

DANIEL RUEDA GARRIDO



# Forms of Life and Subjectivity

## Rethinking Sartre's Philosophy



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Daniel Rueda Garrido, *Forms of Life and Subjectivity: Rethinking Sartre's Philosophy*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0259>

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ISBN Paperback: 9781800642188

ISBN Hardback: 9781800642195

ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800642201

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 9781800642218

ISBN Digital ebook (azw3): 9781800642225

ISBN XML: 9781800642232

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0259

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Cover design by Anna Gatti

# 7. Forms of Life and Subjectivities of Other Communities in the Capitalist Era

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## 1. Forms of Life, Communities and Social Classes

Not all forms of life in the period of capitalist growth were assimilated in the early stages. With the rise of the middle class in the second half of the nineteenth century in England, as well as in other Western European countries, and the imposition of a unique way of being and acting as being properly human, many other communities end up being assimilated, which in turn will have some consequences for the very incarnation of the capitalist form of life in its hegemonic expansion as a mass society (the one that would be exported through colonization and international markets). Again, it should be specified that when I refer to a form of life I do so from the ontological point of view that has been elaborated throughout the previous chapters of this book; it is never a concept directly equated to that of social class, even though there have been moments in the process of integration and universalization when a particular class has exclusively incarnated that form of life.

To show even briefly some of these forms of life in parallel and in contrast to the capitalist form of life already hegemonic in the second half of the nineteenth century in Western Europe, seems necessary if we are to understand more vividly their practical application as well as their dialectical development. In the period mentioned, we can find a high number of different forms of life which, however, are being assimilated by capitalism. According to its constitutive principle, we can identify the austere form of life, the survival form of life, the philosophical form

of life, the scientific form of life, the artistic form of life, the religious form of life, and so on. These forms of life imply different ways of being and acting living together in the same geographical area and under the expansive influence of the hegemonic form of life that seeks to deny them in their principles and to assimilate them. As mentioned previously, its study leads us to formulations similar to Barbara Rosenwein's. For this author, in the same historical period a plurality of modes of feeling can be found that form what she calls 'communities of feeling'. And in fact, it is these communities that give shape and expression to our emotions:

There is a biological and universal human aptitude for feeling and expressing what we now call 'emotions'. But what those emotions are, what they are called, how they are evaluated and felt, and how they are expressed (or not)—all those are shaped by emotional communities.<sup>1</sup>

These feelings shared by a community imply particular ways of expression and assessment: 'Emotional communities are groups—usually but not always social groups—that have their own particular values, modes of feelings, and ways to express those feelings.'<sup>2</sup> I would like to note that the definition distinguishes communities of feeling from social groups just as I have distinguished the latter from forms of life. In that sense, forms of life, which are particular ways of being and acting, would be a broader category that would determine the way such communities feel: in other words, the ontological principle that drives the totality of the ways of acting that provide identity to the individual who freely adopts them. However, in Rosenwein's formulation and exploration of these communities, there is no principle or guarantee of that unity; as the author herself states:

They are not 'bounded entities'. Indeed, the researcher may define them quite broadly—upper-class English society in the nineteenth century, for example—or rather narrowly, as I do in this book. More narrowly delineated communities allow the researcher to characterize in clearer fashion the emotional style of the group. Larger communities will contain variants and counterstyles—'emotional subcommunities' if you will.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Barbara Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 3.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Her method is empirical and linguistic. The examination of texts, in particular letters belonging to individuals from various regions and families from the late Middle Ages in England and France, leads to the postulation of different communities of feeling based on the use of vocabulary and the repetition of certain words. The advantage of this method lies in its empirical procedure through the analysis, contrast and comparison of texts of the time and of the geographical area concerned. This allows it to make subtle distinctions between the supposed emotional community of the author of a text and the emotional community of the subjects to which the text refers. Thus, it does not attribute emotions to historical characters or social groups guided by the interpretation or projection of the author of the text, who at all times reveals his own community:

When Monstrelet described emotions, he did so from his own vantage point and that of the emotional community of which he was a part. It is wrong to use Monstrelet to reveal the emotional life of the people he wrote about, at least those outside his courtly milieu. Rather, Monstrelet tells us about *his* emotional life—or at least, the norms about it that he wished to reveal.<sup>4</sup>

The distinction made in this passage can certainly be applied equally to forms of life. The author of a text always writes from his form of life and from the reaction that other forms of life produce in him and even the denial that he receives from them. In the case that he is dealing with his own form of life, what he shows is a subjectivity that can be objectified with respect to the rest of the members of his community. The disadvantage lies in the fallibility of attributing qualitatively different feelings based on texts written under specific conditions that do not agree with the postulation of a general rule and, even less so, if the feelings are not shown to form a network under a greater unity. The mere association of similar words used by certain individuals to express their feelings can speak more of a linguistic-social community than of a community of feelings. Rosenwein does not overlook such association: ‘Like “speech communities”, they may be very close in practice to other emotional communities of their time, or they may be very unique and marginal.’<sup>5</sup>

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4 *Ibid.*, p. 174.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

The latter does not imply that I deny the existence of communities with qualitatively different feelings or the uniqueness of their expression. What I mean is that emotions cannot be independent of their expression under a particular way of living. Or, what is the same, someone under the capitalist form of life can only feel and spontaneously express emotions that are proper to that form of life and not to another, because emotions have to do with a way of being, doing and feeling (as well as valuing). And the same can be said of the other forms of life. The empirical study cannot ignore the constitutive principle of the actions and habits that are intended to be studied. The totality and the unity are prior to their parts. And the constitutive principle is the totality that waits to be revealed under each of the subject's actions and habits.

On the other hand, the methodology used by Rosenwein focused on the linguistic analysis of texts; while claiming to take nothing for granted, it presupposes a community as a whole in which the texts would make sense. The community of feeling should be prior in the methodology to empirical evidence. And in fact it is, as the author herself recognizes:

The technique of this book is microhistorical: to look at particulars and yet to claim that they tell us something about larger groups in similar situations around the same time. For example, I spend much time on Rievaulx under Abbot Aelred not only because he represented the emotional community of one Cistercian monastery but because I *hypothesize* that Cistercian monasteries in general fostered similar (though not surely exactly the same) emotional styles and sensibilities.<sup>6</sup>

The same can be said of the onto-phenomenological approach to forms of life. In this initial approach, one starts from the intuition of these forms incarnated in real communities. The evidence is double: that of the phenomenological process and that of the factual process. That is, the description of consciousness in its constitution by the ontological principle adopted and the actions and habits that emerge from it as a necessary possibility, and which are empirically observable. This description, on the other hand, is not that of an exclusive subject nor that of all human beings, but that of a certain community identified with that principle. And although Rosenwein thinks that communities of feeling are boundless, as we have seen in the above quotation, nevertheless, if

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6 *Ibid.*, p. 12. The italics are mine.

we take them as part of a form of life, they must respond to a totalization whose principle is fixed a priori. This totalization depends on the actions of its subjects. And these tend to impose it on others, that is, to assimilate others, from instances of power. Thus, each community of feelings would be preserved and enacted by the exercise of its power over the others. This is what she herself assures of the Philippine tribe of the Ilongots:

The anthropologist Renato Rosaldo described the agonized anguish that the Ilongots of the Philippines felt when in 1972 martial law declared a ban on their beloved practice of headhunting. But presumably Ferdinand Marcos and the Protestant ministers long opposed to the practice were very pleased that the Ilongots generally complied. Who suffers, who delights, has a great deal to do with who is in power. An emotional regime that induces suffering in some does not induce it in all.<sup>7</sup>

So, here we have a community that if it loses its power, it also loses the possibility of realizing its habits; something that seems to miss the author here. For feelings cannot be separated from the actions and habits of the community. However, it is clear from the quote that each member of the tribe shares this feeling of sadness about a habit that they apparently consider part of their identity, part of their form of life; otherwise, they would not express it with such anguish. Such a feeling, in order to be understood, requires the positing of the community of feelings to which it belongs and the contrasting of it with that of those who do not belong to it, in this case clearly the Protestant ministers. But, what I am advocating is that both can only have full meaning embedded within or, if you will, born out of a particular form of life.

Communities that incarnate various forms of life can live together with others, but all tend to be assimilated by the hegemonic one, that is, the one that imposes itself. So all these forms experience its influence, while the hegemonic one adopts under its principle meanings or plural connotations as it advances in its dialectical process of universalization through assimilation. As we have seen, such processes are both necessary and contingent. Necessary because they obey the universalizing essence of every form of life as it embodies the image of what it means to that

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7 Barbara Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 22.

subject and that community to be human. And contingent because in its universalizing expansion it confronts and denies the forms of life with which it enters into opposition under particular situations. As it expands, it comes into contact with more forms of life. This is why the forms of life that I will now discuss are forms that are denied at a more advanced stage, once the principle of economic maximization has expanded enough to motivate the behaviour of a large part of the European social population, and in particular England and France. The population, however, does not absolutely identify with the community that incarnates the capitalist form of life. Nor is this community any longer the middle class, since its form of life has expanded so much as to deny it as a class.

