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Man and/in language

Abstract: *In this study we trace the linguistic foundations of the (post)modern understanding of the self. The idea of the centrality of personal deictics to the linguistic system, originally theorised by Jakobson and amply expanded by Benveniste, has deeply affected subsequent reconstructions of the human subject, from the Lacanian psychoanalytical model, to its existential or Marxian re-interpretations by Buber and Althusser, respectively, to name just two of the numerous theorists who have turned their attention to this problem. Language is the matrix of human subjectivity, caught in the web of its symbolic relations.*

Key words: *subject, language, shifter, deictic*

The human subject (Latin. *subiectus*, past participle of *subiacere*, to subject: sub-, under and *iacere*, place) is neither the sovereign Cartesian self, whose existence depends on its capacity of seeing itself as unique, autonomous and distinct from others, because it can think and reason, nor the monolithic being of humanist reflection, capable of acting, rather the subject-in-process which exists only in its interactions with the world and others and through the discourses that represents it. In most languages, the indices of subjectivity occupy a privileged place, they are part of that category of words that Martin Buber, in *Ich und Du / I and Thou* ([1923] 1958), calls “primary words”. They condition not only our attitude to the world, our mode of engaging a rapport with it, but also our way of being in the world:

The life of human beings does not consist of all this and the like alone.

This and the like together establish the realm of It.

But the realm of Thou has a different basis.

When Thou is spoken, the speaker has no thing for his object. For where there is a thing, there is another thing. Every It is bounded by others; It exists only through being bounded by others. But when Thou is spoken, there is no thing. Thou has no bounds.

When Thou is spoken, the speaker has no thing; he has indeed nothing. But he takes his stand in relation. (4)

In the relation I-Thou--a subject-subject relation--, people enter in a dialogue which involves their complete being: they perceive one another as possessing specific qualities and conceive of themselves as part of the world which consists of objects. On the other hand, the relation I-the Other involves separation, distanciation. People, Buber comments, often attempt to covert the subject-subject relation into a subject-object relation and vice versa. However, the unity of the subject cannot be analyzed as an object. When analyzed as object, the subject is no longer a Thou, but becomes an Other. The being thus analyzed is an Other, the object of the I-Other relation. By contrast, the subject-subject relation affirms that each subject has a unity of its being. When the subject chooses the I-Thou relation, this involves the whole being of the subject. It is only in the I-Thou relation that the subject becomes a subject. The subject which appears by means of these words does not exist in the world, as an object among others, it is a dynamic reality that modifies continuously, depending on the discourses it assumes responsibility of (Fairclough 124). This explains, to a certain extent, the difficulty and the diversity of its conceptual location.

Given his insistence on the arbitrary nature of the sign, Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic model is confined to the space of significance only - "dans la langue il n'y a que des différences . . . sans termes positives" (166). Consequently, *Cours de linguistique générale* (Course in General Linguistics) ([1915] 1995) exclusively deals with the systematic relations between the signifier and the signified, particularly the "associative" relation between the sign and all the other elements in the language system, as well as the relation between the sign and the elements that surround it in a concrete significant instance.

However, Saussure notes that the associative relations have their support in human memory: "leur siège est dans le cerveau; elles font partie de ce trésor intérieur qui constitue la langue chez chaque individu" (171). In fact, in his analysis, the Swiss linguist starts from the presupposition that language must be approached from the individual speaker's viewpoint, and from the observation that whatever one says, one always says it from a specific perspective: "Il serait absurde de dessiner un panorama des Alpes en le prenant simultanément de plusieurs sommets de Jura; un panorama doit être pris d'un seul point. De même pour la langue: on ne peut ni l'a décrire ni fixer des normes pour l'usage qu'en se plaçant dans un certain état. (117). At the same time, Saussure discovers a duality in the individual speaker: the speaker has both idiosyncratic features, and features that he shares with others, which the linguist conceives of in temporal and spatial terms.

