real connection to and love for others, she can engage herself for a better future.

The other character who manages to become engaged is an ancestor of the Nedokoro brothers. According to Ōe, the clue to the novel is the synthesis to the

dichotomy between Mitsu and Taka, which mirrors the dichotomy between great grandfather and his younger brother ("An Attempt" 10-1). Although, encouraged by the stories his mother always told them, Taka thought he followed in the footsteps of his great grandfathers younger brother, a man of action, of violence, who was mad enough to turn against his family and then scrupulously leave to seek his fortune for himself in America, the truth turned out to be quite different. The dismantling of the storehouse by the emperor of the supermarkets revealed that great grandfathers younger brother had not left the village at all. Instead, he lived in a secret cellar, choosing to imprison himself. His first rebellion was made with the intention to stop the government from raising the taxes on rice. He made sure that it seemed a rebellion of the young men of the village against the establishment, so that he accomplished his aim, preventing the new law, while ensuring that only the younger brothers who would not inherit land and were superfluous to the village economy would be punished. He only reappeared from his cellar as a ghost in the Nembutsu dance the second time the government tried to raise the prices for rise. This time, he invented a myth; that the vaccination ordered by the government would be dangerous. He took resort to a myth, because he expected that the villagers would fail to see how the higher taxes would ruin their lives. He organized another rebellion, this time wholly avoiding any deaths.

Each time he improved the situation for his village, and he managed to learn from the mistakes he made the first rebellion that cost many lives and improve his strategy for the second rebellion. He lived a life of contemplation and meditation, acting only when it was necessary. Great grandfathers younger brother offers an alternative to the apparent dichotomy between Mitsu's passiveness and Taka's blind activity. Ōe says in an interview that the story of this ancestor "encourag[ed] the surviving individuals who live in the temporal present of the novel to opt for a different way of life in the future. The choice, however, is for each individual to make" ("An Attempt" 11). He does not present a final solution but considers several options on how to deal with the problems of engagement and involvement. It is not simply the case that action is good and inertia is bad: the active characters, Taka and great-grandfathers younger brother, can do good or evil while the passive characters such as Mitsu make themselves guilty of doing nothing to prevent the harm caused by the active characters. It seems important to choose when to remain passive, which authority to follow and which authority to rebel against.

# 5. The Wind-up Bird Chronicle by Haruki Murakami

## 5.1. Haruki Murakami

According to Jay Rubin, who is the translator of the here-discussed edition of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle,* Murakami's "style is un-Japanese. When Murakami first returned to fiction, he could not seem to find his voice until he tried writing in English and then translating himself into Japanese" ("The Other World" 491). He immersed himself in American culture. He owned a jazz bar and is said to have an encyclopedic knowledge of jazz (492). Chozic argues that Murakami writes in such a way as to be accessible to an international audience. The references he uses are not Japanese but international. His references to jazz, opera and literature belong to a level of education rather than a nationality. Those who blame Murakami for not being sufficiently Japanese should consider that nationality might not be one of the most important parameters of the target audience's knowledge anymore. Ōe argues that such international writing goes against the spirit of diversity ("Japan's Dual Identity" 359), but it should be questioned whether diversity necessarily has to be based on geography.

Ōe laments the loss of serious literature. Murakami deliberately chooses not to write such serious literature. Rubin writes that, in an interview, Murakami explained,

> the situation faced by the writer in the late twentieth century who hopes to reach a sizable audience. The reading of novels, he said, must compete with sports and the stereo and TV … and a host of other enjoyable pastimes. The novelist can no longer expect readers to put the time and energy into trying to understand difficult fiction: The writer has to work harder to draw the reader into the cognitive system unique to the novel form. The burden is on the writer to entertain, to tell stories in simple, easy-to-understand language (494).

However, even though Murakami's language is easy to read and his narrative is easy to follow on a superficial level, his narrative has many levels of meaning, many symbols that remain unexplained and that, according to Murakami, loose their force when translated into a unified meaning and he constantly defies the expectations he creates, compelling his readers to think (Dil 59). Reading Murakami can be as easy or

as difficult as the reader chooses it to be. Chozic therefore argues that Murakami's work does not fit neatly into the categories popular and serious.

## 5.2. Inertia in Daily Routine

Toru Okada, the protagonist of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, is usually referred to with the Japanese first person informal pronoun '*Boku'* (Dil 43). He is nicknamed Mr. Wind-up Bird by May Kasahara - a girl who lives in the neighborhood with whom he establishes a friendship in the course of the novel.

When the reader is introduced to Toru, he appears entirely inert. He has given up his job, hardly has any contacts with people other than his wife Kumiko and has no aim in life. He keeps himself busy by following a daily routine that is filled mainly with household work. However, quitting his job can be seen as a step towards overcoming the inertia of his daily routine. As May tells about her job later on, it takes up almost all her time. The time she does not spend working she spends eating, sleeping, doing household chores; and what free time is left she spends in a fog, being too tired to think (446). This is the reality of working life for many people. While doing his household chores, Toru thinks about many of the issues that his former busy working life allowed him to avoid.

He did not quit his job because he disliked it, but because he realized he did not want to continue this job and this way of living for the rest of his life, even though he does not know what he would prefer to do. At this point, he cannot see any other option than replacing the one job with another. He accepts that finding a job is what is expected of him. Yet he says, "I don't have the image of the *one thing* I really want to do [emphasis in the original]" (122). He is not able to imagine a job that is worth engaging himself for. As mentioned in the chapter on Sartre's existentialism, Sartre argues that a situation in itself can never lead to engagement: it is necessary that the person involved can imagine an alternative. At first, Toru does not imagine alternatives because he tends to accept everything as it is. Time and time again he tells Kumiko, 'don't let it bother you:' when she takes her bad mood out on him (29), when she is late from work yet again, etc. Nothing seems to disturb his peace. He is hardly aware of his inertia as a problem.

