

## INTRODUCTION

Movies exercise a hold on us, a hold that, drawing on our innermost desires and fears, we participate in creating. To know films objectively, we have to know the hold they have upon us. To know the hold films have on us, we have to know ourselves objectively. And to know ourselves objectively, we have to know the impact of films on our lives. No study of film can claim intellectual authority if it is not rooted in self-knowledge, our knowledge of our own subjectivity. In the serious study of film, in other words, criticism must work hand in hand with the perspective of self-reflection that only philosophy is capable of providing.

(Rothman and Keane 2000: 17–18)

At the heart of this volume is the understanding that Sartrean existentialism, most prominent in the 1940s particularly in France, is still relevant as a way of interpreting the world today. And film, by reflecting philosophical concerns in the actions and choices of characters, continues and extends a tradition in which art exemplifies the understanding of this philosophy. This book, therefore, seeks to revalidate the Sartrean philosophical project through its application to film.

‘I am an existentialist.’ What does this statement mean? What kind of existentialism is one talking about? There are a variety of philosophical tenets held by those who call themselves existentialists, some of whom are phenomenologists, a philosophy that deals with consciousness and that goes ‘back to the things themselves’, asking the question: what does existing mean? Existentialism is a philosophy derived from the Danish and German philosophers Kierkegaard and Heidegger; the former was Christian and the latter an atheist. In France, the philosopher Gabriel Marcel was influenced by the ideas of Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre (whose existentialism is the primary focus of this volume) by the ideas of Heidegger. William Shearson, in highlighting the differences amongst philosophers who would define themselves as existentialists, defines existentialism as based on two principles: knowledge that is gained through experience, and the self defined not as substance but as a lived relation to that which situates it (Shearson 1975: 135, 138).

Existentialism emerged in France at the end of the Second World War, which had seen France occupied by Germany (see McBride 1996; Webber 2008). A philosophy of freedom and responsibility resonated particularly in

France and in Western Europe before crossing the Atlantic and finding an echo in North America which had also suffered from the war. This context is paramount to the success of Sartrean existentialism in France (Boschetti 1985; Galster 2001). After the end of the Second World War, as Sartre became more prominent in the media, he was continually asked to explain existentialism (Boulé 1992). Sartre says that existentialism is a doctrine according to which existence precedes essence (and not the converse which would be the definition of determinism). His thesis is that human beings exist first and in choosing themselves, they create themselves. In acting, they define themselves; in short, therefore, there is no difference between being and doing. Furthermore, human beings' acts and choices are always defined within a given situation, and within that situation (which is simply one of the aspects of the human condition) human beings are free and therefore responsible.

In most newspaper articles and interviews at the time, Sartre explained existentialism in terms one can find in his work *Existentialism Is a Humanism*.<sup>1</sup> This slim and accessible volume started as a public lecture given on 29 October 1945 which the publisher Nagel published as a small booklet in 1946. It was only ever intended as a lecture designed on the one hand to popularise Sartre's thought and on the other hand to respond to accusations from French Communists and Christians alike that his philosophy was having a corrupting influence on French youth. *Existentialism Is a Humanism* does not represent a complete picture of Sartrean philosophy (Keefe 1972). As an early insight into Sartre's thinking, it is a condensed version of his existentialist philosophy which is why it was chosen as the key reference text for all contributors to this collection. It is inevitable, therefore, that some central existentialist themes will be repeated across chapters. This adds focus to the volume and should not detract from the originality of each chapter, conceived as each is to stand alone on its own merits. *Existentialism Is a Humanism* also has a distinctly un-nuanced moral dimension that does not feature prominently in Sartre's bigger and more theoretical work *Being and Nothingness* (1943), sub-titled 'Essay in Phenomenological Ontology', which features a more in-depth and ontological approach to existentialist thought. As for Sartrean ethics, this is given a thorough treatment in his *Notebooks for an Ethics* (1983). Because this volume focuses on the early period of Sartrean existentialism, it may be viewed that existentialism – at least as it is elaborated in this introduction – is more in tune with the hegemonic ideology of liberal democracy, as espoused especially in the USA today. For example, what Falzon in his chapter calls 'the affirmation of the sovereign individual' in existentialism could be seen as equally applicable to the American Dream of self-realisation as to existentialism. However, it should be stressed that Sartre's insistence on the individual has to be constantly resituated within the context of the Second World War and of the Occupation of France by Germany. Once Sartre discovered Marxism in the late 1940s (Poster 1979), his philosophical focus shifted away from liberal democracy and the denouncement of alienation and oppression towards a greater acknowledgement of the collective:

