



The Experience of the Real in Psychoanalysis*

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Today I will be commenting on some of what I talked about at the University of California in Los Angeles where I was invited to give a lecture. The main audience, categorically entrenched in the domain of cultural studies, was certainly not made of practitioners, not of clinicians, but of academics proper. What to tell you? The interest in Jacques Lacan flourishes in this category, and this is how you are bound to admit it as an undeniable fact.

To convey an understanding of cultural studies in the United States would entail some casual reference to the *couleur locale*, and this is what I will abstain from doing. I won't do it because we are not alone and my words would reach their ears at once [laughter] loaded with our own *couleur locale* and with the misunderstandings to follow from there. So let me leave the *couleur locale* aside, much as my personal perception with regard to Hollywood, Beverly Hills and Sunset Boulevard.

I say enough if I tell you that above all I was charmed with the weather [laughter] and now I feel as if I am in a uniform

* "L'expérience du réel dans la cure analytique." Paris, 03/17/99.

dressed with a suit and a tie. Over there I found myself driven by the climate, by the 'ambiance, to the point of acquiring white sneakers and participating in the colloquium open-collared in a T-shirt. I promised myself to do the same upon my return [laughter] but there is dust in Paris, and I've actually realized that I am a bit of a chameleon myself who takes pleasure in conforming to environments.

During my talk, I tried to find a spot for these cultural studies in the Freudian Field, that is studies that are not clinical as they earnestly avow. Devoted to contemporary sublimation, the aforementioned studies analyze objects of cultural consumption—from the most ordinary to the most sophisticated. If at its best they disclose one of the bearings of discontent in civilization, at their worst they are simply being part of it.

No enticement offered by our civilization, as they say, to colonize the site of *Das Ding*—of *jouissance* qua impossible—is foreign to them.

Lacan's seminar on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*¹ was translated into English several years ago and serves as a main reference to cultural studies. You may surmise that the abundance of enticements in the US is what started and legitimized this institution as the locus par excellence where Lacan's teaching expanded; in marked contrast I may say with the shutting of the clinical field to the actual teaching.

Besides in the US psychoanalysis pays a heavy toll under the guise of a crisis—as I was reminded later on in New York. People undergo analysis less and less, insofar as psychoanalysis is primarily perceived as therapy. It has been for many years now that health insurance companies have enforced a standard called "managed care" (*soins organisés*). Under such an organization controlling reimbursements, psychoanalytic treatment cannot be validated. Likewise the mandate of the health industry leads irresistibly the suffering subject away from psychoanalysis.

The tone of the message, with that margin of error attrib-

utable to chance meetings, is very different from the one I got ten years ago when I used to visit the US on a regular basis.

This crisis—if I were to find its grounding—is the expression of a setback. The setback of psychoanalysis' medication and also its "psychologisation" on behalf of an important faction of psychoanalysts outside the IPA (International Psychoanalytic Association) whose practice is secured by degrees in psychology.

I think that psychoanalysis' reduction to a mere therapy has paved the way to a competition with medication. Again it is losing ground and American psychoanalysts have relinquished its practice as a subjective experience while reducing it to the status of a simple cure.

So follows their impotence to carry on with the transference proper in psychoanalysis—I was already well aware of this. The waning becomes manifest among the advocates of cultural studies, whose interest in decoding Lacan remains purely intellectual, that is to say, disjointed from the analytical experience. They talk psychoanalysis, yet for them psychoanalysis is confined to the reading and deciphering of whatever they have of Lacan's enunciation. The notion that this enunciation is supported, inspired and warranted by an actual experience, by what is for each one their inception into analysis is completely foreign to them. It was even futile to attempt its awakening with this crowd; their rapport to knowledge is completely distinct from the "supposed knowledge."

They are constrained to knowledge delivered in accordance with the modality of academic discourse. And this discourse owns such a consistency, carries such a weight, and is so conspicuous, that a peculiar deep indifference has developed to the danger posited by a subjective experience such as psychoanalysis, Lacanian psychoanalysis.

