
III. OTHERNESS MAKING THE SUBJECT POSSIBLE

The Subject-Matter: The Subject

Ertürk Demirel
(Boğaziçi University)

Abstract

In the following I shall attempt to pursue the self's itinerary in the history of philosophy of the sign, criticizing great thinkers such as Hegel, Nietzsche, Freud, and Butler. I will, thus, pose three questions and attempt to answer them: i) firstly, how to conceptualize the subject to overcome a dichotomy of the inner vs. the outer so that the excluded subject-positions may be articulated? The second question will be: ii) how to account for the subject-position of the subaltern who is subject to the law, but not a subject as such who cannot "talk" and resist in destabilizing the sign that subordinates it? The last question arising from the economies, viz., exchange of signs and exchange of residues of power, has something crucial to do with the exchange of violence. iii) Can the subject, characterized by vulnerability and exposure to violence in its constitution, be the subject of a violent-free constitution if the conceptualization and signification involve violence in excluding singularity?

1. Introduction

The ambiguity of the word "subject," the inherent instability of its agency cherished as the *sine qua non* of political action as opposed to the political subjection which is the very background of the subjectivization, asks for an explanation — if not to presume away the *aporia*, then to deepen it. On the one hand, the subject is what is subject to a call, law of other,¹ which traverses *outside* its realm of sovereignty with its very

¹ It is the law we receive from others when we encounter the authority in subjectivization.

conditions of possibility granted by power.² On the other hand, the notion of “agency” points out the political necessity of resistance against power, as displayed in some of the naive humanist-liberal conceptions of the autonomous agent as pure *locus* of action, viz., in outdated terms, unsullied by, and standing against anything alien to its *inner* voice of “conscience,” “reason,” and “will.” Putting together these two aspects of the subjectivization yields a discontinuity between subordination and action, a hiatus of decision, and an intersection of passivity and activity.

I will, thus, pose three questions and attempt to answer them: i) firstly, how to conceptualize the subject to overcome a dichotomy of the inner vs. the outer so that the excluded subject-positions may be articulated in the economies of audibility and visibility, i.e., exchanges of signs and exchange of residues of power. Louis Althusser,³ heralding Foucauldian formulations of the subject, introduces the notion of “interpellation” in his treatise on ideology that takes on board the addressability and the answerability of the subject to the authority, two central notions of the subjectivization process. In this context, sign appears to be the means of addressing the other, demanding a response, laying out the symbolic order of responsibility. Judith Butler⁴ portrays the paradoxical itinerary of the subjectivization with the figure of “return,” i.e., return of the responsible self toward itself or, better yet, against itself responding to a call, and acting responsibly and finding its sources of resistance, which are left unexplained by Foucault in his study of the effects of power on the body, in *psyche*. In a sense, the subject now appears in its vulnerability, exposed to the call and violence of normativity and deriving its power from what is beyond signification, viz. *the unconsciousness*. The call of the authoritative other to responsibility and the subsequent emergence of an *interiority*, an inner voice, conscience, and guilt that demarcates the boundaries of the *psyche* were linked by Derrida⁵ to the opening up of the secret of the subject in the context of

² Basically, I mean the Foucauldian power, which is everywhere, eliciting a resistance.

³ Louis Althusser, *On Ideology*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2008), 44-60.

⁴ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (New York: Stanford University Press, 1997), 7-33.

⁵ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 1-35.

Christian mystery against the orgiastic mystery of the daemonic. In fact, the origin of these arguments can be dated back to Nietzsche's tirade against the Socratic demystification of moral responsibility that saw to the demise of Dionysiac energies leashed by the Apollonian ruse in his *Birth of Tragedy*⁶ (6, 145, 157-158). Having made a psychoanalytic exegesis of Nietzsche's ideas, Freud also expresses the same excess of psychic forces over what is captured by consciousness, among many other places, in his analysis of the traumatic as the "external excitations ... strong enough to break through the barrier against stimuli."⁷ Jacques Lacan also addresses this excess in his depiction of the subject as "ex-crescence," formed by a violent encounter with the sign, *le petit objet 'a,'* as the epistemological stranger. Eric Santner, in his engagement in "an ethics pertaining to *my answerability to my neighbor-with-an-unconscious*" as the bearer of an uncanny sign, elaborates the strangeness of the sign that comes with the call of law as the "undeadness of what exceeds."⁸

Yet, after all tracing and second-guessing of a century, the *aporia* remains. So, the second question is: ii) how to account for the subject-position of the subaltern who is subject to law, but not subject as such, who cannot "talk" and resist in destabilizing the sign that subordinates it? In the case of the subaltern, the *aporia* deepens: if the conditions of the possibility of action, speech and, hence, of subjectivity lie in the other who calls, its sign as law, and its voice and face, then why does the voice of law, which, authoritative as it may be, nevertheless opens up a space for the subject to speak, act and appear, mutes the subaltern? If the subaltern cannot speak, does that mean that it is a different economy of visibility and audibility that it faces facing the other? If it is supposed to emerge from the abyss of secrets that secretes the subject-positions in violence, attachment, and recognition, then why is it supposedly a lack in *lieu* of a surplus that signifies it?

The bottom line of the theories of subjectivization, that the subject

⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Michigan: Vintage Books, 1967), 157, 158.

⁷ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1942), 34.