At this time, around the second half of the nineteenth century, there are still various forms of life outside of capitalism. Among them, I will focus on the artistic form of life. The reason for this choice is twofold: on the one hand, there is an abundance of accounts about this form of life as expressed by its own subjects: artists, poets, painters, sculptors, etc. On the other hand, the contrast with and the resistance against assimilation by the hegemonic form (already described in previous chapters) in specific subjects-artists such as Charles Baudelaire show us quite clearly its characteristics. In any case, the interest of this form of life lies in itself, because it shows its internal structure as well as the way in which it opposes capitalism in its universal expansion. No less interesting is how this form of life can explain the evolution of the capitalist form of life and its subjectivity in later moments, specifically in the last quarter of the century. For the progressive negation of the artistic form of life means the relative affirmation of its opposite under the principle of maximization: if artistic life is opposed to the life of reduplication of objects, its negation by the principle of maximization will mean the assimilation of its opposite as reduplication and reproduction of artistic objects in the industrial production chain (and in the technological reproducibility of photography that Walter Benjamin will denounce some decades later), but also in the reproduction of reality in literature, such as in realism and naturalism, which explains the rejection of both, especially of naturalism, by the so-called symbolists, who incarnate, as we see below, the artistic form of life:

The symbolists believed they were reacting against naturalism; naturalism and symbolism-decadent may appear to be polar opposites: the one stresses objectivity and exteriority, systematization-mechanization, description or direct presentation of visible things of a given society here and now; while the other values subjectivity and individualism, idealism and spiritualism, the intimation and suggestion of things invisible and transcendent.<sup>8</sup>

For all this, I will explore the artistic form of life through Baudelaire, as its major representative in industrialized France in the mid-nineteenth century. A warning seems necessary at this point. It is not historical, sociological or artistic interest that underpins the following section, but merely philosophical. In other words, what interests me is to apply the concept of a form of life as an ontological unit to a particular case. With this I intend to illustrate the theoretical exploration and bring it closer to the reader's phenomenological experience.

## 2. Baudelaire, the Artistic Form of Life and its Subjectivity

The artistic form of life was one of several marginal forms of life during the nineteenth century in Europe. It was a form on the fringes of the capitalist totalization that began with the decline of the previous century. As a life of reflection and recreation in the aesthetic intuitions, it used to be led by aristocrats. Famous are the cases of Lord Byron in England and Victor Hugo in France. However, with the already mentioned denial of the aristocracy by the middle class, the latter will start to assimilate features typical of the aristocracy under the all-powerful principle of maximizing economic profit. In France, for example, this principle will be the motto of the bourgeois regime of Louis-Philippe that will end in the revolution of 1848:

This was the time of limited franchise in which only those who were rich or who were in a position to become so were allowed to participate in politics and the decision-making process, a period in which the plutocrats took over command and the slogan of the anglophile premier Guizot,

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8 Roland Grass and William Risley, *Waiting for Pegasus: Studies of the Presence of Symbolism and Decadence in Hispanic Letters* (Macomb, IL: Western Illinois University, 1979), p. 10.

'Make money', became the catch cry, if not even a sort of categorical imperative of the age.<sup>9</sup>

Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) spent his youth during this triumph of the bourgeoisie and the capitalist form of life. It is at this time of integration of the various communities into capitalism that the lives of the artists, now largely belonging to the expanding middle class, come to singular attention, produced in part by admiration and in part by horror. Many of these bourgeois artists, like the Pre-Raphaelites in England, led by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and John Ruskin, or those called *poètes maudits* by Paul Verlaine, can be said to lead an artistic life in contrast to the life of their social class:<sup>10</sup> 'If Baudelaire was the first of what Verlaine was later to call the *poètes maudits*, it was because he strove to coincide entirely with his literary creation at a time when society showed very little respect for poetry.'<sup>11</sup> These artists share an aesthetic creed, an attitude towards life and society. With regard to the aesthetic creed, it was established as that of art for art's sake. For them, art had no other purpose than art itself. Victor Cousin was the first to defend this idea in his essay on religious art: 'As Cousin states, "Religion exists for the sake of religion, the moral exists for the sake of the moral, and art should exist for its own sake". Art is a purpose in itself, and, as Alfred de Vigny pointed out, "the modern ... spiritual belief".'<sup>12</sup>

This art for art's sake is already in itself the principle that will move the artist's vital attitude and his antagonism with a society where utility and economic profit predominate. This antagonism is, without a doubt, the one that most clearly integrates and unites all artists, those who in this era are also beginning to be included under the label of symbolism. In France, perhaps the first to express this antagonistic form of life with that represented by the bourgeoisie would be Théophile Gautier in the preface to his novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* and in his poem 'L'hippopotame'. Among the French symbolists, most of whom

9 Dolf Oehler, 'Baudelaire's Politics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Baudelaire*, ed. by Rosemary Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 14–30 (p. 14).

10 Paul Verlaine, *Les poètes maudits* (Paris: Léon Vanier, 1884).

11 John Jackson, 'Charles Baudelaire, a Life in Writing', in *The Cambridge Companion to Baudelaire*, ed. by Rosemary Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 1–13 (p. 11).

12 Rosina Neginsky, 'Introduction', in *Symbolism, its Origins and its Consequences* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp. 1–14 (p. 3).

followed the aesthetics of Edgar Allan Poe, were Gautier, Baudelaire, Leconte de Lisle, Théodore de Banville and, in a second generation, Stéphane Mallarmé, Arthur Rimbaud and Verlaine, among others.<sup>13</sup> Three anthologies of these new poets were published under the title *Le Parnasse contemporain* (1866, 1871 and 1876). They all had a shared attitude: “Hatred of successful mediocrity”, of a society in which those poets lived, was the basis for that attitude. Their style indicated the withdrawal from the world around them and the aspiration to stand aside and be above the society in which they lived.<sup>14</sup> What I then attribute to Baudelaire could be attributed to a lesser or greater extent to all the artists who identified themselves under the attitude of symbolism. All of them expressed a view that emerged from their integration into the artistic form of life.

The examination of the latter in the person of Baudelaire is intended to illustrate the ontological conception of forms of life proposed in the previous chapters. I am not trying to prove any historical thesis but to complement the theoretical approach with a practical case. Or, in other words, to show how the understanding of the life of historical subjects gives rise to an onto-phenomenological constitution that unites them as potential members of the same community through the ontological principle with which they identify and the actions they carry out. And this is seen most clearly when contrasted with other communities whose form of life and subjectivity is opposed. In the opposition and resistance between the two, one can also see the tendency towards the universalization of all forms of life through the denial and assimilation of others. This is what I intend to reflect in the following sections.

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13 Influenced by Verlaine, Ruben Darío, the greatest representative of Hispanic modernism, wrote a book entitled *Los raros* (The odd ones) in 1896, in which he gives a semblance of poets who had followed the path of art—what they called the *ideal*—and who were considered socially marginalized, among them Verlaine, Edgar Allan Poe, Stéphane Mallarmé, etc. Darío himself was considered an outsider. This communion between poets can be extended to other artists such as musicians and sculptors. See Mary McAuliffe, *Dawn of the Belle Epoque* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), p. 262.

14 Neginsky, ‘Introduction’, p. 4.

## 2.1. Baudelaire and the Artistic Form of Life

Of the artists mentioned above, I will take Baudelaire as the highest representative or the most perfect incarnation of that form. But what does this artistic form of life consist of? If we return to the earlier quotation from John Jackson, we now highlight the characteristic that seems to have made Verlaine take Baudelaire as a model of the group or poetic community. This characteristic is that he 'strove to coincide entirely with his literary creation'. The poet identified with his artistic work so much that it would not seem possible to distinguish where one ends and the other begins. His life was his writing. When we think of an artistic form of life, what do we think of if not a life dedicated entirely to art? A life that in a certain way is also art. The subject and the object of art merge. Incidentally, that was what Baudelaire understood by pure art: 'What is the modern conception of pure art? It is to create a suggestive magic which contains both subject and object, the external world and the artist himself.'<sup>15</sup> In a more than figurative sense, it was about incarnating art with its classic ideals of beauty, truth and goodness through the artist's own personality, who thus became a kind of priest of an art religion. From his perspective as an individual subject, the artist captures and transmits an absolute, since for Baudelaire the arts are always the beautiful 'expressed by the feeling, the passion and the reverie of each one, that is to say the variety in the unity, or the diverse faces of the absolute,—the criticism touches at every moment the metaphysics'.<sup>16</sup> There is a correspondence between the artist or his character, what Baudelaire calls *naïveté*, and the essence of that absolute or totality, which could be considered the spirit of an era (*Weltanschauung*), and which I uphold to be the artist's form of life, but the latter is in clear opposition to the general spirit of his time or the hegemonic form of life: 'just as there is a *naïveté* of the individual artist, there is, so to speak, a corresponding *naïveté* or distinctive genius of a particular age'.<sup>17</sup>

15 Charles Baudelaire, *L'Art Romantique*, ed. by Jacques Crépet (Paris: Louis Conard, 1925), p. 119, quoted in Jean-Paul Sartre, *Baudelaire*, trans. by Martin Turnell (London: Horizon, 1947/1949), p. 22.