So what has the future in store as far as this quick outline is concerned? I think that the sensing of an impasse is necessary for a new generation of analysts, presently analysands, led to look into Lacan and find the ways of a renaissance of psychoanalysis.

There are perhaps augural signs, if I'm to believe the quiet grumbling of several young New York psychiatrists who at the very start of their professional life already feel oppressed, so they told me, by the gradual narrowness of the psychoanalytical environment. They are haunted by the idea that perhaps with Lacan they may find a way to open up, to relaunch analytical practice.

And yet their disposition remains inchoate as far as the language barrier is concerned; a significant portion of Lacan's teaching is in French, his cultural background is alien to them and the investment they will have to endure seems too dear.

I replied thereof that there is no way out but to wait for the heightening of their own impasse, for the situation to worsen, to become unbearable and then, perhaps, they will find the appropriate leverage to sustain the effort they seem unwilling to bear. Nevertheless there is a nucleus of people, whom I perceive as sufficiently worried. So let me go back to Los Angeles, to my lecture, to its slightly different Parisian rendition due to the *couleur locale*. I'll start precisely from there.

The name of the symposium I took part in—a name unthinkable in this country—was “The Subject *Encore*,” *encore* in French, in italics, thus referring to Seminar XX.² This subject was coupled with a querying of the Lacanian subject—as they put it—they were looking for its detection in fields such as natural science, law, religion, and the body...

Querying coupled with *Encore*. Seminar XX was translated last year by an old boy from the *Département de psychanalyse* and of the *Section clinique*, Bruce Fink, an excellent translation, though perhaps a little heavy with notes, as I personally told him. Besides I'm quite delighted with the fact that in the United States the *anciens* from this *Cours* and the *Section clinique* are in the avant-garde, accordingly enhancing the presence of Lacan's teaching. Thus the attendees were the above mentioned Fink, now devoted to an exhaustive English version of *Écrits*, Slavoj Žižek, a powerful and original voice within the context of cultural studies,

and Russell Grigg from Sydney, who is also a translator of Lacan's Seminars.

From what was achieved in the 80's, Lacan's text circulates in the English tongue. I must confess I was touched by this encouraging fact.

Myself, without a clear indication of the purpose of my presence apart from being a kind of guarantor of the symposium, I figured I would deal with its topic the way I had been told to, I would deal with the subject *Encore*.

There is an itinerary to be tracked from the subject to *Encore*—the Seminar. Here this subject is challenged to the point of being subverted deeper than it has ever been challenged and subverted in Lacan's teaching. Indeed, Lacan introduces the subject essentially as a lack-in-being—as the opposite, the negative of a being. Thus it's symbol: $\$$

Subject $\$$

The subject is handled as lack-in-being. Still, in Seminar XX, *Encore*, you may say that Lacan assigns another agency to it and at the same time attempts a joint articulation of both the subject and this other agency. He calls it the speaking subject (*être parlant*).

- ① lack in being
- ② speaking being

Subject $\$$ ———> Speaking Subject ^{Being}

I've already stressed the polarity between a subject defined as lack-in-being and an agency that highlights the term *être* (being). Later on, I proposed not a matheme but a neologism: the *parlêtre*.

Subject $\$$ ———> Speaking Subject ^{Being} “Parlêtre”

Our American colleagues—colleagues in the reading of Lacan—will probably preserve it as untranslatable. Indeed, they revere untranslatable words. French too feel a particular well being while conveying Freud's German terminology. In the US it befits the preservation of the French term or Lacan's Other.