As soon as there will exist *for everyone* a margin of *real* freedom beyond the production of life, Marxism will have lived out its span; a philosophy of freedom will take its place. But we have no means, no intellectual instrument, no concrete experience which allows us to conceive of this freedom or of this philosophy.

(Sartre 1960b: 34)

McBride reminds us in an article entitled ‘Sartre at the Twilight of Liberal Democracy’ that Sartre never attempted to elaborate on this philosophy but that ‘it remained the inspiration for all that he wrote in this area’ (McBride 2005: 312), and that he regarded the electoral system, seen as the pinnacle of ‘real’ democracy, as ‘a profound mystification’ (McBride 2005: 312).

Sartre insisted that *Existentialism Is a Humanism* represents a philosophy of optimism, which was not how it was generally received. The day after his public lecture in 1945, Sartre gave a lengthy interview to the journalist Christian Grisoli in which he expressed dismay at the way his version of existentialism was being received as a ‘philosophy of despair’, particularly when he had gone to such lengths in this lecture to emphasise that human beings are the choices they make, that they choose to be good or bad and are always responsible for their acts. In Sartrean existentialism, he stressed, there is no predetermined path that takes human beings to salvation. People have to invent their own path. And in inventing it, they are free, responsible and have no excuses; all hope is therefore within them. If human beings are free, they are also responsible for themselves and for the world in which they live. Through their choices, they decide what sense the world has: they cannot refuse to choose since this refusal is itself a choice. And they must choose alone, without any recourse or help from any religion or system of pre-established values. The accompanying feeling of ‘dread’ experienced in choice is itself the awareness of freedom and an acknowledgement that one’s future is one’s possibility (Sartre 1981: 1913). Freedom, for Sartre, is not a property of our human essence. Human existence is synonymous with freedom; we are free because *we are*. There is, therefore, no distance between our being and our freedom (Sartre 1981: 1914). Human beings are condemned to be free (Sartre 1981: 1916). One is not born a hero or a coward. One chooses to be a hero or a coward, and this choice can always be questioned and changed. In short, there is no absolute meaning in Sartrean existentialism. Sartre’s last liberating move in this interview was to state that it is the future that decides the meaning of the past.

After the existentialist trend of the late 1940s, Sartre’s reception and reputation, in France and abroad, suffered various fortunes. From the 1960s onwards, Sartre is sidelined by structuralism and post-structuralism. Michel Foucault declared: ‘*The Critique of Dialectical Reason* is the magnificent and pathetic attempt by a man of the nineteenth century to think the twentieth century. In that sense, Sartre is the last Hegelian and, I would say, the last Marxist’ (Flynn 2005: 2). Sartre is also sidelined by influential Marxist thinkers such as Louis Althusser: ‘At best, I saw him as one of those post-Cartesian and post-Hegelian “philosophers of history” whom Marx detested’ (Flynn 2005: 2).