## 5.3. Inertia and Alienation in the Marriage of Toru and Kumiko

His marriage with Kumiko is an example of both inertia and alienation. Toru's love for Kumiko can be interpreted from the perspective of Sartre's existentialism as the unrealistic demand on Kumiko to, out of freedom, choose to see the world only from his perspective, to consider her world to revolve around him. No longer working, Toru starts to wonder how well he really knows Kumiko, thinking "I might be standing at the threshold of something big, and inside lay a world that belonged to Kumiko alone, a vast world that I had never known" (30). So far, he has hidden from himself the danger of the Other and the truth of Kumiko's freedom: many options other than life with him are open to her.

Toru tells May, "we had had almost no relationships outside the house the six years of our marriage, but instead had lived a withdrawn sort of life, just Kumiko and me" (180). Toru calls this 'their own little world.' He explains to May that, "the two of us were trying to make a brand new world" (261) and asks her, "have you ever had that feeling – that you'd like to go to a whole different place and become a whole different self?" (261). May replies that he "had the wrong idea from the beginning" (261). It is impossible to start a new life dissolved from one's situation. She says, "that's what you're being punished for – by all kinds of things: by the world you tried to get rid of" (262). They should have transformed their situation into a better one, rather than pretend that it never existed.

Toru's dream with Kumiko can be seen as somewhat similar to Taka's 'thatched hut' in Ōe's *The Silent Cry*, even though it takes a much more socially acceptable form. Toru, like Taka, wants to get away from his situation rather than change it. Toru later realizes how much he is entangled in events outside of their marriage and their home:

> All of these [stories of which *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* is comprised] were linked as in a circle, at the center of which stood prewar Manchuria, continental East Asia, and the short war of 1939 in Nomonhan. Why Kumiko and I should have been drawn into this historical chain of cause and effect I could not comprehend. All these events had occurred long before Kumiko and I were born (498).

It seems to Toru as if they have been *drawn* into this 'chain of cause and effect', but in reality, they have always been part of it. The choices made by others before they were born have created the situation into which they are thrown. According to Sartre, freedom only has meaning with regard to a situation: it is the freedom to change the situation. Thus, it is the responsibility of Toru and Kumiko to move the 'chain of cause' and effect in the right direction.

Toru remarks to May that his name (Toru Okada) reminds him of some pre-war politician. As Rubin points out, this is the Prime Minister Okada Keisure (1934-6), "a key player in events leading to the ideological extremism that led to Japan's disastrous deception to go to war" ("The War Inside" 64). Of course, Toru is not responsible for the name he was given, but it shows that he is connected to the events during the war. A person's ego cannot be seen separately from his situation and the choices he makes within that situation. For Toru as an inhabitant of modern Japan the situation in which he lives is created by people such as Okada Keisure. He is responsible for a situation that was in part created by this man.

Kumiko is connected to the war through her uncle, who played a key role in some of its atrocities and her brother, who continues their families struggle for power in the present of the novel, this time not by means of war but by means of academics, mass media and politics. In the course of the novel it becomes increasingly clear that these methods are by no means an innocent version. Even without Toru's name and Kumiko's family they would be involved in the chain of cause and effect: these merely serve to illustrate their involvement, notwithstanding their apparent lack of ambition and desire for power. They try to maintain the bad faith of indifference towards others and, initially, they do not protect others from the harm that they know Kumiko's brother causes, although hardly anyone can gain better insight into his psychology, his motives and his aims.

Toru and Kumiko are only superficially interested in the war reminisces of Mr. Honda, a medium that Kumiko's family orders them to visit. Mr. Honda fails to reach his audience because of the way in which he presents his memories. As Toru says, "most of [his stories] were bloody, but coming out of the mouth of a dying old man in a dirty old robe, the details of battle lost the ring of reality. They sounded

more like fairy tales" (Murakami 53). He later finds out from a superior storyteller, a comrade of Mr. Honda, Lieutenant Mamiya, how very real these experiences were[9]. The indifference of Toru and Kumiko may help them not to feel bothered by others for a while, but it makes it impossible for them to benefit from interaction with others and to ward of the danger of the Others freedom. The limit situation that sets off the narrative is Kumiko's sudden and unexpected disappearance, which forces him Toru recognize her freedom and his involvement with what is outside 'their own little world,' such as her family and politics.

## 5.4. Fantastic Elements: Imagining Alternatives

Toru tries to win Kumiko back by delving deep into his own mind in order to find out what exactly went wrong, what he failed to understand about her, and to imagine how he can get her back. He goes down into a deep, dry well to be able to concentrate fully on answering these questions. The characters that he meets from this point on do not seem to be real people. They have strange names such as Malta and Creta Kano, and Nutmeg and Cinnamon Akasaka.

According to Jonathan Dil, such fantastic characters in Murakami's works are mere elements of the mythical structure he uses for his novel. He sees them as elements of what Joseph Campbell calls a 'monomyth': a hero's journey. Although they indeed fulfill these functions, this does not explain their meaning yet.

Matthew C. Strecher interprets these characters as emanating from Toru's subconscious. When Toru is in the well, he first has memories, then free floating associations and finally, he passes through the wall of the well. Strecher sees this as a passing through the wall that separates the conscious and the unconscious. Behind the wall he finds a maze-like hotel, where the most important action happens in room 208. Strecher concludes that room 208 represents Toru's core self (see Murakami 270). Strecher argues that these elements become magically real, hence the title of his essay "Magical Realism and the Search for Identity."