The untranslatable word that shines in society is *jouissance*. Lacan himself was against its translation into English. In 1966 while visiting the United States, he noticed the term "enjoyment" as the key word in a Coca-Cola advertisement: "Enjoy Coca-Cola." [laughter] He immediately decided that "enjoyment" was not to become *jouissance*. And so, everybody agreed to keep to this injunction—you even find it in the *Encore* translation—and I think that's just fine. Yet lately, they are willing to add some others. They realized, for instance, that "knowledge" was at pains to convey the meaning of the word *savoir*. So, in their lecturing, you heard more often than not *savoir*, in the French. Until now they seem unconcerned with *parlêtre*, but just wait. They will find good reasons to preserve the neologism attached to our tongue.

The subject, as such, is specially disjointed from the body. Lacan introduces it, and then deals with it as a correlation, first vis-à-vis *parole*, and then as pure correlation of the signifier. You may say that this is what makes the difference with the speaking subject. If with Lacan the subject becomes the speaking subject, this is due to an agency fundamentally anchored in the body.

$\text{Subject } \mathcal{S} \xrightarrow{\text{Being}} \text{Speaking Subject "Parlêtre"}$
 Body

Here it is the body that makes the difference. The theory of the subject deals primarily with the effects of the signifier as they account for signification. And it works as a central reference with the mechanics of metonymy and metaphor prone to disclose the different modes of production of signification, in keeping with the signifier. These mechanics, their very notion, conduct the coding of the text—of *parole*—yet the text as such, severed from the statement (*énonciation*), "em-bodied" if I may say. Conversely, the speaking subject, its theory different from the subject's theory, deals with the effects of the signifier as affecting and not as signification. That is, the signifier's effects occur specifically in the body. And by way of a short-circuit, the major effect is what Lacan termed *jouissance*. *Jouissance* presumes the body; *jouissance* needs the body as its support, thus Lacan called it substance. In Aristotle's tongue it's *ousia*; where *ousia* is, so is substance.

Yet the subject is an *upokeimenom*, not *ousia*. That is, the subject is below, at the level of substance, though in a distinct mode. The subject is purely signified supposition and essentially not substantial.

This is the path I followed when answering the enigma in the title of this Symposium.

There is no exaggeration in positing Lacan's teaching as being animated by the difficulty of thinking about the subject as lack-in-being, that is, as a certain kind of non-being, together with *jouissance* as substance. Freud dubbed this "thinking together" as drive, but only developed it under the auspices of the myth. Lacan's teaching, up to *Encore*, consists of thinking of the subject and *jouissance* together, as a relationship, under the auspices of relatedness itself. This relation is detected in the matheme; \mathcal{S} , lozenge, *petit a*, that Lacan transcribed as the fantasm.

$\mathcal{S} \quad \diamond \quad a$

The cipher spells the problematic rapport between the subject and its eventuality of *jouissance*. Lacan wrote down successive versions of this rapport.

However, if you look into Seminar XX, *jouissance* and the subject are not cogitated under relational auspices, and that for a very simple reason, namely Lacan gave up on the subject. He forgoes the ^{being}subject in order to invent a category, and this is the speaking subject. Here, subject and *jouissance* are thought together under the auspices of a new entity: a body affected by the signifier, a body that is moved, aroused by the unconscious.

A kind of inversion prevails, a turnaround in Lacan's project itself when he introduces, discreetly, in his own way, instead of or by the subject, the speaking subject.

Yet, cautiously too, he wavers all previously familiar categories so that *parlêtre* could, might, substitute for the very word "unconscious." Nonetheless the subject is still the starting point. And there is no impasse in this notion. To expose it in the California setting—as a proviso of Lacan's teaching at its inception and as odd as it seems—I was driven to allude to Jean-Paul Sartre. This name, despite being contemporary with Lacan's, is not in the least affiliated with cultural studies, and seems connected to a distant past, to a faraway epistemological era, for them as well as for us. And yet, all things considered, in all fairness, this name opened the way for Lacan to free psychoanalysis from the prison of the ego.

