

DESCARTES/LACAN

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[*The cogito*], as a moment, is the aftermath (*défilé*) of a rejection (*rejet*) of all knowledge, but it nevertheless claimed to establish for the subject a certain anchoring in being.

- Jacques Lacan, "La science et la vérité"¹

It can never be sufficiently emphasized that the Lacanian watchword of a return to Freud is originally coupled with an expression of Lacan's which goes back to 1946: "the call for a return to Descartes would not be superfluous." The means by which these two injunctions are connected is the dictum that the subject of psychoanalysis is nothing other than the subject of science. But this identity can only be grasped by attempting to think the subject *in its own place*. That which localizes the subject is at the same time the point at which Freud is intelligible only through the lineage of the Cartesian gesture, and where he subverts, through de-localization, the pure coincidence of the subject with itself, its reflexive transparency.

What renders the cogito irrefutable is the form which one can give to it where the *where* insists: "*Cogito ergo sum*," *ubi cogito, ibi sum*. The point of the subject is that *there* where it thinks that thinking it must be, it is. The connection of being and place founds the radical existence of enunciation as subject.

Lacan exposes the chicanery² of place in the disorientating utterances of the subject that supposes that "I am not, there where I am the plaything of my thought: I think of what I am where I do not think to think."³ The unconscious designates that "it thinks" there where I am not, but where I must come to be. Thus the subject finds itself decentered [*excentré*] from the place of transparency where it announces its being, without failing to read in this a complete rupture with Descartes, which Lacan indicates by saying that the subject does not "misrecognize" that the conscious certainty of existence - the home of the cogito - is not immanent but transcendent. "Transcendent" because the subject can only coincide with the line of identification that proposes this certainty to it. More precisely, the subject is the refuse of this certainty.

There, in truth, is the whole question. Cutting quickly through what this implies as to the common ground between Lacan, Descartes, and what I propose here, which ultimately concerns the status of truth as a generic hole in knowledge, I will say that the debate rests upon the *localization of the void*.

What still links Lacan (but that "still" is the modern perpetuation of

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sense) to the Cartesian epoch of science is the thought that it is necessary to hold the subject in the pure void of its subtraction if one wishes that truth be saved. Only such a subject lets itself be sutured in the logical, integrally transmissible form of science.

Yes or no - is the empty set the proper name of being as such? Or must we believe that this term more appropriately applies to the subject - as if its purification from all substance that one could know should deliver the truth (which speaks) through de-centering the null point in eclipse in the interval of the multiple that, under the name of "signifiers," guarantees material presence?

The choice here is between a structural recurrence, which thinks the subject-effect as the empty set, so exposed in the uniform network of experience, and a hypothesis of the rarity of the subject, which defers its occurrence to the event, to the intervention, and to the generic paths of fidelity, referring back and founding the void on the function of the suturing of being for which mathematics exclusively commands knowledge.

In neither case is the subject substance or consciousness. But the first road conserves the Cartesian gesture, its decentered dependence with regard to language. I have proof of this, since Lacan, in writing that "thought only grounds being by knotting itself in speech where every operation goes right to the essence of language,"⁴ maintains the design of ontological foundation that Descartes encounters in the transparency, both void and absolutely certain, of the cogito. Certainly, he organizes the turnings very differently, since the void for him is delocalized, no pure reflection can give us access there. But the intrusion of the outside term - language - does not suffice to reverse this order which implies that it is necessary *from the point of the subject* to enter into the examination of truth as cause.

I maintain that it is not truth which causes the suffering from false plenitude when the subject is overcome by anxiety ("does or doesn't what you [analysts] do imply that the truth of neurotic suffering lies in having the truth as cause?"⁵). A truth is that indiscernible multiple a subject supports the finite approximation of. In result, its ideality to come (the nameless correlate of the name an event would have if it could be named) is the truth from which one may legitimately designate a subject - that random figure which, without the indiscernible, would only be an incoherent continuation of encyclopedic determinations.

If one would point to a cause of the subject, it is less necessary to return to the truth, which is above all the stuff of the subject, or to the infinite, for which the subject is the finite, as to the event. Consequently, the void is no longer the eclipse of the subject, being in relation to Being such that it has been summoned up by the event as the errancy in the situation by an intervening nomination.

By a sort of inversion of these categories, I will arrange the subject in relation to the ultra-one (*l'ultra-un*), even though it would itself be the *trajectory* of multiples (the inquiries), the void in relation to being, and truth in relation to the indiscernible.

Besides, what is at stake here is not so much the subject - save to free that which still, by the

supposition of its structural permanence, makes Lacan a founder among those who echo the previous epoch. Rather, it is the opening on a history of truth finally *totally* disjointed from what Lacan, with genius, called exactitude, or adequation, but what his gesture, too welded to a single language, allowed to survive as the reverse of truth.