⁸ Eric L. Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 9.

is what is addressable, answerable, and vulnerable and quite capable of violence as well, necessitates a reading to trace down the formative power of sign regarding the subjectivization, which is to be understood as opening up an interior space by a violent encounter with the authoritative other and hence producing an excrescence, *an excess that eludes the economies of visibility and audibility as well*. Yet, the problematic aspect of the theoretical moves to grasp and grab the subject from its darker, psychic side — which is somewhat underemphasized by Butler⁹ — is that the “what” of the subject, exceeding the sign and conceptualization, however mirroring undecidedly the excess of law¹⁰ that makes it what it is, cannot be reduced to a happy transcendence of the primal scene of its emergence. The subject exceeds the sign that subjectivates and introduces it into the public sphere of visibility and audibility. But being attached to it in the first place, it cannot escape it since only for and before another can it be a subject, itself caught in the economies of the sign to make itself appear. The subject is thus replaced by the sign, the trope, the sign of the other, but the other will always be out of reach. Therefore, the subject is not present where it is, present before the law as its signified addressee and absent after addressing an unlawful sign — the face of the other.

The last question arising from the economies, viz., exchanges of signs and exchange of residues of power has something crucial to do with the exchange of violence. iii) Can the subject, characterized by vulnerability and exposure to violence in its constitution, be the subject of a violent-free judgment if the conceptualization and signification involve violence in excluding singularity? In other words, what are the epistemico-political conditions of possibility of a law that calls the subjects before it? For instance, can the law articulated through the loving call of the parents avoid the epis-

⁹ One should again interrogate the disturbing doubt that even making the sign “psyche,” a discursive product of power in Foucault, a central theoretical tool is an adequate and violent-free means of capturing the excess of the subject. Do we partake in theoretical violence in attributing psyche a capacity of genuine resistance instead of pushing the borders of signification and invent a new language to express the excess to undo the residues of violence in our theorization?

¹⁰ Santner names this excess of law as excess of meaning over legitimacy, in Agamben’s terms, “[b]eing in force without significance” (*Homo Sacer*, 51, in Eric L. Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001, 41).

temological violence of conceptualization?

In the first place perhaps, an archaeology is required, an archaeology of the sign that negates and erases the face of the other. I suggest we turn to the birth and the death of the subject in the founding “fathers” Hegel and Nietzsche.

2. Hegel and Nietzsche: Sin and Sinn

Hegel is to be credited with the elaborate vivisection of the moments of the subjectivization in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹¹ The sign here is what pertains to the other, marking its existence and addressability in the outer world. The sign is internalized by an intuition that receives the sense (*Bedeutung*, not *Sinn*, viz., extension) of *Begriff* whereby sense (*Sinn*) of the concept (*intension* in analytical philosophical terms) is conceived analogously to the spirit as it grasps something other than itself, like a body with a spirit enclosed inside. The work of internalizing what is outside, alien and other, the content of which is in conflict with itself, is “the subjective” in Hegel, viz., the paradigm of the subjectivization as a moment of grasping what one is through grasping what the other signifies. The grasp and reception of the intuition turns into an independent sign.¹² “Consciousness, however, is explicitly the Notion of itself,”¹³ a homonymy of desire to include, metabolize and negate the other. Self-consciousness in Hegel, then, operates by the internalization and negation of the other by grasping what it signifies to achieve self-certainty where the self is a function of desire to metabolize the outsider.

The desire at stake seeks the satisfaction of Self-consciousness “in its negative relation to the object”¹⁴ of desire. “Desire and self-certainty obtained in its gratification are conditioned by the object, for self-certainty comes from superseding this other.”¹⁵ In other words, self-understanding

¹¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Michael Inwood (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

¹² See G. W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, trans. Gustav Emil Muller, Philosophical Library (Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 1959), 408.

¹³ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Michael Inwood (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 51.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

depends on the other as the object of desire, which must be subordinated to the self by cognitive violence for ontological security.

The sign, conceived in this sense of an instrument used by the universal law that addresses, captures, negates in itself and thus recognizes as an other self-consciousness is, phenomenologically speaking, both a token of social existence, and a voice that calls and grants recognition to the other.¹⁶ Yet the sign is also the grave of the soul, *sêma* of *sôma* in the two senses:¹⁷ a) It subordinates what is present, and presented in the outer sensibility, to appropriate it, to make it its own by conceptualization, and fetters and buries it in the restrained space of a conceptual grave. b) It recognizes the other, names it in the epitaph for others to name “this other.” It reminds one of an elegy right in front of the grave of the beloved, an incantation of their name repeated over and over.

The first phase of recognition and the subjectivization in Hegel is thus a cognitive move, enacting on the dichotomy of outer vs. inner. The other, present as presented outside the self meets “another self-consciousness” as “it has come *out of itself*.”¹⁸ The violent subjectivization by the sign of other also necessitates an attachment to the other: “Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged.”¹⁹ The self loses the ontological security of a self enclosed in itself, and finally loses itself, “for it finds itself as an *other* being; secondly, in doing so it has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other sees its own ‘self.’”²⁰ “This disposition of ourselves outside ourselves seems to follow from bodily life, from its vulnerability and its exposure.”²¹

¹⁶ Hegel attributes to the human voice a central place as the paradigm of sign. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, trans. Gustav Emil Muller (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1959), 408.

¹⁷ The symbols of pyramid and tomb as the symbols of symbolization appear first in Plato’s dialogue *Cratylus*, where the body is conceived as the prison and grave of the soul. Also see Melih Basaran, *Kurbansal Sunu: Dile Getirilebilir ve Gorulebilirin Mantik ve Ekonomileri* (Istanbul: Ayrinti Yayınevi, 2005), 34-38.

¹⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Michael Inwood (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 111.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (London: Verso, 2004), 25.

This subordination which comes with the subjectivization, displacement, and replacement of selfhood is mediated by what is alien to the inner sense of the self, viz., the sign as the vehicle of law. The certainty and immediacy that the self seeks and can only get by the subordination of the object of desire, however, is achieved by a return. The cognitive order of things return as they were when self-consciousness returns back to the other and, in negating it, returns to itself in *signature* as a trace of the subjectivity.