In any case, having to confront this audience, this is where I started. The name of the paper I delivered was "Shifting Paradigms in Lacan." I had recourse to the word paradigm since it is broadly used in academic language, the pursuit of paradigms for instance. So shifting paradigms could be viewed as paradigms that change and yet there is something more to the shift, something akin to what Jakobson used in terms of the "I," the shifter, words that engage, connect. Consequently shifting paradigms are not paradigms that couple randomly, they rather relate methodically to each

the
cipher(ing)
spells [writes?]
the relatin.
between the
\$ and its
eventuality of J

* parlant être
sujet

* parlêtre
nes.

other and thus confer the notion of discontinuity within the prevalence of a kind of continuity.

So with "Shifting Paradigms in Lacan"—which sounds very cultural studies—I tried to convey a general overview of the theory, yet I was unable to follow it to its conclusion. I particularly stressed the fact that Lacan's texts were not to be read as in a contemporary stance. These texts were articulated in a wasteland where paradigms were thus connected successively, without being equivalent. Accordingly I handed them a specific group of scansion while defining the contour of the areas these scansions isolate; the scansions in the rapport of the subject to *jouissance* up to the emergence of the speaking subject where the antinomy, so to say, is at least hypothetically overcome.

As an introduction I dealt with the initial position of the subject, and then I proceeded with what Lacan owes to Sartre since I consider it the best starting place at least for those who do not lean on Freud's work. I especially emphasized two concepts, namely trans-factuality and trans-individuality.

Thus read the first sentence of my paper: "It was a truly monumental shift to move the ego from the central position it had acquired in psychoanalytic thought since the twenties to establish the speaking subject as a focal point of the cure." Oh, this reminds me of Los Angeles. [laughter] I underlined the fact that if psychoanalysis was crystallized in the twenties, in the United States it really took shape after WW II, when, based on a misreading of Freud's second topic, psychoanalysis got centered around the agency of the ego. Lacan's main influence was the undermining, the shifting of the ego's central position in psychoanalysis towards the speaking subject. That was the novelty introduced by the report to the Rome Congress.³

In the US psychoanalytic training is still anchored to the notion of ego-psychology as Hartmann affixed it. Several attempts were made to mend the situation, notably by Kernberg who conflated ego-psychology with object-relation theory.

However, the main shift was the transition from the ego to the subject. The Hartmannian ego, a psychological and synthetic entity that regulates the individual's dealings with reality, was meant to act over a neutralized, objective and de-sexualized libido. The autonomy of this notion was threatened by the *id* and the superego. It followed that a psychological trope appeared as somehow reified to the dominant philosophical paradigm of continental Europe in the 50's, and this is the existentialist paradigm.

Sartre in 1943 attempted a reformulation of Freud under the designation of existentialist psychoanalysis: you will find it in the last chapter of *Being and Nothingness*.⁴ Another French philosopher, Michel Foucault, went against Sartre in 1966 pointing to a new rupture in *The Order of Things*⁵ where he scrutinizes the course of European culture from the sixteenth century on. The focal point of his book—quite different from *Being and Nothingness*—is also psychoanalysis. These two vast projects converge in Freud, in psychoanalysis.

As for the astonishing essay written before WW II—an essay that Lacan read—Sartre already advanced a post-Husserlian analysis of the field of consciousness. *Transcendence of the Ego*⁶ introduced an essential difference between the ego and pure consciousness-for-itself.

Sartre was able to isolate, besides the ego and its representations, besides the ego and its ailments, another agency, non-ethical, namely pure consciousness-for-itself, which is without an object and therefore is not against itself. He envisioned this agency as different from the ego and named it consciousness-for-itself. *

Ego \neq Consciousness-(for)-itself

He bracketed “for” to highlight the non-presence of an objectification, thus an unreflective consciousness, prior to any reflection on itself, undivided and precisely unsubstantial.

He conceived the ego as an object in the psychic field and yet this field was construed as a somehow pre-personal consciousness, as a void—since *Being and Nothingness* evolves from this essay—as a kind of chasm, of emptiness, as a lack-in-being. The Lacanian lack-of-being (*manque-à-être*) originates in the Sartrian notion of lack-in-being.