In a reversal of fortune, Sartre returns to the spotlight over May '68 (and Althusser himself is ironically and temporarily sidelined). *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* (Sartre 1960a), with its analysis of the French revolution and of 'groups-in-fusion' (people brought together by a common cause) resonates positively with his philosophical contemporaries. Epistémon, the pseudonym for Didier Anzieu, declared that Sartre's *Critique* was an apocalyptic work which allowed one to *think* the revolution of May '68 (Boulé 2009: 5). Daniel Cohn-Bendit acknowledged that the militants at the instigation of the students' revolt had more or less all read Sartre (Contat and Rybalka 1970: 462). Flynn reminds us that the shock of May '68 is seen as 'Sartrean social philosophy in praxis' (2005: 2). Sartre lends students his support, creating the concept of the 'new intellectual' who is at the service of the masses as opposed to the 'universal intellectual' who speaks in the name of the masses. Sartre was to subsequently become involved with the revolutionary left in France (*la gauche prolétarienne*).

As a philosopher, Sartre soon fell out of fashion and out of favour post '68 with the rise of the 'new philosophers' and the emerging dominance of an anti-totalitarian strand in French intellectual life (for example, André Glucksmann and Bernard-Henry Lévy). According to Galster, by 1987 there was a perception that intellectuals had lost faith in Sartre's political stance. Philosophers grew indifferent to his philosophy and students no longer felt it relevant (Galster 1987: 244). And yet by the time of his death in 1980, the day of his funeral is acknowledged as the last demonstration of May '68 and tributes are paid to his work and legacy. In 2000, Bernard-Henry Lévy, one of the 'new philosophers', repays his debt by publishing *Le Siècle de Sartre*, a vibrant homage to Sartre. And in 2005, on the occasion of Sartre's centenary, a plethora of books is published (see for instance Cohen-Solal 2005). However, it is Ronald Aronson who sums up the significance of Sartre's centenary in *The New York Times*: 'Meanwhile: Jean-Paul Sartre at 100: Still troubling us today'. Here, Aronson points to Sartre's true legacy, the relevance and subtlety of his views on free will against determinism, and his insistence on our responsibility in a globalised world (Aronson 2005).

Today, Sartre has gained recognition as a thinker whose philosophy can be used to address contemporary issues. His association in the public mind with Simone de Beauvoir, whose feminist legacy in particular is alive and thriving, adds to the perennial appeal of existentialism. Likewise, themes such as authenticity and responsibility continue to hold sway and underpin some postmodernist ethics (Emanuel Levinas). A recent symposium, held following the events of September 11 2001, invoked the memory of Sartre when the organiser Kenneth Anderson said in his introduction that this kind of event 'called for [a Sartrean] philosophical consideration' (Anderson 2003: 3). Sartre's relevance continues to appeal to scholars researching into Sartre and race, for example (Judaken 2008),<sup>2</sup> and Sartre and decolonisation (Arthur 2010).<sup>3</sup> Flynn in the aptly titled 'Sartre at One Hundred – a Man of the Nineteenth Century Addressing the Twenty-First?' argues that in as far as existentialism reflects the

experience of Western Europe in the 1940s, it is tied to its own facticity, but to the extent that Sartre's philosophy addresses the human condition, its relevance transcends the historical values attached to these variables. He states: 'The drama may shift with the dramatis personae, but ... "the plot" remains the same: people trying to make sense of an increasingly complex, threatening, and impersonal world' (Flynn 2005: 11). Flynn concludes that existentialism is primarily a way of life, a form of what the Greeks called 'care of the self' (Flynn 2005: 11). Based on these observations, it is not an exaggeration to claim that Sartre's philosophy transcends time and place.