A signature is the certainty of selfhood, an authenticating sign as a token of social existence of self. A signature is a name, an alibi presented outside the self, that is, an abstraction of the self. The etymological analysis of the term “abstraction,” and its epistemological weight in Hegel suggest that what is at stake is an attraction and a repulsion: the self is attracted to the other, but at the same time, due to its autoimmunity, gets repulsed by what is alien to its cognitive system, ejecting the other to be a pure self back again. When the self and the other compete in the contest for recognition, “[t]hey are, *for each other*, shapes of consciousness which have not yet accomplished the movement of absolute abstraction.”²²

To summarize, homonymy as self-consciousness is grounded on “absolute abstraction,” attraction of the object of desire into the inside, internalizing it by conceptualization and its expulsion to the outside of the self. The gastronomical forces operative at Hegelian subjectivization, however, are not free from violence as “each seeks the death of the other.”²³ The life-and-death struggle, the cannibalistic stakes of which are but the purity and immediacy of the self as a “being-for-self,”²⁴ is an attempt on the part of the self to “rid itself of its self-externality.”²⁵

Its self-certainty wounded and cognitive boundaries violated, the self seeks recourse into signature, a sign on the bondage contract that would make him the Master and the other the Slave. The selfhood, now peripatetic on the mediation of a sign, is sullied by the *externality* of the

²² G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Michael Inwood (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 113.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 114.

²⁵ Ibid.

object of desire, which cannot be fully negated for this precise reason. The sign that remains outside, whereby an “*ó*” is exchanged for an “*ε*” in Greek is the mark of independence of the slave, since it endows it an alienated existence of labor which is neither its own object of desire nor can be fully digested by the Master in the material products it consumes. The sign produces a surplus, a surplus of value in classical Marxism, and a surplus of actions that cannot be fully controlled. More importantly, the sign produces a surplus of subjectivity, an otherness of the other who is now distinct from the self as symbolized by the sign. The otherness will always be there as long as the sign is repeated, as the repetition of action is now guaranteed by the contract. At this point another theme of the subjectivization, namely that of *repeatability*, appears in the repetition of both the sign and the action.

Moreover, sign is the thwarted actualization of death, feared by both parties. Death, the figure of a tomb where the outsider, the outer and independent existence of the object of desire eluding negation is buried, runs on a delicate course of symbolization. It permeates every bit of conceptualization as sign and haunts any attempt to include the other given its postponement by the same encounter that structures otherness. Once the other is signified as the other in signing the contract, the outer-ness of the sign replaces the outer-ness of the other, and in a politics of proximity, traverses the fearful space between the self and the other with a promise of death. The outsider is thus kept at bay with and through the sign out of fear.

As Hegel maintains in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “[f]or this consciousness has been fearful, not of this or that particular thing or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread.”²⁶ The ominous horizon of negation, of symbolic and ultimate death informs the fearful background of the signification and subjectivization in Hegel. The sign may claim the inner singularity under the universality of *Begriff*. And the sign, now appearing as a signature on the contract of bondage, serves as a reminder of the ultimate teleology of desire — death of the other as the object of desire.

To avoid misunderstanding, the violent subjectivization of consciousness by the sign does not take place merely as the fearful inter-

²⁶ Ibid., 117.

nalization of what lies outside the subject, for the simple reason that “[w]ithout the formative activity, fear remains inward and mute, and consciousness does not become explicitly *for itself*.”²⁷ To put it in the terms of contemporary philosophy, the formative power of the sign is not merely suppressive but also productive in the sense that the agency of the subject that hinges on the perilous space opened up by subordination finds its conditions of possibility to resist *precisely in the very same space*. The exact terms of elaboration of resistance which Marx, following Hegel, took on board under the title of alienation cannot be recapitulated here, though the actions permitted to the slave prefigure disruptive forces in the face of an object of independent existence.

That is the insightful aspect of the subjectivization in Hegel as his emphasis on the attachment of the slave to the “primal scene” of subordination in his analysis of unhappy consciousness: “The bondsman realizes that it is precisely in his work wherein he seemed to have only an alienated existence that he acquires a mind of his own ... Since the entire contents of its natural consciousness have not been jeopardized, determinate being still *in principle* attaches to it; having ‘a mind of one’s own’ is ... freedom which is still enmeshed in servitude.”²⁸ Thus there is a space for resistance, albeit an *interior* one, that stores thoughts, desires, and ideas which are yet to come and be signified. In Hegel, consciousness is, as the site of unarticulated signs, the secret abyss of the subjectivity that preserves some “content” which is not exhausted by the subjection to the law of the other.

To summarize, it is undeniably out of sheer terror that the slave attaches to the sign of its servitude; rather a slave than a dead; better captured and limited to a blunt identity than socially obliterated; and better the terror of *Begriff* than full silence. The slave loses its object of desire as an omen of death, loses the purity and the immediacy of its sense of self, but gains the subjectivity, identity and a voice as a slave in *the interiority, by secret of the sign*.

The authority of sign as a norm that regulates the subjectivization would be re-visited by Nietzsche to reveal its arbitrariness in mediating the internalization of the norm and turning the desire of the subject against itself. Having laid out the theoretical setting in which crime,

²⁷ Ibid., 119.