Retaining some of the insights from this interpretation, I suggest seeing these characters, as well as the events behind the wall, as Toru's imagination rather than his unconscious. He delves deep into his subconscious, but he does not merely linger

[9] According to the interpretation explained below in which most of the characters and events are considered stories invented by Toru to increase his understanding of his situation to win Kumiko back, Toru himself revisits the stories of Mr. Honda to understand their true meaning by means of the invention of the character Mamiya.

there or reflect on it, he uses what he finds there with a specific purpose in mind: to bring Kumiko back home. When, at the end of the novel, Kumiko asks: "So, you came here looking for me. You wanted to see me, is that it?" (576), he replies, "Strictly speaking, I didn't come here to *see* you, I came here to *bring you back"* (emphasis in the original) (576). Toru does his 'soul-searching' only to re-emerge from the well and change reality.

One of these fantastic characters is a mysterious woman who keeps phoning Toru. At the end of the novel, he finds a woman in hotel room 208 with the same voice. He tells her, "you were trying to convey some kind of secret to me. A secret of Kumiko's. A secret that the real Kumiko in the real world couldn't bring herself to tell me. (576). The telephone woman appears to be a product of Toru's imagination that helps him to understand Kumiko better. Toru's indifference to everything outside 'their own little world' kept out most of what Kumiko sees as her ego, such as her sexual desire and her dark family history. By inventing these characters he tries to fill the gaps in his understanding

In that case, Room 208 is not Toru's 'core self', as Strecher would have it, but the place where Kumiko is trapped. Toru is not simply delving into his own subconscious: he tries to understand Kumiko and to provide alternatives for the two of them as a married couple. The labyrinthine hotel represents the problems that Kumiko is dealing with, which he first ignored, but now tries to resolve for her (252). He tries to see Kumiko's options from her point of view. He does this by creating stories involving these fantastic characters, which help him to understand why Kumiko could possibly have left him.

An important clue revealing Toru's role as a storyteller who creatively imagines Kumiko's possibilities, is his parallel in the fantastic character Cinnamon, who wrote a series of stories on his computer that he called 'The Wind-up Bird Chronicle.' Toru reads one of his stories and tries to interpret it. In this way, Murakami suggests a way to interpret his novel. Firstly, Toru wonders what the word 'Chronicle' in the title means. This could mean that the sixteen stories of which the Chronicle is comprised are told in chronological older, but a "bolder interpretation [is that these stories are] different versions of the same story" (Murakami 524). This is a clue that the different stories in the Wind-up Bird Chronicle, the story about Toru, Kumiko and Noboru Wataya, the story about the sisters Kano, the war reminisces of Lieutenant Mamiya, the stories about May Kasahara, about the inhabitants of the

haunted house and about Nutmeg and Cinnamon Akasaka, are all versions of each other. Each of these stories explains something about Toru's relationship with Kumiko and each offers a different perspective from which he can see her.

To understand himself, Cinnamon tries to understand the events preceding his birth as related to him by his mother Nutmeg. Toru says, he "had to fill in [the] blank spots in his past" (524), while being aware that "fact may not be truth, and truth may not be factual" (525). Toru realizes that, for Cinnamon, "the important question was not what his grandfather did, but what he might have done. He learned the answer to this question as soon as he succeeded in telling the story" (525). The story of Cinnamon is also invented by Toru, so that his interpretation of why Cinnamon invents stories explains why he invents stories himself and helps to interpret the other stories in the novel. It does not matter that Creta and the telephone women are not factually correct representations of Kumiko. What matters is that they tell him a truth about Kumiko that, hitherto, he had not been aware of. In the case of the telephone woman, this is Kumiko's sexual desire. In the case of Creta, this is the root of Kumiko's biggest problems, her 'defilement[10]' by her sadist brother Noboru Wataya.

So, rather than that these characters become magically real, as Strecher maintains, Toru creates stories involving these fantastic characters and imagines their possibilities, so that he can conceive of alternatives for his real life with Kumiko.

What happens in the world of the well is of consequence in the real world, although not always in exactly the same way. After Toru passed through the wall, he returns with a blue mark on his cheek. When he is cut with a knife, he returns with real wounds and when he manages to kill his enemy Noboru Wataya in the well-world, Wataya loses consciousness in the real world. The events are clearly connected. The way in which Toru thinks about reality changes reality.

An objection against this way to understand the novel could be that the characters in it often surprise Toru and tell him things he did not know. However, as a storyteller, he is free to invent anything he wants, including that these characters do things that surprise him. Moreover, by creating these narratives, Toru comes to conclusions that actually surprise him based on fragments of memory that he has never before connected or traced back to their possible causes.

[10] defilement is the word used throughout the novel

## 5.5. Imagination: Dangers and Benefits

Cinnamon, the storyteller of the novel, is mute. He communicates by means of the computer, but he is inhibited in sharing his insights and largely cut off from interaction with others. According to his mother, something in the stories made him stop speaking. Cinnamon and Nutmeg live entirely closed of from the world outside. Cinnamon keeps their house and office perfectly clean, neat and tasteful. The only activity he engages in is keeping up this perfection. His mother Nutmeg cannot bare anyone in her surroundings to be dressed distastefully, so that she has to buy Toru a complete new wardrobe before he can become a part of their lives. The fictional world that they create is more compelling to them than the real world. Cinnamon and Nutmeg are in a way trapped in the beautiful but very small world that they have created with their storytelling and fashion design. All Cinnamon's time is spend on keeping an immaculate household and Nutmeg, in her work as a paranormal healer, offers her clients some relieve for the moment she treats them but she cannot do anything against the cause of their suffering and she does not improve their lives beyond that. Their life is the epitome of imagination as mere distraction.