16 '[La beauté] exprimé par le sentiment, la passion et la rêverie de chacun, c'est-à-dire la variété dans l'unité, ou les faces diverses de l'absolu,—la critique touche à chaque instant à la métaphysique.' Quoted in James Andrew Hiddleston, *Baudelaire and the Art of Memory* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 9.

17 Hiddleston, *Baudelaire and the Art of Memory*, p. 10.

An artistic form of life, and undoubtedly that incarnated by Baudelaire, was thus a life whose ontological principle was to express aesthetically the intuitions of the poet. These intuitions were certainly subjective, but those of a subjectivity shared by other subjects equally identified with that form of life. Those intuitions constitute their Ideal. And in their capturing, the imagination has a fundamental role:

Imagination is not a fantasy; it is not a sensitivity either, though it would not be possible to imagine a man with an imagination who is not sensitive. Imagination is an almost divine ability which perceives intuitively the intimate and secret relationship, the correspondences and analogies.<sup>18</sup>

His life consisted of the aesthetic expression of those ideal intuitions. With these intuitions the poet gave meaning to his reality. These intuitions of the ideal showed the meaning of that which in merely perceptive world did not have. This is established in his poem 'Correlatives' (*Correspondances*):

Nature is a temple, where the living  
Columns sometimes breathe confusing speech;  
Man walks within these groves of symbols, each  
Of which regards him as a kindred thing.<sup>19</sup>

*La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers  
Laisent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;  
L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles  
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.*<sup>20</sup>

And since they were part of the poet's world, their expression consisted of the expression of his own world, what he calls his dream. It was self-expression. Baudelaire suggests this in his sonnet 'The Ideal' (*L'Idéal*):

That poet of chlorosis, Gavarni,<sup>[21]</sup>  
Can keep his twittering troupe of sickly queens,  
Since these pale roses do not let me see  
My red ideal, the flower of my dreams.<sup>[22]</sup>

18 Jean Cassou, *Encyclopédie du Symbolisme* (Paris: Somogy, 1971), p. 160. Translated and quoted in Neginsky, *Symbolism, its Origins and its Consequences*, p. 5.

19 Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. by James N. McGowan (includes parallel French text) (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 19.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

21 Chlorosis is a sort of anaemia, and Gavarni was a cartoonist and engraver of frivolous figures.

22 Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, p. 39.

*Je laisse à Gavarni, poëte des chloroses,  
 Son troupeau gazouillant de beautés d'hôpital,  
 Car je ne puis trouver parmi ces pâles rosés  
 Une fleur qui ressemble à mon rouge idéal.*<sup>23</sup>

This is precisely what the artistic form of life consists of, in the self-expression of the poet. In making his life a pure self-expression, his life is his own work of art. His behaviour is born of that totalization in which he is progressively integrated. He recognizes himself as a better artist the more he is integrated into that totalization; so his subjectivity depends on his artistic work to the point that he feels happy or joyful only in relation to his work. Everything else is out of his reach, leaves him indifferent or stuns him. These are the states of mind that Baudelaire described in his letters to his mother:

What I feel is an immense discouragement, a sense of unbearable isolation ..., a complete absence of desires, an impossibility of finding any sort of amusement. The strange success of my book and the hatred it aroused interested me for a short time, but after that I sank back into my usual mood.<sup>24</sup>

We have previously recognized this process of identification with his work by examining the capitalist form of life. It bears some resemblance to Jodi Dean's example of the young woman who is only interested when she is in contact with technology (quoted in Chapter 6 on reification under capitalist subjectivity). This is the same process of reification but in this case through art. The subject becomes progressively identical to his work, while his work gradually takes over the only thing that remains of the artist's subjectivity. If the subject becomes an artist mediated by his form of life as artistic self-expression, the form of life is realized in the world through the subject. Thus, the more the subject becomes an artist, in terms of the subjectivity provided by the artistic form of life, the greater his reification as an object of art. The contradictory but constitutive process of such a form of life is masterfully represented in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde: the artist is preserved as a pure art object. Separated from his work and from his process of artistic self-expression, the subject is thus fully aboulic, with no interest in the

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>24</sup> Letter to his mother, 30 December 1857. Quoted in Sartre, *Baudelaire*, p. 31.

superficial life around him. The actions that he would like to carry out in relation to the artist that he is are suffocated under the hegemonic form of life. So, even though he feels sterile to realize his form of life, he feels interested in any action produced by indetermination (we must remember the sense of indeterminacy or randomness discussed in Chapter 4 on imitation and social conditioning), such as those that the poet praises in 'Le mauvais vitrier' ('The Bad Glazier') in *Petits poèmes en prose* (1927). These are irrational actions, without meaning even for the person performing them and, thus, without integrating him into the form of life with which he identifies: 'I felt, to do something great, to perform some fine act; and, alas, I opened the window!'<sup>25</sup> These actions, however, seem to be equally pleasing to Baudelaire, in that they show a break from the behaviour imposed by the hegemonic form of life and from the resulting Spleen or ennui:

I have more than once been the victim of such crises and impulses, which give us grounds for believing that malicious Demons slip inside us, forcing us to carry out, unknown to ourselves, their most absurd desires [...] Crazy jokes like this [*sudden incomprehensible actions*] are not without their peril, and often one has to pay dearly for them. But what does an eternity of damnation matter to someone who has discovered an infinity of joy within a single second?<sup>26</sup>

Every form of life has its constitutive opposite or negative; that life from which it flees. If capitalism flees from the austere life of the peasants and workers, the artistic form of life flees from the deprivation of its self-expression. That is, from the reproduction of imposed actions. The artist seeks to endow his behaviour, his whole life, with a meaning, like that given to a work of art. The opposite is the automaticity and the alienating production of factories and industrial life. Like Baudelaire, every subject of the artistic form of life is in natural opposition to the capitalist form of life as accumulation and maximization of profit. In this sense, the utility of the capitalist and the practical uselessness of art are opposed. This leads Baudelaire to consider himself useless and even to take it as a justification for his own suicide: 'I am going to kill

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25 Charles Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen and La Fanfarlo*, trans. Raymond N. MacKenzie (Indianapolis and Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Co., 2008), p. 16.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

myself because I am useless to other people and a danger to myself.<sup>27</sup> This passage prompted an interpretation from Sartre that deserves to be revisited from the perspective of forms of life. For Sartre, it is the decision to be useless that led Baudelaire to become redundant in his society. In other words, it was a free act of his will to understand himself in those terms, with little to do with society, the environment or others (something very different from what it suggests with regard to the case of the Jews, as we have examined above). Sartre wrote that ‘if he [Baudelaire] did not take up a profession, if he refused in advance to show the slightest interest in every form of business, it was because he had already made up his mind that he was completely useless’.<sup>28</sup>

This aspect of his life points directly to the rejection of the concept of usefulness: ‘To be a useful man has always appeared to me to be something particularly hideous’, he writes.<sup>29</sup> Sartre associates both quotations with a contradictory change of mood. But I do not think there is a contradiction, and definitely it is not a change of mood. Baudelaire was useless for the incipient capitalist form of life because he was the incarnation of an opposite form of life. He did not identify with it and could not act as if he did (at the risk of betraying oneself and then living in self-deception, which he did not do). He *knew* he was useless. It is not a complaint when he says he wants to kill himself because he is not useful to anyone. It is a powerful intuition. The options are either to kill himself physically or kill himself in his subjective identification. That is, to convert to the capitalist, useful form of life.

The poet, rejected in his ontological principle—the one he surely gave himself in his youth when he came into contact with incipient Parisian poets and bohemians—feels like a living dead. He is incapable of integrating himself into the hegemonic capitalist form of life and equally incapable of integrating himself into his own, denied as he was constantly by the former—with which he lived and to which he was exposed. After rethinking Sartre’s dialectic, we can now postulate that negation is not merely exercised by facticity, that is, by the habits and behaviours that oppress the poet, but also by the ontological principle. There is a denial of its principle through the capitalist principle that

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27 Quoted in Sartre, *Baudelaire*, p. 29.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

29 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 30.

drives the actions and habits of the social environment. This makes the denial a real force on the poet, as on any other form of life than the hegemonic one. For, incarnated in the bourgeois middle class, it is constituted by the negation of everything else, everything that is not it (following the negative Fichtean dialectic exposed above). This gave rise to the well-known phenomenon of the bourgeois phobia of the other, that which did not belong to their form of life: 'Baudelaire recognises in the bourgeois that politicoeconomical animal that claims supreme mastery of the world and that will allow no other being near itself, because it is incapable of understanding or tolerating the other, the alien.'<sup>30</sup>

It is not possible from this perspective that Baudelaire acted in bad faith, in the Sartrean sense. That is to say, it does not seem that he was justifying through external forces decisions that he would have taken freely. For, if he freely gave himself the artistic form of life, his denial by his environment was experienced as the impossibility of carrying it out and preserving it. And since what happens is precisely a conflict between two forms of life, in which one cancels out the other, nor can the theory that Sartre will apply to the study of Gustave Flaubert's life as a case of 'objective neurosis' be applicable either.<sup>31</sup> For the artist's difficulties to realize himself are not an internal contradiction that reflects the external contradictions when trying to surpass them. What I argue is that Baudelaire was denied in his inner world (and not only in his material condition and behaviour) by the external world to which he was exposed. Such exposure to the capitalist form meant the denial of the ontological principle that determined who he wanted to be within that community. In other words, the behaviour of capitalist society made his ontological principle impossible. He was free to insist on and integrate himself into his artistic form of life, but he could not do so in contact with the capitalist form of life, which at all times denied him and tried to assimilate him, on many occasions mainly through his loved ones. This explains, beyond Sartre's psychoanalytical interpretation, Baudelaire's tortuous relationship with them, especially with his mother and his lover, Jeanne Duval, the mulatto actress he met in 1842 and who was to

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30 Oehler, 'Baudelaire's Politics', pp. 24–25.