It was the individual's experience of time that led Saussure to isolate the synchronic form the diachronic in linguistics, on which he built his whole system --"la première chose qui frappe quand on étudie les faits de langue, c'est que pour le sujet parlant leur succession dans le temps est inexistente: il est devant un état" (117)—as well as the central distinction between language and speech (between the abstract linguistic system and its manipulation/use by means of which concrete enunciations are produced). The Swiss linguist characterizes speech as non-systematic and infinite and, consequently, impossible to study: "Prise dans son tout, le langage est multiforme et hétéroclite; à cheval sur plusieurs domaines, à la fois physique, physiologique et psychique, il appartient encore au domaine

individuel et au domaine social; il ne se laisse classer dans aucune catégorie des faits humains, parce qu'on ne sait comment dégager son unité." On the other hand, Saussure underlies that "(l)angue existe dans la collectivité sous la forme d'une somme d'empreintes déposées dans chaque cerveau, à peu près comme un dictionnaire dont tous les exemplaires, identiques, seraient répartis entre les individus. C'est donc quelque chose qui est dans chacun d'eux, tout en étant commun à tous et placé en dehors de la volonté des dépositaires." (38). Language is the field of the social, and refers to the general rules that exist for speakers of a language and which can be systematized. That is why, the relation between the signifiers and the signified is seemingly stable and predictable, unaffected by individual speakers.

In Saussure's conception, the subject appears only as a generator of paroles. Given the central place granted to synchrony and language (113), the saussurian linguistic model makes room neither for history, nor for the human subject.

For his contemporary, the American Charles Sanders Peirce, the infinite commutability of what he calls interpretant (the mental effect produced by the relation between the sign and the object, which corresponds to the saussurian signified) seems to exclude any reference to, or dependence on, the object:

Sign [Lat. *signum*, a mark, a token]: Ger. *Zeichen*; Fr. *signe*; Ital. *segno*. (I) Anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its object) in the same way, the interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on *ad infinitum*. (Peirce "Sign", 239)

A *sign*, or *Representamen*, is a First which stands in such a genuine triadic relation to a Second, called its *Object*, as to be capable of determining a Third, called its *Interpretant*, to assume the same triadic relation to its Object in which it stands itself to the same Object. The triadic relation is *genuine*, that is its three members are bound together by it in a way that does not consist in any complexus of dyadic relations. That is the reason the Interpretant, or Third, cannot stand in a mere dyadic relation to the Object, but must stand in such a relation to it as the Representamen itself does. Nor can the triadic relation in which the Third stands be merely similar to that in which the First stands, for this would make the relation of the Third to the First a degenerate Secondness merely. The Third must indeed stand in such a relation, and thus must be capable of determining a Third of its own; but besides that, it must have a second triadic relation in which the Representamen, or rather the relation thereof to its Object, shall be its own (the Third's) Object, and must be capable of determining a Third to this relation. All this must equally be true of the Third's Thirds and so on endlessly; and this, and more, is involved in the familiar idea of a Sign; and as the term Representamen is here used, nothing more is implied. A *Sign* is a Representamen with a mental Interpretant. Possibly there may be Representamens that are not Signs. Thus, if a sunflower, in turning towards the sun, becomes by that very act fully capable, without further condition, of reproducing a sunflower which turns in precisely corresponding ways toward the sun, and of doing so with the same reproductive power, the sunflower would become a Representamen of the sun. But *thought* is the chief, if not the only mode of representation. (Peirce, "Icon Index and Symbol", 67)

For all this, the basis of the peircean signifying triad (sign—interpretant--object) seems to be the existential relationship of the sign to the object. The crucial distinction is that man has only an indirect knowledge of reality, mediated by signs. The sign is an intentional act, it represents the object in some capacity, which is available only as interpretant (*intentional interpretant*), generating in the mind of the individual another interpretant (*effectual interpretant*). Together they constitute a dynamic entity, mutual of interpretant, or a *commens*, as Peirce calls it in *Pragmatism as a Principle and Method of Right Thinking. The 1903 Harvard Lectures on Pragmatism* (77). Thus, the sign connects not only a signifier to a signified but also a mind to another mind, by means of the signifier. In “Some Consequences of Four Incapacities” (1868), he comments that since “every thought is a sign” and “life is a train of thoughts ... (this) proves that man is a sign; so that every thought is an *external* sign, proves that man is an external sign. Thus, “when we think we are at that moment a sign ... the man and the sign are identical” (*Peirce on Signs*, 84). Then, the semiotician adds:

Without fatiguing the reader by stretching this parallelism too far, it is sufficient to say that there is no element whatever of man's consciousness which has not something corresponding to it in the word; and the reason is obvious. It is that the word or sign which man uses *is* the man himself. For, as the fact that every thought is a sign, taken in conjunction with the fact that life is a train of thought, proves that man is a sign: so, that every thought is an external sign, proves that man is an external sign. That is to say, the man and the external sign are identical, in the same sense in which the words *homo* and *man* are identical. Thus my language is the sum total of myself: for the man is the thought. (*idem*)

Once constituted, the maxi-sign designating the subject claims sovereignty of its acts, which may add new dimensions to it. As long as he is capable of accepting new signs and abandoning the old ones, the subject remains a dynamic, instable reality.

In the Peircean triad of the sign, the subject occupies a special place, since it can be at the same time iconic, indexical, or symbolic. It is iconic because it can generate images, which it has existential connections capable of making it invisible conceptually. The subject is also an indexical sign because it has a name and a pronoun which stands for it, by means of which it identifies itself, or places itself in time and space. The subject has a symbolic value too, whose special significance resides in the fact that it is interpreted as denoting the object, in consequence of a natural disposition. In other words, the subject is not an independent ontological reality, but an ensemble of signs. From the point of view of knowledge, it exists only as a sign, a proper noun, personal pronoun in the first person, or as visual images.

Roman Jakobson expands Peirce's remarks on the iconic and indexical properties of language. In a study, “Shifters, Verbal Categories and the Russian Verb”, (1971 [1956]) he comments in detail on such words as pronouns, which “are distinguished from all other constituents of the linguistic code solely by the compulsory reference to the given message” and which, following Jespersen (1922), he calls “shifters” (2: 132), for the role they play in identifying and defining human relations. According to Jespersen, *Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin* (1922), this is

[a] class of words which presents grave difficulty to children are those whose meaning differs according to the situation, so that the child hears them now applied to one thing and now to another. (123)

The child says “I”, but hearing his interlocutor also saying “I”, he is at a loss. A notable example would be the situation which involves both the narrated person and the person executing these speech acts. As Jakobson notes,

[t]hus, the first person signals the identity of a participant of a narrated event with the performer of the speech event, and the second person, the identity of the actual or potential undregoeer of the speech event. (2: 134)

Both persons are therefore „marked”, not only by means of the indexical signs “I” and “you”(the third person is also marked as “he” or “she”), but also through the discursive or dialogic reciprocity that supports the construction of their subjectivity.

It was also the linguistic elements with an indexical status, which have no meaning at the abstract level of language, namely personal pronouns, some temporal forms, some adverbs, such as *here/there*, whose sense clarifies only in discourse, and varies in relation to the discursive situation, that Émile Benveniste draws attention to in his *Problèmes de linguistique générale/ Problems in General Linguistics* (1966). In a study called “On subjectivity in language”, he describes the pronouns “I” and “you” as signifiers capable of making meaning through in concrete discursive situations only, as signifiers without conventional signifieds:

There is no concept corresponding to “I” that would comprise all the *I*’s enounced at any moment by all locutors, as there is a concept “tree” for all the individual uses of tree. Therefore; “I” does not designate any lexical entity. If it were so, then we would have a permanent contradiction accepted by language, which could be anarchy in practice: how can the same term relate to any individual, defining it at the same time in its specificity? We are faced with a class of words, the “personal pronouns”, which are denied the status which all the other signs of language have. What does *I* refer to? To something very special, an exclusively linguistic utility: *I* refers to the act of individual discourse which is uttered and designates the locutor. It is a term which cannot be identified but in what we called discursive instance and which has only a current reference. Only within the framework of the discursive instance in which ‘I’ designates the locutor entitles the utterer to institute himself as “subject”. Consequently, it is literally true that the ground of subjectivity lies in the exercise of language (1: 248).