Lieutenant Mamiya encountered a limit situation during the war, about which he writes to Toru. After severe tribulations in the Mongolian desert, seeing a fellow soldier being skinned alive before his very eyes, he was thrown into a dry well, expecting to die. Under such circumstances, all bad faith falls away. He describes to Toru how, lying in the dark well in utter despair, pain and misery, once a day, the sun reached the bottom of the well for a few seconds, bathing him in light. This all-encompassing intense light seems a revelation to him, which, however, he does not understand entirely. From the moment when Mamiya was -against all reasonable expectation- rescued from the well with the help of Mr. Honda's occult powers, he feels his as if his real life is lost and he is no more than an 'empty shell' (159-67).

In the powerful light of the sun, even the evil of people such as Boris the Manskinner does not seem important anymore. Nothing that happens in his life henceforth seems real in comparison to this experience. Mamiya realized the danger of the Other and the superfluity of the for-itself in the face of the in-itself. He made Toru aware of the danger of such discoveries. It is not without reason that people flee the angst of freedom in 'bad faith.' While Sartre insists that these insights may lead to engagement and, in *Existentialism is a Humanism,* denies that they lead people to

dwell in "quietism and despair" (17), in the case of Mamiya, it seems that if all bad faith falls away and everything that is unimportant to existence falls away, nothing is left. Sartre would say that he should not despair at what Mamiya calls being 'an empty shell,' his existence preceding his essence, but choose who he wants to be each moment anew.

Inspired by Mamiya's story, Toru climbs into a dry well himself. He appears to be looking for an experience similar to Mamiya's, while hoping for a more positive outcome. Then, May Kasahara traps Toru in the well by removing the ladder. This way, his situation becomes more similar to Mamiya's as it would otherwise have been, because his life is in real danger. She is not certain why she did this. She says she wants to make Toru aware of the possibility that he may die at any moment. As Bollnow argues, being aware of death increases people's awareness of the need to act in an engaged way *now.* At the same time, she is also curious how far she can go, how easy it is to kill another person, in this way probing the boundaries of her own freedom.

Toru fears and is continually warned not to get stuck in the well, meaning, not to delve too deep into his imagination, not to get lost in the labyrinth of his own mind (i.e. 219, 573), not to go mad. If Toru were to get stuck in the well, he would not be able to find his way back to other people and he would not be able to act in the real world, to change his insights into action. What he finds in his imagination must be used to improve his situation in reality: it may not remain a self-enclosed exercise.

Sartre discerns imagination as both a danger and a benefit. In this novel, it appears that there is a right time for imagination and a right time for action: without first taking the time to imagine how Kumiko perceives her life and to imagine alternatives, his actions are mere routine and do not constitute engagement, but imagination becomes a danger when he dwells in it for too long to be able to connect it with reality. In one of their sessions, Mr. Honda tells Toru and Kumiko:

> "The point is, not to resist the flow. You go up when you're supposed to go up and down when you're supposed to go down. When you're supposed to go up, find the highest tower and climb it to the top. When you're supposed to go down, find the deepest well and go down to the bottom. When there's no flow, stay still. If you resist the flow, everything dries up. … abandon the self, and there you are" (51)

This is presented as if the right time is independent of Toru's choice, but it can also be interpreted in accordance with Sartre's existentialism, since, according to Sartre, freedom can never be seen separate from the situation. Engagement always requires understanding the situation and being able to negate it and imagine it differently. Sartre's philosophy is a reaction against such philosophies that create models that have nothing to do with reality, such as scientific positivism, which ignores the reality of human intentionality. Toru's situation requires much contemplation and imagination, but ultimately, he has to make these valuable for his reality, for the people he is involved with.

## 5.6. Engagement as Fighting 'the System'

Toru at first becomes engaged by establishing connection to a single other person, but later it becomes 'fighting the system.' In other novels, such as *A Wild Sheep Chase* and *Hard Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, the power against which the protagonist struggled is called 'the system'.

In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, the system is personified in the character Noboru Wataya, Kumiko's brother, who holds academic, economic, mass media; psychological, political and even occult power. In the war memories that occur throughout the novel, the system shows itself in its most vicious and dangerous form. Boris the Manskinner fulfills a function in wartime narratives similar to Noboru Wataya's function in the present of the novel: they have similar powers and abilities. The differences between these characters show differences between 'the system' in war and in peace. Boris holds power through fear. People *want* to oppose him, but they *cannot*. In the present of the novel, on the other hand, people admire Noboru Wataya. The system does not show itself from its cruel ruthless side, but presents a sleek version of itself on television. Noboru Wataya manages to present his ideas in such a way that people do not understand them, but believe this is due to their own lack of competence. Toru, however, is convinced that it is mere rhetoric and that Noboru Wataya is so successful in his debates precisely because there is no coherent worldview behind his arguments that he wants to defend, so that he can concentrate on the battle itself. Boris similarly does not fight for his believes but purely for power. Ideology during wartime is presented as a mere pretext which, in the present of the

novel, has been replaced by academic theories that people fail to understand because of the all pervasiveness of jargon.

In *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991), Anthony Giddens describes the need to trust 'systems of accumulated expertise,' (3) too specialist for even experts in related fields to understand, which become new authorities, as part of the late modern condition. Murakami represents all such systems that people rely on in the person Noboru Wataya.

Toru initially did not oppose the system because, like most other people, his working life was too busy for him to be able to think, he could not pinpoint what exactly is wrong with it, he recognized the superiority, the intelligence, efficiency and eloquence of Noboru Wataya, he did not hate his life or his work and could not imagine an alternative. In the post post-war generation consumerist society, life does not appear bad enough to oppose the system.

