

There's a story from Antiquity that has to do with a Spartan boy who steals a fox. I like it because like many other great stories it deals with civil law, desire, and the difficult relation between the two. The boy steals a fox and hides it under his coat because Spartan society taught him to not get found out above all. Curiously, it was not stealing that Spartan society condemned, but getting caught. There are a few different versions of the story. In one, the boy goes to school, and in another, he is accosted by guards at the barracks and is put into question. In any case, the story goes that the fox, hidden under the boy's coat and increasingly afraid, starts to gnaw at his flesh. The boy nonetheless keeps totally quiet while the fox eats its way through his chest. He is never detected by law because he keeps quiet at the cost of his life. The leaders at the barracks, after discovering the wild animal that was the cause of his death, praise him for keeping silent unto death despite the pain that he was sustaining. They agree in unison that he was an ideal young Spartan. It's striking. That the boy conceals a deleterious and complex element that he cannot confess ahead of time is a very human idea. One of my favourite sayings of Jacques Lacan is something along the lines of how desire is not articulable but is articulated. It's like a very French way of saying that one cannot express one's desire, but one can interpret it by delineating the path that things will have taken. And, in the way that psychoanalysis conceives of it, desire is a spatio-temporal contradiction that organizes the very possibility of thought. I'll comment on why that is the case.

First, I would like to note a few things about the notion of the parallax, which has a nice philosophical history that extends from Marxism to psychoanalysis. It shouldn't escape the reader that parallax is a term that has to do with vision, and that it designates how an object can differ depending on the vantage point from which it is gazed. The shift implied in a parallax gap is, however, not a simple difference but a logical contradiction that internally divides the object and exhausts the reality of both perspectives. One such contradiction was pointed out some time after the advent of Saussurean linguistics by Émile Benveniste. He distinguished speech between the act of *enunciation* and the *statement*. While an enunciation is coextensive with the singular activity of speaking, a statement, we might say, is speech in its positive and objective reality. I speak, for example, knowing well that there is a measure of equivocation, scansion, and error between what I want to say and what the other person will inevitably hear. My words, which are objects with substantial reality, are endowed with a logical register of their own. We know this to be the case because we are sometimes startled by what we ourselves say or do just as much as the other person is. The psychoanalytic insight is that this contradiction should be redoubled at the level of thought where logic is itself split by inner difference. The idea is that language does not express thought, which would amount to an extra-discursive idealism, but language *is* thought; and thought is alienated.

If, as Roman Jakobson claims, every act of speaking is first and foremost an act of listening, we might be compelled to redouble that same circuit between self and other within ourselves. As speakers, our messages are intended to have an effect on an addressee and that implies a margin of alterity implicit within a message from the outset. Colette Soler has a nice albeit technical formulation of this. She says something along the lines of how the statement is made by the subject, but the message is chosen by the Other. A statement, in other words, contains in itself the kernel of its annihilation because it is never univocally transmitted. All statements can be put into question, contradicted, and thereby abolished. We see often, from mathematics to judicial law, that when we try to enclose and totalize systems of knowledge contradictions inevitably start to appear, as do structurally unknowable positions. Descartes

recognized this alienation at the core of thinking when, in his inaugural move of modernity, charged all substantial thought with uncertainty. He doubted the reality of everything, even very basic geometry. The only solid ground that he found in his schizophrenic interrogation of epistemology was the instance of doubting itself. He knew there was at least one truth, namely, he was certain that he was thinking precisely because he doubted thinking. In any case, we might be more inclined to say that in place of transcendental truth, like God or being, he found certainty. And Descartes found it at the cost of negativizing all substantial thought. And after the negation of every positive qualifier, we are left with a universal void: the empty instance of thinking as an indeterminate and formal process of becoming. This is what we've been calling the subject of enunciation.

The subject of thought is parallax split between the subject of enunciation and the subject of the statement. The latter is a logical corollary of the symbolic order since statements, detachable as they are, form chains of knowledge; they form culture at large. We should emphasize here that the subject is neither fully indeterminate, nor fully determined. In other words, between the subject there's the symbolic collectivity of which he is an effect, and then there's the subject's singular relation to that collectivity, its enunciating position. In psychoanalytic theory, the proper name of this singular relation to knowledge and signification is desire. The subject, being both a product of culture and its internal failure, is a dialectical resolution of that gap.

The subject *is and isn't himself*; he is and isn't determined by the collectivity of which he is an effect. We might add here that the subject is kind of like a missed encounter between a natural organism and the demands of culture. As such, it is an organism with an incompletely symbolized body—and it's this missing pound of flesh, which remains unrealized, that determines the cause of his desire and inaugurates the possibility of metaphor and reinvention. The failure of language designates a wild excess life that is inadmissible in the body of the subject. The fox, the obscene object of interdiction, cannot be admitted because it presents the law of the situation with the singularity of a deleterious enjoyment. At the same time, this clandestine object signifies an excess of being over appearance or, more precisely, it signifies a being that is unrealized at the level of appearances. As such, it theoretically presents an occasion for rethinking the order of appearances by intensifying a cut in our understanding of phenomena. Concepts and language are redefined not in spite of their internal contradiction, but because of it. The subject, the contradictory entity of endless metaphor, appears precisely in the place where the incandescent non-existence of unrealized being disturbs the field of appearances and reveals within them a constitutive lack—at which point a new fantasy must be woven to sustain the infinite reinvention of living.