²⁸ Ibid.

guilt (*Schuld*), conscience and asceticism permeate through the interior walls of the subjectivity and give birth to the subject before law,²⁹ Hegel did the preliminary work of putting the inherent contradiction of subjectivization in terms of a clash between “on the one hand, the individuality itself, on the other hand, its universal...”³⁰ signification, one enclosed in the cache of self-consciousness, the other unfolded by power. Nietzsche develops this theme further in his *Genealogy of Morals*,³¹ yet introducing the arbitrariness of the sign as the arbiter of law so that the universal dissolves into the long and unpredictable chain of will as the battlefield of socio-political forces. The notion of “sign-chain,”³² exemplified by the itinerary of the moral duality of “good and evil” as transposed and altered during the slave revolts, takes on board the attachment on the part of the subordinated who are emotionally attached to the terms of their subjection and disrupt the signification by a twist of semantic upheaval. While the pathological attachment of the ascetic priest haunted by a bad conscience cannot transform the normative voice of the symbolic that the subject-position called “the Jew,” Nietzsche avers, achieved in borrowing and transmuting the sign. The production and reproduction of bad conscience may thus prove fruitful in the search for a better account of those people who cannot have a voice.

Nietzsche’s formulations scattered throughout his works reveal the subject as an addendum to the action, a sign that attributes the action, a place-holder that is to be occupied in the socio-historical matrix of power. The psychic reception of the sign that assigns the places in Nietzsche, however, is not mechanic, that is to say, not reducible to the coerced internalization in the dreadful encounter with the other. The sovereign subject, the promising animal bred by the painful mnemonic devices of power receives the sign through painful repetition and grows a conscience.³³ At this point of conjecture, the picture of sign comes closer to completion, *as what is repeatable in the closed economy of the interior vs. the outer*. The painful repetition of violence exercised on the

²⁹ Ibid., 182-184.

³⁰ Ibid., 183.

³¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

³² Ibid., 77-78.

³³ Ibid., 58.

body builds up the memory of will by crime-punishment-memory triad: one commits a crime, is punished for it, and remembers the pain associated with the deed. As long as the repeatable pattern of conscience is preserved, the subjectivity signified — “good” or “bad,” corresponding to the moral value of the action — engraves the sign on the epitaph of will. The bodily pain, however, becomes the most readily expression of the sign and the promise of a continuity between the sign and the action.

Thus the promise “I will” that makes a subject what it is by normatively restraining what it wills and does is always accompanied by terror.³⁴ The so-called mnemonic and oral contract between the creditor and the debtor³⁵ enacts the Hegelian scene of subjectivization, but with a Nietzschean touch. The creditor’s desire to harm the debtor disguised as the execution of the rightful compensation is not so much universality of what law signifies as the arbitrariness of sign.

First of all, in Nietzsche, “[i]nstead of the thing, the sensation takes in only a sign,”³⁶ that is to say, the subject cognizes and memorizes the sign, not the object grasped and replaced by it. *Mutatis mutandis*, the pain inflicted in moral education inculcates the sign of the encounter with the other, not the object of moral law, say, the human being as it is. The sign “guilty” in Nietzsche is arbitrary as it merely conceals, in this context and not in others perhaps since a sign can go through a chain that destabilizes its own conditions of formation, a desire of the creditor, a desire to harm and kill, given that punishment gives pleasure.³⁷ The principle of pleasure may account for the creditor’s will to harm, but not the internalization of the sign by the subject. Why and how the debtor takes its place in the normative scene and receives the sign in full awareness that it will be painful? For the instincts, and the will to freedom coerced to be impotent, turn against themselves, as Nietzsche maintains, and punish the subject from whose interior they originate.³⁸ But *whose will enter the picture to punish the subject from inside, if the will*

³⁴ Ibid., 294-295.

³⁵ Ibid., 297-298.

³⁶ Sander L. Gilman, Carole Blair & David J. Parent, *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 23.

³⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 301.

³⁸ Ibid., 325.

at stake is divorced from the actual action that produces the subject? Where is the subject to be found if the unbridgeable gap between the will and the action erases the mnemonic ground of the subjectivity and, hence, the subject itself?

That would be the main avenue of explanation for why the subaltern cannot speak, why it holds on to the subject-position that it does, why it attaches to the silence. Here in Nietzsche, the self once again in a symbolic turn toward itself in the encounter with the other, paradoxically produces a subject capable of keeping promises, which is absent when the action is not carried and the promise unkept, but punishes itself in its absence. The self is the object of itself via the interior and the subject is what is absent as the object and replaced by the sign of the other if a discontinuity between the will/desire and action is to occur.

In other words, the sign produces the interior that, in turn, produces the self, but a sign is first and foremost something alien, standing outside as a sign of the other. Therefore, even if the internalization of the sign as the authoritative voice of normativity, displayed in guilt, bad conscience, and self-punishment is how selfhood is created, subjectivity requires more. It requires engagement in the secrecy of sign, i.e., its psychic reception and strategic distortion, and creative re-signification of singularity. Thus, subjectivity as the site of secrecy implies that the subject is both present before the law as the addressable out there and absent, or rather, becomes secret as the ineffable of the interior created by being addressed. The subject as such is then not present where it is, but comes out of itself as in a hide-and-seek game, where the self is its own object as the other.

That is why there must be more to subjectivization in Nietzsche than coerced internalization, or lack of recognition by a universal, since the creative power of the sign in fact commands attachment for the very same reason: if the very possibility of the subjectivity stems from continuity between will and action, the subject may as well desire the subordination that in the first place grounds the space of desire. Or else, if the subjectivity takes a command on the sign, one must be subject to its uncanny call in the first place to receive it. The reception of concepts and language, for example, cherished as triangulation and initiation of a new member to the epistemological order, may be far from violence-free. The innocent picture of a child learning to name things may be a cover of the dreadful *mise en scène* of an encounter with the other and subor-

dination to the epistemological authority. The child faces the unknown of the outside and yet must decipher the meaning of the sign that mediates it. On top of this, the sign is not simply at the disposal of the child, but given by the adult authority figure. As Derrida suggests, “[t]his subordination therefore takes the form of an ‘incorporation,’ whether that be understood in its psychoanalytic sense or in the wider sense of an integration that assimilates or retains within itself that which it exceeds, surpasses, or supersedes [*relève*].”³⁹

To return to the necessity of such a violent encounter, it is better to be subject to a law of subordination than not to be a subject at all, even at the cost of having to suppress one’s instincts, which are forbidden by the normative signification. The sign thus also serves to disavow certain actions, disown certain subject-positions, rounding the dark corners of the *psyche*, and holding in check the dark desires by Damocles’ sword of normativity.