31 Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Family Idiot: Gustave Flaubert, 1821–1857*, Vol. III, trans. by Carol Cosman (Chicago and Longon: University of Chicago Press, 1989), chapter titled 'La névrose objective' ('The objective neurosis').

remain his mistress for the next twenty years.<sup>32</sup> The latter is described to his mother in the following terms:

To live with a person who shows no gratitude for your efforts, who impedes them through clumsiness or permanent meanness, *who considers you as a mere servant, as her property*, someone with whom it is impossible to exchange a word about politics or literature, a creature *who is unwilling to learn a single thing*, although you've offered to teach her yourself, a creature *who has no admiration for me*, and *who is not even interested in one's studies*, who *would throw one's manuscripts in the fire if that brought in more money than publishing them*, who drives away one's cat, the sole source of amusement in one's lodgings, and who brings in dogs, because the sight of dogs sickens me, who does not know or *cannot understand that by being tight-fisted*, just for one month *I could, thanks to that brief respite, conclude a big book*—is all this possible? Is it possible? My eyes are full of *tears of fury and shame* as I write this.<sup>33</sup>

His lover is represented to us as an antithesis of the poet. An antithesis whose features are those of the bourgeois and capitalist life of the moment. She makes him a maximizer of his own work, because he seeks to get the most economic profit in order to pay his lover. In one of his poems from *Fleurs du mal* (1857), the poet seems to take revenge on a woman he needs to deny,<sup>34</sup> that is, to kill her allegorically in order to assert himself as a poet; it is his poetry that kills her, in an act of affirmation of the form of life she incarnates.<sup>35</sup> It is a poem to a lady ('A une Madone') whom he stabs with the seven deadly sins, now turned into daggers. In other words, the poet, instead of saving her from her sins, kills her with them in a clear reversal of the Christian morality proper to the *respectable* bourgeoisie.

32 Jackson, 'Charles Baudelaire, a Life in Writing', p. 5.

33 Letter to his mother, 27 March 1851, in Charles Baudelaire, *Correspondance*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1972–73), I, p. 193. Quoted in Jackson, 'Charles Baudelaire, a Life in Writing', p. 5.

34 Literary criticism suggests that this belongs to the third cycle of love poems in *The Flowers of Evil*. In this cycle the poems would be dedicated to Marie Daubrun, an actress with whom Baudelaire had a brief love affair between 1854/55 and 1857. See Barbara Wright, 'Baudelaire's Poetic Journey in *Les Fleurs du Mal*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Baudelaire*, ed. by Rosemary Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 31–50 (pp. 38–39).

35 On the allegorical mode that underpins all of Baudelaire's work, see Michael Jennings, 'Introduction', in Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 1–26 (p. 18).

At last, so you're my Mary perfectly,  
 And mixing love with pagan cruelty,  
 Full of a dark, remorseful joy, I'll take  
 The seven deadly sins, and of them make  
 Seven bright Daggers; with a juggler's lore  
 Target your love within its deepest core,  
 And plant them all within your panting Heart,  
 Within your sobbing Heart, your streaming Heart!<sup>36</sup>

*Enfin, pour compléter ton rôle de Marie,  
 Et pour mêler l'amour avec la barbarie,  
 Volupté noire! des sept Péchés capitaux,  
 Bourreau plein de remords, je ferai sept Couteaux  
 Bien affilés, et, comme un jongleur insensible,  
 Prenant le plus profond de ton amour pour cible,  
 Je les planterai tous dans ton Coeur pantelant,  
 Dans ton Coeur sanglotant, dans ton Coeur ruisselant!*<sup>37</sup>

Art and the artistic form of life are in clear conflict with the morality of the hegemonic capitalist form of life. It will be its opposite, the same one that led Friedrich Nietzsche to write his *Antichrist* and that puts it beyond the good and evil typical of bourgeois society. The latter leads us to examine how the artistic form of life is finally denied by capitalism in the second half of the century, beginning the assimilation of the former insofar as it puts art at the service of maximization through its technological reproducibility.

## 2.2. Ideal and Spleen: The Subjectivity of the Poet

If the *Ideal* is to give meaning to the poet's life, the *Spleen* is the opposite attitude, the lack of meaning. If the first is associated with a certain spiritual good, the second refers to evil, which is in turn associated with the absurd and bourgeois, as Gautier expressed it in his biography of Baudelaire:

He hated evil as a mathematical deviation, and, in his quality of a perfect gentleman, he scorned it as unseemly, ridiculous, bourgeois and squalid. If he has often treated of hideous, repugnant, and unhealthy subjects, it is from that horror and fascination which makes the magnetised bird go

<sup>36</sup> Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, p. 121.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

down into the unclean mouth of the serpent; but more than once, with a vigorous flap of his wings, he breaks the charm and flies upwards to bluer and more spiritual regions. He should have engraved on his seal as a device the words 'Spleen et Idéal'.<sup>38</sup>

*Spleen et Idéal* indicate the essential elements for our understanding of the artistic form of life and that which is considered opposed to it and imposed on it. In Walter Benjamin's study of the French poet, he distinguishes between isolated experiences (*Erlebnis*) and long experiences (*Erfahrung*). The kind of experience that is fragmented and meaningless, because it is outside a framework of understanding (what he calls being outside a tradition), would constitute the isolated experience; while the experiences that make up our world and our tradition, those that we pass on to the following generations, would be the long experiences. For Benjamin, the isolated experiences would be those that produce the Spleen or melancholy:

Tradition is excluded from it. It is the quintessence of an isolated experience [*Erlebnis*] that struts about in the borrowed garb of long experience [*Erfahrung*]. *Spleen, on the other hand, exposes the isolated experience in all its nakedness. To his horror, the melancholy man sees the earth revert to a mere state of nature. No breath of prehistory surrounds it—no aura.*<sup>39</sup>

This distinction is equally useful for the understanding of forms of life, and in particular the artistic form of life in contrast to the capitalist one. For the Spleen, associated with these isolated experiences, denounces a lack of communion and total understanding of what is experienced. That lack of understanding lies in its being a fragment, which loses meaning when extracted from its totality. The isolated experience is an experience of the absurdity of that life which the poet experiences. That which is imposed upon him. That is, these experiences identified by Benjamin are those that the poet has of the capitalist form of life. On the other hand, long experiences have to do with those experiences that give us a cultural identity and continuity as subjects. These could well be equivalent to the subjectivity of the poet with respect to his artistic form of life. In them is encoded the Ideal, which, moreover, Benjamin, in the

38 Théophile Gautier, *Charles Baudelaire: His Life* (New York: Brentano's, 1915), p. 24.

39 Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), p. 202.

extract above, puts in relation to the aura, a concept that insists on the mediation of experience by a tradition. With regard to forms of life, we could say that this mediation consists of the ontological principle with which the subject identifies himself and which constitutes his essential subjectivity:

If we think of the associations which, at home in the *mémoire involontaire*, seek to cluster around an object of perception, and if we call those associations the aura of that object, then the aura attaching to the object of a perception corresponds precisely to the experience [*Erfahrung*] which, in the case of an object of use, inscribes itself as long practice.<sup>40</sup>

This distinction, however, leads Benjamin to a conclusion that finds no place in the ontology of forms of life. For the German author, with the inventions and new technologies of the time, especially the daguerreotype and the camera, isolated experiences (*Erlebnis*) would be given precedence over long experiences (*Erfahrung*): 'They thus represent important achievements of a society in which long practice is in decline.'<sup>41</sup> The latter, in Baudelaire's own view, would be the way the masses experience their own world: 'The masses demanded an ideal that would conform to their aspirations and the nature of their temperament ... Their prayers were granted by a vengeful god, and Daguerre became his prophet.'<sup>42</sup> However, precisely because the poet finds the masses the recipients of a new way of looking represented by the daguerreotype, which he rejects, suggests that this is a subjective appreciation of the poet from his own form of life. That is, those isolated experiences that for Benjamin are typical of the triumph of the masses and their technologies, lead us to question whether it is not from Baudelaire's point of view that the philosopher is looking. For the poet, not only photography but also commerce, utility, professions, money, and so on, all the elements of the capitalist form of life, produced isolated experiences; that is, they are absurd and typical of the Spleen. It is the artistic form of life incarnated by Baudelaire and other poets of the time that is in decline. For, with technological reproducibility, it is being denied and assimilated.