Thus, in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, inertia can be seen as fitting in with the system (no matter how much hard work this requires). Blindly following authorities such as Noboru Wataya's is bad faith, even if one has less information or even less intelligence. As Sartre argues, people are responsible for the authority they choose to follow. The novel shows that, rather than merely believing what is said on television, people should think for themselves, like Toru thinks with deep concentration in his well.

Matthew C. Strecher writes, "When he speaks of 'systems' and 'subsystems,' Murakami is speaking precisely of identity drawn from one's role in society. But today's Japanese 'social system' is one in which individuals are defined according to their role in the economic and industrial machine that runs Japan. There is very little room for deviation in this society" (281). Toru chooses to quit his job, losing his role in society and with that his identity, even without disliking it or having an alternative. He defies the system without pretending to understand and master it. He has no ambition to become successful within the system. He does not accept its logic and its system of value. This is why, in spite of (or because of) his lack of success from the point of view of the system, he manages to become a real threat to Noboru Wataya.

## 5.7. Engagement and Involvement by Switching Perspectives

When Toru descends into the well he is concerned with Kumiko's issues and imagines her possibilities, not his own. Sartre would argue that in this way, Toru

would see himself as an object, a being-for-others, from Kumiko's perspective. He does not consider real M*itsein* a possibility. The start of the novel, when Toru discovers his marriage to be broken, shows that *Mitsein* is not as common as believed. In spite of all his love and respect for her, he did not perceive her as a free subject. He then investigates whether he can, with the help of his imagination, understand the world from her point of view. Hereby he does not become an object, but tries to understand her worldview, while retaining his own. He must avoid assuming only her perspective, because he needs to be able to provide an alternative to it. Thus, he tries to see her as a subject while remaining a subject himself. The novel appears to be an investigation into whether it is possible to make a true connection with others, from the skeptical starting point where Toru has entirely failed to do this and is not at all sure whether this is possible.

Toru's ability to free just himself in his own mind from the logic of 'the system,' the worldview that Noboru Wataya represents and thrives in, is enough to harm Noboru Wataya, even cancel out his influence, in the real world. According to Creta, "Noboru Wataya is a person who belongs to a world that is exactly opposite to [Toru's]" (Murakami 312).

An important theme in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* is the possibility to shift from the one perspective to the other, in this way creating different worlds. As explained above, according to Sartre, the 'world' exists only as centered around a consciousness. What 'the world' is depends on which subject is at its center. To the subject, others appear as objects in his world. Creta's words reflect a similar view on the connectedness of self and world, when she says, "now the world had ceased to be the world, and I had ceased to be me" (99). When she was 'defiled' by Noboru Wataya, she lost her own perspective on the world.

Noboru Wataya often takes a sadist attitude towards others. The description that Creta gives of her defilement by Noboru Wataya is in accordance with the description that Sartre gives of sadism. He succeeds in possessing her consciousness by trapping it in her body by means of pain, as she describes, "I was caught up in a torrent of pleasure and pain. An entirely physical being, I could only cry out, and drool, and churn my hips. The mere act of opening my eyes was an impossibility" (302). He manages to make her into a thing. (She describes this as if it were literal, as if an actual thing could be seen to come out of her).

Kumiko has told Toru that she suspects Noboru Wataya abused their sister and that this is the reason for her suicide. The experience of her alter-ego Creta suggests this happened to Kumiko herself and she was unable to tell Toru this: it was easier for her to tell him that this happened to her sister, or she possibly even repressed her trauma. Creta being a prostitute points at Kumiko's complicity. After Kumiko left Toru, Noboru Wataya holds her captive and Toru believes Noboru is the reason why she left him. They both tried to keep her family history out of their marriage by pretending it had nothing to do with it. When Kumiko is pregnant, she realizes she cannot ignore her past, it makes it appear impossible for her to raise a child and she chooses abortion. Although she makes an attempt, she is not able to tell Toru why exactly her family is the reason for the abortion.

As a sadist, Noboru Wataya cannot tolerate being made into an object within another's worldview, especially one as radically different from his as Toru's. Sadism fails, because in his efforts to subdue the other the sadist admits the other's danger and his importance. As Noboru's deformed servant Ushikawa says to Toru, he respects him because he has the ability to bother a man as important as Dr. Wataya. No matter how well Noboru Wataya can prove Toru fails according to his values, he cannot undo the existence of Toru's perspective, in which Noboru Wataya does not appear as the most successful man, but as a debauched sadist. According to Sartre, any other person can make a sadist into an object within his world. The danger for the sadist is that at any time the roles can be changed and the subject looks at the sadist. This happens in a conversation between Toru and Noboru Wataya, Noboru Wataya, feeling entirely superior, in his usual manner, objectifies Toru:

> "from the first day I met you, I knew better than to hope that you might amount to anything. I saw no sign in you of promise, nothing in you that suggested you might accomplish something worthwhile or even turn yourself into a respectable human being: nothing there to shine or shed light on anything. I knew that whatever you set your hand to would end up half-baked, that you would never see anything through to the end. And I was right. You have been married to my sister for six years, and what have you done in all this time? Nothing, right? All you've accomplished in six long years is to leave your job and ruin Kumiko's life. Now you're out of work and you have no plans for the future. There's nothing inside that head of yours but garbage

> and rocks. Why Kumiko ever got together with the likes of you I'll never understand. Maybe she thought that the garbage and rocks in your head were interesting. But finally, garbage is garbage and rocks are rocks (199).