Nietzsche is loquacious when it comes to describe the psychic mechanisms of attachment to the founding violence of the sign, but one can also follow, or better, *repeat* his steps in Freud who claimed that repetition-compulsion “promotes the bringing to light of the activities of repressed impulses” in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*.⁴⁰

3. Freud and Derrida: the Object of Love, the Subject of Violence

So far, Hegel and Nietzsche portrayed the primal scene of subjectivization as the one informed by fear (fear of social sanction, of excommunication, or even worse — death), repeatability of violence, postponement of otherness, and the denial of the enigma of sign. A gloomy and morbid figure ensues, characterized by its vulnerability, its capacity to die, its mystery in keeping secrets in its interior even if they are suppressed and transgress the economies of visibility and audibility by creative significations out of the suppressed material preserved in the unconscious. The internalization of sign, painful as it is since it buries and hides as much as it reveals and repeats, is also externalization of the

³⁹ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 11.

⁴⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1942), 20.

secret “content” in Hegel’s terms.

This last remark also puts some question marks at the end of the paradoxical Nietzschean story: one formulation of the subject assumes that it is formed by subjectivization, with no ontological anteriority and/or priority before the law that forms it. That is to say, the subjects are absent before the law calls them out. However, the subjects must already be present out there to hear, come forth, or resist the call. How can they be present where they are absent? If they were already, always, imminently present, then there would be no need for a call, no need for secrecy. If they were never ever present, they could not hear the call. Althusser puts it better in his discussion of “always-already the subjects”⁴¹ where even “the expectation of a birth” assigns the unborn baby a subjective status. One can add that the dead are subjects, too. The subject then must be present where it is absent in an unfathomable manner, turning toward and extracting itself from itself.

That seems to be the answer to the question rose by Freud regarding the child game invented to deal with the absence of the object of love and hate. The story of the child who negotiated his mother’s presence/absence in the most economic way has a bearing upon a theory of subjectivization from two crucial perspectives. First, the attachment of the boy to the significant other exceeds coerced internalization of the sign as he learns to derive pleasure in repeating painful patterns of action, viz., *being lawful*. He imitates the absence of the object of love in his game, hiding his toys away (*Fort*) and taking them out again (*Da*), obviously enjoying himself over the fantasy of the “death” of the object of love. “How then,” Freud asks, “does it accord with the pleasure principle that he repeats this painful experience as a game?”⁴² The answer Freud provides gives away the lack and the excess of the subject, as well as absence and presence of the subjectivity.

To begin with, a sign is believed to be repeatable in the sense that it makes the other recognizable due to its stable sense (intension), its adamant meaning (extension), both of which, in the desired case, must coincide with its well-limited use. A proper name in vocative, the worn-out paradigm of significations of recognition, addresses the other (e.g., Lazarus) by its graphic-audio repeatability (“Lazarus”) under repeatable

⁴¹ Louis Althusser, *On Ideology*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2008), 50.

⁴² Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1942), 12.

conditions (say, of Lazarus being present in the vicinity and seen by us) with repeatable teleology (“to call out Lazarus”). The sign, appropriating what it addresses, may replace it in its absence, as it happens when we read the sign “Lazarus,” recognize the name and think of Lazarus. The sign, implacable and impervious, survives the death of what it addresses, and continues to call the deceased. Repetition is what makes things recognizable. So far, so good. But what does that tell us about the economies of desire, violence, and power?

According to Freud, “the child repeats even the unpleasant experiences because through his own activity he gains a far more thorough mastery of the strong impression than was possible by mere passive experience.”⁴³ What does Freud mean by “mastery of the strong impression”? Is it not again a mental faculty to receive the impressions and turn them into concepts, conception of things, into finer, more elaborate, and formidably negative births of signs, and hence will to power?⁴⁴ It may be a conception in the sense of conceiving a child, and burying her spirit in her body as every act of signification may involve giving birth and putting to death, and therefore it may be formative and negative in the sense of negation. No matter what he means by the phrase, it is indubitable that the child recognizes things by repetition, to master and store them in his cache of concepts, in the secret abyss of the subjectivity Hegel names consciousness.

And there is “a daemonic character”⁴⁵ to this repetitive encountering, struggling, taming, and disciplining the psychic excitation into something namable, something both melancholic and sinister, since it is related to the “death instinct” of the subject who cannot deal with an excess of excitation received from the outside. A desire to put to death, and perhaps to die as well, also lurks dark in the secret interior of the adult when “the repressed memory-traces of his primitive experience are not present in a ‘bound’ form.”⁴⁶ *Bound*, that is to say, grasped, born and thus put into the tomb of the conceptual. *Repressed*, i.e., excluded by the normativity. And memory, painful internalization of the sign. Indeed, that is the inchoate political idea of the subjectivity

⁴³ Ibid., 43.