On the other hand, photography and other forms of artistic reproduction do not constitute a qualitative change with respect to the

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 202–03.

practices of the bourgeoisie, since they are still driven by the principle of economic maximization. What it does mean is a progressive change of integration in the mentioned totalization, because, with the accumulation and reproduction of photos that are sold as souvenirs, or lithographs that are sold as substitutes for the original paintings, the economic maximization is greater. Moreover, the life of the subject takes a step forward in its reification: vital moments are now fragmentary objects, which will only become continuous objects, gradual substitutes for the life of the subject, with the cinema, and later with video conferences and Internet forums in neoliberal capitalism, as we have shown above.

Therefore, exposure to these isolated experiences is equivalent to the denial of meaning in the poet-artist's life. The Spleen's reaction is therefore the result of the denial of the artist's form of life. With this denial the artist feels deprived. This is the condition in which Baudelaire recognizes himself in his poems and intimate writings.<sup>43</sup> To be deprived means to have been denied in some respect. And more than a specific aspect, it is the deprivation of its ontological principle, of the Ideal. It does not seem to be bad faith, as Sartre interprets,<sup>44</sup> in the sense of blaming external factors which only depend on his will, but a real limitation of the subject's way of being and acting which is not identified with the hegemonic form of life. This brings us back to the difference pointed out in previous chapters between facticity as pure being-in-itself and facticity as being-in-itself-for-itself. In the world of human acts, facticity is principled, born of a totality which is the pre-reflective consciousness of an anthropological image. It is never pure being-in-itself. It always comes from a meaningful whole. The facticity of the capitalist form of life is regular habits and behaviour determined by a principle of economic maximization. It not only denies the ability to act spontaneously in a different way but to do so under a different principle. It is the denial of their way of being through the imposition of an opposing behaviour principled by maximization and its connotations of utility, efficiency, accumulation, and so on. There is only room for recognition of the impossibility of living artistically in a community that does not; or else to live in a way contrary to that which one wants to live, stunned by the feeling of *l'ennui*, a fatalistic feeling of not being able to resist the life that

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43 Jackson, 'Charles Baudelaire, a Life in Writing', p. 12.

44 Sartre, *Baudelaire*, p. 30.

is imposed on the artist, very much associated with the Spleen:<sup>45</sup> 'I am bored [or I feel alienated] in France, especially because everyone here resembles Voltaire [...] Voltaire, or the anti-poet, the king of the idlers, the prince of the shallow, the anti-artist, the preacher of the concierges, the father Gigogne of the editors of *le Siècle*.'<sup>46</sup>

This leads either to conversion to the principle of life in that hegemonic community and the assimilation of the subject by the latter, or to withdrawal, either internal or external—either option the subject takes freely, but after having understood the denial, rejection and impossibility of his own form of life. The latter has as a consequence his ruin and disgrace:

You must, to earn your meagre evening bread,  
Like a bored altar boy swing censers, chant  
*Te Deums* to the never present gods,

Or, starving clown, put up your charms for sale,  
Your laughter steeped in tears for no one's eyes,  
To bring amusement to the vulgar crowd.<sup>47</sup>

*Il te faut, pour gagner ton pain de chaque soir,  
Comme un enfant de chœur, jouer de l'encensoir,  
Chanter des Te Deum auxquels tu ne crois guère,*

*Ou, saltimbanque à jeun, étaler tes appas  
Et ton rire trempé de pleurs qu'on ne voit pas,  
Pour faire épanouir la rate du vulgaire.*<sup>48</sup>

Thus, Baudelaire and the community of co-subjects of the artistic form of life remain on the margins of society. For 'it is bourgeois society that Baudelaire holds guilty of the suffering of the post-aristocratic period, and not least for the fact that art has gone to rack and ruin, that poets and artists like himself now belong to the *déclassés*'.<sup>49</sup> We could say that he is inside of that society at times, but isolated within it. And no wonder

45 Hiddleston, *Baudelaire and the Art of Memory*, p. 65.

46 'Je m'ennuie en France, surtout parce que tout le monde y ressemble à Voltaire. [...] Voltaire, ou l'anti-poète, le roi des badauds, le prince des superficiels, l'anti-artiste, le prédicateur des concierges, le père Gigogne des rédacteurs du *Siècle*': in Charles Baudelaire, *Journaux intimes* (Paris: G. Crès et Cie, 1920), pp. 65–66. Translation is mine.

47 Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, p. 27 ('The Venal Muse').

48 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

49 Oehler, 'Baudelaire's Politics', p. 24.

he, very much like other artists, constantly complains of loneliness. Therefore, when the poet is in possession of himself through his artistic work, he feels like an aristocrat or a prince;<sup>50</sup> but when he returns to his environment, he feels disoriented, clumsy, embarrassed like the albatross in his poem:

Often, when bored, the sailors of the crew  
 Trap albatross, the great birds of the seas,  
 Mild travellers escorting in the blue  
 Ships gliding on the ocean's mysteries.

And when the sailors have them on the planks,  
 Hurt and distraught, these kings of all outdoors  
 Piteously let trail along their flanks  
 Their great white wings, dragging like useless oars.

This voyager, how comical and weak!  
 Once handsome, how unseemly and inept!  
 One sailor pokes a pipe into his beak,  
 Another mocks the flier's hobbled steep.

The Poet is a kinsman in the clouds  
 Who scoffs at archers, loves a stormy day;  
 But on the ground, among the hooting crowds,  
 He cannot walk, his wings are in the way.<sup>51</sup>

*Souvent, pour s'amuser, les hommes d'équipage  
 Prennent des albatros, vastes oiseaux des mers,  
 Qui suivent, indolents compagnons de voyage,  
 Le navire glissant sur les gouffres amers.*

*A peine les ont-ils déposés sur les planches,  
 Que ces rois de l'azur, maladroits et honteux,  
 Laissent piteusement leurs grandes ailes blanches  
 Comme des avirons traîner à côté d'eux.*

*Ce voyageur ailé, comme il est gauche et veule!  
 Lui, naguère si beau, qu'il est comique et laid!  
 L'un agace son bec avec un brûle-gueule,  
 L'autre mime, en boitant, l'infirme qui volait!*

*Le Poete est semblable au prince des nuées  
 Qui hante la tempête et se rit de l'archer;*

50 Jackson, 'Charles Baudelaire, a Life in Writing', p. 12.

51 Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, pp. 15, 17 ('The Albatross').

*Exilé sur le sol au milieu des huées,  
Ses ailes de géant l'empêchent de marcher.*<sup>52</sup>

At other times, he feels deprived of his power, the power to be the one he has decided to be (that form of life with which he identifies). Denied by the principle that directs the world in which he lives, he feels his power as a loss, an absence, just as the Andromache in 'Le cygne' ('The Swan') feels the absence of what she once was.<sup>53</sup> In the mythological character the poet sees a reflection of the deprivation to which he is subjected in his own time. And the remarkable thing is that these mythologies speak of transformations forced by a greater power (like all those that occur in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*). Under that physical transformation, the intimate being of the character as well as that of the poet continues to beat:

Andromache, I think of you—this meagre stream,  
This melancholy mirror where had once shone forth  
The giant majesty of all your widowhood,  
This fraudulent Simois, fed by bitter tears,  
[...]

A swan, who had escaped from his captivity,  
And scuffing his splayed feet along the paving stones,  
He trailed his white array of feathers in the dirt.  
Close by a dried out ditch the bird opened his beak,

Flapping excitedly, bathing his wings in dust,  
And said, with heart possessed by lakes he once had loved:  
'Water, when will you rain? Thunder, when will you roar?'  
I see this hapless creature, sad and fatal myth [...].<sup>54</sup>

*Andromaque, je pense à vous! Ce petit fleuve,  
Pauvre et triste miroir où jadis resplendit  
L'immense majesté de vos douleurs de veuve,  
Ce Simôis menteur qui par vos pleurs grandit,  
[...]*

*Un cygne qui s'était évadé de sa cage,  
Et, de ses pieds palmés frottant le pavé sec,  
Sur le sol raboteux traînait son blanc plumage.  
Près d'un ruisseau sans eau la bête ouvrant le bec*

52 *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 16.

53 Jackson, 'Charles Baudelaire, a Life in Writing', p. 12.

54 Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, pp. 173, 175 ('The Swan').

