

PHILOSOPHY OF THE SUBJECT

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In a letter to Roger Laporte dated September 24, 1966, Blanchot describes his *scène primitive* as the experience of a depopulated sky, confronting an infinity, which he outlines as an empty infinity:

"I was a child, seven or eight years old, I was in an isolated house, near the closed window, I looked outside—and at once, nothing could be more sudden, it was as though the sky opened, opened infinitely toward the infinite, inviting me with this overwhelming moment of opening to acknowledge the infinite, but the infinitely empty infinite. The consequence was estranging. The sudden and absolute emptiness of the sky, not visible, not dark—emptiness of God: that was explicit, and therein it far exceeded the mere reference to the divine—surprised the child with such delight, and such joy, that for a moment he was full of tears, and—I add, anxious for the truth—I believe they were his last tears."¹

Emptiness of the sky. Emptiness of the absolute. Infinite emptiness that marks the here and now of the one world, its truth unfounded in any other truth. World without superiority. Nothing but this nothing-but-truth, but this lack of meaning. Truth is one name of this withdrawal of meaning. Not even non-meaning can escape the economy of an abundance whose negative complement it remains. The emptiness, however, refers to the inconsistency of the logic of both meaning and non-meaning. It indicates a threshold which no non-meaning is able to absorb. Blanchot has given it the name of the *outside* ("dehors"), of which Deleuze says that it is "farther away than any form exteriority".² Absolute outside: perfect emptiness that gouges and delimits any interior and any exterior:

"The sky [...] suddenly open, absolutely black and absolutely empty, revealing [...] such an absence that all has since always and forevermore been lost therein—so

1 Maurice Blanchot in an unpublished letter to Roger Laporte, September 24, 1966. A German translation of this letter has been published in Blanchot, "[... absolute Leere des Himmels ...]. (Aus einem Brief an Roger Laporte)", in: *Die andere Urszene*, ed. Marcus Coelen, Zurich and Berlin: diaphanes, 2008, 19.

2 Gilles Deleuze, Foucault, trans. Seán Hand, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, 122.

lost that therein is affirmed and dissolved the vertiginous knowledge that nothing is what there is, and first of all nothing beyond."³

Blanchot describes the experience of emptiness as a "feeling of happiness" that assails the subject as a "ravaging joy".⁴ Joy of an opening that opens toward its closure, so infinite is this emptiness that contains not the least positivity. An emptiness that closes the space of the beyond. The event of this closure coincides with, as Foucault puts it, "an absolute opening through which language endlessly spreads forth, while the subject—the 'I' who speaks— fragments, disperses, scatters, disappearing in that naked space."⁵

Now we know that Blanchot, rather than making the subject disappear, thinks it as the scene of infinite self-deconstruction, so that its new way of existence [referring to Nietzsche and Foucault] is that of "disappearing."⁶

By undelimiting it toward the outside, he renders it the subject of the outside, in the sense of this double genitive (*genitivus objectivus* and *subjectivus*), which calls upon us to think the subject as a sub-ob-ject. A genitive which rejects both phantasmata: the construction of a subject full of autonomy and self-transparency, as well as its reduction to its status as an object, to its history, culture and social reality. This is why the joy in the face of emptiness is the joy of a subject, to which a "level" of "itself" is revealed.⁷ We are dealing with an empty subject of emptiness, an originally evacuated *cogito*. A subject devoid of a divine substrate, of transcendental meaning, a subject without subjectivity - because it is the movement of this incessant experience that happens beyond the present self-mediation and auto-appropriation. Empty subject - because it experiences the emptiness as absent foundation, as the desert of an incommensurable freedom, so incommensurable that it cannot be experienced as such. The absence of meaning, the non-existence of God, this emptiness shall not become the celebration of one's own abandonment, because they mark a freedom which exceeds the difference of freedom and necessity.

3 Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986, 72.

4 Ibid.

5 Michel Foucault, *Maurice Blanchot: The Thought from Outside*, trans. Brian Massumi, in *Foucault/Blanchot*, New York: Zone Books 1987, 11.

6 Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, pp. 151.

7 Maurice Blanchot in an unpublished letter to Roger Laporte, September 24, 1966., p. 20.