⁴⁴ He mentions “the ‘power’ instinct,” but does not elaborate on page 14 barring a skimpy formulation of the instinct as “the impulse to obtain mastery of a situation” (ibid., 14).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 44.

of the subaltern as the undead, since Freud links this to the death instinct, which Hegel associated with the stigma of the other on another consciousness to the desire of living beings to hark back to an inanimate form.⁴⁷ A living being that never dies, for it is not fully born (not fully conceptualized and made a subject by the happy expectation of a birth), recognized as an outsider but not cognized in the interior. The subaltern that is theoretically ineffable, half-way excluded by the normative signification, *subject to law but not the subject as such*, then. The common Foucauldian analyses of the subject that always equate two senses of “the subject,” viz., the subjectivization and subordination, may overlook the semantic gap between the two senses that may not be filled in some subject-positions since the sign may also de-subjectivate some positions which are subordinate to it by excluding them from the inter-subjective realm of the visible and the audible.

The *telos* of law hence may be seen as cognition as opposed to recognition. Hegel’s narrative on recognition in fact lends itself to a reading where recognition may differ from cognition in the reception of the sign. For instance, one can even cognize a voice as a phonetic sign, but not a face. A face as the sign of the other can only be recognized, recalled through the maze of memory, collective history, mutual labor of intimacy, and psychic wounds. To be more precise, cognition presupposes the *inner stability of the sign* as implied by its alleged *repeatability*: once conceptualized, the meaning rests in peace, eternal recurrence of the same, buried under its significant tomb and dead, but alive enough for daily use and thus undead. Every time it is repeated, like in pagan rituals, it *hopefully* wards off the unknown singularity, signifying the extension, i.e., the unchanging external object cut off from the ephemeral intension, i.e., the interiority of the subject who cognizes. Recognition, however, *allows for re-signification as reiterability*, given the contingency of the extension that reeks of power and theo-political singularity of the intension that gives privileged authority to the first-person-view over the content of the interiority.⁴⁸ Its aim is never to os-

⁴⁷ Ibid., 46-48.

⁴⁸ But God, the paradigm of the first-person-view, sees without being seen and hears without being heard is supposed to know what we think. Does He as the regulative ideal of economies of visibility and audibility, the source of epistemological authority as the primary Other make a study of epistemico-theology possible perhaps? So *contra* Hegel, secrecy is a pipe-dream?

sify the language games, but to disavow the epistemico-political contract that regulates the reception and performativity of concepts (a violent and painful one!), and keep alive the hope that those who cannot speak with and through present concepts may make their voice heard by *reiteration*. After this detour, and before moving to the conclusion, the picture of the subject may be complemented with the second standpoint from which a reading of Freud may be fruitful.

The child is attached to his mother, as the bearer of epistemological and thus socio-political authority, to receive love and the law. She, as his significant other, might take pride over her son who has “a good reputation for behaving ‘properly,’”⁴⁹ with her son apparently having already gone through the reception of the law to some extent, or through the symbol-formation period, in the famous psychologist Melanie Klein’s terms, at which “the subject’s dominant aim is to possess himself of the contents of the mother’s body and to destroy her by any means of every weapon which sadism can command.”⁵⁰ That is the utmost externalization of the desire to negate the other in Hegelian terms. Klein continues: “A sufficient quantity of anxiety is the necessary basis for an abundance of symbol-formation and of phantasy; an adequate capacity on the part of the ego to tolerate anxiety is essential ... if the development of the ego is to be successful.”⁵¹ I suggest that we read her remark replacing the term “symbol” with “sign” and “ego” with “subject.” I pointed out the frustration and fear, accompanied by a desire to negate the other, in my reading of the role signs play in the subjectivization as Hegel understands it.

The boy that Freud personally observed could tolerate the anxiety (*Angst*) of the absence of his mother, although only through the invention of a game that replaces the other with a sign. To begin with, he used to hide away the objects of his desire, the toys that stand for her mother in his economy of signification. His aim seems to be simply negating them, dispelling them from the realm of visibility, just like internalizing the sign, dismissing it into the interior by grasping the content and calling it back, remembering, and re-memorizing the signified order of

⁴⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁰ Melanie Klein, *Love, Guilt, and Reparation and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1975), 219.

⁵¹ Ibid., 221.

things. Thus, the other, now also symbolically other all the more as its outer-ness is transferred to an object, was mastered, let come and go as he commanded. The other was negated, expelled, the excess gone away with it (*Fort!*). The self also regained mastery of the sign by a perfect act of re-signification, distorting both the extension and the intension of the concept of “presence.” According to the naively Kantian metaphysics of the boy, the things that are not visible and audible are simply not present — they are not objects of the self’s *cognition*.

Or are they? Since the other was called back, this time as an object of *recognition*, and present (*Da!*) with the ghostly sign of love imprinted on the self that cannot help calling it back. Since, along with the simple metaphysical bearings of the game, the more vital question is: why did he always summon the other back? Why did he need for the fearsome other to return, returning the unbearable excess of being a subject, if not because the excess all the authors refer to is not the other itself? No, it must be “*Da*,” and not the “*Fort*” which is most pleasurable and dreadful to the child. Freud was certain at this point, maintaining that “the greater pleasure [is] unquestionably attached to the second act.”⁵² It occurred to the child that when his mother was “*Fort*,” so was he. He was again absent the moment he saw his face, distinct and different from his mother’s. He attached himself to her face as the lawful sign but then facing his face in the mirror placed himself in the topology of otherness, viz., the exterior as well, “bringing about his own disappearance.”⁵³ He perhaps realized that he was the other of his mother he identified himself with so far. He perhaps realized that he did and will always fail to capture her content, either bodily or mentally, on the simple grounds that he is separate and distinct from her, *outside of her*.

Yet that was too much excitement, the first trauma of the subject which consists in finding out that one is a subject. No sooner than he became aware of himself as a subject did he disappear. The interplay and shift of the subject and the other, desire to destroy and command the objects of love (“o-o-oh”), replacement of the other by the sign and always, always returning to the other in returning to the sign. Always returning to the other without which the self cannot turn back to itself, even if this means turning

⁵² Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1942), 13.