Toru so far appeared to be a very passive character. He makes a surprising shift here: instead of accepting Noboru Wataya's view on him, or feeling merely uncomfortable with it, he opposes it, not by arguing with Noboru Wataya in his language and with his concepts, but by looking at Noboru Wataya in turn, from the perspective of his own worldview. He replies not with Noboru Wataya's economic or political logic, but, suitable to his role as the imagination of the novel, with a story:

> Somewhere, far, far away, there's a shitty island. An island without a name. An island not worth giving a name. A shitty island with a shitty shape. On this shitty island grow palm trees that also have shitty shapes. And the palm trees produce coconuts that give off a shitty smell. Shitty monkeys live in the trees, and they love to eat these shitty-smelling coconuts, after which they shit the world's foulest shit. The shit falls on the ground and builds up shitty mounds, making the shitty palm trees that grow on them even shittier. It's an endless cycle.' I drank the rest of my coffee. 'As I sat here looking at you,' I continued, 'I suddenly remembered the story of this shitty island. What I'm trying to say is this. A certain kind of shittiness, a certain kind of stagnation, a certain kind of darkness, goes on propagating itself by its own power in its own self-contained cycle. And once it passes a certain point, no one can stop it – even if the person himself wants to stop it … I know exactly what kind of man you are. You say I'm like garbage or rocks. And you think you could smash me to bits anytime you felt like it. But things are not that simple. To you, with your values, I may well be nothing but garbage and rocks. But I'm not as stupid as you think I am. I know exactly what you've got under that smooth, made-for-TV mask of yours. I know your secret. Kumiko knows and I know: we both know what's under there. If I wanted to, I could tell it to the world. I could bring it out into the light. I might take time, but I could do it. I may be a nobody, but at least I'm not a sandbag. I'm a living, breathing human being" (202)

As Sartre's examples in *Being and Nothingness* show, such a shift of perspective can cause the person who is suddenly looked at to feel shame. Indeed, "something very odd began to happen to Noboru Wataya's face. Little by little, it started to turn red." (203).

In the world of the well, Toru kills Noboru Wataya. As Sartre argues, killing can never serve to overcome alienation, since it cannot undo the existence of the other's perspective. Moreover, it makes it impossible to influence the other's perspective at all. Killing Noboru Wataya cannot be the solution to the problem. The solution is imagination: telling stories different from the one that Noboru Wataya tries to impose on people as the only truth. This includes a story in which Noboru Wataya looses and Toru becomes the hero, fighting alone against the entire system.
As Ushikawa tells Toru: "that's what makes us human – coming up with a million different ideas" (465). Imagination restores Toru's subjectivity and his humanity.

Nutmeg's father, who was a vet in a zoo, is baffled at the enormous shift of perspective. While his aim in life was to take care of the health of the animals in the zoo, one day, officers come in with the order to shoot the animals, because there are not enough resources to take care of them anymore. The aim with regard to these animals has radically shifted[11]. He wonders, "maybe the world was like revolving door … and which section you ended up in was a matter of where your foot happened to fall. There were tigers in one section, but no tigers in another … and there was no logical continuity from one section to another. And it was precisely because of this lack of continuity that choices didn't mean very much" (411).

May Kasahara also points out the inconsistency between the logic in the world of different people. She tells Tory, "it seems to me that the way most people go on living … they think that the world or life … is this place where everything is (or is supposed to be) basically logical and consistent" (460). She wonders whether it could be that there are some people for whom the world really always offers what they expect (460-2). However, her examples show that what she thinks is not that reality is different for these people, but that they impose a model on reality, which can appropriate anything in it and that this is usually taken for common sense. Toru criticizes such a worldview by means of his story about 'the shitty island'. Such a

[11] In *The Silent Cry*, Taka sees the zoo as a proof of the existence of pure good in people. It is not impossible that this is a reference and that Murakami takes the shooting of these same zoo animals as an example of the evil of the inertia of following 'the system,' the bureaucracy that led to this decision that no one benefits from.

world following the logic of 'the system' is not in any way preferable - except maybe that it seems easier. People mostly adhere to it for the simply reason that they cannot, or do not allow themselves, to imagine alternatives to avoid feeling shame regarding the worldview that they think the anonymous, generalized Other holds.

A typical example of a man whose worldview is in line with the system is the father of Noboru and Kumiko. He is what is called a 'self-made man,' typical for the post-war generation. Toru says about him, "this was all very admirable. But as it often the case with men who have made it this way, he was arrogant and self-righteous … he harbored not the slightest doubt concerning the values of the world to which he belonged. For him, hierarchy was everything" (49). This is the way Noboru Wataya learned to think from early childhood on. Toru says, "It seems to me that certain patterns of thought are so simple and one-sided that they become irresistible" (74). This is the case for the logic of 'the system'.

Mr. Honda tells Toru, "the law presides over things of this world, in the end. The world where shadow is shadow and light is light […] But *you* don't belong to that world, son. The world you belong to is above or below that" (51). The world for Toru is not so simple and one-sided but constantly recreated in an endless number of versions of myths, of new imaginative variations on the same reality.

At first, Kumiko tries to escape the System with Toru, but then she notices she cannot ignore the system as she had hoped. She later tells Toru that she is captivated against her will by Noboru Wataya with chains and guards that are herself. She does not want to comply with the system, but cannot resist its simple logic. She cannot open up to Toru, so she turns to Noboru Wataya, the system itself. The system can never help her out of the system, since it's a logic that can include anything in it.