*Baignait nerveusement ses ailes dans la poudre,  
Et disait, le coeur plein de son beau lac natal:  
'Eau, quand donc pleurvas-tu? quand tonneras-tu, foudre?'*  
*Je vois ce malheureux, mythe étrange et fatal ...*<sup>55</sup>

This transformation can be understood as the effect that the hegemonic form of life has on the poet, who feels his being as an absence (a negation), that of a lost majesty, while he finds himself locked in a cage. This explains the contrast between the figure of the poet as a hero or prince and the opposite, that of the useless, guilty and ashamed. The poet, like any subject deprived of his power to be who he is, is ashamed of himself for betraying his own ontological principle. This deprivation is a recurrent motive throughout his work and life. In 'Le cygne', he expresses it as an impossibility and compares it to the experience of being defeated, held captive, forgotten on an island, and so on. The poet conveys a constant state of crisis that never turns into conversion, which is why he speaks of his 'exiled soul'. The impossibility of his being is the result of an external imposition (captive, defeated, forgotten...), it is never felt as a demand of his consciousness:

Of all those who have lost something they may not find  
Ever, ever again! who steep themselves in tears  
And suck a bitter milk from that good she-wolf, grief!  
Of orphans, skin and bones, dry and wasted blooms!

And likewise in the forest of my exiled soul  
Old Memory sings out a full note of the horn!  
I think of sailors left forgotten on an isle,  
Of captives, the defeated ... many others more!<sup>56</sup>

*À quiconque a perdu ce qui ne se retrouve  
Jamais, jamais! à ceux qui s'abreuvent de pleurs  
Et tétent la Douleur comme une bonne louve!  
Aux maigres orphelins séchant comme des fleurs!*

*Ainsi dans la forêt où mon esprit s'exile  
Un vieux Souvenir sonne à plein souffle du cor!  
Je pense aux matelots oubliés dans une île,  
Aux captifs, aux vaincus!... à bien d'autres encor!*<sup>57</sup>

55 *Ibid.*, pp. 172, 174.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 177.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 176.

However, many others have also been deprived (denied) of their form of life, hence the poet identifies with them, even becoming a representative of those other young people of his generation insofar as they have in common that they have been denied by the bourgeois regime of Louis-Philippe. Thus, in the eleventh chapter of *Salon of 1846*, on Horace Vernet, he expresses what for some is his communion with revolutionary France, but which in any case is his union with those who have been displaced and are seeking to take their place in society:

Nevertheless it is not imprudent to be brutal and go straight to the heart of the matter, when at each sentence the *I* covers a *we*, an immense *we*, a silent and invisible *we*,—*we* an entire new generation, an enemy of war and national follies; a generation bursting with health, because it is young, and already shoving its way along, elbowing in and making a space for itself,—serious, mocking and menacing!<sup>58</sup>

In some instances, this 'we' seems to identify with the crowd, with the poet's ability to slip through the skin and bones of others.<sup>59</sup> But, in this particular passage, he refers to his generation, to those who are silent and invisible. These could not be the bourgeois, who were integrated as professionals or businessmen. That 'we' rather brings together those poets and artists who were somehow out of place in a society devoted to material utility and economic maximization; poets and artists who were invisible precisely because they had not yet entered into capitalist totalization, like other groups such as the poor and certain workers. The poet clearly expresses his identification with a community whose members have the same feelings as him of being redundant, and the same attitude of perseverance in a way of being that resists being assimilated by the hegemonic form of life.

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58 Quoted in Oehler, 'Baudelaire's Politics', p. 18. The original reads: 'Cependant il n'est pas imprudent d'être brutal et d'aller droit au fait, quand à chaque phrase le *je* couvre un *nous*, *nous* immense, *nous* silencieux et invisible,—*nous*, toute une génération nouvelle, ennemie de la guerre et des sottises nationales; une génération pleine de santé, parce qu'elle est jeune, et qui pousse déjà à la queue, coudoie et fait ses trous,—sérieuse, railleuse et menaçante!'

59 Compare the prose poem 'Crowds' in Baudelaire's *Paris Spleen*: 'The poet enjoys this incomparable privilege, that he can be, just as he likes, either himself or someone else' (p. 22).

### 3. Artistic Form of Life, Power and Resistance under Capitalism

The power of the hegemonic form of life falls on everyone. In this sense, it is worth stopping to reflect on how we should understand the concept of power with respect to the above processes. Patrick Greaney has studied the issue of power in relation to the social classes of the nineteenth century. Taking Aristotle's conception and Martin Heidegger's interpretation of it, he suggests that power is always relational, that is, a relationship between two powers: one power that seeks to produce change and the other power that resists that change. That is to say, power is defined from the Aristotelian notion of *dunamis*. Power is the capacity to change or resist:

A power is the *archē*, the origin that contains within it the relation to 'another' in which it effects a change or transposition. This will be the central, guiding definition for Aristotle and Heidegger, and it shows how power is always relational [...] But Heidegger argues that, for Aristotle, another relation is more essential: the relation between a power that suffers change and a power that resists change [...] In Heidegger's interpretation, Aristotle's emphasis on suffering and resisting power directs our attention differently and orients it according to the experience of power, in which 'that which resists is the first and most familiar form in which we experience a power'.<sup>60</sup>

Despite being denied by society, the power of the poor is in resisting, in not being assimilated (power to remain what they are, survivors or subjects of an austere life, not maximizers). A distinction must be made between the poor and the workers within the crowd. Workers have already been assimilated at an earlier stage of the universalization process. They are already useful to the capitalist form of life (as it has been shown in Chapter 6). The poor still resist, they are denied but remain on the margins. In that sense, they show their power, the power to persevere in their being against the imposition of an external power, because, as Greaney says following Heidegger, 'suffering and resisting powers are inseparable in a way that bears witness to how power is primarily a relation among powers'.<sup>61</sup>

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60 Patrick Greaney, *Untimely Beggar: Poverty and Power from Baudelaire to Benjamin* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 3.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

This leads us to review more closely the definition of power that this conceptualization by Greaney contains. His discussion tries to understand power as an actual capacity, which according to Heidegger would be Aristotle's conception, and consists of conceiving an actual capacity—or power to exercise change and to resist—even when it is not enacted, that is, when it is not being exercised. His example is that of the potter, who always maintains his capacity to create vessels when he is not creating, and even if he loses his hands. The latter he calls an 'amputated power'. This conception would be in contrast to that of the philosophers of Megara, for whom when a capacity is not enacted, that capacity does not exist:

For Heidegger, the definition of power must reserve a place for nonenactment, which can take three forms: interrupting one's work; finishing a project; or abandoning a project. In all three instances, the capability does not disappear but is withdrawn, and Aristotle insists on this as part of his argument against the hypothesis of the Megarians, who saw the actuality of a capability solely in its enactment and thus understood its nonenactment as its nonexistence. For Aristotle, a power that is not enacted is nonetheless actual, and this claim is crucial for understanding the power of those among the poor who are not productive.<sup>62</sup>

Taking these Heideggerian distinctions as a starting point, power exists as long as the capacity to change or resist exists. The poor and working people would retain that capacity even if it were prevented from being realized. But what do we mean by the power to change and resist? On the one hand, change can refer to both exerting a transformation on an object or on oneself as an object. On the other hand, to resist is to reject a change imposed by another subject. With regard to their capacity to change, what subjects preserve—and not only the poor and the working class—is the capacity to act in the world. But such action can only be according to their capacity, just like the potter as a potter has the capacity to create vessels and ceramics. The poor or the worker—or the artist or the capitalist—can only act according to their capacity. In other words, ability has to do with being. And in a way, it is the capacity that defines being. If the potter did not have the capacity to create vessels, he would not be a potter. If the survivor did not have the capacity to act as a

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62 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

survivor, which might be represented by the poor; or the austere subject to act directed by the principle of austerity, which might be represented originally by the peasant and the worker,<sup>63</sup> they would not be who they are either. In other words, we are what we do, even if our capacity to do is not enacted. That is, we maintain our possibility of doing. One is the totality of one's own possibilities of action.

But we have also said that this capacity to change, as well as acting in the world, is also the capacity to change the subjects themselves. Therefore, the poor and the worker preserve at all times the capacity to change themselves. That is, the capacity to change the way they act in the world. So a different way of acting implies different capacities or possibilities, and those possibilities imply a transformation of their being. Thus, the potter can give himself (can acquire) the capacity to be an athlete as well. But are the capabilities always complementary or are there cases where the capabilities are exclusive? It could be said that there are capacities that are relatively incompatible in terms of the time needed to acquire them, such as that of being a great musician, a great scientist and a great writer simultaneously. But these changes are relative, *accidental* in Aristotelian terminology, and ultimately not exclusive. The changes that seem not to be able to be complementary are those that refer to substance, namely the so-called *substantial* changes. Thus, while the capacities of the potter are maintained when the potter is not performing his trade, and can acquire other capacities such as that of being an athlete, it is inconceivable that he can enact both capacities simultaneously. And yet, he can still be considered an athlete and a potter. In the so-called substantial changes this phenomenon does not seem possible. To be an athlete and a potter one must first be a human being. If one ceases to be a human being, one ceases to have the capacities of a human being. And one cannot be and not be at the same time. The subject always has the possibility of ceasing to be; a possibility that for Albert Camus was 'the only truly serious philosophical problem' (*Il n'y a qu'un problème philosophique vraiment sérieux: c'est le suicide*).<sup>64</sup> And therefore, in the onto-phenomenological sense that I have defended in this book, he also has the possibility of being a different human being.