With a volume entitled *Existentialism and Contemporary Cinema: A Sartrean Perspective*, readers may be curious to know more about Sartre's relationship to film. During the war, Sartre worked briefly as a scriptwriter for Pathé. He was hired, thanks to the director Jean Delannoy. The latter was so disappointed by the film scripts he had been given that he went to see Sartre to ask him to write film scripts (Contat and Rybalka 1970: 486). In 1943–1944, Sartre wrote *Les Jeux sont faits* (*The Chips are Down*), *Typhus*, *La Fin du monde* (*The End of the World*) (Contat and Rybalka 1970: 29) as well as *Les Faux Nez* (*The False Noses*) and *L'Engrenage* (*In the Mesh*). Two of these would become films: *The Chips are Down* which came out in 1947 and *Typhus* in 1953. In an interview given in 1944, Sartre said that the film scripts for *The Chips are Down* and *Typhus* were those of committed films, reflecting life's eternal problems and the complexity of human relationships through the lens of daily existence (Contat and Rybalka 1970: 106). *The Chips are Down* picks up elements of the short story 'The Room' in *The Wall* and proposes the sort of problematical situation found in *No Exit* (also translated as *In Camera*), written at about the same time. The film version of *Typhus* is only partly derived from Sartre's original script. However, the same misadventure that befell *Typhus* comes at the conclusion of Sartre's film script on Freud (Sartre 1984). In 1958, Sartre wrote a first draft of the Freud script but it was too long (almost 800 pages). After meeting with John Huston, he wrote a second version which was even longer. Exasperated, Huston ditched Sartre's services and hired Hollywood scriptwriters. Unsurprisingly, Sartre withdrew his name from the film credits (he refused to have his name associated with the film *Les Orgueilleux* (*The Proud Ones*)), even though the film was described by a critic in *Cahiers du cinéma* in 1951 as a phenomenological film (Contat and Rybalka 1970: 490). In 1976, there was a film made about Sartre by Alexandre Astruc and Michel Contat called *Sartre by Himself* (1976) which was autobiographical and based on a series of interviews given by Sartre. There have been seven films made from Sartre's work including *Les Sorcières de Salem* (1957), an adaptation of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*.<sup>4</sup>

Sartre also tried his hand as a film critic and wrote an article on *Citizen Kane* which, whilst recognising the technical merits of the film, raises doubts about its value as an example for French cinema to follow (Contat and Rybalka 1970: 125); in keeping with his growing 'new intellectual' credentials, Sartre would reproach Welles for having made a film as an intellectual for intellectuals rather

than for the masses. The nature of this critique highlights one of the key functions of film for Sartre. In an interview given in 1947, he claimed that film offers a broader horizon than theatre, pointing out that one can embrace more realistically in film the collective and the crowd; film, he believed, also intensifies the simultaneity of images and he compares changes of scenes on screen to the rapidity of thought processes (Contat and Rybalka 1970: 156). Sartre used to say that the art of cinema was born with him. With the Lumière Brothers' first films appearing at the end of the nineteenth century, cinema was in effect in its infancy as Sartre was growing up: 'We had the same mental age: I was seven and I could read; it was twelve and could not speak ... I thought we could grow up together' (Sartre 1964: 77). When he held his first teaching job in Le Havre in 1931, Sartre made a speech at the annual prize-giving ceremony praising cinema as an art form (Contat and Rybalka 1970: 546–52). Addressing a group of eighteen-year-old students, he told them that film cannot be reduced to nor compared to the theatre. Rather, film must be seen as a cultural experience on a par with Greek art or Philosophy and that, of all the art forms, it most resembles the real world.<sup>5</sup>

These links between film and theatre are apposite because they raise some existential concerns relating to both, and hint indirectly at the direction of this volume, conceived for students seeking to apply the philosophy of existentialism to film. Sarah Cooper reminds us that Sartre works through his philosophy within an aesthetic dimension, and his characters play out existentialist dilemmas, sometimes exposing thorny issues that philosophy cannot resolve. In a similar vein and echoing Sartre's views on the 'descriptive' power of the absurd in the novel and in art, William Pamerleau states:

... film, precisely because of its concrete depictions, can convey insights that inform even the abstract ideas of theoretical philosophy. Generally speaking, there are two ways in which it does so: through its ability to deliver realistic narratives and through the expressive nature of visual imagery.

(Pamerleau 2009: 85)

As Michelle R. Darnell argues in her chapter on 'Being – *Lost in Translation*', Sartre held theatre in great esteem because it was for him a 'true event' in which words and the language of gesture point to something else, a reality not given but one to be perceived through an act of freedom. For Sartre, cinema, it would appear, was more contrived in the way actors and actions were 'ready-canned' and where the interpretative function (meaning) was lost as a vital element of freedom. In the same way that a 'theatre of situations' was part of the template for Sartre's literary exploration of existentialism in the post-war period, a 'film of situations' may signal the illustration of Sartrean philosophy in contemporary film.