Sartre invented an effect as the consciousness par excellence, but the main fact was his isolation of a negative function, a lack-in-being, a chasm. After the war he expounded the consequences of this difference in a short biography on Baudelaire where he posited the notion of an external original choice independent of * any exterior determination, that is originating in the pure undetermined initiative of the void.

Ego \neq Consciousness-(for)-itself

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* Sartre detected in that original choice the central and irreducible causality of human personality. His fundamental project, the ambitious and unfinished *Flaubert*, carried out an identical design.

An original choice means a choice that is not determined by a positive conditioning, which is not mechanically conditioned by family or history since the unsubstantial void introduced by Sartre brings up a chasm in its determinations.

It is instead a causality, therefore Sartre was taken back to a causality occupying this very chasm. The notion of the original choice is echoed in Lacan's 1946 essay on psychic causality⁷ where * the last word in the very causality is depicted as “the being's fathomless decision.” Lacan relates psychosis' causality to that being's

fathomless decision. A few years ago I myself emphasized this same relationship.

By the same token the being's fathomless decision re-echoed Sartre's original choice. *Propos sur la causalité psychique* is an existentialist text. I sustain that what Sartre called in *Being and Nothingness* "for-itself" is at least a forerunner of what is termed as the Lacanian subject, although this subject is the unconscious' subject and is in no way related to a pure field of consciousness. What Sartre concocted as an existentialist void, Lacan reworked under a logical frame, as an empty set. * 21

The setting in motion of such a negative entity—a nothing, yet a nothing that is precisely not nothing, that is a kind of call to being—introduces in fact a decisive break at the level of immanence, while determining the birth of the Lacanian subject and the destruction of the Hartmannian ego in psychoanalysis. ⇒

The level of immanence is a notion I'm borrowing from Deleuze, be it real, biological, natural or just a given. With regard to a vital, real immanence, the introduction of a negative entity opens up a transcendental field, a kind of hereafter. It concerns what in Lacan is to be viewed as the structure of "hereafter," that is, there is a hereafter to any given thing.

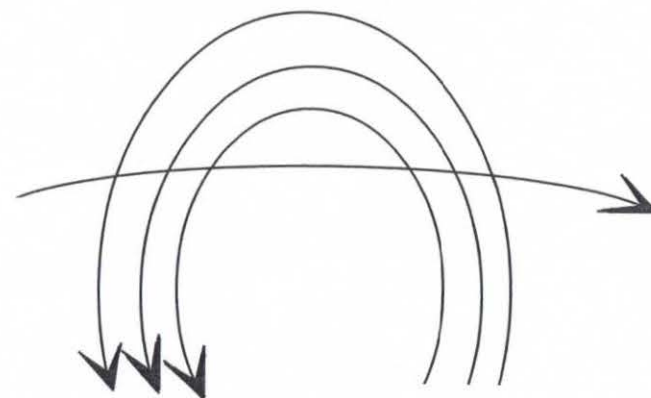
This in turn brings in what I termed a trans-factual dimension, a capital notion in Lacan. It is precisely this dimension that makes you conceive of the penis as something more than an organ: to ponder the penis as just a physical organ would confine you to a field of immanence. To posit the male reproductive organ as a signifier or as a signified means its inscription in a trans-factual dimension, albeit the risk of being labeled a spiritualist since this dimension strays from a positive given. In general, trans-factuality implies a systematic anti-naturalism: it gathers all anti-naturalist and anti-positivist discourses. *

Finally it leads Sartre to the extravagant proposition that "...in a way, I choose to be born."

Yet, at the same time, it is what leads Lacan to assert the

* non-existence of sexual rapport. The two propositions are inscribed in this trans-factual order.