In spite of this, pronouns and temporal forms with an indexical status are not incidental linguistic components. On the contrary, Benveniste underlies, language is inconceivable without them. Discourse is language in action (1: 243), human action institutes it: “language is so deeply marked by the expression of subjectivity, that we ask ourselves whether, thus built, it could function under the same name”(1: 247). Benveniste notes that, from a phenomenological or psychological perspective, “subjectivity” appears as “a fundamental characteristic of language” (1: 246-247). Language and subjectivity are interdependent; there

is no subjectivity without language. Subjectivity is conditioned by the linguistic status of the “person” (1: 247). One could even say that man constitutes himself through language, discourse, or speech acts. Benveniste insists that the individual finds his cultural identity in discourse only, by means of the pronouns “I” and “you”:

Language therefore is the possibility of subjectivity, because it always contains the linguistic forms appropriate to its expression, and discourse causes the manifestation of subjectivity, because it is made up of discrete instances. In a way, language proposes “empty” forms, which each speaker in the exercise of discourse assumes and relates then to his own „person”, instituting at the same time and *I* for himself and a *you* for his partner. This way, the discursive instance draws tighter all the coordinates that define the subject, of which we have mentioned, though briefly, the most evident of them. (1: 249-250)

In “The Nature of Pronouns”, Benveniste distinguishes between two types of subjects that involved in any discursive event: the speaking subject (*le sujet de l'énonciation*) and the spoken of subject (*sujet de l'énoncé*). The former is the individual who participates in the discourse. The latter stands for the discursive element the individual identifies with and, by doing so, discovers his/her own subjectivity. In language, this discursive element is the pronoun “I”:

What is therefore the reality *I* or *you* refers to? Oddly, an exclusively “discursive reality”. *I* can be defined only in terms of “locution”, not in terms of objects, as it happens with the nominal sign. *I* means “the person uttering the current instance of discourse containing *I*”. A unique instance by definition and valid only in its uniqueness. If I record two successive instances of a discourse that contains *I*, generated by the same voice, nothing tells me that one of them belongs to an indirect discourse, to a quotation in which *I* must be attributed to someone else. We must, therefore, retain the following: *I* cannot be identified within the frame of the instance that produces it. Consequently, a double instance conjugates in this process: the instance of the *I*, as reference, and the instance of discourse that contains the *I*, as referred to. The following definition could thus be formulated: *I* is the individual who enounces the present instance of discourse contain the linguistic instance *I*. (1: 240)

Although the two subjects can be understood through their mutual relationship only, they remain forever irreducible to each other, separated by the barrier between reality and meaning. The speaking subject has a referential status, while the subject of the enounce functions as signifier. It is not connected to real persons or things, but is entirely conditioned by the closed system of appositions: “I” derives its meaning from “you”, in the same way “here” defines itself in relation to “there”, etc.

The reason the signifiers isolated by Benveniste are activated only in discourse resides in the fact that they need a subject to complete them conceptually (to give them signifieds). The first person gets its privileged status because the notions of time and space associated to some linguistic terms such as the adverbs here /there, or tenses of verbs, always related to the subject of the enunciation. In “Observations on the functioning of language in the Freudian discovery”, Benveniste claims that discourse always involves the matching of the linguistic

signifiers “I” and “you” with ideal representations, and that, by means of these representations, the subject discovers itself:

We notice that in the course of the Freudian analysis, the subject uses language to ,represented’ itself, as it would like to be perceived, and thus concludes that ‘the other’ exists. Its discourse is both appeal and recourse, sometimes vehement solicitation of the other, by means of the discourse, through which it presents itself with desperation, a recourse that is often lying to the other, in order to individualize itself in its own eyes. Through the simple act of addressing, the one who speaks about himself speaks about the other within himself and thus he perceives himself, confronts himself, becomes what he aspires to be, and historicizes himself finally in this incomplete or falsified history. Therefore, language is used here as speech, converted into the expression of the temporary and elusive subjectivity that conditions dialogue. Language furnishes the instrument of a discourse in which the personality of the subject frees itself and creates itself, influences the other and gets recognized by it. (1: 75)

In the passage above, Benveniste signals the fact that the signifier “I” is activated not by reference to a particular speaker, but through its association to an ideal image, in which the speaker recognizes himself. “You” functions in the same way, referring not to a person, but to the image of the person.