In the second part of *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (namely 'A Commentary on *The Stranger*'),<sup>6</sup> Sartre's study of Camus's 'novel' informs us that philosophy has an interpretative and instructive purpose in relation to fiction (art and

potentially film). Cohen-Solal points to the integral link between philosophy and fiction in her description of the 'deft enunciation of philosophy at the very heart of fiction' (Cohen-Solal 2007: 6). Sartre also tells us that this relationship is a unique one in that the absurd (for Camus) and contingency (for Sartre) operates without justification or explanation: 'Camus is not concerned about justifying what is fundamentally unjustifiable' (Sartre [1946] 2007: 79). Sartre's implication is that the 'descriptive' power of the absurd is enough to convey a philosophy of the absurd. Philosophy, therefore, has a positive role to play in art and film (in the tradition of epistemological inquiry) but in the specific context of the absurd/contingency, this role is decidedly passive and 'descriptive', even post-epistemological in that the absurd and the contingent are by definition explainable phenomenologically, in no need of 'proof', more a matter of 'silence' and as Sartre says more 'in the realm of what is not said' (Sartre [1946] 2007: 80). Likewise, film can illustrate philosophical points in a way that renders accessible obscure philosophical concepts. For Pamerleau, film does so in two ways, firstly 'through its ability to deliver realistic narratives' and secondly 'through the expressive nature of visual imagery' (Pamerleau 2009: 85). And films 'evoke a variety of intellectual and emotional reactions' (40). For Sartre, philosophy in the novel and in art generally instructs the absurd descriptively, using 'substance', 'content', 'presentation', 'image' and 'perception' to convey 'idea' or 'meaning'. This is the template that could transfer legitimately to the screen where the apparatus of film production is deployed to capture the 'truth' of philosophy: 'the outraged acknowledgement of the limitations of human thought' (Sartre [1946] 2007: 81).

The eleven chapters in this volume were not written with a narrow brief but they share the common thread of treating films as narrative texts, as scenarios wherein the actions and interactions of the protagonists are taken to be telling exemplars of the kinds of existential modes that Sartre talks of in his works. As exemplars, they do not engage fully or directly with the filmic object on its own terms. Filmic, fictional representations can inform an understanding of actual character formation and human agency, the model of the 'real' against which this fictional representation is judged being Sartre's existentialist analyses of human behaviour as expounded in his philosophical and fictional texts. Some contributors rely more heavily on Sartre's philosophy in their studies of film, whilst others draw parallels between the films they are studying and Sartrean plays and/or novels. A priori, one might have expected films from the 1950s and 1960s to fall within the scope of this volume, particularly given the coincidence of the emergence of existentialism and the French New Wave, and more broadly the influence of philosophical themes and ideas on classic noir and neo-noir films internationally. Of course, these connections have been established and enriched by a range of scholars, notably Mary Litch (2002), Mark Conard and Robert Porfirio (2007), Chris Falzon (2007), Daniel Shaw (2008), Stephen Faison (2008) and Pamerleau (2009). However, we lay claim to the distinctiveness of our volume in two ways. Firstly, it seeks to engage with

contemporary film from an exclusively Sartrean perspective, which distinguishes our approach from volumes with broader frames of philosophical reference, or from volumes which engage with the filmic object on its own terms. Secondly, it aims to look not at how existentialism underpinned the philosophical outlook of directors in the post-war period in France, Europe and the US, but how we might approach contemporary films using Sartrean existentialism. The focus of this volume lies in the articulation of Sartre's philosophy with the individual filmic texts; how certain philosophical conceptualisations of human behaviour find exemplary models in a select range of filmic texts.