Incidentally, Lacan and Sartre have both stressed the independence of meaning concerning constraints, and the dependence of meaning regarding intention. Lacan outlines it in the matrix of the retroaction diagram. Here, on the axis, facts are inscribed according to a chronological order, and meaning can be construed retroactively over a story, and independent of facts' materiality.



immanence;
introduces
of a -ve
entity;
opening up of the
trans-factual

Undoubtedly, this Lacanian retroaction diagram is based on the Freudian *Nachträglichkeit*, after Freud's *après-coup*, you may refer to The Wolfman. In any case it has exactly the same structure as the existentialist project rendered here by Lacan, and which introduces the dependence of meaning assigned to the past with regard to the project entertained for the future. *

The Sartrian notion posits that facts from the past can

change upon the visioning of the future, thus the meaning is established retroactively with regard to that visioning. The notion proceeds from Heidegger, though it takes shape with Sartre. In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre characterizes the sentence itself—a sentence—as a project. He writes: “The sentence is a project which can be interpreted only in terms of nihilation of a given (the very one which one wishes to designate), in terms of a posited end (its designation which itself supposed other ends in relation to which it is only a means).”⁸

This other passage about language is extremely Lacanian, “...the ‘meaning’ of my expressions always escapes me. I never know exactly if I signify what I wish to signify nor even if I am signifying anything. It would be necessary that at the precise instant I should read in the Other what on principle is inconceivable. For lack of knowing what I actually express for the Other, I constitute my language as an incomplete phenomenon of flight outside myself. As soon as I express myself, I can only guess at the meaning of what I express, i.e., the meaning of what I am—since in this perspective to express and to be are one. The Other is always there, present and experienced as the one who gives to language its meaning.”⁹

You have—barely developed by Sartre—the contracted matrix of Lacan’s reflection on the agency of the Other in language. The Lacanian critique of the libido’s maturing development according to Abraham finds its basis here and was replaced by subjective significations.

In 1966, in *Écrits*, Lacan greets his 1952 text “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis” as introducing the issue of the subject. The subject of psychoanalysis is rooted in existentialism and at the same time is a rupture with the philosophy of consciousness. In Sartre trans-factuality is always solipsist, I think, it is always of the subject alone and the original choice is somehow the epitome of this isolation. It’s a pure outburst of being solitary and the actions described by Sartre in this

dimension of trans-factuality constitute but modalities of my consciousness. The Other is always introduced in a secondary way, as nothing other than the being that makes my consciousness fall into objectivity—my consciousness falls into mortal competition. Likewise it appears essentially as the gaze—Lacan mentions it in *Seminar XI*¹⁰—the gaze of the Other, which, when rising, topples the lack-in-being down from consciousness; the lack-in-being then becomes an object—it becomes reified.

As things go Lacan is frequently used *à la Sartre*, even if Sartre is often forgotten, this notion of reification being so much embedded in the culture. And this means the subject becomes a mere object. This is Sartre, for him the function of the Other is to topple pure consciousness down to the level of the object.

You can see the difference. In Lacan the subjective link to the Other is conversely originator, whereas in Sartre it is always introduced in a second instance. If you look into *Being and Nothingness* you have a philosophical introduction, “The Pursuit of Being” and “The Problem of Nothingness,” and then you have a section on “Being-for-Itself” and finally in part three “Being-for-Others,” where you get acquainted with the Other in a secondary way. If in Lacan the subjective link to the Other is originator, it does not make sense to speak about the Lacanian subject by itself and be all the more fascinated with the Lacanian subject if you lack the notion that the Other precedes it.

Lacan’s sensational innovation was to inscribe all prevailing operations in the trans-factual dimension, insofar as they are effective operations of language. Where in Sartre you have modalities of consciousness that are susceptible to phenomenological descriptions, in Lacan you have effective operations of language. You have substitutions, combinations, and concatenations of signifiers getting inscribed. In Lacan the signifier functions as the key to trans-factuality. Let trans-factuality acquire a material consistency, the consistency of a symbolic order is opened to scientific approach.