⁵³ Ibid.

against itself.⁵⁴ Thus the subject is absent in itself since it is in the face of the other through which it comes to recognize itself, be it a reflection in the mirror (Lacan's favorite scene) or the simple object of reality taken as a whole, which is the inconceivable or, in Kant's terms, the Sublime other.

What might have the child seen in the mirror but his own gaze that captures himself, as his own object of the subjectivity? And why did he "disappear" when his image appeared in the looking-glass? It has something to do with "the disavowal of a secret that is always *for me alone*, that is to say *for the other*: *for me* who never sees anything in it, and hence *for the other* alone to whom, through the dissymmetry, a secret is revealed."⁵⁵ The boy who does not see anything in his own reflection but the otherness of his face as the uncanny sign needs another other to have the secrecy of his subjectivity, one from which he can hold things back, all the way back in his interior. He needs to lie for instance, and to keep secrets to his *self*, perhaps feel guilty over the petty mischiefs he commits. He needs the signs of the other to present himself and be present before his gaze, but yes, one's own self is an other too,⁵⁶ then, with his face captured in the xenio-morphology of visibility as a sign. A sign is always the sign of an other, received through an other, given to an other and violently captured of an other, grasped and still threatening due to an other who will always elude grasping.

The child both appears and disappears in the mirror. Therefore, the subject is the mirror-image of itself, seen through the eyes of the other who sees the self who sees the other who sees... *ad infinitum*. But the gaze of the other, the exposure of bodily presence to the other who calls, punishes, and thus opens up the interior space wherein the self retreats to in fear, guilt, and pain — is that free of violence even in the case of love? Is not love both a hope to reach out to the other and become one

⁵⁴ "The testing of reality, having shown that the loved object no longer exists, requires forthwith that all the libido shall be withdrawn from its attachment to this object. Against this demand a struggle of course arises..." Sigmund Freud, *Collected Papers*, trans. Joan Riviere (London: The Hogarth Press, 1950), 154. Of course, that is an understatement by Freud in his *Mourning and Melancholia*.

⁵⁵ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 91.

⁵⁶ "*Tout autre est tout autre*," in Derrida's words. See the chapter with the title, in Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 82-115.

with it, viz., to *negate its alterity* through the attachment of love? How distinct can the terrorizing other of Hegel be from the luring other of Klein who loves with respect to the desire to negate the other? That there should be no space for secrecy in love, that we should risk our integrity, bodily and otherwise exposing ourselves to the call of others seems to imply that the threat is always there to stay with us. As Butler remarks in *Precarious Life*, “that each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies — as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed,”⁵⁷ indicates the fragility of the hope that a law can be articulated transcending the formative violence.

The gist of the matter is the ambiguity surrounding the conditions of possibility of articulating a violence-free law. On the one hand, the sign *perforce* should mediate between the interior and the exterior, between the site of resistance and the site of power, between the subject and the self, and finally between the self and the other, belonging to none of the sites and all of them at once. That would boil down to the arbitrariness of the sign that constantly shifts across the sites and manipulated as it is subject to the relations of power, something the liberal notion of law can barely tolerate. On the other hand, the sign can be stabilized out of arbitrariness by repetitive rituals of cognition, fixing the referent of the term, say, “human being,” steadfast, so that the *sêma may be buried in sôma* of the letter of law, which would do its best to foreclose resistance, denying the alterity and singularity of what its extension refers to.⁵⁸ How could a semantic hope survive the aporia of signification, expressed in the antinomy of the extension, the raw “object” that stands outside the symbolic order, and the intension, what does it mean for the “the subject” that symbolizes it?

The aporia may be resolved in two ways, none of which can go without sacrificing some aspect of what it means to signify. One can follow the externalist epistemology camp that has fought the “psycholo-

⁵⁷ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (London: Verso, 2004), 20.

⁵⁸ One can simply imagine what exclusionary practices may ensue if we try to answer the question what the expression “human being” refers to. For instance, is it the Aryan beauty as conceived by Hitler or the hideous *Muselmann* of the concentration camps? Perhaps it is always the self that it has referred to so far, biased against what exceeds the conceptualization.

gism” of meaning since Frege, trying to dispel the foggy complication that is intension, the secretive reception of signs by the subjects. The “externalist epistemologists” may even assume away reference, replacing it with deference, and conferring full authority to the scientific experts. Thus, the subjects may be conceived as speaking a language that they do not understand, which is, to put it mildly, paradoxical given the attempts of the camp to clarify the meanings of signs. Or else, one can re-mystify what is involved in signification, dismissing the question of the body buried in the conceptual tomb, giving full authority to the self whose “mental” operations unfortunately take place clandestinely, without the presence of the other.

The third way is to grant the arbitrariness of sign and the theoretical violence as the founding moments of the law itself. In case of triangulation, the Davidsonian scene of the child, the adult, and the object, this ineluctable heritage of violence is transferred to the child who is supposed to learn to name objects. Then it may be safe to conclude that the subjects who are also objects as bodies cannot escape violence if they are to be objects of their own gaze, as Butler puts it explicitly, unless she has some ideas to offer regarding violent-free manners of addressing what is addressable without naming it even through metaphors. If the subject is a trope of return, then it is also a return to the crime scene when one is called out since it is a return to the sign, since it is inevitably and necessary violent to call things, bind concepts in existential quantifiers in logical jargon, conceptualize them for the articulation of law, and hence exercise violence on their alterity that is to be negated. Love and law demand, therefore, getting one’s hands dirty to call the other.