Kumiko goes from Toru's world to Noboru Wataya's world. To get her back, Toru needs to fight the system. And doing that, he helps everybody else to do the same. Noboru Wataya's sadism is not only individual; it is the sadism of the system that defines people according to its own values. Delving into his imagination to find an alternative for Kumiko and also for himself, he creates an alternative for everyone. As Sartre has argued in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, each individual is responsible for what humans are by choosing his own identity. By finding alternative stories to the grand narrative that Noboru Wataya presents, Toru offers these alternatives for all other people as well. The same could be said for Murakami, who, in this novel, provides his readers with alternatives to and ways to fight the system and links them

close enough to his readers everyday life for them to connect the two. Cinnamon the storyteller saves Toru from the well when at the end of the novel, when Noboru Wataya is killed, water comes into the well again. This means that the storyteller saves him from the system: imagination and telling the same story in many different alternative is the cure to its simplistic logic.

# 6. Conclusion

Sartre's shows the possibility for engagement by showing that consciousnesses are absolutely free. However, existentialism cannot offer a concrete content for engagement: after all, people are free because there is no foundation for their choices outside themselves. Sartre further shows that relationships between people are always based on conflict, since it is not possible to view the world from more than one center: the self or the Other. People want to be an object in the world of the Other in order to be relieved from their responsibility, but at the same time they want to determine the way in which the Other objectifies them. This is impossible, because they remain free and responsible themselves and others remain free to see them in whatever way they want. All the attitudes that people can assume with regard to others are expressions of this attempt. Sartre shows the need for involvement with others and engagement for others, but the way in which people engage themselves and for what causes remains up to each individual to choose, and *Mitsein* cannot both be durable and authentic.

*The Silent Cry* and *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* both show the difficulty of engagement and involvement. In *The Silent Cry*, Mitsu realizes he lacks a cause for engagement and does not feel involved with others, which makes him feel so inert that he can hardly move himself to any action. He realizes his responsibility without being able to envisage the right action. Mitsu flees from this awareness in the bad faith of indifference and his belief that he has the identity of a rat because he lacks an ego, which is a step closer to authenticity than simply assuming his role in the village, but he fails to see that this means he is free to choose his actions and responsible for the image that he creates with these. Taka is more active, changing the situation for himself and those around him. However, this is not with the aim of a better future, but to confirm his identity established in the past. He hides in the bad faith of objectifying himself as a man of violence.

At the outset of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle,* Toru is less aware of his inertia than Mitsu and his bad faith merely upholds the system, but does not negatively effect others' lives, such as Taka's attempt to be a man of violence does. He does no harm, but neither does he improve the situation. Inertia mainly takes the form of fitting in with 'the system,' which encompasses academics, economics, the mass media and

politics. Inertia is no less pervasive than in *The Silent Cry*, but most characters accept it as the only possibility and therefore do not consider it a problem to be solved. However, in the course of the novel, inertia reveals itself as evil, as it turns out that the authorities that it empowers are sadists and the war reminisces of Nutmeg and Mamiya reveal the damage that inertly following the system can cause.

Several limit situations in *The Silent Cry* lead to an existentialist experience in which the character's bad faith is disrupted and they realize their own freedom, the freedom of the Other and the responsibility this entails. The grotesque suicide of his friend makes Mitsu and his wife acutely aware that he has the same possibility. His wife's adultery disrupts his bad faith of seeing her only in her role as his wife and he starts to think of her as a person with a name, recognizing her freedom. Mitsu realizes his alienation, his lack of involvement even with those who should be closest to him when he left his handicapped son in the institution and when he realizes that his wife's drunken body feels less alive to him than his dead friends body. The death of their brother S makes Taka acutely aware of the danger of others and the pregnancy and suicide of his sister reveal to him the impossibility of indifference towards their surroundings. In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle,* the sadism of Noboru Wataya and the torture of Boris the Manskinner constitute limit situations for others that reveal the evil in the systems that they comply with and the authorities they follow. Losing Kumiko is the main limit situation for Toru, which entails many insights because it is so deeply analyzed by Toru. He becomes aware that he cannot limit Kumiko's freedom to her life with him, that he cannot ignore the situation in which he lives and stay uninvolved with others, and through losing Kumiko to Noboru Wataya, a sadist authority, he realizes it is not enough to ignore Wataya, but he is responsible to prevent such authorities from ruling other people.

Through the disruption of various types of bad faith with the help of these limit situations, the characters in *The Silent Cry* find new forms of engagement and involvement, but these are again endangered by new forms of bad faith in which the characters hide. Mitsu and Natsumi decide to take care of their severely handicapped child and their child born from adultery and decide that Mitsu will help with the risky expeditions in Africa of which he previously only translated the results. This way, although Mitsu takes responsibility for their well-being, he fails to overcome his alienation from his wife and children. Through Taka's revival of the Nembutsu dance, he helps the village community to imagine alternatives to their situation, but he fails

to do this in sincerity. Only the more marginal characters, Natsumi choosing to raise her children and great grandfathers younger brother acting violently only when this is necessary to save lives, offer positive example of an engaged way of living.

In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle,* Toru engages himself by fighting the system and saving Kumiko. Instead of seeing the system as the only possibility, he learns to see it as an evil plan. In this novel, the actions that constitute engagement are very different from those in *The Silent Cry*. Toru only acts violently and disruptively in the world of his imagination. In reality, his only actions are those aimed at sharing his insights, such as doing everything he can to find a way to talk to Kumiko and addressing Noboru. This however, effects a significant change in the situation, because merely by sharing his insights, by revealing Noboru's perspective as contingent and showing the possibility to live in a different way, he destroys Noboru's power and his hold over Kumiko. In this novel, storytelling, i.e. imagining alternatives, is real and effective engagement.