Then, naturally, what further distinguishes Sartre, and this already distinguishes Sartre and Lacan, is trans-individuality, which means that the subject is not only thoroughly dependent on the Other, but is a concept entirely related to the Other. It suffices then to perceive the subject, to consider—you might take the approach as Lacan did when he reformulated Hegel—the identity of the subject as depending on the Other's mediation.

However, if you look for the Freudian foundation of the subject, you will find it in the formation of the unconscious, which Lacan uses as a model, that is the *Witz*. When Lacan undertakes a seminar on the formations of the unconscious—in Seminar V¹¹—he starts with seven lectures on the *Witz*. The *Witz* emphasizes, particularly if you refer to Freud's work¹², the fact that you are dealing with a formation of the unconscious, which is a social process. As Freud states, a *Witz* must, necessarily, be told to someone^① else. Therefore the psychical process, far from being imaginarily confined within, is completed and concluded only after it has been communicated, that is after it is clearly achieved in the locus of the Other. The *Witz* is the paradigm of everything Lacan calls the formations of the unconscious and its privilege consists in denuding^② the function of the Other. The *Witz* stages the Other since it embodies the Other in public, the *mot d'esprit*, whereas this function remains veiled in dreams as well as in slips of the tongue (parapraxes). The agency of the Other is laid bare in the process of the *Witz* and Lacan re-conceptualizes other formations of the unconscious based precisely on the *Witz*.

To regulate the approach to the unconscious over the occurrence of the *Witz* entails the positing of the unconscious as a discourse *en acte*—between the subject and the Other; the event does not presume the unconscious as an inert content, already there, only to become apparent hereafter.

The unconscious is a discourse that pivots around the answer of the Other, which welcomes it, refuses it or confirms it, validates or invalidates it, that in all instances concludes upon its

meaning and truth. Hence the definition of the unconscious as the discourse of the Other.

In Lacan's teaching the subject with reference to the discourse of the Other is a paradigm not susceptible to shifting. It's the dependency of the subject with regard to the discourse of the Other, it's the dependency of the subject vis-à-vis the Other's signifier, it's even its dependency with respect to the *objet a* as embedded in the Other: a steady paradigm when approaching Lacan.

The subject would not be conceptualized without the Other. The norm is enhanced all over the doctrine of the end of analysis, which was never thought by Lacan as liberation but rather as assumption. Even though the end of analysis is defined as the *passe*, even though it allows of a certain evaporation of the Other as subject-supposed-to-know, the end of analysis never negates but rather * clarifies the dependency of the subject vis-à-vis the doctrine of the *passe* as far as the *objet a* is concerned—the *objet a* is like the residue of the evaporation, of the fall.

In any case, what gets carried on from existentialism into Lacan's structuralism is the supremacy of meaning over the given.

fact // meaning
There is always a schism between the fact and the meaning. And it's this very schism which allows for the pondering on the incidence of traumatism as a fact that doesn't find its meaning. * Contrariwise, in Sartre the giving of meaning is always related to nihilation—the operation proper of consciousness-for-itself that nihilates the given, i.e., to posit ends, to posit the must-be, to posit the ideal. trauma

Nihilation, in Sartre, is a matter of freedom whereas the giving of meaning, in Lacan, is always related to proceedings of the signified. In Sartre, it's freedom that makes holes; in Lacan, the signifier introduces the lack—the signifier as the materiality proper to the trans-factual order. In Lacan, the signifier introduces the locus and the lack in the real, or introduces the chasm and mortification in the living. And that is the reason why in Seminar II,¹³ through a sort of short-circuit, Lacan downgrades, somewhat

signifier
fr ↓

hastily, the death drive to be the sole relation of the subject to the signifier. *death drive*

The signifier—through its endeavors of nullification, mortification, of introducing the chasm and death—is the very engine of the death drive.