A truth, if one thinks of it as being only one generic part of the situation, is the source of the veridical from the moment that the subject forces an undecidable into the future anterior. But if the veridical touches language (in the most general sense of the term), truth only exists there as undifferentiated; its procedure is generic insofar as it *avoids* the entire encyclopedic hold of judgments.

The essential character of names, the names of the language-subject, attaches itself to the subjective capacity of anticipation, by forcing (*forçage*) that which will have been veridical from the point of a supposed truth. But names only create the appearance of the thing in ontology, where it is true that a generic extension results from the placing-into-being of the entire system of names. However, even there, it is just a matter of simple appearance. For the reference of a name depends upon the generic part which is implicated in the particularity of the extension. The name only founds its reference under the hypothesis that the indiscernible will have been already completely described by the set of conditions that, in other respects, it is. In its nominal capacity, a subject is under the condition of one indiscernible, thus of one generic procedure, thus of one fidelity, of one intervention and ultimately of one event.

What is lacking in Lacan - even though this lack would only be legible to us having first of all read in his texts that which, far from lacking, founded the possibility of a modern regime of the true - is the radical suspension of truth in the supplementation of a Being-in-situation by an event, separator of the void.

The "there is" (*il y a*) of a subject is, by the ideal occurrence of a truth, the coming-to-be of the event in its finite modalities. Moreover, we always have to understand that there was no "*il y a*" of the subject, that this "*il y a*" is no more. What Lacan still owes to Descartes, the debt whose account must be closed, is the assumption that "*il y a*" was always there.

When the Chicago Americans shamelessly utilized Freud to substitute the re-educative methods of a "consolidation of the ego" for the truth from which a subject proceeds, it was with just cause, and for the salvation of all, that Lacan opened against them this merciless war that his true students and

heirs have continued to prosecute. But they have been wrong to believe that - things remaining as they are - they could win.

Because it was not a matter of an error or of an ideological perversion. It is obviously what one could believe, if one supposed that there were an "always" of the truth and of the subject. More seriously, the people in Chicago acknowledged in their own fashion what the truth withdraws from and, with that, the subject which authorizes it. They are situated in a historical and geographical space where fidelity to the events - of which Freud or Lenin or Cantor or Malevich or Schoenberg are the operators - is no longer practicable apart from the ineffective forms of dogmatism or orthodoxy. Nothing generic could ever be imagined in this space.

Lacan thought that he redressed the Freudian doctrine of the subject, but in fact, new-comer to the Viennese shores, he has reproduced an operator of fidelity postulating the horizon of an indiscernible, and we are persuaded again that there is, in this uncertain world, a subject.

If we now examine what is still allowed us in philosophical traffic in the modern dispensation, and consequently what our tasks are, we can make a table like this:

- a. It is possible to reinterrogate the entire history of philosophy since its Greek origin under the hypothesis of a mathematical ordering of the ontological question. One will thus see taking shape at the same time a continuity and a periodization very different from that deployed by Heidegger. In particular, the genealogy of the doctrine of truth will lead us to pinpoint, by singular interpretations, how the unnamed categories of the "event" and of the "indiscernible" work throughout the text of metaphysics. I believe I have given several examples of this.
- b. A close analysis of the procedures of logico-mathematics since Cantor and Frege will make it possible to think what this intellectual revolution (a blind return of ontology onto its own essence) conditions in contemporary rationality. This work will make it possible to undo, on its own ground, the monopoly of Anglo-Saxon positivism.
- c. As regards the doctrine of the subject, this particular examination of each of the generic procedures will open up to an aesthetics, to a theory of science, to a political philosophy, and finally to the mysteries of love, to a non-fusional conjuncture with psychoanalysis. All of modern art, all of the uncertainties of science, all of the militant tasks still prescribed by a ruined Marxism and finally, all of that designated by the name of Lacan will be re-encountered, reworked, gone through, by a philosophy brought up to date through clarified categories.

And we will be able to say in this voyage, at least if we have not lost the memory of that which the event alone authorizes, that Being - that which is called Being - founds the finite place of a subject who decides: "Nothingness gone, the castle of purity remains."

- translated by *sigi jöttkandt* with *daniel collins*

- 1 Jacques Lacan, "Science and Truth," trans. Bruce Fink, *Newsletter of the Freudian Field* 3.1-2 (1989): 5.
- 2 *Chicanes* - may be translated variously as squabbles, trickery, zig-zags, etc. - Tr.
- 3 Jacques Lacan "Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious," trans. Alan Sheridan, *Écrits* (New York: Norton, 1977) 166.
- 4 "Science and Truth," 13.
- 5 "Science and Truth," 13.