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63 By this I mean the capacity to act according to their form of life.

64 See Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* [*Le Mythe de Sisyphe*], trans. by Justin O'Brien (New York: Penguin Modern Classics, 1979 [1942]), p. 11.

That is, to stop being who he is in order to be someone else ('To die to live').<sup>65</sup> This is what we have studied as conversion. That change is exclusive, because it is the framework in which its relative possibilities appear. For an aristocrat of the small nobility, whose form of life was knowledge and culture, physical labour could not be counted among his possibilities, nor could he dedicate himself to the maximization of his profits—this latter will be typical of the small nobility of the second half of the century, when it has already entered into capitalist totalization.

Here the power of the subjects has to be related to such a change in the totality of their possibilities as well as to the resistance to an imposed change, for as Michel Foucault put it: 'Where there is power there is resistance.'<sup>66</sup> Before their assimilation by capital, the power of the peasants was to maintain their capacities as human beings whose principle was to lead an austere life, without working beyond necessity or aiming at anything other than the satisfaction of present needs, as shown by the sources discussed in the previous chapter on agricultural life. These capacities were denied by capitalism by imposing new capacities, i.e. a new being that replaced the being of austere life: the proletariat. The proletarians are already subjects of capitalist life in their being, in which they begin to integrate, intensifying and perfecting their capacities, just as a potter with more experience and training is a better potter—without ceasing to be a potter in the absence of training. This will come in a process of continuous integration (in progressive degrees of intensity) until the ultimate stage of neoliberal capitalism where, as shown above, every subject is at the same time an entrepreneur of himself and a maximizer of his properties in a global market (as a reified subject).

This leads us to examine briefly how the power of the hegemonic form of life changes the being of the other forms until they are assimilated into their own power. The power of the proletariat is thus not a power in relation to the necessary resistance to expansive capitalism, but is already a form denied in its original being and affirmed as being constituted by subjects maximizing their economic gains. This is in opposition to what Greaney seems to defend: 'It would be a misreading to conclude from this that the

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65 Hegel's sentence quoted in Paterson, *Conversion*, p. 129.

66 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. I: *An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 95.

two powers are identical, because the ontological unity of the relational being of power demands precisely the ontic discreteness and difference of beings.<sup>67</sup> But in fact, it is not that the two powers are identical, but that the power of the capitalist form of life continues insofar as it preserves the workers as an assimilated group and therefore as a group over which the power to change their nature has already been exercised. That power is verified through the ability to maintain that change. Without capitalism, the proletariat would not exist, for it is the assimilation of a life governed by austerity. While such a life remains possible for those individuals who have not been assimilated, for the proletariat the only form of life possible is already that of maximizing economic profit with its body, time and effort. The difference lies in being integrated into such a capitalist totalization to a lesser degree than the middle class, for example, although it soon progresses within the mass society.

If we now take the perspective of the artistic form of life and its subjectivity, it could be said that the poet is both inside and outside this totalization. He is inside because his form of life is being progressively denied through the economic maximization of art. But he is outside because he is in resistance, for the preservation of his power, understood (as I have argued above) as the preservation of his being with respect to the imposed change (equal to a non-conversion). A resistance that, in Benjamin's opinion, is of an atrocious weight for the poet, so that he seems to understand that he lacks the strength to continue and even seeks refuge in the thought of death: 'Someone like Baudelaire could very well have viewed suicide as the only heroic act still available to the *multitudes malades* of the cities in reactionary times.'<sup>68</sup> The resistance here means to resist the negation exercised by the modern form of life (capitalism), and that negation means the death of the poet or the turning of the poet into a living dead. The poet's death actually is the death of the poetry, the death of the Art incarnated by him as a form of life. For, according to Benjamin, the natural 'productive élan' is that 'poietic spirit' which constitutes the poet naturally or as his given nature.<sup>69</sup>

The denial of the poet's form of life is an insistence on the impossibility of living according to the principle of artistic self-expression in the

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67 Greaney, *Untimely Beggar*, p. 4.

68 Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life*, pp. 104–05.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

midst of a community whose principle requires maximization, with the implication this has on values, feelings, trades, knowledge, and so on. This denial is always an attempt at assimilation. But as a denial, it affirms aspects of its constitutive negativity. That is, the negation of the artistic form of life implies the affirmation of its opposite under the principle of maximization. If the opposite of artistic self-expression—for, as said above, it is a way of endowing meaning through artistic expression—is automaticity and reproducibility, with the negation of the artistic form of life, capitalism affirms the reproducibility and automaticity of the work of art in what Benjamin will call the era of ‘technological reproducibility of art’, and the loss of its ‘aura’. For Benjamin, the aura is precisely a distance between the subject and the work of art mediated by authority and tradition: ‘A strange tissue of space and time: the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be [...] The uniqueness of the work of art is identical to its embeddedness in the context of tradition.’<sup>70</sup> The aura gives prestige to the work of art and power to the class that owns it. In other words, the aura, as that singularity confirmed by the aesthetic corpus created by the relevant authorities, represents the cultural and purchasing power of the middle class. The only one who can afford to acquire a Goya or a Rembrandt or a Rossetti. With the expansion of the middle class in mass society, the artist is denied and assimilated by the technological reproducibility of art from the middle of the century onwards. We could say that the technological reproduction of the work of art is the consequence of the negation of the class power. That is, the passage from auratic work of art to the reproduced work of art signals the passage from the middle class to the mass society as the incarnation of the capitalist form of life: from one way of maximization through the auratic perspective to the other one through the reproducibility.<sup>71</sup>

However, if the transition from auratic art to the art of technological reproducibility was already established by Benjamin, from the perspective opened up by our analysis of forms of life and its dialectics, several fundamental aspects must be noted that complete this conception. First, the establishment of the middle class as an incarnation

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70 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, Vol. III: 1933–1938, ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 104–05.

71 Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life*, p. 79.

of the capitalist form of life is a turning point. The middle class' form of life is established as the only possible way of being and acting, and no longer faces or denies the form of life of a particular class. From 1832 (its rise to political, judicial and cultural power), it progressively denies everything that is not it. Its denial extends to all corners of society, hence the omnipresent theme of the phobia of the non-bourgeois, of the strange. According to the necessity of the dialectical process of expansion through denial, universalization and assimilation, if in a previous moment it had denied the aristocracy, in the next moment it denies, among others, the artistic form of life and the life of survival of the poor. From these denials, the mass society is obtained, in which the capitalist form of life has been definitively adopted. The latter entails the denial of the middle class as a class and its affirmation as a universal form of life. The latter is seen in terms of the shared ontological principle of maximization and accumulation, which has to do with shared habits and aspirations visible in a certain homogenization of leisure, work, consumption, private life, etc.; in a word, what Ortega y Gasset called the mass-man, as already commented in Chapter 6 above.<sup>72</sup> It is at this point that the artist is denied, so that he is integrated into the capitalist totalization through its opposite, namely, material artistic replication through technologies such as photography and industrial art. This kills the ideal of the artist and makes him useful. At this point a distinction must be made between art as a form of life and art as a commercial activity and promotion of social status. The auratic distance to which Benjamin refers, according to this dialectic, would refer to a previous moment, to the denial of the aristocracy or small nobility. It should be noted that Baudelaire is ironic in *Salon of 1846*, when he suggests that the bourgeoisie needed knowledge of art:

Now, you need art.

Art is an infinitely precious commodity, a refreshing and warming drink that restores to the stomach and the mind the natural balance of the ideal.

You can imagine its use, O bourgeois—you who are legislators or shopkeepers—when the hour of six or seven tolls and bends your weary head toward the coals of the fire or the cushions of the armchair...

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72 José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* [*La rebelión de las masas*] (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1957 [1930]).

Bourgeois, you have—you who are king, legislator or dealer—set up collections, museums, galleries. Some of those that sixteen years ago were open only to bailiffs have widened their doors to the multitude.<sup>73</sup>

For the appreciation and knowledge of art was a quality proper to the aristocracy, which incarnates the form of life of knowledge and culture (the intellectual form of life). And because of that knowledge and culture, it was respected as a superior class. With the capitalist negation by the middle class and its assimilation, aristocratic knowledge becomes an absence, for its opposite, namely, ignorance, is affirmed and put at the service of economic maximization. If the bourgeoisie maintains its appreciation of art, it does so through the mediation of aristocratic authority. The bourgeoisie acquires paintings, tapestries, rare books, but it does so from ignorance. That aura or distance with regard to the object of art that Benjamin attributes to the middle class, in reality, is a distance produced by ignorance. Baudelaire's recommendation in *Salon of 1846* is clear proof that the bourgeois acquired and learned about art in a superficial way as a mere gesture of empty power. What appears to be absent at this distance is the loss of knowledge and spiritual appreciation of art, which was characteristic of a literate, cultured and refined aristocracy. Therefore, the move towards reproducibility is a further stage in the loss of ideal appreciation of art. This converges with the denial of the artist who has now become part of the mass society, for whom he produces an art that is mimetic, automatic, reproducible and economically profitable. This is the moment when craft art becomes part of industrial chains and artistic objects of all kinds as lithographs are mass-produced and distributed through an incipient globalization.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, the process is not one of loss of aura in human experience from a bourgeois to a mass society, but rather a continuous process of

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73 Oehler, 'Baudelaire's Politics', p. 16. The original reads: 'Or vous avez besoin d'art. L'art est un bien infiniment précieux, un breuvage rafraîchissant et réchauffant, qui rétablit l'estomac et l'esprit dans l'équilibre naturel de l'idéal. Vous en concevez l'utilité, ô bourgeois,—l'égislateurs, ou commerçants,—quand la septième ou la huitième heure sonnée incline votre tête fatiguée vers les braises du foyer et les oreillers du fauteuil... Bourgeois, vous avez—roi l'égislateur ou négociant,—institué des collections, des musées, des galeries. Quelques-unes de celles qui n'étaient ouvertes, il y a seize ans qu'aux accapareurs, ont élargi leurs portes pour la multitude.'