For Benveniste, the subject has only a temporary status; it does not exist outside the discursive moments in which it appears. The subject constitutes and reconstitutes itself by means of discourse. The French linguist however notices that the speaking subject does not control its own subjectivity, because the discourse of the subject is constrained by the rules of language. The subject can talk, precisely because there is a linguistic system that precedes it. In addition, each new enounce has several different levels of meaning (denotative, connotative), which leads to the idea that the subject is essentially multiple.

In “Observations on the Functioning of Language in the Freudian Discovery”, Benveniste suggests that discourse operates simultaneously along several axes and has its roots in a divided subject, a concept taken over from Freud, who in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1901) had launched the idea that the subject must be thought in terms of an inner division, the former associated with conscious discourse, the latter with the unconscious one. In his turn, the French linguist (under the probable influence of Lacan) distinguished between a continuous, latent discourse and a manifest discourse, which originates both in an unconscious subject, but also in a conscious subject. The latent discourse can be uncovered only through the manifest one. Similarly, the unconscious subject can be found only by means of the conscious one, through a careful reading of the gaps in its manifest content:

For the analyst, however, the antinomy shows itself at a totally different level and behaves in a completely different way. He must pay attention to not only the content of discourse, but also to its functions. If this content informs him about the representation the subject makes of the situation and the position he assigns himself in it, he searches for new content within this content, for an unconscious motivation, emerging out of the hidden complex. Beyond the inherent symbolism of language, he perceives a specific symbolism which the subject is not conscious of, and which takes shape only in what the subject enounces, but also in what the

subject is silent about. In the history the subject places himself, the analyst will provoke the appearance of another history, which will explain the motivation. He will therefore use the personal discourse as an exponent of another “language”, with its own rules, with its own symbols and its own “syntax”, which connects to the deep structures of the psyche. (1: 76)

Benveniste suggest that the moments of seeming silence around discursive events, when language and, together with it, subjectivity seem to volatilize, are completed by elements of a secondary discourse, of which the subject has no knowledge. The subject lives both in a conscious psychic space, and in an unconscious one. The division between them allows the subject to place himself, at the same time, in two alternative discourses, which visibly contrast with each other, both in form and in content. The unconscious discourse uses a language that is totally different from the one used by the conscious discourse—a language with its own “rules, symbols and syntax” (*idem*). Since the discourse that defines the conscious subject must be understood, at least partially, as an answer to what defines the unconscious subject too, and *vice versa*, neither of them can be conceived of in terms of the capacity to speak only. Both are simultaneously “spoken” and motivated to engage in a discourse by an instance placed beyond them.

The existence of a biological entity which we call human being does not necessarily lead to the existence of a subject. We habitually identify the body with the individual subject, as if the two were always going together, as a result of a natural self-generation. The human subject, Jacques Lacan claims (*Écrits* 1, 1966), is always problematic and derived, never spontaneous. It is not an essence, but a set of relations, a continuous process. The critical phase is called by the French psychoanalyst “the mirror stage” and appears at the age of 6-18 months. Before this moment, the child has no feeling it represents a separate reality, autonomous. In “the mirror stage”, for one reason or another, it begins to see an image of itself from the outside, perhaps in a mirror, may recognizing itself in a play partner:

... le *stade du miroir* est un drame dont la poussée interne se précipite de l'insuffisance à l'anticipation et qui pour le sujet, pris au leurre de l'identification spatiale, machine les fantasmes qui succèdent d'un image morcelée du corps à une forme que nous appellerons orthopédique de sa totalité, et l'armoire enfin assumée d'une identité aliénante, qui va marquer de sa structure rigide tout son développement mental. Ainsi la rupture de cercle de l'*Innenwelt* à l'*Umwelt* engendre-t-elle la quadrature inépuisable des récolements du *moi*. (*Écrits* 1: 93-94)