Butler in fact accedes to the inevitability of conflict, of moral quandaries and unsolvable ethical dilemmas experienced at the personal level, although pervading the realm of the political. She attempts to distinguish between the “moralization of the subject that disavows the violence it inflicts”⁵⁹ and transforming the violence itself against itself, with the subject walking on the sharp edge of a blade, keeping a studied distance both from self-denying violence of the ascetic priest and other-oriented aggressiveness of the creditor in Nietzsche. She is also right to maintain that the iteration of founding violence can be shifted through

⁵⁹ Judith Butler, “Reply from Judith Butler to Mills and Jenkins,” *Differences*, 18, no. 2 (September 2007), 14.

re-signification, but given the arbitrariness of sign, the direction of the shift can hardly be directed towards a nonviolent ethics. If signification involves a violence against that which cannot be conceptualized and the actors in the intersubjective realm are bound to return to the sign to face each other and the other, every responsible action is undertaken in the darkness of the *sêma*, reproducing the theoretical violence.

Another lesson to be drawn from Nietzsche's genealogy of the subject is the contest over the sign, such as the one between the Jew and Rome. In the context of economies of visibility and audibility that would boil down to Jenkins' suggestion that one of the discursive effects of power is a rhetorical device to expose the other to the sign, to expose its vulnerability by discursively weakening the other.⁶⁰ One aim of this paper was to show, through a reading of Hegel and Nietzsche, that signification as manifestation of will to power, viz., mastery of the situation in Freud's terms, reveals the vulnerability of the subjects in their neediness. The child in Freud's story, for instance, encumbered with too much excitement when he faced the face of the other *needed* to "discharge" anxiety by attempting to subordinate the objects of his desire to his call. The fear that hunts tyrants and reveals the weak spot in their self-understanding may be seen as a fear of the subordinate, of their unfathomable face that defy conceptualization. That which cannot be grasped fully will always continue to pose a threat to the masters and their self-complacency, since its name and signature is not written on the epistémico-political contract, since it is capable of re-signification, and disavowal of the contract. Thus, more often than not, exposing one's own vulnerability starts with exposing the other to the all-encompassing grasp of signification, and binding it through mnemonic devices of law, as Nietzsche suggests.

That is why Subaltern Studies scholars may not have their cake and eat it too. A study of the daily life strategies and tactics of the subalterns, the performance and performativity of their subjectivity has to face its ethical dilemma because of the perilous enterprise of exposing the other, of taking responsibility of representing their faces and hence their weaknesses. Linking this remark to the inescapable violence of conceptualization, though, may give some grounds to justify that re-

⁶⁰ Ibid., 27.

sponsibility is justifiable. But, in the scope of this work, I would rather conclude with a faint hope of a violent-free conceptualization.

4. Conclusion: Under and Out of It

The authors critically engaged with in the above suggest formulations of *the subject* as the *object* of self-cognition and recognition of the other, through analyses of the sign. The subject is seen to be an excess over the signified, over the consciousness, and over the secure boundaries of the self or, to put it in better terms, *under it*. The themes of desire, vulnerability, death, and violence reflected in the ontologies of power also converge into a common dichotomy, that of *inner vs. outer*. That selves are “ontologically” separate from one another and desire to negate what stands outside, to metabolize it either cognitively or bodily, and to bury it in the tomb of *Begriff* introduces the final theme of “call.” They call their object of desire in two senses: they lure it to come closer, to be present before the law, and they call the other so as to name it. Thus, the subject emerges out of desire, and out of itself, in the face of the other that comes out. That is why I attempted to depict the subject as that which is not present where it is. *The subject is under and out of itself*.

That formulation answers my first question in the introduction, since conceiving the subject as under and out of itself is with the aim of conceiving a theoretical child, of conceiving, quasi-transcendentally perhaps, the *subaltern* as the *subject*. The inclusion of the subaltern into the realm of the visible and of the audible, the political, the public sphere which, as Butler says, “is constituted in part by what cannot be said and what cannot be shown,”⁶¹ takes, needless to say, engagement with the dichotomy above, as well as an analysis of what cannot be captured by conceptualization and signification.

I also implied the reason why the subaltern cannot talk, in reading Hegel and Nietzsche, has much to do with the attachment to the sign that in the first place subjectivates them as such. If the trope of subjectivity is a return, it is a return to the sign that excludes as well as includes inside. The sign calls us, I added, either with a call to cognize, or recognize the other. The lack of the subaltern that robs them of speech turned out to be, rather to my surprise and against the grain, not simply a lack of rec-

⁶¹ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (London: Verso, 2004), xviii.

ognition, as liberal theorists argued, but a lack of cognition on our part as well. Underlying such a lack is the belief in the *perfect repeatability and inner stability of the sign* that leaves no room for re-signification in the internalization and externalization of sense and meaning, in the speech that addresses and calls the other.

The addressability and vulnerability of the subject, linked with meaning and sense, as a considerable part of “relationality that is composed neither exclusively of myself nor you, but is to be conceived as *the tie*”⁶² among the selves as the bodies *outside* and consciousness *inside*, is the occasion to embark upon the issue of violence regarding the formation of subjectivity. Given that signification is inevitable as to address others excludes what is not grasped, and the subject is constituted with and through addressing it, I argued that theoretical violence is inevitable and permeates the life of a viable agent in public, too. I finally pointed out the possibility of putting the subaltern in peril by exposing it, even if the stakes and hopes are high in any struggle to face the other.

The theo-political exploration of the violent injunction to love, even love the enemy is still missing in this theoretical picture, along with signification of its capacity to die as a being-towards-death. Could it be that the neighbor who loves as commanded by his Holy Father is indiscernible from the infant who wants to negate the “content” of her mother? How does the violence of sign find its expression in the love of friends living *in* the neighborhood and of the enemies dying *outside* it? What is an enemy but an undesirable excess in the public? And, most of all, how do we signify the face of the enemy?

⁶² Ibid., 22.