74 Peter Stearns, *Western Civilization in World History* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 106.

alienation whose ultimate motivation is economic maximization, which feeds on ignorance and lack of interest in anything that is not immediately useful and productive (from the denial of aristocratic life and the assimilation of its opposite features by the bourgeoisie). Photography is thus more alienating than painting because it is reproducible and does not require training but only technical knowledge (how to use it for mechanical reproduction). This is the difference Theodor Adorno detected between art and the culture industry:

The concept of technique in the culture industry is only in name identical with technique in works of art. In the latter, technique is concerned with the internal organization of the object itself, with its inner logic. In contrast, the technique of the culture industry is, from the beginning, one of distribution and mechanical reproduction, and therefore always remains external to its object.<sup>75</sup>

And even more so, this alienation derives from there being a transfer of the skills and autonomy of the human being—of the painter who made a portrait or immortalized an occasion with the strokes of his brush—to the machine, which ultimately makes the photo, becoming an appendage of the subject and the subject becoming dependent on it. The artist's alienation regarding the camera could be said to run parallel to that postulated by Marx in his *Grundrisse* about the worker and the machine:

The worker's activity, limited to a mere abstraction, is determined and regulated on all sides by the movement of the machinery, not the other way round. The knowledge that obliges the inanimate parts of the machine, through their construction, to work appropriately as an automaton, does not exist in the consciousness of the worker, but acts upon him through the machine as an alien force, as the power of the machine itself.<sup>76</sup>

Second, according to Benjamin, the auratic conception has to do with the long experience (*Erfahrung*), as indicated above. And he also claims that the auratic conception is the kind of experience that the bourgeoisie has with regard to art, as opposed to the isolated experiences that art in mass society promotes. However, from the perspective of forms of

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75 Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 101.

76 Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 133.

life, the aura as a distance between the subject and the work of art is the distance created by their own ignorance of art and their consequent reliance on the artistic authority of the tradition (mainly the aristocrats). In any case, the long experience or auratic conception, as an experience of unity of meaning within a totality that can be called tradition, entails the expansion of a hegemonic form of life and implies isolated experiences only for those outside that form of life, for example, artists like Baudelaire. In this way, the long experience or the aura to which Benjamin refers can be considered lost only outside of capitalism. For the mass society that incarnates the capitalist form of life, its experience is auratic, because it receives meaning from its ontological principle: thus, the reproducibility of photographic art and lithographs makes perfect sense when it comes to maximizing economic profit and the accumulation of consumption. In short, that long experience is proper to every subject with regard to the possibilities of behaviour, values and feelings of their form of life. In contrast, the isolated experience (*Erlebnis*) would have to do with how the subjects perceive and relate to a hegemonic form of life that is imposed on them and denies them. This means that this isolated experience is proper to every subject with respect to another form of life. A proof of this can be found again in the phobia of the bourgeoisie with respect to the strange, as mentioned above.<sup>77</sup> In that social class and its form of life one could say that isolated experiences shaped its perception of what was opposite, or different, to it. But, contrary to what happened with poets, it avoided these experiences by distancing itself from opposing forms of life and their subjects, as Baudelaire vividly tells us in his prose poem 'Les yeux des pauvres' ('The Eyes of the Poor'). The poet's companion is annoyed when she realizes that as they sit outside a restaurant a family of poor people is looking on, their eyes full of longing; she asks the poet to make the waiter turn them away:

I was not only moved by this family of eyes, but I felt a little ashamed of our glasses and carafes, so much bigger than our thirsts. I turned my gaze to your eyes, my love, in order to read *my* thoughts there; I plunged

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77 Oehler, 'Baudelaire's Politics', pp. 24–25. This is a phobia that one can say is not exclusive to the bourgeoisie with respect to that which is different from itself, but to other forms of life as well, such as that of artists or intellectuals with respect to the capitalist form of life of the bourgeoisie, as has become evident in the last two chapters.

deeply into your eyes, so beautiful and so bizarrely soft, into your green eyes, those eyes inhabited by Caprice and inspired by the Moon, and then you said to me: 'Those people over there are intolerable, with their eyes open wide as gates! Couldn't you ask the head waiter to get them out of here?''<sup>78</sup>

The experience for the accompanying lady has the characteristics of isolated experiences (*Erlebnis*). These are not part of the usual and traditional behaviour to which the lady is accustomed. They are experiences in a certain way traumatic, because they produce an immediate and spontaneous rejection in the subject. And above all, and combining the above, they are experiences constituted by their lack of meaning: the lady does not understand the attitude of the poor, and in a certain way, she does not understand the feeling that their attitude expresses. The poet is ashamed to be with her in that restaurant, where he says they are drinking beverages greater than their thirst; that is, drinks that do not try to satisfy a biological need, which would be the case for the poor. The poet, who is outside the capitalist totalization incarnated in the expansive bourgeoisie, can identify with those other forms of life that remain on the margins, in this case the survival form of life incarnated in the poor. For the poet, the isolated, incomprehensible, absurd experience outside the totalization in which he is involved as a subject is precisely that of the attitude of the lady, to whom he says he hates her: 'you want to know why it is that I hate you today. It will be, no doubt, harder for you to understand it than for me to explain it.'<sup>79</sup> That experience seems to make the poet realize that in a certain way he cannot love the subjects of that form of life incarnated in the lady who accompanies him. For that experience seems to reveal the abyss between the two. On the other hand, his relationship with the poor is no closer (as mentioned above). However, between them

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78 Baudelaire, *Paris Spleen*, p. 53. The original reads: 'Non seulement j'étais attendri par cette famille d'yeux, mais je me sentais un peu honteux de nos verres et de nos carafes, plus grands que notre soif. Je tournais mes regards vers les vôtres, cher amour, pour y lire ma pensée; je plongeais dans vos yeux si beaux et si bizarrement doux, dans vos yeux verts, habités par le Caprice et inspirés par la Lune, quand vous me dites: "Ces gens-là me sont insupportables avec leurs yeux ouverts comme des portes cochères! Ne pourriez-vous pas prier le maître du café de les éloigner d'ici?'"', in Charles Baudelaire, *Petits poèmes en prose* (Paris: Louis Conard, 1927), p. 89.

79 Baudelaire, *Spleen of Paris*, p. 52.

there exists that invisible communion of subjects denied by capital as *déclassés*.

#### 4. Conclusion

The forms of life respond to communities of subjects who identify with the same ontological principle. These communities are not necessarily social classes, although in some cases, as in the development of capitalist life, the opposite form, that of austerity, could be associated basically with peasants and artisans—but not exclusively, as there would be members of other social classes who would also identify with that form. In this sense, the chapter began by exploring the differences and similarities with the ‘communities of feeling’ postulated by Rosenwein: a group of individuals who share a way of feeling and valuing. These are also communities equally distinguishable from social classes. The discussion has helped me to establish the need for such communities to respond to an ontological principle or totalization. In fact, even if this principle is not identified, every community of feeling postulated by Rosenwein is based on an overall hypothesis. The forms of life would be these totalizations. For not only do they constitute consciousness a priori, but they are also in the world through their observable actions. The identification of the form of life in the actions that are the object of analysis is, therefore, inevitable if we want to establish the set or framework in which these actions make sense, since that framework is the condition of their possibility.

To this end, I have briefly examined the artistic form of life, as a particular way of being and acting in the world. And I have contrasted it with other forms, especially the capitalist one. I have focused on Baudelaire as the subject who incarnates this artistic form. My choice has been suggested by the fact that it is a topic on which Sartre expressed his thoughts, and this gives me the opportunity to extend my dialogue with him. In Baudelaire’s actions, values and feelings, I have identified a totalization whose driving principle is the self-expression of one’s own ideals. In this totalization, the poet becomes integrated while offering resistance to the hegemonic life to which he does not want to be assimilated as a useful and efficient subject, from the point of view of capitalist maximization. The latter has served me to show the

ontological structures and characteristics of the form of life and how the subjectivity of the subject depends on them. Subjectivity is born in a situation of assimilation-resistance with other forms with which it comes into contact as objects in the world. It is in these situations that the dialectical process of universalization through assimilation by the hegemonic form of life is triggered.