Thus, for the first time, the specular image (*imago*), born beyond any social determination, offers the child a vision of its integrity, totality and unity (*Gestalt*), which replaces the fragmentation and the dissociation that had dominated so far. The visual, kinetic and spatial registers, dominated by the image we have of ourselves as unitary, coherent and coordinated bodies, makes up what Lacan calls *the imaginary*.

The construction of individuality begins with one's insertion in the *symbolic register*, a system of hierarchical values, linguistically mediated, with which the human subject attempts to identify with. The subject enters the symbolic order hoping to regain the identity which he believes he found in the “mirror stage”. Although the subject perceives itself as unitary, whole and autonomous, the integrity of the imaginary is undermined, because the centre of

gravity of the self lies outside it. The subject is *decentred*, its meaning projects onto it, from a world over which, paradoxically, it can exert only minimal control. In Lacanian terms, *the subject is the discourse of the Other* (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* 131). For the French psychoanalyst, it is impossible for us to derive any meaning of our subjectivity outside of the relation with the Other (*L'Autre*).

The subject is pushed into the world by the insatiable need to fill in the void (*manque à être*) at the centre of its being (*Ibidem* 29), which is nothing else but, the life instinct which can never be fully expressed, or satisfied. This lack would be represented later by all other substitutes, e.g., *objet petit a* (*Ibid.* 198).

The Lacanian subject constitutes itself in that liminal space, at the borders of the unconscious, through the interaction of two movements: the former corresponds to the alienation process by means of language, the latter, to the separation engendered by desire. There is no specific moment when the subject emerges as a stable entity or complete... it appears only temporarily, through this never-ending process of alienation and separation.

As “Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du ‘Je’” (*Écrits* 1: 89-97), shows, alienation designates the action by means of which the subject identifies firstly, with the signifier, and is therefore, determined by it. Moreover, Lacan suggests that the subject is doubly alienated: firstly by omission, the self recognition of the child in the Other, in the mirror stage and, secondly, through the insertion of the subject to the symbolic order. Alienation ‘condemns’ the subject to remain divided and undetermined: produced by the signifier on the one side, it disappears (*aphanisis*) on the other side (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* 210).

Alienation distances the subject from its own being, in the direction of the Other (*Ibidem*, 211); by contrast, separation—the process by which the child differentiates itself from the Other (mother, primarily)—, motivated by desire and instituted through the paternal metaphor (*the name of the Father*), guides the subject towards its own being. It is the wish to become what exists beyond language and the Other, “at the point of lack perceived in the Other” (*Ibidem* 214). Through separation, a gap appears between the subject and the Other, where, what Lacan calls *objet petit a* appears. This gap allows both the subject and the Other to separate temporarily, it is the chosen element which allows for changes (*Ibidem* 214). The subject is, in a sense, suspended between “the would-be subject” and the domain of the Other, in a continuous vacillation, without ever being really present. The subject does not exist, it only opens the way to its true being, which is an answer to the imperatives of the ‘real’. The subject appears and disappears in an unending chain of signifiers. The subject attempts to verbalise its desire and thus constitutes itself, by identifying itself with the signifiers of the Other, without ever filling the gap that separates them:

Two lacks overlap here. The first emerges from the central effect around which the dialectic of the advent of the subject to his own being in the relation to the other turns—by the fact that the subject depends on the signifier and that the signifier is first of all in the field of the other. This lack takes up the other lack, which is the real, earlier lack, to be situated at the advent of the living being, that is to say, at sexed reproduction. The real lack is what the living being loses, that part of himself *qua* living being, in reproducing himself through the way of sex. This lack is real because it relates to something real, namely, that the living being, by being subject

to sex, has fallen under the blow of individual death. (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* 204-205)