Whilst one is not surprised to see Michael Haneke or Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne as existentialist filmmakers, other filmmakers such as Cédric Klapisch are more unexpected. One may well ask to what extent, and in what ways, are the films under study 'existentialist' films? We do not claim that these filmmakers deliberately address issues central to Sartre's philosophy. Some, such as Mike Leigh, make films known more for their social relevance. For others, it is more the case that there are fortuitous parallels with existentialism. But, in the broad brush of film history, which films do not deal with existence or the human condition in some form or another? Drawing a parallel with existentialism, Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake point out that the heroes and heroines of countless Hollywood movies, when faced with choices and confronted by a crisis, have to make decisions and choose a course of action that define their beings (Lapsley and Westlake [1998] 2006: xi). We also acknowledge the fact that some of the contributors use existentialism as a tool to read films that were never intended to be interpreted as existentialist films by their creators in the first place. In the light of these qualifications, what we feel sure of laying claim to in this volume is that there is a valid case to be made for an application of the philosophy of existentialism to film.<sup>7</sup>

The films have been chosen for their relative contemporaneity and international provenance, and have been grouped broadly into two interconnecting sections: 'The Call to Freedom' and 'Films of Situation'. There is of course no exhaustive inventory of existentialist themes but we believe that the above categories incorporate some of the more specific aspects of existentialism, including phenomenology, theories of consciousness, existential crisis, selfhood and subjectivity, identity and authenticity, determinism and predestination, time, commitment, responsibility, ethics, bad faith, despair and dread. We want to stress that our approach in this volume is not to simply reduce existentialism to a checklist of stereotypical themes and motifs. As Hugo Münsterberg has argued, film is an art form that creates its own reality. He characterises cinema as 'overcoming the causal requirements of the outer world to more accurately capture the reality of the inner world', going on to claim that this is the most important reason why film can contribute to existentialism (cited in Pamerleau 2009: 222). Films are seen to have their own concrete realities. Films reflect life on their own terms, and as Sartre has inferred, they represent an opportunity for characters in real life situations to



be called to freedom. Although readers will clearly not identify fully with the characters, there will be situations or aspects of the film narratives to which she/he can relate.

## The Call to Freedom

Christopher Falzon in his treatment of Peter Weir's *The Truman Show* (1998) underlines the importance of individual freedom as a condition of 'existential awakening' and of its capacity for self-determination. Kevin L. Stoehr's analysis of Michael Haneke's film corpus highlights the radical freedom implied by human subjectivity, but also cautions against the complacency caused by bad faith that 'kills' genuine freedom. In this vein, Mark Stanton's examination of Mike Leigh's *Naked* (1993) demonstrates how characters deny freedom by adopting prescribed social roles through bad faith. In this respect, he focuses on expressions of bad faith by individuals towards themselves and attitudes of bad faith directed towards others. In Tom Martin's study of The Coen Brothers' *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001), bad faith is expressed in the form of a distancing (transcendence) in the case of Ed Crane. Specifically, Crane's choice of dry cleaning offers him the possibility (illusion) of escaping hands-on engagement with the ambiguity of worldly objects. Sarah Cooper reads the Dardenne Brothers' film *Lorna's Silence* (2008) from a Sartrean perspective of characters on the road to freedom and responsibility. Specifically, she uses the atheistic overtones of Sartre's existential humanism to illustrate how the Dardennes' 'godless world' calls forth human beings to embrace their freedom and take responsibility for their actions. The call to freedom is also broached by Michelle R. Darnell in her discussion of Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (2003) and her chapter provides the ideal transition to 'Films of Situation'.