Thus Lacan progressively radicalized the primacy of the Other, revealing the signifiers as cause of the signified, see “The Agency of the Letter in...,”¹⁴ he even exposes the signifier as cause of the subject. That is the reason for him abruptly relinquishing the notion of the subject as speaking subject, of the subject as spoken subject. That is to say, it’s not the listener, it’s not the speaker, the reference to the Other’s discourse is the referring subject. And it’s form, it speaks of him/her in the Other. * \$

And there is a sort of concomitant variation between the Other—the big Other—and the subject. Easy enough, Lacan progressively describes a big Other swelling up, bigger and bigger. At the start it’s the Other as subject, in Seminar II; in Seminar V it’s the locus of coding to become abstract, a symbolic locus, supra-individual, immortal, almost anonymous. And finally it becomes a synonym of culture, of knowledge; it’s the locus of parental structures, of the paternal metaphor, of the register of the discourse, of the social norm. It can merge with the god of the philosophers as well as with the god of Abraham, its lack of warranty meanwhile included, the Other is always a kind of all-enclosing fully swollen, huge place that comprehends almost everything. I say almost everything because it does not include the subject. At the same time it is used in such a way that it can be embodied in a being: a father, a mother, etc., while becoming logically reduced to the minimal articulation of a signifier. v A *

How to deal with the subject in relation to that? You may say that the subject is always tied to the Other by means of a system of communicating vessels, that is to say that the more the Other swells up, the more the subject is constricted to its plainest expression. It’s the very topic of interpretation, it’s the Subject Lacan

writes with capital S, characterized in its ineffable and stupid existence. And this Subject is precisely reduced to almost nothing because all its determinations are located in the Other.

The Lacanian conceptual proceeding consists in separating—under the names of subject and big Other—the subject from all its determinations, insofar as they get transferred to the Other.

Lacan writes in his “On a question preliminary...”¹⁵ that “the condition of the subject S is dependent on what is being unfolded in the Other O.” And this is a constant paradigm, which makes up for the mounting of the couple subject/Other. Lacan’s procedure consists of systemically transferring to the locus of the Other, under many diverse forms, whatever is determining in the subject; correlatively the subject empties itself. The more the Other gets filled, the more the subject gets emptied; till it becomes a hole, a hole with different modalities. \$ *

This led Lacan to his symbol of $\$$ and also to the use of set theory and to identify the subject with the empty set.

So far I’ve spoken of the subject as a unity, so let me posit its division: the subject is inscribed as a lack, it depletes the signifier, knowledge. When Lacan attempts its positioning in the Freudian *id* amongst the drives, he says, it’s an empty locus and is therefore inscribed as $\$$, yet the subject is always represented.

Lacan calls S_1 the master signifier, and the split between $\$$ and S_1 constitutes the principle of the division of the subject. Whence you always use the subject over its two faces, and often without noticing it. On the one hand you may relate the subject to its manifestations, odd or bizarre manifestations, that is to say that you may identify it with an accountancy, either in the black or in the red, as never completely inscribed and therefore as a paradoxical presence; and on the other hand, there is always another face of the subject where it is constant insofar as it is being carried in the signifying chain. (†) (-)

You always have to deal with the tension between an inscribed subject positioned in the Other’s network, in the signifying

chains, in the blackboard—as in Seminar XI—and a foreclosed subject, as minus one, never in its place. You tend to shift quite briskly from one description to the other.

It's Lacan's paradox to persist in naming this function "subject" whereas what he calls "subject" is completely estranged from what you normally understand as "subject." If you take it seriously, what he calls "subject" is entirely alienated from any agency of subjectivity. The question is why didn't Lacan substitute the name, why did he persistently carry on with such debris from the ancient world as the word "subject."

The answer is that Lacan preserves the name "subject" in order to transfer it to a function of the signifier, precisely to deter the return of the classical subject.

The fact is you get used to designating as "subject" something thoroughly different from subjectivity, actually for that name to be filled with something other than classical subjectivity. When simply speaking Lacan's language, without necessarily understanding it, you repeat this *mise à l'écart*, this nihilation of classical subjectivity.

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