According to Lacan, the subject emerges in the exchange, the tension between the real register—with its origin in the primary maternal experiences of the individual --, and the symbolic one, whose material and impulses come from the domain (of the Other) of language. The Other is “the field of that living being in which the subject has to appear (*Ibid.* 203). The other is absolute alterity, which we cannot assimilate into our subjectivity, it is the symbolic order, it is language in which we are born and which we must learn if we want to articulate our own desires. According to Lacan, there is no unconscious without language, similarly, desire exists through language only. Unconscious wish is the discourse of the Other, which means that we are condemned to speak our wishes by means of the language and wishes of Others. Although it constitutes itself through language, the Lacanian subject is, at the same time, spoken; it inherits the language and the wish of the Other, and its identity and history are culturally written before it was born (*Écrits* 1: 252).

For Lacan, symbolic structuring is never complete. There is always something that goes beyond the symbolic—the unconscious which has to “be apprehended in its experience of rupture, between perception and consciousness, in that non-temporal locus . . . which forces us to oppose it, in homage to Freud, *die Idee eiener anderer Lokalität*, the idea of another locality, another space, another scene, *the between perception and consciousness*” (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* 56). According to Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901)), the sleep, the symptoms of mental delusion signal the reosnbce of some process beyond conscious thinking which cause a rupture in everyday or experience. The unconscious, says Lacan, is the gap that belongs to “*pre-ontological*” it is the “*non-realized*” [italics in the original (*The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* 29 and 22). Lacan’s main thesis is that the unconscious is structured like language (*Ibidem* 203), in the sense that it is a signifying process. The unconscious constitutes itself through the insertion of the subject in the symbolic order, in the break between the signifier and the signified, through the signifier’s sliding under the signifier and the impotence of the fisig the meaning.

The subject therefore is a break in the signifying chain which opens between the symbolic and the real, by means of impulses; it is the real beyond the signifier, functioning as cause, and motivated by impulse. Because it does not know of any adequate signifier, the subject remains fundamentally undetermined, yet it has the possibility of choice. Crucial in this process is the fact that the subject assumes (it is obliged to assume) a position (*la position du sujet*) in the symbolic order and thus it is capable of acting beyond symbolic conditioning (*Ibidem* 246-247). Hence, the Cartesian adagio, “*cogito, ergo sum*” becomes in Lacan’s reading “*ubi cogito, ibi sum*”, ‘where I think, there I am’ (*Écrits* 1: 275)

The idea the emergence of the subject depends on its capacity to occupy, at a certain moment, several discursive positions, already defined and even contradictory, which reflect social, economic, political, etc., conditioning, is developed by Louis Althusser in an essay called “Ideology and the State Ideological Apparatus”, written in 1969. Discourse, the French philosopher insists, may consist in an exchange between a persona and a cultural agent—another person, an institution or a textual construction—which transmits ideological

information. The latter addresses the person, and in this process it defines its own and the other's identity. Ideology creates subjects by "interpellating" them, calling them in the way a policeman calls someone in the street:

ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: 'Hey, you there!'

Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn round. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was 'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was *really him* who was hailed' (and not someone else). („Ideology and the State ideological Apparatus", 175)

In the situation sketched by Althusser, the 'speaking subject' differs from the 'spoken to subject'. However, since the 'spoken to subject' constitutes itself only through speech, the two categories are closely connected. Interpellation emerges once a person, whom an agent calls through a discursive act, responds to, and assumes the subjectivity that resides in it. Subjectivity therefore is the "kind of being" which we become, while adapting to the larger "political" imperatives of the social system. By forming us, ideology locates us in the system of relations that are necessary for the preservation of the existing class structure, it gives us an identity appropriate for its functioning:

. . . the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself'. There are no subjects except by and for their subjection. That is why they 'work all by themselves'. (Ibidem, 183)

This subjectivity constructs itself concretely, through various ideological practices whose essential characterises are inseparable from the way in which people live the spontaneous and immediate aspects of their existence. We are in ideology, nobody escapes it: "we live, move have our being in it" (*Ibidem* 173), says Althusser modifying a celebrated passage from Saint Paul.

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