## Films of Situation

Darnell revisits the language of the theatre of situations as a site from which meaning is derived, not from one word but from a contextual whole. The situatedness of language becomes the context for both a calling forth of freedom for the main protagonist and a broader assessment of a hypothesis based on a 'film of situation'. In her chapter on Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* (1992), Tracey Nicholls acknowledges that life, for the existentialist, is a product of choice and that, in making choices, one's life becomes a path for others. Sartre says as much in his statement: 'Every man realizes himself in realizing a type of humanity' (Sartre [1946] 2007: 43). The link, therefore, between individual subjectivity/choice and collective responsibility is at the heart of the Sartrean project and this cluster of films. Enda McCaffrey explores the tensions in this link in his study of gratuitous murder and crimes of passion

in the Coen Brothers' *No Country for Old Men* (2007), and particularly in the contrast drawn between the Hegelian terrorism embodied in the character Anton Chigurh and the protagonist Paul Hilbert in Sartre's short story *Erostratus*. Patrick Williams underscores the political dimensions of existentialist choice in his chapter on Ousmane Sembene's film *Moolaadé* (2004). Taking individual subjectivity as a starting point, he argues that an individual decision to protect girls in Africa from genital excision is seen to have an inescapable, collective and ethical dimension, which extends beyond the film to involve the commitment of the filmmaker himself. Drawing parallels with Roquentin in Sartre's novel *Nausea* (1938), Jean-Pierre Boulé charts Xavier's quest for authenticity in Cédric Klapisch's duology *The Spanish Apartment* (2002) and *Russian Dolls* (2005). Accentuating the link between freedom and the freedom to make choices, Boulé traces Xavier's journey from his fear of commitment to choose love (a state of having freedom as an unrealised potential) to the exercise of his freedom in the choice to write as the ultimate expression of his commitment to a project of self-discovery. *Nausea* also forms the backdrop to Alistair Rolls' study of Baz Luhrmann's adaptation of *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996). Rolls demonstrates how the modernisation of the film parallels Sartre's development of the philosophical novel in *Nausea*. By focusing on auto-antonymic comparisons and a mutual recourse to the mechanics of Freudian fetishism, Rolls highlights common points of articulation between key poetic tropes of modernisation and the world-view of Sartrean existentialism. In this way, it is argued that Sartrean philosophy can be used not only to explain diegesis and the psychology and/or motivation of individual characters but also, and importantly, to illuminate filmic and literary process.

These two sections reflect two distinct but interconnected pathways to understand existentialism in the context of Contemporary Cinema, and to engage with the world. The first section represents a theoretical approach and the second provides more concrete examples of situations. Sartre argued 'For a Theatre of Situation' (Sartre [1947] 1973: 3–5). We believe that the contributors to this volume have argued the case 'For a Film of Situation'. Collectively, we hope that these essays make a case for existentialism and its relevance to understanding today's society, whilst keeping at the forefront the elements of freedom, choice and responsibility.

## Notes

1. Readers of this volume may benefit from reading this seminal text alongside this book.
2. 'The first book to systematically interrogate Jean-Paul Sartre's antiracist politics and his largely unrecognised contributions to critical race theories, postcolonialism, and African existentialism' (back cover blurb).
3. 'In this major re-reading of Sartre's life and work, Paige Arthur traces the relationship between the philosopher's decades-long commitment to decolonization and his intellectual thought. Where other commentators have focused on the tensions between Sartre's Marxism and his account of existential freedom – usually to denigrate one in

favour of the other – Arthur shows that Sartre’s political engagement with global liberation movements and his philosophical framework were inextricably intertwined’ (back cover blurb).

4. *Dirty Hands, The Respectful Prostitute, No Exit, Kean: Genius or Scoundrel, The Crucible, The Condemned of Altona, The Wall*. See filmography.
5. Beauvoir recounts in her memoirs that Sartre ranked cinema almost as high as literature (Beauvoir 1960: 48).
6. Translated as *The Outsider* in the USA.
7. Economy of space prevented us from commissioning more counter-intuitive examples – for instance, popular genre cinema – but we believe that there is a wide applicability of existentialism to cinema. In preparation is *Existentialism and Contemporary Cinema: A Beauvoirian Perspective*, Jean-Pierre Boulé and Ursula Tidd (eds), Berghahn Books. For a more general treatment of commitment in contemporary French cinema, see Martin O’Shaughnessy (2007).

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