Imagination turned out to play a much more important role in answering my thesis question than I had anticipated. Sartre's focus is on improving the situation by means of sincere action for which one takes responsibility. In the investigation about how philosophy and literature can be discussed together while avoiding the mistakes that are often made in doing so, it turned out that literature can help to envisage a future that is truly different from (and not just more of) the present and that it can help to overcome the limitations in everyday thinking. In order to improve one's situation it is necessary to imagine an alternative, but imagination does not necessarily lead to action, it can remain a self-enclosed exercise or its translation into action can be indirect.

The importance of imagination, but also the possibility to become stuck in the imagination, turned out to be an important theme in the novels. In both novels contemplation and imagination are symbolized by abidance in enclosed underground spaces. In *The Silent Cry* these are the septic tank hole and the cellar, and in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* this is the well. Mitsu's great grandfathers younger brother was able to avoid bloodshed due to his many years of contemplation in the cellar and his invention of the story about 'blood taxes'. Taka's revival of the Nembutsu dance is a further positive result of imagination, as it revives the village community. However, the 'thatched hut' is an example of imagination as a flight in bad faith.

In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, storytelling is necessary to imagine alternatives. However, Toru almost died in the well: he was almost trapped in the world of mere stories and Cinnamon and Nutmeg are trapped in the perfectly orderly and beautiful world of their imagination that cannot survive involvement with others and engagement in reality. These storytellers are in danger of remaining confined within the world of their imagination without improving reality. This way, both the necessity and dangers of imagination discussed by Sartre are visible in the novels.

In the investigation of how the characters become engaged and involved, timing appeared to be a more important factor than Sartre's existentialist theory suggested. This is closely related to the importance of the imagination, because in order to take the right actions, it is necessary to take the time to imagine to what future they contribute and to take time to contemplate in order to disrupt habits of bad faith and overcome the limitations of everyday life thinking. One of Nussbaum reasons for considering academic philosophical writing insufficient for contemplating the good life is that it lacks the element of time that only occurs in narrative. These narratives show timing to be an important factor in choices: there is a time for contemplation and a time for action.

In *The Silent* Cry, great grandfathers younger brother's life can be considered more engaged and involved than the life of anyone else in the village, in spite of his many years of inactivity, mainly by acting at the right time to prevent a law that would cause famine. Due to the time he spent in contemplation he managed to save many lives by steering the second rebellion with amazing insight into country politics and village mass psychology. In *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle,* the right timing for staying in the well and leaving it plays an important role. Mamiya never recovered from his experience in the well, because it was too intense: the world of his imagination appeared more meaningful than the actual events in his life. Toru must leave the well in time in order not to be flooded: for his experience to be valuable, he cannot take the time to continue to increase his understanding by creating more versions dealing with the same issues, but must return to real life as soon as he understands just enough to help Kumiko. Sartre emphasizes the freedom that people have in each instant to use their imagination constructively or as a means of flight. In the novels it appears important to discern moments in which withdrawal into the imagination is the best choice, as long as ultimately, imagination contributes to real life.

Reading the novels from a Sartrean perspective shows the important role that imagination and taking the time to imagine alternatives have for making the right choices and acting in an engaged way. The analysis of the novels shows that rich and creative imagination is necessary to answer the questions of moral philosophy about what the good life is and what choices and actions contribute to this for specific characters starting from their particular situation.

The difference between Ōe's post-war and Murakami's postmodern commitment can be found in the relation between storytelling and action. In *The Silent Cry*, only action is perceived as valuable. Great grandfathers younger brother's entire life of contemplation only acquires meaning from the two moments in which he translates this contemplation into action, and Mitsu's work as a scholar and translator is not seen as a valuable aim, while raising children and going on expeditions to catch wild animals to bring them to the zoo for children to enjoy *is* considered a worthy cause.

In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle,* understanding and involving oneself in war history and spinning new stories is already seen as admirable. No wonder that Ōe criticizes Murakami for lack of engagement: after all, In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle,* Murakami focuses much more on understanding and imagination than on what action these lead to. Nearly all action in the novel appears to be imaginary and, although imagination is directed at helping Kumiko, Toru is already presented as a winner merely by changing the perception of their situation without having done anything to actually change the situation yet. However, in Murakami's strange and symbolic world, envisaging new stories already appears to be a daring, even life threatening endeavor. Bollnow concludes his overview on German existentialist philosophy with an awareness of the impasses it runs into, particularly conflict between obligations and the possibility to fulfill them. *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* shows awareness of the difficulties in becoming engaged and involved, the deep thinking that is needed to disrupt the bad faith of following the system. Whereas in *The Silent Cry*, the best option appears to acts in spite of one's uncertainties, construction through destruction, in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, gaining deeper understanding and imagining alternatives to the system seems valuable as such and communicating these seems enough. In postmodern theory, becoming engaged and involved has by no means lost relevance, but the focus is on the overwhelming pervasiveness of inertia and alienation and a sense of powerlessness in a world that seems too large and fields of

knowledge too specialized for people to understand enough to make the right choices. Using the framework of existentialist philosophy to understand the works of Ōe and Murakami reveals that Murakami's writing is not a turn away from concern with making morally responsible choices but rather an increased awareness in the contradictions that arise in the attempt to do so. Many postmodern thinkers consider knowledge and power, simulation and reality increasingly hard to separate. From this point of view, being able to imagine alternatives to the seemingly all encompassing and ever globalizing (economic)system and sharing these alternatives with others is already engagement. However, perceiving the world as overwhelming and too difficult to understand is also a choice.

The advantage of the active engagement and involvement of the characters in *The Silent Cry* is that they have much more impact on their surroundings, the disadvantage is that this impact is sometimes also negative and construction often only seems possible though destruction. Toru's engagement in the form of storytelling in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* on the other hand makes it more difficult for him to come to action in reality, but he also does not do any harm. The novels show the advantages and disadvantages of different ways in which to balance imagination and action.

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